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# **Does the Sea Divide or Unite Indonesians? Ethnicity and Regionalism from a Maritime Perspective<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Resource Management in Asia-Pacific**

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# Does the Sea Divide or Unite Indonesians? Ethnicity and Regionalism from a Maritime Perspective

## Abstract

The Indonesian Government argues that the sea bridges the many islands and different peoples of Indonesia. Politically, this might be appropriate as a means of encouraging people to think that wherever and whoever there are, they are united as Indonesians. However, when this ideology is used for maritime resource management, it creates problems. One issue derives from the fact that people do not think that the Indonesian sea is 'free for all' Indonesians. I will argue that people, however vaguely, talk about 'we' and 'they' in defining who has the right to a particular fishing ground and who should be excluded. By analyzing conflicts that have taken part in different places in Indonesia, I will demonstrate that ethnicity and regionalism have been used as the defining factor of 'We' and 'They.' In particular contexts, ethnicity and regionalism define whether fishermen can access marine resources. Thus, at the practical level the sea does not unite Indonesians, and it is in fact, ethnicity and regionalism that divides the Indonesian seas.

## Introduction: The Sea, The Imagined Bridge

The political ideology of the sea in Indonesia is embedded in the concept of *Wawasan Nusantara* (Archipelagic Outlook). The essence of *Wawasan Nusantara* is the 'oneness' of Indonesia in terms of territory (*wilayah*), nationhood (*bangsa*), goal and spirit of struggle (*tujuan dan tekad perjuangan*), law (*hukum*), socio-cultural attributes (*sosial-budaya*), economy (*ekonomi*), and defense and security (*Hankam*)<sup>2</sup>. The territorial 'oneness' of Indonesia assumes that the many islands (land), sea (water) and the atmosphere (air) are a single integrated entity<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, therefore, the sea is not considered as dividing the islands of Indonesia. On the contrary, the sea is believed to unite all the Indonesian islands and the people living on them. In Indonesia this ideology is commonly expressed by the proverbs that *laut adalah perekat kepulauan Indonesia* (The sea is the glue of the Indonesian archipelago) and *laut adalah jembatan yang menghubungkan pulau dan penduduk yang menempatinnya di seluruh Indonesia* (the sea is a bridge connecting all the islands and people of Indonesia).

If we look at the government's marine fishery policies in Indonesia, we can see that these proverbs have been adopted even in their literal meaning; as a bridge for all Indonesians, the sea is 'free for all people' to use. In doing so, the government detaches the sea from all social groups in Indonesia. The Indonesian Constitution 1945 article 33 (3) which states that '*Bumi, air, angkasa, dan kekayaan alam yang terkandung di dalamnya dikuasai oleh negara dan dipergunakan untuk sebesar-besarnya kemakmuran rakyat*' ('the land, water, air and the natural wealth therein are under the state control and used for the best of people's welfare.' Emphasis is mine) is the legal reference for this. As a result, unlike other resources such as forests and minerals—where the government splits the rights over these resources into units and distributes them to people or institutions—the sea is undivided. Again, unlike rights to manage forests (*Hak*

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2 Habib 1981, pp. 27.

3 See Anwar 1996, pp. 10.

*Pengusahaan Hutan*) which are given to a particular company, to the exclusion of other companies for that particular area of forest, many fishermen or fishing companies may hold the license to fish for the same resource in the same fishing ground. In short, the sea is 'free for all.' This means that those who live in the western edge of Indonesia might fish in the waters of the other edge of the archipelago together with people from different places and cultural backgrounds. Of course there are taxes to be paid and procedures to follow, but these taxes and procedures only differentiate people based on the technology they use. Those who use 'traditional' technology are free to fish wherever they like; those who use middle range technology can only fish in the zone defined by the government; and those who use modern technology are only allowed to fish outside the zones defined for less complex fishing gear.<sup>4</sup>

Is this ideology and the marine resource management practice which derives from it followed by fishermen? Do people think about the sea in the same way as the Indonesian Government? What do people think when they enter fishing zones, extract resources or prohibit other people from doing so? The following sections will shed some light on these issues.

