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Land rights and the forces of adat in democratizing Indonesia : continuous conflict between plantations, farmers, and forests in South Sulawesi

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6 ADAT POLITICIZED: THE CONTINUATION OF THE BULUKUMBA PLANTATION CONFLICT (2003-2017)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The dominant discourse of indigeneity finds expression in Indonesian legislation, in the reports published by NGO's and in the jargon of multilateral development institutions. In Chapter 4 I showed that this discourse depicts adat communities as harmonious entities whose members have shared interests. However, as we have seen in Chapter 5, such notions may not correspond well with the historical development of adat in particular regions. Meanings of adat can vary, and the historical account of South Sulawesi showed that besides the contemporary use of adat as a rural justice frame for the marginalized, adat has also been a consolidator of traditional leadership. Moreover, people can have multiple identities, depending on the context, so that an adat leader can be both a representative of his community and a government official.

Against the backdrop of these contrasting meanings of adat, the question is how these meanings relate to one another at the local level and how they impact the trajectory of land conflicts. In the following two chapters I will therefore zoom in on adat land claims at the local level in present-day South Sulawesi.

This chapter focuses on the deployment of adat as a strategy to claim land rights, by examining the interaction between land claimants, their activist mediators, adat leaders and government officials in the Bulukumba plantation conflict. The origins of this conflict, as well as its trajectory until 2006, have been covered in Chapter 3. The present chapter looks at the events that took place in the years thereafter, when local groups began to make adat land claims to oppose the plantation company. It aims to explain how and through whom this claiming-strategy made its way into the conflict and how it has impacted the conflict's further trajectory. Engaging with Li's work on the articulation of indigenous identity, it delves deeper into how the 'tribal slot' is filled by various actors with various interests. Where Li's article is confined to the analysis of how communities as a whole identify themselves as indigenous, this chapter will contribute to the debate by looking at how indigeneity politics create tensions and diverging interests *within* such communities. I will show that at the local level, the contradicting meanings of adat can result into tension between on the one hand activists who invoke adat to support local land users, and on the other hand, traditional leaders whose noble position is legitimized by adat.

I will first explain how after the violent escalation of the conflict in 2003, external mediators became involved who framed the land conflict in terms of a victimized adat community. The subsequent section focuses on the adat claims made by local activists and the resistance against such claims by traditional adat leaders. In the final section, I will look at the role of regional authorities, most notably the Bulukumba District Head. We will see that in the context of regional electoral politics, district officials were initially

receptive to adat land claims, but ultimately used these claims to advance their own position and as a result, did not offer any prospects for a long-term resolution.

6.2 FINDING THE ‘TRIBAL SLOT’: HOW ADAT BECAME A CLAIMING STRATEGY IN THE CONFLICT

6.2.1 After the violence: invoking indigeneity as an ‘injustice frame’

For the local land users involved in the Bulukumba plantation conflict, deploying adat was initially not the most obvious strategy to claim land rights. As previous chapters have pointed out, there was hardly any political space to invoke local identity under the New Order. In 1982, 172 local land users filed a lawsuit against the plantation company for disowning them from their farming land.¹⁴⁰ Their legal claim also targeted the Kajang Sub-District Head and the Tambangan Village Head for their support to the company. The two were not only government officials, but also traditional leaders belonging to the nobility. Hence, not only did the plantation conflict pit a group of farmers against a company, it also pitted traditional leaders against their subjects. It was only after the violent events of 2003, when the conflict temporarily became the center point of national media attention and civil society advocacy, that a new discourse to frame the conflict – one of indigeneity – came about. In the years following, local activist organizations and local land claimants began to use this discourse to make land claims.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, a grassroots movement emerged in the villages surrounding the Palangisang rubber estate of PT. Lonsum in the early 2000s, led by the local organizations YPR (*Yayasan Pendidikan Rakyat*) and DRB (*Dewan Rakyat Bulukumba*). This movement, which at its peak counted several thousand villagers was essentially anti-establishment. It was above all organized as a pro-*rakyat* movement for the common villagers. Armin Selasa, the movement’s unofficial leader, asserted that the presence of the plantation company was but one of the agrarian issues in Bulukumba. Equally problematic in his eyes was the position of the landlords of noble ancestry, whom he referred to as the small kings (*raja raja kecil*). Selasa explained that the YPR and DRB aimed for a more equal distribution of landholdings, which implied stripping large landowners from their land.¹⁴¹

In July 2003, the grassroots movement dissolved after a violent clash with the police during a mass occupation of Palangisang estate, organized by the YPR and DRB. Four occupants were fatally shot by the police. Those who had joined the occupation in the hope of gaining back their land were left disillusioned. With numerous activist leaders behind bars, the movement dissolved. At the same time, regional and national civil society organizations began to show en masse support to the protestors, which reflected the growing resistance against the increasingly violent conduct of the security apparatus in land conflicts in the early 2000s. Within days, a number of NGO’s established a national

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 3, Subsection 4.1.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Armin Selasa in Bulukumba city, 05 October 2015.

network named SNUB (*Solidaritas Nasional Untuk Bulukumba*). One of the main organizations behind SNUB was environmental NGO WALHI.¹⁴²

In Bulukumba meanwhile, many who had joined the occupation fled to the sacred Ammatoa Kajang community forest, located at some 20 kilometers from the dispute location. As explained in Chapter 5, this forest is located in the heartland of the Ammatoa Kajang community, one of the last strongholds of the traditional *Tomanurung* inspired cult once dominant in South Sulawesi. The Konjo-speaking community is well-known for its strict customs and adat institutions, which still function and exist next to modern government administration, with the Amma Toa as the highest spiritual and moral leader.¹⁴³ The forest is believed to be the place where the community's divine ancestor first descended to the earth, and hence it is to be protected at all costs. All over South Sulawesi, people believe that this forest is full of magic, and may only be entered by those who adhere to the adat laws of the Ammatoa Kajang named *pasang*.

For the occupants, the dense forest provided a good hiding spot and many figured that the police would probably not dare to enter the area. When the police did come to look in the forest, Kahar Muslim, at that time the Tana Toa Village Head, stopped them. Muslim was an influential local community leader of noble descent with strong connections to the district government. He told the police officers that there was no one hiding in the forest and suggested them to leave.¹⁴⁴ Afterwards, many occupants could safely return to their villages.

Several days later, Muslim received a visit from several commissioners of Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission- Komnas HAM.¹⁴⁵ News of the violent events had reached national and international human rights watchdogs, including Komnas HAM.¹⁴⁶ A week after the shooting, three commissioners travelled from Jakarta to Bulukumba to conduct an initial investigation.¹⁴⁷ In Tana Toa village, Kahar Muslim assisted them and took them around.

