In November 2008, Muhajir and I paid a visit to Teungku Faisal Ali, the founder and leader of the Dayah Ulum al-Aziziyah in the village of Sukamakmur, Aceh Besar. Teungku Faisal was (and is) also the leader of the traditionalist organisation Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh (Association of Acehnese Ulama, HUDA), and the chairman of the Acehnese branch of the Nahdlatul Ulama. Over the past few years, he has been a well-known presence in the local and national media, because of his activist stance on the need for Shari’a law to eradicate immorality in Acehnese society. One of the themes we discussed during the visit was the historical role of the ulama in Aceh, and the way in which HUDA fitted in. When I asked Teungku Faisal about the differences between Islamic currents (aliran) in Aceh, he emphasized that 80 per cent of the ulama dayah in Aceh, including himself and most members of HUDA, belonged to the line of Syaikh Muda Wali Al-Khalidy, the famous Perti-leader and founder of the traditionalist dayah Darussalam in Labuhan Haji (South Aceh). In response to this affirmation of Acehnese traditionalism, I wondered – somewhat provocatively perhaps – whether the HUDA may be regarded as the first attempt by Acehnese ulama to ‘unite’ in an activist organisation since the PUSA. Evidently, this was not a very appropriate remark to make. While the conversation had been rather spontaneous up until this point, Teungku Faisal suddenly looked cautious. He curtly responded to my suggestion by stating that Daud Beureueh was a ‘soldier, not an ulama’ (orang militer, bukan ulama). Not much later, the conversation was over, and Muhajir and I were on our way again.

Today, the ulama in Aceh are in somewhat dire straits. As experts of religious law, they remain the most important group of specialists providing religious services to the Acehnese people, ranging from religious education and counselling to the facilitation of traditional life cycle rituals, especially in rural areas. At the same time, their position is marked by moral and political ambivalence. On the one hand, the presence of the ulama

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1 HUDA was founded under tense circumstances in 1999, when the conflict between the GAM and the Indonesian military was reaching boiling point. In Banda Aceh, large demonstrations were held to demand a referendum about independence. HUDA was a part of this movement, which was spearheaded by the Aceh People’s Congress (Kongres Rakyat Aceh, KRA). However, HUDA was forced to draw away from the public sphere after both the government and the GAM expressed their distrust of traditionalist ulama reasserting themselves in local politics (McGibbon 2006:334-36).

2 For a recent example, see an interview with Teungku Faisal Ali in Modus Aceh, Edisi 10-16 Desember 2012.

3 Teungku Muda Waly Al-Khalidy (1917-61) was born in Labuhan Haji, South Aceh, and taught both in colonial schools and in various dayah throughout Aceh. His father was a local religious official (jeube) from West Sumatra (Hasbi Amiruddin 2003:2004:180; Sulaiman 1985: 66-67). After studying in West Sumatra and travelling to Mecca, he returned to South Aceh in 1939 and founded the Dayah Darussalam in Labuhan Haji. Unfortunately, little has been written so far about this influential traditionalist leader. A frequently cited, but also problematic source is the (hagiographic) account by his son, Teungku Muhibuddin Waly (who is himself regarded today as one of the most important Sufi leaders in Aceh), entitled Ayah kami: Maulana Syeikh Haji Muhammad Waly al-Khalidy (Teungku Syeikh Haji Muda Waly) (Petaling Jaya: Kulliyyah of Laws, International Islamic University Malaysia, 1993).
remains a standard symbolic element of Acehnese political culture. On the other hand, the trend in recent decades has been one of political marginalisation. Many people in Aceh are suspicious, if not outright disenchanted, about the way in which many ulama have aligned themselves with the objectives of the central state, especially during the conflict, when they were regarded as powerless at best, and accomplices of state violence at worst. Some observers have argued that the ulama no longer possess the traditional authority they once commanded. What seems certain is that, although the implementation of Shari'a law opens possibilities for a renewed political role, the provincial government has not been very keen on granting power to the ulama (Nur Ichwan 2011). In addition, their influence has been compromised by the pervasive social, theological and political differences within their own ranks.

This chapter focuses on the relationship between the inhabitants of Juroung, and the leaders of the traditional religious boarding school Dayah Hidayat, built next to the village. This was a tense relationship, which was described by villagers as a ‘crisis of solidarity’ (masalah kekompakan). The two leaders of the dayah, sons of the late founder Abu Nazir, had become influential figures in recent decades, in their locality and beyond. Some, especially older, villagers pointed at their role as an example that the ulama no longer ‘cared’ for ordinary villagers. Most villagers, however, argued that they cared too much, as they actively blurred the boundary between dayah and village, interfering on a daily basis with what they saw as ‘village affairs’ (urusan kampong). In recent years, the Dayah Hidayat has grown larger, wealthier, and more professional. While santri and santriwati used to live in bamboo huts, by 2009 there were many hundreds of them, accommodated partly in storied, concrete buildings. It was no secret that there was a connection between this rapid development and the dayah accepting – in conflict as well as post-conflict years – government support. In order to draw conclusions about the way in which the relationship between state, ulama, and villagers has changed in recent decades, I will focus on generational differences. I argue that age, and life phase, is a major, but also underestimated, factor in the different ways in which ordinary Muslims today approach the changing nature of the state, and questions of local religious authority.

This chapter consists of four parts. The first part contextualises the Acehnese situation with regard to more generalising ideas about religious authority and the state in the twentieth century. In the second part I move to Juroung, pointing out the ‘crisis of

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4 Irwan Abdullah, Professor of Anthropology at the University Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta (and Acehnese by birth), once explained this ‘symbolic’ role to me as follows: ‘In Java, if there is a problem, people may go to a kiai. Be they ordinary people or important politicians, they may involve the kiai. They may do so openly or discreetly, or they may choose not to go to the kiai at all. But in Aceh, if something is going on, whether in a small village in the countryside or in the pendopo [the Governor’s Residence], the ulama are always there, sitting side by side with officials. This is the difference.’ (Personal communication, October 2008).

5 The most obvious distinction is that between urban-based ulama who teach at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh (a group to which most members of the provincial Ulama Council [Majelis Pemusyawaratan Ulama, or MPU] belong), and the leaders of the many rural, ‘traditional’ dayah (dayah sala'i), commonly grouped together as the ulama dayah (see this dissertation, Chapter 1). Within these (loosely defined) groups considerable theological cleavages and factional allegiances exist. Take, for example, the controversy around the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawwuf (MPTT), a neo-Sufi movement founded and led by Abuya Syaikh Haji Amran Waly al-Khalidy, one of the sons of Syaikh Muda Waly, which has branches in Aceh, North Sumatra, and Malaysia. Many ulama both inside and outside the MPU, have questioned or attacked Amran Waly’s teachings for being ‘un-Islamic’. One of his books was ‘banned’ by the MPU. In response, Amran Waly has openly sought political patronage to safeguard the survival of the MPTT. Compared to many other, smaller non-mainstream groups, Amran Waly has been able to mobilize considerable support, but not from his own family.
solidarity’ referred to above. The third part elaborates the issue of generational
differences by discussing in detail one particular event, which brought to the fore the
tension between the dayah and the village. In the fourth part I zoom out again, analysing
the nature of religious authority in terms of a wider re-conceptualisation of moral
leadership as it takes place, currently, at the local level.

**Fragmented authority and state practice: beyond the politics of violence and grief**

Various scholars have written about the ‘crisis of authority’ in contemporary Islam.⁶ Although it is almost a platitude to state that Islam, as a decentralised and egalitarian
religion, is characterised by weak structural authority, the general argument has been that
modernity is particularly instrumental in undermining traditional Islamic leadership. In
recent years the threat of ‘Islamic terrorism’ and the perceived reluctance of Muslims to
dissociate themselves from violent expressions, has been seen as a sign that it is unclear,
today, who ‘speaks’ for Islam (Bulliet 2002:34). According to Francis Robinson, this ‘crisis
of authority’ has been long in the making, developing first between 1800 until 1920 as a
result from the conquest of almost the entire Muslim world by non-Muslim forces. The
development was intensified in the second half of the twentieth century, which was
marked by ‘the next great movement of globalization, powered by finance, communications and increasingly large movements of people’ (F. Robinson 2009:339).
Robinson mentions different aspects, but his central focus is on the ulama. In the past two
centuries, the age-old tradition of person-to person transmission of religious knowledge
has effectively broken down:

> Lay folk have come forward to challenge the authority of the ulama as interpreters, indeed,
increasingly each individual Muslim has come to arrogate to his or herself the responsibility
for interpretation. Lay folk and some ulama have come to challenge the authority of past
Islamic scholarship. Scholarly authority has become fragmented; old hierarchies have been
flattened; the old interpretative disciplines have been sidelined. All kinds of new interpreters
of the faith have come forward; all kinds of new interpretations have been promulgated. (...)  
[N]o one now knows who speaks for Islam with authority (Ibid.:345).

According to Robinson, it was the ulama themselves who struck at the roots of their own
authority: ‘What the ulama were doing was, in the absence of any Islamic political power,
developing and informing the individual human conscience as the force which would
fashion a Muslim society’. By doing so, they cleared the space for interpreters coming from
outside the ranks of the ulama to decide what is, and what is not, ‘proper Islam’.⁷

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⁷ This is in fact one of the more paradoxical features of modernist Islamic reformism. As we have seen, a
core tenet of the modernist Islamic movement was to attack the principle of taqlid (tradition), and to
reinstate the need for ijtihad (individual reasoning). This was despite the fact, however, that taqlid
formed one of the major constituting principles for the authority of the ulama in the first place. In the
second half of the twentieth century, growing numbers of popular preachers and Muslim intellectuals
have laid claims on the proper content of Islamic orthodoxy coming from outside the system of
traditional religious education. Scholars have advanced different causes for this process to take place,
including mass education and literacy, and the global emergence of transnational Muslim communities
seeking sources of religious authority that are less place-specific compared to the Muslim ‘homelands’.
The development of mass media has further advanced the process, by making public debates about
religious norms accessible to a majority of ordinary Muslims, thus reducing the traditional ‘asymmetries
between senders and receivers’ (Eickelman and Anderson 2003:4-12). A typical expression is that of
popular preachers using television or the internet in order to encourage their audiences to engage in the
In addition, in the twentieth century traditional Islamic authority has come increasingly under the surveillance of the modern (secular) state. In different parts of the Muslim worlds, the state has taken over control over key domains of authority, such as mosques, courts, schools, endowments and institutions that are central to the production of Islamic knowledge. This process has changed the position of the ulama. In classical Weberian terms, if, in the past, the ulama were exemplars of ‘traditionalist’ and ‘charismatic’ authority (and often a combination of the two), modern state practice has gradually replaced these sources of authority with a form of legitimacy that is impersonal and bureaucratic. In late nineteenth century Aceh, Snouck Hurgronje distinguished sharply between those people who carried the relatively common title of teungku, used for ‘all those [with] a religious function, or who distinguished themselves from the mass of the population through higher knowledge or a more faithful practicing of the religion’, and those called ulama, specialists of religious law and doctrine, who taught independently in dayah, and were venerated both for their knowledge and, in specific cases, for their supernormal powers and charisma (1893-95:168, 74). Since the twentieth century this independent authority has been increasingly compromised.

