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PRIVATE LANDHOLDINGS AND PLANTATION CAPITAL: MICHIELS–ARNOLD LANDEN IN EASTERN BUITENZORG (1887–1942)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of private landholdings (tanah partikelir) as a key foundation for plantation capital accumulation through a case study of the Michiels–Arnold Landen company in Eastern Buitenzorg from 1887 to 1942. It highlights the importance of private land in shaping Java's colonial agrarian structure, where land functioned not only as an economic asset but also as an instrument of juridical, fiscal, and administrative power. Addressing the limitations of macro-oriented agrarian historiography, this research focuses on local-level land management practices. Using historical methods with agrarian history and colonial political economy approaches, the study draws on land archives, government reports, concession maps, and company records. The findings show that private landholdings enabled land consolidation, regulated plantation production, and facilitated labor and social control more flexibly than state land. This study concludes that private landholdings served as both an economic base and a mechanism of colonial power that produced long-term agrarian inequality.

Keywords: *Private landholdings, plantation capital, Michiels–Arnold Landen, Eastern Buitenzorg, colonial agrarian history.*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran tanah partikelir sebagai fondasi utama akumulasi kapital perkebunan melalui studi kasus perusahaan Michiels–Arnold Landen di Buitenzorg Timur pada periode 1887–1942. Kajian ini menempatkan tanah partikelir sebagai elemen penting dalam pembentukan struktur agraria kolonial Jawa, yang berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai aset ekonomi, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen kekuasaan yuridis, fiskal, dan administratif. Untuk menanggapi keterbatasan historiografi agraria yang cenderung makro, penelitian ini menyoroti praktik pengelolaan tanah pada tingkat lokal. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode sejarah dengan pendekatan sejarah agraria dan ekonomi politik kolonial, berbasis arsip tanah, laporan pemerintah, peta konsesi, dan dokumen perusahaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tanah partikelir memungkinkan konsolidasi lahan, pengaturan produksi perkebunan, serta pengendalian tenaga kerja dan sosial yang lebih fleksibel dibandingkan tanah negara. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa tanah partikelir merupakan fondasi ekonomi sekaligus instrumen kekuasaan kolonial yang melahirkan ketimpangan agraria jangka panjang.

Kata kunci: *Tanah partikelir, kapital perkebunan, Michiels–Arnold Landen, Buitenzorg Timur, sejarah agraria kolonial.*

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INTRODUCTION

It is a historical inevitability that the system of private landholdings constituted one of the principal pillars in the formation of Java's colonial agrarian structure, enabling large-scale land control by European private actors from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century (Effendhie, 1999). Through mechanisms of land sales and concessions granted by the colonial state, private landholdings functioned not only as economic assets but also as instruments of power, conferring juridical, fiscal, and administrative rights upon landowners over both territory and resident populations (Luthfi, 2020). In this context, private landholdings generated agrarian relations distinct from those of state land, as landowners exercised extensive authority over land use, rent extraction, and the management of local labor (Furnivall, 2009). Such a structure rendered private land a strategic medium for plantation capital accumulation during the colonial period.

Private landholdings were not merely spaces of production but also a foundation for the integration of local economies into the global system of colonial capitalism (Zein, 2019). In West Java (particularly in Buitenzorg and its hinterland) private land expanded rapidly alongside rising global demand for export commodities such as coffee, tea, rubber, and other plantation products from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Eastern Buitenzorg, with favorable geographical conditions and proximity to Batavia as the colonial administrative and commercial center, became a crucial zone for private capital expansion. The availability of transportation infrastructure, irrigation networks, and access to rural labor further strengthened the region's strategic position as a plantation area (Boomgaard, 1999).

One company that significantly exploited the status of private landholdings in Eastern Buitenzorg was the *Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van Rijstlanden op Java Michiels–Arnold Landen*. After acquiring control over several private land estates in the late nineteenth century, the company developed multiple export-oriented plantation enterprises while constructing an integrated production network from upstream to downstream (Rejekiningsih, et.al., 2019). Ownership of private land enabled Michiels–Arnold Landen to consolidate landholdings, regulate cropping patterns, and control the distribution of output with greater flexibility than companies operating on state land (Leksana, 2019).

Private landholdings thus constituted the material basis for the company's capital expansion and sustainability into the early decades of the twentieth century. However, corporate control over private land affected not only economic structures but also reshaped agrarian relations and local socio-economic conditions (Andreas, et.al., 2019). In many private land areas, indigenous populations experienced shifts from independent cultivators to tenants, permanent laborers, or seasonal workers dependent on plantation enterprises. Traditional land rights were increasingly curtailed, while labor obligations and land rents intensified as mechanisms of colonial control (Kartodirdjo, 1991; Luthfi, 2020; Wahyono, 2019). In Eastern Buitenzorg, these relations produced distinctive social

dynamics in which plantation power intersected with local social structures and colonial administrative apparatuses.

Although private land has long been a subject of colonial agrarian historiography, a substantial body of earlier scholarship has tended to adopt macro-oriented and normative perspectives, focusing primarily on colonial agrarian policies, legal regulations, or general critiques of the system. Recent scholarship, however, has increasingly moved toward more empirically grounded analyses of local institutions, property-rights regimes, labour relations, and spatially specific mechanisms of agrarian control. De Zwart and Soekhradj (2023), for instance, demonstrate how local property-rights institutions shaped land distribution in colonial Java, while White and Taylor (2025) emphasize colonial legacies, plantation expansion, labour relations, and agrarian political economy as continuing concerns in contemporary Indonesian agrarian studies. More recently, Novandana and Setiawati (2026) have shown, through the case of Priangan, how colonial land classification and leasing practices created institutional foundations for the commodification and privatized access to land. Nevertheless, these studies have not specifically examined how private landholdings were operated by particular plantation companies as instruments of capital accumulation and corporate power within specific local contexts. Research on Michiels–Arnold Landen has largely emphasized production, commodities, and plantation units, without explicitly analyzing private landholdings as the principal basis of capital accumulation and corporate power. Such studies often treat private land as a structural category without examining how it was concretely operated by specific companies within particular spatial and temporal contexts (Sutherland, 2021).

The distinctive contribution of this study lies in analytically linking these three dimensions (private landholdings, capital accumulation, and corporate power) within a single historical framework. Rather than treating land merely as a productive asset, this study examines how control over private land enabled Michiels–Arnold Landen to consolidate property, organize plantation production, mobilize labour, and exercise administrative and socio-economic authority at the local level. In this sense, private landholdings are understood simultaneously as an economic foundation for capital expansion and as an institutional mechanism through which corporate power was established and sustained.

