



Pop, Pain, and the Pressure to Heal (Masculinity and Emotion in Indonesian Youth Culture)

Pop, Luka, dan Tekanan untuk Pulih (Maskulinitas dan Emosi dalam Budaya Kawula Muda Indonesia)

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Keywords

*Quarter life crisis;
Affective capitalism;
Metamodernism;
Pop music;
Emotional Subjectivity;
Masculinity*

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the works of Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, this study explores how themes of anxiety, healing, and self-reflection are articulated through the intertwined logics of late capitalism and metamodern sensibility. Employing perspectives from affect theory, gender studies, and political economy, the analysis reveals that these emotional narratives, while intimate and seemingly subversive, often reproduce neoliberal norms by transforming vulnerability into a consumable aesthetic. The emergence of “affective masculinity” complicates dominant gender expectations by embracing softness and introspection, yet it remains entangled in capitalist modes of emotional labor. Ultimately, Indonesian pop music becomes a site where sincerity and commodification, rebellion and resignation, continuously oscillate. This article argues for deeper critical engagement with how affective expression in youth culture both reflects and regulates emotional life under capitalism.

Kata Kunci

*Quarter life crisis;
Kapitalisme afektif;
Metamodernisme;
Musik pop;
Subjektivitas emosional;
Maskulinitas*

ABSTRAK

Berfokus pada karya Tulus, Hindia, dan Kunto Aji, artikel ini menelusuri bagaimana tema-tema seperti kecemasan, penyembuhan, dan refleksi diri diekspresikan melalui logika kapitalisme lanjut dan sensibilitas metamodern. Dengan menggunakan perspektif teori afek, studi gender, dan ekonomi politik, analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa narasi-narasi emosional tersebut, meskipun tampak intim dan subversif, sering kali justru mereproduksi norma-norma neoliberal dengan mengubah kerentanan menjadi estetika yang dapat dikonsumsi. Kemunculan bentuk “maskulinitas afektif” memperumit ekspektasi gender dominan dengan menonjolkan kelembutan dan refleksi diri, namun tetap terjerat dalam logika kerja emosional kapitalistik. Pada akhirnya, musik pop Indonesia menjadi ruang di mana ketulusan dan komodifikasi, pemberontakan dan keputusasaan, terus berubah dan tak pernah ajeg. Artikel ini menyerukan perlunya pembacaan kritis yang lebih dalam tentang bagaimana ekspresi afektif dalam budaya pop kawula muda merefleksikan kerentanan mereka, tetapi juga mengatur kehidupan emosional mereka di bawah rezim kapitalisme.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Indonesian youth have increasingly turned to music, social media, and “healing culture” as mediums to articulate feelings of sadness, existential

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disorientation, and a longing for meaning. This emotional atmosphere, frequently associated with the so-called Quarter Life Crisis, is not merely a psychological phenomenon. Rather, it is a socio-cultural symptom of deeper structural forces: precarious labor markets, escalating social expectations, neoliberal demands for self-optimization, and the erosion of intimate and communal ties. Within this context, music has emerged not just as entertainment but as a vehicle for affective expression, therapeutic identification, and cultural negotiation. Within this context, music has emerged not just as entertainment but as a vehicle for affective expression, therapeutic identification, and cultural negotiation, making it a crucial site for understanding how young Indonesians navigate emotional and structural precarity.

Yet, this phenomenon raises critical questions: Are these affective performances, circulated through introspective lyrics, curated visual aesthetics, and algorithmically targeted “self-care” content, genuine forms of emotional resistance, or do they instead reproduce neoliberal norms of positivity and self-optimization? The stakes are not merely cultural but material. The 2022 Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) reported that one in three adolescents (10–17 years old) experiences mental health issues annually, while only a fraction accesses professional help (Salma, 2022). Subsequent studies (Pham et al., 2024; Tim Kompas, 2025) reveal that psychological distress affects nearly a quarter of urban youth, reinforcing the urgency of understanding how emotions are mediated and managed through popular culture.

Amid this crisis of subjectivity, an unexpected pattern emerges: many of the most prominent voices articulating vulnerability, loss, and emotional fatigue are male. Artists such as Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji have become cultural touchstones for young Indonesians. Their music is not defined by overt political critique or sonic aggression but by composure, sincerity, and aesthetic restraint. These men do not renounce masculinity; instead, they reconfigure it, offering an affective grammar where introspection, fragility, and emotional articulation coexist with artistic elegance and popular appeal. Vulnerability becomes not weakness, but a performative strategy that balances authenticity with social legibility.

This article examines how the emotional landscape, centered on the Quarter Life Crisis, is navigated and negotiated within Indonesian pop music. Using a cultural studies approach grounded in affect theory, gender studies, and critical political economy, the analysis focuses on how emotional struggle is framed within the moral and aesthetic logic of late capitalism. Specifically, it interrogates how sadness and healing are transformed into consumable affects that are embedded in sonic aesthetics and lyrical introspection and then circulated as commodities under the guise of empowerment..

Three interlocking concerns guide the inquiry: (1) how the Quarter Life Crisis is represented in music; (2) how emotional subjectivity becomes a site of both agency and containment; and (3) how affective masculinity functions as both a cultural shift and a marketable formation. Theoretically, the article draws on Lauren Berlant’s (2011) concept of “cruel optimism”, which critiques the emotional attachment to promises that sustain harmful systems; Mark Fisher’s (2009) theory of “capitalist realism”, which reveals the limits of critique in an ideological system that absorbs dissent; and Eva Illouz’s (2007) work on “emotional capitalism”, where feelings become structured by economic logics. Sara Ahmed’s (2004) theory of “affective circulation” further illuminates how emotions move between bodies, spaces, and institutional discourses.

Representation theory provides an additional axis of analysis. Stuart Hall (1997) and Michel Foucault (1977) offer insights into how cultural texts shape subjectivity not

passively, but through discursive production. In this frame, pop music becomes a contested site where emotional norms, gender expectations, and neoliberal ideologies are not only reflected but actively produced and monetized. Raewyn Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity helps contextualize the gendered implications of emotional openness, while newer scholarship on affective masculinities shows how men's emotional labor can simultaneously resist and reinforce existing power structures. Local research, including works by Ayuningtyas (2017), Perwiradmoko (2023), and Reskiwardina et al. (2024), demonstrates how Indonesian popular culture navigates these tensions by constructing "soft" masculinities that oscillate between critique and conformity.

