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Subsumption of Landscape under Capital: Extended Urbanisation at the Location of Indonesia's New Capital City

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ABSTRACT



This article uses value-based analysis to examine how landscape is subsumed under capital in Indonesia's new capital city. It identifies three distinct yet interrelated phases which show the deepening processes of landscape subsumption under capital. First, on the basis of cutting down the primary forest, logging extraction started in the 1960s, demonstrating the formal subsumption of landscape under capital, producing absolute surplus value. Second, industrial plantations started in the 1990s replaced the self-growing forest, reflecting real subsumption, generating relative surplus value. Finally, the city's development started in the 2020s embodies speculative subsumption of landscape under capital, marked by value-grabbing (extractive yet non-productive of value) and the shift of that place from an operational landscape of extended urbanisation to an urban centre. Based on documents (archive and policy) analysis and six months of fieldwork, the article shows how these transformations reproduce spatial unevenness, displacing Indigenous communities and dispossessing them of land and forest access.

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Subsumption of Landscape under Capital in Extended Urbanisation

Indonesia is currently relocating its capital city from Jakarta on Java Island to Nusantara (henceforth referred to as *IKN*, *Ibu Kota Negara Nusantara*) in the Penajam Paser Utara (PPU) District of East Kalimantan Province, where large-scale land development is already underway. The large-scale operationalisation of the PPU landscape began with logging extraction in the 1960s. In the 1990s, industrial plantations, palm oil, and coal mining concessions further operationalised the PPU landscape. The introduction of the new

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capital city in the 2020s represents the latest means of large-scale landscape operationalisation in PPU.

Landscape is “a form of a group of visible and immobile artefacts and natural landforms rooted on the ground surface” (Mizuoka 2024, 92). It “embodies all those themes – ethnic difference and struggle, labour strife, the ravages of capital, the despoliation ...” (Mitchell 1998, 7). Landscape operationalisation refers to the process of extended urbanisation, through which areas beyond the city are made functional to meet the needs of concentrated sites. These operationalised areas support the development of concentrated zones by supplying raw materials, lands, and products, serving as markets for goods produced in, as well as sacrificed to absorb the impacts made by the urban cores (Brenner and Schmid 2015; Schmid 2023).

Aiming to explore the operationalisation of landscapes, Brenner and Katsikis (2020, 27) introduce “abstract propositions” to “stimulate further reflection, investigation and debate”. Among these propositions is their adoption of the concept of formal and real subsumption of nature under capital, originally developed by Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman (2001) in their study of nature-based industries. Building on this framework, Brenner and Katsikis (2020, 28) suggest analysing the operationalisation of landscapes under capital as a transition “from formal to real subsumption.” Formal subsumption of landscape under capital describes the process by which “inherited socioecological resources are appropriated as commodities for external market exchange” (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 28). Differently, real subsumption involves the “systematically redesigned” non-city zones to “intensify and accelerate capital’s turnover time” (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 28). Applying the lens of landscape subsumption under capital to the location of Indonesia’s new capital city raises critical questions: (1) *How has the landscape in this area been subsumed under capital?* and (2) *What implications does this have for the people living in the region?*

To address the first question, I engage with Brenner and Katsikis’ (2020) proposal but reinterpret the notion of formal and real subsumption of landscape under capital. While Brenner and Katsikis (2020, 28) characterise landscape operationalisation as a transition “from formal to real subsumption”, this framing can imply that operational landscapes only exist when such a transition occurs. I argue instead that landscapes are operationalised through both formal and real subsumption under capital. Furthermore, I identify/introduce a third moment of PPU landscape operationalisation: speculative subsumption of landscape under capital.

I then conceptualise PPU’s landscape operationalisation as comprising three distinct moments. First, the logging extraction that began in the 1960s exemplifies formal subsumption of landscape under capital. Second, the industrial plantations established in the 1990s illustrate real subsumption of landscape under capital. Third, the development of Indonesia’s new

capital city represents speculative subsumption of landscape under capital. These three moments reflect qualitatively different mechanisms through which landscape is operationalised through its subsumption under capital.

To further clarify these concepts, I ground my analysis in the framework of value production and extraction. Drawing on Marx's ([1867] 1982) concepts of formal and real subsumption of labour under capital, as well as their application by Marxist scholars (Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman 2001; see also, Mizuoka 2024), I define formal subsumption of landscape under capital as a process primarily characterised by the production of absolute surplus value. Differently, real subsumption of landscape under capital is characterised by the production of relative surplus value. Anchored in theoretical discussion of value-production helps this article to engage with a contemporary discussion on "value grabbing" (Andreucci et al. 2017), "speculation" (Bear 2020; Goldman 2011; Goldman and Narayan 2021), and "rent" (Christophers 2019; Mitra 2019; Robertson 2024; Ward and Aalbers 2016) to propose speculative subsumption of landscape under capital as a process that is extractive but not productive of value.

