

## Some Observations on *Adat* and *Adat* Leadership in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan

NORHALIM Hj. IBRAHIM\*

### Introduction

The Malays of Negeri Sembilan are characterized by a matrilineal custom and descent group organization which they refer to as the Adat Perpatih. The *adat* is found almost exclusively in Negeri Sembilan.<sup>1)</sup> The people of Negeri Sembilan claim that the Adat Perpatih originated in West Sumatra and was subsequently brought to Negeri Sembilan by Minangkabau immigrants.

Due to its unique sociopolitical organization, Negeri Sembilan has, since the earlier part of the nineteenth century, been the focus of numerous studies both by foreign and local scholars (for example Abd. Rahman Haji Mohamad [1964], de Josselin de Jong [1951], de Maubray [1931], Hooker [1969] and Nordin Selat [1976]). These studies deal with almost every aspect of the system. From the vast amount of materials two general conclusions can be

summarized. To some, the system is on its way out due to material advancement and its influence, which has penetrated the practising society at all levels since colonial times and continues to do so under the New Economic Policy of Malaysia today. To others, due to its unique internal characteristics, the system is being modified in its practical aspects but philosophically remains intact. Analysis in depth shows that to some extent both views are correct.

The name Negeri Sembilan means "nine states." It refers to the fact that, prior to European contact, Negeri Sembilan was a confederacy of minor states (*luak*) with independent chiefs (*penghulu* or *undang*). What the nine states were is still open to discussion. Scholars on Negeri Sembilan disagree as to which *luak* made up the confederacy. However, all of them agree that Rembau was one of them.

Rembau, in fact, was generally accounted by the Portuguese and Dutch governments at Melaka as the principle of the nine states [Newbold 1836. (repr. 1968): 61]. According to Winstedt [1934: 57], the nine states were first mentioned in the agreement of 11 November 1759 between David Bulen, Governor of Melaka, and Raja Muda Daing Kemboja of Linggi, Raja Tua of Kelang and Datuk of Rembau, who represented Rembau and its nine states. A brief intro-

\* Jabatan Sains Kemasyarakatan, Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

1) In some parts of Negeri Sembilan, especially in the district of Port Dickson, the Adat Perpatih is not practised. However, there are groups of people outside Negeri Sembilan, such as in Naning, Melaka and in enclaves in Lukut in Kota Tinggi, Johore, practising the adat.

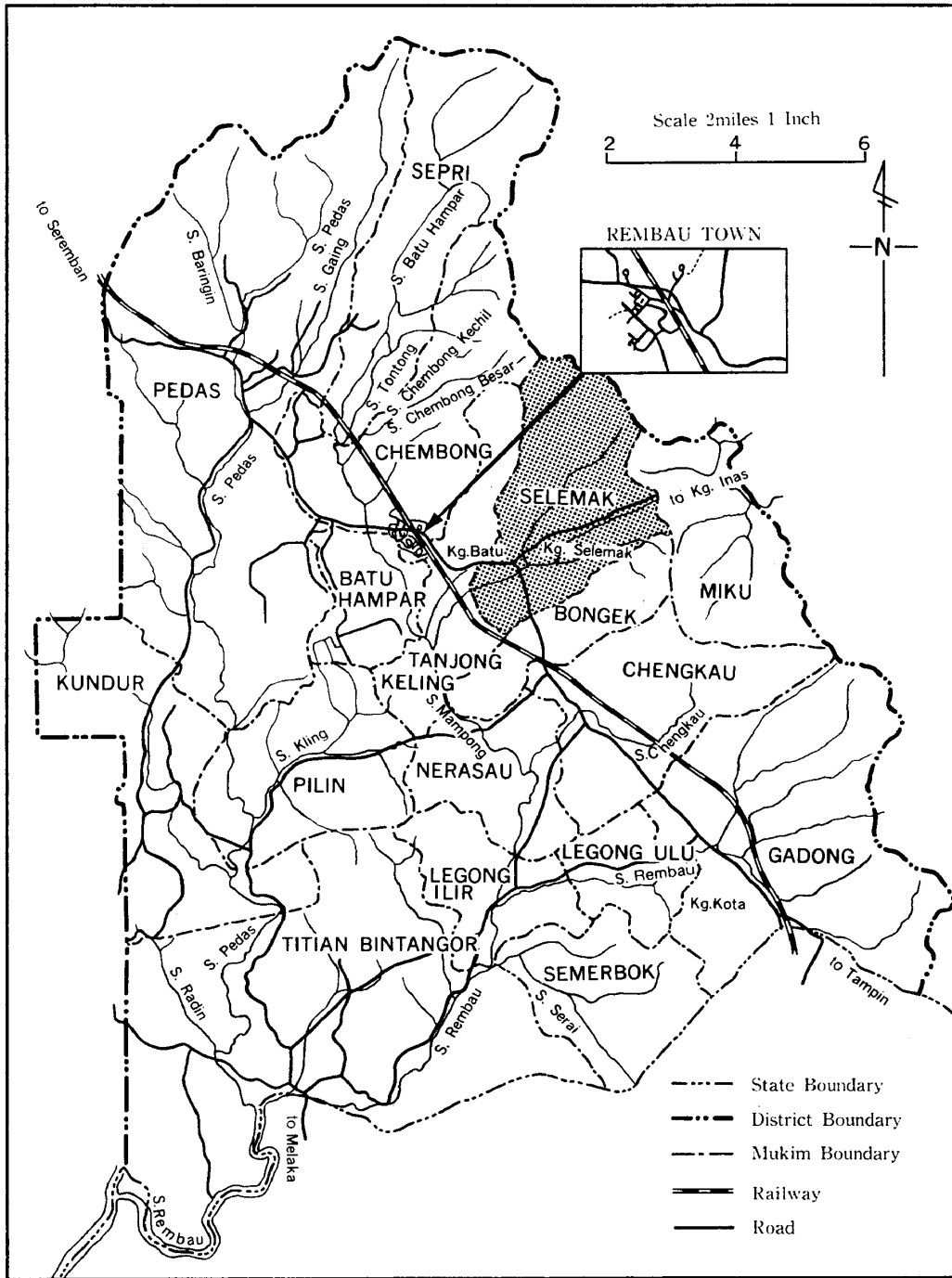


Fig. 1 Map of Rembau District

ductory survey of the complex socio-political structure of Rembau district is in order.

