6. The Village Politics of Marine Tenure: Raiding ‘Illegals’ in Dullah Laut

A day before I left Dullah Laut, I was involved in a raid of an ‘illegal’ fishing company that was preparing for a fishing operation in the Dullah Laut sea territory. This incident developed into a serious conflict involving not only villagers and the fishing company but also military officers. At the village level, the conflict appeared to create three opposing factions. The involvement of military officers added to the complexity of the conflict because they represented outsiders’ interest in the problem.

Although, the nature of this conflict was quite complex, encompassing many issues within the community and also relating to the outside world, I suggest that the political circumstances in the village were most influential in colouring the conflict. What I mean by political circumstances refers to the long-standing contestation between the descendants of the traditional village leader (*orang kaya*), the modern village leader (*kepala desa*), and the Christian settlement leader (*bapak soa*) over the position of village leadership. In this regard, these three political leaders used the customary marine tenure as ‘political capital’ to win the contestation. For the traditional leader, his control over village sea territory was used to gain economic and political support from the fishing company and military officers for his move to oppose the modern village leader. The modern village leader saw this as a challenge by the traditional leader to his position as formal leader of the village. So, raiding the ‘illegal fishing company’ was seen as his duty to restore his leadership in the village. For the Christian settlement leader, settling the problem that was triggered by the incident was a golden opportunity to show his own leadership abilities, something he had dreamed of doing for a long time. Thus for these leaders, controlling traditional marine tenure was a matter of being the village head. This meant that the political value of the marine tenure was much more important.

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1 A shorter version of this chapter was published in MAST (Adhuri 2004).
2 After this incident, I stayed in Tual for a week before I left the Kei Islands for Jakarta. However, my interest in understanding this incident forced me to go back to Dullah Laut Village to attend a customary meeting and record some interviews. Although I did not go back to the village, I was able to understand what has happened after the customary meeting through speaking to some of the villagers who went to Tual to sell their fish and other business.
The Incident and its Resolution

Raiding an ‘Illegal’ Fishing Company

I was in my bedroom when I heard some people talking loudly in the guestroom. When I came out and asked them what was happening, they told me that they were discussing their plan to raid an ‘illegal’ fishing company on Rumadan Island. They talked about seeing three speedboats that had passed the village several times over the last few days laden with goods. At first, the speedboats were loaded with construction materials such as planks, timber and roofing material made of sago leaves. People wondered what they were going to do with those things in their territory. Later on, they saw the boats transporting fishing equipment, such as air compressors, hoses, nets, floating devices (empty plastic drums), as well as oil and fuel drums. Because such equipment is predominantly used by grouper fishermen, the villagers were suspicious of the outsiders’ plans. Also considerable concern was mounting because these practices are often associated with the use of cyanide which is used to stun fish, making them easier to catch. It was when people saw a satellite dish, a television and an electric generator on board one of the speedboats that they were prompted to plan a raid on the fishing company. From this evidence, they believed an illegal grouper fishing company was ready to exploit and pollute their sea territory.

Having reached this conclusion, preparations were made to raid the company that very day. It was around two-thirty in the afternoon when they were ready to leave. A descendant of a well known war commander stepped on board followed by about twenty others. I noticed that leaders of three different fam joined this team. Some were villagers who worked outside Kei but mostly they were well-educated civil servants who were taking a holiday for an Islamic festival after Ramadan.

On the way to Rumadan Island we collected some people from the Christian settlement. The most important person was the leader of the settlement who was also the acting village head since the real village head was away. Other than the settlement leader, there were not many people from the Christian settlement who joined in. We left Ohoisaran with only the settlement leader and some youths and children.

Within fifteen minutes we saw the company’s base camp. We observed two speedboats and a canoe equipped with an outboard engine anchored in the coastal waters of Rumadan Island. Some metres out to sea, we noticed two fish cages floating. On shore, we saw a house-like construction, half of which was completed while the other half was still under construction. In front of the house we observed air hose and rope (estimated to be more than 100 metres
long) and some fresh vegetables. We also saw two air compressors, satellite dish, electric generator, another speedboat and an assortment of metal and plastic drums.

We were received upon arrival by a surprised Taiwanese man, his wife (a Javanese woman) and some workers (who were all Dullah Laut villagers). The ‘raiding party’ confronted the Taiwanese man and his wife because they believed that they must be the owners of the company. First, a man from the Muslim settlement asked if the company had a licence. They answered that they were arranging it with the descendant of the traditional village leader (Mr A. Rahaded) who they believed to be the owner of the territory. The man from the Muslim settlement then explained that the Dullah Laut territory was not owned by a single person, but by seven origin fam and that other fam living in Dullah Laut shared the use right of the territory. Thus, it was a mistake to arrange the licence with only one person. Another person—a university graduate— noted that although every Indonesian has the right to fish or establish a business anywhere in Indonesia, the law obliges them to observe certain procedures. For example, they should arrange a license with government offices starting from the highest down to the lowest levels. In this sense, the village government was the lowest authority with which the company should have arranged the licence. To this explanation, the war commander descendant added that even if the traditional village leader agreed, this agreement could not be valid unless it was approved by the seven origin fam—the owners of the territory.

The leader of the Henan fam who worked at the Southeastern Maluku Court office in Tual, continued the interrogation. First, he asked for the names of the Taiwanese man and the fishing company. The man’s wife answered these questions. She said that his name was Mr C and after some thought she said that the company’s name was CV TT. She explained that Mr C had nothing to do with this activity. ‘He is only visiting me, his wife’, she said. She also explained that she was the owner of the company and not her husband. Questions were then directed to the Javanese woman as the director of the company. Mr Henan took note of the information given by her. Finally, he said, ‘Okay, we will process this in accordance with the law’.

The raiding party then demanded that the company stop their activities, take their belongings back to the capital city of Southeastern Maluku Regency, and wait until the ‘real’ (modern) village head was back to discuss the matter. The company was given one day to get off the island and they were warned that if they did not do this by the next afternoon, no one would take responsibility if people from the village took matters into their own hands.

After having been bombarded by questions and explanations, Mr C seemed to be confused. This was not only because his Indonesian language comprehension
was not good but also, I believe, he thought that he had followed the correct procedures as suggested to him by the descendant of the traditional village leader, Mr A. Rahaded. In this regard, his wife explained that she had been arranging the licence. In fact, she had even sent a draft of the agreement to the Christian settlement leader. ‘Additionally’, she said, ‘my company has not started doing any business. We are only making preparations. Thus, we have not made any mistake’.

It seemed to those present that Mr and Mrs C’s arguments were a stalling tactic to buy them some time. They sent one of their workers to Dullah Laut Village to report the incident to Mr A. Rahaded. They wanted to avoid negotiations before Mr A. Rahaded arrived, but it was impossible not to respond to Mr and Mrs C while waiting for Mr A. Rahaded.

