KAJIAN MALAYSIA Vol. 44, No.2, 2026, 91–113

THE SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES OF THE KERINCHI TRIBE IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF KINSHIP NETWORKS

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Published online: 30 October 2026

To cite this article: Della Amrina Yusra, Yumasdaleni, Musli and Jamaluddin. 2026. The settlement experiences of the Kerinchi Tribe in Malaysia: A study on the role of kinship networks. *Kajian Malaysia* 44(2): 91–113. https://doi.org/10.21315/km2026.44.2.5

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.21315/km2026.44.2.5

ABSTRACT

This article examines the kinship network of the Kerinchi (Kerinci) tribe in Indonesia and their diaspora's migration patterns to Malaysia, considering the dynamic policy landscape between the two countries. Kinship, a cornerstone of Kerinchi culture, plays a crucial role in shaping identity and maintaining social cohesion, particularly through matrilineal inheritance, migration support, and intergenerational bonds. However, migration to Malaysia, driven by economic and social factors, significantly impacts these kinship ties. Evolving policies in both countries on migration, citizenship, and foreign workers' rights further shape the Kerinchi diaspora experience. This study employed qualitative methods, including 19 in-depth interviews with Kerinchi migrants in Malaysia and their relatives in Indonesia, and three focus group discussions (27 participants in Malaysia, 31 in Kerinci, and 11 children of migrants), conducted between 2019 and 2023. These methods provided insights into migration history, kinship support, and settlement experiences. Observations of Kerinchi migrants and analyses of relevant policies and literature are conducted to contextualise the sustainability of their kinship network in migration. The findings reveal that the kinship network plays a crucial role in facilitating and sustaining the Kerinchi tribe's migration to Malaysia to this day. This network provides access to information, resources, contacts and employment opportunities across borders. However, the impact of this network on post-migration experiences is highly complex and varied. While kinship ties can reduce the costs and risks of migration, they can also lead to exploitation and dependency. Furthermore, evolving migration, citizenship, and foreign worker rights policies in Malaysia and Indonesia significantly shape the Kerinchi diaspora experience. These policies can

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both facilitate and restrict migration, having a substantial impact on the lives and livelihoods of Kerinchi migrants.

Keywords: Kinship network, Kerinchi Indonesia, migration, Malaysia-Indonesia policy

INTRODUCTION

Population movements have long played a significant role in this subregion's history, beginning with trade routes to China, Central and West Asia, and Europe, and along the coast. In the 16th century, European colonisation led to the emergence of thriving plantations and industries, creating a need for additional labour that was met by workers from other Asian countries, including an estimated 20 million Chinese and 30 million Indians who arrived between 1840 and 1940 (Amrith 2014). Some of them settled in their host countries, contributing to the formation of today's multi-ethnic societies. After World War II, decolonisation and the consolidation of national independence in Southeast Asian countries were accompanied by stricter immigration policies, leading to a temporary decline in labour migration. At the same time, the establishment of Malaysia triggered an exodus of about 270,000 people from Peninsular Malaysia, with about half relocating to Singapore (United Nations 2013).

The migration of Kerinchi people from Sumatra, Indonesia, to Malaysia has deep historical roots, with some Kerinchi groups having settled in Malaysia even before the formation of the nation-state (Zainuddin and Latief 2021). Economic factors, such as limited job opportunities in their home villages and higher wages in Malaysia, have been the main drivers of this migration. Strong social networks between the two regions have also facilitated the flow of Kerinchi migrants to Malaysia (Musli, Yusra and Yumasdaleni 2023).

In addition to economic factors, government policies have also played a role in population migration. The Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), since 1957, has encouraged internal migration within Peninsular Malaysia (MacAndrews and Yamamoto 1975). This transmigration programme aimed to open up new agricultural land and improve people's welfare, but it also had an impact on inter-regional migration patterns in Malaysia. Changes in Malaysia's migration policies are also an important factor to consider. These policies have changed over time, shaped by economic needs and crises (Pillai 1999). For example, during the 1997 Asian economic crisis, the Malaysian government tightened migration policies to protect local workers.

Government policies also shaped migration. FELDA's internal resettlement programme (MacAndrews and Yamamoto 1975) influenced inter-regional mobility. During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Malaysia tightened migration

policies (Pillai 1999). Entering the new millennium, Malaysia's rapid industrialisation increased demand for foreign labour, leading to stricter work permit regulations and efforts to reduce dependency on migrant workers.

Mahli and Hilman (2021) discussed the lives of Kerinchi ethnic migrants who have settled in Malaysia for several generations. These Kerinchi migrants maintain their ethnic identity and preserve their ancestral land amidst the challenges of living in a foreign country. The studies reveal that the migration of Kerinchi people to Malaysia has been ongoing for centuries and continues to this day (Zainuddin and Latief 2021; Aisyah and Asyiqin 2024). This indicates a strong historical relationship between the two regions. Historically, the migration of the Kerinchi people to Malaysia can be traced back to the colonial era, when economic opportunities in Malaya attracted many migrants from Sumatra, including those from Kerinchi. Mahli and Hilman (2021) highlight that early Kerinchi migrants often worked in plantation sectors, trade, and as religious scholars, contributing to the sociocultural fabric of Malaysian society. Musli, Della Amrina and Yumasdaleni (2023) further explain that kinship networks shaped migration patterns, as earlier migrants facilitated the arrival of relatives by providing initial support and accommodation. Over time, the establishment of Kerinchi communities in Malaysia helped maintain their linguistic and cultural identity while also integrating into the local social structure. This long-standing migration tradition demonstrates not only economic motivations but also the enduring cultural and familial ties between the Kerinchi people and Malaysia.

