

Salasika

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Feminization of Poverty: A critical study on the powerlessness of women informal parking attendants in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty through a case study of women informal parking attendants in Surabaya. In the context of urbanization and economic inequality, poor women are increasingly pushed into vulnerable and unprotected sectors of informal labor. The aim of this research is to reveal the socio-economic realities, survival strategies, and structures of power relations faced by these women. Employing a qualitative approach, the study utilized a case study and in-depth interviews with seven primary informants. The findings revealed that these women worked under legally uncertain conditions, shouldered the dual burden of public and domestic labor, and operated within an informal work structure dominated by patron-client relations and symbolic control. Nevertheless, the women also demonstrated agency through spatial negotiations, community solidarity, and survival strategies. The study concludes that the feminization of poverty in urban spaces is not only economic in nature, but also political and cultural. These findings highlight the urgent need for inclusive and gender-sensitive urban policies to promote social sustainability for marginalized women in urban settings.

KEYWORDS: *feminization of poverty; women; informal parking attendants; gender injustice*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the feminization of poverty has become a central topic in gender and global development studies since the late 20th century. The term was first introduced by Pearce (1978) to describe the growing proportion of women among the world's poor. This condition is reinforced by the fact that women face greater structural barriers in accessing education, decent work, and social protection (Chant, 2003; Moghadam, 2005).

In an increasingly flexible global economy, Standing (1999) highlights how women are disproportionately absorbed into informal sectors characterized by

low wages and a lack of labor protections. In developing countries, including Indonesia, the informal sector employs the majority of female workers (Chen, 2001; ILO, 2018), exacerbating gender inequality and deepening the feminization of poverty (Elson, 1999; Razavi, 2011).

Indonesia, a developing country, is home to Surabaya—its second-largest metropolitan city—which illustrates the dynamics of social inequality driven by rapid urbanization (Widayati, 2022; Nugroho, 2020). Informal occupations such as street parking attendants have become increasingly common, especially among women who have limited access to formal employment (Hartini, 2022; Damayanti, 2023). This practice serves as a manifestation of the feminization of poverty in an urban context.

Previous studies have revealed how women in the informal sector are vulnerable to discrimination, violence, income insecurity, and lack of access to social protection programs (UN Women, 2020; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Sen, 1999). However, there is a notable gap in research specifically focusing on women working as informal parking attendants within the urban context of Indonesia, particularly in Surabaya. This underexplored phenomenon presents a critical area of study.

Most existing studies on informal parking work concentrate on issues of criminality and urban governance (Sutopo, 2020), while few have investigated how women engage in this sector and experience multiple vulnerabilities due to economic disempowerment and gender inequality (Kabeer, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). Sutopo's (2020) approach, for instance, largely emphasizes macro-level legal frameworks, lacking a gender-sensitive analytical lens.

International literature strongly associates the feminization of poverty with inadequate social protection, job segregation, and the double burden of labor (Chant, 2006; Razavi, 2011; Moghadam, 2005). In the national context, research has predominantly focused on domestic workers (Utami, 2019) and factory laborers (Marwati, 2021), while women in semi-informal sectors, such as informal parking, remain underrepresented.

This study offers a new contribution by examining how female informal parking attendants in Surabaya construct survival strategies within a precarious urban socio-economic structure. It combines a feminist approach with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital and Foucault's (1980) theory of power relations, providing a comprehensive framework to understand how power operates within informal social structures. These theoretical perspectives enable a deeper exploration of how structural and symbolic disempowerment is constructed in women's informal labor.

Based on this framework, the study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What are the socio-economic conditions of female informal parking attendants in Surabaya? (2) What forms of disempowerment do they experience in the context of informal labor? and (3) How does the feminization of poverty manifest in their daily lives?

