

**Home as an Emotional Imagination and The Ambiguity of Space and Taste  
in the Urban Culinary Practices:  
A Textual Analysis of *Tabula Rasa* (2014)**

**Shuri Mariasih Gietty Tambunan**

Departemen Susastra, Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, Universitas Indonesia  
(087881093121)

**Abstrak**

Migrasi ke wilayah perkotaan ('merantau') telah memaksa para perantau untuk memindahkan praktik kuliner dari kampung halaman ke ruang kota dan mengakibatkan adanya proses adaptasi rasa. Di satu sisi, mereka harus menggunakan resep warisan agar dapat mereproduksi rasa yang sama tetapi di sisi lain, mereka harus terus berinovasi mengingat bahan makanan dan alat memasak yang ada di daerah perkotaan sangat berbeda dengan apa yang mereka miliki di kampung halaman. *Tabula Rasa* (2014) adalah sebuah film yang bercerita mengenai kompleksitas identitas budaya melalui representasi praktik kuliner di ruang urban. Dengan melakukan kajian tekstual, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi benturan-benturan yang dihadapi para tokoh dalam inovasi dan reproduksi kuliner yang mereka lakukan sebagai bentuk negosiasi dalam kehidupan keseharian para perantau di Jakarta. Keberagaman rasa yang dileburkan dalam makanan-makanan menjadi simbol toleransi dan persaudaraan akan tetapi film juga merepresentasikan ambiguitas dalam hal makanan dan ruang.

**Kata kunci:** praktik kuliner, urban, identitas, rasa (*taste*)

## **1. Introduction**

Cities and mobility are two inseparable entities reflecting the movements within the city and also how people move into the city. These people migrate to the city while bringing their culinary knowledge and preferences creating a complex culinary urban scene. Therefore, "... contemporary urban foodscape, too, is all about food's mobilities. From fast food to immigrant cuisines, from cyber-cafes to home delivery, food moves, too" (Bell, 2002, 11). Within the mobilities of food, immigrant cuisines are one of the most visible and yet problematic foodscapes in big cities, such as Jakarta. It reveals the dynamics of constant negotiation between having to trace back the familiar taste from 'home' for those who migrated to Jakarta and the necessity to innovate and reproduce new flavors to suit the urban context. The innovation done in culinary practices in the

everyday lives of ‘*perantauan*’ (people who migrate to the city) represent their identity formation.

A number of scholars (Sutton 2001, Wilson 2006 and Lugossi 2013) argue that individual or collective identity is not the only thing we can investigate through culinary practices, but also we can also explore ones’ social history as it is reflected through the choices of food and how they are produced and consumed. Furthermore, culinary practices could also be seen as a tool to reflect how we differ ourselves from one another. “Eating and drinking are universal to all cultures; but, the beliefs and practices surrounding food and drink reflect the particular characteristics of cultures alongside the identities of the people who are part of those cultures” (Lugosi, 2013, 20). As mentioned earlier, urban inhabitants come from different cultural backgrounds, particularly in Jakarta, a city that has been the center of migration from all over the country. Even though eating and drinking have been embedded in our mundane everyday lives making it seemingly universal, the specificity of each cultural element, for example due to the different ethnic backgrounds in Jakarta, is encoded in our culinary practices.

The film industry, as an instrument of popular representation, has used the themes of culinary practices to portray the significance of this cultural practice in the meaning-making process of everyday realities. However, in Indonesia, even though food has been represented in many films, it has never played a significant role until 2014, the year *Tabula Rasa* was released. Directed by Adriyanto Dewo, who won Best Director in 2014 Indonesian Film Festival for this film, and produced by Sheila Timothy and Vino G. Bastian, well-known names in Indonesian cinema, *Tabula Rasa* was screened in a number of international festivals, such as CinemAsia Film Festival in Amsterdam, Shanghai International Film Festival and many others. It tells the story of Hans, a young man from Serui, Papua, who moved to Jakarta in order to become a professional football player. After his injury, he was kicked out from the team and as he wondered aimlessly in the city, he met Mak, the owner of a humble Padangnese restaurant. The film’s tagline, “*Makanan adalah itikad baik untuk bertemu,*” embodies the film’s main

theme, which is how food can be the basis of unity between different cultural backgrounds, in this case between Padangnese and Papuan culture.