These limitations reveal an important research gap, particularly in understanding the reciprocal relationship between colonial agrarian systems and plantation capital strategies at the local level. A micro-historical approach addresses the limitations of previous macro-oriented studies by shifting the unit of analysis from colonial agrarian policies and legal frameworks to the concrete practices of a specific plantation company within a particular local setting. By examining Michiels–Arnold Landen as a central actor, this approach makes it possible to trace how formal colonial policies were implemented, negotiated, and operationalized through land consolidation, production management, labour control, and administrative practices. In this way, private land can be understood not merely as a legal or structural category, but as a dynamic socio-economic space in

which relations among land, capital, labour, and corporate power were produced and reproduced in everyday practice. Through the lenses of colonial agrarian history and the political economy of land, private landholdings can be understood not merely as a backdrop to production but as active instruments in shaping power relations, labor control, and the reorganization of rural society (van Zanden & Marks, 2012; Andreas, et.al., 2019).

This study aims to analyze how private landholdings enabled capital accumulation and the exercise of corporate power by Michiels–Arnold Landen in Eastern Buitenzorg between 1887 and 1942. The period 1887–1942 is particularly significant, as it encompasses the consolidation of colonial liberal economic policies as well as the crises and transformations preceding the end of Dutch colonial rule. Accordingly, this study *Private Landholdings and Plantation Capital: Michiels–Arnold Landen in Eastern Buitenzorg, 1887–1942* is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of how private land functioned as an economic, social, and political foundation within local colonial dynamics, while addressing a critical gap in scholarship linking colonial agrarian systems to concrete plantation capital strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs the historical method, combining agrarian history and colonial political economy approaches, to examine the relationship between private landholdings and plantation capital through the case of the Michiels–Arnold Landen Company in Eastern Buitenzorg between 1887 and 1942. Agrarian history is employed to trace changes in landownership, land use, agrarian relations, and plantation organization, while colonial political economy provides an analytical framework for explaining how control over land was connected to capital accumulation, labour management, and corporate power within the colonial system. Combining these approaches therefore enables the study to examine private land not only as an agrarian institution but also as an economic and political resource through which plantation capital and corporate authority were developed and sustained. The research utilizes primary sources consisting of corporate archives (Michiels–Arnold, *Cultuur- en Handelmaatschappij te Amsterdam*), colonial government reports, and official documents preserved at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI) and the Nationaal Archief in The Hague, the Netherlands. Colonial archival materials include *Besluit*, *Memorie van Toelichting*, *Register van Particuliere Landen*, tax reports, population censuses, and land lease contracts, which enable an examination of colonial policies, the legal status of private land, and administrative relations between the colonial state and landowners.

Company and family documents from the Michiels–Arnold archives comprise internal family records, financial ledgers, investment reports, and commodity production documents related to rice, coffee, rubber, and tea. Legal family documents, including wills, inheritance letters, and land sale deeds, are used to trace asset consolidation, capital inheritance, and intergenerational corporate transformation. Additional sources (concession maps, financial reports of the *De Raad van Bestuur* of Michiels–Arnold, and

contemporary newspapers including *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, *De Preangerbode*, *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, and *Java-Bode*) support the reconstruction of the broader economic context, market dynamics, and public representations of the company.

Data analysis was conducted through qualitative-analytical procedures encompassing heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Archival sources were selected on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, provenance, chronological correspondence with the period under study, and their capacity to be cross-checked with other contemporary records. Source validation was carried out through external criticism, including the examination of document origin, authorship, date, institutional provenance, and archival context, and through internal criticism to assess the credibility, purpose, consistency, and possible bias of the information contained in each record. When conflicting information was found across company records, colonial government reports, newspapers, maps, or other archival materials, the evidence was compared through source triangulation. Greater interpretive weight was given to records with clearer provenance, closer temporal proximity to the events concerned, and stronger consistency with independently verifiable sources. Where discrepancies could not be fully resolved, they were retained and interpreted as part of the historical context rather than being artificially harmonized.

The heuristic stage focuses on collecting and classifying relevant primary and secondary sources, recognizing that historical facts derive meaning through their interrelations. Source criticism involves both external and internal evaluation to assess the authenticity and credibility of documents (Herlina, 2008; Kuntowijoyo, 1995; Alamsyah, 2018). Interpretation is carried out through the analysis and synthesis of archival data to elucidate the relationships among land, capital, and power in plantation development and corporate management strategies (Garraghan, 1957). These analytical processes are followed by historiography, in which data are organized chronologically and analytically to present the company's development and agrarian dynamics in a systematic manner (Gottschalk, 1985; Renier, 1997; Abdullah, 1984; Atuahene, 2016). This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the interconnections between private land, plantation capital, and colonial power practices, while situating the dynamics of Michiels–Arnold Landen within their historical and contextual framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Private Land System in Colonial Javanese Agraria

Private landholdings constituted one of the most complex agrarian institutions in the history of colonial Java, as they combined private ownership with public authority within a single entity (Rahmadani & Saraan, 2022). In the context of the Netherlands Indies, private land did not merely denote a legal status of landownership; rather, it created a sphere of power that enabled landowners to exercise administrative, fiscal, and coercive authority over the populations residing on their estates (Pradadimara, 2018). This condition positioned private land as a crucial instrument in the accumulation of plantation capital, particularly in West Java, including Eastern Buitenzorg. A study of the

Michiels–Arnold Landen Company demonstrates how the relationship between private land and plantation capital developed historically through the support of colonial legal frameworks and exploitative political-economic practices.

Historically, the emergence of private land ownership can be traced back to the VOC period, when land was granted as a form of political and economic reward to individuals considered loyal to the colonial authorities. According to Bleeker (1863), this practice continued and became more systematic under the administration of the Dutch East Indies through large-scale land sales to European and non-European private actors. Raffles accelerated this process by transforming land into a marketable commodity that could be freely transferred, thereby shifting the relationship between the colonial state and land from direct control toward legally sanctioned privatization. Geertz (1983) emphasizes that private landownership around Batavia and the interior of West Java became the basis of landlord power, granting privileges over village populations, including the authority to collect taxes and regulate forced labor. It was within this context that the Michiels–Arnold Landen estate emerged through the consolidation of land purchases and inheritance from the late nineteenth century onward.

The enactment of the Agrarian Law (Agrarische Wet) of 1870 further strengthened the position of private land within the colonial legal system. The law formally recognized eigendom land as absolute private property protected by the state, while also creating extensive opportunities for private capital investment through long-term leasehold rights (Thee Kian Wie, 1977; Lindblad, 2002). The Agrarische Wet served as a legal-political foundation for the expansion of European plantation capital by providing legal certainty for land control and the mobilization of labor (Rachman, 2012). Within this framework, private land was no longer regarded as an anomaly but as a legitimate component of the colonial agrarian order underlying an export-oriented economy (Pradadimara, 2018). This position enabled companies such as Michiels–Arnold Landen to integrate land, capital, and labor into an integrated production system oriented toward profit accumulation.

