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Ambivalent identities Decentralization and Minangkabau political communities

Introduction

After the fall of the Suharto regime, Indonesia has embarked on a large scale process of renegotiating its administrative, political and social boundaries. A body of legislation laid the foundation for this negotiating process, loosening the boundaries between the central state and the regions and shifting power to lower administrative levels, most notably districts.¹ However, the process of redrawing boundaries that ensued extends far beyond the devolution of power to lower levels of administration. This chapter explores two separate but closely related consequences of the decentralization policies characteristic for West Sumatra that have important implications for the drawing of social boundaries.²

The first concerns the reorganization of village government. The Law on Village Administration of 1979 put into effect in 1983 in West Sumatra had introduced a nation-wide unified village structure based on the Javanese *desa*. The West Sumatran villages called *nagari* were much larger than the average *desa* in Indonesia. To avoid financial disadvantage for the region the *nagari* were split up in smaller administrative units now called *desa*. From its incipi-

¹ See Kingsbury and Aveling 2003; Sakai 2002; Holtzappel, Sanders and Titus 2002; Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Schulte-Nordholt and Asnan 2003; Avonius 2004; Fanany 2003; Turner et al. 2003; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001, 2005.

² The research on decentralization which we have conducted since 1999 was carried out with the assistance of Alfian Miko, Aidinil Zetra and Indraddin of the Studies Centre for Development and Socio-cultural Change (SCDev) and in cooperation with Andalas University in Padang. We gratefully acknowledge the help and stimulation of Abdul Aziz Saleh, Alfian Miko, Erwin, Syahmunir, Sjoefan Thalib, Narullah Dt. Parpatiah nan Tuo, Takdir Rahmadi and Tasman. We thank John McCarthy and the other authors of this volume for their thoughtful comments and engaged discussions during two seminars.

Map 17. West Sumatra

ence the *desa* system and the splitting up of *nagari* had been heavily criticized in West Sumatra and some reunification of *desa* took place during the 1990s. However, it was not until the decentralization policy was put in place that a more fundamental redesigning of the village administration became feasible. With Provincial Regulation no. 9/2000 on the village administration, village boundaries were redrawn and the neo-traditional village communities within the geographical boundaries of the former *nagari* re-emerged. This 'going back to the *nagari*' kindled interest in *adat* and *adat* institutions, and districts designed different ways of incorporating them into the new village governmental structures. As we shall explain in more detail below, this renewed interest in *adat* and its institutions should not be understood as merely populist, nostalgic and backward looking; it has some clear practical and future oriented reasons as well.

The second consequence concerns the reconsideration of Minangkabau identity in the larger Indonesian polity. While other regions in Indonesia show a similar heightened interest in their regional identity, Minangkabau identity seems to be uncommonly ambivalent. Minangkabau used to pride themselves with a prominent political presence before and immediately following Independence, but this position declined during the Suharto regime. Today, many Minangkabau regret having been reduced to a middle range position of relative insignificance. Coming to grips with their lost superior position and understanding why this happened and what it means for their position within Indonesia is for many as much part of the general discussions about decentralization and the restructuring of village communities as are the more concrete issues of control over resources.

Renegotiations of social, political and administrative boundaries occur in many different but connected arenas and permeate political processes at all levels within the region, and included the urban and rural population in West Sumatra and migrants alike. They have to be understood against undercurrents of *longue durée* in the history of West Sumatra with its ambivalent and shifting relation between three main moral and normative structures of *adat*, the state and Islam.

In this chapter we will focus on the negotiations of the boundaries and political organization of villages. We suggest that control over natural resources is crucial for understanding the tensions and contradictions between *adat* and *adat* structures and the new village administration. Then we turn to the issue of Minangkabau identity and the tensions between *adat*, Islam and the state involved and discuss the various arenas in which debates about these issues are carried out and how the various arenas of negotiation are interconnected. We shall finish drawing some conclusions about the extent to which Minangkabau villages are embedded in larger political structures.

From nagari to desa

When the Dutch incorporated West Sumatra in the beginning of the eighteenth century, during the Padri War between Islamicist groups that tried to establish an Islamic theocracy and those in favour of retaining a political structure based on *adat*, the colonial government based their system of indirect rule on the government structure of the *nagari*, the Minangkabau *adat* village, while suppressing Islamic structures. *Nagari* were largely autonomous territorial political units. Leadership, group affiliation and property relations were based on a matrilineal kinship structure. The *nagari* were governed by the heads of matrilineages, called *panghulu*. Over a period of more than half a century the Dutch reshaped the village political order substantially. They introduced a head *panghulu* as mayor and fixed the number of recognized *panghulu*. The council of lineage heads reconstituted in 1915 as the *nagari* council laid the foundation for a dualistic village structure, that in various forms were to characterize village government till today.³ On the one hand there was the regulated *nagari* government, with the head *panghulu* or mayor and a Village Council or Kerapatan Nagari (KN), which included some but never all *adat* leaders. On the other hand, there remained a *nagari* government 'according to *adat*', albeit not officially recognized by the Dutch. The council of lineage heads, Village Adat Council (Kerapatan Adat Nagari, KAN)⁴ or Council of Panghulu remained the highest village institution in terms of *adat*. Most *nagari* had a complex internal structure, consisting of several settlements or wards under different names. These wards were to become the basis for the structure of village administration introduced during the last decades of the Suharto regime.

In 1979, the Law on Local Government was passed introducing a nation wide uniform village structure. In West Sumatra the law was only implemented in 1983.⁵ The law introduced a new type of administrative organization, called *desa*, a purely administrative model with no provision for *adat* matters or leadership as the earlier local government regulations in West Sumatra had done. The other major change regarded the geographical boundaries of the *desa*. In theory the province of West Sumatra could have opted for converting each *nagari* into one *desa*, but mainly for financial

³ See for the history of village government, Westenenk 1918; F. von Benda-Beckmann 1979; Manan 1984; Kahn 1993; Sjahmunir 1996; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2005. See further Kato 1982; Oki 1977; Dobbin 1983.

⁴ We shall use the abbreviation KAN throughout this paper. As we shall see later, Provincial Regulation no. 9/2000 speaks of Lembaga Adat Nagari (LAN), Adat Law Institution, but in many *nagari* it is common practice to continue to use the term KAN. We shall only use the term LAN when specifically referring to Regulation no. 9/2000.

⁵ See for more details Sjahmunir 1996.

reasons, it preferred to divide the *nagari* up. The new law allocated a fixed yearly development grant (*bantuan desa, bandes*) to each village, irrespective of its size or population. As the *nagari* were substantially larger than villages elsewhere in Indonesia, West Sumatra would financially be severely disadvantaged had they simply converted each *nagari* into a *desa*. In the first phase, the government chose the simplest way and converted all wards into *desa*. This multiplied the amount of funds from the central government by nearly seven. However, many of the new *desa* proved to be too small. From 1988 onwards a process of reunification set in directed by the provincial government which reduced the number of *desa* by half.⁶

Information on the *desa* period is rather scarce.⁷ Mayors and village councils were rather strictly controlled by the district and sub-district administration. This was not new, but as long as the state did not provide many services to the *nagari*, the state's actual control on social and economic and village political issues had been limited. By 1983, state support in the form of structural development grants (*bandes*) and especially development projects had vastly expanded and with that its control over the new village functionaries. During the last decades of the Suharto regime *bandes* was more and more replaced by project funding. The *kepala desa* became the central figure in attracting project funding from the central and provincial government.

