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Female Subjectivity in Masculine Public Space: Power Relations in The Visuality of Truck Beds

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Abstract

This article explores the visual representation of women in truck bed paintings as a cultural phenomenon that goes beyond mere street aesthetics. From a Cultural Studies perspective, truck bed paintings are seen as a space for identity contestation where women's subjectivity is constructed, negotiated, and subordinated under the masculine gaze. Using qualitative methods through critical semiotic reading, this research attempts to dissect how power relations operate in a public space dominated by men (drivers and conductors). The analysis shows that the visualization of women in truck bed paintings functions as an object of solace as well as a marker of patriarchal domination, where women's bodies are commodified into texts that convey messages of morality, sexuality, humor, and even social criticism. This phenomenon emphasizes the tension between masculine desires and the domestication of women's roles that are continuously produced repeatedly along the logistics distribution route. This visual narrative is mass-produced and reproduced along the road, creating a cycle of meaning that perpetuates gender subordination while making the highway a display space for men's power over women's images.

1. Introduction

Roadways are not merely asphalt conduits for vehicular mobility; they constitute dynamic cultural theatres in which narratives of class, gender, and identity intersect. Among the most conspicuous and persistent cultural artefacts within Indonesia's roadside landscape are truck-bed paintings (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). Frequently dismissed by academic elites and conventional aesthetes as "low art," kitsch, or peripheral decoration devoid of high artistic value, these visual forms, when examined through a Cultural Studies lens, reveal multilayered and complex meanings. They articulate the identity negotiations of a working class often marginalized within dominant narratives of national development.

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Truck-bed paintings do not emerge in a vacuum nor from mere decorative impulse. Rather, they are produced through an intense dialectic involving the কঠ realities of road life, economic pressures, workers' fantasies, and deeply embedded social constructions. For truck drivers and assistants, the truck bed functions simultaneously as a second home and a publicly displayed private space wherein anxieties, aspirations, and worldviews are projected. Each brushstroke or airbrushed image manifests a distinct roadside subculture governed by its own aesthetic logic—one shaped not by formal art institutions but by the rhythms of logistics and the hardships of nocturnal mobility (Magdalena et al., 2022). This paradox underscores how a highly functional industrial medium becomes a site of deeply personal emotional and ideological expression.

At the center of this visual assemblage lies a dominant motif: the female figure. Its presence within a sociologically masculine domain—characterized by machinery, exhaust, and physical labor—raises critical questions regarding female subjectivity. Representations vary widely, ranging from popular celebrities to maternal figures imbued with religious serenity, to explicitly sensual portrayals emphasizing physical allure. This diversity indicates that women are not construed as singular subjects but rather as a symbolic spectrum, mobilized according to the psychological needs of male producers and viewers (Bourdieu et al., 2000).

Within this framework, women function as mobile visual "texts" consumed by thousands of viewers along logistical routes. In male-dominated public spaces, women are deprived of the authority to define their own identities; instead, these identities are appropriated, manipulated, and reconstituted by male subjects for divergent, often contradictory purposes (Ajidarma, 2020). On one hand, female imagery serves as visual entertainment, alleviating the monotony and fatigue of long-distance drivers, thereby reducing women to consumable objects stripped of agency. On the other hand, such imagery paradoxically conveys rigid moral prescriptions—frequently juxtaposing idealized female figures with messages of fidelity, domestic duty, and warnings against temptation. This dual function enacts a visual domestication of women within a non-domestic space, legitimizing patriarchal moral expectations and reinforcing gendered surveillance.

The commodification of female bodies in these visual texts is often intertwined with social critique. Female imagery is deployed to articulate economic hardship or systemic injustice; however, such critique frequently instrumentalizes women as symbolic surrogates (Karkono et al., 2020). Women become metaphors for suffering, pleasure, or systemic failure, thereby reinforcing male-centered narratives. For instance, depictions of weeping women are commonly linked to familial economic struggles, positioning female emotion as a device to validate male labor and sacrifice. In such constructions, women are reduced to narrative instruments that amplify male identity as resilient providers.

This phenomenon reflects the enduring force of patriarchy in structuring public space. Rather than functioning as inclusive domains, roadways are reaffirmed as masculinized territories wherein women appear only in representations sanctioned by the male gaze ("Challenging the patriarchal culture; Feminist critical discourse analysis of the Indonesian environmental heroines," 2023). Representations of women as autonomous professionals or authoritative agents within this space are largely absent. Even ostensibly "empowered" portrayals remain framed within sexualized aesthetics, prioritizing male visual gratification over female autonomy.