¹⁴² Local activists were dissatisfied with the way WALHI activists from Makassar suddenly manifested themselves as representatives of the people. A Jakarta Post article explained that in the aftermath of the 21 July events, some local activists opposed the attempt of WALHI to push for the resignation of the Provincial Police Head (*Kapolda*). According to the director of WALHI South Sulawesi, local activists from Bulukumba were against this strategy because they feared this would spawn repercussions from 'certain parties'. Nevertheless, WALHI upheld its demand and remained convinced that it was the 'right approach' to settle the dispute. See: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2003/10/20/local-NGO's-challenge-walhi-over-bulukumba-land-dispute.html>, last accessed 12 August 2017.

¹⁴³ When I use the term 'Ammatoa Kajang' I refer to the community as a whole. When I use the term Amma Toa, I specifically refer to the community's highest moral leader.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Iwan Selasa in Bulukumba city, 14 October 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Kahar Muslim in Tana Toa village, sub-district Kajang, Bulukumba, 19 April 2014.

¹⁴⁶ Amnesty International published a report shortly after the violence in which it expressed its concern for the safety and health conditions of 24 men who were kept in detention. The report stated that several members of the YRP had turned themselves in after being put on the wanted list, but were facing the risk of being tortured by the police. See:

<http://www2.amnesty.se/uaonnet.nsf/dfab8d7f58eec102c1257011006466e1/108260d14fc7cf46c1256d790026d7be?OpenDocument>, last accessed 12 November 2017.

¹⁴⁷ The Komnas HAM team was led by MM. Billah and arrived in Bulukumba on 30 July 2003. The team met with the police, the Bulukumba District Head and detained occupants. On 8 August Komnas HAM held a

During their visit, the commissioners came to know of the traditional character of the Ammatoa Kajang community. They found out that many of those who had joined the land claiming movement were community members. Some of them had worn the community's traditional black attire during the occupation. The commissioners instantly recognized that this offered an opportunity to frame the conflict in terms of indigeneity. They either overlooked or ignored the fact that some of the community's traditional leaders had sided with the company in earlier times.

The local land users had simply referred to themselves as claimants (*penggugat*) or cultivators (*penggarap*). In investigative reports and press statements, Komnas HAM instead referred to them as the indigenous peoples of Kajang (*masyarakat adat Kajang*). Following an additional investigation in February 2004, the commission published its findings in a booklet.¹⁴⁸ Besides a chronology of the legal trajectory of the conflict, the booklet contains many references to the traditional and spiritual culture of the Ammatoa Kajang community. An entire chapter is devoted to the 'Mythology of Kajang' (*Mytologi orang Kajang*) and explains that the people of Kajang stick firmly to their traditions (*lekat dengan tradisi yang terjaga*) and are yet to come into touch with the outside world (*belum bersentuhan dengan dunia luar*) (Komnas HAM, 2006: 12-13). Another section is headed with a phrase in the local Konjo language, which states that the Amma Toa, as the highest leader of the community, requested on behalf of his people that all adat lands of Kajang must be returned to the community (Komnas Ham, 2006: 16).

In national activist circles henceforth, the Bulukumba plantation conflict became known as a classic example of an isolated, dispossessed tribe, something that never occurred to any of the locals involved. That the commissioners framed the conflict in this way is in itself not strange. Li notes in this regard: 'Situations which set indigenous people up against big projects and the state are guaranteed attention, and they set up predictable alliances' (Li, 2000: 168).

Effective as it may be to attract public sympathy for the local land users, the indigeneity frame diverged significantly from the views of the local activist leaders who mobilized the farmers in the area in the early 2000s. They had given meaning to their actions by declaring to represent 'the people' (*rakyat*). The YPR and the DRB were not organizations based on tradition, but on a new sense of empowerment. They were established to strengthen the voices of farmers in Bulukumba, not only against the plantation company, but also against the landowning elites. For them, it did not make much sense to invoke tradition or culture, especially given that some of the traditional, noble elites of Kajang had sided with PT. Lonsum in the 1980s. Numerous Kajang leaders of 'royal blood' had been loyal pawns of the New Order, either as military officials or as

press conference in Jakarta. According to the commission, the police and the occupants had different stories about who had started the violence. Komnas HAM stated that there were nonetheless indications of human rights abuses such as illegal arrests, foreclosure of objects without a license and non-proportional violence against citizens. From a Komnas HAM press statement on the outcome of the investigation team, 08 August 2003.

¹⁴⁸ The second visit by Komnas HAM was made in the context of the mediation process, which began in 2004 (see Chapter 3). Komnas HAM published the book '*Proses Medias Lahan Tanah Adat Bulukumba*' in 2006.

village heads. For local activists like Armin Selasa therefore, adat legitimized inequality and the power abuses of the traditional elite. It would be odd to invoke adat as a claiming strategy for villagers in need of land. According to him, invoking the Ammatoa Kajang cult was part of a claiming strategy introduced by outsiders, with little relevance to the real situation at hand.¹⁴⁹

All taken together, the involvement of Komnas HAM and large NGO's like WALHI did help to attract public attention for the conflict. But their involvement was hardly beneficial for those involved in the conflict at the local level. While the investigations helped to shed light on the possible human rights violations by police officials during the clash of the 21 July occupation, no follow up inquiry was carried out. While the government considered the conflict 'settled' after a mediation process, the outcome of this process was highly unsatisfactory for most and in the end only caused friction among the land claimants.¹⁵⁰ It was only a matter of time before the conflict would heat up again. We will see below that when this happened, land claimants began to adopt a repertoire of new framing strategies.

6.2.2 *The Ammatoa Kajang community and the 'tribal slot'*

It was hardly a coincidence that the novel way of framing came about during the nationwide adat resurgence in the early *Reformasi* years, as discussed in Chapter 4. Given the special characteristics present in Kajang – the obedience to adat rules, the pursuance of a modest lifestyle and the collective preservation of a sacred forest – the Ammatoa Kajang community was one of Indonesia's most obvious candidates to fill what Li calls the 'tribal slot' (2000).¹⁵¹ In her renowned article, Li looks at the circumstances in which certain communities identify themselves as indigenous. She notes that 'self-identification as tribal or indigenous people is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes and repertoires of meaning and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggles' (Li: 2000: 151). Li mentions two keywords here. The first keyword - engagement - refers to the interaction processes that shape the way a group of people perceives itself. One can think here of interaction with mediators and framing experts, through which people become convinced of their special position as adat community. The second keyword - struggle - refers predominantly to experienced grievances or potential harm caused by outsiders.