### **Ethnicity and Access to Fishing Ground**

Conflicts over fishing grounds in the Kei Islands, South eastern Maluku, as in other parts of Indonesia, are not a new phenomenon. As far as people remember, conflicts over sea boundaries and resources have been taking place since the 1930s. The causes and the consequences of these conflicts are various. The cases that I am going to discuss are examples of the conflicts that demonstrate the importance of ethnicity in accessing fishing grounds.

The first conflict that I am going to discuss is a conflict in a village of Sathean on Kei Kecil Island (see Figure. 1). This village consists of two hamlets (*obo*) called *Ohoisaran* and *Ohoislam*. In terms of geographical and population size, Ohoisaran is twice as big as Ohoislam. In 1993 when the population of Sathean was around 1500 people, two thirds of them lived at Ohoisaran. Thus, Ohoislam was populated by approximately 500 people. I observed that the social characteristics of these two hamlets were also different. The peoples of Ohoisaran were Christian, while the people of Ohoislam were Muslim. Looking at the occupations, I found that the majority of Ohoisaran's people spend most of their time farming. A small number occasionally went fishing for subsistence purposes. On the contrary, the majority of Ohoislam's adult males spent most of their time fishing and only farmed in their spare time. Some adult females of Ohoislam were also involved in selling the fish caught by their husbands, brothers or relatives. They also worked on farms after they had sold the fish either in the village or at market.

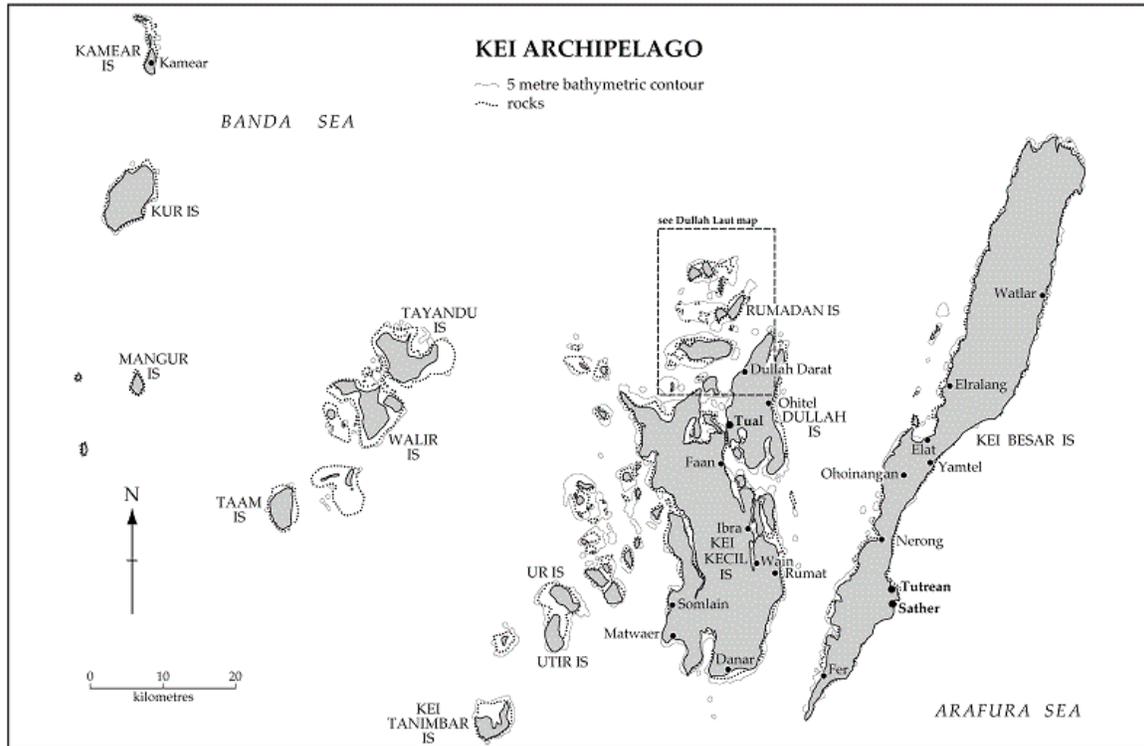
Conflict between people of these two settlements occurred in 1964 when a fisherman of Ohoislam adopted lift-net technology and set his nets in the adjacent waters. People of Ohoisaran protested the operation of the lift-net on the grounds that it would cause unequal distribution of the catch because Ohoisaran people only used fishing lines or gill nets in their

