



## Participation of Indigenous Papuan Women at the Skouw Border Market, Indonesia–PNG

Kristien C. Maryen | Yakoba Womsiwor | Claudia C. Renyoet \*

### INSTITUTION/ AFFILIATION

The International Relations Study  
Program, Cenderawasih University,  
Jayapura City, Papua, Indonesia.

### CORRESPONDENCE

\*Claudia, Jalan Kamp Wolker Waena,  
Cenderawasih University, Jayapura City,  
Papua 99351, Indonesia.  
Email: [claudiaudy14@gmail.com](mailto:claudiaudy14@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to scrutinize the extent of participation of Indigenous Papuan Women in the Skouw Border Market and the challenges they encounter. The Skouw market contributes to Indonesia's economic development where Indigenous Papuan traders and Nusantara traders (non-Papuans) are the drivers. This study adopted qualitative research, while primary and secondary data were collected through interviews, observations, and library research. By using an Indigenous feminism approach, this article demonstrates several points: 1) the participation of indigenous Papuan women in the Skouw market is pretty deficient compared to Nusantara traders, thereby providing guidance and initial capital from the government to enable Papuan women is required; 2) commodities sold by Indigenous Papuan women should be expanded – not only focusing on farming products but need to sell commodities similar to those of Nusantara traders; 3) if indigenous Papuan women continue to face marginalization and get limited access to the Skouw market, this could be seen as a new form of colonization for Papuan women.

### KEYWORDS

Indigenous; Indonesia; Papua; PNG; Skouw

## INTRODUCTION

Papua Province, a region bordering on land with Papua New Guinea (PNG), is an integral part of Indonesia. Notwithstanding that Papua and PNG share cultural and geographical similarities, there are distinct differences among them, such as the national language, currency, and the system of government. Indeed, Papuans commonly speaks 'Bahasa Indonesia' (the official language of Indonesia), while PNG government adopts three official languages: English, Tok Pisin, and Hiri Motu. The currency of PNG is Kina, compared to Papua Province who uses Indonesian Rupiah. Indonesia also runs a presidential system, whilst PNG adopts a parliamentary democratic system of government.

PNG citizens living along the border often enter the Indonesian territory to shop there because Indonesia has a traditional market at the Skouw-Wutung border. This market used to be known as a marketing point, but it is now called the Skouw Market. The market is a business opportunity for traders on the border because most of its consumers are citizens of neighboring PNG, especially from the village of Wutung. PNG residents who live in border areas will have to travel quite a distance to arrive at the city center, so the choice they will make is to visit the Skouw market in Indonesia. Indeed, they only need to have a short trip on foot to reach the Skouw market. The prices of goods on the Skouw market are also relatively low for PNG citizens due to the difference in nominal currencies. The Indonesian currency is smaller than the PNG currency

(but sometimes it depends on the exchange rates). In addition to this, they also cross borders to visit their family in Indonesia (Korwa & Rumabar, 2017).

Indonesian officers can allow the border crossers from PNG to enter the border if they carry a cross-border card, similar to a second passport. The card shows the identity that the passerby is a PNG citizen who lives around the border. However, if the passerby does not live near the border, they must bring a passport and visa to cross. Border crossers from PNG can shop freely at the Skouw market, but when their shopping exceeds the specified capacity, border officers will check the goods belonging to the crossers. They should also follow administrative procedures at the PLBN (*Pos Lintas Batas Negara*; Transnational Border Post) in Skouw, Jayapura.

The majority of people who provide goods at the Skouw market are those who come from outside Papua or the so-called Nusantara traders. The term 'Nusantara traders' will be used throughout this article to refer to non-indigenous Papuans who sell their commodities in the Skouw market. Indigenous Papuans who become traders in the Skouw market are not as many as Nusantara traders. It then raises the question of why are Indigenous Papuans traders not taking a full role in the frontier market? What factors influence Indigenous Papuans lack of participation in the Skouw market?

The role of Indigenous Papuan women<sup>1</sup> can be seen from their participation in trading activities at the Skouw market. Indeed, they sell garden products such as coconuts, betel nuts, vegetables, and others to benefit and contribute to their households. In practice, they have to compete with Nusantara traders in the border market who either have different or similar commodities. This phenomenon, of course, will affect the income they receive. As indigenous Papuans, the local community is fully expected to play the leading actor in border market activities.

