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Contesting Space and Representational Politics: State–Community Conflict in the Development of the Suramadu Area

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the contestation of space between the state and local communities in the development of the Suramadu region, particularly the planned construction of a coastal tourism area (Madura Park) *in Sekar Bungoh Hamlet, Sukolilo Barat Village, Bangkalan Regency. The research aims to analyze how spatial politics are exercised in the development process, identify the key actors involved, and understand who benefits and who is marginalized in implementing Suramadu's development agenda. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through non-participant observation, in-depth interviews with affected residents and government actors, and analysis of planning documents and media coverage. The study is framed by Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, particularly the concepts of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. Findings reveal that the spatial planning of Suramadu's development, articulated through the master plan of the Surabaya–Madura Regional Development Agency (BPWS), prioritizes state and investor interests while marginalizing local communities. The government's representation of space emphasizes economic growth through tourism, trade, and industrial zones, often at the expense of community rights and historical attachments to the land. The forced displacement and land acquisition processes have generated resistance from residents, who organized through the "Kelompok Masyarakat Tolak Penggusuran" (Community Group Against Eviction) to defend their land, heritage, and livelihoods. Their resistance highlights material grievances and symbolic struggles over recognition, justice, and participation in spatial decision-making. This study concludes that spatial development in Suramadu is marked by structural asymmetries of power, in which space becomes a site of political contestation rather than shared progress. It also*

underscores the importance of participatory and culturally informed spatial planning to mitigate conflict and ensure equitable development outcomes.

Keywords: *Community Resistance; Henri Lefebvre; Land Acquisition; Madura; Spatial Politics; State–Community Conflict; Suramadu Development*

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, infrastructure-led development has resurged as a dominant paradigm across the Global South, championed by national governments and transnational financial institutions. Large-scale infrastructure, such as highways, special economic zones, smart cities, ports, and mega-bridges, has been framed as a pathway toward national competitiveness, connectivity, and modernization (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Lin, 2014; Moser & Côté-Roy, 2022; Schindler & Kanai, 2021). This trend reflects a global shift from redistributive development models to growth-oriented logic prioritizing physical capital investment over social equity (Bunnell & Das, 2010; Goldman, 2011)As a result, infrastructure has become a material object and a symbolic and political project that reshapes territory, governance, and citizens' everyday lives.

However, growing literature on post-infrastructure landscapes has pointed out that these projects often produce deep socio-spatial contradictions. In many cases, they are implemented through top-down processes that bypass local participation and lead to land dispossession, forced displacement, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of customary land tenure systems (Graham & Marvin, 2002; Harvey, 2020; Zoomers et al., 2017). Particularly in peri-urban and semi-rural zones, megaprojects frequently function as instruments of territorial reordering, transforming socially lived spaces into abstract zones of capital accumulation (Lefebvre, 1991; Miraftab, 2015). As a result, infrastructure becomes both a site and an instrument of spatial contestation between states, capital, and communities.

Indonesia exemplifies a global trend in infrastructure-led development. Since the early 2000s, infrastructure has been a central priority in national planning, framed as a means of "closing the development gap" between densely developed Java and the less-connected outer islands (Bappenas, 2020; Global Green Growth Institute, 2022). Massive investment has been allocated to toll road networks, industrial corridors, airports, and inter-island connectivity, including the Surabaya–Madura Bridge (Suramadu), inaugurated in 2009. Policymakers celebrate these projects as levers for growth and regional parity. However, critical studies suggest that they often exacerbate spatial inequality, deepen center–periphery disparities, and facilitate new forms of enclosure and land commodification (Firman, 2014; Hudalah et al., 2017; Ristiawan et al., 2024).

In this context, space emerges not as a neutral backdrop for development but as a contested product of political, economic, and symbolic processes. The power to represent and transform space is exercised through master plans, zoning, and land acquisition laws, which frequently clash with local communities' lived experiences, values, and spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991; Simarmata & Surtiari, 2020). Understanding how space is produced and resisted within infrastructure megaprojects is crucial for exposing the hidden power dynamics of development and advancing more equitable and participatory forms of spatial governance.

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The Indonesian government established the Surabaya–Madura Regional Development Agency (Badan Pengembangan Wilayah Suramadu, BPWS) via Presidential Regulation No. 27/2008, mandating it to coordinate and implement integrated development in three 600-hectare zones, including the Kawasan Kaki Jembatan Suramadu Sisi Madura (KKJSM), to foster Madura's economic progress (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2008).

The KKJSM blueprint features a range of ambitious projects, including a rest area, logistics and warehousing hubs, a central business district (CBD), an industrial estate, and a premier coastal tourism project named Madura Park. Spanning approximately 4 hectares along the Sukolilo Barat shoreline, Madura Park is envisioned as a thematic beach tourism destination, designed to attract domestic and international visitors through a blend of recreational, cultural, and halal tourism facilities. These plans are part of a broader effort to rebrand Madura's post-bridge identity, positioning it as a "new frontier" of Eastern Indonesia's growth corridor (Simarmata & Surtiari, 2020).

However, realizing this vision has encountered multiple socio-political challenges, particularly concerning land acquisition, local participation, and cultural preservation, issues that are often underemphasized in spatial master plans.

