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Reinventing Tradition: Hybrid Governance and the Transformation of Adat Institutions in Langsa Villages through an Islamic Political Perspective

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Abstrak
Artikel ini membahas transformasi lembaga tradisional di Aceh dalam konteks kebangkitan kembali tata kelola desa berbasis adat pasca-konflik dan implementasi otonomi khusus. Fokus utama tulisan ialah memahami bagaimana lembaga tradisional diintegrasikan ke dalam sistem tata kelola modern, serta sejauh mana mereka mampu mempertahankan otoritas simbolis dan kapasitas mobilisasi sosial di tengah perluasan birokrasi desa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dilakukan di dua Gampong (desa) di Kota Langsa, yaitu Gampong Kuala Langsa dan Gampong Meurandeh Dayah. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa norma adat dan logika birokrasi coexist dalam tata kelola desa, namun hubungan keduanya tidak selalu harmonis. Meskipun pejabat Gampong bekerja dalam kerangka peraturan negara, lembaga adat tetap memainkan peran vital dalam kehidupan sosial, termasuk mobilisasi sosial. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa lembaga adat tidak hanya bertahan sebagai tradisi simbolis, tetapi juga sebagai aktor aktif dalam membentuk bentuk-bentuk hibrida tata kelola lokal. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya memahami negara sebagai entitas yang dibangun secara sosial, tertanam dalam praktik dan simbol yang tetap hidup di tingkat lokal.
Kata Kuncis: Politik Hibriditas, Adat, Gampong, Aceh

Abstract
This article examines the transformation of traditional institutions in Aceh within the context of the post-conflict revival of adat-based village governance and the implementation of special autonomy. The main focus is to understand how traditional institutions are incorporated into modern governance systems, and to what extent they are able to maintain their symbolic authority and capacity for social mobilization amid the expansion of village bureaucracy. This research employs a qualitative method, conducted in two villages in Langsa City, namely Gampong Kuala Langsa and Gampong Meurandeh Dayah. The findings show that adat norms and bureaucratic logic coexist in village governance, but their relationship is not always harmonious. While village officials work within the framework of state regulations, adat institutions continue to play a vital role in social life, including conflict resolution, religious activities, and collective rituals. This demonstrates that adat institutions persist not only as symbolic traditions but also as active actors in shaping hybrid forms of local governance. These findings reaffirm the importance of understanding the state as a socially constructed entity, embedded in practices and symbols that remain vibrant at the local level.
Keywords: Politcs of Hibridity, Adat, Gampong, Aceh

Introduction

The debate over the repositioning of traditional institutions within Indonesia's contemporary governmental architecture has become increasingly prominent since the decentralization era that followed the Reformation. Revivalism is no longer limited to the preservation of cultural heritage but has evolved into an arena for political negotiations at the local level (Bubandt, 2014). In Aceh, this transformation is reflected in the enactment of Qanun No. 9 of 2008 on Village Governance, which affirms the status of the village as an autonomous unit while formalizing local power structures under the framework of Islamic law (Ardiansyah, 2025; Iqbal et al., 2025; Muslim et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025). As a result, customary institutions such as the Tuha Peut once regarded primarily as guardians of traditional norms have shifted into political actors that influence village government agendas and contribute to building socio-political legitimacy at the local level (Iqbal et al., 2025; Majid & Avafudin, 2025; Muslim et al., 2025; Trisna et al., 2025)

This paper examines the transformation of customary institutions in light of the resurgence of adat-based village governance in Aceh. The literature on customary revival highlights a complex process that cannot be neatly categorized as either conflictual or collaborative between customary institutions and modern state structures (Kaneko, 2025; Singh & Yadav, 2025). Instead, outcomes vary depending on local contexts, institutional capacities, and the involvement of external actors. Within the study of Aceh's local politics, only limited attention has been paid to this dimension, leaving gaps in our understanding of the contemporary relationship between adat and the state.

This article employs Hansen and Stepputat's concept of political hybridity, which views the state not as a single, stable entity but as something continuously shaped, contested, and negotiated through everyday practices at the local level (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). This theoretical lens is used to analyze the revival of traditional institutions and the repositioning of actors within village governance. The premise is that state power is frequently challenged by other authorities, such as customary institutions, and that the interaction between them shows the state as an arena of conflict and negotiation rather than a unified and coherent system. Accordingly, this article explores the transformation of traditional institutions and the repositioning of actors through two main inquiries: first, how the incorporation of customary institutions into the modern state apparatus produces a hybrid form of governance; and second, to what extent these institutions are able to preserve their symbolic prestige and capacity for social mobilization amid the demands of bureaucratic administration. The enactment of Qanun No. 9/2008 not only sets out technical provisions on resource management and administrative authority but also unsettles the cultural hierarchy that historically granted exclusive legitimacy to customary principles. This shift reflects a classic dilemma between preserving the authenticity of traditional norms and adapting to the evolving requirements of good governance.

