



Capitalist Practices in Lampung Tobacco Plantations during the Liberal Economy Period

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Abstract: This research aims to examine the practice of capitalism in the production system and labor relations in Lampung tobacco plantations during the liberal economy period. This research uses a historical method. The results show that tobacco plantations in Lampung flourished during the liberal economy period. The government opened opportunities for the private sector to invest in Lampung tobacco plantations. This is evidenced by the trials conducted on the cultivation of Deli and Manila tobacco varieties. The production system and labor relations in Lampung's tobacco plantations during the liberal economy period reflect the existence of capitalist practices. A capitalist class emerged, consisting of private companies, and a working class from the local community. The production system was controlled by private companies, which controlled all means of production and profits. Farmers obtained capital loans, tobacco seeds, fertilizers, and guidance. Then, the tobacco harvest would be purchased by companies with an advance payment system, creating a pattern that benefited companies and harmed farmers because they had no control over the harvest. This widened the social stratification gap that separated capital owners, the Dutch government, and farmers, and seemed to create shared poverty in society.

Keywords: capitalism; Lampung; tobacco plantation

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti praktik kapitalisme dalam sistem produksi dan hubungan kerja di perkebunan tembakau Lampung selama periode ekonomi liberal. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode historis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perkebunan tembakau di Lampung berkembang pesat selama periode ekonomi liberal. Pemerintah membuka peluang bagi sektor swasta untuk berinvestasi di perkebunan tembakau Lampung. Hal ini dibuktikan dengan uji coba yang dilakukan pada budidaya varietas tembakau Deli dan Manila. Sistem produksi dan hubungan kerja di perkebunan tembakau Lampung selama periode ekonomi liberal mencerminkan keberadaan praktik kapitalis. Muncul kelas kapitalis yang terdiri dari perusahaan swasta, dan kelas pekerja dari masyarakat setempat. Sistem produksi dikendalikan oleh perusahaan swasta, yang mengendalikan semua alat produksi dan keuntungan. Petani memperoleh pinjaman modal, bibit tembakau, pupuk, dan bimbingan. Kemudian, hasil panen tembakau akan dibeli oleh perusahaan dengan sistem pembayaran di muka, menciptakan pola yang menguntungkan perusahaan dan merugikan petani karena mereka tidak memiliki kendali atas hasil panen. Hal ini memperlebar kesenjangan stratifikasi sosial yang memisahkan pemilik modal, pemerintah Belanda, dan petani, dan tampaknya menciptakan kemiskinan bersama di masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: kapitalisme; Lampung; perkebunan tembakau



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Introduction

The tobacco plantations in Lampung were one of the Dutch government's ambitious projects. This was because the plantations and everything in them were used as a means of social and economic exploitation from 1870 to 1900 through the massive influx of private companies into the Dutch East Indies. This situation was supported by the opening of the Suez Canal, which significantly shortened the distance between Europe and Asia, the victory of the liberal party in parliament, and the forced cultivation system, which was considered no longer relevant, compared to the increasing demand for raw materials. During this period, the Dutch East Indies' economic system was based on a liberal system focused on industrial activities in the plantation and mining sectors (Rina et al., 2021). As a result, many plantations were opened, including in the Lampung region. Logically, large-scale land clearing would boost the community's economy and bring prosperity, but the opposite happened. The Dutch government employed various methods to meet production needs and maximize profits without investing significant capital, thereby reducing its role since the Agrarische Wet was enacted. Examining the production process and labor relations, it was identified that capitalist practices were present in the management of tobacco plantations in Lampung, which impoverished tobacco farmers and enriched private entities.

Tobacco was first discovered in America, where it was initially enjoyed only by Native Americans. In 1492, explorer Christopher Columbus and two of his companions observed Native Americans on the island of San Salvador rolling dried tobacco (cigars), burning one end and smoking the other. Tobacco seeds were then brought to Europe, which led to changes in the lifestyle and smoking habits of Europeans as tobacco enthusiasts, including commoners, aristocrats, industrialists, and even the general public (Sriandini, 2024). Meanwhile, in Java, tobacco is believed to have been introduced through the smoking habit. This is evidenced in Raffles' book, *History of Java*, and is consistent with the ancient Javanese manuscript *Babad ing Sangkala*, which mentions that the Dutch introduced tobacco in 1601 (Iksanudin, 2018). Tobacco has emerged as one of the alternative crops grown by the people of Lampung, alongside coconut, banana, coffee, and corn. Tobacco is also referred to as an intercrop grown in rice fields. For example, when farmers do not have enough water to grow rice, rice fields can be used to grow tobacco. Although its processing is still very simple, tobacco is quite popular among the people of Lampung. In addition to Lampung, tobacco is also widely grown in the regions of Deli, Payakumbuh, and Ranau Regency. Tobacco planting in Lampung takes place in January during the two-month rainy season (Mawardani et al., 2020; Jovanda et al., 2024; Novitasari, 2025).

