RESISTING GLOBAL HEALTH COLONIALITY: DECOLONIAL PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN INDONESIA'S *KRETEK* COMMUNITY

Muhammad Abdul Aziz[1]
[1] *Post-Graduated School, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta*
Corresponding author: muhammadabdulaziz.m@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstract

Global health coloniality operates not only through public health regulations and governance but also through epistemic domination that determines who has the authority to define tobacco, nicotine, and health risks. In Indonesia, this dominance reinforces a universal biomedical paradigm that marginalizes farmer's lived experiences, the sociohistorical significance of *kretek*, and the local knowledge embedded within tobacco communities. This article examines how Indonesia's *kretek* community develops decolonial practices through knowledge production as a form of resistance against global health coloniality. Drawing on a qualitative cultural studies approach, the study employs decolonial perspectives, particularly Quijano's concept of coloniality of power, Mignolo's epistemic disobedience, and Maldonado-Torres notion of coloniality of knowledge. The analysis is based on critical readings of cultural artifacts produced by the *kretek* community, including zines, community archives, documentary films, cultural festivals, digital media, and farmers' narratives. The findings demonstrate that the *kretek* community goes beyond constructing counter-discourses against dominant global health narratives by actively producing decolonial knowledge through three interconnected practices: reclaiming farmers' epistemic authority as legitimate knowledge producers, creating alternative archives grounded in lived experiences and local histories, and rearticulating *kretek* as a cultural, ecological, and economic practice that cannot be reduced solely to a public health issue. These practices reveal that the struggle of Indonesia's *kretek* community extends beyond opposing restrictive regulations; it constitutes a broader project of epistemic decolonization that challenges the universalization of biomedical knowledge while advocating epistemic plurality in understanding health, nicotine, and tobacco. Consequently, the article contributes to cultural studies and decolonial academic studies by demonstrating how marginalized communities transform cultural production into a strategic site for reclaiming epistemic authority and contesting global health coloniality.

Keywords: cultural studies, decoloniality of knowledge, global health coloniality, *kretek* community resistance, tobacco

INTRODUCTION

Tobacco control has become an established part of global health governance. The World Health Organization (WHO) adopted Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003 and entering into force in 2005, established an international framework for reducing tobacco demand and supply through taxation, smoke-free policies, product regulation, health warnings, advertising restrictions, cessation program, and other measures (Roemer et al., 2005). The Convention was developed as a response to the transnational character of the tobacco epidemic and has since become one of the most widely adopted international health treaties. As of the present, 180 countries are parties to the Convention. The expansion of this regulatory framework has made tobacco a significant object of global health governance. It has also established a particular vocabulary for discussing tobacco, in which consumption, addiction, risk, disease, and

prevention become central categories for understanding the substance and the people who use or produce it.

The importance of this framework for public health is difficult to dispute. Tobacco consumption is associated with substantial morbidity, mortality, and measures aimed at reducing tobacco-related harm have an important place in public health policy. The problem examined in this article concerns a different dimension of tobacco control. Which is the production and hierarchy of knowledge through which tobacco is understood and governed. Global health studies have increasingly shown that knowledge production is itself shaped by unequal relations of power. Bhakuni & Abimbola (2021) was identify epistemic injustice in global health through the marginalization of certain knowledge producers and the interpretive frameworks used to understand their experiences. Ramani et al. (2023) similarly argue that global health studies remain heavily dependent on biomedical forms of evidence while giving insufficient space to experiential knowledge, local actors, and counter-dominant epistemologies. These concerns have become central to contemporary debates on decolonizing global health, which examine how historical and contemporary power relations continue to influence whose knowledge is produced, recognized, circulated, and treated as authoritative.

This epistemic dimension is particularly relevant when global health knowledge is applied across different historical and cultural contexts. The concept of coloniality provides a way to understand this problem. Coloniality survives the formal end of colonial rule through enduring hierarchies of power and knowledge. Within such hierarchies, particular forms of knowledge acquire the status of universal knowledge, while other ways of knowing are classified as local, traditional, subjective, or insufficiently scientific (Quijano, 2000). Recent studies on the decolonization of global health makes a similar point by showing that colonial relations can persist through institutions, research practices, expertise, and systems of knowledge production even when formal colonial structures no longer exist. The question, therefore, is not whether biomedical knowledge should be rejected. The more precise question is how biomedical knowledge becomes dominant, how its categories are transferred into policy, and what happens to forms of knowledge that do not fit within those categories.

