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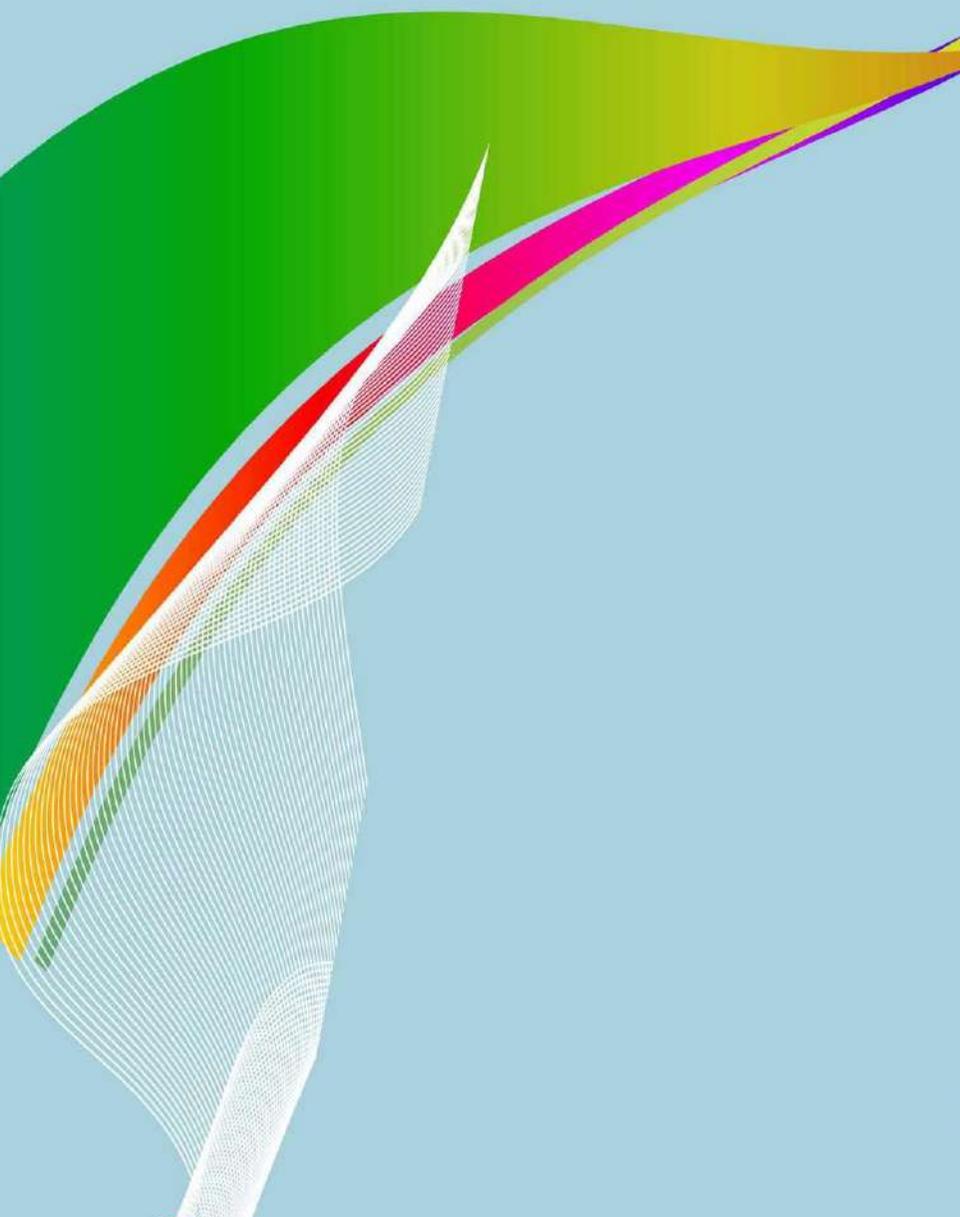
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**The Crisis of the Agency for Customary Institutions (*Keujruen Blang*):  
From the New Order, Reformation to Peace of Aceh**

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## THE CRISIS OF THE AGENCY FOR CUSTOMARY INSTITUTIONS (KEUJRUEN BLANG): FROM THE NEW ORDER, REFORMATION TO PEACE OF ACEH