Ultimately, this article argues that Indonesian pop music, particularly the works of Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, represents a generational response to the psychic costs of late capitalism. These artists offer spaces of emotional identification and momentary comfort, but also embody the ambivalence of cultural resistance within commodified structures. Through close readings of selected songs and public narratives, this study maps how vulnerability functions as both a language of survival and a currency of expression, where healing does not always liberate, and affective sincerity is rendered ambivalent by its circulation within the market.

2. Methods

This study positions itself within the tradition of critical cultural sociology, not merely to interpret Indonesian pop music as cultural expression, but to excavate the affective infrastructures and ideological negotiations embedded in its emotional aesthetics. In an era where sadness has become aestheticized and vulnerability turned into branding capital, methodological neutrality is impossible. The question is not just what these songs mean, but what kind of emotional worlds they create, and for whom (Berlant, 2011; Illouz, 2007).

Inspired by cultural studies and affect theory, this research treats songs not as reflections of a social reality "out there," but as constitutive sites where identities, hopes, and anxieties are constructed, circulated, and contested. The works of Stuart Hall (2024) and Michel (1977) guide this perspective, framing representation as an active process in the production of meaning and subjectivity. Likewise, the affective turn in cultural analysis, through Sara Ahmed's (2004) notion of emotions as social circulations and Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism", grounds the assumption that feeling is not innocent. Emotions are neither free-floating nor purely authentic; they are embedded in circuits of power, capital, and normativity.

To capture these dynamics, the study focuses on a carefully selected corpus of songs and visual performances by three prominent male musicians in contemporary Indonesian pop: Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji. This choice is neither incidental nor based solely on popularity. These artists offer rich case studies due to their thematic consistency, cultural resonance, and stylistic diversity in articulating affective struggles such as anxiety, exhaustion, healing, and self-doubt. All three have emerged as public voices of emotional sincerity in the landscape of Indonesian music, resonating widely with urban youth navigating precarity and reflexivity. They are not only performers but affective curators whose work stages masculinity as both vulnerable and marketable. Their emotional grammar, lyrical, sonic, and visual, mirrors broader socio-economic shifts and changing gender norms in Indonesia's late-capitalist cultural economy (Connell, 1995; Fisher, 2009; McRobbie, 2018).

Rather than relying on a single method, this research triangulates discourse analysis, semiotic reading, and affective interpretation. Discourse analysis, following Hall (1980) and Foucault (1977), seeks to unearth the linguistic and ideological operations that normalize certain emotional expressions while marginalizing others. It asks: how is pain named, managed, or rendered palatable? Who is allowed to be vulnerable, and under what aesthetic conditions?

At the same time, semiotic analysis, drawing on Roland Barthes (1977), is employed to decode the visual language of music videos, album art, and performance gestures. Minimalist visuals, subdued lighting, facial close-ups, and introspective body language all signal not only sincerity but a marketable sincerity. The melancholic male becomes a desirable figure, not because he resists capitalism, but because he embodies its current aesthetic turn (Mar, 2025; Reskiwardina et al., 2024).

The third layer of analysis is affective. Unlike traditional textual analysis that privileges meaning, affective analysis listens for tone, pacing, timbre, and atmospheric resonance. It considers how sadness is sonically constructed, how comfort is promised through certain harmonic patterns, and how repetition serves to normalize emotional fragility as both style and substance. This is where Ahmed (2004) and Berlant (2011) are most useful: emotion is not a window into an inner self; it is a structured form of engagement with the world, socially learned and ideologically constrained.

Importantly, the study acknowledges the researcher's own implication in the affective regimes being studied. As someone inhabiting the same cultural and digital ecosystems that these songs circulate within, full detachment is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, reflexivity is embraced as a methodological stance, recognizing the tensions between critique and empathy, between scholarly distance and emotional resonance (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In analyzing affect, one is also negotiating one's own. This ethical awareness tempers the analysis, resisting the temptation to romanticize suffering or reduce complex emotional performances to commodified clichés.

In short, this methodology does not seek objectivity; it seeks insight. It treats Indonesian pop music not as entertainment, but as a battleground where affect, ideology, gender, and capitalism converge in hauntingly beautiful, painfully intimate ways. This is not merely an inquiry into songs; it is an exploration of the emotional grammar of a generation caught between sincerity and structure, autonomy and algorithm, selfhood and the market.

3. Result

3.1. General Pattern: "Sublimated Affectivity"

A recurring and significant pattern across the selected musical corpus is what can be best described as "sublimated affectivity", a mode of emotional expression that is deliberately restrained, aesthetically refined, and affectively legible. Rather than confronting sadness or existential uncertainty in raw, cathartic terms, these songs internalize and transform emotional turbulence into sonic and visual calmness. The affective landscapes they construct are contemplative rather than explosive, intimate rather than visceral. Emotions are curated, not confessed.

This aesthetic of containment and polish must be read in light of Fredric Jameson's (2005) assertion that postmodern cultural production under late capitalism is marked by the commodification of experience itself. Within this logic, even affect, particularly melancholic affect, is folded into capitalist structures of value and

consumption. The personal becomes political, but also commercial. The pain expressed in pop songs is not unfiltered vulnerability, but a market-ready artifact: digestible sadness, repackaged for collective resonance.

Mark Fisher (2009), writing from the deadlock of neoliberal realism, argued that capitalism colonizes not only the economic and institutional dimensions of life but also the affective and imaginative spheres, rendering alternative emotional registers unthinkable. The melancholia that permeates these songs is thus not an anomaly, but a structural effect, what Fisher might call the “soundtrack to impasse.” In this sense, sadness is not subversion; it is structure, reproduced in harmonious chord progressions and bittersweet refrains.

Building on this, Sara Ahmed’s (2004) conceptualization of emotion as a social and cultural movement rather than an internal feeling is essential. Emotions do not originate within individuals; they move between bodies, signs, and structures. Pop music, in this sense, is a site where particular emotions, nostalgia, regret, hope, and fatigue are organized and circulated. The affective repertoire of these songs is not simply a mirror to inner states, but a technology of mood regulation, a way to teach, normalize, and monetize particular emotional attitudes. As Lauren Berlant (2011) shows through her theory of cruel optimism, the attachment to such aestheticized emotional products often traps listeners in structures that promise comfort but reproduce precarity. Healing becomes a genre, not a possibility.