James Siegel (1969) also emphasized the independence of the ulama. Rather than citing their position in relation to the state, he argued that the pesantren and the ‘village’ represented completely separate realities, characterised by different norms, rules and aspirations. However, since the 1960s the domains of state, village and dayah have become more intermeshed. This process had reverberations for the social position of the ulama. Various observers have argued that the ulama in Aceh estranged themselves from the population by giving up their independence from the state (McGibbon 2006; Syamsuddin Ishak 2001; Kell 1995; Morris 1983). Tim Kell spoke, in this context, of the ‘eclipse of the ulama’. By entering the state bureaucracy and the ‘modern sector’ of the economy, the ulama ‘are no longer a cohesive and independent class powerful enough to confront political and ideological foes’ (Kell 1995:47-50). In similar vein, Rodd McGibbon concluded that, by the time the New Order collapsed in 1998, the ulama had already given up their historical role as ‘agents of change’. Instead, they had become a ‘fragmented and deeply conservative political force’ (McGibbon 2006: 328-29). A stinging critique, voiced inside and outside Aceh, is that, during the conflict the ulama failed to respond to, or were actually complicit in, the grief inflicted on the Acehnese people.

The latter idea has been elaborated (and complicated) by Edward Aspinall in his study of the conflict and Acehnese nationalist ideology. The GAM, he explained, was rooted in the Darul Islam movement. However, in the 1980s and 1990s its ‘Islamic’ vision was gradually replaced with a secular, ethno-nationalist narrative. One of the factors explaining this development is the changing ‘sociological basis’ of the rebellion. Modernist ulama gave up their institutional independence in the 1950s, when their schools were made part of the state system of education, and many of their children were recruited into the state bureaucracy. In the New Order period their traditionalist counterparts followed the same route to state dependence, as they were increasingly co-opted, bought or
intimidated into political quiescence. At the same time, traditionalist scholars were reluctant to support a socially disruptive rebellion for reasons categorised by Aspinall as ‘legalistic’. The latter decades of the twentieth century were characterised by Aspinall in terms of a gradual ‘convergence’ of religious authority and the state, which was facilitated by a ‘precipitous decline of the independent political role of the ulama’ (Aspinall, 2009: 202-8). This process, one may add, continued after the signing of a peace treaty in 2005 (Nur Ichwan 2011).

A different perspective is provided by Michael Feener in his work on the history and institutionalisation of Shari’a law in contemporary Aceh. Feener describes how administrators in Aceh have worked on an ambitious and progressive state project directed at the cultivation of Shari’a minded Islamic ethics since the 1960s. The ‘Shari’a project’ has been designed by teachers and scholars affiliated with state institutions such as the IAIN Ar-Raniry (founded 1960) and the Ulama Council (founded 1966). It was instrumental in the process of aligning Acehnese ulama with the central ideological principles of the New Order by moulding Islamic norms and practices (and their scriptural justification) in the straightjacket of security and economic growth. In Feener’s view, Shari’a law is part and parcel of a general government strategy of ‘greening’ (Islamising) the state, a process tuned to the changing lifestyles of the conservative segment of the urban middle class, the regime’s most loyal constituency. Aceh is a unique case, however, in the sense that the central government has treated the province as a ‘social laboratory’, where local administrators have experimented with the application of Islamic values for managing social conflicts, improving security and economic achievement, counteracting rival ideologies, and creating a lawful society based on the ‘abstracted ideals of Shari’a’. Rather than a sudden innovation, then, Feener sees in the recent implementation of Shari’a law a form of ‘social engineering’ – a future-oriented ‘ideal for the ordering of society’, based on an institutional and ideological framework that has been decades in the making. Rather than co-optation, Feener emphasizes a historical trend in which the ‘officialisation’ of traditional religious authority has been directed, at least in part, by the ulama themselves (Feener forthcoming).

While all of these studies have greatly expanded our understanding of the role of the ulama in contemporary Acehnese society, they have not generally taken into consideration the complexities of state practice at the local level. As a result, it is still difficult to assess how the practical nature of religious authority has changed. To make possible such an assessment, existing accounts must be complemented with an ethnographic view, which incorporates the perceptions, practices and strategies of those

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8 Traditionalist ulama, Aspinall explained, have a general aversion – as based on particular dispositions in Islamic Shafi‘i jurisprudence – against rebellion. Rebellion may lead to a situation of chaos and ‘discord’ (fitnah) which is worse than the prevalent situation. Thus, in 1953 the authoritative traditionalist ulama Muda Waly ‘issued a fatwa declaring the national government to be legitimate according to Islamic law because it did not degrade religion and because its laws resembled Islamic ones. Darul Islam itself, they declared, was bughat – unsanctioned and illegal rebellion against state authority’ (Aspinall 2009:204). Similar criticism was voiced by the widely respected Teungku Hasan Krueng Kale, an ulama and Perti-leader from Aceh Besar, and for a brief period the teacher of Muda Wali (see Isa Sulaiman 2006, n. 41).

9 Instead of the study of classical sources of law and jurisprudence (fiqh), which up until this day has made up the major part of the curriculum of dayah salafi, the style of Islam undergirding this state-directed process is based on a combination of da‘wa (the ‘call’ to Islam) and state economic developmentalism. This ideological construct has been advocated by agents of the state like Governor Ali Hasjmy and Governor Ibrahim Hasan, and socialised through state institutions such as the State Islamic University Ar-Raniry in Banda Aceh (See Feener forthcoming).
people who are not regarded – and who do not regard themselves – as religious 'specialists' or 'professionals'. Authority, one may say (again in the Weberian sense) exists only by grace of a primary and broadly carried interest in obedience. Organised religion, or the 'professional organization for the cure of the soul' owes its existence to a 'need for salvation' (Weber 1946:272-73). This means that, even when it is agreed that the ulama have identified themselves increasingly with the ideological (or mundane) concerns of the state, it remains important not to detach their choices and positions from the agencies of ordinary Muslims, who often have particular stakes in this process of state 'officialisation' themselves.

In the following sections I present ethnographic material focusing on the everyday relationship between the ulama and ordinary villagers in the Juroung locality. Before I do this, however, I should mention two different, but connected considerations, both of which are central for the way in which religious authority and individual agency have been shaped in recent decades. The first involves the impact of the separatist conflict. The second relates to the nature of the state at large.

As I have explained already, this dissertation makes a case, however difficult this may seem in the context of real suffering, for looking beyond violence and grief as a central organizing principle for studying Acehnese lives. It is commonly presumed that, due to Aceh's pious and 'inflammable' character, the Indonesian state has been intent on keeping the mobilizing, and potentially subversive, power of the ulama under control. It is difficult, in this sense, not to let the analysis of the position of the ulama be overly dominated by the changes wrought on the region by the conflict. However, in 1977 (after the establishment of the GAM, but well before the movement became a serious threat to the regime), the Acehnese sociologist Alfian argued that the core challenge for the ulama lay not so much in their formal role in the state structure (as was the case during the run-up to Darul Islam rebellion), but in the increasing authority of what he called the 'new intellectuals' (cendekiawan baru), who were a product of the expansion of secular state education. The cendekiawan baru were rooted in a wide variety of social strata, children of ulama, uleebalang, civil servants, farmers, traders, officers and soldiers. As a 'group', they were essentially rivals of the ulama, because of their capacity to influence public discourse, and exert real power by taking crucial positions in the government and administration (Alfian 1977:215-6). This did not lead to great problems because there was a general acceptance of this process of 'specialisation in various domains of human life'. Of course, it would be easy to discard Alfian's reassuring comment as ideologically prompted (after all, he was himself a prominent representative of the emergence of the cendekiawan baru). Still, I believe that it is quite common for people in Aceh to recognise the ulama's engagement in different domains of social and intellectual endeavour, including the state, and that these domains are related to one another in complex interactions. This situation has continued despite the dominant language of separatist (counter)insurgency, which tends to pit the idea of local, 'authentic' and perseverant religious institutions against its corruptions by the central state.

At the same time, it seems clear to me that many, formerly meaningful, distinctions have faded. 'Traditional' institutions have become more 'professional' and 'modern' institutions have reinvented traditional styles of learning. This is just one aspect of a set of

10 'In Acehnese society this specialisation has already widely spread. Next to the Universitas Syiah Kuala there is the IAIN Ar-Raniry, next to the system of general education there is a system of religious education of dayah and madrasah, next to the Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan, better known as the Aceh Development Board, there is also the Council of Ulama. In short, it appears that the Acehnese (masyarakat Aceh) has accepted the need for specialisation' (Alfian 1977:216-17).
increasingly blurred boundaries between state and society, formal and non-formal, religious and secular. As I have argued, this observation comes with acute implications for the way in which we view the workings of the state. Except for the work of Barker and Van Klinken (as referred to in Chapter 1), I should mention here Akhil Gupta’s elaboration of the spatial differentiation of (everyday) state practice: ‘[A]ny analysis of the state requires us to conceptualize a space that is constituted by the intersection of local, regional, national, and transnational phenomena’ (Gupta 2006:230). The state, in other words, is a transnational phenomenon as much as a localised circumstance. What makes the position of the ulama particularly interesting, is that they are agents in many of these ‘shifting boundaries’ at the same time, as they overlook the distinction between formal and informal, public and private, national and international, local and transnational, and – of course – ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

This connects to my second consideration. While writing this chapter, I was struck by the similarities between my own observations and a recent analysis by Andrew Walker (2012) of rural village society and questions of power in northern Thailand. Although Walker does not deal specifically with questions of religious authority, his work supports, by association, many of the points made in this chapter. According to Walker, peasant life in northern Thailand has become economically diversified, less dependent on agricultural income, and tied in multiple ways to the Thai state. In Thailand, the state is directed at supporting the peasantry through subsidies, rather than, as in the past, extracting surpluses. Walker refers to this new configuration of local state practice as a ‘rural constitution’, stating that ‘it is not just formal constitutions that regulate and channels the power of the state in Thailand’, but equally the ‘extensive network of relationships that makes up political society’ (a term adopted from the work of Partha Chatterjee):

The rural constitution is an uncodified set of values that is based on the desirability of embedding political and administrative power into local networks of exchange and evaluation. Agents of the state, like spirits, need to be domesticated. The rural constitution is not one that seeks to limit the state’s reach, so as to preserve local sources of power. Rather it is premised on the view that the state can enhance local power by providing new modes of authority, additional resources, and innovative forms of symbolic capital that can all be selectively drawn on to pursue security, status, and livelihood enhancement. Of course, the state often fails to meet the expectations embodied within the rural constitution, and this generates responses that range from idle gossip to slander, open dissent, and protest at the ballot box (A. Walker 2012:29).

The ‘rural constitution’, in sum, implies a particular form of agency, that emerges from the interaction between ordinary villages and the state. As we shall see, these observations are highly relevant with regard to the questions dealt with in this chapter. Aceh province lacks commercial or industrial hubs the size of Jakarta or Medan. Instead, it fits the category which Gerry van Klinken has called ‘Middle Indonesia’: the socio-political domain comprising Indonesia’s hundreds of middle-size provincial administrative centres, the

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11 In his study of corruption in contemporary India, Gupta (2006) referred to the day to day encounters between ordinary villagers and local level bureaucrats, to determine how people defined the state in a way that oscillated between, but also integrated, local concerns with ‘public culture’ (i.e. the representation of the state and state practices in newspapers and on television).