### Rembau District

Rembau is one of the seven districts of

modern Negeri Sembilan. It is bounded in the north and northeast by the district of Kuala Pilah, in the east by the district of Tampin, in the northwest by the district of Seremban, in the west by the district of Port Dickson and in the south by the state

Table 1 Population of Rembau District by Mukim, 1970-80

Mukim	1970 <sup>1</sup>		1980 <sup>2</sup>		% Change in Population	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)
	No.	%	No.	%		
Batu Hampar	1,859	4.67	1,843	5.07	-0.86	-0.09
Bongek	1,497	3.76	1,058	2.91	-29.33	-3.41
Chembong	5,056	12.71	5,034	13.85	-0.61	-0.06
Chengkau	1,831	4.60	1,977	5.44	7.97	0.07
Gedong	5,173	12.98	4,649	12.79	-10.13	-1.06
Kundor	1,690	4.24	1,472	4.05	-12.90	-1.37
Legong Hilir	1,618	4.06	1,363	3.75	-15.76	-1.70
Legong Ulu	821	2.06	683	1.88	-16.81	-1.82
Miku	171	0.43	94	0.26	-45.03	-5.81
Nerasau	1,904	4.78	1,418	3.90	-25.53	-2.90
Pedas	5,092	12.78	5,431	4.94	6.66	0.65
Pilin	1,282	3.22	1,189	3.27	-7.25	-0.75
Selemak	3,170	7.96	2,774	7.63	-12.49	-1.33
Sembok	804	2.02	694	1.91	-13.68	-1.46
Spri	1,492	3.74	960	2.60	-35.66	-4.31
Tanjong Kling	2,010	5.05	1,767	4.86	-12.09	-1.28
Titian Bintangor	4,362	10.95	3,944	10.85	-9.58	-1.00
Total	39,841	100.00	36,350	100.00	-8.76	-0.91

Sources: 1. Community Groups, 1970 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Department of Statistics, Malaysia

2. Population Report for Mukims, 1980 by Department of Statistics, Malaysia

of Melaka (Fig. 1). Its maximum length is about 30.58km and its width about 20.92km. Rembau covers a total area of 41,721 hectares (254 square kilometers). Of this, 73.6 percent is under agriculture, while 18.4 percent is forest reserve, 0.2 percent is industrial areas and 7.8 percent is government land.

The district essentially has an equatorial climate with no distinctly marked seasons. The daily temperature is in the range of 78°-89°F, and relative humidity is around 96 percent. The annual average rainfall is below 2,000 mm.

Rembau has a fairly gentle topography, except for a range of mountains which serves as a natural boundary between

Rembau and the district of Kuala Pilah. This range constitutes the southern part of the late Jurassic-early Cretaceous Main range of Peninsular Malaysia. It is heavily wooded and accounts for much of the 24 percent of Rembau district still forested. The hills in the district are low and the highest mountain is Gunung Rembau (892 meters above sea-level). The soils of the district are mostly alluvial.

There are altogether 17 *mukim* (sub-districts) in Rembau (Table 1). Each mukim is further sub-divided into *kampung* (villages). There are 177 kampung in the district. Between kampung there are no clear social or geographical boundaries. All mukim and kampung in Rembau are con-

nected with Rembau town and other small towns by tarred or red earth roads. Small towns play an important part in the lives of Rembau people. It is there that they sell their products and buy consumer goods including rice.

As in other parts of Malaysia, the population of Rembau is multiracial, comprising Malays (26,978 persons), Chinese (5,350), Indians (4,005) and others (17). According to the 1980 census, the estimated total population is 36,350, which shows a decline of 8.76 percent compared with the total population of 1970 (39,841). The district's population density is high, 88.429 persons per square kilometer. According to the 1980 census, its population distribution by sex was 16,918 male and 19,432 female. Compared with the other districts of Negeri Sembilan, Rembau has a very small proportion of males in the population, i.e., 87.1/100 females, which also shows a decline since 1970 census (90.4/100 females).

Most of the people of Rembau are Malays. They live mainly in rural areas and are mostly farmers, rubber tappers, casual labourers, school teachers and government servants. The number of Malays resident in towns, except Rembau town, is small compared with the Chinese.

There are two types of administration in Rembau, the legal-bureaucratic system and the *adat* system, which run parallel to one another. Today, to some extent, in some socio-political aspects they are interrelated.

The head of the legal-bureaucratic administration of Rembau district is the district officer. He is also the collector of land revenue and the head of the *Majlis*

*Daerah* (District Council). To assist him, there are four assistant district officers who are responsible for different units or divisions: development, land, land revenue, and general administration and district council.

As mentioned earlier, the district is divided into seventeen sub-districts (*mukim*), which in turn comprise a few kampung. The mukim is the smallest administrative unit and is under the jurisdiction of a salaried *penghulu mukim* (mukim headman). However, there are only five penghulu mukim in Rembau and one penghulu has to administer three or four mukim, depending on their size.

The penghulu administer the mukim under their jurisdiction with the help of *Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung* (JKKK—Village Committees for Development and Security), of which there are altogether thirty-six in the district. One of the penghulu's tasks is to keep the district officer in touch with mukim affairs.

