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The *klebun*, the *kiai* and the *blater*: notes from western Madura, Indonesia[1]

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Abstract: **By exploring the sources of authority, the characteristics, the socio-political world, the roles and the relationships between village leaders, this paper shows that there have been only a few changes in local politics in western Madura, Indonesia, since the 1998 political reformation. In fact, despite the continual reformation processes, the circumstances of local politics in that area have remained relatively similar and have actually been characterized by continuity. There, local politics has been an arena of typical local leaders: the *klebun* (village heads), the *kiai* (religious leaders) and the *blater* (local strongmen). The struggle for influence within these village elites is centred not only on opportunities for private material benefits, but also on political competition, which is loosely organized, pragmatic and often mutually beneficial in nature. These village elites' continuous presence in the post-Suharto period is without doubt a reflection and a consequence of their constant influence over society.**

Keywords: **village; politics; *klebun*; *kiai*; *blater*; western Madura**

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This paper sheds light on local politics in the post-Suharto period in western Madura, Indonesia, and the multiplicity of roles the village leaders have played in local politics since 1998. It makes use of a case study in the village of Bayang, Langkap subdistrict, Bangkalan regency, western Madura.[2] Various questions are posed. What are the sources of authority of the *klebun*,[3] the *kiai* and the *blater* in western Madurese villages? What are their leadership strategies in village politics? How do these influential figures form a relationship with each other and

[1] Much of this paper is taken from my PhD dissertation at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, based on two sets of fieldwork from July 2009 to January 2010 and from October 2010 to July 2011, while other parts were elaborated later. I would like to thank Professor Kees van Dijk (Leiden University) for his insightful comments on an earlier version of the paper and two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions. I am also grateful to Professor Fauzul Iman and Professor Udi Mufradi Mawardi (both from IAIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten) for their support, and Ade Suntama, Faizal Arissandi and Rima Puspitasari (students in the Department of Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam IAIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten) for their assistance.

[2] The name of the village and the subdistrict where the village is located and the names of the people are fictitious. The reason is obvious: while a number of them did not mind their identity being revealed as a result of the interviews and discussions with them, the majority preferred to remain anonymous, and so names of the locations (except the regency and the island) and people are disguised.

[3] In the Indonesian languages, such as Javanese, Madurese and Bahasa Indonesia, the term *klebun* can be used in both singular and plural forms. Other non-English terms in this study can be used as both singular and plural forms.

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with the villagers? What are the characteristics of village politics in western Madura? Why do these characteristics become important factors? What changes and continuities may have taken place since 1998?

The post-Suharto era has been labelled a 'transitional phase' to denote the political transformation from authoritarian rule to a more democratic government, or from the New Order era (1966–1998) to the *Era Reformasi* (the Reformation Era/1998–present day). This transition has been accompanied by a process of decentralization, one of the main characteristics of which is regional autonomy. As suggested by Henk Schulte Nordholt, the transition from centralization to decentralization should not be mistaken for a transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic one. In fact, the process of decentralization can be accompanied by authoritarian rule under certain conditions (Schulte Nordholt, 2004, p 30). At the lowest level of administrative hierarchy, village politics has also experienced such a transition.

Since 1998 Indonesia has experienced a dramatic shift in political constellations. In the time since this transfer of power, the Indonesian nation has sought to formulate and implement wide-ranging reforms that aim to democratize and improve governance systems, as well as to remedy the wounds left by the administration among peripheral societies marginalized by the New Order administration. One way of doing so has been through decentralization of the functions of the Indonesian government. Ironically, while the reformation process is still taking place, one 'pathological feature' of the previous administration, patronage, appears to have become a characteristic of the post-New Order era (Mackie, 2010, pp 82–83). This patronage pattern is not static because it has been affected by state-building processes and, by the same token, it has influenced these processes. What we see here, then, is a 'changing continuity' that will help to explain the problems connected to decentralization and the establishment of regional autonomy (Schulte Nordholt, 2004, pp 30–31).

In Indonesia, the village is the lowest administrative sector in the hierarchy of the state governmental system. The village head, among other things, implements the government's development programmes, carries out administrative or clerical works, keeps community order, and responds to communal issues and concerns. The head is also expected to be able to maintain public norms and values, bridge the gap between the villagers and higher authorities, and accommodate various interests in his or her community in order to rule the village effectively.

In the post-Suharto period, a village council (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa – BPD) has been established in every village, and this council, along with the village head and village officials (*perangkat desa*), forms the village government that is provided with certain autonomy to establish and implement its own policies. During the New Order, village officials were appointed by the village head and approved by the regency office. In the post-Suharto period, they are – with the exception of the village secretary who is appointed by the regency secretary (Sekretaris Daerah) in the name of the regent – appointed by the village head and approved by the BPD. This shows the importance of the BPD's role in village politics.

