



When the Capital Enters Indigenous Territory: Balik Women and the Politics of Livable Space in Sepaku

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Abstract

The construction of Indonesia's new capital city in East Kalimantan has transformed Sepaku into a major frontier of infrastructure development, investment, and territorial restructuring. Beneath the national narrative of modernization, however, Indigenous Balik communities face profound changes in land access, livelihoods, cultural landscapes, and social relations. This article focuses specifically on the experiences of Balik women, whose perspectives are essential for understanding the gendered consequences of capital-city development. Drawing on feminist political ecology and Indigenous territorial rights, the study examines how land acquisition, displacement, environmental transformation, and changing access to natural resources affect women's everyday lives. It asks how women experience the loss or fragmentation of spaces that support food production, household economies, cultural practices, and community relationships. The article also investigates the unequal power relations embedded in development planning, particularly the gap between state-defined public interest and Indigenous understandings of territory and livable space. By centering women's experiences, the study challenges approaches that treat displacement primarily as a question of physical relocation and compensation. It argues that territorial justice must recognize social reproduction, cultural identity, gendered labor, and political participation. The case of Balik women demonstrates that infrastructure development can simultaneously produce economic opportunity and deepen existing inequalities in access to land, resources, and decision-making.

[Pembangunan ibu kota baru Indonesia di Kalimantan Timur telah mengubah Sepaku menjadi wilayah utama pengembangan infrastruktur, investasi, dan restrukturisasi wilayah. Namun, di balik narasi nasional modernisasi, masyarakat adat Balik menghadapi perubahan mendalam dalam akses lahan, mata pencaharian, lanskap budaya, dan hubungan sosial. Artikel ini secara khusus berfokus pada pengalaman perempuan Balik, yang perspektifnya sangat penting untuk memahami konsekuensi gender dari pembangunan ibu kota. Dengan mengacu pada ekologi politik feminis dan hak teritorial



masyarakat adat, studi ini meneliti bagaimana akuisisi lahan, penggusuran, transformasi lingkungan, dan perubahan akses terhadap sumber daya alam memengaruhi kehidupan sehari-hari perempuan. Studi ini mempertanyakan bagaimana perempuan mengalami kehilangan atau fragmentasi ruang yang mendukung produksi pangan, ekonomi rumah tangga, praktik budaya, dan hubungan komunitas. Artikel ini juga menyelidiki hubungan kekuasaan yang tidak setara yang tertanam dalam perencanaan pembangunan, khususnya kesenjangan antara kepentingan publik yang didefinisikan negara dan pemahaman masyarakat adat tentang wilayah dan ruang yang layak huni. Dengan memusatkan pengalaman perempuan, studi ini menantang pendekatan yang memperlakukan penggusuran terutama sebagai masalah relokasi fisik dan kompensasi. Argumennya adalah bahwa keadilan teritorial harus mengakui reproduksi sosial, identitas budaya, kerja berdasarkan gender, dan partisipasi politik. Kasus perempuan Balik menunjukkan bahwa pembangunan infrastruktur dapat secara bersamaan menghasilkan peluang ekonomi dan memperdalam ketidaksetaraan yang ada dalam akses terhadap tanah, sumber daya, dan pengambilan keputusan.]

Keywords: Indigenous women, Balik community, IKN, land displacement, feminist political ecology

Introduction

The construction of Indonesia's new capital city, Nusantara (Ibu Kota Nusantara/IKN), represents one of the most significant territorial transformations in contemporary Indonesia. Located in East Kalimantan, the new capital is presented by the state as a long-term national development project intended to redistribute economic activity, reduce the concentration of development on Java, and establish a new administrative and economic center. Law No. 3 of 2022 formally established Nusantara as the new capital, while Law No. 21 of 2023 subsequently strengthened the institutional and administrative framework for its development (Republic of Indonesia 2022; Republic of Indonesia 2023). The project has consequently been framed not merely as the construction of a new city, but as a broader transformation of territory, infrastructure, investment, governance, and national identity.

Yet the territory designated for IKN is not an empty space waiting to be urbanized. Long before the announcement of the new capital, the Sepaku area was inhabited and used by local and Indigenous communities whose relationships with land were established through settlement, agriculture, forests, rivers, burial sites, cultural practices, and intergenerational knowledge. Among these communities, the Balik people occupy a particularly important position because several Balik settlements are located within or around areas affected by the development of IKN. Existing research identifies the Balik as an Indigenous community whose livelihood and social existence have historically been closely connected to land and natural resources in Sepaku (Bahzar et al. 2025). Reports concerning the community also

indicate that Balik households have historically relied on forests, agricultural land, and rivers for subsistence and everyday economic activities.

The encounter between IKN and Balik territory therefore raises a fundamental question that is often obscured by the language of national development: what happens when a national capital enters a space that is already socially, culturally, and ecologically inhabited? This question cannot be adequately answered by calculating the number of households relocated, the amount of compensation provided, or the number of hectares acquired. Territory has meanings that extend beyond its exchange value. Land can simultaneously function as a source of food, livelihood, social reproduction, cultural identity, ecological security, and historical memory. The transformation of territory can therefore produce forms of displacement even when households are not physically moved from their homes. Losing access to a garden, forest, river, customary site, or communal landscape can alter everyday life in ways that conventional measures of displacement and compensation fail to capture.

The concept of livable space provides a useful way to understand this broader process. Livable space refers not simply to a physical location in which people reside but to the material, social, ecological, and cultural conditions that make everyday life possible and meaningful. From this perspective, a village is not merely a collection of houses. It is a network of relationships connecting households with land, water, food production, labor, kinship, mobility, cultural practices, and community institutions. When infrastructure development transforms these relationships, the consequences may be experienced through changes in access to resources, increased costs of daily life, declining livelihood opportunities, and the weakening of social networks. The politics of livable space consequently concerns who has the authority to define what constitutes a viable and desirable space and whose definition becomes institutionalized in development planning.

This question becomes particularly important when viewed through feminist political ecology. Feminist political ecology challenges the assumption that environmental change affects communities in uniform ways. It emphasizes that relationships with land and natural resources are shaped by gender, class, ethnicity, household roles, and political power (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996; Elmhirst 2011). Environmental transformation can therefore redistribute labor and responsibility within households even when the overall community appears to experience the same external change. When agricultural land becomes inaccessible, for example, the consequences may include not only the loss of household income but also greater unpaid labor associated with securing food, water, and care. Women may consequently experience environmental change through the transformation of everyday reproductive labor as much as through formal land ownership.

The relevance of gendered environmental relations is well established in Indonesian feminist political ecology. Tiominar and Afiff (2021), examining gendered relationships with land and natural resources in an Indigenous context,

demonstrate that women's relationships with territory cannot always be understood through rigid distinctions between male and female spaces. Instead, women's roles in managing communal resources may change as political and economic conditions change. Their analysis is particularly relevant to the Balik case because it draws attention to the importance of women's interests in participatory mapping and territorial decision-making. If development planning recognizes only formally registered landowners or male community representatives, the everyday spaces through which women sustain households and social relationships may remain politically invisible.

Feminist political ecology also directs attention to the concept of social reproduction. Social reproduction encompasses the activities required to maintain households and communities, including food preparation, water collection, care work, subsistence production, and the maintenance of social relationships. These activities are frequently undervalued because they occur outside formal markets, yet they depend heavily on access to land and ecological resources. When those resources are transformed, the burden of adaptation may fall disproportionately on women. Research on environmental degradation and Indigenous women in other Indonesian contexts demonstrates that land conflict can affect women's health, labor, and social relations in gender-specific ways (Roswally 2024). This broader literature suggests that the effects of territorial transformation should be examined not only through employment and income statistics but also through changes in the conditions required for everyday social reproduction.

The Balik case is particularly significant because recent studies have documented concerns regarding the community's position within the IKN development process. Bahzar et al. (2025) argue that the construction of IKN has created significant pressures on the existence and rights of the Balik community, including concerns about the sustainability of their livelihoods and the protection of Indigenous rights. Yani and Yuniawaty (2025) similarly identify uncertainty surrounding the legal recognition and protection of Balik customary interests in land acquisition for IKN. These studies establish an important foundation, but they largely examine the Balik community as a collective subject. The gendered dimension of territorial transformation remains comparatively underexplored.

This gender gap matters because Indigenous communities are not internally homogeneous. Men and women may experience the same territorial transformation differently because they have different responsibilities, forms of resource access, patterns of mobility, and positions within community decision-making. A policy that compensates a household for the loss of formally recognized land may not capture the consequences for women whose daily activities depend on gardens, forests, rivers, or communal spaces that are not individually registered. Similarly, a consultation conducted with male customary leaders may be formally representative while still failing to capture women's specific concerns and knowledge. Feminist political ecology therefore makes visible the internal

distribution of costs and power that can disappear when “the community” is treated as a single actor.