Despite the ambitious state vision, more than a decade after the Suramadu Bridge's inauguration, the anticipated economic acceleration has largely failed to materialize, particularly on the Madura side. Instead of inclusive growth, the development agenda has contributed to new forms of spatial injustice and local dispossession. Nowhere is this more evident than in Sekarbungoh Hamlet, a coastal community within the KKJSM zone, where residents have expressed strong resistance to the planned construction of Madura Park. Their opposition centers on allegations of inadequate compensation, the absence of meaningful consultation, and the looming threat of displacement from lands imbued with economic utility and deep social, cultural, and ancestral significance.

The local population, comprised mostly of fishing families and small-scale cultivators, views the state's spatial interventions as an erasure of communal memory and an assault on their territorial rights. In response, they have organized under Kelompok Masyarakat Tolak Penggusuran (Community Group Against Eviction). This grassroots coalition frames their resistance as a moral and legal struggle for land, dignity, and spatial justice. Such mobilizations reflect broader patterns of rural and peri-urban resistance observed in other parts of Southeast Asia, where state-driven infrastructure projects collide with locally situated claims to space, identity, and belonging (Corbera, 2012; Li, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2000).

This conflict underscores how spatial injustice is not merely physical eviction or material loss. It involves the symbolic and representational dimensions of development: whose vision of space prevails, whose voices are silenced, and whose ways of inhabiting territory are deemed illegitimate. These dynamics resonate with Henri Lefebvre's triadic conceptualization of space, particularly the tensions between top-down representations of space (master plans) and bottom-up representational spaces shaped by lived experience and collective memory (Lefebvre, 1991).

This case is particularly significant as it exemplifies the tensions that emerge when top-down development paradigms encounter locally embedded spatial practices, affective attachments to land, and historically rooted territorialities. The situation in Sekarbungoh Hamlet is not merely a case of land acquisition gone wrong; it reveals a deeper ontological clash between state-centric representations of space, codified through master plans, zoning, and technocratic language, and lived spaces inhabited, narrated, and defended by communities (Escobar, 2001).

While several studies have assessed the Suramadu Bridge's impact in terms of engineering feasibility, regional connectivity, and policy coordination (Hudalah et al., 2017; Ongkowijoyo et

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al., 2021), a noticeable gap remains in the literature concerning the socio-spatial dynamics of contested development. Specifically, few have critically interrogated the Suramadu project through the lens of spatial production and power relations at the community scale. Even fewer engage with Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory to explore how space is produced, represented, and resisted in Indonesian infrastructure governance.

This study addresses that gap by foregrounding how everyday spatial practices, cultural memory, and grassroots resistance intersect with state-driven territorialization efforts. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of work that repositions infrastructure not only as a material object but as a socially contested terrain of power, identity, and representation (Anand et al., 2018; Simone, 2004).

To address the aforementioned gap, this study poses three interrelated research questions: (1) How does the state construct and institutionalize its spatial vision through the KKJSM development plan? (2) In what ways do local communities interpret, negotiate, or resist these spatial interventions? (3) Who benefits and who is marginalized in the evolving spatial transformation of the Suramadu area?

To answer these questions, the study draws conceptually on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, comprising spatial practices (*pratique spatiale*), representations of space (*représentations de l'espace*), and representational spaces (*espaces de représentation*), to frame space as both a product and a medium of power relations (Lefebvre, 1991). This framework enables a critical interrogation of how space is produced materially, ideologically and symbolically within the contested terrain of state-led development.

Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing on Sekarbungoh Hamlet as a microcosm of broader spatial politics in Madura. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with residents, community leaders, and BPWS officials; analysis of planning documents, news archives, and regulatory texts; and non-participant observation of protest actions and everyday spatial practices in the village. This multi-method strategy facilitates a textured understanding of how spatial visions imposed above are received, reinterpreted, and often subverted from below.

In doing so, the study offers two key contributions. First, it advances empirical knowledge on infrastructure-led development in Indonesia by foregrounding communities' lived and contested experiences at the margins of state planning. Second, it contributes theoretically to debates on spatial justice and representational politics, offering insights into how participatory spatial governance can be imagined in contexts where development imperatives intersect with cultural identity, customary land claims, and local agency.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on critical spatial theory to investigate how space is produced, contested, and politicized in state-led development. At the center of this inquiry is Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which challenges the notion of space as a neutral container. Instead, Lefebvre argues that space is actively produced through social relations, political interests, and symbolic practices (Lefebvre, 1991). In this formulation, space is never merely physical; it is shaped by and constitutive of power.

Lefebvre's spatial triad offers a particularly effective framework for analyzing the conflict surrounding the Suramadu development project. The triad consists of three interrelated dimensions: spatial practices**,** representations of space, and representational spaces. Spatial practices refer to the everyday activities and routines through which people engage with their environment. In Sekarbungoh Hamlet, these practices are embedded in coastal livelihoods,

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informal land arrangements, and seasonal rituals that reflect a deep connection to place. Representations of space are the abstract, technocratic constructions of planners, engineers, and state institutions. In this case, the KKJSM master plan and associated planning documents constitute such representations, envisioning the area as a zone of economic potential and tourist attraction. Representational spaces, by contrast, are those lived and imagined spaces that carry symbolic, spiritual, and cultural meaning. These include ancestral burial sites, sacred coastal locations, and local spatial narratives absent from official development maps.