From a semiotic perspective, truck-bed paintings constitute complex sign systems in which signifiers (female images) and signifieds (moral, sexual, or social meanings) are arbitrarily constructed through masculine power (Nuriarta, 2023). Women's exclusion from this meaning-making process evidences ongoing gender subordination. Circulating along logistical networks—from ports to traditional markets—these visual narratives perpetuate stereotypes and normalize

objectification. Each passing truck bearing exploitative imagery reaffirms the notion that women's bodies are publicly available for interpretation, evaluation, and labeling by male audiences.

A critical deconstruction of truck-bed paintings reveals that aesthetics are inseparable from political and ideological interests. Far from being naïve "popular entertainment," these artefacts function as sites where patriarchal ideology operates both subtly and pervasively. Beneath their vibrant colors and humorous slogans lie entrenched structures of inequality. To understand these paintings is to recognize how women are simultaneously venerated as visual objects and constrained by moral expectations—rendered as texts open to public consumption yet denied authorship over their own narratives. As long as roadways continue to serve as stages for such unequal cultural performances, the struggle to reclaim women's agency and subjectivity within public space remains an urgent and ongoing imperative.

2. Materials and Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design situated within the epistemological framework of Cultural Studies. Such an approach enables a critical interrogation of cultural artefacts as sites of meaning production, contestation, and ideological negotiation. The primary methodological focus lies in conducting a critical-descriptive analysis of visual texts, specifically truck-bed paintings, which are treated not merely as aesthetic objects but as socio-cultural representations embedded within broader structures of power, identity, and discourse.

The data corpus is derived from two principal sources. First, direct observational data were collected from various typologies of truck-bed paintings encountered along major logistical corridors in Bali, where the circulation of goods simultaneously facilitates the circulation of visual culture. Second, supplementary data were obtained through digital documentation available across online platforms and community networks of truck enthusiasts, which provide an archive of visual materials beyond geographically bounded observation. This dual-source strategy enhances both the breadth and contextual richness of the dataset, allowing for a more comprehensive analytical scope.

Analytically, the study employs a deconstructive technique aimed at interrogating the latent meanings embedded beneath the apparent visual surface. Deconstruction, in this context, functions to destabilize taken-for-granted interpretations and to expose underlying ideological formations, particularly those related to gender representation and power asymmetries. Rather than accepting visual imagery at face value, this method seeks to uncover silences, contradictions, and implicit assumptions that inform the construction of meaning within these artefacts.

The analytical framework is further grounded in semiotic theory and feminist theory, enabling a multilayered interpretation of the data. Semiotics is utilized to differentiate between denotative and connotative levels of meaning: denotation is employed to systematically describe the formal and compositional elements of truck-bed paintings, while connotation is mobilized to interpret the symbolic, cultural, and ideological significations embedded within these visual forms. This distinction facilitates a structured yet nuanced reading of how meaning is encoded and decoded within the visual field.

Concurrently, feminist theory is integrated as a critical lens through which the representation and positioning of women within these paintings are examined. This theoretical orientation allows the study to interrogate not only how female figures are depicted, but also why such representations take particular forms and how they contribute to the construction, reinforcement, or contestation of gendered perceptions in public space. By synthesizing semiotic analysis with feminist critique, the study moves beyond descriptive interpretation toward an examination of the socio-ideological implications of visual representation.

Ultimately, this methodological configuration enables the research to address three interrelated dimensions: the formal characteristics of truck-bed paintings, the symbolic meanings they convey, and their broader impact on shaping gender discourse within the public sphere.

3. Discussion

The Construction of Masculine Space and the Male Gaze

The trucking world constitutes a microcosm of hardened masculinity, structured by mobility, endurance, and prolonged separation from domestic life. Truck drivers routinely spend days or even weeks away from familial and residential environments, inhabiting a liminal existence defined by transit and isolation. Within this condition, the truck bed assumes a dual function as both a personal and public space, one that is actively personalized to reflect the driver's identity, emotional state, and worldview. The paintings displayed on the rear panels of trucks thus operate simultaneously as visual markers of identity and as symbolic companions throughout the journey. However, when women become the central objects of these visual representations, a systematic process of objectification is set in motion.