Within this terrain, metamodernism offers a compelling interpretive key. According to Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), the metamodern subject oscillates between irony and sincerity, between detachment and engagement. The emotional performances in Indonesian pop music embody this logic precisely: the songs are never fully ironic, yet never naively sincere. They hover in the ambivalent space of “productive confusion,” where affect is both a gesture of self-exposure and a craft of self-curation. The vocal fragility, lyrical repetition, and ambient arrangements gesture toward emotional truth while remaining carefully stylized and commercially viable. This is sincerity with a strategy, vulnerability as a vocation.

This phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. As Lee et al. (2021) demonstrate through cross-cultural mood perception studies, the emotional language of pop music has a global grammar. Core moods such as sadness, calm, or joy are largely translatable, even as their nuances shift. Their findings suggest that algorithmic mood detection systems, trained on global pop corpora, accurately map such emotions across cultures, indicating that musical sadness, in its popular form, has become a transnational affective commodity. This raises questions about how platforms and listeners increasingly converge on a shared affective aesthetics, optimized for streaming, tailored for emotional availability, and stripped of cultural particularity.

Yet, Indonesia, as part of the Global South, complicates this picture. The adoption of affective pop aesthetics does not occur in a vacuum. As Santiago Colás (1992) emphasizes in his reading of Jameson through a Third World lens, cultural forms in the Global South often bear asynchronous temporalities and hybrid histories, which challenge Western developmentalist narratives. Indonesian pop melancholia, while resonating with global sonic trends, is also shaped by local anxieties over job precarity, digital alienation, and masculine emotional performance. It is not merely derivative, but recombinatory, a cultural grafting of global affect onto local structures of feeling.

This hybrid affectivity is rendered audible and visible through minimalistic production choices: subdued lighting in music videos, neutral color palettes, introspective

close-ups, and ambient soundscapes. Vulnerability is not screamed; it is whispered, but the whisper echoes. The result is what we might call melancholy without rupture, emotions crafted for repetition, remembrance, and refrains. This aesthetic aligns well with the economic logic of streaming platforms, where the affective shelf life of a song depends less on catharsis and more on repeatable mood calibration. To be clear, this is not to dismiss the emotional sincerity of the artists or their fans. Rather, it is to trace the mechanisms by which sincerity itself is mediated, how it becomes embedded in the affective economy of late capitalism, how platform logics shape it, and how it becomes an emotional style with cultural, economic, and gendered implications.

In sum, Indonesian metamodern pop constructs a sublimated affective mode: one that feels emotionally rich, yet aesthetically serene; intimate, yet never destabilizing. It is sadness reworked for contemplation rather than rupture, for algorithmic resonance rather than cathartic release. And perhaps most significantly, it is a sadness that sells, not despite its subtlety, but because of it.

3.2. Tulus: The Sonic Grammar of Controlled Vulnerability

Within the emotional topography of Indonesian popular music, Tulus emerges as a cartographer of tenderness, mapping affective terrains with disarming precision. His compositions, particularly *Diri* (2022) and *Monokrom* (2016), do not express emotional pain through dramatic outbursts; rather, they whisper it. This whisper, however, does not signal emotional fragility. It signifies discipline, a socially acceptable register of suffering, one that soothes rather than disturbs, calms rather than critiques. Tulus's music operates within the logic of what may be called sublimated affectivity: emotion that, while seemingly sincere, is aestheticized, commodified, and mediated through the apparatus of late-capitalist cultural production.

Consider *Diri*. The song functions as a form of emotional biopolitics, teaching the listener not only to feel but to feel properly. Lines such as "*Hari ini kau berdamai dengan dirimu sendiri*" and "*Katakan pada dirimu, semua baik-baik saja*" resemble therapeutic affirmations borrowed from a digital wellness lexicon. The repetition of "*Luka, luka, hilanglah luka*" reveals a deeper imperative: the act of naming pain becomes indistinguishable from its erasure. The wound is not exposed but absorbed, veiled under layers of gratitude and calm. The listener is not encouraged to scream, but to breathe. Within this aesthetic of healing lies a broader regime of emotional governance: one must not only endure hardship but do so with grace.

This structure of emotional restraint continues in *Monokrom*, an autobiographical meditation on memory and gratitude. The opening lyric, "*Lembaran foto hitam-putih / Aku coba ingat lagi warna bajumu kala itu*", suggests an interplay between monochrome recollection and emotional chromaticism. Nostalgia is ritualized, not ruptured; memory becomes consoling rather than disorienting. Gratitude emerges not just as an emotion, but as an ethical orientation: "*Kukirimkan terima kasih / Untuk warna dalam hidupku*". Past pain is not mourned but transformed into moral capital. The aesthetic restraint of the track, delicate vocal textures, ambient instrumentation, and minimal dynamic shifts transform vulnerability into composure.



Figure 1. A still from the Monokrom music video directed by Davy Linggar, depicting an intimate moment between mother and child. The black-and-white aesthetic evokes intergenerational memory, visualizing the emotional palette of the song (Linggar, 2016).

In this context, Monokrom is more than a personal narrative; it is a sonic archive of affect, a sentimental expression of collective memory and intergenerational relationality. The music video, directed by Davy Linggar, extends the song's ethos: the grayscale palette is not a stylistic flourish but a symbol of memory's texture, past moments rendered vivid through emotional recollection. Warm, intimate scenes, such as those portraying familial bonds, further accentuate the lyrical message, positioning Monokrom as a cultural artifact of Indonesia's metamodern turn, where personal sincerity is sutured to broader social resonance.

Both songs, then, operate as affective scripts, subtly disciplining how emotion is felt, remembered, and expressed. In Lauren Berlant's (2011) terms, Tulus's compositions exemplify cruel optimism: a soothing that conceals structural malaise, an emotional balm that numbs but does not treat the wound. In a context where Indonesian youth face economic precarity, sociopolitical disillusionment, and increasing existential pressure, such musical affirmations offer not resistance but pacification, tranquility that streams well.