12 As a result, the Thai peasantry, rather than a class that is suppressed, or dominated by established political elites, has become an important political force, resulting for example, in the infamous ‘red shirt’ movement.
economies of which are ‘pre-industrial, dominated by the state and by trade’.\textsuperscript{13} It is only ironic, then, that even in the context of separatist conflict, one of the most important resources for social mobility in Aceh has been, in fact, the state. Contestations over state resources are typically concentrated locally, and ‘traditional’ leadership plays an important part in these struggles. This chapter investigates some of these struggles, as they played out in one particular location.

**A crisis of solidarity**

There are three access roads to Juroung village. One unpaved road leads from the main road, through vegetable and coconut gardens, to the meunasah. The second is a small foot path, which leads from a suspension bridge over the river (connecting rice fields and other villages), also to the meunasah. Thirdly, there is a paved road, which leads from the market, alongside the walls of the Dayah Hidayat, to the other side of the village. The dayah borders directly onto the village, and is separated from it by walls. When I lived in Juroung in 2009-2010, I observed that the students of the dayah had little direct contact with the villagers. They could access the main road and the market without crossing the village. They only walked through the kampung when they were looking for construction materials (like palm leaves, for the roofs of their accommodation). Female students were also rarely seen in the village. This used to be very different, however. In the past, before a separate, walled section was built especially for them, the santriwati were taught right in the middle of the village, where they lived in a collection of simple bamboo huts. Women told me that they used to do the laundry in the river, side by side with the santriwati, who were friendly, but also shy of engaging with the villagers.

This scarcity of direct contact between villagers and students is not surprising. James Siegel noted that the ‘world of the pesantren’ was meant to function as a retreat from the ‘ordinary’ world of the village. The reluctance of santriwati to talk to the villagers, even though they were close neighbours, may have been because they were discouraged to do so. However, I was also told by some villagers that, over the years, students of the dayah had been less and less prepared to engage directly with the villagers. They thought that this was due, at least partly, to the size and prestige of the dayah. Some of them called the students arrogant (sombong), and stated that, upon returning to their own villages, there would be little to distinguish them from themselves. Opinions varied, however. Other villagers claimed that the relationship with their ‘friends from the dayah’, some of whom had lived in the Juroung locality for many years, had remained unchanged.

Dayah Hidayat was founded in 1946 by Abu Nazir, a Perti member who was taught in the Dayah Mudi Mesri in Samalanga, North Aceh.\textsuperscript{14} The school was not originally located in Juroung. In the mid-1970s Abu Nazir decided that the original location – some kilometres away in the same sub-district – was no longer suitable. The people of Juroung, his wife’s place of birth, gave him permission to move the dayah to their village. On the banks of the river there was still space for expansion. In the late 1980s the leadership over the dayah was taken over by the founder’s son, referred to in this chapter as Abuya (‘father’), who also studied in Samalanga. Abu Nazir passed away in 1997. When I lived in Juroung the dayah compound consisted of two separate sections for male and female

\textsuperscript{13} Van Klinken 2009:880. The only really industrialised area in Aceh is Lhokseumawe, the centre of the oil and gas industry on the North coast. However, these resources have been mainly exploited by foreign multinationals, who draw their skilled workers mostly from abroad (Kell 1994:19-21).

\textsuperscript{14} Dayah Hidayat, Abu Nazir, as well as all the other names connected directly to the Juroung setting, are pseudonyms.
students, and six large houses. One of these houses was owned by Abu Nazir’s widow (and former leader of the women’s section), Umi (‘mother’). The other houses were inhabited by Abu Nazir and Umi’s children (and their families), including (besides Abuya) Abi, Bang Ali, and Anwar. Abi (also ‘father’) was the leader of the women’s section since his mother had become too old for teaching. Bang Ali, the oldest of the children, taught several weekly religious lessons (pengajian) in Juroung and surrounding villages. He was also the imam meunasah of Juroung village. Teungku Anwar also gave religious lessons, though he specialised in female audiences, in his own house as well as the meunasah of various villages.

Before I elaborate further on the relationship between village and dayah, let me briefly indicate how the dayah leaders, Abuya and Abi, perceived their own position in Juroung. Just like Teungku Faisal – the HUDA chairman – Abuya cultivated his traditionalist credentials. Thus, he emphasized his father’s membership of Perti, and the ‘destructive’ role of modernist ulama who, in the early decades of Indonesian independence, had tried to bring Aceh ‘in line’ with the ideas of the PUSA (memPUSAKan Aceh). He mocked their intellectual capacity, comparing them to ‘charismatic’ ulama like his father (this was the term he used - karismatik). The PUSA, he explained, rejected age-old scholarship (membuang ilmiah lama). What they were good at, instead, was ‘making bombs’.

Abuya carried on his father’s role as the leader of the Perti branch in Aceh Besar.15 He saw himself as a religious teacher who served, in the first place, a specific locality. At the same time, he believed that the role of the ulama was by definition translocal. If something important happened in Banda Aceh or West Aceh, a ‘political matter’ deserving his attention, he might decide to talk ‘straight to the governor’. Although the ulama should not aspire to become a part of the government, he regarded it his duty to judge the government on its religious merits. For Abuya there was no need to stay ‘far’ from politics. Quite the contrary. ‘It is our task to engage the government, to work together with government officials’ (ada juga urusan campur dengan pemerintah, ulama dengan umara harus bersatu). By this statement, Abuya meant that, rather than to aspire to executive functions, the ulama may choose to take a seat in parliament, or become a member of advisory bodies, such as the state Ulama Council (Aceh Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama, MPU). In addition, Abuya and his brother Abi had been involved in the formation of a new, local political party centred on traditionalist ulama, the ‘Aceh Sovereignty Party’ (Partai Daulat Aceh, PDA).16 Abuya did not reject financial support from the government for traditionalist dayah. In his view, it was one of the primary responsibilities of the

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15 Perti is no longer a political party. Instead, the organisation focuses on upkeeping networks of religious education and dakwah.

16 The Partai Daulat Aceh (PDA) was established in 2007 as a party of non-GAM ulama and dayah students. Founded by Teungku Hasanul Basri and Teungku Muhammad Nasir Wali, it has been regarded as ‘largely representing the religious establishment co-opted by the Indonesian government during the conflict’ (International Crisis Group 2008:2). However, in the run-up to the 2009 local elections it became attractive both to the HUDA and to a number of pro-GAM religious leaders and dayah students because of its high rhetorical commitment to the implementation of Shari’a (Salim 2009:13). Electorally, the PDA has not been particularly successful, winning only two percent of the votes in the elections, securing only one representative in the provincial parliament Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD). In response to the risk of losing its dayah base, the political successor of the GAM, Partai Aceh (PA) founded a new Islamic organisation, called the Ulama Council of Nanggroe Aceh (MUNA). MUNA quickly became a factor to be reckoned with, especially after Muhibuddin Waly, an influential ulama and son of Syaikh Muda Waly, put his support behind it (Ibid.:13; cf. Feener 2012, forthcoming; McGibbon 2006; Nur Ichwan 2011).
government to develop further the system of religious education, thus advancing the moral condition of the ummah.

His brother Abi, the leader of the women’s section, agreed that the ulama and the government should not be ‘separated’. His arguments were more formalistic, however. ‘In Aceh we have two types of education, a formal type [i.e. state education] and a non-formal type [pesantren]. It would be unfair if the government supported only one type’. I asked him: but are you not afraid that the pesantren will become too dependent on the government?’, to which he answered: ‘No, not if we request support that is unbinding, that does not direct us’ (makanya kita minta bantuan yang tidak terikat, yang tidak mengatur). When I wondered how this could be guaranteed, he mentioned institutions such as the Badan Dayah (a relatively new body responsible for the development of religious boarding schools), and associations such as HUDA (of which Abi was branch leader). According to Abi, these organisations functioned as official intermediaries. In other words, they were signs of the gradual professionalization of the traditional dayah system. When I asked for a concrete example of this process of professionalization, he suggested that, in the future, dayah leaders may be able to pay their teachers a salary, causing their schools to become less dependent on alms (sedekah).17

Besides being a dayah leader, Abi was also the head of the Juroung village council (teuha peut). In this position he engaged, much more frequently than Abuya, with the everyday affairs of the village. Abi explained his role by referring to the Indonesian political system. The ulama, he argued, were obliged to ‘help the village’ (ikut membantu kampung). He joined the teuha peut because this institution was like the ‘legislative’ power (legislatif) assessing the kampung ‘government’ (mengontrol pemerintah desa). Help from the dayah was important because the people of Juroung, including the village head (keuchik), were generally poorly educated. For him, this justified the stance of the teuha peut, which was more proactive than its counterparts in many other villages. Village affairs were not yet well administered, and ‘clearly written rules’ were still lacking. When I asked for an example, he mentioned the division of raskin (beras orang miskin, government aid for poor people in the form of uncooked, peeled rice). In principle, Abi explained, there were clear rules for the division of raskin, and a number of villagers had even received training in how to handle the process. Still, conflicts emerged now and then, and it was his role to intervene. It was only natural, he concluded, that good local administration should develop slowly. He pointed to the experience of the conflict. People in Aceh were still ‘scared and traumatised’ (keadaan takut dan trauma) and often did not understand or want to accept government rules and regulations.

‘In Juroung there is a lot of fighting’

Abuya was widely regarded as an influential ulama, both in the district of Aceh Besar and beyond. His most important public forum was a weekly religious lesson on Thursday night. This pengajian was visited by hundreds of people, many of whom travelled from Banda Aceh, and some even from Sigli. Another sign of Abuya’s stature was that the Bupati (the non-partisan, former university teacher Bukhari Daud), was a frequent visitor to the dayah. Abuya was without doubt the most important authority on Islamic law at the local level. Take, for example, a conversation between me and my host mother, prompted by the somewhat problematic division of an inheritance:

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17 I thought this was a rather extraordinary statement, as sedekah is often seen as the ‘purest’ form of financial support given to traditional dayah.
Abi’s role was perceived differently. According to most villagers, he was not as ‘learned’ as Abuya. He was also, in different respects, a more controversial figure. It was not a secret, for example, that Abi had close ties with the police, the military, and intelligence services (commonly designated as aparat, the security apparatus). Many people, including Abi himself, told me that during the conflict, defecting GAM fighters reported at the dayah, and that Abi would request their pardon. According to Abi, this role was coordinated with the government and the military. Whenever combatants came to the dayah, he would take in their weapons, call their family, and ‘guide’ them on the right path (diberi arah). These fighters remained unpunished, or so it was said.

Abuya and Abi, it may be clear by now, were fervently opposed to the GAM and its objectives. According to Abi, the separatist movement consisted of ignorant young men without education, who were led by a small group of fanatics. ‘The GAM are agents of chaos, who fight against a lawful government (pemerintah yang sah)’. When I asked him whether he thought local people may be unhappy with this stance, he answered: ‘If I do not step forward, then where do we go? (jika Abi nggak bangkit, ke mana kita?)’ He recalled escaping from an assault once. A bomb exploded nearby, and he thought it might have been meant for him. ‘They are terrorists’, he stated. ‘This is why we oppose them. I have never been paid by the government’ (digaji merah-putih, lit. by ‘red-and-white’).

