The Speculative Temporalities of Landholding: Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

This three-part dissertation explores the roles and implications of time in landholding.

Paper A sets the theoretical stage by exploring how temporal symbolism is used to construct land as an object of enduring value in sedentary societies, arguing that sedentary landholding is governed in temporal, not just spatial, terms.

Paper B engages more specifically with the contemporary idealisation of land as a commodity, extending the observations of Paper A to challenge the commodification and speculative private appropriation of land’s future ‘benefit streams’. Here, I suggest a more inclusive definition of land value as a potential tool to reveal certain shortcomings of market-led land policies.

Finally, in Paper C, I present a case study of the non-market land policies undertaken in the five Asian ‘Tiger’ countries after WWII; I argue that these countries substantially reversed the paradigm described in Paper B by channelling the ‘benefit streams’ of landholding towards social stability.
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Introduction

‘The study of value, then, invariably takes us beyond what we normally refer to as ‘economics’, for it leads us into moral, aesthetic and symbolic territory...’ – David Graeber (Graeber, 2005, p. 452)

Land policy is one of the oldest and most important topics to be discussed and debated in sedentary societies. Since the earliest recorded times, land’s capture, holding, and administration have been primary preoccupations in the sedentary world (Linklater, 2013; Powelson, 1988; Tuma, 1965). Despite this ubiquity, or perhaps because of it, there is no unified concept of what ‘land’ is, let alone why people endeavour, fight, and pay to ‘hold’ title to it. A peasant in 18th Century England would give a different answer than a farmer in 20th Century Saskatchewan or a landless worker today in Brazil, and indeed a different answer than even another contemporary peasant living across the channel in France. Likewise, an 18th Century Ottoman Sultan and his tax collector would see land’s ‘worth’ through a very different lens than Bedou traversing the desert, but he would probably also disagree with his successors, who instituted major landholding reforms in the 19th Century (Powelson, 1988). All of these actors, relating to land in different ways, would have slightly different conceptions of what, exactly, land’s value is.

One reason for this concerns the notion of ‘value’ itself; as Appadurai (1986) shows, value in general is a highly contingent notion, and there is no shortage of ‘theories of value’. Another key reason for this diversity is that land, while understood to be important in the universal, only tends to become valued in the particular (i.e. in discretised pieces) when imagined as useful for a particular type of purpose – whether that purpose is functional, as with land as a site of resource extraction, or spiritual, as with sites of burial or locations of metaphysical significance. Regardless, the power of different ideals of land value (and of how access to this value is allocated) in structuring the everyday life of people in settled societies, and in shaping and affecting both social and environmental spaces, are key reasons why the politics of land (including land allocation, land tenure, and land reform) have been pervasive since ancient history, and why they have been linked to so many other social and political struggles.

It is the current generation of such struggles that I ultimately wish to inform with this project. In the present, the idea that land should be allocated as private, commodified property has become ubiquitous not only in the Western world, but also increasingly in other countries under the
influence of Western-backed development institutions with the broad expansion of what Polanyi called the ‘market society’ (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]). This has, with all of these processes, accelerated in the present time, leading to a particular understanding of land value – that of land as an individualised commodity – becoming hegemonic. Today, the rule of the market – and of a commodified understanding of land value – is one of the most powerful shapers of land and resource allocation on a global scale (Linklater, 2013); with this, we seem to have less and less choice but to agree with this conception of land value (and its effects).

Still, as with the many historical forms of land allocation, the market-commodity notion of land value, and its corollary effects, are fiercely contested. Popular discontent has focussed particularly on the apparent and enduring inequities of the market’s allocation mechanisms, and on its insensitivity to tradition, socio-geographic context, and environment. This discontent has been particularly visible amongst rural peasant movements such as the Via Campesina and urban slum dwellers in the Global South (Vendryes, 2014), amongst those in the prosperous ‘global cities’ struggling to afford housing (Smet, 2015; Martin, 2011), and amongst those in declining cities whose wealth has seemingly evaporated with the value of their housing (ibid).

The question of land’s worth, which is in one regard more explicitly defined than ever (in economic terms), is thus also open to revision. Such questions are, as Li reminds us, part of continuing debates over governance and the ‘the right manner of disposing things’ (Li, 2014, p. 3; after Foucault, 1991b, p. 95). With this in mind, the purpose of this project is to explore the roots and emergence of the market-ideal notion of land value in order to de-naturalise it, and to open up alternative ways of theorising and administering landholding in the many contexts where current practices are being contested.

Outline

Because the two largest components of this project (Paper A and Paper C) were composed as independently publishable articles (which have been submitted for publication and are pending acceptance of my revisions), the overall structure of this project differs somewhat from a traditional masters thesis. The two articles that have been submitted are included in as-submitted form, reflecting their current stage in the peer review process.
Paper A sets the theoretical and historical stage, by looking at the broad symbolism that has been used to construct land as an object of enduring value – something worth holding – in sedentary societies generally. Paper B engages more specifically with the contemporary political-economic idealisation of land as a fungible commodity, and extends the observations from Paper A to challenge the market-centric doctrine of land commodification, and the appropriation of multiple social ‘benefit streams’ by private landowners. In this paper’s conclusion, I suggest a more inclusive political economic definition of land value than the ideal traditionally referred to in this field as a potential tool for analysing the shortcomings of market-led land policies. Finally, in Paper C, I present a case study looking at the results of a set of unique land policies undertaken in the five East Asian ‘Tiger’ countries after the Second World War; I argue that these countries in large part de-commodified land (reversing the paradigm described in Paper B) in order to channel the benefits of landholding towards social stability, demonstrating in practice a wider conception / social re-assignment of land value.

Overall my work reflects the overarching theme of landholding as what Polanyi (1957 [1944]) refers to as an ‘embedded’ institution, rather than a standalone phenomenon subject to its own ‘natural’ logic. This means that I have examined landholding as a practice enabled and maintained by social, political, and legal institutions, all of which give legitimacy and social protection to claims on particular pieces of land over time; it also implies that practices of landholding can be subject to institutional revisions.

Positionality

My path to this project, and this degree, has been somewhat unorthodox. I first became interested in issues of land ownership while completing my undergraduate degree in civil engineering here at the University of Toronto. After being introduced to the thought of the 19th Century American political economist (and land reform crusader) Henry George (George, 2008 [1879]), I became particularly interested in the phenomenon of land speculation. With my academic specialisation being in urban transportation and infrastructure engineering, I decided to write an undergraduate thesis (entitled “Land speculation and urban overextension”) on the tendency of public infrastructure investment at the edges of the city to incentivise private landholders to speculate on vacant land, thus driving unsustainable urban growth. The project was interesting and
successful, earning an award for the best undergraduate thesis in the department, and the experienced encouraged me to eventually pursue more advanced study of land ownership.

Although my previous work studied land purely through an economic lens, my choice to pursue a masters degree in geography was based a desire to take a ‘step back’ from the universalising political-economic analysis of land as a commodity (in terms of rent and value theories) in order to contextualise it in a way that could go beyond the age of commodification and marketization of the modern period. In part, this stemmed from my post-graduate experience living with a newly-sedentary Bedouin community in southern Israel. The community in which I lived and worked was facing an intersection of political, cultural, and economic conflicts with the state over land use and land possession, following a long history of mistrust and conflict between ways of life and territory that stretched back to previous Ottoman and Roman regimes. In particular, I became fascinated by how deep-rooted these conflicts seemed to be, stretching as they did far beyond the contemporary (and to me more familiar) context of ethno-political conflict in the Middle East. I was also deeply interested in the unsung role of (supposedly) private landholding in mediating the larger sets of conflicts dividing the region. This experience highlighted in a personal way that that, beyond the economic and political struggles, there could be conflict over the very ideas of and approaches to holding land in the first place; and that these ontological conflicts could in fact inform the larger political, national, and economic ones. I could no longer take the idea of sedentary landholding for granted. I wanted to work on a framework that could somehow connect this question to the other phenomena that I had previously studied.

Out of curiosity, I chose to begin this project (and my masters studies in the department) by undertaking a wide review of historical and anthropological literature on the rise of first-generation landholding societies, in order to better understand the ideas of land’s ‘worth’ that were already prevalent before and beside the dawn of the property and market paradigms. At the same time, wanting to make a contribution to land policy, reflecting on my undergraduate work, and partaking in a course on the political economy of international development in my first year, I was encouraged to explore the existence of present day institutional cases that seemed to have avoided these paradigms (at least when compared to many others). Both of these paths, and a close reading of Polanyi’s The Great Transformation (1957 [1944]) led me to see landholding as a social institution managed differently in different social and geographical contexts. Viewing
land through this historical-institutional lens also revealed an idea that I have carried through the rest of the project: not only is land value administered by social institutions, it is in fact a product of how it is discursively and institutionally delineated, and thus subject to social and institutional change as much as to economic forces.

A note on spelling and annotation

As this dissertation is composed of freestanding articles that I have included as-contributed to publications with differing spelling and stylistic requirements, I have unfortunately had to vary the style between parts. Specifically, the first paper is written with standard British spelling (e.g. labour instead of labor, prioritise instead of prioritize, centre instead of center, and so on), and uses single quotation marks (apostrophes) for direct quotations, while the last paper is written with American spelling, and uses double quotation marks to denote direct quotations. Elsewhere, I have adhered to Canadian-British conventions of the first paper. I offer my apologies in advance for any annoyances that this may cause.

Despite the fact that the project is divided into three papers, all pages, tables, and section headings are numbered sequentially through this document.
1 Paper A – Freeze-Framing Territory: Time and the Significance of Land Tenure

Note: The below text has been submitted to the journal Space and Polity and is currently under peer review as of 21 October 2015.

1.1 (Re)-Introducing Land

In recent years, events in the global political and economic order have conspired to re-introduce issues of land and land possession into both popular and academic discourses. The role of overextended investment in home and land ownership in the 2008 economic downturn, and subsequent property and debt market troubles in Europe, have brought public attention to the intricate and convoluted political-economic relationships between land ownership and finance capital in the Global North (Smith, 2015; Briefing, 2015). In the Global South, a ‘rush for land’, particularly farmland, by international investors, large and small, has emerged as a persistent theme in both economic and socio-political scholarship (White, Borras Jr., Hall, Scoones, & Wolford, 2012; Margulis, McKeon, & Borras Jr., 2013; Li, 2014), just as calls for comprehensive land reform have returned to the policy spotlight (Borras Jr, 2007). Meanwhile, renewed discussion on the ‘resource-state nexus’ (Bridge, 2014), on the role of sovereign wealth in the ‘land rush’ (Wolford, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & White, 2013), and on the state’s unique extra-economic role in structuring resource access and allocation in the first place (ibid), has served to re-emphasize the role of state institutions in organising access and exclusion to and from land. These issues have situated land – as ancient a topic of interest as any – as being thoroughly embedded in the current political-economic moment; a seemingly timeless topic once again placed in the analytical spotlight for its social importance.

Yet, if we look at the evidence presented by work in critical archaeological and anthropological literatures, it is apparent that the notions that inform many of these issues – the supposedly universal ideas that land is ‘worth’ holding over time, allocating, exchanging, and fighting over in the particular - cannot simply be taken as natural facts (Relaki & Catapoti, 2013). Rather, land’s most recent transformations are but a few in a long tradition of such conceptual re-makings that stretch beyond the West, and well before the rise of modernity in Europe. As Tania Li observes, ‘with land, it is never over’ (Li, 2014, p. 3). Thus, I contend that the symbolism
immanent in sedentary conceptions of landholding merit their own theoretical exploration, vis-à-vis those of modern property, territory, and space.

1.1.1 Why does land matter?

There is nothing particularly new about appropriation of land in human history; after all, as Edward Saïd reminds us, the story of human civilisation has in many ways been a saga of people ‘thinking about, settling on and controlling land’ that they ‘do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others’ (Saïd, 1993). Truly, questions of how and by whom land can be held represent some of the most ancient political issues in practically every sedentary society, appearing from the very beginnings of recorded history, and preoccupying rulers and administrators ever since (Powelson, 1988; Tuma, 1965). One could perhaps use this fact to render land rather banal – to argue that the concept of holding and accumulating land doesn’t merit much critical deconstruction because it seems too basic and ubiquitous vis-à-vis other, more developed socio-spatial issues, or that the emergence of land as a contested category is a matter for archaeologists to decipher. Some well-known political theorists (Marx being a good example) are actually quite explicit in explaining phenomena such as landholding as little more than tenacious, parasitic relics of more ‘primitive’ forms of accumulation (Tribe, 1977). At present, scholars in both critical and conservative traditions have largely abandoned theoretical analysis of landholding itself, focussing instead on the property and capital regimes in which landholding has been couched (Linklater, 2013; Haila, 1988). In a similar way, many contemporary critical theories have tended to treat land as a rudimentary substrate for more complex social phenomena such as imperialism and capital formation, preferring to analyse more abstract categories such as territory and space, or political-economic phenomena such as land markets.