The *nagari* had ceased to be an official administrative unit. However, the provincial government realized that total abandonment of *adat* structures might cause problems. Provincial Regulation no. 13/1983 therefore allowed for the *nagari* as 'adat law community' and acknowledged the KAN as the institution representing this community. The various implementing regulations that followed gave detailed instructions for the council's constitution and how it was to exercise its main tasks: strengthening traditional values, maintaining the unity of the *nagari* population, and settling disputes on *adat* matters, and managing the *nagari*'s wealth. Thus, paradoxically, the *nagari* as *adat* law community and the KAN were formally regulated, but as 'informal law and institutions'. These new KAN, however, were more Golkar controlled and more bureaucratic than their predecessors of the 1970s, and representation of clan and lineage heads declined. Although they did not function as intended in many villages, the KAN still had considerable influence in village politics. It seems that *adat* leaders and KAN continued to exert authority over lineage land, people, and in dispute management. Conflicts between the KAN and *adat* leaders or *desa* heads seem to have been common. Their role in managing village land (*ulayat*) was contested by the *desa* administration,

⁶ Thus, the 543 *nagari* in West Sumatra (including the islands of Mentawai) initially split up into 3516 *desa*. After some reshuffling approximately 1700 remained.

⁷ Sjahmuniir 1996; Van Reenen 1996; Biezeveld 2002; Damciwar 1990.

though hardly any *ulayat* was left. Many villages had distributed their *ulayat* land among the lineages long before, while *ulayat* of other villages had been put under the authority of the Departments of Land and of Forestry. Some lineage heads were said to have taken part in shady dealings of expropriation for logging or plantation concessions. The *adat* leaders' authority in marriage and divorce affairs and their authority over the allocation of fees and village development funds were hotly disputed. The period was characterized by a gradual decline of *adat* and *adat* leadership in the villages and the transmission of *adat* knowledge from (*adat*) teacher to pupils virtually came to a halt. There were structural reasons within the villages that contributed to this decline, among them a misfit between *desa* administration and *nagari*. *Desa* authority was based on territorial residence in the *desa*. *Adat* authority was based on the political localization of a person's matrilineage and property. According to the Minangkabau rules of post-marital uxorilocal residence, men resided on the land and in the houses of their wives' matrilineage (F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 1978). Here they were only *urang sumando* (in-laws) and had no right to speak in *adat* matters. Their own place of authority in *adat* terms was where their matrilineage was localized, quite often in a different *desa*. In addition, *desa* heads often had a weak *adat* position in the *desa* which they headed in their capacity as village head, because they had no status in *adat* there. However, for the majority of the population these tensions were unimportant, and they adjusted relatively smoothly to the *desa*. They had conducted their main daily life and business within their ward anyway. If anything, they enjoyed the fact that the village administration had come closer to their home.

Preparing the ground for a return to the nagari

During the 1990s, public debates among *adat* leaders and urban elites were dominated by negative accounts of the *desa* structure. It was generally held that the *desa* system was not functioning well, that it had destroyed *adat* and the unity of the *nagari* population and that it had eroded the authority of the elders over the young. At a seminar held in 1989, Hasbi (Hasbi et al. 1990) concluded that the predictions of many Minangkabau experts had become true, that the decision to divide *nagari* into *desa* had deleterious social, economic and cultural effects. The *desa* administration had proven unable to mobilize villagers for the common good. Moreover, the state did not provide any significant financial compensation for *desa* heads. While the KAN had been acknowledged by the government, it had become an inefficient institution without real authority (Hasbi et al. 1990:30; Mochtar Naim 1990:60). And it was deplored that there was hardly any cooperation with or support

from migrants, because they identified with the *nagari* and not with a *desa*. Mochtar Naim (1990:48) – a well known Minangkabau academic and politician – noted that *nagari* and *desa* did not just differ in size and administrative structure, but that they also represented different world views and philosophies. The *nagari* were the political micro-cosmos of the wider Minangkabau way of *adat* governance, in line with the basic fundamentals of *adat*, matrilineal, and language, while the *desa* was the lowest unit of the bureaucratic state. ‘What we need’, Mochtar Naim (1990:60) concluded, ‘is a village government rooted in earth and with its head up in the air, and not, as the *desa* system, with the roots in the air and the head below’. Discussing the problems of the *desa* system, Abdul Aziz Saleh (1990:88) – professor of Social Science at Andalas University in Padang – concluded ‘that for the time being, the best alternative is to return to the *nagari*, even if we shall have to call this *nagari desa*’. There were also more critical voices. For example, Damciwar (1990:75) – a lecturer at Andalas University – pointed out that ‘it was not the fault of the Local Government Law no. 5/1979 that the wards instead of the *nagari* had been declared *desa*, but our own, because we put the financial considerations higher than the social and cultural ones. So we should not be surprised if the *desa* did not develop well’.

Once the possibility of revising the village government structure had become concrete and the laws of 1999 were to be implemented, attitudes in West Sumatra shifted remarkably from a predominant scepticism that had been dominant during the early 1990s, to widespread acceptance among both politicians and the wider population. In 1998, the governor had initiated research on the opinions and attitudes in rural areas. The researchers, under the guidance of professor Syahmunir of the law faculty of Andalas University, concluded that the majority of the rural population preferred a *nagari* over a *desa* structure. Thereupon the governor decided in 1998 that West Sumatra should return to a *nagari* structure and he set out to convince the political field in Jakarta and in West Sumatra. After intensive discussions within and outside the provincial parliament, consultations with non-governmental *adat* and Islamic organizations, influential Minangkabau migrants in Jakarta and discussions in the local newspapers, Provincial Regulation no. 9/2000 on Village Government was enacted. Within a very short period of time the governor had managed to create a broad consensus at the provincial level.

The prospect of going back to the *nagari* had generated quite passionate political discussions circling around two separate issues that often were confused. The first issue concerned the appropriate territorial basis for the new village. The second was about the organizational model to which the village should ‘return’: a pre-colonial, a colonial, an Old Order (Orde Lama) or an New Order (Orde Baru) model. The images about the *nagari* government before the introduction of the *desa* and the role of the KAN that circulated in

the media and many public discussions were based on a shallow knowledge of Minangkabau history and had little to do with historical reality. Rather they reflected the hopes and expectations of the participants in the struggles.

