



Media Exposing Sea Privatization and Corporate–Government Power Relations Affecting Coastal Communities through Investigative Reporting on “Pagar Makan Lautan”

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the discursive construction of power relation conflicts involving corporations and the government in sea privatization, as portrayed in Tempo's “Pagar Makan Lautan (The Fences Eat the Sea)”. This study adopted a critical-constructivist paradigm (Kincheloe, 2005; Leon-Guerrero, 2018; Levitt, 2021) to examine how power relations were constructed and naturalized in the context of sea privatization. The critical-constructivist approach was particularly apt for this study because it combined a focus on knowledge as socially constructed with explicit attention to political economy, ideology, and collective action (Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2023). This study employed methodological frameworks, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough (1995) and Social Semiotics by Halliday (1993), focusing on three levels: textual analysis (field, tenor, and mode of discourse), discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. The findings reveal an unequal power relationship between corporations (business actors), the state (government), and coastal communities (fishers). The analysis demonstrates that metaphors, satire, and evaluative diction are used to criticize unequal power relations in the sea privatization. At the discursive-practice level, the report is shaped by investigative work, including examination of legal documents, field observations, and interviews with coastal communities. At the sociocultural level, the coverage



reflects broader social, political, and economic inequalities, highlighting how spatial conflict arises from competition over maritime resources among powerful states and corporate actors. Theoretically, this study contributes to Indonesian media scholarship by extending critical discourse analysis to contemporary coastal conflicts, an area that remains limited in current research. In practice, this study offers insights for coastal and marine policy by showing how journalism can expose gaps among government regulation, corporate interests, and community rights, supporting calls for more transparent and participatory governance. This study is limited by its single-text corpus, potential media framing biases, and lack of comparison with other news sources.

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INTRODUCTION

The presence of a mysterious sea fence along the Tangerang coast has sparked controversy and public debate. The fence was erected without clear information about its actors, its purposes, and its impacts on the environment and the livelihoods of coastal communities. This issue gained further attention following Tempo’s investigative report, “Pagar Makan Lautan (The Fences Eat the Sea)” (Tempo, 2025). This revealed that the sea fence restricts access for coastal communities, especially fishers, to the sea, their primary source of livelihood (Tempo, 2025).

Recent scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that coastal privatization cannot be understood

merely as the transfer of access rights, but as a broader reconfiguration of power relations that shapes the everyday lives and political agency of coastal communities. Charles (2025) states that privatization unfolds through multi-layered legal, infrastructural, and discursive mechanisms that systematically disadvantage small-scale fishers and reshape their capacities to negotiate their access. Building on this, Siriwardane-de Zoysa et al. (2025) illustrate how reclamation and shoreline enclosure in Jakarta Bay generate “distanced dispossession,” where communities experience cumulative forms of exclusion even when land or sea territories are physically distant from formal reclamation sites. Their work highlights how privatization processes



are embedded in more-than-human ecologies, sediment flows, tidal rhythms, and artificial shorelines, which reinforce new spatial inequalities. Complementing these empirical insights, Ceglia, Peters, and Steinberg (2025) argue that prevailing narratives of “ocean privatization” obscure the historical continuity of enclosure and the complex institutional arrangements that enable contemporary ocean grabbing. They call for unpacking the discursive regimes through which states and corporations frame privatization as modernization, security, or sustainable development.

Civil society organizations echo these patterns through grounded observations of coastal conflicts in Indonesia. WALHI (2024) documents how conservation-oriented debt swaps and marine governance reforms have produced new contests over territorial rights, often marginalizing communities whose customary access practices are not recognized within formal policy frameworks. Similarly, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF, 2025) notes that coastal communities across the region face heightened vulnerabilities as regulatory changes, investment projects, and enclosure practices intensify, frequently without meaningful participation from affected groups. Together, these academic and advocacy-based studies reveal an emerging consensus: coastal privatization is not a neutral economic process but a political project that redistributes power, redefines territorial

authority, and restructures communities' ability to exercise their rights.

