Beyond the state's control
The important of cultural resources on Florenese migration to Sabah, East Malaysia[1]

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Abstract

Since mid 1950s Florenese have been drifted to Sabah, mostly attracted by labor opportunities in plantations, such as cacao, rubber and oil palm. While the conventional view of labor migration emphasizing the labor supply and demand economics of labour, such explanation is criticized as ignoring the role of culture in the economic production and the important of migratory networks. This paper, based on the observation of Florenese migrant community in the borderland area of Tawao (Sabah) and Nunukan (East Kalimantan) will show how transnational labor migration has been developed basically through familial and social relations. This paper also argued that while the state's role in regulating the flow of migrant is existed yet various non-state institutions, particularly the Catholic churches, play critical role in sustaining the transnational migration networks of the Florenese. Social relations and culture seems working from 'below', while market forces operating under globalization seems working from 'above' in transcending the nation-state borders. Both powers – either from 'below' or from 'above' - have obviously depriving the role of the nation-state in controlling the transnational movement of labors. Transnational migration of Indonesian labor, as shown by the case of the Florenese, has moved beyond the state's control.

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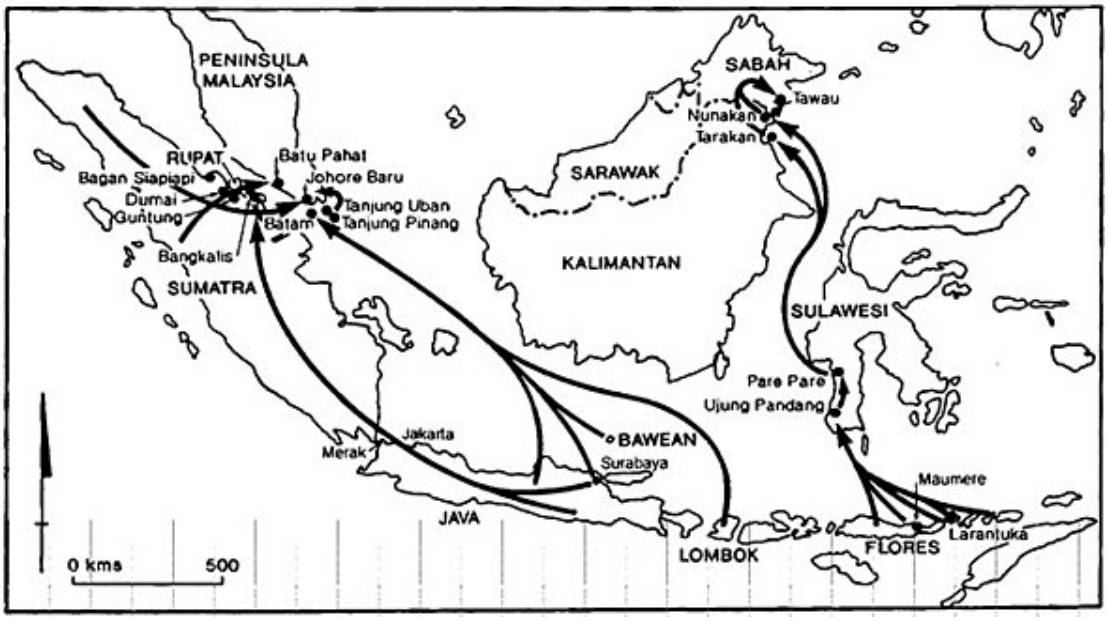
The route of labor migration from East Flores to Nunukan-Tawau areas:



Source: Hugo, 2002.

The Broader Context of Labor Migration in Indonesia

Hugo (1997: 100) a demographer, writing just before Indonesia entering an economic and then political crisis that would not be imaginable to happen, argued that 'in the second half of the 1990s Indonesians will become even more mobile, their internal and international movements will become more complex in their spatial patterning and a wider spectrum of the population will become involved'. The monetary crisis that started around mid 1997 had a strong repercussion throughout the whole of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. Indonesia, in which around two thirds of the Southeast Asian population lives, has been the most critically affected, both economically and politically. The economic aspects of the crisis in particular has had apparently mixed results on population mobility in Indonesia. Cross border movements arguably would be expected to increase, as such movement would be perceived by the people as an alternative source of income to the worsening economic situation in Indonesia. The trend and volume of international mobility has been significantly affected. Middle Eastern countries which were not really affected by the crisis have understandably becoming more important destinations, while Malaysia logically tightened its border controls, resulting in the increasing incidences of illegal or undocumented labor entrants.

