

The Role of Social Capital in Intergenerational Migration among the Lease Islands Community in Ambon City

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the pattern of intergenerational chain migration from the Lease Islands—comprising Haruku, Saparua, and Nusa Laut—to Ambon City, focusing on the pivotal role of social capital in sustaining and reproducing this mobility over time. The research is motivated by the need to understand inter-island migration not merely as an economic response but as a deeply rooted socio-cultural practice embedded in small island communities. The study employs a qualitative approach with an embedded single case study design, involving seven individual migrant case units from different families. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation in both origin and destination areas. Thematic analysis was conducted using a step-by-step coding process, identification of patterns, and interpretation of meaning. The findings reveal that migration from the Lease Islands to Ambon is facilitated by robust social networks that extend beyond immediate kinship, reinforced by values of solidarity, trust, and social obligation. Pioneer migrants act as cultural brokers, providing information, temporary housing, and initial financial support for newcomers. The intergenerational transmission of migration-related values and experiences institutionalizes migration as a cultural pattern. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of internal migration as a community-based adaptive strategy in geographically dispersed yet socio-culturally cohesive island societies. The study offers an original contribution by integrating the concepts of chain mobility and social capital within the underexplored context of eastern Indonesia in both national and global migration discourse.

Keywords: Chain mobility; Intergenerational transmission; Inter-island migration; Small island communities; Social capital; Eastern Indonesia.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pola migrasi berantai lintas generasi masyarakat Kepulauan Lease—yang meliputi Haruku, Saparua, dan Nusa Laut—ke Kota Ambon, dengan fokus pada peran modal sosial dalam menopang keberlangsungan dan keberulangan proses migrasi tersebut. Studi ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kebutuhan untuk memahami migrasi antarpulau bukan hanya sebagai respons ekonomi, tetapi juga sebagai praktik sosial-budaya yang berakar dan diwariskan dalam komunitas pulau kecil. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus terpancang tunggal, yang melibatkan tujuh unit kasus individu dari keluarga migran. Teknik pengumpulan data mencakup wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi lapangan di wilayah asal dan tujuan migrasi. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik melalui tahapan pengkodean, penemuan pola, dan interpretasi makna. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa migrasi dari Kepulauan Lease ke Ambon berlangsung melalui jaringan sosial yang kuat, melampaui relasi kekerabatan inti, dan diperkuat oleh nilai solidaritas, kepercayaan, dan kewajiban sosial. Migran perintis memainkan peran penting sebagai penghubung informasi, penyedia tempat tinggal sementara, dan penopang ekonomi awal bagi migran baru. Proses transmisi nilai dan pengalaman migrasi antargenerasi membentuk migrasi sebagai pola budaya yang terinstitusionalisasi. Implikasi dari temuan ini memperluas pemahaman mengenai migrasi internal sebagai strategi adaptif berbasis komunitas dalam konteks masyarakat kepulauan yang secara geografis terpecah tetapi sosial-budayanya terhubung erat. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi orisinal dengan mengintegrasikan konsep mobilitas berantai dan modal sosial dalam konteks Indonesia timur yang masih kurang tereksplorasi dalam literatur migrasi nasional dan global.

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Kata Kunci: Mobilitas berantai; Transmisi antargenerasi; Migrasi antar pulau; Komunitas pulau kecil;
Modal sosial; Indonesia Timur.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the historical continuity of inter-island mobility in Indonesia, scholarly engagement with such patterns remains limited. Migration across archipelagic regions continues in both scale and significance, yet existing literature provides insufficient understanding of how these movements are sustained across generations—particularly through non-economic mechanisms such as social capital (Lórinicz & Németh, 2022; Murwani, 2024). The Lease Islands—comprising Haruku, Saparua, and Nusa Laut in Central Maluku—present a compelling case. Here, a historically elite-driven migration has evolved into a broader, community-based chain migration pattern. These enduring flows are not solely the result of economic necessity or geographic proximity but are enabled by robust social infrastructures: networks of information exchange, temporary accommodation, and financial assistance built by pioneer migrants who cultivate regional and communal solidarity beyond immediate kinship (Ikhsan et al., 2019).

Recent statistical data reinforces this phenomenon. According to the 2020 Indonesian Population Census, internal migration in Maluku has shown fluctuating patterns over the past five decades. Approximately seven out of every 100 Maluku residents were born outside the province, indicating significant inward migration. Among all regions in the province, Ambon City, Tual City, and Aru Regency reported the highest lifetime in-migration rates, while Ambon City, Southeast Maluku Regency, and Tual City also recorded the highest lifetime out-migration (Soplanit, 2023). These patterns affirm the dynamic role of urban and coastal nodes as both destinations and origins of inter-island mobility, particularly within the socio-economic ecosystem of Maluku.

