

“No Viral, No Justice”: State Extractivism, Structural Violence, and the Politics of Visibility in the Ecological Justice Crisis in Papua

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Abstract

Paulus Laratmase. This study examines the dynamics of power relations among the state, corporations, and Indigenous communities in the context of natural resource exploitation in Papua. Drawing upon the frameworks of political ecology and critical communication theory, the paper demonstrates that extractive projects, such as mining, oil palm plantations, and food estate initiatives have systematically produced structural violence against Indigenous peoples. In circumstances where legal mechanisms fail to deliver justice, the media emerges as an arena of struggle through the production of public visibility, encapsulated in the adage “No Viral, No Justice.” This study argues that media-based advocacy must move beyond mere exposure toward an evidence-based approach grounded in structured and verifiable data. Such an approach is necessary to support sustainable advocacy efforts capable of influencing policy transformation and advancing ecological justice in Papua.

Keywords: Structural violence; political ecology; extractivism; Indigenous communities; media advocacy; visibility politics; ecological justice; Papua.

INTRODUCTION: The Paradox of Wealth and Ecological Poverty

Papua is one of the regions endowed with some of the world’s richest natural resources. Ironically, however, it has also become an epicenter of ecological conflict and prolonged social injustice. This paradox does not arise in isolation; rather, it is the product of an extractivist development model that reduces land, forests, and minerals to mere economic commodities.

119



From the perspective of Papuan Indigenous communities, land is not only an economic asset but, more fundamentally, a cosmological entity, the mother of life, imbued with spiritual, social, and cultural significance. When the state reduces land to an object of investment, the consequences extend far beyond the dispossession of living space. What occurs is also the erosion of identity and the destruction of local knowledge systems.

Normatively, the recognition of Indigenous peoples in Indonesia is guaranteed under Article 18B of the 1945 Constitution and reinforced by Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. In practice, however, a profound gap persists between legal norms and realities on the ground. This gap produces what social scholars describe as structural violence forms of violence embedded within policies, regulations, and development practices that systematically marginalize certain communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political Ecology and Extractivism

The political ecology approach asserts that environmental conflicts are never neutral; they are always embedded in relations of power. States and corporations possess access, legitimacy, and legal instruments that enable them to control natural resources, whereas Indigenous communities are frequently positioned as expendable actors.

Sophie Chao (2020) demonstrates that industrial expansion in Papua has not only resulted in deforestation but has also disrupted the ontological relationships between Indigenous communities and their land. In other words, extractivism produces not only ecological crises but also existential crises.

Political ecology further highlights how extractive practices in Papua operate through what David Harvey describes as “accumulation by dispossession.” Within this framework, the state is not a neutral regulator; rather, it actively facilitates capital expansion through land concessions, mining permits, and national strategic projects.

In Papua, the granting of licenses to oil palm and mining corporations often ignores the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Consequently, Indigenous communities lose control over their customary territories. Tania Murray Li’s study *Land’s End* (2014) emphasizes that transforming land into an economic commodity not only alters ecological landscapes but also restructures social systems and local knowledge traditions that have evolved over generations. Extractivism therefore functions as a structural mechanism that deepens inequality while eroding



Indigenous sovereignty.

Beyond economic dispossession, extractivism also generates what Arturo Escobar (2018) terms ontological violence. This occurs when Indigenous cosmologies, ways of life, and spiritual relationships with nature are forced to conform to the reductive logic of capitalist modernity.

In Papua, as emphasized by Sophie Chao (2020), forests are not merely economic resources but living entities with cultural and spiritual significance. When forests are cleared and land is exploited, what disappears is not only biodiversity but also collective identity, ancestral memory, and the continuity of Indigenous cosmologies.

For this reason, ecological conflicts in Papua must be understood as multidimensional conflicts, encompassing political, economic, cultural, and ontological dimensions simultaneously.