The negotiations started when their worker returned with one of Mr A. Rahaded’s sons, who told Mr C and his wife to agree with what the people demanded. When Mr C and his wife refused, Mr A. Rahaded’s son ushered them into the house to discuss the issues. After some time, they called the settlement leader to the house but as he came with other villagers, Mr C and his wife refused to negotiate. When they came out of the house, Mr C agreed to stop his activities and go back to the capital city of the regency. He asked the people to give him a day to pack and leave, to which they agreed. In return, the people asked the company to surrender one of their speedboats which would be returned when the company had done what they had agreed. A written agreement was prepared, read and signed by the settlement leader and Mr C’s wife. That brought the raiding incident to a close.

The Customary Meeting

The signed agreement tendered by the company appears only to have been a strategy to calm the people who raided them in Rumadan because the night of the incident, Mr C, his wife and Mr A. Rahaded, accompanied by a soldier from the local army post, forced the settlement leader to hold a customary meeting to discuss the possibility of granting the licence so that the company could continue its activities. The settlement leader had no power to refuse so he called together some elders in his settlement and brought them all to the village head’s house in the Muslim settlement.

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3 When people talked about a licence, it usually refers to an agreement between the modern village leader and other leaders, and the company’s representative. The agreement states that the village grants the company the right to operate in their territory. In return the company gives an amount of money to the village.

4 Later when I spoke with one of his workers I was told that she was right —the letter of agreement had been prepared. It was signed by Mr A. Rahaded, the local army post’s commander, and a blank space was left for the modern village leader’s signature.
They arrived at the village head’s house about nine-thirty in the evening. The village head’s father and some other elders in the Muslim settlement received them. After the settlement leader mentioned their intention, the village head’s father and his supporters refused the proposal on the grounds that the modern village leader was away. They also referred to the agreement signed by the company and Christian settlement leader earlier that day which ordered them to stop operations and return to the capital city. Although the company, backed up by military personnel and the settlement leader, kept insisting on holding the meeting, they were unsuccessful. The head of the village’s father and his supporters sent the company on their way.

The situation had grown more intense the following day. The company and Mr A. Rahaded used the local army post commander to pressure the other parties. Early that morning, the Christian settlement leader was picked up from his house. He was taken to the office of the military post commander in Tual. According to the settlement leader, the military commander ordered him to pursue the case by holding a customary meeting to discuss the company’s proposal that afternoon. The customary meeting had to reach a decision on whether or not the company would be allowed to operate in their territory. If the meeting decided to refuse the company’s proposal, the military commander ordered that the settlement leader and other village leaders at the meeting prepare a letter stating that their village would not accept a similar proposal from any other company. In other words, if the company’s proposal was refused, the village should declare that their territory was closed to outside fishing companies.

The modern village leader’s supporters also reported the case to the local authorities. Early in the morning, they went to the local police station where, having already heard about the case, the station commander promised to call all parties involved to meet with him the following day. After that, they went to the army post to meet the military commander who of course already knew about the case because the company and Mr A. Rahaded had come to see him the day before. In fact, he had sent a letter ‘inviting’ the settlement leader to come to see him. He regretted that people had gone to the police post because it looked as though he was in opposition to the commander of the police post. He asked the people to meet him the following day together with the other parties involved.

I was surprised that afternoon when a villager came to my place in Tual. He told me that the situation in Dullah Laut was very tense. The settlement leader was arranging a customary meeting to decide the fate of the company. I was told that the settlement leader, Mr A. Rahaded, Mr C and his wife, and a soldier had been waiting in the village since midday. The villager had just informed some fam representatives who were still in Tual after reporting the case to authorities and was on his way back to Dullah Laut. I was offered a lift and asked if I wanted to
observe the meeting. Of course, I was very keen given the emotionally charged state of the villagers and because this meeting was very much relevant to my research.

The settlement leader’s guestroom was full of people when we arrived around five in the evening. About 15 people were already inside. They were the settlement leader, a soldier from the local military post, Mr C and his wife, Mr A. Rahaded, and representatives of origin \textit{fam} and the Christian and Muslim settlements. This was a very special customary meeting, not only for me but also for all the villagers because this was the only meeting where the origin \textit{fam} from the Muslim settlement was represented by two groups of \textit{fam} leaders, indicating the political factions in the Muslim settlement.

The meeting was opened by the settlement leader who made three points in his opening remarks. First, he noted that he had reported the meeting to the military commander earlier that day and explained the commander’s wishes for the meeting’s outcome. Then, the settlement leader criticised the absence of the village head. He said that the modern village leader should have been back by that time since he had asked permission to leave the village for only two weeks. In addition, the reason for his leaving was not official but personal, which meant that his trip was not for the benefit of the villagers but for himself. Third, for these two reasons he said it was his role to lead the meeting and decide whether the company would be granted permission.

A soldier representing the military commander gave the second speech. He explained he was there to ensure that the problem was handled peacefully. He asked the people to solve the problem at once so that further conflict could be prevented. Like the settlement leader, he also emphasised what his commander expected from the meeting. At the end of his speech he criticised those involved in the incident the day before. He said that the company had not begun its operations and there was not enough evidence to accuse them of using cyanide. Therefore, it was wrong to confiscate their speedboat. He also regretted that people had sworn at Mr C’s wife and asked the people to return the speedboat.

When the settlement leader asked the people to express their opinion, they started the discussion by answering the soldier’s remarks. Mr T. Nuhuyanan, the owner of the boat used to raid the company, explained that the speedboat was not confiscated. It was surrendered voluntarily as a guarantee that the company would leave Rumadan Island as stated in the agreement signed by the company representative and settlement leader. The speedboat would be returned when the company left the island. A man from the Muslim settlement took up this point. He provided the legal definition of the word ‘confiscation’ and said that the incident did not fall under this definition. He also explained that it was the right of the people to defend their territory from outside intrusion. He also
asked why this incident was being questioned while the ‘illegal’ presence of the company was not considered to be a problem. Regarding the company’s operations, he questioned their use of an air compressor with such long hoses. He suggested that it was illogical that the company would only use fish traps and line fishing—as the company had told them—with such a compressor. These ideas were supported by other representatives who also expressed some additional concerns such as ecological destruction, the economic impact, and the fact that the company’s presence had driven people to fight with each other.

Some representatives questioned these arguments. A man from the traditional village leader’s faction raised the issue of representation. He said that the village was divided into three political factions and those who raided the company did not represent all three factions. He added that those who raided the company were youth who worked outside the village and their representation of both the origin fam and the village itself was questionable. He also raised the issue that surveillance of company activities was not their responsibility and required government officials. The fact that the company had been granted a licence was proof that its activities were legal. He argued that even if the company had abused its licence, the people had no right to punish them.

Mr A. Rahaded (the traditional village leader’s descendant), then took up the discussion. He explained that the company had not come without permission. It was he who had allowed them to operate in Dullah Laut territory and construct their base camp on Rumadan Island. He added that the settlement leader had been notified of the plan about two weeks before the raid. At that time, Mr A. Rahaded had told him that a fishing company might come and fish in village territory. ‘Now, since the incident has happened, let us stop accusing them of being “illegal”, because even if it was wrong, it was my fault not theirs’, Mr A. Rahaded said. ‘Now, let us hear the opinion of all representatives as to whether we will grant them the permission [to have a base camp and fish in village territory]. I would like to hear from each of you.’