The economic rights of private landowners were central to understanding the mechanisms of exploitation embedded in the system. Landowners possessed full authority to determine land use, establish tenancy arrangements, and extract various forms of levies from the population. Systems of land rent, contingent taxes, and *cuke* generated a steady flow of surplus for landlords without requiring their direct involvement in production. Kartodirdjo (1991) explains that the colonial plantation system introduced large-scale commercial agriculture that differed fundamentally from the subsistence-oriented, family-based farming systems of Javanese society. In practice, this transition transformed land from a means of livelihood into a capitalist instrument of production governed by the logic of the global market.

Beyond economic rights, private landowners also exercised administrative powers resembling those of the state. They were entitled to appoint and dismiss village officials, regulate labor obligations, and manage social life within their estates. *Staatsblad* 1836 No. 19, Article 40, provided the legal basis for these quasi-sovereign rights, including the authority to collect taxes on behalf of the colonial government. The relevant legal

provision is reproduced in Figure 1. Weak state oversight often resulted in the abuse of such powers for personal gain. Consequently, private land functioned as a privatized sphere of power within the colonial state, where the boundaries between public authority and capitalist interests became increasingly blurred.

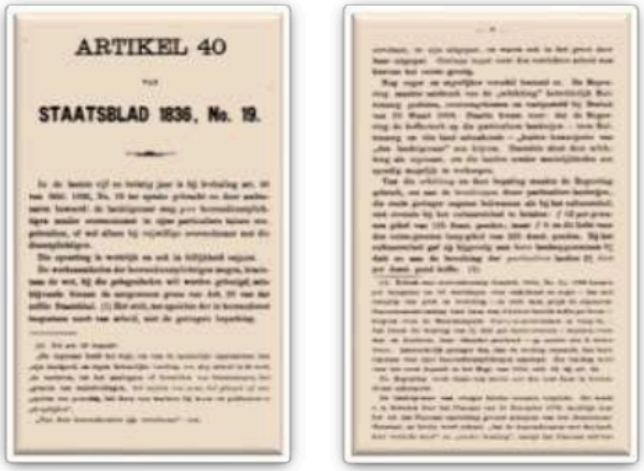


Figure 1. *Staatsblad* 1836 No. 19
Source: ANRI, *Inventaris van het archief van de Algemene Secretarie van de Nederlands-Indische*.

Within the framework of colonial political economy, the relationship between private landholdings and plantation capital was characterized by what Achdian (2008: 20) terms *colonial super profit*. Extraordinary profits were generated through low labor wages, extended working hours, and infrastructure costs borne by the colonial state through the taxation of the indigenous population. This condition was clearly evident in plantation enterprises in Eastern Buitenzorg, which benefited from access to transportation infrastructure such as roads and railway lines to facilitate commodity distribution without bearing the associated social costs. At the same time, such infrastructure accelerated population mobility, both as a source of labor and as part of the broader demographic dynamics of plantation regions (Wahyono, 2019).

Regarding the characteristics of private plantation production systems, Wiradi (2009: 60) argues that large labor requirements could not be fulfilled through a free labor market. Consequently, extra-market mechanisms (administrative and cultural coercion) became dominant in shaping social relations. On private land estates, these mechanisms operated through foremen (*mandor*) and village officials placed under the authority of the landlord. The resulting social structure was highly hierarchical, with landlords and their families occupying the uppermost layer, followed by foremen and religious leaders, while agricultural laborers remained at the lowest level (Wahyono, 2019). Tideman (1974) notes that foremen often aligned more closely with landlords' interests, as their status and income depended directly on them.

Approaches drawn from agrarian history and political economy enable a critical reading of these dynamics as part of broader colonial strategies. Although the Agrarische Wet recognized peasant land rights and prohibited land sales to foreigners, it simultaneously facilitated the appropriation of peasant land through lease contracts and labor control mechanisms (Shohibuddin, 2012). Through this arrangement, plantation capital could access land and labor without direct ownership. On private landholdings, however, such control was more direct and intensive, as landowners held both *eigendom* rights and quasi-sovereign authority (Sihaloho, et. Al., 2016).

In the case of Michiels–Arnold Landen, the synergy between private land status and plantation capitalist logic produced an economic entity that operated with relative autonomy from the day-to-day control of the colonial state, while continuing to benefit from state legal protection and infrastructure. Private land functioned as the material basis for plantation expansion as well as an arena for the formation of power relations that subordinated local populations. This analysis demonstrates that private landholdings were not merely historical anomalies but structural elements of the colonial system that integrated agrarian relations, capital accumulation, and power into a mutually reinforcing whole. Recent studies reinforce this interpretation by showing that colonial land regimes were closely connected to the expansion of private capital and the reorganization of agrarian space. Itawan (2023) demonstrates that Dutch colonial exploitation increasingly transformed land into a commodified economic resource and that the Agrarian Law of 1870 facilitated the capitalization of land by foreign private enterprises through various forms of property rights and concessions. Similarly, Pradita and Wardhana (2023), through the case of the private Mento Toelakan plantation, show how land leasing to European investors transformed agrarian landscapes and linked private investment to broader political and economic structures. These studies support the interpretation that colonial landholding arrangements functioned as institutional mechanisms through which land, capital, and political authority became structurally interconnected. The dynamics of private land and plantation capital in Eastern Buitenzorg thus reflected broader patterns of agrarian colonialism in Java, while also displaying local specificities shaped by landownership histories, capital networks, and localized practices of power. The study of Michiels–Arnold Landen reveals how land became a primary medium for capital accumulation and the reproduction of colonial power over the long term, and how the legacy of these structures continued to shape rural socio-economic history in Java until the late colonial period.

Eastern Buitenzorg as a Strategic Space of Private Landholdings

Eastern Buitenzorg occupied a strategic position within the colonial agrarian landscape of West Java due to the mutually reinforcing combination of geographical, ecological, administrative, and economic factors. From the early nineteenth century, the region was intensively mapped by the colonial government as part of broader efforts to inventory resources and consolidate power (Rahmadani & Saraan, 2022). The *Geografische Caart van de Stad en Ommelanden zo mede van het Voormalige*

Regentschap Buitenzorg (1815), reproduced in Figure 2, illustrates the colonial administration's early cartographic representation of Buitenzorg and its surrounding areas. The map suggests that the region was understood not merely as a geographical space but also as a territory with potential economic and political significance. Boomgaard (2004) emphasizes that colonial mapping functioned simultaneously as an instrument of knowledge and power, enabling the colonial state to measure land, classify populations, and systematically plan resource exploitation.



Figure 2. The Landscape of Buitenzorg, 1815
Source: *Geografische Caart van de Stad en Ommelanden zo mede van het Voormalige Regentschap Buitenzorg* (1815).