My motivations for writing this article are twofold. First, urbanisation scholars have effectively employed the concept of "extended urbanisation" to demonstrate that urbanisation processes extend beyond cities, operationalising both nearby and distant landscapes. This includes suburban areas (Bathla 2021; Connolly, Harris Ali, and Keil 2020; Fahmi et al. 2014; Gündoğan 2021; Keil 2018), rural regions (Bathla 2024a; Batubara et al. 2022; Brenner and Ghosh 2022; Brenner and Schmid 2015; Castriota and Tonucci 2018; Ghosh and Meer 2021; Monte-Mór 2004, 2014; Monte-Mór and Castriota 2018; Pratama et al. 2021; Sevilla-Buitrago 2014; Shatkin 2019), underground aquifers (Batubara, Kooy, and Zwartveen 2023), and more-than-human ecologies (Bathla 2024b). Joining these growing efforts to open the "black box" (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 27) operational landscape, I explain how PPU's landscape is operationalised through extended urbanisation and demonstrate how once operationalised landscapes are transformed into "centralities" (Schmid 2023, 60) – the spatial centre of urban development.

Second, from a political perspective, the operationalisation of landscapes in extended urbanisation continually (re)produces unevenness, defined as "the process of *differential urbanisation* in which inherited sociospatial configurations are continually creatively destroyed" (Brenner and Schmid 2015, 168, italics in original). Through this article, I confront these processes of ongoing unevenness (re-)production to explore what landscape operationalisation means for the people living within these landscapes – thereby addressing the second question. Following Kipfer (2018), opening operational landscape through engagement with the experience of Indigenous communities, as I will show in the case study, not as an outside separated

entity of urbanisation process but as its “constitutive outside” (Conroy 2024), aims to avoid the “planetary gaze” of “totalising” (Derickson 2017, 557 and 559) Eurocentric urbanisation theories.

In the following sections, I elaborate on my framework of formal, real, and speculative subsumption of landscape under capital, followed by a methodological discussion. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections present the case study of formal, real, and speculative subsumptions of landscape. I conclude by highlighting my theoretical contribution, which identifies three interrelated types of landscape subsumption under capital evaluated through the lens of value production and extraction, as well as my political and pragmatic contribution in exposing the (re)production of unevenness tied to these processes.

Formal, Real, and Speculative Subsumptions of Landscape under Capital

Brenner and Katsikis’ (2020) identification of the formal and real subsumption of the non-city under capital represents an attempt to understand how landscapes are operationalised within and through extended urbanisation. Subsumption is a “capitalist incorporation” (Stoler 1987, 543). It “describes an effort to reproduce over time and space an adequate social environment aimed at maintaining a stable surplus-value production” (Briziarelli 2024, 10). In spatial terms, subsumption is a process that “bridges the moments of society and space into a dialectical unity” (Mizuoka 2024, 21). Analogously, the subsumption of a landscape involves making it operational for the interests of societal power – in this case, “the extraction of capitalist profit” (Katsikis 2023, 124). Brenner and Katsikis’ (2020) explanation of the formal and real subsumption of the non-city under capital draws inspiration from the concepts of formal and real subsumption of nature by capital in nature-centred production (Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman 2001).

Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman (2001) sought to distinguish manufacturing and nature-centred production. They describe a shift from the formal to the real subsumption of nature under capital as an effort to “control, intensify, manipulate, or otherwise “improve”” (Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman 2001, 562) nature through the “intensification of biological productivity” (564). Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman (2001) highlight how extractive industries, such as mining and oil, constantly face limits in raw material availability during expansion – a natural constraint that industries cannot overcome. They argue that when nature serves capital’s needs without industries actively controlling, intensifying, manipulating, or enhancing nature’s productivity, this represents the formal subsumption of nature under capital. In contrast, biological-based industries, such as fisheries and forestry, can extend raw material supply

through practices like cultivation, replacing natural growth systems. According to Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman (2001), the introduction of cultivation marks the transition from formal to real subsumption of nature under capital.

Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman's (2001) explanation is anchored in Marx's notion of formal and real subsumption of labour under capital. They (Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman 2001, 562) explain formal subsumption of labour under capital relies primarily on the production of absolute surplus value, while the real subsumption depends on the production of relative surplus value (see also, Marx [1867] 1982, 645; Saito 2022, 31).