Within this contemporary landscape, the case of sea enclosure in Tangerang, popularized through Tempo's investigative report “Pagar Makan Lautan,” provides a timely empirical anchor. The construction of offshore fencing, the issuance of contested sea-use certificates, and the intertwined roles of corporate and governmental actors mirror the broader dynamics outlined in recent literature. When analyzed through a critical constructivist lens, this case illustrates how narratives of legality, development, and state authority are mobilized to legitimize enclosure, while community voices are discursively marginalized. The convergence of scholarly analyses (Charles, 2025; Siriwardane-de Zoysa et al., 2025; Ceglia et al., 2025) and civil-society findings (WALHI, 2024; ICSF, 2025) underscores the urgency of examining such conflicts not only as administrative irregularities but also as struggles over meaning-making, power, and control of marine spaces in contemporary Indonesia.

The phenomenon of the sea fence not only raises questions about the transparency of coastal spatial governance policies but also suggests the possibility of covert privatization of marine spaces by corporations. Sea privatization poses a real threat to ecological sustainability and social justice, as it marginalizes coastal communities that depend on the sea due

to capitalist economic forces (Robbins, 2004; Robbins, 2012).

The privatization of coastal areas in Indonesia has become a complex issue, particularly when corporate interests clash with local communities' rights. Mangalam et al. (2022) highlight that the privatization of coastal lands for industrial purposes is often carried out without regard for legality or the rights of coastal residents, potentially triggering both social and ecological conflicts. Moreover, the issuance of Land Ownership Certificates for marine areas without clear legal grounds can lead to the privatization of public spaces, restrict fishers' access, and cause ecological damage that threatens the sustainability of coastal environments.

The imbalance of power relations between corporations, government, and coastal communities is a key factor in conflicts over coastal area management. According to Jaring Nusa (2024), conflicts in the management and utilization of coastal and marine resources often involve interest groups such as communities, investors, government, and local communities who frequently occupy a disadvantaged position. Coastal privatization tends to strengthen state and investor control over these spaces, while fishers become increasingly marginalized both socially and economically. Such policies lead to social exclusion, increase operational costs for fishers, and trigger conflicts between coastal communities, the government, and private actors.

Privatization, as part of the transformation of marine spatial governance, has been a major concern in various prior studies. Cabral et al. (2011) argue that the shift from communal to privatized coastal areas has serious consequences for local communities, particularly regarding access to natural resources. Their study highlights how privatization schemes often displace fishers who have historically relied on the sea for their livelihoods and as a part of their cultural identity. The study emphasizes that without adequate protection of local communities' rights, coastal privatization risks deepening social inequality and exacerbating spatial conflicts.

A similar phenomenon has occurred in Indonesia. Ridho et al. (2024) conducted a study on Kapoposang Island, Pangkep, examining the impacts of land privatization on coastal communities. Their findings reveal that the privatization process, driven by government policies and investor involvement, has led to communities losing access to traditional fishing grounds. Moreover, the process has triggered horizontal conflicts within communities and weakened their bargaining position in marine spatial planning. The researchers also highlight that the government's maritime diplomacy has not yet fully accommodated the interests of coastal communities amid global economic and political pressures.

Furthermore, Wardana (2017) offers a sharp critique of neoliberal practices in the management of marine space in Teluk Benoa, Bali. His study illustrates how marine spatial management, driven by market logic and capital interests, has manifested through a reclamation project that commodifies coastal space. This practice has not only damaged the coastal environment but has also sparked resistance from local communities who have suffered ecological, economic, and cultural losses. The study stresses the importance of examining power relations in marine space governance, particularly the ways in which the state and corporations collaborate to exclude communities from their living spaces.

These studies collectively demonstrate a consistent pattern regarding the impacts of marine space privatization: the marginalization of local communities, dispossession of living space, social conflict, and ecological degradation. In the context of the sea fence case in Tangerang, such studies offer a strong empirical and theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of power relations among corporations, the state, and coastal communities. The sea fence phenomenon represents a form of covert privatization that sidelines communities in favor of capital interests.