Looking from a broader regional level, the beginning of the eighties saw a shift in labor migration in Southeast Asia as the movement of migrant workers across the nation-state borders became a new phenomenon to add to the continuing migration within the countries. Insular Southeast Asia, Malaysia in particular, started to attract laborers from its neighboring countries, as the demand for labor exceeded the country's own labor supply. History apparently repeated itself as indentured labors were again recruited from Indonesia and the Southern part of the Indian subcontinent, particularly from Bangladesh. Labor migration from Indonesia to Malaysia is particularly interesting as the flow of labor increasingly outstrips the ability of both the sending and receiving state to properly control the cross-border movement.

More than two decades ago, Forbes, a human geographer, made an important critique on the state of the art of migration studies in Indonesia.[2] Forbes located the existing study on migration in Indonesia into three groups: first, studies on circulation in Indonesia, notably that of Hugo's (the Jakarta-West Java literature); second, studies on 'traditional' forces and their role in mobility (the West Sumatra literature); and third, migration studies based on structural approach to understanding 'uneven development' and mobility – particularly the work of Titus and Forbes himself on South Sulawesi. In the conclusion of his critique, Forbes offers his view on the relationship between migration and development. He argues that if our concern is with long term solutions to the problems that give rise to circulation and to which circulation also contributes – i.e. uneven development – then we must turn our attention to regional development policy in Indonesia. Quoting Titus (1978: 202), he noted that New Order policies have failed to come to grips with regional inequality, and instead have tended to reinforce the inequalities which emerged in earlier colonial and mercantilist periods: 'The present development indicators as well as the persisting pattern of inter-regional migration point to a continued process of increasing inequality which is tied to the New Order development concept…Only a more egalitarian and decentralized policy which benefits both peripheral regions and marginal social groups will be able to end these dilemmas'.

In May 1998, the man who established the New Order regime and controlled it for more than three decades stepped down after failing to revive the country's economic fortunes following a combination of economic crises and political pressures. Following Suharto's resignation, a new political format rapidly developed which emphasized the decentralization of power and

[2] See Forbes (1981)

authority to the regional level government. In January 2001 a new regional autonomy law was formally implemented, full of promises, in Titus' words, to become a “more egalitarian and decentralized policy which [would] benefit both peripheral regions and marginal groups”. Now, more than twenty years after Titus wrote his analysis, we see that Indonesia has apparently been moving towards a decentralized policy although its implementation has been marred by pitfalls and obstacles. The Florenese migration to Sabah that occurred since the early 1950s and rapidly grew during the New Order periods significantly emphasized Titus’ thesis and further shows that inequality in fact cannot be isolated within the Indonesian border. The movement of Florenese laborers to Sabah strongly suggests that economic inequality has apparently even stronger roots at the regional level. The decision of few Florenese young males in the early fifties to find their fortunes in Sabah constitute the beginning of the larger flows when economic situation getting worse at home.

East Flores: Demography and Culture at Home

The Florenese who migrated to Sabah are also known in Sabah as ‘Orang Timor’ (in Malay, "people from the east") or ‘Timorese’ (in English). These people originally come from various places in East Flores district (*kabupaten*), in the East Nusatenggara Province of eastern Indonesia. The district capital of East Flores is Larantuka, an old port town, home of the Catholic bishop, and the center of social and economic activities in East Flores and the surrounding islands. As a port town, Larantuka constitutes a hub for the insular transportation that connects its surrounding islands, such as Adonara, Solor and Lembata. This complex of islands constitutes a major source of Florenese labor migrants to Sabah. Before the government introduced the K.M. Awu, a PELNI vessel that takes Florenese directly to Nunukan, the final port before the Tawau port in Sabah, smaller private ships enabled the Florenese to go to Malaysia. Today the Florenese only need four days to reach Nunukan on KM Awu, which every two weeks connects Maumere and Nunukan. In the early fifties, the Florenese needed at least a month to travel to Nunukan, where they had to change vessels and stay in several ports, such as Maumere, Surabaya, Makassar, Pare-Pare and Tarakan. The highly incidence of out-migration have an obvious impact on the demographic features of East Flores.

