

Butonese Diasporic Networks: Trading, Marrying, Exploring in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

Through centuries of migration Butonese migrants have built strong diasporic networks throughout eastern Indonesia. This paper focuses on the diasporic networks of one Butonese village, Boneoge, and the ways in which young migrants utilize these networks in attaining lucrative livelihoods. Boneoge migrants sailed throughout the archipelago during the 1950s and 1960s, then settled in eastern Indonesian towns beginning in the 1970s. Trading began to replace farming and fishing as their primary occupation. By the 1990s, young aspiring Boneoge migrants could avail themselves of a large diasporic network, through which they would explore various job opportunities in different locations. Important factors in the building of these networks include the valorization of pioneers, strong endogamous marriage patterns, flexibility in livelihood strategies, quick response to political and economic opportunities in eastern Indonesia, chain migration whereby successful migrants actively summon young relatives from the home village, and high mobility and frequent trial-and-error migrations by the young. These networks tend to be highly village-specific, depend on kin relations for their strongest links, and are driven partly by the struggle for social status in the home village.