

The Life of Deli Tobacco Plantation's Workers in East Sumatera, 1880-1930

Ririn Darini,* Dyah Ayu Anggraeni

Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Yogyakarta State University, Yogyakarta - Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: ririn_darini@uny.ac.id

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14710/ihis.v5i1.11150>

Abstract

This paper aims to reveal the life of Deli tobacco plantation workers in East Sumatra during the period 1880-1930. The problem was focused on the policies issued by the colonial government on labor and its implementation, and its consequences for the lives of the plantation workers. This study applies a historical method which includes four stages, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The result shows that through a variety of policies that apply in plantations cause daily laborers were very tied to plantation life. They will receive physical sanctions if they violate the rules. The living facilities on the plantations were initially very limited, although later efforts were made to improve the company. Meanwhile the entertainment facilities, such as prostitution in which actually made their lives even more difficult.

Received:
June 2, 2021

Revised:
June 5, 2021

Accepted:
June 7, 2021

Keywords: Workers; Tobacco Plantation; East Sumatra; Colonial Business.

Introduction

In the framework of the implementation of modern imperialism, through its liberalism policy, the colonial government issued an Agrarian Law 1870, that applied in the Dutch East Indies. Since then, many private entrepreneurs have invested in the Dutch East Indies, including in Deli in East Sumatra. Deli had experienced rapid economic growth after the success of Jacobus Nienhuys to develop tobacco plants. Through a wide land concession permit from the Sultan of Deli, the Dutch trading company *Nederlandsch Handel Maatschappij* (NHM) together with Janssen, Clemen, and Nienhuys on November 1, 1869 established the first limited liability company engaged in the field of reach in East Sumatra, *Deli Maatschappij*. The great advantage of this cultivation led to many other entrepreneurs also interested in developing tobacco in the region (Stoler, 2005).

In 1871, the predecessors of the *Senembah Company*, namely *Naeher* and *Grob*, opened the *Tandjong Morawa company* on the border of Deli and Serdang. At first, they grew nutmeg, as well as cocoa, tilapia, and coconut. Then from this plantation *Senembah Maatschappij* was founded in 1889 (Janssen, 1914, p. 9) which developed as a tobacco company. Besides *Senembah Maatschappij*, there are also several large tobacco companies in East Sumatra, such as the *Deli-Batavia Maatschappij* (1875), the *Amsterdam-Deli Maatschappij*, the *Tobacco Company Arendsburg*, and the *United*

Langkat Plantations Maatschappij (Volker, 1928, p. 13)

The development of the plantation business in Deli turned out to be experiencing difficulties related to worker issues. It was because the population in East Sumatra at that time was still very sparse and the reluctance of local communities, both Melayu and Bataks, to work in the plantation companies (Perret, 2010). In 1866 Nienhuys first came up with the idea of contracting workers from China and paying them based on the amount and quality of tobacco each worker produced (Pelzer, 1978). The idea was later modified by J.T. Cremer as a former gardener who became minister of the colony (1897-1901), proposed to bring in coolies from outside. Initially, Chinese coolies were imported from Penang, and then coolies from Java. To attract workers, brokers persuade prospective coolies by promising them high salaries. Brokers also commit fraud and even kidnapping (Said, 1977).

Efforts to bring in these migrant workers require very large costs. As a result, plantation entrepreneurs try to bind the workers and ensure that the workers are always ready to work on the plantations. For this reason, plantation entrepreneurs through the government issued a regulation called *koelie ordonantie* which also mentions the *poenale sanctie* rule. This rule greatly benefits the plantation owners because they have the right to punish workers who are negligent in their work. In addition, the employers also suppress the wages of workers in such a way that the workers must be involved in debt to meet their needs, and in the end, they continued to extend their contracts to become plantation workers.

There are several studies which expose Deli, especially on the plantation worker issue. The study from Breman (1997) describes the cruel practice of colonial politics against migrant workers working on plantations. He concluded that the violence received by the workers was structural violence because of the conspiracy between the colonial government and the owners of capital. Meanwhile, Stoler (2005) examines Sumatran plantation workers for a long period, from the colonial era to the New Order era. According to Stoler, the state plays an important role as an agent of direct and indirect control for the workers. Meanwhile, Sairin (1997) explained about the income of Javanese workers on Sumatran plantations and their strategies for survival. Sairin (1997) also reveals the ways in which plantation companies bind their workforce. Suwirta (2002) examines worker issues as the efforts to maintain workers. Rosyidah (2012) and Anisyah (2018) discusses female coolies in tobacco plantations.