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### Abstract

*This article examines why the Keujruen Blang, as a traditional institution, has continued to experience crises since the New Order Reformation to post-peace in Aceh. This study aimed to reveal and provide an overview of how the Acehnese people's local wisdom, or local knowledge, has been experiencing a crisis, particularly a recent issue with paddy field management. This study was conducted in Aceh Jaya and used qualitative research. Observations and direct interviews were conducted with 17 informants. The technique for determining informants used a purposive technique. In addition to the interview, data were collected through a review of the literature and other documents on the crisis agency of local actors (keujruen blang). These related documents and articles were identified, reviewed, and analyzed. The data analysis techniques used was data reduction, data display, and verification. Reproduction of the keujruen blang authority had yet to bring the expected results. Even though laws, government regulations, and Aceh Qanun had been issued, Keujruen Blang still needed to be strengthened. This fact occurred because there were overlapping roles and functions between the customary institution of keujruen blang and the formal P3A institution.*

**Keywords:** Customary Institution; Keujruen Blang; Domination; Crisis Agency; Structures



## A. Introduction

This article examines why the *keujruen blang*, as a traditional institution, has continued to experience crises since the New Order Reformation to post-peace in Aceh. This study aims to reveal and provide an overview of how local wisdom or local knowledge of the Acehnese people has experienced a crisis, especially an issue of managing the paddy field. On the one hand, the government encourages food security and self-sufficiency. However, on the other hand, the government ignores local knowledge or local wisdom, which has a function as a supporter of community food security.

*Keujruen blang* is a traditional institution in Aceh that has a vital role in the agricultural sector as a regulator and manager of paddy field agricultural affairs (Syarifuddin et al., 2020), primarily regulating and coordinating paddy field water management (Yulia et al., 2018), managing cooperation activities, resolving disputes or conflicts between farmers (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2022), ensuring the implementation of traditional activities including one of them is *khanduri blang* (Salman, 2012). *Khanduri blang* is one of the traditional activities carried out after harvest and in preparation for the new planting season (Arifin & Manan, 2018).

*Keujruen blang* also serves as a food security driver for the rice field community. This function is essential things in realizing community food security. In one of the districts in Aceh, namely Pidie, *keujruen blang* successfully managed agricultural affairs. This customary institution received recognition from the local community and support from the Pidie District government. *Keujruen blang* in Pidie Regency has powers, namely coercive, expert, legitimate, social, organizational, and charismatic power (Syahputra, 2018). However, this is different in Aceh Jaya District. According to the author's observation, *keujruen blang* is still weak. *Keujruen blang* should be continuously maintained and synergized with the government to realize government programs on food security or agriculture. Social capital and local wisdom must be seen by the government as potential partners of the government (Basri, 2021) so that agricultural programs can be realized as expected.

Local knowledge or wisdom has become an important issue after the collapse of the New Order. Indonesian people who live amidst cultural

diversity and local wisdom have resurrected to reproduce local wisdom that has shifted since the New Order until now. In the New Order era, the central government had formed a particular institution to deal with rice farming issues, including in Aceh, namely the Water User Farmers Association (P3A) through the green revolution program initiated by the central government. The presence of an institution established by the central government will undoubtedly impact and shift the position of the *keujruen blang* as customary institution, which previously had an essential role in managing rice field agriculture. These two institutions should synergize in supporting and realizing community food security.

P3A, or Water-Using Farmers Associations, has successfully managed rice field farming issues in Aceh. However, this success and success lasted only a short time and did not function optimally because it needed to be supported by local community wisdom. This institution was not firmly rooted in the life of the farming community in Aceh, so this government-formed institution needs to function optimally in managing and regulating rice farming.

The New Order era, with centralized concepts in various fields, including the issue of rice fields, has brought a pluralistic Indonesian society to submit to a central government concept so that the concepts of local wisdom have been neglected by society. However, during the post-peace reform era in Aceh, *keujruen blang* is still in a crisis position and has yet to emerge as a traditional institution with an important role. Even though in the reformation era, decentralization has become an opportunity to reproduce the local knowledge and wisdom of the community, until now, the village or gampong has still not been able to rise to reproduce the concepts of local wisdom, even though the village or gampong currently has an excellent opportunity after the birth of the Village Law. No. 6 of 2014. Likewise, look at Aceh, which has been in a quiet position since 2005, coupled with the issuance of Qanun No. 10 of 2008 concerning Customary Institutions, Aceh governor regulation No. 45 of 2015 concerning the management of irrigation *keujruen blang*. Based on the law above, until now, local knowledge, especially *keujruen blang*, has yet to rise optimally to re-manage the problem of rice farming.



