
The oral history that describes the formation of a particular domain is referred to as *toom*. Kei people believe that the events mentioned in a *toom* actually took place in the past. These events are important because they explain the process of creation of their social world. For the Kei people, *toom* is not only a history of their origin but also the most important source of traditional claim over positions and objects. Reference to a particular narrative of origin is required to legitimate any claim, thus for the people of the Kei Islands, the narrative of origin is the foundation of their tradition.

By explaining some Kei narrative of origins, the following discussion is aimed at showing that as the foundation of tradition, *toom* has more than one version and each is subject to multiple interpretations. As the basis of claims over positions and objects, these characteristics provide the basis for contestation. While people might argue that this is the sign of the flexibility of tradition, I would suggest that this can create problems because the nature of the *toom* makes it possible for people to craft, modify or even develop it for their own interests. When two or more people or groups with opposing interests are involved in such activities, conflict is unavoidable.

**Narrative of Origin**

The issue of origin is important for most Austronesian-speaking societies. In his article ‘Origin Structures and Systems of Precedence in the Comparative Study of Austronesian Societies’, Fox (1995: 34) states that ‘among the Austronesians, the concern with origins represents a vital orientation, a basic epistemological stance, toward persons and objects in the world’ (see also Fox 1996). Kei islanders are no exception to this. Knowing one’s origin is not only a matter of understanding ‘history,’ but it is also a matter of justifying one’s position in relation to others: who is ruling and who is ruled. In relation to ownership, it is a matter of who controls what, when, and where. In the Kei Islands, the discussion of origin is indeed a discourse of precedence.

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1 Kaartinen 2009(a) spells it as *tum*. I choose *toom* after the double ‘o’ sound pronunciation of the word by the Kei Kecil islanders.
In the Kei Islands, the crucial characteristic of the origin narrative also focuses on issues of ‘installing the outsider inside’ (Fox 2008). Although the journeys of particular persons are mentioned, the most important part of the narrative of origin is the meeting of particular persons with the former inhabitants of the domain. This meeting is crucial because this is when negotiations concerning the distribution of power take place which then determine position in the domain. This process illustrates that the origin structure of the Kei people is more concerned with the creation of a domain rather than tracing the story of the ancestors’ ‘path and the road’ as the Atoni do in Timor. (Fox 1988:12).

Alternatively, Kei Island narratives of origin can be differentiated into three categories on the basis of the social status of the players. The first category consists of narratives that only concern the establishment of a domain by the indigenous (cf. Kaartinen 2009(b); 2010). The second category recounts the meeting of immigrants with the native inhabitants of the Kei Islands. Narratives of this category become the basis of conflicts over precedence between different social ranks, particularly the mel and the ren. The third category includes all narratives that describe the meeting of different groups of immigrants. This type becomes the main source of the legitimisation of precedence among different fam of the same social rank, particularly the mel. The main issues of contestation within and between social strata mentioned in the narratives are issues of ‘government’ or domain leadership and issues of controlling the domain’s territory.

This chapter provides examples of the second and third categories of narrative and shows how these narratives are used to explain the existence of social stratification and the distribution of power within and between different social strata. The first example is one recognised by most Kei people, while the second example is a specific narrative taken from Dullah Laut Village. The details of the narrative are unique to the Dullah Laut people. However, the theme—the meeting of different groups of immigrants—is more common. I believe most, if not all, traditional domains in the Kei Islands have similar versions.

**Social Stratification**

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, the people of Kei are divided into three social strata: the ‘noble’ (mel or mel-mel); the ‘commoners’ or ‘free people’ (ren or ren-ren); and the ‘former slave’ (iri or iri-iri). Laksono (1990) believes that the original structure of the three categories was not a vertical relationship with the mel at the top, the ren in the middle, and the iri at the bottom. He argues that the original differences between the mel, ren and the iri were based on whether they were indigenous or immigrant. Regarding the relationship between the mel and the ren, based on historical fact he suggests that:
the ren-ren were neither under nor above the mel-mel; both basically agreed that they were supposed to live together in a relationship of equality in which the ren-ren held the office of teran nuhu [or tuan tan, meaning lord of the island] and mel-mel held administrative office (Laksono 1990: 110).

It was only between the mel and iri—both considered immigrant groups—that relationships formed a hierarchical structure, whereby the iri was inferior in relation to the mel.

Furthermore, Laksono found that the current disagreement between the mel and ren was due to the introduction of a new hierarchical order by the Dutch. During their occupation, the Dutch granted certain administrative territorial titles such as raja, orang kaya, kapiten and majoer to their local collaborators.2 They also issued letters of appointment and distributed knobbed canes (rottingknoppen) as a sign of the appointment. Since the appointment not only granted administrative rights but also territorial authority, this meant that the mel became the dominant group holding power. On the other hand, the ren, who were neglected by the Dutch, lost their territorial power as well as their balance of power to the former administrative authority of the mel. As a result, their position slipped to mid-rank between the mel and the iri.

For the most part, I agree with the above reading which differentiates between both the mel and ren and the mel and the iri. However, after reading the narratives of origin, I concluded that the mel not only adopted the new Dutch-introduced hierarchical structure, but also took a more active role of transforming their narrative of origin to imply superiority over the ren. Based on the mel’s version of the narrative of origin, the two groups can claim to have never been equal in rank. This asymmetric relationship has been the defining feature of their original relationship with the ren.