The Kerinchi migrants in Malaysia make significant efforts to maintain their ethnic identity. This is evident in their efforts to preserve Kerinchi traditions, language and customs, even though they live in a different environment. For the Kerinchi people, the importance of ancestral land is evident in their efforts to protect and maintain their ancestral lands in Kerinchi, even though they live far from them. The Kerinchi migrants in Malaysia face various challenges, such as changes in state policies, job competition, and cultural adaptation. However, they have adapted and maintained their ethnic identity. Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of migrants in a broader context, including historical relationships, ethnic identity, and cultural preservation. This article will discuss how kinship relations among the Kerinchi people contribute to the sustainability of migration within the landscape of Malaysian-Indonesian policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kinship Studies in Migration Contexts

Kinship studies within migration contexts have long emphasised the crucial role of familial and social ties in influencing migration decisions, facilitating movement and sustaining diaspora communities (Gurak and Caces 1992). Kinship not only provides the emotional and financial foundation for mobility but also shapes how migrants navigate their identities and obligations across borders. Through these networks, migrants maintain a sense of belonging, ensure intergenerational continuity, and reproduce cultural norms in new social environments.

In the Southeast Asian context, kinship is performative and fluid, often defined more by shared experience and mutual obligation than by strict genealogical descent (Carsten 2020). This dynamic understanding of kinship allows for adaptability within changing social and migration landscapes. Watson (1992) offers foundational insight into Kerinchi matrilineal inheritance and the role of *adat* (customary law) in regulating property rights and social order. Complementing this, Puspita (2021) and Refisrul and Ajisman (2015) expand the discussion by examining kinship terminology, marriage practices, and the gendered dimensions of lineage, all of which are central to understanding how Kerinchi communities sustain cohesion across generations.

Recent developments in migration research increasingly draw on network theory, longitudinal qualitative methods, and critical realist approaches to uncover the structural and relational dimensions of mobility (Ryan 2021; Iosifides 2016; Winiarska 2017). These perspectives highlight how kinship operates as both a social structure and a life practice that adapts to changing economic, political, and policy contexts. By combining these approaches, scholars can better capture the complexity of migration as a process embedded in social reaction, revealing how kinship networks continue to shape transnational lives and community resilience.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The study employs a qualitative approach to gain deep insights into the experiences of migrants and their families. Data collection methods included conducting 19 individual interviews, organising 3 focus group discussions (FGDs), and engaging in participant observation. The interviews sought to

uncover respondents' migration histories, the extent of kinship support, and various settlement strategies employed by migrants.

In the FGDs, participants shared collective narratives surrounding adaptation and family survival. The first FGD included 27 Kerinci migrants residing in Kuala Lumpur, who discussed their experiences under the theme "Life in a Foreign Land". The second FGD consisted of 31 families remaining in Kerinci, centred on their experiences titled "The Fate of Families Left Behind". The third group involved 11 children of migrants, addressing their realities in "Our Lives Without Our Breadwinners Abroad".

The data were meticulously analysed using thematic coding techniques and triangulation to ensure the findings' validity. Interview guides were carefully structured to focus on aspects of migration history, kinship support, and settlement experiences.

The conceptual framework of the study integrates matrilineal kinship theory as proposed by Watson (1992), along with transnational migration theory and social network theory. This framework shows how kinship networks facilitate migration processes, adaptation strategies, and the preservation of identity among migrants. Throughout the research, ethical considerations were adhered to in accordance with the guidelines set forth by Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz (2020).

The research began at the end of 2019 through interviews, observations, and FGDs, but was paused due to pandemic-related regulations in both Indonesia and Malaysia. In 2021, the research resumed in Kerinchi, where we interacted with families of migrant workers and those migrants who were unable to return to Malaysia. Follow-up interviews occurred online via WhatsApp in 2023. In Malaysia, the research locations included Kampung Pasir, Selangor, and Jalan Kerinchi, while in Kerinchi Regency, it encompassed three villages: Seleman, Pasar Sore, and Koto Tengah.

Interview guides explored migration history, kinship support, and settlement strategies. FGDs addressed collective narratives of adaptation and family survival. Data were analysed using thematic coding and triangulation to ensure validity. The framework integrates matrilineal kinship theory, transnational migration theory, and social network theory to explain how kinship networks facilitate migration and adaptation.

Hypothesis: The hypothesis guiding this research is that kinship networks significantly influence the migration experiences and adaptability of the Kerinchi tribe, providing both social support and economic resources while also

impacting their integration into host societies. The study of kinship employs a network-based framework that merges performative kinship theory (Carsten 2020) with matrilineal inheritance models (Watson 1992). It hypothesises that Kerinchi kinship networks not only facilitate migration but also serve as a key mechanism for post-migration adaptation, identity preservation, and access to social and economic resources.