The Indonesian tobacco context provides an important site for examining this question. Tobacco has a long history as an agricultural commodity and as part of the social and cultural formation of *kretek*. *Kretek* emerged through the combination of tobacco and cloves and developed within particular historical relations of production and consumption in Indonesia. Its significance extends across farmers, workers, traders, retailers, consumers, and communities whose livelihoods and cultural practices have developed around tobacco and clove production. The material collected for this study similarly shows that farmers are frequently positioned within policy and industry discourse as objects of regulation, suppliers of raw materials, or populations that need to adjust to broader economic and political agendas. This position matters because the marginalization of tobacco communities is not confined to questions of income, employment, or regulation. It also concerns their position as knowers.

The knowledge held by tobacco farmers is developed through prolonged engagement with land, plants, seasons, cultivation techniques, and local social relations. In *Ekspedisi Emas Hijau*, knowledge about tobacco cultivation is presented through farmers' experiences and through local concepts concerning soil, weather, planting time, leaf quality, and agricultural practice. The material documents form of knowledge that emerge from everyday interaction with the environment rather than from formal biomedical institutions. Such knowledge does not necessarily provide an alternative scientific explanation of tobacco-related health effects. Its significance that tobacco already has multiple systems of meaning and knowledge surrounding it before it becomes an object of global health regulation. The question of whose knowledge matters therefore becomes inseparable from the question of how tobacco itself is defined.

These bodies of studies provide two important starting points, but they leave a specific question open. Studies of Indonesian tobacco have examined the cultural politics of *kretek* and the contestation surrounding tobacco regulation, while studies of decolonizing global health have examined broader hierarchies in health knowledge production. Less attention has been given to what happens when a local tobacco community becomes an active producer of knowledge in response to those hierarchies. The question is how they create, organize, document, and circulate knowledge about

tobacco from their own social and cultural positions. This analytical focus to policy toward resistance as a process of knowledge production.

The materials examined in this study indicate that such knowledge production occurs through several interconnected cultural practices. Communities produce books and zines, document farmers' experiences, organize cultural festivals, create documentary materials, maintain digital archives, conduct participatory research, and circulate historical and local narratives through websites and social media. These practices form what can be understood as alternative archives: spaces in which experiences and forms of knowledge that receive limited recognition within dominant health discourse can be recorded and circulated. The earlier analysis of the *kretek* community identifies these practices as a form of counter-archive and connects them to Mignolo's (2011) notion of knowledge produced from the border of dominant structures. The significance of these practices lies in their ability to make local actors visible as producers of knowledge rather than merely as recipients of regulation.

This article asks "How does Indonesia's *kretek* community develop decolonial practices of knowledge production in response to global health coloniality?" The article argues that the decolonial practice of the *kretek* community operates through the reclamation of epistemic authority, the preservation of local memory and experience, and the production and circulation of alternative archives. These practices do not require rejecting public health or biomedical knowledge. They challenge the assumption that one knowledge system should possess exclusive authority over the meaning of tobacco across different social and historical contexts. This position is consistent with the decolonial concern for epistemic plurality and with recent calls to recognize experiential and locally situated knowledge in global health studies.

The article contributes to Cultural Studies and decolonial studies by examining the *kretek* community as an epistemic actor. This perspective places cultural production at the center of the analysis because knowledge is not produced only through scientific institutions, government reports, or academic publications. It can also be produced through community archives, narratives, festivals, documentary practices, and other forms of cultural work. The article consequently treats materials such as *Ekspedisi Emas Hijau* as parts of a broader process through which the *kretek* community constructs and

circulates knowledge about its own history, environment, livelihood, and cultural practices. The analysis also considers its internal limitations, including the possibility of romanticizing local knowledge, the uneven representation of farmers and workers, and the complex relationship between community advocacy and the interests of the tobacco industry. These tensions are necessary for understanding decolonial knowledge production as an unfinished and contested practice rather than as a completed political achievement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of coloniality provides the starting point for understanding how unequal relations of power can persist through knowledge even after the formal structures of colonial rule have ended. Quijano (2000) conceptualizes coloniality as a structure that continues to organize social relations through hierarchies established during colonialism, including hierarchies concerning race, labor, knowledge, and authority. Within this framework, modern knowledge acquired a privileged position by presenting particular European epistemic traditions as universal forms of rationality. Other forms of knowing were consequently positioned as local, traditional, subjective, or insufficiently scientific. Coloniality of knowledge therefore concerns more than the unequal distribution of information. It concerns the authority to determine what counts as legitimate knowledge, who can become a knower, and which ways of knowing can enter institutional and political decision-making.

