

## Patriarchal Dominance in Paris Paloma's Song *Labour*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes the themes in Paris Paloma's song Labour to understand how society encourages patriarchal gender norms. By focusing on how the song depicts the psychological and physical repercussions of the distinction between genders in work, it explores the meaning contained within the song. Using a qualitative approach, this article examines the song's message of gender inequality and patriarchy by combining aspects of literary criticism and lyrical analysis. This article uses feminist theory to comprehend how gender inequality and patriarchal structures are ingrained in society and frequently make women feel ignored and underappreciated. The findings state that Labour is a song that perfectly demonstrates the difficulties, unpaid labor, and patriarchal domination that women encounter. It draws attention to how women are disproportionately given unfair and stressful tasks in families and society. In conclusion, Labour is more than simply a song, it is a potent force that captures the common experience of women overcoming patriarchal restrictions, reflecting and responding to the present zeitgeist.*

### 1. Introduction

A song by Paris Paloma's *Labour* is more than just a song, as it offers a perspective analysis of how society enforces patriarchal gender norms. It also reveals how unfairly and burdensome tasks are assigned to people, primarily women, in both the family and society in general. The lyrics themselves reveal how women are frequently exploited emotionally, psychologically, and physically, even when these behaviors are referred to as "duty" or "love" (Anisa, 2025; Paloma, 2023; Ulya, 2024).

Social criticism is contained in literary works, such as songs that reflects the critical points of society in its complex interactions between the men and women's roles. One of them is about a patriarchal society is one in which men have the majority of the power and authority, frequently resulting in privileges and governance that are oriented by subordinating women (Roka, 2025). This male supremacy is deeply rooted in societal norms, legal structures, and economic systems that disadvantage women and is not just a matter of personal opinion (Ashraf & Jepsen, 2024). This clearly relates to this idea in

Paloma's *Labour* song by showing the unpaid and underappreciated work that women are expected to do, both at home and in their emotional lives.

Moreover, songs often reflect a certain situation. *Labour* by Paris Paloma is a powerful anthem for this time period because it captures the common experiences and feelings of women overcoming the constraints of patriarchy, reflecting, and responding to the current zeitgeist. Therefore, housework is the most universal and exploitative activity of capitalist society, forcing most women to do it (Della Costa & James, 2017). It demonstrates how women's economic options are limited and their subordinate status is reinforced by unpaid domestic work (Meraviglia & Dudka, 2020).

The song *Labour* by Paris Paloma is closely related to a literary approach as it focuses more on how modern art, including music, portrays the psychological and physical effects of this gendered division of *Labour*. This study is on the relationship between women's health and unpaid *Labour*. An excessive amount of household work causes weariness, worry, and a sense of invisibility (Sharma, 2024). It also emphasizes how a key element of the patriarchal and capitalist system is the exploitation of women's work (Anisa, 2025; Ulya, 2024; Utami & Ahmadi, 2025). The researchers use an approach that incorporates elements from literary criticism and lyrical analysis, in accordance with the hypothesis presented. This analysis also covers the important areas, such as emotional impacts, musical analysis, and lyrical analysis.

The novelty of this journal article lies in its interdisciplinary and contemporary approach to literary and cultural analysis. Unlike traditional feminist studies that focus primarily on novels, films, or historical texts, this journal explores a modern music piece as a serious literary and socio-political artifact. By examining the lyrics, tone, and symbolism in *Labour*, the article brings popular culture into academic feminist discourse, highlighting how contemporary artists express resistance against patriarchal oppression.

Another novel aspect is the application of feminist literary theory to song lyrics, treating them as poetic texts rather than mere entertainment. This approach uncovers deeper layers of meaning related to emotional labor, gender expectations, and power imbalance within relationships. The study also contextualizes the song within modern feminist movements, making the research socially relevant and timely. This journal also contributes original insights by focusing on emotional and psychological labor rather than physical domination alone, expanding the scope of patriarchal critique. It bridges music, literature, gender studies, and sociology, offering a fresh perspective for scholars and students, and showing how literary analysis may focus on lived emotional experiences, and its relevance to contemporary gender discourse.