The question of representation is especially important in the Balik context. Reports from the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) indicate that Balik communities in Sepaku have resisted relocation and expressed concerns about the loss of their historical settlement and access to resources. In 2025, AMAN reported that Balik residents experienced increasing difficulties accessing clean water and other natural resources as infrastructure associated with IKN expanded around their settlements. The same report highlighted the testimony of a Balik Indigenous woman, Syamsiah, who described the deterioration of everyday living conditions and the increasing difficulty of obtaining water. Such accounts are significant because they reveal how environmental transformation is experienced through everyday household needs rather than through abstract measures of land conversion alone.

The politics of water illustrates this problem particularly clearly. Water is simultaneously an ecological resource, a household necessity, and a component of territorial autonomy. Changes to rivers, drainage systems, dams, water treatment infrastructure, and groundwater conditions can therefore affect both environmental security and social reproduction. For households that historically relied on nearby water sources, the loss of accessible and reliable water can increase the time and monetary costs required to maintain everyday life. Women may experience these changes especially strongly because household water access and care responsibilities frequently intersect with gendered divisions of labor. The question of water access is thus not merely an infrastructure issue; it is also a question of who bears the labor and cost of adapting to environmental transformation.

The politics of land acquisition presents a similar problem. Indonesian law formally recognizes public-interest land acquisition and provides procedures concerning planning, valuation, compensation, and affected rights. Presidential Regulation No. 65 of 2022 specifically regulates land acquisition and land management in Nusantara, while Government Regulation No. 39 of 2023 amended the broader framework governing land acquisition for development in the public interest (Republic of Indonesia 2022b; Republic of Indonesia 2023b). These legal instruments provide important procedural safeguards, but their application to Indigenous territory raises questions concerning the relationship between formal land rights and customary relationships with territory. Yani and Yuniawaty (2025) argue that the legal position of the Balik community remains problematic because recognition of customary status and protection of customary land rights have not necessarily developed at the same pace as the implementation of IKN development.

This tension reflects a broader problem in the governance of Indigenous territories: the difference between land as property and territory as a lived relationship. Formal land administration generally requires identifiable rights, boundaries, owners, and legally recognized interests. Indigenous territorial relationships can operate through collective histories, customary practices, kinship,

ecological knowledge, and shared use. When these relationships are translated into a formal land-acquisition system, some dimensions of territorial value may become invisible. The resulting problem is not necessarily that compensation is absent, but that compensation may be calculated according to categories that do not fully represent what is being lost. This is why Indigenous territorial justice requires recognition in addition to compensation.

The issue is also connected to the politics of development language. IKN is frequently justified through concepts such as national interest, modernization, infrastructure development, investment, and public benefit. These concepts have significant political and economic legitimacy. However, the definition of “public interest” can become problematic when the people whose territory is being transformed have limited influence over how that interest is defined. From an Indigenous rights perspective, development should not assume that national benefits automatically override locally grounded understandings of territory. Rather, public interest must be constructed through processes that recognize the rights and interests of affected communities.

This concern has been emphasized in recent legal scholarship on IKN. Aura and Abidin (2025) argue that the acceleration of national strategic projects can create pressure on customary rights, including those of Indigenous communities such as the Balik, Paser, and Kutai. Their analysis highlights the importance of legal mechanisms capable of protecting customary territories within development processes that prioritize rapid implementation. Similarly, Elrika and Djaja (2025) find that although Indonesian legislation formally recognizes Indigenous land interests, implementation of land acquisition for IKN continues to generate legal challenges concerning the protection of Indigenous communities.

For Balik women, these questions of territorial recognition are inseparable from political participation. Women may possess detailed knowledge concerning agricultural cycles, water sources, forest resources, food production, household economies, and the social uses of particular places. Yet this knowledge does not necessarily translate into formal authority over land or development decisions. Feminist political ecology emphasizes precisely this contradiction: women can be deeply involved in the material reproduction of a community while remaining marginalized from institutions that make decisions about territory (Elmhirst 2011; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996). Their exclusion therefore produces a double invisibility—women's labor is undervalued in the economy, while their environmental knowledge is undervalued in governance.

This article consequently approaches the transformation of Sepaku not simply as a case of displacement but as a struggle over the meaning and governance of livable space. The central concern is how the entry of a national capital into Indigenous territory transforms the conditions through which Balik women sustain households, livelihoods, cultural relationships, and community life. The analysis asks three interconnected questions. First, how does IKN development transform the territorial and ecological spaces on which Balik women depend? Second, how

do land acquisition, displacement pressures, and environmental changes redistribute women's labor and affect social reproduction? Third, to what extent do existing development and legal institutions recognize Balik women's interests and enable their meaningful participation in decisions concerning their territory?

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach grounded in feminist political ecology and Indigenous territorial rights. Rather than treating displacement as a measurable event defined exclusively by physical relocation, the analysis examines territorial transformation as a process affecting access, livelihood, social reproduction, cultural identity, and political agency. The analysis draws on scholarly literature, legal and policy documents, institutional materials, and documented accounts concerning the Balik community and IKN development. This approach is intended to connect structural processes of urban development with the everyday experiences through which territorial change becomes socially meaningful.

The article argues that the transformation of Sepaku demonstrates how the construction of a national capital can produce a gendered form of territorial restructuring. Balik women may encounter the consequences of development not only through the possible loss of land or relocation but through the fragmentation of the ecological and social spaces that support everyday life. Changes in access to water, agricultural land, forests, and community spaces can increase the costs of social reproduction while weakening forms of livelihood and cultural continuity that are difficult to capture through conventional compensation frameworks. At the same time, limited participation in decision-making can prevent women's knowledge and priorities from shaping the development process.

The significance of the Balik case extends beyond Sepaku itself. It illustrates a broader problem in contemporary development: the assumption that infrastructure and urban modernization automatically expand the possibilities of a better life. For communities already inhabiting development frontiers, however, modernization may involve the reorganization of the very spaces that make existing forms of life possible. The question is therefore not simply whether IKN creates new opportunities, but whose conception of a livable future is being built into the landscape and whose existing ways of living are being displaced, transformed, or rendered invisible. Centering Balik women makes it possible to examine this question at the intersection of gender, indigeneity, environment, and territorial power.

The remainder of the article develops this argument through three interconnected discussions. The first examines the historical and territorial relationship between the Balik community and Sepaku and analyzes how IKN transforms Indigenous territory into a development frontier. The second examines the gendered consequences of land transformation, focusing on displacement, environmental change, livelihood, and social reproduction. The third analyzes the political and legal dimensions of women's participation, recognition, and territorial rights, asking whether the governance of IKN provides sufficient space for Balik

women to influence decisions that fundamentally reshape their livable environment.

Balik Territory, Lived Space, and the Making of a Development Frontier

The transformation of Sepaku cannot be understood adequately if the territory is approached simply as a geographical location selected for the construction of Indonesia's new capital. Before IKN became a national development priority, Sepaku was already a lived territory in which Indigenous and local communities established relationships with land, forests, rivers, agricultural spaces, settlements, and places of cultural significance. For the Balik community, territory has consequently been more than a physical resource. It has provided the material basis for livelihood while simultaneously functioning as a social and cultural landscape. This understanding is consistent with Indigenous approaches to territory in which land is not merely an object of ownership but part of a continuing relationship between people, place, memory, and collective identity (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010; Sikor and Lund 2009).

The concept of territory is particularly important because formal land administration and lived territorial relations do not necessarily coincide. Modern land governance generally seeks to make territory administratively legible through boundaries, certificates, ownership categories, and designated land uses. Indigenous territorial relationships, by contrast, can involve overlapping forms of access and collective use that are embedded in kinship, customary practice, historical occupation, and ecological knowledge. Sikor and Lund (2009) describe this as a broader politics of property in which claims to land are produced and legitimized through competing institutions and authorities. In such circumstances, the question is not simply who possesses a legal document but whose understanding of legitimate territorial authority is recognized by the state.

The Balik experience in Sepaku illustrates this tension. The community's presence predates the designation of the area as the site of the national capital, yet the legal and administrative transformation associated with IKN has changed the institutional meaning of the territory. Research on the Balik community indicates that the development of IKN has created concerns regarding the protection of Indigenous rights, the continuity of livelihoods, and the security of customary relationships with land (Bahzar et al. 2025). Yani and Yuniawaty (2025) similarly identify unresolved questions concerning the recognition and protection of Balik customary interests within the land-acquisition process. These concerns demonstrate that the development of IKN does not simply introduce new buildings into an existing landscape; it introduces new legal and political categories that can redefine how existing relationships with territory are understood.

The designation of IKN consequently represents a transition from lived territory to development frontier. A development frontier is not merely an area where construction takes place. It is a space in which new forms of capital, state authority, infrastructure, and land value enter into existing social and ecological relations. The

designation of Sepaku as part of the new capital transforms the economic and political significance of land. Areas that previously functioned as agricultural fields, forests, gardens, settlement spaces, or communal environments become incorporated into a landscape of roads, government facilities, investment zones, housing, and supporting infrastructure. Land is thereby subjected to new forms of valuation and regulation.