There is a great deal of truth to the notion that land’s value (in the popular sense of the word) depends on the existence of complex socio-political institutions like property and trade regimes (Rose, 1987, pp. 427-429), which can be analysed in terms of political categories such as space and territory. Yet, as we see in broad historical reviews (Linklater, 2013; Spencer, 2010; Powelson, 1988; Tuma, 1965), modern ‘property’ is but one of a wide range of land allocation institutions that has existed around the sedentary world in the spaces between ‘primitive accumulation’ and Locke’s rights-based theory – institutions in which land possession still
appears to have been contentious despite an absence of modern property relations\(^1\). Accordingly, to paraphrase Rose, we need to understand political-economic phenomena such as property relations as arising from and within pre-existing structures of symbols (Rose, 1985, p. 88) that construct the object – land – as something holdable and worth holding. We need to keep in mind that the idea of ‘land’ as it appears in official uses (for instance, landholding laws or investment documents) is a part of a lineage of symbolic representations of nature constructed under certain socio-political circumstances, rather than a pure reference to ‘nature’ itself.

### 1.1.2 From land to ‘land tenure’

While colloquial definitions of land may seem self-evident, it is instructive to note that many conflicts have pivoted on the existence of the idea itself; even within one culture or language, land can mean many different things, and many cultures don’t even have a concept for land in the first place. Accordingly, any attempt to historicize land politics must first come to terms with the considerable ambiguity about what, exactly, ‘land’ even is.

To begin with, it is important to recognise that while, physically speaking, land is ever-present, culturally speaking it is subject to considerable adaptation. The senses of land that figure in both contemporary and historical political and economic struggles (and the senses by which it is identified as a resource, as property, and as a store of social power) depend in every instance on the re-packaging of land’s materiality in particular imagined forms. In practice, this means that ‘land’ can have different (though often related) meanings to different actors in society. The political and economic discourses of land are institutional discourses that are designed to serve purposes of governance, and are not fundamentally necessary to the existence of human life or even of human society. This is a major theme of this paper, and I begin to elaborate on it in the next section.

Consequently, placing the importance of land as something ‘worth’ holding requires thinking about land’s materiality ‘in ways that are simultaneously physical and cultural’ (Bakker & Bridge, 2006, p. 8). The fact that land has, as Tania Li notes, presence, location, and ‘an

\(^1\) I refer the reader to Jones & Phillips (2005) for a detailed, and fascinating, discussion of how oft-ignored pre-modern and non-Western histories can be directly relevant to contemporary political and political-economic issues.
especially rich and diverse array of ‘affordances’’ (Li, 2014, p. 1) makes it bio-physically significant, but for land to be turned into something that can be contested for purposes beyond immediate use, and then held according to dominant structures of governance, requires an additional sense of endurance. It requires thinking about how land is institutionalised not only as a resource, but also how it is freeze-framed as a tenable (i.e. hold-able) one.

What I present in this article is a genealogical exploration of land tenure as a set of practices dominant within sedentary traditions, which vary across those traditions, but which on the whole have shaped the ontology of land as a valued, holdable object. Like Li (2014), and Bakker & Bridge (2006), I see land as a particular, institutionalised assemblage of nature that is made relevant to contemporary politics not only by how it is used, but also by how its materiality is discursively constructed. However, taking a broader historical and theoretical view, I look both more generally at the place of land in sedentary life, and more specifically at the question of land’s enduring value; that is, on the under-studied temporal dimension of land tenure.

In the next section, I discuss the limits of discourses that understand land as simply a substrate to biological or political territories. Rather than an inert platform, I describe sedentary institutions of ‘land’ as techniques that imagine territory not just across space, but across time as well. Land in this way can be seen as an especially durable, ‘freeze-framed’ form of territory.

For purposes of illustration, I refer to an ethnographic account of the territorial practices of a semi-nomadic group, and I integrate some representative historical excerpts to discuss how the meanings of landholding depend not only on degrees of exclusivity, but also on codified interpretations of ‘permanence’. This acknowledges that there are different possible social and temporal scales of landholding including, but not limited to, individualised, perpetual property ‘ownership’. I conclude by discussing the relationship between landholding, institutional ‘permanence’, and power. With this, I argue that different conceptions of time, as elucidated by the placement of temporal signposts in landholding codes, can affect political-economic issues of access and exclusion. With this, my intention is to open up the possibility for more specific genealogies of modern landholding forms (such as property ownership) in future work.
1.2 Land and territory

There is a certain biological-scientific viewpoint that tends towards explaining humanity’s socio-spatial practices (including landholding and property relations) as evolved forms of instinctive territoriality, driven by biophysical needs and forces with respect to space. This viewpoint, which would appear to have the weight of scientific reason behind it, has informed many problematic, ‘evolutionary’ accounts of the rise of private property in land (Barrett, 2013), as elucidated in traditions such as structuralist anthropology, historical materialist political economy, and neo-institutional economics (North & Thomas, 1977; Demsetz, 1967). Yet, despite its significant near-sightedness, the chief insight of this bio-ethological viewpoint provides an interesting starting point for us. Certainly, there is something to the view of territoriality as a natural spatial behaviour (Malmberg, 1980, p. 27); humans do after all express a reasonably high degree of biological inclination towards understanding territories, and it would be hard to deny that as a species we are capable of defining ‘exclusive spaces…distinguished by means of limits, marks or other kinds of structuring…’ that have well-understood social implications (Malmberg, 1980, p. 11).

The issue with such biologically deterministic views, as Barrett (2013) points out, is more in what it misses. First of all, it is worth noting that recent advances in evolutionary science give lie to the simple determinacy of classical and social-Darwinian models (Tallis, 2011); in fact, evolution, even at the genetic level, is as much a matter of lifelong symbiosis and reformation as one of ‘survival of the fittest’. Beyond this, however, is the issue of human agency. While human activity rests on a basis of instinctual tendencies, we are also capable of deeply reflexive contemplation of these behaviours. With this, we exist in a strange cognitive place, always shifting ‘between the practical ability to cope with material existence and…exploration of the forces which provide that existence with its form and its textures’ (Barrett, 2013, p. 295). The incredible variety of relationships to land evident in human history (Souvatzi, 2013) is, in many ways, a testament to these two facts, and it serves as a lesson for any theory purporting to explain human behaviour: that there is no single destiny for the organisation of human space because there is no practical limit to how we can imagine it.

Human history is rather, as Barrett eloquently puts it, a chronicle of how ‘different traditions of humanity’ are made possible by the diverse ways in which they consciously construct different
‘practices of dwelling’ (Barrett, 2013, p. 293). The biological-evolutionary approach to territorial behaviour can only be of limited reference to a genealogy of landholding’s social importance because the idea of ‘holding’ land represents only one practice of dwelling. Like other animals, humans do not need to discretise and philosophise their territories in order to survive on them.

Approaches that view territory as a wholly political phenomenon, rather than as a bio-ethological pattern, attempt to overcome the deterministically unfocused explanations by adding the dimension of strategic agency. Such approaches, the range of which are described in detail by Sack (1983; 1986) and Elden (2010), see territory as more of a consciously strategic action-category; something between Sack’s idea of an attempt ‘…to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by…control over a geographic area’ (Sack, 1986, p. 19), to Elden’s interesting notion of territory as a ‘political technology’ for controlling the ‘political-economic’ and ‘political-strategic’ spaces of land and terrain (Elden, 2010, p. 801). These views provide a more historicised, genealogical approach, because they emphasize the ways in which socio-spatial behaviours, rather than being biologically hard-wired, are formed and reproduced through codification in human societies. But, I hold that they are also problematic for the ways in which they accept the ontological construction of ‘land’ as being a tenable object. While this perspective is apt for analyses that are firmly focussed on the present, or for those mainly interested in the socio-political side of the socio-political-material nexus (as are many analyses in political theory), I would contend that it reinforces a view of human action as taking place on the neutral plain of nature that is inherent in contemporary conceptions of land and in its pre-modern forebears (Catapoti & Relaki, 2013), without acknowledging the artificiality of this division. Territory is in these instances made out to be a totally human game that plays out over land and terrain, even though the forms most often discussed (modern property and state territoriality) require that these categories be ontologically defined in the first place.

1.3 Fluid territorial spaces

With the question of territorial space in mind, it is worth pointing out some differences between the forms of territory most commonly described in ethnographic study of non-landholding peoples, versus the type of land that is implied in, for instance, the examples that open this paper.
Firstly, it is notable that, while humans, like other creatures, may exhibit the ability and indeed the tendency to exert control over geographic areas (as the scientific view discusses), nothing about human nature (as we know it) requires or implies that the physical extents of these spaces should need to be fixed in particular sizes or places, and they by no means have to be seen as permanently ownable objects such as land tends to be understood (Souvatzi, 2013) – a point that I will return to.

Moreover, while more recent scholars who focus on territory look back at their history books and see pre-modern land politics as straightforward and alike (relative to modern political territoriality, which Elden describes as having greater ‘specificity’ (2010, p. 808), this surely discounts the considerable scope of political and social conflict that has occurred over land throughout written history (Linklater, 2013; Powelson, 1988; Tuma, 1965), and the violently divergent ideas of landholding that have through history (but especially under modern imperialism) been imposed by sedentary peoples on those following other (more nomadic) ways of life (Scott, 2009; Blomley, 2003). While Elden is quite correct that territory is more than simply a form of property (in response to Marxist thought on territory) (Elden, 2010, p. 804), his conflation of land and property, which only makes sense if our analytical scope is limited to Western modernity, writes off contexts outside of this realm.

As Li (2014) discusses, a major component of land’s material importance to humans is dependent on exclusion of others; thus, it is understandable that land and property are often conflated, as in Elden’s argument. Yet, although exclusivity is a central part of land’s usefulness, it should also be noted that notions of socio-spatial exclusivity are highly variable across different traditions of humanity, even under present-day property regimes; complete exclusivity is in fact rarely practical, and rarely practiced. This is evident, for instance, in an ethnographic study of semi-nomadic Bedou groups in Oman’s Ja’alan region recently conducted by Efstratiou and Alphas (2013), in which the authors describe considerable flexibility in how control over territorial access and exclusion is practiced. While some area or another may belong

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2 For instance, the ‘freedom to roam’ over others’ land that is common in Nordic countries.

3 Here I wish to be clear that broad categories such as ‘nomadic’ and ‘sedentary’, while describing similar traditions of dwelling, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent a spectrum of survival strategies on which individuals
‘exclusively’ to a particular clan, traditions and norms allow for considerable ‘looseness’ in the application of this exclusivity; in practice, boundaries (marked or implicit) are often crossed without consequence, and access to key resources shared without expectation of immediate reciprocity, following traditions that can seem opaque, or even arbitrary, to outsiders. The authors use this observation to reiterate the importance of ethnographic contextualisation of ideas such as ‘property ownership’, which may form only part of a society’s relationship with land.

As the authors discuss, this implies that such complex relationships over land access and land use are not just spatial; practices of dwelling, or of territorial exclusion, that seem permanent and unitary (like ownership) may not be as solid as they seem, opening up spaces for contingency. Indeed, one of the authors’ central conclusions is that how ‘permanency’ is conceived of in a given situation can define under what terms notions such as ‘ownership’ will be applied (Efstratiou & Alphas, 2013). It is a notion that introduces a sense of time to a seemingly spatial category, while placing a ‘freeze-frame’ on a given spatial-territorial arrangement; a puzzling phenomenon that I wish to explore below in more detail with respect of ideas of ‘land’.

1.4 Separating space and time

‘[I]n mere Time, all things follow one another, and in mere Space all things are side by side; it is accordingly only by the combination of Time and Space that the representation of coexistence arises’ – Arthur Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer, 1889 [1813])

The above example serves as a reminder that temporality matters in landholding as much as spatiality does. Indeed, while territory is often thought of as being a spatial category, the forms of territory most commonly enacted in nomadic life (in which humanity has evolved and spent 95% of our existence (Diamond, 1997)) require no conscious or ontological differentiation between the two (Barker, 2006, p. 58). It is not that such discrete temporal thought is only conceptually available to sedentary peoples – that nomads completely lack a sense of future time, or that they are incapable of ‘true foresight’ and ‘reason’ as has been claimed (Russel, 1946, p.

and groups can shift, due to necessity, expedience, or, quite commonly, coercion (Scott, 2009; Bar-Yosef 2001; Diamond, 1997).
36, as critiqued by Catapoti & Relaki, 2013); but, different ways of dwelling undeniably involve relative differences in how peoples living in different social and material circumstances imagine and assess future material, social, or metaphysical possibilities (see Harari, 2015, ch. 6 for a probing discussion of this)⁴.

