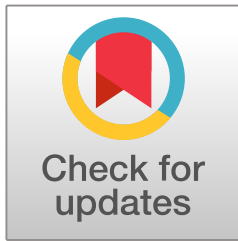**Check for updates**

ARTICLE

Rethinking the Role of Customary Elites

The Flexibility of *Adat* and the Interest of Customary Elites in Local Politics in Lampung, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines the customary elites' role in the local socio-political landscape in Lampung, Indonesia. The problem is that so far, the role of customary elites is often ignored in regional development, where they only become political symbols and are used for local political interests in the region. In this case study, customary elites attempt to manage their *adat* communities so that they make positive contributions to society. *Adat* still has a significant influence and plays an important role in the daily lives of the Lampung people. However, this is not just community-level regulation or customary law; it also has important cultural and social significance for the nation. This study uses qualitative research methods and an ethnographic approach. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation with analysis using data reduction, verification, data display, and data triangulation. The result showed that *adat* helps form and maintain social ties among local communities, contributing to government development programs and administrative changes. In the *adat* government, traditional elites also represent their *adat* communities. *Adat* shows flexibility towards change while preserving local wisdom and contributing to regional development. Customary elites and *adat* communities have great influence in society, and they are valued and respected by their collective members. Their role should be maximized by local governments in regional development because one of the keys to successful development is utilizing local wisdom because local wisdom is the element that is most adaptable and flexible in change.

Keywords: Custom (*Adat*); Indigeneity; Customary Elites; Social Capital; Management of Customary Society.

1. Introduction

This article presents the findings of research on the politics of indigenous peoples (*Adat* Community) in Lampung, focusing on the transformative aspects of a local community, local politics, and the influential role of customary elites (*tokoh adat* or *adat* community leaders) in local politics and government in Lampung. *Adat* communities are important not only for development but also for politics, which are also called marginal groups (Manoby et al., 2021; Sulista, 2019). The customary referred to here is *adat*. *Adat* is defined as customary or body of local customs. *Adat* is usually defined as a local custom that regulates the interaction of the members of a society. In this second sense, *adat* is supposed to form the entire value system, the basis of all ethical and legal judgment, and the source of social expectations. In short, it represents the ideal pattern of behavior. The customary elites referred to here are people who are referred to as traditional leaders or traditional figures or *adat* community leaders who are influential in the *adat* community.

Indigenous elites also have power in local political leadership (Gunawan, 2021). Indigenous peoples have the nationalist language of their' inherent right to self-determination, which is helpful in articulating their political demands (Oksanen, 2020). Indigenous peoples continue to face substantial challenges (Renwick et al., 2020).

Delving into the history of indigenous communities, one can trace their evolution from the colonial period to the present day. Indigenous communities, often referred to as customary groups in Indonesia, have played a pivotal role in shaping the country's political dynamics. The combination of government and indigenous institutions strengthens the position of the existing indigenous governments and institutions (Azwar et al., 2020). In the New Order era, the government established customary organizations in each province, reflecting the diversity of regions across Indonesia. The Regional Regulation that does not empower the indigenous institutions has to be revised (Azwar et al., 2018). Problems with indigenous people can also result in ethnic conflicts, which have an impact on economic problems and political stability. Therefore, the role of the local elite itself is needed (Mulyadi, 2017).

While these organizations were formed based on the wishes and aspirations of the people, they lacked political power and primarily functioned as social units dedicated to preserving art and culture. During the New Order era, customary communities seemed suppressed, resulting in their limited involvement in political movements. Indigenous people have long faced powerful political actors who would benefit from their eradication, either from their presence in society or as actors in the political process (Witmer et al., 2022). Hoarding Indigenous resources requires narrations that historically legitimate the dominant culture's territoriality (Everson, 2022). Culture fluctuates substantially from year to year. Change in personal culture is increasingly varied for younger birth cohorts (Lersch, 2023).

The Reformation era witnessed the re-emergence of customary communities, each led by a figure known as *kepala adat* in Lampung, also referred to as *kepala marga* or *penyimbang*. In the post-Reformation era following the New Order regime, customary leaders have assumed a pivotal role in the administration of government systems across various regions. Specifically, these leaders, identified as *kepala adat*, *kepala marga*, or *penyimbang*, are actively engaged in activities such as mobilizing the populace for gubernatorial, local, and state legislative elections, presidential elections, the delineation of administrative units and providing support for diverse developmental initiatives orchestrated by the government. Indigenous communities

have much to teach about the ethics and application of sustainable development (Asteria et al., 2024; Brady et al., 2024; du Cros, 2024; Mensah, 2023; Yenice & Yagmur, 2024).