This process reflects what political ecology identifies as the political production of environmental and territorial value. Land does not possess a single, universally accepted value. Its value depends on the social institutions and political-economic processes through which it is understood. A parcel of land may have a market value determined by its potential for development, while the same parcel may have subsistence value for a household, cultural value for a community, ecological value as part of a watershed, and historical value because of its connection to previous generations. When one form of value becomes dominant in development planning, other values may become institutionally invisible (Escobar 2008; Martinez-Alier 2002).

The transformation of Sepaku is therefore also a transformation in the politics of valuation. The state's designation of land for a national capital gives development-related values significant institutional authority. Roads and government facilities can be justified through the language of public interest, national development, strategic infrastructure, and economic transformation. These categories are powerful because they allow particular forms of land use to be presented as serving a collective national objective. Yet the fact that a project is designated as serving the public interest does not eliminate the existence of competing local interests. Instead, it creates a political question concerning whose understanding of the public interest prevails.

Indigenous territorial claims are particularly vulnerable within this process because customary relationships can be difficult to translate into the categories used by formal land administration. A community may regard a landscape as collectively significant without holding a conventional title that corresponds to the boundaries used in government planning. Similarly, a family may have historically used a particular agricultural or forest area without possessing an individually registered right over the entire space. When land acquisition proceeds through formal legal categories, these complex relationships can become fragmented into narrower claims. The result may be a situation in which the state recognizes a particular form of legal interest while failing to recognize the broader territorial relationship through which that interest was created and maintained.

This problem is not unique to Indonesia. Indigenous land conflicts around the world demonstrate that formal recognition of property rights can coexist with the marginalization of customary territorial relationships. Indigenous peoples often understand territory through collective responsibilities and reciprocal relationships rather than through individualized ownership (Whyte 2011; Coulthard 2014). The significance of this perspective for Sepaku is that the loss of territory cannot be

measured exclusively through the quantity of land transferred. What may be disrupted is an entire system of relationships connecting people to places and resources.

For the Balik community, such relationships include the use of land for agriculture and household production, access to forests and water, social interaction, and the maintenance of cultural memory. The importance of these spaces becomes particularly visible when they are threatened or restricted. What may appear from an administrative perspective as an ordinary piece of land can have multiple functions within everyday life. Feminist political ecology is useful here because it encourages researchers to ask not only who formally owns or controls resources but also who uses them, who depends on them, and whose labor sustains the household through those resources (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996).

The gender dimension of territory is therefore already embedded within the concept of lived space, even before questions of displacement and social reproduction are considered. Tiominar and Afiff (2021) demonstrate that Indigenous territories in Indonesia cannot necessarily be divided into rigidly male and female spaces. Land and natural resources may be collectively managed, while the forms of access and responsibility can change over time. This finding is important for understanding the Balik case because it suggests that mapping territory only through formal ownership or through male-centered representations of community authority can obscure women's actual relationships with land and resources.

The entry of IKN into this territorial system also changes the meaning of accessibility. Infrastructure improves access for some actors while potentially restricting access for others. A newly constructed road may provide faster transportation to government facilities and commercial areas while simultaneously crossing agricultural spaces or limiting movement through previously open areas. A new security boundary may protect a government facility but alter the ability of residents to access nearby resources. Development therefore produces differentiated forms of mobility. The same infrastructure can be experienced as opportunity by one group and as restriction by another.

This differentiated accessibility is central to understanding why territorial transformation should not be reduced to physical displacement. A household can remain in the same location while experiencing substantial changes in its relationship with surrounding territory. If roads, construction zones, security areas, or land-use restrictions prevent access to gardens, forests, rivers, or communal spaces, the household may experience a form of spatial displacement without immediate physical relocation. Such processes are particularly important for women because many forms of household provisioning depend on access to dispersed resources rather than a single parcel of formally owned land.

The transformation of land value can intensify this process. Once a region becomes associated with a major national development project, land may acquire

new speculative and investment value. This can change relationships between residents and land even before formal acquisition occurs. Land that previously functioned primarily as a livelihood resource can increasingly be perceived as a financial asset. Rising land values can create incentives for sale, alter household expectations, and generate pressure on communities whose land rights are insecure. In political-economic terms, the arrival of IKN therefore creates a new land market environment in which local territory becomes incorporated into broader processes of capital accumulation.

This transformation can be interpreted through the concept of accumulation by dispossession, originally developed by Harvey (2003) to describe processes through which common or collectively controlled resources are incorporated into circuits of capital accumulation. The concept should not be applied mechanically to the Balik case, because the legal and historical circumstances of Sepaku differ from those of other land enclosures. Nevertheless, it provides a useful analytical lens for examining how infrastructure and investment can convert previously embedded social and ecological relationships into economically exchangeable land. The central issue is not simply whether land is bought or acquired legally, but whether the transformation weakens communities' capacity to determine how their territory is used.

The state's role is crucial in this process because IKN is not simply a private real-estate development. It is a state-led national project supported by a specialized legal and institutional framework. Law No. 3 of 2022 established the legal foundation for IKN, while Law No. 21 of 2023 expanded and refined the institutional framework governing the new capital (Republic of Indonesia 2022; Republic of Indonesia 2023). The Otorita Ibu Kota Nusantara was granted substantial authority to organize development, land management, and the implementation of the capital's master plan. This institutional arrangement gives the state considerable capacity to coordinate infrastructure and land use, but it also makes questions of recognition and accountability particularly important.

The central governance challenge is therefore not simply the existence of state authority but how that authority interacts with pre-existing territorial claims. A strong state can coordinate development more effectively, but it can also redefine territory rapidly when national development objectives are given priority. The question of Indigenous rights becomes especially important in such circumstances because customary communities may have limited institutional power relative to the state and investors. If the planning process begins from the assumption that the state possesses ultimate authority over the territory, community participation may become reactive rather than constitutive: communities are asked to respond to development decisions rather than participate in defining the terms under which development should occur.

This tension is visible in the broader legal framework for IKN land acquisition. Presidential Regulation No. 65 of 2022 establishes specific arrangements for land acquisition and land management in Nusantara, while Government Regulation No.

39 of 2023 regulates changes to the broader system of land acquisition for public-interest development (Republic of Indonesia 2022b; Republic of Indonesia 2023b). These instruments are important because they create procedures for identifying land, determining affected interests, and organizing acquisition. However, procedural recognition of land interests does not necessarily resolve the deeper question of customary territorial authority. The critical issue remains whether Indigenous claims are treated as substantive rights or merely as interests to be accommodated within a state-defined development process.

This distinction is particularly important for the Balik community because the category of “affected community” may be too narrow to describe the relationship between people and territory. A community may be affected not only when a house is acquired but also when access to forests, rivers, agricultural areas, or cultural sites is restricted. Likewise, the loss of a particular landscape can have collective consequences even when individual households receive compensation. The territorial unit that matters to Indigenous communities may therefore be larger and more relational than the property unit used by land-acquisition procedures.

The concept of territorial justice helps to clarify this problem. Territorial justice asks whether different groups have equitable access to space, resources, decision-making, and the ability to shape the future of their territories. It moves beyond a narrow understanding of justice as compensation for losses and instead examines the power relations through which spatial arrangements are produced (Soja 2010). Applied to Sepaku, territorial justice requires asking whether the Balik community has meaningful capacity to influence how its territory is transformed, whether development benefits are equitably distributed, and whether cultural and ecological values are given institutional weight alongside economic considerations.

Recognition is a central component of such justice. Fraser (2000) argues that injustice can result from institutionalized misrecognition, whereby particular groups are positioned as less legitimate participants in social and political life. In the context of IKN, misrecognition may occur when Balik territorial relationships are acknowledged only after they are translated into categories acceptable to state land administration. If customary territory becomes legible only when it resembles formally registered property, then the legal system may unintentionally privilege one form of territorial knowledge over another.

This problem also concerns the production of knowledge about Sepaku. Development planning typically relies on maps, cadastral data, land-use classifications, environmental assessments, and infrastructure plans. These forms of knowledge are essential for large-scale planning, but they do not necessarily capture the everyday meanings of territory. A map may identify a forest area without recording which families gather resources there, which paths are used to access agricultural land, or which locations hold cultural significance. Feminist political ecology emphasizes precisely this gap between official representations of space and the lived knowledge through which people understand and manage their environments (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996).

Participatory mapping can partially address this problem by allowing communities to represent resources, histories, and patterns of use that may not appear in official spatial datasets. Tiominar and Afiff (2021) demonstrate the importance of participatory approaches for making women's relationships with land and natural resources visible in territorial decision-making. In the Balik case, participatory mapping could therefore serve not simply as a technical exercise but as a mechanism of political recognition. Mapping where people collect food, obtain water, cultivate land, conduct cultural activities, or maintain community relationships can reveal dimensions of territory that conventional cadastral mapping may overlook.