The settlement leader took up this point and tried to continue the discussion. He started by saying that the company’s representatives were surprised and scared so they agreed to sign the statement. According to the settlement leader, what they really wanted was to be allowed to pursue their activities. ‘Thus, they now come to us to propose their intention.’ He then asked each of the representatives to express their opinion. A representative from the Christian settlement agreed and asked other representatives from his settlement to actively participate in the discussion.

The discussion however, did not go in the direction that Mr A. Rahaded and the settlement leader wanted. Another representative from the Muslim settlement, who was involved in the raid, interrupted the discussions by evaluating the
authority of the meeting. He did this by criticising Mr A. Rahaded, who had given the company permission as if he had the authority to transfer the ownership or use right of their sea territory. ‘This was not right’, he said. He also verbally attacked the settlement leader for washing his hands of the incident the day before and concluded that this was a sign that the settlement leader was inconsistent. He demanded that they postpone the discussion until the real village head was back. ‘We are now walking without the “head”, we will only be complete as a human being when the real village head is back here.’ This idea was supported by the descendant of the war commander and others who had paid more attention to raiding the company than pursuing the discussion about granting the company’s licence.

It was almost eight in the evening. The sun had set, forcing us to turn on a gas lamp in the house. The meeting progressed slowly. It was primarily an argument between those who wanted to pursue giving the company a green light to continue their business and those who wanted the company to leave and wait until the modern village leader was back.

Finally the soldier took control of the discussion. He did not see any way the meeting would reach a conclusion and considered that the meeting had caused considerable conflict rather than reaching a solution to the incident. Therefore, he stopped the customary meeting without any agreement being reached.

Political Autonomy of the Settlement and Modern Village

To understand the various undercurrents of conflict in this incident, an analysis of the different forms of political autonomy in Dullah Laut is required.

The Settlement

Villagers believe that by tradition, Dullah Laut is an autonomous village. This means that they have the right to govern themselves. There are two primary characteristics associated with self-governance. The first aspect concerns social relations—people believe that they have full authority to control all social relations in the village. This is what I call ‘social autonomy’. The second aspect concerns issues related to territory. People believe that as a social unit, they control their own territory meaning they believe that they have the right to distribute and make use of their own territory. This is what I call ‘territorial autonomy’.

In terms of social autonomy, Dullah Laut is divided into two settlements. The two hamlets—Ohoislam and Ohoisaran—physically represent this division. According to the narrative of origin, this division was created with religious
conversions. Those who converted to Islam around the 1850s moved from the original settlement and erected a new hamlet on the eastern tip of the island. Their settlement was what the Dutch sources called ‘Tewaniohoi’ (see Riedel 1886: 222), which became Ohoislam when the villagers moved to the current settlement. The original settlement populated by those who converted to Catholicism in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century was called Duroa by the Dutch sources and is now called Ohoisaran.

In terms of territorial autonomy, Dullah Laut as a ‘traditional village’ is not divided into smaller units. So even though the village is socially divided into two settlements, both settlements share an undivided territory. In Dullah Laut, people don’t refer to petuanan Ohoislam or petuanan Ohoisaran when they discuss issues of territory. They use the term petuanan Dullah Laut.

Let’s now discuss the internal structure and distribution of power in a village. According to Geurtjens (quoted in Van Wouden 1968: 36–7) there were five prominent functionaries in a village. These were: the traditional village leader (orang kaya); lord of the land (tuan tan); the attendants of the local spirit (mitu duan); Islamic religious official (leb); and precursor and carver (dir-u ham-wang).

The traditional village leader was the headman of the village who ‘used to be a particularly independent governor in his village’ (Van Wouden 1968: 36). On this particular point, Van Wouden comments:

most probably we should take this to mean that each village formed a practically independent unit, for in fact any tendency towards such independent rule was entirely alien to the office of headman. He was not permitted any arbitrary action, and for all important questions he had to call a meeting of the “elders” of the family groups (ibid.).

The lord of the land was ‘the official owner of all village lands’. In times when the lord of the land still held authority, his role was crucial in allocating their territory. He was the person villagers would go to whenever they wished to make a new garden. He was also considered to be the person who knew most about land distribution among people in the village and boundaries between neighbouring villages. Therefore, he played an important role in solving disputes over land ownership.

The attendant of the local spirit was responsible for dealing with affairs related to the ancestral spirits and local guardian spirits, and the religious leader was responsible for the Islamic rituals. Their role was to perform sacrifice rituals on behalf of the community. Finally, the precursor and carver handled matters related to the ceremonial war boat (belang), the emblem of the village. He piloted
the ceremonial boat during its departure from and arrival to the island and was also the person responsible for distributing the catch of communal hunting or fishing to the villagers.

It is quite difficult to understand the exact power structure of these village functionaries since Geurtjens did not provide details explaining the relationships between those who share power. It is clear though that the political power of the village elders was superior to that of the traditional village leader and other functionaries and held the spot at the top of the organisational structure (see Figure 6-1). The superior position of the elders allowed them to give direct commands to each type of functionary (shown by bold lines). The village functionaries are not represented at the same level as the traditional village leader (*orang kaya*) because while these functionaries might represent the totality of village political power, each of them holds only a specific power. For example, during a dispute over land or other problems related to territorial autonomy, the lord of the land (*tuan tan*) might play a leading role. In another context—such as marriage—the attendant of the local spirit (*leb*) and religious official might be centre stage because this is the context in which their respective powers are required. In this regard, we might say that there is no permanent hierarchical relationship between the village functionaries. However, since the traditional village leader was the governor of the village, it seems that in every situation his role was needed.

Figure 6-1: Structure and distribution of power in a traditional village.

Source: Author’s fieldwork.
Theoretically, the political life in Dullah Laut is in the hands of a committee comprising members of the origin *fam, Ohoiroa Fauur* (see Chapter Four). In the political realm of the village, this committee is considered to be the holder of ultimate power. This means that they control all issues relating to Dullah Laut as a village, both in social and territorial terms. This control works in both inward and outward directions, meaning that the *Ohoiroa Fauur* has the power to control the whole population of Dullah Laut in matters relating to the social order of the village, and represents the interests of the village to the outside world. For example, if there is a conflict between villagers that the smaller social group cannot solve, the *Ohoiroa Fauur* will hold a meeting with all parties involved in the conflict. In this meeting the *Ohoiroa Fauur* will examine the nature of the conflict, decide which party is at fault, and find a solution to the conflict. Once the *Ohoiroa Fauur* has reached a decision, all parties are required to comply with the outcomes. The *Ohoiroa Fauur* also represents the interests of the village to the outside world. So for example, if a fishing company wishes to operate in Dullah Laut territory, it is the *Ohoiroa Fauur* from whom the company should get permission.

