

**Melapau Tradition: The Persistence of Minangkabau Custom in Medan city**

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**Abstract:** The culture of spending time at *lapau* (hanging out at a small tavern) is one of the traditions owned by Minangkabau people to talk about numerous things, from discussing the nation's current affairs, problems at workplace, or any topics suitable to bring upon. There is an anecdote "*apapun masalahnya bisa disalaskan di lapau*" (every problems can be solved in small tavern) which is very common in Minangkabau society. This paper will describe about *melapau* tradition: the persistence of Minangkabau custom in Medan. Taking qualitative approach along with descriptive method, this paper will explain the tradition of *melapau* as cultural reproduction from the hometown to the migration area abroad in the Minangkabau society. Furthermore, cultural sociological perspectives are used to reveal how the existence of *melapau* done by Minangkabau people in Medan, especially in Bromo, Kotamatum, Sukaramai and Denai. This paper shows that *melapau* is a tradition still manifested in the hometown as well as abroad. This demonstrates a process of reproduction of Minangkabau culture in migration area/abroad. Various ideas, activities, and other habits that exist in the hometown are enacted again by the immigrants and Minangkabau men who were born in the City of Medan in different contexts. *Melapau* becomes a habitus for Minangkabau emigrants, therefore the emigrants reinvent the tradition of *melapau* and the ideas and activities involved in it. *Lapau* is an arena for fulfilling *melapau* habitus.

**Keywords:** *Melapau* Tradition, Minangkabau Custom, Cultural Mission.

**INTRODUCTION**

Minangkabau people are one of approximately 31 groups of tribes spread over 3000 islands in Indonesia. Minangkabau people are originated from Minangkabau land in West Sumatra, which is surrounded by three mountains namely Mount Merapi, Mount Sago, and Mount Singgalang. Data of the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2010 shows that the number of Minangkabau people is only about 2.73 percent or 6,462,713 people from the indigenous people population of Indonesia. Nevertheless, they are the seventh largest group of people in Indonesia. They are also spread on the island of Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and other islands.

Minangkabau people are known for the dynamic community and highly adaptable life, and they are widely spread in various parts of Indonesia. One of the Minangkabau habits is their habit to travel to big cities and even abroad to get a better life, education and experience [1]. These habits can be seen from the many traditional businesses run by Minangkabau people and thrive in the overseas with the establishment of Padang restaurants in various regions. So this raises some assumptions that the Minangkabau people are known to

have an entrepreneurial spirit compared to other ethnicities [2].

For Minangkabau people, *merantau* (migration) is not merely understood as the process of urbanization or process to fulfill their needs economically but as a demand of Minangkabau culture. As the Minangkabau custom explanation according to [3], that Minangkabau and Mandailing communities have tradition of migrating with "cultural mission". This means that the objectives are expected to be achieved by members of a particular society, based on the dominant values of the community's worldview. This move is meant to be permanent in the new place. The relationship between old and new places is sometimes maintained [4].

Minangkabau people are also known as one of the tribes who deeply appreciate differences of opinions, uphold the rights of individuals, and able to be open. This is inseparable from the strong verbal culture of the Minangkabau community itself, so that any problems or differences that arise can be communicated well.

The culture of spending time at *lapau* for example (hanging out at a small tavern) is one of the

traditions of Minangkabau people to talk about numerous things, from discussing the nation's current affairs, problems at workplace, or any topics suitable to bring upon. There is an anecdote "*apupun masalahnya bisa disalasaikan di lapau*" (every problems can be solved in small tavern)

Tradition of going to *surau* and *melapau* are considered as the arena of "adolescent" and "period of descent" or a transitional period for boys, as they become the visitors of the *surau* and *lapau*. They return home only to eat and wash their clothes and then go back again to the *surau* and *lapau*. According to [3] *surau* are centers of religious education in the broadest sense, including issues concerning the welfare of the community. *Surau* can be viewed as a symbol of holiness (sacral), courtesy, and obedience to God. *Lapau* is a business term (profane), symbolizing worldliness, roughness, and courage. In *surau* people have to keep their manner and speak politely, but in *lapau* they can do as they please.