In Lampung and throughout Indonesia, customary leaders should be acknowledged as a distinct category of elites alongside their modern counterparts. Certain individuals in Indonesian society are recognized as community and customary leaders, indicating their status as stakeholders imbued with customary knowledge. Members of customary society entrust these individuals with decision-making responsibilities, viewing them as capable representatives. Typically, a community or customary leader is perceived as experienced and wise, deemed fit to articulate the needs of their community. However, it is acknowledged that some customary elites may prioritize personal interests, rendering them unsuitable to authentically represent the collective interests of their customary society (Nurdin et al., 2023).

Historically, Van Rooyen (1930) documented the presence of 62 clans in Lampung. Subsequent experts, Hilman Hadikusuma and Rizani Puspawidjaja, noted that these clans increased due to the movement of groups across different territories, involving the establishment of new kingdoms through migration and clan formation. A clan in Lampung may comprise several *buay*, *kepaksian*, and *suku*, although a single *buay* forms some clans. For example, the Legun (Sai Batin) clan in Kalianda was formed based on four *kepaksian* (Paksi Maja, Paksi Tengkuju, Paksi Way Urang, and Paksi Canggu) and four *kebuayaan*, which declared themselves as a clan and acknowledged Way Urang's identity as *bandakh* or leader (Legun, n.d.). Then there is Buay Belunguh in Tanggamus, where the name Belunguh comes from just one *buay*, which later became the Buay Belunguh clan (Nurdin, 2018).

Furthermore, Lampung is characterized as a multi-ethnic region, as highlighted in the 2000 census published by BPS - Statistics Indonesia (2000). This census reveals that descendants of nearly all ethnic groups in Indonesia reside in Lampung province. Consequently, Lampung can be regarded as a microcosm of Indonesia, exhibiting a rich tapestry of ethnic diversities. This research seeks to analyze the transformations occurring in local politics at the customary level within this intricate socio-cultural context. This is important to research because local political studies rarely discuss the role of traditional leaders, even though, in reality, the role of traditional leaders is very important in local political dynamics and even important in the election of regional heads such as Regents and Governors. Traditional leaders influence people's choices in exercising their voting rights. So, this research is important to research. This is also shown by previous studies, namely as follows. This research from Fajri (2022) discusses how the customary elite plays an important role in local democracy, namely a regional election contestation. Customary elites in this research play an important role in mobilizing their mass base through traditional instruments to support certain candidates in the regional elections and fill important positions such as advisors to the winning team and even as winning team leaders. The existence of a power owned by the customary elite is used and exploited by the customary elite to provide a message to support prospective election participants.

For example, research conducted by Akbar and Andriyani (2023) found out the role of the customary elite in the 2020 Jambi gubernatorial election and the factors behind the victory of candidate pairs in the 2020 Jambi gubernatorial election. The research results show that the customary elite or the village head has a big influence on the governor's election. Jambi Malay Indigenous customary elite play an important role in the 2020 Jambi Governor Election, and they campaign for

candidates, take part in debates and discussions related to the Governor election, are active in civil society and social movements, advocate for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and take part in activities to improve the standard of living of the Jambi community, is actively involved in protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as implementing programs to improve the standard of living of the people of Jambi and taking part in decision-making processes and initiatives related to the development of Jambi province. The research from Bastiang (2020) discusses the existence of the customary elite in the 2018 election for Governor and Deputy Governor of North Maluku, where the customary elite was considered to have a very important role, especially by candidates for governor and deputy governor to the support provided by this customary elite. Apart from that, the role of the customary elite is very influential on community participation where the customary elite play a role in helping organizers socialize the stages and importance of political participation that the community must carry out.

The research from Winarno et al. (2023) shows that there is a role of the customary elite in the supervision of Bawaslu Palangka Raya, where the role of the customary elite as figures is also continuous with the general election to provide strategies in the 2020 regional head election. Customary elites act as supporting facilitators for each activity carried out, including collaborative activities with universities and mass organizations, outreach through banners and brochures, and the use of social media. This research shows that the customary elite plays a role in social, cultural, and economic functions and politics in the regional elections held in 2017 in Buru Regency. These elites have carried out internal participation, including political outreach. Carry out lower-level mobility and become a committee member in the Regional Election so that people can participate in politics and not abstain. The research from Tuhulele and Yunanto (2022) shows that the customary elite plays a role in social, cultural, and economic functions and politics in the regional elections held in 2017 in Buru Regency. These elites have carried out internal participation, including political outreach. Carry out lower-level mobility and become a committee member in the Regional Election so that people can participate in politics and not abstain. From the results of previous research, it can be seen that it is very important to review and rethink the role of customary elites in government.

2. Methods

This research employed qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach (Gibbons et al., 1986; Spradley, 2016). This research uses an ethnographic approach because to understand customary elites and indigenous communities, you have to do a lot of field research and conduct in-depth understanding more often with informants. Researchers take part in activities with informants. Research with an ethnographic approach is research about an ethnic group, while indigenous peoples or the *adat* community are part of an ethnic group. The data collection involved field research, in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with 31 informants, including customary elites, customary and community leaders, members of customary groups, government officials, and other relevant informants.

