

BETWEEN LARANTUKA AND TAWAU: EXPLORING FLORENESE MIGRATION SPACE¹

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Since the early 1950s, Florenese people from East Flores, eastern Indonesia, have migrated to Sabah, eastern Malaysia, in search of opportunities and a better life. Florenese migrants have commonly found employment on plantations, especially oil palm plantations, as unskilled laborers. The persistent flow of Florenese workers and their families has created a migration space that connects East Flores and Sabah and is reflected by two cities: Larantuka and Tawau. The spontaneous and unofficial nature of Florenese migration is sustained by family and kinship networks characteristic of the Florenese community. Catholic institutions and Florenese leaders also play pivotal roles in nurturing the familial and social networks that operate between the migrant sending and receiving communities. A Florenese transnational community has slowly emerged, developing a collective identity centered on language, attachment to locality, and Catholicism. In Sabah, where Malay Muslims dominate the population, migrant Florenese hold marginal positions and face both discrimination and deportation. Under these circumstances, the Catholic Church has been instrumental in providing Florenese migrants and their families with a home away from home.

Keywords: Borderlands, Ethnicity, Migration, Networks, Space

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