2. The Kei Islands

The native boats that had come to meet us were three or four in number, containing in all about fifty men. They were long canoes, with the bow and stern rising up into a beak six or eight feet high, decorated with shells and waving plumes of cassowaries’ hair. … These Ké [Kei] men came up singing and shouting, dipping their paddles deep in the water and throwing up clouds of spray; as they approached nearer, they stood up in their canoes and increased their noise and gesticulations: and on coming alongside, without asking leave, and without moment’s hesitation, the greater part of them scrambled up on our deck. … These forty black, naked, mop-headed savages seemed intoxicated with joy and excitement. Not one of them could remain still for a moment (Wallace 1986: 420).

I was not welcomed with the same excitement on my first visit to the Kei Islands. This was not only because I shared similar skin colour to the people of Kei or that I landed at a different spot, but was more likely due to the people of the Kei Islands’ familiarity with one and a half centuries of change since Wallace’s visit in January 1857.

This chapter will highlight important changes that have occurred over the last century as well as introduce the Kei Islands and its people. A principal focus of this discussion will involve demographic and social changes in Kei society especially regarding population size, belief systems, and political structures. These changes have been fundamental in shaping the current political dynamic and in particular, the impact on the control and use of natural resources.

Location and Population

Location

The Kei Islands form an archipelago in the Arfura Sea, between 5°–6°5′ south and 131°50′–135°51′ east (see Map 1-2). They are located about 300–400 kilometres southeast from Ambon Island and the capital city of Maluku province. Discrepancies in island classification have resulted in Berhitu (1987) and KSMT (1993) classifying the Kei Archipelago with 100 islands, whereas Laksono (1990) claims there are 120 islands. Laksono (1990: 22) divides the islands into two
major and three minor groups. The Kei Kecil group is the first major group comprising two relatively big islands: Dullah (about 600 km²) and Kei Kecil (about 1300 km²). Dullah is the home to Tual, the capital city of Southeastern Maluku Regency and Ohoitel Village which was Laksono’s 1990 research site. Despite its name meaning ‘small’, Kei Kecil is more than twice the size of Dullah and of particular significance in the region because it is where most of the government offices are located. The second major island group is Kei Besar. The main island, Kei Besar Island (585 km²) is the longest island in the archipelago and where Antunès had his research site in Watlaar Village in 1996/7. Kei Besar is surrounded by six small islands, only one of which is populated. The three minor groups are Kur, Tayando, and Tanimbar Kei, Barraud’s 1979 research site.

At the time of Wallace’s exploration in the mid-1800s, travel around the Kei Islands was limited to manpowered transport such as paddled or sailed canoes for short distances and the larger traditional Indonesian sailing boats, called sailed prau (perahu layar), were used for long distance voyages. Land transportation devices such as the bicycle were probably first introduced by Westerners in around 1882 when the Dutch established a remote area representative (posthouder) in Dullah Village, and Langen — a German — started a sawmill business in Tual.

Since the early 1990s weekly flights have operated from Ambon and more recently daily flights are available. In addition to commercial flights, a monthly military flight also operates to the Kei Islands. All air traffic uses the airport located at Langgur on Kei Kecil Island. Sea transportation has also developed greatly and probably well beyond the imagination of the people who boarded Wallace’s vessel. Every fortnight, two big steel ships with hundreds of passengers arrive in Tual as well as smaller passenger and cargo ships, with an estimated 500 people coming and going from the Kei Islands fortnightly.

Motorised public transport in the form of small and medium-sized buses operates on Kei Kecil, Dullah, and central Kei Besar. Between the islands, there are two medium-sized wooden boats which transport people and goods from Watdek (on Kei Kecil) to Elat (on Kei Besar) twice a day. Other smaller wooden boats traverse the seas between outlying centres on a regular basis enabling

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1 It is interesting to note the way in which earlier writers described these islands as it indicates the development of geographical organisation of the Kei Islands. Bezemer (1921: 229) classified the Kei Islands into four groups: Groot Kei (Kei Besar); Klein Kei (Kei Kecil); Tajando (Tayando); and Koer (Kur). GBNID (1944: 294) had a five group classification: Koer (Kur); Tajando (Tayando); Nehoerowa (Kei Kecil); Kai Dullah (Dullah); and Noehoetjoet (Kei Besar). Yet another division was proposed by the GBHD (1943: 148) consisting of Noehoe Tjoet (Kei Besar), Nohoe Rowa (Kei Kecil), Tajandoe (Tayando) Island, Koer (Kur), Keimeer (Kamer), Drie Gebroeders, Tengah and Boei. (Insufficient documentation exists to identify the last three of these islands.)

2 Dullah Laut and other smaller surrounding islands on the northern side between Dullah and Kei Kecil islands are part of this group.