As a result of the continual reformation process after the collapse of the New Order, village officials are no longer able to ignore pressures and close scrutiny from different parts of society. In many places, village politics has, in fact, been marked by recurrent power struggles between village officials and influential vil-

lage leaders. Despite the presence of the BPD, as is the case in many rural societies, it seems quite obvious that the existence of traditional local leaders in a decentralized era cannot be ignored due to their constant influence.[4] The circumstances in the western Madurese villages encourage interaction between important segments of society in which the *kiai*, the *blater* and the *klebun* form complex relationships in the struggle for influence. Within these relationships, Islamic symbols and patronage play a significant role. I further maintain that, despite different attitudes from the three actors, their relationship is perhaps best described as pragmatic and mutually beneficial in nature. According to Hans Antlöv, the structure of local politics created by the New Order administration was based on intimate personal relations and on patronage (Antlöv, 2003, p 196). In post-Suharto Madura, despite exceptions and changes, the circumstances have remained relatively similar.

The village of Bayang

The village of Bayang is located along the coast of western Bangkalan. It borders on the Madura Strait in the west. Due to its proximity to Java, a number of villagers are commuters who live off casual occupations in Surabaya and Gresik. Like many villages in Madura, Bayang is a *swasembada* (self-sufficient) village. While the level of education of all village officials in Bangkalan in recent years has been relatively low (50.96% are primary school (Sekolah Dasar – SD) graduates; Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bangkalan, 2007, p 2), in Bayang, the majority of the village officials are junior high school graduates (Sekolah Menengah Pertama – SMP). All of the villagers in Bayang are Muslims. In fact, the subdistrict of Langkap, of which Bayang is an administrative part, has no followers of any other religions besides Islam. Of the 18 subdistricts in Bangkalan, Langkap and four other subdistricts are exclusively Muslim (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bangkalan, 2007, p 145).

With regard to the level of religiosity among adult villagers, the people of Bayang are composed of three groups. The first and smallest group includes those who most consciously and adamantly observe religious teachings and have a high level of religious knowledge. This group consists mainly of more highly educated villagers (junior high school and above) and those who travel to other subdistricts or other regencies quite frequently. They attend *pengajian* (Islamic congregations), *tahlilan* (a prayer performed on six consecutive nights to facilitate a deceased person entering paradise), *khaul* (annual celebrations held on the anniversaries of the death of religious leaders) or other religious communal gatherings on a regular basis and understand the significance of these occasions. They do not overtly claim that they are *santri* (orthodox Muslims),[5] but they do not reject identification as such. The second group, which constitutes the majority, is made up of those who claim that they belong to the *santri* group. They are mostly of low

[4] Although the BPD plays crucial roles in local politics in many villages in Indonesia, the council seems, for the most part, to have played less significant roles in the village of Bayang. The presence of other influential community figures appears to prevent the council from taking a truly major part in political configurations in the village. Therefore, its roles do not appear in this paper.

[5] The term *santri* has several meanings. In this paper, it means both devout Muslims and pupils of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Here it simply refers to devout Muslims.

educational background (junior high school and below). They are also active in attending *pengajian*, *tahlilan*, *khaul* or other religious communal gatherings on a regular basis, but they do not fully understand the entire meaning and significance of these events. The third group lies in between the first and second groups in terms of size. These are the people who do not clearly identify with a religious orientation. They are neither aware of the latest developments in Islamic issues and concerns, especially outside their own village, nor do they claim that they belong to the *santri* or non-*santri* group. They are mostly less well educated and are the least active in attending the above religious gatherings. This grouping is meant to depict the composition of the villagers. Nevertheless, these are relative rather than absolute indications of religiosity.

Sources of authority

This section of the paper introduces the local leaders, Rokib the *klebun*, *Kiai* Shodiq the *kiai* and Khoirul the *blater*, and describes their sources of authority. The first leader is Rokib, a 54-year-old small to medium-sized business entrepreneur whose profession, besides his *klebun* post, is running a service station (*bengkel*) near the subdistrict market and renting out a number of fishing boats. He was elected *klebun* in the village head election in early 2010.

Rokib is perceived to have extensive economic resources by village standards. Coming from a village elite family, his father owned almost all of the fishing boats in the village. His siblings are among the richest people in the village. Members of the family run a building materials store, a small restaurant in Bangkalan city centre and a grocery store in the market of Bangkalan. Their grandfather is said to be among the village pioneers who practised inter-island trade between Madura and Borneo.[6] Rokib is a sympathizer of one political party. However, he does not really maintain a close relationship with the party. His network is limited to local functionaries in the subdistrict. During the New Order, he was not affiliated with any particular political party. His association with the party started when an acquaintance asked him to get involved, not long after the 2009 general elections. He does maintain a close relationship with higher authorities and has continuously striven for state backing during his years in office. In the context of religious affairs, he and some family members are *haji*, having travelled to Mecca in 2007 with his wife.