In contrast to previous studies, this paper focuses more on the daily lives of tobacco plantation workers in Deli. This article aims to reveal about the lives of tobacco plantation workers in Deli related to the policies issued by the government regarding employment and its implementation in the plantation areas. The initial period used is 1880 taking into account that the *koeli ordonantie* regulation was officially issued. The year 1930 is used as the end of the period, because in 1930 America passed a new Tariff Act which prohibited the goods imports in which produced on the basis of forced or contract worker. In particular, this study targets the Dutch East Indies by imposing an embargo on the import of tobacco packs if contracted workers on the east coast of Sumatra with punitive sanctions still apply.

Method

This study was conducted using the historical method which consisted of four stages of research. The first stage is the heuristic or source collection. The second is source criticism, emphasizing on the internal criticism, which will produce historical facts. After obtaining historical facts, the next step is interpretation or arranging historical facts as a unified whole. The last step is historiography.

The sources used in this study are written documents collected from archival institutions and libraries. In addition, also through online explorations on historical sources, some facts are revealed. *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch Indie* (1880), *De Million uit Deli* by Van den Brand's (1902), *Oerbosch tot Cultuurgebied* by T. Volker (1928), *Schadee* (1919), and *Uit Onze Colonial* (1903) by van Kol. In addition to these sources, contemporary novels will also be used to describe the daily life in plantation communities, including the works of Hamka (1966) and Lulofs (1985).

Colonial Penetration in Tobacco Plantation Business in Deli

The presence of tobacco plantations in East Sumatra began with the efforts made by Jacobus Nienhuys to develop tobacco plantations in 1863. These efforts yielded extraordinary results. The tobacco leaves produced are of good quality so they can be sold at high prices. In 1865 he managed to sell as many as 189 bales of tobacco leaves easily in Europe at a high market price. The profits obtained attracted the attention of other entrepreneurs to participate in investing in East Sumatra. Among them was the *Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij*, a Dutch trading company owned by King Willem I, who invested in the Nienhuys plantation, namely *Maatschappij* in 1869. In line with the issuance of *Agrarische Wet* 1870, many private venture capitals expanded tobacco plantations in Indonesia and turned forest areas into plantations.

The period from 1873 to 1884 became a development period of tobacco cultivation. In 1872 there were 13 plantation companies operating in Deli, each one Langkat and Serdang. At the end of the next period, there were 44 companies in Deli, 2 in Bedagai, 1 in Padang, 20 in Langkat, and 9 in Serdang. Deli tobacco production value was also increasing. The yield in 1884 of more than 125,000 packages with a value of about 27,550,000 guilders made Deli become one of the world's main tobacco-producing regions and Amsterdam one of the most important tobacco markets in the world (Schadee, 1919, p. 19). However, tobacco industry had been hit when the crisis occurred to 169 companies in 1891. Between 1870 and 1895, tobacco exports increased from 2,868 to 204,719 bales. Deli has even become a major source area for the expansion of the American cigar industry (Airries, 1995, p. 69).

Besides the Deli company being the largest, several other major tobacco companies were *Sanembah Company* in 1871, *Deli-Batavia Company* in 1875, *Amsterdam-Deli Company*, *Tobacco Company "Arendsburg"* in 1877, and *United Langkat Plantations Company*. As their topography is suitable for growing tobacco, plantations began to expand to other areas of the Langkat and Serdang sultanates. In a relatively short time, plantation companies have been established along the east coast of Sumatra, stretching from the Asahan River in the south to the Batangan River in the north, a distance of

about 200 km (Broersma, 1919, p. 164).

In 1891 there was a tobacco crisis as a result of overproduction since the late 1880s. As more plantations were established in Deli, Langkat, and Serdang and tobacco production continued to increase throughout the 1880s due to attractive prices on the world market, signs of excess tobacco production began to appear at the end of the decade. Production in 1891 reached 500,000 bales. The overproduction caused a crisis so that the price of tobacco on the world market fell by more than 50%. The most important factor causing the tobacco crisis was the world market which experienced an increase in tobacco supply due to the increase in Deli tobacco production. The next factor is the issuance of the Mc. Kinley (tobacco imports tariffs in the United States). Import duty rates were raised so that America would not buy tobacco. This rate varied from 35 cents to 75 cents per pound depending on the quality, but by 1890 it had risen to \$2 per pound. In 1891, America did not participate in the purchase, while the supply of the new tobacco harvest that year increased by more than 25% over the previous year (Thee, 1977, p. 10).