By centering the experiences of female informal parking workers, this study positions them as critical subjects for understanding the dynamics of the feminization of poverty in Indonesia's urban informal economy. It is hoped that

the research will provide both empirical and theoretical insights into the structural mechanisms that reinforce the disempowerment of poor urban women. Furthermore, it aims to inform gender-sensitive urban development policies through policy briefs targeted at government stakeholders.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and feminist methodology. This approach was chosen as it was well-suited for exploring women's subjective experiences within the context of structural inequality and power relations (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Harding, 1987). A qualitative design also allows for in-depth narrative exploration of how women construct survival strategies amid economic uncertainty (Creswell, 2013).

The research was conducted across several informal parking locations in Surabaya, including the Blauran Market area, Jembatan Merah, and the vicinity of Jalan Tunjungan. The research subjects were female informal parking attendants selected through purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) identifying as female; (2) having worked in informal parking for at least one year; and (3) willing to participate in in-depth interviews. In total, seven key informants were identified, all of whom came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and had worked in the informal parking sector for at least two years. This ensured that participants represented a vulnerable category of informal workers.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing for a flexible exploration of informants' lived experiences. This technique is considered appropriate for understanding how subjects construct meaning around poverty and powerlessness (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, participant observation was conducted, whereby the researcher was present at parking sites for several days to observe firsthand the social interactions and work practices of the women in the field (Spradley, 1980). This observation enriched contextual understanding and strengthened data validity. The final technique used was document analysis. Secondary data were collected from local media reports, municipal regulations, and government documents related to parking management in Surabaya and informal sector empowerment policies.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with an interpretivist orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process involved the following steps: (1) data transcription; (2) initial coding; (3) theme categorization; and (4) interpretation through the theoretical lenses of the feminization of poverty, power relations (Foucault, 1980), and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Data validity was ensured through source and methodological triangulation (Patton, 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Informant Socioeconomic Profile

This study involved seven female informants who worked as illegal parking attendants in Surabaya. The seven informants came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds but had a common thread: they were in a position of economic powerlessness that forced them to choose work in the informal sector with all its limitations and uncertainties. This phenomenon shows a real manifestation of what is called the feminization of poverty, namely a condition in which women are more vulnerable to falling into structural poverty due to minimal access to decent work, education, and social protection (Moghadam, 2005).

Mrs. Sumiati (40 years old), an elementary school graduate, lives with her husband and three children. Previously, she worked as a household assistant, but lost her job two years ago. Due to the difficulty of finding a new job, she finally accepted an offer to become an illegal parking attendant. She said:

"I have applied everywhere and looked for work, it is very difficult to get. Finally I was offered to be a parking attendant, but not officially."

Her husband worked odd jobs, and her eldest child, who is still in school, is also forced to work as a dishwasher in a restaurant. In such conditions, Sumiati must manage an uncertain daily income to cover the costs of rent, electricity, water, and her children's school needs. Her dual role as breadwinner and household manager reflects the typical double burden of women in a patriarchal society.

Mrs. Muslikah (37 years old), a migrant from Sampang, Madura, dropped out of elementary school in the 5th due to her family's economic limitations. She has been married since she was a teenager and is a single mother after her husband died.

With a daily income of around IDR 75,000 to IDR 100,000, she is able to rent a boarding house with her children and meet basic needs. Muslikah decided not to remarry, because for her being a single head of the family is more stable psychologically and economically. This decision illustrates the brave survival strategy of poor women in an unfair social structure.

Mrs. Faizah (50 years old), originally from Nganjuk, used to work in a factory before being laid off. She then works as a parking attendant in the Blauran Market area and expresses her gratitude despite her initial awkwardness. She works from the afternoon to evening, earning an income of between IDR 50,000 and IDR 80,000. In her family, she is the economic backbone because her husband, who only works as a pedicab driver, does not have a fixed income. She even still put aside money to give her grandchildren pocket money, a form of intergenerational solidarity that shows how women often become the economic "support" of the extended family.

Ms. Dewi Aisyah (24 years old), a single woman, a vocational high school graduate, and the backbone for her elderly and sickly parents. She previously

worked as a shopkeeper at Pasar Atom but switched to being a parking attendant due to the higher income.