The second leader is Kiai Shodiq, a 67-year-old *kiai* who leads a small *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) with less than a hundred *santri* (pupils of *pesantren*). Locals say that the *pesantren* used to attract a lot of *santri* in the 1960s and 1970s from neighbouring villages and subdistricts, and even from Sampang, Sumenep, Surabaya and Gresik during the *kiai*'s father's leadership. Nowadays, only *santri* from other subdistricts in Bangkalan study in the *pesantren*, and very few of them are Bayang locals. Some villagers point out that the *pesantren* is dying out because, unlike his father, the current *kiai* does not possess enough charisma to attract *santri* and followers. Some older villagers hold that, unlike his father, *Kiai*

[6] In the early twentieth century, a large number of Madurese lived in the south and west of Borneo, especially in areas around Kotawaringin and Sambas. Some resided in coastal cities such as Pontianak and Banjarmasin. They worked in seaports or became contract workers in clearing and managing hinterland areas. See Huub de Jonge (1989), *Madura dalam Empat Zaman: Pedagang, Perkembangan Ekonomi, dan Islam: Suatu Studi Antropologi Ekonomi*, Gramedia, Jakarta, p 25.

Shodiq does not have healing and predicting abilities, taking away the main reason why a large number of *santri* studied in the *pesantren* during his father's *kiai*-ship. Some other villagers, however, believe that the *kiai*'s somewhat self-imposed seclusion from the vast network of *kiai* and the political world is the main reason why the *pesantren* is declining. Whatever the reasons behind the decline of the *pesantren*, *Kiai* Shodiq is always compared with his father in many respects. This signifies the importance of hereditary factors to *kiai*-ship, in which the status of a *kiai* is ultimately legitimized by such factors.

Kiai Shodiq comes from a *kiai* family. As mentioned above – and like Rokib – he also possesses a prominent religious genealogy in the village. His father's reputation extended beyond his village not only as a preacher but also as a healer. His father wanted *Kiai* Shodiq, his only son, to follow in his footsteps as a *kiai dukun* (shaman or medicine man). It is said that the young *Kiai* Shodiq was not interested in running the *pesantren* and learning mystical-supernatural sciences because he was more interested in becoming a trader. However, his father kept pressuring him, and when he passed away, the untrained *Kiai* Shodiq had no choice but to take over the *pesantren* and to forget about his desire to become a merchant. Sooner or later, the *santri* started to leave his *pesantren*. Visitors no longer came to the *pesantren* for spiritual guidance or healing, although he is still visited today by people who want to ask for guidance and advice on family matters such as marriage and divorce. He once established a cooperative without success and it was closed down within eight months of its establishment. He also had a number of fishing boats that he rented to local fishermen, but due to bad management, none remains. He still has, however, a number of crop fields tilled by his relatives, and this provides him with a source of income in addition to donations from the *santri*'s parents and those who visit him to ask for guidance and advice.

The third leader is Khoirul, a 61-year-old businessman. Khoirul runs three grocery stores: one in the village, one in the market in the subdistrict, and one near the Kamal port. He also has a scrap business in Jakarta that is managed by two of his younger brothers. He and his family are all *haji*. Despite his claim that he is retired from *blater*-ship, the villagers still consider him as a prominent *blater*. In fact, he is still recognized in the vast network of *blater* in Bangkalan, and to a large degree in Sampang and Surabaya as well. Before travelling to Mecca in 2004, he had been a leader of a *blater* group for years. Nowadays, he sometimes comes to *remo* (feasts characteristic of the *blater* community)[7] in order to pay respect to the old brotherhood if he knows the host quite well. He claims, however, that he no longer drinks alcohol in *remo*, although he admits that he sometimes still dances with the *tandhak* (dancers in *remo*) and will give some money to the hosts now and then (as a rule in *remo*).[8]

[7] *Remo* is an exclusive all-*blater* meeting that signifies the importance and existence of *blater* in Madurese society. *Remo* is a feast for *blater* which also serves as a rotating savings and credit association. *Remo* is a means of establishing new fraternities or fortifying old brotherhoods. *Remo* also entails performances such as a *tayub* (a traditional Central and East Java performing art). For a broader explanation of the significance of *remo* for the *blater*, see See Yanwar Pribadi (2014), 'An *abangan*-like group in a *santri* island: the religious identity of the *blater*', in Bernhard Platzdasch and Johan Saravanamuttu, eds, *Religious Diversity in Muslim-Majority States in Southeast Asia: Areas of Toleration and Conflict*, ISEAS, Singapore, pp 220–221.

[8] *Blater* are closely identified with cultural forms associated with fraternity, wealth, status and violence, such as *remo*, *kerapan sapi* (bull racing), *sabung ayam* (cockfighting) and *carok* (distinctive Madurese forms of fighting using sharp weapons). This wide range of cultural forms has provided the *blater* with ample opportunities to express their identity.