As David Harvey (1996) argues, the separation of time and space into orderly dimensions is an analytical and governmental technique, not a fundamental property. For those who are accustomed to thinking of time and space as independent Cartesian dimensions, this all may seem rather esoteric; yet, it is of more than philosophical importance. In fact, a large body of ethnographic and indigenous scholarship has shown that in non-sedentary life, the boundaries between space and time do indeed tend to be quite fluid. Ingold, for instance, in a widely cited paper describes a common belief amongst nomadic peoples that personal history and life paths are indelible parts of space; in his words, ‘who one is becomes a record of where one has come from and where one has been’ (Ingold, 1996, p. 138).

Even evaluated in modern, rationalist terms (something that we should do only with great caution), activities such as searching for water or following suitable grazing areas do not require an explicitly defined temporality. They also, as (Efstratiou & Alphas, 2013) remind, do not require an explicit sense of ‘permanence’, whereas conceptions of land that can be held or owned do require this. In situations where it is more advantageous to move than to stay put, there is less motivation to impart substantial and lasting physical alterations to any particular area, since a group’s territories can shift with them in response to need. In this sense land would remain an embedded part of what Polanyi calls the ‘articulate whole’ of life (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]), ‘appropriated not by fences and boundaries, in the way of farmers, but by moving through it along paths’ (Barker, 2006)⁵.

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⁴ I present this as the converse of Harari’s (2015) non-moralising assertion that nomadic peoples, for their own reasons, simply ‘discounted the future’ (ch. 6).

⁵ Importantly, this type of co-existence should not be understood as an idealisation, or as a quirk of ‘primitive’ peoples, but simply as one tradition of humanity that, in historical perspective, has been as successful as any other at ensuring survival and social continuity. I use it to illustrate the there are multiple ways in which humans have related to time and space.
But the bounding of space in more or less ‘permanent’ and exclusive ways, and the imparting of enduring value to particular areas of land that are ‘appropriated by fences and boundaries’ (ibid), as has now been practiced in some places for thousands of years, would seem to require a re-regimentation of permanence into more strictly-defined forms. Indeed, the notion of bounded land having ‘enduring value’, which is often taken for granted in accounts of the ‘evolution’ of property rights (for instance, (North & Thomas, 1977) and (Demsetz, 1967)), is reliant on conceptions of time that see the future as a place of clearly definable possibilities. Time is, in fact, an important feature of the landholding ontologies.

1.5 Settling ‘permanent’ land

As Efstratiou and Alphas (2013) note, ‘land possession and use are directly related to the way in which the concept of permanency…is manifested and experienced by individuals and groups of people…’ (p. 147). In settings marked by movement and transience, such as they describe with the Ja’alan Bedouin, ‘permanence’ can counter-intuitively be quite situational, as discussed above. Yet, in cases where groups settle down and begin pegging their subsistence to particular places, permanence does, according to the archaeological record, begin to take more definitive forms (Bar-Yosef, 2001; Spencer, 2010), which while not equalling contemporary conceptions of land ownership do apparently begin to approach land as an enduringly excludable, and a contested, thing.

The difference, as is often the case, is perhaps rendered clearest at the boundaries between different forms of dwelling. These boundaries can be internal, as with the varying degrees of ‘permanent’ ownership amongst the Ja’alan Bedouin (Efstratiou & Alphas, 2013), or they can be external, as with the clashing ideas of property and land between more-nomadic and more-sedentary groups (see, for instance, Scott, 2009; or Blomley, 2003). Regardless, a relationship between the deliberate concentration of effort into particular places and the extension of institutional, temporally-defined definition to ‘permanent’ claims over those places seems to be rather common, marking a line (though a porous one) between more fluid and more solid manifestations of territory.

Accepting this, the argument that I wish to carry forward here is twofold. First, the socially important aspect of land – that it is both necessary and excludable – is contingent on the relative ‘permanence’ of territorial behaviours and norms. Second, how the relationship between territory
and permanence is defined plays a major role in delineating the symbolic meaning, and indeed the value of land under a given landholding regime, up to and including modern conceptions of ‘perpetual’ property ownership and ‘tenure’. More than just spatial ideas of territory, these represent temporal territories; divisions and appropriations of space given extended permanence over time.

1.6 Examples of contingent ‘permanence’

Although we should be careful not to ascribe present forms of social organisation on past societies, it is clear that the question of ‘permanence’ in land governance is more than just a matter of modern political theory; it is, rather, one of the major themes of land laws and landholding practices going back as far as written history. Time periods such as growing seasons, years, lifetimes, and clan lineages serve as unmistakable ‘temporal signposts’ for this early manifestation of centralised power over territory. Though the idea of ‘permanence’ having contingency, and thus needing to be codified is admittedly difficult to grasp, a few brief examples illustrate this well.

One such instance is the concept of ‘eternal’ land possession being vested in a god or gods, apparent in records of the earliest known sedentary societies, the city-states of Uruk and Ur (in present-day Iraq) roughly 5000 years ago, and common in many other theological texts around the world (Powelson, 1988). In these cases, land ‘ownership’ by groups and clans was administered by a priestly caste, which among other things dealt with the allocation of landholding ‘on behalf of’ a god or gods. While the notion of metaphysical ownership of the earth may or may not be novel in this case, it would appear that the channelling of this power via a hierarchical social structure, entrusted with allocation of the gods’ lands for all eternity, provides an implicit ability for them to, rather paradoxically, subdivide eternity (into periods such as growing seasons, or lifetimes, or rent periods) for the pragmatic purpose of allocating land. More interestingly, we see in cases such as this how different time horizons are ascribed to different ‘owners’; eternity belongs to the gods, while (select) people must make do with (limit their land uses to) lesser durations – even if that lesser ‘permanence’ lasts an entire lifetime or extends to multiple generations.

Hammurabi’s ancient code (the earliest known comprehensive, written law code, attributed to King Hammurabi of Babylon) provides a somewhat later and more manifest glimpse at
landholding regimes in the same part of the world. The code’s rules on landholding not only bear reference to implicitly periodic notions such as tithe and tribute payment; they actually establish specific temporal limits on certain types of landholding, and strict time-delimited rights to use and claim land between different groups in society, breaking otherwise ‘permanent’ landholding arrangements when triggered. To take a representative case, the code (Hammurabi, 2008) decrees that:

‘If a chieftain or man leaves his house, garden, and field and hires it out, and someone else takes possession…and uses it for three years, if the first owner return and claims his house, garden, and field, it shall not be given to him...he who has taken possession of it and used it shall continue to use it.’ (Code of Hammurabi, Art. 30)

What is magic about three years? Nothing, unless one accepts the divine providence of this decree. Yet, the codification of this number as a signpost marking the ‘end’ of a previous holder’s right to reclaim their let land serves as a very real, temporal boundary of possession, and we can imagine that it became very significant in determining land allocation regardless of how arbitrary it may have been.

Likewise, we also see how different temporalities are used to achieve certain goals, such as rewarding loyal soldiers:

‘If a chieftain or man be...[captured in battle], and if his field and garden be given to another..., if he return...his field and garden shall be returned to him, he shall take it over again.’ (Hammurabi, Art. 28)

Here, what was theoretically a permanent usurpation of land by the second comer is itself usurped by the greater permanence of the original holder. Temporality is not measured in years, but in departure and return, with time under captivity effectively disappearing. The labour-time of the former recipient of the soldier’s lands also disappears.

Different actors in society (be they individuals or groups) often have different needs and practices when it comes to time, that are either imposed on them (by necessity or by law) or that stem from epistemological differences in time horizon. For instance, in a study of landholding practices in France during the middle ages, Weinberger (1985) describes in great detail the
different conceptions of time held by the two dominant (and often conflicting) landholding groups: the clergy (in the name of the Catholic Church) and the landed aristocracy. In short, ‘the ways that these two classes regarded time helps to account for both their approach to acquiring land and, in the event of a dispute, whether it would be settled by compromise or violence’ (Weinberger, 1985, p. 163). Beyond this, Weinberger concludes that the arrangements made by the Church to award lifetime ‘precarial grants’ of land to wealthy laymen reflected the church’s long-term goal of increasing its landholdings, vis-à-vis the lay-nobles’ shorter-term horizon of agricultural land use.

Suffice it to say that temporality, however it is instituted and measured, plays a major role in the ways that landholding is regulated across a wide range of sedentary traditions, from ancient Mesopotamia to China and the Mayan and Incan empires (cf Powelson, 1988) 6, and from the fields of middle-ages France to the present. The point is that different applications of time, and different gazes towards the future, play a role in ordering how landholding shapes and is shaped by socio-political structures. Through this, they help to define and solidify ontologies of land that serve the societies in which they are constructed.

1.7 Landholding and lasting structures of power

‘In future time, through all coming generations, let the [future] king...not alter the law of the land...my monument let him not mar.’ (Hammurabi’s Code, Epilogue, par. 5, in Avalon Project, 2008)

In this last section, I return to the question posed in the introduction to this paper: why does land, in the particular sense of an object that can be held, matter? The answer turns out, unsurprisingly, to be that land matters because it has been made to matter; specifically, because its constructed form as a useful and allocable resource has been imbued with a sense of symbolic ‘permanence’ tied to material sustenance and to political organisation in sedentary society.

6 Powelson (1988) reviews the historical land-tenure politics of Ancient Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, post-Roman Europe, the post-Roman Middle East and North Africa, China, Japan, India, Mexico, the Ancient Incan Empire, sub-Saharan Africa, and Vietnam. Here, I refer to his comprehensive synthesis of the anthropological record, rather than his hypothesis on land reform.
1.7.1 The material

First, the material ontology of land as embodying potential (for sustenance, surplus production, and expansion) is made to matter at the scale of the polity in societies that (at least primarily) rely on sedentary forms of subsistence. Here we should recall that sedentary agriculture is not necessary for the existence of human political organisation per se (for instance, chiefdoms and alliances have been known to form amongst mobile groups), but settled agricultural production does appear to be necessary for the formation of complex, lasting states of the sort that have come to dominate social life (Diamond, 1997; Diamond & Bellwood, 2003; Bang Petersen & Skaaning, 2010). It thus follows that the set of territorial practices required for sedentary agriculture are inextricably wrapped up with the structure of the sedentary state.

In particular, if we look at examples of early states, it is clear that institutionalised agricultural land use is fundamental in both enabling and sustaining the durable bureaucracies and administrative structures associated with sedentary polities (Spencer, 2010; Bang Petersen & Skaaning, 2010). In some cases, this can be transient, leading to nothing more than a more predictable season or two of subsistence, and in others it may simply be abandoned in response to biogeographic constraints (Bar-Yosef, 2001). However, in cases where institutions form and mature (the overwhelming majority; Bang Peterson & Skanning, 2010), it is evident that the raison d’être of these groups is inseparably tied to territorial administration and to the conquest of land (Spencer, 2010).

The point here is that the relationship to land inherent in sedentary, surplus-producing agriculture is very closely linked to the extension of the state’s administrative and coercive institutions (Johnson & Earle, 1987; Cohen & Service, 1978); there is thus a natural, or at least a straightforward reason for these institutions and the groups that constitute them (such as soldiers, bureaucrats, and nobles) to perpetuate this idea of land as a productive, valued thing. To paraphrase Spencer’s hypothesis, social structures made possible by the holding of land and the production of agricultural surpluses (as bureaucracies and armies are) have a strong interest in

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7 I follow the lead of Bang Peterson & Skanning (2010) in accepting Tilly’s (1992) historically inclusive definition of states as ‘coercion-wielding organizations [sic] that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories’ (Tilly, 1992, pp. 1-2). I assume as they do that this form set the stage for the much more recent formation of the modern state as we know it.
reproducing these phenomena in order to reproduce their own existence (Spencer, 2010). This, I argue, can allow original appropriations of land by groups who use that land for agriculture (such as agrarian tribal groups and chiefdoms) to proliferate into lasting systems of sedentary landholding.

1.7.2 The symbolic

Secondly, and in concert with the above, in polities formed around sedentary land use, land is given *symbolic* meaning, which is, like its administrator/bureaucrat makers, symbiotically formed by and formative of the land’s productive material importance as an agricultural resource. Land begins to take the familiar ontological form of a tenable resource as it comes to explicitly represent possibilities for predictable subsistence, territorial conquest, and political expansion.

The channels by which this occurs are best articulated by Foucault’s notion of *governmentality*. Regimes of landholding, as governmental institutions concerned with what Foucault called the ‘right manner of disposing things’ (Foucault, 1991b, p. 95), reflect and reinforce the imposition of discursive grids by which governed ‘things’ – such as population and territory – are perceived and evaluated (Foucault, 1991a, p. 81). Thus, while classical political thought, like that of Hobbes (1991 [1651]) and Bodin (1992 [1576]), places power in a monolithic sovereign entity, Foucault begs us to see political power as being rather more diffuse (Edwards, 2012), channelled through the ways in which populations are made to understand and experience the world of ‘things’. Land, of course, is one such thing.

