

2013

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Recommended Citation

Mandracchia, Francis Joseph (2013) "Indonesian Tobacco: A Consumer Culture of Exploitation," *Proceedings of GREAT Day*: Vol. 2012, Article 7.

Available at: <https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day/vol2012/iss1/7>

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Indonesian Tobacco: A Consumer Culture of Exploitation

Francis Joseph Mandracchia

Globalization is a pervasive, man-made force that is on par with a force of nature in its ability to shape the way the world functions. It is the opening of markets, peoples, cultures, and governments into a global village. It is space and time becoming increasingly irrelevant as technology becomes increasingly relevant in daily life. It is the consequences of these increasingly common interactions as seen in Barber's (1992) "Jihad vs. McWorld" (Lechner & Boli 32). Barber's essay describes the ways in which globalization and local culture make war on each other and the nation state. His binary underscores the paradox of a global village: a world that is defined by evaporating political borders and free-flowing economies, cultures, and peoples. Under globalization, nations have seen great economic prosperity through trade liberalization policies, opening markets to the world economy (Barber 95). Institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank argue that trade liberalization is essential to development of economies. Trade liberalization is a large force behind globalization and has been known to cause unintended catastrophes in which people and nations are exploited (McMichael 151).

Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems theory seeks to better understand these processes and the dynamics of and stemming from globalization. The theory draws on the neo-Marxist literature of exploitation to explain the relative position of nation states in the world capitalist economy in three categories (core, semi-periphery and periphery). The categories are essentially economic zones with core countries such as the United States, representing nations with large, developed economies and high living standards. Nations like the Congo are in the periphery, defined as countries that have seen little economic growth, relatively low living standards, and exploitation from the core. Comparatively, the semi-periphery nations are stuck somewhere in between the former and the latter (Lechner 2001). Indonesia lies claustrophobically confined in between the

two categories in the semi-periphery. Though it looks to the core in hopes of greater wealth and prosperity, it nervously looks back at its past in fear of reverting to its peripheral status.

Since the 1970s, when the country first made efforts to attract transnational corporations and capital, it has seen trends pointing to development. World Bank data (2011) reveals growing literacy rates, gross domestic products, household expenditures, and life expectancy, all indicators of development. As such, the Indonesian people have greater participation in the world economy and in consumer culture. The tobacco sector is one of the industries in which Indonesia has experienced the greatest growth. Globalization has played a major part in increasing tobacco consumption both globally and within Indonesia. Ways in which tobacco has been imposed on Indonesia, from the colonial era to present day, and the consequences stemming from it are exploitative by nature. The consumer market and culture of tobacco threatens to reverse economic development by undermining the health of Indonesian smokers and non-smokers.

The inception of tobacco in Indonesian society was caused by global interaction. The Spanish imported the plant in 1601 to the island of Java, an island in the Indonesian archipelago (Arnez 50). Prior to the advent of tobacco, the betel nut served as both a stimulant and an important fixture of Indonesian culture for thousands of years (Staples & Bevacqua 3). Indonesians would chew the nut much like chewing tobacco. Reid claims, “It was a social necessity for every adult in society. To refuse to offer betel, or to refuse to take it when proffered, was esteemed a deadly insult” (Reid 531). The nut was given high value because of its many uses. While it was used as a means of social integration, it was also used in marriage ceremonies, adulthood rituals, and tributes to the deceased, among other uses. The cultural importance of the betel nut, coupled with a large supply and low relative cost, made the nut a ubiquitous object in Indonesian society. Tobacco would come to be used as an additive in the betel’s recipe, along with spices and other organic material (532).

As early on as the eighteenth century, it was understood that tobacco and the betel nut had similar stimulating effects on the human body (Penzer). With its similarities to tobacco in a social and pharmacological sense, the betel nut was usurped by tobacco in a relatively short amount of time (Arnez 50). The nut and tobacco served certain social

functions in Indonesian society (Porth, Neutzling & Edwards). In the case of the betel nut, it served as a mechanism for social congregation and amicability stemming from its stimulating properties. Tobacco, though lacking the significance the nut had in rituals and other important rites of passage, served a similar function as the nut in terms of daily social interaction. The congruence of the two commodities coupled with the coercive assimilation of Indonesians by their Dutch colonizers, may explain the relatively quick change from betel nut to tobacco.

