Our knowledge of the nature of local political leadership in modern democracies based on systematic comparative scholarship is limited. This makes it difficult to generalise across political systems. [...] Political scientists just have been more interested in their own political system, and in interviewing national politicians than in comparative studies of local leaders. (Eldersveld et al. 1995:1.)

The informal market role in rulers’ construction of parallel political authority in the wake of the near total decay of formal state institutions – a Shadow State – is less well known. (William Reno 1995:1.)

Introduction

The quotations above indicate how few comprehensive studies there are on local politics. Observers tend to focus on the national level. Yet in the Indonesian context, local power relations cannot be understood simply through a formal approach, as they also involve informal networks, including relations between power holders and business. Therefore, a fuller understanding requires an approach that can simultaneously comprehend the formal and informal relations.

Motivated by a desire to understand more fully the power relations in the conduct of local governance in Indonesia, especially in the post-Suharto era, I decided to undertake this research, with the theme ‘Business and politics in the province of Banten’. My interest grew when one day I found an article in the ‘Nusantara’ column of Kompas daily (4-7-2003), entitled ‘If you’re going to Banten, don’t forget your black clothes’. The writer, ‘Zal’, described the influence of the jawara in the conduct of local government in Banten.¹ The

¹ Raffles (1965) and M. Williams (1990:45-6) define the jawara in Banten as people who do not have fixed jobs and commit criminal acts. I would further describe them as an individual or
Map 8. Banten