Utilizing a textual analysis from a Cultural Studies perspective, this article examines the intricacy experienced by the characters in the process of innovation and reproduction of taste as they explore their culinary practices representing a tolerant cultural interaction and how they negotiate with the urban setting of Jakarta as ‘*perantauan*.’ The analysis looks into the cinematographic elements, such as the dialog, the characterization, the *mise-en-scene* (camera movement, sound and lighting) and the contextual setting in order to understand how the films portray home as an emotional imagination and the representation of space and taste which leaves ambiguous meanings of how the characters reflect their ethnic identities.

## **2. *Merantau* or Migrating: An Emotional Imagination of Home**

*Merantau*, which is a basic premise of the film’s main theme, is known in Indonesia as a migration from the rural areas to urban areas, but in recent years, it has been narrowed down to ‘moving to the city (particularly Jakarta as the capital city)’. Scholars have argued whether this is a part of the local culture, for example the Minangkabau culture, which is the cultural background for Mak’s character, or simply due to economical condition. Other purposes are to pursue higher education, find a job or join other family members who are already living in Jakarta. In *Tabula Rasa* (2014), the two main characters, Mak and Hans, are both ‘*perantauan*,’ and how they make sense of their home and their new ‘home’ reflect an emotional imagination rather than a physical and geographical understanding of belonging.

The reason why Hans came to Jakarta and how he described his intention to his foster mother in Papua show the conventional meaning of *merantau* as ‘finding a better life in the big city.’ As a socially and culturally pattern of migration, *merantau* is described in this film, from Hans’ character, as a place

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

where he can be a great and successful person (*orang hebat*) and also as a place where he could see things that he could not find in Papua.

(00:35:08) A scene when Hans was packing his bag before migrating to Jakarta to join a football club

Mama : Why don't you just join the Persipura or Perssidadon football teams?

Hans : Wouldn't you be happy if I become a successful football player? I will do great in in Jakarta.

Mama : Aren't you going to be lonely there?

*Pause ... Hans look doubtful ...*

Hans : Mama, I am not a kid anymore. I'll definitely have friends there. I want to see what is not here in Papua.

Mother: What's not in Papua?

*Pause ... Hans look doubtful ... The mother came to his side.*

Mother: Hans, I always consider as my own son. So, if you are happy. I will

be happy too.

Take good care of yourself there, alright?

Hans : Yes mama.

(All dialogs are taken from the subtitle. The dialogs are done in Indonesian and Padangnese language. The researcher will occasionally provide a more accurate translation if the English subtitle from the DVD does not use the appropriate translation.)

From the dialog, it can be concluded that Hans' imagination of the big city, Jakarta, is more or less similar to the the popular beliefs that the opportunities in the big city, especially in Java, are definite success stories. "In Java/Bali absorbs large numbers of short-term and long-term migrants, reflecting its high share of the total population ... In Java, five municipalities that make up the capital, Jakarta, had 2.4 million long-term and 430,000 short-term migrants from rural areas in 2005" (Resosudarmo, Yamauchi and Effendi, 2009, 6-7). Furthermore,

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

the gap between Papua and Java is emphasized when Hans explained to his foster mother, he wanted to see new things in Jakarta. After this scene, Hans was suddenly woken up by Mak as realized he was actually dreaming. The scene happened when he was not yet fully accepted by the restaurant's family particularly by Parmanto and Natsir. It sorts of reflects Hans' longing for home when he dreamt about when he was talking to his foster mother. Longing for home happened when he was not yet able to feel that they he belonged in his 'new' home, the Padangnese restaurant, as he was feeling rejected by the two characters even though he was completely accepted and embraced by Mak.

Both Mak and Hans have experienced emotional pain in their lives as *perantauan* in Jakarta and this has created a bond between the two main characters. Hans' emotional investment in Jakarta (the city) was shattered when he was kicked out from the football club after his injury. In one scene, he explained to Mak that he was 'dumped' just like trash because the medical cost is too expensive. And when Mak asked him why he did not go home because his family must be worried, he said he was 'too embarassed' to go home (00:45:20). In the lives of *perantauan*, the idea to return home as a non-successful person is an embarrassment since it denies the whole purpose of getting a better life in the big city. Due to this incident, Hans is in an in-between space where he does not feel like he belongs in Jakarta, a place which rejected him symbolized by the football's club rejection, and he could not return home to Papua. In the middle of this contradicting emotional turmoil, Hans found himself in *Takana Juo*, the Padangnese restaurant.