The Liberal Party's victory in the Dutch Parliament initiated economic policy changes in the colonies. Liberals began to pay attention to uncultivated land in the Dutch East Indies. Not only in Java, but also in Sumatra, which was considered to have great potential, including in the Lampung region. The opening of tobacco plantations in Lampung illustrates the Dutch colonial government's ambition to exploit Sumatra since the enactment of the Agrarian Law or Agrarische Wet in 1870 (Mawardani et al., 2020). The majority of tobacco cultivated in Lampung comes from Deli, East Sumatra. Its geography consists of highlands, and the fertile Lampung region is the reason why the Dutch government sought to open Deli tobacco plantations in Lampung (Sumarno, 2016; Rafiqi & Marsella, 2021).

Tobacco continued to develop through trials, not only with seeds from Deli, but also from various regions such as Manila. Trials were conducted in the Kebagoesan area using various methods to obtain high-quality tobacco. The government built an experimental station in response to the threat posed by the disease *Phytophthora nicotianae* in tobacco seedlings. According to the newspaper *De Handelsbeweging der Buitenbezittingen*, published in 1915,

there was rapid development in Lampung's tobacco plantations, as seen from the export of 166 tons of tobacco in 1912, which increased to 198 tons in 1913. However, problems often arose when the tobacco planting season coincided with the rice planting season. This led to limited granary supplies and a high demand for labor, but the distribution of labor was uneven. Natural conditions, such as prolonged dry seasons, also posed challenges for tobacco farmers in cultivating tobacco crops.

In addition to the opening of tobacco plantations, the strengthening of liberalism also led the Dutch government to open up as many opportunities as possible for private companies to participate in this exploitation project. Ultimately, this indirectly led to the implementation of capitalist production methods and labor relations, which caused much suffering and poverty among the indigenous people. The smooth movement of foreign capital allowed the colonial government to enjoy the benefits of economic prosperity once again (Kristian, 2019; Akbar, 2018). Two important elements in the overall process of mobilizing agrarian resources in tobacco plantations were land and labor, which then became vulnerable to the arbitrariness of the Dutch government.

There are many studies on tobacco plantations in Lampung, plantation capitalization practices, and Dutch economic policy in Lampung, such as research conducted by (1) Syanila Indah Mawardani in 2022 entitled "The Development of Tobacco in the Lampung District during the 19th Century Colonial Period," which reviews the existence of tobacco plantations during the colonial period. (2) Gregorius Andika Ariwibowo's study titled "Economic and Trade Activities in the Lampung Residency from 1856 to 1930." This paper reviews the Lampung region as a gateway for trade between Java and Sumatra. (3) Yuli Kristian wrote a thesis titled "Dutch Economic Policy towards Lampung in 1800-1942," which reviews the Dutch strategy to control Lampung in the economic sector. The existence of Dutch power in Lampung over the economy in the trade and plantation sectors has been widely discussed in various writings, but studies on the practice of capitalism in tobacco plantations in Lampung are very rare. This has created a research gap regarding how the author attempts to examine the practice of capitalism in tobacco plantations in Lampung through the production system by analyzing various historical and supporting sources. The author also hopes that this paper can enrich the literature and spark similar studies in a broader context regarding the history of plantations in Lampung.