Data were analyzed using triangulation, peer review, and member checks, which are crucial for ensuring data validity. Triangulation in ethnographic research is vital because data obtained during in-depth interviews may not always be focused, leading to subjective data or gossip. The researcher also conducted a member check, revisiting informants to verify previously provided data affirmatively or checking the data with other informants regarding its validity. Peer review was undertaken by

discussing the data with experts in the field, particularly peer groups, engaging in discussions, seeking criticism, and obtaining suggestions (Gibbons et al., 1986; Spradley, 2016).

Subsequently, the researcher presented data based on taxonomy, categories, and theme classification. Data analysis utilized theory to guide researchers in identifying emerging trends, understanding the position of resulting theories and concepts among previously existing theories, whether to build a new theory, criticize an old theory, or support a previous theory (Gibbons et al., 1986). The theory used in this research is the social capital. The ultimate goal of this qualitative research with an ethnographic approach was to find or build a theory from the phenomena studied (Suparlan, 1997).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Changes in Customary Societies in Lampung During the Dutch East Indies Era

Custom (*adat*) and *adat* community (*masyarakat adat*) have undergone multiple redefinitions of their socio-political functions, influenced by macro-level changes in Indonesia from the colonial period to the present day. The annexation of the Lampung area to the Dutch East Indies in 1856 subjected the Lampung people (orang Lampung) to Dutch colonial rule, centered in Batavia (now Jakarta). During the colonial era, significant transformations were initiated. The development and reproduction of a strong sense of ethnicity identity among disparate Indigenous peoples is key to sustaining strong social movements (Lupien, 2020; Mackay & Feagin, 2022).

In the late 19th century, the Dutch East Indies introduced a centralized, modern administrative system in the Lampung area, compelling customary societies to make substantial concessions in the political domain. Suzuki notes that from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, the local government in Lampung "abandoned the local 'marga' system" and "ignored customary social systems," deviating from the colonial government's 1857 principle that custom should be protected (Suzuki, 1980). These communities are characterized by unique indigenous cultures, values, and beliefs, maintaining their kin-based structures (Bansal et al., 2024).

Consequently, customary villages, previously characterized by members and social strata identified through genealogical relationships, were integrated into the colonial administrative structure as a sub-division of the government. Colonial officials replaced village chiefs, who traditionally held positions based on custom and genealogical status inheritance. In essence, the kinship-based customary society underwent reorganization, transforming into a modern administrative unit with clearly defined territorial boundaries.

Simultaneously, at the regional level, the local government established the District-Protatin-Raad (The Dutch word Raad means a council) to administer the restructured 'customary' society. This district-level administrative body was attended by village heads but presided over by a European official responsible for handling legal matters and criminal issues throughout the district, with judgments delivered by the European official (Suzuki, 1980). This centralized administrative system persisted until the restoration of the *marga* system in 1928 as an administrative unit.

Customs functioned as a complementary set of rules in this "dualistic system" (Kingston, 1987) as long as it did not contradict colonial law. The Ethical Policy,

initiated at the beginning of the 20th century, led to the formation of the *Volksraad* (Council of Local People) in Jakarta in 1918. For regencies, including *Lampongsche Districten*, the colonial government implemented the Decentralization Law in 1923, which came into effect in (Kingston, 1987).

The population census of 1930 revealed that, at that time, *Lampongsche Districten* had approximately 350,000 people, with 180,000 categorized as orang Lampung, around 88,000 as Javanese migrants, and about 80,000 from various ethnic groups such as orang Palembang, Bengkulu, Sumendo, Minang, Bugis, among others. Despite the smaller population compared to the present, Lampung, especially in Telukbetung-Tanjungkarang City (currently called Bandarlampung City), was already a multi-ethnic region with diverse customs.

Figure 1. District Divisions of Bandar Lampung City

Source: Google.com, 2024

In 1928, the *marga* system was reintroduced in Lampung, marking the breakdown of the former "dualistic system." The leader of the *marga, kepala marga*, was chosen by heads of each customary family (*penyimbang*) within the *marga* (Suwondo, 1978). The *marga* was established as an administrative unit of the colony, distinct from the customary *marga* before colonization. It is essential to note, however, that the post-colonial *marga* system differed from its pre-colonial counterpart.

These transformations stemmed from the acknowledgment of custom as a form of local juridical system (*adatrecht*) by Dutch scholars associated with the customary law school, particularly led by Van Vollenhoven. Despite its wide range of socio-political functions, customs, unlike laws, demonstrated flexibility to adapt to changes in socio-cultural and political environments. The challenge arose when the emerging local ruling class, benefiting from the new colonial economy and ascending to customary status through feasts of merit, lacked sufficient knowledge of the operational intricacies of the modern *marga* within the colonial administrative system. The system proved unsuitable for people living without such a *marga* system for decades following the annexation to the Dutch East Indies. In this context, local intellectuals even led a rebellious movement against the *marga* system (Kingston, 1987).