In the East Flores district, population increase since 1961 has been relatively low, although population pressure is evident, as the number of people per square kilometer continues to increase. The rate of population growth since 1961 has been generally declining and showed a

drastic drop between 1971-80 and 1980-90, and even experiencing negative growth in the period 1990-2000. The latter negative growth is most likely due to the separation of Lembata when it became a new district in 2000. The generally low population growth in East Flores resulted mainly from low levels of fertility and high rates of out-migration. Another demographic characteristic of the region is the unbalanced sex ratio which also reflects high out-migration rates for the male population. For the Florenese who migrated to Sabah through Nunukan, their geographic orientation seems to have been strongly influenced by their daily experiences in their place of origin. Interestingly, the geographic images of Nunukan-Tawau areas resemble their geographic experiences at home – Larantuka port and its surrounding islands. Frequent sea transportation between Larantuka and the other small towns - such as Weiwerang in Adonara and Lewoleba in Lembata - strengthened their association with Nunukan and Tawau. Psychologically, perhaps, this could also explain the relatively ease of adjustment for Florenese in the Nunukan-Tawau area.

The people of East Flores often known in Flores as Larantuka people are considered to be separate from the other peoples in Flores because they are influenced by migrants from various cultural backgrounds residing in Larantuka. However, people in East Flores belong to the more generic Lamaholot ethnic group, as they all speak Lamaholot. Lamaholot is used by people on eastern part the Flores island, as well as on Adonara, Solor and Lembata islands. This region is therefore known as the Lamaholot region. The only distinctive group within this region considered to have their own language is the Kedang who live in the northern part of Lembata Island.[3] According to Ruth Barnes (1974), the Lamaholot region comprises an area that is linguistically and culturally distinct from the Sikka region – the western neighbouring district. In general terms, one can speak of a coherent Lamaholot culture. At the same time, though, the notion of coherence has to be qualified. The Lamaholot language is spoken on the East Flores mainland and on Solor, Adonara, and Lembata, with the exception of Kedang, which is linguistically independent although culturally related. There are three distinct Lamaholot dialects, however, with further linguistic subgroups. Although people can understand each other throughout the region, words and intonation vary greatly, often from village to village. This diversity is also reflected in the interpretations of similar customs, beliefs, and manifestations of material culture.[4]

[3] According to Robert Barnes (1980) the Kedang is characterized not only by their difference in language but also by their physical environments as well as their administrative boundaries.
[4] See Ruth Barnes, 'East Flores Regency', Roy W. Hamilton (ed.), Gift of the Cotton Maiden: Textiles of Flores and the Solor Islands, 1994, pp. 170-193. Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of Cultural History, UCLA.

Based on the result of the 2000 Population Census, the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics classified the population of East Flores into several ethnic groups. The largest group, 156,257 persons (79.2 per cent), is represented by the Lamaholot, Lamah and Lamaloko. The second group, 22,066 persons (11.2 per cent), comprises the Solor and Solot ethnic communities. The Larantuka people account for 7,526 persons (3.8 per cent), and the rest belong to minority groups such as the Sikka, Ende, Bajau, Javanese and Florenese.[5] According to the 2000 Population Census the majority of people in East Flores are Catholic (79.3 per cent), an approximately 20 per cent of East Flores population is Muslim. The Muslim population resides mainly in the coastal areas of East Adonara district on Adonara Island. Protestants represent another minority in East Flores.