This triadic model reveals the core tension of the Suramadu case: the state's abstract spatial vision, rendered through zoning and investment frameworks, collides with a vernacular spatiality grounded in memory, identity, and collective attachment. As Lefebvre suggests, such collisions are not incidental but constitute the very politics of space, where different modes of spatial production contend for legitimacy and authority (Elden, 2004).

This study also engages with scholarship on state territorialization and infrastructural power to situate Lefebvre's framework within broader debates. Scott (1998) conceptualizes state planning as a form of high-modernist abstraction, in which local complexity is reduced to simplified categories that enable administrative control. Ferguson emphasizes how development apparatuses depoliticize space while extending bureaucratic and technocratic authority (Ferguson, 2006). Infrastructure development has been deeply entangled with spatial enclosure and territorial reordering processes in many parts of the Global South, including Indonesia. Rather than merely facilitating connectivity, such projects often serve as instruments to reconfigure land relations and enable capital expansion (Li, 2014; Peluso & Lund, 2011). Establishing the Surabaya–Madura Regional Development Agency (BPWS) through Presidential Regulation No. 27/2008 can be understood as an administrative move and a strategic effort to assert state control over contested space. The agency's mandate, to plan, coordinate, and implement development in the Suramadu corridor, reflects what Peluso and Lund term "authority over territory," wherein development justifies new forms of spatial governance and legitimizes state-backed interventions on land long inhabited and managed by local communities (Peluso & Lund, 2011).

However, this process of spatial redefinition rarely proceeds uncontested. Drawing on previous studies (Holston, 2021; Miraftab, 2015), this study understands community resistance as a reaction and a form of insurgent planning, an active effort to reclaim space through alternative narratives, practices, and symbols. The mobilization of Sekarbungoh residents through the Kelompok Masyarakat Tolak Penggusuran (Community Group Against Eviction) illustrates such insurgent politics. Residents have articulated their claims using religious discourse, local history, and visual protest to challenge the dominant spatial representations imposed by the state. These acts reflect a form of spatial agency that disrupts the developmentalist logic of dispossession.

The study also engages with the spatial justice concept (Harvey, 2020; Soja, 2010). Spatial justice concerns the equitable distribution of land and resources and spatial governance's procedural and symbolic dimensions. In contexts such as Suramadu, spatial injustice manifests through exclusion from decision-making, erasure of local meanings, and the privileging of state-sanctioned imaginaries. Following Yiftachel, the "gray space" notion is especially relevant: it captures the ambiguous legal and moral status of communities that are simultaneously visible and vulnerable, recognized enough to be governed, yet excluded from formal rights and protections (Yiftachel, 2017).

These theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional lens to analyze how space becomes a site of struggle. They make it possible to examine the material transformations associated with infrastructure and the discursive, affective, and symbolic dimensions of spatial

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politics. The Suramadu case thus exemplifies how development projects are not simply technical interventions but are deeply entangled with power, representation, and competing claims to land and place.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Spatial Politics and Development Trajectories in Indonesia

State-led development agendas have long shaped spatial transformation in Indonesia. From the centralized planning of the New Order era to the post-decentralization surge in infrastructure investment, the state continues to influence how space is imagined, classified, and utilized (Hudalah & Firman, 2012). The national obsession with connectivity and economic acceleration, exemplified by toll roads, tourism zones, and industrial estates, has frequently led to community displacement and the simplification of complex land relations. Empirical studies in Indonesia highlight such outcomes: research in Bandung shows peri-urban land conflicts and gentrification linked to infrastructure expansion (Hudalah et al., 2017), while investigations of Jakarta's urbanization reveal how strategic planning and zoning have reinforced spatial inequalities (Firman, 2004; Hudalah et al., 2017; Ristiawan et al., 2024). Rather than treating space as neutral terrain, scholars have argued that infrastructure is inherently political: it privileges certain spatial imaginaries while marginalizing others (Li, 2014; Rachman, 2016; Wijardjo & Perdana, 2001).

In this context, spatial planning operates as a mechanism of state legibility (Johnson & Scott, 2001), reducing lived space into governable units. Such reductionism obscures the plural and contested ways local communities use, understand, and claim space. These tensions become particularly acute in peri-urban and coastal regions where informal tenure, spiritual geographies, and customary practices intersect with state development visions.

3.2. Land Governance and State–Community Encounters

Land acquisition has become one of the most contentious arenas in Indonesian development politics. The coexistence of overlapping legal systems, customary, informal, and statutory, complicates governance, particularly in areas where land carries economic but also ancestral, religious, and moral significance (Corbera, 2012; Lucas & Warren, 2013). Numerous studies have documented how land acquisition processes in Indonesia are frequently coercive, opaque, and fail to acknowledge the affective and symbolic dimensions of land tenure. Compensation schemes, although framed as legal remedies, are often contested for overlooking ancestral ties, livelihood dependencies, and the moral economy of land claims (Butt, 2014; Lucas & Warren, 2013).

In Madura, land struggles are further complicated by a history of clientelist politics, religious authority, and informal spatial regulation (Budiyanti et al., 2020; Harimurti et al., 2020). Such contexts challenge the state's attempts to reconfigure land for investment through institutional instruments like development agencies or spatial master plans.