As a result of the crisis, several tobacco plantations began to close. Between 1890 and 1894 about 25 tobacco companies were dissolved. In 1896 the number of tobacco plantations remained 120 and in 1904 it shrunk again to 114 plantations. The newly opened plantation in Padang-Bedagai only operated until 1892. In 1891 there were 170 tobacco plantations in operation, in 1927 only 70 plantations remained. Many plantation lands were then diverted to other plantations such as coffee, rubber, and oil palm. The tobacco crisis of 1891 marked the end of the first phase of Deli tobacco development.

The next phase is the consolidation phase. After the crisis, the remaining tobacco plantations were managed by people who were genuinely interested in investing in tobacco plantations. Efforts were made to rationalize tobacco plantations. To get quality Deli cigar wrapping tobacco leaves, special soil, climate and care are needed. Deli wrapping tobacco is a monopoly product that has high quality due to the unique combination of climate and soil. Only plantations that exist in suitable locations and climates are continued as tobacco plantations, namely in Deli, especially around Medan and Binjai.

Production methods were improved and scientific research was carried out to overcome plant diseases and improve the quality of Deli tobacco. The Deli Research Institute was established under the supervision of the Deli Planter Association / Deli Planter Vereeniging (DPV) which carries out important research activities on ways to improve Deli tobacco quality. The process of consolidating tobacco plantations in Deli in 1920 left only four large tobacco plantation companies, namely *Deli Company*, *The Deli-Batavia Company*, *The Sanembah Company*, and *The Arendsburg Company* (Thee, 1976, p. 11).

Until 1940, almost all tobacco plantations in East Sumatra were operated by these four large plantations. Although the number of tobacco plantations decreased over the decades, the area planted to tobacco each year has not changed much, varying from 14,000 to 20,000 ha annually. The total area of tobacco controlled by plantations

is certainly larger, at least 8 times the area planted with the shifting cultivation system practiced by Deli tobacco farmers. The tobacco crisis has also taught planters an important lesson that highly profitable tobacco cultivation cannot be practiced everywhere in East Sumatra.

Labor Recruitment

The availability of worker is one of the supporting factors to sustain large plantations. However, in the case of Deli plantations, the labor factor has become a big problem, including since the first plantation owned by Nienhuys was opened in 1863. This is because the population in Deli is still sparse and they do not want to become plantation workers (Encyclopedisch Bureau, 1919, p. 132). In general, Malays and Bataks are not willing to work for plantations because they are used to shifting cultivation and do not like to work regularly from morning to evening. Therefore, to overcome labor problems, workers from outside Deli were brought in. The workers were procured through Chinese brokers from Penang and Singapore. However, it was later realized that it would be cheaper to bring in labor from Java. At the end of 1875 there were about 50 companies with about 4000 Chinese and 1000 Javanese and Keling (Encyclopaedisch Bureau, 1919, p. 132).

There are several factors that cause plantation entrepreneurs in Deli to recruit workers from Java. First, the uncertainty about which Chinese workers will be sent to the plantations because of the negative image of plantations in Deli spread by the Chinese press. Second, Javanese workers are considered to have a more obedient nature than Chinese workers who tend to be rebellious and conspire. Third, the Chinese government urges an increase in labor wages so that workers can set aside some of their wages to be sent to their families in China (Breman, 1997, pp. 64-67). These factors caused the plantation entrepreneurs to bring in workers from Java. The number of workers coming from outside Deli can be seen in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Number of Immigrant Workers in East Sumatra, 1883-1930

Year	Ethnics		
	Chinese	Javanese	Indians
1883	21.136	1.711	1528
1893	41.700	18.000	2000
1898	50.846	22.256	3360
1906	53.105	33.802	3260
1913	53.617	118.517	4172
1920	27.715	209.459	2010
1930	26.037	234.554	1021

Sources: Wie, 1977, p. 39.

The deployment of workers from Java, received support from the government, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century poverty in Java continued to increase due to population growth, narrowing of land, and increased living needs. Javanese workers were obtained through *Deli Planter Vereeniging* (DPV) agents

managed by Europeans with Javanese field workers, known as *Werek-Deli*. The main targets of these *werek* are villagers who are less educated, illiterate, still innocent so they are easily deceived. They were persuaded and deceived about the success story on the other side of the Deli plantation. Delis are often advertised as paradise lands, where money, land, and women are abundant. Many villagers in Java are lured into free cash advances, when in fact the down payments are considered debts that they must repay by reducing their income as contract workers (Lulofs, 1985).

Koelie Ordonantie

The immigrant worker system is not profitable for plantation companies. It has several disadvantages and requires very large costs so that it brings a certain inelasticity to plantation operations, and causes instability in the East Sumatran economy. It results fluctuations in population numbers which happened when the immigrant workers are imported or sent home in large numbers (Thee, 1976, p. 44). Due to the high cost of bringing in these workers, either from China or from Java, plantation companies to bind the workers and ensure that these contract workers keep all signed agreements. Moreover, there were many cases of workers fleeing from plantations after receiving advances due to inadequate supervision (Schadee, 1919, p. 13).