In the mean time, Mak, the female character who is the owner of the restaurant and the 'leader' of the group, went through a more painful displacement of home. In a scene (starting from 00:39:45), when Hans and Mak was discussing about Mak's past, the reason why she left her hometown was revealed:

Mak : How long have been in Java?

Hans : For almost a year. *Walking toward a picture on the wall*. Is this a picture of your house?

### Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban

Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

Mak : That's our old restaurant.

Hans : If you had restaurant there, why did you migrate (*merantau*) to Java?

Mak : Our village was destroyed by an earthquake in 2009. Everything was flattened.

Hans : There was also an earthquake in Serui in 2010. Thankfully, no Tsunami occurred. The children and I from the orphanage were ready to run up the hill.

Mak : You said you lived in an orphanage? Where is that?

Hans : In Serui.

Mak : Then how come you ended up here?

*Hans avoid eye contact*

Mak : The three of us fled to Java starting from zero with eight pats of bones as capital.

In the last part of this scene, it is also revealed that Mak's son passed away due to the earthquake. In this scene, home is no longer seen as a safe space. "Currently, a transition in meaning is underway which alters the concept of 'home' as an idyllic sphere of belonging and attachment to that of a threatened space; a space under siege from a range of perils in the areas of safety and security, whether due to natural disasters, terrorism or conventional warfare" (Ludewig, 2007, paragraph 15). Due to natural disaster, Mak was displaced from her home and was forced to find a new home. Geographically, Mak, Parmanto and Natsir have to move away from their hometown to the big city in order to have a 'better life,' which is the same premise with Hans' reason to move from Papua. However, Mak rebuilt her home by establishing a Padangnese restaurant since in her hometown, as seen from the picture on the wall, she also had a restaurant.

From this discussion, one can see how the notion of home is re-evaluated since the geographical or physical setting is no longer a significant aspect. Hans

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

and Mak are physically relocated but home for them are located in their emotional imagination. “Home is hence a complex and multi-layered geographical concept. Put most simply, home is: a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two” (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, 3). For Mak, it is both physical (the restaurant as a physical building) and the cultural meaning of her ‘old’ restaurant to be rebuilt in the new place. Her sense of belonging is not on the physical location (in the city) but on the attachment to the Padangnese restaurant, which is completely reflected in Mak’s relationship with Padangnese culinary practices.

Before the ending of the film, Hans was finally accepted as a part of the restaurant’s family and he had developed a sense of belonging to his new home. The film, in this stage, uses a diegetic sound, which is “...sound that has a source in the story world. The words spoken by the characters, sounds made by objects in the story and music represented as coming from instruments in the story space are all diegetic space” (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997, 278). The sound was actually a song sang by a street busker who came to the restaurant and during this scene, there was a continuous flow of camera shots portraying how busy they are due to the recently found success after Hans convinced Mak to sell a new menu and sudden disruption of the shot when Hans was shown to be looking at the painting of natural scene on the wall and the shot moved to the scenery of Papua, his ‘old’ home.



Picture 1: The restaurant after the success, a street busker entered and started singing

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan



Picture 2: The music and song from the street busker could still be heard, Hans was looking at the painting of a natural landscape



Picture 3: The natural landscape of Papua, Hans was walking on the beach, the song from the street busker could still be heard (diegetic sound) with lyrics about ‘hometown’

The scene then returned to the earlier shots of the busy restaurant representing Hans’ anew found realization of his ‘home.’ The diegetic sound, as argued by Bordwell and Thompson (1997), gives a more perceptual (become aware of something through the senses) experience. The song lyrics, particularly the refrain, was during the shots of the busy restaurant: “*Lukisan indah kampung halamanku, wajah keluarga, sahabat dan sanak saudara, tempat berbagai kenangan indah*” which can be literally translated to: “The beautiful painting of my hometown, the faces of my family, best friends and relatives, the place to share beautiful memories.” This scene, with all of its cinematic elements, portray a new understanding of home for Hans which reconcile his new (the restaurant and his new family) and old home (Papua).