Under the Ethical Policy, this colonial marga system persisted during the Japanese military rule until 1945, albeit with a change in the title of the marga chief to a Japanese one. For example, the title "kepala marga" was changed to "marga cho (マルガ長)." In this context, the word "cho (長)" means head or chief of an organization, while the word "marga" was still used as the name of the administrative unit.

3.2. Transformations in Customary Societies in Lampung Post-independence

Following the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, a significant functional shift occurred within customs. With the establishment of the new nation-state, a revised administrative system was introduced, leading to the abolition of the *marga* system in Lampung. Consequently, locally recognized leaders, as defined by customs, lost their official political power and status, marking Lampung's third notable change in customs and customary society. Simultaneously, newly implemented agricultural and forest laws facilitating private land ownership diminished the socio-political authority of customs over communal land and forests. These changes repositioned the role of customs from a socio-political domain to a socio-cultural one.

The constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945 was amended to acknowledge customary society, defining them as individuals who have resided for generations in a specific geographical area, bound by cultural identity and a strong connection to the land, territory, and natural resources in their traditional domain. During the New Order era, limited attention was given to customary elites in Lampung. However, the political prominence of customary elites resurged at the beginning of the reformation era in 1998. The discourse of "putra daerah" (literally, "son of the region") gained significance nationwide, including in Lampung province. Customary elites began influencing local political dynamics, exhibiting two primary roles: assisting local governments in addressing community-level social problems and advocating for their political demands.

This research focuses on the Olok Gading sub-district in Bandar Lampung, where customary elites, particularly *penyimbang*, played a crucial role in aiding regional government officials in resolving community-level issues. This article will specifically highlight *penyimbang* as a representative customary elite.

3.3. Case Study: History of Negeri Olok Gading Customary Village

Assimilation between different cultures in Indonesia offers several valuable benefits, such as creating a shared sense of identity among diverse communities, promoting tolerance and respect as individuals learn about and appreciate each other's traditions and beliefs, etc. (Maisondra, 2023). For example, one of the villages in the city of Bandar Lampung, which has various ethnic groups and cultures within it, has succeeded in creating a peaceful environment with a unique mix of cultures. The village is Negeri Olok Gading village. The Negeri Olok Gading sub-district is situated in the Teluk Betung Barat District of Bandar Lampung City.

Villages have the lowest government level in the district/city government's administrative area in Indonesia, and they are mostly synonymous with areas far from urban areas (Manoby et al., 2021). Contrary to the connotations associated with the term "village," the boundaries of this sub-district closely align with those of the customary village of Negeri Olok Gading. Importantly, it is not located in an isolated

rural setting; rather, this customary village exists within a residential neighborhood not far from the bustling commercial hub of the provincial capital.

Negeri Olok Gading maintains its rich customary culture despite its proximity to urban life. Notably, two historical structures stand as testaments to this cultural heritage near the village gate. The first is the Lamban Balak, a customary house affiliated with the "Telukbetung" clan or Sai Batin Adat community.
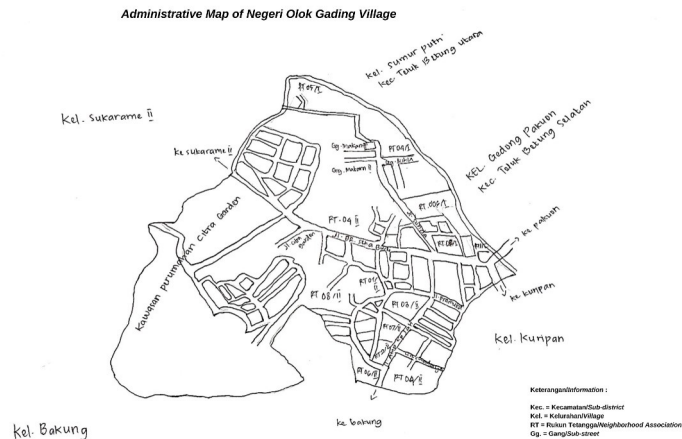

Figure 2. Administrative Map of Olok Gading Village

Source: Negeri Olok Gading Village, 2024

This village holds significance in the history of Bandar Lampung City as one of the oldest customary villages. Accompanying its historical prominence is the Quba Mosque, the city's second-oldest mosque. In 1883, the eruption of the Krakatau volcano inflicted considerable damage, with the village facing destruction from an earthquake and tsunami. The Quba Mosque and Bandar Balak buildings were the sole structures to withstand the calamity, retaining their original form for over a century. According to informants, the establishment of the Saibatin custom in Negeri Olok Gading, known as "Bandar Balak," traces its roots back to the Sultanate of Bengkunat, situated on the west coast of West Lampung in 1618. The following recounts a brief legend concerning the establishment of this customary village.