At the kampung level, the head is known as *ketua kampung* (kampung headman). The ketua kampung provides the link between the penghulu and the villagers. Besides being the head of the kampung he is also the chairperson of the JKKK. As chairperson it is one of his main responsibilities to see that the mechanism of the JKKK runs actively and smoothly, besides planning and determining the types of development projects that are needed in the kampung. It is also his responsibility to see that ongoing projects are running on schedule and to encourage the kampung folk to participate in developing the

kampung through cooperative projects.

As a whole, kampung are administered by the JKKK. This committee acts as an agent implementing development projects passed down from above. Its members (ten of them) are elected by the villagers, while the chairperson and secretary are nominated by the state government. The other officials of the committee are the treasurer, and the heads of the religious affairs, women's affairs, health, education and welfare sections.

The committee sits monthly to discuss matters pertaining to the running of development projects in the kampung and to examine the economic activities and requests made by the villagers. The penghulu attends all these meetings, and sometimes the district officer is also present. The results of the meetings are reported by the penghulu to the district officer. Thus, the JKKK is the liaison body between government administrators and the people.

The people of Rembau, as mentioned earlier, practice the matrilineal system, Adat Perpatih. The adat was traditionally total in its application, for besides covering the areas of life that fall under criminal and civil law in western society, it provided rules of etiquette and normative codes. Traditionally it was backed by a range of formal sanctions such as exile, physical punishment, and fines, as well as such informal sanctions as gossip and avoidance. The adat and its sanctions were spelt out in a series of maxims familiar to everyone, of which some derive from the homeland, Minangkabau, and others are later, incorporating local and Islamic rules.

Ideally the socio-political structure of Rembau was embodied and summarized in the following maxim:

*Alam beraja,  
Luak berpenghulu,  
Suku berlembaga,  
Anak buah berbuapak,  
Orang semenda bertempat semenda.*  
(The universe [or state] has a ruler,  
The district has a territorial chief,  
The clan has a clan-chief,  
The sub-clan has a leader,  
The affine has affinal relatives.)

The adat concept of society was then of a state composed of segmentary lineages of varying depths, each with its own territory and with a hierarchy of descent group leaders. The descent groups in descending order of size and level were: *suku* (clan; lit: quarter), *perut* (sub-clan; lit: stomach), *ruang* (lineage; lit: room or space), and *rumpun* (sub-lineage; lit: cluster).

Before coming under British administration, Rembau was under the control of the Penghulu Luak or Undang Luak.<sup>2)</sup> The undang in those days wielded supreme authority over the luak, as indicated by the adat saying:

*Boleh menghitam dan memutihkan,  
Boleh memanjang dan memendekkan,  
Boleh mengesah dan membatalkan.*  
(With authority to pronounce black and

2) The administration of Rembau was surrendered to the British by the Agreement of 17 September 1887, in return for one-third of the total yearly revenue of the *Luak* [Maxwell and Gibson 1924: 51-52].

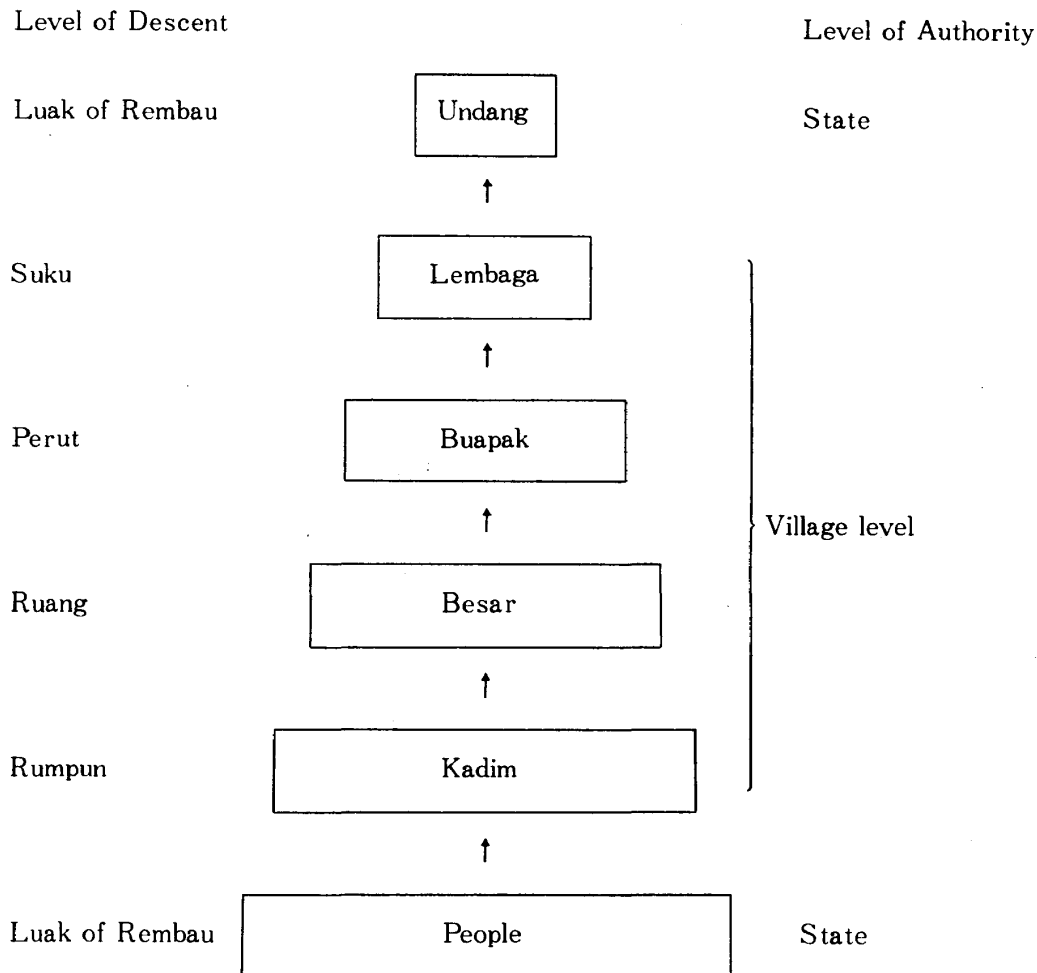


Fig. 2 The Paradigmatic Structure of the Traditional Rembau Political Hierarchy

white,  
 With authority to lengthen and shorten,  
 With authority to confirm and annul.)