Given the difficult problems, the Dutch East Indies government in 1880 issued a regulation for plantation workers called *Koelie Ordonantie* ("Deli Data 1863-1938," n.d.). *Koelie Ordonantie* entered into force on October 28, 1880, is a regulation regarding the duties and obligations of the coolies. These workers are bound in a contract with the employers so that the workers find it difficult to terminate the contract. The contents of the Coolie Ordinance work contract are contained in the State Gazette (*Staatsblad*) No. 133 of 1880 which states that there should be no relationship between a coolie and an employer without a written agreement. In the contract written name and occupation. The length of work is 10 hours a day with a three-year contract period. The responsible official must prove that the contract is voluntary and the coolie confidently carries out the work assigned to him and must not leave the plantation without written permission. The contract stipulates the employer's obligation to provide accommodation complete with washing and drinking water facilities. When the contract expires, the coolies must be returned to their original place if the coolies so desire. Every violation of the employment contract will be punished, on the part of the employer in the form of a fine of not more than 100 guilders, on the part of the worker who does not receive wages of no more than three months.

The coolie ordinance was made to regulate the relationship between coolies and their employers. In the *Koeli Ordonantie* regulations, it is known that the *Poenale Sanctie* law was imposed on workers who run away. *Poenale Sanctie* ruled threats of refusal to do work or punishment if they escape. According to this regulation, workers are not allowed to leave the plantation area, workers must work obediently, workers cannot run away, and cannot rebel.

Coolies who violate the rules can be sentenced to imprisonment, fines, or forced worker for a period that exceeds the term of the contract. In addition, plantation

companies are also trying to reduce the level of wages for workers so that workers will always be in debt and as a result these workers are forced to extend contracts to pay debts. *Poenale Sanctie* basically aims to bind coolies to always obey the coolie ordinance rules. In practice, this coolie ordinance is more detrimental to the workers. Brand widely criticized the atrocities committed by the gardeners to their workers. This regulation protects the interests of plantation entrepreneurs rather than protecting the rights and interests of workers (Brand, 1902).

Social Class and Plantation Facilities

Communities in the tobacco plantations in Deli are classified and separated rigidly based on status and wage system, nation, skin color, and race. The division of labor on plantations is based on nationality. Tobacco plantation work organization has been determined, namely one plantation is led by an administrator who supervises 4 assistants, 1 chief supervisor, and 12 supervisors including *tandil*, with area of 280 ha (400 *bau*). An assistant can supervise 3 supervisors with 70 ha (100 *bau*), and 1 supervisor in charge of 50 contract laborers (Breman, 1997, p. 97).

Plantation communities are divided into four groups which include administrators, staff employees, non-staff employees, and labors (Mubyarto, 115). Europeans dominated the upper class. The European staff of the tobacco companies in Deli consisted of 740 people, not including the European staff of the Deli Planter secretariat and the Deli trial center which numbered 26 people. Of these, 556 were Dutch (Volker: 65). This upper-class society includes administrators or managers called masters or gardeners, assistants and plantation supervisors (*opziechter*). They are mostly adventurers from Europe who have ambitions to collect treasures. The second class which consists of Eurasian descent and contract coolies who have advantages. There are middle class groups who work as clerks (*kerani*) in the field of administration, generally Chinese people who can speak Malay, as the language of instruction on plantations. The third class is foremen (non-staff employees), including foreman planting, harvesting, processing, sorting, packing, and so on. Meanwhile, the lower class are the contract workers who are dominated by Chinese, Keling, and Javanese.

In addition, in the tobacco plantation community, there is also a division of worker based on ethnicity which aims to facilitate the accountability of the coolies in the event of unfinished work. The Chinese were assigned the task of planting and picking coolies, the Javanese as hoe coolies, the Kelings as porters and other transportation activities, the people from Bawean and Banjar islands as construction workers, and the Batak people help clear the jungle (Encyclopedisch Bureau, 1919, pp. 133-135). In 1884 the number of coolies in tobacco plantations was 26,000, who worked under the coolie ordinance and 6,000 workers. Of the 26,000 coolies, 21,000 were Chinese, 1800 Javanese, 1500 Kelings, 1200 Boyans, and 100 Malays. While most of the free workers were Chinese (Volker, 1928: 67).