3 In 2007, Tual became the centre of a new municipality bearing the same name. This municipality is the result of a split of the former Southeastern Maluku District. Tual municipality covers the island of Dullah and some outer islands of the Kei Archipelago.
people to move between islands. However, despite the availability of motorised sea vessels, local sea transportation remains susceptible to the vagaries of the weather and small boats in particular are vulnerable to the strong currents and rough seas typical in the tropical archipelagoes. Remote islands such as Tam, Tayando, and Tanimbar Kei and the villages at the extreme northern and southern ends of Kei Besar are often difficult to reach due to bad weather. Even in the larger sailed prau, trips are dangerous during bad weather and islanders are reluctant to travel.

The advent of motorised transportation, both on land and sea, began sometime in the second half of the twentieth century and has been one of the key variables that intensified social interactions with the outside world. Unequal distribution and access to transport facilities can be seen as the major cause of uneven development which is illustrated by the high levels of development and infrastructure in the urban areas of Tual, Langgur and Watdek compared to the lack of development in remote villages and islands. Electricity is another modern invention that has impacted development in the Kei Islands. Regular power supply is only available in Kei Kecil, Dullah, and around Elat in the central region of Kei Besar Island and to a much more limited extent in villages where a number of small-scale residential generators operate. Access to power has enabled electronic communication and opportunities for increased interaction with outsiders in urban areas, but there has been limited change in villages without access to urban power supply.

**Population**

Collected census data is presented in Table 2-1. Population changes have been most notable over the last century. Although Wallace did not mention the population of the Kei Islands when he visited, Reidel (1886: 216) who was there shortly after, estimated that in 1882 the Kei Islands were home to about 17 246 people, 5580 of whom lived on Kei Besar and the rest populated Kei Kecil (5324), Tajando (665), Dullah Laut (391), Dullah (2352), Kur (1151), Kamer (195), Tam (790), Kei Tanimbar (322) and Hiniaar (476) islands. Comparing Reidel’s estimation with the census conducted by the Dutch government in 1930, it seems that he had underestimated the population of Kei Besar which according to the latter was 25 229 people. Although the census was carried out 48 years later than Reidel’s calculation, it is unlikely that the population of Kei Besar grew more than 350 per cent, while the population of Kei Kecil only increased by 13.9 per cent.
Table 2-1: Kei Kecil and Kei Besar population data (1882–2005).\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdistrict</th>
<th>Population census data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1882(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kei Kecil</td>
<td>5324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kei Besar</td>
<td>5580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10 904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: \(^a\) Riedel (1886: 216); \(^b\) DEZ (1936) \(^c\) KSMT (1995: 33, 35); \(^d\) BPSK (2003).

The census taken in 1971 indicates that the total population of the Kei Archipelago grew almost one and half times since 1930. In that period, the population of Kei Kecil increased more than three and half times while the population of the Kei Besar grew only slightly more than one-third (33.6 per cent). One possible explanation for this trend is that the period 1930–71 coincides with the development of the Kei Kecil as the administrative center of Maluku Tenggara District allowing Kei Kecil—together with Dullah—to become vibrant business centers in the region. Such developments have opened new opportunities, particularly in paid employment, which has drawn people to the area from Kei Besar and other rural islands of the Kei Archipelago. Migration from other districts in Maluku Province and even other provinces in Indonesia has also been evident.

Population increases were also noted for the census data from 1990, 1995, and 2000. From 1930–90, the population of the Kei Archipelago grew about 12.67 per cent accounting for 11.37 and 15.09 per cent growth of Kei Kecil and Kei Besar respectively. Between 1990-95 and 1995–2000, the total population rose by just over six per cent with the population of Kei Islands reaching 120 151 in the year 2000. As illustrated in Figure 2-1, population growth tended to rise slowly, except in the period of 1930-71. I suspect that the peak development which caused in-migration only took place from the 1960s to early 1970s, and the success of government family planning program introduced in the 1980s may also explain the slow growth trend.

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\(^4\) After the application of Local Government Law No. 22/1999 in 2000, Kei Besar and Kei Kecil islands subdistricts were split into five. The Kei Besar Subdistrict was re-organised into three subdistricts: Kei Besar; Kei Besar Utara; and Kei Besar Selatan respectively. The Kei Kecil islands sub-regency was restructured into Kei Kecil and Kur islands' subdistricts.
Religion

The oldest known belief system in the Kei Islands was termed ‘Alivuru’ and has been described as a type of animism with the sun and moon gods as spiritual centre (Riedel 1886: 220; Van Hoëvell 1890; Barraud 1979, 1990a). A small number of villagers in Kei Tanimbar still acknowledge the Alivuru religion whereas others from this village call themselves Hindus. ⁵ However, some elements of belief and practice persist in most communities, regardless of assumed religion. For example, beliefs in ancestors or guardian spirits of sacred places—and the associated rituals—are still upheld by Protestant, Muslim, and Catholic communities.