Structural Violence as a Mechanism of the State

The concept of structural violence explains that injustice does not always manifest in overtly repressive forms. Instead, it often operates through systems that appear legal and legitimate. In Papua, structural violence manifests through several mechanisms:

a. The Dispossession of Indigenous Land through Concession Licenses

The dispossession of Indigenous land in Papua frequently occurs through formal legal mechanisms whereby the state grants concessions to corporations in the mining, forestry, and plantation sectors. These practices often ignore the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), meaning that Indigenous communities are not meaningfully involved in decision-making processes.

A study by Forest Peoples Programme (2015) reveals that within the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) project, thousands of hectares of Indigenous land were transferred without the full consent of the Malind community. Similar patterns were identified in investigations by The Gecko Project (2019), which uncovered irregularities and manipulation in licensing procedures during the expansion of oil palm plantations in Papua.

Theoretically, this phenomenon reflects the process of accumulation by dispossession, in which capital accumulation occurs through the appropriation of resources from local communities (Harvey, 2003).



b. The Criminalization of Communities Defending Their Territories

Criminalization of Indigenous communities in Papua often arises from conflicts between investment interests and customary land rights. When communities attempt to defend their territories, they are frequently accused of obstructing development or even labeled as security threats.

A report by JATAM (2022) concerning the Wabu Block in Intan Jaya documents cases in which residents who opposed mining activities faced intimidation, arrest, and restrictions on their movement. Similar patterns were documented earlier by WALHI (2011), which recorded repression against communities involved in conflicts over natural resources.

Within the political ecology framework, criminalization and law enforcement can function as instruments of power designed to discipline local resistance and ensure the smooth operation of extractive projects.

c. Militarization as a Tool for Securing Investment

Militarization in resource-rich regions of Papua reveals a close relationship between security agendas and economic interests. The presence of large numbers of security forces is often justified in the name of maintaining stability, yet in practice it frequently serves to protect corporate operations and suppress community resistance.

Investigations conducted by the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) between 2010 and 2012 in Wasior, as well as reports by JATAM (2022) regarding the Wabu Block, indicate that security operations often intersect with extractive industry interests.

From a critical perspective, this situation reflects the securitization of development, whereby economic development is framed as a security issue that legitimizes the deployment of military force. As a consequence, civic space becomes increasingly restricted, and Indigenous communities face heightened vulnerability to human rights violations.

Thus, the state functions not merely as a regulator but also as an active actor in the reproduction of systemic injustice.

Media, Public Sphere, and the Politics of Visibility

Within communication theory, the media occupies a strategic position in shaping social reality.



a. Jürgen Habermas: Media as the Public Sphere.

According to Jürgen Habermas, media ideally functions as a public sphere, a space in which citizens participate in rational discourse free from domination by political power.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas argues that an ideal public sphere allows critical exchange of arguments that shape rational public opinion. However, he also warns of the colonization of the public sphere by state and market interests, which erodes media independence.

In Papua, limited access to independent journalism and the dominance of state narratives indicate that the public sphere remains far from inclusive. Consequently, alternative media and advocacy journalism become crucial in restoring the public sphere as a democratic arena for deliberation.

b. Manuel Castells: Power in the Network Society

While Habermas emphasizes discourse, Manuel Castells conceptualizes power in contemporary society as operating through networks.

In *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012), Castells argues that actors who control information flows within digital networks possess the capacity to shape public perception and mobilize collective action. Social media therefore becomes a powerful tool for generating counter-power against state and corporate dominance.

The phenomenon of “No Viral, No Justice” in Papua can be understood through this framework. Issues of injustice often receive attention and institutional response only after they circulate widely within digital networks and achieve viral visibility.

In this sense, power no longer resides solely within formal institutions; it also lies in the capacity to manage visibility and control information distribution within digital spaces.

In Papua, the media thus becomes the arena in which previously hidden injustices are transformed into public issues. It is within this context that the concept of “No Viral, No Justice” gains significance as a form of politics of visibility.

Case Studies: Systematic Patterns of Extractivism in Papua

Wasior: Disaster as a Product of Policy

The 2010 flash flood in Wasior, West Papua, cannot be understood merely as a natural phenomenon; it was also the consequence of human intervention in fragile forest ecosystems.