This migration trend is deeply rooted in the geographic, social, and historical context of the Lease Islands. Located close to Ambon City—an urban center of governance, education, and trade—these islands have maintained long-standing migration ties with the city. Haruku, for example, is situated only 29.3 kilometers from Ambon, making frequent travel and settlement viable. Migration from Lease to Ambon dates back to the Portuguese period, with early settlements forming around Fort Victoria. During the Dutch East India Company (VOC) era, this flow intensified as Ambon emerged as a commercial hub (Handoko, 2009). Initially, migrants were elites—traders, clergy, and aristocrats—who maintained dual residences in Ambon and their home villages. Over time, the motivations for migration diversified. The establishment of Pattimura University in 1956 catalyzed educational migration, facilitating greater social mobility.

Research on internal migration in Eastern Indonesia can be grouped into three major strands. First, several studies focus on the role of social capital and network-based migration. Mulyoutami et al. (2016) illustrate how Buginese farmer migration in Southeast Sulawesi is facilitated by extended kin and friendship ties, supported by intermediaries or brokers. Similarly, Basuki et al. (2016) emphasize that strong inter-ethnic trust among transmigrant farmers in Wasile, East Halmahera, plays a key role in livelihood formation and community resilience.

Second, scholars have explored the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and knowledge in migrant communities. Pratiwi et al. (2022) demonstrate how descendants of Javanese migrants maintain influence in agricultural knowledge systems in Maluku, shaped by ties to Java and integration into local social structures. Mukrimin & Acciaoli (2023) show that Bugis transmigration to West Sulawesi relied heavily on community norms and mutual commitments. Likewise, Silda et al. (2021)

find that Balinese transmigrants in Ngkari Ngkari (Baubau) adapt to economic diversification through religiously anchored social solidarity.

Third, other studies investigate the cultural and symbolic meanings of maritime mobility in Maluku. Ririmasse (2012), Pirasou et al. (2021), and Pessy et al. (2025) highlight how the sea functions not merely as a geographic barrier, but as a cultural medium that enables social exchange, identity-making, and mobility. However, these studies tend to treat social capital as a static condition and rarely explore how it is reproduced or transmitted across generations in the context of chain migration. Therefore, although trust, norms, and networks are widely acknowledged as central to migration, few studies explicitly address how social capital is mobilized and passed on intergenerationally within geographically dispersed communities. This study seeks to fill that gap.

This research aims to examine how social capital is both mobilized and transmitted intergenerationally in sustaining the chain migration of the Lease Islands community to Ambon City. Specifically, the study seeks to trace the historical, symbolic, and institutional dimensions of social capital that enable migration to persist across generations in an archipelagic context.

The core argument of this study is that chain migration among the Lease Islands community is not merely driven by economic incentives, but is embedded in social capital that is actively reproduced across generations. This social capital—manifested through information sharing, kin and communal support, temporary shelter, and trust—constitutes an enduring infrastructure that sustains inter-island mobility. The study hypothesizes that such migration becomes sustainable when social capital is not only present, but also institutionalized in cultural memory, communal practices, and everyday social interactions—making mobility a collective, rather than individual, endeavor..

RESEARCH METHODS

This study explores the intergenerational chain migration of the Lease Islands community—comprising Haruku, Saparua, and Nusa Laut—to Ambon City. The unit of analysis in this research is the pattern of island-to-city migration as a social and cultural phenomenon, with seven individual migrants serving as embedded cases to represent micro-expressions of broader community-based mobility. These cases allow for a rich, contextualized understanding of how migration is structured, sustained, and transmitted across generations.

A qualitative research design was employed using a single embedded case study approach (Maxwell, 2009; Truna, 2021). This method was selected due to its suitability for examining complex social phenomena within specific cultural and geographic contexts. Given Indonesia's archipelagic nature and the role of kinship and regional ties in shaping mobility, the case study approach enables an in-depth investigation into how localized traditions and social capital influence the migration process. The embedded design allows for exploration at both the collective and individual levels, capturing nuances that might otherwise be overlooked in broader quantitative surveys.

Primary data sources include individuals from the Lease Islands who currently reside in Ambon City and meet specific selection criteria: born in one of the Lease Islands, aged 15 or older, and possessing a clear migration history. This age threshold ensures that participants are capable of articulating migration experiences and decision-making processes. Participants were selected purposively and then recruited through snowball sampling, allowing the researcher to access extended social networks relevant to the study. Data also includes contextual information from the places of origin and destination, gathered through immersive field engagement.

The study utilized three complementary data collection techniques: (1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore migration motives, experiences, and the structure of social relationships; (2) participant observation in both the origin villages and urban migrant communities, with emphasis on everyday practices, rituals, and community cooperation; and (3) documentation, including field notes, photographs, and audio recordings to ensure comprehensive triangulation. Fieldwork was conducted intensively over a period of three months (July to September), ensuring sufficient time for rapport building and data saturation.

Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Manual coding was employed to allow close, iterative reading of transcripts and field notes. To enhance trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation across methods and sources, conducted member checking with participants to validate interpretations, and engaged in peer debriefing with fellow researchers. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining participant confidentiality throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Social Capital in Migration Initiation

Migration from the Lease Islands (Haruku, Saparua, and Nusalaut) to Ambon City has a long historical lineage, first emerging during the early 17th century following the takeover of Ambon by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1605 (Knaap, 1991). Ambon, transformed into a colonial administrative and trading hub, required significant labor, drawing populations from nearby islands—particularly those with maritime and agricultural expertise like the Lease Islanders. This early wave of movement laid the foundation for what would become a sustained, intergenerational pattern of internal migration, driven not only by economic opportunity but also by the strength of social capital (Knaap, 1995).

The contemporary structure of migration from the Lease Islands to Ambon City continues to be shaped by these social mechanisms. Migration initiation is rarely an isolated act; rather, it is embedded in relational frameworks involving pioneer migrants who serve as facilitators (Andaya, 2016). These pioneers offer crucial support—temporary accommodation, information about schooling and employment, and daily necessities—allowing new migrants to transition more easily. This is evident in Case Unit 3's experience:

“After completing elementary school, I moved to Saparua with my uncle and aunt, who were assigned there as public information officers. I pursued my junior and senior high school education in Saparua. When my uncle was later transferred to Ambon City, I followed them after graduating from high school and continued my university studies there, still living with them. We also shared our residence with several relatives from our home village. In the Lease Islands' cultural context, successful family members are expected to support others within the extended family network. Now that my wife and I are both employed and financially stable, we continue this tradition by accommodating nieces, nephews, and other relatives pursuing education in Ambon. My own experience underscores the critical role of familial support, especially during times when remittances were delayed due to adverse weather and reliance on sea transportation.” (Case Unit 3, Interview, August 26, 2023).

A similar pattern is described by Case Unit 1:

“Upon deciding to pursue my studies in Ambon City, I moved in with my uncle and aunt. My uncle, who served in the military, had been stationed in Ambon and was living in military housing. I lived there along with several other nieces and nephews of his. My aunt is my mother’s younger sister. In our culture, it is customary for family members who are considered successful in the city to provide support and accommodation to relatives from the village. Therefore, my uncle and aunt had the responsibility to host us as part of this cultural obligation.” (Case Unit 1, Interview, August 26, 2023).

These two testimonies illustrate how the migration process is rooted in moral and social obligations within kinship systems. Early migrants are expected to act as social anchors, taking on roles similar to surrogate parents by ensuring the welfare of incoming migrants.