To make my point clear, I will discuss the Kei Islanders’ narratives of origin. The people believe that the native inhabitants of the Kei Islands sprang forth from the earth or sea having emerged from animals and plants. These people were considered the first inhabitants of the islands and owners of the land and sea. As a consequence they were entitled to hold the title of ‘lord of the land’ (tuan tan) referred to as ‘free people’ (ren).3

2 As was common in other parts of Indonesia, the Dutch used the policy of indirect rule. This meant that at a local level, the Dutch did not create new political structures but used the existing political structures for their political and economic interests. In the Kei Islands, since the local political leadership was traditionally in the hands of the mel, it was the mel who were appointed to be the collaborators with the Dutch. It seemed that the Dutch were not aware that local tradition distinguished between political and territorial leadership and that these two issues were contested between and within different social ranks.

3 Actually, there is a narrative that asserts that some native inhabitants were considered to be the mel, however the mel consider this to be an exception.
Once upon a time, immigrants from various places came to Kei and met the lord of the land. For various reasons these immigrants were incorporated into Kei society. Renyaan (1990: 3) in ‘The History of Kei Tradition’ notes that various versions of these narratives considered the immigrants to be smart, brave, and rich. These characteristics led them to win various physical tests and contests of spirituality against the native inhabitants. Some versions even mention that due to these superior traits, the native inhabitants invited the immigrants to live together with them and surrendered their territory and lives to be governed by the immigrants. To cite an example, here is an excerpt of the narrative from Englalarang, Kei Besar, written in 1959 by Ahmad Rahawarin, the traditional village leader of Englalarang:

Balaha Rahawatin was the ruler controlling the territory of Englalarang/Ubohoifak, its sea and land and Ren-ren Hoerngutru Yelmesikrau. He was appointed by a leader of Ren-ren Hoerngutru Englalarang and given the name of Lord of the Land of Englalarang (Hemar). Thus, the lord of the land admitted that Balaha Rahawarin became their lord and leader, controlling all their possessions and Ren-ren Hoearngutru was ruled by Balaha Rahawarin for ever; for generations to come, Balaha Rahwarin was obliged to support Ren-ren Hoerngutru and Ren-ren Fuartel in time of need according to their custom (Adhuri translation).

Another version which is typically supported by the ren indicated that the installation was based on a mutual agreement on the distribution of rights between the two parties. The native inhabitants continued to hold their power over territory while the immigrants were given the right to rule the domain. Both versions still attest that the native inhabitants held the title ‘lord of the land,’ but the former version makes it an official title without any real control of their territory. In this version, ‘lord of the land’ is only understood as ‘those who know the territory’ while the latter version acknowledged the right of the lord of the land to control all issues pertaining to the territory of their domain.

Looking at the first version of the narrative, it is obvious that the immigrant mel asserted their superior position over the indigenous ren from their very first meeting. Even before they negotiated the distribution of rights, the immigrants were ascribed superior traits. I believe that this sense of superiority is why they put strong emphasis on issues of social boundaries in what they called the ‘Law of Red Blood and Spear from Bali’ (Hukum Larvul Ngabal). The following is a condensed version of the background narrative of the declaration of Hukum Larvul Ngabal:

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4 These immigrants were known by their place of origin such as from Bali and Sumba (Mel Bal Sumbau), from Luang and Maubes Islands (Mel Luang Maubes), and from Jailolo and Ternate (Mel Delo-Ternat).
5 This version is shared between the mel and the ren, but the interpretation was based on the mel concept.
The narrative begins with Kasdew and Jangra, two persons from Bali. After being installed within by the acceptance of the natives, Kasdew and Jangra, who then held the title of the great (hilaay), each developed their own domain in Ohoivuur (the present Letvuan village) on Kei Kecil Island, and Ler Ohoilim on Kei Besar Island. The social situation in Kei was in disorder at that time with crime, incest and other immoral acts occurring on a daily basis. Stimulated by these circumstances, Tebtut, the son of Kasdew, attempted to unite some hilaay around his domain. He held a meeting with hilaay from nine domains. The meeting declared a law called the Law of Red Blood (Hukum Larvul). This name derives from lar (blood) and vul (red) which was the blood of a buffalo slaughtered during the meeting. The blood was a sign of the oath spoken by the nine hilaay that they had come to an agreement to uphold the Hukum Larvul. These nine hilaay were the origin members of the nine groups (lor siwa) (Adhuri translation).

A similar scenario was arranged in Kei Besar. Jangra held a meeting attended by the five heads of the hamlet, or hilaay. This meeting declared a set of laws called the Hukum Ngabal. The name ngabal refers to the spear (nga) brought by Jangra from Bali (bal). On this occasion Jangra slaughtered a whale (lor) and distributed it to the hilaay from Fer, Nerong, Uwat, Tutrean and Raharin, who got the head, stomach, tail, fin and teeth respectively. These five hilaay were core members of the five group (lor lim).

These laws were disseminated to the whole archipelago at the same time that the two groups were recruiting new members. Every new ally was appointed as a king and given a certain token reflecting their acceptance either as five or nine group members and applying either Hukum Larvul or Ngabal. Several wars broke out between the two groups as a result of their competition before they finally came to a peaceable agreement which united the Hukum Larvul and Ngabal. Ever since, the kingdoms of both sides have erected Hukum Larvul Ngabal as a single entity of their ‘basic law’.