At the level of visual denotation, female figures in truck-bed paintings are typically depicted in poses that are simultaneously passive and provocative. Such representations align with the concept of the male gaze, wherein the visual apparatus—in this case, the painter's brush—positions the (male) viewer as the controlling subject who derives pleasure from observing the (female) object. Within this framework, female subjectivity is effectively erased; women are rendered voiceless, reduced to surfaces of visual consumption designed to gratify the fatigued gaze of male drivers navigating long and arduous journeys. This gaze extends beyond a merely biological or perceptual act; it is inherently political, reinforcing a gendered hierarchy in which public road space is constructed as a domain of male authority, while women are relegated to the status of visual spectacle.

At the level of connotation, these representations must be situated within the broader socio-cultural context of Bali and Indonesia, where normative frameworks of propriety, adat, and religious values coexist—often uneasily—with the practices of popular culture. A fundamental tension emerges between the expectation that women embody modesty and moral integrity, and the simultaneous proliferation of visual representations that sexualize and commodify the female body. This contradiction generates a pronounced double standard that disproportionately disadvantages women. Through a feminist theoretical lens, such visual and textual constructions can be understood as mechanisms that objectify women, normalize ethically problematic desires, and reproduce patriarchal power relations. In contemporary socio-cultural life, discourses of this kind contribute to the استمرار of gender inequality by embedding asymmetrical power dynamics within everyday visual culture. Consequently, the cultivation of critical awareness becomes imperative, alongside efforts to foster a more equitable cultural framework in which the dignity and bodily autonomy of all individuals are fully respected. In this regard, violence against women is not only enacted physically but also symbolically manifested within truck-bed paintings.

Representations that allude to sexual violence are particularly evident in certain truck-bed paintings that depict semi-nude female bodies. At the denotative level, such imagery often portrays women wearing minimal clothing, such as breast coverings and underwear, thereby foregrounding the body as the primary site of visual attention. Accompanied by textual elements such as the phrase "Lihat Jalanmu, Jangan Lihat Celana Dalamku," these artefacts are frequently framed as forms of roadside humor. However, from a feminist perspective, they reveal a far more complex interplay of symbolic and sexual violence (Figure 1). The juxtaposition of visual exposure and verbal admonition produces an ambiguity that simultaneously prohibits and invites the gaze, thereby reinforcing the logic of objectification. Within this dynamic, the female body becomes a contested site upon which patriarchal power is inscribed and reproduced in public

space, further entrenching unequal gender relations through seemingly trivial yet ideologically loaded cultural

Figure 1: Painting of a Truck Bed
"Watch Your Road, Don't Look at My Underwear"
Source: Ari, 2025



The female body in such visual representations is unequivocally constructed as an object of the male gaze. The exposure of bodily areas—particularly the breasts and underwear—should not be understood as a neutral aesthetic choice; rather, it constitutes a deliberate visual strategy designed to attract attention and stimulate desire. Within this representational regime, women are not articulated as subjects endowed with agency, but are instead positioned as objects "on display," curated for visual consumption. Consequently, the male gaze occupies the central axis of meaning production, while the female body functions as a medium that services and sustains that gaze.

The accompanying text, "Lihat Jalanmu, Jangan Lihat Celana Dalamku," generates a paradox that is both rhetorically compelling and ideologically problematic. At the literal level, the statement operates as a prohibition, instructing viewers to focus on the road. Yet, at the implicit level, it paradoxically redirects attention toward precisely that which is ostensibly forbidden. This dynamic may be interpreted as a *double bind*, wherein the message simultaneously prohibits and invites the gaze. Within this configuration, the female body becomes the locus of semantic play—at once an object of interdiction and of desire. From a feminist perspective, such paradoxes are closely aligned with the broader phenomenon of sexualization cloaked in humor. Humor, in this context, functions as a discursive mechanism that normalizes otherwise problematic representations. By framing the message as a joke, the possibility of critique is preemptively weakened; those who question it risk being dismissed as overly sensitive or lacking a sense of humor. It is precisely through this subtlety that its ideological force operates—diffuse, normalized, and embedded within everyday cultural practice.