Islam is the second oldest religion in the Kei Archipelago. Although the precise timing of the introduction to Islam is not known, Van Hoëvell (1890: 120) noted that there were no Muslims before 1864 but in the next decade, 30 per cent of the total population was of the Muslim faith. As in most other parts of

⁵ When the Indonesian New Order declared that there were only five official religions (Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist and Islam), these people identified their religion as Hindu.
Indonesia, Islam was introduced through trade with Arabs, Makassarese, and Bugis. As traders settled on the islands, so the conversion to the Muslim faith began among the Kei islanders.

The introduction of Islam notably changed the settlement patterns among the Kei islanders, with converts to Islam geographically distancing themselves from pagans. Drawing from the contemporary situation, a reason for such separation could be the strict rules Muslims have in relation to food preparation. In particular, Muslims have strong concerns regarding food that may be contaminated by pork or the use of utensils that have been in contact with pork-related food. They also consider meat from animals not killed by Muslims as prohibited.6 Increasing numbers of converts to Islam and the geographic isolation of Muslim communities has resulted in popularisation of the term ‘Muslim settlement’ (Ohoislam).

Catholicism was brought to the Kei Islands at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Catholic mission in the Kei Islands was at the request of Adolph Langen to save the pagans from the domination of the Muslims.7 Langen’s views on the issue were shared by Van Hoëvell (1890) who was sent by the Dutch to verify his claims that the Muslims tended to exploit, manipulate, and introduce bad habits to the pagans (Van Höevell 1890; Schreurs 1992). Van Hoëvell noted that:

[T]he Arabs and persons from Makasar do a lot of harm, they instil a hate against pagans and the European authority and also take advantage of their religious status. Everybody has to be submissive to the holy man and he has to have all he wants. The Keiése has to give his daughters, sell his produce to him at an unfair price and does not dare to complain (translated from Van Hoëvell 1890: 121).

They believed that adherence to the Islamic faith would jeopardise the good nature and character of the Keiése and felt strongly that conversion to Christianity would ensure the maintenance of their virtues and civilise the population. Driven by this belief, Langen sent a letter to the Central Catholic Mission in Batavia (now known as Jakarta) inviting their presence in the Kei Islands. The mission responded positively to this letter and on 12 October 1886, they sent a letter to the Dutch Governor General in Jakarta requesting permission for the establishment of a mission on the Kei Islands. The Dutch government consented and the first missionaries arrived in Tual in 1888 (Laksono 1990: 132; Renyaan 1996: 13).

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6 Consequently, when other denominations host a ceremony with a mixed faith attendance, they will organise for Muslims to prepare the food for their Muslim guests.
7 Adolf Langen, a German who started a sawmill business in the Kei Islands in 1882, took an active interest in the social circumstances of the the Kei people.
The introduction of Catholicism and the establishment of a mission station at Langgur on Kei Kecil created tensions between the Muslim and Catholic converts. The tensions that developed were largely influenced by the mission’s involvement in the political rivalry between segments of the community, as illustrated by the conflict that arose between the Muslim village of Tual and the new Christian village of Faan (see Map 1-2).

In the traditional context, Faan Village was under the control of Tual and as such, the village head of Faan was required to pay respect to the ruler of Tual. When Faan villagers converted to Christianity, the village head of Faan disputed the inferior position in relation to the rule of Tual and asked the mission to free them from the relationship. The missionaries supported this proposal since they saw that Islam was a significant challenge to their success in spreading Christianity. Despite some disagreement, the Dutch officials were finally persuaded and agreed to appoint the Faan village head as new ruler of the territory. The new appointment and order gave Catholics political superiority over Muslims and was a sign of political and cultural victory for the Dutch.

The Tual ruler and other Muslim leaders in Tual rejected the appointment. Assen, the Dutch representative in Tual, reported their protest:

> If there is a person who by their own, wants to be a Catholic, we will not hamper them, but if it will make a ruler or a de facto orang kaya ['wealthy person,' the title for a village head] withdraw their domain from a traditional bond, this means that the submission to a religion [Catholic] is a political rebellion against our power (translated from Schreurs 1992: 42).

The protest expressed a clear readiness for direct confrontation which was taken seriously by the Dutch. Thus, when they visited Tual, police men were brought along to protect them from possible Muslim attack. Apparently, this was a good policy to avert conflict between these two communities and open conflict never broke out between Faan and Tual.