## 2. Literature Review

Feminist perspectives on patriarchal and inequality can be clarified by looking at how these ideas manifest in women's daily lives. Feminist theory delves into the core of human behavior, social structures, and emotions to expose how patriarchal systems and gender inequality are deeply rooted in society and are often the root cause of a woman's feeling of being unheard or unvalued. Structures of patriarchy use sexual dynamics to remove women

from their freedom and preserve inequality (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Kartiningsih et al., 2024; Roka, 2025).

Feminism is defined by its aim for gender equality, its confrontation of oppressive systems, and its elevation of women's voices in both private and public domains (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Kartiningsih et al., 2024; Mohajan, 2022). Feminism fundamentally focuses on breaking down conventional gender roles, promoting equal opportunities, and recognizing the value of women's work, whether it is compensated or not. It also emphasizes intersectionality, recognizing that women's experiences of oppression vary based on factors like race, class, sexuality, and culture (Grant, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2024; Yuliastuti et al., 2022). Through the examination of cultural, political, and economic structures, feminism aims to forge a society where women are not restricted to subordinate positions but are enabled to engage fully and equally in every facet of life (Mohajan, 2022; Ulya, 2024).

Feminism opposes patriarchy as it upholds systemic injustices that benefit men and disadvantage women. Patriarchy legitimizes the exploitation of women's work, suppresses their voices, and diminishes their identities to roles of service, reproduction, and emotional support. It establishes obstacles to women's financial autonomy, restricts their social and political influence, and perpetuates damaging stereotypes that validate discrimination. For feminists, challenging patriarchy is crucial as it maintains inequality and prevents women from having the liberty to shape their own identities and destinies (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Kartiningsih et al., 2024; Saeed & Khan, 2025). Through opposing patriarchal dominance, feminism aims to free women while also reshaping society into a fairer and more equitable framework for all.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine Paris Paloma's *Labour*, using an explorative thematic and lyrical analysis to uncover the song's underlying critiques of patriarchy and gender inequality. The analysis focuses on the song's textual and symbolic content to reveal how Paloma artistically portrays the "double burden" of unpaid domestic labor alongside the more underlying forms of patriarchal domination that women experience in everyday life. By carefully attending to the interplay of language, metaphor, and emotional tone, the study aims to illuminate how *Labour* transforms personal narratives of oppression into a broader commentary on systemic gendered power relations. The qualitative method is used through closed reading as its technique of data collection and content analysis as its technique of data analysis. By using such approach, this article enriches the song of *Labour* by deepening its meanings regarding gender-based research.

### 4. Findings

Paris Paloma released the indie pop song *Labour* on March 24, 2023. It was then featured on her debut album, "Cacophony", which was published on August 30, 2024. The song narrates the lives of women, highlighting the atrocities they face in society (Anisa, 2025; Lab, 2023). The lyrics expose the unfair and burdensome responsibilities that women have to endure, which are often seen as "duty" or "love". In other words, it is openly criticizing patriarchal

structures. The song also examines how society creates and maintains patriarchal gender norms in excessive detail.

Furthermore, the composition also clarifies the nuanced nature and complexity of a relationship in which one side is compelled to perform a great deal of work while the other side avoids accountability. The imbalance when one individual does everything, including apologizing, while the other acts parasitically and never does the emotional or physical *Labour* is expressed in the song. The song also discusses the concept of the non-working woman and the emotional, mental, and physical *Labour* women have historically done to keep their marriage intact (Anisa, 2025; Terasaki, 2023). *Labour* stands as a demonstration of to the incredible talent by Paris Paloma and her ability to deliver the messages through her music. The lyrics of the song are listed below:

**[Verse 1]**

*Why are you hangin' on  
So tight  
To the rope that I'm hangin' from  
Off this island?  
This was an escape plan (This was an escape plan)  
Carefully timed it  
So let me go  
And dive into the waves below*

**[Pre-Chorus]**

*Who tends the orchards?  
Who fixes up the gables?  
Emotional torture  
From the head of your high table  
Who fetches the water  
From the rocky mountain spring?  
And walk back down again  
To feel your words and their sharp sting?  
And I'm gettin' fuckin' tired*

**[Chorus]**

*The capillaries in my eyes are bursting  
If our love died, would that be the worst thing?  
For somebody I thought was my saviour  
You sure make me do a whole lot of labour  
The calloused skin on my hands is cracking  
If our love ends, would that be a bad thing?  
And the silence haunts our bed chamber  
You make me do too much labour*

**[Post-Chorus]**

*(You make me do too much labour)*

**[Verse 2]**

Apologies from my tongue  
Never yours  
Busy lapping from flowing cup  
And stabbing with your fork  
I know you're a smart man (I know you're a smart man)  
And weaponise  
The false incompetence  
It's dominance under a guise

**[Pre-Chorus]**

If we had a daughter  
I'd watch and could not save her  
The emotional torture  
From the head of your high table  
She'd do what you taught her  
She'd meet the same cruel fate  
So now I've gotta run  
So I can undo this mistake  
At least I've gotta try

**[Bridge]**

All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid  
Nymph, then a virgin, nurse, then a servant  
Just an appendage, live to attend him  
So that he never lifts a finger  
24/7 baby machine  
So he can live out his picket-fence dreams  
It's not an act of love if you make her  
You make me do too much labour  
All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid  
Nymph, then a virgin, nurse, then a servant  
Just an appendage, live to attend him  
So that he never lifts a finger  
24/7 baby machine  
So he can live out his picket-fence dreams  
It's not an act of love if you make her  
You make me do too much labour

**[Chorus]**

The capillaries in my eyes are bursting (All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid)  
If our love died, would that be the worst thing? (Nymph, then a virgin, nurse, then a servant)  
For somebody I thought was my saviour (Just an appendage, live to attend him)  
You sure make me do a whole lot of labour (So that he never lifts a finger)  
The calloused skin on my hands is cracking (24/7 baby machine)  
So if our love ends, would that be a bad thing? (So he can live out his picket-fence dreams)

*And the silence haunts our bed chamber (It's not an act of love if you make her)  
You make me do too much labour (Paloma, 2023)*

The song portrays the associated meanings between struggle, unpaid *Labour*, and patriarchal control. The singer in the song articulates the difficulties, sacrifices, and continuous struggles that women face in a patriarchal society (Anisa, 2025; Maemunah & Rahmawati, 2025). Paloma understands the bitterness experienced by women who must live under a patriarchal system established by men. Paloma feels that women must contend with emotional difficulties, household duties, and social reproductive restrictions without receiving equal compensation or reciprocity (Maemunah & Rahmawati, 2025; Ulya, 2024).

## 5. Discussion

### DATA 1

#### [Verse 1]

*Why are you hangin' on  
So tight  
To the rope that I'm hangin' from  
Off this island?  
This was an escape plan (This was an escape plan)  
Carefully timed it  
So let me go  
And dive into the waves below*

The first line of Paris Paloma's *Labour* uses a metaphor right away to talk about the burden and power dynamics that come with being in a relationship. The act of "hangin' on" to the rope is not an act of support, but a possessive one that prevents the singer from finding freedom. When a person takes on a major part in ensuring the emotional health and harmony of the relationship, it can lead to feelings of being "hung" from a rope (Jeung et al., 2018; Paloma, 2023; Ulya, 2024). In this context, even if the other person is drowning, the other person holding the rope is making them bear the emotional burden of their attachment.