Furthermore, the text implies a moral economy of responsibility. The imperative "jangan lihat" ostensibly places the burden of self-regulation upon the (male) viewer. However, this is contradicted by the visual composition, which is explicitly designed to attract attention. This tension produces a structural ambiguity that, within broader social contexts, often culminates in

victim-blaming narratives. In lived realities, women are frequently held accountable for harassment or violence on the grounds of "provocative" appearance, despite the fact that responsibility lies with perpetrators. Such representations thus participate in a broader cultural logic that simultaneously regulates and exploits the female body. Women are expected not to "invite" attention, yet popular culture persistently generates hyper-sexualized images of femininity. Within these visual texts, the female body is fragmented and reduced to isolated anatomical features—such as breasts or underwear—divorced from identity, subjectivity, or personhood. This objectification is not merely representational; it exerts tangible effects on how women are perceived and treated within everyday social interactions.

Public space, including roadways, is saturated with masculinized and sexualized imagery, and truck-bed paintings operate squarely within this contradictory terrain. While they employ the female body as a visual attractor, they simultaneously cloak this deployment in ostensibly moralistic messages. Such moral discourse, however, is largely illusory. Rather than promoting respect for women, it reinforces the notion that the female body is available for display, consumption, and humor.

Although truck-bed paintings are typically produced within working-class environments—where expressions of masculinity are often articulated through sexual humor—this contextual grounding does not render them immune to critique. On the contrary, it underscores the গভ extent to which patriarchal ideology permeates all strata of society. The depiction of semi-nude women accompanied by phrases such as "Lihat Jalanmu, Jangan Lihat Celana Dalamku" should therefore be understood not as benign entertainment but as a discursive practice that reproduces patriarchal norms. Through a feminist analytical lens, such artefacts can be seen to objectify the female body, generate ambiguity between prohibition and desire, and normalize forms of symbolic violence.

In contemporary socio-cultural contexts, discourses of this nature contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Accordingly, there is a pressing need to cultivate critical literacy with respect to such representations and to advocate for forms of cultural production that are more equitable, ethical, and respectful of human dignity. From a feminist standpoint, language and imagery do not merely reflect social relations; they also articulate the psychological structures of masculine fantasy. Truck-bed paintings render this semiotic energy visible through exaggerated humor, wordplay, and hyperbolic bodily imagery. Yet, these expressive forms remain circumscribed by patriarchal symbolic structures that position women as objects of visual pleasure and fantasy. Within feminist discourse, sexual violence is not limited to physical acts but extends to cultural practices that normalize objectification and diminish women's autonomy. Persistent visual reduction of women to corporeal fragments contributes to a permissive environment in which harassment becomes trivialized.

Bali, as a socio-cultural space, presents a distinctive configuration of these dynamics. Strong adat structures, kinship systems that remain patriarchal in many respects, and a tourism-driven economy that foregrounds beauty and exoticism collectively produce a complex discursive field. In certain social formations, lineage and familial authority are predominantly male-centered. Although women play significant roles in ritual life and household economies, their symbolic representation is often constrained within normative boundaries. Truck-bed paintings that sexualize the female body thus exist in tension with the culturally sanctioned image of women as embodiments of purity and propriety. This tension underscores the fact that culture is not a monolithic entity but rather a contested arena of meaning-making.

Many slogans inscribed on truck beds employ colloquial humor and sexually suggestive wordplay. Humor, in this regard, operates as an ideological shield. When such messages are challenged, they can be defended as harmless jokes devoid of serious intent. However, humor is

never entirely neutral; it can function as a subtle vehicle for the dissemination of dominant ideologies. Repeated exposure to jokes that demean women gradually obscures the boundary between humor and harassment, thereby normalizing symbolic violence.

The discursive practices underlying truck-bed paintings also reveal asymmetrical power relations. The majority of truck owners and painters are male, and the visual preferences that emerge reflect a dominant masculine perspective. Women are rarely involved as subjects who determine how they are represented. Instead, men, as the dominant group, possess the authority to define female imagery within public space, while women remain objects of representation without direct participation in the processes of meaning-making.