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<sup>4</sup> These interpretations derive from my readings on various regulations such as Fishery Law No. 9, 1985, President Decree on Trawl Ban, Ministry Decree on Sea Zoning, etc.

fishing activities. Lift-net operators would get much more catch than line fishing and gill net operators. In response to the protest, the Ohoislam fisherman stopped operating the lift-nets, thus avoiding further conflict.

Figure 1. Map of the Kei Archipelago



A new conflict broke out in 1984. Again, this conflict was triggered by the adoption of lift-net technology by a fisherman from Ohoislam. Interestingly, the conflict was solved differently on this occasion. In this conflict, the people of Ohoisaran allowed the fisherman of Ohoislam to continue operating his lift-net with two conditions. Firstly, he and other fishermen who followed him in operating lift-nets had to pay a kind of tax (*ngasi*) to the village. Secondly, they were prohibited from setting their lift-nets in the village's sea territory where people of Ohoisaran did some fishing.<sup>5</sup> The second condition was followed by the

5 Traditionally, the people of Kei claim communal ownership over adjacent sea territory which is called *petuanan laut* (sea estate). The social unit that claims ownership to a particular sea territory range from a kin-group, an *ohoi*, a village, a *ratschap* (traditional 'kingdom'), a moiety, and an ethnic group (the whole Kei people). This claim makes it possible for a particular social group to exclude others (or outsiders) from making use, particularly for commercial purposes, of their sea territory. In reference to Sathcan, normatively, their sea territory is a part of *petuanan laut* under the control of *ratschap* named Ibra. Thus, they share the ownership of a bigger sea territory with two other villages - Ngabub and Ibra - under the control of a *rat* ('king') who lived in the village of Ibra (the village and the *ratschap* shared the same name). In practice, however, each village controlled their own sea territory and developed relatively autonomous regulations for accessing

division of the village territory into two sections: one section exclusively for Ohoisaran people and another section available for both.

In reference to traditional sea ownership (see footnote no. 6), these conditions reflected that the people of Ohoisaran considered the fishermen of Ohoislam to be ‘outsiders’ who, without the consent of local people, were not allowed to fish in the village territory. (Or, at least, the people of Ohoisaran thought that the people of Ohoislam did not have the same rights in relation to the village’s sea territory and resources). This logic was based on the ‘history’ of the village. In their narrative of origin it is told that the first people who came to Sathean and established a settlement were the ancestors of the people of Ohoisaran. Based on this story, they considered themselves to be the ‘origin group’ of the village, which is used as a source of legitimacy to lay claim to ownership of the land and the surrounding sea. On the other hand, the population of Ohoislam are said to be the descendants of a Buginese man who married a Sathean woman. Since the local kinship system focuses on the male line, they were not considered to be the original social group. In fact, the people of Ohoisaran identified the population of Ohoislam as Buginese. However, since the people of Ohoislam adopted the family name of an origin kin group, *Yamlean*, they were also considered *Yamlean Tempel* (attached to Yamlean). As such, they were not complete outsiders.

It is clear from an assessment of this conflict that it was not only technology that constrained the people of Ohoislam from accessing the village’s sea territory, it was their ‘otherness’ from the perspective of the Ohoisaran people. Furthermore, the parameter of this otherness was not locality or biological connections but it was a cultural parameter, namely ethnicity. In terms of locality, the people of Ohoislam had lived in the village for generations. Biologically, they also shared the same blood with the people of Ohoisaran through a Sathean woman. Yet, in terms of ethnicity, they were, as people of Ohoisaran address them, Buginese. This is the reason that they were excluded from accessing marine resources. It was only with permission from the origin group, which was bought by paying the *ngasi*, that these ‘outsiders’ were allowed to enter and make use of the village’s sea territory.