In practice, the *Ohoiroa Fauur* distributed their power to what might be called the village functionaries. As a settlement, Dullah Laut had only five village functionaries. They were the traditional village leader, war commander, Muslim leader, and the two settlement leaders. In theory, the traditional village head was the governor of the village. The war commander was responsible for handling potential or real conflicts, particularly with outsiders. For example, during wartime it was his duty to devise the war strategy and to coordinate villagers’ roles within it. The imam was responsible for dealing with issues related to Muslim religion and rituals. Conceptually, in terms of social autonomy, the settlement leader was also important because the settlement organization was under his leadership.

Among the five functionaries, the traditional village leader was the most important mainly because there were so few functionaries in the village. This caused the political power of *Ohoiroa Fauur* to be distributed amongst a limited number of people. If we consider the non-existence of the lord of the land\(^6\) alone, this resulted in the traditional village leader becoming the power holder regarding both social and territorial autonomy. Other factors that have caused the traditional village leader to become so prominent include the diminished role of the war commander since conflicts that generated what used to be called war rarely occur now. In addition, the role of the Muslim leader has diminished because there are few communal rituals performed in the village and because

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\(^6\) The explanation for the extinction of the lord of the land can be found in Chapter Four.
the imam only serves the Muslim community which is isolated from the Catholic population at the Christian settlement. The third factor is that the leaders of both settlements are under the direct command of the traditional village leader.

To understand the third factor requires an analysis of the internal structure of the Muslim and Christian settlements. I mentioned earlier that in terms of social autonomy, Dullah Laut was divided into two settlements and for issues regarding the internal life of the settlement, they were run autonomously. For this purpose, each settlement had its own Ohoiroa Fauur representatives consisting of the head of the origin fam living in each settlement. As at the village level, they were considered the political power holder in the settlement.

In turn, the Ohoiroa Fauur of each settlement delegated their power to the settlement leader. In theory, the Ohoiroa Fauur of the Christian settlement appointed the settlement leader to exercise their power in maintaining harmonious relations in the settlement. Likewise, the Ohoiroa Fauur of the Muslim settlement provided the settlement leader with the power to govern the settlement. By this delegation of power, the control of daily life of both settlements was in the hands of the settlement leaders. In the Muslim settlement however, the practical leadership was directly in the hands of the traditional village leader. It was only in the Christian settlement that the settlement leader exercised some level of autonomy. During my fieldwork, I observed that only in the Christian settlement did the settlement leader hold a customary meeting. The settlement leader consulted the traditional village leader when he faced a problem he could not handle himself. In this context, he would follow the decision of the traditional village leader. Similarly, customary meetings at the Muslim settlement were always led by the traditional village leader.

Finally, having explained the structure and the distribution of power in the traditional village, I would suggest that the political power in Dullah Laut was not distributed in the way suggested by Geurtjens. The political power in Dullah Laut was more centralised in the hands of the traditional village leader as shown in Figure 6-2. This is not only because of the reasons outlined, but also because the village functionaries are taken to be representatives of the origin fam (Ohoiroa Fauur). The imam is from Nuhuyanan, the war commander is from Rahawarin, and the settlement leaders of the Muslim and the Christian settlements are from Raharusun and Rahawarin respectively. Thus, since the role of the war commander and imam has decreased in importance and the heads of

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7 In fact the Ohoiroa Fauur of the village was a coalition of the Ohoiroa Fauur of Ohoisaran and Ohoiroa Fauur of Ohoislam. It was not uncommon during a customary meeting at the village level for each Ohoiroa Fauur to represent the interests of their own settlement.
both settlements are under the traditional village leader’s command, the role of the traditional village leader has increased significantly in importance and even has some control over *Ohoiroa Fauur*.

**Figure 6-2: Traditional structure and distribution of power in Dullah Laut.**

*Source: Fieldwork research.*

**The Modern Village Organisation**

Dullah Laut had been regarded as consisting of two different villages (*desa*) since the Kei Islands became part of the Republic of Indonesia in the early 1950s up until 1989. Formerly, the Muslim and Christian settlements were called Desa Dullah Laut Islam and Desa Dullah Laut Roma Katolik (RK) respectively. Being considered two distinct villages meant that Dullah Laut Islam and Dullah Laut RK were autonomous units with full rights to govern their own people and territory. Each village was led by a different leader who had their own staff and village deliberation council. Thus, when the central government started providing village subsidies in the 1970s, each village received the same amount and was independent of the other’s influence in making use of the subsidy. Of

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8 The legal terms used for a village, its leader, staff and its legislative assembly have changed over time with changes to the village law. For example, in *Village Law No. 19, 1965*, the *desa* was called *desapraja* and the title of the head of the village and his staff depended on local tradition. In the *Village Law No. 5, 1979*, the village is called *desa* or *kelurahan* and staff are named differently according to their position, for example the village secretary is called *sekretaris desa* and the development program coordinator is called *kepala urusan (kaur) pembangunan*.
course overall they were both bound by the same obligations under Indonesian law to report the allocation of their subsidy to the head of the subdistrict office in Tual.

Despite the fact that the separation of Dullah Laut was not in accordance with tradition, few problems arose between the two villages. In fact, there were many factors that created relatively harmonious relations between Dullah Laut Islam and Dullah Laut RK. The first factor was that the villages did not have much exposure to the external world and the village government mostly dealt with only internal issues. Since both the Muslim and Christian settlements were relatively autonomous, this caused few reasons for interaction or subsequent conflict between the two villages. Secondly, whenever they dealt with outside agencies—particularly regarding the use of their territory which according to tradition is inseparable—each head of the village was allowed to represent the interest of both villages, and when a large amount of money was involved, they would make a decision together and share the risks and the benefits. The latter implies that the Indonesian village law, which considers every village to have its own territory and make its own decisions individually, was not strictly followed to the letter.9

Furthermore, some have suggested that the separation was beneficial citing for example, that as two different villages they got two packets of central government subsidies allowing the two to develop their villages better. Another example of the benefits of the separation occurred when the Madurese fishermen came to ask permission to fish in their territory. Both heads of the villages asked for the ‘betel nut money’ (the customary term used for a contractual fee) from the fishermen. They believed that they could not have done so if they had been considered a single village.

Nevertheless, the Indonesian government’s equal treatment of the two villages promulgated a profound change in the traditional relationship between these two settlements. Some informants told me that during this period the village head of Dullah Laut RK often brought problems in his village directly to the King of Dullah meaning that he ignored the role of the traditional village leader who sat in Dullah Laut Islam. According to tradition, the head of the Christian settlement should have brought his problem to the traditional village leader. Only if the traditional village leader could not solve it, should the problem have been taken to the king. In this case, the traditional village leader would lead

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9 All of the village laws, including the Dutch Village Law which was applicable until the Indonesian government substituted it with the Village Law No. 19, 1965, implicitly or explicitly considered that a village must have its own territory (see Marsono 1980).
the settlement leader and those involved in the issue to meet the king. What is implied by this example is that the hierarchical relationship defined by tradition between the Muslim and Christian settlements was starting to lose relevance.