As Shamir (1996) describes (after Foucault), systems of law (which I contend can be as basic as Hammurabi’s code though they are more completely delineated in the modern state) implicitly unite control over their subjects with control over territories *by imposing a conceptual grid on space - expecting space to be divided, parcelled [sic], registered, and bounded*, and expecting populations to be located on the spatial grid (Shamir, 1996, p. 234). Simultaneously, these

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8 It must be noted that Foucault considered the notion of population to be an ‘absolutely modern’ one (Foucault, 2007), and I am cognisant of the dangers of a-historically applying his thought. Still, in my view Foucault is clear in seeing progenitors to the technologies of governmentality in pre-modern societies, and in understanding the rise of modernity as a crystallisation, rather than an absolute origin of such governmental techniques.
systems of governance place a grid on time by placing ‘objective temporal signposts that determine when a story begins and ends, what kind of historical narrative may be listened to, and what are the necessary conditions for establishing temporal truth’ (Shamir, p. 242; see also Shenhav (2012) ch. 1 after Fabian (1983)). These spatial and temporal grids in turn produce legally defined places, such as fields or other plots, where people, objects, and relationships are fixed and made more-or-less ‘permanent’ by the law - what Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2014), after Harvey (1996), refer to as ‘permanences’. With this, divisions of land become the ultimate material-symbolic ‘permanences’ – places that are imbued with deep meaning and with a sense of lasting value.

Keeping Foucault’s observations in mind, it is not difficult to see how institutions of landholding can be channelled to form and preserve such structures of power. Carol Rose (1985), for instance, has noted how, in modern property regimes, the doctrine of ‘first possession’ is the most important progenitor of later claims of ‘rights’ to land; this appears to be the case in many non-modern codes as well. Epistemologies such as this set and preserve facts on the ground, ‘crystallizing’ early appropriations and enclosures of territory into enduring institutions of landholding. These institutions define what, exactly, it means to hold land, and in doing so they create a category – legally-administered ‘land’ – which is understood to be recognised and protected physically (through the state’s coercive power) but also symbolically (by the discursive legitimation of landholding). Land is naturalised as a self-evident, permanent form of space and as a site of material sustenance, and is thus made conceptually available for appropriation and contestation. It is, in this sense, a form of territory that is extended not only over space and its material contents, but over time, via the norms, codes, and laws that protect its holding. Looking at contemporary issues, then, we can ask, what roles do ‘time’ and permanence’ play in how our institutions govern landholding?

1.8 Conclusion – ‘Everything about human history is rooted in the earth’

‘Everything about human history is rooted in the earth’: this profound statement opens a central passage in Edward Saïd’s introduction to Culture and Imperialism (Saïd, 1993, p. 7). Indeed, since the emergence of the oldest sedentary civilisations – or at least those that have recorded their own histories and that imagine the histories of others - controlling more land has always
somehow been seen as useful, desirable, and achievable with the right combination of strategy and force. Even at the extreme frontiers (spatial and temporal; see Blomley, 2003) of recorded history, we find the idea of land deeply embedded into the cultural institutions of sedentary civilisation. This ‘civilised’ notion of land has transcended wholeness by being parcelled, and has subsumed ephemerality by being held according to enduring social institutions. It has transcended conceptual invisibility by being dreamed of, traded, fought, struggled, and negotiated over. However, as with all supposedly ‘permanent’ social things, land’s ‘permanence’ does in fact have its own history, and it has a constructed political structure that is well worth exploring.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that the enactment of landholding as a social institution marks a departure in territorial outlook, from that of more fluid societies whose territories grow, shrink, and move as circumstances dictate, to ones (such as states) that define themselves primarily (though perhaps disingenuously) by the opposite trait: the steadfastness of their territory. The settled ontology of ‘land’, given steadfast ‘permanence’ by legal discourse in an attempt to secure the spatial structure and hierarchy of society, is a central result of this change. It is the freeze-frame of ephemeral territory that allows such divisions to make sense. From the perspective of political theory, this suggests that we cannot examine the particular meanings of land to different groups and in different contexts without examining the particular notion of ‘permanence’ used to secure those contexts.

Secondly, and crucially, while it is taken for granted that by examining the social and spatial contours of land ownership we can trace power and address issues of distributive justice in society, the fact that ‘temporal signposts’ (Shamir, 1996) are used to define ownership suggests that the static condition of ownership is only one piece of the puzzle. To examine land ownership as a static fact, or even as a momentary enactment, as is often done, is simply to examine a territorial moment. Instead, we must try to understand how landholders use and are treated by the institutional codification of landholding over time, because both the idea of land tenure and the functional definition of land itself are founded on selective definitions of permanence by the forces that enact and maintain the institutions of landed property in society. This can mean, among other things, questioning how time is used to gauge output and rent, how temporal limits (measured in various ways) regulate cycles of possession and dispossession, and how linear and perpetual temporal ontologies are used to define and place value on so-called perpetual forms of
landholding (like modern freehold ownership). Whatever power there is in controlling land – and it seems that there is much - it is located as much in these temporal-institutional dimensions as in the spatial arrangements of plots or populations.
2 Paper B – Expectation, commodification, and the market-centric paradigm of land policy

2.1 Introduction

‘Property is nothing but a basis of expectation; the expectation of deriving certain advantages from a thing we are said to possess, in consequence of the relation in which we stand towards it...It is not material, it is metaphysical: it is a mere conception of the mind’ – Jeremy Bentham, *Traité de Législation Civile et Pénale* (Bentham, 1802, cited in Macpherson, 1978, p.51)

‘...there is a cause...to explain the influence of material progress upon the [inequitable] distribution of wealth. That cause is the confident expectation of the future enhancement of land values...which leads to speculation, or the holding of land for a higher price than it would then otherwise bring’ – Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (George, 2008 [1879], p. 255)

This paper briefly interrogates the roles played by expectation in the intertwined doctrines of ‘property rights’, commodification, and market allocation that dominate landholding institutions in the Global North, and that have in recent decades spread to the Global South under neo-liberal development policies. As evinced by the quotes above, ‘expectation’ has a long history in discourses of property rights, tied to utilitarian ideals concerning the appropriation, enclosure, ‘improvement’, and commodification of land (Brace, 2001; Macpherson, 1978). At the heart of expectation is, of course, a particular temporal lens: conception of future time as a place of manifold potential (Paper A). Contemporary ‘property rights’ scholars (de Soto, 2000; Posner, 1998; North & Thomas, 1977; Demsetz, 1967) are as idealistic about the role of such future-orientated potentials as were Bentham and his peers (Rose C. M., 2004; Bromley, 1989).

However, in thinking about the normatively constructive potentials of land, such idealists rarely acknowledge that it is a rather close jump from expectation to speculation – a scourge on land policies that has also been noted since the early days of land commodification (George, 2008 [1879]; Macpherson, 1978). In this paper, I apply the recent observations of Loehr (2012) on the property rights policy doctrines currently fashionable in international development practice, arguing that full commodification of land inadvertently packages more than one kind of temporality in its bundling of property rights as economic ‘benefit streams’. Following Loehr, I put forward a hypothesis that de-commodification via tempering of speculative expectations can
effectively re-channel some of the benefit streams of land use into social development goals. This reflects the conclusions of the preceding paper (Paper A), and sets up the next and final paper of my thesis (Paper C), where I present a case study successful forms of land de-commodification in the East Asian ‘Tiger’ countries following the Second World War.

I begin here with a broad overview of the contemporary and classical liberal property rights doctrines in theory and practice, moving on to discuss the role of tangible and expected benefit streams in those doctrines, and the speculative temporalities embedded within them.

2.2 Private property in market-centric land policy

Theories and practices of land policy today are to a very large degree structured around the connected paradigms of property rights and market allocation (Ingram & Hong, 2009; Hunt & Gilman, 1998). Although neither of these paradigms is in any way new (indeed both were integrally tied to the rise of modernity in Western Europe, circa the 15th to 19th Centuries (Macpherson, 1978)), both have experienced resurgence in their normative influence over the past 30 years, following the thought of an influential field of scholarship known variously as ‘law and economics’, ‘new institutional economics’ or the ‘property rights school’ (Rose C. M., 2004; Hunt & Gilman, 1998; Bromley, 1989; Platteau, 1996). Scholars following this broad tradition have seen economic land value as stemming from highly defined (as presumably individualised and private) property rights (Rose C. M., 2004). They have, variously, proposed ostensibly market-based rationales for the interpretation of property law, advocated for a spread of liberal property rights as a crucial enabler of broad-based economic growth, and condemned policies that avoid, roll back, or limit individualised property rights in general (Radin, 1993).

Moreover, they have often promoted these assumptions as being applicable in a general way, downplaying the importance of local and cultural factors (Sjaastad & Cousins, 2008; Bromley, 1989). The effects of these theories have been particularly notable in the Global South, where mainstream international development doctrine (Deininger, 2003; Deininger & Binswanger, 1999) was, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, quick to catch on to its idealist, hands-off approach to land distribution in place of previous, non-liberal and non-market state-led approaches (Borras Jr, 2007). These influences have re-structured access to and relationships with land for hundreds of millions of the world’s poor in a rather experimental fashion. Meanwhile, states undergoing large-scale reconstruction or political transition over the past 25
years (such as South Africa, Guatemala, and the former socialist states of Eastern Europe) have proven to be tempting testing grounds for advocates of versions of the market-led doctrine (Lahiff, Borras Jr, & Kay, 2008; Kepe, Lewison, Ramasra, & Butt, 2011; Gauster & Isakson, 2008; Stahl, 2012). Sadly, as many independent studies have suggested, the outcomes of these property rights-based policies have in many cases been far from ideal (ibid).

A major component to the idealism of (neo-)liberal property-based approaches to land policy reform stems from neo-classical notions of the functioning of ‘free’ markets (Akram-Lodhi, 2008), which are presumed, when properly delineated, to result in coupling of the benefits and costs of ownership and thus an ‘efficient’ allocation of land to those most ready to use it (Deininger & Binswanger, 1999). Based on a simplistic evolutionary view that sees a thriving market society emerging thanks to the increasing definition and (especially) individualisation of property rights over time (Platteau, 1996), the presumption has been that liberal private property ownership is necessary for the flourishing of ‘civilisation’ in the Western style (Musembi, 2008). Again, this is not a new idea – it was famously articulated in the early days of classical liberalism by theorists such as John Locke and Jeremy Bentham, and used to justify all manner of colonialist dispossessions (Macpherson, 1978; Musembi, 2008); however, the zeal of contemporary policymakers in labelling nearly all non-liberal landholding regimes as ‘market distorting’ (Deininger & Binswanger, 1999, p. 263), and in promoting the equitability and efficiency of liberal property regimes, has been applied with little regard to the intricacies and issues of liberal property theory and practice (Lahiff, Borras Jr, & Kay, 2008; Musembi, 2008). Alternative, non-commodity forms of allocation have meanwhile been written off in wholesale fashion.

### 2.3 Enclosure, alienation and commodification of land in property markets

The expansion of the property- and market-centric paradigm is often referred to as ‘commodification’ – a term that describes combined phenomena such as the detachment of an

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9 Though it should be noted that, following de Soto (2000), policymakers and commentators have been increasingly open to allowing the formalisation of traditional property arrangements (Sjaastad & Cousins, 2008); still, the idealised outcomes of such projects are eventual commodification and capitalisation (Loehr, 2012).
aspect of life from personhood or community (‘alienation’), its categorisation with standard attributes, and its subjection to allocation by ‘market forces’ of supply and demand (Radin, 1993). In Western tradition, this process is seen as being associated with the dismantling of feudalism, the enclosure and appropriation of common lands, and the disintegration of a large number of other traditional land regimes in England beginning in the 15th Century (Linklater, 2013; Buck, McLaren, & Wright, 2001; Powelson, 1988). In place of the customary and reciprocal obligations and the socially-stable (but decidedly illiberal) reality associated with feudal ownership, a new set of mechanisms allowing for the transfer of landed property and for its ‘fungibility’ (interchangeability for money and other standardised commodities) was institutionalised alongside the decline of the feudal system and the rise of capitalism. Together, these processes made the appropriation of land possible by economic means, setting it up a monetarily valuable ‘commodity’ that could be used as a factor of production for the industrial revolution that was just beginning in England (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]). The unprecedented changes involved also opened up considerable uncertainty to those who had relied on access to commonly-owned lands for their subsistence (the majority), ultimately forcing most off of their ancestral lands to seek work in the new urban industrial economy. Although the original events are far in the past, the effects of these changes are felt profoundly today, as they are inherent in the structures and ideals of liberal property regimes, and in the legacies of capitalism and modern political organisation throughout the world (Linklater, 2013); furthermore, both the processes and their effects are being closely mirrored in the present by what Akram-Lodhi calls ‘neoliberal enclosures’ taking place under contemporary development doctrines in the Global South (Akram-Lodhi, 2008, p. 21).

