

APPENDIX V

The Ata, or Slaves, of South Sulawesi

The definition of Ata varies in ethnographic accounts of Makassar. The term means un-free people or slaves. Bulbeck (1992), in particular, divided them into several categories as follows:

- a. *Ata sossorang*, the bequeathed slaves whose parents (both father and mother) were formerly slaves.
- b. *Ata niballi* (literally, those selling themselves). Individuals became slaves by selling themselves or their children voluntarily to avoid famine or simply putting themselves under the patronage of a chief. In practice, however, people did not agree with the idea of selling slaves. The common way for a master to get rid of a slave he no longer wanted was to command the slave to become a 'debt-bondsman'. The former master borrowed a sum of money of a person and the slave had to work for the person, who then became his new master, until the money had been paid off. Usually, the slave remained with his new master because his former master kept adding to the debt.
- c. *Ata nibuang*, individuals becoming a slaves as prisoners of war or because of serious violations of customary law; for example, incest, adultery, thieving, *anniyala* (elopement, or thwarting an arranged marriage), and what Bulbeck mentioned as *siri'*, the parameter of the enhancement and degradation of self-respect, self-worth or self-esteem of a person (see below) (Mukhlis 1975: 27–32; Daeng Patunru 1983: 139; Maeda 1984; Röttger-Rössler 1989: 28; cf. Bulbeck 1992: 40–42).

Despite the many different status levels of the Ata, the first three generations are considered as bequeathed slaves, thereafter the Ata were categorised as mere *Ata sossorang* (hereditary slaves).

The Ata, known in present times as *Ata sossorang*, have mixed with the Tumaradeka and are now socially welcomed. Yet, their social role seems to be the lowest among the Tumaradeka. They depend for their subsistence mainly on fishing, agriculture and other manual work. The majority of them (as the offspring of former slaves) are still working in places today owned by their Karaeng (their parents' former masters). The reason why they remain there is unclear: whether it is an expression of gratitude to their Karaeng or because they have no other choice.

According to the historical records, unlike in Java and Madura, the implementation of the official abolition of slavery in South Sulawesi (particularly Makassar) was relatively late. The *Regeerings Reglement*, the Dutch colonial constitution, carried out a decree on 1 January 1860 calling for the abolition of slavery in the entire Netherlands Indies (Reid 1983: 5). However, many Karaeng in South Sulawesi refused to free their Ata. The reason was that, perhaps like helots, the majority of the Ata were working in the farming fields of the Karaeng. They numbered roughly hundreds per estate.

The Karaeng were not persuaded by the call for the abolition of slavery, fearing that their fields would be left in an unfinished state. Therefore, the Governor-General reluctantly stated that the abolition of slavery was only applied to the trade in slaves and implicitly let the existing slaves remain under the possession of their Karaeng. So, the practice of slavery continued to exist in South Sulawesi, even outside the region, until the 1900s (Reid 1983).

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