Although Christianity and Islam have been embraced by Florenese people for hundreds of years, Lamaholot local beliefs are apparently widely practiced by the people. The people of East Flores worship their ancestors, through a practice known as *Lerawulan.* The customary rituals and festivities are in many cases related to daily activities of agriculture and the life cycle (birth, marriage and death). The *sambut baru* ceremonies, for example, often lavish affairs conducted locally can be seen as religious rituals in which a child is baptized or receives the first sacrament. The rituals and festivities are well entrenched despite government attempts to abolish them. The success of the Florenese migration is often reflected in the grand scale of their rituals and ceremonies back home.

A particular local tradition that strongly affects the lives of Florenese is related to the marriage arrangement and ceremony. According to customary law the male bridegroom is obliged to provide the elephant tusk and the female bridegroom have to reciprocate with a traditional woven cotton cloth. Although this practice is merely symbolic, it has created a heavy burden for the young Florenese wishing to arrange their marriage. A study by Graham in the 1980s shows that the difficulties perceived by the young Florenese have strongly influenced the propensity for young Florenese to migrate, first to avoid the burden of tradition, and second to arrange their marriage outside their home village where customary marriage laws can be ignored.[6]

[5] It shows that, using the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics ethnic classification, several names are used for identifying Florenese ethnic groups.

[6] On the role and influence of state and church, Graham noted that institutional interests at different levels of church and state also generate divergent views and conflicting policies based on what officials in particular hierarchical settings perceive as the hidden dangers of and/or the benefits that accrue to such transnational labour migration. Whatever the policies formulated at the national level in Indonesia, the two most prominent institutional discourses that are promulgated locally place themselves for quite complex reasons firmly against the patterns of labor migration

The existence of traditional beliefs is also strongly related to the social systems and structures of the Florenese communities, which are dominated by several major clans, such as *Koten, Kelen, Hurit* and *Marang* who are believed to be the legitimate authority and power of the Lamaholot people. These major clans also control land ownership as well as the leadership of the Florenese. The heavily hierarchical social structures of the Florenese means that people at the lower end of the social spectrum often perceive out-migration as the only alternative to improve their socioeconomic status. The dry climate and the poor natural resources in most part of East Flores also have a significant bearing on the economic life of the Florenese. The main agricultural activities are dry-land agriculture, producing crops such such as corn, dry-land rice and cassava. Florenese landholdings often consist of a very small plot farmed using traditional techniques and yielding little more than a subsistence level of production.

According to the 2000 population census, 73 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture, slightly less than in 1990 (77 per cent). The non-agriculture activity has therefore slightly increased from five to seven per cent within the last 10 years, while the service sector has also increased from 9 to 10 per cent. In 2000, the level of education in East Flores was still very low, with approximately half of the population either possessing no schooling or not having graduated from elementary school. Around 35 per cent of the population has graduated from elementary school. The paucity of natural resources and economic opportunities, in addition to limited access to land, has always been a strong factor pushing the population to migrate in seek of a better life and income.

Labor Migration and Transnational Community

Although few Florenese migrated before the 1950s, the number of Florenese migrants began to increase at the beginning of 1950s and reached its peak in the 1980s. The Florenese migrated from East Flores and entered Sabah to engage in various unskilled jobs, mostly as plantation workers. They came in a small group, traveling through Ende, Surabaya, Balikpapan, Tarakan, Nunukan and using small boats they heading into Tawau's territory, a

established early on. Graham is therefore arguing that a long-standing anxiety over competing codes of sexual morality underlies the Catholic church's expressed concern about the adverse effects of labor migration on Christian family life in Flores. Graham suspect that a range of political issues to do with the desire for order and control inform the discourse of Indonesian officials of the East Flores regency about unregulated labor migration undermining local attempts at economic development. See, Penelope Graham, n.d., "Widows" at home, workers abroad: Florenese women and labour migration. Unpublished paper, Monash University, Melbourne Australia.

journey that took several weeks or a month. Before arriving in Sabah, they had to evade the coastal security apparatus guarding the coastal areas to detain those who tried to enter Sabah's territory illegally. Having successfully entered Sabah, those Florenese waited to be hired by rubber plantation owners, mostly British, who were given the opportunity to work there. The development of the Florenese community in Sabah paralleled the establishment of Sabah in the 1950s as a frontier area where various extractive activities were established in addition to the plantation estates. Migration rates appeared to drop during the Confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia in early 1960s - but escalating again since the 1970s. In the 1970s, more migrants from Flores (Adonara, East Flores) came for family reunions with their families who had been living in Tawau and places surrounding it. Many were accepted for work in the domestic and construction sectors as well as plantation particularly oil palms. While some Florenese succeeded in settling in Sabah, some of them who failed decided to stay and work in Nunukan.