Mignolo (2009, 2011) develops this argument through the concepts of epistemic disobedience and border thinking. Epistemic disobedience begins with questioning the assumption that knowledge produced from dominant epistemic locations can function as a universal measure for all social contexts. Mignolo does not propose abandoning modern knowledge. His argument concerns the recognition that knowledge is always produced from particular historical and geopolitical locations. Decolonial practice therefore involves creating spaces in which knowledge produced from marginalized locations can speak on its own terms. In this sense, decoloniality is concerned with epistemic plurality and with the redistribution of authority over the production and interpretation of knowledge.

This perspective becomes particularly relevant to the study of global health. Global health has developed through extensive networks of international organizations, universities, research institutions, governments, philanthropic foundations, and professional experts. These networks have contributed substantially to the production and circulation of health knowledge, yet their structures can also reproduce unequal relations between different regions and knowledge producers. Recent studies on decolonizing global health identifies epistemic injustice as one of its central problems. Bhakuni and Abimbola (2021) argue that global health research can marginalize certain groups as producers of knowledge while treating their experiences primarily as sources of data. Global health coloniality can be understood through the relation between knowledge, expertise, and governance. Health policies depend on particular definitions of disease, risk, evidence, and appropriate intervention. These definitions are not produced outside institutional structures; they are developed through research systems, professional expertise, international organizations, funding arrangements, and policy networks. The authority of global health consequently operates partly through the capacity to establish particular ways of understanding health problems as legitimate and actionable. This does not mean that biomedical knowledge is inherently colonial or that global health interventions are necessarily forms of colonial domination.

Decoloniality is understood in this study as an epistemic practice. A community cannot be declared fully decolonized simply because it produces an alternative narrative or challenges a dominant institution. Decolonial practices emerge through ongoing efforts to negotiate epistemic authority, preserve situated knowledge, and create spaces in which marginalized experiences can acquire public legitimacy. This understanding is consistent with recent studies that connects decolonizing global health with epistemic justice, pluralism, local agency, and the transformation of knowledge-production structures. Decolonial practice in this sense involves asking who speaks, whose experience becomes knowledge, how that knowledge is documented, and through which institutions or cultural forms it circulates.

This understanding also requires attention to the distinction between local knowledge and decolonial knowledge. Knowledge does not become decolonial simply because it originates within a local community. Local knowledge can contain its own

hierarchies, exclusions, gender inequalities, or political interests. It can also become incorporated into commercial or institutional agendas. A decolonial analysis therefore needs to examine the practices through which knowledge becomes a resource for challenging epistemic hierarchy. The earlier materials on the Indonesian *kretek* community illustrate several such practices, including counter-narrativization, the reclamation of epistemic authority, and the exposure of epistemic bias. These practices demonstrate that decoloniality is better understood as a contested process of knowledge production than as an intrinsic characteristic of a particular community.

Cultural Studies provides an important complement to the decolonial perspective because it allows cultural production to be examined as a site of power and meaning-making. Hall's (1997) approach to representation understands meaning as something produced through cultural practices rather than simply reflected by cultural texts. This perspective allows zines, documentaries, festivals, community archives, digital media, and other cultural forms to be examined as practices through which communities articulate their experiences and construct social meanings. Cultural production can therefore become an epistemic practice when experiences are selected, organized, documented, represented, and circulated as meaningful accounts of social reality.

This perspective is particularly useful for understanding the materials produced by the Indonesian *kretek* community. *Ekspedisi Emas Hijau* contains representations of farmers' experiences and local agricultural knowledge, while other community practices include documentary production, cultural festivals, participatory research, digital archives, and public communication. The significance of these practices lies in their capacity to transform situated experiences into forms that can circulate beyond the immediate community. The earlier analysis of the community's cultural production identifies these practices as forms of alternative archiving through which experiences excluded from dominant accounts can be documented and made publicly available. The zine is consequently relevant to this study as one component of a wider process through which the community produces and circulates knowledge.