Returning to the issue of social boundaries, one could look at the contents of Hukum Larvul Ngabal. The law consists of seven points, namely:

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6 The buffalo mentioned in this narrative might not be the animal we call buffalo now because it is not native to the Kei Islands.

7 Some informants believe the law only has five points saying that the first two, the fifth, and the sixth are each a single verse. The King of Watlar told me that those who felt the Hukum Larvul Ngabal consisted of five verses were those who wanted to associate the law with the Pancasila (the Indonesian five pillars). However the different versions do not affect the content of the law.
Selling the Sea, Fishing for Power

Hukum Larvul Ngabal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hukum Nevnev</th>
<th>Law of Red Blood and Spear from Bali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Uud entauk na atvunad</td>
<td>Our head rests on the nape of our neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lelad ain fo mahiling</td>
<td>Our neck is respected, glorified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uil nit enwil rumud</td>
<td>The skin made of soil covers our body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lar nakmot na rumud</td>
<td>Blood is contained in our body</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hukum Hanilit

| 5. Rek fo kilmutun | Marriage should be conducted properly so it can be kept in its purity |
| 6. Morjain fo mahilin | The woman’s place is respected, glorified |

Hawear Balwirin

| 7. Hira ini fo ini, it did fo it did | Theirs is theirs, ours is ours |

Locals recognise three categories within the Hukum Larvul Ngabal. The first four points are considered to share the same theme concerning the principles of general conduct and are called Hukum Nevnev. Interestingly, using the upper part of the human body as an analogy, the first issue raised is the ‘head’, the focal point by which all parts of the human body are controlled. The most important concept deriving from this point is the unquestioned obligation to obey and glorify the ruler. In religious terms, this must be an obligation to worship god (duad). Regarding the social structure, the mel is the ‘head’ to which the ren and the iri are obliged to offer their submission. The second, third, and fourth points sustain the first and describe the specific obligation to respect life (point 2), not to gossip about others’ misbehaviour (point 3), and not to attack others (point 4).

Points five and six—called Hukum Hanilit—concern issues related to women and marriage. The crucial topic here is the question of ‘who may marry who’. The only answer to this question is rank endogamy: mel should only marry mel; ren with ren; and iri with their own kind. This is what the term ‘purity’ in point five refers to. Marriage outside this arrangement is subject to punishment. The most severe punishment—exclusion—occurs when a lower rank male marries an upper-rank female. The issue of sexual misbehaviour, which is the main concern of the sixth point, is also subject to the boundaries of social rank. Punishment for sexual harassment (impregnation, touching a woman’s body or other types of harassment) within a single rank is always negotiable. But, for example, if an iri male harassed a mel woman he is subject to severe punishment. By contrast, sexual harassment of a male noble towards a lower-ranked woman is not subject to punishment, but is covered up. This different treatment shows that Hukum Nevnev is most concerned with maintaining boundaries rather than defining universally applied proper behaviour.

The last point—called Hawear Balwirin—regulates ownership, a very special issue. Interestingly, the focus of this point is not only material goods such as land, houses and clothes, but also social boundaries. Ohoitimur (1983: 64) notes the complete version of this point as:
The point to make about the *Hukum Larvul Ngabal* is that after declaring their superior position as rulers, the *mel* drew a boundary distinguishing themselves as the ‘head’ from the *ren* (and the *iri*) who were obliged to pay homage (*Hukum Nevnev*). This boundary was made clear by the prohibition of inter-marriage (*Hukum Hanilit*). Losing the chance to be linked by a marriage alliance meant losing one of the ways in which contestations of precedence could occur.\(^8\)

Finally, even in *Hawear Balwirin* social boundaries are stressed. The *mel* is *mel*, *ren* is *ren* and *iri* is *iri*. If their position was not assured as superior, I don’t believe the *mel* would have made the boundaries so firm.

I would now like to turn specifically to the relationship between the *mel* and the *iri*. Unlike the *mel* and the *ren*, there is no question that the *mel–iri* relationship was hierarchical. There were no circumstance that could reverse their relationship—the *mel* was always superior to the *iri*. To be exact, their traditional relationship was that of master and slave. The noble was the lord or master, while the *iri* was the slave.

In analysing the original structure of the relationship between these two parties, Reid (1983) distinguishes between ‘closed’ and ‘open’ systems of slavery. He notes that ‘a closed system of slavery may be defined as one oriented primarily towards retaining the labour of slaves by reinforcing their distinctiveness from the dominant population’ (ibid.: 156). By contrast, ‘open’ slavery is defined as ‘acquiring labour through the capture or purchase of slaves, and gradually assimilating them into the dominant group’ (ibid.: 158). Using this division, slavery in the Kei Islands clearly took the form of a closed system. Once a person became a slave, there was no chance for him or her—or even their descendants—to return to his or her former status. Geurtjens observed other distinctive features of the slave. In his article ‘De Slavernij of the Kei-eilanden’, published in *De Java-Post*, 19 May 1911, Geurtjens noted that the slaves took care of almost all of their master’s work and that their dress was regulated. The slave was not allowed to wear colourful clothing and had to wear a sarong above the knee. The word *sien*, meaning bad or ugly, was also added to their name. Geurtjens also mentioned that slaves were generally degraded, even in relation to god.