The existing literature complements and critiques itself in building a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between custom, the state, and society

in the context of contemporary political and social change. As Tyson argues, the revival of adat in Indonesia is not simply a nostalgic return to the past but has become an intense arena of political struggle (Tyson, 2010). He shows how customary communities selectively employ their identities and traditions to demand recognition and political rights, which in turn generates conflicts and power struggles at the local level. This view reinforces the argument of Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann, who emphasize that the revitalization of customary and religious law is not a romantic effort to preserve tradition but a forward-looking process that requires adaptation to contemporary realities (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2017). This perspective, however, is critiqued by Zikir et al., who identify two distinct types of power relations between customary institutions and village governments: a symbiotic relationship in community development and empowerment, and a conflictual relationship when government assistance intersects with customary identity (Zikir et al., 2021). Umbase further illustrates this dynamic with the case of Ratumbanua in Taturan Village, which plays an effective role in local governance (Umbase, 2017). This role is evident not only in the preservation of traditional practices but also in economic empowerment through agriculture and trade. Our research in Langsa shows a dynamic interplay of power between adat and the state bureaucracy. As seen in Gampong Kuala Langsa and Meurandeh Dayah, adat does not simply become a sub-system of the bureaucracy, nor is the bureaucracy entirely reshaped to conform to adat. Instead, the two continuously influence one another. The novelty of this article lies in viewing adat and bureaucracy not as opposing or conflicting entities, but through a hybrid lens in which both systems interact, adapt, and coexist.

Studies on the transformation of traditional institutions and the repositioning of actors are not confined to Indonesia. Enomoto, for instance, highlights how the revival of Acholi traditional justice in Uganda was shaped by both local and international actors, each advancing competing visions and interpretations of tradition. This case demonstrates that, in a global context, customary institutions often become arenas for

complex struggles over meaning. From this perspective, Tyson can also be critiqued, as his analysis tends to frame indigenous movements primarily within local dynamics while overlooking how external actors also shape the direction and substance of revivalism (Tyson, 2010). Similarly, Beall and Ngonyama, in their study of South Africa, show that traditional institutions and leaders have been integrated into the political and development processes of the post-apartheid state (Beall & Ngonyama, 2009). Their findings challenge the assumption that tradition and the state are always in opposition, showing instead that they can be incorporated into broader governance processes.

The context of Aceh with its history of conflict and strong Islamic identity makes this research relevant not only for studies of village governance in Indonesia but also for theories of traditional actors in political anthropology. In recent years, the revitalization of adat and local wisdom in Aceh has gained growing attention, both in academic debates and in government policy. These efforts are often framed as cultural preservation initiatives and as mechanisms for conflict resolution at the community level (Jamhir, 2016). The Tuha Peut, as a village deliberative body, holds a dual function: normative authority in enforcing adat and a consultative role in formulating public policy. Traditional mechanisms such as di'et, sayam, suloh, peusijuk, and peumat jaroe, which involve customary leaders and local figures, are often praised for effectively maintaining social harmony (Riezal et al., 2019). In these practices, the institution demonstrates a form of "customary political entrepreneurship" articulating community interests into the formal arena while reducing potential conflict between traditional aspirations and modern demands.

On the other hand, the Acehnese government's formal attempts to revive traditional institutions through local regulations (qanun) reflect political commitment but often remain top-down and symbolic (Jamhir, 2016; Riezal et al., 2019). Unfortunately, much of the scholarship tends to romanticize the role of adat without critically examining the dynamics of power, which actors benefit, and who is excluded in the process. The lack of in-depth analysis of everyday adat practices has made the

discourse of revitalization appear idealistic and insufficiently grounded in the complex social and political realities on the ground.

Theoretical Framework

The revival of Adat in village governance in Indonesia marks a clear shift from a centralized state toward recognition of legal pluralism and local authority (Bubandt, 2014; Henley & Davidson, 2008; Li, 2001; Song & Mansur, 2021; Tyson, 2010). After being pushed aside for decades by a uniform system of state law, customary institutions are now gaining both legal and political space to play a role again in village life (Abbas, 2009). Many studies have examined this trend, presenting different views some see revivalism as a way of correcting history, while others question its impact on local democracy and social fairness.

