

Minangkabau Markets: A Picture of an Indigenous Economic System*

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1. Introduction

For most Indonesians the Minangkabau are famous as a society of entrepreneurs. This reputation is mainly based on their involvement in trade (*galeh*) that is carried out within and beyond their own region.¹ I assume that an understanding of Minangkabau culture refers not only to the Minangkabau social organization based on matrilineal kin groups, the simultaneous use of *adat* (customary law) and Islamic law, the dichotomy between the traditions of the highland area (*darek*) and those practiced in the coastal area (*rantau*), and so on, but also to an awareness of the transformation process expressed in so-called economic rationality and changes in social morality.

Therefore, a description of Minangkabau culture today should not only revolve around a structural discussion of its ideal aspects, but also focus on the practical everyday actions related to economic life that have a great impact on Minangkabau culture. The economic aspects of everyday life, as we shall see, are the most important factors shaping the psychological characteristics of the Minangkabau.

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¹ The current story of Minangkabau traders operating in areas outside of their own region can be found in the local tabloid "Limbago" published in Padang city in 1996. In many cases, trade outside of their own region is motivated by migration (*merantau*). We assume that either migration has the purpose of involvement in trade in frontier areas, or the involvement in trade in the home region is preparation for migration. However, Ok-Yun (1996) argues that migration is not easily carried out unless the migrant is well prepared financially or educationally. I here assume that trade may be a precondition for migration. The psychological and physical preparation in the home region is an important factor in the process of migration and its success.

The paper will discuss the Minangkabau markets and trade that are mainly performed by the local community within the region of origin (*kampung*). The purpose of this paper is to present the markets and trade as the main activity that sustains daily life and as a part of indigenous social organization of the majority of the Minangkabau who mostly live in rural areas. Hence, this activity reflects the integration of Minangkabau economic organization into the social system.

2. Classification of Minangkabau Markets

The local marketplaces and trade represent the basis of economic activities of the Minangkabau, especially for those who live in rural areas.² The closeness of the Minangkabau to both activities emphasizes the extent to which economic exchange plays an important role in community life. In fact, both activities function as expressions of the most typical characteristic of Minangkabau social behavior, expressed in a strong enthusiasm for developing every possibility for economic gain, while still valuing traditional law (*adat*) highly. For example, the local market organization cannot be separated from the process of *nagari* organization and development (Manggis Dt. Radjo Panghoeloe 1971: 65).³

How intertwined the market and daily practice are is seen in the fact that the Minangkabau refer to the market with local terms, namely, *balai*, *pakan* or *pasa*. In daily life, these terms are used interchangeably. *Balai* is used to refer to the marketplace, but also to the *adat* council hall.⁴ The *balai* is usually located at the center of the *nagari* (the so-called Minangkabau village). Its location invites *nagari* members, as well as people from neighboring communities, to aggregate and engage in the exchange of goods there. Therefore, *balai* is understood as a place of both social encounters and commerce.

² For example, the expression *pai ka pasa* or *pai ka balai* (go to the market) can often be heard in daily speech.

³ Based on governmental regulation of West Sumatra province no.13/1983, paragraph 14, *nagari* properties and assets include the marketplace.

⁴ Many Minangkabau writers who explain Minangkabau customs and tradition (see: Hakimy Dt. Rajo Penghulu 1978; Manggis Dt. Radjo Panghoeloe 1971; Hanafiah 1970, and Datuk Batuah and Datuk Madjoindo 1956) mention the *balai* in two contexts. In the *nagari* context, it usually refers to the marketplace. Meanwhile, in *adat* context, it refers to the council hall. Based on my experience in the field, this term always means the marketplace.

The market is also often called *pakan*.⁵ This term conveys the impression that the rural market is held on a weekly basis instead of everyday.⁶ *Pasa*⁷ is another word for market that is also used by the Minangkabau. The term *pasa* is commonly used in the lowland region, rather than in the hilly Minangkabau heartland and usually refers to the markets located in urban areas.

Minangkabau markets are classified informally and formally. The informal classification mainly refers to the local concept of the market and is derived from its temporal and spatial aspects whereas the formal classification has to do with governmental legislation and geographic and administrative purposes.