Although extreme rainfall served as the immediate trigger, widespread deforestation caused by large-scale logging operations had already weakened the ecological functions of the forest as a water buffer. WALHI (2011) reported that both legal and illegal logging accelerated forest degradation in the upstream areas of Wasior, significantly increasing the risk of landslides and flash floods.

Investigations by Komnas HAM (2010–2012) similarly concluded that the state had failed to protect the environmental and human rights of affected communities. From the perspective of political ecology, the Wasior tragedy represents a man-made disaster, produced through political and economic decisions prioritizing resource extraction. The event thus reflects not only an ecological crisis but also a crisis of state responsibility.

Merauke: Food Estates and New Colonialism

The food estate project in Merauke, categorized as a National Strategic Project, illustrates how the state deploys the narrative of food security to legitimize large-scale agrarian expansion into Indigenous territories.

Projects such as the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) have dramatically transformed ecological landscapes through massive deforestation and the conversion of customary lands into industrial agricultural zones.

Forest Peoples Programme (2015) reports that land acquisition processes frequently failed to comply with FPIC principles, resulting in Indigenous communities losing control over their territories.

Sophie Chao's research *In the Shadow of the Palms* (2020) further reveals that the Malind people have experienced profound disruptions to their livelihoods, social structures, and cosmological relationships with land.

Thus, the food estate project has generated not only ecological crises but also a form of new colonialism, in which Indigenous living spaces are reduced to sites of capitalist production.

Wabu Block: Mining and the Oligarchy of Power

The case of the Wabu Block in Intan Jaya illustrates how the interests of the state, corporations, and economic elites converge in the management of natural resources.

The transfer of gold mining concessions without adequate consultation with Indigenous communities highlights the weakness of public participation mechanisms in decision-making processes. JATAM (2022) notes that the licensing process tends to be elitist and opaque, ignoring



the customary rights of local communities.

This condition reflects the emergence of a resource oligarchy, in which economic and political power is concentrated among a small group of actors.

The increased presence of security forces around mining areas further indicates that investment often proceeds alongside repressive approaches. Militarization functions not only as a security mechanism but also as a tool of social control over communities resisting mining operations.

Oil Palm Expansion: Deforestation and Criminalization

The expansion of oil palm plantations in Sorong and Jayapura has become one of the primary drivers of deforestation in Papua over the past two decades.

Large-scale land clearing threatens biodiversity while simultaneously destroying Indigenous territories that serve as the basis of local livelihoods.

Investigations by The Gecko Project (2019) reveal that many companies obtained permits through opaque and irregular processes, including document manipulation and abuse of authority. Such findings highlight weak governance in the management of natural resources.

At the same time, plantation expansion has triggered social conflicts that often result in the criminalization of Indigenous communities. When residents attempt to defend their land, they frequently face legal intimidation and security pressure.

From a critical perspective, this situation represents a form of green grabbing the appropriation of land and resources under the banner of economic development or sustainability that ultimately marginalizes Indigenous populations.

“No Viral, No Justice”: Media as an Arena of Resistance

The phenomenon of “No Viral, No Justice” reflects a transformation in the mechanisms of justice in the digital era. Justice is no longer determined solely by formal legal processes, but also by the extent to which an issue gains public attention.

In the context of Papua, the relationship between media visibility and justice can be observed in how local issues often receive attention only when they are widely publicized. Alternative media outlets such as suaraanaknegerinews.com consistently raise issues surrounding the rejection of National Strategic Projects (PSN) and critiques of militarization, as illustrated in the article “PGI Tegaskan Sikap: Tolak PSN di Tanah Papua dan Kecam Militerisme.” Publications of this kind function as an early warning system, presenting counter-narratives to the dominant



discourse of the state. However, unlike mainstream media, articles in such outlets generally lack transparency regarding readership data (views), indicating limitations in terms of public visibility and reach.