Framework: The framework for this study is grounded in qualitative research methodologies that prioritise understanding the complexity of kinship in migration contexts. By integrating matrilineal kinship theory, the framework explores patterns of inheritance and gender roles; transnational migration theory provides a lens to examine cross-border connections and policy influences; and social network theory helps map the relational dynamics and support systems that sustain the Kerinchi community across borders. By utilising a combination of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observational methods as outlined by Given (2008) and Beaton and Clark (2009), this study aims to generate rich, nuanced insights into the experiences of Kerinchi migrants. It adopts a critical realist approach, as advocated by Iosifides (2016), to explore the underlying structures shaping these kinship networks and their migration-related decisions. Ethical considerations highlighted by Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz (2020) guide the research practices to ensure respect for participant perspectives and rights.

The research analyses kinship as a complex system of social relationships that significantly affects migration decisions, experiences, and outcomes. For example, kinship networks may offer essential social and economic support, facilitate adjustment to new environments, and aid in the integration process within host societies. Data collection involved interviewing 19 informants, including Kerinchi residents with varying statuses in Malaysia, children of migrant workers, and family members remaining in their hometowns. Additionally, three FGDs were held, with participants discussing themes relevant to their experiences as migrants or families left behind.

The first FGD took place in Kampung Kerinchi, Malaysia, with 27 participants discussing "Life in a Foreign Land." The second was conducted with the families of migrant workers in Sleman, Kerinchi, Jambi, with 31 participants focusing on "The Fate of Families Left Behind by Migrant Workers in Malaysia." The third FGD involved 11 children of migrant workers in their hometown, who discussed "Our Lives Without Our Breadwinners Abroad."

By placing kinship analysis at the forefront of migration research, this study aims to uncover new dimensions of migrants' experiences and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of migration phenomena. This focus on kinship enriches the field by highlighting the significance of familial and social ties throughout the migration process.

Concepts and Theories of Kinship in Migration

Kinship is a fundamental aspect of all human societies, encompassing structured relationships that connect individuals. It intertwines with various other social systems, including religion, economics, and politics. A society's beliefs about procreation and kinship determine a newborn's social identity and position within the family and existing social network. Kinship relationships also serve as a framework for expressing social organisation in human societies (Read 2001).

The Migrants of Kerinchi people of Sumatra have a complex kinship system that plays a crucial role in their social structure and cultural identity. Their language includes numerous kinship greeting words, reflecting the importance of family relationships (Puspita 2021; Diyanti 2021). The Kerinchi follow a matrilineal lineage system, similar to their Minangkabau neighbours, though with some unique variations (Watson 1992; Refisrul and Ajisman 2015). Kinship influences various aspects of Kerinchi life, including marriage practices, with endogamous marriages being common but increasingly negotiated with Islamic principles (Iskandar, Herningrum and Susanti 2022). The significance of kinship extends to land tenure, property rights, and local political structures (Rodgers 1995; Watson 1992).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The History of the Name Kampung Kerinchi in Kuala Lumpur and the Legacy of the Key Figures

Kampung Kerinchi, now known for the luxurious Kerinchi Residensi, holds a significant history as the initial settlement of the Kerinchi people who migrated from Jambi, Aceh and Minangkabau, Indonesia, in the late 18th century (Junipah 1992). This migration was triggered by dissatisfaction with the oppressive rule of the Dutch military. They chose a location resembling their homeland and officially established Kampung Kerinchi around the 1890s, led by Abdullah Hukum and his followers. The village flourished into an agricultural hub, cultivating pineapples, vegetables, and fruits. Farming became the primary livelihood and contributed to the local economy. The Kerinchi people also expanded their influence to other areas in Kuala Lumpur, such as Pudu, Sungai Putih and Petaling Jaya. Starting in 2005, the area underwent a major transformation through large-scale development projects.

The history and significant role of a Kerinchi figure named Abdullah Hukum in Kuala Lumpur's early development helped shape the city's identity and structure. Abdullah Hukum, whose original name was Muhammad Rukun, migrated to Kuala Lumpur in the mid-19th century. Abdullah Hukum is known as one of the

early pioneers who opened and developed the Sungai Putih area, now known as Jalan Bangsar. After obtaining permission from Raja Laut, Abdullah Hukum and his followers began clearing land in the area, which later developed into Kampung Kerinchi. Besides his role in the development of Kampung Kerinchi, Abdullah Hukum was also known as a community leader active in social and economic activities. He was involved in various agricultural and trade activities that helped advance the local economy. His name is immortalised as the name of a road and LRT station in Kuala Lumpur, in tribute to his contribution to the city's development (Mariana and Kaur 2015). Abdullah Hukum contributed to the migration network of Kerinchi residents to Malaysia in the times before Indonesia and Malaysia gained independence.

The following image is a map of Kuala Lumpur, where there are three locations connected to Kerinci (Kerinchi): Jalan Kerinchi, Kerinchi LRT station and Abdullah Hukum Commuter (KTM) station.



Figure 1: Map of Kuala Lumpur City and locations of Kerinchi landmarks.

Source: Google Maps (n.d.)

The Abdullah Hukum Jamek Mosque, located above KL Eco City in Kuala Lumpur, was built at the request of Abdullah Hukum's descendants. Its construction serves as a tribute to their grandfather's legacy, recognising his significant role in opening and developing the Sungai Putih area and Kampung Kerinchi in the 19th century. Today, the mosque stands not only as a place of worship but also as a symbol of historical heritage, commemorating the Kerinchi community's contributions to Kuala Lumpur's social and cultural identity.