In understanding how capitalism operated within the production system and labor relations on tobacco plantations in Lampung during the era of liberal economics, this study employs the perspective of colonial economic theory. This theory clearly explains that the state actually played a role in facilitating capitalist practices by providing a legal infrastructure in the form of the 1870 Agrarian Law, as well as guarantees of ownership and private contracts. Consequently, land became a commodity, and farmers became a source of cheap labor, subject to long working hours and low wages (Masyrullahushomad & Sudrajat, 2019; Muhdi & Nur, 2026; Zulyanti & Hidayat, 2025). Furthermore, this study also adopts the perspective of Marxist capital penetration theory, which explains that the state provides legal protection by guaranteeing private investment. Capital penetration, as an ongoing process, is illustrated by farmers transitioning into laborers (proletarianization), with broader implications such as economic inequality, dependence on foreign capital, and the emergence of social conflict. (Darsono, 2021). Thus, the purpose of this article is to identify how private companies organized land and labor from the era of forced cultivation to the era of liberal economics, to explain changes in land use and capitalist practices in Lampung's tobacco plantations as part of an agrarian transformation, and to map the resulting socioeconomic impacts, particularly within production systems and labor relations. Thus, this research is important for enriching the

historiography of plantations in Sumatra, as previous studies have primarily focused on the Java region. Furthermore, this research is crucial for understanding the roots of agrarian inequality currently prevalent in Lampung, thereby serving as a basis for evaluating policies within the socio-economic sector.

Research Methods

This study uses the historical method as part of the process of critically examining past sources. According to Louis Gottschalk, the historical method consists of heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography as the final stage (Gottschalk, 1950; Herlina, 2020). Data collection was carried out using primary sources in the form of contemporary written documents, including Encyclopaedisch Bureau, the book *Sumatra Tabak, Overzicht Van de Nijverheid In De Buiten-Bezittingen Van Nederlandsch Oost-Indie, over 1868, Indische Bergcultuurondernemingen Voornamelijk in Zuid-Sumatra, Overzicht van Zuid-Sumatra, and Zuid-Sumatra*. The *De Sumatra Post* newspaper and contemporary photo archives from KITLV were also used. Secondary sources came from written documents as supporting material, such as journal articles relevant to the research theme. Next, the document sources were critiqued by comparing various contemporary written sources and internally ensuring that the information contained therein was accountable in terms of chronological description, year of publication, writing style, and content, as well as external criticism by looking at the visual aspects of the documents. The next stage was to interpret the data sources. Finally, all the facts obtained are then written down as a whole as a result of the entire stages, so that the scientific study is presented objectively in accordance with the theme being studied.

Research Result

Lampung Tobacco Plantations: From Forced Cultivation to Liberal Economy 1870-1900

A series of Dutch government economic policies shaped the development of the plantation sector in the Lampung region. Long before the forced cultivation policy was implemented in Lampung, tobacco was already being cultivated in limited quantities. Farmers in Lampung usually grew tobacco only as needed. However, since industrialization became rampant in the colonies, the Lampung region was also affected by the clearing of forests, which were then converted into plantation land. Land clearing outside of Java was caused by increasingly difficult regulations (Masroh, 2015). Large-scale land clearing was also touted as an effort by the Dutch to finance the war in their own country. During the forced cultivation period, Governor-General Van den Bosch required farmers in the Dutch East Indies to grow crops for export to the world market, including commodities that were in demand on the world market, such as coffee, sugar cane, tobacco, and indigo (Perdana et al., 2020; Perdana et al., 2023).

Table 1. Land area and main crop types designated for cultivation during the 1833 forced cultivation period in Lampung

No.	Jenis Tanaman	Luas Tanah (<i>Bouw</i>)
1	Tebu	32,722
2	Nila	22,141
3	Teh	324
4	Tembakau	286
5	Kayu Manis	30

Source: Sumatera Tabak Book, 1916

The forced cultivation system was later abolished because it was considered to be oppressive to the indigenous people. This was a result of the victory of the liberals in the Dutch parliament. The abolition of compulsory cultivation marked the beginning of a new policy by the Dutch government, one of which was the enactment of the Agrarian Law (*Agrarische Besluit*) in 1870, which indirectly guaranteed investment activities in the plantation sector. This was because there were basic regulations regarding land ownership. The land of the Dutch East Indies was claimed to be divided into two types: first, indigenous land in the form of rice fields, gardens, and fields; and second, government land (forest land not included in indigenous land). The government issued land ownership certificates and allowed private parties to lease land, both government land and indigenous land. Agricultural Decree State Gazette of 1870 No. 118 Article 1 stipulates that all land that is not owned by anyone or without proof of ownership (*eigendom*) shall become the property of the state or government. Land regulations stipulated in the agrarian law: (1) land owned by the people cannot be sold to non-indigenous communities; (2) government-owned land covering an area of 10 bouw may be sold to non-indigenous communities for business purposes; (3) non-indigenous communities have the right to use the land and the right to build on it, known as *recht van post* (ROV). Another right obtained is land as *erfpacht* (the right to lease and pass it on to children or family members) (Bosma, 2025).