Khoirul is the wealthiest of the three most influential villagers. From the late 1970s until the end of the 1990s, he was known as a *blater* who was held in awe (*disegani*). He was frequently involved in petty crimes in Surabaya when he was in his twenties. During this period, he made friends with local gangsters who dominated the Perak port area in Surabaya. He gained prominence when he became head of security for a number of warehouses in Perak.

Thanks to his reputation for being a reliable security guard, he was approached by the Golkar (the ruling party during the New Order) branch of Bangkalan to ensure the smoothness of Golkar's campaigns during election periods in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, his closeness to Golkar functionaries brought him to another stage in his life in the mid-1990s when he started his own business in scrap trading in Jakarta, supported by a Golkar functionary from Bangkalan whom he had met during Golkar's campaigns and who was transferred to Jakarta. It was during the New Order that Khoirul came to be associated with politics. His collaboration with Golkar, which was facilitated by privileged access to funds, brought him to prominence and riches, and at the same time he built up intimate relations and patronage with Golkar functionaries. In this sense, Khoirul is an obvious product of the New Order.

Based on their position and how they are regarded, each figure symbolizes distinctive sources of authority. The *klebun* represents official and formal authority, while the *kiai* reflects religious authority and the *blater* personifies community-based authority. While the *klebun*, together with village officials and the BPD, constitutes the village government, the *kiai* and the *blater* are regarded as *tokoh desa* (important figures of the village) or *tokoh masyarakat* (village notables) and are sometimes addressed as *sesepuh desa* (village elders), even though they are not very old. They are neither elected nor appointed to this special position, but their positions are justified by the general agreement of the villagers. In Bayang, besides *Kiai* Shodiq and Khoirul, there are other villagers who are regarded as *tokoh desa* who have various occupations and positions, ranging from civil servants to landowners. The above three figures – *klebun*, *kiai* and *blater* – are typical local leaders in Madurese villages. The official, religious and community-based archetypes of leadership are ideal. In reality, not all villages are marked by the presence of such leaders. Therefore, categorizations of this kind are useful, although they should never be treated as absolute.

It is clear now that these three influential villagers possess certain authority based on their background. While official, religious and community-based authorities indicate the level and type of authority each figure possesses, other aspects, such as popular opinion in regard to these figures, play a significant part as well. *First*, all these figures are well-off villagers. Some *tokoh desa* are not rich, and to a large degree this undermines their participation in communal programmes or their say in communal issues. *Second*, another vital element of authority that the three figures have is the religious title attributed to them. While the principal religious authority in Bayang is in the possession of *Kiai* Shodiq, the *haji* status of Rokib and Khoirul is also very highly regarded. Therefore, the *haji* status places Rokib and Khoirul among the village's magnates. *Third*, it is a question of genealogy. Rokib and *Kiai* Shodiq come from respectable families that settled in the village three or more generations back. Despite Khoirul's salt-of-the-earth ancestry, he is perceived as the founder of a new, influential entrepreneurial family in

the village, and hence his descendants will be considered prominent in the future. This shows that the criteria for someone to be considered of prominent descent are not clear, and it is evident that the labelling is based on general agreement, and not on a fixed and absolute appraisal.

The *klebun*: the formal official leader

Among the three influential villagers, the *klebun* is the one who has the official task of administering the village. The *klebun* is the link between the state and society. In a traditional and less heterogeneous society – at least when we compare it to the neighbouring Javanese – such as the Madurese, in which issues spread rapidly and become communal concerns, the position of the *klebun* is of importance. This is exemplified by his introduction and accommodation of government programmes and village regulations, or in hushing up false rumours over government policies, and channelling people's concerns to higher authorities.

These village regulations govern, amongst other things, administrative services related to marriage and divorce, arrangements for identity cards (KTP), building permits (IMB) and birth certificates (*Akta Kelahiran*). Villagers expect the village head and village officials to represent communal interests and to be autonomous rather than compliant to higher authorities. In Bayang, Rokib has shown himself to be an average leader whose leadership is often questioned due to his low loyalty to the village. Rokib's preference in conducting his business and abandoning his official tasks has generated resentment. His popularity has gradually diminished within a year of his appointment. A number of villagers do not really take him seriously. He does have a number of loyal supporters (for as long as he maintains patronage with them), such as his clients in business, employees of his service station, fishermen who rent his fishing boats and their business partners and families, the *taksi* (small van used as public transport) and *ojek* (motorcycle taxi used as public transport) drivers and his closest neighbours. Rokib is certainly a powerful patron for his clients, a condition reflecting that of the New Order. As Antlöv shows, even though a new type of village leader has been emerging since the collapse of the Suharto administration, village dynamics change over long periods of time (Antlöv, 2003, p 206).