This posture of affective control extends beyond the recorded tracks into Tulus's public persona and curatorial work. In 2025, he initiated the SAMA SAMA tour, a collaborative project that brought together musicians across generations and genres. Widely covered as both nostalgic and warm (Lestari, 2025; Liputan6.com, 2025), the tour exemplified his role not merely as a performer but as a facilitator of shared emotional space. In interviews, Tulus spoke of his surprise and gratitude at the emotional synergy that emerged among collaborators. The project demonstrated his capacity to foster curated intimacy, an affective atmosphere in which vulnerability is safe, stylized, and celebrated.

Such performances exemplify what Mark Fisher (2009) diagnoses as the deadlock of capitalist realism: the cultural condition in which it becomes easier to imagine the end of the world than to envision the end of the very social conditions that necessitate this

kind of music. Tulus offers no rupture, only resolution. His songs are not revolutionary, but reconciling. Crisis is folded inward, reinterpreted as reflection, not critique.

This emotional discipline takes on further significance when considered through the lens of masculinity. Tulus disrupts the dominant association of masculinity with stoicism or aggression, yet he does so in a manner that still adheres to a neoliberal grammar of emotional productivity. His is not the masculinity of rupture but of decorum. As Raewyn Connell (1995) theorizes in her work on hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, affective performances like Tulus's occupy a hybrid space: they challenge emotional repression while reinforcing composure, self-management, and serenity as normative virtues.

From this vantage, Tulus's affective labor is best understood not merely as an expression of individual sincerity but as a cultural technology, a means of disseminating emotional norms acceptable to both market and moral order. As Sara Ahmed (2004) contends, emotions are socially oriented: they align bodies toward certain feelings and away from others, binding individuals to collective scripts. Tulus's affective grammar orients listeners toward gratitude and healing, but diverts them from anger, refusal, or structural critique.

It is precisely this tension, between sincerity and self-regulation, between emotional authenticity and emotional governance, that renders Tulus's music so compelling. His lyrical world oscillates, in true metamodern fashion (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010), between woundedness and quiet resilience, memory and momentum, hope and hurt. This is not the irony of postmodernism nor the certainty of modernism, but a floating sincerity embedded in a deeply aestheticized world.

In sum, Tulus's music offers a compelling case study in how Indonesian pop articulates and reproduces the emotional architectures of late capitalism. Under the guise of healing, it performs discipline; under the language of self-love, it promotes order. His songs render wounds not as cries, but as design, poised, patterned, pacified. And in doing so, they remind us that even the gentlest voice can carry the weight of a system.

3.3. Hindia and Singing from the Cage: Personal Liberation in the Absence of Structural Exit

Hindia's music dwells in the interstice between exhaustion and affirmation. In songs like *Secukupnya* (2019) and *Berdansalah, Karir Ini Tak Ada Artinya* (Hindia, 2023), Baskara Putra does not merely narrate the trials of youth in post-Reformasi, hypermediated Indonesia; he embodies the emotional stasis of a generation that knows too much and can do too little. His lyrics do not scream or incite rebellion. Rather, they hum with weary intimacy, gesturing toward resistance only to retreat into the realm of personal care, emotional maintenance, and momentary relief.

This thematic signature is reinforced in Hindia's own public reflections. In a 2023 profile by NME, he candidly described the emotional toll of his career: "My career costs so much, emotionally and personally," citing the instability of working with "sketchy event organisers" and the lingering psychological impact of the pandemic (Martua, 2023). Setianingsih (2024) similarly chronicled his performances in Japan, highlighting how his stripped-down, introspective stage presence resonated with audiences across linguistic and cultural boundaries, testimony to the transnational legibility of his affective voice.

In *Secukupnya*, Hindia offers what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls a relation of cruel optimism, an invitation to feel deeply, even honestly, but only in moderation. The refrain, "*Bersedihlah secukupnya*" (be sad, but just enough), is striking not for its sorrow but for

its restraint. Here, sadness is not a rupture but a calculation, something to be measured, rationed, and regulated within the borders of polite self-conduct. It is a form of affective governance: not only are we told what to feel, but when, how much, and to what extent (Ahmed, 2004).

“*Kita semua gagal / Ambil sedikit tisu / Bersedihlah secukupnya.*”. What is most telling in this verse is not the admission of collective failure, but the proposed remedy: tissues and calibrated grief. There is no vocabulary of resistance, no invocation of solidarity. Only private consolation. Hindia’s emotional language, then, is permitted but never disruptive. It is commodified and consumed within the affective economy of late capitalism.



Figure 2. Still from the music video of *Secukupnya*, produced as the official soundtrack for *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* (Visinema Pictures, 2019). The image features the three siblings, Angkasa, Aurora, and Awan, standing in silence, reflecting shared emotional exhaustion. This scene visualizes the film’s central concern with familial pressure, grief, and the struggle to accept vulnerability within contemporary Indonesian youth culture.

The affective resonance of *Secukupnya* deepened when it was selected as the official soundtrack for *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* (NKCTHI). The song’s lyricism, which reflects the silent anxieties of youth, burnout, generational expectations, and unspoken trauma, echoes the film’s central narrative of intergenerational vulnerability. Its viral circulation on digital platforms transformed it into a collective anthem of emotional healing, often shared by users as an expression of cross-experiential resonance. Rather than serving as mere accompaniment, the track functioned as both a narrative bridge and a site of catharsis, underscoring how music can deepen cinematic experiences and amplify psychosocial discourse around mental health in contemporary urban Indonesia.

The same logic extends to *Berdansalah, Karir Ini Tak Ada Artinya*, in which Hindia names the absurdities of late-capitalist life, pointless labor, performative productivity, and the commodified self. Yet, instead of inciting critique or revolt, the lyrics propose individual release as the only viable exit, “*Lakukan apa yang kau mau sekarang / Saat hatimu bergerak, jangan kau larang / Hidup ini tak ada artinya / Maka kau bebas mengarah maknanya seorang.*”

This is not melancholic resignation, but quiet defiance. The listener is encouraged to dance, to claim freedom, to re-author meaning, yet all within the same system that renders life meaningless. It is a soft rebellion, stripped of teeth. In this dynamic, we find Mark Fisher's (2009) notion of capitalist realism: the structural impossibility of imagining alternatives. Even as the song identifies the problem, it retreats into personal coping.

Musically, this contradiction is dramatized through upbeat tempos (circa 124 BPM) and bright harmonic textures more suited for celebration than despair. The dissonance is deliberate, an audible instance of metamodern oscillation (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010), where joy and grief coexist in unresolved tension. The irony is sincere; the resignation, reframed as empowerment.