Likewise:

*Sah batal pada Undang,*  
*Keris penyalang pada Undang.*  
 (Confirmation and annulment are with the Undang,  
 The execution kris is with the Undang.)

In ruling the day-to-day affairs of the luak, the undang had a council of advisers, that is, the *Orang Besar Undang* (Ministers to the Undang), who were also called as

*Pegawai Pada Undang* (Officials of the Undang) or *Tongkat Sokong Pada Lembaga* (Supports of the Lembaga);<sup>3)</sup> and the

3) There were four of them:

- Datuk Raja Diraja from Suku Biduanda Jakun, who assumed the duties of secretary to the undang and was in charge of the religious affairs;
- Datuk Menteri Lela Perkasa, also from Suku Biduanda Jakun, who was responsible for all judicial cases of the state;
- Datuk Shahbandar from Suku Biduanda Jakun and Suku Biduanda Jawa by rotation, who was responsible for collecting import duties; and
- Datuk Mangkubumi from Suku Biduanda Jawa whose responsibilities were collecting land revenues and keeping account of the total state revenue besides looking after the treasury.

Table 2 Lembaga of Rembau and the Suku under Their Authority

Lembaga	Suku
1. Datuk Perba	Biduanda Jakun and Biduanda Jawa
2. Datuk Sri Maharaja	Paya Kumbuh Darat
3. Datuk Bangsa Balang	a) Tiga Nenek b) Tiga Batu Baruh
4. Datuk Andika	a) Batu Belang b) Tiga Batu Baruh c) Paya Kumbuh
5. Datuk Mendelika	Semelenggang Empat Ibu
6. Datuk Sinda Maharaja	a) Selemak b) Tiga Batu Darat
7. Datuk Ngiang	Mungkal Darat
8. Datuk Merbangsa	a) Paya Kumbuh Baruh b) Semelenggang c) Agam
9. Datuk Senara	Tanah Datar Baruh
10. Datuk Maharaja Inda	Tanah Datar Darat
11. Datuk Samsura Pahlawan	Mungkal Baruh
12. Datuk Puteh	Batu Hampar Petani
13. Datuk Lela Wangsa	Anak Acheh
14. Datuk Gempa Maharaja	Batu Hampar Minangkabau
15. Datuk Setia Maharaja	Biduanda Setia Maharaja
16. Datuk Sutan Bendahara	Batu Hampar Darat
17. Datuk Ganti Maharaja	Anak Melaka
18. Datuk Mengkuta	a) Semelenggang Kendung b) Tiga Batu Kendung c) Tanah Datar Kendung
19. Datuk Dagang	a) Semelenggang Miku b) Tiga Batu Miku
20. Datuk Panglima Dagang	Semelenggang Minangkabau

*Lembaga Delapan* (the Eight Lembaga), who were also known as *Lembaga Tiang*

4) They were:

Datuk Gempa Maharaja of Suku Batu Hampar Baruh;

Datuk Merbangsa of Paya Kumbuh Baruh;

Datuk Samsura Pahlawan of Mungkal Baruh;

Datuk Bangsa Balang of Tiga Nenek Baruh;

Datuk Sri Maharaja of Paya Kumbuh Darat;

Datuk Sinda Maharaja of Selemak (Sri Lemak) Darat; and

Datuk Mendelika of Semelenggang (Sri Melenggang) Darat.

*Balai* (lit: Pillars of the Hall of Audience) or *Tulang Urat Undang* (lit: Bones and Sinew of the Undang).<sup>4)</sup>

A suku or clan was the largest descent grouping (Fig. 2). It consisted of a body of people whose claims to membership was

They advised the undang on all internal and external affairs. They had to reach unanimous agreement before the undang could take any action, and no treaty between Rembau and other parties was binding unless they all signed it.

either birth through their mothers or by adoption through the process known as *kadim*. Members of a suku could not necessarily trace their connection to each other, though they all believed that they had a common ancestress. Ideally there were twelve suku in the adat system;<sup>5)</sup> but for Rembau the number was twenty-four since each suku was divided into two.<sup>6)</sup> Each suku, theoretically, should have its own head or *lembaga*. However, in Rembau today, due to new immigrants, there are twenty-seven suku.

The head of a suku, the *lembaga*, also bore a specific title. Although there are twenty-seven suku in Rembau, there are only twenty *lembaga* (Table 2). Both figures fluctuated over time: for example, in 1910 there were twenty-four suku with twenty-one *lembaga* [Parr and Mackray 1910: 56]; in 1943, twenty-eight suku with twenty-one *lembaga*;<sup>7)</sup> and in 1963, twenty-seven suku

with twenty *lembaga*.<sup>8)</sup>

The *lembaga* was responsible for the administration of his suku, both socially and legally. Once elected, he would remain in office for life or until he was deposed by his *anak buah* (clan members) and/or the *undang* if he went against or broke any of the stated rules of etiquette.