Government land can be leased for 75 years, while indigenous land can be leased for up to 30 years. The land lease process must be reported to the Dutch government. Since the agrarian law was indirectly implemented, the Dutch East Indies entered an era of an open economy. There were many significant changes in plantation management. According to Kartodirjo (1991), private companies were given full authority to manage their own plantations without full government intervention. During this period, investors began to invest their capital with permission from the Dutch government, according to (Mulyani, 2018). Thus, the Dutch government's expansion of land and acreage through the hands of liberals was possible as long as land and labor were available as tools for industrialization in the plantation sector.

In 1885, according to Wellan's records (1932), an experimental plan was conceived to cultivate tobacco seeds from Deli and Manila in various locations in Lampung. Tobacco planting experiments from Deli in Lampung were carried out in the areas of Pitoe, Kebagoesan, Redjosarie, and Bernoeng. In 1887, tobacco cultivation using seeds from Manila yielded a good harvest, so planting began on a large scale. Then, in 1896, a large-scale trial was conducted in the Pitoe area. P. C. van de Kamer had planted tobacco using the Deli method in the Kebagoesan area. Tobacco planting was carried out in January, during the rainy season. First, tobacco farmers cultivated the land and made seed beds. When the seedlings reached a height of 15 to 20 cm, they were planted in 70 × 70 cm plots covering an area of approximately 1.20 m² in scrubland or forest land. Tobacco harvesting is done leaf by leaf, starting from the leaves at the end of the row, then stored under houses or in other places protected from sunlight and covered with plantain leaves. After harvesting, the selected leaves are watered with hot water, stripped, and placed in baskets, then sorted. Several samples of cultivated tobacco are sent to Deli for fermentation and evaluation. However, the lack of supervision by experts and limited transportation in the area from Telok Betong (Tanjung Karang) to Deli, East Sumatra, resulted in poor tobacco quality, with cream-colored tobacco and coarse stems. Meanwhile, tobacco cultivation trials conducted in the Bernoeng area were unsuccessful (Sumarno, 2016).



Figure 1. Tobacco Plantations in Sumatra

Source: <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/724298>

The emergence of disease in tobacco seedlings caused by *Phytophthora nicotianae* led to the establishment of an experimental station in 1894. In the Pitoe and Redjosarie areas, tobacco cultivation was carried out at the same time as rubber cultivation. This situation caused some of the land to become isolated and the workforce to be unevenly distributed, resulting in a lack of storage space (granaries) for the harvest. In 1914, planting was carried out on 100 fields to assess the feasibility of cultivating European tobacco in Lampung. However, at the end of the same year, it was decided to stop planting tobacco in the Pitoe area. According to Broersma's records (1916), the land was then converted into coffee and rubber plantations, which were combined with the Redjosarie area under one management. In addition, this period was also marked by very low rainfall for about three months, making it the driest period in Lampung. The extreme dry conditions even caused fires in several fields. According to Kops (1919), rainfall variation in this region was influenced by two main factors, namely the monsoon pattern and the altitude of the area. The development of plantations in Lampung, which was not balanced with the provision of health facilities for workers, led to an increase in disease among farmers. This condition also became a factor that threatened the sustainability of tobacco production in the region.

In 1833, the Dutch government had prepared 286 bouw of land, equivalent to 211 hectares, for tobacco cultivation. The enactment of the Agrarian Law (*Agrarische Besluit*) attracted many investors to invest their capital, including in tobacco plantations. Various methods were used to obtain high-selling tobacco, including trials to cultivate Deli and Manila tobacco varieties in the Lampung region. Various factors, such as a lack of expert supervision, the emergence of diseases in tobacco seedlings, prolonged droughts, and health services for workers or farmers, also threatened tobacco productivity in Lampung. In 1912, the tobacco commodity experienced rapid growth. De Handelsbeweging der Buitenbezittingen in Novitasari (2025) stated that there was a significant increase in tobacco harvest from 166 tons to 198 tons within a year. This success was certainly a sign that tobacco plantations in Lampung

were experiencing rapid development after the implementation of the open-door economy. Adequate capital support from the private sector, full supervision from the Dutch government, and the hard work of farmers bore fruit during this period. However, abuse of power was often seen in tobacco plantation activities. The social class that felt the impact the most was farmers. They often received wages that were not commensurate with the heavy work they did.