Geographically, Eastern Buitenzorg was characterized by a landscape of highlands and rolling hills, fertile volcanic soils, and relatively stable river networks. These ecological conditions created a cool microclimate that supported the cultivation of high-value plantation commodities such as tea, coffee, and rubber. Soil fertility resulting from past volcanic activity made the region particularly attractive to plantation capital, as it enabled high productivity without excessive initial investment. Kartodirdjo (1991) notes that colonial plantations tended to select areas combining fertile soils and suitable climatic conditions in order to minimize production risks and maximize profits. In this context, Land Tjibaroesa and other estates incorporated into Michiels–Arnold Landen fulfilled these ecological prerequisites.

Colonial transportation infrastructure was not neutral but was primarily constructed to serve export-oriented economic interests and to facilitate the movement of agricultural produce from the interior to port cities (Colombijn, 1998). The ecological appeal of Eastern Buitenzorg was further reinforced by its spatial proximity to Batavia, the administrative and commercial center of the Netherlands Indies. This proximity enabled efficient integration between production zones and export distribution centers (Oldenburger-Ebbers, 1999). Although early access to the region relied primarily on rudimentary roads and river routes, the gradual development of colonial transportation infrastructure improved connectivity between Buitenzorg and Batavia. The planned

railway routes across Java and Madura in 1871, shown in Figure 3, provide a broader context for understanding colonial transportation planning and the anticipated links between inland production areas and commercial centres. By the late nineteenth century, the development of roads and railway networks facilitated the movement of plantation commodities towards ports and commercial centres. These infrastructural developments strengthened Eastern Buitenzorg's integration into the colonial plantation econom.



Figure 3. Planned Railway Routes of Java–Madura, 1871.
Source: *Spoorwegkaart van Java* (1871), published by Smulders, Doc. Geoplaza, 's-Gravenhage.

The status of land in Eastern Buitenzorg as private landholdings added another dimension to the region's economic attractiveness. Data reported in Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad (1917) indicate that the Buitenzorg district contained one of the largest concentrations of private land in comparison with the urban areas of Batavia. As shown in Figure 4, the geographical distribution of private land around Batavia in 1917 illustrates the concentration of private estates in the wider Buitenzorg region. This pattern reflected a broader transformation in agrarian control, whereby landownership increasingly concentrated in the hands of European and Chinese capital owners at the expense of local populations (Boomgaard, 1986). Rachman (2017) further characterizes private landholdings as an extreme form of colonial agrarian privatization, in which landowners exercised authority not only over land but also over the populations residing on it. In Eastern Buitenzorg, this institutional arrangement provided plantation enterprises with opportunities to consolidate control over land, labour, and capital within an integrated production system.



Particuliere Landerijen.

Van alle residentiën bezit Batavia de meeste particuliere landerijen, verdeeld als volgt:

District		bouw.
Batavia (stad en voorsted.)	ongev.	9000
Meester Cornelis	"	3400
Kebajoran	"	2470[illegible]
Bekasi	"	7100[illegible]
Tjikarang	"	6070[illegible]
Tangerang	"	9163[illegible]
Mauk	"	5200[illegible]
Baradja	"	583[illegible]
Buitenzorg	"	460 000
Krawang	"	386 000

Eenige der grootste landerijen zijn

		bouw.
Pamanoekan en Tjiasami.	(Krawang)	300.000
Legalwaroelanden	"	86000
Tjipamingkislanden	(Buitenzorg)	7842[illegible]
Tjibaroesa	"	4357[illegible]
Pondok Gedehlanden	"	3119[illegible]
Solang	"	3025[illegible]
Tjitrap	"	2547[illegible]
Djasinga	"	2300[illegible]
Tjiomas	"	1026[illegible]

Figure 4. Private Land Ownership around Batavia, 1917
Source: *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 13 February 1917.

Agrarian colonialism often operated through ambiguities in land status that enabled collaboration between the colonial state and private capital in appropriating indigenous land (Shohibuddin, 2012). Land Tjibaroesa provides a concrete example of how private landholdings were transformed into a foundation of colonial capitalism. Initially, this land was held under private ownership acquired through mechanisms of purchase and inheritance since the seventeenth century (Molsbergen, 1937). Over time, changes in administrative status increasingly integrated the area into the formal colonial structure through the establishment of districts and *onderafdeling*. Rather than eliminating its private character, this process facilitated the incorporation of private land into the colonial bureaucratic apparatus.

The Michiels–Arnold Landen Company (Tjibaroesa, Tjipamingkis, Tjileungsi, and Klapanoenggal) capitalized on these conditions to develop large-scale, export-oriented plantation enterprises (Molsbergen, 1937). Land was managed intensively through contract-based tenancy systems and the recruitment of both local and migrant labor. Indigenous populations that had previously enjoyed communal access to land were gradually transformed into plantation laborers or tenant cultivators. Nineteenth-century demographic data indicate population growth in the Tjibaroesa district concurrent with plantation expansion. This increase was not solely the result of natural growth but also of labor mobilization driven by employment opportunities in plantation agriculture (tideman, 1974). This pattern aligns with Elson's (1994) observation that colonial plantation expansion in Java was frequently accompanied by significant demographic change as labor demands stimulated internal migration.

Colonial administrative structures in Eastern Buitenzorg further reinforced the position of private land as a strategic economic space. A hierarchical bureaucratic system

placed European officials at the apex, while local elites functioned as administrative intermediaries (Boomgaard, 1986). The appointment of *wedana*, *demang*, and community leaders from Chinese and Arab groups illustrates how the colonial state relied on existing social structures to maintain stability and ensure the smooth operation of production. Tideman (1974) notes that indigenous officials on private land often occupied a dilemmatic position, required to serve the interests of landlords while simultaneously maintaining social order among the population. This arrangement produced relatively effective social control without the constant presence of colonial officials in everyday life.

The dominance of private land over state and village land also generated ambiguities in land rights that facilitated the conversion of peasant land. Communal land rights (*hak ulayat*) were gradually eroded through lease contracts and colonial regulations that favored capital owners. Wiradi (2009) argues that this process formed part of extra-economic mechanisms that compelled peasants to enter capitalist relations of production. In Eastern Buitenzorg, these pressures were intensified by the region's proximity to Batavia, which enabled stronger administrative oversight and market integration.

The economic attractiveness of Eastern Buitenzorg for plantation capital also stemmed from relatively lower land acquisition costs compared to the urban core of Batavia, as well as the potential for long-term profits from export commodity production. Land Tjibaroesa, as part of Michiels–Arnold Landen, operated within this framework by exploiting extensive landholdings, inexpensive labor, and access to international markets via Batavia (Wahyono, 2019). By the early decades of the twentieth century, Eastern Buitenzorg was increasingly integrated into the colonial capitalist economy. Plantation agriculture operated intensively and became the backbone of the regional economy (Oldenburger-Ebbers, 1999). However, economic growth was not accompanied by social redistribution. Inequality between capital owners and plantation laborers deepened, generating various forms of agrarian unrest. Areas with high concentrations of plantations frequently became sites of labor protests and tax resistance in the early twentieth century (Boomgaard, 2004).