The struggles through which the positioning of adat communities occurs are, more often than not, livelihood struggles about natural resources. Afiff and Lowe provide a case

¹⁴⁹ In an interview, Selasa expressed his belief in religious values as a concept of justice, explaining that one way to create a more egalitarian society would be to implement shari'a law. According to him, the only problem was that it was very hard to properly enforce such laws in practice. From: Interview with Armin Selasa in Bulukumba city, 5 October 2015.

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter 3, Subsection 5.4.

¹⁵¹ For a more elaborate discussion on the characteristics of the Ammatoa Kajang community, see Chapter 5, Subsection 4.1.

of this in their study about the use of the adat community claim in the district of Sosa in North-Sumatra in the early 2000s. Here, the conflict concerned an ongoing contestation between local land users and a palm oil plantation company over the ownership of land. They observed an almost instant shift in the community's positioning from 'farmers' to 'adat community'. That the people suddenly reframed their struggle was due to their engagement with AMAN. While they initially framed their claims as farmers (*petani*), they established their own adat organization after a local activist leader attended the first AMAN congress in 1999. According to Afiff and Lowe, the positioning as adat community significantly enhanced the mobilizing capacities of activists and local land users, not in the least because it made people proud of their social status (Afiff and Lowe, 2007: 88).

In the case of the Ammatoa Kajang however, whether or not the community positioned itself as adat community was not really an issue. There has long been a general consensus that the Ammatoa Kajang community is culturally distinct from people living in adjacent rural areas (Cense, 1931; Usop; 1978; Rössler, 1990). Already during colonial times, Dutch ethnographers picked Kajang as a site for ethnographic research, because of its special culture and strong traditions. These were still in place, despite the political influence of the larger South Sulawesi kingdoms on the region (Cense, 1931; Kooreman, 1883). During the Darul Islam period moreover, the Ammatoa Kajang community fought against the Islamic guerillas to protect its spiritual cult. These events likely strengthened the local sense of community and identity. Thus, with a 'tribal slot' so evidently in place, the question is not whether there has been a process of articulating indigenous identity in Kajang. The question is rather, how do community members negotiate the meaning of this identity and the purpose for which it may be invoked?

For the Komnas HAM commissioners from Jakarta, who were fully familiar with the indigenous discourse that had become prominent in activist circles in the 1990s, the unique characteristics present in Kajang provided useful framing tools. At the local level however, the acceptance of this frame was much less univocal. In the previous chapter, I have explained that although the Ammatoa Kajang community lives in accordance to principles of modesty and egalitarianism, a strict distinction exists between adat leaders of noble descent and commoners. Those who joined the occupation were mostly commoners desperately in need of land. Many adat leaders on the other hand did not want to be associated with rebellious protest and collective contestation against the plantation company or the district government. Some of them deliberately tried to stay away from the conflict. Others, such as Kahar Muslim, only became involved when the occupants hid in the forest and urgently needed help. Most adat leaders contested the idea that the plantation conflict involved the adat community as a whole.¹⁵² Moreover, several adat leaders held positions in the village and district government and hence were cautious about being outspoken.

¹⁵² Traditional leaders (Including the Amma Toa, the *Karaeng Labiria* and the *Gala Lombo*) told me numerous times that the plantation conflict was a conflict between individuals and the company and did not involve the Ammatoa Kajang community 'as a whole'.

The case of Kajang thus shows that while communities may ‘fill’ the tribal slot, the question of who can invoke indigeneity for a particular purpose is a contentious matter. Diverging interests between various groups within the community may result into disagreements about the deployment of indigeneity. This will be the focus of the next section, where I will discuss the recent strategies of local activists and land claimants.

6.3 ACTORS, ADAT CLAIMS, AND DIFFUSE INTERESTS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

6.3.1 Adat and the tension between agrarian activists and traditional leaders

When I began my research in Bulukumba in July 2013, activists tried to reorganize the farmers, after a period of little protest against PT. Lonsum. The new protagonist advocating the rights of the local land users was AGRA (*Alliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria*). AGRA is an agrarian reform movement concerned with the situation of small farmers.¹⁵³ The organization is explicitly anti-capitalist and strongly opposes the presence of multinational plantation corporations in Indonesia. AGRA is part of an international farmer advocacy alliance through its membership of APEC (International Peasant Coalition) and ILPS (International League of People Struggle). AGRA has a central board in Jakarta but it is poorly funded. The regional bases in rural areas, where the organization enjoys a relatively large following, carry out the bulk of the work. In 2013, the organization claimed to have more than 300,000 members among farmers nationwide.¹⁵⁴

An AGRA-aligned activist from the district capital of Bulukumba named Rudy Njet, took the initiative to collectively oppose PT. Lonsum. He worked closely together with Budi, an AGRA activist from Makassar who accompanied me on my first field visit to Bulukumba. I joined both of them on their trips to villages around PT. Lonsum's Palangisang estate where they tried to convince local farmers to become members of AGRA. Much like the YPR and DRB in the early 2000s, they believed that mobilizing as many people as possible would be the most effective way to put pressure on the district government and PT. Lonsum.

However, finding participants at the local level was initially not easy. Many still vividly remembered the violence of 2003 and feared that if they would mobilize again, violent repercussions were bound to follow.¹⁵⁵ Others had developed a skeptic attitude towards activists coming from the city and did not believe that joining a demonstration would provide any benefits.¹⁵⁶ Some of the original claimants who first brought PT. Lonsum to court in 1982 contended that it was better to stick to legal procedures.¹⁵⁷ One

¹⁵³ A profile of the organization can be found at www.agraindonesia.org, last accessed 26 June 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with AGRA national chairman Rahmat Arjiguna in Jakarta, 28 July 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Personal communication with Rudy Njet in Bulukumba city, 13 October 2015.