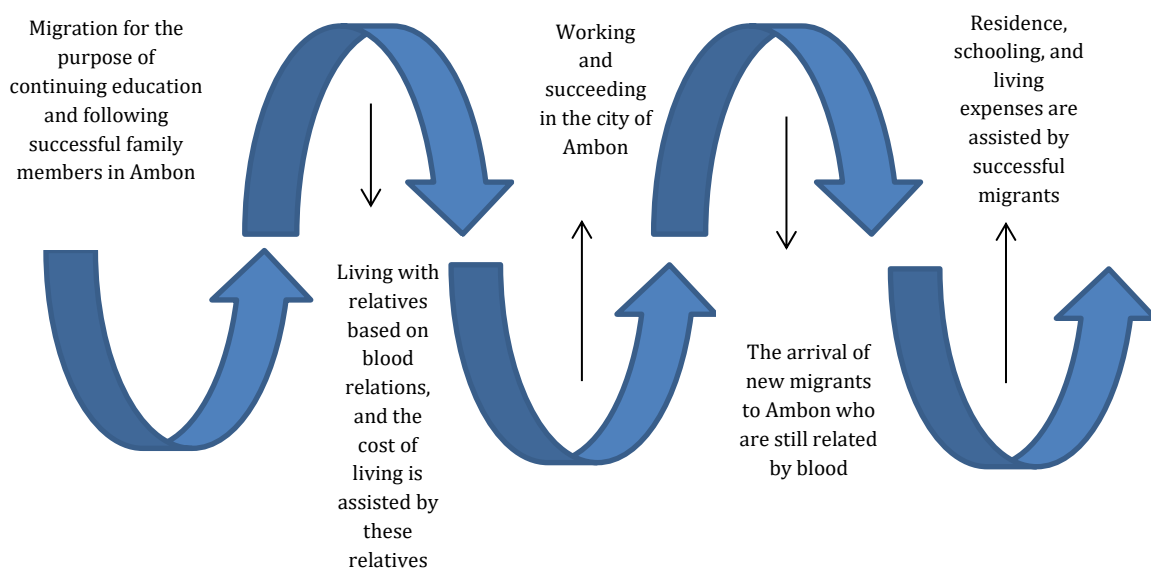


Figure 1. Mobility Chain Based on Close Kinship Relations

Figure 1 illustrates the chain migration pattern initiated and sustained through close kinship ties between residents of the Lease Islands and earlier migrants who had previously settled in Ambon City. In this context, kinship functions not merely as a social background but as the primary mechanism for triggering and supporting migration processes. Migration typically begins when a younger family member decides to pursue education in Ambon, a long-standing hub for education, governance, and commerce in the Maluku region. The choice of destination is influenced not only by geographic proximity but, more importantly, by the assurance of social support available in the city—such as housing, food, educational guidance, and sometimes financial assistance—offered by close relatives like uncles, aunts, or cousins who had migrated earlier.

In the figure, the migration chain is portrayed as a continuous social loop. The pioneer migrant, usually a family member who is perceived to have “succeeded” in the city, occupies a central position in this chain. They provide not only physical shelter but also assume a parental-like role for the newcomers. In many cases, these pioneers are the primary providers until the new migrants become socially and

economically self-reliant. This practice reflects the Lease community's values of familial solidarity, where an individual's success is not seen solely as a personal achievement, but as a shared family resource to be redistributed for collective welfare.

This migration pattern does not stop with one generation. Those who once received support eventually adopt the same role for other relatives, perpetuating a recurring, structured migration cycle that involves not only physical movement between islands but also the intergenerational transmission of values, aspirations, and social networks (Asrif & Kumbangsila, 2019). Migration thus emerges not merely as a rational individual decision based on economic opportunity but as a social practice embedded within the Lease community's moral and cultural framework. Figure 1, therefore, not only maps relational ties but also visualizes how mobility operates as a collective social mechanism continuously reproduced through kinship and moral obligation.

Furthermore, this figure helps us understand that the success of migration is inseparable from the existence of "social bridges" linking the origin villages with the urban destination. Blood ties function as a social safety net, enabling newcomers to minimize risks and accelerate their adaptation to the new environment. In the Lease Islands context, these ties are reinforced by a communal culture and traditional value system that emphasize collective responsibility for family welfare, rendering migration not merely an individual act but a social legacy passed down across generations.

The findings indicate that migration from the Lease Islands to Ambon City is not driven solely by economic rationality or personal initiative, but rather by deep-rooted social norms and moral expectations within extended kinship networks. Migration is a relational and intergenerational endeavor that draws strength from collective identity and shared obligations among family members. Within the cultural worldview of the Lease community, those who have previously migrated and achieved a degree of stability are morally bound to facilitate the migration of younger or less-experienced kin.

This facilitation is not limited to material assistance such as food and shelter but extends to emotional support, guidance, and the transmission of practical knowledge needed to navigate life in the city. Importantly, migration is viewed not as a rupture from the home village but as an extension of communal life into a new setting. The act of migrating is therefore not isolated or autonomous—it is woven into the family's long-term strategy for upward mobility and community continuity. Those who migrate remain socially tethered to their village through expectations of reciprocity, remittance, and the hosting of future migrants.

Several distinct patterns emerge from the narratives and observations collected during the study: First, the presence of key family members—such as uncles, aunts, older siblings, or cousins—who have already settled in Ambon plays a catalytic role in initiating migration. These individuals function as cultural brokers who not only offer housing and logistical support but also serve as intermediaries who introduce the migrant to urban norms, opportunities, and social networks. Their status within the family often grants them authority and trust, making them ideal figures for newcomers to emulate and depend on.

Second, education appears as a dominant motivation for initial migration, particularly among younger members of the Lease Islands community. The pursuit of formal schooling—especially university education—is deeply valued and often planned collectively within families. Migrating to Ambon City is seen as a rite of passage and a strategic investment, with relatives providing moral and financial backing. This educational aspiration is embedded in the community's long-standing maritime ethos of exploration, adaptability, and resilience.

Third, kinship ties in the Lease community operate on an extended basis. Rather than being confined to the nuclear family, support systems stretch across wider relational lines—including in-laws,

distant cousins, and clan-based affiliations. This elasticity in defining “family” is evident in how obligations to host, feed, and mentor newcomers are not restricted to close relatives but also extend to those who share common geographic or ancestral origins. The use of kinship terms such as “uncle” and “aunt” for non-biological relations reflects a socially embedded ethic of care and collective responsibility.