The people of Juroung were ambivalent about the association between the dayah and the aparat. Many of them were sympathetic to the goals of the GAM, and during the 2009 local elections a large majority voted for Partai Aceh, the political party into which the GAM was transformed after the 2005 peace agreement. However, very little fighting had taken place in the vicinity of the village. Due to its location – close to the main road, the local police station and the dayah – Juroung was spared much of the violence inflicted on more isolated parts of Aceh Besar (such as the mountainous areas around Lam Teuba and Lam Kabeu, which were known as GAM hotspots). Many people believed that it was partly thanks to Abi that the soldiers refrained from harassing Juroung and the other nearby villages. One time when fighting did break out in the forest nearby, villagers took refuge in the dayah. People were generally grateful that the war had not engulfed them to the extent known in other areas. For the rest, they had their own private thoughts.

A greater source of tension was the interference of the dayah in ‘village affairs’ (urusan kampung). Central positions in the village leadership were held by Abuya’s family. Bang Ali was the imam meunasah. Abi was the head (ketua) of Juroung’s village council (teuha peut). Fachri, another one of Abu Nazir’s brothers (whom I haven’t mentioned yet), was the village secretary (Sekdes). Discontented villagers stated that dayah leaders made use of these positions to access state resources. This was far from a strange. Villages in Indonesia are entitled to various funds, mostly directed at ‘development’ (perkembangan). By controlling Juroung’s administration, it was argued, this funding was partly channeled to the dayah. At the root of this disagreement lay the question whether or not the dayah should be seen as a ‘part’ of Juroung village. Certainly, the compound was

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18 Fachri was the only one of Abu Nazir’s children who did not live in the dayah compound, but in the village. He was not a religious teacher, but earned his money as a contractor.
located within the official administrative boundaries of the desa. However, both villagers and the santri regarded the dayah as a separate social unit, despite the fact that it was connected to the village through family ties, proximity, and religious services performed for the community. The dayah students had no particular relation with Juroung (the santri often came from far away, while most santriwati came from other villages in the district), and it was common for the villagers and the students to speak of the ‘village’ (kampung) and the ‘dayah’ as different places.

This tension escalated in 2007, after the election of a new village head. As he explained to me personally, Ilyas had never aspired to become keuchik. He came from Indrapuri, and it was not very long ago that he married a woman from Juroung and moved to this village. He was taken by surprise when, on a certain day, Abuya summoned him to the dayah for a private conversation, and asked him to stand as candidate. Other villagers were less surprised, however, or at least this is what they said afterwards. Zulkiflar, the previous keuchik, had long been seen as a ‘puppet’ (boneka) of the dayah. Ilyas’ candidacy was perceived as a move to replace Zulkiflar with an equally loyal and discreet figure. Sani, Ilyas’ wife, was a full niece of Umi, so this – and the fact that he was an outsider – made him an obvious choice. Two other candidates contested the position. Din was a man in his forties, still unmarried, who sold rice and gulai (a spicy beef stew) in one of the coffee shops on the side of the main road. Miram, a son of my host parents, was in his early thirties, married, and earned his living by transporting people and goods with his pickup truck. What did surprise the villagers, however, was the fact that, on the morning of the election (which took place at the meunasah), more than a hundred santri came down from the dayah to cast their vote. A few hours later, it became clear that Ilyas had won, with more than a hundred votes difference.

The outcome did not remain undisputed. A small group of villagers decided that they would not accept the course of events, and went to the Camat to request a meeting. They complained that, although apparently the santri were officially registered as inhabitants of Juroung village (Zulkiflar, the previous keuchik, had taken care of this), they did not have the right to vote, for they were ‘not part of the Juroung community’ (bukan orang Juroung). The Camat brushed them off. The elections were legitimate, and nothing could be done about the situation. One of the protesters summarised the overall sentiment to me by stating that, clearly, the Camat was already ‘under the foot of Abuya’ (camat sudah di bawah kaki Abuya).

The election of Ilyas formed the apex of what people in Juroung called a ‘crisis of solidarity’ (masalah kekompakan). By this they meant the emergence of a disruptive rift between the kampung and the dayah, and, within the kampung, between a ‘kampung group’ and a ‘dayah group’ (kelompok kampung/dayah), the latter consisting mainly of people related to Umi. This conflict was considered by many of my interlocutors as the single most important problem facing Juroung. Firstly, it disrupted religious services. In the case of some families, when holding a kenduri Abuya refused to send his santri. In the words of one person involved, he wanted to ‘test’ them (mengetes; i.e. their loyalty). Secondly, and more importantly, the conflict was causing strife at every level of village life. At the level of local administration, it obscured the decision making process. Some matters were discussed in meetings. Others were not, and decided among the keuchik and the teuha peut. At the same time, the allocation of government subsidies became increasingly dependent on shadowy allegiances, machinated, according to many villagers, by Abi. Some families supportive of the role of Abi in the village leadership were accused of gaining economically from this. At the same time, not everyone related to Umi supported the
dayah. Some of Abuya’s greatest critics were relatives, who became enmeshed, in turn, in intra-family conflicts.

The situation, in other words, was festering. I once attended a village meeting, which was called together to resolve an argument from the previous meeting (and which then itself got almost out of hand). As the atmosphere heated up again, a young man sitting next to me whispered in my ear: ‘Sorry, it is always like this. In Juroung there’s a lot of fighting’ (sering ribut di Juroung).

Let me give one example of the kind of conflict dividing the village in this period. In the course of 2009 the keuchik, together with the Sekdes and the teuha peut, successfully applied for a contribution to Juroung from a government program aimed at poor village youth. The support was provided in the form of money, but the condition was that this money was spent either on seeds (for sawah or gardens) or livestock (goats), to encourage the receiving parties to set up their own businesses. The division of this money was not publicly discussed. Instead, a private meeting of the teuha peut decided that half of the amount was to be allocated to the pemuda (village youth), a quarter to the village leadership (pengurus kampung – including the keuchik, the members of the teuha peut, the imam, three kepala lorong, and the kepala pemuda), and the final quarter to the dayah. Unsurprisingly, this angered many young people, who learnt about the outcome when the money was already divided. In addition, the division among the pemuda was disputed. The amount was too small to be divided among all pemuda, so only ten people were selected. It soon became evident, that it was people close to Abi (rather than the poorest section of the pemuda) who were given a share. The case created such tension that quite unusual forms of reconciliation (perdemaian) had to be performed in order to normalize relations. For example, the youth member of the teuha peut decided to use a part of the money allocated to him to organise a trip to the beach for the (male) youth of Juroung. Rather than to soothe his conscience, he took this decision as a necessary step to end the discord (fitnah) that was related to the ‘problem with the goats’.

The person who, arguably, was most ‘caught in between’ the arguing parties was Bang Ali, the imam. Bang Ali was the oldest brother of Abuya and Abi. He was less tied to the dayah, as he made a living teaching weekly lessons in the villages around the district. According to Bang Ali, the conflict was the ‘biggest problem in Juroung’. Instead of a problem between village and dayah, however, he spoke of an ‘Ilyas faction’ and a ‘Miram faction’ (kelompok Ilyas/Miram, referring to the main rivals in the election of the keuchik), thereby placing the conflict squarely in the village. He defended the election of Ilyas, but also acknowledged that the situation was partly his responsibility as a

19 While in Indonesia the word ‘youth’ (pemuda) is also used in a more general sense, in this particular context I refer to the institutionalized role of male-gendered young adults (roughly between 15 and 30 years old), who, according to local customs, are responsible for a number of village ‘chores’, such as digging graves or preparing festivities, but also for guarding the village against ‘disruptions’ and bad influences from ‘outside’. The latter may include thieves, but also public morality breaches. As Syihab, the ‘head of the pemuda’ (ketua pemuda) in Juroung, summarized it for me, the pemuda are those ‘in front’ (di depan), taking care of the boundary between the domain of village integrity and the ‘outside world’.

20 Some of the beneficiaries were not even pemuda. ‘Youth’ is an elastic concept in Indonesia, as is ‘poor’. However, there is little question that to categorise the village treasurer, a middle-aged, married man who drove a large Toyota Kijang, as ‘poor village youth’, certainly seems pushing it. Mumanad, a dead poor, orphaned young man in his late teens, who came every single day to the house of my host family for his evening meal, received nothing.

21 Thus, he argued that santri who had lived in the dayah for a long time surely had a right to vote, and that Miram may be seen, just like Ilyas, as a ‘newcomer’ (pendatang) because his father was originally from Sigli.
community leader. Still, it was not an easy problem to solve. ‘People argue behind your back’ (kacau di belakang), and the people did not dare to speak straight to the ulama (orang kampung malu terhadap ulama). He hoped that the tensions would soften as the time passed.

### Generational differences

In the course of months, I gradually became aware of a conspicuous difference between older and younger generations in the approach to this ‘crisis of solidarity’. Some of these differences were self-evident. Older villagers often complained that ‘it had not always been like this’. They told me that, over the years, the dayah became increasingly affluent. After Abuya and Abi had relocated the female students to the central dayah compound, the previously shabby accommodation was replaced, bit by bit, with modern, partly storied concrete buildings, equipped with large communal kitchens. The houses of Abuya and his siblings also became larger and larger. Their houses were the nicest and best furnished in Juroung. While the dayah grew, the star of Abuya had risen. He received people like the Bupati and the Banda Aceh mayor, and he was concerned less with people in Juroung. Older people saw this as a problem. Abu Nazir, they said, used to be modest and accessible. He knew every villager personally, and cared about their problems. His sons were different. They cared more about the interests of the dayah (and, some said explicitly, about their own interests). As traditional leaders (tokoh masyarakat, or tokoh adat), they alienated themselves from the village. Younger villagers were less outspoken. They agreed about the alienation, and the importance of social harmony. However, they objected to the principled manner in which their elders framed the problem. Instead, they approached the conflict in a way that, at least in their own view, was more pragmatic, constructive, and ‘suitable’ to modern times.

Let me give a few examples. Mustafa was a widower in his seventies, who lived together with his daughter (who had remained unmarried). For the largest part of his life, he had been a landless farmer. He was born in Keumala (Pidie), and had come to Juroung as a child. He was too old to work. His daughter earned some money by doing the laundry of other families. They were generally considered to be among the poorest households of the village. When I was talking to Mustafa about the dayah, he said:

*Mustafa: Abu Nazir, ah, I knew him well! He was a good man. He would accept no money from the government. The Bupati was called Teuku Bachtiar then. Abu Nazir used to say: if he [i.e. T. Bachtiar] wants to give us money in the name of the Bupati (di atas nama bupati), let him bring it. There is a river here, I will throw it all in. But if he wants to give it in his own name (di atas nama Bachtiar), I will accept it. (...) In the past, the ulama (teungku-teungku) were common people, like me. [Now it is] nice and easy but not nice (enak-enak, tapi tidak enak). Nice and easy for them, but not so nice for the people. (...) We do not know where the money comes from. The bupati does not see the difference. Money is money, even if it is the levies taken from pigs (sampai pajak babi). Tell me David, do you know who is the richest man of the village?*

*David: Teuku Arif?*

*M: Wrong, it is Abuya, he owns a thousand cows!*

*D: Is that a reason to have less confidence in the ulama?*

*M: No, not that. We have to trust them. If we do not trust them it means we have no faith.*

In the past Mustafa used to be a member of the teuha peut. Back then, he said, the members were not paid (digaji). It used to be normal to serve the village (mengabdi kampung). ‘But now I don’t care anymore (nggak peduli lagi).’
Teungku Maimun was in his early 50s, and, for a farmer, relatively well to do. His oldest child was a student in Banda Aceh. Teungku Maimun was a nephew of Umi, and thus related by blood to Abuya and Abi. After the election of Ilyas, however, he was one of the villagers who went to the Camat to protest:

Teungku Maimun: When we went to the Camat, [Abuya and his family] were very angry with me, because we are kin (saudara). But I was not afraid, because I know we should do what is right. It is the principles that count (…). I do not answer to them, I answer to the Creator (sang pencipta). (…) Perhaps I’ll be less happy here, but more happy there [i.e. in the Afterlife; akhirat].