The suku was sub-divided into several *perut*. The head of a *perut* is called *buapak* or *bopak* in the local dialect. However, in some suku, such as Semelenggang, Mungkal, Tiga Nenek and Selemak, there was only one *buapak* for all the *perut* in the suku. The number of *buapak*, too, varied over time: in 1910 there were only 64 *buapak* [*loc. cit.*], by 1943 the number had increased to 102,<sup>9)</sup> and by 1963 it had dropped to 73.<sup>10)</sup>

The *buapak*'s responsibilities, power and authority were limited to his *perut* only. Since a *buapak* was elected by unanimous vote, the members of the *perut* could depose him. Otherwise, he would remain in office for life. The *buapak* was elected in rotation from several *ruang* within the *perut*.

The head of a *ruang*, the sub-division of a *perut*, was called *besar* (lit: big) or *tua ruang* (elder of the *ruang*). The number of *besar* was also inconsistent, for in 1910 there were only 20 [*loc. cit.*], by 1943 the number had risen to 327,<sup>11)</sup> and by 1963 it

5) The twelve suku were: Biduanda, Batu Hampar, Paya Kumbuh, Mungkal, Tiga Nenek, Semelenggang, Selemak, Batu Belang, Tanah Datar, Anak Aceh, Anak Melaka and Tiga Batu.

6) The existence of two suku of the same name was a reflection of the fact that Minangkabau migration occurred in waves into Rembau. The first major wave settled in the southern part and the second in the northern part of Rembau. In early times there was no specific boundary between the two. This came into being due to a civil war in the later part of the sixteenth century, which resulted in Rembau being divided into two political divisions: *Rembau Darat* (Upper or Up-country Rembau) and *Rembau Baruh* (Lower or Low-country Rembau). Thus we have pairs of suku with the same name, such as Suku Tanah Datar Baruh and Suku Tanah Datar Darat.

7) Pejabat Jajahan Tampin (PJT) (Tampin District Office). Minute Papers P.J.T./03. Daftar Menyatakan Datuk-datuk Lembaga dan Pegawai-pegawai Adat dalam Jajahan Tampin. Papers 1-23.

8) Balai Undang Rembau (BUR) (The Office of the Undang of Rembau). Fail No. B.U.R. 40/63. Membaharui Minute Papers P.J.T./03: Daftar Menyatakan Datuk-datuk Lembaga dan Pegawai-pegawai Adat dalam Jajahan Tampin (Rembau). Papers 1-23.

9) Minute Papers P.J.T./03. See footnote 7).

10) Fail No. B. U. R. 40/63. See footnote 8).

11) Minute Papers P. J. T. /03. See footnote 7).



had dropped to 219.<sup>12)</sup> The post of besar was usually, but not necessarily, held by the eldest male in the group, and he was elected to the post also by rotation among the rumpun and voted unanimously by members of his ruang. He had limited authority and could only settle petty quarrels among ruang members. Serious disputes had to be passed on to the buapak or the lembaga, depending on their severity according to the adat rules. The besar also acted as intermediary between members of the ruang and the buapak and as an officer of the lembaga's court.

The smallest descent-based group was the rumpun, which was headed by a *kadim* or *tua rumpun*, the eldest male in the family. It was his duty to lead and organize any ceremonies in the group, act as arbiter in conflicts among family members, and see that members of the rumpun lived harmoniously, besides representing the rumpun in any outside activities including voting for a new besar.

When the British came, the undang and his adat chiefs lost their administrative power. All that remained was the undang's authority in adat and religious affairs. However, according to the Negeri Sembilan Constitution, the undang is a permanent member of the Council of the Yang Dipertuan Besar and the Ruling Chiefs.<sup>13)</sup> Under this constitution, the undang also has certain privileges and in some aspects his power is equal to that of the Yang Dipertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan. The

undang has very little to do with the machinery of government, except that the expression "ruler" in the constitution indicates the Yang Dipertuan Besar and the four undang. The dualism appears in matters of adat land, where the presence and the opinions of adat chiefs, especially the buapak and lembaga, are always sought by the district officer and assistant district officers. Cases which they can not settle have to be brought to the undang for arbitration.

Although the undang and his adat chiefs are not powerful in a political sense, their positions are still desirable in the public eye. Thus there often arise conflicts in the succession of adat positions. I want to describe one such case in a village in Rembau. Before going into it, let me first introduce the village in question, that is, Kampung Selemak.

### Kampung Selemak

Kampung Selemak is about 97 km south of Kuala Lumpur and about 6 km south of Rembau town. It lies about 1.5 km east of Kampung Batu town, along a country road connecting Rembau with Kuala Pilah district. It is one of the eight kampung of Mukim Selemak and in the traditional political division, it is situated in up-country Rembau.

Topographically, this kampung can be divided into three areas, that is, a hilly area, a settlement area, and paddy fields or former paddy fields (Fig. 3). The hilly area is situated in the north-eastern part of the kampung, with highest peak, Bukit Bintungan, reaching 842 meters above sea-

12) Fail No. B. U. R. 40/63. See footnote 8).