Capitalist practices in the production system and labor relations on tobacco plantations in Lampung

Capitalism is characterized by the existence of the bourgeoisie as capital owners and the proletariat as workers (Lubis et al., 2025). There are two models of capitalism, namely the Asian and European models. First, the Asian model, also known as the feudal system, developed in the 18th century and lasted throughout the royal era, where the king had absolute power, meaning that everything within his territory belonged to him. Second, the European model, which developed rapidly in the 19th and 20th centuries, is characterized by the existence of capitalists who invest their capital to open up land and subsequently give rise to industrial activities in the plantation sector (Novita et al., 2021). Capitalism, as referred to in this paper, refers to plantation practices, particularly the production system and social relations.

Plantation activities cannot be separated from two things: land and labor. Both are essential for mobilizing agricultural resources, in this case, tobacco. Dutch control over Lampung was complete by the mid-to-late 19th century because local resistance had been successfully suppressed. This freedom was evident in the opening of plantation lands, including coffee plantations in Way Lima, rubber plantations in Sungai Langka, and pepper plantations in the Tulang Bawang and Seputih areas (Mustafa & Utami, 2022). In many cases, colonial-era plantation practices in Lampung often showed injustice in the management of land and labor. The Dutch government's dominant role as a liaison between capital owners and local workers or farmers highlighted the principles of capitalism. Capital owners used traditional bureaucratic channels to gain a strong bargaining position, both with the colonial government and the local government. Through cooperation with village heads (*beke*l), they gained easy access to land and labor at a relatively low cost. Village heads acted as intermediaries who provided land and mobilized peasant labor in exchange for certain compensation. In Padmo (1991), land ownership structure forms the basis for class division among farmers, ranging from small farmers with less than 0.5 hectares of land, medium farmers with 0.5–1 hectare, to large farmers who own more than 1 hectare (Novitasari, 2025). However, all of these farmer groups remain dependent on capital provided by plantation companies. Farmers are required to grow tobacco on part of their land, while seeds and guidance are provided by the company. The green tobacco harvest is then repurchased by the company, with an advance payment system that binds farmers and prevents them from freely selling their harvest to other parties. This pattern creates economic dependence that benefits the company and harms farmers.

The emergence of competition between plantation companies also prompted the Dutch government to intervene economically through a policy of merging several small companies to make them more efficient and able to compete in the global market. The government also provided capital loans through colonial financial institutions such as Cultuur Banken. One of the large companies operating in Lampung was Lampong Cultuur Maatschappij. The work structure on the plantations showed a clear social hierarchy. Important positions such as administrator, *ziender* (supervisor), and *sinder* were only filled by Europeans or Dutch people. Meanwhile, the indigenous population occupied positions as manual laborers who did field work such as soil cultivation, plant maintenance, and sorting tobacco leaves in warehouses. This working relationship showed a form of labor exploitation, in which indigenous farmers

and laborers became part of a production system that only served to generate maximum profits for capital owners (Zainol Hasan & Mahyudi, 2020).

Tobacco plantations in Lampung were seen as a means for European capitalists to increase their profits through the exploitation of local labor and resources. Colonial rulers and officials exploited their relationships with indigenous rulers to mobilize farmers to grow tobacco without providing them with a fair share of the profits. This practice reflects agrarian capitalism, in which the bourgeoisie (capital owners) control the means of production—in this case, land, seeds, capital, and trade networks—while the proletariat (indigenous farmers and laborers) only have their labor to sell in order to survive. The surplus value generated from the farmers' labor was entirely appropriated by the entrepreneurs and the colonial state as profit.

The characteristic of capitalism lies in the pursuit of maximum profit through capital accumulation, where profits are derived from the difference between the value of workers' labor and the wages they receive. This condition is very apparent in Lampung's tobacco plantations. Farmers are required to grow tobacco on their land, receive seeds and guidance from the company, and sell their harvest only to that company. This pattern traps farmers in a subordinate and dependent working relationship, as they no longer control their own production. The ambition of Dutch entrepreneurs and officials to obtain maximum profits without regard for the welfare of farmers reflects the logic of colonial capitalism, which is oriented towards the accumulation of wealth for the colonizing country. This means that capitalism will always give rise to social inequality between those who control the means of production and those who only have labor to work. In this case, the tobacco company acts as a representation of the colonial bourgeoisie, while the indigenous farmers and workers become the proletariat exploited in the tobacco production system.