Inter-religious relations were further complicated with the arrival of the Protestant Mission in the early twentieth century. The Catholic and Protestant missions were in direct conflict, converting as many pagans to their respective faith as possible and both sought support from the Dutch government. Laksono (1990: 145–56) describes an example of this conflict with the conversion of the pagan population of Ngat settlement on Kei Besar. The Ngat resisted the Catholic missionaries’ efforts to convert them to Catholicism and the mission responded with a request to the Dutch official in Tual to relocate the villagers to a neighbouring Catholic village called Bombay. The Catholic Mission believed that if the Ngat lived in the same village, they would eventually convert. The
Dutch official agreed and planned to move the people of Ngat. The leaders of Ngat however, contacted a Dutch Protestant minister in Tual and asked him to prevent the move and in return they would become Protestants. The conflict then became one between the Catholic and Protestant missions.

The Protestant Mission also became involved in conflicts between and within local communities. Lasomer (1985: 74, quoted in Laksono 1990: 149), describes a conflict that was triggered by a marriage arrangement involving communities living in the upper and lower areas of Soindat Village on Kei Besar (see Map 1-2). As a strategy to gain external support, the people living on the lower part of the village converted to Catholicism in 1909. In opposition, those from the upper part of the village converted to Protestantism. Subsequently, the two communities became separated by a marked boundary and connected to different external agencies for support. Disharmony was not only restricted to Catholics and Protestants but also characterised relations between Muslims and Protestants.

The Dutch government generally favoured Protestants and Catholics over Muslims. Referring to the situation in Ambon, Chauvel (1985, 1999) detailed how local Christians were assimilated into structures of colonial empire, gaining access to education and employment. In such positions as colonial government officials and military officers, they straddled ruling in the name of the colonial power on the one hand, and being ruled by their colonial masters on the other. In this situation, it was not uncommon for some of them to believe that they were superior to others in the community.

When the Japanese reached the Kei Islands in 1942, the situation was reversed (Chauvel 1985, 1999). The Japanese removed all of the structures developed by the Dutch, including the Protestant and Catholic missions. Thirteen Catholic leaders, including the bishop working at the mission, were executed by Japanese troops shortly after landing in Tual. Many Protestants associated with the Dutch were also killed and some churches were destroyed.

In these new circumstances, both Catholics and Protestants feared Muslims. Father Bedaux (1978), who escaped the massacre because he was working in a village some distance from Tual when the Japanese troops raided the mission in Langgur, openly expressed his and his followers’ fear of and suspicion toward the Muslims. Informed that the mission leaders had been killed and the Japanese troops were looking for other priests, he ran from the village. During his escape, he avoided passing by Muslim settlements or greeting Muslim villagers. This was driven by the common suspicion held by Catholics that Muslims were Japanese spies and that their sightings would be reported to the Japanese troops. These suspicions were confirmed by Lawalata (1969: 32–5) who recorded that the Japanese did recruit Muslims to spy for them and work at the Japanese administration office.
The disharmony between religious groups has continued and although relations appear cordial, there remains a palpable uneasiness between them. This has been highlighted by the more recent conflicts in Central and North Maluku Province and even in the Kei Islands. Conflicts between Muslims and Christians which started in Ambon in January 1999, lasted for years resulting in more than 3,000 deaths, forcing more than 123,000 to become refugees, and destroying billions of rupiah in property (see Van Klinken 2001 and International Crisis Group (ICG) 2002). In the Kei Islands, similar conflicts took place in 1999. Two of the bloodiest incidents as well as several minor clashes that broke out in that year caused the deaths of 200 people, injured hundreds, destroyed around 4,000 buildings, leveled more than 20 villages, and internally displaced around 30,000 people. (Topatimasang 2004: viii). Although the violence has ceased, it is not impossible that similar incidents could erupt in the future.

The combined impact of religious and political ideologies constructed through conflicting circumstances and the spatial distance between these communities has added fuel to these conflicts. As with the Muslims, the Catholics and Protestants have created separate settlements that have resulted in distancing genealogically connected individuals and constrained the development of avenues for communication. It is evident that these divisions are becoming more entrenched and isolating family members. Some provocations could instigate violent clashes, as in the above mentioned conflicts.

A breakdown of the Kei population based on religious following over the last century is presented in Table 2-2. This data clearly shows that the founding belief system of paganism has been almost entirely lost from the population. Although the Muslims have always outnumbered the Catholics and Protestants separately, collectively the Christians have outnumbered the Muslims since sometime in the 1920s. Comparing Christian groups, there have always been more Catholics than Protestants and more recently it appears Catholic numbers are increasing more so than Protestant numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>1887</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>5893</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>50,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>28,663</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>41,138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14,137</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,030</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>120,151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a Pagan, b Hindu, Buddhist and Pagan.