Fourth, a pattern of circular reciprocity becomes evident over time: those who once received assistance eventually take on the role of providers, creating a sustainable cycle of intergenerational mobility. This continuity strengthens the social fabric between origin and destination communities and embeds migration within the moral economy of the Lease Islanders. Migration thus becomes part of a broader cycle of mutual aid, cultural reproduction, and strategic mobility management. These patterns reflect a socially coherent and culturally rooted migration system that is supported by strong moral codes, customary practices, and extended family governance. In the Lease Islands, social capital is not merely a resource but a relational infrastructure that structures the who, how, and why of migration across time.

Transmission of Social Capital Across Migrant Generations

In the internal migration practices of the Lease Islands community, the transmission of values and social networks across generations plays a vital role in sustaining mobility patterns. One of the primary findings of this study is that social bonds extend beyond immediate family to include distant relatives and shared territorial origins (Asrif & Kumbangsila, 2019). For the people of Lease, the terms “uncle” and “aunt” are not restricted to one’s parents’ siblings but also refer to individuals connected through marriage or originating from the same village—reflecting a culturally embedded and expansive understanding of kinship.

This pattern is particularly evident in migration journeys mediated by distant relatives, as narrated by Case Unit 4:

“I came to Ambon City accompanied by my father. When I first arrived, I stayed with my grandmother, who had already been living in Ambon as a papalele (informal market trader). Since my campus was far from her house, I later moved in with my aunt in Wayame. Our family connection is through marriage—she is the younger sister of my father’s sister-in-law. While living with her, all my living expenses were covered by my aunt, although my father occasionally sent food supplies to Ambon. For us, the people of Nusalaut, this type of marital relationship is considered close. Now that I’ve completed my Master’s degree and have a job, I live in a rented house in Poka with my younger siblings. I am the one responsible for supporting them while they study in Ambon.” (Interview, August 26, 2023).

This migration model is not limited to individual decisions, but rather spreads through households and community members as a collective practice. New migrants often seek shelter and guidance from relatives who previously migrated, and once economically secure, they take on the responsibility of hosting and supporting future newcomers.

Field data further reveals that migrant networks from the Lease Islands manifest in three dominant forms, each representing a mode of transmitted social capital that facilitates adaptation and intergenerational continuity. First, there are homeland-based community networks—often referred to as one-country networks—which include associations such as Persano (Noloth Children’s Association), along with similar organizations formed by people from Titaway and Sirisori Amalatu. These community-based groups hold regular monthly gatherings involving savings collectives (arisan), social events, discussions about village affairs, and joint prayers. Their function extends beyond social cohesion; they

serve as active channels for circulating information and maintaining the emotional and logistical ties that encourage continued migration from the Lease Islands to Ambon.

Second, there are family name networks, known locally as *mataruma*. These networks represent extended familial ties based on shared surnames and clan affiliations, often visible in both formal and informal settings in Ambon. The *mataruma* network functions in multiple domains—providing newcomers with temporary shelter, emotional encouragement, and access to employment. Members of the *mataruma* who occupy positions of influence in the city government or other formal sectors frequently act as gatekeepers, helping relatives secure jobs or educational opportunities. For instance, it is common for migrants from Saparua Island to be employed in the municipal government of Ambon, while those from Haruku Island often serve in the Maluku provincial administration.

Third, village-based networks emerge as another key structure of support. One prominent example is the Ori Hamlet network, originating from Pelauw Village on Haruku Island. The Ori community maintains a deep sense of unity through shared Islamic belief and customary ties. In Ambon, these village-based bonds are kept alive through strong mutual recognition among migrants, many of whom hold prominent positions in public service. The Pelauw network, in particular, is known for its institutional presence in civil society and its ability to function as a reliable platform for employment referrals, mutual assistance, and the preservation of communal identity among the diaspora.

The findings indicate that social capital within the Lease Islands diaspora is not merely inherited passively, but actively cultivated, expanded, and transmitted across generations and contexts. Migrant networks—whether based on shared place of origin, extended kinship, or village affiliation—form the backbone of collective survival strategies in Ambon City. These networks are not static or symbolic; they function as living systems of exchange that provide real, material support for new migrants. Through regular gatherings, mutual assistance, and culturally embedded expectations, these community-based structures reinforce a sense of solidarity that is both adaptive and durable. The continued presence of such networks demonstrates that migration from the Lease Islands to Ambon is not just an individual journey, but a deeply collective and institutionalized practice.