In Foucault's thought, power is not understood as something possessed by a single entity, such as the state or an institution, but rather as a dynamic,

dispersed, and productive relation. Power is not only repressive or oppressive but also productive, as it shapes knowledge, creates norms, and regulates the behavior and thinking of individuals and groups (Foucault, 1980). Foucault explains that power operates through various social mechanisms that manifest as discourse, regulations, institutions, and policies. One of his key concepts is governmentality, which refers to the ways in which the state (and other institutions, including corporations) governs the population through seemingly rational and scientific techniques of governance (Foucault, 1980).

In the context of sea privatization, the government and corporations construct policies and development discourses that emphasize the importance of managing the sea as an economic resource. This discourse shifts the meaning of the sea from a living space for coastal communities to a commodity to be exploited for investment, tourism, and national development.

The subjects in this power relation are not limited to the government and corporations but also include coastal communities, becoming the objects of regulation and surveillance. Gradually, these communities lose autonomy over their living spaces due to the dominance of development discourses constructed by the state and corporate actors. According to Foucault (1980), power apparatuses or

dispositifs operate through networks of marine spatial planning policies, reclamation permits, technocratic data, and media narratives. These apparatuses shape public perception of reclamation and sea privatization as legitimate, necessary, and inevitable in the name of progress.

Political Ecology Theory views spatial conflict as a consequence of resource struggles among actors with economic power (Robbins, 2004). In the context of this study, the theory is employed to examine the impact of sea fences on coastal communities and local ecosystems. Political Ecology examines the interconnections between political, economic, and environmental power in the context of conflict and social change. Paul Robbins emphasizes that environmental issues cannot be understood in isolation from the surrounding social, economic, and political structures.

According to Robbins (2012), environmental degradation and resource conflicts are not merely the result of technical failures or public ignorance, but rather the consequences of unequal power relations among actors such as the state, corporations, and local communities. Political ecology is grounded in the assumption that environmental conditions are always intertwined with the distribution of power and access to resources.

The primary subjects in political ecology analysis are the social actors involved in the production and

reproduction of environmental conditions. This analysis seeks to understand how development policies, globalization processes, and state interventions often produce inequality in the control and utilization of natural resources.

Robbins (2004) argues that ecological conflicts frequently arise from policies that prioritize short-term economic interests while neglecting long-term social and ecological sustainability. In the context of sea privatization, such conflicts should be seen as the result of contested access to space and resources, unfolding within an unequal socio-political structure.

Political Ecology also rejects the notion that coastal communities are to blame for environmental degradation. On the contrary, it recognizes these communities as possessing long-standing knowledge, practices, and systems for managing the environment. Robbins (2012) contends that technocratic approaches that disregard local dynamics can exacerbate social conflicts and damage existing ecological systems.

Through critical discourse analysis (CDA), this current study seeks to uncover how the discourse of power relations in sea privatization is constructed in Tempo's news coverage, "Pagar Makan Lautan." The objectives of this research are to analyze the representational patterns and power asymmetries embedded in Tempo's reporting, to identify ideological

processes that shape public understanding of maritime privatization, and to interpret how discursive practices reflect broader sociopolitical tensions between state the ideological processes that shape public understanding of maritime privatization, and to interpret how discursive practices reflect broader sociopolitical tensions among the, capital, and marginalized coastal communities.

This study offers a novel contribution by integrating Fairclough’s CDA with Hallidayan social semiotics within a critical-constructivist framework to examine the contemporary sea privatization discourse, an area with limited scholarly attention in Indonesian media studies. This research advances current debates by demonstrating how investigative journalism participates in the discursive construction of maritime power relations and by revealing the ideological mechanisms through which privatization is contested in public media narratives.

METHODOLOGY

The paradigm is epistemologically compatible with Norman Fairclough’s (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is grounded in critical theory and addresses how discourse reproduces or challenges social structures. Its compatibility also extends to Halliday’s (1993) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which conceptualizes language as a social semiotic system shaped by contexts.

CDA provides the macro-critical orientation to interrogate power, while SFL offers a micro-linguistic toolkit, field, tenor, and mode, to analyze how linguistic choices encode ideological functions. The integration of these approaches enabled a multilayered understanding of how sea privatization was legitimized through textual features, institutional processes, and sociocultural structures.