The coolies who had arrived at the plantation were placed in barracks or huts that could accommodate twenty people. In each barracks there is a leader. The bed of porters was lined up, in the middle there was a place to cook, the environment was

very dirty and lacked water. Such conditions are very easy to cause disease (Breman, 144). The sewerage site is very close to the barracks, while the barracks themselves are full of mud during the rainy season, the walls are made of wood and the roof is made of nipa palm. The barracks had no windows, there was only one way in and out. They ate in the barracks bed. The coolies did not get a cupboard, they were only given a wooden box in which to store clothes and belongings (Lulofs, 1985).

Barracks for coolies at any time can be occupied by other coolies and they can also move to other barracks if desired by the little master who orders it to the foreman or *tandil*. Married couples try to make curtains with tattered cloth. The proposal to live in a separate cottage for married people was opposed by the gardener (van den Brand, 1902: 69). The existing facilities are very inadequate for the workers. When many coolies died due to the plague, the problem of workers' settlements was just beginning to become a serious concern for plantation entrepreneurs. In the records of the Snembah company, there was a death rate of 71 per 1000 people during the period 1890-1894. The biggest cause of workers' deaths was due to the cholera epidemic. For example, what had been done by Sanembah company in response to the epidemic, they paid attention to housing issues on the advice of dr. Schuffner who did a lot of research on tropical diseases (Janssen, 1914). Under Janssen's leadership, housing for Javanese workers was built and suitable for living in a Javanese village atmosphere. The house for married coolies was different from those who were single coolies. Housing policy for single *koolie* in an elongated barracks occupied up to 30-40 people.

Work Routines and Wages

To open a plantation and produce good quality tobacco, it takes many stages of work. The work begins with clearing land. All foreign plantations in East Sumatra were opened only by manpower. Clearing of groves of forest, felling of large logs, construction of water canals, and land preparation were carried out by plantation workers who were imported from outside East Sumatra. Javanese workers made a big contribution in clearing forest land in Deli land for plantations. At that time there were no machines. They only use simple tools such as hoes and machetes. The next work is nursery, tobacco planting, maintenance, supervision, and harvesting. After harvesting, the produce is transported from gardens and drying sheds. After drying, it is taken to a sorting warehouse, after which it is transported to the port for export.

Every day the workers do their routine. Fourteen days of work, a day of rest. Fourteen days toiling, exhausting and a day playing, smoking, talking about petty events. The coolies always worked in the same order. They were awakened by the sound of a gong, and went to bed with the sound of a gong. They run the job like a machine, without thinking and without understanding why the work is being done (Lulofs, 1985, p. 65).

At 5 a.m., the gong sounded. The foreman or *tandil* are responsible for the coolies in the barracks and check who is not working. Coolies walk in groups to work, and start work at 5:30 or 6:00, break at 11:00 for 1 or 1 and a half hours and return to work until 5:30 or 18:00. The rule of working for 10 hours a day in practice is often an excess

of 1 or 2 hours (Szekely-Lulofs, 1947, p. 215). The gardeners, both male and female, have to get up at four in the morning because the garden where they work is far away. At seven or eight o'clock in the evening they returned to the barracks where they rested. They work hard hoeing in eight to twelve hours a day, with very disproportionate rewards (Malaka, 2017, p. 68).

In addition to male workers, plantations also employ women. Women workers are related to tobacco plant care, including sorting or sorting, looking for pests and diseases such as caterpillars, harrowing the soil, tying and hanging tobacco leaves. According to the rules in the *koelie ordonantie*, female coolies only do light work including sorting and tying tobacco leaves, weeding nurseries and fields, looking for tobacco caterpillars, sweeping streets, and other work that is not burdensome (Breman, 1997, p. 101). But in reality, female coolies also do heavy work such as dredging pebbles from rivers, breaking stones, hauling and so on (Breman, 1997, p. 101).

The workers were tasked with making wards (a place for drying tobacco leaves) as well as barracks or other buildings related to plantations. The Keling people work as porters, namely carrying tobacco leaves in carts to the drying area or to the collection point. The Bengalis served as custodians (*opas*) of warehouses or housekeepers for big and small masters. The Chinese workers, had done to sowing tobacco for 40 days until the planting season, usually at the end of the month. Meanwhile, the Chinese coolies worked to raise young tobacco plants, watering, sowing, looking for caterpillars, and preparing the soil for sowing or planting.

The wages payment under the contract was f0.40 per day. Meanwhile, the minimum daily wage on the first contract for male coolies in East Sumatra ranged between 30 cents per day (1935-1937) and 55 cents (1920-1921). A survey conducted by the government in 1924 showed that the lowest wage for contact coolies in East Sumatra was 42 cents (Reid, 2011, p. 59). The wage rate of tobacco workers in East Sumatra can be seen in Table 2. If they work for 28 days in a month then they would receive f9.8 as their wages, which still be deducted from the down payment (*vorschoot*), so it remains only f2,4 (Sairin, 1997, pp. 29-31).