Existing studies on Indonesian, tobacco has already identified important conflicts over meaning and regulation. Indonesian tobacco politics involves competing representations of tobacco control and *kretek* (Welker, 2021). She describes a conflict

between public health evolutionism, which can represent Indonesia's tobacco practices as backward, and commodity nationalism, which presents *kretek* as a distinctive form of cultural heritage and tobacco control as a threat to an indigenous industry. This study demonstrates that tobacco regulation is also a cultural and political struggle over how Indonesia and its tobacco practices are represented. Other studies on decolonizing global health have examined epistemic injustice, unequal expertise, research partnerships, and the marginalization of knowledge from the Global South (Bhakuni & Abimbola, 2021; Ramani et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative interpretive approach situated within Cultural Studies and informed by decolonial theory. The approach is used to examine how the Indonesian *kretek* community produces and circulates knowledge about tobacco, agriculture, culture, and community life. This study approaches them as sites where meanings and knowledge are actively produced. This perspective allows the analysis to examine the relationship between cultural production and epistemic authority. The primary materials collected by the researcher through previous fieldwork and research activities. The materials were selected purposively according to their relevance to the research question. Materials were included when they contained narratives, representations, or documentation concerning tobacco knowledge, farming practices, local histories, cultural practices, or the position of tobacco communities within broader debates about tobacco and health. *Ekspedisi Emas Hijau* is therefore analyzed as one part of a wider body of community-produced materials.

The materials were analyzed through close and comparative reading. The analysis focused on three dimensions of decolonial knowledge production; reclaiming epistemic authority, producing alternative archives, and circulating situated knowledge. The first dimension examines how farmers and community members are positioned as subjects who possess and produce knowledge. The second examines how local experiences, memories, agricultural practices, and histories are documented and transformed into community records. The third examines how these forms of knowledge are circulated through publications, audiovisual materials, cultural events, and digital media. These dimensions were then interpreted through the concept of coloniality of knowledge. The

analysis examines how dominant forms of knowledge establish particular forms of epistemic authority and how community practices negotiate those hierarchies. The analytical focus is therefore placed on the processes through which knowledge is produced, legitimized, documented, and circulated.

The researcher's prior involvement in collecting the materials forms part of the methodological context of this study. The analysis therefore treats the researcher's position as part of the interpretive process rather than assuming complete analytical neutrality. The materials were re-examined through the decolonial framework developed for this article, allowing an earlier body of empirical material to be interpreted through a new research question. The study also does not assume that community-produced knowledge is inherently decolonial. Local knowledge may contain its own exclusions, hierarchies, romanticization's, or relationships with economic and political interests. These tensions are therefore incorporated into the analysis, particularly when examining the limits and contradictions of the *kretek* community's epistemic claims.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Global Health Coloniality and the Epistemic Marginalization of *Kretek* Communities

The global governance of tobacco establishes particular categories through which tobacco is made intelligible as a public health problem. Within this framework, tobacco is primarily approached through concepts such as disease, addiction, risk, prevention, and population-level harm. These categories are important for public health intervention, but they also influence which forms of knowledge become relevant to discussions about tobacco. The dominant discourse tends to privilege epidemiological evidence, biomedical expertise, and policy-oriented knowledge, while the everyday experiences of farmers and communities involved in tobacco production occupy a less authoritative position. This creates an epistemic hierarchy in which some actors are primarily positioned as producers of knowledge and others as subjects to whom that knowledge is applied (WHO, 2004).

The position of tobacco farmers within this hierarchy can be seen in the ways they are represented in policy and public discourse. Farmers frequently appear as populations affected by tobacco regulation, suppliers within the cigarette production chain, or

beneficiaries of agricultural diversification programmers. Their knowledge of cultivation, land, climate, plants, and agricultural cycles receives considerably less attention as a form of knowledge in its own right. The distinction is important because farmers do not encounter tobacco primarily as an abstract health-risk category. Their relationship with the plant develops through cultivation, seasonal changes, soil conditions, labor, household economies, and accumulated experience. These experiences produce a situated understanding of tobacco that cannot be reduced to the categories used in global tobacco-control discourse.

This difference does not establish a simple opposition between biomedical knowledge and local knowledge. The two operate at different levels and answer different questions. Biomedical research may explain the health consequences associated with tobacco consumption, while farmers' knowledge may explain how a particular tobacco plant responds to soil, climate, cultivation techniques, and seasonal conditions. The epistemic problem emerges when one system is treated as universally authoritative while the other is excluded from legitimate discussions about tobacco. From a decolonial perspective, this is where the issue of coloniality becomes visible: the hierarchy concerns not only the content of knowledge but also the authority assigned to its producers.

