

The Transmigration of the Javanese Ethnic Group in Bangun Rejo Village, Kutai Kartanegara (1980-1983)

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Abstract This research explains the background of the transmigration of Javanese tribes to East Kalimantan, namely to Bangun Rejo Village in 1980-1983. This research aims to find out the factors behind their transmigration and the dynamics they faced during the transmigration process. The method used is the historical method, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, with data in the form of the phenomenon of the Soeharto era transmigration program and population distribution. The results showed that transmigration was a national effort to overcome poverty and develop inland areas as well as equalize the population throughout Indonesia. Transmigrants were given land to cultivate and financial support for one year. The program aims to provide new opportunities for those who want to build a life in developing areas. This research also illustrates the challenges of transmigrants' adaptation and integration with local communities.

Keywords: Transmigration, Javanese, Bangun Rejo Village, Samarinda, East Kalimantan

Abstrak Penelitian ini menjelaskan tentang latar belakang transmigrasi suku Jawa ke Kalimantan Timur yaitu ke Desa Bangun Rejo pada tahun 1980-1983. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor yang melatarbelakangi mereka bertransmigrasi dan dinamika yang mereka hadapi selama proses transmigrasi tersebut. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode sejarah, meliputi heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi, dengan data berupa fenomena program transmigrasi era Soeharto dan pemerataan penduduk. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transmigrasi ini merupakan upaya nasional untuk mengatasi kemiskinan dan mengembangkan wilayah pedalaman serta pemerataan jumlah penduduk di seluruh Indonesia. Para transmigran diberi lahan untuk bercocok tanam dan dukungan keuangan selama satu tahun. Program ini bertujuan memberikan kesempatan baru bagi mereka yang ingin membangun kehidupan di daerah berkembang. Penelitian ini juga menggambarkan tantangan adaptasi dan integrasi para transmigran dengan masyarakat lokal.

Kata kunci: Transmigrasi, Suku Jawa, Desa Bangun Rejo, Samarinda, Kalimantan Timur



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INTRODUCTION

The transmigration program during Soeharto's administration between 1980 and 1983 was part of an effort to relocate residents from Java to other islands in Indonesia, including Bangun Rejo Village in Kutai Kartanegara. The program aimed to address population density on Java, improve people's living standards, and support rural development and food self-sufficiency (Purwanto, 2019). Bangun Rejo Village was chosen as a transmigration site because of its strategic location and its potential for agricultural development. This transmigration process involved relocating thousands of families from Java to Bangun Rejo Village, with logistical support from the government and the involvement of TNI personnel and farmers (Sucahyo, 2018). The transmigrants faced various challenges, including limited basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and clean water. Nevertheless, they struggled to clear land, build houses, and create new lives in the destination area (Legiani et al., 2018).

Although the program was designed to improve welfare, several studies showed that its implementation often created new problems, such as conflict with local residents and difficulties in environmental adaptation (Nugroho, 2020). The transmigration program in Bangun Rejo Village also followed the self-initiated transmigration (swakarsa) model, in which new transmigrants were accommodated by earlier transmigrants, enabling them to clear forest land, build houses, and construct roads independently (Legiani et al., 2018). During the Reform era, the goals of transmigration shifted from merely addressing population density to promoting economic development and regional growth (Yusuf, 2017). This shift was reflected in revisions to the Transmigration Law, which emphasized improving the welfare of transmigrants and surrounding communities as well as more equitable regional development (Heryanto, 2019).

This research focused on transmigration in Bangun Rejo Village, Kutai Kartanegara (1980–1983), examining the background and process of Javanese transmigration in Bangun Rejo. Based on the discussion above, the author decided to conduct a study entitled *The Transmigration of the Javanese Ethnic Group in Bangun Rejo Village, Kutai Kartanegara (1980–1983)*, which discussed the background and process of the transmigration.

METHOD

This study used the historical method to describe and present the transmigration of the Javanese ethnic group in Bangun Rejo Village, Kutai Kartanegara (1980–1983). According to Kuntowijoyo (2005), there were five stages in historical research. The first stage was topic selection, which was based on intellectual and emotional closeness as well as the feasibility of being studied within the available timeframe. The second stage was heuristics, namely the collection of historical sources through interviews with directly related informants, such as Mr. Sunaryo, Mrs. Tri, and Mrs. Sri. In addition, historical documents were also used as data sources.

Documentation was obtained from the Office of the Department of Transmigration of Kutai Regency.