No one can deny that the existence of the Skouw Market on the Indonesia-PNG border will undoubtedly encourage economic growth in the border region and offer a positive impact on the country. The gorgeous and natural border area will also become a tourist attraction for border crossers from PNG and vice versa. However, the government's success in creating infrastructure development in border areas has not been in line with the empowerment of indigenous Papuans.

This article aims to scrutinize the extent of participation of Indigenous Papuan Women in the Skouw Border Market and the challenges they face. It is structured as follows. Firstly, this article conducts a literature review that focuses on the Indigenous feminism approach. Secondly, it describes the methods used, including primary and secondary data collection. Thirdly, the paper presents the

results and discussion that focuses on three sub-sections: Overview of the Skouw Market at the Indonesia-PNG Border; The Indigenous Papuan Women participation at the Skouw border market; Papuan Women in the Skouw Market: Enablers and Constraints. Finally, this article summarizes some critical points in the conclusion.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: INDIGENOUS FEMINISM**

Nickel and Snyder (2019) argue that Indigenous feminism is a concept to understand better how indigenous peoples' past and present lives are influenced by gender and gender conceptions. This approach also attempts to dispel stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, gender, and sexuality and develop frameworks to deal with those issues. Even though Indigenous feminisms focus on gender, sex, and sexuality, they intersect with other dimensions of identities, such as indigeneity (Indigenous and ethnicity), age, ability, and social class.

Nickel and Snyder (2019) also affirm that a broader power relation like sexism, racism, and colonialism contributes to understanding Indigenous feminisms even though the target could be different based on one's gender. It is believed that Indigenous women worldwide faced higher rates of gender-based violence, received smaller incomes, and obtained less parliamentary representation compared to Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, Indigenous Papuan women refer to those living in the Eastern Province of Indonesia; not PNG women.

Gearon (2021), on the other hand, starts his argument by saying that “Indigenous feminism can change our world if given a chance.” In this regard, Gearon, who advocates Indian Country, does not question what terminology is used to describe Indigenous feminism, whether it is ‘matriarch’ or ‘matriarch-in-training’, or whatever it is, instead she emphasizes that Indigenous feminism is about decolonizing. According to Gearon, “It is also about recognizing, naming, and discarding the worldview forced, reinforced, and enforced by this colonial experiment called the United States of America, and picking up the teachings and practices of our ancestors.”

Another scholar, Smith (2011), who tends to use the term ‘Native feminist’ rather than ‘Indigenous Feminist’, emphasizes the importance of examining ethnic studies as an extension that can describe a politics of multicultural representation in conjunction with Native feminists. Smith believes that Native feminists should focus more on questions that are closely relevant to the actual conditions experienced by women (nexus of patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy) rather than on the question of representational conditions.

In this study, Indigenous feminism is appropriate for explaining Indigenous Papuan women’s condition in accessing the Skouw market on the Indonesia-PNG border. This approach can challenge the stereotypes attached to Papuan women who may have been considered behind and could be obstacle factors for entering market activities. Undeniably, there is

plenty of research out there concerning gender-based violence in Papua, such as Yaron (2021), Sanggenafa & Hidayana (2020), Ratnasari, Sumartias, & Romli (2021). Nevertheless, they are not paying precisely focused attention to the discourse of Indigenous feminism; thereby, the authors shall try to fill this gap.

The view expressed by Smith will help the authors analyze more of this case study on the situation faced by Papuan women in accessing border markets rather than focusing only on their participation. Smith also provides an insight to focus on ethnic studies, which are very useful in this study. Gearon’s view that associates Indigenous feminism with decolonizing is also great for advocating for the rights of Papuan women to have more roles in the border market.

## **METHODS**

This study adopts qualitative research and uses primary and secondary data—the primary data are collected from semi-structured interviews and observations at the Skouw Market. Considering a pilot project, the writers made a random selection for interviewing five people (buyers and sellers) based on the circumstances at the Skouw Market and doing an interview with one official at the Industry and Trade Service Papua Province. The interviews were conducted in October 2020. Meanwhile, observations were undertaken at the Skouw market in November 2020 to look at the condition of the market firsthand, knowing the participation of indigenous Papuan women in market activities and the

interactions between buyers from PNG and sellers in Indonesia. The data is then analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification (Walliman, 2011). In addition to this, the writers also discuss what enables Indigenous Papuan participation, the barriers and challenges. The secondary data emanated from books, journals, mass media, and internet web pages.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Overview of the Skouw Market at the Indonesia–PNG Border**