These dynamics indicate that strategic spaces such as Eastern Buitenzorg functioned not only as centers of capital accumulation but also as arenas of social conflict within the colonial structure. Eastern Buitenzorg can thus be understood as a strategic private land space due to its capacity to integrate ecological, spatial, administrative, and economic factors into a cohesive colonial configuration. The presence of Batavia as the center of colonial power provided a structural context that enabled private landholdings to flourish as a foundation of plantation capital. The case of Michiels–Arnold Landen demonstrates that land control in this region was not merely a matter of ownership, but part of a broader colonial strategy to organize productive space, control populations, and channel economic surplus toward the colonial core. Through the lenses of agrarian history and colonial political economy, Eastern Buitenzorg emerges as a crucial node within the network of colonial capitalism in West Java.

Michiels–Arnold Landen and Strategies of Private Land Control

The emergence of the Michiels–Arnold Landen Company in Eastern Buitenzorg in 1887 must be understood within the colonial agrarian configuration that had developed long before the company's establishment. Since the eighteenth century, the eastern Bogor region had been the subject of agrarian surveys and experiments conducted by the VOC, reflecting colonial perceptions of its ecological and economic potential. Archives of the Hoge Regering indicate that the Batavia Bovenlanden were envisioned as a potential plantation zone capable of supporting colonial demand for export commodities from the early period of European colonial rule in Java (ANRI, 1790). The early VOC experiments in plantation development in the Batavia region are summarized in Figure 5, providing a historical context for the subsequent expansion of colonial plantation spaces. Viewed against this longer trajectory, the establishment of Michiels–Arnold Landen represented not a historical rupture but a continuation of earlier efforts to consolidate land control and reorganize production space in accordance with colonial economic interests. The company's entry into Eastern Buitenzorg in 1887 can therefore be situated within a longer process through which the region's agrarian resources were incorporated into the colonial plantation economy.

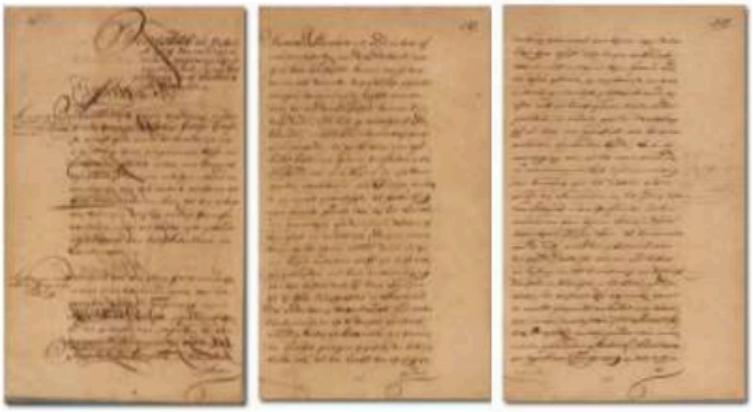


Figure 5. Early VOC Experiments in Plantation Development in the Batavia Region, Sources: ANRI, Hoge Regering, 1790: 544–557.

The VOC initially attempted to develop coffee cultivation in the Batavia region; however, these efforts proved unsuccessful. As an alternative, the VOC subsequently shifted to experimenting with pepper as a plantation commodity in Batavia. This policy was implemented through the establishment of a special commission tasked with investigating the feasibility of pepper cultivation in the Batavia *Bovenlanden* (hinterland), particularly in the areas of Jatinegara, Klapanunggal, Cipamingkis, and Cianjur.

The Kart van de Landen Michiels–Arnold, prepared by the company's board of directors in 1937, provides a visual representation of the company's territorial control and the spatial organization of its estates (Figure 6). Beyond delineating geographical

boundaries, the map illustrates how the company's landholdings were represented as an organized corporate space, structured according to the distribution and management of its estates. The areas of Tjibaroesa, Tjipamingkis, Tjileungsi, and Klapanoenggal were depicted as components of a broader territorial unit, highlighting their spatial relationships within the company's estate network. More broadly, colonial mapping functioned as an instrument of knowledge through which the state and capital could measure, classify, and organize agrarian space for administrative and economic purposes (Boomgaard, 1996). In the context of Michiels–Arnold Landen, the map thus reveals not only the geographical extent of the company's landholdings but also a form of capitalist rationality through which territory was rendered legible and organized as a corporate asset.



Figure 6. Map of the *Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van Rijstlanden op Java "Michiels–Arnold"*, Source: *Kaarten van plantages etc.*, *Inventaris van het archief van de Michiels–Arnold Cultuur- en Handelmaatschappij te Amsterdam*, 1887–1957, 2.20.02.02, 202; *De Raad van Bestuur Michiels–Arnold N.V.* (1937). *Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van Rijstlanden op Java "Michiels–Arnold", N.V., s'Gravenhage; 1887–23 July 1937*. The Hague: N.V. Drukkerij Mouton & Co., 66.

The company's expansion motives were closely linked to the requirements of capital accumulation, particularly the need to secure extensive landholdings as the basis for export-oriented commodity production. The company's capital of 4,000,000 guilders, divided into 200 shares, indicates that land functioned not merely as a means of production but also as financial collateral through mortgage arrangements. The land contributed by the heirs of J. W. Arnold formed the foundation of the company's capital structure (Soerabaijasch Handelsblad, 13 October 1887). This condition supports Kartodirdjo's (1991) argument that colonial plantations expanded through the integration of financial capital and land control, whereby land served both as a long-term asset and as a source of economic legitimacy. Recent scholarship provides further perspectives on this relationship. Ikhsan and Saidin (2023), examining tobacco plantation concessions in

colonial East Sumatra, demonstrate how foreign plantation investment depended on long-term land concessions that reorganized communal land relations and reduced local autonomy over land management. From an institutional perspective, Salam, Supardjo, and Nurlinda (2024) show that property rights in Java developed through deliberate political and legal interventions, particularly through successive colonial land policies that increasingly formalized land as a transferable economic resource. At a broader political-economic level, Batubara and Rachman (2022) conceptualize this pattern as "concessionary capitalism," in which large-scale land claims and state-mediated land allocations constitute an important mechanism of capitalist expansion in Indonesia. Compared with these studies, the Michiels–Arnold Landen case demonstrates a distinctive mechanism whereby private landholdings were incorporated directly into the corporate capital structure, functioning simultaneously as productive assets, long-term property, and financial collateral for plantation expansion.