The second conflict occurred between Dullah Laut villagers and Butonese fishermen. This conflict took place in the second half of 1997. Again, the conflict was triggered by the operation of lift-nets in Dullah Laut’s water (see Figure. 1). Dullah Laut villagers knew that the owner of the lift-net must have been an ‘outsider’ because none of the villagers currently used this technology. After some investigations it was revealed that the owner was a Butonese man who was married to a woman from Ut Island in the Kei archipelago. Knowing that the lift-net owner was associated with the people of Ut Island, Dullah Laut villagers did not take hard measures against the lift-net operator who had entered their sea territory without requesting permission. This was because the people of Dullah Laut respected the Ut Island villagers. Dullah Laut villagers recount that the ancestors of Ut Island people had once assisted their ancestors in a time of war. This respect was expressed by allowing them to do some fishing in Dullah Laut sea territory. However, when more and more lift-nets were brought into the fishing ground, and it became clear that most, if not all, of the fishermen had nothing to do with the Ut Island people but were fellow Butonese of

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the territory, as conflicts in Sathean - that I will discuss soon - reflect. (See Adhuri 1993 and 2002 for a more detailed discussion of traditional marine tenure in Kei Islands).

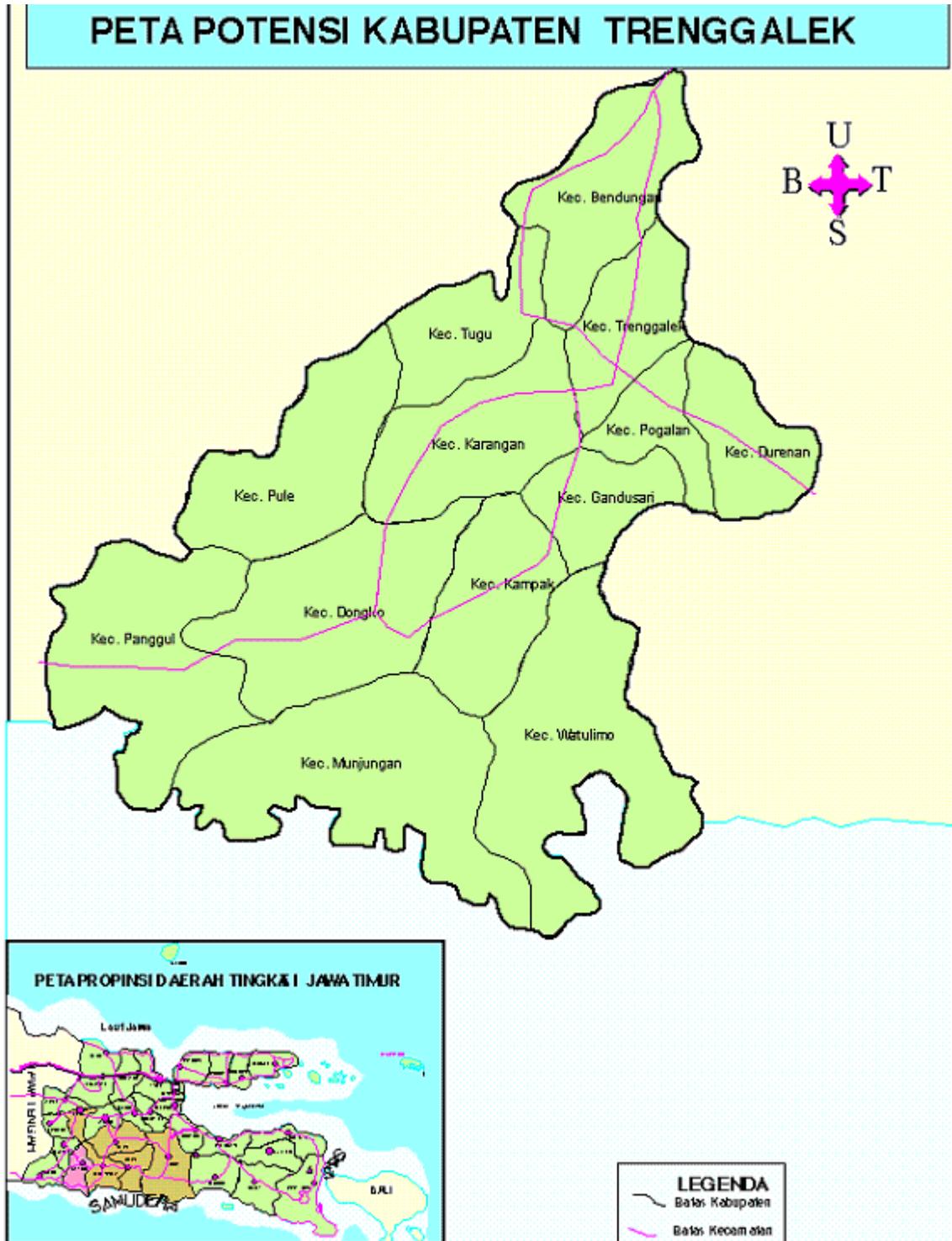
the first lift-net's owner, Dullah laut villagers took a firm stand. They raided the lift-net fishermen, forcing them out of Dullah Laut sea territory. The lift-net fishermen did not return to fish in the territory again.