According to the informal classification system of Minangkabau markets, villagers categorize a market as a big one if it is open the whole day. This kind of market is usually called *Balai*. The market is categorized as small if it is open only for half of the day. This type of market is called *balai ambek* (literally "the market that functions to blockade"). If one compares *balai ambek* in Tanah Datar such as Situmbuk, Simpang Dadok, or Lubuak Jantan markets⁸, it may be observed that this term is quite often used by the market participants, especially traders. Traders, who trade at two markets on the same day, call the first market attended, whatever its size, *balai ambek*, and the second market, also whatever its size, simply *balai*.

In terms of geo-political location, each *nagari* governs its own territory and includes the marketplace within its organization. Therefore, the Minangkabau call their local market the *nagari* market and usually give it the same name as the *nagari*, for example the Tabek Patah market, the Sungai Tarab market, the Balai Tengah market, and so on.

In terms of the formal classification system (see also Giffen and Chatra 1990; 1996: 171), the rural markets are divided into two main types, A and B.⁹ Market type A includes rural markets that belong to a single *nagari* or village. Each market is arranged by the market administrator (*penghulu pasar*) who is usually under the authority of a village head. He is appointed because the market is located in the village which he leads. The market administrator has authority over some other officials who occupy certain

⁵ In Bahasa Indonesia this term means one week.

⁶ In Tabek Patah village, for example, villagers always call the marketplace *pokan* (a dialect variation of *pakan*).

⁷ In Bahasa Indonesia this word is *pasar*, meaning the market.

⁸ All these markets are located in Tanah Datar Regency.

⁹ This reference uses the governmental regulation of Tanah Datar Regency No.10/1990.

positions. These are a secretary, a treasurer, market tax (*beo*) collectors, and one or two persons responsible for the maintenance of the marketplace. The head of market administration is subject to the supervision and control of the market commission, which includes the function of the market supervisor, under the leadership of the *adat* council.

Market Type B denotes rural markets that are organized by several *nagari* located in the same district. In this type, the head of the market administration (*penghulu pasar*) is a village head who is appointed because the market is located in the village which he leads. He is accountable to the market commission which is run by a district head. Unlike market type A, in the case of market type B, the *adat* council does not directly supervise the market, but rather has the role of a consultative board. Even though the market is owned by a group of *nagari*, the *adat* councils of these *nagari* have no direct power to organize their market, because this role has been taken over by the district government.

Table 1: Number of Official Market Types in each District of Tanah Datar Agency

District	Type A	Type B	Type C
X Koto	3	-	-
Batipuh	3	4	-
Rambatan	4	1	-
Tanjung Emas	2	1	-
Padang Ganting*	4	-	-
Lintau Buo	3	3	-
Sungayang	1	2	-
Sungai Tarap	3	-	-
Pariangan	-	1	-
Salimpaung	6	-	-
Lima Kaum	-	-	1
Total	29	11	1

* The new district split from Tanjung Emas District in 1994.

Source: Own data, 1996

In addition to these two market types, there is yet another one, C. This market is usually classified as the city market. It is directly controlled by government on the regency level. Only one market of this type exists and is located in Batusangkar city in Tanah Datar Regency. It is called *Pasar Serikat Batusangkar*. From another perspective, Giffen and Chatra (1996: 171) have noted that, besides these three types, there are some other categories of market: the village market (*pasar desa*) and governmental market (*pasar inpres*). This classification is based on the ownership of the land where the market is held.

3. The Market Actors

A look at all the roles of the various actors involved in the rural markets shows that it is misleading to assume that the Minangkabau market is merely a site where trading takes place. The marketplaces, most importantly, represent a system of social relationships that is revealed in the variety of transactions carried out by market participants. At the marketplaces we can also observe the form and operation of social networks. In this context, people can be seen to engage in economic relations through the social mechanism of the market (see Johnson 1995:164). The following groups of actors are generally involved in daily market activity:¹⁰

1. Peasants, as well as villagers
2. Middlemen (*kalene*)
3. Traders
4. Shopkeepers
5. Service providers such as drivers of public transport vehicles, traditional hair cutters, blacksmiths
6. Local entrepreneurs
7. Formal 'beggars'
8. Local transportation arrangers
9. Market administrators, and tax collectors
10. Market supervisors as well as *adat* leaders
11. Police and members of the army.