The third stage was source criticism. Internal criticism focused on the content of historical documents, the language used, grammar, the situation in which the documents were written, writing style, ideas, and other aspects; external criticism was also conducted. The fourth stage was interpretation, in which the researcher provided objective interpretations based on analysis of the collected data. The final stage was historiography, namely writing up the research results in a scholarly format in accordance with applicable academic writing guidelines.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Background of Javanese Transmigration to Bangun Rejo Village

Since Dutch colonialism in the early 19th century, population movements from Java to other regions in Indonesia had already occurred. Although it was not yet called transmigration at the time, this activity was motivated by the idea of the "Ethical Policy" proposed by Van Deventer to address population density on Java. From 1905 to 1941, population transfers were carried out gradually to Lampung, with a recorded total of 44,687 households from Central Java, East Java, and other regions. The main aim of this movement was to redistribute population from densely populated areas to regions with fewer inhabitants. As Arifin (2020) noted, "From 1905–1941, population transfers from Java were carried out gradually to Lampung; a total of 44,687 households were recorded as originating from Central Java, East Java, and other regions."

Under Dutch colonial rule, population transfers were not only intended for redistribution but also to meet labor needs in Dutch plantation sectors spread across Kalimantan and Sumatra. At its peak in 1929, more than 260,000 contract workers were brought to the east coast of Sumatra, most of them from Java. They worked as laborers under heavy workloads and inhumane wages. This practice continued throughout the colonial period until Dutch colonial power weakened. Goldman (2006) recorded: "At its peak, in 1929, more than 260,000 contract workers were brought to the east coast of Sumatra; 235,000 of them came from Java."

After Indonesia's independence, the transmigration program began in 1949 with a broader scope reaching as far as Papua. In the independence era, transmigration was no longer aimed at supplying plantation labor, but at improving the welfare of the poor, redistributing population, and promoting development outside Java. During the New Order, transmigration regulation became more structured through the issuance of Law No. 3 of 1972 and the revision of Law No. 15 of 1997. "Transmigration is the relocation of residents from one area to settle in another area designated within the territory of the Republic of Indonesia for the purposes of national development and is regulated according to the provisions stipulated in law." (Law No. 3/1972).

The transmigration program faced obstacles in 1979 due to the energy crisis and rising transportation costs. However, in the 1980s, the program received funding from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and Western countries. In the period 1979–1984, 535,000 families, or nearly 2.5 million people, were relocated through transmigration. This international funding reflected the importance of transmigration in both national and international development contexts. Suhardin (2007) noted: “In 1979–1984, 535,000 families (nearly 2.5 million people) moved residence through the transmigration program.”

The transmigration program was designed to reduce population density on Java, Bali, and Lombok and to create more equal employment distribution across other Indonesian regions. In addition, transmigration aimed to improve the welfare of poor communities by providing agricultural land in new areas. The program functioned as a solution to unequal population distribution and uneven development. Swasono (1986) explained: “Transmigration is a national program as an effort to equalize population distribution in Indonesia and achieve comprehensive development.”

Javanese communities who transmigrated to Bangun Rejo Village were driven by various economic factors, including limited land and minimal employment opportunities on Java. They hoped to obtain better lives in transmigration settlement areas that were still natural and fertile. Opportunities to work in agriculture also became an important factor. Although they faced adaptation challenges in the early stages, they believed that through hard work they could create a better life in their new village. Yulmardi (2019) stated: “Migration carried out by the Javanese ethnic group during the Dutch colonial era could not be separated from the turbulence of poverty in Java.” Through the transmigration program, the Javanese who arrived in Bangun Rejo Village were expected to gain opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their families, while also contributing to development and growth in Indonesia’s interior regions.

The Process of Javanese Transmigration to Bangun Rejo Village

The transmigration process to Bangun Rejo village consists of 7 stages: Registration and Selection of Prospective Transmigrants, Requirements for Prospective Transmigrants, Implementation of Registration, Selection of Prospective Transmigrants, Guidance and Waiting for Departure, Transport and Placement and Adjustment in the New Area.

Registration and selection prioritized regions meeting particular criteria. The first priority included areas with barren, dry, critical land requiring reforestation. The second priority included areas affected by natural disasters such as floods, volcanic eruptions, landslides, earthquakes, and cold lava. The third priority included areas with high population density, namely more than 1,000 people per square kilometer. Prospective transmigrants who met these conditions were considered for relocation to prepared new settlement areas.

Requirements to become a transmigrant under Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 42 of 1973 on the Implementation of Transmigration were explained in Chapter XII. Article 25 set out the main requirements: (1) being an Indonesian citizen, (2) having good conduct, (3) being physically healthy, (4) participating voluntarily, (5) possessing work ability and skills, and (6) complying with regulations on transmigration implementation.