As Radin (1993) notes, the concept of alienation is particularly apt for explaining the commodification process, as it evokes the transformation of land from a habitat and an element of socio-political identity (involving both benefits and duties under many historical landholding regimes and belief systems) into an alienated (detached from personal identity) object subject to market allocation, and sought after mainly for its material benefits. Although many historical and traditional landholding systems can be seen as recognising forms of ‘property’ in land, assigning rights to use, change, and allocation, the construction of land markets requires the packaging of various benefits of landholding, particularly the right of alienation, as ‘property rights’ that can themselves be ‘owned’ and traded (Earle, 1998).
Traditional systems of landholding – particularly systems of common property, as many are - often involve a very large number of overlapping rights, privileges, and duties, which may be difficult for outsiders to understand (Efstratiou & Alphas, 2013; Rose C. M., 2004). As Rose points out, such systems could be seen as ‘limiting commerce’ and preventing commodification of property (evoking the ideal of commodification as something natural and inevitable that will emerge if not ‘prevented’), but more generally they fulfil a protective function in maintaining social and inter-generational communal continuity (Rose C. M., 2004, p. 289). Looking at the differences between the liberal conception of private property and nearly all other historical and extant systems, the private property doctrine is more than anything differentiated by its inclusion of the right of complete alienation in the ownership bundle (Earle, 1998; Hudson, 1998), which removes the primary safeguard on inter-temporal continuity from communal or hierarchical control, and places it in the hands of an idealised individual owner\(^{10}\).

### 2.4 Property’s benefit streams and temporalities of landholding

Reflecting the thoughts expressed in Paper A, I would suggest that alienation and commodification cannot simply be seen as one-time social changes. Just as regimes that codify landholding implicitly reflect notions of time, conceptualising alienation and commodification also requires re-thinking many of the implicit temporalities of landholding regimes. As alienation requires the simplification of complex social systems, so it requires the undoing of the often complex cyclical temporal arrangements that structure traditional systems of access to and exclusion from land (see Ribot & Peluso, 2003; Hudson, 1998). For instance, the seasonal reversions of property rights practiced by the Bedouin discussed in Paper A enable inter-temporal sharing of the benefits and costs of accessing important resources, regulating their use and allowing for social cohesion and harmony while allowing exclusivity at certain junctures where it is deemed most useful (Efstratiou & Alphas, 2013). Indeed, such cyclical temporalities have historically existed on much larger scales as well. Hudson (1998), for example, discusses how periodic cancellation of private property in land and mortgage debt was a hallmark of how ancient sedentary civilisations in Mesopotamia and Rome maintained social stability (see also

\(^{10}\) Of course, private property can be held by more than one person, and private property rights can be distributed in many ways; however, private property differs from common property in that it can be theoretically represented in a single title, and all rights can be alienated as a unit.
Powelson, 1988). The expectation that the state would periodically act in such a way as to limit the wealth inequalities of property markets also structured how people valued landholding in such cases, reducing the tendency for land to be concentrated in the hands of a few (Prisman, 2015). In the next paper (Paper C), I will show how similar changes characterised the land reforms of a number of East Asian countries following the Second World War.

Helpful in conceptualising the temporal dimension of land regimes is Bromley’s notion of property rights as rights to the ‘benefit streams’ of objects and situations (Sjaastad & Bromley, 2000; Bromley, 1989). The imagery of a stream of benefits – by definition inter-temporal – illustrates the role of an expectant gaze towards the future in systems that codify and enforce landholding structures, particularly in societies that subsist off of sedentary agriculture (Paper A). However, it is important to note that the future is not a singular place. Land can provide numerous streams of benefits, both on-going and recurring, and different systems of access and exclusion deal with and allocate these benefit streams differently, both temporally and socially (in terms of who gets access to what benefit stream, and when). Access to the seasonal benefit streams of a particular area of land may, for instance, be in a sense ‘owned’ by a semi-nomadic Bedou family that is entitled to return to it each year during the sedentary growing season, yet in the sense that the land is a communal resource ‘available to all’, it would seem that longer term benefit stream belongs to the tribe as a whole (Efstratiou & Alphas, 2013, p. 146). Further, as discussed in Paper A, in certain social systems the ultimate ‘perpetual’ timeframe of land benefits may be seen as belonging to the metaphysical or spiritual realm, while still allowing the subsidiary allocation of more immediately defined benefit streams (Powelson, 1988). This was the case, for instance, in the periodic redistributions of landholding in ancient Israel (Prisman, 2015; Hudson, 1998).

One of the main effects of the modern property paradigm has been to group together disparate sets of rights and benefits into singular titles, identifying idealised ‘owners’ entitled to the benefit streams of their property over the long term (in theory giving them an incentive to enlarge those benefit streams by ‘improving’ land use) (Rose C. M., 2004; Earle, 1998; Pejovich, 1990; Bromley, 1989). Yet, reflecting on the actual diversity of benefit streams discussed above, it is clear that the packaging of numerous property rights into commodified units for the market in fact has the potential to upend not only the static distribution of access to land amongst members of a group, but also the vast sets of existing and potential ‘benefit streams’ afforded by the land
over time. Not only all of the rights, but also all of the foreseeable and less-foreseeable benefit streams are packaged into a fungible commodity that is supposed to be assessed, traded, and exchanged in a fair and efficient manner.

Combining benefit streams of land into a commodified package in a way that allows (in fact idealises) the possession of all of these existing and expected streams in the hands of an individual owner, often with few obligations but to pay the price demanded at the time of sale, in one sense embodies the longstanding utilitarian rationale for the existence of private property: that if one can be assured of ‘owning the future’ on their land, then they have reason to try and maximise the value of that future by exerting effort now (Rose C. M., 2004; Sjaastad & Bromley, 2000; Bromley, 1989). Yet, there are logical flaws in this seemingly simple argument. On one hand, as a long line of scholars have pointed out, this same reasoning can also apply to communal property, as long as the allocation of benefits and duties is well defined and understood (Hunt & Gilman, 1998; Ostrom, 1990). Further, and less commented on, questions remain as to the temporal extent of foreseeable benefit stream required to incentivise ‘improvement’; the potential of unequal access to foresight and unequal ability to pay for a seller’s longer time horizon; the correlated incentive to speculate on land due to the estimation of more lucrative future ‘benefit streams’; and the impacts on equity and environmental management of all of the above. Looking at commodification of land as individualisation of a wide range of benefit streams – some of which are collectively created – helps to clarify these issues. It also gives an alternative way to frame the issues of market-led land policy (in both the North and the South) outside of the tired ‘public versus private’ dichotomy (Borras Jr, 2007) by diversifying the question of ownership to new dimensions (as demonstrated in the next paper, Paper C of this thesis).

In the next and final section of this paper, I briefly discuss some implications of seeing land ownership in this way in terms of the economic analysis of commodified property, showing that potential speculative impacts are hidden in the way that economic thought considers land value, and leading me to question some key assumptions about the fairness and efficiency of markets in allocating fully commodified land.
2.5 The market conception: commodified property rights as capitalised benefit streams

Although the notion of ‘value’ is highly contested and contingent (Graeber, 2005; Appadurai, 1986), it is central to market-centric discourses of land ownership. In general, value can be said to exist where people seek benefits from things or from social arrangements (Ribot & Peluso, 2003); however, marketisation of land requires that these benefits be formalised in standard discourses in order to lower the ‘costs of transaction’ to a workable level (Coase, 1960). In particular, market trade in land, especially on the large scale of contemporary economies, requires the construction of standardised notions of what land is ‘worth’ – notions of land ‘value’ linked to its alienability and possessibility, and, especially, to the economic potentials embedded in them.

In economic parlance, the benefit streams of landholding are usually condensed into the notion of ‘rent’ (Hubacek & van den Bergh, 2006). Although different streams of economic thought follow different theories of the nature of value, land value (or price) is generally understood to reflect a capitalisation of foreseen rents (generally a net present value) (Hubacek & van den Bergh, 2006; Hammel, 1999). Yet, recalling the discussion above on the existence of multiple benefit streams, the question of expectations, so important to property theory, is not as straightforward as it seems.

Table 1 categorises the collected benefits of landownership by type of temporal outlook, and shows how an approach that constitutes the value of commodified land in terms of rent as a capitalisation of foreseen benefits misses the dynamic (and potentially speculative) expectations enabled under perpetual commodified property rights.

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11 Rent theory can be traced back to the discourses of early classical political economy, in the writings of theorists such as Adam Smith, James Anderson, and David Ricardo, as well as later revisionists such as Karl Marx and Henry George (Hubacek & van den Bergh, 2006).
Table 1 – Property rights in land classified by type of use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two gazes towards the future</th>
<th>Stable benefit streams – Defined timeframe</th>
<th>Dynamic (speculative) benefit streams – Perpetual timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valued by...</td>
<td>Rent as capitalisation of:</td>
<td>Flexibility premium as expected value of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>A: Benefits of using the land in the current way</td>
<td>C: The flexibility to change the use of land at any time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>B: Benefits of leasing land (or opportunity cost of not having to lease elsewhere) at a price based on continuation of the current use</td>
<td>D: The flexibility to sell all other rights (A-C) to the land parcel, at any time, as necessary or convenient. Or, the right to regularly charge more to tenants, capturing all conceivable price increases in perpetuity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 1, and following the analysis of Loehr (2012), the usual conception of rent (as it is typically considered in mainstream economic approaches) does not include consideration for the fact that land ownership, under systems where land is fully commodified and can be held in perpetuity (e.g. freehold), can be valued as much by the subjective expectation of all possible future use and exchange values, as by anything currently foreseeable to buyers and sellers (such as continuation of present use). This creates what Loehr refers to as a ‘flexibility advantage’ granted to landowners in freehold land regimes, reflecting the considerable flexibility that they have to capitalise on their possession of effectively unlimited inter-temporal rights to land, and ultimately privatising the effects of economic growth while creating artificial scarcities of land.

The flexibility advantage places a *premium* (I will adapt Loehr’s terminology and call it a ‘flexibility premium’) on the theoretical ‘net present value’ (capitalised rent) estimation of land price conceived of in neo-classical ideals of market function. This observation is not new; on one hand, it reflects the notion of there being different streams of rent in classical Marxian political economy (Evans, 1999a), while Loehr in fact explicitly bases it off of an emergent approach in financial economics known as ‘real options’ valuation. This financial approach sees ownership of vacant freehold land as similar to a financial ‘real option’ that gives the owner the right – without the obligation – to develop or rent out their land (Titman, 1985; Dixit & Pindyck, 1994).

As Lee and Jou (2010) summarise,
‘The real options model emphasizes [that] … 1) the future rewards associated with the development of vacant land are stochastic, and 2) the costs associated with the development of vacant land are irreversible, mainly because of land use regulation. In particular, the real options model suggests that the interaction between uncertainty and irreversibility confers upon developers an option value of waiting, and that this option value affects developers’ choices regarding the timing and density of development.’

[Emphasis added]’ (Lee & Jou, 2010, p. 162)

This provides theoretical reasoning for the existence of land speculation, which pure neo-classical theory considers irrational and thus of negligible effect. Interesting, and worthy of further study, is the unlikely synthesis thus unwittingly formed between Marxian political economy and contemporary financial analysis (Evans, 1999a; 1999b), reflecting shared recognition that freehold ownership of land grants the landlord not only a right to develop, demand rent, or to sell and capture the increment of investment, but also a tangible value of flexibility stemming from “the power…to withdraw his [sic] land from cultivation” (Marx, in Tribe, 1977, p. 80) in order to await possible higher prices. Only orthodox neo-classical and neo-liberal based theories seem to deny the possibility of its existence.

Since the late 1980s, a number of empirical studies of option-based land valuation have validated the fact that traditional neo-classical approaches, which consider only the net present value of tangible future proceeds (i.e. rental incomes), tend to significantly under-estimate the market value (transaction price) of land compared to approaches that acknowledge the indeterminate-yet-salient value of flexibility (Power & Turvey, 2010). This seems to add empirical weight (and from neo-classical finance scholars at that) to the notion of a speculative premium that is not considered in idealisations of land market function. Interestingly, and counter to the argument that markets can fairly allocate land and correct wealth inequalities, it has been shown that, in an uncertain world, access to information and initial wealth position significantly affect the estimation of option value, meaning that those with higher initial wealth are likely to outbid those without, since they can sit on land with a much longer time horizon (Alexander & Chen, 2012) while they wait to capitalise on the many exogenously-created benefit streams of landholding. Of course, this will not be news for those who have studied market-led land policies in practice (Lahiff, Borras Jr, & Kay, 2008). Yet, the macro-level implications of such processes are barely being discussed, either in the North or the South.
Nearly all property-rights based discussions in land policy assume a) that the full set of rights is required for the presumed efficiency benefits of secure property to accrue in society, b) formalisation and security of title must be combined with alienability and capitalisation rights, and c) that these rights must apply simultaneously to the land and the so-called ‘improvements’ (the capital rooted on the land, such as crops or buildings, for which there are better arguments for private titling) (Loehr, 2012). The justice and necessity of being able to capitalise on the full title of the land itself is meanwhile taken for granted. Yet, given the serious questions raised about the importance of original wealth and access to information, the evidence of strong incentives for speculation, and the troubles that this creates for poor farmers and households needing access to land in the present, this approach needs to be revised. Furthermore, it is apt for us to question both the justice and effectiveness of privatising (via titling) the perpetual, dynamic stream of benefits associated with land value. As has been pointed out by others, many of these benefits are essentially products of collective processes (Lefebvre, 1979; George, 2008 [1879]; Gottdiener, 1985) and of the state’s guarantee of perpetual property rights, rather than of individual ‘industriousness’ or ‘improvement’.