The role of *lapau* in the city of Padang is as one of the reproduction of culture that can be developed to realize the political culture in Indonesia through the concept of *Badunsanak* (brotherhood) [5]. This phenomenon is a commitment in the form of elite agreements formalized in the implementation of Election of Regional Leader in the form of readiness to accept defeat as part of the democratic process implemented. The talks take place in *lapau* as the context of the data on the grounds that the venue is a very integrative socio-cultural space in the grassroots lifestyle in Minangkabau, especially for men.

The identity of the origin that has become part of one's life history cannot be abandoned, even the culture of origin tends to be the guideline in life in a new place [6]. *Melapau* tradition can also be observed on Minangkabau migrants in Medan City. They continue to practice the *melapau* habits seen from Minangkabau migrants in the area around Bromo, Kotamatum, Sukaramai and Denai. Therefore, this paper wants to see how this *melapau* tradition exists and survives in the city of Medan.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a descriptive qualitative approach that explains the tradition of *melapau* as a reproduction of culture from the region of origin to the overseas in the Minangkabau society. Furthermore, sociological cultural perspectives are used in this paper to reveal how the existence of *melapau* conducted by Minangkabau people in Medan City, especially in Bromo, Kotamatum, Sukaramai and Denai ". Primary data collection is done through participative observation techniques and in-depth interviews. In participative observation, researchers are involved with the daily activities of people being observed or used as research

data sources. In-depth interviews were shown to informants who in this case divided into 3 types namely: *lapau* owner, *lapau* visitors who come from overseas and *lapau* visitors born in Medan. Data analysis is done by using triangulation of data from various data sources. In other words, the source data obtained from the informants are cross-checked with data obtained from other methods. It is said by Denzim [7] that triangulation of data can be done by using source, method, inquiry and theory. Triangulation of data is conducted by comparing the consistency or suitability of data originated from the in-depth interview method with data originated from participative observation method.

## *Lapau* and *Melapau* Option for Minangkabau Society

*Lapau* is an internal aspect for Minangkabau society where the main function of *lapau* at that time was as the place where the merchant stopped or stayed overnight. *Lapau* in the beach area was even functioned as a venue to stay for the merchants who came from the hinterland. In this *lapau* also occasional transactions among merchants were made. In addition, in this *lapau* they also share information, both on merchandise carried, price fluctuations, market conditions, experiences in commerce, to socio-political circumstances in the areas they pass. The topic or issue is unfocused, fluid, loose, and it depends on what most current affairs are at the moment. It may be that on one occasion, a topic or issue is discussed very warmly and seriously, but then the topic and issue are immediately forgotten and the merchants moved on to another topic.

As time goes by, the existence of *lapau* as a place to stop or stay for the merchants and the travelers began to change. Lately, aside from being a place to buy daily necessities, *lapau* tends to play a role as a venue where men gather to spend time, chat and discuss issues ranging from entertainment to high level politics while smoking, drinking coffee, tea or while playing domino koa or *ceki* or bridge. In Medan, there are also many *lapau* established, as the place where the Minangkabau tribe migrants gather to get the information they need. In the *lapau* also Minangkabau people feel like they are in his hometown, because they can be together with relatives or brothers from the same hometown. *Lapau* in the city of Medan is found in many areas of Bromo, Suka Ramai, Denai and Ma'sum city, because in that area most populations are the people of Minangkabau tribe. In Medan, Minangkabau migrants still preserve tradition in *lapau* because they assume that by sitting in *lapau* they will get the information they need. The migrants community can gather with colleagues in a relaxed atmosphere, drinking coffee, tea and snacks while playing domino. *Lapau's* visitors are peaking in the morning from 06.00 am until 08.00 pm and afternoon until evening from 17.00 pm to 00.00 hours. *Lapau* will be quiet outside of

those operating hours because the community is doing their working activities. This paper shows that there are several reasons that cause the community of

Minangkabau ethnic migrants who are in the city of Medan to visit *lapau*, namely:

**Table-1: Reasons Why Minangkabau People Visit *Lapau* In Overseas**

Reasons to visit <i>Lapau</i>	spending time and refreshing
	getting information related to business, political and social issue, and religion
	discussing about Minangkabau custom and language issue. The benefit of <i>melapauis</i> enabling people to use mother tongue with other Minangkabau people

Source: Research data 2017

The research data also shows that not only the Minangkabau tribe who gathered in *lapau* but also other tribes such as Batak, Java, Malay, and others. *Lapau* which is used as an arena to reproduce the cultural habitus *melapau* also becomes a cultural reproduction that cannot be separated from the habitus *melapau* in hometown. Through *lapau*, visitors get the information they need, as well as the arena of social capital in answering the relevant issues to be raised in the public sphere. The objective is basically to reproduce the culture in the hometown and be developed outside the village (overseas). The subject matter in *lapau* is generally used as space to bring together one tribe, the Minangkabau ethnic group, whether the person was born in hometown or born in the overseas. In a discussion carried out in *lapau* one thing that became main concern among Minangkabau people was the absence of Minangkabau culture among young people of Minangkabau ethnicity who was born in overseas. As revealed by one of the informants about the situation of young people from Minangkabau ethnicity born in Medan:

*"... Minangkabau youngsters in the city of Medan mostly do not know the Minangkabau language, they barely know several words. I am afraid that eventually the Minangkabau language will disappear, even the families in the overseas areas rarely teach the Minangkabau language ... "*

The situation can also be seen nowadays where the interaction of visitors in *lapau* is by using the Indonesian language while Minangkabau people who visit the *lapau* only use Minangkabau language occasionally. This indicates that the Minangkabau regional language is the subject of discussion, but the most important thing is that most young people do not know the Minangkabau customs. This situation has meaning and value that is different from the *lapau* in the hometown like the experience given by one of the informants:

*"... In our village where a habit to go to the surau and lapau has been formed. there is an obligation for us, the boys to go to surau every day. In surau we learnt about Islam. After that we went to lapau to chat with friends*

*in accordance with age, yes ... when you grow up, usually you go into lapau with adult visitors. Yes, but here, it is less, mostly we go to the mosque, then back to home doing work afterwards ... "*

**Social Interaction of Minangkabau Society at *Lapau***

The development of *lapau* is not merely viewed a commercial success, but also a social success as well as political success. In its development, the function of *lapau* shows the dynamics. The process of socialization to the region of *lapau* has started from childhood for Minangkabau boy born in Medan. The interview shows that customers in the streets of Bromo, Kotamatsum, Sukaramai and Denai have known each other in *lapau* since childhood. Like the first experience told by one of the informants when visiting *lapau*.

*"... I was first invited by my Father to lapau. Friends who often talked to him was Mr. Darwin. His appearance was dandy, very intellectual, and always neat with a long shirt. He was the most flamboyant visitor in my opinion compared to any other customer. Maybe he adjusted himself to the customer's social status there. Later I found out that he worked in a bureau taking care of letters like a board bureau. Indeed he knew a lot of people and well-known by many people also (Interview with Y, November 1, 2017).*

The formation of *lapau* community can be divided into two types. The first type is a community that has been formed outside and then enters the *lapau*. Typically, members of this community are members of the social organization, such as the NGOs, cultural communities and social organizations that have emerged since the reformation era. In this case, the coffee shop as a public environment for various social organizations serves as a forum to discuss issues of concern, whether environmental, cultural, economic, political and other social issues.

The *second* type is a naturally formed community through a process of social interaction and discussion involvement and perceptual similarity among Minangkabau *lapau* visitors. There is no rigid boundary between the first and second community types of the *lapau* community. It could be that the

second community member joins the first community member because it has the same perception of one issue being discussed.