Epistemologically, adopting a critical-constructivist stance implied that data were not treated as neutral representations of reality but as discursive events embedded in unequal power relations. Accordingly, the data collection involved purposive sampling of texts that were central to public knowledge construction, including Tempo’s investigative report “Pagar Makan Lautan,” published in the January 19, 2025, edition. Researcher positionality was explicitly acknowledged: the researchers operated as an interpretive agent whose analytical lens was shaped by theoretical commitments to social justice, community empowerment, and anti-hegemonic critique. Transparency about this standpoint is essential to avoid the illusion of objectivity.

A reflexivity statement was therefore integral to the methodology. Throughout the analysis, the researchers reflected on potential interpretive biases, the influence of personal background and disciplinary training, and the risk of projecting normative assumptions onto



the data. Bias and power asymmetries were managed by maintaining a constant comparison between text, context, and alternative interpretations; engaging with counter-discourses where available; and grounding claims in transparent linguistic evidence. This reflexive and iterative process ensured that the analysis remained critically informed while retaining methodological rigor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this research used the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough (1995), and Social Semiotics by Halliday (1993), focusing on three levels: textual analysis (field, tenor, and mode of discourse), discursive practice, and sociocultural practice.

Textual Analysis

Field of Discourse

The Tempo report, "Pagar Makan Lautan," constructs the reality of the sea fence as a form of land grabbing or, more precisely, ocean grabbing of the coastal communities' living space by corporate powers (capital owners), with the silent approval of the government (the state). The discourse field opens with an absurd narrative:

"There is a fence, but no one knows who built it. On the northern coast of Tangerang, a bamboo fence suddenly appeared, stretching over 30 kilometres." (Tempo, 2025)

This statement illustrates not only a breakdown of information systems but also the state's incapacity to control its own public space. Another striking statement reinforces this condition:

"In Tangerang, the state has truly lost to those who control the capital." (Tempo, 2025)

This quote encapsulates the central thesis of the discourse field: development projects are not being carried out by the state for the people, but by corporations for the elites, with the government merely acting as a facilitator.

The report adopts a discourse frame of resistance, countering the dominant development narrative shaped by capitalist interests, as further quoted in the report:

"The construction of the sea fence on the northern coast of Tangerang reflects the defeat of the state by corporate interests in managing natural resources." (Tempo, 2025)

Tenor of Discourse

The discourse presented in the Tempo report involves three primary actors: the government (the state), corporations, and coastal communities. From the government's side, actors such as the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency (ATR/BPN), political elites, law enforcement agencies, and regional governments are depicted as

“ambiguous and unresponsive.” This ambiguity is illustrated in the report through statements such as:

“The Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries does not know who has built it.”

“The Banten regional government was also surprised when photos and videos of the ‘sea fence’ circulated on social media.” (Tempo, 2025)

These statements underscore how the government acts as if it is unaware of what is happening, despite holding full authority over coastal and marine territories.

In contrast, corporations are portrayed as actors who operate covertly yet systematically.

“Tempo traced the creators of the sea fence and found that it led to a major corporation based in North Jakarta.” (Tempo, 2025)

The report also points to individuals involved in the process, including Ali Hanafia and Tyson (a foreman), as well as suspicions of links to Agung Sedayu Group, owned by Sugianto Kusuma (also known as Aguan).

“The purpose was to facilitate the legalization of those land plots.” (Tempo, 2025)

The corporations are presented not only as actors with capital power but

also as entities that possess privileged access to state legal mechanisms.

Meanwhile, coastal communities, particularly fish farmers and fishermen, are described as affected participants who are largely unheard. One fisherman, Wana, expressed his helplessness:

“I can only surrender,” he said.

“Even if I wanted to protest, I wouldn’t know where to go.” (Tempo, 2025)

These statements reflect the structural position of coastal communities as victims of sea privatization, in which the fencing off of the sea has increasingly restricted their living space and means of livelihood.