\(^8\) An example of how marriage strategies are used to achieve and maintain precedence can be found in Fox (1994).
One of the reasons why slaves were considered so low was because of the narrative of their path into bondage. According to local narrative, there are two main ways a person becomes enslaved: either captured during war or through judicial punishment. In ancient times, serious crime such as murder or incest was punished by death, which usually involved sinking the culprit into the sea. Before the execution, however, the guilty person would be ‘auctioned’. If someone bought him or her by paying certain customary wealth—such as an antique canon, gong or gold—the punishment would be cancelled and the wrong doer became the slave of the purchaser. The purchaser had to be wealthy because the price was high. In relation to both capture and purchase, the slave was considered to be polluted or in terms of rights, dead. This is why intermarriage was prohibited, enabling the noble to maintain their ‘pure’ blood. Since the slaves had no rights and only obligations to their master, it was logical for all aspects of slave life to be controlled by the master.

The economic and social benefits slaves provided their masters—such as free labour and social standing—ensured masters provided some support for their slaves, albeit of a low standard (see Reid 1983 for some examples). In this regard, Geurtjens (1911) observed that the nobles provided their slaves with basic needs and saw to ceremonies such as marriage and death. It was also the noble’s responsibility to punish slaves for any wrongdoing.

Before looking at the contemporary slave and master relationship, I will discuss how these relationships were handled in the past starting with the story of Beruntung, a little Papuan boy who was captured in the Papuan War. When the Papuans were defeated in the war, he was the only person left after the battle of Ohoimas Island (Map 3-1). All the others were either killed or ran away. Masen father (yaman), the war commander of Dullah Laut from Rahawarin fam, brought the boy back to Dullah Laut as a token of their triumph. From that time on, the boy was named Beruntung and considered to be the possession of Masen’s father. Some time later, when one of the Rahawarin mel members intended to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, they sold Beruntung to the Rahaded mel for cash. This then transferred Beruntung from Rahawarin into Rahaded hands.

Another example was provided by a mel member of Yamko fam. I was told that his fam had obtained an iri member as a marriage gift (lof fen-fen) from their wife-giver (mang ohoi). What he meant by lof fen-fen was the gift of an iri given to mel members when members of Yamko mel married women from another fam.

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9 Some killings, particularly those concerning a woman’s dignity or territorial defence, were considered to be justified and those who killed for these reasons were not punished.
In this context, the *iri* was considered to be part of the ‘accompanying goods’ (*barang bawaan*) of the bride. Theoretically, the *iri* was supposed to help the bride to fulfil her duties as the wife of a man from another *fam*.

Some elderly people described to me how the *iri* were also under the control of the *mel* economically. I was told that the *iri* were a source of free labour. They had no choice when their master demanded labour, either for household duties—such as cleaning and collecting firewood and water—or for agricultural work such as opening or clearing gardens. As a result, it was very common for the *mel* who owned many *iri* to have many large gardens.

Politically, the *mel* controlled the *iri* as well. The *iri* had no right to be involved in any political decision-making processes, and political discourse and practice in the village was under the control of the *mel*. In Dullah Laut, for example, all political decisions were made at meetings of all origin *fam* representatives, village functionaries such as the traditional settlement head, religious leaders and the head of the village. People holding these various positions were exclusively the *mel*.

The present relationship between the *mel* and *iri* is quite different. Despite the fact that they are still called *iri* and looked down on, slavery is now a thing of the past. Referring to Reid’s classification (1983), the relationship between the two might now be seen as a transitional system. On one hand, it is not a closed system any more because the *iri* enjoy some degree of freedom. But on the other hand, it would be difficult to say that their relationship has become a totally open system because to some degree, they are still considered a distinct social group, the boundary of which is kept through strict prohibition of inter-class marriage. The contemporary relationship between the *mel* and *iri* in the villages of Dullah Laut in the Kei Kecil Islands and villages on Kei Besar Island illustrate this situation clearly.

Unlike the picture of social stratification for Kei Islanders as a whole, other social orders have evolved in local areas including the creation of villages that are populated by one social rank only. Barraud (1990b: 196) for example, observed that the population of Tanimbar Village on Kei Tanimbar Island were all *mel*. In contrast, on Kei Besar Island, the population of Sather Village is composed of *ren* and the populations of Ngan, Rerean, Watkidat, Ohoilean and Uat hamlets are entirely *iri*.

The reasons for this diversity in social organisation lie in the formation ‘history’ of these villages and hamlets. The King of Tabab Yamlim on Kei Besar Island once explained to me the history of Ngan, Rerean, Watkidat, Ohoilean and Uat hamlets. He said that when his grandfather was king in the mid-nineteenth century and during his own time in 1935, some *iri* families were moved out of
villages under their control. During these times, the issues behind the forced resettlements included population pressures and preventing intermarriage between people from different social ranks to maintain purity of the upper class. In his grandfather’s time, there was also movement of *iri* families as punishment for sexual harassment of a *mel* woman. These people were ordered to establish new hamlets at Ngan, Rerean, Watkidat, Ohoilean and Uat. Since marriage between social ranks is prohibited, these hamlets remain exclusively populated by *iri*. Some informants in Dullah Laut told me that the situation in their village was implied in the narrative of origin. When the immigrants came to the island, Landlord Henan—who was most probably a commoner—drove the immigrants inland and they became the ‘disappearing people’ (*orang ilang-ilang*). Or alternatively, as the narrative describes, they vanished because of a lack of members leaving only the *mel* and the *iri* on the island.