From this section of analysis, the film is re-evaluating the notion of home more as an emotional imagination. Home are depicted as both a place and as a spatial imaginary. “Home does not simply exist, but is made. Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging. This process has both material and imaginative elements. Thus people create home through social and emotional relationships” (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, 23). It does not only entail a physical place, in this case Jakarta as a physical city or the restaurant as a physical building. It has more to do with social and emotional relationships that helps construct particular elements of identity. Hans, in this film, senses himself in relation to his experiences in his new home. However, these formations of sense of belonging to the new home is also closely related to the relation of power between the characters, which have to be critically examined. We will now move on to the discussion of how space and place in the film reflect the cultural interaction between the characters and how they necessitate an ambiguous power relation between the two ethnicities of *perantauan*.

### **3. Space and Taste**

#### **3.1. The Old and the New Padangnese Restaurant: The Blurring Boundaries of Masculine- Feminine and Traditional-Modern Spaces**

There are limited number of scholars who have done research on Padangnese or Minangkabau restaurants in Jakarta, but they have argued that it was due to the migration of people from Minangkabau to other parts of Indonesia, such as Java. They have also stated that there are still a lot of empirical questions that needs further investigation. Klopfer (1993) was among the few scholars who did a comprehensive research as he “examines the transformations of Minangkabau cuisine as it moves from village to Minangkabau expatriate communities and to the restaurant-going Indonesian middle class” (293). He reveals that Minangkabau (he prefer to use this term rather than Padangnese; however, in this research, as the film interchangeably uses Padang and Minang, the researcher decided to use Padangnese restaurant as a more familiar term in the setting of Jakarta) identity is embedded in these restaurants particularly in the

urban context. However, it does not actually represent the everyday food of people in Minangkabau.

Kloffer (1993) also argues that the Minangkabau restaurants in Indonesia came from a very masculine cultural background before it was transported to the big city. He said "...Padang restaurants actually represent a specific type of Minangkabau cooking associated with ceremonial feasting and male migration" (295). Furthermore, meat, as one of the main staple dishes in any Padangnese restaurants in Jakarta, according to Kloffer's research, is not a common item in the everyday diet of people in Minangkabau and mostly only served during ceremonies (rituals). For these ceremonies, men usually do the slaughtering and cooking of meat outdoors, which is different from the everyday cooking process as it is mostly done by women in the kitchen. "Minangkabau men not only do the butchering, but they are also responsible for cooking the curry, known as *gulai*, in an iron cauldron over a wood fire in the house yard ..." (298). That is why, Padangnese restaurants in Jakarta are highly masculinised because most of them are run by men and employ male staff while only a few female employees are hired, mostly as cashiers.

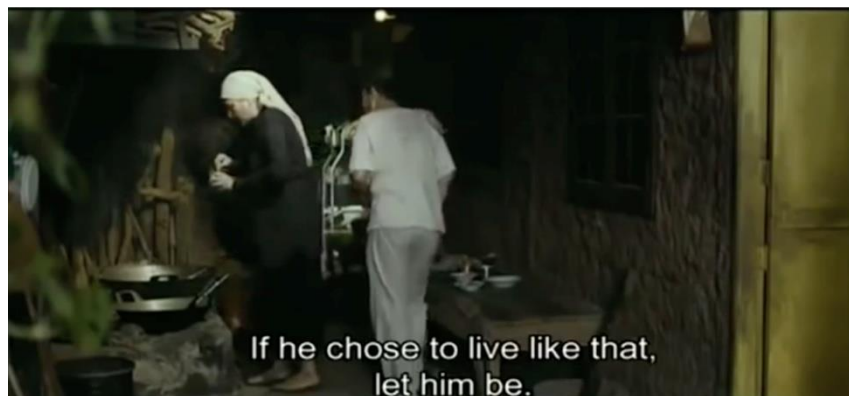
The character of Mak, who is the owner of the restaurant, actually negates Kloffer's argument because the once concluded transformation from feminine to masculine principles embodied in the establishment of the Padangnese restaurants in Jakarta, in this film, is reversed. A woman is the owner of the restaurant and she is the one who have all the recipes. In a way, Kloffer's findings that the staff of these restaurants are mostly men are in line with what the film is representing: the three male characters, Natsir, Parmanto and Hans. Furthermore, when the new Padangnese restaurant was built across the street, this particular type of restaurant embodies what Kloffer found in his research: a masculinized space.

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan



Picture 4: The new restaurant is modern and masculinized with all male staff.