However, participatory mapping itself is not automatically transformative. If community-generated information is collected but does not influence planning decisions, participation becomes extractive rather than empowering. The value of participatory knowledge depends on whether institutions are willing to recognize it as legitimate evidence. This is particularly important where community knowledge challenges existing development boundaries or proposed infrastructure. A genuinely participatory planning process must therefore provide mechanisms through which local knowledge can alter project design rather than simply document local conditions.

The development frontier also changes the temporal character of territorial life. Before IKN, changes in land use may have occurred gradually through household decisions, agricultural expansion, market changes, or local infrastructure development. The national capital introduces a much more rapid and externally driven transformation. Roads, government facilities, investment zones, and administrative boundaries can alter the landscape within a relatively short period. This acceleration can create difficulties for communities attempting to adapt because the institutional and physical environment may change faster than local livelihood strategies can respond.

Acceleration also affects the ability to negotiate. Communities with secure and recognized territorial rights may possess stronger bargaining positions when development projects are proposed. Communities whose rights remain uncertain may have fewer opportunities to influence the timing, location, or conditions of development. The speed of infrastructure construction can therefore become a political factor in itself. When development moves faster than recognition, consultation, or dispute resolution, communities may face decisions after critical choices have already been made.

This dynamic reveals why the politics of IKN cannot be reduced to a binary opposition between development and resistance. Balik residents may recognize the potential benefits of improved roads, public services, employment, education, and regional investment while simultaneously opposing forms of development that threaten their territorial security. These positions are not necessarily contradictory. They reflect an attempt to negotiate the terms of modernization rather than reject modernization altogether. A politically meaningful analysis must therefore avoid

representing Indigenous communities as inherently anti-development and instead examine the conditions under which development becomes acceptable or unacceptable from their perspective.

The concept of livable space makes this distinction particularly clear. A livable space is not simply a space with modern infrastructure. It is a space in which people can sustain material livelihoods, social relationships, cultural practices, and a sense of security. New roads or housing may improve some dimensions of living conditions while simultaneously weakening others. A relocated household may receive a modern house but lose access to agricultural land or community networks. A new water system may provide piped water while the construction process disrupts traditional water sources. A new commercial center may generate employment while increasing dependence on cash income. These transformations demonstrate that “development” is experienced through multiple and sometimes contradictory dimensions of everyday life.

The politics of livable space therefore requires attention to the question of what counts as improvement. State planning often measures improvement through infrastructure, investment, connectivity, economic output, and public facilities. Communities may evaluate improvement through different indicators, including access to land, food security, social cohesion, cultural continuity, environmental quality, and autonomy. Neither set of indicators is necessarily irrelevant, but the political problem arises when one is automatically treated as superior to the other. The construction of IKN creates precisely such a situation because national development indicators can become institutionally dominant over locally defined measures of well-being.

The Balik case thus demonstrates that territorial transformation is simultaneously material and political. Roads, buildings, and land acquisition physically reshape Sepaku, while laws, maps, investment regulations, and development narratives reshape the political meaning of the territory. What is presented as the creation of a new national capital can therefore also be understood as the reclassification of an existing lived landscape. This reclassification changes who is authorized to make decisions, which land uses are prioritized, what forms of knowledge are considered legitimate, and which futures become institutionally possible.

The significance of this process extends to the gendered politics of territory. When a community's relationship with land changes, women do not simply experience the same transformation as men. Their responsibilities within household production, food provisioning, water management, caregiving, and community networks can make them particularly sensitive to changes in resource accessibility. Yet these same responsibilities may not translate into formal recognition during land negotiations. The transformation of Balik territory therefore creates the conditions for a second layer of inequality: the possible marginalization of women within both the broader development process and the internal politics of community representation.

This is where the analysis must move from territory as a collective space to the everyday practices through which territory is reproduced. The loss or fragmentation of agricultural plots, forests, water sources, and communal spaces can alter the distribution of labor inside households. Activities that were previously supported by nearby natural resources may require additional time, travel, or monetary expenditure. Women may consequently absorb a disproportionate share of the adjustment costs even when they are not the formal holders of land rights. Recent feminist political ecology research in Indonesia similarly shows that women's relationships with land and ecological resources can become particularly important during periods of land conflict and environmental change (Prawitasari, Sinaga, and Viajar 2025).

The transformation of Sepaku should therefore be understood as a process in which a national development project enters an already inhabited and socially meaningful territory. IKN does not create the territory's value; it introduces new institutions, economic interests, and spatial priorities that compete with existing forms of value. The Balik experience reveals that the central issue is not whether the territory will change—development inevitably produces change—but whether communities retain meaningful capacity to shape that change and whether the social and ecological relationships that make the territory livable are protected.

The development frontier consequently represents a struggle over more than land. It is a struggle over authority, value, knowledge, and future possibilities. For the Balik community, the question is not merely whether individual parcels are acquired but whether the community can continue to reproduce a meaningful relationship with its territory under conditions of rapid urbanization. For the state, the challenge is whether national development can accommodate existing territorial rights without treating them as obstacles to implementation. For feminist political ecology, the central concern is how these transformations are experienced differently within the community and how women's contributions to sustaining territory become visible or invisible in the process.

Gendered Displacement, Social Reproduction, and the Transformation of Everyday Life

The transformation of Indigenous territory becomes socially consequential when changes in land and ecological access enter the everyday organization of household life. For the Balik community, the consequences of IKN development therefore cannot be understood only through the physical acquisition of land or the relocation of settlements. They must also be examined through the changing conditions under which households obtain food, secure water, generate income, maintain social relationships, and reproduce community life. This perspective is particularly important for understanding the experiences of Balik women because much of the work associated with maintaining household and community well-being is performed through activities that remain insufficiently recognized within formal economic and development assessments.

Feminist political ecology provides a useful framework for examining this process because it rejects the assumption that environmental change has uniform consequences across a community. Access to natural resources is structured by gender, class, ethnicity, household position, and political authority. Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari (1996) demonstrate that women's environmental relationships are frequently shaped by their responsibilities for subsistence, household provisioning, and social reproduction. These responsibilities can make women particularly dependent on local ecological resources while simultaneously limiting their access to formal decision-making institutions. Elmhirst (2011) similarly argues that feminist political ecology must examine how gender relations operate across multiple scales, connecting everyday household practices with broader processes of political economy and environmental transformation.

For Balik women, the significance of land consequently extends beyond its role as a productive asset. Agricultural plots, gardens, forests, rivers, and other resource spaces can support food production, household consumption, informal income generation, and cultural practices. When access to these spaces becomes restricted, the effect may be experienced through an increase in the time, labor, and financial resources required to perform everyday activities. A reduction in agricultural production, for example, may increase household dependence on purchased food. Restricted access to water may require longer journeys or greater expenditure. The loss of nearby forest resources may eliminate sources of food or materials previously obtained without monetary exchange. These changes represent forms of economic transformation even when they do not appear as direct income losses in conventional development statistics.

This is why the concept of social reproduction is central to understanding displacement. Social reproduction refers to the activities and relationships through which households and communities are maintained across time. It includes paid and unpaid labor, caregiving, food preparation, household provisioning, childrearing, and the reproduction of social and cultural relationships. Feminist scholarship has long demonstrated that these activities are indispensable to the functioning of economies even though they are frequently excluded from conventional measures of economic productivity (Federici 2012; Fraser 2016). In Indigenous communities, social reproduction may also be closely connected to ecological resources and collective territorial practices. Consequently, environmental transformation can become a crisis of social reproduction when the resources supporting everyday life become more difficult to access.

The relevance of this perspective is particularly evident in relation to water. Reports concerning the Balik community have documented concerns about access to clean water amid the development of IKN. In accounts published by the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN), Balik residents described increasing difficulties in accessing water as infrastructure development changed the surrounding environment. One account from a Balik woman described the worsening conditions of everyday water access and the implications for household

life (AMAN 2025). (aman.or.id) Although such accounts cannot by themselves establish the precise causal relationship between each infrastructure project and changes in water availability, they are important evidence of how environmental transformation is experienced at the household level.

Water access is inherently gendered because the consequences of water insecurity frequently intersect with household responsibilities. When water becomes less accessible, the additional costs do not simply appear as an environmental statistic. Someone must travel farther, spend more money, wait longer, or reorganize household routines. In contexts where women carry substantial responsibility for household provisioning and care, these adjustments can disproportionately affect them. The result is a redistribution of labor from ecological systems toward household members. A natural resource that once provided relatively low-cost access to water is replaced by additional human labor or monetary expenditure.

This process can be understood as a form of hidden displacement. Physical relocation is visible because a household changes its residence. Changes in resource accessibility are less visible because the household may remain in place while the conditions supporting everyday life deteriorate. A woman may continue living in her original village while traveling farther for water, purchasing food that was previously produced locally, or spending additional time securing resources for the household. The residence remains, but the material basis of residence has changed. Displacement, in this sense, occurs through the fragmentation of the relationships that make a place livable.