¹⁵⁶ A number of people in Bonto Biraeng village, sub-district Kajang, informed me that some AGRA activists asked people to pay 300,000 rupiah (approximately USD 20) to become a member of the organization. People were promised that if they would become a member, the chances of getting back their land would be higher. Local AGRA leaders however deny to have asked membership fees.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Selasa B (original claimant) in Bonto Biraeng village, sub-district Kajang, 02 April 2014.

farmer who inherited a noble Kajang title (*Galla Ganta*) explained that even though PT. Lonsum took ten hectares of his family land, contesting the company would be an infringement of the *pasang* adat laws. These dictate that one has to always accept decisions taken by the government.¹⁵⁸

Despite the initial difficulties to mobilize people at the local level, AGRA eventually managed to organize a large action in Bulukumba in August 2013. News reports note that more than 3000 farmers joined AGRA during an occupation of Palangisang rubber estate, which lasted for several days.¹⁵⁹ Participants had various motives to join the action. Some of them were original claimants who had lost their adjudicated land in 2003/2004,¹⁶⁰ when PT. Lonsum took control of about half of the land released in 1999.¹⁶¹ Others were landless farmers who were about to move elsewhere to search for work opportunities and had not much left to lose. There were also people who worked as plantation workers for PT. Lonsum and joined the occupation to demand a higher salary.¹⁶²

The occupation lasted several days but eventually failed to yield results. During the time of my fieldwork, there was a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction with AGRA among local farmers. Some were disappointed that the demonstrations did not have an impact. Others had doubts about the leadership qualities of AGRA's activists. They complained that when the police dispersed the crowd, the activists seemed scared and instantly fled the scene.

AGRA activists meanwhile were of the opinion that the action failed because local people were too loyal to traditional leaders. According to Budi, the main obstacle for the efficient organization of farmers at the village level was the 'feudalist culture' that continued to exist. In his view, 'common' people were not capable of 'operating the organization', due to their persistent subordination to traditional leaders. For AGRA, this was particularly an issue in Kajang, where more than elsewhere, large landownership is still largely confined to the nobility and divine ancestry continues to be a highly important asset for people with leadership aspirations.

In Kajang, the different family lineages of noble descent continue to be held in high esteem by local people. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Amma Toa is the highest spiritual and moral leader. His authority extends over all adat related matters, but not over politics. He is never allowed to leave the traditional territory and must constantly fully abide by the modest lifestyle that is required inside this domain.

Positions associated with other families, such as the *Karaeng*, are however not confined to the spiritual and moral domain but confer political authority. Several members of the *Kareang* lineage live outside of the traditional territory, have modern daily lifestyles and are involved in business or hold a position in the local or regional government. While most of them live in Kajang, they often travel to the district capital of

¹⁵⁸ Interview with *Galla Ganta* in Bonto Biraeng village, sub-district Kajang, 18 April 2014.

¹⁵⁹ According to Indonesian newspaper *Kompas*, 17 August 2013.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 3, Subsection 5.3.

¹⁶¹ Interview with three AGRA members from Malleleng village, sub-district Kajang, 25 April 2014.

¹⁶² Meeting with four plantation workers of PT. Lonsum in Bonto Manggiring village, sub-district Bulukumpa, 01 May 2014.

Bulukumba, as well as to the provincial capital Makassar. A prominent example is the Kajang Sub-District Head, who holds the noble title of *Karaeng Labiria*. He lives a modern life, holds a position in the district government and owns much land. He is nevertheless considered to be an integral part of the adat community and takes pride in being of noble descent. He regularly visits the traditional adat territory and participates in adat rituals.

There are also noble families in Kajang who hardly adhere to the culture of modesty anymore, but still reap the benefits of having noble blood. In Tambangan for example, a village several kilometers away from the Ammatoa Kajang heartland, village heads are virtually without exception elected from offspring of one of most prestigious *Karaeng* families of Kajang. The current Tambangan Village Head holds the traditional position of *Karaeng Muncong Bulowa*, which is one of the three traditional *Karaeng* princes of Kajang. He was first elected at the exceptionally young age of seventeen.¹⁶³ The *Karaeng* family of Tambangan also owns a lot of land and allegedly obtained much wealth through successful businesses and close ties to the military under the New Order. It is this privileged position of noble elites in areas like Kajang that AGRA contests and tries to change. For AGRA, equal land relations can only be realized when traditional culture makes way for a more egalitarian one. Hence, AGRA's contentious politics were not only targeting the district government and the company, they also aimed to change power relations at the village level.

For poor farmers on the other hand, traditional patronage structures can provide a firmly rooted personal safety net, and such structures are therefore not easily challenged. In the aftermath of the 2003 violence, the traditional patronage relations offered Kajang villagers protection. Tana Toa Village Head Kahar Muslim (who later became a member of the district parliament) in particular proved to be a reliable patron. One poor and illiterate farmer asserted that he regards Muslim as his father (*saya punya bapak*), especially after Kahar bailed him out of jail when he was arrested in relation to the 2003 plantation occupation. He promised to be forever loyal to Muslim by always voting for him. Having political ambitions beyond the position of district parliament member, Muslim of course expected his clients to return the favor. Many Kajang farmers voted for Muslim when he ran as the GOLKAR candidate for Bulukumba District Head in the 2015 regional elections.¹⁶⁴ Local people often appreciate such traditional patronage-client relations more than the promises of activists from town, who in the eyes of many, are not reliable when times get rough.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Interview with Tambangan Village Head in Tambangan village, sub-district Kajang, 19 April 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Despite winning the majority of votes in sub-district Kajang, Kahar Muslim nevertheless lost the elections to another candidate.

¹⁶⁵ Various villagers in Bonto Biraeng village told me that they were disappointed in AGRA activists because they appeared to be scared of the police and left demonstrators behind when the police came.



Kahar Muslim, dressed in Kajang attire on a GOLKAR campaign poster for the 2014 Bulukumba district parliament elections.

While AGRA activists considered traditional culture a problem at the local level, they simultaneously saw the potential of invoking the traditional image of the Ammatoa Kajang community. They realized that emphasizing the more communitarian and egalitarian aspects of Kajang culture would surely attract sympathizers. AGRA's strong ideological basis as anti-feudalist and its objections against what the organization viewed as traditional 'feudal culture' thus did not stop the Bulukumba activists to use adat as one of their strategies.¹⁶⁶ For AGRA, any opportunity to strategize against the company was to be seized.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ See for instance the following political statement made by chairperson Rahmat Arjuna: <http://agraindonesia.org/political-statement-of-the-national-executive-committee-of-aliansi-gerakan-reforma-agaria-agra-in-commemorating-57-years-of-national-peasant-day-htn-2017/>, last accessed 26 June, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ At the time of my first field visit, the indigenous movement in Indonesia experienced a significant boost due to Constitutional Court ruling no. 35/2012 of May 2013 on the separation of adat forest and state forest (see Chapter 2). Throughout the country, self-proclaimed adat communities mobilized to claim their ancestral lands by putting signs in the ground stating 'adat forest, not state forest' (*hutan adat bukan hutan negara*). Rudy believed that the Constitutional Court ruling also provided a new basis for the Bulukumba

In March 2013, AGRA and its international partner APEC organized a three-day international fact-finding mission to Bulukumba joined by 32 activists from Indonesia, Cambodia, India and the Philippines. Guided by Rudy, the participants visited four villages near the Palangisang rubber estate. The final report, entitled 'The case of PT Lonsum and the Indigenous Peoples' Struggle to Reclaim their Land', was published on various NGO websites and submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Much like the booklet of Komnas HAM, the report refers to the land claimants as the Kajang indigenous people, who have 'one of the most ancient cultures in South Sulawesi'. Several sections emphasize the egalitarian aspects of Kajang society, such as the modest houses located in the inner territory. The report moreover contains pictures derived from a tour agency based in Makassar, which show traditional rituals being performed by Kajang people dressed in black.