Optimists, among them many *adat* leaders, argued that going back to the *nagari* would solve all problems the *desa* were facing. They hoped it would revive respect for *adat* and *adat* leaders as the legitimate village government and holder of village property, and as the guardians of family histories. These voices were supported by the Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau (LKAAM, Minangkabau wide Association of Village Adat Councils). The LKAAM had been established in 1966 after Suharto had come to power, its main function being to contain political aspirations of *adat* leaders. Though it had always taken a critical stance to the governments' attempts to further registration of lineage land, it developed into a rather complacent organization and became increasingly involved in the Golkar party. Towards the end of the Suharto regime, the LKAAM dissociated itself from Golkar and took more independent positions. In the Reformasi period, it withered an opportunity for *adat* leaders to recover some of the power they had lost during the *desa* period and became one of the most vocal critics of the government.

More sceptical voices, among them many university teachers and other urban intellectuals as well as most of the acting *desa* heads who feared losing their position, pointed out that a return to some nostalgic past would not remedy any evils of the *desa*. In their eyes, the main reason why the *desa* did not function well was lack of adequate financial resources and qualified personnel. In their view, *adat* leaders were not a remedy; they were part of the problem, because they often refused to cooperate with the *desa* administration. Moreover, it was claimed, they themselves had contributed to the destruction of *adat* and *adat* authority, because they no longer really knew *adat*, did not develop the KAN into a functioning institution and manipulated whatever control they had over *nagari* assets to their own personal advantage. Among the youth that had grown up under the *desa* system very few saw the necessity or advantage of a *nagari* system of which they had no knowledge at all. During a discussion at the Law Faculty of Bung Hatta University in 2001, students complained they would be subjected to a system that would strengthen the position of old men instead of relying on young, dynamic, well educated persons. Yet others predicted that the local government reform would simply change the name of the village unit and would not fundamentally change the political and economic relationship between farmers and the state administration, or between provincial and national politics. Most common villagers and urban people did not have a clear opinion one way or another, but remained ambivalent, at times almost schizophrenic, towards *adat* and *adat* leadership. On the one hand, a return to *adat* values and governance seemed to hold great promise for improving the

social, cultural and political conditions in the region. On the other hand, *adat* and lineage heads were seen as weak, autocratic and old-fashioned.

The land issue

A central issue in the debate concerned the question of control over village land (*ulayat*). The question of who rightfully controlled such resources and could legitimate their exploitation had been a source of conflict between village governments, lineage elders and the Land and Forestry Departments of the State ever since the Dutch had issued the Domain Declaration for West Sumatra in 1874. Villages claim – on the basis of *adat* – that they should control their *ulayat* land. The state claims its superior rights on the basis of national law. While West Sumatra never had a large plantation sector, during the last decades of the Suharto regime much land and forest had been expropriated with inadequate compensation, yet sometimes in close cooperation with lineage elders. Most of these lands had been given as concessions or licenses to persons or enterprises close to the regime for logging or plantations.⁸

The new political freedom and the public emphasis on anti-corruption, transparency, and good governance had given many the hope that some of the worst injustices could be redressed. More generally, many saw a 'window of opportunity' to settle the still contested *ulayat* issue in their favour and to have it recognized.⁹ The central government in 1999 issued a Ministerial Regulation concerning the Recognition of Village Land in order to resolve the *ulayat* problem.¹⁰ However, this regulation only recognized *ulayat* land that 'continues to be held as in the past by the *nagari*, and where the relationships between the *adat* law community and *ulayat* have not been severed in the course of time'. The regulation thus validated all actions on *ulayat* land taken by the government, including the transfer of former Dutch plantations to the state. In the state interpretation, *ulayat* land, once it has been given or taken as license or concession under state law, remains state land after the license expires. A provincial draft regulation on *tanah ulayat* based on this interpretation has been under discussion for the past four years. It has led to many protests and demonstrations, and an alliance was formed between farmers and fishermen, urban intellectuals and NGOs and the LKAAM, claiming that the status of village land cannot extinguish by these acts of government. The

⁸ See Oki 1977:114; Kahn 1993:202; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2004.

⁹ Compare Sakai 2002 for examples elsewhere in Indonesia.

¹⁰ Between 1994 and 1999, a World Bank sponsored research looked into the possibilities of recognizing and registering communal land rights in Minangkabau and some other regions (Slaats 1999).

LKAAM in particular has become an outspoken critic of the government's draft regulation. It proposed its own draft regulation according to which land concessions after expiration resume their status of *ulayat* land. Some staff of the faculty of law at Andalas University, notably Syahmunir and Narullah, have relentlessly lobbied for recognition of villages' *ulayat* rights, to the growing irritation of the provincial government. Given the contested nature of these land rights questions, the issue of *tanah ulayat* was left out of the Provincial Regulation on Village Government no. 9/2000. Early 2005 the issue was still pending.

The *ulayat* issue became a central factor in the discussions about the role of *adat* in the new village structure, because land claims directed against the state or investors had to be based on *adat*, and in the name of *nagari*, clan and lineage leaders. It became all the more prominent because it was expected that the state would gradually lower its funds for villages and require the *nagari* to generate their own funding. Despite disagreement about the specific form the return to the *nagari* should take, there was general agreement among the rural population that *ulayat* should be under village control. Some of the district heads with personal logging and plantation interests were said to resist a return to a *nagari* structure, because they feared that this would foster claims to *ulayat*. They were slower in responding to the new village structure than those without plantation and logging interests. Despite the fact that the issue has not been resolved, the very idea that *ulayat* in the future may form an important source of revenue for villages convinced many initially opposed of the importance of returning to the *nagari*. *Nagari* could what *desa* never could accomplish: lay a claim on *ulayat* legitimated in *adat*.

The administrative structure of the nagari

Provincial Regulation no. 9/2000 provides for an initial return to the *nagari* in their territorial boundaries of before 1979 and sets a general framework for local government, leaving the details to the districts.¹¹ The village government consists of an elected mayor, his staff, and an elected legislative body. The mayor represents the *nagari* internally and externally and is accountable to the village parliament which discusses and enacts village regulations and the village budget, and controls their implementation. According to the provincial regulation, the village parliament consists of members elected by the *nagari* population in general and free elections. The district regulations

¹¹ There is considerable variation in the district and village regulations, both in terms of institutional set up and in terms of election rules. For more details, see F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001; Alfian Miko et al. 2005.

require that the village parliament represent the important categories of persons constituting the *nagari*, including the three classical categories, the *adat* elders (*ninik mamak*), religious leaders (*alim ulama*) and intellectuals (*cerdik pandai*) and 'adat women' (*bundo kandung*) and 'the youth'. This not only resonates *adat* but perhaps even more the functional groups (*golongan karya*) of the Old Order and the New Order.

Mayor and parliament together form the official village government. In addition, two further institutions are provided for. An Adat and Religion Consultative Council advises the mayor and village parliament on *adat* and religious matters. Moreover, all villages are to have a Village Adat Institution (Lembaga Adat Nagari, LAN) which mediates in disputes relating to lineage property and protects *adat* in general, but which is not part of the official *nagari* government. By choosing the term Village Adat Institution (LAN) instead of Village Adat Council (KAN) provincial parliamentarians wanted to emphasize their intention of dissociating this body from the KAN of Suharto's New Order. But districts and *nagari* could opt for another name, and five out of eight district regulations have reverted to the term Village Adat Council, KAN. The KAN (and LAN) maintained their ambiguous position in the new village governance structure. It is not a body of the official *nagari* administration, yet it is regulated and its functions are officially regulated in quite some detail.