The co-optation of the *klebun* and the construction of patron–client relationships between them and the state did not always mean that they were merely puppets who could be manipulated by higher authorities. Regency and subdistrict officials often tolerated self-interested political manoeuvring by *klebun*. It was true that in some villages the *klebun*'s authority was more restricted than observers might assume. For instance, the *klebun* was unable to collect the entire IPEDA (a land tax to be paid annually by landowners) because some villagers failed to pay and the *klebun* had to find ways to compensate for the shortage (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1987, p 107). It is also true that there were many *klebun* who did not serve as an extension of higher authorities. It was common knowledge that as soon as they assumed office, many *klebun* did not serve public interests properly, and instead abused their position for their own interests. Those who were lucky would not be confronted by people's protests or the government's fury. Those who were unlucky would become targets for removal by the government, as in a number of cases in Bangkalan. The *klebun* of Baringin village in Labang sub-

district got into trouble with the law because he allowed people to gamble in the *balai desa* (village office) of his village (*Memorandum*, 14 April 1994). Moreover, the *klebun* of Morkepek village in Labang subdistrict was prosecuted because of extortion (*Memorandum*, 15 April 1994). In principle, higher authorities did not interfere with daily affairs in the village as long as government programmes and policies were implemented in ways that did not compromise the position of higher authorities.

In post-Suharto Madura, the *klebun* is frequently caught between the extensive demands of the bureaucrat and the expectations of the villagers. That is why the *klebun* is expected to be a powerful patron for his people so that he will be able to maintain his independence against the higher authorities' commands. In reality, the *klebun* is hardly able to escape the higher authorities, especially the regent, not only because of the high demands of the regent, but more importantly because he also expects something in return – for example, because he wants to tackle government projects without really being monitored by the BPD. Meanwhile, some of the villagers are interested in forging a patron–client relationship with the *klebun*. These people are usually among the poorest and have a low status in society. They are looking for a dependent relationship in which they will serve the *klebun*'s interests and ensure the security of the *klebun*'s position, in return for which they will obtain material advantages.

The *kiai*: the man of religion

Among the three influential villagers, the *kiai* is the one who probably has the most followers, especially when including followers from outside the village. Although the *pesantren* of *Kiai* Shodiq hardly catches the attention of the local population, at least in the village and other villages surrounding it, the *kiai* remains an influential figure. Indeed, many prominent *kiai pesantren*[9] are nationally renowned, as is often the case with *kiai* who become actively involved in politics. Hence, *Kiai* Shodiq is still regarded as an influential figure among local notables of Bayang. The most prominent role of *Kiai* Shodiq is his guidance in village rituals. Almost all religious activities in Bayang are led by *Kiai* Shodiq. Even if, for instance, a famous *kiai* is imported to a *pengajian akbar* (grand *pengajian* – Islamic congregations) or to give a sermon at a wedding party, *Kiai* Shodiq is also invited to accompany the famous *kiai*. This is a special honour bestowed on *Kiai* Shodiq for his contribution in terms of giving guidance to the villagers.

To the majority of the villagers, weekly *pengajian* in *Kiai* Shodiq's *pesantren* or in the village mosque, along with *tahlilan* and *slametan* (religious meals/feasts) and other religious gatherings, are considered as routine occasions that are part of their ancestral heritage. If they do not observe these traditions, they believe that something bad may happen. For others – the minority – the purpose of these occasions is much broader than just tradition. They serve as media to bring themselves

[9] In Madura, there are four types of *kiai*. *First*, *kiai pesantren* are generally regarded as the highest in rank. *Second*, there are also *kiai tarekat* who usually lead a *pesantren* too, but who are more commonly recognized as *tarekat* (Islamic mystical brotherhood) teachers. *Third* are *kiai dukun*, shamans or medicine men. *Fourth*, the lowest in the hierarchy are *kiai langgar*, who run small mosques in the villages. The first type of *kiai* are the real agents of socio-political-economic-cultural life in Madura, and constitute what Eric Wolf identified as cultural brokers, people who 'connect the local system to the larger whole' (Wolf, 1956, p 1075).

closer to God by praising His name. *Kiai* Shodiq does not seem to be bothered by people's different understanding of the occasions. For the *kiai*, these occasions can be used to gather villagers and mobilize them for social, political, economic and religious purposes.

Although more and more *kiai* are becoming active in politics, *Kiai* Shodiq seems to remain apolitical. By contrast, one author argues that the majority of *kiai* in Sumenep are political (Karim, 2008, p 163). It is quite obvious, however, that the majority of *kiai* in Bangkalan are not political. It is true that in Bangkalan there were many *kiai* who became functionaries in the PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan – the United Development Party) and represented the party in the local, regional and even national parliaments during the New Order. It is also true that in the post-Suharto period there are even more *kiai* who represent political parties – not only the PPP. However, the majority are still not associated with political parties.

Despite the presence of many 'political' *pesantren* in Bangkalan, the *pesantren* in Bayang remains non-political and focuses more on educational activities. Some village cynics say that the *pesantren* is too small to be taken into account in the political world of Bangkalan. Some, as explained above, assert that *Kiai* Shodiq does not have a talent for *politik praktis* (politics). Some also mention that the *kiai*'s father instructed him not to get involved in politics. The reason is not clear. In short, however, like many other *kiai*, especially *kiai pesantren*, *Kiai* Shodiq certainly knows how to 'survive' in village politics, by turning himself into an indispensable man of religion, highly regarded by the villagers.