This limitation in visibility directly affects the level of political pressure that can be generated. By comparison, when the same issue is highlighted by larger platforms, such as advocacy reports by WALHI concerning the rejection of PSN projects in Merauke, the broader publication significantly strengthens the voices of Indigenous communities. In the report, local communities openly express their rejection of state projects that they perceive as dispossessing them of their living space. When such issues circulate more widely in the public sphere, through national media or digital platforms pressure on the government begins to increase, demonstrating that media exposure becomes a crucial factor in prompting state response.

Furthermore, the dynamics of virality can be seen in how Papua-related issues often “live” within digital spaces, including public discussion forums. In one online discussion organized by the Association of Indonesian Catholic Lecturers of South Papua Province (2025), it was revealed that the change of forest status covering hundreds of thousands of hectares in Merauke initially went unnoticed by the public until the relevant documents were accessed and disseminated, triggering reactions from Indigenous communities and wider public attention. This illustrates that without massive information distribution, whether through media or digital networks, strategic state policies may proceed without adequate public oversight.

Nevertheless, media platforms such as negerinews.com and suaranegerinews.com continue to face significant challenges in terms of audience reach and transparency of readership metrics. There is no credible publicly available data regarding real-time readership statistics for these media outlets, indicating the infrastructural limitations of independent media in building what digital communication theory describes as network power. This condition reinforces the argument that without virality, often supported by broad distribution and platform algorithms issues of injustice in Papua tend to remain invisible and fail to generate meaningful political pressure.

In the framework of modern democracy, media is no longer understood merely as a channel for information distribution but also as a socio-political institution capable of intervening in relations of power. Within this context, the strategic functions of media can be outlined as follows.



Monitoring Power (Watchdog Function)

Media acts as a watchdog by overseeing state actions and those of other dominant actors through investigative journalism and critical reporting. This function aims to prevent abuse of power, corruption, and human rights violations. The concept of the watchdog role originates from libertarian press theory, which emphasizes the importance of media freedom as a pillar of democracy. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, in *The Elements of Journalism* (2001), emphasize that one of journalism's central obligations is monitoring power in order to maintain public accountability. In the Indonesian context, this function becomes particularly crucial in issues such as natural resource exploitation in Papua, where independent media can reveal practices hidden from public scrutiny.

Amplifying the Voices of Victims (Amplifier Function)

Media also functions as an amplifier, strengthening the voices of marginalized groups who lack access to public space. From the perspective of critical communication theory, media can serve as a platform for presenting counter-narratives to the dominant discourse of the state or corporations. Nancy Fraser (1990), through the concept of subaltern counterpublics, argues that marginalized groups require alternative spaces to express their experiences. Media—particularly community media and advocacy journalism—can fill this space by highlighting stories of victims of human rights violations, Indigenous communities, and other vulnerable groups, ensuring that their experiences are not erased from public discourse.

Shaping Public Agenda (Agenda-Setting Role)

As an agenda setter, media possesses the power to determine which issues are considered important by the public through processes of selection, emphasis, and framing of news. Agenda-setting theory developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) suggests that while media may not always tell the public what to think, it is highly effective in determining what to think about. In practice, the intensity of media coverage on certain issues—such as deforestation or agrarian conflicts in Papua—will influence the level of public attention and ultimately exert pressure on policymakers. Thus, media plays a strategic role in shaping social and political priorities.

Encouraging Policy Change (Advocacy Journalism)

Beyond reporting facts, media can also promote policy change through advocacy



journalism, a form of journalism that consciously aligns itself with the values of social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability. James W. Carey (1989) argues that communication is not merely the transmission of information but also a cultural practice that shapes social reality. In this sense, media can build public pressure through in-depth investigations, media campaigns, and collaboration with civil society to encourage policy reform. Such practices are evident in numerous cases where media coverage has triggered government audits, regulatory reforms, or even interventions from international institutions in response to violations.

From Virality to Evidence: Designing Effective Media Advocacy

However, virality alone is insufficient. Without a solid data foundation and structured strategy, public attention tends to be temporary. Therefore, media advocacy must be transformed into an evidence-based approach through the following strategies.