Hindia's public positioning further reflects this oscillatory logic. At the 2024 Spotify Loud & Clear press event, he celebrated the reach of Indonesian-language music on global platforms while simultaneously critiquing the lack of structural support for artists working internationally (Era.id, 2024; Setiawan & Rantung, 2024). This paradox, being inside the machine yet disillusioned by its scaffolding, positions Hindia as both participant and dissenter, echoing the ambivalence of many metamodern cultural producers (Pradana, 2024).

Yet this sense of empowerment remains hollow. Dancing because "career is meaningless" is not emancipation; it is adaptation. As Fisher contends, this form of micro-emancipation offers temporary therapeutic relief without unsettling systemic conditions. Emotional coping becomes privatized, individualized. Hope is transformed into a pacifying strategy, an emotional analgesic. This aligns with Angela McRobbie's (2018) critique of the "soft tyranny" within creative industries, where emotional expressivity is both a requirement and a marketable asset. The creative subject must not only produce but also emote, authentically, persuasively, and tastefully.

There is also a gendered dimension to Hindia's affective performance. His public persona, marked by vulnerability, emotional fragility, and candor, complicates dominant codes of Indonesian masculinity. Drawing on Connell's (1995) notion of alternative masculinities, we may read Hindia as emblematic of a broader cultural shift wherein emotional openness among men is no longer subversive but expected, even branded. As featured in the 2025 documentary *Bersekutu Kita Bisa*, his lyrical honesty and stylistic hybridity are framed as markers of a progressive indie-pop aesthetic that has "redrawn the boundaries of the mainstream."

Yet, as Banet-Weiser (2018) warns, such performances of vulnerability risk becoming commodified identities. Emotional confession becomes another genre of cultural production, another form of affective labor in the market. Even sincerity, then, becomes strategic. To be clear, Hindia's lyrics are not cynical. They are earnest, crafted with disarming softness and poetic restraint. But this sincerity is situated: embedded within discursive and economic structures that govern what may be said, sung, and felt. Hindia offers a voice, articulate, wounded, reflective, that speaks for many. But the collective remains largely imagined. There is no theory of change. No structural intervention. Only a soft affirmation: life hurts, and that's okay. As listeners, we may find solace. But the conditions that produce the pain remain largely untouched.

3.4. Kunto Aji: Healing as Affect, Market, and Moral Technology

Among the voices shaping the metamodern emotional landscape of Indonesia's millennial generation, Kunto Aji occupies a distinct and affectively potent niche. His

music, frequently described as “therapeutic”, interweaves soft vocal textures, ambient instrumentation, and self-soothing lyrics that speak directly to a wounded collective psyche. Songs such as “Rehat” (2019) and “Pilu Membiru” (2019), both released in 2019, are not merely love ballads or songs of heartbreak; they are emotional architectures, carefully constructed forms of auditory healing, designed to accompany the listener through cycles of vulnerability, acceptance, and release. However, while sonically calming, these compositions remain firmly embedded within the logic of the healing industry: the commodification of psychological recovery in the era of late capitalism.

In *Rehat*, Kunto Aji sings “*Tenangkan hati / Semua ini bukan salahmu / Jangan berhenti / Yang kau takutkan takkan terjadi.*” This is more than consolation; it is lyrical therapy. The voice within the song assumes the tone of a counselor, or perhaps a friend schooled in the discourse of self-help. The message is not simply to feel better, but to manage the self following therapeutic directives: calm yourself, forgive yourself, trust the universe. This is not incidental. As Eva Illouz (2007) has noted, the rise of emotional capitalism has rendered intimacy, healing, and authenticity deeply intertwined with market relations. The listener is not merely moved; they are, in effect, treated.

Rehat has since become an anthem within mental health conversations among Indonesian youth. It frequently appears on playlists labeled “healing” or “self-care,” algorithmically curated and widely circulated via platforms like Spotify. During his 2022 performance at Joyland Festival, Kunto Aji moved beyond traditional musical delivery, inviting his audience to express emotions, whether through crying or laughter, as a form of “public introspection.” As reported by Kompas Muda (Utama, 2022), this live performance became a moment of collective catharsis, signaling a shift in the way emotional release is not only experienced but also staged in contemporary cultural life.

This multimedia sensibility continued in the 2024 release of his third album, *Pengantar Purifikasi Pikir*, which was launched in collaboration with visual artist Antonio Reinhard. In this project, the album’s lyrics were translated into visual art, establishing an immersive, cross-modal aesthetic space that blends sonic and visual registers of emotional processing (Asih, 2024). As Kunto Aji himself described, the project sought to “open new emotional dimensions” through non-verbal expression, positioning him not merely as a singer-songwriter but as a curator of affect.

Similarly, *Pilu Membiru* contemplates the melancholia of unspoken words and unresolved partings. The lyrics repeat, with measured intensity, “*Masih banyak yang belum sempat / Aku katakan padamu.*” This repetition is haunting, evoking open wounds and the impossibility of closure. Yet the grief presented here is enveloped in softness, ambient strings, subdued tempos, and Kunto Aji’s tender delivery. It is not grief as rupture, but grief as design. As with *Rehat*, the affect remains sublimated. Drawing from Fredric Jameson’s (2005) reading of late capitalist cultural production, one might argue that the emotional is permitted, so long as it remains aestheticized, commodifiable, and managed.



Figure 3. 'Pilu Membiru' video project directed by Surya Adi Susianto illustrates the emotional tension experienced by young Indonesian men who grapple with sadness and vulnerability in silence. Through its melancholic tone and restrained visual language, the project challenges dominant norms of masculinity by making emotional pain visible and narratable within youth culture (Susianto, 2019).

Indeed, *Pilu Membiru* is not merely a song, but a multimedia discourse on metamodern emotionality. The *Pilu Membiru Experience*, a collaborative initiative involving psychologists and real-life trauma stories from volunteer participants, constructs a post-subjective narrative that negates ego and emphasizes communal empathy. This aligns with the broader metamodern aesthetic of "ironic sincerity," oscillating between hope and melancholy, idealism and skepticism. Utilizing 396 Hz frequencies and orchestral arrangements by GUT Orchestra, the project situates itself at the frontier of Indonesia's therapeutic pop, illustrating how music can function as both a site of personal healing and a medium for collective intimacy (Puteri, 2021).