Both in Nunukan and Tawau, Florenese community members maintain relations with their kin and relatives in East Flores through their social and familial networks. Their cultural bonding as Florenese influenced their strong traditional beliefs system as well as their adherence to the Catholic religion. This social and cultural background as well as their place in the labor market significantly distinguished the establishment of Florenese identities in relation to the other ethnic groups and the states. After working throughout the week in the plantation site, on Sundays migrant workers would visit Tawau Parish regularly. For the Florenese, the Catholic churches, both in Nunukan and Tawau, therefore play important roles in easing the hardships of their position. For the Catholic churches, the presence of the Florenese provides the *raison d'être* for the Catholic Church's presence in these borderlands.

The Florenese migration to Sabah is a typical example of chain migration that operates through familial and kinship networks. The Florenese migration is therefore a form of labour mobility that occurs outside the formal recruitment processes.[7] In the context of migration study in Indonesia, Florenese migration constitutes a new type of migration that contains a combination of tradititional-ethnic migration as well as international labour movement. From a different perspective, Florenese migration also can be classified as labour migration beyond states' control that in theory should be the case as countries develop into nation-states after

7 In the first half of the twentieth century, Dutch colonial state recruited, mostly the Javanese, to be exported to Sabah as indentured labor for the British Borneo Company. A fuller discussion on the Javanese labor in Sabah, see Miyazaki (2003).

decolonisation.[8] Forbes' classification on population mobility based on studies conducted in Indonesia during the 1970s and 1980s apparently overlooked the phenomena of international migration that in fact have been steadily increasing since 1970s, particularly to Malaysia.[9]

The Florenese community, both in Tawau (as well as in other places in Sabah) and Nunukan, maintained their ethnic identities – their mother tongue, Catholic religion, and links to their homeland in East Flores. The Florenese community is a borderland community, but interestingly it also has elements of a transnational community. The Florenese case therefore provides a new dimension in the existing knowledge of the borderland communities in Southeast Asia, which is mainly dominated by studies on purely indigenous communities.[10] While borderland communities are generally perceived as having tensions within their own nation-states, the Florenese are at the same time exposed to both the national as well as international quandaries. In this regard, the conventional approach to the borderland communities should be adjusted in the study of such a community as the Florenese in Nunukan-Tawau area.

Studies on transnational communities, as argued by Portes, et. al. (1999: 218) are in their infancy and are still highly fragmented. Furthermore, the literature lacks both a well-defined theoretical framework and analytical rigour. Existing studies often use disparate units of analysis (that is, individuals, groups, organizations, local states) and mix diverse levels of abstraction. Levitt (1999), based on her study on Dominicans community in Boston area in the US, describes transnational community as 'A group that is formed by migrants and non-migrants who are strongly connected to a particular place. Transnational communities arise from the strong, interpersonal networks through which migration begins. As these networks strengthen and spread, they develop into larger communities of individuals who are more loosely tied to one another'. The Florenese community in Nunukan-Tawau area could be seen as an embryonic form of a transnational community as explained by Levitt.

8 On the discussion of migration study in Indonesia see Forbes (1981)

9 Cross-border migration and transnational communities, while in fact are not a recent phenomena, are clearly under-researched and neglected by social scientists. Cross-border migration and transnational communities occurred as nation-states increasingly entrenched and state's border jealously guarded. Yet, as the case of the Florenese in Sabah, the Sangirese in southern Mindanao, Philippine and Minangkabaus in East Malaysia; the boundary of the nation-states seems irrelevant as migrants are continuously interacting with their relatives in their place of origin. Discussion on contemporary issues of cross-border movement in Indonesia, see introductory chapter on 'From Entikong to Nunukan', edited by Tirtosudarmo and Haba (2005)

10 In Southeast Asia, studies on the borderland communities have mostly concentrated on the indigenous population, such as Wadley's (2000) on Iban's transnational circular labour migration in northwestern Borneo, Horstmann's on Thai-speaking Muslims from the west coast of southern Thailand and Buddhist Thais from northeast Malaysia (n.d), and Uchibori's (2002) study on cultural citizenship of the Iban in Sarawak and Brunei.