13) See [*Undang-undang Tubuh Kerajaan Negeri Sembilan* 1959: Art. VI(16), p. 8]

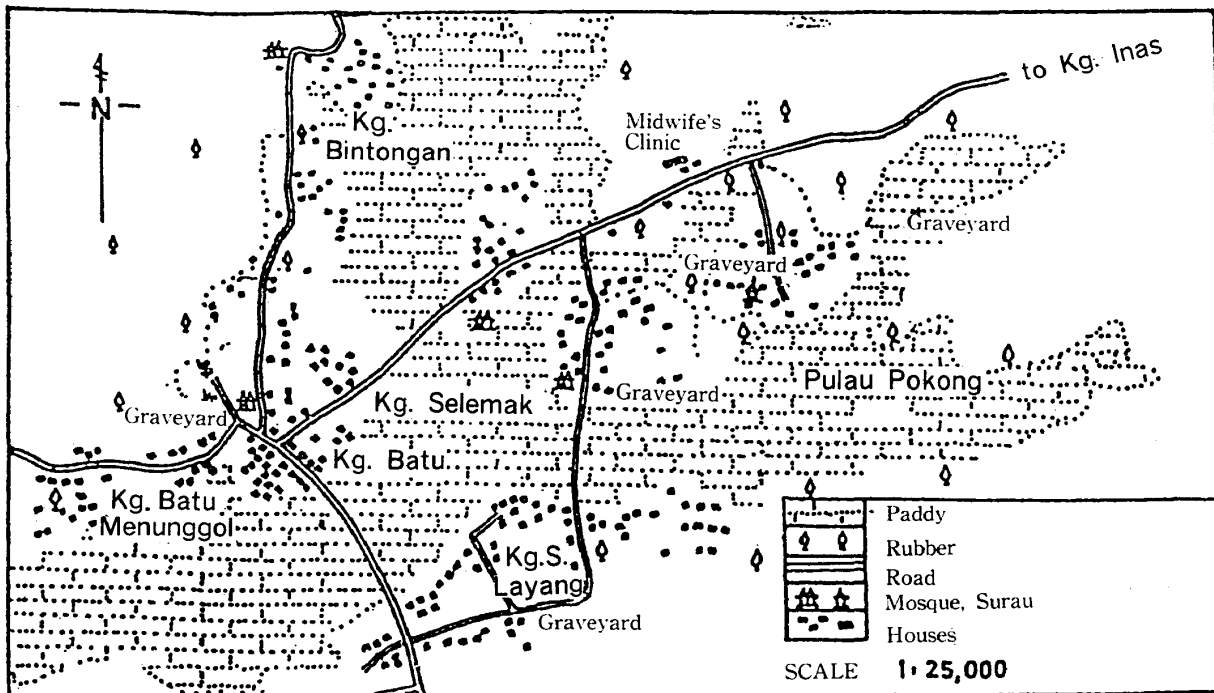


Fig. 3 Map of Kampung Selemak

level. Along the hill-slopes there are rubber plantations and fruit orchards mostly owned by the villagers. The most common fruit trees are *durian* (*Durio zibethinus*), *langsak* (a variety of *Lansium domesticum*), *cempe-dak* (*Artocarpus polyphema*) and *manggis* (*Garcinia mangostana*). These trees bear fruit annually and provide one of the villagers' main sources of income.

The settlement area lies not more than 15 meters above sea-level. It is here that the people built their houses, close to each other. The structures and plans of their houses do not conform to a prototype but are according to the taste and means of the owner. Some of them still have the Minangkabau style, although modified greatly in line with the modern residential style. Settlement in this kampung is nucleated around the mosque and the *surau*.<sup>14)</sup> In total, buildings number about 122 houses,

3 sundry shops, one mosque, one *surau*, one *balai raya* (community centre) and one midwife's clinic. Of the 122 houses, only 101 are occupied. The owners of the vacant houses had migrated to other parts of the country, especially Kuala Lumpur.

Two or three decades ago, about 50 per cent of the people in this kampung were paddy farmers. However, the paddy fields had dried up due to lack of water supply, and today most of them are idle. A few families tried to replace paddy with tobacco, but this also was abandoned due to factors such as lack of technical know-how and marketing. The main occupation left today is tapping rubber. Since the majority of the people here are pensioners, their income derives from monthly pensions and remit-

14) A building that is not a mosque of general assembly but is otherwise devoted to religious or quasi-religious purposes.

**Table 3** Population of Kampung Selemak  
by Age and Sex  
(December 1987)

Age	Male	Female	Total
0- 5	33	40	73
6-10	31	40	71
11-15	38	42	80
16-20	23	35	58
21-25	6	5	11
26-30	6	13	19
31-35	4	9	13
36-40	6	20	26
41-45	6	14	20
46-50	17	20	37
51-55	10	12	22
56-60	8	13	21
61-65	14	19	33
66-70	18	15	33
71-75	8	6	14
75 above	3	5	8
Total	231	308	539

tances from sons and daughters working in urban areas.

This kampung is not isolated from elements of change in the urban areas. Carriers of change, especially community members who travel between the kampung and urban centres, introduce new elements of both material and non-material traits into the community life. People here also keep in constant touch with government officers who hold office outside the kampung, either in Rembau town or Seremban, or even in Tampin town.

According to a census taken in December 1987, there were 539 persons in the kampung, all of them Malay (Table 3).<sup>15)</sup> Compared

15) The census was taken in the months of October to December 1987, during which time the figures may have changed due to horizontal mobility between kampung and town.

with the figure for early 1970, that is, 620 persons [Abu Hassan 1971: 25], the population has decreased by 13.05 percent.

The figures indicate that 42.1 percent of the kampung population are thirty-one years old and above, and this was the largest age group. This was not true in 1970, when this age group constituted 31 percent of the population. The majority (54.8 percent) were then in the age group below fifteen years, which in the present census accounts for only 41.6 percent of the total population. In a seventeen-year period, therefore, the population of this kampung in the age group below fifteen years has decreased by 15.8 percent and that in the age group above thirty-one years has grown by 15.4 percent.

The decline in the age group below fifteen years has occurred mostly because young couples now seldom send their children to their parents to be looked after, preferring to keep their children with them. For the increase in the older age group, several reasons can be advanced. The main cause seems to be the nation's economic recession. The economic cut-back in both government and, especially, private sectors has made blue-collar workers redundant and left them no alternative but to go back to their respective kampung for survival. In addition nobody in this kampung was selected to join any of the schemes under the government's Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA). Thus in this age group there has been little out-migration but increased in-migration.