David: Did you not consider taking the matter up directly with Abuya?
T.M.: No, there is no use. They are people with lots of knowledge (ilmu). Even the Camat is afraid of Abuya. (…) We are at the bottom (kita orang rendah). We better just mind our own business (jaga urusan sendiri).

D.: Does that make you feel bad? (sakit hati)
T.M.: No. Why? If you follow what is right (ikut yang benar), there is nothing to feel bad about.

This kind of ambivalence could be found with many people of his age. A principled critique of the ‘worldly’ interests and engagements of the teungku-teungku was coupled to an equally principled refusal to deal with these matters directly. This, Teungku Maimun argued, would mean to transgress fundamental norms guiding the relationship between the villagers and the ‘people with lots of knowledge’.

In some cases, this ambivalence would lead to a near-complete severance of social ties. Teungku Usman was a 66 years old former market trader, and father of three adult children. His analysis resulted in one of the harshest condemnations of the dayah leaders I have heard:

They [i.e. the dayah leaders] are interested in money. If no money is involved, they do not bother. (…) They have gardens, they have rice fields, they even bake cakes [to sell]! But that is not their business, that is the right of the poor. (…) They turn in a proposal for this, a proposal for that [i.e. for government funding]. (…) And they take money from the kampung. (…) Actually we do not need to listen anymore. We really do not need them anymore.

Now let me compare Teungku Usman’s comment to that of his youngest son. Putra was 22 years old when I first met him, still unmarried, and a pious young man. He prayed diligently, and on Friday night he often went to the dayah to join Abuya’s public pengajian.

Putra: The villagers do not respect [the teungku-teungku] anymore. In secret they say that they are no longer ulama, but that they have become businessmen (towkay)!

David: If that is true, then why do people still go to the pengajian? Why do you?
I: Because Abuya can still explain the kitab. No one knows the kitab better than Abuya. We do not listen to Abuya, we listen to the kitab. They still have the right to teach (masih berhak mengajar). And it is an obligation to search for knowledge. It would be sinful not to listen to them.

D: And why do people keep working together with them, for example in the teuha peut?
I: Because we are professionals.

Just like his father, Putra was ambivalent about the role of the role of the dayah. Yet his ambivalence was cast in quite different terms. Putra did not think that the teungku-teungku had become ‘redundant’. They represented a reservoir of knowledge and religious service that remained important to the villagers.
I perceived a similar contrast in other families. Take, for example, a conversation with Jannah and Muhamad, a married couple in their 50s, and the owners of a shop on the market:

Jannah and Muhamad: There is a problem with the leadership. The leaders of the kampung and the leaders of the pesantren. (...) They are unjust. They don’t know halal from haram. It would be better if they do not interfere with the affairs of the kampung, they already have a job.

David: Do you think this is just a problem in Juroung? Or in other places as well?

Y. & M.: No, just here, in Juroung. (..) Other places we don’t know about. We don’t need to know. Why would we want to know? The important thing is we have this problem here. Well, maybe in other places also, but we don’t know.

Their daughter Cut (27, married, one child), said (in a different conversation):

People have doubts about the ulama still being pure of heart. [This is a problem because] they are our role models. (...) For example, if the children of ulama have other interests than teaching, they should pursue other things, and this is no problem. They should still behave well, however, because they are the children of ulama. So they are different from ordinary people. (...) [On our part] we have to respect the pesantren. We can choose when we want to deepen our own knowledge. At the moment, I am not ready for this yet. But since in our village a pesantren is nearby, we have to respect them (..) for example, by wearing a headscarf when we pass by that side of the village.

Cut’s view was comparable to that of Hafid, her 24 year old (unmarried) cousin:

David: Does [the crisis of solidarity, masalah kekompakan] make it more difficult for you to accept the opinions of the ulama? For example when they tell the villagers that certain behaviour is not allowed?

Hafid: [reacts surprised] Of course not! Why? Those are just the rules of our religion. It is good when they remind the people of this. (...) Of course different people react differently. (...) These are matters of faith (iman) and practice (ibadah). But it is only good if certain things are forbidden.

The young adults Putra, Cut, and Hafid thus distinguished, more than their elders, between the ‘traditional’ authority of the ulama and the knowledge and values they transferred and ‘represented’. In comparison to their parents, they regarded the social configuration of Juroung in a more pragmatic, strategic, and individualistic style.

In the next section, I will elaborate on the implications of this difference by discussing one particular event, and the contrasting responses of Zainuddin, and his son Fendi. I use this case to demonstrate how the discursive differences between generations had particular consequences for the way in which people responded to, and acted upon, lived crises.

The theft from the dayah

Perdamaian

It was the talk of the village, and perhaps the neighbouring villages as well: the theft from the dayah. For several nights in a row, three boys from Juroung (one fourteen, the other two seventeen years old), had broken into the dayah to steal kitchenware from the
communal kitchens. It was Ramadan, the holy fasting month, so it was quiet in the dayah. Most of the students (santri) had temporarily returned to their home villages. The boys had sought out tarawih, the daily ‘recommended’ prayers following on the mandatory isya), as their moment to enter the compound unnoticed. Youthful rogues rather than professional criminals, their design had been to collect a number of cooking stoves, take the devices apart, and sell the components to scrap metal dealers for small cash. Still, the theft was not a small one, with the retail value of one stove being equal to three days wage of a day labourer, and the boys taking over 30 pieces. I learnt about the commotion on a Saturday afternoon, when I returned to Juroung from Blang Daruet. Upon arrival, I was told by villagers that the evening before one of the boys had been caught red-handed, and taken, on personal orders of Abuya, to the local police station. There he had given the names of his accomplices, who were publicly lifted from their beds. I was shocked when I heard the names of the three boys. One of them, Irwan, I knew quite well, for I was close to his older brother, Fendi. Irwan was fourteen year old. I knew him as quiet, polite and certainly not as a ‘criminal’.

I did not visit Irwan’s family immediately. I had not been in Juroung for two weeks, and I wanted to greet my adoptive family first. On Sunday morning I looked up Fendi at the market, where he ran a motorcycle workshop. I asked him to tell me the story from his point of view. Fendi said that, on Friday night, he had gone to the market to have coffee with some friends. When he came home, he found his mother, Cut Nurul, crying. Irwan had been arrested. His father, Rahmat, was at the police station. Fendi immediately jumped on his motorcycle. When he entered the police station, and saw his younger brother there, he lost his composure and slapped Irwan hard, right on his ear. His younger brother had shrivelled on the spot, and Fendi had lectured him, emphasizing his stupidity, and the irresponsibility of not thinking about the consequences, including the shame for his family. Fendi lit a cigarette and looked at me. ‘I still can’t believe he has been so stupid’, he said. I asked him whether he knew when his brother would be released. He shrugged. ‘No idea. First there has to be a solution (solusi)’. By this, he meant an agreement between the families of the three boys, Abuya, the keuchik, and the police about the appropriate way of dealing with this rather unusual incident.

I went back to the village. Cut Nurul looked distressed. She had hardly slept and suffered from severe headaches. She said that she was afraid that Irwan might not be home before Hari Raya Idul Fitri, the celebration of the end of the fasting month, which would commence next Friday. Zainuddin was not at home. I stayed for an hour, and tried to comfort her. Later that afternoon I met the keuchik. No solution had been reached yet. The only thing that seemed certain was that the boys’ families would have to compensate the dayah for the damage done. It was not just about money, however. The boys themselves would also have to feel the consequences of their mischief. Their detention, in other words, was as much a punishment as an incentive for the families to seek a financial solution. From the keuchik I understood that it was up to the police and Abuya to figure out how long this should take. I asked him: ‘Do you think that they will be released before Hari Raya?’ He replied: ‘I don’t know. Maybe yes, maybe no, everything is still in process (masih di dalam proses)’. ‘So what happens if there is no solution?’, I asked. ‘Then they will be taken to court. There is a juvenile court in Jantho [the district capital]. There even is a juvenile prison. But I don’t think it will come to that.’

Irwan and the other boys were not actually locked up. They were allowed to walk around freely as long as they did not leave the police station. Officially their detention was the decision of the local police chief (the Kepala Polisi Sektor, or Kapolsek). Most villagers, however, assumed that it was Abuya who was making the calls, and who had decided that
it was necessary to ‘teach the boys a lesson’ (kasih peringatan, literally ‘to give them a reminder’). On Monday I was invited by Fendi’s family to break the fast. Irwan had now spent three nights in the police station. Cut Nurul was doing better, even though it was still unclear when Irwan would be released. At the same time, the shamefulness of the situation has sunk in. ‘I am sad about what Irwan did,’ she said, ‘and everyone is talking about it’.

A day later Zainuddin was among the 40-50 men assembling at the meunasah to perform isya and the subsequent tarawih prayers.22 After they finished, and readied themselves to go home or to the coffee shop, the keuchik suddenly requested that they should stay somewhat longer. The Kapolsek had announced that he would come to the meunasah for the ‘hand-over’ of the young thieves (serah terima masyarakat kampung). The men sat down. There was no attempt to convene the other villagers, although a number of people, men and women, who had noticed that something was going on, came from their houses to witness the event. About fifteen minutes later a police pickup truck arrived with the three boys, the Kapolsek, and two officers. Somewhat later Abuya also arrived, on foot, accompanied by a small group of students. The boys were requested by the Kapolsek to sit in the middle of the meunasah while the village men assembled around them in a big circle.

The keuchik spoke first. He asked the men to accept the hand-over of the boys, and to participate in a reconciliation ceremony (perdamaian) aimed at restoring (memperbaharui, lit.: ‘renew’) the relationship between the kampung and the dayah. After this he read two documents. The first was an ‘announcement’ (pengumuman), drafted one and a half years earlier by the village leadership, and signed by the keuchik, the teuha peut (the village council) and the kepala pemuda (the head of the village youth). This document stated that, in the case of theft by a village resident, the perpetrator would be subjected to adat sanctions (sangsi adat), including the obligation to pay all damages, and, in the case of no compliance, the risk of being expelled from the village. The second document was a separate statement, drafted earlier that day, which was to be signed by the ‘perpetrators’ (pelaku) and their guardians (wali, in all three cases their father), promising that they would compensate the dayah for ‘material and immaterial damage’ (rugi material dan imaterial). It also included the provision that, in the case of a relapse, the case would be taken to court, rather than solved informally (secara adat).