Tobacco farmers have lost control over their work because the entire production process, from seed provision and planting techniques to crop sales, is determined by plantation companies. Farmers do not have the freedom to sell their crops independently because they are bound by an advance payment system, which makes them economically dependent on the companies. The Dutch government's policy of merging companies demonstrated an effort to strengthen capitalist efficiency and competitiveness in the global market, a characteristic of a capitalist system oriented towards profit accumulation. The colonial government acted not only as a regulator but also as a protector of the interests of the bourgeoisie. This condition illustrates how the ideology of capitalism penetrated the social and economic structures of colonial society, creating social inequality that benefited capital owners and oppressed workers. Thus, farmers' work was no longer a means to achieve independence but rather strengthened the dominant position of capital owners. Thus, the economic practices of tobacco plantations in Lampung not only reveal the economic relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, but also vividly illustrate how the mechanisms of agrarian capitalism—through capital accumulation, labor exploitation, and inequality in the ownership of the means of production—operate within the production system and labor relations on Lampung's tobacco plantations. Thus, the work of farmers no longer served as a means to achieve independence, but rather strengthened the dominant position of capital owners. Thus, the practice of tobacco plantation economics in Lampung not only demonstrates the economic relationship between colonizers and the colonized, but also vividly illustrates how the mechanisms of agrarian capitalism—through capital accumulation, labor exploitation, and inequality in the ownership of the means of production—operate within the production system and labor relations in Lampung's tobacco plantations. However, over time, the tobacco commodity weakened with the emergence of imported Shag tobacco, causing plantations in Lampung to switch to cotton.

Capitalist practices in the production system and labor relations on tobacco plantations in Lampung

The dynamics of tobacco plantations in Lampung have an impact on the lives of the community, especially on the social stratification that has emerged. Unlike tobacco plantations in Deli, East Sumatra, which specifically enforce the “Deli Contract” for workers (coolies), the same principle is also applied to tobacco plantations in Lampung, but not in detail (Novitasari, 2025). In practice, coolies in Lampung are considered to be treated more humanely than in Deli plantations, where coolies often receive physical punishment and are even exploited based on gender, with women often subjected to sexual violence (Ramayanti, 2018; Darini & Anggraeni, 2021; Octavia, 2020). The cultivation of tobacco plantations in Lampung requires labor, continuing the tradition of forced labor during the liberal economic era, and giving rise to the term coolies to refer to workers on tobacco plantations (Kristian, 2019). This further highlights the social divide between capital owners, the government, and workers, who are often referred to as coolies.

The need for large areas of land for tobacco plantations has led the government to seek strategies, often involving the leasing of community-owned land that is normally used for growing food crops. This situation usually occurs when the government lacks tobacco plantation land and feels the need to expand its land holdings. This results in the loss of food crops and ultimately a shortage of food resources for the community. Food shortages, especially rice, occurred during the decade of forced cultivation, which led to a rice crisis and famine, forcing the government to send rice to Lampung from Bengkulu, Palembang, and Java for several years (Ariwibowo, 2018). Although the government provided rent, farmers often still faced economic difficulties because the rent varied greatly depending on the size of the land. This land leasing actually had an impact on the decline in the social status of farmers because they no longer had land to cultivate, and changed their work orientation from being mostly owner-farmers to laborers on tobacco plantations.

According to Sartono Kartodirdjo in Novitasari (2025), The expansion of tobacco cultivation outside Java not only benefited capital owners but also brought changes to the surrounding community, especially tobacco farmers. The social structure in tobacco plantations at that time was divided into foreign entrepreneurs as capital owners at the top of the pyramid, followed by the Dutch government, local rulers, in this case, such as *jenang*, and farmers/laborers at the bottom. The Dutch government maintained the role of *jenang* from the era of forced cultivation, who were then tasked with collecting the farmers' produce (Afwan, 2021; Oktaviani et al., 2024). According to Clifford Geertz, this process of “petanisasi” (peasantization) in agricultural evolution resulted in social homogenization, which led to widespread poverty.