Absolute surplus value is derived from extending the working hour/day (variable capital). Relative surplus value, on the other hand, arises from other factors beyond the length of the working hour/day. Capitalists achieve this by increasing productivity, "completely revolutionises the technical processes of labour" Marx ([1867] 1982, 645). through mechanisation, more efficient "cooperation" and the "division of labour" (Saito 2022, 31). Cooperation distributes tasks, while the division creates specialised labour, both of which enhance productivity (see Marx [1867] 1982, 439–491; also, Arboleda [2020], Chapter 2, on relative surplus value).

Anchored in value-based analysis, I propose a third concept: speculative subsumption of landscape under capital. My proposal is inspired by the notion of "value grabbing" (Andreucci et al. 2017). I argue that speculative subsumption of landscape under capital does not involve value production but rather value extraction or grabbing, which is why I characterise it as speculative. Here, speculation means processes in which labour becomes less significant in the production of profit (see, Bear 2020; Goldman 2011; Goldman and Narayan 2021). There is a specific spatio-temporal conjuncture in which the mere announcement of PPU as the location of Indonesia's new capital city has increased land price in PPU substantially. This price surge occurred without additional labour inputs to produce absolute surplus value or revolutionary changes in technical processes of labour to generate relative surplus value. The underlying logic of speculative subsumption is rent, particularly rent derived from land ownership (Christophers 2019; see also Mitra 2019; Robertson 2024, 3; Ward and Aalbers 2016), manifested in the increased land prices. Within this framework, landowners can "grab" value (Andreucci et al. 2017) through increased land prices without injecting additional labour power to produce value.

By categorising landscape operationalisation into three moments – formal, real, and speculative subsumption – I do not intend to present them as isolated processes. Instead, their interconnectedness reveals that one may find the production of relative surplus value alongside value extraction without value production in logging extraction. Similarly, industrial plantations may involve the production of absolute surplus value alongside

value extraction. The same applies to new capital city development, where both absolute and relative surplus value production may coexist. In other words, these processes can intertwine while remaining qualitatively distinct. The three phases of PPU's landscape subsumption under capital – logging extraction, industrial plantations, and new capital city development – help clarify these qualitative differences, showing the deepening processes of capitalism in the operationalising landscape.

In summary, I use the relocation of Indonesia's capital city to PPU to explain, and be explained by, three types of landscape operationalisation under capital. My framework draws on Brenner and Katsikis' (2020) abstract proposition of landscape subsumption under capital, which is inspired by Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman's (2001) analysis of absolute and relative surplus value production in nature-centred industries, itself rooted in Marx's ([1867] 1982) concepts of formal and real subsumption of labour under capital. Formal subsumption of landscape under capital, exemplified by PPU's logging extraction since the 1960s, is characterised by absolute surplus value production. Real subsumption, evident in industrial plantations during the 1990s, is marked by relative surplus value creation. Engaging with scholarships on "value grabbing" (Andreucci et al. 2017), speculation (Bear 2020; Goldman 2011; Goldman and Narayan 2021), and rent (Christophers 2019; Mitra 2019; Robertson 2024; Ward and Aalbers 2016), I propose a third mechanism: speculative subsumption of landscape under capital. This extractive but non-productive process, enabled by new capital city development in the 2020s, captures value through rent – manifested in land price and controlled by land ownership and the type of land claim – rather than produces it through labour exploitation.

Methodology

I utilised two types of data sources to analyse the formal, real, and speculative subsumption of the PPU landscape under capital: documents and fieldwork.

For documents, I visited the Manggala Wanabakti Documentation and Information Centre at the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry in Jakarta to access ministry archives. These archives provide insights into the history of landscape operationalisation through logging extraction and industrial plantations in PPU. I also examined the archives of *Kompas* – arguably Indonesia's most established newspaper, based in Jakarta – to understand the transmigration programme that supplied labour from Java to PPU from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Additionally, I analysed the IKN Master Plan policy document (Presiden Republik Indonesia 2022) to identify the exact location, size, and planned zones of the new capital city. Online media coverage and reports by NGO activists further helped me understand the political economy of land concessions related to logging

extraction and industrial plantations in Sepaku, a sub-district in PPU where the core area of the new capital city is located.

To complement research on documents, I conducted fieldwork to unravel the history of landscape operationalisation in PPU and the mobilisation of materials to Sepaku as a new centre of urban development. My fieldwork consisted of three rounds. The first round was a two-week visit to PPU in August–September 2022. The second round was a six-month visit to PPU from December 2022 to May 2023. During this period, I spent one month in Palu (March–April 2023), the capital of Central Sulawesi Province, where stone for the new capital city's construction was mined and mobilised. I also spent time, less than a month in total, in Jakarta and Samarinda (the capital of East Kalimantan Province). The third round of fieldwork was a ten-day visit to PPU in August 2024.