When the keuchik was finished, Abuya spoke. Children, he explained, are entrusted temporarily by God in the hands of their parents (anak adalah titipan Tuhan). Thus, he emphasized the parents’ responsibility for a good upbringing. He also warned that this behaviour brought shame not only on the families of the boys, but also on the village (namely in the face of other villages and the subdistrict; buat malu kampung […] terhadap kampung-kampung lain dan terhadap kecamatan). He ended his speech by asserting his personal authority. If this would happen again in the future, he would not hesitate ‘to send the perpetrators across the sea’ (perilaku dikirim ke seberang laut), a remark understood by the audience as a reference to Nusa Kambangan, the infamous, high security prison-island off the coast of Java. In that case, he continued, directing himself explicitly to the boys, ‘your parents will not be able to visit you, because there will not be a ship to take them there’.

Finally, the Kapolsek spoke. He started out with a point by point summary of events: how the boys were caught, what they had stolen, and what they had done with the goods. Then an explanation followed of why they were held in the police office for several

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22 The extra (recommended) tarawih prayers are common practice during the holy month of Ramadan.
days. They were not 'jailed', he said. They were held for 'general safety' (untuk keamanan). It was normal procedure that the perpetrators were taken in custody until a definite solution had been found. While it had never been the intention that these boys would be held for longer than just a few days, it might be the last time for them that a solution could be reached 'within the community' (diselesaikan di kampung). Next time there would be no 'dispensation' (dispensasi) and they would be brought instead 'to [the district court in Jantho]'. He had already informed his colleague about the case. Also, the 'evidence' (barang bukti) had been forwarded to the Jantho police office. As for the details of the reimbursement, he mentioned a total amount of Rp 1.450.000 (approximately EUR 125,--) worth in damages per family. Subsequently, the Kapolsek added a note about education, this time directing himself to the fathers of the boys, who were all present. Fathers should take at least an hour per day to talk with their families about 'right and wrong' (yang baik dan yang jahat). ‘Why’, he said, ‘do the fathers always enter the house through the front door, and the sons through the back door? How can they know then what their children are up to?’ He finished his lecture by declaring that the task of the police was to ‘make big things small, and to make small things disappear (buat kecil hal yang besar, dan buat hilang hal yang kecil). On the one hand, this ambiguous comment seemed a reference to the willingness of the police to facilitate an informal solution in such matters. On the other hand, it seemed to urge people not to get too excited about how things were handled, and not to blow controversial decisions (such as the detention of the boys) out of proportion.

In the meantime, the boys sat quietly, shoulders bent, with faces turned to the ground. After the Kapolsek had finished, the children and their fathers signed the first document, thus promising in front of everyone present that this would not happen again. The agreement was further officialised by making photos of the boys. The meeting ended with an extensive public apology, which is a common element of the peacemaking (perdamaian) ritual. The boys and their fathers all went around the meunasah, approaching every person present with a greeting (briefly touching the tips of the fingers, then raising one’s own hand to the chest) and spoken apology (A: meuteume ampon). When this was finished, everyone left, and the boys were allowed to go home.

One week after the perdamaian, I briefly discussed the incident with Abuya. It was ironic that, a month before, we had had a discussion about crime, social tensions, and the responsibility of the ulama to mediate in local conflicts. Of course, we had not anticipated the possibility of a ‘criminal act’ taking place within the dayah. Abuya had told me that, although there were many possible situation on which he may be consulted, ‘crime’ was not generally one of them. As a community leader, he was concerned with matters of religious law (hukum agama) and adat law (hukum adat, or hukum kampung). ‘Criminality’ (kriminalitas), like stealing, violent assault, or drug use, should be seen instead as a matter of civil law (hukum negara), and a concern of the police rather than the community (masyarakat). However, the theft from the dayah was an unusual case, and revealed that the meaning of masyarakat was contested. When I asked Abuya why he had forwarded the theft to the police, he said it was never his intention to have the boys tried in a court (although he said that he could, if he wanted). He sounded defensive, though. Rather than ‘threatening’ the boys (mengancam; his term), his main concern was that it would not happen again. At the same time, he emphasized that one of the two older boys had a track record of theft and small crime, and that he could not ignore the scale of the

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23 This view resonates with the more generally view held in Acehnese society. This is interesting in itself. While many Acehnese argue that Islamic law offers rather clear cut ways of dealing with for theft (just like it does with gambling, drinking alcohol, or adultery), very few of people actually thought that theft should be made part of the provincially implemented Shari’a legislation.
theft. When I asked him again whether theft, generally speaking, should be considered a matter of civil law, he said: 'No. Not in the case of children under age (anak di bawah umur). In Islam, it is enough to have them pay damages, and give them a warning (peringatan). This is enough.' Thus, he suggested that the procedure followed was one of protection, not punishment.

Abi’s stance was more confrontational. About the question of involving the police, he said: 'First we ask: how is it possible that children from the village steal'. This was a rhetorical question. According to Abi, the blame should be sought with the parents, and their own failing education. In the case of the boy with the bad ‘track record’, the father was a former thief himself, and thus a particularly bad example. In the other two cases, including Irwan, the problem was that the parents were not sufficiently well educated (kurang pendidikan). In his view, the arrest and detention of the boys were less a punishment for the boys than a ‘deterrent’ for the parents (untuk bikin jera), encouraging them and other villagers to put more effort into raising their children (supaya orang tua mau mendidik anak). When I asked why a perdamaian alone could not instil sufficient warming, he said that the solution should be to scare the parents (buat takut orang tua). By keeping the case within the confines of the village community, people may be made to ‘think lightly’ about the issue (menganggap enteng dia masalah). Just like Abuya, Abi thought that the decision to forward the boys to the police was not to sidetrack adat (bukan di luar qanun). ‘We take them to the police, so we can coordinate matters, and so that these people will change their mentality (berubah pikiran). That is all.’

Villagers were ambiguous about the affair. Few people felt ‘bad’ for the boys being arrested. This was seen as their own fault, and some people agreed that it was a good ‘warning’ for other aspiring criminals. No one believed that it would be appropriate to keep them locked up for more than a few days. Most people described the boys as ‘naughty kids’ (anak nakal), who probably had not thought very hard about their behaviour. They thought the case should be relatively easy to solve – if only the damages were paid. Like Abi, many people pointed at the role of the parents, arguing that, apparently, they had not looked after their children well. If I asked about Irwan, however, most people said that he was just a child who followed the oldest of the three boys, who was viewed as the ringleader. Everyone agreed that the affair caused great shame for the boys’ families, and some people used the language of shame to denigrate the families involved (especially if there were particular reasons to do so, such as jealousy, or previous feuds). When I talked to Liz, Irwan and Fendi’s sister, the very first thing she wanted to know was who told me about the arrest. Taken somewhat by surprise, I answered that I was told by the keuchik (which was true, even though I had heard many other people talk about it). From her reaction I learnt that this was not the desired answer. She answered, gloomily: ‘Oh... so Pak Keuchik is already talking about it yeah... so now all the people know’ (jadi Pak Keuchik sudah ngomong ya... semua orang sudah tahu).

A contentious aspect of the affair was the extent to which it implicated the village as a whole. Villagers stated that the incident was not very good for the ‘good name of the village’ (nama baik kampung). The idea of collective shame appeared to be a powerful discursive instrument. In the course of my fieldwork I often encountered a particular level of anxiety about the good name of the village, both in Juroung and in Blang Daruet. Village ‘shame’ could be tied to a variety of issues, ranging from allegations of criminality to the (public) violation and transgression of religious and communal (adat) norms.24 The discourse of communal shame and the ‘good name’ of the kampung was an effective mobilizing instrument. I will return to this – particularly in relation to the problem of vigilante violence – in Chapter 7.
argument of the shamed community was central to the ways in which Abuya and the police chief accounted for their actions during the 'hand-over' of the boys. One of the villagers explained to me that, if Abuya said that 'shame was brought upon the kampung', what he really meant was that 'shame was brought upon him' (buat kampung malu artinya buat abuya malu). There was a history in this strategy of addressing the village as a whole. For example, I noted a conspicuous parallel between the way in Abuya's speech during the serah-terima, and his sermon a few months earlier during the celebration of maulid. Knowing that many people from other villages came to listen, he publicly criticized the Juroung villagers for not showing up at his weekly pengajian. What would people think about him, he had said, if people from his own village would not even attend? Thus, he had shamed Juroung by saying that Juroung shamed him. I elaborate on this issue of shame, because it played a role in the way in which Zainuddin, Irwan's father, responded to the crisis that involved his youngest son.

Zainuddin and Fendi

Zainuddin was one of the villagers who had gone to the Camat after the controversial election of Ilyas. Unsurprisingly, this made the whole incident particularly sensitive for him. What puzzled me most during the whole affair, however, was not his reaction, but that of his son. Fendi was the fourth of Zainuddin and Cut Nurul's five children. He had an older brother named Saiful. There were also two daughters, Novi and Liz, both of whom were married and had moved to Banda Aceh. Irwan, at fourteen, was the only one of Zainuddin and Cut Nurul's children to be still in school. In the months preceding the incident, I came to know Fendi as a responsible young man. Working in his uncle's small but successful workshop (which became his personal property in early 2010) he earned the largest part of the family's income. Although he had a girlfriend (a student in a pesantren near Sibreh), he did not seriously think about marriage yet. For now, he enjoyed the respect he felt he had already earned.

Over the years Fendi gradually assumed responsibility over his family's finances (which meant, for example, that whenever Zainuddin was able to sell a portion of his yearly yield, he gave the money to Fendi to manage). Fendi's sense of responsibility went further than this, however. In a village-wide conflict about the division of irrigation water, it was he who represented his family. This time, however, with the incident of Irwan's involvement in the theft from the dayah, things were different. Except for his emotional outburst at the police station on the night of Irwan's arrest, Fendi kept aloof from the affair. He stayed away from the perdamaian, even though (as I found out later) he was told about it beforehand. Instead, he had gone to Indrapuri with some friends. At first, I thought he felt ashamed. In subsequent days and weeks I gradually found out that there was a different reason as well, which was connected in turn to a subtle, largely non-articulated difference of opinion with his father about the relationship between family, village, and dayah.

Let me start with Zainuddin. After breaking the fast together on Monday night (Irwan had been caught on Friday night), Fendi left the house to reopen his shop. I stayed behind to drink coffee and smoke a couple of cigarettes with Zainuddin. He had just come home after a day of working on the sawah. He seemed tired and weary (which was not so strange, in the middle of the fasting month). When we started talking about Irwan, however, I quickly noticed that he was furious, not so much with his youngest son, but with Abuya. Zainuddin agreed that Irwan had done something terrible, yet he considered the way in which the situation was handled to be entirely out of proportion. Irwan, he said,
was ‘like all children’, and did not ‘fully possess reason’ (tidak penuh akal). ‘He does not know anything, he does not know what it means to be sinful, he does not think on the long term’ (dia nggak tahu apa-ap; nggak tahu dosa; nggak tahu pikiran lama). As a result, Irwan had not been able to assess the consequences of his actions. He did not know the real value of money. Although Zainuddin seemed to stretch this argument (other villagers were less eager to explain the theft as being ‘without reason’), this view was generally compatible with a dominant discourse about moral responsibility, based on the Islamic idea that children reach a state of moral ‘maturity’ when they reach puberty. 25 According to Zainuddin, one could not expect a 14-year-old to have fully internalised the difference between right and wrong. This, he said to me, was both a ‘universal’ and an Islamic principle, found equally in Christian religion (di agama Nasrani). In addition, he thought that the practice to lock up children violated ‘human rights’ (melanggar HAM).