3.3. Representational Politics and the Symbolic Dimension of Infrastructure

Infrastructure transforms the physical environment and reorganizes how space is represented and narrated. While economic and engineering perspectives dominate mainstream analysis, a growing body of critical literature argues that infrastructure projects generate new spatial representations that marginalize vernacular meanings (Lefebvre, 1991; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Simone, 2004). These representations are embedded in planning documents, land-use maps, and investment zones, which frame space as abstract, homogenous, and economically legible.

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However, such representations often clash with representational spaces, namely the lived and symbolic understandings of space rooted in memory, ritual, and social practice. In the Indonesian context, these frictions are rarely captured in policy discourse, but they underpin the moral and cultural grounds of resistance.

3.4. Suramadu in Scholarship: A Technocratic Blind Spot

Despite its national prominence, the Suramadu development area has received limited scholarly attention beyond feasibility studies, economic assessments, or policy evaluations (Hudalah & Woltjer, 2007). Much of the literature treats the project as a technical or administrative challenge, sidelining the sociocultural and political struggles it has provoked. While debates on urban infrastructure in Southeast Asia increasingly emphasize the relational and contested nature of space (Shatkin, 2016), studies on Suramadu have yet to engage with such perspectives.

This review thus highlights the need to examine the Suramadu case through a lens attentive to spatial politics, representation, and local contestation, approaches that are gaining traction globally but remain underexplored in the Indonesian peri-urban context.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive–interpretative design to examine how spatial contestation unfolds between state authorities and local communities in the development of the Suramadu Bridge Area on the Madura side (Kawasan Kaki Jembatan Suramadu Sisi Madura, or KKJSM). Guided by Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory, the research conceptualizes space not merely as a physical setting, but as a socially produced arena shaped by power, representation, and lived practice (Lefebvre, 1991).

Fieldwork was conducted in Sekarbungoh Hamlet, located in Labang Subdistrict, Bangkalan Regency, East Java, from July to October 2023. The site was purposively selected due to its strategic position within the KKJSM development zone and its significance in ongoing land acquisition conflicts, particularly surrounding the planned Madura Park tourism complex. Data collection employed three complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. A total of 23 informants were selected purposively to represent key stakeholder groups. These included affected residents such as small-scale farmers and fishers (eight individuals); village and subdistrict officials involved in land administration (four); planners from the Surabaya–Madura Regional Development Agency (BPWS) and the National Land Agency (BPN) (three); members of civil society, including legal aid advocates and NGO workers (four); and respected local cultural or religious figures (four). The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and, when appropriate, in the local Madurese dialect.

Observational data were gathered through site visits, including protests, community meetings, and daily land-use activities, allowing the researcher to understand how spatial claims were expressed materially and symbolically. At the same time, key documents, such as planning proposals, spatial regulations, and public communications, were analyzed to explore how state narratives framed land legitimacy, authority, and development priorities.

The analysis followed a thematic approach, combining inductive coding with Lefebvre's triadic framework of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. This model provided an interpretive structure to understand how various actors materialized, narrated, and resisted development plans. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents strengthened the validity of findings. Although this study focuses on a single case, the number of interviews, twenty-three, was considered methodologically adequate. This aligns

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with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's finding that thematic saturation in qualitative research is often reached within 20 to 25 interviews for focused, context-sensitive topics (Guest et al., 2006). The emphasis was placed on depth, diversity of perspectives, and contextual relevance rather than statistical generalizability.

All participants provided informed consent prior to interviews, and the identities of individuals have been anonymized using pseudonyms or generalized titles. Ethical precautions were prioritized throughout the research in light of the political sensitivity surrounding land conflicts. While some limitations emerged, such as limited access to internal planning documents and the refusal of several state officials to participate in recorded interviews, these were mitigated by the breadth and depth of perspectives obtained from civil society and community-based informants. The study's goal is not generalizability but analytical depth, offering a contextualized understanding of spatial politics in infrastructure-driven development on the margins of urban expansion.

5. Results

5.1. Spatial Practice: Informal Land Tenure and the Lived Production of Space in Sekarbungoh

In Sekarbungoh Hamlet, space is not experienced as an abstract or neutral container, but as an integral part of everyday life, shaped by long-standing practices of residence, subsistence, and ancestral continuity. Despite being officially categorized as *tanah negara* (state land), the territory has been inhabited, cultivated, and spiritually marked by residents for generations. Land is not merely an economic asset, but a composite of functions and meanings: a place to live (*tempat tinggal*), to work (*tempat mencari nafkah*), and to preserve family memory (*tempat menyimpan sejarah keluarga*).

Field data reveal that residents rely on fishing, seaweed drying, cassava farming, and small-scale animal husbandry to sustain their livelihoods. These activities occur on land parcels that are not registered under formal titles but are organized and respected through oral inheritance, long-term occupation, and kinship-based legitimacy. Informal boundaries are defined by natural landmarks such as trees, pathways, or irrigation channels. These arrangements are widely acknowledged and rarely contested within the community, even without state-issued documentation.