During these fieldwork rounds, I conducted interviews in Jakarta, Samarinda, PPU, and Central Sulawesi. In Jakarta, I interviewed a national-level activist from the Alliance of Indigenous People of the Archipelago (AMAN, *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara*), whose members have been affected by logging extraction, industrial plantations, and the development of the new capital city in Sepaku/PPU. In Samarinda, I interviewed representatives from provincial-level indigenous organisations, environmental NGOs, and government officers. In PPU, I spoke with village-level government officers, labourers from industrial plantations and construction companies, and residents – particularly members of the Balik Indigenous People (who currently hold the most widely media coverage on the claim of indigeneity in PPU) and transmigrant families or their descendants. In Central Sulawesi, I interviewed NGO activists, government officers, harbourmasters, village heads, owners and project managers of rock mining companies, mine workers, and residents of villages where the mines are located.

I organised the fieldwork data into two categories. The first one is fieldnote, made based on conversations and observations. I compiled 75 fieldnote files (Note 1–75, totalling 200 pages). The second one is transcript of interviews. I recorded 49 interviews, ranging from 20 min to over an hour in length (Interview 1–49). Most of these interviews have been transcribed (1,234 min in total). I repeatedly reviewed and analysed these datasets – documents, fieldnotes, and interviews – to develop the arguments presented in this article.

It is important to note that I have excluded coal mining and palm oil plantations, both of which are present in Sepaku, from this discussion. While coal mining aligns with the formal subsumption of landscape under capital and palm oil plantations align with real subsumption, I consider them qualitatively represented by logging extraction and industrial plantations, respectively, which are discussed in detail in the case study section.

Formal Subsumption of Landscape under Capital in Logging Extraction

My interlocutors from the Indigenous Community of Balik recounted that during the 1960s, when they were children, a foreign logging company arrived in Sepaku to clear the forest.¹ At the time, their families lived within and were deeply connected to the forest. They practised rotating cultivation, using controlled fire to clear land for planting mountain rice. They were skilled at isolating fires to ensure only the necessary areas were cleared. Their agricultural practices followed a sustainable cyclical circular pattern: they cultivated specific areas for a season, moved to new locations, and later returned to previously used plots. However, when the logging company entered the region, the government prohibited their traditional farming practices and even barred them from entering the forest.

This oral history aligns with archival records from Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry. The International Timber Corporation Indonesia (PT ITCI) was established on 3 June 1969 as a joint venture between IRDA, an enterprise owned by the Indonesian Army (Karya TNI-AD Republik Indonesia), and Delong Corporation, a U.S.-based company. This partnership was formed under Indonesia's Foreign Investment Law 1/1967. Initially, IRDA and Delong Corporation each held 50% of PT ITCI's shares. Later, Delong Corporation's stake was transferred to Weyerhaeuser Far East Ltd, another U.S.-based logging company (PT ITCIKU, *n.d.*, II-19 and II-20).

In 1969, the Indonesian central government granted PT ITCI a forest concession licence (*HPH, Hak Penguasaan Hutan*) covering 601,750 hectares (PT ITCIKU 2005, 1; see also Gellert 1998, 227). By the 1980s, foreign investment rights expired, and all shares were transferred to Indonesian entities. As of 7 October 1999, Yayasan Kartika Eka Paksi, owned by the Indonesian Army, held 50.71% of PT ITCI's shares. The second-largest shareholder was PT Asriland, with 33.71%, likely owned by Bambang Trihatmojo, the third son of Suharto, Indonesia's New Order² leader (ITCIKU, *n.d.*, II-20). Yayasan Nusamba, owned by Bob Hasan, a tycoon closely associated with Suharto, held 14.71% of the shares, while ITCI-invented cooperatives held the remaining 0.87% (PT ITCIKU 2005, 4).

The fall of Suharto during Indonesia's 1998 Reformasi Movement disrupted logging and industrial activities, particularly those involving his family and associates. In 1999, PT ITCI rebranded as PT ITCI-Kartika

¹Interview 1, 11 August 2022; Interview 6, 12 August 2024. For East Kalimantan, logging extraction started from the colonial era in the 1900s (Pratama 2016, 122).

²Indonesia's New Order is an authoritarian regime led by army general Suharto who stepped into presidential power after the ideological battle in 1965/7 which put an end to Indonesia's left, Communist Party of Indonesia and its sympathizers (see, Farid 2005; Larasati 2013).