The same dynamic can occur in relation to agricultural land. Subsistence and small-scale agricultural activities are often not fully represented in household income calculations because production may be consumed within the household rather than sold. Nevertheless, such activities can reduce dependence on cash income and provide a degree of food security. When agricultural land is lost or fragmented, households may become more dependent on wage employment or market purchases. For women, who may participate in cultivation, food processing, livestock management, or household gardens, the loss of productive space can therefore affect both economic security and daily routines.

The transformation of agricultural space can also alter the division of labor within households. When food production becomes less accessible, women may compensate by increasing food purchasing, processing, or other forms of household management. When livelihood activities disappear, women may seek alternative income sources while continuing unpaid domestic work. Such processes can generate a double burden, in which women absorb new economic responsibilities without a corresponding reduction in reproductive labor. The gendered consequences of development are therefore not necessarily visible through formal employment figures because women may respond to environmental change through additional unpaid or informal labor.

This issue demonstrates why compensation-based approaches to displacement can be inadequate. Compensation generally focuses on identifiable losses: houses, crops, land, or other measurable assets. Social reproduction, however, depends on relationships among multiple resources and places. A household garden may have limited market value but substantial nutritional value. A nearby forest may not generate formal income but may provide food, medicine, fuel, or materials. A river may not be treated as household property but may support bathing, washing, fishing, and other everyday activities. When these resources become inaccessible, the compensation received for a formally recognized asset may not correspond to the actual increase in the cost of living.

The problem becomes even more complicated when compensation is paid to household heads rather than distributed according to the differentiated interests of household members. Formal land governance may assume that compensation to the household adequately compensates all members. Feminist political ecology challenges this assumption by emphasizing that households are internally differentiated institutions in which resources and decision-making power are not necessarily equally distributed (Agarwal 1994). A woman can therefore experience a loss of access to resources even when her household receives financial compensation. Whether compensation improves her position depends on how resources are controlled and allocated within the household and community.

This distinction between household compensation and individual well-being is especially relevant for Indigenous women because their territorial relationships may not be expressed through individual property ownership. A woman may have extensive practical knowledge and use rights without holding a formal title. She may know where particular food resources are found, which water sources remain reliable during dry periods, or which areas are culturally significant, while formal land records recognize someone else as the rights holder. The exclusion of such knowledge from valuation procedures can create a gendered form of invisibility.

The problem is not simply that women are “vulnerable.” Such a characterization can unintentionally portray Indigenous women as passive victims of development. Feminist political ecology instead emphasizes women's agency and their capacity to adapt, negotiate, resist, and produce knowledge. Women are not merely recipients of environmental change; they actively respond to it. The challenge is that their strategies are often developed under unequal institutional conditions. When access to land is restricted, women may develop alternative livelihood practices, strengthen social networks, or participate in community advocacy. These responses represent forms of agency, even when they emerge from conditions of structural constraint.

The Balik case should therefore be analyzed through the tension between agency and structural inequality. The construction of IKN creates new opportunities as well as new risks. Infrastructure development may generate employment, improve transportation, expand access to services, and create new markets. Some households may benefit from these changes, including women who obtain new

economic opportunities. However, the distribution of these benefits cannot be assumed to be equal. Access to new employment may depend on education, mobility, skills, social networks, or the ability to participate in wage labor. Women whose responsibilities remain concentrated around household care may be less able to benefit from opportunities that require long working hours or geographical mobility.

This creates an important distinction between opportunity expansion and capability expansion. A new labor market may formally be available to everyone while remaining practically inaccessible to individuals whose social responsibilities constrain their mobility. Amartya Sen's capability approach emphasizes that development should be evaluated not only through the resources available to individuals but through their substantive ability to convert those resources into valued forms of living (Sen 1999). Applied to Balik women, the question is therefore not simply whether IKN creates jobs but whether women possess the time, mobility, education, social support, and territorial security necessary to benefit from them.

The transformation of livelihood also affects cultural reproduction. Indigenous cultural practices are often sustained through relationships with particular places rather than through formal institutions alone. Knowledge concerning plants, agriculture, water, food preparation, ceremonies, and ecological practices can be transmitted through everyday engagement with territory. When access to these spaces is disrupted, cultural knowledge may become more difficult to reproduce across generations. For women, who may play important roles in food preparation, household education, care, and cultural transmission, environmental transformation can therefore have consequences for the continuity of community identity.

This does not mean that Indigenous culture is static or that territorial transformation automatically causes cultural disappearance. Indigenous communities continuously adapt to social and economic change. The analytical point is instead that adaptation occurs under different conditions of power. Voluntary adaptation can strengthen community resilience, while forced adaptation can weaken the capacity of communities to determine the direction of change. The difference depends substantially on whether communities have meaningful control over the processes transforming their territory.

The issue of displacement therefore requires a broader conceptualization. Cernea's (2004) impoverishment risks and reconstruction framework identifies several risks associated with displacement, including landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity, loss of common property resources, and social disarticulation. Although developed primarily in relation to resettlement, the framework is useful for examining the Balik case because several of these risks can emerge before or without complete physical relocation. The loss of access to common resources, for example, can occur when infrastructure development restricts access to forests or water. Social disarticulation can begin when community spaces and patterns of interaction are disrupted.

The concept of common property is particularly important. Not all resources necessary for household survival are privately owned. Forests, rivers, pathways, communal spaces, and other ecological resources can function as shared assets even when they are not formally registered as community property. The transformation of these resources can produce what may be called common-resource displacement: the gradual removal of access to resources that support multiple households. Such displacement can be difficult to detect through individual compensation systems because the affected resource does not correspond neatly to a single property holder.

For Balik women, common-resource displacement can have consequences that extend beyond economics. Shared spaces often support social relationships among women, kinship networks, informal exchange, and mutual assistance. When these spaces disappear or become less accessible, women may lose not only resources but also social infrastructure. This matters because social networks can function as informal systems of care and resilience. Neighbors and relatives may exchange food, assist with childcare, share information, or provide support during economic difficulties. Territorial fragmentation can therefore weaken forms of social protection that are not provided by formal institutions.

The relationship between environment and social networks demonstrates why the concept of livable space must remain multidimensional. A place becomes livable through the interaction of ecological resources, economic opportunities, social relationships, and cultural meanings. If one dimension is transformed without adequate attention to the others, the overall quality of life can deteriorate even when certain development indicators improve. The construction of modern housing, for example, cannot by itself compensate for the loss of agricultural land, community networks, or culturally meaningful landscapes.

This multidimensional understanding also challenges the assumption that relocation automatically constitutes a successful resettlement outcome. A relocated household may have a new house and formal access to utilities while simultaneously losing proximity to relatives, agricultural land, customary sites, or familiar livelihood opportunities. For women, relocation may also increase the distance between home and the resources required for social reproduction. A settlement that appears adequate from an architectural perspective may therefore be inadequate as a social and ecological space.

The gendered character of relocation is particularly important because women often organize everyday activities around multiple locations. The home, garden, market, school, water source, agricultural field, and community spaces may form a connected geography of daily life. Relocation that separates these spaces can increase travel time and reorganize household routines. The spatial design of resettlement consequently becomes a gender issue. A house cannot be evaluated independently of the wider network of places required to sustain household life.

The IKN case thus raises a broader question about what constitutes a just resettlement. If justice is understood solely as the provision of replacement housing

and financial compensation, many dimensions of loss remain invisible. A more comprehensive approach would evaluate whether affected communities retain access to livelihoods, natural resources, cultural spaces, social networks, public services, and decision-making institutions. For women, such evaluation should also examine changes in unpaid labor, time allocation, mobility, care responsibilities, and access to independent income.

The importance of these considerations is reinforced by Indonesian environmental and land-governance law. Law No. 32 of 2009 establishes principles of environmental protection and recognizes public participation in environmental management, while Government Regulation No. 22 of 2021 provides a more detailed framework for environmental protection and management (Republic of Indonesia 2009; Republic of Indonesia 2021). These provisions create a legal basis for considering social and environmental consequences beyond narrow land ownership. However, the effectiveness of these protections depends on whether participation is substantive and whether environmental information is accessible to affected communities.

In the context of IKN, the challenge is particularly significant because development decisions are occurring at a scale that can reshape the ecological and economic structure of the region. Environmental assessments and planning procedures may identify aggregate impacts, but aggregate assessments can obscure differentiated household experiences. A reduction in forest cover, for example, can be reported as a land-use change without identifying who previously depended on that forest and how the loss changes household labor. A change in water availability can be measured hydrologically without documenting the additional time required to obtain water. Feminist analysis therefore adds a necessary scale of observation: the everyday household and community.

The accounts of Balik residents regarding changes in access to water and natural resources illustrate why this scale matters. When a community reports that environmental changes make everyday activities more difficult, the appropriate response should not be to treat such testimony as anecdotal and therefore secondary to technical data. Community testimony can provide information about dimensions of environmental change that quantitative assessments do not capture. At the same time, such testimony should be triangulated with environmental, spatial, and socioeconomic evidence to establish patterns and causal relationships. A rigorous feminist political ecology therefore combines lived experience with documentary and empirical analysis rather than privileging one form of knowledge over another.