Land claims are often articulated in terms such as "ancestral inheritance" or "parental legacy," reflecting a deeply held belief in intergenerational land stewardship. These expressions are not symbolic superficially; they perform real social functions in delineating property rights, mediating inheritance, and affirming identity. Informal transactions, including land division among heirs or temporary use rights, are typically resolved through verbal agreements facilitated by customary or neighborhood elders, without recourse to legal institutions.

Contrary to the state's framing of the area as *lahan kosong* (idle land), which appears frequently in planning and policy documents, Sekarbungoh is a socially active and ecologically adaptive landscape. The state's technocratic vision fails to account for labor density, meaning, and intersubjective recognition embedded in local land use. As Lefebvre emphasizes, spatial practice involves not only physical occupation but the ongoing reproduction of social relations through space (Lefebvre, 1991). In this context, residents collectively enact a form of spatial legitimacy that contests the bureaucratic erasure of their presence.

Moreover, the local spatial system is dynamic and responsive. Tenure arrangements evolve with seasonal needs, demographic changes, and household negotiations. This fluidity contrasts sharply with the rigid zoning proposed by the KKJSM master plan, which imagines the territory as a standardized tourism and infrastructure development platform. Instead of engaging in open

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confrontation, residents assert their spatial claims through continued use and care, embodying what Johnson and Scott describe as "everyday resistance" (Johnson & Scott, 2001)

These practices construct a counternarrative to state-driven spatial order. They affirm that land is already inhabited, organized, and meaningful, regardless of whether it is legible to state apparatuses. In doing so, the community sustains a vernacular geography that challenges formal categories and reasserts a lived logic of place-making.

5.2. Representations of Space: State Planning and the Bureaucratic Imagination of "Empty Land"

The contestation over land in Sekarbungoh Hamlet does not rest solely on questions of physical occupation or formal legality. It is also embedded within competing representational logics. While the community views the land as a socially saturated and historically rooted domain, state agencies project a technocratic imagination that seeks to abstract and reclassify it as a site of economic potential. This divergence in spatial interpretation is central to understanding how development operates as a material and symbolic force.

Following the inauguration of the Suramadu Bridge, the Surabaya–Madura Regional Development Agency (BPWS) formulated a master plan for the Kawasan Kaki Jembatan Suramadu Sisi Madura (KKJSM). Within this 600-hectare designated zone, Sekarbungoh Hamlet was mapped into investment-oriented spatial categories, such as rest areas, commercial clusters, and a coastal tourism attraction branded as Madura Park. These spatial visions were not merely conceptual but institutionalized through zoning maps, cadastral overlays, strategic investment blueprints, and public presentations.

In official documents, the land was routinely described as lahan kosong (idle land), which carries ideological weight. It frames inhabited, cultivated, and culturally significant spaces as vacant or underutilized, legitimizing state intervention, land acquisition, and spatial transformation. This bureaucratic reframing reflects what Lefebvre terms "representations of space", the domain of planners, technocrats, and state actors who define space through functional, often reductionist, lenses (Lefebvre, 1991).

The planning discourse employed by BPWS prioritized infrastructural efficiency and economic growth while omitting recognition of informal settlements, sacred spaces, or social tenure arrangements. Community members were systematically excluded from early-stage consultations. When public forums were eventually held, they were limited in scope, often procedural, and involved only select local representatives, rather than inclusive participatory mechanisms. This procedural marginalization reflects a broader pattern in Indonesia's infrastructure governance, where spatial plans are produced through top-down logics that render vernacular geographies invisible (Hudalah & Woltjer, 2007).

Moreover, spatial representations were enforced not just through technical documents but also through juridical and symbolic mechanisms. The deployment of state authority, through eviction notices referencing Presidential Regulation No. 27/2008, military presence during clearance operations, and the invocation of "national interest" rhetoric, underscored the dominance of formal spatial regimes (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2008). Within this regime, land without certificates was equated with illegitimacy, even when inhabited for generations.

The KKJSM plan represents a paradigmatic case of what Johnson and Scott term "state legibility", a process whereby local complexity is simplified into administratively legible units (Johnson & Scott, 2001). The technocratic abstraction of Sekarbungoh as "empty land" effectively nullifies its social, ecological, and historical dimensions. This act of representational erasure

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constitutes a political and epistemological maneuver, wherein alternative spatial rationalities are rendered unintelligible within the planning language.

5.3. Representational Space: Moral Geographies and the Symbolic Resistance of Sekarbungoh Residents

Beyond material usage and bureaucratic classifications, the space in Sekarbungoh is produced through collective meaning-making, intergenerational memory, and symbolic resistance. For residents, land is not simply a site of economic activity or shelter, but a culturally embedded landscape shaped by ancestral presence, ritual practices, and moral claims to belonging. This mode of spatial experience aligns with what Lefebvre terms representational space, wherein lived and imagined relationships to space resist formalized abstractions imposed by planning regimes (Lefebvre, 1991).

Family cemeteries, located within or near residential compounds, are at the heart of this symbolic geography. These burial grounds function as tangible anchors of historical identity and spiritual continuity. The state's intention to relocate them for tourism infrastructure is not interpreted as progress but as a rupture in the community's moral order. Such proposals provoke affective resistance grounded in the sacredness of place rather than legal entitlements.

