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Ambivalent identities
Decentralization and Minangkabau political communities

Introduction

After the fall of the Suharto regime, Indonesia has embarked on a large scale process of renegotiating its administrative, political and social boundaries. A body of legislation laid the foundation for this negotiating process, loosening the boundaries between the central state and the regions and shifting power to lower administrative levels, most notably districts. However, the process of redrawing boundaries that ensued extends far beyond the devolution of power to lower levels of administration. This chapter explores two separate but closely related consequences of the decentralization policies characteristic for West Sumatra that have important implications for the drawing of social boundaries.

The first concerns the reorganization of village government. The Law on Village Administration of 1979 put into effect in 1983 in West Sumatra had introduced a nation-wide unified village structure based on the Javanese desa. The West Sumatran villages called nagari were much larger than the average desa in Indonesia. To avoid financial disadvantage for the region the nagari were split up in smaller administrative units now called desa. From its incipi-
Map 17. West Sumatra