From a metamodern perspective, Kunto Aji's compositions hover between resignation and transcendence. *Rehat*, with its circular chord progressions and moderate tempo, avoids the extremes of despair or utopianism. It instead offers a sonic space of mindfulness, a quiet presence that reflects what Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) identify as the core of metamodernism: the pendulum swing between depth and irony, sincerity and knowingness. Kunto Aji's audience is not seeking revolution; they are seeking emotional alignment. This is not a failure of political imagination; it is a cultural symptom of our affective condition.

Nevertheless, this therapeutic gesture is not without ambivalence. While Kunto Aji offers comfort and care, he also participates in the neoliberal ethic of self-responsibilization, wherein the management of emotional pain becomes the burden of the individual. The system that induces this pain remains unnamed, unchallenged. Healing is offered not as critique, but as quietist survival. Here, Herbert Marcuse's (1964) concept of "one-dimensionality" remains highly instructive: even sorrow, regret, and anxiety can be absorbed back into systems of commodified emotional control.

Yet to dismiss Kunto Aji's work as merely complicit would be unjust. His emotional labor is sincere, and its impact is real: offering recognition, presence, and solace. But comfort is not always synonymous with liberation. The enduring question

persists: when healing becomes industry, when intimacy is branded, and when grief is curated as mood, can the affective ever truly be emancipatory?

4. Discussion

Across the musical landscapes of Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, what emerges is not merely a pattern of emotional candor or personal confession, but a broader cultural grammar of what can be called oscillative metamodernism, a modality wherein affect is rendered meaningful, yet suspended; critical awareness is voiced, yet systemically inert; and emancipation, though yearned for, is perpetually deferred.

This condition, deeply rooted in the emotional economies of late capitalism, is not one of total alienation nor revolutionary rupture. Rather, it manifests as a rhythmic back-and-forth between insight and impotence, between the recognition that “something is wrong” and the repeated turning inward to manage, modulate, or spiritualize that wrong. As Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) articulate, metamodernism is not the negation of postmodern irony nor the re-embrace of modernist hope, but a swinging motion between the two. In this cultural logic, affect is neither fully liberated nor fully co-opted; it wavers.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the lyrical mantras offered by the three case studies. When Tulus sings “*Semua baik-baik saja*” (everything is fine), or when Hindia proclaims “*Lakukan apa yang kau mau sekarang*” (do what you want now), or when Kunto Aji whispers “*Tenangkan hati, semua ini bukan salahmu*” (calm your heart, none of this is your fault), we encounter a generation’s deep need to feel, to validate, and to survive. But we also encounter the limits of that survival strategy. These refrains, though tender, function as affective containment mechanisms, redirecting systemic anxiety toward private resolution. The promise of emancipation is offered as a personal choice, never as a structural possibility.

This pattern can be seen as symptomatic of a deeper historical impasse. Youth are encouraged to express, but not to intervene; to critique gently, but not to disrupt; to suffer aesthetically, but not politically. In this way, even the articulation of alienation becomes productive, not in the emancipatory sense, but in its ability to generate cultural capital, emotional resonance, and consumer engagement (Jameson, 2005).

Mark Fisher’s (2009) concept of capitalist realism further clarifies the dynamics at play. The sense that “there is no alternative” permeates these songs, not as doctrine, but as mood. Fisher reminds us that the most powerful effect of neoliberal hegemony is not censorship, but the slow erosion of our capacity to imagine anything beyond it. This is what makes the oscillation so haunting: it is not simply movement, but repetition. Hope flickers, but never solidifies. The subject is left hanging, feeling everything, but doing nothing.

Crucially, this oscillation is not a failure of the artists. It is the dominant affective structure of the current conjuncture, especially among Indonesia’s precarious, hyper-mediated, and emotionally literate youth. These subjects are reflective, not naïve. They know that “healing” is often commodified. They are aware that self-care has become a branding strategy and that vulnerability now sells. But knowing this does not release them. We remain attached to fantasies that hurt us because those fantasies are the only forms of comfort we have left (Berlant, 2011). This is the cruel optimism of the metamodern subject: aware of their entrapment, and yet unable, or unwilling, to abandon its aesthetics.

Moreover, the supposed radicalism of emotional openness must be interrogated in terms of market logic. Emotions are never “free” (Ahmed, 2004; Illouz, 2007). They are culturally mediated, politically structured, and economically circulated. In today’s creative economy, vulnerability has become not only permissible but profitable. Artists, especially men like Hindia and Kunto Aji, are celebrated for breaking with stoic masculinity, but even this transgression is absorbed into the machinery of branding and affective consumption.

In the end, metamodern oscillation reveals a subjectivity that is suspended: caught between critique and compliance, between longing and lethargy. It is neither a cynical withdrawal nor a hopeful uprising. Rather, it is a delay, a prolonged moment of deferral where feeling stands in for transformation, and expression becomes the endpoint, not the beginning, of change. This is the heartbreak of the metamodern moment in Indonesian pop: not that youth feel too little, but that they feel so much, and yet remain trapped within the very systems their feelings critique. Emotion becomes both a refuge and a prison, at once intimate and institutional.

Within the broader terrain of affective expression in Indonesia’s contemporary pop music, one striking feature remains underexplored: the gendered voice of vulnerability. The prominence of male artists, Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, in articulating emotional depth, inner wounds, and the search for healing signals a reconfiguration of masculinity under late capitalism. These are not simply men who “dare to be sad,” but figures who navigate the tensions of contemporary gendered subjectivity with an affective literacy that neither collapses into feminized tropes nor clings to hegemonic masculine codes.

What we are witnessing is a transformation in how masculinity is performed, branded, and consumed, a shift that resonates with Raewyn Connell’s (1995) notion of hegemonic masculinity, yet departs from it through the emergence of alternative masculinities that are not based on dominance, stoicism, or control. These musicians enact what might be called affective masculinity: a mode of being male that foregrounds emotional reflexivity, relational fragility, and psychic complexity. The fact that these expressions are met not with mockery but with admiration indicates a cultural shift in the emotional economy of gender.