The literature on the transnational communities is strongly dominated by studies of the transnational communities in the US, mostly Mexican communities. In the literature, borderlands and transnational communities are often not clearly delineated. Studies on transnational communities generally point to the impact of globalization and contextualize transnational communities within the various contending transnational actors and agencies.[11] In this sense, Florenese communities should be seen as a reflection of the process of globalization in the peripheral areas of Southeast Asia. Whatever the perspective adopted, the Florenese community in Nunukan-Tawau is clearly an ethnic minority group that has been discriminated against, both economically and politically. The discrimination experienced by the Florenese is partly rooted in their social place in the labor market hierarchy and their identification as Catholics in a predominantly Muslim society.

The Florenese, who now number in the thousands, are scattered throughout Sabah, but mostly reside in enclaves surrounding the plantation estates. Their main characteristics as unskilled migrant workers (a euphemism for 'coolie') who mostly engage in plantation estates (oil palms, cocoa, tobacco, etc.) have made this community rather distinct and easy to identify. The Florenese physical appearance is also distinct: their skin is darker and their hair also curlier than the Malay or indigenous 'Sabahan' peoples, such as Kadazan, Dusun and Murut. The Florenese are mostly devout Catholics. This places the Florenese as a distinct religious community, as Islam is becoming the dominant religion in Malaysia. Other ethnic groups have a perception of the Florenese migrants as 'Orang Timor', strongly identifying them as people who have particular physical and socio-cultural characteristics. This strengthens the Florenese' self perception as an ethnic group. Furthermore, the Florenese majority that is employed as plantation labourers strengthened the social and economic status identification of the Florenese in Sabah as 'the low working class' within the strongly ethnisized social and economic hierarchy of Sabah society. The majority of Florenese' Catholic identity, has provided a particular socio-political niche as a minority group within a society where Islam is increasingly becoming the politically-dominant group in the state of Sabah. Muslim migrant groups, particularly the Bugis from South Sulawesi. The Bugis, besides being clearly visible in important economic sectors, such as public transport and the market place, are more

[11] See Ethnic and Racial Studies, special issue vol. 22, No. 2 (1999), *Transnational Communities,* guest edited by Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo and Patricia Landolt, in particular the introductory chapter *Introduction: Pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field.* See also a review article on comparative perspective of border studies by Wadley (2002).

importantly easily accommodated within the Malay-Muslim political alliances that represent the dominant group in Sabah.

Beyond the State: The Important of Family and Kinship Network

The Florenese that began to migrate to Sabah in the early 1950s have created a sustain sense of communal identity based on familial and relational networks. Several informants that belong to the first generation of Florenese migrants – now in their late sixties – apparently succeeded in their professional career and enjoy being the informal community leaders for the Florenese community. These informal Florenese leaders resided in Tawau as well as in Nunukan – between which communication is maintained across the borders. Among the important community leaders are Tuan Azam in Tawau, and Om Franky in Nunukan.[12] Both Tuan Azam and Om Franky came to Sabah in their teens in late 1950s because they were attracted by the success stories of other Florenese who returned from Sabah. The stories of their attempt to enter Sabah, while different in some aspects, generally contain a similar narrative. The main differences between Tuan Azam and Om Franky are their final destination and nationality. Tuan Azam, who then converted into Islam, decided to be a Malaysian citizen and stay in Tawau; and Om Franky, who joined the Indonesian militia group during 'the confrontation' with the British, remained an Indonesian citizen and lives in Nunukan. These two informal leaders have maintained their comradeship, and play important role being a kind of 'godfather' for the Florenese community in Nunukan-Tawau areas.