Several recurring patterns emerge from the data. First, the role of homeland-based associations like Persano and other village groups illustrates how identity rooted in a shared place of origin continues to generate social cohesion long after physical relocation. These associations are not only forums for socialization but also centers of practical coordination, where information about employment, housing, and education is exchanged. Second, *mataruma* networks, defined through extended family names, reinforce vertical solidarity. They offer access to resources, mentorship, and influence, especially when certain family members occupy strategic roles in civil service or other institutions. The expectation to help one's kin is not only a moral duty but also a customary norm, transmitted and enforced through community values. Third, village-based networks, such as the Ori Hamlet community from Pelauw, demonstrate how religion and customary affiliation interact to produce highly cohesive subgroups (Knaap, 1995). These networks often mobilize around shared rituals, collective memory, and practical goals—like ensuring employment or housing for new arrivals. In contexts like Ambon, where formal institutional access may be uneven, these grassroots structures offer a vital system of social resilience. Together, these three types of networks reflect a sophisticated ecology of social capital that enables the Lease Islands diaspora not only to survive but to adapt and flourish in an urban environment. They serve as interlocking mechanisms for maintaining identity, redistributing opportunity, and ensuring long-term community presence across generations.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the internal migration of the Lease Islands community—particularly toward Ambon City—follows a sustained intergenerational pattern rooted in strong social capital and cultural norms. Migration is not an isolated decision but rather a social process, initiated by pioneer migrants who establish foundational support systems such as accommodation, financial assistance, and information flows. These networks are then maintained and transmitted across generations, forming a durable structure that enables continuous population movement. Two primary mechanisms emerge: first, the strategic role of family-based and extended kinship networks (both close and distant); and second, the presence of institutionalized social structures such as village associations and clan networks that ensure the continuity of support for newcomers. Together, these findings confirm that the Lease community's migration to Ambon is not merely a response to economic hardship but a deeply rooted socio-cultural tradition.

The strength of this migration pattern can be explained by several interrelated factors. The geographic proximity between the Lease Islands and Ambon has enabled short, repeated maritime mobility, while a shared cultural background reinforces solidarity. Social capital operates not only through kinship but also through shared religious, territorial, and communal identities, facilitating both physical relocation and social integration in urban settings. Migration becomes not only a pursuit of economic betterment, but also a form of cultural reproduction and strategic positioning within the broader socioeconomic system. The expectation that successful migrants will “open the way” for others is codified within the community's value system and continually reenacted through intergenerational practices. Thus, social capital acts as both a mechanism and an outcome of migration—an asset that grows and strengthens with each successive wave of movers.

These findings align with existing scholarship that emphasizes the role of social capital in reducing the risk and cost of migration. Massey et al. (1993) introduced the idea of cumulative causation in migration, where each migrant contributes to the expansion of networks that lower the threshold for subsequent movers. In the context of Indonesia, studies by Sahai et al. (2022) and Murwani (2024) confirm that community support mechanisms are critical in ensuring both the decision to migrate and the process of settlement. Other relevant works—such as Minza & Herlusia (2022), Partelow & Nelson (2020), and Mohammad & Stedham (2021)—demonstrate that affective ties and relational trust are indispensable in youth migration, particularly when economic incentives are insufficient. The Lease case enriches this discourse by showing how small-island communities utilize multi-layered social networks to ensure the survival and sustainability of their mobility traditions.

Theoretically, this study offers a reinterpretation of mobility not as a dislocation from origin to destination, but as a continuous cultural trajectory, supported by internal social mechanisms that replicate themselves over time. Migration, in this sense, is a practice of social continuity as much as it is a response to structural conditions. It implies that community resilience, cultural identity, and kinship obligations are not weakened by migration; instead, they are adapted and redeployed in new urban contexts. This insight aligns with the theoretical contributions of Berry (1983) and Poerwanto (2010), both of whom emphasize that cultural integration and transformation are shaped by internal psychological and social dynamics, not only by external economic forces.

The findings of this study offer a broader understanding of internal migration in Indonesia, particularly within the context of island communities that are often overlooked in national development discourse. In the case of the Lease Islands community, migration is not merely an economic movement but a socio-cultural practice transmitted across generations. The social meaning embedded in these results

reveals that migration functions as an adaptive strategy employed by small communities to confront geographic and resource limitations. This perspective aligns with a number of international studies which argue that migration is often part of a broader survival strategy for vulnerable populations. For example, Warziniack (2013) shows that water scarcity and natural resource pressures can trigger population movements as a form of escape or adaptation. In Bangladesh, as Mendola (2008) explains, more affluent households tend to engage in high-risk but high-return international migration, while poorer households are more likely to opt for low-return domestic migration that offers limited improvement to their economic condition.

Furthermore, Scheffran et al. (2012) demonstrate that in the context of West Africa, migration is regarded as an innovative mechanism to strengthen climate resilience through social networks and remittances. This is echoed in Roland's (2023) study in the Marshall Islands, where geographic isolation and climate change impacts make migration not only necessary but urgent—although deteriorating conditions may paradoxically constrain mobility due to diminishing resources. In such cases, migration is not only a vehicle for physical displacement but also a system of collective risk management sustained through social and financial relationships.