Yet this shift is not entirely radical. As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) has noted in her analysis of popular feminism and popular misogyny, affective expression, especially in digital and cultural industries, can become part of a neoliberal grammar of selfhood, where emotional vulnerability is valorized only insofar as it remains marketable, inspirational, or aesthetically pleasing. In this sense, the male artists under discussion do not dismantle masculinity; rather, they repackage it for the gig economy, where sensitivity becomes both currency and content.

Still, this repackaging cannot be dismissed as mere commodification. What it produces is a hybrid masculinity, to borrow from the scholarship of Ayuningtyas (2017), Perwiradmoko (2023), and Reskiwardina et al. (2024), where emotional exposure becomes a form of agency. It is not about “becoming feminine” or “soft,” but about reclaiming the right to feel, to be conflicted, to confess. When Hindia sings about exhaustion from work, or when Tulus speaks to the self in gentle affirmations, they are participating in the re-politicization of interiority, reminding us that the inner life is not apolitical, but deeply embedded in structures of gender, labor, and power.

Moreover, this emotional turn challenges the lingering cultural script that associates masculinity with silence. As Mark Simpson (1994) presciently wrote in his

formulation of the metrosexual, the late capitalist subject is increasingly shaped by consumption, self-styling, and emotional visibility. What we see in Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji is perhaps a post-metrosexual iteration: not just stylish men who feel, but structurally anxious men who perform their affect in alignment with the spiritualized, therapeutic logic of the self-help age.

Nevertheless, the political possibilities of this affective masculinity remain uncertain. On the one hand, it allows space for more expansive models of male emotional expression, pushing against toxic norms of emotional repression. On the other hand, it often reframes suffering as a personal problem to be managed through playlists, affirmations, and inner work, rather than a structural condition to be collectively contested.

This ambivalence returns us to the insights of Lauren Berlant (2011) and Sara Ahmed (2004), who both warn against reading affect as inherently liberating. Just because something is felt deeply does not mean it escapes the circuits of power. Just because a man cries on a track does not mean the system that made him cry has been undone.

Still, something important is taking place. These male musicians are not only singing about pain; they are redefining who gets to feel it publicly and what that feeling should look like. They embody a generation of men untangling their identity not in rebellion, but in reflection, men who, rather than shouting, choose to whisper their way out of silence.

At the core of the emotional turn in Indonesian pop music lies a paradox: the widespread visibility of sadness, anxiety, and healing does not signal an escape from capitalist structures; it often signals their intensification. What appears, on the surface, as a cultural opening for emotional honesty is in many ways the refinement of capitalism's latest frontier: the commodification of affective subjectivity.

In the works of Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, pain is rarely explosive or revolutionary. It is aesthetically curated, sonically tender, and visually intimate. These artists do not shout into the void; they whisper into algorithmic timelines, offering curated experiences of vulnerability that are designed to soothe, rather than disrupt. Their work operates as what Fredric Jameson (2005) would describe as the cultural logic of late capitalism: sadness no longer resists commodification; it has become one of its most profitable idioms.

This is not to say these expressions are inauthentic. Rather, authenticity itself has become a valuable asset in the digital attention economy. Under what Mark Fisher (2009) termed capitalist realism, even dissent becomes a genre, and heartbreak a brand. The contemporary listener is invited not just to consume music, but to consume affect, packaged in Spotify playlists with titles like "Sad but Healing," "Emo Night," or "Menangis di Kamar Sendiri". The listener is not just hearing another's pain; they are performing their own through the act of streaming. This is not merely music; it is emotional labor sold back to the self.

This affective economy mirrors the logic explored by Eva Illouz (2007), who showed how emotional life becomes structured by market relations: the feelings one expresses, seeks, or performs are increasingly shaped by the expectations and vocabularies of consumer culture. In this frame, "healing" becomes a ritualized commodity: an experience to be curated, aestheticized, and consumed, often in solitude, often in silence.

Here, Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of cruel optimism is particularly apt. The idea that music can heal becomes a seductive fantasy that attaches individuals to

structures which, paradoxically, exacerbate the very wounds they are trying to soothe. When Hindia sings “hidup ini tak ada artinya, maka kau bebas mengarang maknanya,” the nihilism is rebranded as empowerment. But this freedom to construct personal meaning is profoundly conditioned: it is a freedom that must be self-managed, privately executed, and ultimately monetized. There is no demand for structural transformation, only a gentle nudge toward resignation with style.

In this context, the culture of healing functions less as liberation and more as pacification. It offers comfort, but also discipline. It encourages reflection, but within limits. Instead of organizing solidarity, it organizes self-regulation. It speaks of self-love, but rarely of collective care or political grief. This is what Angela McRobbie (2018) critiques as the entrepreneurial self of the creative industries: a subject who manages their feelings like a business portfolio, always branding, always optimizing, always surviving.

What is lost in this process is not just structural critique, but the possibility of grieving together, of reimagining together. The therapeutic turn in pop, while not without merit, risks becoming a tranquilizer for structural malaise, rendering crisis aesthetically pleasing and thereby resistant to rupture. The pain remains, but now it sings.

In the cultural atmosphere of late capitalism, Indonesian youth emerge not as passive victims but as highly reflexive agents, self-aware, emotionally articulate, and aesthetically sensitive. They know the system is flawed. They feel the weight of precarious futures, shrinking social mobility, and the silent violence of a gig economy that rewards flexibility and punishes fragility. Yet this critical awareness, rather than becoming the basis for resistance, often loops back into itself, an endless oscillation between irony and sincerity, between despair and self-soothing. This is the central tension of metamodern subjectivity: to feel deeply, yet act cautiously; to hope, but only within aesthetic boundaries.

The young artists discussed in this article, Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, embody this tension. Their lyrics are filled with existential questioning, subtle sarcasm, and gentle affirmations. They speak to a generation that recognizes the absurdity of labor (“*Karir ini tak ada artinya*”) and the quiet tyranny of productivity (“*Tenangkan hati, semua ini bukan salahmu*”). However, the response is rarely revolt; it is a reflection. Music becomes not a battle cry but a soft meditation. Pain is not a rallying point but a personalized aesthetic. In short, the political becomes therapeutic.

This is not to say that reflexivity is futile. As Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) argue, the oscillation between modern hope and postmodern skepticism can be “productively confusing.” But there is a risk here: when emotional intelligence is not accompanied by structural critique or collective action, it can devolve into affective solipsism, a constant circling of self-feelings without outlets for transformation.