This approach also changes how resilience should be understood. Development discourse frequently portrays communities as resilient because they are capable of adapting to rapid change. Yet resilience should not become a justification for transferring the costs of development onto communities. If women must work longer hours, travel farther for resources, or accept declining livelihood security in order to accommodate infrastructure development, describing them as

“resilient” can obscure the structural conditions producing those burdens. Justice requires reducing unnecessary burdens rather than simply celebrating people's ability to endure them.

At the same time, women's agency remains central to understanding how the Balik community responds to transformation. Women can participate in community organizing, communicate environmental concerns, preserve cultural practices, document territorial change, and negotiate with state institutions. Their knowledge can also contribute to alternative visions of development that prioritize environmental security and community well-being. Recognizing these forms of agency challenges approaches that position Indigenous women exclusively as vulnerable subjects requiring protection. They are also political actors capable of defining what development should mean for their community.

The transformation of Sepaku therefore produces a gendered restructuring of the conditions of everyday life. Land acquisition, environmental change, and infrastructure development can redistribute not only physical space but also time, labor, resources, and social responsibilities. Women may experience these transformations through the increasing costs of maintaining households and communities, even when those costs remain invisible within official calculations of development benefits and compensation. The key issue is consequently not whether women are affected by IKN development—they clearly occupy important positions within the social and ecological systems being transformed—but how their experiences and knowledge are incorporated into the governance of that transformation.

The analysis suggests that displacement should be understood as a continuum rather than a single event. At one end is direct physical relocation; at other points are the loss of access to land, degradation of natural resources, fragmentation of social networks, increased livelihood costs, and the erosion of cultural and ecological practices. These processes can occur simultaneously and reinforce one another. A household may remain geographically close to its original settlement while becoming increasingly disconnected from the resources and relationships that previously sustained it. Such a condition represents a significant transformation of livable space even in the absence of formal relocation.

For Balik women, this continuum is particularly significant because social reproduction connects multiple dimensions of territory. Access to land affects food; access to water affects household labor; access to forests affects subsistence and ecological knowledge; access to community spaces affects social networks; and access to decision-making affects the ability to protect all of these relationships. The disruption of one element can therefore generate consequences across the wider system. Understanding these interconnections is essential if policy interventions are to address the actual distribution of development costs rather than only the most visible forms of loss.

The central implication is that the social consequences of IKN cannot be adequately addressed through compensation alone. Compensation may be

necessary, but it should be accompanied by measures that protect livelihood continuity, common-resource access, cultural spaces, environmental quality, and women's participation. A gender-sensitive approach should also examine whether compensation and development benefits are accessible to women on equitable terms and whether women have independent opportunities to influence decisions affecting their households and territory.

The question of women's participation leads directly to the final dimension of the analysis: political recognition and territorial decision-making. If Balik women experience the consequences of development through their everyday relationships with land and resources, their participation cannot be treated as an optional addition to consultation processes. The next section therefore examines the legal and political structures through which Indigenous communities participate in IKN governance, with particular attention to whether Balik women are recognized as political subjects capable of shaping decisions about their territory rather than merely as members of an affected population.

Indigenous Women, Political Participation, and Territorial Justice

The transformation of Balik territory ultimately raises a question that extends beyond land, livelihood, and displacement: who has the authority to decide what happens to the territory? This question is particularly important for Balik women because their experiences of environmental and spatial transformation do not automatically translate into political representation. The existence of consultation mechanisms does not necessarily mean that women possess meaningful influence over development decisions. Political participation must therefore be examined not simply in terms of whether communities are invited to meetings, but whether affected people have the capacity to influence decisions, challenge proposed interventions, access relevant information, and obtain effective remedies when their interests are threatened.

The distinction between formal and substantive participation is central to this issue. Arnstein's (1969) classic formulation of the "ladder of citizen participation" demonstrates that participation can range from symbolic involvement to meaningful citizen control. Although developed in a different institutional context, the framework remains useful for analyzing development projects in which consultation may occur without transferring significant decision-making power to affected communities. In the context of IKN, a meeting with Indigenous residents cannot automatically be interpreted as meaningful participation if the fundamental decisions concerning land use, infrastructure location, relocation, or territorial transformation have already been determined.

This distinction becomes more significant when participation is considered through a gender lens. Indigenous communities are often represented institutionally through customary leaders, village authorities, landholders, or other formally recognized representatives. Such representation may be necessary, but it does not necessarily capture the differentiated experiences within the community. Women

may have extensive knowledge of agricultural spaces, water sources, forests, household economies, and cultural practices while remaining underrepresented in formal negotiations. A process that treats the community as a single political subject can consequently reproduce internal inequalities even while appearing inclusive at the collective level.

Feminist political ecology provides an important critique of this form of representation. Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari (1996) argue that environmental governance must recognize the differentiated knowledge and interests of women because gender shapes access to resources and political authority. Agarwal (1994) similarly demonstrates that women's exclusion from decision-making concerning land and natural resources cannot be understood simply as a consequence of cultural tradition; it is connected to broader institutional structures that determine whose claims are recognized. Applied to the Balik case, this means that participation should be evaluated at two levels: the relationship between the Balik community and the state, and the internal distribution of voice within the Balik community itself.

The second dimension is particularly important because recognition of Indigenous communities does not automatically guarantee recognition of Indigenous women. A state may formally recognize a community while relying on male-dominated institutional structures to represent it. Likewise, a community may collectively defend territorial rights while women's specific concerns about water, food production, social reproduction, cultural practices, or relocation remain insufficiently represented. Gender-sensitive territorial justice therefore requires more than including women in the category of "affected persons." It requires institutional mechanisms through which women can independently articulate and influence decisions concerning their territory.

The Indonesian legal framework provides several foundations for such participation, although these provisions must be distinguished from their implementation. Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management recognizes community participation as part of environmental governance and establishes rights associated with a good and healthy environment (Republic of Indonesia 2009). The law's structure includes provisions concerning environmental information, participation, oversight, and dispute resolution. These provisions are significant because they establish that environmental governance is not exclusively a technical or administrative function of the state. Communities have a legally relevant role in environmental decision-making.

However, the existence of a participation provision does not establish the quality of participation. The practical question is whether information is provided early enough to influence decisions, whether affected communities can challenge environmental assumptions, whether their objections receive reasoned responses, and whether participation can lead to modification of a project. This distinction is particularly relevant for IKN because development takes place within a highly centralized and strategically important national project. When development is

framed as an urgent national priority, consultation can easily become a process of communicating predetermined decisions rather than jointly constructing them.

Government Regulation No. 22 of 2021 further develops Indonesia's environmental governance framework, including arrangements concerning environmental approvals and public involvement (Republic of Indonesia 2021). Its importance for the Balik case lies in the recognition that environmental decision-making should account for potential impacts and provide institutional mechanisms for affected interests. Yet environmental participation can remain inadequate if the affected population does not have equal access to technical information or institutional resources. Environmental impact documents may contain complex scientific assessments that are difficult for community members to interpret, particularly when they are not provided with independent technical assistance.

This produces an epistemic dimension of participation. Participation is not meaningful merely because people are physically present in a consultation forum. Participants must have the ability to understand the information on which decisions are based and to present alternative knowledge in a form that institutions recognize as legitimate. Indigenous communities possess forms of ecological and territorial knowledge that may not be captured by conventional technical assessments. Women's knowledge can be particularly important because it often emerges from repeated engagement with household resources, agricultural production, water systems, food collection, and care practices. If such knowledge is excluded from formal decision-making, participation becomes epistemically unequal.

The IKN legal framework adds another layer to this problem. Law No. 3 of 2022 established Nusantara as the new capital, while Law No. 21 of 2023 amended the original law and strengthened the institutional framework for its development (Republic of Indonesia 2022; Republic of Indonesia 2023). The legal framework gives the Otorita Ibu Kota Nusantara extensive responsibilities in coordinating the development and management of the new capital. From a governance perspective, this institutional concentration can facilitate coordination across sectors. From a justice perspective, however, it increases the importance of mechanisms that ensure accountability to communities affected by decisions made within this institutional structure.

The issue is not whether a centralized authority is inherently unjust. Large-scale urban development requires coordination, and fragmented authority can create its own problems. The concern is instead whether institutional efficiency is balanced by effective mechanisms of accountability, participation, and remedy. A development authority capable of rapidly changing land use must also be capable of responding to claims concerning rights, livelihoods, environmental harm, and cultural loss. Without such mechanisms, institutional efficiency may become asymmetrical: the state can act rapidly, while affected communities face slower and more difficult processes for challenging decisions.