The new restaurant, besides being completely masculine, contradicts the *Takana Juo* restaurant because it is modern, big and ‘new.’ Visually, the film uses different lighting techniques in order to emphasize the differences. During shots of the *Takana Juo* restaurant, it is mostly dark with less lighting. Particularly when the shots are taken in the kitchen, lighting is used merely in the center of the frame and darkens the left and right part of the shot as shown in the pictures bellow:



Picture 5

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan



Picture 6



Picture 7

The depiction of the shabby, old and traditional kitchen of *Takana Juo* is further emphasized with the old-fashioned cooking equipment, which will be further elaborated in 3.2.. However, the dark setting actually accentuates the closeness and intimacy of the characters in *Takana Juo*, which is the representation of a tight-knit ‘family.’ This is in contrast with the depiction of the new fancy restaurant which is mostly depicted in empty frames:



Picture 8. The kitchen in the new restaurant is bright and most parts of the frame are empty representing the not-so-tight-knit relationship among the staff unlike the characters in *Takana Juo*.

### **3.2. Taste: Nostalgia, Memory and ‘Authenticity’**

Food has the potential to create a sense of bonding in a community and as building blocks in constructing our social identity (Wilson, 2006: 15). Therefore, in the film, as argued earlier, food and food preparation have been constantly used to represent the idea of cultural interaction between the characters. Mak is a Padangnese character, while Hans comes from Papua. In one of the scenes, Hans was introducing the food from his hometown, Papeda, which is congee made from Sago starch traditional meal from Moluccas and Papua. Starting from 00:43:15, when Hans offered Papeda to Mak, she asked while laughing “Will I die if I try this?” Hans laughed with her and answered “Try and we’ll see.” He taught Mak how to eat Papeda, which is not to chew but to sip and swallow. Hans was laughing looking at Mak trying to chew Papeda. The humorous exchange represents an intercultural dynamic between the Padangnese and Papuan character. Papeda, in this scene, is used to reflect on the similar traits between the two ethnic cultures. Padangnese and Papuan culture have unique and delicious meals and Hans, just like Mak, also has familiar tastes that remind him of home. As mentioned earlier, the basic conceptual framework for this article is how culinary practices could be understood as a part of one’s identity formation,

individually and as a group. Gabaccia (1998) argues that “Human eating habits originate in a paradoxical, and perhaps universal, tension between a preference for the culinarily familiar and the equally human pursuit of pleasure in the forms of culinary novelty, creativity, and variety” (6). Hans’ search of culinary familiar emphasized the significance of introducing Papeda to Mak. Unfortunately, this exposure to the culture of the ‘other’ was not further elaborated. There were no other discussions on Papuan cuisines and everything was focused on Padangnese food.

The most symbolic food is *Gulai Kepala Ikan* (Fish Head Stew) which is used to show how food is embedded with nostalgia and memory. Natsir explained to Hans why Mak refused, at the beginning, to sell this meal in the restaurant even though Hans believed it can be a solution for the restaurant’s financial problems: “The day Mak first found you was the same day as Mak’s late son’s birthday. Do you still remember what she served you? Do you know what her son’s favourite food was? (*Hans looked up and his face reflects that he just realized something.*) That is why Mak refuses to sell Fish Curry, Hans.” Furthermore, in a latter scene, Mak finally explained to Hans: “Hans, cooking Fish Head Curry is a form of pilgrimage (ziarah) for me. When I cook it, it feels like I’m meeting my late son.” Food becomes the vehicle of memory and in the same time creating a sense of nostalgia. “... the sensuality of food causes it to be a particularly intense and compelling medium for memory. The experience of food evokes recollection, which is not simply cognitive but also emotional and physical ...” (Hotzman, 2006, 365). *Gulai Kepala Ikan* in this film is not just a signifier of Padangnese ethnic identity, but also a symbolic meal because it triggers emotional and intense meaning-making processes.

There are two other scenes in which *Gulai Kepala Ikan* plays a significant role in the film, which are Parmanto’s reconciliation process with his ‘family’ and Hans’ first encounter with the restaurant. The picture below depicts Parmanto who, in the middle of the film, felt he was being replaced by Hans and was not seeing eye-to-eye with Mak concerning the restaurant’s well-being, finally left

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

*Takana Juo* and became a cook in the new fancy restaurant across the street. In this particular scene, after Mak was taken to the hospital, Natsir sent *Gulai Kepala Ikan* to Parmanto and while he was eating it, he started crying. Food becomes another vehicle of tangible memories, which is the memory of the ‘family’ he had in *Takana Juo*.