Forms of resistance observed in the community take on symbolic and discursive dimensions. Protest banners, appeals to political leaders, and the preservation of homes marked for demolition express a rejection of commodified spatial logic. Residents draw upon expressions such as *warisan orang tua* (parental inheritance) and *tanah turun-temurun* (inherited land) to articulate a vernacular land tenure framework rooted in social recognition, memory, and kinship obligations.

Religious gatherings, such as *tahlilan* (communal prayers), conducted at ancestral graveyards serve a dual function: They reaffirm faith and simultaneously declare the sacred character of space. Through these embodied practices, residents construct a moral geography that cannot be captured by cadastral surveys or spatial zoning. Through this lens, the local landscape becomes irreducible to "idle land," as described in state planning documents.

Consolidating resistance through Kelompok Masyarakat Tolak Penggusuran (Community Group Against Eviction), comprising more than 130 households, signifies a shift toward collective authorship of space. Rather than being passive recipients of top-down planning, residents actively produce alternative spatial imaginaries that challenge technocratic visions of modernization. Their resistance, while non-violent, asserts legitimacy not through legal ownership, but through affective ties, spiritual lineage, and historical embeddedness.

This contestation is not solely over physical territory but over epistemological authority. By reclaiming representational space, the residents of Sekarbungoh articulate an ontological claim to land grounded in lived experience, moral obligation, and communal memory. Such resistance underscores the limits of planning paradigms that seek to render space legible to capital and bureaucracy while disregarding place's symbolic, historical, and emotional dimensions.

6. Discussion

The findings from Sekarbungoh demonstrate that spatial contestation in peri-urban Indonesia is not simply a conflict over land ownership or economic valuation, but a more profound struggle over the right to define and inhabit space. Applying Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad enables us to disentangle how the state and local communities operate with fundamentally divergent spatial logics, each shaping, legitimizing, and contesting the meaning of territory through different modalities of knowledge, power, and representation (Lefebvre, 1991).

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6.1. Reproducing Space from Below: Spatial Practice and Vernacular Legitimacy

The spatial practices of residents in Sekarbungoh are neither incidental nor peripheral; rather, they constitute a vernacular system of spatial production rooted in ecological intimacy, moral inheritance, and collective stewardship. In contrast to state-sanctioned cadastral systems that rely on formal documentation and legal instruments, this vernacular system is enacted and legitimized through lived relations. Residents construct homes near kin, cultivate land passed down orally across generations, and maintain informal mechanisms of mutual recognition that govern access, delineate boundaries, and define obligations.

These practices exemplify what Blomley refers to as the "unwritten life of property," in which informality does not imply a lack of order but the presence of an alternative one (Blomley, 2004)In this context, phrases such as Warisan orang tua (parental inheritance) and Tanah *turun-temurun* (ancestral land) are not merely expressions of familial sentiment; they signify deeply held moral and historical claims that contest the state's efforts to reclassify space into abstract zones of use, stripped of memory and identity.

Labeling these lands as *tanah negara* (state land) or *lahan kosong* (idle land) by agencies such as the Surabaya–Madura Regional Development Agency (BPWS) and the National Land Agency (BPN) reflects more than a bureaucratic designation; it constitutes a form of symbolic disqualification. This administrative categorization renders community-based tenure practices illegible within official planning discourse. It enables dispossession not solely through coercion, but through representational erasure. As noted by Peluso and Lund, control over land is often exercised not only by enclosing physical territory but also by monopolizing the narratives that define it (Peluso & Lund, 2011).

This dynamic mirrors broader trends in peri-urban Indonesia, where so-called "informal" settlements are increasingly targeted for displacement under the guise of modernization or public interest (Lucas & Warren, 2013). However, such informality is not a juridical vacuum; complex social arrangements often underpin it. These include unwritten boundaries demarcated by trees or irrigation ditches, verbal agreements between families, and collective maintenance of shared land. These systems often provide greater social stability than formal land titling regimes (McCarthy, 2000).

Importantly, the spatial reproduction practiced by Sekarbungoh residents is marked by adaptive resilience. Although unrecognized by formal law, their persistent occupation, use, and local acknowledgment of the land articulate an alternative territorial logic, where legitimacy is anchored in historical continuity, community recognition, and practical utility rather than in notarized property titles. These vernacular spatial practices become acts of place-making that resist the extractive and rationalizing tendencies of infrastructure-driven development.

In this regard, spatial practice is not merely the context in which resistance occurs but a form of resistance. By sustaining their everyday lifeways, residents perform a grounded defiance that challenges the core assumptions of state rationality. They uphold a spatial order fundamentally incompatible with the commodifying logics of zoning and land-use abstraction. This unresolved tension between lived space and technocratically planned space lies at the heart of the ongoing spatial conflict in the KKJSM area.

6.2. Planning as Erasure: The State's Representations of Space

Lefebvre's notion of representations of space refers to how institutions, technocrats, and planners conceptualize and organize space through mapping, categorization, and zoning practices (Lefebvre, 1991). In the case of Sekarbungoh and the KKJSM (Kawasan Kaki Jembatan

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Suramadu) development corridor, this logic materializes through technical documents, regulatory classifications, and investor-oriented blueprints that portray Madura's northern coastline as an unutilized economic frontier. Agencies such as BPWS, alongside affiliated governmental and private actors, depict the area as a tabula rasa, a blank canvas upon which infrastructure-led growth will be imposed.