In relation to the role of social capital, Lőrincz & Németh (2022) emphasize that strong social ties between communities significantly increase the likelihood of migration, while Andrews (2016) notes that local power structures and land tenure systems are critical in shaping migration pathways in rural communities. A study by Jamero et al. (2019) in the Philippines further suggests that in-situ adaptation can pave the way for more organized and planned migration. Stange et al. (2023) highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of translocal migration strategies in managing environmental risks. Conversely, several studies warn of the dysfunctions associated with unregulated migration. Teicher & Marchman (2024) and Iuchi & Maly (2016) point out that exclusionary integration processes can lead to social tension in receiving areas. Accordingly, Ehrenfeucht & Nelson (2023) advocate for transformative, community-based relocation initiatives to mitigate such risks.

Historically, the migration tradition of the Lease community to Ambon has been rooted in the colonial period when institutional ties between Lease and Ambon were first established. When the Dutch East India Company (VOC) seized control of Ambon in the early 17th century, the city was transformed into a colonial administrative and commercial hub in the Moluccas, drawing labor from surrounding islands, including the Lease group. In this context, migration was not simply a spontaneous response to economic opportunity but part of a deliberate colonial policy that structurally connected peripheral regions to the colonial center. Niemeijer (2023) reveals that the VOC actively constructed secular governance structures and Reformed Church consistories in Ambon as part of a larger "Christian Republic" project, thereby deepening the involvement of local Christianized communities in colonial systems. Post (2021) also records how VOC diplomatic relations with indigenous rulers and religious leaders were conducted through rituals and ceremonial protocols that legitimized Dutch power and opened avenues for political and social integration between Lease and Ambon.

The impact of these colonial structures extended beyond the political realm to the cultural domain. Musgrave and Ewing (2006) note that Christian communities closer to colonial centers like Ambon tended to lose their indigenous languages more rapidly than Muslim communities, which remained more autonomous and less exposed to direct colonial governance. Gaspersz & Souisa (2021) reinforce this by showing how the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM), as a legacy of Dutch evangelization, adapted to local conditions and became a central institution in shaping values, social networks, and the migratory orientation of its adherents. It is therefore unsurprising that the Lease community, with its historically

structural proximity to Ambon's colonial center, developed consistent and enduring migration patterns that have persisted into the present.

Moreover, the colonial roots of this relationship have significantly shaped the identity and social status of Lease migrants in Ambon. They are often positioned as intermediary groups—not only geographically but also socially—between colonial authority and indigenous communities. Even after Indonesian independence, the legacy of colonial relations continued to manifest in regional political dynamics and identity formation. Chauvel's (2008) study of the Republic of South Maluku and its separatist movement illustrates how these colonial legacies continued to influence political mobilization and regional identity in post-colonial Indonesia. Thus, understanding Lease migration to Ambon requires attention to the historical colonial structures that shaped mobility patterns, opportunity structures, and cultural identities since the 17th century. This study, therefore, contributes to a deeper comprehension of how colonial histories continue to shape the trajectory and meanings of internal migration in the Indonesian archipelago.

Ideologically, the findings of this study challenge the prevailing assumption that population mobility is solely driven by structural pressures such as poverty or limited resources. Instead, it underscores that values such as solidarity, kinship obligations, and social trust are active elements that regulate and drive migration patterns—particularly within island communities like those of the Lease Islands. In this context, migration is not merely a survival strategy but rather an institutionalized expression of collective cultural practice passed down through generations.

This perspective aligns with Killias (2014), who demonstrates that the migration of Indonesian domestic workers to Malaysia is not only economically motivated, but also mediated by kinship metaphors that shape a sense of belonging and social obligation at both familial and national levels. In a different context, Quinlan et al. (2019) found that faith- and ethnicity-based solidarity enabled Muslim migrants on the predominantly Christian island of Sumba to maintain their identities and social networks through religious communities and ethnic enclaves. These findings suggest that strong social bonds are critical in sustaining migration and facilitating intercultural integration.

Further, Minza & Herlusia (2022) observed that relational trust is a primary driver of educational migration among youth from West Kalimantan to Yogyakarta. Social ties built on shared hope and emotional support function as an affective infrastructure that sustains migrants through their transitions. A similar pattern is reflected in Bräuchler's (2017) study, where reciprocal integration mechanisms between migrants and host communities in Eastern Indonesia emerged from a foundation of mutual trust and deep social understanding—even in contexts of asymmetrical access to land and customary rights.