Studies on local wisdom, especially on *keujruen blang*, have been introduced previously and focus on the role of *keujruen blang* (Syahputra, 2018); (Budi et al., 2019); (Budi & Wardah, 2021); (Syarifuddin et al., 2020), the position and function of *keujruen blang* (Hakim & Mahmuddin, 2017); (Kiawan, 2017), farmers' perceptions of *keujruen blang* competence (Ikhsan et al., 2018), the importance of the existence of *keujruen blang* (Nugroho et al., 2018); (Azis, 2018) and conflict between *keujruen blang* and the farmers (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2022). Previous studies have provided an important description of how the issues of *keujruen blang* as a traditional institution or local wisdom are essential to continue to study. However, the current author has yet to find specific studies on how *keujruen* has experienced crises from the New Order and reforms to post-peace Aceh.

Based on previous studies, this current study complemented existing studies by highlighting why *keujruen blang* continues to experience a crisis amid opportunities for decentralization and the presence of Village Law No. 6 of 2014, peace in Aceh since 2005 and the issuance of governor regulation No. 45 of 2015. Aceh's peaceful situation and the Village Law issuance should provide a good opportunity for *keujruen blang* to rise from an unfavorable situation.

## **B. Method**

This article explores the crisis of local agency in a customary institution (*keujruen blang*); from orde baru, reformation, and peace era in Aceh, Indonesia. This research was conducted in December 2021 in Krueng Sabee District, Aceh Jaya Regency. Aceh Jaya Regency is one of the rural and coastal areas. This study uses qualitative research using data collection techniques, namely observation and in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2019). A descriptive study was used to obtain primary data from participants. Observations and direct interviews were conducted with 17 informants, consisting of 4 *keujruen blang*, 4 *keuchik gampong*, 1 *imuem* (priest) *Mukim* (leader of several *gampong*/ village), 4 *gampong officials* (*Kaur*), 4 *Tuhapeut gampong*. The technique for determining informants uses a purposive

technique, meaning that the determination of informants is based on specific criteria or considerations (Sugiyono, 2013). In addition to the interview, data were collected through a review of the literature and other documents on the crisis agency of a local actor (*keujruen blang*). These related documents/articles were identified, reviewed, and analyzed. The data analysis technique used is data reduction, data display, and verification.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

### **1. Result**

Aceh Qanun No. 10 of 2008 explains that customary institutions function as a vehicle for community participation in governance, development, community development, and solving social problems. *Keujruen blang* is one of the traditional institutions in Aceh, which is described in article 98, paragraph 3 of the Law on Governing Aceh No.11 of 2006. The Law on Governing Aceh states that there are 13 (thirteen) traditional institutions in Aceh, namely the MAA (*Majelis Adat Aceh*), *Imuem Mukim*, *Imum Chiek*, *Keuchik*, *Tuha Peut*, *Tuha Lapan*, *Imuem Meunasah*, *Keujruen Blang*, *Panglima Laot*, *Pawang Glee*, *Peutua Seunebok*, *Haria Peukan*, and *Syahbanda*.

*Pangulee Buet Ibadat*, *Pangulee Hareukat Meugoe* (the best human action is worship, and the main source of livelihood is farming), *Kaya Meuh Hana Meusampoe*, *Kaya Pade Meusempurna* (rich in gold is not essential, rich in rice yields is a necessary or perfect thing) (Syarifuddin et al., 2020). The two proverbs above show how vital rice and paddy fields are for the people of Aceh and the enthusiasm of the people of Aceh to maintain food security through agriculture. The enthusiasm in the agricultural sector must, of course, be manifested through the strengthening of traditional institutions, especially *keujruen blang* in Aceh, so that the food security of the Acehnese people can be realized.

#### **a. The Fading of Authority of *Keujruen Blang* in Aceh**

Rice fields are the center of livelihood for farmers in Aceh. The people of Aceh have always lived in a rural and coastal community. Farming life, especially planting rice in paddy fields, cannot be separated from the life of



the Acehese people. Rice has become the primary need, and rice is the staple consumption for the people of Aceh. Since the era of the Aceh kingdom, rice farming has been regulated in the life of the people of Aceh, primarily how to regulate the distribution of water in the fields and arrange the planting season or schedule. *Keujruen blang* is an extraordinary institution that regulates rice field farming issues. This institution has full authority to regulate and manage farmers in rice fields.