The process of forming this *lapau* community depends on the layout of the table and time. Coffee time, morning, afternoon or evening gives influence to socialization process and social interaction and formation of *lapau* community. In the morning, the *lapau* community of the Minangkabau ethnic group around Jalan Bromo, Medan, is a community that consists of clothing businessmen and others. In the afternoon, the community of this tavern changes. Usually the visitors are office workers or market traders. Meanwhile, *lapau* nearby located near Bromo, has more varied community, among others is the community of fish traders, pensioners, and also artists. This coffee shop is more relaxed because at certain times, musical instruments such as guitars hanging in a corner of *lapau* are being played by visitors to entertain themselves and coffee lovers.

Socialization process that occurs in *lapau* has started to happen since Minangkabau society still small until it becomes a habit at the present. Visiting *lapau* and sitting together there will form an interaction within each individual and will create different intensities according to the same tastes of different individuals so it is not uncommon in *lapau* Minangkabau people sit around the table with people from the same community, taste and interest. For example, a member of the Minangkabau migrant, in a *lapau* that belongs to Mr. Marwan, is a representation of an intellectual community, a cultural group and environmental activist addressing cultural and environmental issues. This community holds meetings more frequently at night, because they are busy with their respective work during the day. The process of "selection" of community members in *lapau* runs naturally, and this happens when it comes to one issue. If someone who sits at a table cannot enter and contribute in the conversation, eventually he will avoid the community and look for other friends or other *lapau*. In addition to the need to obtain information in *lapau*, there is another motive for a person to become a member of the *lapau* community in the city.

Everyone is welcome in every *lapau*. However, a person who has entered a particular community will be restricted by the labeling. The labeling of a person has led to and limited the scope of speech in *lapau*. For example, an informant labeled as a humanist, if he goes to a political-themed coffee shop and speaks politics, then members of the political *lapau* community will divert the conversation, for example about the shaman. He cannot be dominant and become a major figure in the political *lapau*, let alone to be noted when he talks as revealed by following informants who have been labeled as the humanist.

*"I do not restrict myself in hanging out in the coffee shop, but people do limit me by the label Republic of Klekak, the humanist. But when I speak politics and understand politics, they turn the conversation to topics like shamans or they are reluctant to respond. They say it is Shahibul Hikayat. Even though I work in Badan Perencanaan Daerah (Regional Planning Government Institution), then talk about spatial issues, they do not care. They are not eager to respond. I cannot be dominant if I speak politics or government, even though I work in government (Interview with FR and Y, October 30, 2017).*

Discussion among *lapau* community sometimes shows a high tension between members who agree or disagree with the initial idea. In this situation, there is a character who is thought to be able to cool things down and bring serious talks in a lighter way. The presence of consoling figure may serve to warn the boundaries of the conversations or the limits of debate by saying this is '*lapau*' or by conveying serious conversations with a relaxed and humorous tone.

#### **Lifestyle and Melapau**

Social factor is the most dominant factor to the formation of *melapau* consumer behavior. Some examples of social factors are small groups, families and the role and social status of consumers. A person's behavior is influenced by many small groups such as family, association, organization. A role consists of activities expected of a person to do according to the environment. Each role carries a status that reflects an award [8]. Reference groups are friends, colleagues, and relatives of the informants have given an effect or influence that shapes consumer behavior in *lapau*. This can be seen from each of the informant's acknowledgment that the visit to *lapau* is always done continuously because of the social interaction that often happens. *Lapau* consumers are often in a social or community group.

Research data shows that going to *lapau* has become a lifestyle for Minangkabau society [9] Lifestyle is defined as an individual way of life that is identified by how people spend their time (activities), what they consider important in their lives (interest), and what they think about the world around them. Through this section we will describe the chatting and coffee lifestyle that evolves through the dimensions of lifestyle, demography, and the desire for emotional needs. Lifestyle describes the identity of a person who interacts with his environment [8]. In general, the depiction of lifestyle can be identified by how people spend their time (activities), what is considered important to people in their environment (interest), and what people think about themselves and the world around (opinion).

Minangkabau people in this area allocate and spend more time in *lapau*. The intensity of public visits can be concluded as quite often and *lapau* becomes a comfortable place for this Minangkabau migrant society. The Minangkabau community has a high interest in interacting with individuals who are even unknown by people in *lapau*. Meeting new people according to the Minangkabau community can help them to add useful information, networks, or also to find a job.