In general, in most villages in Madura during the New Order and the post-New Order period, the main village leader was the *kiai*. Despite the government's efforts to convert rural leaders into state officials, most *kiai* were not that malleable. Their position as *umat* (community) leaders and their social standing would be endangered if they were seen to be too close to the authorities. Most *kiai* in rural as well as urban Madura were inclined to maintain their independence because they did not want to jeopardize their religious authority in the view of the *umat*. However, independence here should not be understood as political non-affiliation. In fact, many *kiai* who were labelled as independent religious leaders were actually affiliated with the PPP, or later the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa – the National Awakening Party) in the post-New Order period.

The *blater*: the local strongman

Among the three influential villagers, Khoirul is without doubt the one who has the least followers. He is neither a village official with formal authority nor a spiritual leader who has religious authority. However, he is a charismatic man whose reputation as a respected *blater* in the past, combined with his riches, has placed him among the village's influential *tokoh desa*. Like the position of the *kiai*, the status of the *blater* – indeed, of strongmen in general – seems to cling to a person for life, and provides him with a lasting reputation. Therefore, even though Khoirul claims that he is retired from *blater*-ship, the villagers and his fellow *blater* still regard him as one. More importantly, in a situation where one's status is of importance, such as in village meetings, he will not hesitate to remind people of his *blater* status. Nonetheless, in village religious festivities, such as *pengajian*

akbar, Khoirul will not stress his *blater*-ship and instead will proudly emphasize his *haji* status. Although this sounds very pragmatic to outsiders, villagers are never really concerned by this.

During the New Order, the *blater* tended to make alliances with the government by being Golkar propagators. If they assumed a *klebun* office, as was the case in many villages, they would appear to be devoted to a steady relationship with superiors such as the *camat* (head of subdistrict), as opposed to communal concerns. Even though they acted as patrons in their relationships with many villagers, at the same time they were clients to the patrons higher up in the hierarchy.

Khoirul is seen as an important figure not because of his wealth or merely because of his *blater* status. There are also a small number of petty *blater* who live in Bayang and actively participate in *remo*. However, some of these petty *blater* are seen to show off their physical power too much in public, and are criticized for drinking alcohol in public. They are not wealthy, and as for their level of religiosity, these people may partly fit with the third group I have outlined above. These people are regarded by many as *bajingan* (thugs) instead of *blater*. Here we can see that the distinction between the *blater* and thugs is quite hazy, and that is how many people see it in reality.

Khoirul has changed significantly, but the *blater* status remains attached to him. It is his closeness to state officials (*pejabat*) and state security forces (*aparat*) that makes him an important figure in the village. His past experience as part of the security force in Golkar's campaigns and his security work in Perak introduced him to the *aparat* and the *pejabat*. This closeness to the *pejabat* and *aparat*, which follows the common pattern of the patron–client relationship in Indonesia, has been carefully maintained by Khoirul. His connections allow people from his village and also from other villages to use his *jasa* (service) to deal with the *aparat* when they have a problem with the law. Here we see that he becomes a fixer, someone to solve people's problems, often by improper or unlawful means, and an intermediary. For instance, if someone loses a motorcycle, instead of reporting it to the police, he will come to Khoirul to ask for his help to find it using his wide network within the underworld. It is a less attractive prospect to ask for help from the police because they are less likely to find the motorcycle again and, even if they do, the price that the owner of the motorcycle has to pay to the police for its return is high. Although Khoirul may also ask something in return, the cost will not be as high as that of the police. Moreover, people put more trust in Khoirul because they know him better than they know the police. This situation reminds us of Daniel S. Lev's suggestion that for the less privileged recipients of justice, money is often crucial for buying acquittal, lowering the charge, or ensuring better treatment in prison. Bribery is so common that it has become a standard procedural stratagem, as it were, in both civil and criminal cases (Lev, 1999, p 186).

Khoirul's ability as a fixer differentiates him from petty *blater*, the *klebun* and the *kiai*. By maintaining this special position, Khoirul has become a prominent figure whose influence stretches beyond the village. That does not mean, however, that Khoirul is able to mobilize villagers in the way that the *klebun* do when they call on the people to undertake *gotong royong* (communal aid), or like the *kiai* who can gather the people for a *pengajian* in his *pesantren* or the village mosque. Khoirul is not a communal leader. The only environment where he enjoys

real leadership is among the *blater*, leading *remo* gatherings during his active years. However, he is still able to mobilize people who depend on him economically, such as those who are employed in his business in Jakarta or in his grocery stores in Bangkalan. Here we see that Khoirul also acts as a protector or patron to his clients, an ideal type of *blater*, unlike some of the petty *blater* I describe above.