Utama (PT ITCIKU), reflecting a change in ownership. By this time, Hashim Djojohadikusumo, the brother of Prabowo Subianto (Indonesia's 2024-9 president), had acquired ownership of the company (Lestari 2019).

From the 1960s onward, logging operations primarily targeted *Dipterocarpacae* trees in Kalimantan's forests, including those in Sepaku. The logs were transported via Kalimantan's rivers network, and through the sea supplying plywood industries at the centre of planetary capitalist urbanisation in Japan, the U.S., China, the Middle East, Europe, and Canada (Barr 1998; Gellert 2003). East Kalimantan played a pivotal role in Indonesia's logging boom during the 1970s. In 1979, the region contributed 10.2 million cubic meters of the national production total of 25.3 million cubic metres (Gellert 1998, 115, 137–8, 142).

Among the 20 logging companies operating in East Kalimantan during the 1990s, PT ITCI ranked fifth in terms of concession size (Gellert 1998, 320). The company employed 658 workers, sourced both locally and from Java through the government's transmigration programme in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Kompas 1981; 1991; Gellert 1998, 311). Gellert (1998, 327) categorised these workers into two groups: 580 in logging operations and 78 in administrative roles. Hence, basically the company "appropriated" the "inherited socioecological resources", in this case trees, and transformed it "as commodities" for global "market exchange" (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 28). In other words, standing based on extracting or cutting down the East Kalimantan primary forest, logging companies exploited the absolute surplus value, the unpaid work of its waged labourers who cut and administered the logging extraction.

Real Subsumption of Landscape under Capital in Industrial Plantation

The shift from logging extraction to industrial plantation aimed to maintain landscape productivity after the depletion of primary forests and to align with global demands for the so-called sustainable forest management (PT ITCKU 2007, I-2). In the 1990s, pressure from developed countries, such as a grievance raised by an Austrian parliament member, highlighted the need for sustainable practices. Concerns over global warming underscored the importance of preserving carbon stored in tropical forests like those in Kalimantan. The Indonesian government feared that such grievances could spread to other countries importing logs from Indonesia (Agus 1993), potentially destabilising the lucrative logging industry. This international pressure compelled PT ITCI to adapt. Bob Hasan explicitly emphasised the need for sustainable forest management to justify the company's transition to industrial plantations and to secure public funding for its initial public offering (TOM 1994).

In response to above global environmental concerns, PT ITCI Hutani Manunggal (IHM) was established on 24 February 1993 (Gellert 1998, 227; PT IHM 2012, 2). On 23 April 1996, the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry granted PT IHM the rights to operate an industrial plantation (PT IHM 2012 – and its additional document of the Ministry of Forestry Decision). By 2004, PT IHM's shareholders included PT ITCI-KU (30%), PT Kreasi Lestari Pratama (30%), and PT Inhutani-I Persero (40%) (PT IHM 2014, 1).

PT Kreasi Lestari Pratama is owned by Indonesian tycoon Sukanto Tanoto, who also controls Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings Ltd (APRIL) (Yasmin 2019). APRIL operates through Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (RAPP) in Sumatra, which produces pulp and paper (Aprilasia.com, n.d.). Meanwhile, PT Inhutani-I Persero is a state-owned enterprise (Inhutani1.co.id, n.d.).

Industrial plantations differ from logging operations in their production processes. According to Siji (pseudonym), a labourer at PT IHM, the defining feature of industrial plantations is the planting of trees, which – seen through Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schrumman (2001) analysis discussed at theoretical section – replaces the self-growing system of the forest and reforests the deforested land. PT IHM cultivates species such as *Acacia mangium*, *Paraserianthes falcataria*, *Gmelina arborea*, and *Eucalyptus deglupta* (PT IHM 2014, ii). To manage its operations, PT IHM established more specialised departments than those typically found in logging companies. These include research and development, learning and development, human resources, accounting, operations, sustainability, and social security and legal departments. The operations department, crucial for industrial plantation, is further divided into nursery, planting, maintenance, and harvesting divisions.³

The landscape under industrial plantation management is compartmentalised into various plots to facilitate forest management. For example, PT IHM's 2014 plan included five key components: (1) preparing 20,676 hectares of shrubland and previously harvested areas for replanting; (2) nurturing over 33 million tree seedlings in nursery areas; (3) planting trees across the prepared 20,676 hectares; (4) maintaining existing trees on 19,268 hectares; and (5) harvesting timber from 14,857 hectares (PT IHM 2014, ii).