During my fieldwork in Dullah Laut, I observed that the current relationship between the *mel* and the *iri* was not the same as the historical accounts provided by Geurtjens or my own informants. Economically, the *iri* are now independent. I did not see any *iri* who worked in the house of their master. If the nobles needed labour for their garden, they might ask their *iri* to work for them, but they would pay them for it. Thus, the size of a mixed crop garden owned by a family no longer reflects the number of *iri* they have. Now, it depends on the size of the family, their willingness to work, and their capacity to pay people. This situation has made it possible for some *iri* to become wealthier than the *mel*. In fact, some *iri* families could afford to send two of their members on the pilgrimage to Mecca. I even found one *iri* family who’d supported their master’s pilgrimage to Mecca. I was told that this *iri* family had contributed four million *rupiah* (approximately US$1739) which amounted to more than half of the total cost of around seven million *rupiah* for the pilgrimage costs.

Politically, the *iri* have achieved what they consider to be a better situation. Although all important positions are still exclusively in the hands of the *mel*, the *iri* have been able to participate in the most important political event in the village—the election of the modern village head. This has become possible because the election is now based on Indonesian government rules under which social rank is not taken into account. These rules state that every villager who is at least 17 years old (or younger if married) can participate in the election of the village head and parliament members.

It was also apparent that the *iri* had gained courage to strive for more freedom, or at least refuse unfair treatment by the *mel* through political participation. For example, many *iri* families, primarily from the Muslim settlement, actively worked towards abandoning the ‘traditional’ relationship they had with their masters. To this end, in Nuhuyanan some *iri* voted for the village head candidate from Rahaded instead of the candidate from Nuhuyanan *fam* because
of his promise that if he won the election, he would eliminate the boundaries between social ranks. At the Christian settlement, a serious conflict between mel and the iri took place in 1987 triggered by the elopement of a mel woman with an iri man. The mel woman’s family did not accept the relationship. They took the woman back, beat the man, and brought the case before the village head. The man was fined by the customary court but neither party was satisfied that the issue was adequately resolved. The man’s party, supported by other iri families, considered the decision unfair because in previous cases where a mel men had eloped with iri women, the men were not beaten or fined as heavily. The mel believed that this case had been pursued with the specific purpose of challenging their domination at the Christian settlement. Although the case was formally closed, each party still retained ill feelings towards the other. These tensions hampered communal working relations and surfaced with the building of a new church. When the mel woman’s family was working, a relative of the iri man came to collect some tools so that his team could start making bricks, but the woman’s family did not allow him to take them. The man’s relative explained what had happened to his team, who by chance were mostly iri, and they interpreted these actions as a rejection of their involvement in constructing the church. Again, conflict was ignited. A church commission from the central missionary came in to settle the situation with a novel diversion—a challenge to all families to construct a fence around, or at least in front of their houses. Interestingly, the mel constructed brick fences while the iri erected wooden fences.

Village Leadership

Everyone in Dullah Laut seems to agree that the Henan fam formed the first settlement on the island. As the first inhabitants they were entitled to hold the position of landlord. This title indicated that they were the owners of all the land and adjacent waters (in this case, the island of Dullah Laut and its waters). As holders of the position of landlord, they had to be consulted whenever members of the community intended to make a new garden. The landlord was also considered to have a ‘spiritual’ attachment with the land and to be its guardian. Therefore, he was needed not only because of his position as the owner of the land but also because he was the only one who could communicate with the invisible owner from whom spiritual permission should be requested.

Unfortunately, this fam has disappeared. There are two versions of the story accounting for this fam’s disappearance. The first concerns their physical appearance. The people of Henan were believed to be short with elephant-like

10 Riedel (1886: 218) noted that the first inhabitant of Dullah Laut Island was born from an areca nut flower. However, he did not mention that it was the Henan fam.
11 A similar narrative stating that the real landlord disappeared was told in Ohoitel (Laksono 1990: 101).
ears and as more people came to settle on the island, the Henan were driven inland to the forest finally isolating themselves by becoming ‘invisible people’ (*orang ilang-ilang*).\(^{12}\) The second version asserts that those who were driven out were only the lowest rank Henan, while the *mel* Henan vanished simply because they lacked members.

This narrative is very important for other *fam* in Dullah Laut. This is because when the real landlord disappeared, Dullah Laut became an ‘unclaimed’ island meaning that the door was opened for other original *fam* to stake a claim. The narrative has also provided a new direction to the discourse of precedence based on the assumption that since the original Henan no longer exist, the landlord position should be left out of the discussion of who has rightful claim of ownership of Dullah Laut. The discussion of ownership of Dullah Laut has now turned into a discourse on political leadership based on a common belief that most of the landlords in Kei had transferred their rights to the leaders of the villages.\(^{13}\)

The claim to being the first immigrant on Dullah Laut was proposed by two pairs of *fam*: Henan(2)-Rahaded and Yamko-Lumevar.\(^{14}\) Their claims were based on the narratives of their ancestors. The Henan(2)-Rahaded *fam* narrative starts from the village of Har on the east coast of the northern part of Kei Besar Island (Map 1-2). It was said that a wild dragon that ran amock had driven the inhabitants out of the village. To avoid the danger, two of the villagers, Bad and Sam, departed their homeland and sailed to the north. After passing Tanjung Burang, the northern-most cape of the island, they turned to the southwest. Finally, they anchored on the white sand of Dullah Laut beach. According to the second version of the first narrative fragment, Bad and Sam were accepted by Henan. Bad lived there and developed his own *fam* called Rahaded.\(^{15}\) Sam, due to a lack of male members in Henan, was adopted as a member of that *fam*. When the real Henan died out, Sam continued holding their *fam* name.