In this paper I will only explore the roles of three main market actors, namely, peasants and villagers, middlemen, and traders.

¹⁰ This list of market actors is based on the cases of the Tabek Patah market in Salimpaung district and Sungai Tarab market in Sungai Tarab district, both in Tanah Datar Regency.

3.1 Peasants and Villagers

Peasants, the majority of Minangkabau villagers, can be seen as people whose life is closely intertwined with the marketplace. After all, the main market function is to provide an outlet for agricultural products. Through the local market peasants obtain the cash they need for everyday living. Akira Oki stresses that the Minangkabau have been long involved in the market economy or commercialization, at least since the beginning of the colonial era in what is now Indonesia (Oki 1977, see also Manan 1995). As a result, Minangkabau villagers are quite familiar with the operation of the market principle in the local setting.

This Minangkabau involvement in the market mechanism should be seen from two perspectives. Peasants are the object, but at the same time they are the subject of the market. As objects peasants have become the main target of the flow of inter-local goods¹¹, and the "victim" of price oscillations. Peasants can not simply market their produce without experiencing the penetration of inter-local commodities, and the external forces setting prices. They are dependent on a few powerful local market actors, such as middlemen and distributors of agricultural products, but also on the larger marketing system.

On the other hand, fortunately, they have the freedom to sell their own products, and no external agent determines what they have to cultivate and produce.¹² In this context, the peasant can be an independent producer. But the sale of these products does not generate enough income to live on, because the peasants are forced to rely on others to sell their crops at all.

This factor contributes to the self-maintenance orientation of the Minangkabau peasants' life today. It is related to the growing tendency toward economic rationality in the local community which is reflected by the influence

¹¹ This is my own term. It refers to the flow of various commodities, produced in various locations or villages, that are encountered at one marketplace. The flow of commodities occurs because of the role of traveling traders and a number of middlemen who bring commodities from one locality to another. This situation is sustained by a number of villages in Minangkabau that specialize in the production of certain agricultural products. This presence of inter-local goods often causes a low demand for similar products that are locally produced. Thus, villagers know some products from their origin or the villages where they are produced, for example the sugar cane from Tabek Patah village or Pato village, the coconut from Belimbing village, the baskets from Kandang Malabuung village, and so on.

¹² This was entirely different when Minangkabau peasants were subjected to the forced delivery system (*Kultuurstelsel*) under Dutch colonial rule from 1847-1908. They were forced to cultivate coffee and other commercial crops to the advantage of international trade. Then they had to deliver the produce at a very low fixed price (Oki 1977:34-35). They also became a target of the institution of corvee labor (Abdullah 1972; Kato 1982).

of the market principle in promoting pragmatic and temporary social ties. As a result of this orientation, the traditional culture, in this case *adat*, is being called into question.

3.2 Middlemen or Distributors

To a certain extent, peasants may facilitate middlemen or distributors in their playing of a significant economic role at the local marketplace. The daily transactions are carried out between peasants, who bring their agricultural or other home-made products to the market, and middlemen, who are always present at the marketplace. Middlemen need the local products for the larger trade chain within and beyond the province of West Sumatra. Their business depends greatly on the agricultural harvests. They play a minor role in agricultural production itself, but their trade is heavily influenced by the fluctuation in harvests. In fact, they always play a major role in dealing with peasants especially in regard to price setting. The middleman determines the prices.

The middlemen also often follow a secret strategy for setting prices. In other words, villagers are generally kept blind about the current prices of produce. As a result, the official price that has been set by government regulations is not operational in the local setting.¹³ The problem of oscillating prices, set arbitrarily by middlemen (as well as traders) at the village level, represents the villagers' dilemma today. On the one hand, they need middlemen to buy their agricultural products as soon as possible in order to get the cash they need. On the other hand, villagers do not like middlemen because they always set the prices to their own advantage. The peasants therefore exercise double standards in establishing social relationships with the middlemen. In the social sphere they conduct friendly relations with middlemen, but not in the economic sphere.