Street Language and the Negotiation of Morality

One of the most salient features of truck-bed visuality is the interplay between image and text. Phrases such as “Kutunggu Jandamu” or “Ojo Lali Omah” extend beyond mere casual humor; they function as discursive sites in which truck drivers negotiate moral values in relation to their social realities. Within this framework, women are frequently positioned as scapegoats for economic hardship or social anxiety. Narratives depicting women as materialistic or unfaithful serve to legitimize male struggles within the demanding context of road-based labor. Here, a shift in subjectivity occurs: women are constructed as threats to familial economic stability, while men position themselves as betrayed heroes. Such representations are particularly problematic, as they reinforce negative stigmas surrounding women’s economic agency in public space. The mobile nature of truck-bed imagery further amplifies its ideological impact, enabling it to function as an effective vehicle of patriarchal propaganda that reaches segments of society often beyond the reach of academic feminist discourse.

Another striking example of street language and moral negotiation is found in the phrase “Life is like being raped, if you can't fight back, just enjoy it.” (Figure 2). This expression constitutes a form of dark, paradoxical satire that employs the metaphor of sexual violence to comment on life’s hardships. However, from both semiotic and feminist perspectives, this statement is deeply problematic. It represents a discursive practice that normalizes violence, trivializes the lived experiences of survivors, and obscures real power relations within society. Rather than functioning as mere sarcasm or “extreme motivation,” such language reproduces harmful cultural logics by transforming acts of violence into rhetorical devices, thereby desensitizing audiences and perpetuating symbolic harm within the public sphere.



Figure 2
"Life is like being raped, if you can't fight back, just enjoy it."
Source: Ari, 2025

The statement constructs an analogy between "life" and "rape"—two ontologically distinct phenomena that are forcibly rendered equivalent within a single semantic structure. Life's hardships are thus represented as inevitable conditions to be passively endured, while sexual violence is positioned as an equally unavoidable circumstance, beyond resistance. The paradox emerges in the clause "cukup dinikmati" ("simply enjoyed"). The term "enjoyed" carries connotations of voluntariness, pleasure, and positive affect, yet it is embedded within the context of sexual violence, which is inherently coercive, traumatic, and non-consensual. This juxtaposition produces a profound distortion of meaning: an act of violence is reframed as something that can—and implicitly should—be accepted or normalized. From a feminist perspective, such a formulation constitutes a form of ideological work that normalizes powerlessness and suppresses resistance.

The phrase "Hidup itu seperti diperkosa" explicitly equates life with the experience of sexual violence. At the lexical level, "diperkosa" evokes extreme violence, while "hidup" is personified as intrinsically painful. The implicit imperative—"jika tidak bisa melawan, cukup dinikmati"—introduces a tone of resignation. Structurally, the sentence adopts a proverbial or motivational form ("Hidup itu seperti…"), yet it replaces conventional experiential comparisons with the metaphor of sexual violence. Rhetorically, the statement operates through a shift from irony to sarcasm: the juxtaposition of violence with "enjoyment" produces a disturbing dark irony. This construction employs hyperbole, amplifying extremity to achieve both poetic and shock effects, and antithesis, juxtaposing violence and pleasure in stark contrast. As a form of street language, the expression transcends ordinary irony by appropriating the structure of motivational discourse while subverting its ethical grounding. The extremity of diction and the comparative structure transform the statement into a pseudo-aphoristic utterance that simultaneously performs as "wisdom" and satirical commentary on life.

Ideologically, the phrase reinforces conservative and patriarchal logics. By asserting that one should "enjoy" what cannot be resisted, it implies that victims lack the right—or the capacity—to oppose violence. This paradoxical normalization displaces responsibility onto the victim, suggesting that resistance is futile and that victimhood is synonymous with weakness. More specifically, it reflects an individualization of responsibility: a systemic issue such as sexual violence is reduced to a matter of personal resilience. Within patriarchal and paternalistic cultural frameworks, victims are implicitly expected to conceal shame and "move on," thereby reinforcing stigmatizing assumptions that blame victims for their inability to resist. The statement also implies a tacit normalization of violence, as if to suggest that once it has occurred, it must simply be accepted. Such logic fundamentally disregards the rights and dignity of victims. In this sense, the statement aligns closely with victim-blaming discourses prevalent in many social contexts. It therefore functions not merely as satire, but as a reinforcement of a dangerous narrative that frames sexual violence as an inevitable fate rather than a crime demanding resistance and justice.