For the Henan(2) and Rahaded *fam*, this piece of the narrative is clearly considered to be proof of their precedence. As the narrative suggests, their ancestors’ arrival on Dullah Laut was accepted by the first Henan—the real Landlord of Dullah Laut. Furthermore, the adoption of Sam by the first Henan not only strengthened this association but also demonstrated a special

\(^{12}\) These invisible people are not spirits or ghosts, according to local legend. They are real human beings but for some reason they isolate themselves in an invisible world. However, they are believed to be immortal and powerful.

\(^{13}\) Van Hoëvell (1890: 132) noted this transfer had occurred just a few years before he travelled to these islands in October and November 1887.

\(^{14}\) The Henan in this narrative is the second Henan, the first Henan having vanished (see the beginning of this section). I will refer to the second Henan as Henan(2).

\(^{15}\) Members of Rahaded *fam* interpret the term ‘Rahaded’, which derives from the words *rahan* and *ded*, as the ‘pioneer house’. Others understand it as ‘the house that is opposite on the street’.
relationship between the two parties. An old Henan(2) member told me that an adoption would not be conducted except for those who had a kin relationship or were considered to be very special.

The Henan(2) position is also supported by another fragment that recounts the story of Raharusun fam. The ancestors of this fam were believed to come from Luang. They migrated to Langgiar Fer on the southern part of Kei Besar Island, and then moved to Tetoat on Kei Kecil Island (Map 1-2). A diarrhoeal epidemic then forced them to leave Tetoat.¹⁶ Sailing to the north, the Raharusun ancestors anchored in shallow waters in Dullah Laut territory. To avoid the epidemic, they lived on their wooden prau for three months.¹⁷ Finally, they were found by the Henan(2) fam members, called Sertut Renan and Sertut Yaman, who invited them to join them on Dullah Laut. Assuring them of their good intentions, Henan(2) presented the island of Moa as a gift to Raharusun. Their conversation was recorded in a traditional song that goes as follows:

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16 Van Hoevell (1890: 153) found that epidemics frequently forced people to move out of their village and establish a new village elsewhere.

17 In remembrance of this event, the coastal waters were called Ibun vuantil (ibun meaning sea beds/grass, vuantil meaning three months).
This traditional song is considered to be the strongest ‘proof’ of the narrative. What does this song prove? Henan was an influential person, as shown by his invitation to Raharusun. Only those who hold privilege may invite others to live with them, a notion which is bolstered by the story that Raharusun was offered Moa Island. Henan’s answers to the questions regarding the customary names of his territory are additional proof of his privilege because only prominent persons can master the customary names of their territory. Finally, the song also implies centrality as it associates Henan with Woma Varne Harmas, the centre of the village. In this context, the Henan then claimed that their ancestor was the chief of the village.

The oral history of Yamko\textsuperscript{18} proposes another claim on Dullah Laut. Conflict between the *mel* and the *iri* had forced Varne and his wife—the ancestors of this *fam*—to move away from Uf on Kei Kecil Island. They found that Awear on the northern part of the island was a convenient place to live, so they settled there. They had two children—the first was born with gold teeth and became a goldsmith. The place was given a name after his profession, Vaan Fomas (*vaan* meaning cave and *fomas* meaning goldsmith).

The story goes on to introduce the ancestors of another *fam* and its relation to Yamko’s. Driven from the island of Banda, Kabir—the ancestor of the Nuhuyanan *fam*—landed at Wada Iyuwahan\textsuperscript{19} on the northern part of Dullah Laut, near Awear (Map 5-2 12). Because the land was not habitable, he continued his journey to the island of Wara Fangohoi, which later became known as the island of Rumadan (*Rumah Orang Banda* meaning the house of the Bandanese). Varne found Kabir and invited them to join them at Awear. Kabir agreed and Varne arranged for him to marry his daughter, Lumas.

Starting from this point a settlement took shape. Led by Varne, his and Kabir’s descendants established a hamlet. First, it was located around Vaan Fomas. Later they moved inland to a place called Tenantua Ohoi. As the population grew, Tenantua Ohoi became too small. Finally, they moved some kilometres to the south and erected another hamlet. Yamko’s ancestor was recorded in this place and his name, Varne, was used as the name of the settlement centre.

This fragment is used to legitimize the privilege of the Yamko *fam* over Dullah Laut Island as well as Yamko’s superior position over that of Nuhuyanan. The name of the village centre, Woma Varne, is strong proof of their privilege. They argued that the settlement centre was intentionally given the name of their

\textsuperscript{18} There was an ancestor of another *fam* who came to Dullah Laut together with the ancestor of Yamko’s. This was the ancestor of Lumevar *fam*. They were considered to be a brother *fam* (*fam adik-kakak*). This is why in ritual idiom Yamko is always associated with Lumevar. However, this *fam* vanished and no one could remember any part of the story narrating their history.