3.3 Traders

Even though the peasants, i.e. the villagers, face a dilemma in dealing with middlemen, their need to earn cash on each market day is very crucial. They need money to buy daily necessities and items of daily consumption. Seen from this perspective, the traders are very important. They play a positive role as the providers of what peasants need along with their arbitrary power to set prices, sometimes unfairly. From the traders' perspective, their own situation also looks unstable. On the one hand, traders may be

¹³ The prices of various agricultural products are officially broadcast following the national news on the Radio of the Indonesian Republic (RRI) every night.

dominant in relation to their customers, but on the other hand, they are strongly dependent on the peasants' ability to produce and on their spending power in general.

As long as peasants are relatively successful in producing their agricultural commodities, which are sold at the marketplace on one day, traders can depend on their purchasing power. This means that traders have the opportunity to sell as many goods as possible. The situation can change dramatically when peasants' incomes tumble because of a bad season or as a result of being oppressed by middlemen who pay too little for produce. This situation automatically cripples peasants in their ability to spend cash for necessary goods, which results in a low demand for traders' goods, and thus threatens the traders' business in general. That is why we often find traders complaining about the very low purchasing power of peasants. Traders may find the markets crowded with people but transactions can be very minimal, or almost non-existent. This is a form of "the trader's dilemma" which is faced by the majority of Minangkabau traders.¹⁴

The situation described above means that traders neither measure the market by its size nor by the number of visitors, but rather by the rate of transactions on the market day. In fact, based on my study, they are unable to calculate the frequency of their transactions. They can only say *pacah talua*, which literally means: "an egg has broken". For every day of trading, traders have a precise idea of how much they have to sell in order to break even. The first transaction in the daily trading is regarded as the start of potential profit. This is referred to with the term cited above. After this point, they do not calculate the result of one day's trading, but only say that they have achieved "a broken egg" (*pacah talua*) or that they have made a certain amount of profit.

The so-called dilemma of the Minangkabau traders described above is overcome by their establishing as many social relationships as possible with customers. In this way, they hope to keep a certain number of permanent customers.

4. The Market and the *Nagari*

4.1 The *Nagari*

Basically, the *nagari* is defined as an autonomous territorial unit (Josselin de Jong 1952; Abdullah 1966, 1972; Gunawan Mitchel 1969; Oki 1977; Kahn 1980). Specifically, a *nagari* governs its own territories, which con-

¹⁴ Evers and Schrader 1994.

sist of several settlement areas or *koto*. In addition, each *nagari* has its own community and system of governance under its own customary law (Manggis Dt. Radjo Panghoeloe 1971; Hanafiah 1970; Manan 1995). Because of this distinctly autonomous character, the *nagari* has often been called "a village republic", because the community is geographically discrete, largely endogamous and self-governing (Chadwick 1991: 47).

According to tradition, the *nagari* should possess certain facilities. These include a road system, a public bathing place, a council hall, a mosque, and an open field for amusement and sport (Kato 1982 quoted from Datoe' Sanggoeno Di Radjo 1919; see also Hanafiah 1970). Politically, the *nagari* should reflect a certain political tradition, either the *Koto Piliang* system or the *Bodi Caniago* system.¹⁵ But, as a matter of fact, many *nagari* combine both these political traditions (Datuk Batuah and Datuk Madjoindo 1956: 38).

In terms of social organization, the *nagari* consists mainly of different levels and units of matrilineal groupings (Josselin de Jong 1952, Hanafiah 1970; Kato 1982; Manan 1995). These are *suku* (clan), *kaum* (lineage), and *paruik* or *samande* (sub-lineage). These groupings may be divided differently and called by different terms in some *nagaris* (see Josselin de Jong 1952; Benda-Beckmann 1979; Kato 1982). Each *nagari* should have economic resources such as land, fields and forests that are inherited and maintained by the matrilineal lineages (Hanafiah 1970: 28).

Every *nagari* in the Minangkabau territory has its own particular *adat* (customary law), called *adat salingka nagari* (the *adat* that is only valid within the *nagari*). This is expressed in an *adat* proverb (LKAAM, 1996: 2):

lain lubuk lain ikan,
lain padang, lain belalang,
lain nagari lain adatnyo

(Different ponds have different fishes,
different fields have different grasshoppers,
therefore, each *nagari* has its own customary law.)