Table 2. Wages in East Sumatra Tobacco Plantation, 1913-1940 (cents/day)

Years	Daily Wages		Allowance for Food, Board, Health		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
1913	43	33	10	10	53	43
1920	54	42	44	44	98	86
1925	52	42	10	10	62	52
1930	58	44	10	10	68	54
1935	49	30	7	7	55	37
1940	52	29	5	5	57	34

Sources: Wie, 1977, p. 99.

Table 3. Expenditures for Living Cost of a Worker

Type of Expenditure	Living Cost/ month
Matches	f 0,10
Salt	f 0,11
Rice	f 2,22
Salted fish	f 0,90
Feeding oil	f 0,40
Vegetables	f 0,60
Tobacco	f 0,50
Korosene (5 bottles)	f 0,50
Total expenditure	f 5,33

Table 3 shows the amount of labor expenditures for a month that was greater than the income they received. With income of f2.4 they had to spend for living cost of f5.33. It means that the workers income was not sufficient to meet their daily needs. Therefore, many workers were involved in debts to the foreman or chief supervisor. By pledging their wages, they would not fully receive their wages because it had been deducted for debts payment (Hamka, 1962, p. 62). This involvement in debt makes it difficult for them to move.

Gambling and Bullying

Gambling activities and illegal habits in plantation areas are activities that were commonly found as an entertainment for workers to overcome boredom. Meanwhile, from the plantation side, this activity was deliberately held to bind the workers to continue working on the plantation, because through this activity the workers could still be in debt. The first debt for coolies was the down payment given. The money must be repaid after deducting their salaries. Furthermore, this debt circle is maintained by the plantations with gambling and opium.

This gambling activity is usually done after payday arrives. In 1935, the average wage received by tobacco plantation workers was 33 cents per day for male coolies and 38 cents per day for female coolies working 13 hours per day. The wages of Chinese coolies in tobacco plantations are higher than those of Javanese coolies, at 40 to 50 cents per day because they were judged to be better at doing their jobs related to discipline and endurance. In general, in tobacco plantations, salaries are paid twice a month, the big paycheck every first day and the small paycheck in the middle of the month (Lulofs, 1985).

Gambling become entertainment for the workers so that gambling activities become a social phenomenon that is inseparable from the lives of workers on plantations. Lulofs (1985) in his novel mentions that on the workers' payday which takes place every two weeks, the bookies are ready to persuade the workers to place their paychecks as bets for gambling games. Many of them immediately lost their salaries, so they had to get into debt again and eventually had to extend their contracts with plantation entrepreneurs in order to keep earning. Hamka in his novel, *Merantau*

ke Deli, describes the coolies who won gambling with a beaming face, while the losers looked furious because within two hours the salary money that had just been received immediately ran out on the gambling table. Gambling has become a tool for plantation entrepreneurs to snare coolies. This gambling has received support from the government by granting bookies permits and collecting gambling taxes. Through gambling, the coolies got into debt and were forced to extend their contracts making it difficult for them to return to Java. This is also described in the novel *Lulofs* (1985) about a coolie from Java named Ruki. After working as a contract coolie in Deli for decades and planning to return to Java, the night before his return he was tempted by the gambling table. In no time the savings accumulated over the years had vanished on the gambling table, even the clothes he was wearing.

There was a special place for gambling. Foremen, *tandils*, coolies were often involved together in gambling games. Gambling was usually managed by wealthy Chinese and organized through foremen who extended credit to coolies who were interested in borrowing money. The Chinese also opened grocery stores that served the daily needs of coolies, sold opium, ran pawnshops, became bookies, and built barracks for prostitution.

In addition to gambling, opium was also introduced to the plantation environment. This is inseparable from the interests of the colonial government in order to cover the costs of domestic government, courts, and the deployment of soldiers. According to Breman, through the bulk of opium smoked by the coolies, the costs mentioned above can be met. The income obtained through opium is a large income for the government, especially to increase regional budgets in general. Government revenue through opium and gambling in East Sumatra in 1901 reached f2,259,500, and in 1902 it reached f2,321,980.