In 1939, the number of Kerinchi people migrating to Malaysia increased significantly. While exact figures are difficult to determine (Rizal 2012), historical records indicate that by the early 20th century, hundreds of Kerinchi families had settled in Malaysia, particularly in Klang, Selangor. The late 19th and early 20th centuries (1900–1905) saw the largest wave of Kerinchi migration to

Malaysia. During this period, estimates suggest that at least 2,000 to 3,000 Kerinchi migrants moved to the Malay Peninsula in search of better economic opportunities. By 1939, the migration intensified, with over 5,000 Kerinchi individuals reportedly settling in plantation areas around Hulu Langat, Kuala Kubu, Kemensah, and Ulu Yam. Initially, with the help and good relations with the local population, they opened rubber plantation lands. Their way of life and shared Malay ethnicity and culture made it easier for the Kerinchi people to integrate into local communities through the *serumpun* concept (Ruhanas 2023). Some of them married residents. At the beginning of Malaysia's independence in 1957, the government (Kingdom-Sultanate) granted permanent residency and citizenship to Indonesian descendants, including the Kerinchi people. By the 1980s, the number of Kerinchi descendants in Malaysia was estimated to exceed 10,000, with many having acquired Malaysian citizenship. Today, the Kerinchi-Malaysian population is believed to have grown to over 20,000 individuals, spanning multiple generations.

Dozens of people from the 3rd to the 5th generation have become important officials in the Malaysian government and civil service. For instance, Tan Sri Abdul Ghani Othman, a prominent Malaysian politician with Kerinchi ancestry, served as the Chief Minister of Johor from 1995 to 2013. Another notable figure is Dato' Seri Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah, who held the position of Malaysia's Second Finance Minister. Additionally, several Kerinchi descendants have attained positions as senior officers in the Malaysian Immigration Department and the Ministry of Education. Malaysian children of Kerinchi descent and children of migrant workers born in Malaysia use three languages when returning to their ancestral homeland: the Malaysian dialect of Malay, English and the Kerinchi language (Rizal 2012).

In the decades from the 1900s to the 1950s, the Kerinchi people migrated to the Malay Peninsula, referring to their destination as "Kelang" (now known as Klang). Kelang served as a crucial port for Hajj pilgrimage using sea routes. Some Kerinchi people who returned via Klang did not return to Kerinchi but settled in Klang, Selangor.

The relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia from 1963 to 1968 was marked by tension and conflict known as the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (Sahul Hamid 2010). This Confrontation was triggered by Indonesia's opposition to the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, which was seen as an attempt at British neocolonialism in the region (Rizal 2012). Issues related to the strained relations between Indonesia and Malaysia include:

1. Opposition to the Federation of Malaysia: Indonesia, under the leadership of President Sukarno, opposed the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, which included Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. Indonesia viewed this federation as a threat to its sovereignty and a form of British neocolonialism.
2. Military and political Confrontation: This Confrontation involved limited military action on the Kalimantan border, as well as intense political and propaganda campaigns by both sides. Indonesia carried out infiltration and attacks into Malaysian territory, while Malaysia received military support from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.
3. Economic and social impact: The Confrontation had a negative impact on economic and social relations between the two countries. For example, Indonesia banned the use of Singapore and Malaysian dollars in the Riau Islands, replacing them with the Riau Rupiah. This policy was part of broader economic measures taken during the Confrontation, which significantly affected trade and monetary systems in the region. Additionally, the military and political tensions led to propaganda campaigns and infiltration attempts, further exacerbating social divisions (Sulistyono et al. 2023). Diplomatic relations were severed, trade restrictions were imposed, and tensions among the people increased.
4. End of the Confrontation: The Confrontation ended in 1966 following a regime change in Indonesia. The New Order government under President Suharto chose to improve relations with Malaysia and other neighbouring countries.

General H.A. Thalib played a significant role in normalising relations between Indonesia and Malaysia (Rizal 2012) and (Bachtiar 1988). After the Confrontation ended, the two countries began the process of normalising relations. Diplomatic relations were restored, economic cooperation was enhanced, and reconciliation efforts were made to address the negative impacts of the conflict. Major General TNI (Ret.) H. Abdul Thalib, better known as Tan Sri Depati Santiobowo, was an Indonesian military figure and diplomat who served as Indonesia's ambassador to Malaysia from 1968 to 1973. He was born in Kerinchi in 1918 and passed away in Kuala Lumpur in 1973. General Thalib's appointment as ambassador held significant meaning in the context of Indonesia-Malaysia relations, which had just recovered from the Confrontation. He played an active role in restoring diplomatic, economic, and social relations between Indonesia and Malaysia after the Confrontation. He built trust and cooperation between the two countries. Major General Thalib also promoted bilateral cooperation in various fields, such as trade, investment, education, and culture. These

efforts helped strengthen relations between the two countries. At the same time, General Thalib also helped protect the interests of Indonesian citizens in Malaysia, including migrant workers. He ensured their rights were protected and they received fair treatment.

Through effective diplomacy, General Thalib successfully strengthened bilateral relations between Indonesia and Malaysia. He established good communication with the Malaysian government and fostered close relationships with various community leaders. General Thalib is remembered as a figure who helped restore and strengthen Indonesia-Malaysia relations. His dedication and leadership as an ambassador significantly contributed to cooperation and friendship between the two countries. For his service, the Malaysian government awarded General Thalib the title Tan Sri. This title is the highest honour given to foreign nationals who have made outstanding contributions to Malaysia.