Mode of Discourse

The mode of discourse employed in the Tempo report is explicit in its critique of power structures. Headlines such as “Lemahnya Penguasa di Depan Pengusaha (The Weakness of the Rulers in Front)” and the satirical phrase “Pagar Makan Lautan (The Fences Eat the Sea)” serve as rhetorical devices that are both provocative and confrontational. These linguistic choices are designed to shock and challenge the readers’ common sense and moral reasoning. A rhetorical question included in the report captures this tone effectively:

“How is it possible that the government and law enforcement agencies are unaware of the sea fences stretching the same

distance as from Bogor to Cawang?” (Tempo, 2025)

The report also employs sarcastic metaphors to critique the government's inaction. One such metaphor, “the flying crane technique,” describes a person walking on top of bamboo stakes, seemingly unnoticed by authorities. This imagery represents a symbolic depiction of power actors who are silently yet systematically complicit in the construction of the sea fence. In addition, the report uses critical terminology such as:

“State capture,” “cake sharing,” and “pure fabrication.” (Tempo, 2025).

The terminology above reinforces its critique of the state's legitimacy and transparency in the project. The language throughout the article is evaluative and satirical. A phrase like “the state suddenly struck dumb” underscores the report's ideological stance, portraying the government as willfully ignorant or deliberately silent in the face of corporate domination.

Practice of Discourse

The production of this text was carried out through an in-depth process using investigative journalism methods. The report was not based on a single event or source but was instead the result of a collective effort by the Tempo

Politics Desk Team, as stated in the article:

“To address the issue of the sea fence, the Tempo editorial board assigned the Politics Desk team to investigate it.” (Tempo, 2025)

This indicates that the text is an actively and collectively constructed discourse with a critical perspective. The journalists involved in the investigation not only interview with coastal communities but also examine legal documents and government data. One of the key findings was the issuance of land ownership certificates (HGB) over the sea areas:

“HGB titles have been issued over the sea.” (Tempo, 2025)

This reveals a legal manipulation process, as sea territories, by law, cannot be certified as private property. Such findings underscore the existence of a systematic legal engineering effort.

Intertextuality plays a significant role in the production of this report. The Tempo article draws on fishermen's testimonies and statements from government officials and investigates both formal and informal actors involved in the sea fence project. One example illustrates:

“Letterheads from several village chiefs were used without consent, and the names listed on the land certificates did not



belong to local residents.”
(Tempo, 2025)

This strengthens the allegation that the sea fence project was executed through manipulative means involving a network of political and legal power.

The discourse in the report explicitly aligns itself with the affected coastal communities, especially fish farmers and traditional fishermen, and opposes development narratives that serve only the elite. This is strongly asserted in one of the concluding statements:

“The designation of the National Strategic Project (PSN) seems merely a cake-sharing scheme by the Jokowi administration for a handful of super-rich elites.”
(Tempo, 2025)

Practice of Sociocultural

Social Context

Socially, the report emerges within the context of structural inequality among the state, corporations, and coastal communities. These coastal communities, whose livelihoods depend on the sea, are losing access to natural resources and their agency in decision-making processes. A striking phrase in the report illustrates this condition:

“Fenced at sea, backfilled on land.” (Tempo, 2025)

This line offers a powerful visual representation of how coastal communities are squeezed between land-

based and sea-based developments within an unjust system of governance.

The report emphasizes that these communities are treated as mere objects of development, rather than as active participants. Their involvement is often only symbolic, as seen in the creation of fictitious organizations such as the “Jaringan Rakyat Pantura,” which was allegedly formed to disguise the absence of genuine community engagement. One Tempo journalist expressed skepticism:

“From the beginning, the team didn’t believe that the sea fence was built by fishermen who were members of the Jaringan Rakyat Pantura.”

(Tempo, 2025)

This suggests that the appearance of local participation was manufactured, reinforcing the narrative of exclusion and marginalization of coastal residents in favor of elite-driven development projects.