To execute these tasks, PT IHM employs approximately 500 labourers, who reside in company-built settlements within its enclave in PPU.⁴ In addition to those, the company subcontracts the transportation of timber from its concessions to Sepaku River Harbour to external firms. For instance, my interlocutor Loro (pseudonym), who migrated from North Sumatra to PPU in search of a better life, worked for years as a truck driver for PT

³Interview 47, 15 August 2024.

⁴Interview 47, 15 August 2024.

Karya Indah Maju (KIM), a subcontractor of PT IHM. His job involved transporting timber from PT IHM's plantations to Sepaku Harbour. From there, the timbers are shipped all the way, sailing Sepaku River, Balikpapan Bay, Makassar Strait, Java Sea and finally harboured at RAPP factories in Sumatra, to be manufactured into paper distributed to over 100 countries worldwide.

When we met on 8 March 2023, Loro was no longer employed by PT KIM. The company had promised him a monthly salary of IDR 6.5 million but failed to deliver, paying him less than agreed. After saving enough for a down payment on a truck, he resigned and began working independently, transporting stones from Sepaku River Harbour to factories supplying concrete for the new capital city's development.⁵

PT IHM's industrial plantation has then "systematically redesigned" (Brenner and Katsikis 2020, 28) the PPU landscape, transforming it from a deforested area exploited by logging companies into a productive industrial plantation. This redesign includes the division of labour into specialised departments, such as the operations department, which oversees nursery, planting, maintenance, and harvesting. Therefore, in addition to exploiting the unpaid work of waged labour to generate absolute surplus value, the company invests in "technical processes of labour," such as the divisions of labour and specialised means of production (constant capital) for seeding, planting, maintaining, and harvesting trees. These efforts ensure the productivity of the once-deforested landscape, enabling the company to exploit both absolute and relative surplus value.

Speculative Subsumption of Landscape under Capital in New Capital City Development

On 16 August 2019, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, announced plans to relocate the nation's capital city during a speech before Indonesia's national parliament (Metrotvnews 2019). While he initially mentioned East Kalimantan as the new location, he did not specify the exact site. Ten days later, Jokowi revealed that the capital would be relocated to the Penajam Paser Utara (PPU) District. Two years after this announcement, Indonesia's parliament passed Law 3/2022, formally establishing the new capital city, known as *IKN (Ibu Kota Negara Nusantara)*, the Capital City of Nusantara).

Law 3/2022 and its accompanying IKN Master Plan (*Rencana Induk IKN*) (Presiden Republik Indonesia 2022, 9) divided the new capital into four zones, encompassing a total of 256,142 hectares of land, much of which was previously occupied by forests, plantation, and coal mining concessions

⁵Note 46, 8 March 2023.

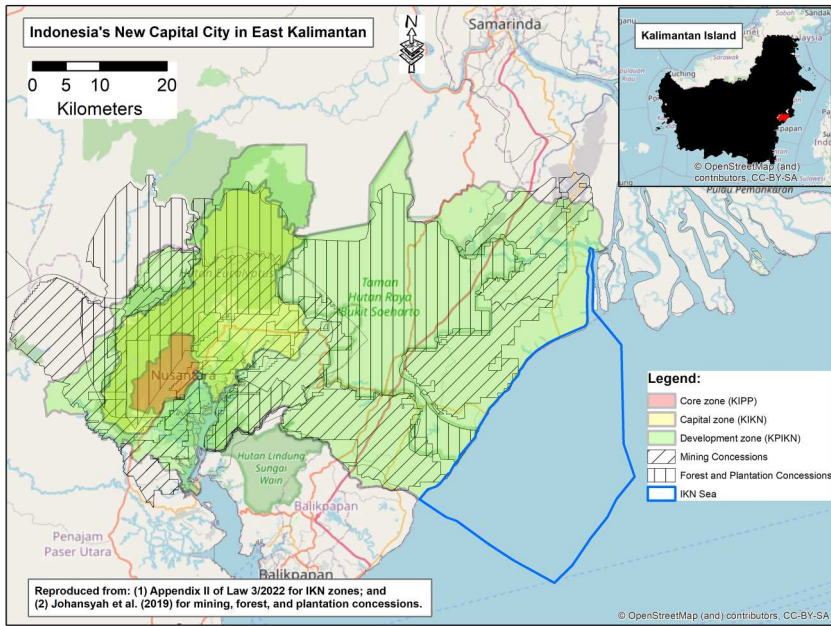


Figure 1. IKN areas with coal mining, forest, and plantation concessions in and around it.