According to their customs, the Kerinchi people live and settle in groups. Kerinchi family groups inhabiting one area usually originate from the original villages in Kerinchi that they left. For example, informant 1 stated that Kerinchi residents from Seleman Village, Danau Kerinchi District, settled in the Kuala Kubu Baru and Kampung Pasir areas, Hulu Langat. People from Tanjung Tanah Village settled in Kampung Kerinchi and Kampung Pasir, while people from Jujun Village and Pulau Tengah Village settled in the Pansun and Hululangat Ujung areas. People from Lempur Danau Village and Semerap Village settled in the Sungai Pencala settlement area. Kerinchi Mudik people, especially those from Sungai Abu, Sungai Tutung, Sekungkung, and surrounding villages, generally settled in the Sungai Tekali settlement area. People from Sanggaran Agung Village, Pendung Talang Genting, Danau Kerinci District, Temiai, Batang Merangin District, and the surrounding areas settled in the Gombak Ujung area. Residents from other villages in Kerinchi settled in scattered areas in Sabak Bernam, Tanjung Malim, Perak, Pahang, Hulu Yam (Ulu Yam), and Klang, Selangor. The locations can be seen in the Figure 2.

Referring to the historical explanation, the researchers argue that the traces of early pioneers who migrated to Kuala Lumpur formed the initial network in the Kerinchi tribe's series of migrations to Malaysia.

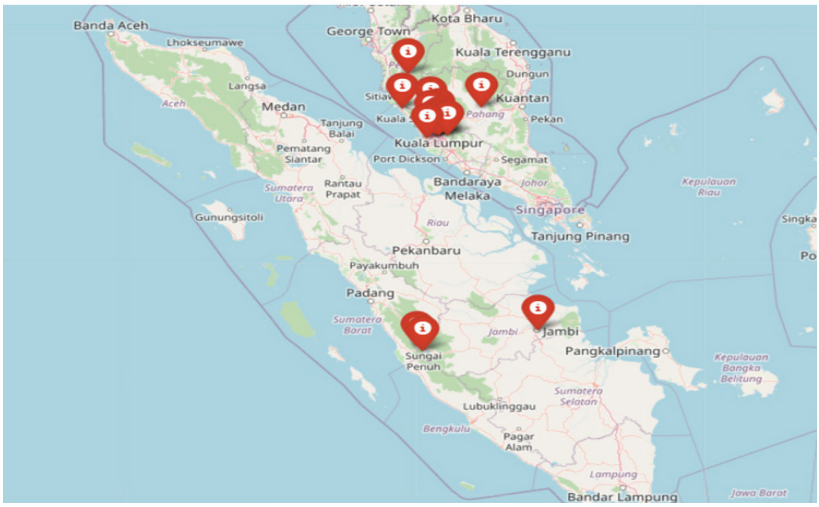


Figure 2: Geographic distribution of research sites in Peninsular Malaysia, Kerinci Regency, and Jambi City, Indonesia, for the study of Indonesian migrant workers.

Source: OpenStreetMap (n.d.)

Kinship Relations of the Kerinchi Tribe

The basic research on Kerinchi kinship by (Watson 1992) in his book "Kinship, Property, and Inheritance in Kerinchi, Central Sumatra" is an in-depth ethnographic study of the Kerinchi people. Watson focuses on the matrilineal kinship system, where descent and inheritance follow the maternal line, with daughters typically inheriting land and property. He explores how customs and customary law (*adat pepatih*) maintain social relationships and manage property, ensuring economic and social continuity despite modernisation pressures. The study highlights the unique characteristics of the Kerinchi kinship system, emphasising the matrilineal nature of inheritance, where ancestral property is passed down through the mother's lineage. Watson also explores the significant role of gender, highlighting how the matrilineal system gives women a key position in property and land inheritance, though social and economic changes can affect their status.

Kinship in Kerinchi also serves as a support system, providing economic, social, and emotional backing to its members. Watson (1992) finds that conflicts over property and inheritance are common but are effectively resolved through traditional mechanisms like mediation by customary elders.

Within the Kerinchi community, some view marriages within one's own kin group as preferable (Watson 1992; Refisrul and Ajisman 2015; Puspita 2021). However, this does not mean that marriages outside the kin group are forbidden,

especially if no suitable partner is available within the kin group. Some groups disapprove of marriages that are too close, such as with first cousins. On the other hand, they highly favour marriages with the children of one's mother's brother or father's sister, which are considered ideal and often referred to as "*kuah jatuh ke nasi*" (gravy falling on rice). This practice is known as endogamy, where marriages occur within the same kin group.

The Kerinhci kinship system is complex and rich in cultural values; it shows how the Kerinchi people maintain family and social relationships and manage ancestral property and gender roles within their community. The Kerinchi kinship system is also matrilocal, meaning that after marriage, the wife will remain in her parents' home, and the husband usually lives in the wife's family environment, a practice known as "*duduk semendo*". This indicates that the wife's family plays a central role in the new family's life. Consequently, women have an important role in managing and inheriting family property, reflecting respect and recognition of their role in maintaining the continuity and well-being of the family and the broader community. The Kerinchi kinship system encompasses wide-ranging relationships not only within the nuclear family but also with extended clan members. These social bonds and support networks are extensive and include many community members. The Kerinchi language itself has specific kinship terms to distinguish relationships based on lineage and marriage, highlighting the importance of this system in daily life. These terms reflect cultural identity and include specific ways of addressing maternal and paternal relatives, older siblings (both male and female), and even cousins (Puspita 2021).