Ibrahim, holding the customary title of Raja Pemuka, was the sixth-generation descendant of Batin Pemuka Pesirah Alam I, the inaugural leader of the Bengkunat Sultanate. Having an elder brother named Husin, who held the customary title of Pangeran Mengkubumi, Ibrahim sought permission to establish a new village that he would govern. Aware that the leadership of the Bengkunat Sultanate would pass to his elder brother, Husin, Ibrahim embarked on a journey to find a suitable piece of land for his envisioned village. Out of respect for his elder brother, he obtained permission and blessings before commencing his quest for a new territory suitable for farming and habitation. Prior to initiating construction, he promptly returned to the sultanate to inform Husin about the identified land.

His elder brother granted Ibrahim permission and blessings, but under certain conditions: he must name the village "NEGERI" and the customary house "Lamban Balak." Departing from the Bengkunat Sultanate, accompanied by three escorts—Kemas Sengaji, Kemas Ngeladang, and Cinta Gemulung—and their people, Ibrahim arrived at the chosen location in 1618, officially establishing Kampung Negeri.

Shortly thereafter, Ibrahim, now bearing the new customary title of Raja Pemuka, undertook a formal visit with tributes, known as *siba*, to the Sultanate of Banten. At

the time, the Sultanate of Banten wielded significant influence over the western part of Java Island and the southern part of Sumatra Island, including Lampung. Ibrahim stayed in Banten for an extended period and was honored with the title Kariya Kencana Dipura, along with gifts from Sultan Muhammad Agung—a *kupiah*, a scarf, and a long robe. It is still preserved at Lamban Balak. These gifts symbolized the strong relationship between Kebuayan Telukbetung and the Sultanate of Banten. Upon his return, Ibrahim was officially appointed as a customary leader, and this title was subsequently passed down to his patrilineal descendants, a tradition that continues to this day.
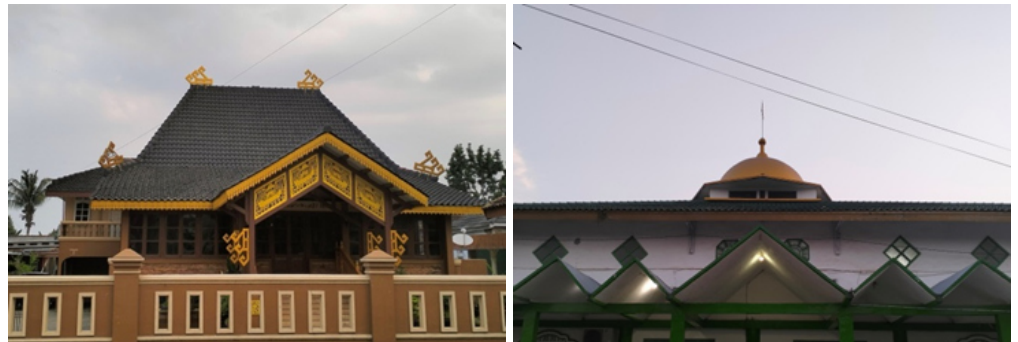

Figure 3. Lamban Balak (left) and Mosque of Quba' (right)
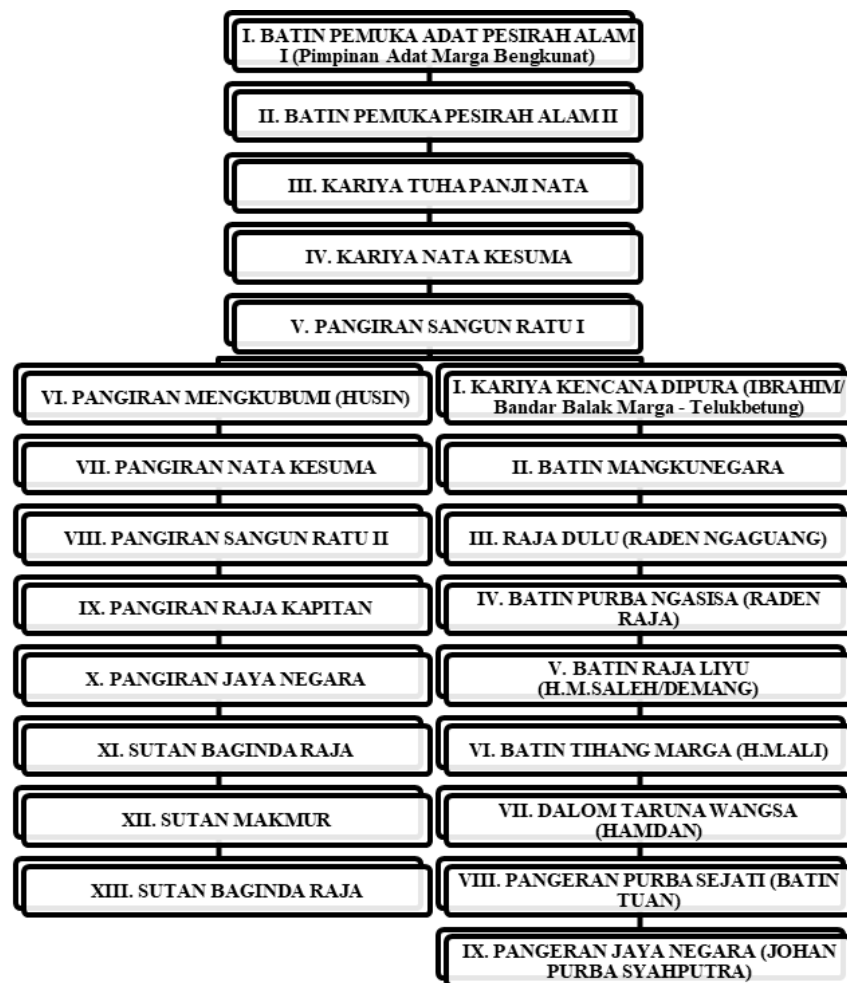
Source: Researcher's collection