Recently, the underlying tension between activists and traditional leaders rose to the surface. During AGRA's demonstration in November 2017, dozens of protestors, of which many barefooted and dressed in traditional black attire, demanded that PT. Lonsum's concession will not be extended in 2022. This time around, one prominent Kajang nobleman and retired military officer named Mansur Embas publicly expressed his opposition to use the name of the Ammatoa Kajang community in the plantation conflict. Embas claims to be of *Karaeng* descent and is generally regarded to be very knowledgeable of the community's traditional culture and socio-political organization. He is also vice-chairman of the board of AMAN South Sulawesi. Several regional online media reported that Mansur Embas complained about 'outsiders with certain interests' using the Ammatoa Kajang community in the conflict against PT. Lonsum. He claimed that there never had been any conflict between the community and the company.¹⁶⁸ Rudy, who was not mentioned but obviously referred to, replied on Facebook that this adat leader might as well start a career as manager of PT. Lonsum. In addition, one of Rudy's friends commented that Embas had apparently forgotten that the company had stolen his community's customary land.

farmers to claim land, although he knew that the ruling only applied to the Forest Areas, not plantation concessions. Nevertheless, shortly after the ruling, Rudy and fellow activists went around the plantation estates and put up signs on which they wrote 'this land is owned by the people and was seized by Lonsum' (*tanah ini milik rakyat yang dirampas oleh Lonsum*). Hence, while AGRA did not deploy the adat community claim at the local level, they did follow the buzz and mode of action of the movement.

¹⁶⁸ See: <http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2017/12/01/masyarakat-adat-ammatoa-jangan-dijadikan-tameng-untuk-bergerak> and <https://makassar.terkini.id/wakil-ketua-dewan-aman-minta-jangan-bodohi-masyarakat-kajang/>, last accessed 26 June 2018.



Demonstration held in the capital of Bulukumba organized by AGRA, November 2017. Protestors walk barefooted and are dressed in traditional Kajang attire.

6.3.2 New claims from marginalized noblemen: reviving a former kingdom

For some people, adat serves to legitimize their privileged position as noblemen. For others, adat is useful as a defense strategy to protect marginalized communities from outside intrusion. For a number of recently emerged land claimants, it was both. The new group - calling itself the Bulukumba Toa adat community - revolves around two figures, Pak Sangkala, a retired farmer in his early seventies and *Karaeng* Gatot, the great grandson of *Karaeng* Nojeng. Nojeng was once appointed as the head of the Bulukumba Toa *Karaengschap* in 1918. Bulukumba Toa had been a local kingdom subordinated to the larger Kingdom of Bone and came under colonial rule through the 1860 Palakka-treaty. The Dutch administered Bulukumba Toa as a district, it became an *adatgemeenschap* in the 1920s. The *Karaeng* was traditionally a man of noble descent elected by the local *hadat* council. Under colonial administration, the *Karaeng* would automatically be appointed as *Regent* and later as *adatgemeenschapshoofd* (Goedhart, 1947). Following Indonesian independence, Bulukumba Toa became Bulukumpa, one of Bulukumba's ten sub-districts (see research locations map on page 6).

In contradiction to the nobility in adjacent sub-district Kajang, where traditional noblemen remain political elites, the Bulukumpa nobility lost its prominent role in the local government administration after Indonesian independence. From the 1950s onwards, the *Karaeng* family of Bulukumpa was gradually ousted by political competitors of common ancestry and today, most of the village heads in the sub-district are commoners.

Gatot now invokes his family's former authority to claim land located inside PT. Lonsum's concession. By invoking a glorified history of equal partnership between the

colonial government, the Bulukumba Toa adat community and the plantation company, he highlights the current abusive and selfish conduct of PT. Lonsum. Gatot still refers to himself as *Karaeng* and speaks with great pride of the late colonial period, when his family ruled the area. The adat house of his great grandfather, built in 1913, is still intact and now functions as a museum. It exhibits various objects of the community, such as sacred *kalompoang* objects and old letters of the colonial government. Although people still visit the house now and then for rice harvest rituals, adat hardly plays a role in the local political domain. In an interview, Gatot admitted that the adat community in Bulukumpa is 'already extinct' (*kita sudah punah*). All land previously regulated by communal arrangements is now held under individual ownership.¹⁶⁹ Gatot nevertheless tried to keep his family's legacy alive as a member of a national organization for local and regional sultanates and kingdoms named FKSNI (*Forum Keraton Silaturahmi Nusantara*).

While wearing traditional clothes and practicing worshipping rituals are still the order of the day in Kajang, these practices have lost their every-day significance in Bulukumpa. Therefore, all that the Bulukumba Toa claimants could do to deploy adat as a claiming-strategy was referring to the past. In 2012, Sangkala and Gatot began to write up the history of the rubber plantation in Bulukumpa, to show that the relationship between local people and the company over the course of time had transformed from one of equality and benefit sharing to one of exploitation. They later sent the story as a report to the Bulukumba District Head. It explains how in 1919, *Karaeng* Nojeng agreed to lease a part of the land under his jurisdiction to *NV Celebes Landbouwmaatschappij*, the company of two British entrepreneurs that later became PT. Lonsum.¹⁷⁰ For many years, the company successfully improved local welfare, providing working opportunities for the local population. The company respected the boundaries of the adat lands (*ornamentsgronden*) located outside of the *erfpacht* land.