"On weekdays it can be IDR 80,000, on Sundays it can be IDR 120,000."

Her income is used up for household needs and her parents' medical expenses. Although she is still young, Dewi bears a heavy burden as the main breadwinner. This kind of burden is common among young women from urban poor backgrounds who face an economic system lacking adequate social security.

Mrs. Nurjannah (35 years old), an elementary school graduate from Bangkalan, initially worked as a waitress at a food stall but switched to being a parking attendant due to the better income. With an income of around IDR 70,000 to IDR 120,000 per day, she can cover her children's school needs and other basic needs. Her husband, who also works odd jobs, eventually becomes a parking attendant. Nurjannah portrays the collective effort of poor families, where husbands and wives share the burden to survive amidst limitations.

Mrs. Halimah (30 years old), previously a housewife, was forced to work after her husband was laid off. She works from noon until dusk as a parking attendant, while still taking care of her child who is still in kindergarten. Unfortunately, the interview data do not provide detailed information on her income and spending patterns are not well described. However, Halimah still demonstrates the character of a resilient woman in facing the household economic crisis.

Mrs. Ika Marwati (48 years old), from Probolinggo, previously worked in a home industry before finally becoming a parking attendant around Tugu Pahlawan (Heroes Monument).

"Because I don't have a diploma and I'm old, it's hard to find work. Finally, I join a parking coworker."

With an income of between Rp 50,000 and Rp 100,000 per day, she supports her family's economic well-being and remains actively involved in social activities in her village, such as social gatherings. Her activeness shows how poor women not only play a role in the household and work, but also maintain social relations in the community as a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Overall, the seven informants present a portrait of structural inequality experienced by poor urban women. They face obstacles in education, limited access to formal employment, and no social security, but still carry out domestic and public functions simultaneously. Women in this position experience a very visible feminization of poverty, as stated by Chant (2003), that women's poverty is not only economic, but also cultural and symbolic.

The Reality of Women's Work in the Illegal Parking Sector

In an increasingly segmented and layered urban economic system, women who work as illegal parking attendants occupy marginal, informal, and

unsecured work positions. This reality reflects the strengthening of the informal economic sector as a "flight" space for poor urban women. They not only fill job vacancies that are not provided by the state or the formal labor market, but also become part of a work system that is managed in a semi-feudal manner through the structure of "bosses", "landowners", and "backers".

Work Patterns and Rhythms

The majority of female parking attendants who participated as informants in this study work with a daily work pattern, including weekends and public holidays, without fixed holidays. They usually work in two shifts: morning to afternoon, or afternoon to evening. The difference in these shifts depends on the work location and the volume of vehicles in the area. As told by Mrs. Nurjannah:

"Surabaya is crowded with illegal parking on Saturdays and Sundays...it is busiest on Sundays because there is a car-free day event and there is a cheap second-hand goods market around the East Java Governor's office in the Tugu Pahlawan area...visitors who overflow with motorized vehicles become a delicious breakfast for parking attendants..." (Interview with Nurjannah, March 2025)

This phenomenon suggests that holidays are actually "harvest days" for parking attendants. This also shows that women workers in the informal sector work in a flexible and exploitative capitalist work logic—they do not know rest time and are vulnerable to overwork without compensation or legal protection (Standing, 2011).

The absence of supervision from official parties, such as the Transportation Agency, on busy days highlights the state's neglect of parking lot regulations, which are actually controlled by private parties or informal actors referred to by informants as "boss" or "backing". This was emphasized by Mrs. Ika:

"From the City Transportation Agency which officially manages parking, no one comes to supervise on weekends... because parking lots in busy areas of Surabaya have been bought by boza or backers and in collaboration with the City Government..." (Interview with Ika, May 24, 2025)

The irregular work rhythm, depending on the volume of vehicles, and the absence of formal institutions make women illegal parking attendants work in a very fluid but oppressive work system.