On the other hand, out-migration in the age group between sixteen and thirty years

is still high. In absolute numbers this age group is unchanged compared with seventeen years ago, although proportionately it has grown to 16.3 percent of the total population from 14.2 percent in 1970. As in 1970, most of this group, after sitting the *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran* (SRP; Lower Certificate of Education) or their *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM; Malaysian Certificate of Education) examination, migrated to urban areas in search of job opportunities and/or to further their studies, depending on their qualifications and interests. This process of urban migration has greatly effected the strength of the kampung population. This was true even in 1970 [*ibid.*: 25-26].

Of the 101 household heads in Kampung Selemak, 75 are males and 26 are females. Most of the female household heads are wage-earners supporting themselves and their families. In some cases they are divorcees, in others their husbands are away, mostly working in urban and industrial areas. These household heads are engaged in various types of employment. However, the largest group, about 42 percent, are rubber tappers. The rest are either pensioners, in government service, or doing odd jobs.

Landownership among these household heads is small. Of the 101 household heads, about 55 percent own less than one hectare. Only two heads, or 1.9 percent, own between 5 to 15 hectares. The lands are either rubber plantations, homesteads, paddy fields or orchards.

Historically, Kampung Selemak was one of the first to be opened by the early

Minangkabau settlers in Upper Rembau. It was opened by Datuk Kepala Puteh, who also founded the neighbouring Kampung Sungai Layang in the early sixteenth century. It was in these kampung that he started his suku, Suku Selemak (also called Suku Seri Lemak), and was elected by his followers as their chief, with the title of Datuk Sinda Maharaja, a title which still exists.

Due to population movement and development, the people of this kampung are no longer confined to one suku but belong to four different suku: Selemak, Batu Hampar, Semelenggang, and Tanah Datar.<sup>16)</sup> In the kampung, marriages between members of different suku occurred, but never between members of the same suku, this being forbidden and having traditionally been sanctioned by exile.

### Leadership in Suku Selemak

Although the people of this kampung come from four suku, the majority are from Suku Selemak, which is sub-divided into four perut: Perut Masjid, Perut Tengah I, Perut Tengah II and Perut Hujung Tanjung. The lembaga for this suku is Datuk Sinda Maharaja. Below him there is one buapak, Datuk Juan, and eight besar. These eight besar do not represent equally the four perut: Perut Masjid has four besar, Datuk Samang Menteri, Datuk Laksamana, Datuk

16) It should be mentioned that although Kampung Selemak is situated in Upper Rembau according to the traditional political divisions, the people of Suku Batu Hampar, Semelenggang and Tanah Datar are members of the Lower Rembau suku of the same names.

Menteri Penghulu and Datuk Nara Kaya; Perut Hujung Tanjung has two, Datuk Maharaja and Datuk Panglima Sutan; and Perut Tengah I and Perut Tengah II have one besar each, Datuk Panglima Besar and Datuk Paduka Menteri, respectively.

Theoretically, all elections of a new adat chief involved rotation of candidacy among the perut, rumpun and ruang and required the unanimous vote of suku members. In electing a lembaga, the perut in line first had to be identified, then the ruang, then the rumpun. This was also the case in the election of buapak and besar, except that fewer descent groups had to be considered. Identification of the perut was made through *kerapatan adat* (adat public meeting). If the position in question was that of lembaga, then the kerapatan was initiated and chaired by the buapak or by the most senior buapak if there was more than one buapak in the suku. If the position was that of buapak, the meeting was conducted by the lembaga. In all these types of meeting, the *Lembaga Tali Pusaka* (Council of Lembaga, representing the undang in the election of a new adat head) had to be present. They acted as advisers and it was their responsibility to report the proceedings of the meeting to the undang.

In the election of a new lembaga, the meeting could only nominate a candidate or, as usually happened, a number of candidates. The name or names would then be submitted to the undang by the Tali Pusaka for confirmation of the nominee or selection, usually through an interview, from among the nominees. The undang had the power to accept or reject any candidate,

and if he rejected all, then the kerapatan process began again and a new list had to be submitted.

The power of confirming buapak and besar rested with the lembaga. This was done at the kerapatan witnessed by the Tali Pusaka, after which the lembaga would inform the undang.

All new heads had to go through the *mengadap* or *menyalang* (audience) ceremony, held between certain specific times. If one failed to do so, he and his suku, perut, ruang or rumpun, whichever it might be, could be considered as having a *cacat* (defect, shortcoming). He had to pay a fine as imposed by the adat rule or be dismissed from office.

#### **Succession Conflict in Kampung Selemak**

In early January 1958, Datuk Juan Duman bin Kesuh, the buapak of Suku Selemak, died. He was from Perut Tengah I. On 5 July 1958, Datuk Sinda Maharaja Mohd Amin bin Said, the then lembaga of Suku Selemak, called a meeting at the Masjid Selemak to identify which perut was in line for the vacant buapak post. After deliberation, it was unanimously agreed that it was Perut Masjid.

Perut Masjid consisted of three Ruang: Ruang Masjid, Ruang Padang Balai and Ruang Bongek. According to the rule of rotation, the post should have gone to Ruang Bongek, because both of the former ruang had already held the office. These two opposed the idea, however, claiming that Ruang Bongek did not exist according to the suku's history and constitution and

thus had no right to the post. Accordingly, the two ruang elected Othman bin Lanjung of Ruang Masjid as the new datuk. However, the lembaga, who recognized the existence of Ruang Bongek, opposed the election.