MAL's land consolidation strategy was implemented through the amalgamation of multiple private landholdings acquired since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Company records provide more precise quantitative evidence regarding the scale and development of MAL's landed assets. By 1937, the company controlled a total of 115,073 hectares of private land comprising Tjilingsie, Tjibaroesa, Klappa Noengal, Tjipaminkis, Tjimapak, and Denambo (Tanah-Baroe). The development of this landed complex was accompanied by a gradual transformation in both management and land use. Between 1887 and 1892, the estates were entirely leased out; from 1892 to 1905, Tjipaminkis was brought under direct company management while Tjibaroesa, Tjilingsie, and Klappa Noengal remained leased; and after 1905 all estates were placed under direct corporate management. This transition was accompanied by the expansion and diversification of cultivated land. In Tjipaminkis, approximately 100 bouws of abandoned rice fields were restored to production, while Liberica coffee cultivation expanded to around 150 bouws. Rubber cultivation in Tjilingsie began on a limited scale in 1905 and reached 15 bouws by 1907/08. By 1937, the tea estates of Tinggardjaja and Selawangi covered 1,672 bouws (1,187 hectares), while the rubber estates of Klapanoenggal and Menteng encompassed 1,891 bouws (1,343 hectares). These figures demonstrate that MAL's land consolidation was accompanied by a progressive shift from leased estates toward centralized corporate management and increasingly diversified plantation production. Land acquisition was carried out through purchase and inheritance mechanisms sanctioned by the colonial regime. The purchase of Tjileungsi by Jonathan Michielsz in 1776, documented in the sale deed (*koopbrief*) reproduced in Figure 7, illustrates the gradual process of land acquisition that preceded the establishment of Michiels–Arnold Landen as a modern corporate enterprise.



Figure 7. *Koopbrief*, dated 28 August 1776, concerning the sale of the land of Tjileungsi to Jonathan Michielszz for 29,500 rijksdaalders, Source: Molsbergen, *Maatschappij tot exploitatie van rijstlanden op Java "Michielsz–Arnold"* N.V., 's-Gravenhage, 1887–23 July 1937, 12–13.

The management of private land by Michiels–Arnold Landen (MAL) demonstrates a high degree of rationalization. After 1905, the company completed its transition toward centralized and autonomous management by appointing administrators for each territorial unit. This administrative division of labor enabled more effective control over production, labor management, and the distribution of output. Tideman (1974) notes that plantation officials and indigenous administrators on private estates often occupied intermediary positions, maintaining social stability while ensuring the continuity of production. The company's financial performance over the period 1887–1942 is summarized in Figure 8, which presents its reported net profits and provides a financial perspective on the company's long-term development.

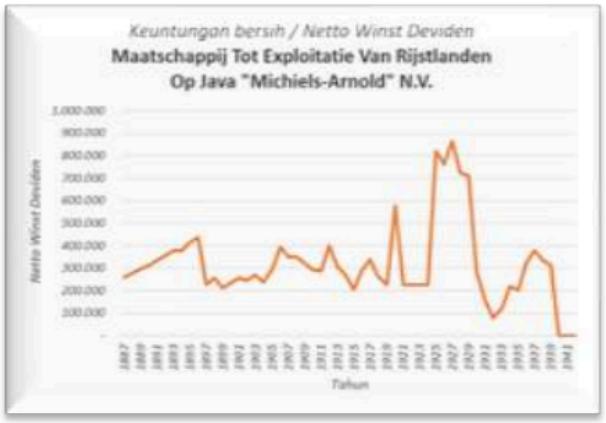


Figure 8. Net profits of the Michiels–Arnold Company, 1887–1942, Source: Compiled from various sources (company archives, contemporary newspapers, and reports of the Dutch stock exchange).

Commodity diversification constituted a key strategy in the management the MAL. In Tjibaroesa and its surrounding areas, the company not only continued the cultivation of rice as a long-established commodity but also expanded into tea and rubber plantations. This strategy reflected an adaptive response to global market demands in the early twentieth century, particularly the growing demand for rubber and tea (Molsbergen, 1937). In this context, Tjibaroesa functioned as a complementary production zone to Karawang, which was widely recognized as a major rice-producing region, thereby creating a more balanced production portfolio for MAL. Capital investment was directed not only toward land and crops but also toward infrastructure and transportation. The construction of roads linking Batavia, Karawang, and Tjibinong, as well as the Batavia–Bandung railway line via Cikampek, accelerated the mobilization of commodities and labor (Molsbergen, 1937). The emergence of stations and markets along these transportation routes generated new economic dynamics that connected plantation production to regional trade networks.

Technological changes in transportation had far-reaching social implications for local communities. In East Buitenzorg, markets, roadside stalls, and trading activities expanded, largely mediated by Chinese merchants. These developments, however, unfolded within an unequal power structure, as access to land and capital remained firmly dominated by plantation enterprises.

Within the MAL system, land functioned as a long-term asset underpinning colonial capital accumulation. The Agrarian Law of 1870 (*Agrarische Wet 1870*) provided legal guarantees for private investment, enabling companies to secure long-term land-use rights. MAL's integration into the administrative structure of the Netherlands Indies reveals the flexibility of colonial boundaries at the levels of residencies, *afdelingen*, and districts. Although Land Tjibaroesa was historically located within Karawang, its joint management with estates around Buitenzorg demonstrates that corporate operational logic often transcended formal administrative boundaries (Boomgaard, 1986). As Stoler (1985) argues, the colonial state frequently tolerated administrative ambiguity so long as economic interests were preserved. This helps explain how MAL was able to manage land across multiple regions with minimal obstruction.

The strategies of private land control employed by MAL illustrate the close interconnection between land consolidation, agrarian management, and capital investment within the framework of colonial political economy. East Buitenzorg emerged as a strategic space where ecological conditions, capital, and administrative power converged. This analysis reinforces the argument that *tanah partikelir* was not merely a form of land ownership but a colonial institution that enabled large-scale capital accumulation while simultaneously reproducing social inequality. This finding advances previous studies of colonial agrarian history in several respects. Earlier scholarship has generally emphasized colonial land policies, legal frameworks, plantation commodities, or broad patterns of agrarian transformation, often treating private land primarily as a juridical category or a setting for plantation production. The case of Michiels–Arnold Landen shifts the analysis to the company level and demonstrates how private

landholdings operated simultaneously as productive assets, a basis of corporate capitalization, and an institutional mechanism of territorial and labour control. By tracing the consolidation and management of land through a specific plantation enterprise, this study shows how broader colonial agrarian structures were translated into concrete corporate strategies involving land acquisition, commodity diversification, infrastructure investment, labour management, and administrative authority. The contribution therefore lies not merely in documenting another plantation enterprise, but in explaining the micro-historical mechanisms through which private landownership connected local agrarian relations to capital accumulation and the reproduction of colonial corporate power.