The politics of changing boundaries

The provincial regulation prescribes that the villages return to the territorial units of the *nagari* before the introduction of the *desa* system. Fusions and divisions of *nagari* are not excluded, but referred to a later stage. A *nagari* may be split up only after consultation of the whole *adat* law community and common deliberation (*musyawarah*) between the KAN and other social leaders. If consensus is reached the decision is forwarded to the district administration and has to be confirmed by decision of the district head. The regulation also provides for the establishment of a new *nagari* with its own administration, while remaining under the KAN of the mother *nagari*. By early 2005, 32 *nagari* had split and it is generally expected that eventually there will be around 800 *nagari*, considerably more than the pre-1983 543 *nagari*.

In most cases the *desa* agreed to reunite, but some of the old *nagari* simply had grown too large and agreed to split up. Some *desa* had once been a separate *nagari* and were fused by the state administration sometime in the past, as had happened with Padang Luar. These *desa* decided to establish a separate *nagari* again, such as Sungai Tenang did early 2005. Such splits have not been problematic.

In two situations the redrawing of boundaries has caused serious problems. One is where *desa* have been caught up in the expansion of municipalities trying to incorporate neighbouring *desa* as municipal districts (*kelurahan*). For example, the mayor of Bukittinggi has unilaterally incorporated some adjacent *desa* of *nagari* belonging to the district of Agam. This has created protracted political fights among the district head of Agam, the mayor of Bukittinggi, the respective parliaments, the media, former *desa* heads and current mayors and *adat* representatives of the *nagari* concerned supported by mass demonstrations of the village population, and included the governor and the central government. Other expanding municipalities such as Padang Panjang and Pariaman face similar problems. By early 2005, these conflicts were still unresolved.

The other problematic constellation concerns *desa* that had originally been settlements of newcomers (*orang datang*) or descendants of slaves (*kemanakan dibawah lutiuk*). Most of these settler groups are Minangkabau themselves and have lived there for more than a century. But they may also be traders or Javanese transmigrants who have settled relatively recently. They enjoy only inferior political and economic rights under *adat*. The territory on which these communities live is usually part of the inherited property of original clans who had 'given' it to the newcomers according to *adat*. While this property has the status of inherited property (*pusako*) for the newcomers, it remains under some residual rights of control of the original *pusako* or *ulayat* holders. Some of these groups live in a more or less separate ward of the old *nagari* and were a *desa* of their own. Under the *desa* system such newcomer-*desa* enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy, cherished by these settlements and resented by the old lineages. Newcomer-*desa* are afraid that under the new regime the heads of the old lineages, who mainly reside in the older parts of the *nagari* and who dominate the KAN, will reassert their rights, and for that reason insist on forming an independent *nagari*.

These struggles are an indication of the resilience of *adat* principles and old *adat* status differences and their legal implications. In contrast to equally important social distinctions on the basis of education, the *adat* status differences between newcomers and original *adat* citizens are ascribed, implying a legal status with differences in rights and obligations. The fear among many urban intellectuals that former inequalities, which had been largely balanced out under the *desa* regime, would re-emerge under the new system is more realistic than the *adat* protagonists like to concede.

Contesting nagari resources

One of the major problems in the new *nagari* is the question of who controls the village resources: the mayor representing the village government and its citizens, or the KAN as the representative of the *adat* community? This issue has substantive grounds. Under the New Order an investor wanting to exploit gravel, sand, coal or forest had to negotiate with the provincial or even central administration. District and village authorities simply had to carry out the instructions from above and villages usually received little or no compensation. Today investors have to negotiate at many levels and can no longer neglect village and district administrations. Markets were an important source of income for districts, but today villages want their share and claim control over their markets. Though not many markets have in fact been handed over to villages, most villages expect this to happen in the not too distant future. Village control not only means potential income for the village to use for village development; it also means a source of potential corruption for persons in leading positions. It is in particular this potential illegitimate income that makes the internal struggles among village administration and *adat* institutions so intense. The experience of corruption is so ingrained that distrust among the villagers and their leaders is rampant.

Compared with the period before 2000, the KAN's role in the management of *nagari* resources has changed. The *desa* heads, having no basis in *adat*, could not lay claims to *ulayat* or other *nagari* property, but the mayor as the head of the new *nagari* government now competes with the KAN as the holder of traditional *adat* authority. Somewhat paradoxically then, the return to the *nagari* has formally strengthened the position of the mayor vis-à-vis the *adat* government. The governor's Circular Letter (Surat Edaran) of 2003 prescribes that the riches of the *nagari* are to be managed (*dikelola*) by the Village Government. In some villages, the authority has officially been handed over by the chairman of the KAN to the village government, but many mayors have difficulties to take over actual control over the resources from the *adat* elders or the KAN. In other *nagari*, compromises have been negotiated. There are also examples of fruitful cooperation between the mayor and the chairman of the KAN.

Adat, Islam, the state and Minangkabau identity

In the process of redrawing of villages' geographical, social and administrative boundaries, the relationships between the three major normative orders are also being renegotiated. Going back to the *nagari* not only preoccupies the minds of many Minangkabau because of the details of village govern-

ment and land rights. Equally important is the feeling that it restores an essential element in Minangkabau identity, namely their geographical, social and political roots. These processes have also revitalized discussions about Minangkabau culture (*kebudayaan*) in general and in particular with respect to the other half of Minangkabau identity – of being Muslim.

Minangkabau identity has always been strong and ambivalent, multi-layered, full of contradictions and tensions. The historically oldest layer is rooted in *adat*. But *adat* has been joined, partially superseded but never replaced, by other worldviews, symbolic universes and legal orders. While the extent to which Minangkabau embraced or rejected new knowledge and values varied considerably, they rarely relinquished the earlier ones. Over time, Minangkabau developed a pronounced self-understanding and cultural – and later ethnic – identity that implies an uneasy and shifting reconciliation of these normative orders. The titles of three recent books by Minangkabau writers indicate this growing concern of Minangkabau with their own ethnicity: *Etnis dan adat Minangkabau* (Ethnicity and *adat* Minangkabau, 2002), H.Ch.N.Dt. Bandaro Latief; *Masih ada harapan; Posisi sebuah etnik minoritas dalam hidup berbangsa dan bernegara* (There still is hope; The position as one ethnic minority living with people and state, 2004), S. Bahar and Mohammed Zulfan Tadjoeeddin; *Utopia nagari Minangkabau* (The utopia of the Minangkabau *nagari*, 2003), Hasrifendi and Lindo Karsyah. In each of these publications discussions of the new *nagari* implies a discussion of Minangkabau identity.