Knowledge Production

a. In-Depth Field Investigation

Field investigation constitutes the primary foundation of evidence-based advocacy because it enables the exposure of empirical realities often hidden behind official narratives of the state and corporations. In the context of Papua, investigative journalism is crucial in documenting the direct impacts of extractive projects on Indigenous communities and the environment. According to Internews (2021), field-based investigative journalism enhances public accountability by presenting verified and in-depth facts. This approach aligns with the tradition of investigative reporting that positions journalists as active actors who examine, verify, and challenge claims of power.

Furthermore, field investigation allows the integration of local perspectives often overlooked in policy discourse. Sophie Chao's research (2020) demonstrates that ethnographic approaches and direct observation reveal the social and cultural dimensions of ecological crises that cannot be captured solely through statistical data. Thus, knowledge production through field investigation not only generates information but also constructs more comprehensive and contextual narratives.

b. Collection of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data is essential for strengthening the



legitimacy of media advocacy. Quantitative data, such as the extent of deforestation, the number of agrarian conflicts, or cases of criminalization, provides objective empirical foundations to support advocacy claims. Meanwhile, qualitative data including interviews, testimonies, and case studies offers deeper insight into the lived experiences of Indigenous communities.

According to Forest Peoples Programme (2015), the combination of these two forms of data ensures that advocacy is not merely based on numbers but also reflects social realities on the ground. Moreover, a mixed-methods approach enhances credibility in the eyes of policymakers and donors. In global advocacy practices, institutions such as the World Bank emphasize the importance of evidence-based data in shaping public policy. Consequently, integrating quantitative and qualitative data not only strengthens arguments but also increases the likelihood of effective policy intervention.

Strategic Distribution

a. Collaboration among Local, National, and International Media

Cross-media collaboration constitutes a crucial strategy for expanding the reach and impact of advocacy efforts. Local media possess advantages in contextual understanding and access to communities, while national and international media have broader distribution capacities. According to International Media Support (2020), such collaboration can generate an amplification effect, whereby local issues rise to national and global levels. In the context of Papua, this collaboration becomes particularly important given the limitations of information access and the political risks faced by local journalists.

Moreover, collaboration increases the credibility and protection of journalists. Joint reporting between local and international media is often more difficult to suppress because it attracts global attention. This aligns with the concept of networked journalism, where information production and distribution occur collectively within interconnected media networks (Beckett, 2010). Thus, media collaboration is not merely a distribution strategy but also a strategy for protection and legitimacy.

b. Utilization of Digital Platforms

Digital platforms play a central role in distributing information quickly and widely. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube allow local issues to reach global audiences in a short period of time. According to Manuel Castells (2012), power in the network society is determined by the ability to control the flow of information within digital spaces.



Therefore, the effective use of digital platforms becomes key to building visibility and influence.

Furthermore, digital platform algorithms influence how information is disseminated and received by the public. Studies indicate that content featuring strong narratives and compelling visuals has a greater potential to become viral. In the context of advocacy concerning Papua, the use of multimedia—such as documentary videos and infographics can increase public engagement. Thus, digital strategy is not only about distribution but also about how information is framed and communicated to maximize its impact.

Public Mobilization

a. Targeted Digital Campaigns

Digital campaigns represent an important instrument for raising awareness and mobilizing public participation. Strategically designed campaigns, with clearly defined audiences, consistent messaging, and appropriate timing can significantly increase advocacy effectiveness. According to Greenpeace, well-organized digital campaigns can pressure governments and corporations through the mobilization of global public opinion. In the context of Papua, campaigns such as #NoViralNoJustice can serve as tools to highlight previously marginalized issues.

Furthermore, digital campaigns enable broader public participation. Society is no longer merely a consumer of information but also an actor that disseminates and strengthens advocacy messages. This corresponds with the concept of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), where mobilization occurs through flexible and decentralized digital networks. Thus, digital campaigns function as a bridge between information dissemination and collective action.

b. The Use of Strong and Contextual Narratives

Narratives possess the power to connect empirical data with public emotion. In media advocacy, strong and contextual narratives can transform abstract issues into experiences that audiences can understand and emotionally engage with. According to Marshall Ganz, public narrative is an important tool in building collective motivation through stories that connect values, identity, and action.