\textsuperscript{19} A shell-like stone at Wada Iyuwahan is considered proof of this story. People believe that this stone was Kabir’s vehicle which transported him from Banda to Dullah Laut Island.
ancestor because of his position as a great man and head of the hamlet (hilaay). The creation of Vaan Fomas and Tingivan are further proof of their precedence. Tingivan is a face-like relief on a stone at the beach with the same name. The relief is believed to be the face of one of Varne’s servants.

There is another fragment that mediates these two claims. This fragment acknowledges Henan-Rahaded and Yamko-Lumevar as the first two immigrants to come to Dullah Laut since both settled and controlled different parts of the island. Henan-Rahaded and their allies Raharusun-Rahawarin, who were called Ohoiroa, occupied the southern part of the island with Woma Hermas as its centre. Yamko-Lumevar and Nuhuyanan-Songyanan, the Fauur people, controlled the northern part of Dullah Laut, with Woma Varne as its centre. Before they met, each developed their own people and maintained their own territory. Once they realised the existence of the other, boundaries were erected between the two groups. According to some local elders, this boundary was a stone fence stretching from the northern edge of the present Christian settlement in a westerly direction to Foarne Ohoi, to a spot near the island of Moa.

Marriage contracts between Ohoiroa and Fauur members and the frequent occurrence of war in the region encouraged these two groups to merge. For this reason they abandoned their previous settlements and constructed a new one at the present Christian settlement. This was the crucial point in Dullah Laut history because, starting from this point, rights and obligations were shared among the eight fam. This meant that all decisions concerning Dullah Laut as a community had to be decided by meetings comprised of representatives of all origin fam, that is the Ohoiroa Fauur. In return, all members of Ohoiroa Fauur were responsible for defending their territory from outside intervention. This is seen in the membership of ‘the thirty troops’ of Ohoiroa Fauur, the group of 30 traditional soldiers representing the original fam of Dullah Laut who are responsible for defending the territory.

This narrative has shifted the discussion of leadership, which was formerly based on the issue of the first settler—a ‘founder focused ideology’, borrowing Bellwood’s term (1996)—to a ‘personal achievement’ ideology. By ‘personal achievement’ I mean the role of members of a particular fam in events that were crucial for the Dullah Laut community. This alternative discourse has raised the position of non-first-settler fam from a subordinate to a more equal position. Some cases even demonstrate the precedence of non-first-settler fam. I will relate a narrative that demonstrates this point.

Bal Ulab Nuhuyanan was a guardian of the law which says: ‘[those who] paddle should paddle with the sharp side of the paddle, [those who] use a stick [to move their prau] should use the stick upside down, [those who] bail out [the prau] should use the back side of the container’ (an vehe an hov vehe ngoan, an
leak an hov leak tutu, an it vaha an hov yer tetan). He was very strict in imposing this law. No culprit escaped his sword and his agility with the weapon was the reason he was called ‘the lightning from the north’ (anvitik sarab ribat naa baad maar). Arnuhu, the King of Danar, considered him a dangerous enemy but at the same time needed him as an ally. The king sent a moon-shaped medal (mas a yam vot) to Bal Ulab Nuhuyanan, nominating him to be a king of his region. Because Duroa [Dullah Laut] was a very small island, Bal Ulab Nuhuyanan rejected this nomination. Eventually, King Danar appointed Baldu Wahadat, the leader of Dullah Darat village on Dullah Island, as the new king.20

This narrative clearly shows how the achievements of Bal Ulab lifted the social standing of Nuhuyanan within Dullah Laut and led to him being considered a local leader.

**Territory**

While these narratives discuss particular issues of territory they do not apply to the whole of the Dullah Laut territories (petuanan). The narratives deal only with Dullah Laut Island, which is one of nine islands that comprise the village territory. The following narratives provide reasons for the incorporation of other islands into Dullah Laut territory.

The narrative begins with the story of Utan Fak Roa (utan meaning a group of settlements or village, fak meaning four, roa meaning sea). As the name implies, they were four hamlets located on Dullah Laut, Ohoimas, Rumadan (Warohoi Island) and Ngang Hangar Laay (Map 1-2).21 Those who lived on Ohoimas Island were known as the Ohoimas people.22 Their territory covered not only the island where their hamlet was located but also the islands of Baer, Sua, Watlora, and their adjacent waters. On the island of Rumadan lived the people of Wara, Fangohoi, and later immigrants from Banda Island. Their territory covered both the islands of Rumadan Warwahan and Warohoi and their adjoining waters.23

A conflict called the ‘Waterspout War’ (Vuun Asnen) broke out on Warohoi Island. The disputing parties were the Wara and Fangohoi against the Rumadan people who originally came from Banda. They fought over a waterspout that was used as a rainwater collector. The people of Rumadan, supported by Bal

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20 The former King of Ibra, Moh, Fagi Renwarin (Renwarin: n.d.) and Ohoitimur (1983: 55) wrote similar narratives. The present King of Dullah rejects these versions.