In the 14th century, in the Kerinchi highlands, nine leaders called Sigindo ruled, each Sigindo being the title of a tribal chief or clan leader. They governed their people in their respective territories. Within each Sigindo kingdom, there were several villages and hamlets with a considerable population that obeyed the Sigindo. Between one Sigindo and another, they shared a harmonious relationship and a sense of kinship, with the principle of "sharing burdens and responsibilities" and "fighting together against enemies". They would not retreat even a step in helping a Sigindo territory facing threats from enemies.

The nine Sigindo were: (1) Sigindo Ekok Misai Sungai Tenang, based in Koto Tapus (now Jangkat); (2) Sigindo Balak Serampas, based in Tanjung Kasri (now part of Jangkat District); (3) Sigindo Batinting Jerangkang Tinggi, based in Pulau Sangkar; (4) Sigindo Bauk Tanjung Muara Sekiau, based in Temiai; (5) Sigindo Kumbang Wilayah Selatan Danau Kerinchi, based in Jujun; (6) Sigindo Kuning Wilayah Barat Danau Kerinchi, based in Seleman; (7) Sigindo Teras Wilayah Utara Danau Kerinchi, based in Pengasi; (8) Sigindo Panjang Wilayah Rawang, based in Rawang; and (9) Sigindo Sakti Wilayah Ujung Tanjung Muaro Sekiau, based in Muaro Sekiau. During that time, the unity among the Sigindo was very

strong. The difficulties one Sigindo faced were also considered difficulties for the others. Other kingdoms highly respected the Sigindo kingdoms, and they held meetings every year to discuss common interests. Their *wadah persatuan* (unity platform) was called "Sakti Alam Kerinchi" (Rizal 2012).

This name, Sakti Alam Kerinchi, later became the name of the migrant and diaspora organisation originating from Kerinchi in Malaysia. The sustained migration of the Kerinchi tribe to Malaysia can be explained by examining the evolving understanding of kinship within anthropological studies and its intricate connection to migration processes. As a dynamic and adaptable system, kinship plays a crucial role in shaping migration decisions and patterns. Within the Kerinchi community, strong kinship ties foster a sense of collective identity and belonging, encouraging members to migrate together or follow established routes to join existing kin networks in Malaysia. This phenomenon aligns with findings by Choldin (1973) and Gurak and Caces (1992), which highlight the importance of kinship networks in sustaining migrant communities.

Migration and kinship networks are closely intertwined, with extended family ties persisting and providing support during the migration process (Choldin 1973; Gurak and Caces 1992). These networks play a crucial role in shaping migration patterns and sustaining migrant communities. In some Southeast Asian contexts, kinship is viewed as fluid and acquired through shared experiences rather than inherited from ancestors (Carsten 2020). This perspective aligns with the concept of "performative" kinship, which emphasises the dynamic nature of familial relationships in contexts of mobility (Carsten 2020).

Informant 2, who has lived in Kampung Pasir, Selangor, for over 20 years and originally comes from Seleman Village in Kerinchi, recounts:

> I came to Malaysia in the 1980s, at that time, I was invited by relatives and friends from my village. If you look at the migration timeline, my generation is the 4th or 5th to migrate to Malaysia. At that time, I didn't know that to stay and work in Malaysia, I had to apply for a permit. I was deported because of document issues. Because the job prospects in Malaysia were more promising, I took care of all the documents, and that's why I still live and work in Malaysia to this day.

Informant 3 shares:

> Around the 1990s, I graduated from high school, and my parents couldn't afford to pay for college. Together with a friend from my village, we migrated to Kampung Pasir, Selangor. There were already many people from our village living here, some of them had become Malaysian citizens. For people from our village, migrating to Malaysia is common because since ancient times, there has been a Kerinchi village in Kuala Lumpur. A *datuk bandar* (mayor) named Abdulah Hukum also inspired us to migrate.

During our FGDs at the house of one of the residents in Kampung Pasir, Selangor, they all said their migration was a chain migration through networks of relatives and friends from the same village. Similarly, the stories of the 4th or 5th generation living in the Jalan Kerinchi area of Kuala Lumpur. Those who live here are from several generations ago, and because most marriages remain within the same village, kinship ties with Kerinchi people in Indonesia continue to this day.

The Kerinchi people's conception of kinship as fluid and acquired through shared experiences, as Carsten (1995) suggests, may contribute to their ability to adapt and thrive in new environments. This flexibility allows for the formation of new kinship ties with fellow migrants, fostering a sense of community and belonging even in a foreign land. The Kerinchi tribe's migration to Malaysia is not driven solely by economic rationality. While economic opportunities may be a significant pull factor, kinship networks also play a vital role in providing information, resources, and emotional support throughout the migration process. This aligns with observations by Hendrix (1975) and Ostergren (1982) on the complex interplay between economic motivations and reliance on family connections in migration decisions.

The presence of kin in Malaysia serves as a strong pull factor, encouraging further migration from Kerinchi. Leitner-Stojanov and Pichler (2023) highlights how kinship networks provide crucial assistance with accommodation, employment, and psychosocial well-being, making the transition to a new country less daunting and more manageable. Despite the challenges, the Kampung Kerinchi community has found new ways to maintain their identity while adapting to change.