Political Context

Politically, the construction of the sea fence and the PIK 2 development is presented as part of a broader national development agenda orchestrated by political and economic elites. The discourse surrounding “National Strategic Projects (PSN)”, which in principle should serve the public welfare, has instead become a legal instrument for controlling the living space of coastal communities.



Central government officials and party elites are portrayed as taking a cautious stance and shielding the project from criticism. This is evident in the following statement reported by Tempo:

“Three members of parliament admitted that they were asked not to comment too much on the National Strategic Project (PSN), because it could disrupt the investment climate.” (Tempo, 2025)

This quote reflects how political elites deliberately distance themselves from the controversy, choosing to protect economic interests and elite-led development plans over addressing the concerns of affected communities.

Economic Context

Economically, the PIK reclamation project and the construction of the sea fence reflect the expansion of corporate capitalism at the expense of coastal communities. The development discourse is not aimed at promoting social inclusion, but rather serves as a means for capital accumulation.

Corporations such as the Agung Sedayu Group are portrayed as dominant actors who benefit from privileged access to public policy, as reported by Tempo:

“Agung Sedayu Group is among the companies reportedly granted land use rights (HGB) over the sea areas.” (Tempo, 2025)

This illustrates how economic power enables private interests to navigate and utilize state policies for their own benefit.

The news report also critiques the role of law and bureaucracy in the sea fence case. Institutional fragmentation and avoidance of accountability are evident in the following quote:

“The Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency (ATR/BPN) has no authority to evaluate this. The matter is in the hands of the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs.” (Tempo, 2025).

This statement reveals the shifting of responsibility among government agencies, highlighting the state's weak protection of the rights and welfare of coastal communities.

The news report titled “Pagar Makan Lautan” is a form of discursive construction that not only records social reality but also interprets and intervenes in power structures through its reporting. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), discourse is not merely understood as text, but as a form of social and sociocultural practice. Through this framework, discourse serves as a medium that both shapes and is shaped by power structures in society (Fairclough, 1995). The report on the sea-fencing project along the coastal region of Tangerang, presented as an act of exclusion against coastal communities, particularly fishers and

fishpond farmers, is a clear example of how media coverage can challenge dominant power relations involving corporations, the government (the state), and marginalized coastal groups.

This coverage consistently builds a discursive field that highlights corporate dominance in seizing the living spaces of coastal communities through the construction of the sea fences. The report is not only a factual account or information about the sea privatization, but also a social practice that both reflects and contests societal power structures (Fairclough, 1995). The discourse participants are constructed through three main actors: the dominant corporations, the passive government, and the affected coastal communities, who are victims of the privatization of marine spaces via the sea-fencing initiative.

Discourse instruments such as metaphor, satire, and evaluative diction are strategically used to critique the unequal power structure behind the sea privatization in Tangerang. The choice of diction, metaphor, and narrative structure in the report is not accidental; it shapes social relationships, constructs social reality, and organizes the flow of information deliberately (Halliday, 1978). The investigative style, which includes direct quotes from coastal residents (victims), strengthens the emotional proximity and solidarity between readers and affected communities. This illustrates that the language practices in the text serve as

tools for moral articulation and advocacy on behalf of the coastal population.

The narrative framing in the news text reveals how a discourse of power inequality shapes the reality of events. The report illustrates not only the mysterious emergence of the sea fence but also critiques the government's failure or refusal to protect the coastal communities' living spaces. A statement such as “In Tangerang, the state has truly lost to those with capital” (Tempo, 2025) reveals the article's critical stance on the government's alignment with corporate interests rather than with coastal populations. This aligns with Fairclough's view that discourse contains ideological structures shaped through language practices, choices in diction, metaphor, and narrative structure, all of which contribute to an effect of power that either perpetuates or resists the status quo (Fairclough, 2003).

In this report, the symbolic power of language is employed to construct a moral opposition. The title “Pagar Makan Lautan” serves as a satirical metaphor that criticizes the role of government institutions, in which a fence, ordinarily a symbol of protection, becomes a tool of dispossession. The language is far from neutral, imbued with ideological weight through terms such as “mere fabrication,” “sharing the spoils,” “state capture,” and “mysterious project.” By deploying provocative language, the text effectively frames reality as a contested arena of power. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) thus

provides a framework to understand how media reporting acts as a political agent that shapes public opinion through linguistic structure and narrative.