Figure 4. Genealogical Legacy of Bandar Balak Marga in Teluk Betung

Source: Researcher's collection

As depicted in the genealogy chart (Figure 4), a distinctive customary title was bestowed upon each customary leader, with instances where the same customary title was reiterated for leaders of different generations. Within the broader Lampung cultural context, these customary titles are commonly referred to as *adok*.

Customary leaders further bestow adok titles upon their descendants or individuals deemed deserving of such an honor. Additionally, adok serves as a means to pay homage and preserve the memory of deceased ancestors, passing down the title to subsequent generations. Furthermore, adok may be conferred in the context of a marriage between an individual from a particular lineage and someone outside that tradition or clan, necessitating a sequence of customary rituals. The detailed descriptions of each adok within the Telukbetung clan are elucidated below.

3.4. The Significance and Role of Customary Title (*Adok*) in the Telukbetung Clan

a. *Pangeran/Pengikhan*: This customary title designates the leader of the highest rank within the Telukbetung clan. The status of a *pangeran* is akin to that of a sultan/sutan in Lampung custom, granting the *pangeran* the authority to establish decisions and rules adhered to by all indigenous peoples under their leadership. A *pangeran* must be a legitimate descendant of the founders' lineage, regardless of their profession or day job. For instance, even if a *pangeran* engages in farming, custom dictates that they fulfill their role as a *pangeran*, commanding respect as a customary leader within the community. The current leader of the custom in Negeri Olok Gading is Johan Purba Syahputra (customary title: Pangeran Jaya Negara), the ninth-generation descendant from the Telukbetung clan's founder.

b. *Dalom/Kariya*: This customary title is bestowed upon the *pangeran*'s first younger brother, representing the second-highest position in the customary system. Often, this title is also designated for a future *pangeran*. In cases where a *pangeran* has no male descendants, the leadership position is passed to the *dalom*. Similar to the *pangeran*, the *dalom* must originate from a legitimate lineage of the founders.

c. *Batin*: This customary title is passed down from parents to the eldest male child in a family. For instance, if the father holds the title dalom, it is typically passed to his eldest son. An illustration is seen in the customary leader of the Bengkunat clan, Batin Pemuka Pesirah Alam I, passing down the title *batin* to his eldest son, Batin Pemuka Pesirah Alam II. In their customary practice, the *batin* title is usually derived from the father's customary title (adok) and automatically transferred to his first son. Thus, if the father's customary title is *batin*, his son's title will also bear the designation *batin*.

d. *Ratu*: This customary title is conferred upon the wife of the *pangeran*. While the role of the *ratu* may not always be prominently showcased in the Telukbetung clan customs, as men traditionally play more active roles, the *ratu* is still respected by tradition and the community. The current *ratu* of Negeri Olok Gading is Ratu Penyimbang Adat (Dewi Aya Sofia), the wife of Pangeran Jaya Negara.

e. *Suri Paduka*: This customary title is given to the daughter of the *pangeran*. *Adok Suri Paduka* is typically bestowed upon the daughter of a *sultan* or *penyimbang*.

As previously mentioned, Lampung customs adhere to a patriarchal principle with a lineage system, ensuring that a man consistently holds the highest position in a custom, irrespective of whether he is the eldest, middle, or youngest son. In matters of inheritance, following customary rules, only sons of male lineage inherit their

parents' entire property. Daughters usually receive a portion determined by male heirs, often at their discretion. However, daughters may sometimes request specific properties from male heirs. Whether or not these requests are granted remains at the discretion of the male heirs.

Following the trial, the people of the customary village unanimously agreed, based on historical background and customary lineage, that the status of customary leaders of Kampung Negeri remained in the hands of the original lineage of Kariya Kencana Dipura (customary title: Pangeran Purba Sejati). Despite the merger of Kampung Negeri and Kampung Olok Gading into Kampung Negeri Olok Gading, the existing customary system remained unchanged. The Dutch officially recognized the Kampung Negeri, Teluk Betung Clan in 1930, with Batin Tihang (Haji Mohammad Ali) confirmed as the *penyimbang* of the customary village and appointed as a member for the *adat raad* or *marga raad* trial.