Minangkabau *adat* is very elaborately expressed in oral histories, proverbs, stories, and songs. It has sparked the imagination of foreign observers from the early nineteenth century on and in the Dutch writings on *adat* and *adat* law in Indonesia, sources on Minangkabau occupy a disproportionately large space. Yet as Joel Kahn (1993) has shown, ‘constituting the Minangkabau’ has never been an affair of colonial Dutch or Indonesian state officials of non-Minangkabau origin only. Many Minangkabau writers have actively contributed to debates on the relations between *adat* and other world views.

The relationships between *adat* and Islam, and later between *adat*, Islam and the state, have varied historically.¹² In pre-colonial times Islam was largely adapted to matrilineal *adat*. This changed in the Padri War, when Islamists offered their own blueprint for social, economic and political organization. It changed again when the Dutch intervened and supported *adat* against Islam. The duality of *adat* and Islam has remained a central and constitutive point of identification for most Minangkabau. The inseparable unity of *adat* and Islam is expressed with the saying ‘*Adat* is founded on the *syarak*, the *syarak* is founded on the holy Koran’ (*Adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*,

¹² Taufik Abdullah 1966; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 1988.

usually abbreviated as ABSSBK). While this saying has a long history,¹³ in recent years it is on everyone's lips. Between 2002 and 2003 three conferences were held and several publications appeared on ABSSBK.¹⁴ The conviction that *adat* and Islam are inseparable, that values of both must govern the lives of Minangkabau, and, given their decline, must be revitalized, has also found its expression in another 'return movement', the 'return to the *surau*'. *Surau* were the sleeping places for unmarried Minangkabau men who had no place to stay in their maternal homes under the system of matrilineal social organization and post-marital uxorilocal residence. They were also the place where instruction in *adat* and Islam was given.

The Dutch and later the Republican governments introduced new social and political worldviews of modernity and development. While many Minangkabau had no difficulty in adopting these new ideas, matrilineality and modernity were often seen as mutually exclusive. Yet Minangkabau persistently occupied a prominent position in the political landscape of the emerging Indonesian state. Minangkabau politicians were represented in the leadership of all political parties and they were disproportionately present in first governments of the Republic. 'Modernity' later gave way to the struggle for independence and, once that goal had been reached, for a democratic Indonesian state.

After the regional rebellion Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia (PRRI, the Revolutionary Government of the Indonesian Republic) had been put down by the armed forces of the Republic, Minangkabau's educational head-start dwindled away and most intellectuals became complacent under the increasingly authoritarian and centralist regime of Suharto's New Order. There is a deep and widespread sense of frustration in Minangkabau of having lost its prominent position in Indonesia.¹⁵ Navis (1995:19) speaks in this respect of an 'intellectual disaster' (*musiba intelektual*).

Discussions of Minangkabau identity since the downfall of the Suharto regime are mostly inward looking. While in former times the Minangkabau had operated jointly with others against a common enemy (the Dutch during the colonial period, and the Javanese during the PRRI) and had been the centre of the strong and resource-rich Province Middle Sumatra, today they stand rather alone in negotiating their relationships within the national state, and their weak economic position gives them little leeway. Richer provinces within Sumatra such as Riau and Aceh redefine their position within the

¹³ Until the late 1970s, the relationship was commonly expressed as *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi adat*. See Taufik Abdullah 1966; F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann 1988.

¹⁴ LKAAM 2002; PPIM 2003; Salmadanis and Samad 2003. See also Ade Chandra et al. 2000; Erizal 2000a, 2000b.

¹⁵ Taufik Abdullah 1995; S. Bahar and Mohammed Zulfan Tadjoeuddin 2004.

Indonesian state from a strong economic position and show no inclination to share their wealth with Minangkabau who have little to offer in return. The enthusiasm for the return of the *nagari* should therefore also be seen in the light of a general frustration of finding Minangkabau in a position among neighbours who are much stronger and richer than West Sumatra. Despite their critique and disillusion most Minangkabau still identify strongly with the Indonesian nation-state. There is no discussion about secession in the region.

The diminished political and ideological pressure from the centre has stimulated an outburst of formerly suppressed Minangkabau-ness, which finds its expression in *nagari*, *adat*, and ABSSBK. Questions that emerge include: how to fill this space, what is *adat*, who knows *adat*, what do *nagari* government and ABSSBK according to *adat* mean? Globalization offers additional frameworks in which identities can be formulated (for example ethnic minority, indigenous people) while at the same time neo-liberal pressure poses challenges that are held to threaten Minangkabau values. With regard to Minangkabau a number of international organizations support the process of decentralization and the return to the *nagari*. Minangkabau as well as outsiders from within Indonesia, foreign anthropologists and development agencies assisting the decentralization policy such as the Ford Foundation, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), the GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit), largely use a global rhetorical repertoire, and local agents increasingly adopt the same language. A striking illustration is the report on a seminar on the return to the *surau*, held in Padang in 2001. It warns of the dangers which the globalization of science, information technology and lifestyles bring for Minangkabau identity and ABSSBK values, but then goes on to frame the issues in globalized language: *partisipatif*, *dialogis*, *demokratis*, *transparansi* and *akuntabilitas*, *sinergi*, *efektivitas*, *efesiensi*.¹⁶ Thus, the normative order represented by the state and transnational normative notions are as much part of the Minangkabau identity as *adat* and Islam, but in contrast to the relationship between *adat* and Islam, there is not much debate about the ensuing contradictions.

Arenas and actors

Discussions and struggles about identity occur in different, interdependent arenas, in villages, among district and provincial political elites, in parlia-

¹⁶ 'Pemda Sumbar dan ICMI, Padang, Pedoman gerakan kembali ke surau di Sumatera Barat, Kembali ke surau di Sumatera Barat', outcome of seminar and workshop, in Hotel Buni Minang, on 27-28 June 2001. See for Bali, Henk Schulte Nordholt in this volume.

ments, and in circles of development agencies, and among Minangkabau migrants in Medan, Jakarta, or Bandung. Workshops, seminars, books and local TV and newspapers are the main channels of information. Return to the *nagari* and ABSSBK also mean different things for different people in different positions. The debate about the *nagari* has been focussed on the glittering past and has created much nostalgia.¹⁷

Debates among intellectuals

After a period of relative neglect in the 1980s and early 1990s, *adat* and Minangkabau society are enjoying lively interest among intellectuals, university lecturers, journalists, and migrants.¹⁸ Illustrative are the books published by the Foundation Genta Budaya which came out of workshops held in the 1990s, in which the predicaments of Minangkabau are critically discussed.¹⁹ A series of school books on *adat* and history have been published for use in primary and secondary schools (Yulfian Azrial 1994). With the return to the *nagari*, the search for *adat* knowledge intensified further. Publications on *adat* have increased and older books and booklets on *adat* have been reprinted. The LKAAM publishes books and teaching materials and for some time a *Buletin Seri Alam Minangkabau* in Minangkabau language. It also offers training courses in *adat*.²⁰ Members regularly publish in local newspapers and appear on TV (*Semangat Demokrasi* 16-19 March 2002). Today the LKAAM is only one organization out of many claiming a greater role for *adat* and interpreting and extolling the significance of ABSSBK. It has been joined by new organizations such as the Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Minangkabau (PPIM, Centre for Studies of Islam and Minangkabau). Feminist organizations organize meetings on the role of Minangkabau women; NGO alliances fight for *adat* rights and organize seminars and workshops. Migrants write books and pamphlets on Minangkabau *adat* and on problems of ethnicity and identity and organize meetings and seminars

¹⁷ Taufik Abdullah (1995:8) characterized this attitude as narcissistic and warned against utopian expectations.

