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Family rule in Wajo, South Sulawesi

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the position of aristocratic power holders in the district of Wajo, South Sulawesi, from the late New Order until the elections in 2004. In particular I address the following questions: 1. To what extent was administrative power embedded in aristocratic family rule in the late New Order? Which families were involved, and how did they exercise their rule? 2. What was the impact of Reformasi and regional autonomy in Wajo? What changes can be observed? 3. What was the effect of the elections in 2004 on the position of the aristocracy? 4. Finally, what kind of changes took place in the local power structure between the late New Order period and 2004?

Christian Pelras (1976:314) analysed traditional authority in Wajo in the 1960s. He concluded that members of the aristocracy would remain in power, although in forms which differ from those of the past. Similarly Burhan Magenda (1989:891-2) emphasized with regard to South Sulawesi the survival of the local aristocracy within the administrative apparatus (pamong praja). The fact that the pamong praja had become the bastion of local aristocrats is not surprising given the fact that the local bureaucracy had grown out of the dynastic bureaucracy of the ‘self-governing territories’ dating from the colonial period. The decentralization reforms of 1938 brought about the enlargement of the dynastic bureaucracy, accommodating the fruits of expanded educational opportunities and a growing number of aristocrats (Burhan Magenda 1989:896). With respect to the Philippines, Benedict Anderson (1988) described a so-called ‘cacique democracy’, in which a well-entrenched oligarchy cooperates with a strong central state machine. Anderson showed how Filipino notables learnt to manipulate electoral politics during the Marcos era. In the following pages I will describe how the aristocratic elite in Wajo tried to survive with ‘coerceductive’ strategies, when the political system to which they were accustomed began to change.

1 Syllogism between coercion and seduction, a communication concept introduced by Rene Jean Ravault (1985, 1986).
Map 15. Wajo in South Sulawesi