The judgment letter clarified the events among *penyimbang* at that time, ensuring that the customs of the Telukbetung clan continued to be upheld based on the specified criteria for the succession of the *penyimbang* position—either the descendants of Haji Mohammad Ali or a legitimate successor defined by Bengkunat custom. Every *penyimbang* occupying a customary position resides in the Lamban Balak customary house with their family to preserve the architecture and its historical relics. The change in the name or term from "kampung/desa" to "kelurahan" was mandated by the provisions in Law Number 5 of 1979, aiming to standardize the administration system.

3.5. The Role of Customary Elites in Government Administration

The customary law observed in the Olok Gading sub-district remains a significant aspect of the local community's identity. Despite the predominant presence of migrants and their descendants in this sub-district, the Saibatin custom continues to be upheld, providing a longstanding foundation for social security. The customary law in Negeri Olok Gading Village is characterized by its simplicity, with rules primarily focused on fostering harmony and order in social life.

A key emphasis in this village is placed on maintaining harmonious neighborly relations. Residents of Negeri Olok Gading are expected to adhere to established rules and norms, displaying respect, assistance, and care towards one another. This practice has earned the village a reputation for unity among its diverse inhabitants, transcending different ethnic groups and traditions.

Stringent measures are in place to address intentional disruptions or conflicts within the community. The village secretary, Samsul Komar, notes that the customary system effectively resolves common issues such as noise disturbances, misunderstandings, and conflicts. The strict nature of the custom ensures that individuals causing trouble face substantial sanctions, discouraging the repetition of such problems. Residents highlight the positive qualities of their *pangeran* or *penyimbang*, noting their humility and close connection with the community. Negeri Olok Gading Village upholds various customary rituals, with certain ceremonies integral to the local cultural fabric. Among these ceremonies, processions and title-giving events, known as *adok*, are prominent and still actively practiced.

Processions serve as celebratory events for weddings, baby *aqiqah* (naming ceremonies), circumcisions, and welcoming guests. In the village, weddings and circumcisions are particularly marked by elaborate processions. During these events, the celebrants, adorned in customary clothing and jewelry reflecting their *adok*, are accompanied by bodyguards showcasing *silat* movements. Some processions

involve the use of umbrellas or, in certain cases, a palanquin resembling an artificial throne, where the celebrants are paraded down the aisle while prayers are recited.

In Negeri Olok Gading Village, processions typically forego palanquins, emphasizing a more straightforward approach. This cultural expression serves to convey gratitude, joy, and blessings to the community. Notably, the prayers recited during these ceremonies are in Arabic or *sholawat*, a reflection of Lampung's cultural diversity. The title-giving ceremony or *adok* occurs in Lamban Balak when an individual is set to join the custom, a decision sanctioned by the customary *penyimbang*. During this ceremony, the *penyimbang* bestows an *adok* upon the person entering the custom, following established procedures. This ritual ensures the preservation of lineage purity within customs and promotes transparency in the customary and cultural systems. Notably, entry into the tradition is not open to everyone, and in Lampung customs, *adok* in Sai-Batin cannot be purchased.

Many customary ceremonies have undergone acculturation and assimilation with Islamic teachings. For instance, traditional rituals for the deceased have been replaced by ceremonies following Islamic practices. However, burial sites for families of customary leaders differ from public burial places, as they have designated areas for their final resting places.

3.6. Does *Adat* Serve Community or Personal Objectives?

Customs and customary leaders play a crucial role in fostering community-level autonomy; however, it is essential to acknowledge that customary elites may sometimes pose challenges driven by personal interests. Some elites might manipulate customs to serve their political agendas rather than the community's well-being, leading to conflicts and potential issues for local governance. The research findings reveal that several clans or indigenous communities in Lampung have encountered such challenges, posing obstacles to the local government's development initiatives. Development prioritizes building critical awareness and exploring the potential of local community knowledge (Mahmud & Junaidi, 2023).

There are four significant problems prevalent in Lampung's customary societies. These issues underscore the importance of addressing internal conflicts within customary societies to ensure a harmonious and cooperative environment, allowing for more effective local governance and development initiatives.

a. Conflict over Legitimacy and Power: This conflict revolves around claims regarding who holds the highest rights and power within the customs. Determining the "legitimacy" and superiority among clans becomes challenging as various parties claim their rights, leading to intricate problem-solving situations.

b. Claims on Customary Land: Disputes over customary land ownership pose complex challenges. Lack of written proof for land boundaries, relying solely on the memories of clan members, complicates the resolution process. Traditionally, land boundaries were defined by the range of buffalo grazing or using a traditional length scale, 'depa,' based on the span of hands. It is also because some ethnic groups of Lampung have the tradition of shifting cultivation from land to land.

c. Involvement of Customary Elites in Local Politics: Customary elites may become entangled in local political agendas, such as territorial administrative divisions or provincial governor elections, creating additional challenges.

d. Customary Elites and Resource Access for Business: The involvement of customary elites in accessing resources for business purposes introduces another layer of complexity and potential conflicts.