In 1989, the governor of Maluku issued a Provincial Decree No. 146/SK/39/89 which regulated the number and names of desa and kelurahan in Maluku Province. According to this decree, Dullah Laut was considered to be a single village that bore the same name. This decree led to the understanding that the village of Dullah Laut consisted of two hamlets (dusun), Dusun Dullah Laut Islam and Dusun Dullah RK. Since the seat of the modern village leader was at Dullah Laut Islam, it meant that Dullah Laut Islam was the centre of the village (desa induk, lit. mother village) and Dullah Laut RK became the ‘child village’ (anak desa).

This decree was a surprise to the people of Dullah Laut RK, particularly the former village head. It was a surprise because in September 1987 he and the village head of Dullah Laut Islam had arranged a meeting attended by representatives of origin fam (Ohoiroa Faur) from both villages. The aim of this meeting was to change the name of each village since they shared the same words—Dullah Laut—and the words Islam and RK represented a religious division that might have bad connotations. The meeting decided that the names Dullah Laut Islam and Dullah Laut RK would be changed to Dullah Laut and Duroa respectively. It was clear there was no indication at this meeting that the two villages would be merged. In fact, the aim of the meeting was understood to have been an attempt to strengthen the division between the villages.

The decree was therefore inconsistent with the direction taken by the former village leader of Dullah Laut RK who had tried to loosen the hierarchical relationship with the Muslim settlement and establish the notion that the Christian settlement was independent from the traditional village leader at the Muslim settlement. By contrast, the 1989 decree degraded the position of the Christian settlement from an independent village to a ‘child village’ (anak desa), which meant it was under the control of the modern village leader at the Muslim settlement.

The people of the Christian settlement, or at least the former village head, questioned the decree. They were suspicious that some people had misused the letter they’d signed as a result of a September meeting a year before which was an agreement that Dullah Laut RK would become the ‘anak desa’ while Dullah

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10 Kelurahan is another term used for village but unlike desa, a kelurahan has no autonomous right in any sense. The kelurahan leader and programmes were appointed and arranged directly by the Indonesian government. Villages in a city are governed as kelurahan (see Village Government Law No. 5, 1979).

11 A report of the result of this meeting was made and sent to the head of regency Maluku Tenggara, signed by both village leaders. The list of those present at the meeting and their signatures were attached to the letter.
Laut Islam would be the centre of the village should both villages be merged into a single village. They also argued that if the village was to be considered a single desa, it was the Christian settlement that should have been the centre of the village (desa induk—mother of the village). Interestingly, the latter argument was developed based on another interpretation of tradition. They believed that the decision on the location of the centre of the village and child village should have been based on the origin of the settlement and not on the seat of the village head. In this sense, the Christian settlement should have been the centre of the village because the village centre or ‘navel’ (woma) was located in this settlement. This interpretation of tradition must be quite recent since the ruler of Baldu (Dullah) told me that it was he who had located the centre in the early eighties. At that time, he attended a ceremony for the construction of the church that was led by the first priest from the settlement. During a break, the priest asked him, ‘If this is a village where is its woma?’ At that moment, the ruler of Baldu spontaneously designated a plot of land at the corner of the football field located in the middle of the settlement and said: ‘That is the woma of this village, with the name of woma Varne Harmas’.

I also spoke with others who argued that even when considering the position of the traditional village leader, the Christian settlement should have been the centre of the village. They explained that the first traditional village leader, Yahaw Rahaded, had lived and was buried at the Christian settlement. The position of traditional village leader was transferred to the Rahaded at the Muslim settlement when Yahaw Rahaded passed away because his oldest son, who was Catholic, worked outside of the village. This meant that his younger brother inherited the title and took the position. Thus, ‘If we will follow adat correctly’ they said, ‘the title of traditional village leader should be brought back to the Christian settlement by appointing a descendant of the eldest son of Yahaw Rahaded to take the position’.

The former leader of the Christian settlement always raised this issue when he met officials whom he believed had the power to reconsider this issue. For example, when he was visited by a team representing the ruling party during the New Order of Indonesia (Golkar), he asked the leader of the team if Golkar could help raise the status of his settlement to a village as it used to be. The subdistrict leader of Kei Kecil and his staff also told me that the former Christian settlement’s leader had raised the same question with them. Interestingly, the issue of turning their settlement into the central village—which meant reversing their relationship with the Muslim settlement—was never a concern of the former Christian settlement’s leader. In an interview, he told me that according to Village Government law, a village head should be elected by the villagers. Considering that a higher proportion of the population is Muslim, it would be difficult to have a village head from the Christian settlement since it
would be almost impossible for the Muslims to vote for a Catholic village head. Further, promoting the argument that the position of village head should have been at the Christian settlement because the hamlet is the origin settlement of the village would not be beneficial to the former Christian settlement’s leader. The consequence of this argument would be that the position of village leader should be given to the descendant of the first traditional village leader, which the former village head is not.

Internal Structure

There are some laws that have become the basic reference for the village organisation. The first law was the *Inlandsche Gemeente Ordonnantie Buitengewesten*, the Dutch law that regulated the village organisation in the outer islands of the Netherlands Indies. This law was not intended to change the structure of the traditional village organisation but was used to benefit the Dutch, both politically and economically (Cooley 1973). However, in practice this law brought about many changes, at least in some villages. For example, the Dutch were involved in the appointment of the traditional village leader, and their appointments were not always in accordance with tradition. Another more important example was that the law degraded the position of the lord of the land because it did not differentiate between social and territorial issues. Under this law both issues were under the control of the traditional village leader. In some villages this change generated disastrous conflicts (see Chapter Nine).

Dullah Laut did not experience the ‘negative’ impact of the Dutch law. In fact, the Dutch period of village organisation is seen as the time when tradition was followed properly regarding the appointment of the first traditional village leader. People accepted Yahaw Rahaded as the first village leader. By doing this, they believed that the position of the traditional village leader was the right of his descendants. In addition, people did not see that the Dutch law created any change in power between the traditional village leader, the origin *fam* (*Ohoiroa Faur*), and village functionaries.

The Dutch village law was replaced by *Village Government Law No. 19, 1965*, which was in turn replaced by *Village Government Law No. 5, 1979*. Many changes have been brought about with the application of these laws, especially the latter. Two of these changes are worth mentioning here. First, regarding the distribution of power in the village, I believe that the ideology of these laws is centralisation, and that the head of the village is the centre of all elements in the village organisation.