Sources: Taken from Laksono (1990: 26, 122) and BPSK (2000).
Political Organisation

Understanding the dynamics of political organisation in the Kei Islands revolves around two ideals. First, political organisations frame the social relations between people and groups, making it an important source of power. The position of village head, for example, is a source of power that enables this person to make decisions about the lives of so many villagers. Second, Kei people consider change from one political organisation to another more as a process of enrichment or accumulation rather than replacement of an old by a new type of organisation. So, when external powers such as the colonial or Indonesian government introduced different types of social organisations, they added more avenues from which to source power which complicated issues of contestation and conflict. The case studies in later chapters will give concrete examples of these complexities, while this section will only describe the structural dynamics of political organisations. In this regard, the discussion is divided into two parts—the first part relates to traditional political organisations, and the second deals with ‘modern’ political organisations.

Traditional Political Organisation

The traditional political organisations in the Kei Islands are hierarchically ordered with the overarching organisation refered to as a lor (literally meaning ‘whale’). There after the rankings in descending order are: kingdom (utan, ratschap);8 village (ohoi); and hamlet or settlement (ohoi kot).9 In this system of organisation, the smaller groups form an integral part of the larger organisation (Figure 2-2).

Categorically, Kei islanders are divided into three lor, referred to as ‘nine group’ (lor siw), ‘five group’ (lor lim) and ‘neutral group’ (lor labay). Membership of a particular social group within one of the three lor is based on the narrative of group formation, which starts with the appointment of a king (rat).

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8 Most if not all utan were converted to political units called ‘kingships’ (ratschap) during the Dutch colonial period. Now the term ratschap is more popularly used than the Kei term utan, but in rituals people still use the vernacular term.

9 Actually, there is no special term in Kei language that refers to this political unit. In a District Regulation on Ratchap (spelled as ‘ratshap’) and Ohoi issued in 2009, this political unit is also called ‘ohoi’. I asked the ex-village head of Dullah Laut, who had become a member of Tual City Legislative Assembly (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah) when I met him in 2009, to differentiate between the two and he suggested adding the word ‘kot’ which literally means ‘small’.
The appointment of a king determines whether his kingdom would be a member of the nine, five, or neutral group. The membership of a social group is taken from membership of a particular kingdom. Thus, in determining what lor a village belongs to, people first consider which kingdom the village is attached to and then determine the membership in relation to the nine, five, or neutral group. For example, in determining whether the villagers of Dullah Laut belong to the nine group, five group, or the neutral group, they will indicate that their village is a member of ‘the three villages in the west’ (lor utan til warat) led by King Baldu of Dullah village. Based on this, they claim membership of the nine group since this kingdom is a member of the nine group.

The first two groups (nine and five) are often associated with the moiety system, a system that divided the community into two distinct but complementary groups, which was common in eastern Indonesia. In Maluku, this system ‘once encompassed all societies from Seram to Aru in the southeast and that even now is ideologically important’ (Valeri 1989: 117).

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10 Seram is an island north of Ambon while Aru is an archipelago to the southeast of Kei (see Map 1-1).
system named themselves using a numerical index nine (siwa) and five (lima). Cooley (1962) and Valeri (1989) called them as ‘nine’ and ‘five’ moieties. They also argued that this division was associated with symbolic marks such as (1) ‘autochthonous’ verses ‘immigrant,’ and (2) ‘landward’ verses ‘seaward.’ The first mark referred to the association of ‘nine’ or ‘five’ groups either as autochthonous or immigrant population, while the latter mark pointed to the association of either group to their coming, settlement, or territorial control.

Interestingly, despite the same numerical indices—nine and five—these two groups have different characteristics from the nine and five moieties described by Valeri (1989) and Cooley (1962). By way of clarification, we can examine the application of symbolic marks associated with nine and five groups, such as autochthonous, immigrant, landward and seaward. Considering the narratives of the nine and five group, the association of the two groups with autochthonous and immigrant marks do not apply because the founding fathers of both groups were immigrants and because the narratives note that the recruitment of group membership was conducted by appointing a king in each domain. This appointment meant that the king’s domain became members of the nine or five group. The issue of political leadership in the Kei Islands that privileges the nobles who are almost all—if not entirely—immigrants, is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The distinction between the nine group and five group as it relates to the seaward and landward marks is not applicable either for two reasons. First, almost all villages in the Kei Islands are located in coastal areas where there is no conceptual distinction between those who live on the landward or seaward positions. Second, the distinction between the geographical distribution of nine group and five group members is not particularly relevant since both are distributed evenly throughout the archipelago (Map 2-1).