These representations do not merely overlook the social history embedded in the landscape; they enact epistemic erasure by reclassifying inhabited and cultivated spaces as administratively vacant. Terms such as zona strategis (strategic zone) or lahan tidak produktif (non-productive land) reflect an ideological framing rather than empirical spatial analysis. Through cartographic omission or marginal annotation, these discursive strategies systematically render vernacular life-worlds invisible in planning regimes and environmental assessments.

Such processes echo Johnson and Scott's critique of "state legibility," whereby complex socio-ecological realities are flattened into standardized, measurable, and governable units (Johnson & Scott, 2001). Within the KKJSM framework, the emphasis on transport corridors, tourism clusters, and economic zones displaces attention from existing settlement patterns, subsistence practices, and residents' symbolic attachments to their land. Spatial simplification thus becomes a prerequisite for governance, investment, and dispossession.

These spatial representations are not incidental but central to the displacement mechanism. By categorizing community-held land as tanah negara (state land), lahan tidur (idle land), or tanah telantar (abandoned land), state actors generate a legal pretext for appropriation, often in the service of elite or investor interests (Lucas & Warren, 2013; Peluso & Lund, 2011)These terms do not passively describe space; they actively constitute it through performative language that aligns it with development narratives and market logic.

Such practices are within a broader neoliberal transformation of spatial governance in post-authoritarian Indonesia. Urban and regional planning in the post-New Order period has increasingly been structured around competitiveness, deregulation, and public–private partnerships, frequently sidelining the principles of distributive justice and community participation (Hudalah & Firman, 2012). In these contexts, planning documents become instruments of power that determine what is seen, what is erased, and what can be claimed.

Within the KKJSM project, these planning instruments effectively displace the community of Sekarbungoh at the discursive level before physical eviction occurs. Though residents remain present and socially organized, their existence is omitted from formal maps, regulatory language, and project justifications. Their homes are unnamed, their livelihoods unrecognized, and their claims to space unacknowledged. This silence is not neutral; it reflects a calculated denial of political recognition and spatial citizenship. As such, the technocratic vision propagated by BPWS functions not merely as a development plan but as a mode of spatial erasure that legitimizes dispossession under the guise of rational planning.

6.3. Symbolic Resistance and Moral Geographies

The third dimension of Lefebvre's spatial triad, representational space, refers to how space is lived and experienced symbolically, imbued with emotion, memory, and cultural significance (Lefebvre, 1991). In Sekarbungoh, this dimension becomes the principal arena where residents articulate and perform resistance. Their spatial claims are not advanced through litigation or bureaucratic procedures, but through ritual acts, symbolic discourse, and moral appeals that disrupt the state's sanitized development narrative.

This symbolic resistance is manifested in the refusal to relocate ancestral graves. Such refusal is not merely an act of spiritual reverence but constitutes a moral claim to territorial continuity.

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In many local cosmologies, graves are not simply burial sites but enduring markers of lineage, sacred obligation, and communal identity. They function as mnemonic anchors within the landscape, binding present habitation to historical depth that transcends legal ownership or economic rationality. By insisting on their preservation, residents challenge the abstraction of land into development zones and reaffirm the conception of space as inhabited by memory and meaning.

Public displays of protest, such as banners with slogans including *Tolak Penggusuran* (Reject Eviction) and references to warisan orang tua (ancestral inheritance), reflect the formation of a moral geography. Within this geography, legitimacy is derived not from formal land titles but from intergenerational stewardship, cultural embeddedness, and affective ties to place. These claims are ontological rather than legal or political, rooted in a worldview that regards land as inalienable from life, lineage, and cosmological order.

Such expressions of resistance align with what Johnson and Scott define as "everyday resistance": subtle, gradual acts that contest hegemonic authority without overt confrontation. (Johnson & Scott, 2001). In Sekarbungoh, these forms of resistance take shape in the continued cultivation of contested land, the performance of ritual ceremonies, the occupation of spaces marked for demolition, and the repetition of narratives that affirm belonging. These are not merely passive responses but active articulations of an alternative spatial logic grounded in dignity, continuity, and recognition beyond formal bureaucratic inclusion.

These symbolic practices have, in recent years, evolved into more structured collective mobilization. The formation of Kelompok Masyarakat Tolak Penggusuran (Community Group Against Eviction) signifies a shift from diffuse expressions of dissent to organized resistance. This corresponds to what Fraser terms a "counterpublic", a discursive arena in which subordinated groups articulate oppositional interpretations and contest dominant spatial imaginaries (Fraser, 2014).

Through these practices, Sekarbungoh residents are not only resisting displacement but are actively reclaiming authorship over the production of space. In doing so, they expose the reductionist logic underpinning the state's development vision and call for a more pluralistic and inclusive understanding of spatial legitimacy. Their struggle, therefore, is not only a defense of territory but an assertion of the right to define its meaning.

Ultimately, representational space in Sekarbungoh operates as a site of political contention. It is a vibrant terrain where ritual, memory, language, and symbolic expression converge to affirm presence, contest dispossession, and inscribe moral legitimacy upon the landscape.