According to Sartono Kartodirdjo and Suryo in (Susilo & Sarkowi, 2020), the work system has introduced monetization, namely a system of payment using money. Indirectly, traditional communities are now gradually becoming familiar with commercialization through agricultural production and labor work. The government still uses a feudal system in tobacco production, which has resulted in less space for laborers to fight exploitation. This has indirectly caused laborers to suffer socially (Azwar & Baxadirovna, 2025).

The tobacco plantation capitalism in Lampung cannot be separated from the colonial dynamics that shaped its labor structure. Since the late 19th century, the Lampung region has been developed as a commercial plantation area integrated into the global market network of the Dutch East Indies. This expansion was mainly driven by colonial agrarian policies such as the Agrarische Wet 1870, which opened up vast opportunities for European private companies to lease land on a long-term basis and develop export commodities, including tobacco. Within

the framework of colonial capitalism, the need for cheap labor became a central issue. Lampung, which was relatively sparsely populated, was seen as lacking an adequate supply of local labor. To overcome this problem, the colonial government under Dutch administration implemented a colonization program that moved farmers from Java to areas outside Java, including Lampung. Formally, this program was presented as a solution to overpopulation and poverty in Java, as well as an effort to “develop” areas outside Java. However, in practice, colonization also served as a mechanism for providing labor for private plantation companies. The Javanese farmers who were relocated were indeed wage laborers, not slaves. They received wages and, in some cases, were given land to cultivate. However, the working relationship that was formed remained within the unequal structure of colonial capitalism. Low wages, dependence on companies, and limited access to capital and markets made their position vulnerable.

Tobacco plantation capitalism in Lampung thus exhibits a dual character: on the one hand, it embraces market logic and a modern wage labor system, but on the other hand, it continues to reproduce patterns of exploitation typical of colonialism. Agricultural companies are oriented toward profit accumulation through exports, while the risks of production and social reproduction of labor are largely borne by the workers and the colonized communities themselves. In addition, the transfer of Javanese farmers also created a new social stratification in Lampung. There was a differentiation between plantation companies as capital owners, colonial officials as regulators, and colonized farmers as laborers. This structure shows how capitalism in colonial areas did not stand neutrally as an economic system, but rather relied on colonial state policies that actively regulated population mobility for the sake of capital accumulation. Thus, tobacco plantation capitalism in Lampung was not merely an economic phenomenon but part of a broader colonial project. The colonization program became an important instrument in ensuring the availability of cheap and stable labor for agricultural companies, while also expanding the colonial state's control over the region and its population. This discussion shows that the relationship between capitalism and colonialism is mutually reinforcing: capitalist expansion requires colonial structures, while colonialism finds its economic legitimacy in capitalist projects such as tobacco plantations.

Conclusion

The development of tobacco plantations in Lampung has undergone significant growth since the era of forced cultivation. Through the Agrarische Wet policy of 1870, many capitalists leased land and became partners with local rulers. The Dutch government created conditions that enabled the accumulation of capital for the colonialists and capital owners, while the indigenous people became exploited laborers. The working relationship between plantation companies, the colonial government, and local farmers reflected the true nature of capitalism. The bourgeoisie—as capital owners—controlled the means of production, such as land, capital, seeds, and international trade networks. Meanwhile, indigenous farmers or laborers only had their labor to sell in order to survive, with no control over the products they produced. Farmers and laborers lost the meaning of their work because the entire production process was controlled by companies. Thus, economic practices on tobacco plantations in Lampung not only reflected the relationship between colonizers and the colonized but also provided concrete evidence of the colonial capitalist system at work in the agricultural sector. The vast expanse of tobacco plantations opened in Lampung required a large workforce. The massive development in the tobacco plantation sector did not bring prosperity to the laborers who worked there. Instead, this situation reinforced the exploitation of laborers. Not only that, socially, tobacco plantations in Lampung were responsible for widening the social class gap between capital owners, the

Dutch government, and workers (coolies). The history of plantations in Lampung has been heavily influenced by colonial policies, so there are many aspects that need to be explored, especially in tobacco plantations. As an area close to Deli, Lampung has great potential to become an area that implements a work system similar to that in Deli, especially in tobacco plantations. This could be an interesting topic for discussion in the future. Of course, the author is aware of the limitations of this paper and hopes that it can serve as a catalyst in the process of exploring and writing the history of tobacco plantations in Lampung.

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