21 People believe that Ngang Hangar Laay has been submerged and is now under the sea.

22 Riedel (1986: 215) noted that Suwa, Ohoimas, Baer, and Watlora islands were attached to Letman Village.

23 Riedel (1886: 215) found these islands were a part of Tamadan village territory.
Ulab Nuhuyanan\textsuperscript{24} drove the Wara and Fangohoi off the island.\textsuperscript{25} The Rumadan people lived on the island until they all moved to the village of Tamadan on Dullah Island.

Because of Bal Ulab Nuhuyanan’s involvement in the Waterspout War, the people of Dullah Laut claimed possession of these islands. However, the people of Rumadan contested this claim. In 1967, Tamadan, the traditional village leader, requested the people of Dullah Laut stop making use of the Rumadan Islands. The people of Dullah Laut were very upset and put signs of possession around the islands. They then reported their action and their reasons to the King of Dullah. Two days later, the two parties were called before a customary court. The court failed to determine who owned the islands, but it was decided that both parties would share equal rights to the Rumadan Islands to avoid escalating the conflict.

Claims over Ohoimas and Baer islands are based on another narrative. Once, some Papuans (Nisyaf) came to Ohoimas for the purpose of collecting human heads and raided Ohoimas Island. While some were killed, a woman called Ngirut escaped. She swam to Rumadan Island and had a rest on a beach that was later named after her, Ded Ohoimas. She continued her escape by swimming across the strait between Dullah Laut and Rumadan. She reached Dullah Laut at a place called Wear Ohoimas. After walking to the village of Dullah Laut, she reported what had happened on Ohoimas. Ohoiroa Fauur, headed by Yahaw Rahaded, the traditional village leader, declared war on the Papuans who were still on Ohoimas Island. The war between the two parties—called the Papuan War—broke out on the island of Ohoimas. Ohoiroa Fauur defeated the Nisyaf. The Papuan commander was killed in a duel with the commander of Ohoiroa Fauur.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1920, the people of Letman contested this claim. They went to Ohoimas and put some signs of possession around the island. Paddling back to Letman, they passed Dullah Laut Village and sang the following song: “aklul sang sang vat larito vat yaf o be” (“[we are] sharp like metal, hard like stone and hot like fire, ready to face all the challenges or the enemy who comes”). This was considered to be a war challenge by the Dullah Laut people who chased the people of Letman and reported the event to the King of Dullah. This case was brought to a customary court led by the king, but it failed to reach a satisfactory decision. The people of Dullah Laut and Letman appealed and took the case to the Dutch

\textsuperscript{24} An old Rumadan informant who lives at Tamadan Village on Dullah Island told me that Bal Ulab was not involved in this event.

\textsuperscript{25} The descendants of these people can be found at Faan and Sathean village on Kei Kecil Island.

\textsuperscript{26} Mr A. Rahaded claimed that it was Yahaw Rahaded who fought with the Papuan commander. Mr M. Rahawarin believed that it was their ancestor by the name of Masen Yaman who was the Ohoiroa Fauur commander that killed the Nisyaf commander in a duel.
government in Ambon and a copy of the decision was given to the King of Dullah. The people of Dullah Laut have interpreted the court’s decision as being favourable to them and conclude that Ohoimas Island should be ruled as part of their territory. Interestingly, the people of Letman support this conclusion. Although the official ruling on the case was never produced, Raja Dullah claimed that the decision clearly indicated that the islands were under his control.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the most important aspect of Kei tradition. The *toom* is both a narrative of origin and history according to the people of the Kei Islands. *Toom* is the only point of reference when people talk about tradition, therefore understanding the *toom* is the only way to understand tradition.

The *toom* that explains the construction of society form the foundations of Kei tradition. According to the *toom*, the Kei people are divided into three main social ranks: the *mel*; the *ren* or free people; and the *iri*. Based on this *toom*, relations between social ranks are defined based on political and territorial domains. Other *toom* describe the formation of a specific domain such as a kingdom, village, or settlement. Again, these *toom* provide the basis for explaining how a particular group of people came to be connected with a particular territorial and/or social domain.

At the practical level however, the explanation of relations between the *mel*, *ren*, and the *iri*, as well as relations between social groups within a social rank is not as simple as it is described by a *toom*. This is because the same *toom* is open to different and often contradictory interpretations. Frequently there is more than one *toom* that explains the relationships between social groups in a single domain. This means that different social groups may propose different forms of relations and put forward different claims by drawing on the same or different *toom*.

The multiple interpretations of *toom*, as well as the existence of multiple *toom* describing a particular issue, could be interpreted as reflecting the flexibility and richness of tradition. However, as with newly introduced structures such as religion and politics (see Chapter Two), when people consider their interests to be more important than those of others, the *toom* serves merely as a vehicle to promote those interests. Using a motor sport analogy, the *toom* could be seen as a display of racing cars. People choose the most efficient and effective car and

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27 I intentionally added this information to show that even for an event recorded historically, the written proof is not considered as important as the oral history.
if they cannot find one, they make a better car. In this circumstance, winning the race is more important than the car itself. In this sense, the toom became an object of history rather than representing history itself. It is the people—driven by their interests—that create the toom, rather than toom determining how people should behave.

This logic is very apparent if we look at how the toom was used in conflicts relating to the political and territorial control over particular domains in the Kei Islands. An analysis of the conflicts that occurred in the Kei Islands forms the basis of the following chapters.