¹⁵ Based on the Tambo (stories of olden times or traditional Minangkabau history), the Koto Piliang political system was established by Datuk Katumanggungan. This system has an aristocratic character in which the *nagari* government consisted of three kings (*raja*). These are the Pagaruyung king who is the highest king, the Buo king who was also called the *adat* (customary law) king, and the Sumpur Kudus king who is also called the *ibadat* (religious) king. In contrast, the Bodi Caniago system has a democratic character. The members of the governmental council are all on a similar level, as expressed in the proverb: *duduk sama rendah, tegak sama tinggi* (by sitting all are low, by standing all are high) (Datuk Batuah and Datuk Madjoindo 1956; Hanafiah 1970: 29-32, Kato 1982: 35-36).

This proverb simply emphasizes that different *nagari* have different traditions. This results in their specific social rules regulating various social institutions such as marriage, land ownership, organization of economic resources and the general social characteristics of each *nagari* community. To put it another way, in spite of the fact that the Minangkabau are classified as a single ethnic group, on a deeper level there are various Minangkabau cultural traditions that distinguish one *nagari* from another. They constitute a sub-cultural differentiation among the Minangkabau themselves. Seen from the outside all the Minangkabau are similar, but from inside they are different (Radjab 1969: 12–19). The specific character of each *nagari*, and its own organization of social, political and economic aspects play an important role in shaping the distinctive character of the individual *nagari* communities.

Finally, there are three aspects to each *nagari*. Firstly, because the *nagari* is a territorial unit, it holds land that constitutes its boundaries with the surrounding *nagari* and is seen as ancestral and communal property (*harta pusaka*). Secondly, as a result of being a distinct social unit, the *nagari* has its own social structure based on matrilineal kin ties. Thirdly, because it is an economic unit, the *nagari* has a collection of assets that are supposed to provide a source of income and can be used to pay for *nagari* expenditures.

4.2 The Market

The role of the market in the *nagari* must be seen in the context of the land system. Traditionally, land in the *nagari* is classified into two types *hutan tinggi* or *pusako tinggi* (uncultivated land) and *hutan rendah* or *pusako ranch* (cultivated land) (Kato 1982: 55; Manan 1955).

Kato noted that land is actually only one of the Minangkabau ancestral properties (*hart pusako*).¹⁶ Land is, however, very crucial in economic terms (Kato 1982: 56). All land situated in a single *nagari* was initially part of the ancestral properties belonging to the *nagari*. These lands are then distributed for use among the members of the *nagari* community. In each *nagari*, there is land that is always held and used by the *nagari* itself and cannot be distributed among the members of the *nagari* community. It is completely under the supervision of the *adat* council in accordance with customary law and is usually used by the *nagari* for particular economic purposes, such as the establishment of the marketplace, the development of the *nagari* forest and so on. This land is the source of *nagari* income.

¹⁶ These ancestral properties also include livestock (cattle), houses, fishponds, heirlooms and *adat* titles (*gala*).

The use of a piece of land as a marketplace is one of the main ways of generating income for the *nagari*, besides other sources of income such as the forest tax, land tax, market tax, fines, religious alms (*Sakata* or *wake*), and *nagari* community members' contributions (Oki 1977; Manan 1995). In another source, various sources of *nagari* income are officially stated and classified (LKAAM 1996: 70):

1. Self-generated income that is derived from *nagari* assets
2. Financial contribution of *nagari* migrants (*perantau*) or remittance
3. Contributions of local government at the village level
4. Contributions of local as well as of central government
5. *Adat* money
6. Other sources of income that are regarded as lawful.

This makes it clear that the establishment of the marketplace is only one of the *nagari*'s efforts to generate income.