Parking Social Structure: Bosses, Backers, and Invisible Power

These female parking attendants are not independent workers, but are in a subordinate work relationship with the parking lot owner, who is referred to as "boss" or "abah". They make daily deposits from parking fees collected directly from road users. In this system, workers receive a portion of their wages that is determined by the manager, without clear contracts, social security, or complaint mechanisms. As explained by Mrs. Faizah:

"I work, it is halal because I sweat... there is a boz who pays me... for example, if I get IDR 300,000 a day, I get IDR 100,000 in wages... later I will pay it to the boz..." (Interview with Faizah, May 16, 2025)

This system reflects a patron-client-based work relationship that contains power inequality. Women have no control over the results of their work, and their position is highly dependent on the "protection" of informal superiors. This is in line with Lindell's (2010) findings that the informal sector in Global South cities is often not a space free from regulation, but rather is regulated by institutionalized informal power—whether from thuggery, mass organizations, or shadow bureaucrats.

Income Uncertainty and Field Challenges

Working as an illegal parking attendant is characterized by high vulnerability, including irregular income, no insurance, no paid leave, and dependence on weather and traffic conditions. Muslikah, one of the informants, explained that if she did not show up for work, she would not get anything:

"If I don't work, I don't get any money. But I'm grateful, because I have a boss who gives me work." (Interview with Muslikah, April 2025)

In addition to economic uncertainty, these women also face the risk of verbal and sexual violence from parking service users. Young women like Dewi Aisyah said that sexual teasing and jokes were commonplace:

"If I get teased, that's normal, just don't touch me. I'm used to it because I'm on the road every day." (Interview with Dewi, May 2025)

The weather is also a physical challenge. They work in hot sun, rain, and pollution without adequate protection. All informants complained of dull skin and respiratory problems due to vehicle pollution. This situation shows how women's work in this sector is not only economically vulnerable but also threatens physical and mental health.

No less important is the issue of gender-based wage inequality. Women admit that male parking attendants get a higher share of the results because they are considered stronger in arranging vehicles. This discrimination reflects the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in informal work, where masculinity is considered more productive than the work done by women (Elson, 1999).

Some informants admitted that they had never been evicted by the authorities, because they were protected by "boss" or because they knew when to avoid patrols. However, there were also experiences like Halimah's, who was approached by someone claiming to be a government deposit collector:

"There was a man asking for money, he said it was for a deposit to the government. But I knew he wasn't my boss... I was scared at that time too." (Interview with Halimah, May 2025)

This condition shows that the security for women in illegal parking is superficial: as long as they are in an informal protection network, they feel safe,

but once the informal structure is absent, they are very vulnerable to violence, extortion, and eviction. This confirms their position as a working group that is not only unrecognized by the state but also unprotected by the formal legal system.

Survival Strategies in Uncertainty

Women illegal parking attendants in Surabaya not only face severe economic and social challenges, but also have to continuously develop survival strategies. When the state is absent and the formal job market is completely closed to poor women, the informal space becomes a field of struggle that requires not only energy but also ingenuity and social solidarity. In this condition, various adaptive strategies employed by women parking attendants have emerged, ranging from informal loans, utilizing social networks, to adapting to social stigma.

One of the main strategies in dealing with income uncertainty is borrowing from one's closest social network. Mrs. Sumiati said:

"Usually I borrow from my neighbors if it's urgent. If I can't get it, then I go to my relatives... there was also a time when it was too tight, I borrowed from a loan shark... but I don't dare anymore because they are mean when they ask for money..." (Interview with Sumiati, May 2025)

The choice to borrow money from loan sharks shows how poor women are often pushed into exploitative financial channels because they don't have access to formal financial institutions. This was also agreed by Mrs. Faizah, who had tried online loans (*pinjol*):

"I once borrowed online, but my neighbor helped me because I couldn't use a cellphone. The important thing was that I could get money, to buy medicine for my grandchildren at that time." (Interview with Faizah, May 2025)

They also take advantage of informal financial schemes, such as *arisan* or savings and loans in religious study groups, which provide interest-free loans. This is where the importance of women's communities as an economic and social safety net is evident.