Ruang Bongek was not satisfied with the outcome of the kerapatan. They had a meeting of their own, conducted by the lembaga and attended by the Lembaga Tali Pusaka, who were also in favour of Ruang Bongek. The meeting unanimously decided that their case should be brought before the undang. The undang, a week after the audience, declared that Ruang Bongek was a ruang in Perut Masjid. Using the undang's decree as support, the Datuk Lembaga and the anak buah of Ruang Bongek elected Haji Zakaria bin Hassan as the new Datuk Juan.

The two other ruang, that is, the majority of the perut members, were against the second election. To them, the latter Datuk Juan was not elected in the spirit of the adat rule. A datuk could only be elevated to power after being unanimously elected by perut members; but in their case, they did not recognize the latter ruang, and their own candidate had already been legally elected.

On the other hand, to be officially elected as a buapak the sanction of the suku's lembaga was needed. This was due to the fact that the lembaga and the buapak had to work closely together in the affairs of the suku, especially if the suku had only one buapak representing all its perut, as was the case in Suku Selemak. This was true in Haji Zakaria's case. He was the

lembaga's candidate and had the blessing of the Lembaga Tali Pusaka, even though he was supported by only one ruang, or a third of the perut members. Beside the lembaga's consent, he also had the blessing of the undang, who had ratified the existence of his ruang.

The problem became more complicated when the undang accepted both men when they sought audience with him. To accept the mengadap ceremony conducted by both (at different times) meant that the undang acknowledged and accepted both candidates officially. During the mengadap each was accompanied by his own followers, and Haji Zakaria also had the presence of the lembaga. Thus in 1958 there were two Datuk Juan in Suku Selemak Darat of Rembau.

In December 1962, Datuk Lela Maharaja Haji Ipap, the Undang of Rembau, passed away. On 19 January 1963, Datuk Adnan bin Maah was chosen from among ninety aspirants to be the new undang, with the title of Datuk Sedia Raja. New efforts were made by members of Perut Tengah I, Perut Tengah II and Perut Hujung Tanjung, Ruang Masjid and Ruang Padang Balai to have the new undang dismiss Datuk Juan Haji Zakaria. Petitions were sent to the undang at times until 1965 but the undang declined to take action.<sup>17)</sup>

Then, on 1 April 1968, Haji Mahmud bin Hussin, a sixty-five-year-old kadim from Perut Hujung Tanjung with the title of

17) Balai Undang Rembau (BUR) (The Office of the Undang of Rembau). Fail No. B.U.R. 12/64. Rayuan Waris Suku Selemak, Kg. Masjid Selemak, atas Pusaka Buapak bergelar Juan. Letters 1-4.

Pawang Khatib, was chosen as new lembaga from among six aspirants following the death of his predecessor Datuk Sinda Maharaja Mohd. Amin bin Said, on 1 June 1967. Haji Mahmud was one of the regular petitioners for dismissal of Datuk Juan Haji Zakaria in 1964-65. Even in office, however, he could not take any action to change the situation. But in adat-related matters, he treated Othman bin Lanjung as buapak rather than Haji Zakaria.

This dual leadership at perut level persisted until December 1972, when Haji Zakaria died. On 1 January 1973, during a kerapatan to choose a new Datuk Juan, the Datuk Lembaga secured the blessing of the other besar of the suku and officially nominated and confirmed the other buapak, Othman bin Lanjung, as the Datuk Juan. In this kerapatan the rotation of office was set aside and for two successions, the post was held by Perut Masjid. Under the rotation system, the post should have gone to Perut Tengah II. However, the kerapatan agreed that, for the sake of the suku's solidarity and relevant matters, and with the agreement of members of Perut Tengah II, the rotation system was set aside until the incumbent Datuk Juan died or relinquished the post.

From the above narrative it can be seen that an adat office, even if it is a non-salaried post, is always a centre of conflict. To hold an adat office is an honour and awe-inspiring to the individual and his descent group. Moreover, if a descent group is passed over, the implication is that its members are *menompang* (outsiders). This is *memalukan* (humiliating) and lowers the

group's status in adat society.

In the process of identifying the right group and the right individual, corruption is rife. Gifts, usually in form of cash, flow from the individual to the lembaga and the Lembaga Tali Pusaka. Beside the lembaga, the anak buah also have to be *beri makan* (lit: fed; given money) for their support during the kerapatan.

Giving money (*memberi makan*) to the lembaga is normal and no shame attaches to the individual. Rather, it is a cause for pride, since this act indicates the wealth and strength of the giver. The money might not come personally from the individual but, as in the case mentioned, be collected from or given voluntarily by members of the descent group.

From the above event it is evident that the society of Rembau lacked an understanding of the working system of adat. This was due to the absence of documentary evidence of which group and who was in line for the succession of adat positions. The understanding of the adat was through oral tradition, passed from one generation to the next. Thus, in time of need, each descent group had its own version denying other group's rights.

The only source of reference on the adat system in Rembau is the work of Abas Haji Ali [1953], which is a translation of Parr and Mackray's work [1910]. It was published in 1953 and no reprint or later edition has been issued. This is the only book dealing with the history of the Luak and the Luak's constitution, and today it is out of circulation. Even if today's younger generation can get hold of it, most will not

be able to use it because very few of them can read the Jawi script in which it is written.

In my opinion, this book will not be of much help in solving an adat crisis today, because the original was published in 1910 with the purpose of giving colonial officers in Rembau some understanding of the adat. In the translation version, few new facts, mostly updating historical events, were added. Thus the Malay version is also of little help in solving conflict which needs minute detail of events. In addition only 20 percent of the present adat chiefs of Rembau possess this book.

All these and other factors, such as the influence of modern political parties, the personality of the individuals involved, and their connections with leaders of both the traditional and modern bureaucratic systems, tend to play a role in inducing and prolonging the crises such as the one described here.

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