However, the character of rivalry between the nine and five group was shared with their corresponding moeties. In fact, one of the most important factors that drove each group to recruit as many members as possible was to defeat the opposing group or, at least to strengthen their defense against attack. In essence, it was a ‘system’ of alliance to accumulate strength to overpower the opposing group. Renyaan (1990: 33) noted that there were 11 wars between the five and nine groups which concluded when the two groups agreed to end hostilities.
The narratives of group formation also determined the position of a particular member of the nine or five group in the organisation of the group. Arnuhu and Bomav were considered founding fathers of the nine and five group respectively. The seniority of other members was taken into account in the recruitment process and those who were recruited earlier were considered a ‘big brother’ to those who were recruited later. In theory, senior members hold more power than junior members, however in practice the position of those with more power was a constant source of contestation. In fact, Van Hoëvell (1890: 123) notes that the nine group has had many leaders—first the king from Wain, later the ruler from Danar, and finally the ruler from Dullah.\footnote{This version is different from the narrative of origin which mentions that the King of Danar was the founding father of the nine group (see also references to this in Chapters Three and Four).}

The discussion of the moiety system of the nine and five group does not focus on the neutral kingdom (lor labay). From the narrative describing recruitment of the nine and five group, it is evident that the neutral kingdom groups which consist of Tam on Kei Kecil and Werka on Kei Besar were neglected in the recruitment process. As these two kingdoms did not coordinate as allies or as a distinct social group, it is difficult to ascertain whether the kingdoms formed a single organisation similar to the other two groups. However, these kingdoms
were also called ‘mediators’ or ‘neutral’ groups. These names indicate that the neutral kingdom might play an important role in encouraging the two conflicting lor to reach an agreement, although there was no evidence of this in the literature.

The function of lor changed over time. In the ancient time, as indicated by the narratives, the lor functioned as an organisation of allies and played an important role in settling conflicts between its members. In times of war those belonging to one lor would help fight another. However in modern times, rather than fighting when there is conflict, the nine group, five group, and neutral kingdom are more likely to work together to resolve customary problems that they cannot solve alone. In such cases, a committee of leaders from both five and nine groups and the neutral kingdoms is established. An example of such a situation was the committee that formed for solving the dispute between Tutrean and Sather villages in 1990 (detailed in Chapter Nine).

In daily life however, these groupings are not so important. Although elders still remember the narratives and key events relating to the lor, they do not see it as a significant element that directs their daily life. The Sather villagers’ rejection of the decision made by the committee consisting of leaders from the nine and five groups and the neutral kingdom was an example of this. Yet, sometimes lingering tensions become known. For example, during the celebration of the fiftieth Indonesian Independence Day, the two groups competed in the wooden war boat race and a fight broke out among them because one of the rowers in the winning boat was not a member of the boat’s lor.

The kingdom (utan or ratchaap) designated during colonial rule is the second highest traditional level of political organisation. There are 22 kingdoms in the Kei Islands—ten in each of the nine and five groups, and two kingdoms categorised as neutral (see Table 2-3). A ruler or king (rat) led each kingdom. In organising the territory and people, he was assisted by prominent leaders in his domain including village heads under his control. In difficult times, the king would arrange a meeting attended by all leaders of the village and other prominent leaders in the kingdom. The king would lead the meeting and discuss any issues in need of resolving.

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12 The use of the words neutral or penengah instead of vernacular terms might indicate that the meaning of lor labay as ‘mediator’ is a modern conception.
The incorporation of different village heads into a kingdom was based on narratives of the kingdom's formation. Since there are 22 kingdoms, there are at least 22 narratives recounting each kingdom's formation. However, each narrative explains the connection of a particular village leader to a king. Villages where the head is associated with a particular king become members of the kingdom, but this was all—including the position of king—subject to contestation. Van Höevell (1889: 108) noted that Har and Mun used to be under the king of Watlaar but they broke the connection declaring themselves free from the king's domain. The village of Langgiar also tried to break away from the control of the king of Fer, but they failed.
The village (ohoi) is the political organisation that is smaller than that of the kingdom and is led by a village head referred to as a ‘wealthy person’ (orang kaya) or in a few cases, by a military commander (kapitan). The village head is assisted by other leaders in the village such as an imam (Muslim religious leader), landlord (metu duan or tuan tan), war commander (panglima perang), and so on. The smallest political unit is the settlement (ohoi kot) which is led by ‘the father of the settlement’ (bapak soa).

In summarising the practical function of the traditional political organisation in the Kei Islands, the settlement can be viewed as the most important political organisation because it was integral to people’s daily lives and handled problems that occurred in the community. Once the settlement resolved an issue, there would be no further need for discussion on the matter. Only if the settlement organisation could not resolve an issue would the problem be brought to the village level. In such situations, the village head and his village functionaries would be called on to assist and this pattern continued up to the lor level until the issue was resolved satisfactorily.