Prostitution

The first workers brought to Deli were mostly male coolies. European workers for positions as management staff are also selected who are not married and many plantation companies prohibit their staff from bringing their children and wives to Deli. At the end of the 19th century, of all 55,000 Asian workers only about 10-20% were women. In Deli plantations, by 1912 there were 100,000 more men than women, and of the nearly 100,000 Chinese, about 93,000 of them were men (Stoler, 2005:49). Meanwhile, from Breman's records (1997:205) it is known that at the beginning of the 20th century there were 62,000 workers in Deli Maatschappij, which included 57,000 male coolies and 5000 female coolies. Both Stoler's and Breman's records show a disparity in the number of men and women. This inequality makes women in plantation communities a scarce resource and is often a source of conflict between Chinese and Javanese workers, and attacks against European workers, as illustrated in Madelon Lulofs' novel.

The imbalance in the number of men and women in the plantation community led to the emergence of prostitution activities. The female coolies were imported from Java, and the wages they received were lower than that of the male workers. Therefore,

their income is not enough to meet their daily food needs and even for other purposes. In van de Brand's report it is even stated that unmarried female workers do not have a house to live in but they live wherever they can find it. Hundreds of female contract laborers support themselves by serving the large number of bachelor coolies in the Chinese barracks. They were forced and forced into prostitution.

Stoler (2005:51) mentions various responses to the problem of venereal disease among coolies. Some officials argued that this was due to the low wages of female laborers, others stated that it was due to the depravity of the female coolies themselves as evidenced by the many incidents of child neglect and the frequent sale of the coolies' children. The female coolies were part of the bait used to lure male workers to the Deli and as part of the solace expected to keep them there. Prostitution usually occurs every pay night. At that time female coolies would dress up beautifully and become ronggeng dancers. After the ronggeng performance was over, it was continued with the practice of prostitution. Plantation entrepreneurs also facilitated by building prostitution tents on vacant plantation lands (Stoler, 2005).

Health State

Van Kol's report (1903:100) states that the mortality rate in plantations is high. For example, records in 1901 show that the number of workers who died reached 4,403 out of a total of 93,468 people. The workers generally suffer from anemia, fever, dysentery, eye disease, bone disease, and ulcers. The high mortality rate is mainly due to dysentery, syphilis, and heart disease. A source said that there were cases of syphilis. It was reported by a doctor that more than half of the women in one plantation district suffered from venereal disease. During a visit to one of the Deli plantations, Van Kol reported that in a room without a partition there was a woman with syphilis with malaria, beriberi, and leprose. She was a very young girl, lay face down of venereal ulcers (van Kol, 1903, p. 106). It means that the plantation community suffers from many diseases such as anemia (hookworm disease), skin diseases, malaria, and venereal diseases. In addition, outbreaks of cholera and flu were also reported.

Poor health facilities, low wages, dirty residential environment, working too hard, and very poor nutrition are some of the factors that cause the high mortality of plantation workers. During the period 1872-1884 it was reported that many plantation workers were reported to have died from disease outbreaks. During this time there were several cholera epidemics. It was reported that in 1876 213 patients at Deli Hospital died of cholera. In 1901 a cholera epidemic occurred again with the death rate reaching 40 per 1000 people (Darini, 2021, p. 27) The high mortality rate and to improve the health conditions of the workers the plantation side began to repair health facilities that were previously very minimal. Health services from plantations such as improvement of hospital facilities, environmental sanitation, and nurse visits can reduce mortality among plantation workers.

Punishment and Violence

Through the Coolie Ordinance, coolies live a difficult life on the plantations, especially with the very burdensome poenale sanctie. Any protest made by the workers will result in receiving a caning sentence. The coolies who leave their jobs, or run away, or neglect their work obligations, fight, kill, causing a coolie to be punished either in the form of fines, caning, or imprisonment. The gardeners in practice act as judges who try contract laborers who are considered to have violated the rules.

The life of the plantation coolies was based on contracts signed by coolies from both China and Java, so they could not escape from work. They are forced to work around the clock under the supervision of slackers, supervisors, and low-level employees on the plantations, who are generally stocky and very violent. They are also tasked with looking for traces of the coolies who fled. If they caught the coolie, they would beat him to a pulp and lock him up. Various forms of punishment that apply in plantations are a form of cruel punishment, for example being tied to a tree without being given food and water. Caning or being tied up and then beaten with a rattan or stick is a type of punishment that often afflicts contract laborers.

On the other hand, as a form of protest, the workers also fought back in the form of attacks on the superiors of contract workers. The contract laborers who could not hold themselves back often attacked their superiors, both Europeans and Javanese. According to Reid, almost every year there are attacks on plantation assistants. The highest recorded case occurred in 1930, where there were 60 cases of assault with a total of two deaths (Reid, 2011, p. 61).

Violence did not only occur between coolies and their superiors or supervisors, but also between coolies themselves. Often there is competition between coolies, especially regarding women's issues. As mentioned in the previous section, women are so rare that they become objects of struggle for male coolies, especially between Javanese and Chinese coolies (Lulofs, 1985).

