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Essay

HAPPY LEBARAN,
ENJOY 'KETUPAT'

Lebaran, or Idul Fitri, the biggest Muslim celebration in Indonesia, is just around the corner. The holiday marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, so you know food plays an important role, perhaps even more so than with other celebrations.

In the tradition of Indonesian society, one of the foods served during Idul Fitri is *ketupat*.

Ketupat is a compressed rice dish cooked in diamond-shaped parcels made from coconut fronds. It has a very bland taste and is normally served with other dishes such as *rendang*, a dried beef curry.

Ketupat is easy to make at home, with the exception of the parcels, which require a bit of skill. The best place to buy *ketupat* parcels are at traditional markets.

Some foods that use *ketupat* among others *kupat tahu* (Sunda), *graisy* (Magelang), *kupat glabet* (Tegal), *soto Malassar* (Malassar), *kotek* and *gudo-gudo*. *Ketupat* can also be served along with *sate*, though *lentong* (rice cake) is more common.

During Idul Fitri, *ketupat* is not only a distinctive menu offered to visitors but also it has deep meaning, not only in terms of religion but it also attaches cultural meaning to the festivity.

The tradition of consuming *ketupat* is said to originate from the symbol of the Javanese language expression, "ku" means admit, and "pat" or "lep-at" means mistake.

So the literal meaning of *ketupat* is to admit the mistakes one had made. It has been used by Sunan Kalijaga in spreading Islam in Java, which at that time there were still many who believed in the sanctity of *ketupat*.

People hang it above the door of the house to be talisman. It was believed to have magic power so that it was needed to be well treated and maintained. Otherwise the miracle of *ketupat* would not be sustainable.

Therefore, some people at certain places in Java make *ketupat* on a normal day considering its unique meaning. It is only served during Idul Fitri and five days after the Islamic day celebration.

Even there are several areas in Java which simply offer *ketupat* to visitors on the seventh day after Idul Fitri, which is called Hari Raya *Ketupat* (*Ketupat Eid*). The process of long rooted cultural assimilation and belief has finally shifted *ketupat* sanctity into Islamic tradition.

In Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, people celebrate Lebaran *Tupat* on Sunday. They cook *Ketupat* or *Tupat* and other cuisines to share with their neighbors. Residents gather in mosques called *flowah* and visit the tombs of Muslim preachers at Loang Balog cemetery in Mataram and Batu Layat cemetery in Senggol. The tradition known as *Duwgami* has existed here since the 17th century.



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it was introduced by a Javanese Muslim missionary called Sunan Prapen.

In this tradition, *ketupat* becomes the main menu on offer when Muslims celebrate Idul Fitri as the perfect moment to apologize to each other and to admit mistakes. The way to slice *ketupat* has a particular meaning. *Ketupat* is usually sliced into four parts with four meanings: *laburan*, *luberan*, *lebaran* and *lebaran*.

Laburan means to clean. Houses are cleaned and repainted so the dirt is gone and the house will look like new. *Luberan* refers to all types of menus which are overflow their capacity. Likewise, the streets become crowded and jammed owing to the fact that the vehicles spill onto the streets of the village.

Lebaran means the openness of door for forgiveness, which is characterized by the opening of the house to receive guests who visit. *Lebaran* emphasizes melting sins of human beings due to mutual forgiveness. Thus it makes sense that many are willing to travel long distances from city to village despite risky accident.

In West Sumatra, however, *ketupat* is not a typical culinary item. In Minangkabau, *ketupat* becomes a complementary choice of food other than rice. Minangkabau usually serve various foods and some cakes – wet cakes or pastries – and *lemang* (sticky rice cooked in bamboo). The menu offered is also different depending on the custom of *nagari* (village).

Nowadays *ketupat* is one of the favorite culinary items during Idul Fitri celebration. Even after performing Eid prayer and forgiving one another, most Minangkabau people will choose to eat *ketupat* as the starter menu.

Unlike other regions where *ketupat* is served with a generous helping of *gulai apur ayam* (chicken stewed in coconut milk), in West Sumatra *ketupat* is served with jackfruit curry or *tauco* sauce. In addition to its yummy taste, the taste of this curry is very special mixed with *rendang* goulash, spicy cassava chips and other menus. Each area in West Sumatra will serve different taste of *ketupat* due to distinctive taste of diverse Minang culinary variants.

A happy and blessed Eid to everyone.

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