There were other reasons to be angry too, including the involvement of the police. Whatever the outcome, Zainuddin predicted, this would turn out to be a costly affair for him and for the families of the other two boys. Of course, he said, it was only reasonable that they pay compensation for the (financial) damage caused to the dayah. ‘If I do not have enough money, I will borrow it, or I will sell one of the buffaloes’. Yet it was easy to understand why he was angry. The Indonesian police force is generally regarded as a predatory and unreliable institution, the involvement of which usually costs money more than anything else. So why did Abuya not simply try to solve the case with the parents, in consultation with the village head? The only reason Zainuddin could think of was that he used the incident to retaliate, a ‘punishment’ directed at his family in return for his own role in the conflict about the election of the keuchik. For him, then, this was just another confirmation of the impoverished status of Abuya as a ‘community leader’ (tokoh masyarakat, or tokoh adat). As an adat leader, he argued, Abuya should have shown enough composure to send for the boys’ parents, and discuss, within the confines of the dayah or the village, how to solve the case, including, if necessary a perdamaian. Instead, he opted to ‘throw [the case] to the police (lempar ke polisi aja). By doing so, he had failed to respect adat. The role of a community leader, Zainuddin explained, is not to be ‘above’ the people (di atas masyarakat), but to be help the people.

We have no education (pendidikan) or advanced knowledge (ilmu tinggi). We are all just farmers (tani semua). Abuya is an ulama. He is like a guide (pedoman). But how can the ulama be guides if they act like this? We may be ignorant people, but we do know adat (kami orang bodoh, tapi kami tahu adat). (...) How can Abuya, who is so great (hebat) and rich (kaya), and who has gone on Haj how many times (yang berapa kali naik Haj) be so careless?

Yet if Abuya seemed careless, Zainuddin felt hopelessly powerless to do something about it. He thought that everything he said or did would only make the situation worse. At the police station he was one and all cooperation (answering every question with ‘Yes Sir’ – ya Pak, ya Pak, as he acted out to me). He also worried about the money. While it was easy to calculate the costs of the broken stoves, he had no idea what to expect from the police. All he knew, was that complaining would be useless – the issue would be forwarded to a higher authority, presumably increasing the cost. The only thing he could do, then,

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25 Some of my acquaintances, especially in urban, middle class circles, took this idea quite literally, equating moral maturity, or the moment from which people can be held accountable for their committed sins, with sexual maturity (the first ejaculation for boys, the first menstruation for girls). I will return to this in Chapter 7.
was to keep quiet (*diam aja*) and consent. It was ironic that this should happen to him. Being forced to keep his mouth shut was experienced as an extra humiliation. When I asked him whether he felt ashamed (*apakah ayah merasa malu?*), he answered that ‘everyone makes mistakes’. Still, there was no need for the whole district to know. He turned the argument around. Everyone was saying that, apparently, Abuya had not shrunk from putting children in jail. This, he believed, was where the real shame was.

It took a few days before I spoke to Fendi privately. This was unusual. A week earlier, a text message would have been sufficient for a late night cigarette behind the house. Not this time, though. Fendi, I had rightly guessed, felt trapped. When I did finally speak to him, he said that his father, via his mother, had asked him to ‘settle’ the problem (*ayah minta saya menyelesaikan*). Fendi had refused. When I asked him why, he said: ‘Because I get angry too quickly’ (*masalahnya emosi, cepat marah*). As we talked longer, it turned out that there was another reason: Fendi no longer wanted to take responsibility for a situation in which, according to his own personal view, his own father was to blame. Fendi agreed with his father that Abuya would not have had to send Irwan to the police. He also shared the suspicion that this was a way for Abuya to get back at Zainuddin. This was the root of the problem. Fendi held his father in high regard, but he also thought that Zainuddin was inflexible, and not very pragmatic:

> My father is a good man. He hates injustice (*ayah benci dengan ketidakadilan*), but he is too stubborn in his opinions (*teguh pendirian*). If my father wants to go to Banda Aceh, he will go too Banda Aceh. Whether it rains or whether it storms, he will still go. This time it is not different.

In Fendi’s view, this attitude was no longer appropriate. I did not have an opportunity to note down his words exactly, but in summary his argument went something like this: ‘Today, there is no use resisting people that are rich and powerful. We will always lose out. This world is a different place compared to the time when my father was young. My father’s reaction to these matters is old-fashioned and not sensible. We should cooperate with them instead of aggravating discord.’ To this, I replied: ‘But is that not exactly what Zainuddin has done?’ Fendi answered: ‘Yes, but everything would have been easier if he had done this from the start.’ Gradually, the tone of our conversation changed. I felt irritated, and asked Fendi how, if everyone thought like him, people would be able to ‘stand up against the rich and the powerful’ (*bagaimana melawan orang kaya dan besar*). Fendi coolly replied that I was right, but that I should understand it was important to take into account the interests at stake. Personally, he had ‘no problem’ with the Abuya. Rather than to make matters worse, he thought that people should ‘mind their own business’ (*memikirkan urusan sendiri*), and focus on making a living (*mencari rezeki*). Fendi said that because of his own economic position, and because of his parents getting older, in effect he had become the ‘head of the family’ (*kepala keluarga*). Nonetheless, he did not feel like taking responsibility for Irwan’s mischief. ‘I am not going to be the one who pays’.

This statement was not just about money. What Fendi meant, was that he did not want to become personally implicated in a family vendetta with a powerful figure like Abuya, and that this connected closely to his personal idea about responsibility. In Fendi’s view, it was important for the *ulama* and ordinary people to be ‘close’ (*akrab*). His argument was complicated, however. First of all, he explained that it was strategic not to

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26 There was an additional reason for ‘keeping quiet’. According to Zainuddin, it was important not to alert opportunists. ‘There are already people in other villages who also say that their stoves have been stolen’.
be alienated from influential people like Abuya and Abi. If people had a conflict with Abuya, the risk was that the santri would no longer come to the village to pray at important rituals, such as funeral kenduri. With Abi, the situation was different again. Abi controlled the flow of money from the government to the village. Like most other villagers, Fendi thought that this was a problem. Whenever the villagers of Juroung were entitled to government subsidies (bantuan), increasing amounts seemed to be redirected to the dayah. Yet, at the same time Fendi thought that Abi’s activities and network supplied opportunities for the village and its inhabitants. The problem, then, was partly one of equity. The shady redistribution of government subsidies were felt mostly by the poor, who noticed every year that there was less raskin. For Fendi the situation was different again. ‘I am independent (mandiri), I work, I make sure that my earnings are halal, and I take care for my family.’ For Fendi, in other words, there was very little to win and (potentially) a lot to lose in the practice of alienating the leaders of the dayah.

A fundamental ambiguity thus underlay Fendi’s approach. On the one hand, he formulated a harsh judgment of the apparent misuse of money and power, by Abi in particular. On the other hand, he said that he had ‘no problem’ with the teungku-teungku, and even said that he was ‘close’ to the leaders of the dayah. The question, then, is how Fendi perceived and explained this moral ambiguity. One way was by distinguishing between Abuya and Abi. Abuya, Fendi explained, was a learned and widely respected ulama, who derived much of his income from alms (sedekah). Abi was different. He was ‘not an ulama’, as he gained most of his authority from connections with the government, the provincial parliament (DPRD), and the security apparatus, not from religious learning. Both of them were people to be reckoned with, however.

Another way of reasoning was to put the responsibility of moral judgment in the hands of God, at least in particular contexts. ‘It is not good to be scornful (menghinakan),’ he stated. ‘But you do think the situation is bad right now,’ I responded. ‘Yes, I do. I hate people who are not good. But this is in my heart (dalam hati). I feel bad for the poor, but I do not show this too much (nggak kasih nampak). In this, there would be little gain (nggak ada untung),’ In the end, there would be a settlement by God. Rather than mentioning Abuya or Abi, he referred to one of their nephews, who was a member of the DPRD. ‘He has a bad skin disease. Everyone knows this.’ Fendi explained that, in the Quran, there is a story about a particular type of skin disease, which is given to those ‘who are most hated by God’ (yang paling benci same Tuhan). ‘My grandfather had a stroke. He prays every day for a cure. And perhaps he will get better. But imagine that, afterwards, he forgets about God. Certainly he will be ill again! This is the same thing.’

Village politics and the reconceptualisation of traditional leadership roles

I have discussed the theft from the dayah in detail, in order to illustrate some of the ways in which the relationship between ordinary villagers, exemplars of religious authority, and the state has developed in Aceh over the past decades. In this brief final section, I zoom out again, and ask to what extent the situation in Juroung was an expression of the ‘crisis of religious authority’ cited in the first section of this chapter. I will try to answer this question by viewing the position of the ulama in a more general context of traditional leadership roles.

In the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that many people, and young people in particular, accepted, and were comfortable with, the idea that religious leaders, agents of the state, and ‘ordinary villagers’ were increasingly involved in overlapping interests and roles. They did not, however, generally translate this worry in terms of a ‘crisis’ of
religious authority. In Juroung, even despite the anger and unease felt about the way in which the dayah stripped the village community of local government funding, Abuya continued to be seen as an authoritative figure, respected for his knowledge of religious law and correct Islamic practice, and his guidance in important life cycle events. Certainly, the ‘crisis of solidarity’ resulted from a clash of interests. But rather than a case of disintegrating religious authority, the problem was framed in terms of a much more general problem with moral leadership in Aceh. The real problem, I think, was that local institutions had largely lost the capacity to absorb the disruptions caused by these conflicting interests, and resolve conflicts in a way that was morally acceptable to the majority of villagers.

A good starting point with which to extend the analysis is the position of the keuchik. The keuchik always comes from among the villagers. He is usually an elderly man (though there are also female keuchik in Aceh), sufficiently pious, knowledgeable about local adat, and someone with the authority to deal with local conflicts. Most cases of local conflict in Aceh are dealt with in first instance by the keuchik. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the responsibilities of the keuchik have increased over the past decades. Today people expect the village head to lobby for government funding at the Camat’s office, to make sure that villagers are properly registered (and thus able to claim entitlement for a wide variety of government support programs), and to organize the maintenance of the village living environment and infrastructure. In the past, the latter was a matter of gotong royong – communal labor. While gotong royong is still important today, it is expected that the keuchik encourages both the local government and the more affluent segments of the population to invest and improve the village or neighborhood over which he presides. These are expectations that community leaders are increasingly unable to fulfill. One could speak of a vicious circle, as respected and capable people seem to be increasingly unwilling to make themselves available for this ‘risky’ office, anticipating that they will make enemies rather than friends, regardless the way in which they carry out their task.