‘Modern’ Political Organisation

The introduction of modern political organisation in the Kei Archipelago dates back to the period of the Dutch occupation in Maluku. Contact with the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Companie (VOC) in 1622 can be considered the starting point toward the incorporation of the Kei Archipelago into the Dutch East-Indies and the origins of ‘modern’ political organisation. At this time, the VOC signed an agreement with the leaders of Har, Laar, and Add villages on Kei Besar Island and installed its representative in Elat before 1636 (Reidel 1886: 218). In 1661 and 1664, villagers on Kur Island prepared agreements with the VOC and Riedel concluded that these contracts placed the people under their control (ibid.). The incorporation of the Kei political organisation into the ‘modern’ bureaucracy however, did not occur until after 1816 when the Dutch took control of Maluku from the British. At this time, Dutch officials began legalising the appointment of leaders and sorting out reported problems during intermittent visits to the Kei Islands.

Dutch control over the Kei people was established two centuries after the first contact between the people and the VOC. In 1882, the Dutch governor in Ambon set up a remote area representative (posthouder) in Dullah Village on Dullah Island. In 1892, the status was raised to that of sub-department (onderafdeling).

13 Before the imposition of colonialism in the nineteenth century, the United Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) controlled portions of the Dutch East Indies (the future Indonesia) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The VOC was a chartered company that owned a powerful naval fleet and employed European and native soldiers.
The Kei Islands

led by a domestic administrator (controleur) in Tual (Laksono 1990: 137). This change put the position of the Kei Islands in the Dutch political organisation as follows:

1. Maluku was considered a province, led by a governor based in Ambon.
2. The province was divided into several residencies, each of which was led by a resident.
3. The resident controlled several departments, each headed by an assistant resident. One of the departments was the South Islands Department with its office in Tual.
4. Every department consisted of several ‘sub-departments’, each run by a domestic administrator. The South Islands Department consisted of sub-departments based on Tanimbar, Babar, Kei, Aru, and Kisar islands.

In light of this structure, it is apparent that the Dutch incorporation of institutions in the Kei Islands did not change the traditional political structure because the unit of the Dutch political organisation that covered all of the Kei Islands acted principally as mediators rather than as ‘judges’ when dealing with villagers’ issues. The traditional political organisation was effectively ‘underneath’ the Kei Islands sub-departments. This is best illustrated by the commission established by the Dutch to deal with community conflicts called ‘the Great Council of Leaders in the Kei Islands’ (Groote Raat van Hoofden der Kei-Eilanden) which consisted of prominent local rulers. Dutch decisions were mostly based on consultation with this committee (this example is discussed in Chapter Nine).

Nevertheless, we should also note that the Dutch had vested interests. As a consequence, even though their decisions were based on consultations with traditional leaders or their understanding of local tradition, fulfilling Dutch interests was their first priority. Therefore, policies were not always supportive of tradition. By way of illustration, if the Dutch had been effective mediators at appointing the ruler in Faan, they would have consulted the ruler of Tual or discussed the matter with the great council of leaders. It would appear that their interest in demonstrating the superiority of Christianity—which was associated with Dutch civilisation—over Islam was in conflict with their role as mediator.

Dutch policies also tended to be based on Western conceptions of ‘state’ and governance. The consequence was that the application of Western concepts to the traditional political organization and structure lead to conflicts. When the Dutch formalised the position of a particular person as a village leader, for example, they treated him as a village leader according to Western rather than traditional conception. The Dutch understanding of a village head presumed that he assumed all power related to the social and territorial organisation of
the village. The traditional understanding is that the village head controls the political domain only, while issues of territory are under the control of the landlord. Or at least, the traditional view was that political and territorial control were two different issues and control over these issues was subject to contestation between different segments of the community (this point is elaborated on in Chapter Four).

The Dutch administrative position was also more highly recognised than that of the traditional political position, the consequence being that the policies of the Dutch could be used by local communities, or community factions, as a source of legitimacy. Because Dutch decisions were not always in accord with tradition, and tradition itself was subject to different interpretations, those who were favoured by the Dutch involvement in local issues would use their interpretations as additional ‘ammunition’ against their rivals. In other words, Dutch involvement made it possible for particular segments of communities to say, ‘look, even the Dutch define me or my group as right. That means you’re wrong’.

Another significant structural change to the political organisation occurred in the 1950s when the Kei Islands were declared part of the Republic of Indonesia. Under Indonesian law and regulations, the political organisation of the Kei Islands could be summarised as follows and illustrated in Figure 2-3.

1. At a provincial level, the Kei Islands are part of the province of Maluku, headed by a governor in Ambon.

2. Maluku province consists of several districts, one of which was the district of Maluku Tenggara, led by a head of district in Tual. In 2007, Tual was separated administratively at the district level and called a municipality, resulting in the Kei Archipelago now having two district administrations.