The market is usually located on ancestral communal land. This clearly indicates that the market always belong to the *nagari*. Therefore, the market is set up by the *adat* council because the various beneficial activities, held on *nagari* land, must have its consent. The position of the marketplace in the *nagari* is sustained by a legally binding statement in the Governor's Regulation of West Sumatra Province:

"In accordance with the Governor's Regulation of West Sumatra Province no. 103/GSB/1985 the market commission is the only board that carries out the *nagari* market arrangements and should at the same time be responsible in its works to the *adat* council. The market commission has a right of market tax collection, to be collected from rents of shops, kiosks and the market hall. The money should then be submitted to the *adat* council, after 10% have been deducted from the taxes collected for wages." (my translation)¹⁷

Thus, every *nagari* has the political right to make the marketplace a major source of steady income for itself. The basic goal of *nagari* politics is also to make local laws that maximize the income from the marketplace, through setting the amount of market tax, collecting rents for sections of the market land, etc.

¹⁷ "Dengan Surat Keputusan Gubernur Kepala Daerah Tingkat I Sumatera Barat no. 103/GSB/1985 ditetapkan bahwa yang akan mengelola Pasar Nagari adalah Komisi Pasar yang harus bertanggung jawab kepada Kerapatan Adat Nagari (KAN). Komisi Pasar memungut sewa pasar, sewa kedai, sewa kios dan los, yang setelah dikurangi 10% sebagai upah pungut, diserahkan kepada Kerapatan Adat Nagari."

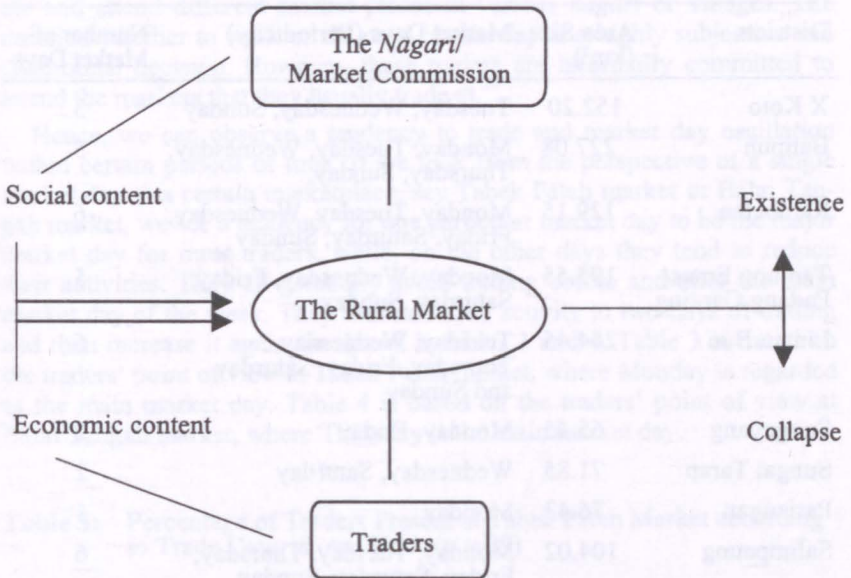
4.3 The Position of the Market in *Nagari* Politics

The *nagari* level of local government is represented by clan leaders (*penghulu*) who constitute the *adat* council (Kerapatan Adat Nagari). In relation to the market, this body represents the authorized market commission or market board (*komisi pasar*). The board has rights of control over the market activities to the benefit of the *nagari* community. It also has a full right to set the amount of market tax, to levy it, and then to use the money collected without having to report to government officials at the village or district level.

In the Minangkabau context, the *nagari* does not function as the agent of a local capitalist class or any other economic system. Rather, the *nagari* is an indigenous institution that has social control over temporary local "capitalists", i.e. local traders and middlemen (*tengkulak*). The middlemen have a monopoly over the distribution of some locally produced commodities and quite often pay unfair prices for agricultural produce. In this sense, the *nagari* is an objective body that functions to balance the contradiction between rationality and morality in trade at the market place.

The reason why the *nagari* can represent the communal interests in the economic sphere is because its leaders are aware of the market's role in the peasant community. This awareness represents the important element of "social embeddedness" in the context of the rural market economy (see Polanyi 1957; Granovetter 1985, Plattner 1989). The nature of the rural market is mainly influenced by the *nagari*, traders and the local community. The market would simply collapse if people were not interested in operating and participating in it. What happens in the market is always linked to the local community. For example, the local market is influenced by social problems.¹⁸ Every problem that may affect the market's existence will be discussed by the market commission in order to solve it. Thus, there is an indication that the *nagari*, a purely local institution is, to a large extent, in charge of maintaining the peasant market's existence. The market's existence does not merely depend upon its commercial activities, but also on the way the *nagari* handles everyday social situations at the marketplace.