As I have noted, Ilyas was not the Juroung villagers’ first choice as the new keuchik. He was not originally from Juroung, and he had not lived there long enough to convince people that he had the local knowledge necessary to solve problems. Ilyas himself did not really want to become village head (he likened Abuya’s request to a situation in which ‘someone is telling you to eat’; orang bilang makan). Unsurprisingly, the situation was hard on him. The most difficult problems, he said, were those related to money. Feuds between neighbors, arguments about land rights – those were relatively easy to solve in comparison to issues relating to money, especially if these were related to the division of state subsidies. In Indonesia, individuals and local communities may claim entitlement to particular funds by drafting and submitting a ‘proposal’ (proposal).27 The keuchik is

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27 A proposal may be submitted by the village administration (pimpinan desa, or pemerintah desa) or by private persons. In both cases, if helps if there are good contacts in the government, especially at district (kebupaten) level, and preferably in the Bupati office. For example, one of my interlocutors in Daruet wanted to clear out a piece of land he had near Montasik, and plant rambutan trees. He then asked his son in law, who worked at the kebupaten office, to submit a proposal, as a result of which he was granted 150 young trees from a government fund for ‘rural development’. In addition, he was granted three million rupiah to build a fence to keep wild pigs out. Interestingly, when talking about this my acquaintance did not only emphasize his son-in-law’s position and connections, but also, and perhaps even more forcefully, the latter’s knowledge of preparing such a proposal (including writing the text, adding the right kind of photos of the location, etcetera). A kind of cultural capital is involved, in other words, in the process of successfully applying for government funding. (For a sophisticated ethnographic vignette of the proposal in the context of post-tsunami reconstruction, see Samuels 2012b:40-44).
always involved in this process (even individual applications usually need improvement by the *keuchik*). Obviously, communal subsidies are the more problematic category, for it is often unclear how the money should be divided. Both in Juroung and in Daruet, this process was characterized by a shady mix of public meetings and negotiations (*musyawarah*) and behind the scenes tussles. The problem in Juroung was that these tussles were often controlled by the ‘dayah faction’. Still, it was often Ilyas, as the one responsible for resolving local contestations in good harmony, who was blamed first by the ‘losers’.

The problem with the *pemuda* and the goats made Ilyas feel ‘torn apart’ by the two factions. As a result, he announced that he would no longer be involved in proposals that involved a large part of the *kampung*. Although he acknowledged that it was his role to bring both sides back together, and to ‘restore the community’ (*buat persatuan*), he also thought that both sides should cooperate, and at present this was not the case (*The dayah group is easier to talk to*; *kelompok dayah lebih mudah berkommunikasi*). When I asked him how, in a ‘normal’ situation, the sense of community should be restored, he mentioned *gotong royong* as the most appropriate way. However, many villagers in Juroung refused to respond to his calls for *gotong royong*. Ilyas compared his role to a herder guiding a group of buffaloes to a clearly defined goal. ‘There are always a few who don’t want to listen, who go this way, who go that way.’ Ultimately, Ilyas seemed to be a lonely man, who very much felt a victim of the situation. And to a large extent, I think he was right in this. Ilyas was not seen by most of his fellow villagers as a ‘bad’ man. Rather, they made him feel paralyzed as a leader, and he had neither the character nor the support to bring harmony in the Juroung community.

The situation in urban Blang Daruet was different in many respects. The *keuchik*, Syahrul, was an uncontested ‘local’, and chosen in a fair election by a majority of the people. There was no *dayah* here, and no ‘crisis of solidarity’. Like in Juroung, however, anger, disappointment, and discontent about unequal economic opportunities and its effect on social relations were directed, albeit not very openly, at the *keuchik*. Like Ilyas, Syahrul was seen by many of his fellow villagers as an ineffective leader. People would state, for example, that there was ‘hardly any change’, and that Syahrul was not sufficiently ‘clever at lobbying the government’ (*pandai melobi pemerintah*). He did not make enough ‘proposals’ compared to other villages with a more pro-active *keuchik*. When I asked for concrete examples, people would start about the bad quality of the water in Daruet, the underdeveloped infrastructure, and lack of education possibilities for children and adults. When I asked a group of particularly critical women whether this was not the responsibility of the community as a whole, they reacted slightingly: surely, that would be the world upside down! It was the task of the *keuchik* to lead the community (*keuchik yang memimpin masyarakat*), not the other way around. At the same time, Syahrul was criticized for helping his ‘own’ family rather than causing government funds and opportunities to be divided justly. Syahrul was not an affluent man, and was regularly accused of taking public money for private use.

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28 One of the incidents in which it became plainly evident to me that this was a means for dissent, was *maulid* (the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet), when the area around the *meunasah* had to be cleaned up and prepared for the festivities and the sermons. A part of the village youth, called up to engage in communal labour, stood idle on the side, without raising a finger. This incident took place in the wake of the fight about the goats.

29 Syahrul was born in Daruet in 1953. He had worked most of his life in the construction business, first as a worker, later as a small scale contractor (*tukang rumah*).

30 I will return to this in more detail in Chapter 6.
Although many people in Daruet complained about Syahrul's leadership, it was young people in particular who argued for a more adequate interpretation of modern village leadership. In their view, this would mean reconciling the traditional role as _adat_ leader with a professional approach to local governance. Take, for example, the analysis of Andri, Blang Daruet’s young and energetic village secretary. Andri was an intelligent young man, who put a lot of time and effort into professionalizing the village administration. He produced extensive village reports, reorganized population records, organized village meetings (with neatly typed invitations and attendance lists), and spent lots of time in the Camat's office to promote Blang Daruet interests. It would be wrong, however, to think that Andri sought to 'replace' Blang Daruet's 'traditional' leadership system with a bureaucratic one. Although Andri complained about old-fashioned village leaders, he criticized inhabitants who seemed less and less eager to accept the 'traditional' authority of their leaders:

One of the biggest problems in Daruet is that the people here no longer want to accept the decisions of the _keuchik_ and the _teuha peut_. (...) According to _adat_, the village leaders (pengurus kampung) are mediators (lit. 'between the people', di antara orang). When there is a conflict, they seek the middle path (jalan tengah). But the people don't accept this anymore. They want to be right. Today, people bring things straight to court. (...). They are egoistic (ego sendiri). When there is a conflict, they want to take everything, they are not interested in the middle road, even though this is the essence of _adat_ law (esensi hukum kampung).³¹

Andri did not blame any specific group for the problems in Blang Daruet. 'It is everyone's fault. No one cares' (salah kita, salah semua, sama-sama tidak peduli). But if people would start making an effort, things might change. He pointed at his own role. With senior high school, he was not particularly high-educated. He did not have rich parents, and he was not even 'fully Acehnese' (his father was from Padang). He did, however, want to know 'how everything worked', and was motivated to make a 'career' out of advancing the condition of the village.

The views and strategies of younger people in Juroung were quite comparable to that of Andri, even if they were not similarly committed to the 'common cause' (in this respect, Andri was rather unusual). Young people judged, and acted upon, the conflict between the village and the _dayah_ not by drawing on a principled or ideologically 'coherent' approach to traditional religious authority, but by navigating, and finding a balance between, traditional norms and life course strategies. Despite the dubious role of the _dayah_ leadership, and the near-complete co-optation by the _dayah_ of the village administration, they did not 'dismiss', like some of their elders, the need for 'traditional' leadership. Instead, they observed the way in which careers, access to resources, and the establishment and elaboration of local networks could be reconciled in accordance with their moral attachment to the community. To an extent, this personal navigation of religious authority supports Francis Robinson's notion of a 'crisis of religious authority' in Islam. Still, the material presented here also complicates some of his conclusions. Indeed, young people in both of my field sites behaved – more than their parents – as 'consumers' of religious authority, as they adapted sources of religious knowledge to their own personal concerns, preferences, and situations. This did not mean, however, that, in Juroung and Blang Daruet, 'increasingly every individual’s view comes to have the same

³¹ In part, this had to do with the tsunami and its aftermath, when there was lot of money in circulation, and different struggles took place about the entitlement to aid and problems of inheritance. This explained, at least partly, why people were ‘egoistic’, and why problems were ‘difficult to solve’ (egoisme tinggi, payah diselesaikan).
value as everyone else's'. Young villagers still valued – perhaps even more than their elders –, the need for a distinct realm of local-specific moral authority, where norms were preserved in a context that was recognizable, stable, and safe.

Conclusion

In Aceh, the position of the ulama – as transmitters of religious knowledge and main bearers of traditional religious authority – has been subject to change. A variety of factors can be mentioned in this context, ranging from the social, political and cultural transformations associated with the 'crisis of authority' in the Muslim world, and more localised tensions. A crucial local factor is the contested alignment of many traditionalist ulama during the protracted conflict between the Indonesian government and the GAM. In this chapter I have sought to approach the changing position of the ulama not by foregrounding politics or armed conflict, but by focusing on the worries, aspirations and situations of ordinary people in the village of Juroung, Aceh Besar.

Central to this chapter is the tense relationship in Juroung between the leaders of the Dayah Hidayat – a large traditional boarding school adjacent to kampung Juroung – and ordinary villagers. The interference of dayah leaders in ‘village affairs’ (urusan kampung) culminated in widespread allegations directed at the dayah of manipulation, favouritism, and abuse of power. Some people framed this ‘crisis of solidarity’ as a development in which the ulama had abandoned the ‘common people’ (rakyat, or orang kecil). However, most people expressed a more ambivalent view. Young people especially argued that the personal connections and supraregional networks of the dayah leaders constituted an important reservoir for local status and state support. Taking my cue from these responses, I focused in this chapter on generational differences, in order to demonstrate what I regard as an important trend in the reframing of traditional religious authority in contemporary Aceh. During my fieldwork in Juroung, I noticed that young people were prepared, more than their elders, to accept, and act upon, the role of traditionalist ulama as ‘agents of the state’. This does not mean that they denounced their role as ‘traditional’ religious leaders. Rather, it meant that they sought to reconceptualise traditional configurations of moral leadership by addressing, and maximising, the use of state resources in a way that could be both ‘effective’ and ‘just’. This shift is connected to the way in which people navigate social relations and conflicting interests on basis of increasingly personal assessments of moral responsibility.

The case of Juroung thus contains information about the changing interactions in present-day Aceh between tradition, the state, and the development of a personalised religious agency. As we have seen, conflict-centered narratives of contemporary Aceh tend to place ordinary villagers in a position that is fundamentally opposed to the Indonesian central state. In reality, the aspirations of many ordinary people depend to a large extent on the functions and possibilities offered by the state, and influential figures such as the leaders of the Dayah Hidayat play a central role in this interaction. This observation has implications for the way in which we frame the everyday constitution of religious authority. Particularly important, I believe, is the simultaneous functioning of the state as both a resource and a repertoire for moral action. As I have argued, the gradually expanding state has increased the level of control exerted by both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ institutions (such as the dayah). What is often forgotten, however, is that it has also increased the agency of ordinary villagers, who may decide to make use of the framework of the state as they engage in local contestations about norms and values related to issues like community, shame, wealth, and punishment. While this dynamic seems to be
paradoxical at first sight, I argue that, in fact, these dual forces form a core quality of the changing nature of religious authority in contemporary Acehnese society.

In the next chapter, I will further elaborate on the themes of community, shame, and wealth. It is now time, however, to add another complicating layer, namely the global Islamic revival, and its impact on the inter-generational contestations marking the post-conflict, post-disaster dynamic.