Both laws consider that the head of the village is what Geurtjens might call the governor of the village (art. 10 of the Village Law No. 5/79). Van Wouden’s comment that the head of the village was not a real governor since he was
expected to consult elders of the village was not applicable here. It is true that for important issues, the village leader should consult or be responsible to the Village Deliberation Council (Lembaga Musyawarah Desa or LMD) which is the representative body of the villagers. But the laws have also assigned the leadership of the LMD (art. 17/2 of Village Law No. 5/79) to the village head. The village head also controls his staff which consists of: a village secretary (sekretaris desa); an administrative coordinator (kepala urusan, kaur pemerintahan); a development program coordinator (kaur pembangunan); a welfare program coordinator (kaur kesejahteraan); a treasury coordinator (kaur keuangan); a general coordinator (kaur umum); and heads of constituent hamlets (kepala dusun). All of these positions mostly take orders from and work for the village head, except for the heads of hamlets. The head of hamlet is different because he is considered to be the representative of the village leader in the hamlet (art. 7/2 of the Village Government Law No. 5/79). This means that a certain amount of the village leader’s power is transferred to him.

Figure 6-3: The modern village organisational structure.

Source: Adapted from Marsono (1980).
In practice, the role of the village head is obvious. He is the only representative of the village that interacts with the outside world. He is also the only person to whom the power of the central government is delegated. It is only through the village head that the Indonesian government provides subsidies and programs from diverse outside sources. All problems in the village that need to be resolved outside of the village should go through the village head before they are taken to the external agencies.

These laws also regulate the number of positions in the village organisation, who fills these positions, and the ways in which villagers can choose and assume such positions. While the Village Law of 1965 still gave some acknowledgement to local tradition, the Village Law of 1979 paid almost no attention to it at all. In fact, the main goal of the Village Law of 1979 was the unification of the village organisation in Indonesia using a supposed Javanese cultural model (Kato 1989: 94).

It was predictable that the Kei people would not approach these issues in the same way. For example, under both laws the village head should be elected from and by the villagers. This violated the tradition which identified the position of traditional village leader (as well as other village functionaries) as inherited positions. These laws were also not in accordance with the tradition that considered the village leadership to be the privilege of the mel. According to the tradition, the iri had no right at all to take part in any matter regarding village leadership. However, the law stipulated that all villagers had the same right to vote and to be voted for in the election of a village head.

As noted previously, some villagers perceived that these laws did not replace tradition. They believe that the village laws are supplementary to tradition rather than contradictory. This understanding derives from some ambiguity of the law toward tradition. I mentioned earlier that in the Village Law of 1965, the titles of the village leader and functionaries still used local names. As noted by Kato (1989), in the 1979 law, the ambiguity can be found under point b) in the section headed ‘to consider’ (menimbang), which notes:

In accordance with the nature of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, the state of affairs concerning Desa administration is to be made uniform as much as possible, with due respect for various local conditions of Desa and stipulations of customs (adat istiadat) still in existence, in order to strengthen Desa administration so that [we will be] more competent to mobilize society in its participation in development and to run Desa administration increasingly more extensively and efficiently (emphasis added, ibid.: 93).
Some other villagers considered that the village laws offered new options on how the village could be organised. These people acknowledged the difference between tradition and the law, but did not decide which to follow. In fact, they applied a mix of tradition and the law and explained that by saying ‘as the children of adat, we cannot just leave the adat, and as citizens we should also follow the government’. As an example, the present village head said that it was difficult to make village staff appointments and had not yet done so because the number of staff stipulated by the law was not large enough to accommodate the number of persons appointed by tradition.

The ambiguous relations between Indonesian government laws and tradition and the various interpretations of how these laws should be applied generated problems in Dullah Laut. The biggest problem was the conflict between the descendants of the traditional and the modern village head at the Muslim settlement. The former claimed that the position of modern village head was his right while the latter believed that he was the one who had been chosen for the position by the villagers and approved by the Indonesian government. Another serious problem related to the position of the former modern village head at the Christian settlement whose position was degraded to that of hamlet leader and village secretary. The following section will discuss these issues in detail.

### The History of Village Leadership

The main reference point for the discussion of village leadership tradition in Dullah Laut is the history of the traditional village leader. The starting point of the history was the appointment of the first traditional village leader in the last decades of the nineteenth century or the first decade of the twentieth century. According to this history, the first traditional village leader was Yahaw Rahaded, who was appointed by the Dutch. There was no conflict during his leadership and it seemed that the people of Dullah Laut welcomed his appointment. This appointment was the point of reference for the claim that the position of traditional leadership in Dullah Laut is the right of Yahaw Rahaded’s descendants.

This belief was also the reason why people accepted the transfer of the position to Yahaw Rahaded’s son, Yahaw Rahaded’s son’s son, and Yahaw Rahaded’s son’s son’s brother-in-law respectively (Figure 6-4).
The succession of the first two followed the usual pattern for transfers of the title—from father to son. The transfer from the third traditional village leader was unusual because it was not from father to son but between in-laws. However, since the transfer was initiated by the legitimate person—the third traditional village leader, who was the direct descendant of the first—and for a legitimate reason—that there was no adult descendant of the traditional village leader—people accepted the leadership of the fourth traditional village leader. In such circumstances it was quite common for the title to be transferred to those who have close relations with the former title holder. In this context, an informant told me that during the leadership of the third traditional village leader, his brother-in-law Mr A.H. Nuhuyanan, often helped the traditional village leader in time of difficulties. This was the reason why the third traditional village leader transferred his title to Mr A.H. Nuhuyanan in the early-1930s.

One of the most significant signs of the peoples’ acceptance of the fourth traditional village leader’s leadership was the involvement of Mr A. Rahaded, a son of the third traditional village leader, in the development of the village during the second half of the fourth traditional village leader’s tenure. In 1963, Mr A. Rahaded initiated the establishment of an Islamic elementary school. This idea became a shared dream of all the Muslim villagers. They worked together...
in constructing the school. Some local volunteers were also prepared to teach in the school. During that period, their only mosque was also enlarged. Mr A. Rahaded donated his land for this purpose.

However, this development program was said to be the beginning of the conflict between the elite members of the village, particularly between Mr A. Rahaded and the fourth traditional village leader’s fam. The conflict escalated when the connection between their village and the central government and outside agencies started to develop. This period began when the central government started providing a village subsidy in 1970 (Kato 1989) and when donations were received from some outside agencies for the construction of the elementary school. The conflict mostly involved the distribution of the money or materials they received.

The conflict worsened when the fourth traditional village leader died and his son, Mr M. Nuhuyanan, replaced him in 1967. Mr A. Rahaded disputed this transfer by claiming that the title should have been transferred to him. His claim was based on the fact that the three first traditional village leaders at Dullah Laut were his father’s father’s father, his father’s father and his father. Explaining why his father transferred his title to Mr A.H. Nuhuyanan, Mr A. Rahaded argued that his father had entrusted him with the position because at that time, no one of his generation was old enough. According to Mr A. Rahaded, it was agreed that whenever the descendants of the first traditional village leader were ready to take over the position, Mr A.H. Nuhuyanan would resign and transfer the title back to them.