Lifestyle-forming factors can be considered through demographic and psychographic factors. According to Lazer [10] demographic factors can be known through age, sex, and also work, while psychographic factors are more complex because of their constituent indicators of direct consumer characteristics. *Melapau* tradition which becomes a lifestyle for Minangkabau society overseas is formed from demographic factor which is work. In the *lapau* Minangkabau people will meet with other individuals who have the same job or profession so *lapau* becomes a place to share stories about workplace and to eliminate fatigue after a day of work.

Through a lifestyle perspective the characteristics and behavior of consumers in spending their free time, and how they choose to spend their income, can be explained. There are four categories of behaviors that are the motives of consumer purchase in meeting their needs because of lifestyle drives: utilitarian purchases, indulgences, lifestyle luxuries, and aspirational luxuries [9]. In this study it can be known that consumer behavior model of *lapau* visitors is identified through aspirational luxuries. Aspirational Luxuries are consumers getting satisfaction from the emotional aspect. Through purchasing, consumers can express themselves, their values, interests, and passions [9]. Of all the activities and time spent in the *lapau*, all informants in the study feel emotional satisfaction. Satisfaction arises from emotions greater than satisfaction of practical or functional fulfillment [8].

Lifestyle that is reflected through *lapau* consumers can be categorized into an easy going lifestyle, community-based, and seeking inner satisfaction that is very difficult to judge. Consumer's habits who always visit the *lapau* form a new sub-culture. People who come from the same sub-culture, social class, and job may have quite different lifestyles. But, in general *lapau* visitors has the average same lifestyle. Through the opinions and interests submitted by each informant this activity can be classified into a lifestyle concept, where every informant has a very deep opinion and interest in the chatting activities. Consumers of *lapau* will try to maximize emotional satisfaction as long as its financial ability allows.

### Reproduction of *Melapau* Tradition

*Melapau* tradition is understood as Minangkabau cultural construction in relation to matrilineal family system. This system encourages men to stay out doors, even when they were small they have been constructed to live in small huts (*surau*). Meeting in *lapau* is considered as an arena to get information, discussion about social culture that comes into contact with everyday life. This suggests that social and cultural boundaries have been blurred, since a person or a group has become a part in a new place with a different socio-cultural background. The existence of a person in a new environment requires him to adapt continuously in order to become a part of the new socio-cultural system. On the other hand, the identity of the origin that has become part of the history of one's life can not be abandoned [11]. The process of cultural production is an active process that highlights its existence in social life so that it requires adaptation for groups with different cultural backgrounds. The process of interaction in *lapau* must be understood as giving a value, while maintaining identity within a different ethnic group. The understanding of cultural reproduction is how "cultural origin" is represented in a new environment. The tradition of *melapau* among Minangkabau migrant communities in the city of Medan is also understood as re-interpretation of the culture of the hometown to get a new meaning about the ever changing cultural context.

The formation of social practices of the domain or the traditional environment of *melapau* by Minangkabau migrants in Medan is a kind of competition market where various types of capital are disseminated and used [12]. Associated with social practices of *melapau*, there are numerous kinds of domains including the family domain, the friendship domain, economy domain and cultural domain. These domains contain bets, forces and people who have lots of capital, little capital or no capital at all. The domain is inseparable from the social space. Social spaces may be conceived to consist of multiple domains with relationships between one another and the point of contact [13]. Social space of *lapau* can be divided into several kinds such as home, *lapau*, workplace and others. The social space that has the greatest influence on the actualization of social practices of *melapau* tradition is dubbed as a form of cultural reproduction.

The visitor of *lapau* in this category is more familiar with other visitors who already know each other. They often talk about work or more like share information. This was revealed by one of the informants as followed.