(see, [Figure 1](#)). The first zone, the Core Area for Government (*Kawasan Inti Pusat Pemerintahan, KIPP*), covers 6,671 hectares. The second zone, the Capital City Area (*Kawasan IKN, KIKN*), spans 56,180 hectares. The third zone, designated for future development (*Kawasan Pengembangan IKN, KPIKN*), comprises 199,962 hectares (Presiden Republik Indonesia [2022](#), 9). Additionally, the new capital claims 68,189 hectares of seawater (Article 6, Law 3/2022).

The announcement of the capital's relocation to PPU triggered a sharp increase in land prices in the area. In terms of land claims, which significantly influence land price, there are at least two types in Sepaku. The first is the certificate of ownership (*Sertifikat Hak Milik, SHM*), the strongest form of land claim in Indonesia. The second is *segel*, which indicates state ownership of the land but acknowledges its use by individuals.

As previously mentioned, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the central government relocated populations from Java (East, Central, and West Java, as well as Jakarta) to Sepaku under the transmigration programme. Each transmigrant family was allocated 2 hectares of land: 1 ha for housing and 1 ha for farming. Over time, the government granted *SHM* land claims to these families, including under Jokowi's administration.⁶

⁶Interview 14, 22 December 2022

As a result, most transmigrant lands now hold *SHM* claims. In contrast, the Indigenous Balik community's lands, inherited from their ancestors, are classified under *segel* claims. A key struggle for the Balik Indigenous People today, therefore, is gaining state recognition of their ancestral land rights.⁷

In addition to transmigrants and the Balik Indigenous Community, Sepaku is a home to diverse ethnic groups, including Bugis people from Sulawesi and migrants from Sumatra, such as my interlocutor Loro, mentioned earlier. These groups may hold lands with *SHM* and *segel* claims (Olijan 2023, 43), both are actively traded in Sepaku's land market.⁸

Following the announcement of the capital's relocation, land prices in Sepaku surged dramatically, with annual increases reaching 1,000% by 2022 (Hikam 2022).⁹ For comparison, land prices in Jakarta rose by 16% annually between 2010 and 2014 (Roberts, Sander, and Tiwari 2019, 254), while infrastructure developments in West Java and Yogyakarta led to annual increases of 135% in 2018 and 206% in 2021, respectively (calculated from Ristiawan, Huijbens, and Peters 2024, 8). An extraordinary annual land price increase of 16,666% is recorded by Leitner, Nowak, and Sheppard (2023, 400) at the peri urban of Jakarta, close to the mega urban development of Meikarta.

This spike in land prices at the location of Indonesia's new capital city occurred at a specific spatio-temporal juncture. Spatially, it was concentrated around the core zone or *KIPP*. Temporally, it preceded the development of state infrastructure, such as government buildings (e.g. the presidential palace, hotels, and hospitals) in the *KIPP* zone, as well as the construction of dams for water supply in the *KIKN* zone.

According to Marxist theory, surplus value – both absolute and relative – is generated through capitalist production processes involving constant capital (means of production) and variable capital (labour power). However, the increase in land prices in Sepaku occurred without additional labour input into the landscape. Instead, it was driven solely by the government's decision to relocate the capital city. While labour power was required to produce regulations like Law 3/2022, this labour is “speculative” (Bear 2020, 6) and not productive in Marxist sense, as it does not involve metabolism that facilitates material or energy flows between labour and land. Thus, the rise in land prices at this specific spatio-temporal moment occurred

⁷Interview 1 and 3, 11 August 2022; interview 5 and 6, 12 August 2022.

⁸Interview 20, 4 January 2023.

⁹Hikam (2022) does not explain in detail the annual increase of land price. This media coverage mentions the relative increase before and after IKN. I take 2018 as a point before IKN, and 2019 as a point after IKN. With that, I calculated the annual increase of land price. My own interview shows the annual increase of land price reached the point of more than 800% (interview 13, 24 December 2022). The sudden increase of land price in Sepaku after it was announced as a location for the new capital city is also documented by Nurjaman and Rusata (2023, 142–143).

without the production of absolute or relative surplus value. Instead, it is a speculation, extractive but not productive of value, or “value grabbing” (Andreucci et al. 2017), facilitated by the government’s policy.