While transnational linkages were a major actor in the diffusion of Dutch culture during this era, there was no mass media that rapidly broadcast information and culture. Instead, education was used as an essential vehicle of cultural appropriation to implement Dutch ideals into Indonesian society. The Dutch saw betel nut chewing as an extremely primitive act. Many young Indonesians opened their perspectives to the Dutch way of life and in doing so hoped to attain a higher status within society. Along with a higher status came access to education opportunities. Many rejected the betel nut for the more modern and Western white cigarette (Arnez 51). During the colonial era, educated Indonesians participated in their changing, Dutch-influenced culture by following many of the 'scripts' necessary to assimilate. The patriarchal society excluded women from education and in turn, the immediate conversion from the betel nut to tobacco.

In areas such as Tana Toraja, where betel-chewing among both sexes is still common today, the first generation to have been exposed to education was also the first to abandon betel. The whole image of "modernity" that education conveys to a young person is contradictory to the chewing of betel. Their association with education, and subsequent employment in the modern sector of the economy, is no doubt part of the reason why men generally abandoned betel-chewing a generation or so ahead of women (Reid 539).

These scripts usually envisioned a schism in the roles of each gender into separate spheres. Males would often enter into the public labor force for cash crops, or in some cases the modern work force, after receiving an education (McMichael 34). The Dutch sought to educate and employ Indonesian elites as civil servants, even though Indonesian labor was traditionally reserved for agriculture. The motives behind this initiative were to cut administrative costs by placing Indonesians into the primarily Dutch-run civil service sector, embedding Dutch favor into educated Indonesians and setting an example for those in the lower echelons of society (Ricklefs 156).

Coupled with a long Islamist influence, the Dutch ideology constructed a domestic sphere for women that defined their status as wives and “childrearers.” As patriarchy was the defining gender discourse of the West during the colonial period, men were primary actors in almost all facets of Indonesian society, excluding the home (Blackwood 864). This left little room for women to receive an education, especially since “the cause of women’s education...was never taken up as a government priority” (Ricklef 157). Women, and the lower classes, for a brief period, saw little in switching to tobacco. This could be attributed to their exclusion from participating in a predominately male, elitist culture. Exposure to education was important to the insemination of Western practices and ideals in Indonesia at that time (Arnez 51).

Indonesian education was at its height when education became accessible to the lower classes at the end of the nineteenth century. By 1930, there were over 1.7 million Indonesians being educated in Western educational institutions, as compared to about 270,000 Indonesians only 30 years prior (Ricklef 159). Betel nut use continued to decline through 1950. By this time it appears as though the nut was almost entirely gone from daily Indonesian life (Arnez 50). Tobacco became the drug of choice in social settings. Indonesians chewed and smoked tobacco, enjoying their new-found “modernity.”

Just as education was a gentrified structure, the ways in which the different classes within Indonesian society smoked also varied. The social elite of Indonesia usually smoked white imported cigarettes, while the lower classes would smoke hand-rolled kreteks (Hanusz 25). Kreteks are a hand rolled cigarette composed of cloves and tobacco, wrapped in cornhusks or cigarette paper (13). The Western white cigarette was easily identifiable in contrast to the hand-rolled kretek. While the imported Western cigarette was neat and white in appearance, the kretek varied in its color and its shape, and it left stains on its user. These apparent differences in appearance made smoking a conscious act that was closely tied to class image. Hanusz claims, “[e]ven if they personally liked the taste of kretek, well-to-do Indonesians...would light up a white cigarette in public and only enjoy their kretek in the privacy of their home” (25).