The report further notes that when the company was nationalized in 1964, the situation changed significantly. With support of the military, the company began to expand its rubber plantation beyond the borders of the original concession. The local adat leaders were afraid to resist, as a result of traumas from the Darul Islam rebellion, as well as the risk of being labelled communists. In the 1980s, the company, now under the name of PT. Lonsum, began to illegally expand its rubber estates again. The total size of land belonging to the Bulukumba Toa adat community taken by the company comprised 254 hectares.¹⁷¹

Although the adat community in Bulukumpa had long lost its formal position, Gatot, as a descendant of the Bulukumba Toa *Karaeng* family, still presents himself as a local authority, sealing each letter sent to government agencies with government-like stamps stating *Lembaga Adat Bulukumba Toa, Kabupaten Bulukumba, prov. Sulsel*. However, it was not Gatot, the grandson of *Karaeng* Nojeng, but Sangkala, a retired, university-educated farmer of common descent, who manifested himself as the group's

¹⁶⁹ Interview with *Karaeng* Gatot in *kelurahan* Jawi-Jawi, sub-district Bulukumpa, 11 November 2014.

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 3, Subsection 4.1.

¹⁷¹ A report named '*Sejarah Keberadaan PP. PT. Lonsum Tbk Di Kelurahan Jawi-Jawi Kecamatan Bulukumpa*' written by *Lembaga Adat Bulukumba Toa*.

leader and main claimant. Sangkala organized all the documents, including maps, the written history and pictures of soldiers who supported the company in the 1960s. Gatot himself was less involved and allowed Sangkala to represent the adat community as adat leader (*pemangku adat*) in meetings and negotiations with government officials, even though Sangkala did not have any kinship lineage to the *Karaeng* family. Sangkala had the will and verbal skills to take the lead in negotiations, while Gatot had the noble blood to legitimize the claims to rights over the land.

In an interview, Sangkala stressed that he had no desire to restore the political influence of adat in Bulukumba. The only reason why the Bulukumba Toa adat community was revived, was because doing so provided an opportunity to claim the land taken by the company.¹⁷² After numerous conversations at his house, Sangkala eventually informed me that his biggest personal discontent in fact not even concerned land. In principle, he supported the presence of the plantation company, but felt that the company did not do enough for local development. He for instance complained about the bad conditions of the roads surrounding the plantation. Hence, rather than to restore an old order, the invocation of adat served as a means to obtain a share of the fruits reaped from capitalism.

To summarize this section, we have seen that the deployment of indigeneity in relation to the Bulukumba plantation conflict is a contentious issue. Initially, external mediators - the Komnas HAM commissioners – framed the conflict in terms of an adat community victimized by a plantation company and the government. The local level is however marked by various stances toward adat. The conservative nobility of Kajang, of which many are tied to the local and regional government, are proud of their noble position but rather not see the indigeneity card being played in the conflict. Prominent activist leaders in the early 2000s did not see the point of invoking something which in their eyes hampered a more egalitarian and emancipated society. More recently emerged activists, such as those aligned with AGRA, do see the potential of the ‘tribal slot’. While aware of the conservative and sometimes even suppressive role of adat at the local level, they nevertheless use the indigeneity frame for strategic purposes. The local land claimants are generally not very fond of activists but join protests organized by AGRA in the hope of getting a plot of land. Finally, I have discussed the recently emerged Bulukumba Toa claimants, who use adat in the form of a tactical revival of a long abolished former kingdom in order to get more benefits from the plantation company. Overall, the deployment of adat land claims has added another layer to the conflict, which was already complex. In the next section, I will look at how regional authorities have responded to the conflict amidst the growing number of claims.

6.4 THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT GOVERNMENT IN THE ERA OF REGIONAL ELECTORAL POLITICS

6.4.1 Negotiating land claims through the Bulukumba District Head

¹⁷² Interview with Sangkala in *kelurahan* Ballasaraja, sub-district Bulukumba, 28 April 2014.

In March 2014, I met with ibu Suarni, the Regional Head of the NLA in Bulukumba. When I asked her about the plantation conflict while having coffee in her office, she took out a huge pile of documents from her desk drawer and handed it to me. The unorganized stack comprised the related claims that she had accumulated over the course of time. Among the hundreds of papers was a map, which indicated the locations of the three groups of active claimants with dots. There was the AGRA group, the Bulukumba Toa adat community and the original claimants from Bonto Biraeng village that had gone to court in 1982. Ibu Suarni informed me that NGO's such as AGRA had regularly come to her office to demand the re-measurement of PT. Lonsum's concession. She told me that she found this confusing, as it had become impossible for her to determine which claims were valid. She also mentioned that it was the authority of the central government (*kewenangan pusat*) to resolve such large-scale conflicts. Numerous times had she proposed to the claimants to go to court and enter legal procedures, but the claimants declined. According to her, they refused to go to court because, she claimed, they knew they lacked the legal proof to substantiate their claims.

Ibu Suarni was not the only official with a stack of claims tucked away in a desk drawer. A similar pile of documents could be found at other government offices. With the exception of those who had litigated in 1982, few claimants put much trust in the judiciary. Most did think that the NLA was important, since its mother office, The Ministry of Agrarian Affairs, is formally in charge of issuing plantation concessions. However, most claimants believed that particularly the district government of Bulukumba could play a key-role in resolving the conflict, especially the Bulukumba District Head, as a high, yet relatively accessible official. What also mattered for some were their personal connections to the power circle of the Bulukumba District Head.

When AGRA and the Bulukumba Toa adat community became active, a new Bulukumba District Head named Zainudin Hasan had recently taken office in 2010. Hasan was a wealthy businessman owning several factories in Sulawesi and a five-star hotel in Makassar. In the eyes of many, a man of such wealth could not possibly become a 'clean' civil servant. Rumor was that he bought each of his children living in Jakarta a Ferrari. There were also people who respected him because of his 'commoner' background, although he was now usually addressed with the noble Buginese title of *puang*. He grew up in a simple rural household and was a security guard before eventually working his way up. In the early years of his term, he actively manifested himself as a capable mediator in the plantation conflict, presenting himself towards the claimants in a patron-like way. Such a role fits well into the context of the politics prompted by regional elections, in which 'candidates facing newly competitive elections for governor and district head posts now need local allies and mass support' (Buehler, 2016: 107). Therefore, right before and right after elections, political candidates tend to concede to demands made by their constituents, in order to boost their image as caring and responsible leaders.

Shortly after being elected, the Bulukumba District Head first formed a team of district government officials to examine PT. Lonsum's plantation borders,¹⁷³ followed by a second team to investigate the claims on location.¹⁷⁴ He asked village Heads and sub-district heads in the disputed area, to submit people's claims to him.¹⁷⁵ The claimants initially felt supported by this active approach as they had the impression that serious steps were taken to resolve the conflict. They submitted their claims on paper, in most cases signed by their sub-district head or village head.