This strategy demonstrates how poor women rely on community solidarity as an alternative to the state's absence in providing social protection. This concept is known in feminist theory as the "community-based care economy", where women support each other in informal systems to fill the gaps of the state (Tronto, 1993; Federici, 2012).

Social Network and Family Support

The family is also an important foundation in supporting the lives of women parking attendants. Although the husbands of several informants work odd jobs or even are not employed, the presence of the family is still considered important emotionally and socially. Ibu Nurjannah, for example, said that her husband eventually followed her into becoming a parking attendant:

“Because I worked as a parking attendant and the income was better, my husband eventually joined. So we both work, but I still cook and take care of the house too.” (Interview with Nurjannah, April 2025)

Dewi Aisyah, although still single, works full-time to care for her parents:

“All my income is for my parents’ needs. They are old and sick. I have to be strong, even though I am tired.” (Interview with Dewi, May 2025)

In these cases, women’s work not only supports themselves, but also others. The economic and care contributions made by women are central to the family’s survival. However, this work is often not formally or symbolically recognized in the social and economic systems.

Adaptation to Social Pressure and Stigmatization

Working as an illegal parking attendant, especially for women, is often looked down upon in society. They are considered to violate gender norms that place women in the domestic sphere, and their work is associated with “street life”, which is closely associated with violence and crime.

However, informants demonstrated adaptive strategies in dealing with this stigma. Mrs. Dewi expressed her indifference to the taunts:

“If someone talks, I just keep quiet. The important thing is that I do halal work. I don’t beg them.” (Interview with Dewi, May 2025)

In contrast, Faizah chose an integrative approach:

“I still join in the women’s activities. If there is a social gathering or community service, I come. So they know that I am also active in the village.” (Interview with Faizah, May 2025)

This adaptation reflects women’s ability to negotiate their social identity amidst pressure. They are not passive in accepting stigmatization, but actively rebuild their self-image and social relations within the community. This demonstrates what Butler (1990) calls “agency in vulnerability”—the power of women to act, even when in a vulnerable and marginalized position.

The survival strategies carried out by women illegal parking workers are not merely a response to poverty, but also a form of symbolic resistance to oppressive socio-economic structures. They refuse to be paralyzed by circumstances, instead manifesting empowerment through work, solidarity, and cultural resistance.

They do not engage on open protests or social movements, but their actions to continue working, reject dependency, and build informal networks within an informal work system are forms of grassroots feminist praxis. In this context, they are not only victims of the feminization of poverty but also social subjects who continuously strive for a more humane living space.

Discussion

Structural and Symbolic Powerlessness

The findings of this study demonstrate that women's work in the illegal parking sector in Surabaya cannot be separated from the structural and symbolic configurations of power. Women's bodies and work experience social, material, and discursive control. In Michel Foucault's view, power is not merely repressive, but productive—it regulates how the body is used, regulated, and positioned in social space. These female parking attendants are part of a network of power that shapes them as productive subjects, yet simultaneously subordinates them (Foucault, 1979).

Their bodies are mobilized in hard work on the streets, without legal protection or health insurance. Not only that, their bodies also become objects of public gaze, sexual jokes, and symbols of "inappropriate" work for women. This shows the existence of disciplinary power that regulates what women's bodies can and cannot do in informal workspaces.

Meanwhile, from Bourdieu's (1986) perspective, this condition of powerlessness can be explained through the concept of habitus and the lack of access to various forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. These women lack economic capital (education, savings, and assets), have minimal social capital (elite networks or institutional support), and experience a symbolic deficit because their work is not socially recognized. As a result, they are trapped in an informal work cycle that does not allow for vertical mobility. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, social class is not only reproduced through formal institutions, but also through dispositions embedded in everyday life, including passive acceptance of inferior positions. These women mostly do not question the oppressive work system, because it has been internalized in the habitus that "the important thing is to be able to eat today".