In relation to contemporary socio-cultural life, the statement reflects a broader tendency to romanticize or rationalize suffering. Expressions such as "jalani saja," "nikmati proses," or "terima keadaan" are commonly mobilized as coping mechanisms in the face of hardship. However, when such narratives are articulated through the metaphor of sexual violence, they become deeply problematic, as they blur the distinction between acceptance as a survival strategy and submission to injustice (Ajidarma, 2020). In many hierarchical and unequal social contexts, individuals often lack the structural power to resist systemic oppression—whether in the form of poverty, labor exploitation, or gender-based violence. While the statement may be interpreted as an expression of collective frustration, it ultimately redirects individuals away from critique and transformation, encouraging instead the internalization of oppression as something to be "endured" or even "enjoyed."

From a feminist standpoint, the critique of this statement becomes significantly sharper. The metaphor appropriates the lived experience of sexual violence—an experience disproportionately borne by women—and repurposes it as a rhetorical device without regard for its ethical and political implications. In doing so, it contributes to what is widely conceptualized as rape culture: a cultural environment in which sexual violence is normalized, trivialized, or implicitly justified. Since sexual violence is fundamentally defined by the absence of consent, it cannot be legitimately framed as an experience capable of producing enjoyment. By juxtaposing violence with pleasure, the statement obscures the centrality of consent and risks reinforcing harmful myths, including the notion that victims may—or should—derive some form of acceptance or satisfaction from the violence inflicted upon them.

Commodification and Resistance in Popular Culture

In more recent developments, truck-bed paintings have increasingly incorporated icons from global popular culture. Figures from Hollywood cinema, K-Pop, and Japanese anime now frequently appear on truck surfaces, signaling processes of cultural hybridization. However, despite this global infusion, the underlying logic of subjectivity remains largely unchanged. These global female figures are appropriated into localized roadside aesthetics, where they are symbolically "domesticated" and subsumed within representational frameworks that continue to marginalize women's agency (Budianto, 2007).

From a Cultural Studies perspective, this phenomenon may also be interpreted as a form of aesthetic resistance. Truck painters—often self-taught artists from working-class backgrounds—utilize the female body as a medium for expressing creative autonomy outside the constraints of formal art institutions. Yet, this resistance is paradoxical: while it challenges elite aesthetic norms, it simultaneously reproduces gender subordination. The resistance articulated here is thus primarily class-based—an assertion of popular artistic expression against elite cultural hierarchies—rather than a challenge to patriarchal gender relations.

The presence of the Joker figure in truck-bed paintings further exemplifies the incorporation of global cultural icons. Originating from the Batman franchise, the Joker is portrayed as a figure who outwardly embodies humor and entertainment while internally grappling with darkness, hardship, and psychological tension. His narrative—marked by poverty, frustration, and eventual descent into anarchic criminality in Gotham City—renders him a symbol of existential contradiction. The paradox intensifies when juxtaposed with accompanying textual elements such as "Bekerja keraslah sampai barang mahal terasa murah" (Figure 3).

This phrase constitutes a rhetorical paradox that appears motivational while simultaneously embedding an implicit critique of contemporary socio-economic logic. From a semiotic and feminist perspective, it extends beyond a simple exhortation to diligence, reflecting instead the ideological workings of capitalism, consumerism, and power relations as articulated through everyday language. Structurally, the sentence adopts a dual imperative form ("bekerja keraslah"), emphasizing motivational urgency. Yet, it juxtaposes "barang mahal" (expensive goods) with "murah" (cheap), producing a paradoxical expectation that extreme labor will render high-value commodities subjectively accessible. Lexically, "kerja keras" invokes the ideology of hustle culture and meritocracy, while "barang mahal" signifies aspirational consumption associated with middle-class identity.



Figure 3 "Truck Back Painting Featuring the Joker"
Source: Ary, 2025

The deployment of hyperbole is evident in the boundless extension of "hard work," coupled with the implicit irony that financial ease is attainable only upon reaching an exceptionally elevated economic status. The slogan reproduces the characteristic pressure of motivational discourse, yet it is reconfigured here through paradox. This paradox lies in its critical divergence from conventional motivational maxims: while it echoes the familiar dictum "work hard to achieve success," it substitutes "success" with "expensive goods becoming cheap," thereby exposing underlying class dynamics. Its rhetorical strategy blends subtle satire with the harsh realities of socio-economic life, appropriating the ostensibly positive ethos of diligence while simultaneously underscoring the practical impossibility of achieving such goals within the lived conditions of most individuals.