Private Land as a Basis of Production and Social Control

Private land in East Buitenzorg functioned as the primary foundation for the formation of an integrated colonial production system linking plantations, processing facilities, and logistical networks (Wahyono, 2019). Within the framework of colonial political economy, land was not merely a physical space but a material prerequisite for capital accumulation. Lasmiyati (2015) demonstrates that commodities such as tea, sugar, and coffee cultivated in the Priangan highlands became integral to a global economic system connecting raw-material regions to European industries and markets, with implications that were not only economic but also political. In this context, Land Tjibaroesa, managed by Michiels–Arnold Landen, served as a production node supporting colonial export interests through the intensive exploitation of private land.

Administratively, as part of the Buitenzorg *Afdeeling*, Land Tjibaroesa was officially directed to channel its production toward the district center of Tjibinong. In practice, however, commodity flows moved northward toward the coastal region via Tjikarang, which offered more efficient overland access. Colonial government archives reveal administrative dilemmas arising from the divergence between corporate economic orientations and colonial spatial planning (Darini & Ekayati, 2023). The strategic position of Tjikarang as a commercial hub was further strengthened by the construction of roads and bridges connecting Lemahabang, Tamboen, and Kedoeng Gede. The granting of a market license in Tjikarang in 1855 demonstrates that the colonial state accommodated the economic interests of private landowners when such initiatives were deemed capable of increasing trade flows (*Java-Bode*, 1855).

Labor relations on private estates reflected profound inequalities of power between landowners and local populations. Plantation workers and tenant farmers were embedded in a labor regime regulated through wage contracts and compulsory labor obligations. Boomgaard (1986) notes that the plantation labor system in Java combined elements of free and forced labor through contractual regulations that bound workers to companies for specified periods. In Land Tjibaroesa, this pattern was reflected in workers' dependence on the company as their primary source of employment and income. Such relations reinforced the company's position as a dominant actor in the everyday economic life of local communities. The photograph of female workers queuing to receive wages at the Michiels–Arnold Company's rice warehouse in Lemahabang, dated approximately

1925–1930, is shown in Figure 9. It provides a visual record of wage-payment practices within the company's plantation operations.



Figure 9. Female workers queuing to receive wages at the rice warehouse of the Michielsz–Arnold Company in Lemahabang (1925–1930), providing visual evidence of laborers' dependence on the company as their sole source of employment and income. The Michielsz–Arnold Company operated in the Lemahabang area, east of Batavia. Source: KITLV 68921.

Private land also generated mechanisms of exclusion from access to productive land for local populations. Customary land rights (*hak ulayat*) and communal forms of land control were gradually displaced by corporate private ownership legitimized under colonial law. The legal framework of private estates enabled landowners to control not only land but also the populations living and working upon it, severely restricting local access to agrarian resources. This dependency forced peasants to choose between becoming plantation laborers or tenant cultivators under conditions dictated by the company. Such arrangements demonstrate how land functioned simultaneously as an economic and a political instrument.

Surveillance and social discipline constituted central dimensions of private land management. Companies appointed *mandor* (foremen) and internal supervisory personnel to monitor labor, regulate settlements, and control population mobility. As Foucault (1977) argues, modern discipline operates through the regulation of space, time, and bodies, producing compliance without the constant use of overt violence. In the colonial plantation context, these mechanisms were implemented through rigid work schedules, close supervision of production, and the spatial organization of labor camps designed to facilitate control. Stoler (1985) further notes that surveillance practices on colonial plantations also functioned to maintain social stability and to prevent potential resistance.

31 Social control on private land was reinforced by the involvement of local elites who acted as intermediaries between the company and the population. Tideman observes that indigenous officials often occupied ambivalent positions, required to maintain order among residents while simultaneously serving the economic interests of landowners. This intermediary role made surveillance more effective because it was embedded in social

relations that appeared familiar and legitimate to local communities. At the same time, it deepened social fragmentation, as local elites derived symbolic and material benefits from their proximity to the company.

From the perspective of agrarian history, private land in East Buitenzorg illustrates how the colonial production base was constructed through the integration of land, labor, and infrastructure. Boomgaard (1996) argues that plantation expansion in Java was consistently accompanied by a reorganization of agrarian space that prioritized export production. Land Tjibaroesa offers a concrete example of how this priority was implemented through a shift in production orientation from local subsistence needs to global markets. Logistics, markets, and transportation networks were structured to serve export interests, even when these arrangements conflicted with colonial administrative planning.

The social implications of this system are evident in the growing dependence of local communities on plantation enterprises and the erosion of local economic autonomy. Wiradi contends that extra-economic pressures within colonial agrarian systems compelled peasants to enter unequal capitalist production relations. In East Buitenzorg, this condition was intensified by the concentration of land within a single corporate entity controlling nearly all productive land (Boomgaard, 1986). When land functioned simultaneously as a basis of production and an instrument of social control, the living space of local communities contracted both materially and symbolically. Reading private land as a foundation of production and social control demonstrates that the power of companies such as Michiels–Arnold Landen lay not only in financial capital but also in their capacity to organize space and populations. Land thus emerged as the nexus where capitalist logic and colonial practices of power mutually reinforced one another. This analysis underscores that agrarian dynamics in East Buitenzorg must be understood as part of a broader colonial structure in which economic production, social surveillance, and population governance operated in an integrated regime of land control.

Agrarian and Local Socio-Economic Impacts

Agrarian transformation in East Buitenzorg from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates how *tanah partikelir* (private estates) became a primary medium for the accumulation of colonial plantation capital. The case of Michiels–Arnold Landen shows that land control was not merely an economic matter but was deeply intertwined with colonial power relations that marginalized local communities. Within the framework of agrarian history and colonial political economy, private estates functioned as instruments for transferring control over production from smallholders to European private corporations operating under the colonial legal system (Breman 1989).

Changes in the agrarian structure of the Tjibaroesa area reflect a fundamental shift from community-based land ownership and management toward corporate domination. Land previously cultivated as peasant rice fields and dry farms was gradually relinquished or appropriated through contracts, debt mechanisms, and colonial regulations. This

process resulted in the erosion of local agrarian autonomy, as access to land became increasingly restricted. This phenomenon aligns with Elson's (1994) analysis of colonial Java, which emphasizes that the expansion of private plantations undermined village economic autonomy and deepened peasant dependence on the colonial market.

The integration of Tjibaroesa into the colonial market economy produced ambivalent economic consequences. On the one hand, plantation enterprises created employment opportunities for local residents who had lost access to agricultural land. On the other hand, this integration positioned them in a subordinate role as wage laborers with low levels of welfare. Low wages, long working hours, and strict surveillance systems generated structural dependence on plantation companies. These conditions reflect what Furnivall (1944) described as a colonial plural society, in which economic relations were governed by the interests of foreign capital without corresponding social integration.