The community's response can therefore be understood as an effort to reposition tobacco farmers and other community members within the field of knowledge production. Their publications, documentation, festivals, audiovisual materials, and digital archives create spaces where experiences that are rarely central to global health discourse can be recorded and circulated. The significance of these practices lies in the transformation of the community's position from an object of knowledge into a subject capable of producing it. This shift provides the starting point for understanding the subsequent practices of epistemic reclamation examined in the following section.

b. Farmers as Knowledge Producers

One of the most significant practices identified in the materials is the repositioning of farmers from objects of regulation into subjects of knowledge. This process becomes visible when farmers' experiences are presented as sources of explanation rather than as supplementary testimonies to an externally established argument. The concept of *siti-wiji-wanci-wahyu* provides an important example. As documented in the research materials,

the concept connects agricultural practice with place, seed, timing, and a form of guidance or understanding that emerges through the relationship between farmers and their environment. It provides a framework through which agricultural decisions are interpreted and practiced rather than functioning simply as a symbolic cultural expression. The significance of this knowledge lies in its practical function. It provides farmers with a way to organize experience and make decisions concerning cultivation (Benang, 2025).

Other practices documented in the materials, including *Among Tebal*, *puasa nandur*, *lekasan*, and *tumpang sari*, similarly demonstrate that agricultural knowledge is embedded within social and cultural practices (Benang, 2025). These practices connect farming with memory, ritual, environmental observation, and collective experience. They demonstrate that what may appear from outside as a collection of cultural traditions also functions as a system through which communities interpret their environment and organize agricultural activity. The decolonial dimension of the practice becomes significant in there. The community does not simply preserve cultural practices as heritage. Through documentation and circulation, these practices become claims about what constitutes legitimate knowledge about tobacco and agriculture. The act of recording a farmer's experience, explaining a local agricultural concept, or documenting a cultivation practice gives that knowledge a different public status. It moves knowledge from an ephemeral experience within the community into a form that can be encountered, discussed, and transmitted beyond the immediate context in which it was produced.



Figure 1: An explanation of Tumpang Sari in the Ekspedisi Emas Hijau's zine.

The experience changes the direction of interpretation by making situated experience part of the analytical starting point. The community consequently gains a degree of epistemic authority over how its own history, environment, and practices are represented. This reclamation remains incomplete and contested. The production of community knowledge does not automatically transform the institutional hierarchy that gives biomedical and policy knowledge greater authority in global health governance. Nor does every community narrative challenge dominant knowledge in the same way. What the materials demonstrate is a more specific process, the creation of spaces in which community members can establish themselves as legitimate producers and narrators of knowledge. This process becomes more visible when their experiences are collected into archives and cultural media, which forms the focus of the next section.

c. Producing Alternative Archives

The reclamation of epistemic authority becomes more consequential when community knowledge is documented and transformed into forms that can circulate beyond the immediate context in which it is produced. The materials examined in this study show that the *kretek* community undertakes this process through publications, zines, documentary materials, cultural events, digital archives, and other forms of community media. These practices preserve experiences that may otherwise remain confined to individual memory or oral transmission. They also establish a material record through which the community can articulate its own history and knowledge. In this sense, archiving becomes part of the community's epistemic practice.

Ekspedisi Emas Hijau provides a clear example of this process. The publication documents the experiences of tobacco farmers in *Temanggung, Boyolali*, and *Klaten.* They bring agricultural knowledge, local histories, and community narratives into a publicly accessible form. The significance of the publication lies in the way it assembles dispersed forms of knowledge into a coherent narrative. Experiences that normally exist within particular villages, farms, families, or agricultural practices are brought together and presented as part of a broader account of tobacco and *kretek* culture. Documentation therefore becomes a means of establishing continuity between individual experience and collective memory.

This process can be understood through the concept of the counter-archive. An archive is never simply a neutral collection of information. Decisions about what is recorded, preserved, classified, and made accessible determine which experiences remain visible in the historical record. Community archives can intervene in this process by preserving materials and narratives that are absent or marginal within institutional archives. The earlier materials collected for this research demonstrate such an orientation through the documentation of farmers' experiences, local agricultural practices, community histories, and cultural knowledge. The counter-archive therefore operates as a cultural practice through which the community determines what deserves to be remembered and how that memory should be represented.

The production of an alternative archive also changes the temporal dimension of knowledge. Agricultural knowledge is often transmitted through repeated practice and intergenerational experience. When such knowledge is documented, it becomes available for transmission in another form. A farmer's account can be read by someone who has never visited the agricultural landscape being described, a local practice can be encountered outside the community, and a historical narrative can become part of a wider public discussion. Documentation thus creates a relationship between lived experience and future audiences. The archive becomes a mechanism through which situated knowledge can survive beyond the circumstances of its initial production.