The sudden increase in land prices primarily benefited those with *SHM* claims, particularly the transmigrant community. Land with *SHM* claims is easier to trade in the market and commands higher prices than land with *segel* claims, even when other factors (e.g. size and location) are equal. To illustrate, my interlocutor from the transmigrant family explained that the price of land with *segel* before the announcement of Sepaku as a location for the new capital city was IDR 20 million/hectare. After the announcement of Sepaku as the location of the new capital city, the price of land with *SHM* claim reached IDR 1 billion/hectare.¹⁰ This disparity is due to the stronger legal standing of *SHM* claims and the difficulty of upgrading *segel* claims to *SHM* status.¹¹

Other potential beneficiaries of the land price surge include concession holders in and around the IKN area, such as Hashim Djojohadikusumo and Sukanto Tanoto, who hold shares in PT ITCIKU and PT IHM concessions (Hudalah 2024, 137). This is precisely the point underscored by Indonesian NGO activists who argue that the capital relocation primarily benefits Indonesia’s oligarchs (Johansyah et al. 2019). While it is unclear how the government compensated these stakeholders for land taken for the IKN project, the relocation has undoubtedly increased the strategic value of their holdings without requiring additional labour investment. In other words, they may extract value without producing it.

Together with the qualitative difference that comes with speculative subsumption of landscape under capital is also the relative change in terms of the position of PPU’ landscape within the socio-spatial arrangement of urbanisation. Historically, PPU was a non-urban operational landscape, a periphery functioning as a site of resource extraction (logging and coal) and plantation agriculture (timber and palm oil), with outputs directed to the centres of planetary urbanisation. The relocation of the capital city has transformed PPU into a hub of concentrated urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid 2015; Schmid 2023), drawing resources from other regions to meet its needs. For instance, labourers from Central and East Java¹² and

¹⁰Interview 14, 24 December 2022. Compare for instance with Gnagey and Tans (2018: 72) finding that the price of land with customary or informal land rights are lower 30.71% than land with *SHM*.

¹¹In Indonesia, every step in land legalisation is a chance for officers to make money, or corruption (see, Bachriadi and Aspinall 2023; Habibi 2023, 195). This is an example that makes people hesitant to get in touch with state agencies. (Seems to me, the very core of Indonesian bureaucracy principle is the well-known wisdom *kalau bisa dibuat susah, mengapa dibuat mudah?* literally means, if it can be made difficult, why make it easy?)

¹²Note 43, 28 February 2023 and Note 45, 4 March 2023; Interview 25, 28 February 2023 and Interview 26, 4 March 2023.

stones from Central Sulawesi are now being mobilised to support the development of the new capital city in PPU (Batubara et al., [under review](#)).¹³

Conclusions

I have revisited two theoretical developments. The first one is Brenner and Katsikis (2020) abstract proposition to integrate Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman's (2001) notion of the formal and real subsumption of nature under capital into the context of the operational landscape of extended urbanisation. The second one is Boyd, Scott Prudham, and Schruman's (2001) theoretical innovation, which adapts Marx ([1867] 1982) concept of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital into the framework of the formal and real subsumption of nature under capital.

I have also reworked the concept of landscape subsumption under capital. Brenner and Katsikis (2020, 28) interpret this concept through the different treatments applied to the operationalised landscapes, such as the appropriation of available socio-ecological resources and the systematic redesigning of landscapes. Their interpretation tends to identify the "shift from formal to real subsumption" as a process of landscape operationalisation. In my application of these concepts, I demonstrate how the PPU landscape was operationalised through both its formal and real subsumption under capital.

My application of these concepts is value-based, re-linking the notion of landscape subsumption under capital with processes of value production, I engage with the scholarship on "value grabbing", speculation, and rent to propose a third moment: speculative subsumption of landscape under capital, extractive but not productive of value. While these three moments can be entangled, they are qualitatively distinct and yet reflecting the deepening processes of landscape subsumption under capital. In my analysis, the formal and real subsumption of landscape under capital – exemplified by logging extraction and industrial plantations, respectively – are primarily characterised by the production of absolute and relative surplus value. In contrast, the development of the new capital city exemplifies speculative subsumption of landscape under capital, proceeds without producing value. The underlying logic of speculative subsumption of landscape under capital is rent, extracted based on land ownership and/or control.

Inherent to the three distinct qualitative moments of landscape subsumption under capital in Sepaku is the (re)production of unevenness. While logging capitalists, starting in the 1960s, extracted millions of tons of timber from Sepaku and, more broadly, from the Kalimantan forests, the Indigenous Balik Community was systematically excluded from their control over and access to land and forests. The introduction of industrial

¹³Many interviews, for example, interview 37, 6 April 2023.

plantations in the 1990s was fundamentally enabled through the reproduction of this unevenness. It further reinforced the exclusion of the Balik people from their control over and access to land (and forests). The ongoing development of the new capital city once again (re)produces unevenness, this time through the types of land claims. Once more, the Balik Indigenous Community finds themselves in a disadvantaged position, as they hold weaker land claims.

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