A third case concerns a conflict between Madurese and local fishermen in Perigi, on the south coast of East Java (see Figure. 2). The conflict that took place in 2000 was provoked by the use of kerosene lamps (*petromaks*) by Madurese fishermen when they operated their fishing gear. This was considered to be a threat to the catch of local fishermen because, although they used the same fishing technology (but without the *petromaks*), the light of the lamp attracted more fish to the Madurese fishermen and reduced the catch of locals. Based on this logic, the local fishermen protested against the use of *petromaks*, but the Madurese resisted. Locals responded by burning four of the six Madurese fishing boats, destroying the Madurese huts and driving the Madurese from the area. When I did my fieldwork in early 2002, none of these Madurese fishermen had returned to Perigi.

My reading of the above conflict is as follows. Unlike in Kei Islands where the coastal area is communally owned, in Java, normatively, the sea is 'free for all.' Therefore, fishermen working in the area came from different places and ethnic groups. However, the non-locals were differentiated from local fishermen. The former was called *nelayan andong* ('visiting fishermen'). Interestingly, at least from the perspective of locals, this category also reflects the different rights and obligations of each in relation to the sea, as well as modes of conduct in daily life. In relation to the sea, the *andong* fishermen should not use fishing technology that might disturb the operations of the locals. In relation to modes of conduct, the locals also thought that as guests of the local community, the *nelayan andong* should behave in accordance with the local norms. Unfortunately, the Madurese fishermen had breached these rules. The first mistake was their use of kerosene lamps. The second mistake was something to do with the 'character' and behaviour of the Madurese. With regard to character, local fishermen judged the Madurese to be violent. They were easily provoked to argue and could be physically violent, which often involved the traditional Madurese weapon (*clurit*). According to local people, this contrasted with the Javanese who were humble and tended to avoid conflict. The Madurese were also disliked because they were considered to be impolite (*tidak sopan*). They walked from the coast to their huts—approximately 300-400 meters, passing through public spaces such as the market, offices and hotel—only wearing their under-pants. Again, according to the local norms, this was not acceptable.

These conflicts clearly show how local people manipulate local and non-local identities in order to control maritime resources or exclude others from access to resources. In this regard, ethnicity is used to define 'non-localness' or 'otherness'. This was obvious when people of Ohoisan called the Ohoislam fishermen 'Buginese' or, 'half Buginese'; the Dullah Laut villagers addressed the lift-net fishermen as the Butonese; and the Perigi fishermen labelled 'Madurese' those who used *petromaks*. These ethnic groups were defined as non-local, and were then excluded from accessing local marine resources. It is also apparent that technological differences or innovations precipitate ethnic labelling.