The living conditions of plantation laborers in Tjibaroesa provide concrete evidence of these socio-economic impacts. Workers' housing typically consisted of crowded barracks or densely populated villages with inadequate sanitation. Access to clean water and healthcare was severely limited, increasing vulnerability to infectious diseases. Monotonous and nutritionally poor diets weakened workers' physical condition. This situation corresponds with Boomgaard (1986) findings on colonial plantations in Java, which emphasize that the reproduction of labor was often neglected in favor of production efficiency. Educational opportunities for laborers' children were almost nonexistent, allowing poverty to persist across generations and reinforcing entrenched social inequalities.

The dual impact of plantation expansion is also evident in the relationship between companies and surrounding communities. While plantations such as Tjibaroesa did provide employment that temporarily reduced local unemployment, their territorial expansion frequently led to the reduction or disappearance of traditional agricultural land (Luthfi, 2020). Relations between European plantation owners or managers and indigenous populations were hierarchical and paternalistic. Local communities were positioned as cheap labor expected to submit to colonial labor discipline (Luthfi, 2020). Such power asymmetries often generated latent or open social tensions, as noted by Houben (2002) in his study of colonial relations in Java.

The social inequalities that emerged in Tjibaroesa reveal a sharp polarization between capital owners and plantation laborers. Capital owners benefited from profit accumulation derived from plantation commodities integrated into global markets, while workers remained trapped at subsistence levels. A new social stratification replaced the relatively more egalitarian traditional agrarian structure. From a colonial political economy perspective, this outcome represents a logical consequence of plantation capitalism operating through land monopolization and the exploitation of cheap labor.

Before the expansion of plantation enterprises, the socio-economic life of Tjibaroesa was largely shaped by agrarian communities whose livelihoods depended on rice cultivation. Seasonal planting and harvesting cycles structured everyday activities

and reinforced communal relationships, while lowland rice fields provided the foundation of local food security and contributed to supplying colonial centres such as Batavia. The expansion of large-scale plantations subsequently introduced significant changes to this agrarian order. Growing demand for labour attracted migrants from various parts of Java and beyond, altering the demographic composition of the region and creating new forms of social diversity. At the same time, the increasing availability of labour intensified competition for employment, potentially weakening workers' bargaining positions. These local transformations formed part of a broader colonial agrarian landscape characterized by the concentration of private estates around Batavia, as illustrated in Figure 10. This regional context situates the experience of Tjibaroesa within the wider pattern of private landholding in colonial Java and provides a basis for examining how plantation expansion reshaped local livelihoods and labour relations.



Figure 10. Overview Map of All Private Estates in Batavia**,** Source: ANRI, KG-1 K-0026.

The transformation of land-use patterns following its conversion into *tanah partikelir* (private estates) marked a profound agrarian change with long-term consequences. Land was no longer perceived as the basis of communal life but rather as a productive asset optimized for the interests of capital. The legacy of this process is evident in persistent agrarian conflicts that continued into the postcolonial period. Spatial inequalities between former plantation areas and surrounding villages remain visible in land distribution and unequal access to economic resources.

Overall, the experience of the Michiels–Arnold Landen Company in East Buitenzorg demonstrates how private estates and plantation capital functioned as instruments of colonial domination that shaped local agrarian, economic, and social structures. The critical integration of agrarian history and colonial political economy enables a more comprehensive understanding of both the short- and long-term impacts of plantation expansion.

Recent scholarship has advanced the study of colonial agrarian change from several complementary perspectives. De Zwart and Soekhradj (2023) examine how sugar cultivation and local property-rights institutions shaped land distribution in colonial Java, while Novandana and Setiawati (2026) trace the legal and administrative processes through which land was made available for private leasing in Priangan. Bosma (2025), in turn, examines the changing labour regimes through which colonial commodity production connected local societies to global markets. Building on these contributions, this study shifts the analytical focus to the company level by examining Michiels–Arnold Landen in Eastern Buitenzorg between 1887 and 1942. Its distinctive contribution lies in demonstrating how private landholdings functioned simultaneously as productive assets, components of corporate capitalization and financial security, and institutional foundations for territorial and labour control. By tracing land consolidation, the transition from leased estates to direct company management, and commodity diversification, the study explains the concrete mechanisms through which private landownership was translated into capital accumulation and corporate power. Rather than treating landholding, production, and labour management as separate dimensions, this study integrates them within a single microhistorical framework to explain how a specific plantation enterprise organized productive resources and exercised corporate authority within the colonial agrarian order.

The broader significance of these findings extends beyond the local history of Eastern Buitenzorg. The Michiels–Arnold Landen case illustrates historical mechanisms through which large-scale land concentration, corporate control over productive resources, and the displacement of community-based agrarian relations became embedded in colonial territorial structures. These historical dynamics provide an important perspective for examining contemporary agrarian issues in Indonesia, including land redistribution, competing tenure claims, and unequal access to productive resources. Recent studies demonstrate that plantation concessions can reorganize customary land relations, generate agrarian fragmentation, and stimulate social resistance (Kurniawan et al., 2024). Research on contemporary land conflicts also reveals persistent power asymmetries between rural communities, plantation companies, and state actors (Berenschot & Saraswati, 2024). Furthermore, Suhardiman et al. (2026) demonstrate how colonial-era land deeds can be mobilized in contemporary Indonesia to legitimize claims over community land. These studies reinforce the relevance of examining the historical formation of landholding structures when interpreting contemporary agrarian inequality and tenure disputes. Nevertheless, the findings of this study do not imply a direct or uniform continuity between the colonial and postcolonial periods. Rather, they demonstrate that colonial landholding structures constitute an important historical layer for understanding how land claims, corporate territorial control, and unequal access to productive resources have been shaped and contested over time. The historical experience of Michiels–Arnold Landen therefore provides a contextual basis for examining contemporary agrarian conflicts and uneven rural development in Indonesia without assuming that present-day conditions are identical to those of the colonial period.

CONCLUSION

Private estates constituted a fundamental basis for the growth and persistence of plantation capital operated by the Michiels–Arnold Landen Company in Eastern Buitenzorg between 1887 and 1942. Through control over private land within the colonial legal framework, MAL consolidated productive resources, organized plantation production, managed labor, and strengthened corporate authority at the local level. Land therefore functioned not only as an economic asset supporting capital accumulation but also as an institutional and political instrument that structured relations between European capital owners and indigenous agrarian communities. The findings demonstrate that the expansion of plantation capital was accompanied by the erosion of local agrarian autonomy, increasing dependence on wage labor, and the emergence of new forms of social stratification, particularly in Tjibaroesa and surrounding areas. From the perspectives of agrarian history and colonial political economy, the study shows that private landholdings linked land control, capital accumulation, labor management, and corporate power within a single colonial agrarian structure. The case of Michiels–Arnold Landen therefore contributes to a broader understanding of how plantation enterprises transformed local agrarian relations and generated structural inequalities whose historical legacies remain relevant to the study of postcolonial land relations and agrarian inequality in Indonesia

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