According to Mr M. Nuhuyanan, he did not return the position for several reasons. The first was because Mr A. Rahaded did not ask for his right ‘politely,’ and the second was that the Indonesian government recognised his position. The Southeastern Maluku Regency leader issued a letter for his appointment as the village head of Dullah Laut in November 1979. This letter was a result of Mr M. Nuhuyanan having won the village head election that had been conducted several months before. Mr M. Nuhuyanan was now implying that his position was not the traditional village leader, but the modern village head.

Interestingly, Mr M. Nuhuyanan and his fellow fam members also developed an argument based on the tradition to account for his refusal to return his position. He argued that according to tradition, Yahaw Rahaded—the first traditional village leader—was not a patrilineal descendant of the Rahaded fam as explained by the story that Yahaw Rahaded was the illegitimate son of Balohoiwutun Balubun, who had ‘illegally’ impregnated Afenan Rahaded. Therefore, Yahaw should have been a member of the Balubun fam. In addition, Yahaw Rahaded was cared for by Bal Ulab Nuhuyanan who married Afenan’s sister. Moreover,
the Nuhuyanan fam believes that the appointment of Yahaw Rahaded was not based on ‘real’ adat. It was they argue, just because of his fluent Malay and his closeness to the Dutch.\(^{13}\)

The conflict reached its climax in 1989. At that time, Mr A. Rahaded organised a meeting at the former village office which had been converted to a small prayer house because he and his allies refused to pray at the mosque. The group decided that Mr M. Nuhuyanan had to return the position before his retirement. A number of people were appointed to go to Mr M. Nuhuyanan’s father’s brother (who was the leader of Nuhuyanan fam) to discuss the proposal. Mr A. Nuhuyanan, the present village leader—who was at that time his father’s secretary—was very upset and hit one of the representatives.\(^{14}\) As a result, Mr M. Nuhuyanan’s house, where Mr A. Nuhuyanan also lived, was attacked. Some people were injured and some parts of the house were damaged. An old woman who was the only person in the house died some days later. When the incident was brought to court, six of Mr A. Rahaded allies were sentenced to three months in jail.

Although the physical violence has stopped, the conflict continues. Mr A. Rahaded and his allies have written several letters to various government offices in the regency and Maluku province reporting Mr M. Nuhuyanan’s misbehaviour. Although most of their letters were ignored, one of them brought Mr M. Nuhuyanan to court on charges related to the use of village subsidies. The regency court found Mr M. Nuhuyanan guilty of corruption. He was sentenced to six months in jail and fined Rp2.5m. However, the Maluku Province High Court in Ambon freed him when he appealed the case.

Conflict also occurred in the village head election which was held in 1992. There were two candidates—Mr A. Nuhuyanan (the son of the former village leader), and Ali Rahaded (Mr A. Rahaded’s brother). Mr A. Rahaded’s side almost won the election since the Kei Kecil subdistrict leader\(^{15}\) supported him as had most of the iri in both settlements. The subdistrict leader supported Mr Ali. Rahaded because she believed that Rahaded was the fam who traditionally held the position. Most of the iri supported Mr A. Rahaded because he had promised to discontinue the tradition of rank at Dullah Laut, meaning that there would no longer be the noble and the former slave. Unfortunately, Mr A. Rahaded and his brother made a mistake. They issued a letter giving permission to a Madurese fisherman to dive for sea cucumber and signed it on behalf of the owner of Dullah Laut village territory and the village head. The Nuhuyanan

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\(^{13}\) People believe that Yahaw Rahaded was the one who brought the Dutch to the Kei Islands.

\(^{14}\) Mr A. Nuhuyanan told me that his anger was also triggered by the fact that the person he hit was a slave who according to tradition, should not have been involved in the issue.

\(^{15}\) The Kei Kecil sub-regency leader is the direct superior of the modern village leader. In fact, it was the sub-regency leader who was in charge of the election of the modern village leader (see Chapter Two).
reported the matter to the subdistrict leader who considered the letter to be such an error in judgement that she switched her support to the Nuhuyanan. In her effort to support the Nuhuyanan, the subdistrict leader asked her staff to direct Christian voters to the Nuhuyanan’s side. The subdistrict leader’s staff member called the settlement leader of the Christian settlement and asked him to influence his people to vote for the Nuhuyanan. In return, the subdistrict leader’s staff member promised the settlement leader that he would develop his settlement into an independent village. The settlement leader agreed. In the end, the Nuhuyanan won the election by fifteen votes.

After the election failure, the Rahaded faction did not give up. In fact, they did not acknowledge the Nuhuyanan leadership and based their rejection not only on tradition, but also on the law of village organisation. In a letter sent to various government offices, Mr A. Rahaded wrote that according to the law, traditional community is recognised. Therefore, he argued, the Nuhuyanan’s leadership did not accord with the law.

In opposition to the Nuhuyanan, Mr A. Rahaded and his supporters ran their own programs which included building a small prayer house, constructing a stone dock, and widening their settlement (see Plate 6-1). These programs have been carried out on the eastern part of the Muslim settlement where most of the iri houses are constructed. Although several times after Friday prayer I heard leaders from Mr A. Rahaded’s faction scolding those who did not participate in the communal work they organised, they felt satisfied with the development of their programs. Several new houses had been constructed and the stone dock was almost finished.

The history of leadership at the Christian settlement is as follows: from the leadership of the first traditional village leader until that of the fourth traditional village leader, the Christian settlement was led by a settlement leader from Yamko fam. In 1952, when the settlement was considered to be a village, his position was raised to that of village head. During the tenure of this village leader, the present settlement leader was his secretary. In 1984, the village leader passed away. His secretary—the present settlement leader—took the position until the village was merged with desa Dullah Laut Islam in 1989. This turned his desa into a ‘child village’ (anak desa) or a hamlet and demoted his position from a village head to a settlement leader.
Conflict over the issue of leadership had never occurred at the Christian settlement before which is quite interesting since the leadership of the settlement was not transferred ‘from father to son’ and the leadership position was never in the hands of a descendant of Yahaw Rahaded (the first traditional village leader). When I spoke with some elders, they told me that most of the first traditional village leader’s descendants did not live in the village. They usually worked as government civil servants, teachers, and other white-collar workers outside of their village. Recently one family had returned to the settlement, but was not interested in the position of settlement leader because it was no better than the position they had retired from. Some other elders told me that Yamko, the first village leader, was one of the most important fam in Dullah Laut. In fact the centre of the village, which was located in their settlement, was named after their ancestor. Thus they believed it was appropriate to have one of them lead the village.

Concerning the present settlement leader, the elders argued that he was the one who knew best how a village or hamlet was organised because he had been involved in the business for decades. However, because the leader of Dullah Laut Village is Muslim, the people of the Christian settlement have developed a resistance movement. Although they have never expressed their resistance
directly to the people or leader at the Muslim settlement, it was apparent that they had tried to cut their dependant connection with the Muslims. This movement was led by the present settlement leader.