Figure 2. The Location of Perigi



## Regionalism and the Politics of Exclusion

Conflicts between fishermen in Indonesia have become more serious and widespread since 2000. These conflicts have not only caused the loss of many boats and fishing gear but also the lives of many people. Conflicts took place in North Sumatera, Bengkulu, Lampung, along the northern and southern coast of Java, Madura and Pontianak in Kalimantan.

From the account of conflicts that I have compiled, it is apparent that the politics of exclusion plays an important role in fishing disputes (see table 1). Two grounds for exclusion can be identified: 1. fishing ground violations, and 2. technological violations.

Fishing ground violations refer to the operation of ‘outside’ fishermen in a fishing ground claimed to be under the control of a particular local group. Unlike the three cases that I discussed in the previous section (where ethnicity was used to define otherness)—in many cases the boundaries of the fishing ground and the ‘otherness’ derive from the Indonesian Government’s administrative vocabularies. Thus, all the conflicts in table 1 relate more to the village (*desa*), sub-district (*kecamatan*), district (*kabupaten*) or province (*provinsi*) rather than to ethnicity or other ‘traditional’ boundaries. For example, the burning of four purse seines of Indramayu and Cirebon fishermen in Serang (No.9), shows that the Serang fishermen used the provincial boundaries as a basis for accusing the Indramayu and Cirebon of violating their sea boundaries. The same explanation might apply to the conflict between Cilacap (Central Java) and Pangandaran (West Java) fishermen (No. 5) and between Bengkulu and North Sumatera and South Kalimantan fishermen (No. 10). Other cases, however, show that conflict is more complex. Conflicts between the northern coast of Java and Masalembu fishermen (No. 1, 2 and 8) demonstrate that groupings are not always in line with the division of administrative units. In these conflicts the fishermen from the northern coast of Java --who were from different districts-- acted as a group against fishermen from Masalembu who were from a single district. In these conflicts, the Masalembos drew their marine boundaries according to their district boundaries, so that fishermen from other districts were excluded. In contrast, the sea boundaries erected by the northern coast of Java fishermen—to exclude Masalembu—represented the boundaries of many different districts.

The second issue, technological violation, refers to the use of ‘illegal’ technology in a particular fishing ground. The definition of illegality might be based on the Indonesian Government’s regulation. The use of trawl fishing is banned according to the President’s Decree in 1980, and thus protests against trawler operation provide an example of a dispute over a technological violation. Some cases also show that technological violations are defined by differences between local and non-local fishing technologies. The use of more advanced technologies by outsiders was often considered illegal. Thus, in Bengkulu local fishermen protested against the use of purse seine (No.10). Masalembu fishermen burned the six boats of Central Java fishermen because the Central Javanese were using lamps in their fishing operation. The use of more advanced technologies by outsiders was believed to increase the outsider’s catch, at the expense of the local fishermen’s catch.

These conflicts reveal that people associate technological difference with perceptions of local and non-local. All the conflicts caused by technological violation show that those who controlled more advanced technologies were not locals but fishermen from other regions. Furthermore, the proposal of fishermen in Bengkulu, that the locals might allow the purse seines to operate in their territory if half or more of the operators were local (No. 10),

indicates that the problem relates to the issue of who has better access to and hence control over the resource. The proposal obviously represented the interests of locals; unless locals controlled the resources, other fishermen would be not allowed to use advanced technology. This also implies that the outsiders were not to take more of the resource than the locals.