¹⁸ Until the 1970s the representation structure of *adat* was relatively simple, consisting of some recognized all-Minangkabau *adat* experts such as Rasjid Manggis Dt. Rajo Panghoeloe (1971) and Idrus Hakimy Dt. Rajo Panghulu, the LKAAM and some *adat* law teachers, social scientists and historians such as Taufik Abdullah, Mochtar Naim, Imran Manan, Amelioes Sa'danoer and Abdul Aziz Saleh.

¹⁹ See M. Hasbi et al. 1990; Edy Utama 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Abdul Aziz Saleh and Van Giffen 1990; Idrus Hakimy Dt. Rajo Panghulu 2001.

²⁰ LKAAM, Padang, Lembaga pemberian bekal adat alam Minangkabau (Babekal Alam) LKAAM Sumatera Barat, 2001.

in West Sumatra.²¹ The migrants' organization Gebu Minang in Jakarta has founded a book club and in 2001 started to publish a series of short pocket booklets (*buku saku*) dealing with selected aspects of Minangkabau *adat* and history.

There is subtle and not so subtle negotiating about who is entitled to speak about and for *adat*. The LKAAM always emphasizes that it covers both *adat* and religion, in the spirit of ABSSBK, and tries to capture the back to the *surau* discourse. According to them, the all-Indonesian Islamic organization Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Council of Indonesian Islamic Scholars) is expert on religion only and is therefore not entitled to speak about *adat* or about the relationship of *adat* and Islam. NGOs have no say in *adat* matters either according to the LKAAM. The LKAAM itself is also under critique and its abolition has been repeatedly demanded in the local media. It is criticized for its Golkar past, and other organizations doubt its legitimacy to represent *adat* (*Singgalang* 28-4-2003). NGOs in particular see no reason for the existence of such an institution.²² Others argue that there is no need for an LKAAM because *adat* is rooted in the *nagari*; there are no *adat* institutions on the provincial level. Moreover, *nagari* leadership should not consist of *adat* elders only. The LKAAM defends its position and history in the media and in seminars. It explains that it was not founded in 1966 by the regional government but by the KAN of all Minangkabau *nagari*. It would accept critique only from those KAN. Moreover, the LKAAM had always claimed that land in Minangkabau was *tanah ulayat* and not government land.²³

Activist groups such as the Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH, Legal Aid Bureau) or the Forum Peduli Sumatera Barat (FPSB, Forum of Concerned West Sumatrans) take a similar position as the *adat* champions in the *tanah ulayat* issue. The NGO alliance Paga Alam for instance adopts an approach to *adat* and *tanah ulayat* that is even more radically *adat* minded than that of the LKAAM.²⁴ But while the members of the LKAAM fully identify as *adat*-

²¹ M.S. Amir 1999, 2005; H.Ch.N.Dt. Bandaro Latief 2002; H.Ch.N.Dt. Bandaro Latief et al. 2004; S. Bahar and Mohammed Zulfan Tadjoeuddin 2004. S. Bahar organized a live discussion of his controversial book (S. Bahar and Mohammed Zulfan Tadjoeuddin 2004) on Padang TV. The migrants' organization of Solok district organized a large meeting on *adat*, the position of women and *suku* management in January 2005. The Minangkabau Women Congress planned for 2005 and for a discussion of the agenda with Minangkabau migrants from Java, local NGO activities and the provincial branch of the Indonesian Human Rights Commission.

²² *Semangat Demokrasi* 16-19 March 2002. See A.R. Rizal in *Singgalang* 6-7-2002; Mochtar Naim in *Singgalang* 4-5-2003.

²³ *Singgalang* 29-4-2003. LKAAM, Padang, Hubungan dan eksistensinya Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau (LKAAM) dan Kerapatan Adat Nagari (KAN) di Sumatera Barat, no date.

²⁴ Paga Alam Minangkabau, Padang, Siaran Pers no. 01/S-Pers/PALAM/IX/2004 tentang Ranperda Pemanfaatan Tanah Ulayat, 2004.

champions, other organizations fight for recognition of *adat* rights without implying an extensive role for *adat* leadership. According to them, government according to *adat* is not democratic but has a feudalistic ring. They differentiate between the substantive rights embodied in *adat* (considered more just than land rights embodied in state legislation) and the organization entitled to claim these rights. Yet others claim that struggles for political and economic rights of the population could better be entrusted to uncompromised civil society organizations. *Adat* rights are supposed to support the interests of the population and not to strengthen feudal positions of corrupt *adat* leaders.

The government and provincial politics

The provincial government is an important and active player in the regional arena. It successfully pre-empted and controlled the politics of decentralization. When it became probable that the Suharto regime would not last and an era of Reformasi appeared at the horizon, the emphasis on Minangkabau-ness and revaluating the characteristically Minangkabau *nagari* became a means to show distance towards Jakarta and the 'Javanese' village organization of the *desa* which 'Jakarta' had imposed in 1983. Emphasis on Minangkabau-ness also served to reassert local economic interests against domination by central authorities in Jakarta. When the West Sumatran political elite fought against the centre to keep West Sumatra's only large industrial enterprise, the Cement Factory in Padang, under local control, West Sumatran authorities strongly emphasized the specific status of Minangkabau *tanah ulayat* which according to *adat* cannot be sold (Sakai 2003b). As we have seen, this does not prevent the same authorities from insisting that once licenses or concessions have been given for such land, the land remains state land.

The provincial government continues to subsidize most of the organizations engaged in discussions of *adat* and Minangkabau culture. There is hardly any publication without a preface by the governor. The debates between organizations operating at the provincial level such as the LKAAM, the PPIM, and the MUI about the role of *adat*, the position of Islamic authorities, ABSSBK and the return to the *surau* are not only a discussion about values and morals, but should also be understood as a competition for government funding and for advisory services to the government.²⁵ While this gives the

²⁵ Thus when the LKAAM criticizes the provincial government for not caring about *adat*, this probably is a veiled critique that the government has given too much subsidies to a newcomer in the *adat*-Islam-culture field, the PPIM. See the critical exchanges in the newspaper *Semangat Demokrasi* 23-26 March 2002, (LKAAM) and 20-22 March 2002 (Governor's office).

government a means to sanction certain views, it cannot prevent organizations such as the LKAAM or university staff from criticizing provincial politics. Some other organizations operate more at a distance from the government, as they are supported by migrants or foreign NGOs.

