

***Kretek Capitalism: Making, Marketing, and Consuming Clove Cigarettes in Indonesia.* By Marina Welker. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2024. Hardcover: 264pp.**

In *Kretek Capitalism*, Marina Welker, an anthropologist at Cornell University, offers an ethnographic examination of Sampoerna, a subsidiary of Philip Morris International and one of Indonesia’s largest cigarette producers. This detailed study reveals the socio-economic and cultural landscape surrounding the production and consumption of *kretek*, a clove-infused cigarette distinct to Indonesia. Welker’s work transcends the conventional focus on the health and addictive aspects of tobacco, providing an in-depth analysis of how Sampoerna “uses contracts, gamification, self-improvement logics, and class, gender, and age hierarchies to extract overtime, shift, seasonal, gig and unpaid labour from workers, influencers, artists, students, retailers, and consumers” (p. 2). Welker’s central thesis is the paradoxical nature of *kretek*, which Indonesians perceive as both a cultural heritage and a capitalist commodity. This duality reflects broader debates in anthropology about capitalism as a cultural phenomenon.

The book opens with a historical context of Indonesia’s tobacco industry in the post-Suharto era (1998–present). Welker details how tobacco companies, including Sampoerna, align themselves with civil movements and organizations, such as the Indonesian Tobacco Farmers Association. However, these alliances are often backed by elite investors in the tobacco sector, highlighting the interplay between grassroots activism and corporate interests. Sampoerna’s case offers an example of how the tobacco lobby sponsors tobacco farmers’ groups to protest against anti-smoking regulations through appeals to national prosperity. Indeed, Indonesia holds a significant position in the global tobacco market, being the second-largest consumer and the sixth-largest producer (pp. 30–32).

In Chapter Two, Welker examines Sampoerna’s branding strategies, which are deeply intertwined with Indonesian culture, tradition and hypermasculinity (p. 41). The chapter also discusses the gender dynamics in Sampoerna’s marketing. In the 1950s, Sampoerna began a campaign with the slogan “*state ibis*” (motherhood), employing feminine images of familial obligation that contrast with typical masculine *kretek* consumption. This section underscores the role of cultural narratives in sustaining and promoting *kretek* consumption.

Welker's third chapter focuses on Sampoerna's use of "gamification"—for instance, it organizes competitions (*lomba*) on factory floors ostensibly to make work appear more fun and fulfilling, although the real aim is to increase efficiency and productivity—and rhetoric of a "work-life balance" as tools of capitalist exploitation. Despite offering competitive salaries and benefits, Sampoerna's practices often obscure the harsher realities of labour conditions, including inadequate workplace safety. This chapter critically assesses how such strategies benefit those with existing capital while offering limited broader social benefits, highlighting the contradictory nature of Sampoerna's corporate image versus its labour practices.

The fourth chapter delves into Sampoerna's efforts to recruit and incentivize various actors—including "sales promotion girls" (SPGs), artists, musicians and influencers—amid stringent regulations on tobacco advertising. For example, the government prohibits tobacco companies from showing cigarettes in any advertising, although tobacco firms can broadcast advertisements on television and radio between 9:30 p.m. and 5 a.m. Cigarette packages must also display textual and pictorial warnings, which are often quite graphic. Through social media and targeted promotions, Sampoerna crafts images of adulthood, confidence, youth and creativity. This chapter reveals the extensive network of collaborations and the strategic use of cultural figures in marketing *kretek*, showcasing the sophisticated methods employed to bypass advertising restrictions.

In Chapter Five, Welker explores how Sampoerna controls its retail networks. She discusses the fragmented and vernacular nature of Indonesian retail, which marketers systematically exploit, and challenges the notion of the "invisible hand"—a supposedly self-regulating market—by presenting a detailed account of the calculated market strategies that perpetuate the distribution of *kretek*.

The final chapter addresses the social implications of smoking and non-smoking, illustrating how these choices shape social identity. Despite governmental prohibitions and health warnings, many smokers perceive themselves as responsible for the consequences of their habits, both economically and healthwise. This perception allows companies like Sampoerna to deflect responsibility for the broader societal impacts of smoking, maintaining their image as benefactors to the nation.

Kretek Capitalism is a meticulously researched work that fills a significant gap in the study of *kretek* and capitalism. Welker's

ethnographic approach offers valuable insights into the unique cultural and economic dimensions of *kretek* in Indonesia—a topic not widely known outside the country. The book provides a comprehensive perspective on how *kretek* transcends mere commodity status, reflecting deep-seated cultural values and intricate socio-economic relations.

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