Land acquisition illustrates this asymmetry particularly clearly. Presidential Regulation No. 65 of 2022 establishes specific arrangements for land acquisition

and land management in IKN, while Government Regulation No. 39 of 2023 modifies the general framework for land acquisition for public-interest development (Republic of Indonesia 2022a; Republic of Indonesia 2023a). These rules provide formal procedures through which land acquisition can be implemented. Yet the legal recognition of compensation does not necessarily resolve the question of territorial justice. Compensation addresses a particular conception of loss, whereas Indigenous communities may experience the transformation of territory as the disruption of a wider social and ecological system.

This distinction can be expressed as the difference between property justice and territorial justice. Property justice focuses on whether recognized property rights have been appropriately treated and compensated. Territorial justice asks a broader question: whether the transformation of space distributes benefits and burdens fairly and whether affected communities retain meaningful power over the future of their territory. Both dimensions are necessary, but the second is particularly important for Indigenous communities whose relationship with land cannot always be reduced to individually transferable property rights.

Indigenous territorial rights are also recognized within Indonesia's constitutional framework. Article 18B(2) of the 1945 Constitution recognizes the existence of customary communities and their traditional rights, subject to conditions established by law. Article 28I(3) also recognizes respect for cultural identity and traditional communities. These provisions create an important constitutional basis for the recognition of Indigenous peoples. However, constitutional recognition is not equivalent to automatic territorial protection. The practical realization of customary rights depends on legislation, administrative recognition, spatial planning, land administration, and institutional willingness to acknowledge community claims.

This legal gap between recognition in principle and recognition in practice is particularly important for the Balik community. If customary relationships with territory are not adequately translated into administrative recognition, communities may have difficulty defending their interests when development decisions are made. The problem is therefore not necessarily the absence of legal norms but the fragmented institutional process through which those norms become effective. Recognition may depend on local regulations, identification procedures, mapping, evidence of customary existence, and coordination among government institutions.

Recent scholarship concerning Balik communities highlights precisely this problem. Bahzar et al. (2025) identify the pressures experienced by the Balik community as a consequence of IKN development, while Yani and Yuniawaty (2025) emphasize unresolved issues concerning the legal protection of Balik customary interests in the context of land acquisition. These studies suggest that the question of recognition remains central to the community's position within the development process. The problem becomes more complex when recognition is considered from a gender perspective because women may not be equally visible within the institutional representation of customary claims.

The politics of recognition therefore needs to operate at multiple levels. First, the state must recognize the Balik community as a political and territorial subject rather than merely as a population affected by development. Second, development institutions must recognize the plurality of interests within the community. Third, women's specific experiences and knowledge must be recognized as legitimate components of territorial decision-making. Nancy Fraser's (2000) theory of recognition is useful here because it conceptualizes misrecognition not simply as an interpersonal insult but as a form of institutionalized inequality. A group is misrecognized when social and political institutions prevent it from participating as an equal.

For Balik women, institutional misrecognition may occur when their relationship with territory is treated as secondary to formal ownership, when their knowledge is considered anecdotal rather than evidentiary, or when community representation is assumed to be adequately captured through male authorities. Such processes can reproduce inequality without any explicit policy excluding women. The structure of representation itself can generate unequal outcomes. Consequently, gender-sensitive participation should be understood as a matter of political equality rather than merely a matter of inclusion.

The concept of participatory parity is particularly useful in this regard. Fraser (2000) argues that justice requires social arrangements in which people can participate as peers. Participation therefore requires more than formal access to an institution; it requires the removal of social, economic, and cultural barriers that prevent some groups from exercising influence. For Balik women, participatory parity would require access to information, opportunities to speak and organize, sufficient time and resources to participate, recognition of their knowledge, and institutional mechanisms through which their positions can affect decisions.

Such an approach also changes how consultation should be designed. A gender-sensitive consultation process should not simply invite women to meetings organized around technical land-acquisition procedures. It should consider the spaces and times in which women can participate, the language and forms of communication used, and the specific issues that affect their everyday lives. Consultations concerning relocation, for example, should ask not only whether a household agrees with a proposed settlement but how the settlement will affect access to water, agricultural production, markets, schools, healthcare, kinship networks, and care responsibilities. Participation becomes meaningful when these questions can influence the design of the intervention.

The same principle applies to environmental assessment. Environmental impact analysis often focuses on measurable changes in land cover, water quality, biodiversity, or infrastructure. These indicators are essential but incomplete. A gender-sensitive assessment should also ask how environmental change redistributes labor and affects household well-being. If a new development reduces access to a water source, the assessment should consider not only the hydrological consequences but also the additional time and cost required for households to

obtain water. If agricultural land is converted, the assessment should examine consequences for food security and unpaid household labor. Such analysis would connect environmental governance to social reproduction.

The legal principle of environmental participation can therefore be interpreted more substantively. Under Law No. 32 of 2009, participation should not be understood simply as an administrative formality but as part of environmental governance. The law recognizes public involvement in environmental management and provides mechanisms for environmental information and legal protection (Republic of Indonesia 2009). The significance of these provisions for Indigenous women is that they provide a normative foundation for challenging exclusion from environmental decision-making. The challenge is to translate this normative foundation into accessible and effective institutional practice.

An additional development in Indonesian environmental law strengthens the relevance of this issue. In 2025, the Constitutional Court, through Decision No. 119/PUU-XXIII/2025, clarified the scope of protection associated with Article 66 of Law No. 32 of 2009. The Court held that environmental defenders covered by the provision include victims, reporters, witnesses, experts, and environmental activists participating in environmental protection or pursuing legal avenues against pollution and environmental damage. This decision is important because participation without protection can expose affected communities and environmental defenders to retaliation. The recognition of anti-retaliation protection therefore strengthens the legal environment in which communities can raise environmental concerns.

For Balik women, however, legal protection must be considered alongside the social conditions that shape the ability to use legal mechanisms. Formal legal rights are less effective when individuals lack financial resources, legal knowledge, institutional access, or social support. Indigenous women may also face gendered barriers to public advocacy. Consequently, access to justice should include not only the availability of courts and administrative complaints but also access to information, legal assistance, community organizing, and independent advocacy.

The question of remedy is therefore central to territorial justice. Participation becomes more meaningful when communities know that there are consequences if their rights are ignored. Effective remedy can include administrative review, environmental dispute mechanisms, judicial proceedings, mediation, and other forms of accountability. Without credible remedies, consultation may become symbolic because communities have little leverage to influence decisions after consultation has concluded.

At the same time, legal remedies should not be viewed as substitutes for preventive participation. Litigation is often costly, slow, and adversarial. The ideal form of territorial justice would prevent irreversible decisions from being taken without meaningful involvement of affected communities. This requires participation at the earliest stages of planning, before land-use decisions and infrastructure routes become institutionally entrenched. Early participation is

particularly important because once infrastructure is constructed, the possibility of changing its location or design becomes increasingly limited.

This principle is especially relevant to IKN because development occurs through interconnected infrastructure projects. A road, government facility, housing area, water system, or commercial development can affect the spatial relationships of surrounding communities. Evaluating each project separately may therefore underestimate cumulative effects. For the Balik community, the relevant unit of analysis may not be a single land-acquisition event but the cumulative transformation of the territory. Women's experiences can provide important evidence of these cumulative effects because everyday household activities connect multiple locations that may be assessed separately by different agencies.

The notion of cumulative impact also strengthens the argument for recognizing Indigenous women as knowledge producers. Women who regularly move between household, agricultural, water, market, and community spaces can observe changes that become apparent only when viewed across the landscape. Their knowledge can therefore contribute to identifying indirect and cumulative consequences of development. Treating such knowledge as a legitimate source of evidence would broaden the epistemic basis of IKN planning.

Nevertheless, community knowledge should not be romanticized. Indigenous communities contain internal differences and conflicts, and women themselves may have different interests depending on age, household status, economic position, and proximity to development sites. A gender-sensitive approach should therefore avoid presenting "Balik women" as a single homogeneous category. The objective is not to replace one generalized representation of the community with another, but to create institutional spaces where internal diversity can be expressed.

This point has implications for the concept of Indigenous representation. A customary leader can legitimately represent collective interests, but representation should remain accountable to community members. Women should have opportunities to influence the positions presented by community representatives and to participate directly where decisions have differentiated gendered consequences. This does not require abandoning customary institutions. Rather, it requires strengthening their inclusiveness and accountability so that customary governance can reflect the interests of different members of the community.

Such an approach is consistent with a broader understanding of Indigenous self-determination. Self-determination does not necessarily mean complete separation from state institutions. It can involve the ability to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting Indigenous territories, negotiate development conditions, protect cultural practices, and determine acceptable forms of economic change. Coulthard (2014) warns that recognition can become problematic when Indigenous communities are expected to seek validation from state institutions while the underlying structures of territorial power remain unchanged. For the Balik community, meaningful recognition should therefore involve not only state

acknowledgment but also an expansion of the community's actual capacity to shape development.