This verse also addresses more general concerns about inequality and struggle, especially in relation to power dynamics between people. The image of one person hanging while the other has all the power to release them demonstrates an imbalance of effort and control. When a person's freedom and personal development are restricted by the demands and aspirations of the other, relationships can degenerate into places of extreme inequity (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2022; Paloma, 2023; Ulya, 2024). In this context, one person's *Labour* serves as the other's leverage, symbolizing the unequal burden of sustaining the partnership.

## DATA 2

### *[Pre-Chorus]*

*Who tends the orchards?*

*Who fixes up the gables?*

*Emotional torture*

*From the head of your high table*

*Who fetches the water*

*From the rocky mountain spring?*

*And walk back down again*

*To feel your words and their sharp sting?*

*And I'm gettin' fuckin' tired*

The unequal distribution of responsibilities and emotional stresses in a partnership is powerfully portrayed in the pre-chorus. It symbolizes the continuous, unrecognized work that one person puts in. Unpaid job inherently involves mental effort, and stress is caused by a high cognitive load related to it (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Kartiningsih et al., 2024; Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023). This issue may be intensified by a lack of appreciation, which can lead to a feeling of being taken advantage of. Furthermore, it undermines emotional health and may result in a chronic psychological tiredness condition.

By showing a distinct power dynamic, the pre-chorus also directly addresses the issue of inequality and struggle. While the other person sits at the head of the highest table. The singer, figuratively at the bottom of the mountain, handles all the difficult responsibilities. The demands of one person take priority by restricting the other's freedom and personal development (Körner & Schütz, 2025; Paloma, 2023; Ulya, 2024). The singer struggles not only with the work but also with the partner's power and control. Furthermore, it is a type of mental abuse that perpetuates this unequal dynamic, maintaining the singer's submissive position and making getting away is even more challenging.

## DATA 3

### *[Chorus]*

*The capillaries in my eyes are bursting*

*If our love died, would that be the worst thing?*

*For somebody I thought was my saviour*

*You sure make me do a whole lot of labour*

*The calloused skin on my hands is cracking*

*If our love ends, would that be a bad thing?*

*And the silence haunts our bed chamber*

*You make me do too much labour*

The chorus contrasts with a demanding, unpaid job, effectively showing the relationship's emotional and physical costs. The lyrics clearly represent of tremendous amount of work the singer's doing, work that is far more than what is sustainable and healthful. It also involves preserving harmony in the relationship and continuously controlling a partner's emotional state (Unkel & Leonardo, 2018; Wijaya et al., 2024; Yuliastuti et al., 2022). This can result in frequent unappreciativeness, causing extreme physical and mental exhaustion.

The relationship's underlying inequalities and struggles are powerfully and metaphorically represented by the same image of physical strains. The partner's emotional neglect adds to the issue, while the singer is taking on an excessive amount of work. There is an obvious power difference in the chorus, with one person doing all the effort and the other being unable or unwilling to help. Those with more authority typically show less empathy, less perspective taking and less accommodating conduct toward others (Paloma, 2023; Tobore, 2023; Ulya, 2024).

**DATA 4**

**[Verse 2]**

*Apologies from my tongue  
Never yours  
Busy lapping from flowing cup  
And stabbing with your fork  
I know you're a smart man (I know you're a smart man)  
And weaponise  
The false incompetence  
It's dominance under a guise*

This line illustrates the work by showing how the relationship's emotions are out of balance. The singer's apologies are freely given, while the partner is busy savouring a flowing cup, symbolizing how they passively receive emotional comfort without providing any in return. Maintaining relationship solidarity and easing a partner without getting anything in return can have serious mental and physical effects (Tobore, 2023; Zhai et al., 2025). In this context, having such an imbalance takes a big toll on mental health, which causes burnout and anger.

Furthermore, the partner's intelligence is acknowledged, but it is used against them by acting like they cannot do emotional jobs, which is a manipulative way to control them. A person may pretend to be incapable of completing duties to pass on the responsibility to another individual (Körner & Schütz, 2025; Tobore, 2023). Moreover, the singer is fighting against this intentional, unequal distribution of *Labour*, in which the partner utilizes their pretended helplessness as a means of dominance and responsibility avoidance.