The delimitation of the Indonesia and PNG boundaries on the island of New Guinea refers to the agreement between Indonesia and Australia concerning certain boundaries between PNG and Indonesia on 12 February 1973, which was later ratified by Law no. 6 of 1973, as well as the joint declaration of Indonesia and PNG in 1989-1994. The coordinates and locations of the land boundary pillars with the PNG are spread out in 52 boundary pillar points that have been agreed in the Indonesia-PNG agreement. The installation of boundary markings or demarcation of the Indonesia-PNG boundaries has been started since 1966. The number of main monuments is 55 Meridian Monuments (MM) available, and the sealing monuments are 1792 (World Bank, 2011; Mangku, 2018).

The border gate is interpreted as a nexus between the citizens of PNG and Indonesia. Economic activities also take place in the border area, in which Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday have

been designated as Market Days. When visiting the Skouw-Wutung border and crossing into PNG territory, Indonesian visitors will be presented with souvenirs of local PNG products, and visitors can try PNG culinary. Of course, this gives an impression to visitors from Indonesia.

Visitors from PNG tend to come to Indonesia for shopping at the Skouw market, which is located not far from the border gate and offers lower prices. As stated by one visitor from PNG, “Yes... the Skouw market sells things that are cheaper than shopping at the Supermarket in Vanimo City... sometimes I buy many things so that I can sell it again” (SM, personal communication, 22 Oktober 2020). In this regard, it could be argued that commodities purchased from Indonesia are considered good quality and are therefore resold in PNG. Indeed, some PNG commentators, cited in Conroy (2020), describe this phenomenon as a ‘loss’ of kina because Indonesian goods are resold and reached the PNG Highlands and Lae.

Not only cross the border for shopping, but some PNG citizens also enter the Indonesian border for farming and visiting relatives. It occurs because a river traditionally separates the border between Indonesia and PNG in the Skouw area. Yet, the United Nations has determined that the border is 9 km from the river, which is in the tribal territory of PNG. Therefore, the PLBN and Skouw Market are in the tribal territory of PNG (Direktorat Jenderal Bea Cukai, 2016). Consequently, Wutung people only use traditional cards to cross the border, set

up in the Special Arrangements for Traditional and Customary Border Crossing Between the Government of The Republic of Indonesia and the Government of PNG in 1993.

According to the interview, the Skouw Market was initially established from a 'marketing point' in 2003. The traders then took part in the location of the marketing point in the border area of Indonesia and PNG. The location of the marketing point is within the scope of land owned by the local government. However, the land owned by the local government is also adjacent to the land belonging to a Wutung village head named Stotenes, who lives around the border. Given that the market activities at the border offer benefits to the community, he subsequently built some kiosks to be rented out to traders (HB, personal communication, 22 Oktober 2020).

Considering the positive impact of commercial activity (buying and selling goods and services) at the border, the local government then proposed to the Ministry of Trade to build a pilot market in the Indonesia-PNG border area. When approved, the local government, through the Industry and Trade Service, Papua Province, provided budget funds for land expansion. When the Ministry of Trade agreed to build the pilot market, the construction continued until 2008. At that time, the business premises had already reached 100 kiosks for traders, and the goal was to be managed by traders themselves in supporting their activities in the (Skouw) market. In 2015, the

Minister of Trade inaugurated the Pilot Market and was effectively used between 2015 and 2017 (HB, personal communication, 20 Oktober 2020). However, the market experienced significant damage due to fires in 2017, resulting in decreased effectiveness.

Under Presidential Instruction No. 6 of 2015 concerning the Acceleration of Development of 7 (seven) Integrated Cross-Border Posts and Supporting Infrastructures in Border Areas, the Industry and Trade Service Papua Province requests the central government to revitalize the pilot (Skouw) market in the Indonesia-PNG Border to be a new market. Hence, the Ministry of National Development Planning collaborated with the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing to build the market, which is also located in the PLBN Skouw area. Based on the authors' information, the new market that has been revitalized will change its name to *Pasar Wisata Skouw/Skouw Tourist Market* (HB, personal communication, 20 Oktober 2020). The new market is expected to be inaugurated and occupied by traders in mid-2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down the market development. As stated by the official at the Industry and Trade Service, Papua Province:

In March, the new market had been officially handed over to the Papuan government to manage. The distribution stages were underway, starting with giving the first 200 keys to the traders, while the remaining 100 were delayed due to the Covid-19 situation. Some kiosks

were under construction by the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing as well. The committee team in Papua, consisting of several agencies, was directly led by the Head of the Border and Foreign Cooperation Agency of Papua Province. Overall, the number of kiosks to be relocated in the first phase was about 304. The second phase was around 152. Thus, the total was about 457 (HB, personal

communication, 20 October 2020).