Structurally, the imperative form "bekerja keraslah" positions hard work as a moral obligation incumbent upon the individual. The absence of an explicitly defined subject universalizes the injunction, rendering it ostensibly applicable across social classes, genders, and structural conditions. It is precisely here that its ideological force resides: the statement obscures structural inequalities by reducing success to the outcome of individual effort alone. The subsequent clause, "sampai barang mahal terasa murah," introduces a compelling paradox. Literally, expensive goods remain expensive; what shifts is the individual's perception of affordability. Thus, the objective of hard work is not to transform pricing structures or address economic inequality, but to adapt oneself to existing systems in order to consume without perceived burden. This reflects the logic of late capitalism, wherein individuals are encouraged to enhance their capacity for consumption rather than to interrogate the systemic conditions that produce inequality.

Within contemporary socio-cultural contexts, this narrative resonates strongly with the ethos of *hustle culture*, widely disseminated through digital media. Slogans such as "work now, enjoy later" or "grind until you shine" have become emblematic of a generational orientation toward relentless productivity. In this cultural framework, personal value is frequently measured through productivity and consumption. High-value commodities—such as advanced technological devices, luxury vehicles, or premium lifestyles—function as symbolic markers of success to be pursued.

From both semiotic and feminist perspectives, such narratives obscure structural realities, including income inequality, unequal access to education, and disparities in employment opportunities. By positioning hard work as a universal solution, the statement implicitly attributes failure to the individual, suggesting a deficiency of effort among those unable to attain certain consumption standards. Feminist analysis further reveals how this discourse intersects with gendered divisions of labor. Historically, "hard work" has been aligned with masculinity, associated with male participation in the productive public sphere, while women have been linked to unpaid domestic labor. Within this framework, exhortations to "work hard" often disregard the double burden experienced by women, who must balance formal employment with domestic responsibilities. Consequently, the imperative to work harder in pursuit of consumption becomes deeply problematic, as not all forms of labor are equally recognized or remunerated within the economic system.

The slogan's emphasis on hard work and affordability effectively sublimates the implicit logic of capitalism: the high cost of goods is attributed not to market dynamics or regulatory inadequacies, but to insufficient individual effort. This paradox simultaneously critiques and reproduces the illusion of meritocracy. In reality, outcomes are shaped not only by effort but also by factors such as talent, social networks, and, in certain contexts, nepotistic practices. Comparable dynamics are observable in policy discourses—such as in education—where terms like "efficiency" and "competitiveness" are mobilized to legitimize market-oriented logics without adequately accounting for socio-economic disparities. The slogan thus reveals an alignment with dominant class interests: the capacity to purchase expensive goods is equated with achievement, while those outside middle- and upper-class positions are implicitly tasked with self-correction. Its ideological effects are ambivalent: some audiences may respond with skepticism, rejecting simplistic meritocratic narratives, while others may internalize its cynical message as an expression of harsh social reality.

Through a feminist lens, the statement "Bekerja keraslah sampai barang mahal terasa murah" can be understood as a manifestation of capitalist and consumerist ideology embedded within everyday discourse. It illustrates how labor, consumption, and identity are interwoven in shaping modern subjectivity, while simultaneously opening a space for critique of structural inequality and gendered norms. Rather than accepting the statement as a self-evident truth, it is imperative to approach it critically—interrogating its underlying assumptions and envisioning more equitable and humane configurations of the relationship between work, consumption, and well-being.

4. Conclusion

The representation of women in truck-bed paintings constitutes a critical site for examining the subtle operations of patriarchal power within public space. Through a Cultural Studies analysis, it becomes evident that female subjectivity within the masculinized domain of the roadway remains significantly constrained. Women are positioned as visual texts whose functions are entirely determined by male subjects—whether as symbols of traditional morality or as objects of sexual commodification.

This phenomenon demonstrates that roadways are not merely channels for the distribution of goods, but also conduits for the dissemination of gendered ideologies marked by inequality. It is therefore essential to cultivate critical awareness among consumers of visual culture, recognizing that beneath the vibrant colors of truck-bed paintings lie recurring narratives of symbolic domination. Efforts to deconstruct such visuality are crucial to ensuring that public spaces—including roadways—do not continue to marginalize certain identities in service of others' dominance. Female subjectivity must not remain confined to silent imagery on the backs of vehicles, but must instead be acknowledged as an autonomous and sovereign presence within lived social reality.

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