The role played in nurturing the Florenese migrant community in the borderland of Tawau-Nunukan areas by both Tuan Azam in Tawau and Om Franky in Nunukan reflects their share of belonging and strong connection of the same place of origin: East Flores. As leaders of the community, these two personalities or actors separated geographically and nationally apparently transcend their formal national citizenships and become members of a trans-nationality. In this regard, their share and involvement in the business of transporting and recruiting Florenese labour from East Flores to be employed in Sabah could also explain their strong engagements in nurturing the Florenese migrant community. Tuan Azam, who retired as a high-ranking police officer (colonel), has now opened a passport service that essentially operates as a labour recruitment or employment agency. His extensive connection with Malaysian authorities, particularly immigration officials, in Tawau as well as Kotakinabalu,

[12] Tuan Azam and Om Franky are not their real names. 'Tuan' is a Malay word means 'Mister', and 'Om' is originally a Dutch word means 'Uncle'.

combined with his vast knowledge of, and access to, plantation business community networks in Sabah, constitutes a strong asset to conduct 'good business' on migrant workers.

While Tuan Azam is actively involved in providing services for labour recruiters and suppliers in Sabah, Om Franky, after retiring as Indonesian militia leader, joined the shipping company operating twice a year between Nunukan - Pare-Pare and East Flores (Larantuka, Lewoleba, Weiwerang). His experience as a former Indonesian militia leader in the confrontation period with Malaysia is instrumental in his ability to control Florenese port labourers in Nunukan when they become rebellious. Having physical presence and perceived authority obtained from their previous experience and career, gives both Tuan Azam and Om Franky critical roles as patrons for the Florenese transnational community in the Nunukan-Tawau areas.

As noted earlier, the agency that sustains Florenese Community in the border areas of Nunukan and Tawau is the Catholic Church. The Church in Tawau (Gereja Katolik Holy Trinity) and in Nunukan (Paroki Santo Gabriel) is actively involved in helping resolve various problems face by the Florenese migrant communities. Under the Church, a Florenese community organization (KKI or Keluarga Katolik Indonesia – *Indonesian Catholic Association*, formerly Keluarga Kebajikan Katolik Indonesia) was formed in Tawau. Its leaders work closely with local priests to provide social and religious services to the Florenese community members and their families. The leader of the Florenese Catholic organization in Tawau also acts as the medium for communication between the two Catholic Churches. The social services provided by the Church, which are primarily centered on the needs of the Florenese as the catholic religious community, include religious functions such as marriage ceremonies, 'christenings'. However, in reality, the Church's social services also include helping migrants to find relief for their economic difficulties and social hardships. The Catholic church in Tawau play important role in mediating the Florenese migrants with the state's officials in cases related to the improper documentation and immigration status of the migrants and their families. In Nunukan, the Church has sheltered hundreds of Florenese families deported by the Malaysian government in August through September 2002. In a situation in which the states, both Malaysian and Indonesian, are generally ignorant and in

many instances, exploitative and discriminative toward Florenese migrants, the Catholic churches significantly play a pivotal role in protecting the life of this borderland community.[13]

Concluding Remarks

This paper shows an episode of cross border labor migration in the contemporary Indonesia. The Florenese who were moved to Sabah since the mid 1950s represent the process of international labor migration that undertook outside the state's control. While economic pressure at home play important role in pushing the Florenese to move out it is only through their cultural resources that is embedded within the familial and kinship relationships that their migratory networks could be sustained. Religion in this matter Catholic church also significantly provide a cultural resources and moral support as their livelihoods as undocumented migrant labor often marginalized by the state as well as by other dominant ethnic groups. Florenese labor migration to Sabah that slowly developing into transnational community suggests the important of cultural resources in the process of globalization from below that transgress the nation-state sovereignty.

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[13] In Nunukan, an organization that belongs to the people originating from East Nusatenggara has been formed (KEKARNUSA – Kerukunan Keluarga Nusatenggara or Association of the Nusatenggara Brotherhood). This organization is established to serve the need of the migrant family from all places in eastern part of Indonesia.

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