Registration was conducted through village/urban offices (Kelurahan), sub-districts (Kecamatan), or directly to the Office of the Directorate General of Transmigration at the regency level whose jurisdiction covered the applicant's domicile. Good cooperation with local government, information services, BKKBN, and other agencies within BP2DT made communities increasingly aware of the importance of the transmigration program. This was supported by information and outreach activities explaining the benefits of transmigration and the registration process.

Selection took place through three main stages: administrative selection, physical selection, and mental selection. Administrative selection ensured completeness of documents such as marriage certificates, police certificates of good conduct, photographs, and required forms. Physical selection ensured prospective transmigrants were healthy and did not have contagious diseases. Mental selection assessed readiness to face challenges in a new place. This was important to prevent negative return migration due to dissatisfaction or mental unpreparedness.

While awaiting departure, prospective transmigrants received special guidance to maintain morale. Trainings on agriculture and other skills were provided to prepare them for challenges in the new area. However, problems such as uncertain departure schedules and negative news from settlement areas often created doubts among candidates. Therefore, intensive guidance and continuous support were essential.

Transport implementation prioritized safety and order through coordination between the Directorate General of Transmigration and the Directorate General of Transportation. Identity cards and other required documents had to be completed before departure. Gathering of prospective transmigrants was conducted after approval from the central monitoring team, indicating the readiness of the settlement area. In the placement process, candidates were also accompanied by medical staff if there were late-term pregnancies, helping them feel safe during travel.

Upon arrival, transmigrants faced adaptation challenges to new environmental conditions, including geographic, social, and economic aspects. Trainings on land cultivation, fertilizer use, land maintenance, and disease prevention were provided to help them adapt. This self-adjustment involved dynamic interaction between internal factors (knowledge, skills, attitudes) and external factors (physical, social, and economic environments). In this way, transmigrants were expected to build better lives and contribute positively to development in the new area.

The Dynamics of Javanese Transmigrants in Bangun Rejo Village (1980-1983)

In the next stage, transmigrants no longer received funds from the government. They faced difficult challenges such as land still covered with large trees, tree-stump remnants, and waterlogged swamps that were hard to cultivate. Pest threats from rats and wild boars also often damaged their agricultural yields. The government eventually granted an additional half-year period to help meet residents' food rations. Transmigrants from various islands, including Java, began arriving to start new lives after hearing about the success of relatives who had already settled there. However, not all transmigrants remained in the new location.

Some chose to return to their places of origin after selling or surrendering their land. Those who stayed had to rely on assistance from the Regional Office of Transmigration to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, farming tools, and access to health facilities. After obtaining land from the government, transmigrants began managing it by clearing their yards and planting preliminary crops such as cassava, corn, sweet potatoes, and long beans. Their harvests were sold at Tenggarong Market or Segiri Market in Samarinda. Some transmigrants also sought work outside agriculture, such as in coal mining or construction projects.

The transmigration program also paid attention to building basic infrastructure such as roads, irrigation, schools, and health centers at transmigration sites. This not only improved transmigrants' access to public services but also generally enhanced their quality of life. Improved or newly built educational and health facilities gave transmigrants opportunities to improve their families' education and health. Moving to a new location also opened opportunities for forming strong communities among transmigrants. They formed social networks, participated in religious and cultural activities, and supported each other in adapting to the new environment. Today, transmigrant residents in Bangun Rejo Village hold various jobs across diverse economic sectors, ranging from coal mining to rice farming. Initial government training programs helped them develop skills needed to adapt and succeed in the new environment.

CONCLUSION

Javanese transmigration to Bangun Rejo Village, Kutai Kartanegara was part of Indonesia's national program to address population density on Java while promoting development in remote regions. The program originated during Dutch colonial rule with the initial aim of meeting plantation labor needs, then was adopted by the post-independence Indonesian government to promote more equitable national development. The program received international funding in the 1980s despite facing an energy crisis. Its objectives were to relocate people to more spacious areas, improve the welfare of poor communities, and build basic infrastructure in new settlement areas.

The transmigration process involved stages of registration, selection, departure, and adjustment in the new area. Prospective transmigrants had to meet requirements such as being physically healthy, participating voluntarily, and having relevant work skills. They faced environmental adaptation challenges, but they managed to build solid communities and contribute in agriculture and industry sectors. Javanese transmigration to Bangun Rejo Village illustrated a government program that facilitated population relocation for national development, although it also encountered challenges related to adaptation and long-term survival in the new area.

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