¹⁸ During field research, I was witness to an event where a woman lost her money at a rural market. The amount was Rp. 400,000 (US\$ 200 based on the exchange rate in 1996/1997). She, and other market visitors too, assumed that a pickpocket took her money. She had intended to use the money to buy a large amount of various foods, necessary for the preparation of the wedding party for her daughter a few days later. Losing her money made her very sad and she acted like a mad person, loudly crying, screaming and running back and forth at the marketplace. She could not believe or accept what had just happened to her. This event then became a major story talked about for weeks at this market. The negative event spread out to the local community. Since then, the news has spread that this market is not safe for shopping.

Diagram 1: The Market as a Zone of Interaction

This scheme indicates how the market is apparently a zone of interaction of two important institutions: the *nagari* as the market commission, and the traders as the main market actors. They have different motivations but similar goals. Their encounter determines whether the market itself survives or collapses.

5. Market Circulation: The Basic Pattern of the Rural Market System

5.1 Market Days and Places

The most important feature of the market system in Minangkabau contexts is the pattern of market days and places. Days are calculated in reference to a weekly plan (*pakan*), which is used as the basic time cycle for the whole circulation. The places are understood as locations where the market takes place in the various *nagari*.

Table 2: Market Circulation according to Market Days in each District

Districts	Area Size (km ²)	Market Days (Periodicity)	Number of Market Days
X Koto	152.20	Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday	3
Batipuh	227.08	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday.	5
Rambatan	129.15	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday	6
Tanjung Emas/ Padang Ganting	195.55	Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday	5
Lintau Buo	264.45	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday	6
Sungayang	65.45	Monday, Friday	2
Sungai Tarap	71.85	Wednesday, Saturday	2
Pariangan	76.43	Monday	1
Salimpaung	104.02	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday	6
Lima Kaum	50.00	Thursday	1

Source: *Tanah Datar Dalam Angka*, 1994 (Statistical Book of Tanah Datar Regency, 1994) and own data, 1996.

Table 2 indicates that the market circulation has nothing to do with the size of the areas and the number of market days in each district. One might assume that the larger the size of the areas, the higher would be the number of markets and market days held there in order to fulfill the needs of the people living in the remote and scattered region. In fact, the effect of market circulation, based on the different market days, is to distribute economic activities in a regular and equitable way throughout the region (see Alexander 1987).

5.2 Distribution of Markets Visited by Traders in one Week

The main market actor who makes the market circulation possible is the *pedagang babelok* (the traveling trader).¹⁹ From 199 traders interviewed at

¹⁹ *Babelok* is derived from two words, *ba* is a verb describing a certain action and *belok* denotes an action which means to turn or move around. This term is well known in many areas of the Minangkabau highlands (see also Kahn 1980: 115).

Tabek Patah and Balai Tengah markets, 77.4% have the status of the *babelok*. With the *babelok* style of trade, traders can determine the trade schedule and attend different market places in various *nagari* or villages. The decision whether to work or not on a certain day is a highly subjective and conditional decision. However, these traders are informally committed to attend the markets that they usually trade at.²⁰

Hence, we can observe a tendency to trade and market day oscillation within certain periods of time. If we look from the perspective of a single market day at a certain marketplace, say Tabek Patah market or Balai Tengah market, we see a tendency for one particular market day to be the major market day for most traders, while, on the other days they tend to reduce their activities. They all generally avoid trading before and after the main market day of the week. They decrease their activity to two days of trading and then increase it again, as shown in tables 3 and 4. Table 3 is based on the traders' point of view at Tabek Patah market, where Monday is regarded as the main market day. Table 4 is based on the traders' point of view at Balai Tengah market, where Thursday is the main market day.