A key turning point was Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, which openly recognizes desa adat as legal entities with original rights. Donny Michael Situmorang argues that the law represents an attempt by the state to repair its past mistake of ignoring local social systems (Situmorang, 2016). In his works, Situmorang saw recognition of customary villages should not stay as empty words but must come with real institutional support as budgets, organizations, and regulations that ensure the survival of customary institutions . This position reflects a normative revivalism, seeing adat as a right that belongs historically and morally to local communities. But this way of thinking is often criticized because it paints an ideal picture of adat without asking whether customary institutions are truly capable of meeting the demands of modern governance and the principles of good administration.

Other scholars take a more practical view, pointing to the ongoing tension between customary institutions and the state's administrative structures (Azhari et al., 2023; Jamhir, 2016). From this angle, revivalism is not only a top-down process of state recognition but also a bottom-up movement that demands local sovereignty. Here, adat becomes a political symbol of resistance against domination by the state and its

bureaucracy. On the ground, Lesmana et al. show how village governments and customary institutions in Kelumbayan, Lampung, manage to work together (Lesmana et al., 2019). Their study suggests that this cooperation depends not so much on legal rules but on a spirit of mutual support among local leaders. This reflects a relational revivalism, created through compromise and balance between actors rather than through formal structures alone.

A stronger and more organized version of revivalism can be seen in Kutuh Village, Bali, studied by Amalia Syauket and Bambang Karsono. They describe how dual leadership between the official village head and the customary leader works smoothly under the philosophy of trihita karana and the customary law of awig-awig (Syauket & Karsono, 2024). In this case, adat is not just culture, but also a tool for managing resources like village funds. This is an example of functional revivalism, where adat adapts to the needs of administration while still keeping its identity. Filling the gap between the two approaches, Rahmasari et al. stress the importance of multi-actor empowerment (Rahmasari et al., 2023). They argue that successful revivalism requires the active involvement of communities, village governments, legal institutions, and universities. Their point is that adat revivalism needs more than legal recognition it also needs a supportive system that helps adat become an actor of governance that is both adaptive and participatory. From this discussion, it is clear that revivalism is not only about bringing back old institutions. It is also about building new relations between the state and customary communities in a way that is inclusive, democratic, and sustainable.

At the same time, the revival of adat in village governance also shows attempts to restore traditional authority that was long pushed aside by the modern state. Situmorang sees the 2014 Village Law as a legal way to return sovereignty to adat communities through formal recognition (Situmorang, 2016). Yet, this normative revivalism often works in a top-down way and tends to ignore internal problems such as gender inequality, local authoritarianism, or conflict with democratic principles. On the other side, cases like West Seram show how the state tries to absorb adat into its

bureaucracy. This may bring administrative order, but it also reduces the independence of adat, putting it under state control.

Beyond these two models, a third approach highlights the role of local actors and their daily negotiations of power. Research by Lesmana and shows that the cooperation between village governments and adat leaders depends on the personal relations between village heads, customary chiefs, and the people (Lesmana et al., 2019; Syauket & Karsono, 2024). In this way, adat is not only revived through law but also through joint practices that adjust to current needs for example, using awig-awig rules to manage village funds. This approach is flexible and participatory, but it can also be fragile in the face of local politics and often lacks strong legal backing.

Taken together, the three approaches—normative revivalism, state cooptation, and local negotiation—show the tension between legality, authority, and social practice in local politics. Seen from this view, the state at the village level is not a fixed structure, but something that is shaped again and again in everyday practice. The state is not only a set of laws or formal institutions but something created and maintained through relationships, symbols, and power at the local level. This often reveals contradictions and paradoxes that villagers experience in their dealings with policies, officials, and institutions.

Revivalism, state control, and the work of local actors together reveal that the state in villages is not stable but a contested arena of cultural, political, and administrative interests (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). Claims for adat rights, demands for resources, and struggles for legitimacy show that the village-state is a space of ongoing contest. In this space, state authority may be strengthened, questioned, or even challenged by other forms of power such as adat (Tyson, 2010). Looking at village politics from the ground up helps us see how the state is carried out, understood, and debated from below and why, despite constant tension, the idea of the state still remains a strong and lasting myth in village political life.

Method

This research used a qualitative approach with desciptive analysis. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to study the complex relationship between adat institutions and the modern government system in a contextual and detailed way, especially in post-conflict communities that are still experiencing decentralization and social-political change. The case study focused on two villages (gampong) in Langsa City: Kuala Langsa and Meurandeh Dayah. These villages were selected purposively because they still have active customary institutions, such as the Tuha Peut and Imum Mukim, and because they illustrate different patterns of interaction between adat and formal government. Kuala Langsa is a coastal village with 1,917 inhabitants, most of whom are Acehnese. Because of its ethnic homogeneity and reliance on fishing, adat plays a strong role in providing social legitimacy, and customary institutions maintain wide influence. By contrast, Meurandeh Dayah is an urban village with 971 residents, most of whom are migrants. In this setting, adat struggles to gain legitimacy, while bureaucratic logic becomes more dominant. This makes Meurandeh Dayah an example of a village under the pressure of modernization and social mobility.