Beyond critical diction and structure, this report views language as a system of signs used in social contexts. According to Halliday (1978), language functions through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. All three are clearly reflected in the Tempo’s reporting. The ideational metafunction, which represents experience through language, is visible in the portrayal of the sea fence as a social and ecological conflict. Sentences such as “fenced at sea, backfilled on land” symbolize the structural oppression experienced by coastal communities: not only do they lose spaces for livelihood, but their territorial rights are erased.

The interpersonal metafunction, which constructs social relations between a writer and a reader, is achieved through an investigative style. The sharp tone, irony, and direct quotes from victims, such as “I can only surrender” and “Even if we wanted to protest, we wouldn’t know where to go” (interview with Wana, as cited in Tempo, 2025), create emotional proximity between the readers and those affected. This indicates that journalists do not act as neutral observers but build a moral alliance with the marginalized. The textual metafunction, which concerns how linguistic elements are cohesively organized to convey meaning effectively, is seen in the structured

narrative of the report: from the discovery of the mysterious sea fence, legal document tracing, interviews with officials, and the investigation of the economic and political actors behind the project. Intertextuality is evident through references that span field investigations, official documents, and commentary from public figures and local leaders.

The discursive practice in this text reveals a production process rooted in investigative journalism, involving tracking legal documents, interviewing with affected communities, and investigating key actors behind the sea fence. The journalists’ involvement through the YouTube channel “Bocor Alus Politik” also expands the reach of the discourse and underscores their role as discursive agents who understand the political implications of their reporting.

From a sociocultural perspective, the report reflects unequal social, political, and economic relations. Such discursive construction demonstrates that power operates not only through legal or regulatory frameworks but also through discourse practices. To examine the text’s underlying dimensions, Michel Foucault’s theory of power relations is relevant. Foucault (1980) argues that power is not only repressive and hierarchical but also productive and diffused through discursive networks, institutions, and everyday practices. In the case of the sea fence, power manifests through the normalization of development policies deemed legal and legitimate, yet which displace coastal



communities from their living spaces. The sea fence's mysterious appearance is not an isolated event but the result of a long-term process involving regulation, National Strategic Project (PSN) status, and the government's passive stance, all framed as “commonplace” development.

This power relation is reinforced through the emergence of informal actors such as site supervisors (Tyson), land certificate holders (Ali Hanafiah), and corporations (Agung Sedayu Group), who are portrayed as having direct access to state structures. Foucault calls this a form of power governmentality, a technique by which the state governs populations not through overt violence, but through administrative control, statistics, and policies that appear rational but are biased toward certain classes or groups (Foucault, 1991). The government is not portrayed as assertive or authoritative; instead, it is depicted as “suddenly clueless” or “pretending not to know.” Statements like “The Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries doesn't know who built it” reflect the absence of the state in the face of coastal community conflict. Meanwhile, the state appears active when granting PSN status, thus legalizing the project. This suggests that power in the text operates ambivalently: the state exercises power in silence, while authority is expressed through invisible but effective structures.

These power relations cannot be separated from the political-economic structure. According to Robbins (2004),

environmental conflicts are inseparable from social, economic, and political struggles, as ecological changes often result from unequal power dynamics and skewed economic structures. In this context, the sea-fencing conflict represents a struggle over ecological space between corporate capitalism and coastal communities that rely on the sea as their living space. The installation of the sea fence is not only a technical development process but also a process of social and political exclusion.

Political ecology asserts that “space” is not a neutral entity, but a battleground of interests. The sea fence's construction has serious social and ecological consequences. Tempo reported “Land certificates (HGB) have been issued over the sea,” and “the listed certificate holders are not local residents, but rather names that were falsified” (Tempo, 2025). These findings reflect manipulative practices involving document forgery, false ownership claims, and disregard for spatial justice principles. The report serves as a documentation of dispossession, showing how coastal communities are stripped of their spatial rights by a seemingly legal but highly exploitative system.