This study also builds upon Utomo's (2020) research, which emphasizes the continuing role of kinship networks in shaping migration and marriage decisions in Jakarta, as well as Ambarwati's (2022) analysis of Balinese migrants in Yogyakarta who maintain ties with their home villages as part of their cultural identity and emotional security. At a structural level, Auwalin (2020) demonstrates that ethnic identity significantly influences migration decisions—though the strength of this influence is mediated by local social contexts and whether migrants are part of a majority or minority group. Collectively, these studies support the conclusion that solidarity, social obligation, and trust are not merely background factors in migration, but rather ideological drivers that shape the meanings and mechanisms of mobility itself.

Functionally, this research highlights that intergenerationally transmitted social capital serves as a powerful adaptive force for migrant communities. Social networks formed by pioneer migrants function as informal systems capable of addressing structural limitations—such as limited financial capital or

institutional support—through mutual aid and resource pooling. However, there is also a potential dysfunction that must be addressed: overreliance on origin-based networks—commonly referred to as bonding social capital—can lead to exclusivity among migrants. In the context of Lease migrants in Ambon, strong ties based on shared regional origin serve as essential safety nets during early stages of settlement. Yet, if not balanced by openness to broader social engagement, such reliance can hinder cross-community integration and restrict access to wider socioeconomic opportunities in urban settings.

This concern is reinforced by Ryan (2011) and Flores-Yeffal (2015), who show that bonding social capital is crucial for initial emotional and material support. However, Zhang et al. (2024) and Butratana & Trupp (2025) warn that overdependence on homogenous networks may lead to social isolation and constrained access to broader resources. In some cases, such internal exclusivity can result in intra-community segregation, as observed by Horiuchi (2008).

Moreover, the strengthening of intra-group ties often obstructs the development of bridging social capital—connections between migrants and members of other groups. Research by Horiuchi et al. (2013) and Zhang et al. (2011) shows that limited bridging ties reduce migrants' ability to participate in more inclusive public life. In some contexts, bonding capital can even reproduce exclusive norms that marginalize vulnerable groups within the migrant community itself (Moore & Recker, 2015).

Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance between fostering internal solidarity and building outward-facing social bridges. Strategies such as intercultural community programs, interethnic social activities, and municipal policies that promote horizontal social interaction are particularly vital (Nannestad et al., 2008; Ryu, 2017). Policy interventions that actively promote the development of bridging social capital can empower migrant communities—such as the Lease population in Ambon—to become more inclusive and resilient in the long term, while preserving their cultural roots and internal cohesion.

Based on the findings of this study—and the accompanying potential dysfunctions—several policy recommendations can be proposed to enhance the positive functions of migrant social networks while mitigating the risks of exclusivity. First, local governments—particularly in destination cities like Ambon—should provide legal recognition and institutional support for migrant organizations based on regional origin. This recognition is critical to ensure that these organizations function inclusively, foster inter-community collaboration, and do not serve their members in isolation. Second, mechanisms to foster bridging social capital should be developed systematically—such as encouraging migrant participation in interethnic forums, cross-village or cross-district programs, and joint sociocultural activities involving both locals and migrants. Third, education and vocational training programs should not be limited to distribution within internal networks, but also facilitated through cross-organizational partnerships to encourage openness and experiential exchange. Fourth, the development of inclusive public spaces—such as community halls, cultural centers, and parks designed for diverse social interaction—should be oriented toward promoting intergroup encounters. With policy frameworks that balance bonding and bridging forms of social capital, internal migration can evolve into a collective force that strengthens social cohesion and fosters more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban communities..

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that internal migration from the Lease Islands to Ambon City is not merely an individual or economic endeavor, but a sustained and socially embedded process rooted in intergenerational social capital. Migration is initiated, supported, and perpetuated through kinship-based networks, communal obligations, and cultural norms that bind migrants to their origin while enabling

them to adapt in the urban setting. From the role of pioneer migrants providing moral and material support, to the function of community and family-based associations in sustaining migration chains, the Lease case illustrates how mobility is maintained as both a socio-cultural heritage and a strategic life trajectory.

The main contribution of this study lies in its conceptual and empirical elaboration of migration as a culturally transmitted system supported by intergenerational social capital. By combining sociological and historical perspectives, the research offers a framework for understanding internal mobility not as a fragmented individual decision, but as a collective practice governed by trust, customary obligation, and communal resilience. This study advances academic discourse by introducing the idea of “chain mobility” as a culturally organized phenomenon in small-island societies and provides empirical insights into how such systems function across time and space.

Nonetheless, the study has several limitations. The focus on a single case within the Lease-Ambon migration corridor restricts generalizability to other archipelagic contexts in Indonesia. The qualitative approach also prioritizes depth over breadth, which means broader quantitative patterns or variations across villages remain underexplored. Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative and longitudinal studies involving other island communities—such as those from Bawean or Alor—to examine whether similar mechanisms of social capital and cultural reproduction are at play. Such investigations would enrich our understanding of how internal migration systems can be sustained and strengthened across the Indonesian archipelago.

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