The data were collected through in-depth interviews, document review, and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with adat leaders, members of the Tuha Peut, the village head (keuchik), religious figures, and sub-district officials. The document review included an analysis of Qanun Aceh No. 9 of 2008. Participant observation was carried out during village meetings and adat ceremonies to capture social and political dynamics that are not always reflected in documents or interviews, such as symbolic resistance, negotiation strategies, and expressions of adat authority.

The data were analyzed using a thematic approach. The process started with transcription and coding, followed by identifying key themes such as the shift of adat authority, resistance against bureaucratic intervention, and the integration of adat

norms into village governance. The findings were interpreted using theories of local governance, institutional hybridity, and state–society relations, and they were compared across cases to identify both common patterns and specific contexts.

To ensure validity, the study applied several strategies: triangulation of sources and methods, member checking with key informants, and peer debriefing with colleagues to minimize subjective bias. Ethical standards were maintained by obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing confidentiality, and keeping the researcher neutral in sensitive issues. The ethics of representation were also safeguarded so that local narratives are not oversimplified or politicized. Through this approach, the study provides a holistic understanding of the role of customary institutions as important local actors in gampong governance in Aceh.

Result and Discussion

Result

The Politics of Traditional Institutions

In Indonesia's state system, the existence and role of traditional institutions have an important place through formal recognition in various legal frameworks, one of which is Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages. This law creates space for recognizing indigenous communities and their institutions as part of the village government system. This is clearly stated in Article 1, which defines a village as a legal community unit with territorial boundaries that has the authority to regulate and manage the interests of the local community based on local initiative, original rights, and/or traditional rights recognized and respected in the government system of the Republic of Indonesia. This definition not only recognizes the existence of indigenous communities but also affirms their right to manage village governance according to their traditions and local structures.

Furthermore, this recognition is reinforced in Article 18, which explains that village authority includes responsibilities based on community initiatives and customs. Article 19(a) specifically states that villages have authority rooted in original rights, which

include customary institutions that carry out social, cultural, and governance functions within local traditions. These provisions show that the state provides space for villages to integrate local social structures, such as tuha peut, imeum meunasah, and mukim, into the village government system, as long as they are legally regulated through Village Regulations (Perdes).

Although customary institutions are not explicitly listed in the formal structure of village government (such as village officials or the Village Consultative Body, BPD), they hold significant influence through participatory mechanisms outlined in Article 5 of the Village Law. This article encourages villages to hold deliberations involving village government, BPD, and community members, including customary leaders, to decide strategic policies. In Aceh, where institutions like tuha peut and imeum meunasah are deeply rooted, their role is not merely symbolic but substantive, as they hold authority in decision-making, conflict resolution, and community deliberations based on reusam (customary law).

The recognition of customary institutions becomes more explicit and binding in Aceh through Qanun Number 9 of 2008 on the Development of Customary Life and Traditions. This qanun reflects Aceh's special autonomy, recognized by Law Number 11 of 2006 on Aceh Governance. Article 6 of the qanun states that the Wali Nanggroe is responsible for maintaining, developing, protecting, and preserving customary life and culture, and this responsibility is carried out through the Customary Assembly and customary institutions. This article provides a strong legal foundation for customary institutions to function as guiding structures, not just as traditional symbols. Article 8 further states that customary institutions must develop and maintain traditions in line with Islamic law, which strengthens their integration into Aceh's socio-religious and local governance structures. In this way, the roles of tuha peut as village council leaders, imeum meunasah as spiritual leaders, and mukim as coordinators between villages are

formally recognized by local law, even if they are not part of the official administrative structure under the national Village Law.

The flexibility to organize local social structures is also emphasized in Article 4 of the Village Law, which highlights one of the goals of village governance as "preserving and promoting the customs, traditions, and culture of village communities." This principle was further strengthened in the Second Amendment to the Village Law through Law Number 3 of 2024. In the revised Article 4(c), it is explicitly stated that village governance aims to "preserve and promote the customs, traditions, and culture of village communities." This shows that the recognition of customary institutions is not only symbolic but is also part of a national strategy to develop village governance based on local wisdom.