*"...Lapau is a place to eliminate the boredom at home, as well as to get information about business opportunities. Although I am not married, but as a*

*businessman I have to get useful and diversified information in lapau..... "*

Their relationship with waiters and *lapau* owners is also quite good. *Lapau* waiters often accompany visitors of *lapau* when they are not busy. They often talk about hobbies because they have the same hobby of keeping birds as pets.

The visitors in this category go to *lapau* independently or in groups. It depends on their age. Teenage visitors usually come to *lapau* together, while adults arrive individually more often. Teenage *lapau* visitors are friends with each other since childhood and to the present time often go into *lapau* in groups. Based on observations in several visits, the visitors (informants) in Bromo *lapau*, treat each other coffee and exchange cigarettes from school friends and acquaintances and then smoke together. Usually they treat friends if they have spare cash.

What Bourdieu once pointed out in the theory of habitus, is appropriate to describe these findings as values and positions of class. Habitus produces a classification system that enables it to identify specific lifestyle choices and their relationship to class positions, and this ability has the capacity to discriminate and appreciate practices and products called taste or favour that actually represent the social, where lifestyle spaces are formed [14]. *Melapau* lifestyle that arises cannot be separated from the habitus *melapau* that has been known by Minangkabau society since childhood. *Melapau* is not a habit that was done accidentally by the Minangkabau community in the overseas but was thought or processed first before being done. Habitus will lead individuals to automatically reproduce what the Minangkabau community has received since childhood in their hometown.

The taste of the *lapau* visitors is a disposition that is capable of differentiating as well as appreciating, in other words a form of ability to define and give "marks of difference boundary" through a process of distinction. Tastes are practical ability to feel or an instinct about what will happen, which will afflict individuals who occupy a certain position in the social space. Taste serves as a kind of social orientation, 'a sense of one's place', which indicates where a person should be. Therefore social agents, in addition to being producers of classifiable actions, they also produce classifications that they themselves are also classified there in [14].

If the arena of cultural production is the field of forces, the arena of dynamic forces where diverse potentials are possible to be contained in it and the struggle is seen to transform or maintain the arena of power, the taste is in the heart of that symbolic struggle based on the agents' lifestyles.

## CONCLUSION

*Merantau* (migration), *surau*, and *lapau* are traditions of Minangkabau people. *Merantau* is leaving our own area or hometown to seek knowledge and experience, in some cases even because of economic considerations and later return home matured and as a successful person in respected field. *Lapau* is a very good arena for practicing speech and debate. Because, in *lapau* where the people from Minangkabau ethnicity gather in terms of speaking publicly and conversing about politics and economy. In *lapau* the visitors are free to express their opinions without any sense of awkwardness in mind. In the city of Medan there are lots of *lapau* founded by migrant Minangkabau people. Through the existence of *lapau* in overseas area, it helps Minangkabau people to relinquish their longing for missing their hometown by revitalizing Minangkabau culture in *lapau* with other Minangkabau people in urban areas.

Minangkabau people who often come to the *lapau* are Minangkabau people who come from Pariaman, Bukit Tinggi, Tiga Koto, and others. However, visitors of *lapau* are not all originated from the tribe of Minangkabau. In the areas of Bromo, Sukaramai, and Denai *lapau* are mainly visited by people who come from Pariaman and Tiga Koto. While in the Kotamatum area it is most widely occupied by Minangkabau tribe originating from Bukittinggi and Payakumbuh. The activities of the Minangkabau people in the *lapau* are having conversations while telling jokes occasionally. There are also games, usually games like domino, *ceki* and carrom. Activities in *lapau* also cannot be separated from the joint discussion related to religion, politics, culture and economy. Visiting *lapau* can show and build togetherness between *lapau* consumers.

This shows that *melapau* is a tradition that is still manifested in the hometown and overseas. This shows a process of reproduction of Minangkabau culture in migration area. Various ideas, activities, and other habits that exist in the hometown are re-established by the migrants and Minangkabau men who were born in Medan in different contexts. *Melapau* turns into a habitus for Minangkabau migrants, therefore they reinvent the *melapau* tradition and the ideas and activities involved in it. *Lapau* is an arena in fulfilling the habitus *melapau*.

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