The cigarette industry again felt the effects of globalization in the 1970s that expanded the scale of the industry. The first event that spurred overall economic growth was an oil boom in 1974. The boom was mostly due to increasing oil prices mandated by

OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), of which Indonesia was a member (Booth 77). Investment capital, both foreign and domestic, flooded the Indonesian economy during this time (264). The influx of investment capital was abetted by an upsurge in government revenue from the growing economy, specifically in oil. Taking into account historical exchange rates, government revenue from oil alone went from 25,504 rupiah million (\$86 million US dollars) to 1,540,000 rupiah million (\$3.7 billion) in a matter of eight years, from 1968 to 1976 (Antweiler 3; Palmer 48). Growing tax revenues led to a rise in the number and size of low-interest loans given out by the government. Many industries grew as a result of the ascending Indonesian government and economy. The kretek industry was included in this trend as the loans attracted entry into the market by many (Hanusz 29).

Another phenomenon associated with the growth of the kretek industry was the ability to mass-produce their product. Kreteks were solely hand rolled, until 1968 when the Indonesian government granted a few large kretek-producing firms licenses to mechanize their production. By the 1980s, most firms were mechanized and this allowed several companies to dominate the market in future years. Firms seen on today's market such as Djarum, Gudang Garam, and Sampoerna, were mechanized in 1976, 1978, and 1983, respectively (Tarmidi 90). Today these firms are the top three market share holders in the tobacco economy, suggesting the mechanization of kretek production was essential to firms' development and success ("Tobacco Industry Profile—Indonesia" 3).

As such, many small businesses exited the industry because of their inability to compete with larger firms, thus consolidating the industry. They were unable to mechanize in time to compete with the larger firms that initially received mechanization licenses and they were more susceptible to fluctuations in commodity prices because of corruption within the Indonesian government. This can be seen in the aggregate data on the number of firms within the cigarette industry. In 1961, there were a total of 941 companies producing cigarettes. By 1985 there were only 143 companies making the commodity (Arnez 57).

Prior to mechanization, many firms were entering the kretek market because of the considerable gains the industry proffered. This led to a rise in employment and a subsequent labor shortage. Mechanization came at an ideal time for an industry that was

facing labor shortages (Saptari 14). The large firms that received the licenses to mass-produce experienced great benefit from this since they were able to cut labor costs as well as mass produce the commodity (Tarmidi 97). Data from the Barber et al. report (2008) reveals that after only after 1970 did cigarette production significantly increase. The industry manufactured 48 billion cigarettes in 1970 and expanded this to just over 200 billion sticks by 2000 (40). Though this data may provide a picture of the tobacco consumption that was developing, it does not take into account the large portion of the population that hand-rolled kreteks (Reid 540).

Once the industry had the capacity to turn out kreteks, they needed to expand their market. The companies turned to the middle and upper classes, which had been smoking white cigarettes, a symbol of modernity. The mechanization of kretek production gave the kretek a uniform appearance, similar to white cigarettes. Kreteks were no longer a poor man's smoke, one that he had to hand roll. To convey this large firms spent a great deal of money marketing the kretek as a "sophisticated smoke for a sophisticated generation" (Hanusz 29). Packaging emulated that of foreign white cigarette brands in an attempt to appeal to the young, professional class in Indonesian society. The kretek was becoming "a precise marker of the achieved status of the host who dispenses this new narcotic" (Reid 542).

The predominance of tobacco use in Indonesia and the rapid growth of the industry primed the market for transnational corporations' increased attention—and capital. The two major transnational corporations, Philip Morris International and British American Tobacco, were both part of the Indonesian economy by 1984. However, it was not until the aughts that the companies began acquiring local kretek firms (Lawrence & Collins 97). This was largely a response to the unsuccessful attempts to extend white cigarette consumption passed 14.2 percent of the market (Barber et al. 74).