Many young Indonesians know that the world they inhabit is shaped by neoliberal logic, digital hyperconnectivity, and exhausted social institutions. They understand, intuitively or explicitly, the “capitalist realism” described by Mark Fisher (2009): the idea that even in their dreams, they are trapped within the system’s logic. But in place of resistance, what often emerges is micro-expression: curated sadness on Instagram, healing-themed playlists, emotionally aware podcast content. These are not trivial; they are forms of life. But they are also easily co-opted.

This is the trap of oscillation: the feeling that one is critically outside the system while still performing within its codes. The subject becomes politically aware yet institutionally impotent, expressive yet disempowered. Music offers catharsis, not

confrontation. The young are not apathetic; they are exhausted, trapped between knowing too much and being able to do too little.

Moreover, the affective turn in youth culture often functions as a release valve, managing rather than mobilizing emotional discontent. As Sara Ahmed (2004) reminds us, emotions are not only private states but social technologies; they move through bodies, shape relations, and reproduce power. When sadness is endlessly aestheticized, when hope becomes content, and when vulnerability is monetized, emotions risk becoming tools of containment rather than liberation.

The reflexive youth, then, is a paradox: intelligent but fragmented, expressive but isolated, aware but pacified. What's needed is not less feeling, but new infrastructures of feeling, as Raymond Williams might say: collective platforms where grief can become solidarity, where aesthetic pain can become political energy. Without this, the oscillation will continue, melancholic, beautiful, and ultimately paralyzing.

The rise of emotionally expressive male artists in Indonesia, such as Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji, signals a significant shift in the gendered affective economy. These musicians perform a mode of masculinity that is gentle, self-reflective, and emotionally articulate, offering an alternative to the hegemonic masculine ideal that has long valorized stoicism, rationality, and emotional detachment. In songs like *Diri*, *Secukupnya*, and *Rehat*, male vulnerability is not only made visible, but it is also aestheticized, stylized, and distributed. The question, however, is not simply whether this reconfigured masculinity is more “liberated,” but whether it marks a form of affective resistance, or rather a cultural capture under neoliberalism.

Drawing on Raewyn Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity, these affective performances may appear to challenge traditional gender norms. Yet, as Connell notes, alternative masculinities often emerge within the hegemonic order, not outside it. Emotional vulnerability, in this case, does not necessarily dismantle male privilege; it may rebrand it. The emotionally intelligent man becomes a desirable subject, not because he subverts masculinity, but because he updates it to suit the demands of contemporary capitalism: flexible, marketable, affectively literate.

This insight aligns with Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2018) analysis in *Empowered*, which shows how the affective turn in gender politics, especially in popular media, can often serve the very systems it appears to critique. In the context of music, male artists may articulate personal pain and invite audiences into moments of shared melancholy, but this is often done through hyper-curated images, strategic branding, and emotional labor that aligns neatly with the algorithms of the digital marketplace. Authenticity becomes performance; vulnerability becomes content.

What we witness, then, is a double bind: these artists open valuable discursive spaces for men to feel, to grieve, to pause, but they also operate within an economy that rewards this kind of feeling when it is packaged correctly. This aligns with Mark Simpson's (1994) early critique of the metrosexual, where masculinity is not so much dismantled as redesigned for consumer culture. The emotional man is not anti-patriarchal; he is the next evolution of a masculinity shaped by markets rather than by tradition.

More troubling is how this affective masculinity can obscure structural violence. By emphasizing personal healing over political change, and aesthetic emotional labor over collective grief or action, the emotional male subject risks becoming post-political: emotionally fluent but socially inert. As Eva Illouz (2007) warns, when the emotional becomes a commodity, it can lose its political bite. The sadness is real, the vulnerability is sincere, but their cultural function may be to manage affect rather than to mobilize it.

This is not to discredit the value of affective transformation, but to highlight its ambivalence. These performances of masculinity do create space for dialogue, for softness, for identification. But they also raise the question: what kind of resistance is possible when resistance itself becomes aestheticized? Can tenderness challenge capital, or is it merely a new product line?

The answer is, perhaps, both. The emotional man in Indonesian pop is a liminal figure: part critic, part brand ambassador; part disruptor, part trend. He is caught, like his listeners, in the oscillation of metamodern sensibility: desiring depth but haunted by commodification, reaching for authenticity in a landscape governed by metrics. His masculinity is not the old one, but whether it's new in a liberatory sense remains open to struggle.

5. Conclusion

This article has explored the representation of Quarter Life Crisis and the broader affective landscape of Indonesian youth through the lens of contemporary pop music by Tulus, Hindia, and Kunto Aji. Drawing on theories of late capitalism, affective subjectivity, metamodern oscillation, and gender reconfiguration, the analysis reveals that Indonesian pop music articulates a generation's emotional and ideological tensions. These expressions are not merely personal or cathartic; they are deeply embedded within the cultural logic of advanced capitalism.

The narratives of vulnerability, anxiety, and emotional healing found in these songs reflect a generation that is critically aware yet structurally immobilized. Rather than offering revolutionary rupture, these musicians articulate a reflexive and melancholic subjectivity, one that is both sincere and commodified. Healing becomes aesthetic; sadness becomes strategy; emotion becomes marketable content. Emotional articulation thus provides temporary relief but rarely translates into structural critique or collective transformation.

The rise of emotionally expressive male musicians also signals a shift in gender performance. This form of "affective masculinity" challenges dominant norms by embracing softness and self-reflection, yet risks being co-opted by neoliberal affective economies. Instead of dismantling hegemonic masculinity, it often rebrands it in emotionally fluent and commercially palatable forms.

Consequently, Indonesian pop music performs a dual function: it gives voice to genuine emotional experiences while simultaneously pacifying political energies that might otherwise challenge the status quo. It offers spaces for coping and containment. This ambivalence invites further reflection: who benefits from a generation that is emotionally articulate yet politically disarmed?

This study does not dismiss the emotional resonance or cultural value of pop music. Rather, it calls for deeper readings that situate these expressions within the ambivalent terrain of affective capitalism, where resistance and reproduction often blur. Future research should further explore how affective spaces like musical, digital, or intimate can serve as a collective imagination and transformation instead of only as sites of consolation. In an era where sadness is streamed, vulnerability is liked, and healing is monetized, the task is not to feel less, but to ask instead: what kinds of feelings can build the future?

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