In addition, the government is also preparing a new program – the official money changer transactions for the Skouw (Tourist) Market – in which there will be a place in the Skouw market that serves legal money exchange (HB, personal communication, 20 Oktober 2020). Accordingly, money exchange is no longer carried out by every trader who sells in the Skouw market.



Figure 1. The Skouw Market Before (left) and After Revitalization (right)

Source: Hamid (2017) & Authors' documentation (2020)

### The Indigenous Papuan Women Participation at the Skouw Border Market

The role of Papuan women in development can be seen from their participation as traders in the Skouw market. This participation has indirectly created job opportunities for the local indigenous people. Although not all Papuan women participate, at least there are still those who want to harness the existing development

(the market). It would be useless to have the infrastructure, but the community does not use it, especially the indigenous people. The government provides the infrastructure to help enhance the well-being of society.

Household items are sold in the Skouw market everyday, ranging from betel nut, spices, clothes, electronic equipment, culinary, and other household necessities. However, the majority of

traders in the Skouw market are Nusantara traders. The author's observations show that the number of indigenous Papuan women traders is deficient compared to the Nusantara traders (see table 1). The Nusantara traders, people coming from outside Papua, distribute their merchandise such as household necessities, food ingredients, household utensils, and other supplies from the island of Java. In contrast to Indigenous Papuan women traders who only rely on their local commodities like betel nuts. This situation, of course, has an impact on the incomes they will receive because the value of items affects the price.

At the Skouw market, women are more likely to take part in the activities, while men become 'ojek batas' (a term for people who take border crossers using motorbikes). Seen from a gender perspective, most women will trade in the Skouw market because being an 'ojek batas' requires a motorbike that men mostly own. Nevertheless, the advantage of women when they become traders is the trust of the community. When trading, people will usually ask the sellers regarding quality and price. In this context, female traders are believed to know more about consumers' or buyers' desires than male traders.

Table 1. Merchandise sold at the Skouw market amid Covid-19

No	Merchandise sold by Indigenous Papuan Women	Number of traders	Merchandise sold by Nusantara Traders (Women)	Number of traders
1	Betel nut	8	Clothes	13
2	Kiosk	3	Kiosk	10
3	Souvenirs PNG	3	Household Utensils	4
4	-	-	Bags	6
5	-	-	Spices	4
6	-	-	Food stalls	4
7	-	-	Firecrackers	2
Total amount		14		43

Source: Authors' observation in the Skouw market (2020). Note: This data was taken during Covid-19 in 2020, thus it can change at any time. The authors also acknowledge that the men traders get involved in the Skouw market, yet they are not the focus of this research.

### **Papuan Women in the Skouw Market: Enablers and Constraints**

Even though the number of Indigenous Papuan women in the Skouw market is lower than the Nusantara traders, they have some strengths. First, they can speak foreign languages, especially Tok Pisin (or New Guinea Pidgin), so it is beneficial to

interact with PNG people who come over for shopping at the Skouw market. The Skouw village women who have lived for generations should know the language of their relatives in Wutung village (PNG), so this is an advantage for them. Second, Indigenous Papuan women also know more about the culture and conditions of



the Skouw-Wutung border than Nusantara traders from outside Papua. Of course, this will be an added value for them in establishing communication with buyers from Wutung in Skouw market activities.

However, the weaknesses of Indigenous Papuan women in accessing the Skouw market are quite large. First, they lack initial capital, as found in interviews with several Papuan women traders at the Skouw market. Indeed, they complained about the limited capital (money) to open their businesses and survive in the market competition with Nusantara traders (AF, SL, AM, personal communication, 22 October 2020). Second, they also acknowledge a lack of guidance/training from the government or relevant institutions in fostering their skills. Of course, the training will improve Indigenous Papuan women's skills in trading. Third, the commodities sold by Indigenous Papuan women may not attract (eye-catching) residents from the village of Wutung, PNG. It is because the commodities they offer, like betel nuts, can also be found in Wutung village. This condition is quite different from Nusantara traders, who offer unlike commodities, such as packaged food and drinks, snacks, clothes, pillows, carpets, household necessities, and many more.