Picture 9. Parmanto was eating *Gulai Kepala Ikan* sent by Natsir to the new restaurant where Parmanto worked after he betrayed Mak

After this scene, Parmanto came to *Takana Juo* and helped Hans and Natsir cooked meal orders for a wedding. They needed his help because Mak was at the hospital. The reconciliation was initiated by the chosen symbolic food. In the beginning of the film, Hans first encounter with the restaurant also revolved around this meal. Mak brought him to the restaurant and served *Gulai Kepala Ikan*.



Picture 10. Hans was served *Gulai Kepala Ikan* when Mak first brought him to the restaurant.

This scene is symbolic in several different levels. First of all, it was the first time Hans, after his dreams to become a football player in Jakarta was shattered, was accepted as a part of something. He was still confused and hostile to the people in the restaurant. Gulai Kepala Ikan became the food welcoming him to the new home.

Dalession (2012) argues that to adopt particular identities, permanently or temporarily, the characters in the American literary works he analyses must conduct a culinary practice, namely preparing or eating a particular cuisine. This will then validate the chosen identity. Dalession borrows a terminology from Camille Cauti, which is '*culinary passing*' referring to "attempting to gain acceptance among an ethnic group to which one does not belong via the preparation and eating of certain foods" (10). Hans' first encounter with *Gulai Kepala Ikan* becomes a way for him to enter the restaurant's family especially if we see the nostalgic element of the meal for Mak, a food that reminds her of her son. Now, the tangible memory embedded in the meal is the day Hans came to the restaurant and started his way of being a part of the family.

Another aspect of taste that needs to be elaborated from *Tabula Rasa* (2014) is how persistent the character of Mak with only using local ingredients even though they are more expensive. The emphasis on locality is an ambiguous finding because the cultural interactions in the film, particularly between a Papuan and a Padangnese character entail a clash or even mixture of tastes. However, one could see this emphasis on locality as a representation of the dichotomy between traditional-modern. Mak firmly believed that the main appeal of the restaurant is to cook food with excellent taste and flavor. When Parmanto suggested they buy less expensive (with less quality) ingredients to cut cost since they're losing customers, Mak refused by saying: "Don't mind about the price as long as the taste is good. Just like the ancestors said ... I don't agree with lowering the quality. For the Minang people, taste is number one" (00:45:48). In another scene, at the market, Mak was showing to Hans that the local shallots are better than the imported ones because it has more flavor: "While this is a local shallot. It tastes



**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

stronger. Smell it. A produce from our own land” (00:48:16). Mak keeps on insisting that the local products, even though it is more expensive and it is not cost effective particularly during the restaurant’s financial difficulties, are better due to its stronger taste. From this scene, the film is once again emphasizing the significance of locality, in this case ‘our land’ (Indonesia) being contrasted to the imported shallots (coming from outside or other countries).

In other scenes, the emphasis is on the traditional cooking equipment which is in accordance with the cinematographic portrayal of the shabby and traditional kitchen explained in 3.1.

Hans : Mak, I’ve been dying to ask you this for a while. They sell coconut

milk at the market. So why do we still have to grate and press it like this?

Mak : Hans, in cooking, you have to feel everything with your hands. That’s called the feel of the hands.

Hans : Mak, can’t we just use the gas stove instead? This is just using burning stones in Papua. Using firewood really takes a long time. Gosh!

Mak : Hans, to cook *rendang* one must use a low and constant heat. We can

use the gas stove but you will have to pay for the gas.

The insistence on using only traditional cooking utensils and tools, besides being a financial issue because she could not afford to pay a lot for gas since the beef stew requires many hours to cook could be read as Mak’s way of preserving familiarity (Gabaccia, 1998) in the midst of constant innovation and transformation in the urban setting.

### **Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**

Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

The cinematography or film language of how taste is depicted visually also underlines the preservation of what is considered more familiar or ‘authentic’ for Mak. Aesthetic shots with close-ups from the top invite audience to use all of their senses in consuming the images:



Picture 11. Pouring the coconut milk to the pan



Picture 12. Stirring the coconut milk



Picture 13. Stirring the beef *rendang*

By taking an upper position, as the camera zooms in and provide audience with the dish preparation from the top of the pan, with images of the steam coming out of the cooking dish, audience is invited to use their sense of smell since with this position, as if the audience is directly confronted with the smell of the dish. Furthermore, the positioning of the pan in the middle of the frame, even though the cooking utensil is old and traditional, the film language is similar to modern cooking shows inviting audience to be involved in the cooking process. Ketchum (2005) explains that in cooking shows on television: “There were extreme close-ups of all action including cutting, steaming, boiling, and frying. There was also the exciting transformation of raw ingredients into a meal ... To create intimacy, the director relied heavily on medium shots, intercut with close-ups of the food” (224). The gaze is from the cook, positioning the audience, momentarily, as the person who is cooking and stirring.