In 2005, Philip Morris International became a majority shareholder in the kretek brand Sampoerna, attaining 97.5 percent of shares. Philip Morris Indonesia is another company owned by the conglomerate that operates a factory that produces much of the firm's white cigarettes, including Marlboro, a top seller among white cigarettes in Indonesia ("Tobacco Industry Profile—Indonesia," 3). British American Tobacco (BAT) existed as early on as 1908 and has been a significant force in the industry since

(Lawrence & Collins 97). By 2009, BAT acquired Benotel, a local brand of kretek, holding 85 percent of shares. Benotel is also a conglomerate which owns a number of other holdings like development, trade, and industrial enterprises as well as an amusement park. The company also operates through BAT, producing predominately white cigarettes with popular international brands such as Lucky Strike and Pall Mall. It has been reported that Lucky Strike has been particularly successful in gaining a niche among Indonesian smokers. Recently, Philip Morris International has become the dominant firm in the tobacco industry as a whole, commanding a 37.8 percent market share after acquiring BAT and its subsidiary Benotel (“Tobacco Industry Profile—Indonesia,” 3–4).

The make-up of local firms in the tobacco market composes a majority at 62.2 percent. While this proportion of the market is significant, there are a large number of firms in this sector. It is estimated that there are approximately 5,000 local firms sharing the local market. What is unique about the Indonesian tobacco market is its resistance to domination by transnational corporations. As one transnational tobacco executive explained, “tiny factories can compete in the same market as huge multinationals.” Performance of local companies is considerable, considering the presence of TTCs. Gudang Garam, a local corporation, has a 22.1 percent market share and is the top producer of kretek in the world (5).

The consumer tobacco market has been the impetus in the growth of the industry. There is a sizeable and growing demographic consuming tobacco products. With a total population of 245,613,043 people and 63.1 percent of males and 4.5 percent of females smoking by 2004, Indonesia has a sizeable tobacco population (Barber et al. 62; World Bank). Consumer preference indicates that kretek is the ideal tobacco product in the tobacco market, with 88.1 percent of smokers preferring kreteks to a mere 11.9 percent preferring white cigarettes. Tobacco composes 11.5 percent of total household income, which is a significant portion considering health and education account for 2.3 percent and 3.2 percent, respectively (64–5).

Advertising in Indonesia has been an innovation essential in appealing to consumers. The use of marketing has managed to socially reconstruct the perceived image of tobacco consumer culture into one that is as attractive as it is young and

masculine. As reflected by the large number of males who are smokers, advertising is particularly made relevant to images of masculinity. Advertisements also take advantage of inherent social cues in Indonesian society. Firms place advertisements near communities' culturally significant locations like mosques. Outside the places of worship large ads that simply read, "wish you well," are clearly sponsored by companies like Bentoel, a kretek firm (Reynolds 86).

Strategic promotions and sponsorships are aimed at young audiences. Though regulation prohibits advertising specifically aimed at children, these events are indirectly targeted towards young audiences. Sponsored shows similar to American Idol as well as concerts with international artists like Alicia Keys and the Cranberries are run by tobacco companies and draw much attention through attendance and media coverage. Sports events such as soccer tournaments and drag racing are also planned by the tobacco industry. Many times the intent of youth culture marketing is to attract smokers early, so the industry may gain lifelong consumers ("Tobacco Industry Profile—Indonesia," 8).

Factors involving price play a large role in the consumption of cigarettes, including kreteks. With the average pack of cigarettes (16 sticks per pack) costing around 0.58 US dollars, Indonesia has the most affordable cigarettes in South Eastern Asia. Beyond looking at price, Guindon et al. (2003) calculated the affordability of the commodity by dividing cigarette prices by South East Asian countries' per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and found these results still held, with Indonesia at the very bottom in terms of expense (Barber et al. 23). Contributing to the low cost of cigarettes is the Indonesian government's low tax rates that have remained relatively stagnant for a number of years (19). Another contributing factor to low relative cost is the ability of transnational corporations to invest readily available capital into expanding and mechanizing efficient production ("Tobacco Industry Profile—Indonesia," 3).