Kinship networks act as vital support systems during migration, helping individuals navigate new environments by providing emotional, financial, and logistical assistance. They enable the transmission of essential information about job opportunities, housing, and legal requirements, thereby reducing the risks and uncertainties associated with migration. Furthermore, kinship ties help migrants build social connections in the host country, which can be crucial to their social integration and economic success. The idea of kinship as performative suggests that familial relationships are not static but are continually created and reinforced through shared experiences and mutual support. This concept is particularly relevant in migration contexts, where traditional notions of kinship may be reshaped by the challenges and opportunities of adapting to a new environment. Migrants often form new kinship bonds with fellow migrants based on shared experiences of displacement and settlement, creating a sense of community and belonging in unfamiliar settings.

Kinship in migration provides easier access to information and to jobs and housing for the Kerinchi people. Informants said they first followed relatives or friends who were carpentry contractors. They started as assistants, and after gaining expertise, they could independently seek out project work with higher incomes.

Because the Kerinchi kinship system in marriage often involves relatives, temporary accommodation is not an issue. Even if they rent houses in Kampung Pasir, most of the houses belong to Kerinchi diaspora who have become Malaysian citizens. The continuity of marriage within the same family or village has expanded to include marriages with people originally from Kerinchi, including Kerinchi descendants who have become Malaysian citizens. This inter-country marriage status creates opportunities for easier administration of residence permits in Malaysia. Children born of these marriages can also access Malaysian state facilities, such as public schools up to university level. A female informant who migrated to Malaysia for work and met her husband, a Kerinchi descendant who had become a Malaysian citizen, said:

> I'm happy that my children can attend public schools here without me having to leave them in the village because their father is a Malaysian citizen. My children can apply for student loans if they enter the university later. I don't feel like I married a foreigner because we still use the Kerinchi language and practice Kerinchi customs in our daily lives here.

Carsten (1995) highlights the process of transforming one's origins as a positive aspect of identity formation in migrant communities. This deliberate adaptation can facilitate the creation of new shared identities, helping migrants adjust to their new surroundings and build cohesive communities. It allows a reimagining of kinship that transcends traditional ancestral ties, embracing new forms of relatedness grounded in the lived experiences of migration.

Kerinchi migrants, both those with residence permits and those in the diaspora, routinely hold social activities. For example, during weddings, they help each other prepare for the ceremony. As in their villages in Kerinchi, close relatives and neighbours assist the party hosting the wedding, while guests are Kerinchi residents living in the same or other areas. They regularly hold monthly religious gatherings, including those to commemorate the passing of a member.

The traces of kinship in Kerinchi's historical leadership, known as Sigindo, are carried forward through unity organisations among the Kerinchi people. There are several Kerinchi organisations in Malaysia, including Keluarga Besar Kerinchi Bersatu (KBKB), Kerinchi Bersatu, Ikatan Keluarga Besar Sakti Alam Kerinchi (IKBESAK), Pertubuhan Keturunan Waris Kerinchi Malaysia (PKWKM), and PASMA 3 D Malaysia. PASMA (Persatuan Anak Seleman) specifically focuses

on three villages of origin in Seleman Village, which are now three separate villages: Seleman, Koto Tengah, and Pasar Sore. The administrators of three PASMA organisations stated:

> We are the generation that is still actively working. The members of this organisation are those who are already married, with or without Malaysian citizenship. This organisation aims to maintain solidarity among the people of Seleman, especially in facing problems such as illness, death, and even immigration issues. We communicate through WhatsApp groups and Facebook. The number of PASMA members has reached 1.8 thousand. So, the total number of Kerinchi descendants is likely more than 2 thousand. (informant 4)

The researcher's observations show that during every social and religious activity, they easily gather, following the customs in their villages in Kerinchi. informant 5 shared:

> Before I left for Malaysia to work, there was nothing I was worried about, and during my stay in Malaysia, I felt like I was in my own village. It's just that here, communication is a mix of Kerinchi and Malay languages. Since the majority of traditions in Malaysia are Islamic, it's not difficult for me to adapt to the local customs.

For those couples where both husband and wife have valid residence permits, there are no issues. However, some couples have one or both partners staying illegally. Organisations play a helpful role in providing information to support the process of obtaining residence permits.

Currently, in Malaysia, many migrants from Kerinchi are Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs). They mostly work in the informal sector, including in factories, supermarkets, service industries, and some as domestic workers. Compared with income in their home country, workers' income, especially in the informal sector, is relatively higher. The average lowest income (minimum) for informal sector workers is RM 1,000 (minimum wage) or equivalent to Rp. 3,500,000 to Rp. 4,500,000/month. The Kerinchi people mostly learn about job opportunities through their kinship networks. However, they have now started using technology by advertising their services through social media and other media platforms.

The Kerinchi residents we met mostly work independently in the informal sector, while their wives are the ones employed by employers. The wives of Kerinchi men, from the migration groups of the 1990s until today, often work as part-time domestic helpers for Malaysian citizens. They work while taking care of their households in Malaysia. This additional income allows them to send remittances back to their villages every month or even annually, often in significant amounts. The money sent is used for the needs of the family left behind (children and parents), including purchasing assets like land and houses.

Although there is no official monthly or annual data on remittances to Kerinchi, it is estimated to be more than RM300,000 (more than Rp. 1 billion). A bank administration in Kerinchi once reported that the average monthly remittance reached Rp. 1 bilion (Dede 2018). Overall, kinship provides a flexible resource for imagining and adapting to new environments, facilitating both movement and settlement in migration contexts (Carsten 2020). By offering a framework for support and social organisation, kinship networks help migrants navigate the complexities of their journeys, ensuring continuity and stability in their new lives. This adaptability and resilience are essential to the success and sustainability of migrant communities, highlighting kinship's enduring importance in the context of global mobility. Understanding the dynamic nature of kinship and its interaction with economic and social factors is crucial for comprehending the complexities of Kerinchi migration and developing effective policies to support migrant communities.