Power Relations in the Informal Work System

The illegal parking work structure reveals a unique power relation between the "boss", market managers, officials, and female workers. Power is not exercised openly, but through informal mechanisms such as daily deposits, verbal permits, and protection from "backers". In this system, female parking attendants do not have control over their workspace and depend on personal relations with the power holders.

As shown in the interview results, there is no legal clarity in this work system. Women do not know how the profit sharing is allocated between managers and the city government, and they have no bargaining position. This shows a form of hidden domination that Gramsci (1971) calls hegemony—where subordination is accepted voluntarily because it is considered "natural".

However, these women are not completely passive. They negotiate, form informal networks, and in some cases, demonstrate agency to maintain their jobs and protect their families. This indicates that power relations in the informal sector are dynamic, not absolute, and always contain spaces for resistance.

Feminization of Poverty in the Urban Context of Surabaya

The phenomenon demonstrated by female illegal parking attendants in Surabaya is a concrete manifestation of the feminization of poverty in urban space. The term feminization of poverty refers to the increasing proportion of women in the world's poor population, which reflects not only income inequality, but also structural exclusion and disempowerment (Chant, 2003; Moghadam, 2005). In Surabaya, the feminization of poverty is seen in the form of women's informal work with minimal protection, low wages, no legal recognition, and still burdened with domestic work.

The informants in this study—whether widows, heads of families, or wives of casual workers—bear the main economic burden within their families. This condition shows that women are not only "forced" to work, but are also "needed" by the family's economic structure to survive. However, this contribution does not change their subordinate position in the public or domestic spheres. This shows that the feminization of work does not automatically lead to women's empowerment, but rather often deepens inequality.

Intersection of Gender, Class, and Inequality in Urban Space

The inequality experienced by female illegal parking attendants is not singular, but rather the result of the intersection of gender, class, and inequality in urban space. The intersectionality perspective emphasizes that social vulnerability arises from the intersection of various systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). In this case, poor women who come from low-education backgrounds, migrate from other regions, and do not have access to elite social networks, experience double exclusion in urban space.

Surabaya, as a modern urban space, displays ambivalence: on the one hand, it prioritizes modernization and orderly urban governance, but on the other hand, it still provides a gray area where the informal economy thrives. In this context, female parking attendants fill spaces that are not officially regulated, and their presence is accepted as long as they do not disrupt the city's aesthetics. In other words, they are allowed to exist only as long as they do not demand rights.

As Mrs. Ika said, they were "never evicted as long as they paid the boss" and did not cause problems with the authorities. This suggests that the presence of poor women in urban spaces is conditional and dependent on informal tolerance that is often transactional.

Uncertain working conditions, without social security, and full of risks have a direct impact on the quality of life of women and their children. The double burden they experience—public work on the streets and domestic work at home—accumulates into physical exhaustion, mental stress, and the potential for long-term health problems. None of the informants in this study had access to BPJS Employment, job training, or skills improvement programs.

In addition, the children of these women parking workers are also at risk of experiencing a recurring cycle of poverty. They grow up in an unstable work

environment, with limited education, and a survival mindset that normalizes informal work from an early age. As exemplified in Mrs. Sumiati's narrative, her child, who is still in school, works as a dishwashing laborer. This shows how the feminization of poverty does not stop at one generation, but becomes a social legacy that is reproduced through unchanging structural conditions.

This study confirms that the city is not a neutral space for all its citizens. Access to decent work, safe spaces, and vertical mobility is largely determined by social class and gender. Poor urban women face not only economic barriers, but also symbolic and cultural barriers that keep them on the fringes of the system.

Inequality of Access to Formal Programs

Although the Surabaya Government has various programs for women's empowerment and poverty reduction, such as MSME training, social assistance, and job placement, field findings show that none of the informants have access to these programs. Some of the main causes are:

- a. Lack of information – Informants do not know about the program or how to register.
- b. Administrative limitations – They do not have a Surabaya ID card or supporting documents.
- c. Stigma and symbolic exclusion – They feel unworthy or undeserving of assistance.