A major topic in the regional political discourses concerns the Minangkabau form of democracy. Most Minangkabau take great pride in Minangkabau democracy with its strong emphasis on common deliberation and consensus and consider it superior to the 'western style 50 plus 1 voting democracy'. It is not just the traditionalist *adat* lobby that is in favour for introducing Minangkabau principles of democracy, many politicians and public figures such as the rector of Andalas University praise Minangkabau consensus democracy as well.²⁶ Such statements, however, do not prevent the provincial and district governments from overloading villages with regulations and bureaucracy.

Various international, national and regional donor agencies also participate in these debates, following their own agendas and trying to promote their political issues. Thus, the GTZ advises several villages and districts and organizes training courses on the organization of a *nagari* structure, emphasizing issues of transparency and administrative responsibility.²⁷ Both proponents of *adat* and 'modern' democracy play to the ears of donor agencies. The former emphasize that *adat* is indeed development from below, participatory, community based. The latter stress the value of free elections and democratic decision-making processes. The donor agencies themselves are ambivalent how to evaluate the competing principles of democracy. The Minangkabau consensus type appeals to their notion of participation and community based development (see Asia Research Centre 2001). With their interest in *adat* they want to emphasize that they are not introducing foreign or 'Western' ideas into Indonesia. A brochure of the UNDP Partnership for Governance presents the Minangkabau *nagari* as good governance *avant la lettre*, indicating that the present good government offensive is nothing new but intended to restore traditional values (UNDP 2001:6). The partnership organizes and finances workshops and small research projects on the progress of the local government reform, carried out by local NGOs or university research and development institutes.²⁸ These workshops are important events not only because they bring villagers into contact with issues discussed in wider social and political contexts; they also are important meeting places for village offi-

²⁶ See the rector of Andalas University in *Haluan* 8-6-2001.

²⁷ The Friedrich Naumann Stiftung supports anti-corruption training; The USAID-sponsored Perform Project has been active in some districts and some projects are supported by the Ford Foundation. The UNDP partnership for governance has sponsored meetings with villager leaders about democracy and open society in the *nagari*.

²⁸ On the activities of donor agencies, see GTZ 2001b; Turner et al. 2003:129-35.

cials, who learn about each others' experiences. From the discussions we had over the past five years with representatives of foreign donor organizations it seems, however, that the initial enthusiasm for local level democracy has given way to more sober assessments.

These discussions also serve to renegotiate the relationship between *adat* and Islam. Under the rhetorical unity of *adat* and Islam, old struggles over the relative superiority of one over the other continue. The greater autonomy of districts have allowed district heads to make their imprint on the village structure, thus contributing to regional differences within the province. Some district heads clearly favour *adat* dominance in internal village affairs, while others have created a sharper division between *adat* and religion by introducing a separate Council of Religious Elders parallel to the KAN. The return to the *nagari* and especially the issue of land rights are clearly issues that upgrade *adat*. For most local politicians, village leaders and NGOs, the relevant 'community' under debate is the *adat* community of the *nagari* (*masyarakat hukum adat*), not the Islamic community of believers. Initially 'the return to the *surau*' discourse (later called movement) was an answer to the return to the *nagari* discourse. In contrast to the discourse on *adat* with its political and economic overtones, the discourse on Islam stresses the importance of Minangkabau moral values, and the need to defend them against cultural and economic globalization. Islamic pressure in the Provincial Parliament, for example, led to the adoption of a hotly discussed regulation (no. 11/2001) on 'social illnesses' (*penyakit masyarakat*, PEKAT), such as gambling, prostitution and drug abuse. This regulation has great symbolic value but no-one expects any practical relevance. Thus, while *adat* has acquired greater prominence in political and economic terms, Islam is mobilized for specific moral issues.

Villagers

The depressed sense of identity is primarily a problem for the Minangkabau elite within and outside of West Sumatra, where the discussion about the relation between *adat* and Islam is the most pronounced. However, it rubs off on the rural population as well, because these arenas are linked to rural areas. Many participants mainly engaged at the regional level occupy an *adat* position or are otherwise actively involved in their village of origin. The LKAAM and MUI have their links with villages, as have political parties. Political parties are not allowed to play an open and active role in village elections, but through the organization of workshops for villagers they supported the process materially and made their views known. Moreover, with the new *nagari* many (often retired) migrants, who had lost interest in village affairs,

have taken a renewed and active interest in their village or origin. Some have taken on office as *adat* leader, as official advisor, or even as mayor. Wearing several hats at the same time, neither a real insider nor a real outsider, they contribute to the construction of Minangkabau identity and to the more mundane concerns of village administration and politics.

While urban elites discuss *adat* in general terms, villagers tend to discuss it in connection with concrete issues of the structure and procedures of village government, control over resources, and lineage and property histories. This requires knowledge about the actual functioning of the *nagari* government in the past and of the embodiment of *adat* in the political and economic *nagari* constitution. That knowledge remains oral and is, if at all, transmitted within the lineages. However, many of the newly installed young *panghulu* have been elected because of their high education and good connections with the government. They lack authoritative knowledge about the history of their *nagari*, the composition of its *suku* and lineages, the history of *suku* and lineage land and lineage splits, which is necessary to be a successful village leader (Agus Indiyanto 2005). But they are reluctant to ask the old men and women who may know more, because that does not accord with their status and might undermine their authority. More often than not essential knowledge has been lost for ever and the lineage history is being recreated from scratch by young lineage heads without any training in *adat*. The many books and booklets on *adat* are of little help, because these reproduce Minangkabau *adat* and history, as expressed in *adat* proverbs and maxims, but are far removed from contemporary affairs. Knowledge of this type may help the youth to develop a stronger identification with *adat*, but such books do not provide clues as to how *nagari* in the sense of *adat* organizations might be developed or fruitfully accommodated within the state structure.

Likewise, the relationship between *adat* and Islam has different connotations for urban elites and the rural population. While some Minangkabau migrants in Java find it difficult to reconcile the two systems of belief, villagers generally have no problem identifying equally with *adat* and Islam. They are critical of the political elites in West Sumatra who took the issue as an opportunity to debate whether villages should or should not have Religious Councils, for these councils were said to be an entry point for political influence from which political parties were legally barred. Wealthy migrants financed prayer houses and mosques for their family or lineage back home as a public sign of religiosity and of family support. But many villagers regarded these prayer houses as a threat to the *nagari* community, undermining the rule that a *nagari* community shares one mosque, and thus undermining the unity of *adat* and Islam. On the other hand, many villagers have readily embraced the new slogan of 'going back to the *surau*', as a counterpart to the movement of 'going back to the *nagari*'. Few take it literally, but see it as a

necessary reconsideration of Islamic morals and values, that are threatened to be eclipsed by the *adat* hype. The rapid spread of Islamic dress requirements for women must be seen in this light. Though it certainly is part of an Indonesian wide development, it has only taken off in West Sumatra since the debates about *adat* had evoked an Islamic response.