The socio-political world, the roles of leaders and the relationships between the leaders

In Bayang, Rokib, *Kiai* Shodiq and Khoirul are present-day *klebun*, *kiai* and *blater*. While during the New Order Bayang was not free from the influence of Golkar and the PPP, the village today has not become a battleground for ambitious local leaders who transform religious group loyalty into loyalty to political parties. While during the New Order there were hardly any local leaders and villagers who openly supported Golkar, and the majority of the population claimed to endorse the PPP, the post-Suharto period has witnessed far more diverse political aspirations channelled into various political parties. While during the New Order strong group loyalties and a lack of tolerance towards other groups often sparked political tensions, the post-Suharto period seems to be marked by a lack of political loyalties. It is true that the PKB gained the majority of votes in the 1999 general elections in Madura, but in the 2004 and 2009 elections, it received significantly fewer votes. Bayang has experienced a similar situation.

Rokib seems to be the most avid politician compared to *Kiai* Shodiq and Khoirul. However, his position as *klebun* prevents him from being a political party functionary. *Kiai* Shodiq, as I have explained, is not really interested in politics, while Khoirul became an integral part of Golkar's campaigns during the New Order. In the post-Suharto period, Khoirul has become less active in politics and pays more attention to his business. Supra-village politics apparently does not really attract local notables from Bayang, who appear to be more interested in being involved in the village's political configurations.

So far, we have seen that each local notable has his own authority and his own purview. Although these different authorities can sometimes overlap, many people are aware that each figure has his own distinctive expertise. Disputes are often solved through private arrangements by particular individuals, rather than in line with formal sets of rules. Personal struggles between village elites seem to be obstacles to the implementation of more formal, rational policies. This mirrors the conditions of the New Order, something that Schulte Nordholt explains well: the post-Suharto era demonstrates continuities with the New Order era, and the extent to which 'civil society' has managed to organize itself in order to establish a more democratic system is doubtful (Schulte Nordholt, 2004, p 32).

Certainly, these three influential figures in the village know how to remain on good terms with the villagers as well as to mobilize them, while at the same time channelling their power and influence towards their own interests. We can see that, among other things, wealth, religiosity, ancestry, occupation and charisma play central parts in making these figures influential in their society.

The most fragile relationship in Bayang is perhaps that between the *kiai* and the *blater*. That does not mean that they are directly competing with each other over many things. Their religious orientations and practices differ to a considerable

degree, but in daily affairs, they are not so different. During the New Order, despite their non-involvement in the PPP, the *kiai* (mainly *Kiai* Shodiq and some *kiai langgar*) and the majority of the villagers channelled their political aspirations through the PPP. Khoirul, along with a number of *blater* and a minority of the villagers, gave his political preference to Golkar. Political orientations polarized the village. Yet this polarization occurred only at times of general elections, especially during campaigns. In present-day Bayang, the division of society during election periods is not as obvious as during the Suharto era. In all elections (general elections, presidential elections and provincial or regency/municipal elections) in Bayang, political affiliations do not really matter, as the level of political apathy has increased in the post-Suharto period.

Nowadays, the villagers of Bayang have diverse political orientations. The majority of villagers do not clearly know which party to support in general elections or which candidates to vote for during presidential elections and provincial or regency/municipal elections, as many of them have continuously shifted their political preference in the last two elections. Nevertheless, they seem to pay more attention to which party or which candidates not to pick. Today, therefore, there is no single political party that is capable of integrating the villagers.

A wide gap between village leaders and official bureaucrats, however, remains prevalent, and it seems that this aggravates political tensions during crucial moments, such as during village head elections. The rural elites were privileged clients (*anak emas*) of the state during the New Order, as opposed to being part of the purely capitalist class, whose opportunities to accumulate and rule depended on their crucial links with higher authorities (Antlöv, 1995, pp 6–7). However, the decentralization era – despite its policies to give more space to village bureaucrats to form village regulations – does not really provide village officials with ample opportunities gained from these enhanced powers.

During the New Order, village heads were recruited to represent the government's client organizations, based mostly on their affiliation with higher authorities, and so their administrative authority increased gradually as these state clients were granted privileged access to state funds. This condition was an attempt to secure the support of a village middle class that acted as a vehicle for state intervention and monitoring, and as an executor for Golkar as a representative of the electoral machinery of the state (Antlöv, 1995, p 7). Nowadays, the social and political roles held by village bureaucrats seem to have shifted into the hands of other local notables: that is, religious and cultural figures. Village leaders are expected to preserve the values of the village and act as brokers who bridge the gap between the population and supra-village politics. In order to do this, village leaders need to be community-oriented. They have dual commitments: as neighbours and community representatives on the one hand, and as agents of governments and members of the village elite on the other. It is important for village leaders to be accepted in the village and to form good relations with other village leaders, and in order to achieve this they are required to present themselves as the guardians of traditions.