However, it is important to note that even though this recognition is strong at the normative level, its implementation depends heavily on the existence of Village Regulations (Perdes) or Qanun Gampong that specifically define the position and function of customary institutions within the village governance system. Without such local regulations, the role of customary institutions often remains in a gray area between social recognition and administrative absence. For this reason, it is crucial for village governments in Aceh to draft Qanun Gampong that clearly regulate the working relationship between the village head (keuchik), BPD, and customary institutions such as tuha peut, mukim, and imeum meunasah. The recognition of institutions such as tuha peut, imeum meunasah, and mukim is not only affirmed through principles of recognition and subsidiarity but also institutionalized through qanun, making them an essential part of Aceh's village governance system. Still, strengthening their role in practice requires local political commitment and technical regulations, such as Perdes and Qanun Gampong, so that structural recognition does not remain only at the normative level.

The Hybridities of the State and Customary Institutions in Gampong Governance

Fieldwork findings from interviews and observations in Gampong Kuala Langsa and Meurandeh Dayah reveal that while both villages exhibit a coexistence of customary norms and bureaucratic logic in their governance, the nature of their interaction differs. In Gampong Kuala Langsa, adat and bureaucracy tend to operate more collaboratively, with frequent negotiation and mutual adaptation. In contrast, Meurandeh Dayah shows more instances of tension and selective accommodation between the two systems, reflecting a more complex and sometimes conflicting relationship. Their relationship is dynamic—sometimes collaborative, sometimes overlapping. This phenomenon can be explained through Hansen and Stepputat's theory of state hybridity, which argues that the state does not exist as a single, stable, and coherent entity (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). Instead, it is constantly shaped through contestation and negotiation in everyday social practices. In this sense, the state is produced situationally by different actors through language, institutions, and actions that merge with local forces.

One clear example of hybridity appears in the different patterns of interaction between adat and bureaucracy in the two study sites. In Kuala Langsa, the coexistence is symbolically collaborative, where adat is involved to safeguard the community's moral and social integrity. Traditional leaders such as tuha peut still play an important role in resolving household disputes or community conflicts, even though formal legitimacy remains in the hands of village officials. A village head explained: "Sometimes bureaucracy is like a book with too many pages. But adat is simpler—you just talk at the bale or meunasah." This reflects a perception that adat provides a more flexible and humane approach compared to the rigid procedures of bureaucracy. A local woman, Bu Maimunah, echoed this view, stating: "The village government runs by the rules, while adat runs by custom." Here, the two normative systems coexist, but they are not fully integrated institutionally.

In contrast, in Meurandeh Dayah, coexistence is pragmatic and selective, where adat is only involved when it is politically or ceremonially useful. In this case, traditional leaders are used instrumentally by village officials. The local keuchik stressed: "For policy and budget matters, I work with the BPG and the secretary." This shows the dominance of the formal structure in decision-making. Even in development projects, the involvement of adat leaders was transactional. The keuchik recalled: "They once asked to be included in the development budget, and I said, 'If you want to join, then you must work too.'" This suggests that adat authority is not seen as a strategic partner, but rather as an element to be used according to bureaucratic needs.

Tensions also surfaced between the Village Consultative Body (Badan Permusyawaratan Gampong-BPG) and adat structures like tuha peut. In Kuala Langsa, a village head remarked: "Sometimes BPG feels they are the most legitimate because they were elected by the people, but tuha peut claims they guard the adat and the spirit of the village." This highlights the contest between electoral authority and moral-cultural authority. In cases like land disputes or family conflicts, villagers often trusted adat leaders for resolution, seeing them as fairer and more approachable. However, the official recording, legalization, and validation remained with village administrators, showing a shift of authority from moral norms to administrative control.

Formally, adat institutions have been acknowledged in official documents such as Decrees (SK), Village Medium-Term Development Plans (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Gampong-RPJMG), and through participation in village deliberation forums. Yet, this recognition does not automatically translate into functional integration within the bureaucratic system. In Kuala Langsa, the keuchik admitted that adat institutions are "included in the documents" and given "main tasks and functions," but in practice integration is weak because "not all adat leaders understand how state administration works." A similar situation was found in Meurandeh Dayah, where adat recognition was

described as merely "listed for administrative completeness." This indicates that adat recognition often remains administrative rather than substantive.

These findings support Jamhir and Riezal et al., who argue that adat revivalism policies in Aceh are often top-down and symbolic (Jamhir, 2016; Riezal et al., 2019). When recognition only takes the form of names in documents without meaningful involvement in decision-making, the role of adat institutions becomes reduced and ceremonial. Institutionalizing adat as part of post-conflict identity revival and Aceh's special autonomy faces serious challenges in bridging normative recognition with functional participation.