In the context of Papua, narratives that highlight the perspectives of Indigenous communities—for example, portraying land as the “mother of life”—can add moral and cultural dimensions to ecological issues. This is important because data alone often fails to mobilize public concern. Therefore, the combination of empirical facts and compelling storytelling becomes essential for building effective and sustainable advocacy.



Policy Intervention

a. Preparation of Policy Briefs

Policy briefs represent important instruments for bridging research findings with policymaking processes. These documents are concise, evidence-based, and solution-oriented, enabling policymakers to understand the issue and its recommendations more easily. According to the Overseas Development Institute, an effective policy brief must present clear evidence, rigorous analysis, and practical recommendations.

In the context of advocacy concerning Papua, policy briefs can encourage the recognition of Indigenous rights, reform natural resource governance, and strengthen environmental protection policies. By translating complex data into clear recommendations, policy briefs become strategic tools for influencing policy agendas.

b. Direct Advocacy to Government and Donor Institutions

Direct advocacy represents a crucial stage in ensuring that knowledge production and public mobilization ultimately lead to policy change. Engagement with governments, parliaments, and donor institutions allows recommendations to reach decision-makers directly. According to the World Resources Institute, evidence-based advocacy combined with policy dialogue has a greater likelihood of producing structural change.

Advocacy toward donor institutions is also important to ensure program sustainability. Donors not only provide funding but can also serve as strategic partners in expanding advocacy impact. Therefore, policy intervention should focus not only on regulatory reform but also on building a sustainable supporting ecosystem.

Discussion: Media between Risk and Hope

Despite its strategic role, media in Papua faces serious challenges.

Political Repression and Restrictions on Access

Political repression and restricted access remain major obstacles for journalistic work in Papua, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as conflict, human rights violations, and natural resource exploitation. State authorities often use administrative and security mechanisms to restrict journalists both domestic and international from accessing certain areas.

Human Rights Watch (2015) reports that restrictions on foreign journalists in Papua have hindered independent reporting and narrowed the public sphere. Findings from the Indonesian



National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) also indicate that information control is often justified as an effort to maintain political stability but ultimately reduces transparency and state accountability.

Threats to Journalists' Safety

Journalists covering issues related to Papua frequently face intimidation, physical violence, and legal criminalization. These risks increase when reporting involves powerful actors such as corporations or security forces. Reports from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) indicate that journalists working in conflict areas are particularly vulnerable to attacks and political pressure.

The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) has also documented multiple cases of violence against journalists in Indonesia, including Papua, reflecting weak legal protection for media workers. In this context, journalist safety becomes a fundamental requirement for the sustainability of advocacy journalism.

Limited Resources

Limited financial, technical, and human resources represent significant barriers for independent media attempting to conduct in-depth reporting in Papua. The high costs of travel, logistics, and content production in geographically remote areas often exceed available funding.

According to Internews (2021), local media in developing regions frequently face limited access to technology, training, and distribution networks, which affects the quality and reach of their reporting. Without adequate support, media organizations struggle to fulfill their investigative and advocacy roles effectively.

In this situation, support from donor institutions becomes crucial to ensure the sustainability of independent advocacy journalism.

CONCLUSION: The Politics of Visibility as a Path toward Justice

The exploitation of natural resources in Papua represents a clear manifestation of structural violence legitimized by the state through development policies. Indigenous communities, as the rightful custodians of their territories, often become the most affected and marginalized parties.

In this context, media plays an irreplaceable role. The principle of "No Viral, No Justice" demonstrates that visibility has become a prerequisite for justice. However, for such visibility to



lead to real change, it must be accompanied by evidence-based advocacy, cross-sector collaboration, and sustained institutional support.

Thus, media should not merely function as a witness to injustice but also as an instrument of transformation, capable of encouraging the emergence of policies that are more just, inclusive, and sustainable for the Indigenous peoples of Papua.

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