Conclusions

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that Deli developed into a large plantation area in East Sumatra because its area is indeed potential for plantation economic activities and it is especially supported by the policies of the Dutch colonial government with the issuance of the Agrarian Law 1870 and other regulations that support plantation companies, especially related to labor issues. , such as Koeli Ordonantie. The existence of workers is one of the elements of the success of the plantation business in Deli. In this case, workers from Java and China played a vital role in the development of plantations in Deli.

Despite having an important role in the success of the plantation business, the life of plantation workers can be said to be far from prosperous. Through various policies that apply in plantations, the daily life of workers can be said to suffer greatly. They do not have freedom, but are bound by plantation life which is conditioned in such a way by the gardener. Their work routine is like a machine. They receive severe physical sanctions if they are deemed to have violated the rules. The facilities that can

be enjoyed on the plantation are very limited and even lacking. Meanwhile, the entertainment they get, such as gambling and drugs, actually makes their lives entangled in a cycle of debt and increasingly tied to plantations.

References

- Airries, C. (1995). Port-centered transport development in colonial North Sumatra". *Indonesia*. 59, 65-91.
- Breman, J. (1997). *Menjinakkan sang kuli: Politik kolonial pada awal abad ke-20*. Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti.
- Broersma, R. (1919). *Oostkust van Sumatra eerste deel: De ontluiking van Deli*. Batavia: Boekhandel & Drukkerij.
- Darini, R. (2021). Deli maatschappij's contribution to the transformation of East Sumatra, 1869-1940s. *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* 31(1), 22-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v31i1.25774>
- Deli Data 1863-1938 (n.d.) Mededeeling no.26 van het Oostkust van Sumatra-Instituut.
- Encyclopaedisch Bureau. (1919). *De buitenbezittingen oostkust van Sumatra*. 's-Gravenhage: Boekhandel & Drukkerij.
- Hamka. (1962). *Merantau ke Deli*. Jakarta: Jamhuri.
- Janssen, C.W. (1914). *Senembah maatschaapij: 1889-1914*. Amsterdam: Koeloffzen-Hubner en van Santen.
- Kol, Van H. (1903). *Uit onze kolonien*. Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff,.
- Malaka, T. (2017). *Autobiografi Tan Malaka: Dari penjara ke penjara*. Yogyakarta: Narasi.
- Mubyarto, et al. (1992). *Tanah dan tenaga kerja perkebunan: Kajian sosial ekonomi*. Yogyakarta: Aditya Media.
- Pelzer, K. J. (1978). *Planter and peasant: Colonial policy and the agrarian struggle in East Sumatra 1863-1947*. 's-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Ramayanti, A. (2018). Kehidupan kuli perempuan di perkebunan tembakau Deli Sumatera Timur, 1870-1930. *Avatara*, 6(2), 58-67.
- Reid, A. (2011). *Sumatera: Revolusi dan elite tradisional*. Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu.
- Rosyidah, I. (2012). Eksploitasi pekerja perempuan di perkebunan tembakau Deli, Sumatera Timur, 1870-1930 (Master thesis). Universitas Diponegoro.
- Said, M. (1977). *Koeli kontrak tempo doeloe dengan derita dan kemarahannya*. Medan: Percetakan Waspada.
- Sairin, S. (1997). Kebijakan perburuhan di perkebunan Sumatera Timur pada masa kolonial. *Antropologi*, 52, 54-64.
- Schadee, W.H.M. (1919). *Geschiedenis van Sumatra's oostkust*. Amsterdam: Oostkust van Sumatra-Instituut.
- Staatsblad van Nederlandsch Indie No. 133, 1880.
- Stoler, A. L. (2005). *Kapitalisme dan konfrontasi di sabuk perkebunan Sumatra, 1870-1979*. Yogyakarta: Karsa.
- Suwirta, A. (2002). Buruh perkebunan di Sumatera Timur: Sebuah tinjauan sejarah. *Historia: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah*, 5(3), 19-36.
- Szekely-Lulofs, M.H. (1985). *Kuli*. Jakarta: Grafiti Press.

- Szekely-Lulofs. (1947). Ons leven in de tabaks. In *Zoo leven wij in inidie*. 's-Gravenhage: W. van Hoeve.
- Thee, K. W. (1977). *Plantation agriculture and export growth: An economic history of east sumatra, 1863-1942*. Jakarta: Leknas-LIPI.
- Volker, T. (1928). van Oerbosch tot Cultuurgebied: een Schets van de Beteekenis van de Tabak, de Andere Cultures en de Industrie ter Ooskust van Sumatra, Medan: de Deli Planters Vereeniging.