The distinction between recognition and redistribution is also important. Fraser (2000) argues that recognition alone cannot resolve inequality when material resources and institutional power remain unevenly distributed. In the Balik case, acknowledging Indigenous identity without protecting access to land, water, livelihoods, and decision-making power would produce limited justice. Similarly, providing economic opportunities without recognizing territorial and cultural rights would leave structural inequalities intact. Justice therefore requires both recognition and redistribution.

This combined perspective leads to a more demanding understanding of development responsibility. The state and development authorities should not only minimize direct harm but also ensure that the benefits associated with IKN are accessible to communities whose territories are transformed. This can include employment, education, public services, infrastructure, health facilities, economic programs, and support for sustainable livelihoods. However, benefit-sharing should not be treated as a substitute for rights. A community should not be expected to exchange territorial rights for development benefits.

The distinction is particularly important for women. Employment programs may create new income opportunities, but they will not necessarily compensate for the loss of food-producing spaces or increased unpaid labor. Training programs may be valuable, but they will not automatically address exclusion from decision-making. Infrastructure may improve mobility, but it may also restrict access to particular resources. Development benefits must therefore be evaluated in relation to the specific conditions under which women live and work.

A territorial justice framework consequently requires at least four interconnected dimensions: recognition, participation, distribution, and remedy. Recognition requires acknowledgment of Balik territorial and cultural relationships. Participation requires meaningful influence over decisions affecting the territory. Distribution requires equitable sharing of development benefits and burdens. Remedy requires effective mechanisms for addressing violations and environmental or social harms. These dimensions correspond with broader environmental justice scholarship, which emphasizes that justice involves not only distribution but also recognition and participation (Schlosberg 2007; Walker 2012).

The gender dimension adds a fifth analytical requirement: social reproduction. Territorial justice that ignores the conditions under which households reproduce everyday life may still reproduce gender inequality. For Balik women, access to water, food, land, community networks, and cultural spaces is not peripheral to development; it is part of the infrastructure of everyday life. A just development process must therefore evaluate whether these foundations of social reproduction are maintained, strengthened, or weakened by territorial transformation.

This approach also challenges the conventional temporal boundaries of development assessment. Justice should not be measured only at the moment of

land acquisition or relocation. It should be evaluated over time. A compensation package may initially appear adequate but become insufficient if households subsequently lose livelihood opportunities or face increasing costs of living. A new settlement may initially function well but become problematic if social networks weaken or employment opportunities fail to materialize. Long-term monitoring is therefore necessary to determine whether development actually improves the capabilities and well-being of affected communities.

For IKN, long-term accountability is especially important because the project is expected to develop over decades. The consequences for Balik territory cannot be fully assessed at a single moment. Environmental conditions, land values, employment structures, demographic patterns, and community relationships will continue to change. A justice-oriented governance system should therefore incorporate mechanisms for periodic review and community feedback rather than treating consultation as a one-time event.

The Balik case ultimately reveals that the politics of a new capital is also a politics of citizenship and belonging. The state constructs IKN as a national space, but the territory is simultaneously experienced as a local and Indigenous space. These identities do not necessarily have to conflict. A national capital can coexist with Indigenous communities if national development recognizes the territorial rights, cultural identities, and political agency of those who already inhabit the area. The problem emerges when national belonging is defined in a way that requires local communities to surrender meaningful control over their own territories.

For Balik women, this question of belonging is particularly significant. They are not simply residents affected by a national project. They are members of a community whose everyday practices contribute to the social and ecological reproduction of Sepaku. Their claims to livable space are therefore not demands for exemption from national development but claims to participate in defining what national development should look like. Their inclusion would make IKN more democratic not because women represent an inherently harmonious or environmentally pure perspective, but because democratic legitimacy requires those who bear the consequences of decisions to possess meaningful opportunities to shape them.

The politics of livable space consequently provides a bridge between feminist political ecology and Indigenous territorial justice. Feminist political ecology reveals how environmental and spatial transformations are experienced through gendered labor, resource access, and social reproduction. Indigenous territorial justice emphasizes collective rights, recognition, self-determination, and the political meaning of land. Bringing these approaches together makes it possible to see why the displacement of Indigenous women cannot be adequately measured through physical relocation or monetary compensation alone.

The central implication is that the legitimacy of IKN development depends not only on whether infrastructure is successfully constructed but also on whether the process respects the political agency of communities whose territories are being

transformed. In the Balik case, this means moving from a model in which Indigenous people are primarily treated as affected populations toward one in which they are recognized as co-participants in territorial governance. For Balik women, this requires participation that reaches beyond symbolic consultation and into the substantive decisions that determine land use, environmental management, relocation, livelihood programs, and community development.

Such a shift would also improve the quality of development itself. Local and gendered knowledge can identify problems that may remain invisible within centralized planning systems. Community participation can reveal the social costs of infrastructure decisions before those costs become irreversible. Recognition of customary relationships can reduce conflict and strengthen the legitimacy of land governance. And women's participation can bring attention to social reproduction and everyday resource access that might otherwise remain outside conventional development indicators.

Ultimately, the question is not whether IKN should develop, but under what political and territorial conditions development can be considered just. A national capital that expands through the weakening of Indigenous territorial security would reproduce a familiar pattern in which national development benefits are achieved through locally concentrated social costs. Conversely, a capital that recognizes Indigenous communities as political subjects, protects their territorial relationships, ensures meaningful participation, and addresses gendered consequences could demonstrate that modernization and territorial justice do not have to be mutually exclusive.

The Balik experience therefore provides a critical test for Indonesia's broader development model. If livability is defined only through modern housing, infrastructure, connectivity, and economic growth, the experiences of Balik women risk being treated as secondary costs of national progress. If livability is instead understood as the capacity to sustain livelihoods, relationships, cultural identity, ecological security, and political agency, then the experiences of Balik women become central to evaluating the legitimacy of IKN. The question of who has the right to define a livable space is ultimately inseparable from the question of who has the right to define the future of the territory.

Conclusion

The development of Ibu Kota Nusantara demonstrates that the transformation of a national territory into a new capital cannot be evaluated solely through infrastructure, investment, or urban modernization. For the Balik community in Sepaku, the arrival of IKN represents a profound transformation of a lived territory in which land, water, forests, livelihoods, cultural identity, and social relationships are interconnected. This article has shown that displacement should therefore be understood beyond the physical relocation of households. Changes in access to agricultural land, water resources, forests, communal spaces, and livelihood opportunities can produce forms of spatial and social displacement even when

residents remain geographically close to their original settlements. Through a feminist political ecology perspective, these transformations also reveal that environmental and territorial burdens are distributed unevenly. Balik women may experience development through changes in household provisioning, unpaid labor, livelihood security, mobility, and social reproduction, while their knowledge and experiences remain insufficiently represented in formal development processes. The case consequently challenges the assumption that the benefits of national infrastructure development automatically translate into improvements in the everyday conditions of affected communities.

The analysis further demonstrates that the central issue is not whether IKN development is legally authorized, but whether the exercise of state authority is accompanied by meaningful recognition, participation, distribution, and remedy. Indonesia's constitutional framework recognizes customary communities and their traditional rights, while Law No. 32 of 2009 provides an important normative foundation for environmental participation and protection. The specific IKN framework established through Law No. 3 of 2022 and subsequently amended by Law No. 21 of 2023 provides extensive institutional authority for the development and management of Nusantara. These legal arrangements demonstrate the state's capacity to organize development at an unprecedented territorial scale, but they also make accountability toward affected communities increasingly important. Land acquisition procedures, compensation mechanisms, environmental approvals, and consultation processes should not be treated as sufficient indicators of justice when customary territorial relationships and gendered experiences of displacement remain inadequately recognized. A just approach requires participation to occur before major territorial decisions become irreversible, access to information to be genuinely meaningful, and community knowledge to be treated as legitimate evidence rather than merely as supplementary testimony. For Balik women, this also means creating institutional spaces in which they can participate as political subjects in their own right, rather than being represented only indirectly through household heads or customary authorities.

Ultimately, the experience of Balik women demonstrates that the legitimacy of IKN should be assessed not only by whether a modern capital can be constructed, but by whether its construction produces a more equitable relationship between the state, Indigenous communities, and the territory. Development that provides new infrastructure while weakening access to land, resources, cultural spaces, and political voice risks reproducing an unequal model in which national benefits are accompanied by locally concentrated social and ecological costs. Conversely, recognizing Indigenous territorial rights, protecting the conditions of social reproduction, ensuring gender-responsive participation, strengthening environmental accountability, and establishing effective mechanisms for remedy can create a different model of urban development—one in which modernization does not require the political marginalization of those whose territories are transformed. The Balik case therefore contributes to a broader understanding of

climate- and development-related justice by demonstrating that a livable future is not produced simply through physical infrastructure. It depends equally on who has the authority to define the meaning of development, whose knowledge is recognized, whose livelihoods are protected, and whose voices shape the future of the territory. In this sense, the question raised by the arrival of the capital in Indigenous territory is ultimately a question of democratic justice: who has the right to decide what a livable space should be, and for whom is the new capital being built?

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