Rudy and his fellow activists made a list of hundreds of claimants from more than ten villages, reporting about the location and size of the land taken by the company. They furthermore collected the transcripts of court hearings and took photographs of what claimants called 'natural evidence' (*bukti alam*) of people's land rights, such as the presence of burial sites inside PT. Lonsum's concession. Taken together, the registered claims amounted to a size of more than two thousand hectares, approximately a third of the company's concession. In addition, the Bulukumba Toa adat community demanded 254 hectares of land that belonged to the former adat community.

The government investigation team concluded in its final report that there was strong evidence that the plantation estates of PT. Lonsum extended beyond the borders of the concession and overlapped with land owned by local land users. The team therefore concluded that a re-measurement of the concession was needed. The Bulukumba District Head subsequently asked PT. Lonsum to stop operating in the areas that possibly overlapped with people's claims in order to avoid conflict.¹⁷⁶

In anticipation of a possible re-measurement, some claimants formed strategic informal alliances with lower district government officials. There were rumors that some officials made deals with certain land claimants to share the profits from land transactions, in case the land was to be released from the company's concession. The re-measurement however turned out to be an empty and unrealizable promise. The district government declared that there was no budget for this two-billion-rupiah operation (approximately USD 140,000) and that PT. Lonsum had to bear the costs, which the company refused.¹⁷⁷ PT. Lonsum contended that according to the law, a re-measurement could only be carried out at the request of the concession-holder, in this case PT. Lonsum, and that it saw no reason for such an operation. The company dismissed the adat land

¹⁷³ Decree of Bulukumba District Head no. 255/VII/2011 (*Keputusan Bupati Bulukumba nr 255/VII/2011 tentang Pembentukan Tim Terpadu Peninjauan/Pemeriksaan Batas-Batas Lokasi HGU PT. PP Lonsum Tbk. Di Kabupaten Bulukumba*).

¹⁷⁴ Decree of Bulukumba District Head no. 44G/X/2012 (*Keputusan Bupati Bulukumba nr 44G/X/2012 Tentang Pembentukan Tim Verifikasi Lapangan Lokasi HGU PT. Lonsum Indonesia Tbk. Di Kabupaten Bulukumba*).

¹⁷⁵ Letter of the District of Head of Bulukumba of 28 March 2012, entitled 'Request for data of land owned by the people inside the concession' (*Permintaan Data Warga Pemilik Lahan Dalam Areal Lokasi Pengelolaan*).

¹⁷⁶ Letter of the Bulukumba District Head to PT. Lonsum of 31 September 2012, entitled 'Request to temporarily stop activities' (*Permintaan Kesediaan Menghentikan Aktivitas Sementara*).

¹⁷⁷ Notes of a mediation meeting between PT. Lonsum, the claimants and the regional government in Makassar, 23 September 2013, chaired by the regional secretary of South Sulawesi province.

claims, arguing that such claims had no legal validity.¹⁷⁸ In a long letter addressed to the Bulukumba District Head, the CEO of PT. Lonsum noted:

*'We have opened this land in a gradual, systematic way with good intentions for the local communities, who were given the chance to cultivate the land while the company did not yet use it. But since the Reformasi era, groups of NGO's have constantly made new claims about adat land. (...) We hope that the Bulukumba District Head can offer protection and legal certainty to our company, which has been investing in Bulukumba since 1919'.*¹⁷⁹

After PT. Lonsum sent this letter, the Bulukumba District Head initially continued to appear determined to settle the conflict. In January 2013, he even informed the provincial and central government that he was trying to settle the conflict at the district level, calling it 'one of the classic problems' (*salah satu permasalahan klasik*) of the Bulukumba district government.¹⁸⁰ However, in November, he suddenly announced that as the Bulukumba District Head, he had no authority to deal with the conflict. The statement noted the following:

*'The Bulukumba District Head has never said and will never say to the people that the land inside the concession of PT. Lonsum will be divided among the people, because that matter is not in the hand of the district government. If there are any remaining problems between the people and the company, I recommend proceeding through the available legal mechanisms'.*¹⁸¹

Upon reading the statement, many activists and land claimants felt cheated. Some were convinced that the Bulukumba District Head had used the conflict to the advancement of his personal interests. For example, Sangkala, leader of the Bulukumba Toa adat community, believed that the Bulukumba District Head used the claims submitted to him to pressurize PT. Lonsum and extract bribes. Although hard to verify, such accounts do fit the broader patterns that characterize regional politics in decentralized Indonesia, where the district governments have more power and 'a weak, fragmented state also makes it easier for local government officials and the private sector to engage in collusive corruption' (Wollenberg et al, 2006, see also Palmer, 2001; Smith et al, 2003; Luebke, 2009).

6.4.2 New Government, new alliances

During my first fieldwork period in early 2014, not much was going on in terms of collective action of the various groups of claimants. Activists seemed to lack motivation and the statement of the Bulukumba District Head appeared to have been a serious blow to their spirit. Groups like AGRA saw no reason to demonstrate as there was not much left

¹⁷⁸ Letter of PT. Lonsum CEO to the Minister of Home Affairs, 28 January 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Letter of PT. Lonsum CEO to the Bulukumba District Head, 04 October 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Letter of the Bulukumba District Head of 11 February 2013, entitled 'Handling the problem of people's claims of PT. Lonsum's concession' (*Penanganan Permasalahan Tuntutan Masyarakat atas Lokasi HGU PT PP Lonsum Tbk*).

¹⁸¹ Statement of the Bulukumba District Head, 6 November 2013, sent to sub-district heads and village heads.

to bargain for. When I returned for my second period of fieldwork in late 2015 moreover, it appeared as if there had hardly been any developments during my absence. In fact, it seemed as if the conflict had become somewhat of a non-issue in Bulukumba. However, a village head in Kajang sub-district explained to me that this was only the silence before the storm. In December 2015, district head elections (*pilkada*) were scheduled in Bulukumba. The village head asserted that until that time, all four candidates would certainly stay away from the conflict, even though several candidates had strong informal connections to prominent figures in the land claiming movement.¹⁸² He assured me that as soon as the election period had passed, Bulukumba would once again become agitated by the conflict.