Figure 2: A website featuring reading material about kretek at bukukretek.com

The process is also important because dominant representations of tobacco tend to organize the subject around particular temporalities. Global health discourse often approaches tobacco through measurable indicators such as prevalence, mortality, disease burden, and policy targets. These categories produce a specific temporal orientation toward intervention: identifying a risk, measuring its effects, and reducing its prevalence. Community archives introduce another temporal dimension by connecting tobacco with agricultural histories, intergenerational knowledge, memories of place, and long-term relationships between communities and their environments. The difference is not simply between "modern" and "traditional" knowledge. It concerns the different ways in which social actors establish what counts as relevant evidence about tobacco.

d. From Community Media to Public Discourse

Producing an archive does not by itself establish epistemic authority. Knowledge becomes socially consequential when it can move between contexts, reach different audiences, and participate in wider processes of meaning-making. The *kretek* community therefore extends its knowledge production through publications, documentary works, festivals, digital platforms, and social media. These media provide channels through which farmers' experiences, agricultural knowledge, historical narratives, and cultural practices can reach audiences beyond the communities in which they originate. Circulation consequently forms the third dimension of the community's decolonial practice.

The materials collected for this study indicate that the community uses multiple forms of cultural production to create this circulation. Books and zines provide relatively durable textual records, documentaries translate community experiences into audiovisual narratives, festivals create spaces for collective encounter, while digital platforms allow these materials and narratives to travel beyond physical communities. The earlier research materials identify these practices as part of a broader ecosystem that includes publications, audiovisual documentation, festivals, participatory research, digital archives, websites, and social media. The diversity of these forms matters because situated knowledge does not circulate through a single institutional channel.



Figure 3: Temanggung Lembutan Festival 2026

This circulation also changes the relationship between community knowledge and public discourse. Knowledge produced within a farming community may initially address immediate concerns about cultivation, livelihood, or local history. When that knowledge enters a zine, documentary, festival, or digital platform, it becomes available for interpretation by audiences who do not share the same experience. The community consequently participates in defining how tobacco and *kretek* can be discussed in public. Its intervention takes place through the production of alternative categories, narratives, and points of reference rather than through formal authority over health policy.

Digital media further expand this process by reducing the dependence of community knowledge on physical proximity. Websites and social media allow materials produced within particular communities to circulate nationally and potentially internationally. This creates new possibilities for community actors to bypass some of the institutional filters through which knowledge traditionally becomes publicly visible. At the same time, digital circulation introduces its own conditions. Visibility becomes dependent on platform infrastructures, audience attention, algorithmic distribution, and the ability to produce content in forms that can compete within crowded media environments. Decolonial knowledge production therefore does not take place outside existing structures of power; it operates through them and must negotiate their constraints.

This point is important for understanding the relationship between decolonial practice and Cultural Studies. Cultural production does not simply transmit knowledge that already exists. The form through which knowledge circulates affects how that knowledge is understood. A farmer's testimony presented in a documentary, for example, produces a different encounter from the same testimony preserved in an archive or discussed in a community gathering. Each medium establishes different relationships between speaker, audience, context, and interpretation. The circulation of situated knowledge is therefore also a process of cultural translation. Such translation creates possibilities and risks. Greater circulation can increase the visibility of marginalized experiences, but it can also simplify those experiences to make them more accessible to wider audiences. Complex agricultural knowledge may become a symbol of "local wisdom"; cultural practices may be presented as evidence of authenticity; and farmers may become representatives of an idealized rural community. The circulation of knowledge can reproduce forms of essentialization even when its initial purpose is to challenge dominant representations.