*Keujruen blang* is a term in the Aceh language; *keujruen* means *keurajeun* or kingdom. *Keurajeun* or kingdom can mean territorial power, while *blang* means rice fields (Nugroho et al., 2018). It can be interpreted that *keujruen blang* has the power and authority to regulate rice field farming issues. *Keujruen blang* has a hierarchy with three levels, namely: *keujruen chiek* (district level), *keujruen muda* (village level), and *keujruen petak* (Khatir, 2014). In different references, *keujruen blang* is also divided into three levels, *keujruen chiek* (mukim level), *mukim* can mean an administrative area consisting of several gampongs, *keujruen Muda* (village level), *petua blang*, namely if the rice fields are in the gampong (village) too broad, then this *blang* elder becomes a person who helps with his task of *keujruen muda* (Nugroho et al., 2018).

*Keujruen blang* has a role and function to regulate and manage the field of rice farming; *keujruen blang* is chosen by farmers through deliberations in the gampong. The criteria that can become *keujruen blang* are experienced in the social field, a good personality, mastering customary agricultural law, an understanding of situations that are influenced by hydrological conditions (*keuneunong*), or understanding the rainy and dry season schedules (Khatir, 2014).

*Keujruen blang* needs a complete place to regulate rice fields according to their roles and functions. *Keujruen blang* was formed by the government following Qanun No. 10 of 2008 concerning Customary Institutions, Aceh governor regulation No. 45 of 2015 concerning the management of irrigation *keujruen blang*. Referring to the rules above, *keujruen blang* should have an important function and role in the life of the people of Aceh. The *keujruen blang* is only a complement and symbol in traditional institutions.

Field findings show that these customary institutions still need to be fully empowered to play a role in their duties and functions. The crisis or the

fading of the authority of the *keujruen blang* customary institution has started since the new order came to power until now, even though the reproduction of the *keujruen blang* has been echoed since the reformation to post-peace. This crisis has harmed the agricultural community in Aceh; for example, the rice planting system is no longer carried out simultaneously, so it will be easily infected by rice pests which harms crop yields. The water distribution system in the fields is also experiencing problems; social values and togetherness are starting to fade, and the handling of conflicts between farmers cannot be appropriately resolved, so the authority of the *keujruen blang* as a customary institution is no longer essential and sacred for some people in Aceh.

The reproduction of the authority of the *keujruen blang* clashed with the presence of formal institutions formed by the government, namely P3A (Association of Farmers Using Water). Clashes are not interpreted as conflicts, but their roles and duties overlap with *keujruen blang*. The presence of these two institutions, the formal P3A institution, and the *keujruen blang* customary institution, should be able to work together, or the government can focus on empowering and strengthening the *keujruen blang* customary institution so that hopes of increasing agricultural output or food security can be realized.

#### **b. *Keujruen Blang* in Three Eras; New Order, Reformation, and Post-Peace of Aceh**

In the new order era, *keujruen blang* needed an administrative place in the gampong. This was inseparable from the influence of the new order, which tended to be centralized in its leadership, so traditional institutions with local wisdom began to be marginalized. Sociologically, the people of Aceh cannot wholly escape *keujruen blang* because this customary institution has become a habit and has been practiced for generations in the lives of farmers in Aceh. However, this customary institution needs to work optimally.

In the New Order era, the P3A (Water User Farmers Association) institution was formed in Aceh. The presence of this institution, on the one hand, paid attention to farmers as supporters of rice farming. Construction of irrigation and water distribution to the residents' fields, this program benefits rice farmers. Generally, farmers in Aceh still apply traditional farming



methods and rainfed rice fields. The New Order era has indeed become a trend where nationally, it has achieved success in the agricultural sector, especially in food self-sufficiency. The results achieved by the New Order government were considered satisfactory in its time. However, on the other hand, the top-down model program would only last for a while, especially what happened in Aceh Besar District. P3A needed to be running optimally.