His predictions proved to be right. It turned out that for some of the claimants the new political constellation was promising, particularly for the Bulukumba Toa adat group. The newly elected Bulukumba District Head, Sukri Sappewali, was a man of noble ancestry from sub-district Gantarang, and known for his sympathy toward the old former kingdoms of the region.¹⁸³ But even more important was that the new Vice District Head (*wakil bupati*) Tomy Satria, was the son of the leader of the Bulukumba Toa adat community, Sangkala. This connection provided the Bulukumba Toa group a direct line to the regional center of power. Prior to becoming a government official, Tomy worked for the powerful US NGO called The Nature Conservancy in East Kalimantan. His civil society background and the fact that his father was one of the main claimants in the plantation conflict, was reason for optimism among local activists. AGRA activist Rudy organized numerous meetings with the Bulukumba Toa group, in order discuss cooperation.

Similar to the previous Bulukumba District Head, Satria initially presented himself as a flexible leader who is supportive of the claimants. When AGRA organized a new demonstration in front of the district head office in 2016, it was Satria who went outside to meet the protesting crowds. There he announced the formation of an investigation team to verify the people's land claims. Satria has also organized various formal meetings with his father and representatives of AGRA. During one of these meetings, he noted that he does not think that the presence of PT. Lonsum contributes to the prosperity of Bulukumba's people in any way. Satria also coined a plan to replace the company with a local company, so that more people could benefit from it.¹⁸⁴ It is yet to be seen whether this is going to materialize and whether his attitude will remain the same throughout the further course of his term.

¹⁸² An example is Kahar Muslim, the adat leader from Kajang who had protected the hiding occupants in 2003. Having already served three terms in the district parliament (DPR-D), he now ran as district head candidate for GOLKAR. His campaign team (*tim sukses*) was led by Armin and Iwan Selasa, the two main leaders of the YPR and DRB, the grassroots mobilizations organizations that coordinated the mass occupation of PT. Lonsum's plantation in 2003.

¹⁸³ Sukri Sappaweli claims noble ancestry from the kingdom of Gantarang and is known to be proud of his hereditary connection to this former regional kingdom. In this context, he accepted an initiation of *Karaeng Gatot* to visit the adat house and meet with the Bulukumba Toa adat community in 2017.

¹⁸⁴ See also the following online news article: <https://www.suaralidik.com/wabup-bulukumba-sepeserpun-saya-dan-bupati-tidak-pernah-terima-dari-pt-lonsum/>, last accessed 26 June 2018.

Prominent noblemen of the Ammatoa Kajang community currently appear divided. While figures like Mansur Embas have argued that there is in fact no land conflict between the Ammatoa Kajang community and PT. Lonsum, the Kajang Sub-District Head/*Karaeng Labiria* recently began showing support for the land claimants. Local voices claim that this support is motivated by his political aspirations. Although he has not publically spoken on the issue, he has informally announced his support to revoke the concession after its expiration in 2022. As such there is at present a relatively strong local coalition against the extension of the company's plantation concession. However, whether this coalition will survive the next round of electoral politics is far from certain.

6.5 CONCLUSION

In the contentious politics revolving around land claims in the era of democracy and decentralized governance, invoking adat has become a common strategy in Indonesia. The plantation conflict in Bulukumba has sparked various representations of adat. External mediators found in the traditional Ammatoa Kajang culture a powerful symbol to frame the conflict. Emphasizing the egalitarian aspects of the community's traditional lifestyle helped to create an image of a harmonious and pure traditional rural community, pitted against a greedy corporation. But adat also has a different face in Kajang, as it simultaneously serves to legitimize the privileged position of the nobility.

In the plantation conflict, adat has been used for both ends. The Bulukumba Toa group referred to a glorified past of a former kingdom in Bulukumba, while Komnas HAM and AGRA deployed the traditional culture still present in adjacent sub-district Kajang. Although AGRA activists believed that adat was suppressive and a problem for organization at the grassroots level, they also saw that the egalitarian aspects of the Ammatoa Kajang culture provided powerful tools to present an appealing story of rural injustice to the outside world. Noblemen in Kajang on the other hand viewed adat not so much as an emancipatory resistance force, but rather as a legitimization of their privileged position. Tension between such traditional noblemen and activists signifies the dichotomy of adat: it has been a source of contention among different groups with vested interests.

However, adat must not be understood exclusively in terms of its politicization. On the contrary, it continues to play a dominant role in many people's lives in the Bulukumba countryside, especially in a traditional area like Kajang. Besides the traditional normative system called *pasang*, traditional patronage structures based on adat remain important in Kajang. Adat leaders enjoy considerable authority while newcomers such as activists from outside face distrust. Adat leaders can offer their subordinates protection in difficult times. But if it is in their interest, these leaders may at times also oppress their followers. We have seen in Chapter 3 that several leaders of noble blood worked with the plantation company during the New Order.

The point is that the role of adat leaders in society is not always the role that the indigenous movement wants them to have, especially when adat leaders have retained their political authority. How, by whom, and for which purpose the 'tribal slot' is invoked

is a matter of contention between different interest groups. Traditional leaders simultaneously hold other influential positions, either in business, the government or the military. It is revealing that most leaders of the Ammatoa Kajang community have not played an active role in the plantation conflict. Besides their role as community leaders, they also have their own interests and in the case discussed in this chapter, it was usually not in their interest to turn against a plantation company or to oppose government authority. Given their position and embeddedness in networks of power, most adat leaders prefer to accommodate and co-opt to government authority rather than oppose it. Overall, traditional noble rulers whose position is still strong have had little reason to deploy adat to claim land rights, while those traditional noblemen that actually did engage as claimants in the conflict (the Bulukumba Toa group) lost their elite position long ago. They deployed a position they no longer had by referring to a former regional kingdom that already lost its political influence.

This chapter finally looked at the role of the district government, particularly the Bulukumba District Head, in the era of decentralization and regional elections. The analysis showed that a 'government close to the people' creates both limitations and opportunities for land claimants. The decentralized district government first appeared seriously committed to resolve the conflict as the Bulukumba District Head was receptive to the claims submitted to him and followed up on them with several investigations. By doing so, he preserved an image of flexible authority, while maintaining a bargaining position between the various claimant groups and the plantation company. However, he later claimed to have no authority to deal with the conflict, which caused suspicion among activists and land claimants about alleged corruption. Because the Bulukumba District Head first conceded to claims, only to reject them at a later point, the conflict appeared stuck in a theater of ongoing negotiations without resolution.

The district government that took office in 2016 appears more opportune for the land claimants, as several claimants are informally connected to an influential official, the Bulukumba Vice District Head. Such a connection appears to advance the bargaining position of claimants. The current position of the Bulukumba Toa adat community and their AGRA allies exemplify this. Nevertheless, the unfulfilled promises of the previous Bulukumba District Head tell us that in the cycles of contention, the current momentum is not in any way a guarantee to realize land rights in the future.