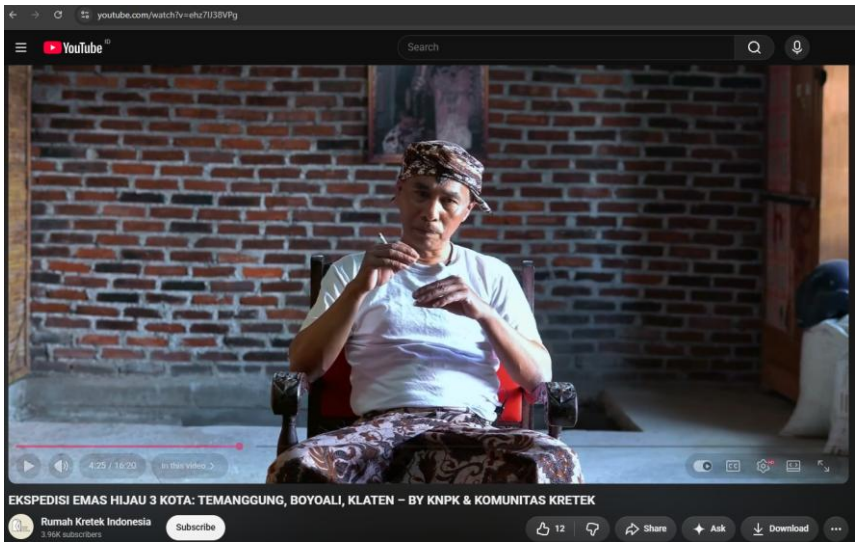


Figure 4: Ekspedisi Emas Hijau Documenter Video

Through cultural media, the *kretek* community gains opportunities to articulate its own categories, histories, and experiences and to contest representations produced exclusively through external institutions. Situated knowledge becomes politically meaningful when communities can influence the terms under which their experiences are

made visible. At the same time, this process reveals a central contradiction in the community's decolonial project. The creation and circulation of counter-knowledge can challenge the epistemic authority of global health discourse, yet the community itself operates within wider structures involving the tobacco industry, cultural nationalism, media platforms, and market relations.

e. The Contradictions of Decolonial Knowledge Production

The production of alternative knowledge does not occur outside existing economic and political relations. The *kretek* community operates within a field shaped by tobacco companies, state regulation, public health institutions, cultural politics, and media infrastructures. These relations complicate any understanding of community-produced knowledge as automatically decolonial. A knowledge project can challenge one hierarchy while remaining connected to another. Examining these contradictions is therefore necessary to determine the limits of the community's epistemic intervention.

One tension concerns the relationship between community narratives and the tobacco industry. The materials examined in this study place considerable emphasis on farmers, cultural history, local knowledge, and the effects of tobacco regulation. These emphases provide an important counterpoint to representations that reduce tobacco communities to populations at risk or objects of intervention. At the same time, the position of tobacco companies and their role in the broader political economy of tobacco receives less attention. The earlier analysis of the community materials identified this limitation, particularly in relation to the relationship between farmers, tobacco companies, and the wider production chain.

This absence matters because farmers' interests cannot be assumed to be identical to those of the tobacco industry. Farmers may depend economically on tobacco while simultaneously occupying a weaker position within the commodity chain. A discourse that places "the tobacco community" and "the tobacco industry" within a single oppositional category can therefore obscure differences in economic power and political interests. The production of counter-knowledge needs to account for these differences because decolonial analysis is concerned with relations of power within communities as well as between communities and dominant institutions.

A second tension concerns the representation of local knowledge itself. The documentation of agricultural practices and cultural concepts can challenge the marginalization of local epistemologies, but it can also transform complex practices into fixed representations of "local wisdom." Concepts such as *siti-wiji-wanci-wahyu* emerge from particular social and agricultural contexts. Once they are extracted from those contexts and circulated through publications or public events, they can become symbols of cultural authenticity. This process can strengthen the visibility of local knowledge while simultaneously simplifying its historical and social complexity. The same problem appears in the representation of farmers. Presenting farmers as knowledge producers is an important epistemic intervention because it challenges their conventional position as objects of policy. However, the category of "farmer" itself is not socially uniform. Gender, age, land ownership, labor relations, economic position, and access to cultural organizations can shape whose experiences become visible. A community archive may therefore challenge external marginalization while still providing greater visibility to some members than others. The question of representation must consequently remain part of the analysis of decolonial practice.

There is a tension between cultural resistance and cultural nationalism. *Kretek* can be articulated as part of Indonesian cultural history and as a product of local agricultural knowledge. Such claims can challenge representations that treat tobacco culture as an imported or socially backward practice. Welker's analysis of Indonesian tobacco politics is useful here because she identifies a tension between public health discourses that frame tobacco control through a developmental hierarchy and commodity-nationalist narratives that defend *kretek* as an indigenous cultural product (Welker, 2021). The cultural defense of *kretek* can provide an important counter-discourse while also producing its own selective account of history and identity. These contradictions do not invalidate the community's decolonial practices. They demonstrate that decoloniality is a process of negotiation rather than a position that exists outside power. Producing alternative knowledge can redistribute epistemic authority without eliminating the economic, institutional, and cultural structures within which that knowledge circulates. The value of the community's practices therefore lies in their capacity to open contested spaces of

knowledge production rather than in their ability to provide a complete alternative to global health knowledge.