The two villages studied reflect different local responses to this tension. In Kuala Langsa, the principle of marwah (dignity) is maintained through a symbolic–substantive approach to uphold the honor of adat institutions, though participation remains limited in practice. In contrast, in Meurandeh Dayah, adat recognition is more opportunistic. The remark that adat was included merely to "complete administration" shows that adat is treated more as bureaucratic formality than as an institutional force in governance. As one keuchik put it:

> *"Our village institutions look thicker on paper, but thinner in reality. Since the Qanun Gampong, everything is boxed—there's an SK, functions, names of adat institutions but here in Meurandeh Dayah it's different. We're not originally an Acehnese adat village. Most residents are Javanese descendants of colonial plantation workers, so the mindset is practical. If something is useful, we apply it. If it's only formality, it stays on the shelf."*

A key factor limiting adat integration into village governance is capacity. In both Kuala Langsa and Meurandeh Dayah, adat leaders often struggled with technical terms such as "program, APBG, output, logframe." Even the Langsa city government acknowledged that not all adat leaders were prepared in terms of age and education, despite regular training efforts. This gap created an imbalance between recognition and participation.

In this context, the multi-actor empowerment approach proposed by Betha Rahmasari et al. becomes highly relevant. They emphasize the need to create a collaborative ecosystem that transforms adat institutions into adaptive and participatory governance actors (Rahmasari et al., 2023). Legal recognition must be accompanied by social learning, cross-actor dialogue, and institutional capacity-building, so that adat leaders can serve as strategic partners rather than administrative accessories. Ultimately, these findings underline the importance of moving from an administrative–institutional approach to a collaborative one based on social relations and local networks. Harmonizing adat and village governance cannot be achieved solely through documents or technical training, but must be built on trust, intergenerational communication, and institutional adaptation that respects local values while functioning effectively within the framework of the modern state. In Hansen and Stepputat's view of hybridity, the local state is not a fixed entity but an ongoing negotiation between different logics—between adat and bureaucracy, between the symbolic and the technocratic, between the moral and the administrative.

Representation and Resilience of Adat

Our findings showed that traditional institutions still had strong capacity to mobilize community participation, especially in religious activities, conflict resolution, and collective rituals. This function made adat not only a cultural heritage but also an effective tool of social mobilization and a bond of social cohesion at the community level. Even as formal bureaucratic logic developed, the strength of adat remained relied upon as a driver of solidarity and a shaper of collective identity that could not be replaced by state instruments.

Table 1. The differences of representation and resilience of adat in Langsa

Aspect	Gampong Kuala Langsa	Meurandeh Dayah
Mobilizing Power of Adat	Strong, especially in moral and spiritual activities; adat mobilizes people effectively, even more than bureaucracy.	Weakened mobilization capacity, especially among youth; adat activities rarely influence daily life.
Moral Authority	Adat figures (e.g., teungku) hold strong moral authority, surpassing village officials' instructions.	Adat has lost moral basis and social legitimacy, especially with younger generation.
Conflict Resolution	Adat preferred for private disputes (family, land) over formal legal channels.	Not emphasized; adat's role in dispute resolution is diminished.
Community Participation	High participation rooted in religious and social norms; adat tied closely to community values.	Low participation, especially from youth; limited emotional and cultural connection.
Role of Adat in Governance	Coexists with bureaucracy; adat influences governance informally.	Adat overshadowed by bureaucracy; functions more as cultural tradition than governance.
Adat's Symbolic Roles	Maintained through spiritual functions: leading prayers, mediating conflicts, organizing religious ceremonies.	Preserved mainly as cultural heritage during ceremonies; less governance role.
Respect for Adat Leaders	Depends on leaders' integrity and religious involvement; active participation sustains respect.	Respect tied to cultural event participation; authority weakens if leaders neglect ethics/spirituality.
Adat's Legitimacy	Rooted in ethical conduct aligned with community's moral/spiritual values.	Declining legitimacy; adat viewed more as tradition than authority.
Relationship with Bureaucracy	Adat and bureaucracy influence each other and coexist in a hybrid governance model.	Bureaucracy dominates; adat role is mostly symbolic.

In Kuala Langsa, the mobilizing power of adat institutions was especially visible in moral and spiritual activities. A village head explained, "Once the teungku says, 'Come to the meunasah, this is important,' people will come even in the rain." This showed that the moral authority of adat figures such as teungku was still stronger than instructions from village officials. The same leader added, "If you want to mobilize the community, adat is more powerful than banners," meaning that communication rooted in social and religious norms was more trusted and obeyed than formal approaches, which were

often seen as rigid and distant. In Kuala Langsa, it was adat that moved people, not the bureaucracy. As one elder said: "Autonomy gives the body, but adat gives the soul. That's what we hold: the body from the state, but the spirit from our own wisdom."

Adat also played a central role in conflict resolution, especially in private disputes such as family quarrels or land boundaries. "If there's a family or land dispute, people don't run straight to the police," explained the village head of Kuala Langsa. He added, "They still feel more comfortable going to the tuha peut than to the police office." Even though the state was structurally present through officials and legal procedures, people still prioritized local wisdom mechanisms that they saw as more humane, communicative, and socially harmonious.

