

Abstract: The Journey of Coconut Oil

This research report is attempting to untangle the myriad of issues entangled within the process of producing and consuming coconut oil for global and local consumption. Through making visible the processes and agents, this research report highlights the historical trajectories of coconut palm as an important cash crop and the implications this has on rural farmers. The coconut palm, is perceived to be one of the most important cash crops, with over eighty million people depending directly on coconut farming or processing for their livelihoods. Even though this type of farming is considered one of the most common in many regions such as the Philippines, India and Indonesia, coconut farmers are paid poorly, most studies clearly pointing to the unequal distribution of income within the process of producing coconut oil. These studies, and this report demonstrate that income of coconut farmers does not meet the basic needs of farm workers, leading farmers to have low economic, material cultural capital. Which this report shows, contributes to the growing problem of farmers struggling to cope with the accelerating consumer demand for coconut oil, along with farmers being left with little or no options for escaping poverty.

Attempting to take on a multi-disciplinary approach, this report attempts to highlight the multifaceted scope which is revealed through the analysis of the politics of food. Looking specifically at the social stratification of a community, through to the environmental effects of coconut farming to produce coconut oil has within the world today. Along with highlighting some of the benefits, associated with the production of coconut oil as means of economic development. Through tracing the 'social life' of coconut oil and the journey this food takes to the global market, the paper sheds light on the often-contradictory conceptualisations of coconut oil as a health food. Showing how the perception of coconut oil has changed over time.

Through the above analysis, this paper attempts to demonstrate that there are multiple variables and actors involved not only in the production process but also the consumption of coconut oil. All of which have been shaped by public perception on the healthy or unhealthy factors associated with consuming coconut oil. Within any attempt to trace the political and social life of food, it becomes clear very early on that the process is complex and affects a great deal of actors. Which is proliferated by the consumer drive towards ethical consumption. By conducting research on the journey, a food makes to the consumer, it creates a more transparent view of the production-consumption relations, allow individuals to make a more conscious choice regarding the foods they consume. It also can dissect, to a certain degree, the power relations that are entangled within this process, which may reveal the political, economic arrangements on which the food has been marketed to a global audience. The production of food has often felt distant, this report will help to show audiences that the process, is very personal to those whom are within the process.

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