Above all, the fact that such valuation is now explicitly acknowledged in the management literature (read by institutional and professional land investors) and that studies in such literature have empirically verified the presence of an ‘option premium’ on land (what I call the flexibility premium) hints that political economic analyses of land market (dis)functioning would be wise to consider the impact of inter-temporal expectation on landowner behaviour more closely. The current simplistic notion of how market actors value land likely misses much of the incentive for speculation and related price gouging, contributing to the naivety of market-centric approaches. These conclusions also suggest a larger role for policies that remove some of the inter-temporal flexibility of landholding, and that re-channel some of the benefit streams of land use away from private hands into collective goals, as will be discussed in the next and last paper of this thesis (Paper C).

2.6 Conclusion and bridge to Paper C

In the preceding paper (Paper A), I engaged with a broad theoretical look at the institutionalisation of landholding in sedentary life, using the lens of temporality to explore the practice of institutionally codified landholding. A central outcome of my discussion in that paper
was to explicitly relate the institutionalised allocation of land to landholders – which is by definition an inter-temporal phenomenon - to the institutionalisation and change of ontologies of temporality and ‘permanence’. In a basic sense, this could involve ideas of inter-temporal investment in agricultural production, while in a more advanced sense I hypothesised that this would be reflected in the temporal regulation of landholding, and the management of forms of land tenure and landed property.

In this paper, I extended that discussion, discussing its relevance to the idealisation of land as it is pictured by the market-centric discourses of present day land policy. Reviewing the market paradigm of commodified land (which informs current practice in land policymaking, particularly in international development) in terms of the assignment of inter-temporal benefits, I discussed how the inter-temporal flexibility granted by full commodification of land (ownership of a full suite of private property rights) packages numerous benefit streams with multiple horizons into a seemingly monolithic commodity. I concluded by noting that the theoretical consolidation of various rights and inter-temporal benefits into a capitalisation as ‘rent’ (reflecting typical economic parlance) obscures its complexity, preventing real analysis of the temporal dimension of benefit distribution and distributive justice by hiding an embedded speculative component present when land is fully commodified.

The commodification of land – always incomplete and often contested – is an on-going process and is therefore subject to debate and revision (Li, 2014, pp. 2-3). With that in mind, I have used this paper in part to set up the discussion for the last paper of this thesis (Paper C), which explores the case study of alternative, de-commodified land regimes. There, I discuss the two models of land reform undertaken in the East Asian ‘Tiger’ countries following the Second World War. My suggestion is that de-commodification in part tempered the speculative element of private landholding in those cases.
3.1 Introduction

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, while mainland China was undergoing waves of Maoist transformation and other East Asian countries were shaking off painful legacies of colonialism, the war-torn countries of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, as well as the poor city-states of Singapore and Hong Kong (British territories until 1959 and 1997, respectively), experienced what has been described as “miraculous” economic growth, alongside broad improvements to social equity and political stability. Since that time, scholars and policymakers have displayed great interest in examining how these proverbial ‘Tigers’ (World Bank, 1993) managed to shed rather deep legacies of impoverishment and unrest so rapidly, and in ways that many other countries have found more difficult. Numerous duelling studies have attempted to claim the ‘Tiger’ successes for the causes of, broadly, elements of either state-led industrial policy or laissez-faire capitalism, but with mixed success. In some cases, cultural and circumstantial factors have been credited. All of these views have their own shortcomings.

In the context of such heated historical debate, agreement on general policy lessons has been notably difficult to achieve. Still, attempts have been made, and agreement has coalesced around the importance of a strong state in certain policy areas and at certain points in time, even amongst some traditional advocates of the laissez-faire approach (see Nayar (2012), Padin (2003), or Dollar and Sockoloff (1994), discussing World Bank (1993), for a good overview).

It is important to note that these growth stories are not free of blemishes; in some cases, forms of inequality have persisted, the progress of democracy has wavered, and economic performance has disappointed. Yet, there can be little doubt that they have all achieved remarkably rapid, broad-based development to a degree that sets them apart from most of their contemporaries.
One of those policy areas, and the one with which this paper is concerned, is the distribution of landholding.

For many years it has been observed that equality in landholding can have a major influence on early stage development, improving the productivity of agriculture, the economic and social health of rural populations, and the availability of endogenous funds for investment; this correlation has played a major role in analyses of the ‘Tiger’ story. Some particularly notable studies (e.g. Griffin, 2002; Kay, 2002) have even gone so far as to classify early, decisive, and radical land reform as a primary takeaway of the East Asian growth miracles, a theory that has received empirical support (Mo, 2003). Still, distributive land policy is understood to be only a partially applicable model vis-à-vis other strategies. Certainly, land reform per se is typically only discussed with respect to three of the five ‘Tiger’ cases – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan – the only ‘Tigers’ in which classical redistributive land reforms occurred. But this, I believe, is only superficially true.

In fact, for a variety of political and economic reasons, all five of the original ‘Tiger’ states implemented what could be called state-led land reforms in the post-War period, only they did so in two different ways, tuned to their particular rural and urban contexts. In this paper, I describe those two land reform models and outline their remarkable results. What I find in all five cases, despite differing contexts, motivations, and implementations, is a similar approach to the allocation of land wealth as a socially ‘embedded’ (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]) institution, rather than as a pure commodity (a philosophical approach notably complemented by doses of political calculus and Cold War realpolitik). As we will see, the celebrated success of these policies, under capitalism and in both rural and urban contexts, points to a much wider role for land reform than is generally conceded.

3.1.1 Land ‘embeddedness’ and social stability

This article is founded on a holistic view of landholding as an institution that is embedded in, and ultimately inseparable from, its social, economic, environmental, and political contexts. In this, my reasoning follows the historical institutionalist approach epitomized by the economic historian Karl Polanyi, who made the interaction of economic and social institutions central to his historical analyses. I begin with a word on his approach.
In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]) argued that the *disembedding* of land (as well as labor and money) from the bonds of moral tradition, and its epistemological transformation into a “fictitious commodity” for sale, had been not only a progenitor of economic growth, but equally a root cause of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries’ major tragedies - depression, revolution, fascism, and war. According to this theory, the disembedding and commodification of life’s essentials unleashed a “double movement” of violent oscillation between two naïve ideals: a purely rational ‘market society’ on one side, and a society ruled wholly by morals and traditions on the other. Although classical liberals predicted that the former would inevitably prevail, Polanyi saw the “counter-movement” reactions to it as equally natural, and thus he saw a society ruled by totally free markets as being essentially self-destructive to liberalism itself.

In this story, land played a major part. Despite their inherent inequality and exploitative nature, ancient social relations nearly always included reciprocal obligations between landlords and peasants, structuring a sense of predictability and moral orientation, repressive as it was. Yet, in the course of a few short generations, these structures were rapidly transformed by the creation of idealized “free” factor markets, and this raised its own problems. The construction and enforcement of economic systems presumed to supersede moral and social tradition provided a convenient excuse for powerful groups and individuals to extricate themselves from their historic social obligations and to act in favor of their individual interests only. Though this sowed popular unrest, it also angered and emboldened traditional elites, creating two powerful audiences for radical ideologies like communism and fascism, with infamous consequences (Linklater, 2013).

Though Polanyi’s analysis was focused on European history, it is very easy to apply his logic to pre-War East Asia as well. There as in Europe, the politics of a number of countries – most notably imperial power and future aggressor Japan and its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan – were dominated by complex post-feudal power structures that had experienced rapid upheaval due to global economic change. According to many accounts, inequality in rural landownership was the primary source of social and economic unrest in the countries of East Asia, and it fed directly into the rises of fascism and communism there (Linklater, 2013). With such memories fresh after the War, it is no surprise that land reform became a central plank of post-War political and economic reconstruction for the region’s new regimes.
3.1.2 Agrarian reform and beyond

Although most of East Asia experimented with land reform in the post-War period, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan undertook by far the most radical actions outside of the communist sphere (Rosset, Patel, & Courville, 2006; Putzel, 1992), for a variety of reasons that we will explore. With direct American backing and support, these countries—which were heavily reliant on small-scale agriculture—all undertook massive land redistribution programs. Among other things, the reform programs seized and redistributed massive amounts of agricultural land at below-market prices, imposed and enforced strict regulations on rents and lease terms, and restricted the amount of land that any family or individual could own, effectively ending absentee landlordism in the countryside (Ladejinsky, 1970).

Despite controversy over the confiscatory methods of radical reform and state-led redistribution, it has become accepted wisdom that the ‘Tigers’ post-War land programs, as hoped, did help to significantly improve both equality and productivity in the countryside - no mean feat considering that the rural poor made up the majority by a wide margin at that time (Tai, 1974; Ladejinsky, 1970; Pak, 1970; Yoo, 1968). More specifically however, it has long been argued by economists that this equalization and enhancement of land wealth was one of the foremost preconditions for later increases in domestic productivity and capital investment in the ‘Tiger’ countries, allowing for the widespread and widely shared growth for which they became famous (Mo, 2003; Griffin, Khan, & Ickowitz, 2002; Kay, 2002; Alesina & Rodrick, 1994; Adelman, 1979; Pak, 1970; Yoo, 1968; Johnston & Mellor, 1961).

Altogether, countless studies have cited the post-War land reforms of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in a favourable light. Indeed, even those (such as the World Bank) who have consistently opposed the mechanisms of radical reform have nonetheless emphasized at least in principle the central role of broad land distribution in early development (World Bank, 1993). Meanwhile, in comparison to the rather disappointing results of more conservative policies (Musembi, 2007; Ho & Spoor, 2006; Bourbeau, 2001; Rosset, Patel, & Courville, 2006), the ‘Tigers’ post-War reforms have continued to look rather impressive. Thus, there would seem to be a strong argument for using their radical post-War policies as a template for land reform in the rural Global South, as many have called for (see Griffin et al, 2002, for a good overview of this perspective) – and I generally agree.
Yet as Borras (2015; 2007) has convincingly argued, the call for ‘land reform’, while well founded, should not be oversimplified. This isn’t to argue that radically redistributive forms of land policy are wrong or unnecessary; in fact, the post-War experiences of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have demonstrated that massive, state-led land redistribution, where conditions are ripe, can both co-exist with and set the stage for massive advances in social, political, and economic development under capitalism. But this perspective too often leads us to reify the superficial *mechanism* of redistribution (a one-time action, useful as it may be) over the underlying *principle* that equitable land distribution matters (which is necessary for reforms to be effective over time). It is indeed this principle, and the state’s role in guarding it, that stands out in the two different models of land policy applied in the post-War Asian ‘Tigers’.

### 3.2 Two models of state-led land reform in the five original ‘Tigers’

As Borras (2007) discusses, nominal land reforms that do not activate the principle of real wealth distribution may achieve little in practice, while those that do not fit the mould of typical agrarian reform can sometimes still lead to good outcomes. Too often, he argues, fixation on “the official and static” dichotomy between private and public property (Borras Jr, 2007, p. 9) prevents other forms of tenure, such as state landownership or leasehold, from being considered in scholarship and policy. Arguably, the various successful implementations of distributive land policy in the post-War Asian ‘Tiger’ countries – including the city-states Singapore and Hong Kong – demonstrate just this: multiple models of land reform can indeed achieve exceptional results, and all can coexist with economic growth. As shown in Table 2, after carrying out their massive and radical mid-century land reforms, four of the five classical ‘Tiger’ countries ranked in the top tier of landholding equality (Frankema, 2010)\(^\text{13}\), even as they stood out as capitalist development case studies (World Bank, 1993).