#### **4. Conclusion**

All in all, *Tabula Rasa* (2014), as one of the few Indonesian films depicting culinary practices and ethnic identities, represent a dynamic meaning-making process of how food is used as a tool to construct individual and group identity. The notion of *merantau* is used to re-evaluate the meaning of home for the two main characters. Home is no longer seen as merely a physical space but also as an emotional attachment or even imagination. For Hans and Mak, the Padangnese restaurant is more than just a working place but it has been

transformed, with the act of cooking and sharing knowledge of cooking between Hans and Mak, as a home for the Papuan and Padangnese character. Furthermore, Padangnese restaurants in the film have become spaces where narrations could be conveyed and a space where culinary actors could make meaning out of their fluid and complex identity. As an audio visual medium, the film language was utilized throughout the film to convey particular meanings for example the invitation to the audience to be involved in the cooking process and use all of their senses in watching the images of food preparation.

Food and identity, as argued in this article, are inseparable entities which have to be taken into account whenever they are brought up or represented in popular culture. In other words, one could not simply dismiss the significance of food as a part of culinary practices in the construction of identity. The mundane everyday activity of getting a meal on the table or eating a bowl of soup for dinner is in itself a cultural practice that convey who we are as an individual or which group do we belong to.

### **Reference List**

- Barthes, Roland, "Toward a psychosociology of contemporary food consumption." In *Food and culture: A Reader*, eds. Counihan, Carole, and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), 28-35.
- Bell, David. "Fragments for a New Urban Culinary Geography." *Journal for the Study of Food and Society* 6, no. 1 (2002): 10-21.
- Blunt, Alison, and Robyn M. Dowling. *Home*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film art: an introduction*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2007.
- Cauti, Camille. "'Pass the Identity Please': Culinary Passing in America." In *A Tavola: Food, Tradition and Community among Italian Americans*. Eds. Edvige Giunta and Samuel J. Patti, (Staten Island: American Italian Association, 1998), 10–19.

**Seminar Nasional Budaya Urban**  
Kajian Budaya Urban di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora:  
Tantangan dan Perubahan

- Dalessio, William R., *Are We What We Eat?: Food and Identity in Late Twentieth-century American Ethnic Literature*. Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2012.
- Gabaccia, Donna. *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Holtzman, Jon D. "Food and Memory." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2006): 361-78. doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123220.
- Ketchum, Cheri. "The Essence of Cooking Shows: How the Food Network Constructs Consumer Fantasies." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29, no. 3 (2005): 217-34. doi:10.1177/0196859905275972.
- Klopfer, Lisa. "Padang restaurants: Creating "ethnic" cuisine in Indonesia." *Food and Foodways* 5, no. 3 (1993): 293-304.
- Lai, Ah Eng. "The Kopitiam in Singapore: An Evolving Story about Migration and Cultural Diversity." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2010. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1716534.
- Ludewig, Alexandra, "Home Meets Heimat." *M/C Journal*, 10(4), 1-5. 2007. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/12-ludewig.php>
- Lugosi, Peter. Food, Drink and Identity. In *Food & Drink The Cultural Context*. Ed. Donald Sloan. (Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Limited, 2013.)
- Resosudarmo, Budy P., Chikako Yamauchi, and Tadjuddin Noer Effendi. "Rural–Urban Migration in Indonesia: Survey Design and Implementation." *The Great Migration*. 2009. doi:10.4337/9781781000724.00020.
- Ottenbacher, Michael C., and Robert J. Harrington. "Institutional, cultural and contextual factors: Potential drivers of the culinary innovation process." *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 9, no. 3 (2009): 235-49. doi:10.1057/thr.2009.8.
- Sutton, David Evan. *Remembrance of repasts: an anthropology of food and memory*. Oxford: Berg, 2006.
- Wilson, Thomas M. "Food, Drink and Identity in Europe: Consumption and the Construction of Local, National and Cosmopolitan Culture." *European Studies* 22, 2006. 11-29. doi:10.1163/9789401203494\_003.