From the reformation era to post-peace Aceh, *keujruen blang* still needs a sound bargaining chip in Aceh. P3A still exists with the irrigation development program; as an example, it can be observed that in 2021 the Government of Aceh, together with members of the Republic of Indonesia DPR (House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia), are monitoring the implementation of the program in Kuta Malaka District and Indrapuri District. In this program, farmers and P3A heads (former keuchik/ village heads) are involved, which are supported by the government through the Ministry of PUPR (Public Works and Public Housing) (Ahmad, 2021). As a local customary institution, the *keujruen blang* was not involved in this monitoring activity. This monitoring activity showed that Aceh's *keujruen blang* customary institution had experienced an administrative crisis. The traditional *keujruen blang* institution and the government-formed institution (P3A) can synergize in developing the agricultural sector.

## 2. Discussion

Indonesian society comes with a variety of tribes, languages, cultures, and religions that are united in a single Bhinneka Ika, which means that even though they are different, they are still one within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The unity of the Indonesian nation does not mean we must eliminate each other's regional identity and local wisdom. The diversity that exists gives the color of a plural Indonesian nation. It can live side by side and in harmony. Indonesian people can live in harmony with differences. This is constructed in Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

Local wisdom is a characteristic of a pluralistic Indonesian nation, one of which is that the Indonesian people already have local wisdom in the field

of government at the local level. For example, the mention of villages in West Sumatra called Nagari. In Aceh, they are called gampongs, and some places are called villages. The same goes for leaders at the village level. In Aceh, they are called keuchik, reje, and datok penghulu, besides the village head.

In managing agriculture, the Indonesian people also have their local wisdom and Aceh. *Keujruen blang* is a traditional institution that has significantly contributed to farmers' lives by managing rice fields in Aceh. *Keujruen blang* is not a new institution in Aceh; it has been known since the Aceh era was still under the government of Sultan Iskandar Muda. *Keujruen blang*, in the era of the Sultan Iskandar Muda kingdom, had the power and authority to manage rice fields. However, during the era of Aceh being part of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, *keujruen blang*, as local wisdom, experienced a crisis and shift. This condition certainly has reasons. The pattern of government in Indonesia in the New Order era adhered to a centralized pattern that ignored local knowledge.

The crisis of local knowledge or wisdom was felt not only by Aceh but also by other regions in Indonesia, especially in the New Order era, which was centralized in its leadership pattern. In the New Order era, all regions of Indonesia had to submit to a centralized concept of government; for example, in the mention of desa, there was no mention of kampung, gampong, or nagari. The establishment of a PKK (Family Welfare Development) institution in the village to increase women's capacity, LKMD (Village Community Resilience Institute), has the aim of being an institution to increase community participation in development in the village.

The presence of two institutions formed by the government certainly has good value for the village community, firstly to increase community participation in development, secondly as an institution to increase women's capacity in development or involvement, and the role of women is significant in development in the village. However, social values need to be added to the life of the village community with the government realizing it in implementing development in the village. The government has unknowingly imposed its will with the concept of top-down development, so local values have been neglected. In certain situations, the program runs well because the community



must comply with the government's plan. However, the program did not run optimally. On the one hand, the output was achieved, but the process failed.

Development programs with a top-down concept (government-community) will usually run if forced by program implementers but will stop if there is no monitoring from program implementers. This condition will be different if the program is born based on participation from the community (grassroots) synergized with government programs (bottom-up). Development programs of this model will usually be optimal and have a good impact. Actual development departs from broad community participation without coercion or pseudo-participation and mobilization from the government.

Likewise, *keujruen blang* needs a place in the gampong administration. However, historically and sociologically, it has been integrated and has become part of the life of the people of Aceh. The *keujruen blang* crisis is the impact of structural dominance that has been going on for a long time, starting with the New Order and continuing through to reform and post-peace. Reformation and post-peace must be a space for Aceh to reproduce *keujruen blang* as local knowledge. *Keujruen blang* has local knowledge and local wisdom but has an essential role in the development of agriculture, especially in rice farming. From a different perspective, local wisdom has no meaning and is essential, bearing in mind that it is no longer following the times. However, if you look at its role and function, local wisdom is more appropriate for solving village problems. Local wisdom lives and exists within the local community, which has been passed down from generation to generation and is integrated into their social life. For example, *keujruen blang* has a role in handling farmer conflicts and creating food security. These two roles are still relevant when faced with the current condition of society.