The situation was different in Meurandeh Dayah, where the mobilization capacity of adat institutions had weakened. Adat had lost its moral basis and social legitimacy, especially among young people. Adat activities rarely touched the daily lives of the younger generation and no longer formed part of their lived experience. As observed in the field, community participation in adat-based agendas was minimal because there were no figures or activities that could create emotional and cultural connections with youth.

he comparison between Kuala Langsa and Meurandeh Dayah showed that the success of adat institutions in maintaining their role depended greatly on their closeness to the values lived by the community and on the credibility of adat leaders. Where adat remained tied to religious practices and community structures, as in Kuala Langsa, it continued to be a binding and mobilizing force. Conversely, when adat became disconnected from daily life and lost respected role models, as in Meurandeh Dayah, its role weakened and was overshadowed by administrative power.

This condition aligned with other findings that showed the honor (marwah) of adat institutions was still preserved in ceremonial and socio-religious spaces, but had declined in the formal spaces of village government. The dignity of adat was upheld through

symbolic roles such as leading prayers, mediating small conflicts, organizing feasts, tahlilan, zikr gatherings, and commemorations of the Prophet's birthday. These activities showed that adat authority still had a place in collective memory and social practice, even if it no longer shaped administrative decision-making.

In Kuala Langsa, the village head explained that "we maintain the dignity of adat through symbolic roles: leading prayers at big events, acting as mediator when people fight." This showed how adat was preserved through spiritual and mediative functions. However, this status was not absolute. A local youth leader, Pak Triyono, emphasized that respect for adat leaders depended on their personal integrity and involvement in religious life. "If the teungku is active in study circles, people still respect him," he said, showing that adat authority was contingent on ethical conduct, not automatically guaranteed by structural position.

A similar trend appeared in Meurandeh Dayah. The village head explained, "If it's a death or tahlilan, adat is still used. But now it functions more as culture." This showed that the meaning of adat was being redefined—from normative authority to cultural heritage, practiced for tradition's sake rather than governance. In this setting, adat dignity was preserved not only through symbolic practices but also through cultural strategies that reinforced social and spiritual ties. The presence of adat leaders in these events still mattered, as Bu Maimunah said: "If there's a tahlil, or maulid, they still attend." This participation became a visible marker of adat's existence, even if it no longer carried weight in governance.

Nevertheless, findings also showed that adat dignity could fade if leaders engaged in practices perceived negatively, such as joining development projects without a clear role or neglecting ethical and spiritual values. At this point, it was clear that adat legitimacy was not built through formal systems but through daily practices consistent with the community's moral and spiritual values. Thus, adat authority depended more on "ethical conduct" than on official positions. These findings supported the argument

that in hybrid states, power was not legitimized solely by bureaucratic systems but also by the ability of local actors to consistently perform symbolic and spiritual roles amid changing social values and structures.

Discussion

The transformation of traditional institutions in the context of village governance in Aceh reflects a highly complex dynamic. This process cannot simply be understood through the binary of conflict versus collaboration between adat and the state, but instead requires a more flexible and contextual approach. This article draws on the framework of political hybridity developed by Hansen and Stepputat, who argue that the state does not appear as a single, consistent, or stable entity (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). Instead, the state should be seen as a field of conflict and negotiation that is continuously contested in everyday practices by various local actors. In this perspective, the state is "performed" by local actors through diverse social practices that shape, negotiate, and sometimes even challenge formal authority.

At the gampong level, the state is not fully represented only through administrative devices, but also through informal relations and customary norms that remain alive and influential in social life. The presence of the keuchik, tuha peut, and adat institutions not only reflects role differentiation, but also illustrates the intersection of bureaucratic and customary logics within the same practical space. In this sense, village government is not merely an extension of the state; it is also an agent shaped by local norms and community dynamics.

Field findings show that adat and bureaucratic logics coexist, but do not always move in harmony. Bureaucratization has a double effect: on one hand, it provides access to legal-formal systems and clarifies governance procedures; on the other, it creates administrative burdens and performance expectations that do not always match the capacities and work styles of adat leaders. In many cases, overlapping roles between the keuchik and adat leaders can be seen in conflict resolution and in the formulation of local

policies. This indicates that the boundaries between formal and informal authority are fluid and constantly negotiated.

This condition also supports the finding that in a hybrid state, authority is not legitimized solely through formal regulations, but also through the ability of local actors to build trust and solidarity based on contextual values. Customary institutions, in this regard, serve as bridges between society and the state—especially in mobilizing communities, resolving disputes, and preserving communal values that formal bureaucracy cannot easily reach. For example, the ability of adat leaders to organize kenduri, tolak bala, and pengajian remains a symbolic strength that unites villagers, even though their administrative authority has weakened.