Cost is an important factor in consumption as it determines demand levels. Analysis of the effects of price on demand can be better understood by analyzing demand curves. In observing the Indonesian market, analysis has consistently found demand to be inelastic. Essentially, as the price of a good increases, consumers will still be willing to purchase the good, at any price (Barber et al. 27). Tobacco's addictive properties make elasticity more inelastic as consumers who are addicted will be more willing to pay

higher prices to meet their tobacco needs (33). Income elasticity, which studies the relationship between income and consumption, has also consistently found cigarettes to be a normal good. As such, when incomes increase, the consumption of the good increases (27). World Bank data reveals that incomes have been on the rise since the country opened its borders, which can be directly linked to higher tobacco consumption rates because the product is a normal good (World Bank). Moreover, the diversity in tobacco products at many different price ranges allows for consumers in most economic positions to afford the commodity (“Tobacco Industry Profile—Indonesia,” 7).

Many of the conditions of the tobacco market have made it ideal to attract new entrants. It is estimated that over 70 percent of these entrants begin smoking between the ages of 5 and 19 (Barber et al. 66). Some estimates indicate that 20 percent to 25 percent of ten-year-old boys smoke (van der Meij and Hüsken 50). Even more troubling is the fact that kreteks are more appealing to children as the cloves in the cigarette make the smoke sweeter. Many times the harsh flavor of a white cigarette will dissuade most children from smoking; however, the kretek’s taste is attractive to many first-time smokers. While there is little evidence on the effects of kreteks relative to white cigarettes, data has shown higher carbon monoxide, nicotine and tar emissions in kreteks (52). While no data is available, social workers have reported infant-smoking cases have even been on the rise (Putzel et al). The conditions of the market and the prevalence of cigarette advertising have created prime conditions for smokers to begin at an increasingly younger ages. The average age of smoking initiation has gone from 18.8 in 1995 to 17.4 by 2004 (Barber et al. 66).

Increasing childhood smoking rates are one of many effects of the market failures in the Indonesian tobacco economy. Lack of regulation has created an environment where consumers, especially children, are bombarded with cigarette advertisements. The Indonesian government’s lack of regulation has allowed ads to be extremely prevalent and invasive. Some of the few restrictions the industry faces are limiting advertising on television to only be broadcasted between the hours 9:30 p.m. and 5 a.m. as well as regulation requiring health warnings must be posted on all advertisements, with no minimum size or amount time the warnings must be shown for (Barber et al. 81; Danardono 99). Advertisements have been known to be placed right outside playgrounds

and schools (Rorandelli; Putzel et al.). The Centers for Disease Control found that, on average, 90 percent of children had been exposed to at least one cigarette advertisement over the span of one month (cited in Barber et al. 12). Lack of information on the health risks associated with smoking is also a prevalent issue. One study found Indonesian boys from 12 to 17 years old believed smoking one to two packs a day was not harmful to health, even though they were fully aware of the warning labels on the packaging (Ngi 797). Even less is understood about the health impacts of secondhand smoke.

Approximately 97 million Indonesian non-smokers are frequently exposed to secondhand tobacco smoke (“Tobacco Burden Facts”). Of the 200,000 deaths that are reported annually one-eighth, or 25,000, are attributed to secondhand smoke (Barber et al. 6). Large numbers of non-smokers are affected by secondhand smoke largely because there is little regulation where smokers can and cannot smoke. The government has no laws banning smoking in designated areas; however, some health facilities and schools have been known to ban use (“Indonesia: Tobacco Policy Status”; van der Meij & Hüsken 58).

With tobacco deeply engrained into Indonesian culture and exposure to the drug at unprecedented levels, the effects of the tobacco smoke on health and the economy are sure to be widespread. As the number of smokers is expected to continue to rise, illness will increase significantly as well. Little data is available on the effects of tobacco on public health in Indonesia because statistics are just beginning to emerge on the consequences of 25 years of smoking on health. Estimates available are extremely limited because of the lack of information as well as the low rates of health services use. Some predict the health care costs of tobacco related illness to be between \$484 million and \$1.2 billion. These estimates, however, are based on the healthcare costs of other countries, even further affecting the estimate’s accuracy (Barber et al. 13).