**Table 1.** Some conflicts between fishermen in Indonesia (2000-2002)

No	Incident	Issues	Place	Time	Source of Info.
1.	The burning of six boats, hostage taking, torture of Pati and Tegal (Central Java) fishermen by Masalembo fishermen	Fishing ground and technological (the use of lamp) violations	Masalembo, East Java	Early 2000	Republika, 13 Nov. 2000
2.	The burning of one fishing boat belonging to Central Javanese fishermen by Masalembo fishermen	Fishing ground violation	Masalembo, East Java	November 2000	Rakyat Merdeka, 17 November 2000
3.	Jakarta fishermen protested against non-local trawl operation traditional fishing zone	Trawl operation in traditional fishing zone	Jakarta	August 2001	Kompas, 13 August 2001
4.	Physical fight between fishermen from Wedung and Bonang sub-districts, Demak district	The operation of a police owned mini-trawl assisted by Bonang fishermen	Demak, Central Java	January 2002	Kompas 12 January 2002
5.	The arrest and hostage taking of eight Cilacap (central Java) fishermen by Pangandaran (West Java) fishermen	Fishing ground and technological (the use of <i>payang</i> net) violations	Pangandaran, West Java	February 2002	Kompas 23 and 27 February 2002
6.	Confiscation of 16 mini trawl boats owned by Panciran sub-district, Lamongan district and Paceng sub-districts, Gresik district by traditional fishermen from Ujung Pangakah sub-district	The use of mini-trawl that was considered ecologically destructive and reduced the local fishermen's catch. (Note: the conflict was settled by an agreement that:  1. operation of the mini-trawl was prohibited within 30 phantoms depth 2. fishermen from Ujung Pangakah have the right to arrest those who violate this rule 3. sanction of the violation is the burning of the boat)	Gresik, East Java	March 2002	Kompas, 12 March 2002

7.	The burning of eight mini-trawl boats belonging to Sampit village's (Matan Hilir Utara sub-district) fishermen by fishermen from Sukabaru village, Matanhilir Selatan sub-district	The Sampit boat owners did not pay the fine of three million <i>rupiah</i> to fishermen from Sukabaru as a consequence of the fishing ground violation	Pontianak, West Kalimantan	March 2002	Kompas, 21 March 2002
8.	Madurese Karimunjawa fishermen taken hostage by locals	Fishing ground violation	Brebes and Tegal, Central Java	April 2002	Kompas, 18 April 2002
9.	The burning of four purse seine boats owned by fishermen from Indramayu and Cirebon districts (West Java), by locals	Fishing ground and technological violations	Serang, West Java	May 2002	Kompas, 21 May 2002
10.	The burning of a trawl boat and protest by traditional Bengkulu fishermen over the use of trawl and purse seine owned by fishermen originating from North Sumatra and South Sulawesi	The use of trawl and purse seine in the zone for traditional fishing technologies (Note: It had been an agreement between purse seine fishermen and locals that the purse seine fishermen give 100 kg of their catch/trip to the locals. The locals contested this agreement. A new agreement was proposed that half or more fishermen working on a purse seine boat should be local fishermen).	Bengkulu	July 2002	Kompas, 19 July 2002
11.	Protest by traditional fishermen in North Sumatera	Trawl operation in the zone for traditional fishing Resistance to the government's plan to legalize trawl operations	Medan, North Sumatera	September 2002	Kompas, 17 September 2002

All these cases indicate a high level of regionalism in the maritime world of Indonesia. These conflicts demonstrate that regionalism provides fishermen with the basis for strong associations with local marine resources. Such association enables locals to prohibit fishermen from other regions from making use of particular resources, or at least, restricts their access to particular resources.

### **Concluding Remarks: Ethnicity, Regionalism and their Relevance to Marine Resource Management**

Obviously, in marine resource management practice the ideology that ‘the sea is a bridge for all Indonesians’ or is ‘free for all’, is still an active ideology used to help understand the problems of marine fisheries. Thus, the Indonesian Department of Marine Affairs and Fisheries perceives that the key issues in the above conflicts are technology and misinterpretation of the Law of Autonomy, No. 22, 1999.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of technology, Indonesian officials believe that conflicts have occurred because of technological discrepancies. When they talk about fishermen, they identify them with the technology used: the traditional, the medium scale and the modern fisherman. Other than that, as the ideology teaches, they are all Indonesians.