Furthermore, according to Wahyuni (2022), investigative journalism in Indonesia can serve as a counterbalance to corporate and state dominance, especially in cases of land and resource conflicts. In many instances, coastal communities' voices

are excluded from formal forums such as parliament or ministries. Through this report, the voices of coastal residents, such as Wana, Makdis, Samudi, and other fishers, are not mere decorative elements; they are given space to express suffering and aspirations. Thus, the text functions not only as a source of information but also as a space for political representation.

In the context of the “Pagar Makan Lautan” coverage, the text becomes a contested arena of meaning and legitimacy, a counter-discourse that deliberately amplifies the voices of coastal communities, questions the legality of the sea fence, and exposes the power networks linking state actors and corporate interests. Therefore, this analysis positions the text not only as a linguistic object but also as a political and social field that both produces and resists power.

Following the virality of this report, various government agencies and law enforcement authorities initiated investigations and proceeded to seal off the sea fence.

CONCLUSION

The news report titled “Pagar Makan Lautan (The Fences Eat the Sea)” is a discursive construction that not only documents social realities but also interprets and intervenes in the unequal power relations among corporations (business actors), the state (government), and coastal communities (fish farmers and fishers). This coverage consistently

constructs a discursive field that reveals the dominance of corporate actors in seizing the living spaces of coastal communities through the erection of the sea fences in Tangerang. The report is not only a record of events or information about the ocean privatization but also a form of social practice that reflects and simultaneously challenges the prevailing power structures in society (Fairclough, 1995).

The tenor of this discourse is constructed through three main actors: dominant corporations, a passive government, and coastal communities as victims of the sea privatization through the practice of sea fencing. The mode of discourse devices such as metaphor, satire, and evaluative diction is strategically employed to critique the structural imbalance of power surrounding the sea privatization in Tangerang. The choice of diction, metaphors, and narrative structure in the report actively shapes social relations, constructs social reality, and strategically organizes the flow of information (Halliday, 1978). The investigative style, incorporating direct quotations from affected coastal residents, reinforces emotional proximity and solidarity between the readers and impacted communities. This demonstrates that linguistic practices in the text function as tools for moral articulation and advocacy on behalf of the coastal population.

The discourse practice in this report reflects a production process



grounded in investigative journalism, which involves examining legal documents, interviewing affected communities, and tracking key actors behind the sea fence. The journalists' engagement through the YouTube channel “Bocor Alus Politik” further expands the discursive reach and affirms their role as discursive agents conscious of the political meaning behind the news they report.

From a sociocultural, this coverage reveals unequal power relations across the social, political, and economic spheres. Power in the text functions productively and is diffused through institutions, policies, and the discursive practices of the state (Foucault, 1980; 1991). The government is portrayed ambiguously in the report, characterized as “suddenly clueless,” “pretending not to know,” unresponsive, and absent at critical moments when coastal communities seek protection. Moreover, power operates through what is termed state capture, whereby corporations leverage informal networks and symbolic power to influence the state and create policies that benefit capital interests.

These power relations are inseparable from broader political economic structures. Environmental conflicts are inherently linked to social, economic, and political struggles, as ecological transformations often arise from imbalanced power dynamics and inequitable economic systems (Robbins, 2004). In this context, the conflict over

ocean privatization is a concrete manifestation of the struggle over “ecological space” between capitalist interests who are represented by corporations and coastal communities who depend on the sea as their living space. The installation of the sea fence is not only a technical development process but also a process of social and political exclusion.

Following the virality of the report, several government agencies and law enforcement authorities finally took action by sealing off the sea fence and launching an investigation. This fact highlights that the text functions not only as a form of representation but also as a transformative discourse, capable of catalyzing social change and prompting a real response from previously passive power structures.

CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Muh. Syaiful: is a doctoral student in the Department of Communication, Universitas Indonesia. He contributes to conceptual writing, methodology, data curation, draft preparation, and investigation. Meanwhile, Muhammad Yunus Zulkifli contributes to supervision, review, and editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or



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