Future projections seem to point towards disconcerting trends. As nations continue to develop and tobacco consumption rises—as well as healthcare costs related tobacco, developing nations like Indonesia will face an “epidemiological trap, saddling their new health care systems [due to development] with considerable new health costs while having to continue treat infectious disease [related to tobacco]” (Kawachi &

Wamala 53). These aforementioned projections do not account for the possibility of expansion of the tobacco market to women in Indonesia.

Though the market has remained untouched by tobacco, trends in development have shown that as development increases, women's tobacco consumption increases as well. As global influence (namely Western influence) increases, entrenched cultural norms on gender begin to change. Further, transnational tobacco companies exploit this narrowing gender gap in order to expand their market to the female population (Hartwig et al. 204). Marketing towards women in developing nations takes cues from this and exploits the image of freedom and vanity, as women respond to different cues in marketing. Since women have both reproductive and productive duties, and consequent high stress levels, as the intersection of these two roles often cause, they are more likely to turn to smoking for stress relief (207).

Increases in smoking rates among women will lead to higher rates of secondhand smoke exposure among the family, especially among children. Illness and death associated with secondhand smoke, such as cancer and heart disease, will rise as well. Among children there will be severe effects, such as sudden infant death syndrome and asthma. Beyond this children will be raised in homes and in a society where smoking is seen socially acceptable (Hartwig et al. 230; Barber et al. 12).

Not only do the social spheres of Indonesian society face regression, but the Indonesian economy also has the potential to be greatly hindered by tobacco consumption. There is no doubt that constant, prolonged use of tobacco is harmful to health, as it is expensive. Health and the economy go hand in hand, as human capital is only worth as much as the ability of its labor force to contribute to the economy. A healthy work force means more productivity and less sick days. Healthy consumers can take full advantage of their working capacity. Greater and widespread accumulation of wealth in Indonesia would lead to increased investment in the economy (Barber et al. 8).

Contrasted with this is potential for unbounded tobacco consumption. Smoking can cause illness and decreased well-being. Statistically smoking is known to increase the rate of general infections (9). With the rise in illness comes more sick days (Eriksen & Mackay 40). Manual labor is greatly affected by this, as there usually is no compensation for missed work time. Smoking also causes increased death rates and many of these

mortalities occur when a person is in the productive span of their life. Early death of parental figures can also cause decreases in quality of life, including higher dropout rates, of their children (Barber et al. 9). Further, expenditures on tobacco in low-income households has been shown to increase poverty as it takes away from human capital investments such as money spent on healthcare and education (Esson & Leeder 35). Food is also affected by expenditures on tobacco consumption. Malnutrition is directly affected by smoking in the poorest of households. The father, who is usually the primary provider of income, will spend much of his wages to pay for his cigarette addiction and leave little left to feed his family (Semba et al. 9).

Tobacco is largely a consequence of globalization's ability to disperse commodity flows cross-nationally. Trade liberalization, a catalyst of globalization, which has ushered in gains in economies and qualities of life, has also embedded the potential to see these developments degenerate. As time goes on, emerging trends will point to the damaging effects of this commodity on people and society. Many of these models have played out in countries like the United States, where the tobacco industry was able to attain much success through the exploitation of the legal system, modern science and the trust of the people (Brand). Fortunately, the relative stability of the United States afforded its citizens, for the most part, retributive justice.

Countries like Indonesia face even more pervasive exploitation by tobacco companies, especially transnationals that are well aware of and have historically used the damaging effects of their product as a defense in litigation in the United States. Indonesian consumers are largely unaware of the effects of the product and the Indonesian government fears action in the defense of its people in fear of the fleeting capital of these corporations. Indonesia stands at the pivotal point of a dilemma—the balancing of economic interests with the interests and health of the people who make an economy possible.

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