**Conclusion**

Before I start my conclusion, I would like to summarise chronologically the main focus of this discussion, which was the raiding of the ‘illegal’ fishing company. The conflict started from an agreement made by Mr A. Rahaded with a grouper fishing company associated with a Taiwanese man and his Javanese wife. Their agreement was that Mr A. Rahaded would give the company permission to construct the company’s base camp on Rumadan Island and operate their fishing activities in the surrounding waters. In return, the company would give a certain amount of money and employ some villagers for their operation. In this agreement, Mr A. Rahaded represented himself as the traditional leader and the lord of the land. The agreement was prepared with the involvement of the local army commander.

Some villagers raided the company when they were constructing their base camp at the location designated by Mr A. Rahaded. These people considered the operation of the company ‘illegal’ because its presence was without the permission of the legitimate village leader—the modern village leader. They felt that the company had not ‘knocked at their door but had gone directly to a bedroom of their house’. It was agreed that the company would stop its activities and return to Tual until they had a further settlement with the village leader and a representative of the origin *fam*. The villagers took one of the company’s speedboats as a guarantee that the company would comply with the agreement.

The company and Mr A. Rahaded, with the support of the local army commander, protested this incident the following night. This led to a customary meeting the following day which failed to reach any resolution and became an area of conflict between the three different political groups in the villages.

Now, the main aim of this discussion is to examine what the conflict was really about. This will be done by looking at the meaning of the conflict to each of the political groups in the village, particularly the leaders. I’ll start by looking at the conflict from Mr A. Rahaded’s perspective. It is clear that for Mr A. Rahaded, marine tenure represented the ‘political capital’ to oppose the power of the village leader. Leasing the right to use their sea territory to an outside fishing company was certainly a political ploy to demonstrate his leadership of the village. Regarding the agreement he made with the company, there were at least three crucial aspects to consider. First, leasing the village’s territory demonstrated his territorial power both to the villagers and to outsiders. It was
as if he’d said, ‘Look! The territorial power over the village territory is in my hands, so I can represent the whole village in transferring the use right of the territory’. It was of course, a public challenge to the village leader’s power on the issue of territorial rights.

The second aspect was the agreement with the company to employ villagers in their activities. This was considered effective for two reasons—reason one, the villagers became a buffer for both the company and Mr A. Rahaded. Whenever the opposing villagers confronted them, they were now able to say, ‘look! This business is not only for us (the company and Mr A. Rahaded), but also for the villagers’. The implication was that the opposing villagers not only attacked the company and Mr A. Rahaded but also fellow villagers who, according to tradition, had use right over the village sea territory (see Chapter Five). As for reason two, the involvement of the villagers was also a means to win the hearts of the villagers. By Village Government law, the number of voters is important in securing a village leader position. Unless voted in by a majority of the villagers, a candidate for village leader is unable to take his seat. In the same way, villager(s) can remove a village leader from his position.

Money was the third important aspect of the agreement. Although few knew how much money the company was going to give Mr. A Rahaded when the incident took place, it was certain that money was a part of the agreement. This money was important for Mr A. Rahaded not only for his personal income, but for running his programs such as the settlement expansion, the stone dock, and the prayer house. In this context, the agreement was significant because the money involved was likely much greater than the amount generated voluntarily by villagers. There was also the possibility that the company would be asked for some additional economic support during the term of their agreement.

An additional value of great significance lay in the connections offered by the company. The most important of these was with the army. In Indonesia, the army was and still is a powerful institution. It not only controlled military related issues but also had significant influence in political, social, and economic affairs (Kristiadi 1999: 48; Crouch 1979). It was also an open secret that army officers not only used their power for the benefit of their organisation but also for their personal interests. This often led to their involvement in both legal and illegal businesses (Samego et al. 1998).

The circumstances in the Kei Islands were no different. Although civilian leaders led most of the government offices, the military’s involvement in political and economic spheres was indisputable. For example, when I did my fieldwork, I met a military official who carried out a political census just months before the general election in 1996 which forced people to declared which political party they would chose. The census was considered a form of intimidation because
those who did not choose the ruling party would be discriminated against. People also knew that some military officials were involved in some cyanide fishing businesses, yet no one—not even the head of the regency—dared to challenge their power (Adhuri 1998a).

Mr A. Rahaded was very much aware of this situation. He also knew how to use the military. Enlisting the support and involvement of the army in his agreement with the fishing company provided him with two significant advantages. First, the army became his shield from his fellow villagers’ resistance. Those who opposed the agreement could be thought of as blocking the interest of the army. Second, his relationship with the army was also useful in smoothing his way whenever he met other local leaders. The latter was important since Mr A. Rahaded’s final goal was to gain the position of modern village head.

From the point of view of the village leader’s political faction, the raiding of the fishing company was a ‘must’ in order to demonstrate the village leader’s power as the legitimate head of the village. According to the village leader’s supporters, the company’s activities in Dullah Laut territory were ‘illegal’ for two reasons. First of all, this company had ‘entered their house without knocking at the door,’ as they put it. Without the consent of the village leader—the ‘door’ in the metaphor—no outsider could be allowed to make use of the village territory or resources for commercial purposes. People believed that both tradition and the Indonesian law regulated this. Second, judging by their equipment, the company was likely to use cyanide when fishing which was also illegal.

Mr A. Rahaded’s agreement with the fishing company was also an ‘illegal’ way of challenging the village leader’s power. According to his faction, the village leader was the only legitimate person who was authorised to represent the interest of the village to the outside world. They also believed that Mr A. Rahaded’s claim of being the owner of the village territory was wrong. Dullah Laut territory was under the shared control of the origin fam which meant that Mr A. Rahaded had no right to make the agreement. In this context the incident was a way of ‘getting things straight’. It would put the village leader into the top position and restore control over the territory to the hands of Ohoiroa Fauur. Ecological, economic, and social justice concerns raised in the customary meeting were only the means to justify the village leader’s supporter’s raid on the company. In fact, two years before the incident, the village leader allowed a different fishing company to use cyanide to fish in their sea territory for one year. At that time, it was Mr A. Rahaded who opposed the leasing.

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16 As I mentioned earlier, the village leader was away when people raided the company. However, when I met the village leader in Jakarta and told him about this incident, he regretted that he was not in the village because he would have led the raid himself.
Finally, the most significant aspect of the incident in the eyes of the settlement leader was the timing. This incident occurred when the village leader was away and the settlement leader was appointed as the acting village head. From his perspective, he finally held the position that he had been dreaming of since Desa Dullah Laut Katolik had been transformed into the ‘child village’ of Dullah Laut and he felt that he could earn several points if he could succeed in persuading the customary meeting to allow the company to continue their activities. The first point was that villagers would perceive that he had passed the test of holding the power of village head, meaning that he would be considered a credible occupant of the position. Second, he could succeed in opposing the village leader without looking as though he was doing so by using Mr A. Rahaded, the army commander, and the company as a “smoke screen.” Third, he could use the company’s networks, as Mr A. Rahaded did, to assume power.