Critical voices

Adat and *adat* leadership are not unanimously supported in Minangkabau. Critique is partly directed at established *adat* leadership, and partly at the lifestyle *adat* seems to stand for. Many among the younger generation of urban intellectuals, hold at best ambivalent feelings towards *adat* leadership. *Adat* elders in the *nagari* are frequently perceived as indeed old, old fashioned and backward, not in line with modern life, and lacking good formal education. They are therefore considered incapable of governing the *nagari*. They are also blamed for having given in too easily to the pressures and temptations of the administration and investors during the Suharto government. They are reproached for having abandoned *ulayat* too easily and of having pocketed compensation without sharing it with their *kemanakan* (matrilineal relatives). Urban intellectuals, on the other hand, are held to be lacking solid knowledge of *adat*. Many leading civil servants of the provincial and district governments in West Sumatra now carry the *datuk* title of a *panghulu*. Since they do not live in the *nagari*, they are seen as useless for day to day village government. While mobile phones have considerably bridged temporal and spatial distance and are indeed frequently used for inter-local communication they cannot replace day to day physical presence and availability.

Finally many Minangkabau have self-critically commented on the flowery but virtually empty rhetoric of *adat* virtues, ABSSBK and the return to *nagari* and *surau*, and depicted Minangkabau as 'champions in slogans' (*juara slogan*), spending hours '*ber-Minang-Minang*', engaged in being Minangkabau. These critics do not trust the regular declarations that the values are good, and that only the people have forgotten them. And they do not believe that once the return to the *nagari* and the *surau* is 'socialized' (*disosialisasikan*), *adat* values and the authority of knowledgeable elders and their matrilineal kin will automatically be restored and the *nagari* will function as it should.

The return to the *nagari* thus is a lively issue discussed in many arenas at different levels. Each of these arenas has its own political constellation and concomitant preoccupations. However, the arenas are not insulated from each other, but form permeable, overlapping fields. Urban Minangkabau, participating in regional or national debates and at the same time being an *adat* leader or participating in *nagari* matters in another capacity, play a crucial

bridging role. But perceptions of the *nagari* certainly are different for people living in the *nagari* and for outsiders. From the outside and from the perspective of migrants living far away, the *nagari* may be a small and intimate community, the incarnation of *adat* and *adat* leadership through *adat* elders in the Adat Village Council, inviting nostalgic feelings and supporting romanticized notions of *nagari* and *adat*. Seen from the inside *nagari* are not cosy communities but complex social organizations divided along many lines.

Conclusions

Decentralization has evoked a process of renegotiating social and political boundaries in West Sumatra in various interlinked arenas each with its own specific focus and concerns. While the province has receded somewhat to the background, districts self-confidently emphasize their autonomy vis-à-vis the province and the central state. The same autonomy allowed districts freedom to redesign their relationship with villages and to define the boundaries of authority. Despite widespread initial scepticism about the wisdom of returning to the *nagari*, it was soon accepted throughout West Sumatra. Much of the debate then addressed the particular form the *nagari* was to take. These debates were carried out in urban centres, in the regions, as well as in each village, while Minangkabau migrants outside West Sumatra took an active part as well. Important links between these arenas were formed by members of urban elites who had become actively involved in village politics as *adat* official or in other capacities. For some it provided a return to their own values which had been oppressed by the autocratic Jakarta regime. For others it provided a populist platform for local politics. A main factor, and not only for *adat* leaders, was the promise of more control over village resources, so vital for a future with decreasing funding from the central government. Such claims only had a chance to be recognized if based on *adat* by *adat* communities, which *nagari* were but *desa* were not.

Decentralization and the return to the *nagari* was much more than just a geographical and administrative reconfiguration. They allowed for considerable differentiation among the districts and villages. Territorial village boundaries were renegotiated under legislation that allowed *desa* to go back to the *nagari* territory and prevented *desa* from establishing their own *nagari*. And it forced the rural population to redefine internal village relationships. In that process, social and economic boundaries that had become more or less obsolete during the *desa* period, such as between original settler lineages and lineages of newcomers or descendants of former slaves were reinforced, causing much tension within villages with a major population classified as newcomers. On the other hand, old social and economic relationships based

on common clan-membership of persons living in different *desa* relations that had weakened during the *desa* period now become closer and stronger again. To some extent the new village structure also blurred their boundaries, as migrants living in the urban centres within West Sumatra or outside became more involved in village matters, taking *adat* offices or positions in the village government. Thus the geographical boundaries are not so problematic as such, but because of what they imply for social differentiation and political control over economic resources such as village land and markets. The *nagari*, then, are complex social and political communities, with diverse and ambivalent administrative structures, and with more internal social boundaries and differentiation than during the last decades of the Suharto regime. Externally they have become somewhat more independent from the central and provincial administration, yet as the lowest level of state organization, heavily regulated and predominantly funded by the districts, they remain deeply embedded in the wider Indonesian political, financial and social structures.

The decentralization policies have stimulated debate about the relationship between *adat*, Islam and the state. This has not only had ramifications for the structure of village government, but also for Minangkabau identity and their position within the Indonesian state. While tensions between *adat* and Islam have marked Minangkabau history from the beginning of conversion, this relationship has gone through phases of great tension as well as relative relaxation. The last decade of the Suharto period was characterized by general disinterest in *adat* and a rise of Islam. The new political freedom and the decentralization policies increased identification with *adat* even among the urban elites and pushed Islam temporarily more to the background. The return to the *surau* movement must be seen as an attempt to balance out the relationship between *adat* and Islam. Most Minangkabau identify as much with the Indonesian nation-state as with *adat* and Islam and leave no doubt that they see their future within Indonesia. Urban elites are used to combine a modern lifestyle and strong adherence to Islam and with a heightened interest in *adat*, despite the numerous discussions about Minangkabau identity. For villagers state institutions have been part of their everyday life and they have been so accustomed to bureaucratic procedures that it has even rubbed off on *adat* institutions. Even the most adamant proponents of *adat* only strive for a larger role of *adat*, not for retreat from the Indonesian state. The relationship between *adat*, Islam and state has shifted, but the Minangkabau still derive their identity from the three normative orders in conjunction.

Postscript: the revised decentralization laws of October 2004

The revised decentralization laws of October 2004 mark an end to the decentralization policies as discussed in this chapter, paving the road for a partial reversal of decentralization. Given the dynamics of Indonesia's political and economic development it is not easy to predict what this will mean for the internal dynamics within the region, but a few things can be said. During our last field visit in February 2005, officials of the district administration were fully aware of the changes to come. They showed great concern, because it would mean a shift in the power relationships back towards the province and central government, at their expense. The concern among the district officials contrasted starkly with the matter-of-fact attitude we found in villages. In this reshuffle the village structures are of little importance though they will not remain unaffected. The new laws bring considerable change in the degree of village autonomy. The mayor and the village secretary will come under more district control, while within the villages their power will increase in relation to other village institutions, notably the village parliament. However, to many *nagari* the autonomy has proven to be more of a burden than a blessing anyway, because autonomy means more tasks without proper funding. To lose some of this autonomy therefore may be less important than the question how much funding can be expected from the state. There is thus far no indication that the *nagari* will be abolished and replaced by something like a *desa* structure. Politicians at higher levels are fully occupied with their fight for power with the political and administrative centre where villages do not play a role.