During the New Order, political events were disguised within a cultural framework of meaningful symbols. Political meetings and ideological messages were given ritualized and symbolic forms that people could easily recognize. The government operated through a successful appropriation of community and patriotic norms

that were expressed in ritual meals, community assemblies, religious events and popular dramas (Antlöv, 1995, p 10). Nowadays, despite some camouflaged efforts to convey their messages, it seems that the government is more overt in translating its programmes to the people. Programmes such as Jamkesmas (Public Health Insurance) and Raskin (an aid programme for certain poor households to purchase rice below the market price) are not implemented in disguise. It is true, however, that some village officials will try to benefit from uneducated villagers by mistranslating government programmes.

Lastly, in religious spheres, despite many differences between the *kiai* on the one hand, and the *klebun* and the *blater* on the other, these two sides are far from mutually exclusive. They form important segments of society who share common interests and jointly safeguard the common values of the people. In the Madurese tradition, the common values of the people are translated as Islamic and cultural values. While the *kiai* focus on common Islamic values such as *khaul* and *tahlilan*, the *klebun* and the *blater* promote and strive to maintain festivities that are likely to be frowned upon by the *kiai*, such as *kerapan sapi* and *sabung ayam*.

Consequently, it is not uncommon for some *santri* to become spectators in *kerapan sapi* or *sabung ayam*, while it is not surprising to see the *klebun* and the *blater* in *khaul* and *tahlilan*, or the presence of a *kiai langgar* as the one who leads the ritual in the *klebun* and the *blater*'s personal religious events, such as *slametan* held to bless members of their family in rite-of-passage ceremonies. However, we should note that their mutual participation in seemingly opposing occasions should not be understood as a sign of conversion or submission to the 'other side'. Most importantly, these are standard practices in Madura. The people are always highly aware that they have their own spiritual beliefs that may be at risk from other values, but they stand firmly in their own beliefs. This is in line with Kees van Dijk's argument that, in Java, it would be a mistake to treat 'Javanese' and Islamic beliefs as complete opposites (van Dijk, 1998, p 229).

Conclusion

Local politics in Madura during the New Order and the post-New Order period are marked by recurrent processes in which Islam and local cultural elements coexist, flourish, interlace and strive in complex, pragmatic and mutually beneficial relationships. All the contemporary actors of local politics in Madura – groups of local leaders – have been extensively engaged in the formation and transformation of political culture on the island, especially since the New Order. The actors are part of larger configurations of interdependent individuals within Madurese society and Indonesian society at large. The socio-political formations of local politics in Madura have been exercised by local leaders, who each play their part. These local leaders have employed and promoted Islamic symbols and cultural elements to reinforce their positions in society.

In Madura, the leadership strategies of the *klebun*, the *kiai* and the *blater* in village politics are most clearly visible in their efforts to win support from the villagers. Using his official post, a *klebun* may be able to mobilize villagers to obey village and regency regulations imposed upon the people and to mobilize the population for his own private purposes. Making use of his religious/spiritual influence, a *kiai* may be able to rally villagers in the name of God. A *kiai*'s position

of authority is, in fact, firmly grounded in and associated with the village as opposed to higher tiers of society. Finally, utilizing his feared and admired standing, a *blater* may be able to direct his clients who are dependent on his influence and power. This is even true for prominent *blater*, who may have close ties to the *aparat* and *pejabat*.

The relationships between religious leaders, local strongmen and village officials in the village in Madura have been complex since the colonial era. The struggle for influence within these village elites is not only centred on opportunities for private material benefits, but also on political competition which is loosely organized, pragmatic and often mutually beneficial in nature. Their continuous presence in the post-Suharto period is without doubt a reflection and a consequence of their constant influence over society, and their presence also fits well within ongoing state-building processes in contemporary Indonesian politics. Decentralization, for example, allows for the emergence of a politically autonomous brand of local leaders. The way they survive and continue to exercise their influence in society is not surprising. There are two rather different reasons for that. *First*, it shows that they are highly capable of adjusting to the continuously changing political atmosphere of the Indonesian state. *Second*, they continue to be needed by society to safeguard and preserve its values and norms. The first reason indicates that the creation of a strong civil society is still hampered by the presence of an ineffective state system, while the second suggests that the religious and cultural values and norms of the Madurese are their last strongholds in coping with modernity.

To conclude, village politics in Madura is characterized by its typically rural nature. The presence of traditional local leaders is highly apparent in their struggle for influence, in connecting the local community with the outside world, and in defining the appropriate values and norms for the village residents. In the struggle for influence, Islamic symbols, wealth and genealogy are extensively used to win the support of the villagers, while patronage and personal relations become the prevalent pattern in relationships with them. These characteristics are important parts of village life in Madura because they show the prevailing living conditions and circumstances accepted based on general agreements between all segments of society. Therefore, although in the contemporary period the Madurese no longer blindly honour their local leaders, and might sometimes even be critical of them, the importance of these leaders in Madura remains as great as ever.

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