**DATA 5**

**[Pre-Chorus]**

*If we had a daughter  
I'd watch and could not save her  
The emotional torture  
From the head of your high table  
She'd do what you taught her  
She'd meet the same cruel fate  
So now I've gotta run  
So I can undo this mistake  
At least I've gotta try*

In these lyrics, the fear of carrying this responsibility to a future daughter increases the singer's emotional *Labour*. This additional layer of accountability is a type of intergenerational *Labour* since it is not only for her good, but also the well-being of the following generation. In order to break the cycle, people must undo the taught behaviors that involve emotional suppression and an imbalance in caring (Scharpf et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2024; Yuliastuti et al., 2022).

Furthermore, dominant partner behaviors can cause behavioral problems in children, which can result in a lack of awareness of healthy family dynamics (Paloma, 2023; Ulya, 2024; Zapf et al., 2023). Children may develop an incorrect understanding of appropriate limits and respect for one another when they observe that a parent's freedom is being repressed. As a result, they could have trouble in their own relationships later on, either by adopting a submissive role or by replicating the dominance and control tendencies.

#### DATA 6

##### [Bridge]

*All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid  
Nymph, then a virgin, nurse, then a servant  
Just an appendage, live to attend him  
So that he never lifts a finger  
24/7 baby machine  
So he can live out his picket-fence dreams  
It's not an act of love if you make her  
You make me do too much labour  
All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid  
Nymph, then a virgin, nurse, then a servant  
Just an appendage, live to attend him  
So that he never lifts a finger  
24/7 baby machine  
So he can live out his picket-fence dreams  
It's not an act of love if you make her  
You make me do too much labour*

The song's bridge describes the singer's emotional and household *Labour*, which is both persistent and complex. The lyrics themselves depict the exhausting and broad nature of emotional *Labour* by detailing several jobs. Emotional disorientation is the result of ongoing conflict between one's true feelings and what one is expected to display (Jeung et al., 2018; Paloma, 2023; Ulya, 2024). The singer's psychological reserves are depleted by her ongoing attempt to fulfill these conflicting tasks without receiving any emotional support in return from her partner.

Furthermore, the singer is confined to a baby-making machine or an accessory for the partner's confining fantasies since her roles are imposed rather than chosen. These gender norms encourage women to exert more mental effort, which can harm their well-being (Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024; Yuliastuti et al., 2022). Moreover, these lyrics show how a dominant partner can utilize their partner as a means to an end rather than as an equal. This is further linked to an expectation in society for women to offer

consolation and emotional support, which is not only unpaid but also intellectually and physically exhausting.

## 6. Conclusion

Paris Paloma's song *Labour* explores the struggles of women living within a patriarchal society through a poignant blend of literary and lyrical expression. The song foregrounds themes of emotional exhaustion, invisible labor, and the pervasive control of patriarchal norms. Its lyrics highlight how women are often exploited—emotionally, psychologically, and physically—under the guise of affection, devotion, and domestic responsibility. By portraying unequal divisions of labor both in intimate relationships and in broader social contexts, Paloma exposes how gender roles are normalized and sustained through cultural expectations. The narrative becomes a mirror reflecting the systemic undervaluing of women's contributions, particularly those rendered within private, domestic spaces. Beyond critique, *Labour* functions as a powerful feminist anthem that reclaims agency through articulation and resistance. Paloma's impassioned vocal delivery and evocative language transform private suffering into collective awareness. The repetition of domestic imagery—cleaning, serving, and enduring—serves as both a symbol of oppression and a tool of empowerment when voiced in song. Through its defiant tone, the piece dismantles the silence surrounding women's unpaid emotional and physical labor. Through that sense, *Labour* stands as a modern protest against patriarchal exploitation, asserting the necessity of recognition, equality, and liberation for women in all spheres of life.

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