With regard to the second problem, Indonesian officials consider the association of ethnicity or regionalism with conflicts over sea resources, as reflecting misunderstandings of the Law of Regional Autonomy by local fishermen. The Law of Regional Autonomy stipulates that the provincial territory covers land and sea as far as twelve miles from the coastline toward the open sea (article 3) and the authority to manage the first third of a province’s sea territory is placed in the hands of the district government (article 10). Officials of the Department of Marine Affairs and Fisheries argued that the Law of Regional Autonomy was translated as the right of local fishermen to exclude fishermen from other ethnic groups or regions. According to the officials, this understanding is a mistake. Thus, they believe the claims to marine territory based on ethnicity and regionalism are wrong.

These understandings led officials to propose that maritime conflicts resulting from technological discrepancies could be solved both by assisting the traditional fishermen to adopt more modern technology and by the enforcement of zoning systems<sup>7</sup>. Once the government has declared that a particular fishing technology could only be operated in a particular zone, conflict between fishermen with different technologies would be avoided. Similarly, the government could overcome misunderstandings by promoting the ‘proper’ meaning of the Law of Regional Autonomy.

There are several problems with this approach. Firstly, it ignores the people’s perception of the problem. Since the perspective of the government is different to that of the fishermen, the government has no option other than to use ‘power’ to make the people comply. Yet, in current circumstances the government does not have enough power to do so. Since the last years of the New Order regime, the standing of the government has been degraded in the eyes of the people. It was a distrust of the government that contributed to the collapse

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<sup>6</sup> See Kompas 26 February 2000, 18 April 2002

<sup>7</sup> See Kompas 14 August 2002.

of Suharto's regime in 1998. Despite people's dreams of a more trustworthy government replacing the authoritarian New Order regime, I do not think the people's perception of the current government is better. In fact, within the last four years there have been many examples of people taking the law into their own hands. I believe this is a reflection of people's mistrust of the post-Suharto Government.

Secondly, this approach shows that the central government still considers itself the only legitimate agency to produce fisheries policies; it still adopts a centralized marine resource management system. Yet, many studies have proven that centralized marine resource management suffers from several weaknesses. These weaknesses include: the state's limited ability to provide human and financial resources needed to collect and analyse data on the condition of the resource; limited capacity to develop effective policies and regulation to monitor and enforce their policies; subordination of environmental concerns by the state's specific economic and political interests; and resistance from resource users due to a lack of effective relations between local communities and state authorities.<sup>8</sup> These problems make it difficult to believe that governments, particularly those in third-world countries, can be expected to develop a sustainable, effective and socially just resource management system.

In saying that, I do not mean that current practices of 'ethno-claim' and regionalism are appropriate. Almost all conflicts that took the form of violence indicated that people could not cope with problems in a peaceful way. We might also question whether the politics of exclusion practiced by locals, using either 'ethno-claim' or regionalism, was driven by an awareness of sustainability of marine resources. Seemingly, it was mostly economic reasons that stimulated locals to exclude others from extracting marine resources from their sea territory. These problems have also been identified in the practice of community-based marine resource management where management is under the control of the local community.

However, these conflicts expose two important issues to be considered in relation to sustainable and socially just resource management practices. The first issue is a 'sense of belonging' of local fishermen over marine territory or resources. A sense of 'ownership' is an essential element for creating a sustainable and socially just resource management strategy.<sup>9</sup> The second issue concerns the distributional aspect of the resource extraction. I think it is reasonable for locals to raise concerns about their share of a local resource given that they will be the first affected by any change occurring in their environment. I believe these two issues provide good reason for the government to take into account local concerns and interest when crafting and implementing a marine resource management regime that is sustainable and socially just. This does not mean, however, that we should totally abolish the ideology that the sea is a 'bridge' for all Indonesians but since a particular sea territory is closer to a particular community, it might be better to encourage locals to maintain the 'bridge.' In return, their interests in relation to their use of the 'bridge' should be given priority.

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8 Baland and Platteau 1996. For Indonesian case see Bailey and Zerner 1992.

9 See Hardin 1968.

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