These findings echo Tyson's argument that the revival of adat is not a form of romantic nostalgia for the past, but a political arena full of intensity and selectivity (Tyson, 2010). Customary communities use their identities and traditions strategically to demand recognition and political rights. In this sense, adat is not a static or passive entity, but a dynamic force that constantly adapts to political and social change.

This view is supported by Benda-Beckmann et al. who emphasize that the revitalization of customary and religious law is not simply restorative, but proactive, directed toward the future, and involves renegotiating broader legal and social structures (Benda-Beckmann & Benda-Beckmann, 2017). In practice, adat becomes an arena where discourses, positions, and local resources are contested. However, this approach has been criticized by Zikir, who identifies two types of power relations between adat institutions and village governments: first, a symbiotic relationship in development and empowerment; and second, a conflictual relationship when it comes to distributing resources and government assistance labeled under adat identity (Zikir et al., 2021).

Further, Umbase, through the case study of Ratumbanua in Taturan Village, shows that adat institutions can play a substantive role in local governance, particularly in cultural preservation and economic empowerment through sectors like agriculture and

trade (Umbase, 2017). Similarly, Indra Lesmana highlights effective synergy between village governments and adat institutions, which allows them to collaborate in designing development programs rooted in local values (Lesmana et al., 2019). A multi-actor approach, as developed by Betha Rahmasari et al., also shows that successful adat-based village governance cannot depend only on norms or structures, but on networks of actors who actively shape policy directions and social practices (Rahmasari et al., 2023). This argument is reinforced by Nurdin and Riezal et al., who note that traditional mechanisms such as di'et, sayam, suloh, peusijuk, and peumat jaroe remain highly effective in maintaining social harmony, precisely because they involve local actors with credibility and acceptance in the eyes of the community (Nurdin, 2015; Riezal et al., 2019).

Thus, the coexistence of state and adat in Aceh's village governance cannot be reduced to questions of dominance or subordination, but must be seen as a flexible and situational hybridity. The state is not a closed system that governs society from above, but rather an open arena in which multiple actors—including adat institutions—struggle to gain influence and legitimacy. Within this framework, the state and adat are not separate entities; instead, they continuously shape and give meaning to each other in the everyday practices of local communities.

Conclusion

The findings in Gampong Kuala Langsa and Meurandeh Dayah show that customary norms and bureaucratic logics coexist in village governance, but their relationship does not always run in harmony. In practice, the interaction between adat and bureaucracy is dynamic—sometimes taking the form of collaboration, but at other times overlapping or even creating tension. While village officials carry out administrative functions based on state regulations, customary institutions continue to play an important role in community life, especially in religious activities, conflict resolution, and collective rituals. This role shows that adat is not merely a traditional symbol but an active social force that mobilizes community participation and maintains

social cohesion. Even as formal bureaucratic logic develops, people continue to place strong trust in adat authority as a source of collective identity that cannot be replaced by formal state structures.

Theoretically, these findings strengthen Hansen and Stepputat's argument that the state is not a single entity that simply dominates from above, but rather is formed through interaction and negotiation with existing social practices such as adat (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001). At the local level, the state does not appear in a pure and uniform form, but is mixed and entangled with local ways of life, norms, and symbols. Therefore, understanding the state in the village context cannot rely only on analyzing bureaucratic structures or formal regulations, but also requires attention to everyday practices and symbolic meanings enacted by local actors. In Aceh, the presence of the state through gampong officials such as the keuchik and the village secretary is always in interaction with customary norms that both shape and are shaped by society. The local state that emerges in Acehnese villages is the result of ongoing social negotiation, in which local actors actively determine how state rules are applied and interpreted.

However, this study also has several limitations. Research was conducted in only two gampong, which is not sufficient to represent the variety of configurations of adat–bureaucracy relations across Aceh, given its wide cultural and political diversity. In addition, this study has not specifically highlighted the role of women in hybrid governance, even though they may hold important positions within both customary structures and local bureaucracy. The economic-political dimension, such as the influence of village funds, resource distribution, and local political interests on the position of customary institutions, has also not been explored in depth. Based on these limitations, further research is recommended to take a comparative approach across districts or customary regions to examine the varied patterns of incorporating adat into village governance systems. It is also important to conduct more explicit studies on the roles and agency of women within customary and bureaucratic structures. Furthermore, exploring how economic-political relations affect the power and legitimacy of customary

institutions would enrich the understanding of hybrid governance at the local level. Finally, in-depth ethnographic approaches are recommended to capture the symbolic dynamics and everyday practices that form the foundation of the complex configurations of the local state.

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