3. The district is divided into several subdistricts, each under the leadership of a subdistrict head. Until 2000, the Kei Islands were incorporated into two subdistricts—Pulau-pulau Kei Kecil, and Pulau-pulau Kei Besar. The office of Kei Kecil subdistrict was in Watdek on Kei Kecil Island and the Kei Besar subdistrict office was in Elat, Kei Besar Island. From 2001, these subdistricts split further with Kei Besar Islands now organised into three subdistricts: Kei Besar; Kei Besar Utara; and Kei Besar Selatan respectively. Kei Kecil Subdistrict has now been divided into seven subdistricts: Dullah Selatan; Dullah Utara; Pulau Tayanto-Tam; Pulau-pulau Kur; Kei Kecil; Kei

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14 Changes due to Japanese influence are not detailed here as the impact on local institutions was not as apparent.
Kecil Timur; and Kei Kecil Barat. The first four subdistricts are under the Tual Regency and the rest are parts of Maluku Tenggara District.\footnote{In 2007, ICG produced an interesting briefing on the political process of this separation that looks at the political maneuvers of local leaders to both support and oppose the separation of the district and subdistricts.}

4. Finally, every subdistrict controls the smallest political unit called the modern village (\textit{desa}).\footnote{The term used for village political unit is different from one law to another (see Chapter Six). I added an example of Dullah Laut village in the figure as a reference to the discussion of Chapter Six.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{kei-islands.png}
\caption{Kei Se positions within the Indonesian political structure.}
\end{figure}

Unlike the Dutch, the Indonesian political organisation overlaps with the traditional political organisation, down to the village level. Since Indonesian laws and regulations assume that this government-created political organisation should replace the traditional political organisation, the people’s political organisation formally changed. The kingdom of villages was no longer
coordinated by a king, instead they were under the control of a subdistrict head (camat) and the former ‘traditional village’ (ohoi) was known as the ‘modern village’ (desa). At the village level, the application of the Indonesian political system also created problems because a traditional village did not automatically convert to a single modern village. In order to attract a larger central government subsidy—which was based on the number of modern villages—some traditional settlements (ohoi kot) in a traditional village were converted to a modern village. That meant that the traditional settlement head (kepala soa) who was formerly under the coordination of a traditional village head (orang kaya), came under direct control of a subdistrict head because his traditional settlement was converted to a modern village and he became a modern village headman (kepala desa).

To conclude this section, I would like to emphasise that at a practical level, people viewed these structural changes as cumulative, not consecutive. This meant that in a particular context they might use a structure that was not formally applicable and in other contexts, they might use more than one structure. Some of the cases discussed in the following chapters will illustrate this tendency.

Conclusion

Throughout their history the Kei people have been exposed to different structural arrangements. In terms of religion, the Kei people were exposed to Islamic, Catholic and Protestant religions. Once they chose to be part of a particular structure, this put them in opposition to others who adopted other religious structures. In terms of politics, the Kei also experienced the formal structural changes introduced by the Dutch and Indonesian states which are not compatible with their traditional political structures.

Interestingly, these structural encounters and changes were not thought to be replacing old structures with new ones. It seems that they considered these changes more as a process of enrichment of their structural preferences. For

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17 With this introduction of a different type of village organisation, utan will from now on refer to ‘traditional village’ and desa refers to ‘modern village’.
18 In his report, Berhitu (1987) explained that in order to absorb more government subsidies, 67 traditional settlements were converted to a modern village in 1970. When the Village Government law was applied, 44 traditional villages became 111 modern villages.
19 In 2009, the district of Maluku Tenggara passed regulations on Ratschaap and Ohoi that attempted to revitalise the traditional political organisation/structure. This was a response to the decentralization processes that have taken place since the collapse of the New Order Regime in 1998. Interestingly, they also adopted some ideas on ‘modern’ village government such as the requirements for the orang kaya candidate to be loyal to Pancasila (Indonesian Five Ideological Foundations) and to have graduated from at least the senior high school level. These regulations are another example that people do not consider the new structural changes to be replacements of the old. In fact, these regulations show that people produce and re-produce structure using either tradition or ‘modern’ elements in response to the contextual changes.
example, although Kei people are formally, Muslims, Catholics, or Protestants, they still practice rituals pertaining to their old religion. Despite the fact that their formal political structure should be the Indonesian ‘system,’ people still resolve their problems with customary law and procedures.

This situation could have advantages. If the Kei people found that a particular structure was incapable of defining or sorting out a problem, they still had other choices. However in a conflict situation, this circumstance can complicate and worsen the conflict since the conflicting parties might use different, incompatible structures in trying to legitimise their actions or claims.