Table 3: Percentage of Traders Present at Tabek Patah Market according to Trade Days in one Week (n = 99)

	Going to Trade	Not Going to Trade
Monday	99.0	1.0
Tuesday	39.0	61.0
Wednesday	22.2	77.8
Thursday	50.5	49.5
Friday	60.6	39.4
Saturday	41.4	58.6
Sunday	35.4	64.6

Source: Own data, 1996

²⁰ Traders and villagers, in this sense the market visitors, have a kind of shared moral commitment to keep a certain marketplace running. Traders need villagers to be their customers. Equally, villagers need traders to come to their market regularly. This consciousness of interdependent and mutual benefit ties them socially. This is quite different in the context of relationships in the so-called capitalistic market, where relations between traders and buyers are very impersonal. It appears that no moral obligation must be considered when carrying out trade.

Table 4: Percentage of Traders Present at Balai Tengah Market according to Trade Days in one Week (n = 100)

	Going to Trade	Not Going to Trade
Monday	37	63
Tuesday	41	59
Wednesday	23	77
Thursday	99	1
Friday	52	48
Saturday	32	68
Sunday	42	58

Source: Own data, 1996

As indicated above, one day each week is treated by traders as the starting point of the market circulation as well as of their traveling trade. Taking a look at the days which follow, we can see the tendency of traders to minimize their trade days. One day before the main trade day most traders seem to decrease their trading activities. According to traders interviewed at Balai Tengah, Wednesday is regarded as the day not to go trading as was indicated by the traders interviewed at Tabek Patah market as well. For them, the main trade occasion requires preparation of materials. Based on both views, we may argue that the market circulation, to a certain point, is created by the traders' variation of their trade days. As the case of the Tabek Patah market shows, Monday is regarded as the main market day, while it is Thursday at the Balai Tengah market.

5.3 The Possibility of Making a Profit: The Grounds for *babelok*

By practicing *babelok*, traders have more possibilities to make a good profit at every market they attend. By anticipating the fluctuation of the market crowd present at each marketplace, they can calculate their profit. They are very conscious that different marketplaces can present opportunities for profit. One of the most important factors is the different crowds present at each market. Traders are very concerned with these differences, related to the various circumstances affecting the buying power of market customers (*kuek mambali*), customer relationships (*langganan*), and the commodities to be sold (*laku*). To put it another way, losses suffered at one marketplace

may be recovered at other marketplaces. Therefore, one strategy they use to avoid lost profits is to charge different prices for commodities sold at various marketplaces. One of the persons asked said:

"Usually nobody knows the capital (*pokok*) we have, therefore it is easy for me to set my own prices. As I see it, trade is only partially of a consensus (*kato jadi*) between a trader and a buyer. If the buyer agrees with the price I set, then he or she will buy my things, if he/she does not, that means trade does not happen (*indak jadi*). This is no problem for me at all. However, my basic rule is to not sell my capital (*tajua pokok*) ..."

Table 5: Motives for *Babelok* Trade given by Traders at Tabek Patah and Balai Tengah Markets (in %)

Tabek Patah Market (n = 99)		Balai Tengah Market (n = 100)	
Profitable, because many commodities can be sold	51	Profitable, because many commodities can be sold	42
Profitable, because many buyers come	33	Profitable, because many buyers come	32
Not profitable, because of changing buying power of customers	1	Not profitable, because of changing buying power of customers	1
Not profitable because <i>babelok</i> is exhausting work	3	Not profitable because <i>babelok</i> is exhausting work	3
Uncertain profit, sometimes loss, sometimes not	3	Uncertain profit, sometimes loss, sometimes not	6
Prefer to trade daily	1	Prefer to trade daily	1
Not relevant	8	No difference from <i>babelok</i>	2
		No comment	1
		Not relevant	12

Source: Own data, 1996

6. Conclusion

The strong involvement of the Minangkabau in market and trade constitutes a practical method of maintaining local social organization. This can be demonstrated by the role of market actors and of *nagari* in operating the

marketplace. The participation in the market economy is supported by the traditions of the local community.

The organization of the Minangkabau market clearly depicts how the local community maintains the pattern of social life through its involvement in market and trade. Most importantly, this observation enriches the understanding of the economic embeddedness of market and trade in the local community.

By dealing with the phenomena of market and trade as integral parts of the social rhythm of the peasant community, we show how the principle of market economy cannot be separated from an understanding of Minangkabau culture.

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