Continuity of Migration Amidst Policy Changes in Both Countries

At the beginning of 2020, when this research was conducted in Kerinchi, we met Kerinchi people living in Malaysia who were returning to their villages. They had to return because they could not extend their residence permits in Malaysia during the pandemic. Until the end of 2021, Malaysia still implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO) in anticipation of the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, preventing migrants whose permits had expired from re-entering Malaysia.

When we met them in Kerinchi, they all answered that they would return to Malaysia to continue earning a living for their families. During the pandemic, many of them participated in their parents' activities, such as working in rice fields and plantations. Some also tried to start furniture service businesses, such as kitchen sets and cabinets. We asked whether they would continue the businesses they started in Kerinchi, and they replied that it was unlikely because the income was not as high as it would be if the business were run in Malaysia.

On 1st April 2022, the Indonesian and Malaysian governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia. This joint policy aims to protect migrant workers and establish administrative order for the arrival of foreign workers in Malaysia. Despite this MoU, it did not significantly affect Kerinchi residents who had already established ways to work in Malaysia. The ease of obtaining sponsors and guarantees from local residents of Kerinchi descent allows Kerinchi people to continue migrating without significant obstacles. Although the Indonesian government temporarily stopped sending domestic migrant workers (housemaids) in July 2022 after the Malaysian government opened vacancies online without going through official Indonesian agencies, the MoU was later reaffirmed as a joint commitment between Indonesia and Malaysia.

Throughout history, Kerinchi migrants to Malaysia have faced various political and policy shifts between the two countries. However, these challenges have not hindered the continued migration of Kerinchi residents to Malaysia, as strong kinship support is one factor enabling this continuity.

Kinship networks offered vital support to Kerinci migrants in Malaysia, particularly in three key areas: employment, housing and administrative assistance. In terms of employment, these networks were instrumental in connecting newcomers with job opportunities. Relatives already established in Malaysia leveraged their contacts to help their family members secure positions in plantations and various service industries. This direct link facilitated a smoother entry into the workforce, allowing migrants to start earning an income more quickly.

For housing, kinship ties provided immediate support by offering accommodation to migrants who had just arrived. Families opened their homes to newcomers, significantly reducing the costs of settling in a new environment. This initial housing support helped migrants feel more secure and less financially burdened as they began to adjust to life in a foreign land. Additionally, kinship networks played a critical role in providing administrative support. Kin members guided migrants through the often complex processes involved in obtaining work permits and managing essential documentation. This guidance was crucial for newcomers who may have been unfamiliar with legal requirements and procedures, helping them navigate the bureaucratic landscape more effectively.

These forms of assistance not only facilitated Kerinci migrants' integration into Malaysian society but also highlighted the importance of kinship networks in providing essential support during the migration journey.

Policy Implications

Malaysia's policies on foreign labour, work permits, and citizenship directly shaped Kerinci migrants' experiences. Stricter regulations during economic crises limited opportunities, while citizenship grants in the 1950s facilitated integration. Indonesia's policies on transmigration and diaspora engagement influenced migrants' ties to their homeland. The findings therefore underscore the need for effective bilateral policies that acknowledge the role of kinship networks as informal welfare systems and incorporate these networks into broader strategies for migrant settlement and integration.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that kinship networks are central to Kerinci migrants' settlement experiences in Malaysia. These networks provide employment, housing and administrative support, sustaining migration across generations. However, they also create risks of dependency. Policy frameworks in Malaysia and Indonesia significantly shape these experiences, underscoring the need for clearer, migrant-sensitive approaches.

Furthermore, the research highlights the complex interplay between economic motivations and reliance on family connections in migration decisions. While economic opportunities may be a significant pull factor, kinship networks provide essential information, resources and emotional support throughout the migration process. The concept of performative kinship emphasises the dynamic nature of familial relationships, which are continually created and reinforced through shared experiences and mutual support in the context of migration. Despite the challenges posed by evolving policies and regulations in both countries, the Kerinchi community's strong kinship ties and adaptability have allowed them to maintain their migration flow. The authors argue that the kinship networks serve as vital support systems, facilitating the transmission of essential information, access to resources, and the establishment of social connections in the host country. The ability of the Kerinchi people to transform their origins and create new shared identities further strengthens their resilience and contributes to the sustainability of their migration.

Kerinchi kinship networks are central to sustaining long-term migration to Malaysia; these networks provide emotional, logistical, and economic support, but also expose migrants to vulnerabilities such as dependency and exploitation. Matrilineal structures empower women's property management, yet policy shifts in Malaysia and Indonesia affect their mobility and rights. The authors argue that kinship should be recognised as a dynamic force in migration governance. Policies must account for familial ties that transcend borders, especially in regions with deep historical connections. The Kerinchi case illustrates how migration is not merely an individual economic choice but a collective, culturally embedded process.

Future research should further explore the intersection of kinship, migration and policy, particularly in contexts of regional integration and diaspora engagement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi Research Grant No. 931/2021 under the Strategic National Studies Applied Research Cluster. The authors sincerely thank all participants and institutions involved in this research.

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