As conceptualized by Bourdieu (2011), the term "social capital" refers to an individual's intangible relations and networks, functioning as a form of "capital" for that person. Customary elites, as demonstrated earlier, possess robust social capital, particularly within their respective customary societies, which benefits the community. Social capital manifested as civic engagement and social connectedness (Wright & Zhu, 2021).

Coleman (1988) elucidated social capital as a resource influencing individuals' behavior in life. He emphasized the capacity of social capital to address diverse societal problems arising through interactions that create structures or patterns connecting individuals. This structure encompasses norms derived from interactions, behavioral values, knowledge, and interpersonal relationships. In this context, the elite exhibits a structure capable of uniting individuals, holding values, knowledge, and robust societal relationships, rendering them trustworthy representatives of the community. The foundational principle of social capital posits that only groups sharing a set of social and cultural values can truly appreciate the importance of cooperation.

Syahra (2003) contends that social capital is a manifestation of an organized society involving work networks, norms, and values of trust that facilitate cooperation and beneficial actions. He particularly highlights the impact of diminishing ties within the family and community on social life.

From this perspective, customary elites, functioning as social leaders, can contribute to steering the community towards improvement, provided their activities align with the principles of a democratic society and adhere to constitutional and legal limits. Customary elites, no longer rulers, are individuals trusted by, or capable of building trust with, community members. Through trust, they hold the potential to foster the construction and development of a stronger and more cohesive community and region.

The customary elites experienced major transformations from the colonial period, the independence period, and the post-independence period until the regional autonomy period. In the period before independence, namely during the Dutch colonial period, the customary elites were needed by the colonialists to legitimize their colonial rule; the colonialists even succeeded in pitting the traditional elites against each other. During the independence period, especially during the New Order, customary elites were not prioritized and often ignored. The existence of customary elites was only used to legitimize the power of the government, especially during the New Order. After the New Order period, namely the period of regional autonomy, the existence of the traditional elite began to revive. Still, it was only used for local political interests, which, in this case, was during the regional head election. In this case, the relationship between customary elites and the state is seen as a power relationship that is more dominantly controlled by the state and customary elites are only used for certain interests, not for the advancement of the *adat* community. This can be seen from the recognition of customary rights of indigenous peoples, which until now is still very lacking.

Many development failures today are because they do not involve customary elites. Even though the customary elite can influence the community and have flexible local knowledge, development runs smoothly, this shows the important role of customary elites in government. This research underscores the significant

influence and crucial roles played by customary elites and leaders within customary villages, emphasizing the need for the government's recognition to facilitate improved development in Indonesia. Customary elites and leaders possess the potential to collaborate with local authorities, contributing to the advancement of community-level development. A noteworthy example is the Negeri Olok Gading village in Bandar Lampung, where customary values are actively employed to address local issues, showcasing the potential for collaboration between customs and government initiatives.

4. Conclusion

The results of this research follow the conceptualization by Bourdieu (2011) where customary elites are social capital. Customary elites have many networks and relationships with every local elite, including government elites, military elites, and businesspeople. The term "social capital" refers to an individual's intangible relationships and networks, which serve as a form of "capital" for that person. Customary elites, as shown previously, have strong social capital, especially within their respective *adat* communities, which has proven beneficial for society. Customary elites are representatives of the past or traditional society but have a flexible appearance and can adapt to change, so they can build local politics based on the present. This can be seen from the transformation of traditional elites since the Dutch colonial period, the period after independence, and the period of regional autonomy. Customary elites are a manifestation of the flexibility of local values in changing nations and states.

Several key observations emerge from the research findings: (1) Customary elites and leaders should be redefined as social and cultural leaders or stakeholders, departing from the notion of rulership, which is incongruent with the democratic principles of the current state. (2) The social capital of customary elites and leaders should be strategically channeled toward development and peacekeeping endeavors. (3) Sustainable support and assistance in the social and cultural domains are essential for yielding long-term results. Establishing foundations or NGOs capable of providing ongoing assistance is recommended. (4) The role of customary villages should be considered in alignment with Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages (Law Number 6 2014 concerning Villages). This legal framework provides a basis for integrating customary principles into governance structures, ensuring compliance with democratic principles.

Article 19, letter (a) of the law recognizes the entitlement of customary villages to shape their government structure based on the foundations of their traditions and local potential. This is also in accordance with research from Anam et al. (2024). Despite the adaptable and flexible nature of customs, indigenous communities can undergo political transformations to foster development and establish an effective governance system. Subsequently, the government system at the sub-district and village levels should integrate customary rules into its operations, ensuring that collaboration and empowerment align with democratic principles.

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