6.4. Between Spatial Justice and Epistemic Violence

The spatial conflict unfolding in Sekarbungoh is not merely a legal or physical contest over land; it is a clash of epistemologies, two fundamentally distinct ways of knowing, valuing, and organizing space. On one side stands the state's modernist and technocratic paradigm, which conceives land as an abstract, divisible commodity governed by zoning regulations, investment projections, and cadastral mapping. This paradigm, embedded within the KKJSM master plan and institutional instruments of the BPWS, reflects what Johnson and Scott identify as high-modernist logic: a worldview that privileges clarity, legibility, and scalability over complexity, ambiguity, and local variation (Johnson & Scott, 2001).

Opposing this is a vernacular epistemology grounded in social relations, ecological rhythms, and historical memory. In Sekarbungoh, space is not experienced as a neutral substrate for economic accumulation, but a domain that is lived, storied, and ritually inhabited. Land is understood as tanah warisan, not because of formal inheritance mechanisms, but due to its role

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as a site of ancestral continuity and moral responsibility. This epistemology resists reduction to coordinates or monetary value; instead, it insists on presence, affect, and legitimacy established through intersubjective recognition.

The inability or unwillingness of state institutions to acknowledge this vernacular spatial knowledge constitutes what Spivak has theorized as epistemic violence: the silencing of subaltern ways of knowing, not merely through coercion, but via discursive exclusion, institutional disregard, and bureaucratic simplification (Spivak, 2014). These mechanisms do not passively overlook local claims; rather, they actively reframe such claims as illegitimate by classifying the land as *lahan kosong* (idle land), the practices as *liar* (illegal), and the histories as *tidak tercatat* (unrecorded).

Such discursive disqualification has tangible consequences. Once spatial knowledge becomes unintelligible within the formal planning apparatus, the land it refers to becomes susceptible to dispossession. Under the banner of *proyek strategis nasional* (national strategic projects), land can be cleared, settlements dismantled, and graveyards removed, not because they are unoccupied, but because they are institutionally unrecognized. The case of Sekarbungoh thereby exemplifies how spatial injustice is deeply intertwined with epistemic erasure.

Importantly, this is not an isolated case. The rapid expansion of infrastructure mega-projects justified under the imperatives of national development and post-pandemic economic recovery has generated similar dynamics across Indonesia. Examples include the Mandalika tourism zone in West Nusa Tenggara, the Rempang Eco-City project in Batam, and the food estate programs in Kalimantan. These initiatives frequently target regions characterized by ambiguous land tenure, strong customary affiliations, and spiritually significant landscapes, domains that resist bureaucratic standardization yet are vulnerable to appropriation in the name of growth (Afiff & Rachman, 2019; Li, 2014).

Development planning must go beyond superficial inclusion and move toward the substantive institutional recognition of spatial plurality to challenge this trajectory. This requires acknowledging that multiple regimes of spatial legitimacy coexist and that administrative simplification cannot be the sole basis for territorial governance. Planning frameworks should be restructured to accommodate, rather than erase, vernacular spatialities. This calls for participatory mechanisms and redistributing epistemic authority, allowing communities such as Sekarbungoh to define, narrate, and defend their spatial order on their terms.

Ultimately, the pursuit of spatial justice is not only a matter of equitable access to land. It is also about the right to epistemic visibility: the right of marginalized communities to have their spatial knowledge taken seriously within law, public policy, and urban planning. Absent such recognition, the threat of dispossession persists, even when legitimized by the formal logics of development.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the spatial contestation in Sekarbungoh Hamlet as a reflection of deeper structural tensions within Indonesia's infrastructure-led development model. By employing Lefebvre's spatial triad, the analysis demonstrates how development interventions, such as the KKJSM project, are materially imposed and discursively produced, enabling the state to reshape territories through planning, classification, and symbolic control.

The findings reveal that residents of Sekarbungoh reproduce space through practices grounded in daily rhythms, ancestral ties, and informal tenure systems. These spatial practices challenge the state's portrayal of the land as idle or vacant, exposing the disconnect between formal planning categories and lived territoriality. At the discursive level, official representations

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of space marginalize existing settlements and erase their historical depth in favor of investment-oriented abstraction. In response, residents assert their claims through symbolic resistance and moral geographies, mobilizing cultural memory and collective presence to rearticulate space from below.

This study underscores that spatial justice cannot be reduced to technical redistribution or legal reform alone; it must also engage with the epistemological foundations of planning and governance. When vernacular spatial knowledge is systematically excluded, dispossession occurs through land loss and the erasure of voice and worldview.

While the study offers grounded insights into the politics of space in peri-urban Madura, it is not without limitations. The focus on a single case may constrain the generalizability of the findings, and the reliance on qualitative data limits the ability to capture broader demographic or economic trends. Additionally, the research did not include perspectives from private investors or internal planning debates within BPWS, which could have further enriched the analysis.

Comparative studies across other national strategic project zones could benefit future research by assessing the recurrence of epistemic conflicts and spatial injustice. Further inquiry into institutional mechanisms for recognizing and integrating vernacular spatialities, such as participatory mapping or customary tenure recognition, would also be valuable in informing more inclusive development frameworks.

The case of Sekarbungoh reminds us that space is not merely a backdrop for development but a contested field shaped by power, meaning, and memory. Any attempt to plan or transform it must begin with the recognition that space is produced, lived, and defended.

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