This illustrates what is known as exclusion by design, specifically, social programs that indirectly exclude the most vulnerable groups through technocratic mechanisms and non-inclusive administrative criteria. In the case of illegal female parking attendants, they are not only unreachable by the state but are systematically left behind.

Contribution to Understanding the Feminization of Poverty in the Informal Urban Economy

This study contributes to the literature on the feminization of poverty by highlighting how poor urban women occupy informal work spaces under conditions of uncertainty and lack of recognition. Although the term feminization of poverty is often used generically, this study shows that women's experiences of poverty are contextual, situated at the intersection of urban policies, informal economic structures, and social inequality.

The work of illegal parking attendants carried out by women is not simply an economic activity, but also a form of intervention against family crises, state neglect, and social exclusion. In this context, these women are not only victims of structures but also actors who respond adaptively. They build informal networks, strengthen community solidarity, and form creative survival practices—even within a highly exploitative system.

The concept of the feminization of poverty, previously understood narrowly—simply as an increase in the number of women in the poor population—needs to be developed into an analytical framework that captures the intersectional complexity of how class, gender, migrant status, and family status intertwine to determine one's position in the socioeconomic structure.

This finding aligns with studies conducted by Saptari (2001) and Ford (2004) on women's work in the informal sector in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, which demonstrate that women informal workers often experience invisibility in public policies and lack work protection. However, what distinguishes this current study is its focus on women's work in the context of illegal parking—a sector that has so far been rarely studied and tends to be considered masculine.

Unlike women domestic workers or street vendors who have received a lot of attention from activists and academics, women parking attendants are in a sector that is almost untouched. In many studies, parking work is associated with male thuggery. Therefore, the presence of women in this space broadens our understanding of the forms of feminization of work in complex and masculine urban structures.

This study also highlights the importance of reading women's work not only from an economic aspect, but also from a political and cultural one. Their presence in the city's public space presents an implicit claim to the right to space and social recognition—although it is often not directly stated.

Ethical Reflection on the Research

This research has several limitations that need to be noted. First, the number of informants is limited to seven people and does not include variations in age between young and old or migrant workers from outside Java. Second, due to the sensitivity of the topic of illegal work and relations with informal officials/managers, there are limitations in exploring structural information in more depth, such as the flow of deposits, the amount of levies, and relations with parking mafias.

Third, due to the ethnographic and participatory nature of the fieldwork, there is a possibility of bias in the interaction between researchers and informants—especially when researchers are considered "outsiders" or part of official institutions. Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on the researcher's position in the fieldwork, and to maintain ethical principles, such as confidentiality, security, and comfort of informants.

Ethically, the researcher realizes that the narrative constructed in this study should not reinforce stereotypes or stigmatization of poor urban women. On the contrary, this research aims to provide a voice for women who have so far been unheard, so that they can be recognized as important actors in the dynamics of the urban economy—even in the most vulnerable conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that women's work as illegal parking attendants in Surabaya is a manifestation of the feminization of poverty in an unequal urban economic space. These women face complex social realities—minimal formal education, limited access to formal employment, income uncertainty, and the double burden of being breadwinners and housekeepers. In an informal work structure dominated by unofficial power relations such as "boss" and "backers", women's bodies and labor are mobilized without legal protection, social security, or symbolic recognition. Nevertheless, they continue to develop survival strategies through social networks, informal loans, and community solidarity that demonstrate their agentic capacity in conditions of great limitations.

Theoretically, this study emphasizes that the feminization of poverty cannot be read purely economically, but must be analyzed through an intersectional lens that considers gender power relations, social class, and inequality in urban space. Women's work in the illegal parking sector not only reflects a crisis of labor protection, but also symbolic injustice in the distribution of social dignity. Therefore, efforts to empower poor women in the city must go beyond economic interventions, but also target the social structures that cause their exclusion in the first place. This research serves as a starting point for expanding academic discussions and policy advocacy related to the right to the city and decent work for marginalized women.

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ABOUT

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SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

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