The dominance of the structure needs to recognize local wisdom in practice. Even in the discourse, local wisdom seems to be being reproduced after the reformation and post-peace Aceh, the presence of Aceh peace in 2005, Qanun No. 10 of 2008 concerning Customary Institutions, Village Law No. 6 of 2014 and Aceh governor regulation No. 45 of 2015 concerning the management of irrigation *keujruen blang*. Aceh's peaceful situation and the presence of various regulations should be an excellent opportunity to

reproduce *keujruen blang* as local wisdom. In the current decentralization era, the government needs to be more severe about reproducing *keujruen blang* as a government partner in realizing agricultural programs.

The author tries to dissect this study through Antony Giddens' theory of agency and structure. Agents and structures cannot be separated in practice and human activity; agents and structures are a duality (Giddens, 1976, 1984; Ritzer, 2014). Human activity is carried out continuously by agents who are reproduced so that they declare themselves to be actors or agents. In social activities or actions, the agent continues to create conditions so that the activity can continue (Furniss et al., 2019; Yang & Liu, 2019). Giddens generally focuses on the dialectical process by which social practices, structures, and consciousness are created (Giddens, 1995; Ritzer & Douglas J. Goodman, 2008).

The dominance of the structure, namely the government through an agent that has been going on for a long time, has caused the Acehnese people to experience a crisis of identity and culture, one of which is the loss of space for *keujruen blang* to play a role in their social community. Structures are habits that are set to become standards so that they have a relationship with institutionalization and give shape to the dominant influence in the social life of society (Giddens, 2010). The loss of space for *keujruen blang* is considered a minor issue for some groups who aspire to modernization. *Keujruen blang* is considered an ancient institution that no longer has relevance in today's modern era. However, if traced and studied in depth, what was done by *keujruen blang* is still relevant today. For some people, it has been hegemonized that traditional institutions are insignificant compared to institutions formed by an established government. Meanwhile, critical people think that the government is dominating by utilizing structures and systems to bring traditional institutions to the brink of crisis and fade the authority.

Agents carry out continuous domination through their structure, domination that is carried out by creating various rules that must be followed by society; for example, the New Order era ignored traditional institutions and local wisdom, united the term "village" for all of Indonesia, formed formal institutions in villages by ignoring existing traditional institutions.



Agent and structure are inseparable and interrelated dualities. He works to continue to dominate his society to follow what the agent (ruler) wants. The disappearance and crisis of the identity of *keujruen blang* cannot be separated from the domination of the structure, which has lasted for a long time, thus leading the community to accept what agents have done through the structure.

In the reformation and post-peace era, they should have risen to reproduce *keujruen blang* as local wisdom, but the crisis continues. This is inseparable from the long domination so that new habits or habitues are formed in society, resulting in the emergence of pseudo-awareness, as if the truth has become lost and a crisis of local wisdom. This situation leads people not to think about how to return forms of local wisdom. to be reproduced.

In the reformation and post-peace era, the government has attempted to reproduce local wisdom, including *keujruen blang*, through the presence of various laws, qanuns, and government regulations, the formation of the MAA (Aceh Traditional Council). However, the rules do not work and are implemented as expected, the strengthening of traditional institutions or local wisdom does not go well, so local wisdom that has long been in crisis is challenging to reproduce, coupled with the habits of the people who have become habitus since the new order began.

#### **D. Conclusion**

*Keujruen blang*, as a traditional institution, has experienced crises in three eras, the New Order, reforms to post-peace Aceh. The New Order era was centralized so that the *keujruen blang*, as a customary institution, had united with the formal institutions that had been formed by the government, thereby shifting the positions of traditional institutions, including the *keujruen blang*. Meanwhile, during the reformation era, the government still could not completely abandon the shadows of the New Order. The state was looking for a form, so traditional institutions, including the *keujruen blang*, have yet to get the expected position. Reproduction of the *keujruen blang* authority was carried out in the era of peace in Aceh, but it also has yet to bring the expected results. *Keujruen blang* is still weak and powerless even though the Law, Governor Regulation, and Aceh Qanun have been realized. This fact

occurs due to overlapping roles and functions between the *keujruen blang* customary institution and the formal P3A institution. The government's continuous domination has impacted the Acehnese people's perspective by ignoring *keujruen blang* as a crucial traditional institution.

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