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\(^{13}\) The land Gini coefficient of the fifth ‘Tiger’, Hong Kong, has not been investigated, probably because all land is nominally owned by the state; however, I argue later that the applications of land value capture and state ownership towards social spending also constitutes meaningful land reform in an urban context like Hong Kong’s.
Table 2 – Interventions in landholding and post-reform Gini Coefficients of land distribution in the Five ‘Tigers’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Extent of Land Redistribution</th>
<th>Land Gini Rank, Late 20th Century (Frankema, 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>State ownership extended from 44% to 76% of all land and redistributed as public housing to 86% of total population [1]</td>
<td>1st (most equal – includes publicly-built apartment housing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>65% of agricultural land (private and public) re-distributed to 77% of the rural population [2]</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>48% of agricultural land (private and public) re-distributed to 48% of the rural population [2]</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>33% of agricultural land (mostly private) re-distributed to 70% of the rural population [2]</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>All land already owned by state; public housing extended to 40% of the total population [1] and land rents used for social and infrastructure spending</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For the sake of simplicity, we can trace two patterns of state-led land policy in the ‘Tiger’ countries during the decades after the war. In Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, land reform followed the well-understood path of mandatory, state-led redistribution of agricultural land, with widely noted success. These programs, more than any other, have set the standard for agrarian reform under capitalism (Griffin, Khan, & Ickowitz, 2002). Singapore and Hong Kong, however, followed a policy path less known to land reform scholars. In fact, with miniscule and unimportant agrarian sectors and largely urban economies, they are generally not seen as having had land reforms in the first place! Yet although these supposedly ‘laissez-faire’ city-states did not undergo agrarian reforms, as in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, their state-led land policies are still unusual, and have in a number of ways been radically redistributive compared to those elsewhere in the capitalist world (Haila, 1999). Given the high levels of land wealth redistribution accomplished (directly via housing in Singapore, and via more convoluted means in Hong Kong), I argue that their policies should also be considered as types of land reform, in
the sense of being real transfers of land-based wealth, as Borras (2007) has stipulated. The implication is that land reform was common across the ‘Tiger’ cohort.

In the next two sections I detail the national contexts in which these two forms of land policy have been implemented. Later, I argue that the salient pattern across them is a socio-political compact in which the state has protected key elements of land’s social function in the context of laissez-faire capitalism. Looking for common elements in the two approaches, I discuss potential channels by which this compact has succeeded in fuelling growth, beyond oft-discussed agrarian ones. Lastly, I discuss more recent divergences that have emerged between the five countries, highlighting the importance of institutionalization in securing the legacies of land reform.

3.2.1 Redistributive Land Reform: Japan, Korea, and Taiwan

In Japan and its former protectorates Korea and Taiwan, post-War conditions were ripe for major changes in the distribution of land. Historic grievances over inequality were returning to the fore, and new regimes understood that they faced competition from the communist alternative being shaped all around. With these realities known, a temporary surge of support for radical agrarian reform in the American reconstruction bureaucracy gave new leaders ideological support, political immunity, and a correspondingly strong ability to impose their will on the defeated ruling class (Putzel, 1992, pp. 67-78). The transformations that ensued not only stand out as some of the most rapid and extensive implementations of land reform in the history of agrarian change, especially notable since they were not carried out under socialism – on the contrary, they stood out from the anti-socialist ethics of both the states and their American backer (Rosset, Patel, & Courville, 2006).

Japan:

In Japan, ancient paternalistic feudal relations involving powerful Samurai landlords had, by the start of the 20th Century, given way to a more centralized system in which agriculture was taxed heavily to fuel an industrial drive by the Meiji government, following the model of Bismarck Germany (Johnston & Mellor, 1961). Despite a number of half-hearted attempts at peasant land titling and at market-led reforms (which were easily subverted by powerful landowners (Kowagoe, 1999)) the traditional hierarchical relationship between tenants and landlords still guided socio-economic relations, even as the landlords’ traditional obligations to the peasants
disappeared. In this context, as broader economic troubles mounted in the interwar period, large landlords adopted an increasingly “parasitic” role in demanding high rents from already-impooverished tenant farmers and indebted part-owners, who together made up around 70% of the rural population (Kowagoe, p. 50). This led to a rapid increase in social unrest, as peasants traditionally protected by paternalistic social norms came into conflict with landlords who were growing more and more concerned about their own economic positions. Since peasants had the least social protection, disputes between landlords and the state inevitably trickled down into disputes between farmers and landlords over tenancy rights and rents (Ladejinsky, 1939).

Eventually, both the landowners – many of whom were high-ranking military officers – and the peasantry grew frustrated with this tumultuous status quo, and they threw their support behind the rise of a fascist imperial expansion policy promising to restore Japan’s economic power (Ladejinsky, 1939). The world is familiar with the consequences of this choice, yet its origins in rural inequity are too often forgotten. Few know, for example, that Japanese fascism was built on the economic transformation of a feudal agrarian structure stripped of the social norms of mutual obligation (Linklater, 2013).

After Japan’s defeat in the War, the Japanese Diet (parliament) again began to discuss agrarian reform, in part because of intense food shortages (Kowagoe, 1999) and in part because the anger of the impoverished rural majority was on the verge of boiling over once again (Ladejinsky, 1970). As the Diet dithered due to strong resistance by conservative elements representing influential landowners (an often fatal obstacle to land reforms), the American occupiers stepped in and insisted on a radical solution, on the principle that there could be “no firmer foundation for a sound and moderate democracy and no firmer bulwark against the pressure of an extreme philosophy” than radical redistribution of land (General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied occupation forces, quoted in Kowagoe, 1999, p. 29).

The subjugated Japanese government was in no position to resist these orders, and the bureaucracy was well equipped to carry out the actions (Ladejinsky, 1970). What followed was, in MacArthur’s bombastic words, “…the most successful land reform program in history” (Kowagoe, 1999, p. 29). Exaggerated words aside, the results were indeed striking. By the end of the reforms, one-third of all agricultural land had been compulsorily seized from landlords (at below-market rates) and redistributed to over 70% of the rural Japanese population (Ladejinsky, 1970; Kowagoe, 1999). The percentage of farmers who completely owned their land more than
doubled, and the number of absentee landlords was reduced to nearly zero (Kowagoe). These results were further cemented by the adoption of radical restrictions on landlordism and on corporate ownership of agricultural land, which effectively ended both activities. To this end, General MacArthur asserted that “the benefits of the reform must become a permanent part of the texture of Japanese rural society” (Kowagoe).

Eventually, institutions such as village councils that had been established to help carry out the land reforms evolved, and they played a key role in supporting the new, democratic constitution. In effect, the village councils formed a political pact with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in which it promised to safeguard the equitable results of land reform for many years (Kowagoe, 1999; Linklater, 2013). The legacy of these reforms for Japan has thus not only been economic development (since industrialization began long before the war) but the emergence of participatory rural politics and relatively even growth in a country where previous rounds of state-led industrialization had benefitted only select groups (Linklater, 2013). Land reform was required in order to bring the benefits of economic growth to the service of social stability.

**South Korea:**

The pattern of post-war land reform in South Korea, also under American-led occupation after the Japanese retrocession in 1945, reflected Japan’s experience closely (Linklater, 2013). Initially, the interim South Korean government proposed radical land reforms similar to those being proposed by communists in the North (but with redistribution as an end-goal rather than collectivization); however, as in Japan, the debate over reform was controversial and conservative elements in society blocked its implementation (Pak, 1970). Then, in 1950, as hostilities with the North opened and communist support quickly blossomed, the newly elected government in the South panicked, and with direct American backing, accelerated the pace of reform drastically in order to win over the allegiance of the rural poor.

Prior to the reforms, 50% of Korean farming families did not own the land that they worked, and a further 35% were bonded by crushing rent and debt obligations (Pak, p. 355). By the end of the civil war, this situation was all but history, as agricultural landholdings in the South above a seven-hectare ceiling (including lands abandoned by Japanese landlords) were being expropriated by the state and immediately redistributed to the rural peasant majority, who had often farmed them already as tenants. Furthermore, substantial state landholdings, formerly held
by the Japanese, were distributed to those who were not covered by the private redistributions. By 1965, the percentage of rural households who owned the lands that they tilled had risen to nearly 70%, and rural landlordism had been completely abolished via strict reforms to leasehold regulations. Within 15 years, the bonds that had long obligated rural Koreans to their landlords had been broken, longstanding farm debts reversed, and a new set of reciprocal obligations with the state established. Subsequently, over the latter half of the 20th Century, South Korea was rated as having the second-most equal land distribution in the world (Frankema, 2010) while it also experienced one of the world’s highest growth rates. Given the country’s long post-War history of authoritarian rule, a direct link between this and democratization seems tenuous; however, it is clear that equitable wealth distribution clearly played an enabling role in the spread of public political participation (Linklater, 2013).

Taiwan:

The defeat and subsequent occupation of Japan spelled the end of Japanese rule over Taiwan as in Korea. After 1949, following the expulsion of the Japanese, two million Chinese nationalists (following the Kuomintang movement) fled the mainland and established a state in exile on Taiwan island. The government, though autocratic, was particularly interested in land rights. This interest stemmed from a few sources. First, the importance of just land distribution had been mythologized in the writings of the movement’s late founder Sun Yat Sen, and thus it had an ideological basis. Secondly, land reform was seen by the Kuomintang as a useful strategy to court the rural poor population away from communism (Chinese Delegation, 1966), and the regime’s American advisors supported it on these terms. Finally, and rather less magnanimously, the reforms were seen as a good way to weaken the middle-class landlord groups that happened to be opposed to the Kuomintang’s rule (Apthorpe, 1979).

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14 Dr. Sun Yat Sen was a well-known follower of the ideas of the American political economist Henry George, who argued that land values should be collected for the good of society, in contrast to capital profits, which he regarded as legitimate returns on investment ideally left in private hands. Georgist thought may indeed have inspired the Taiwan reforms, but in their implementation these reforms more likely followed the methods applied by German colonial administrator Wilhelm Schrameier in Qingdao (Loehr, Shihe, & Li, 2014).
The suite of land reforms carried out in Taiwan occurred in three stages, beginning with mandatory rent controls, evolving into distribution of public lands to peasants (giving them private ownership), and concluding, most notably, with a “land to the tiller” programme broadly similar to the experiences in Japan and South Korea (ibid). Not just the latter, but rather all three of these stages had real effects on wealth distribution. Whereas tenant farmers had been charged an average of 50% (and sometimes 70%) of their harvest, and had often been obligated to their landlords in other ways prior to the reforms, by 1964 86% of farm households owned their land, and those who did not paid no more than 37.5% of their income in rent, with no other feudal obligations (ibid). Farmers who received redistributed land were asked to pay no more than this rental rate to the government in ‘mortgage’ instalments and taxes over 10 years\(^{15}\). As in Japan and South Korea, market-controlling regulations were enacted to cement the results of the land reform and to ensure that land remained widely and equitably distributed.

It should be noted, as Putzel (1992) discusses, that the beliefs that shaped Japan’s South Korea’s, and Taiwan’s radical reforms dominated American foreign policymaking only temporarily, representing at best an influential minority of the American bureaucracy eventually silenced by dominant conservative elements. In these cases, the ‘liberty’ of an unrestricted free market in land, seemingly a cornerstone of American values, had been usurped by pragmatism and politics. But despite its clearly positive results, this pragmatism did not survive long, and American appetite for radical land reform waned by the time the U.S. became embroiled in South Vietnam (Lin, 1970). In other American protégés like the Philippines, it was decisively dismissed (Putzel, 1992). Due to the growing influence of absolutist liberal, free-market, and anti-socialist dogma in the United States, by the late 1960s, actions in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan that had been supported two decades prior were no longer deemed acceptable (Linklater, 2013). With the benefit of hindsight, one wonders to what extent this hardening of ideology has precluded the emergence of other development success stories within the American sphere of influence.

\(^{15}\) However, as Apthorpe (1979) and Kay (2002) have noted, the government in many ways replaced the landlord class in ‘squeezing’ agricultural surpluses from the peasantry. They did this mainly by imposing monopolies on agricultural inputs, and mandating low prices for produce. Still, Kay sees the state’s interventions in agriculture up to the 1970s as having provided the necessary conditions for industrialization via increased rural equality and productivity.
3.2.2 State Control of Land Supply: Singapore and Hong Kong

Whereas Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan had significant rural-agricultural populations in the 20th Century, making the majority of their citizens directly dependent on access to farmland and harvests, Hong Kong and Singapore were already mostly urban, and experienced population growth mostly via immigration. Thus, for their citizens, the more relevant aspect of land access has been access to housing and urban infrastructure, and both have been provided for under the city-states’ land regimes. These systems do not qualify as land reform in the traditional sense; however, the fact that they have allowed for the broad distribution of land wealth (in terms of housing access and redistributed rents) undeniably links them to the theme. Recognizing this is simply recognizing that land wealth means different things in different contexts.

Singapore

Singapore’s main land-policy achievement has been the provision of near-universal housing, which has been achieved via expansion of state landownership. In the 1960s, faced with high levels of poverty and a crisis of slum housing, and without an agricultural hinterland where poor refugees could seek subsistence and housing, Singapore’s post-colonial government made an executive decision to pursue homeownership as a cornerstone of social and economic development policy (Field, 1987; Phang, 2001; Phang, 2007). Yet instead of simply granting land titles to slum dwellers or providing incentives for home purchasing on the free market (as the neo-liberal version of such reforms has done in the UK and elsewhere), the state actually increased its role in the land market, using its significant expropriative powers expanded under the 1966 Land Acquisition Act (Motha & Lim, 1980), to redistribute much of the island’s land in the form of publicly-constructed housing. Housing was made available at every income level as a key social benefit – a policy of ‘decent housing for all’ – while the state otherwise spurned ‘welfare state’ ideals (Phang, 2007). The result was that, by the 1980s, over 85% of Singapore’s population lived in publicly built housing, (Phang, 2001), and this figure has since remained relatively constant.