This perspective also changes how decoloniality should be understood in relation to the *kretek* community. Decolonial practice is visible when community actors gain greater control over the production and representation of knowledge about their own experiences. It becomes more complicated when that knowledge is mobilized through cultural nationalism, selective representation, commercial relations, or platforms governed by external infrastructures. The community's epistemic project is consequently marked by both resistance and negotiation. The findings suggest that the most productive way to understand the *kretek* community is not as a unified alternative to global health institutions, but as an epistemic actor operating within a contested field. Its publications, archives, cultural events, and digital practices create opportunities to challenge dominant representations and establish situated knowledge as publicly meaningful. At the same time, those practices remain embedded in relations that can reproduce other forms of hierarchy. Decolonial knowledge production therefore involves an ongoing struggle over who can speak, what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is represented, and under what conditions it can circulate.

Overall, the findings show three interconnected dimensions of this struggle. The community first reclaims epistemic authority by positioning farmers and community members as legitimate producers of knowledge. It then produces alternative archives by documenting experiences, histories, and practices that receive limited recognition within dominant tobacco discourse. Last, it circulates situated knowledge through cultural and digital media, allowing community-produced narratives to enter wider public discourse. These practices constitute a form of decolonial intervention, while their internal contradictions demonstrate that epistemic resistance remains situated within broader relations of power.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined how Indonesia's *kretek* community develops decolonial practices through the production and circulation of knowledge in the context of global health coloniality. The analysis shows that the struggle over tobacco is also a struggle

over epistemic authority. Global tobacco-control discourse gives strong authority to biomedical, epidemiological, and policy-oriented forms of knowledge, while the experiences of farmers and communities are often positioned outside the dominant structures of knowledge production. The *kretek* community responds to this hierarchy by creating cultural spaces in which farmers, local practices, historical memories, and community experiences can become sources of knowledge.

The findings also demonstrate that decolonial knowledge production is not a politically neutral or internally homogeneous process. Community-produced knowledge can challenge the epistemic authority of global health institutions while remaining connected to cultural nationalism, commercial interests, media infrastructures, and existing social hierarchies. The limited attention given to the relationship between tobacco farmers and tobacco corporations, for example, demonstrates the need to distinguish the interests of tobacco-producing communities from those of the wider tobacco industry. Similarly, the elevation of local knowledge can produce selective representations of culture and may give greater visibility to some community members than others. These tensions do not negate the decolonial potential of community knowledge; they demonstrate that decoloniality operates through an ongoing negotiation of power.

The study argues that the Indonesian kretek community functions as an epistemic actor by producing and circulating situated knowledge through cultural practices such as publications, archives, documentaries, festivals, and digital media. These practices challenge dominant knowledge hierarchies by giving communities greater authority over how their experiences are documented and represented. The study contributes to decolonial global health by shifting attention toward community practices of epistemic negotiation and to Cultural Studies by framing cultural production as a site of knowledge production and contestation. It also identifies further research opportunities concerning regional variation, the representation of women and agricultural workers, and the relationship between community knowledge, public health institutions, and tobacco corporations.

REFERENCES

Bhakuni, H., & Abimbola, S. (2021). Epistemic injustice in academic global health. *The Lancet Global Health*, *9*(10), e1465–e1470.

Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *26*(7–8), 159–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275

Mignolo, W. D. (2011). Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: On (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience. *Postcolonial Studies*, *14*(3), 273–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, *15*(2), 215–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005

Ramani, S., Whyle, E. B., & Kagwanja, N. (2023). What research evidence can support the decolonisation of global health? Making space for deeper scholarship in global health journals. *The Lancet Global Health*, *11*(9), e1464–e1468.

Roemer, R., Taylor, A., & Lariviere, J. (2005). Origins of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. *American Journal of Public Health*, *95*(6), 936–938. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2003.025908

Welker, M. (2021). Indonesia's Cigarette Culture Wars: Contesting Tobacco Regulations in the Postcolony. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *63*(4), 911–947. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417521000293

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE.

Benang, R. (2025, May 23). Ekspedisi Emas Hijau. *Komite Nasional Pelestarian Kretek (KNPK) dan Komunitas Kretek*.

Organization, W. H. (2004). *WHO framework convention on tobacco control*. WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. https://iris.who.int/bitstreams/8b5abf4b-0ea0-4cb8-a77a-ecdc7ae85b43/download