From an Indigenous feminist perspective, the real threats or conditions faced by Indigenous Papuan women in accessing the Skouw market need to be underlined as well. Indeed, they are discriminated against by border officers to establish a permanent place of sale. As stated by one of the traders and a native of

Skouw, "We.. Papuan women who were intended to set up market stalls/ kiosks were scolded and restricted.. If we built the stalls, the officers would demolish them. However, Nusantara traders were allowed to build small kiosks to sell merchandise" (AF, personal communication, 22 October 2020). In addition, the Skouw Market's revitalization plan only provided 100 kiosks for Indigenous Papuan women, while Nusantara traders would receive a quota of around 300 (AF, personal communication, 22 October 2020). This circumstance is undoubtedly a form of marginalization for Papuan women, who are local indigenous people. The Skouw market must show more of the ethnic identity of the Papuan tribe, which can be shown by the dominant representation of Papuan women in the Skouw market.

Meanwhile, the opportunity that Indigenous Papuan women have is that they can submit requests for training and initial capital to the relevant government agencies, considering Papua is now under special autonomy status so that indigenous Papuans deserve special attention. Such assistance may also improve the quality of merchandise sold by Papuan women as they sell the same merchandise as Nusantara traders. In the perspective of indigenous feminism, when the role of Indigenous Papuan women in market activities can be strengthened, this might eliminate the stereotype that Papuan women are constantly leaving behind and unable to compete with Nusantara traders. Indigenous Papuan women can show the best performance if

they can be supported by training in trading skills, given business capital, and given greater access to the Skouw market.

## CONCLUSION

This article has examined the participation of indigenous Papuan women in the Skouw border market and the factors affecting their competition with Nusantara traders. As the supporting infrastructure for economic development in the border area, the Skouw Market also attracts many visitors. In particular, the Skouw market is often visited by Wutung community, PNG, because of its very close distance and lower price offer. This condition certainly provides a window of opportunity for Indonesia to become a supplier of goods to PNG and offers business opportunities and employment prospects in the local community.

Nonetheless, it found that the participation of indigenous Papuan women in the Skouw border market remains low compared to Nusantara traders. Because of this, government intervention is required to enable Papuan women to compete with Nusantara traders. This is caused by several factors such as the lack of initial capital in developing their businesses, the lack of guidance/ training from the government, and the lack of interest from PNG citizens in the commodities sold by indigenous Papuan women because of the similarities in commodities they find in their areas. Furthermore, Papuan women have experienced discrimination by border officers to build permanent stalls, while Nusantara traders do not face a similar

situation. Even the planning for revitalizing the Skouw market into a Skouw tourist market also only provides a small quota (kiosks) to Papuan women, whilst Nusantara traders get a larger quota.

To sum up, the indigenous feminism approach used in this study confirms that Indigenous Papuan women encounter actual conditions such as discrimination, not getting enough support from the government, and the lack of capital for the market activities. These are vitally important because, as local indigenous people and considering the Papuan special autonomy, they have to play a more prominent role than Nusantara traders from outside Papua. If indigenous Papuan women continue to face marginalization and receive less access to the Skouw market, this could then be argued as a new form of colonization for Papuan women. In this sense, the Skouw market must show Papuan ethnic identities more than non-Papuan identities (Nusantara traders) because the Skouw Market is located in the Papua region. Therefore, considerable efforts should be made to increase the capability of indigenous Papuan women in the Skouw Market, such as receiving guidance/ training and initial capital from the government, increasing the variety of commodities sold, and getting more quotas/ places to sell in the Skouw market.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kristien C. Maryen completed her undergraduate study from the International Relations Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Cenderawasih University, Papua in 2021. Her research interests focus on international borders and global migration.

Yakoba Womsiwor is a permanent lecturer at the International Relations Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Cenderawasih University, Papua. Her research interests focus on international political economy and multinational corporations.

Claudia C. Renyoet is a permanent lecturer at the International Relations Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Cenderawasih University, Papua. Her research interests focus on diplomacy and peace studies.

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