Singapore’s public housing drive can be distinguished from both the capitalist and the socialist models (Chua, 2012). Firstly, as compared to the laissez-faire model, it was decided that land itself should not be owned outright by individuals or corporations, since it was already scarce and could provide a means for accumulating undue power and fomenting unrest. Singapore’s
government already owned 44% of the land on the island as a colonial legacy, which it had leased to individuals and businesses on terms of up to 99 years. The state decided to expand this practice, and on the principle that empty land should be a public good and not an investment good, it expropriated a further 30% of the land on the island from private landlords, paying rates which explicitly excluded speculative profits (and were therefore essentially confiscatory). What has differentiated this policy from the socialist model is an arrangement in which housing units themselves are routinely ‘sold’ to tenants on long-term leases, creating a private market for publicly-constructed apartments (some of them unsubsidized and quite luxurious). Yet, in contrast to the privatizations of public housing that have taken place elsewhere under neo-liberal reforms, this arrangement is not about the release of land from state ownership, but rather the sale of functionally and temporally defined leases from the state. Although privately-owned public housing apartments can be bought and sold on the open market, lease provisions make it very difficult to use those apartments for anything other than owner-occupancy, and speculative landlordism is further discouraged by the time-limited nature of leases (which are not normally renewed on transfer of title). Singapore does have a relatively open market for housing choice, with buyers free to choose between locations and apartment types, but most of the land itself is allocated by state bodies, and clearly not open to private investment or speculation. Further, with land development often initiated by state-owned companies, and purchases regularly financed via citizens’ mandatory, state-managed savings according to strict limits on the ratio of cost-to-income, both the supply- and demand-side fundamentals of the housing market are routinely manipulated in order to control the price of entry-level housing. Analogous arrangements are made for commercial and industrial floor space. In effect, this means that built space is treated as a tradable (though supply-managed) commodity, while land (which is widely understood to be precious and limited) is not. Questions of economic freedom aside, this system has been regarded as highly successful at ensuring universal access to housing (Phang, 2007; Doebele, 1987), and it has formed a cornerstone of Singapore’s social welfare and political legitimacy strategies for decades (Chua, 2012; Phang, 2007).

**Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is similar to Singapore in that the state retains ownership title to nearly all land (Lai, 1998); as in Singapore, private ‘ownership’ of land actually entails possession of a time-limited lease. Unlike Singapore, however, Hong Kong allocates not only finished units, but also raw land
(both redevelopment and new development) via a competitive process in which private
developers bid for the right to develop this land and re-market residential or commercial
condominium leases. Over time this arrangement has led to the emergence of a powerful
development oligopoly, which is usually able to outbid smaller players (Choy, 2013) and is
widely reviled by the public. Nonetheless, there are two important elements to Hong Kong’s land
ownership system that point to a level of social ownership of land. First is the fact that, as the
ultimate landowner, the state is able to retain and develop whichever lands it chooses at no direct
cost, for social services such as public housing; indeed, 40% of the population (a very large
proportion in the capitalist context) live in public housing that the state has built on its own land,
and as in Singapore housing is a key social benefit. Second, and more central to my argument, is
the collection of revenue from land development. As both Choy and Haila (2000) point out, the
fact that the state collects a large portion of its revenue from land-development auctions, lease
renewals, and rent payments, has allowed it to maintain extremely low tax rates on both labor
and capital (a *laissez-faire* dream) while providing universal public services such as education,
healthcare, and the aforementioned social housing. Indeed Hong Kong’s high land rents, while
no doubt influenced by market dynamics, are habitually appropriated by the state, and are to a
large degree re-distributed in social services and public infrastructure – the ‘Henry George
theorem’ in practice (Phang, 2001). Of course, how this re-distribution is allocated depends
largely on the responsiveness of the authorities to public needs, and recent experience has shown
that Hong Kong’s democratic responsiveness is far from perfect. However, despite relatively
high levels of income inequality and a democratic deficit, the stable funding of high-quality
public services (including public housing) have helped the state maintain high standards of
human development, and remarkable political stability (Choy, 2013)\(^\text{16}\). The fiscal capacity of the
state to achieve this despite low levels of direct taxation is largely attributable to Hong Kong’s
socialization of land wealth.

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\(^{16}\) Also notable is the fact that the state is able to control the total amount and characteristics of residential and commercial floorspace on the market by writing specific development quotas into land tenders (what Lai calls “planning by contract”) (Lai, 1998). This, in theory, gives the state a strong lever of control over housing availability. However, evidence shows that the Hong Kong authorities have been less successful than Singapore in employing this lever.
3.3 De-commodification and de-capitalization in the ‘Tigers’

Beyond the superficial mechanisms of land policy, how are we to view the commonalities between all five of the above cases? Certainly all have employed the power of the state to radically affect the distribution of land and land wealth. They have also both strived for and achieved remarkable levels of social and political stability, largely due to their success in distributing the crucial affordances of land – either agriculture, housing, or land rents – widely by policy means. Clearly then, these countries’ approaches have reflected a view that land allocation is best done outside of the market system, at least initially. This is a view of land as a resource ‘embedded’ in larger socio-political systems, rather than as a pure commodity.

The term ‘de-commodification’ is perhaps most easily applied to the city-states, as Chua (2012) has argued for Singapore specifically. To those who believe that these countries are models of laissez-faire economic doctrine, the centrality of this principle is conveniently ignored. In both Hong Kong and Singapore, British colonial rule left common-law land systems modified with substantial state power, in that ‘private’ land for development or use could often only be leased from the state, not owned outright. In Singapore in particular, eminent domain laws requiring full market compensation for expropriated land were purposefully lifted in the mid-1960s in order to fulfil the newly elected regime’s promise of ‘decent housing for all’ (Phang, 2007), a clear rejection of free market fundamentalism. Hong Kong has also explicitly employed state ownership of its lands to allow for affordable housing provision, but to a lesser degree (‘only’ 40% of Hong Kong’s citizens live in public housing, to Singapore’s 85%). However, it has also redistributed land wealth indirectly, by channelling its land rents into social service and infrastructure provision.

In any case, it is clear that these states have not approached land as the ‘commodity’ that it is viewed as in liberal economic doctrine (Haila, 2000; Chua, 2012); rather, land here is explicitly a public good, and the state’s administration of it creates a unique set of obligations and

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17 In terms of the ‘bundle of sticks’ commonly used to describe property rights in land ownership, in the public leasehold model the state keeps back certain sticks and apportions the rest as leases, which are then marketed. Importantly, control over which of these rights can be traded as commodities, and which are maintained by the state for socio-political purposes, make the land ‘markets’ in Hong Kong and Singapore quite restricted.
responsibilities. Both city-states have used public housing as a major component of their overall social harmony strategies, and both have used revenues from their virtual land monopolies to provide other aspects of social welfare (Phang, 2001). Remarkably, this has all taken place within the highly – and some would say radically – capitalist contexts of two cities known for their free market credentials. Clearly then, land allocation in these states has been approached as being outside of the role of the market. Land policy seems to have been embedded in and inseparable from social and political policy, as much as economic policy, in Singapore and Hong Kong.

In Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, land reform followed the much more typical model of compulsory redistribution. Here, land policy reflected an approach towards development that emphasized social and political compromise in order to grant stability to the new ruling regimes. It is clear that land was not viewed as being ‘essentially’ a commodity in these cases either, because the market was rejected as an adequate mechanism for its distribution – that had already been tried, and had quite clearly not worked. Further, the post-War land reformers in these countries were not primarily interested in finding a more ‘efficient’ or ‘effective’ way to govern the land market (Lin, 1970) as they would with markets for ‘pure’ commodities, since they were attempting to equalize rural landholding for socio-political and geo-political, rather than economic, reasons. Yet, contrary to the predictions of its ideological opponents, land reform in these countries appears to have gone hand-in-hand with both economic growth and political emancipation for the majority. In these cases, as in the city-states, a free market in land was not considered to be a prerequisite for successful development or democratization under capitalism.

As far as economic mechanisms go, both models can be said to involve wealth transfers that have been directed towards development in other fields. A number of important studies have discussed and debated channels by which land reform led to broader economic growth, and in terms of this, it is the more rural ‘Tigers’ – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan – where the literature has been most clear. Adelman (1979), for instance, discusses how the equalizing effects of agrarian reform can create a level field of competition for small producers who would normally be outbid by larger players in negotiating input and output prices. Once equalization is accomplished, concerted actions to increase agricultural productivity (for example through support and research programs) have the ability to increase production rates widely, rather than on only a few large farms. In another notable study, Winters et al (1998) discuss the important
Role of surplus transfers from agriculture in economic development. As they note, the application of surplus wealth produced by increased agricultural productivity has played a major role in providing investment capital for the export-oriented industries that later came to dominate the ‘Tiger’ economies. Surplus transfer, they discuss, takes a number of forms (visible or invisible, and direct or indirect), which involve not only clear extractions, but also manipulations of agriculture’s terms of trade, the manipulation of food pricing as a subsidy for industry, and others. In particular, Winters et al stress “the fundamental role of flexible product and factor prices to transfer to non-agriculture the benefits of productivity growth in agriculture” (p94).

Other channels include an increased ability for rural families to save, creating endogenous capital for investment, the creation of a new capitalist class of investors amongst dispossessed former landlords, and the freeing-up of agricultural labor for industrial work at globally competitive wages (Griffin, Khan, & Ickowitz, 2002; Kay, 2002).

However, it is not just the agrarian ‘Tigers’, but also the city-states, that have employed transfers of land-based wealth to achieve development goals, and this mechanism is less discussed. In urbanized areas, particularly those experiencing population growth as were mid-century Singapore and Hong Kong, the salient feature of land wealth is usually speculative value based on current and foreseen rents. As described above, the city-states have applied the ‘Henry George principle’ that pubic services can be financed by capturing these increases in land value, which would normally collect in the pockets of landlords and speculators. In Hong Kong for instance, where the state is the ultimate owner of all of the territory’s land, the Hong Kong government captures a large proportion of land value rents, keeping direct taxes exceptionally low for the level of public spending (Phang, 2001). Singapore does this too, and in addition it uses affordable housing as not only a direct subsidy to households, but as a direct and indirect subsidy to industry (affordable housing means that wages go farther). In fact, both states have used the public capture of land rents and the provision of subsidized space to favourably impact their business climates.

As noted above, there were differences in both the pre- and post-reform patterns and systems of landholding across the entire ‘Tiger’ cohort, and the results differed too. Yet, it is the common elements in these countries’ approaches to landholding as a socially important institution to be allocated by non-market means – the de-commodification and social re-embedding of land in
stable systems of mutual obligation beside the rise of capitalism in other economic spheres - that tie these experiences together and make them notable in a global context.

3.4 Legacy and the role of enduring institutions

In a technical critique of the market-based reform theory, Loehr (2012) refers to the titling agenda that reached its apex under the influence of de Soto (2000) and the World Bank as “capitalization by formalization”, an arrangement by which state assurance of private land titles is supposed to lead to the ability of landholders to “capitalize” on their landholding by investing in it securely and using it as collateral for capital borrowing (Sjaastad & Cousins, 2008). This, then is supposed to lead to an allocation of land that is both efficient and fair (Deininger, 2003; Borras, 2006). As Loehr shows, however, it is precisely the idea of “capitalizing” on land – its transformation from shared resource to commodity – that has ironically failed both the poor and the market ideal. Those who trade in land values (as most outright owners of land do) have quickly capitalized on the fact that land is, actually, a finite resource – that to own even a piece of it is to own a monopoly, and that it is worth outbidding small land users simply to hoard land. In reality, then, the free-market privatization of land value has led to the familiar symptoms of rent-seeking, including inefficient land use, unsecure tenure, unstable access, and wealth-biased planning (Loehr, 2012). Urban areas in the Global South have faced similar challenges (Doebele, 1987). As with any scarce resource that is traded freely as a commodity, the temptation of those with greater means to hoard and speculate is strong.
Table 3 – Land ownership model and modes of state intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Predominant Landownership</th>
<th>Dominant Modes of State Intervention</th>
<th>Years of Active Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan [1]</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Redistribution of large private landholdings</td>
<td>1946 – 1950s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea [2]</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Redistribution of large private landholdings; distribution of public landholdings; leasehold reforms</td>
<td>1945 – 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan [3]</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Redistribution of large private landholdings; distribution of public landholdings; leasehold reforms</td>
<td>1949 - 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong [4]</td>
<td>State w/ fixed-term private leases</td>
<td>Control of land supply (to development market); compulsory allocation of land to public housing; land value capture</td>
<td>Enduring institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore [4]</td>
<td>State w/ fixed-term private leases</td>
<td>Land nationalization; Control of land supply (to end-use market) and broad public housing</td>
<td>Enduring institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Borras (2007) has argued that the two key measures of success in land reform policy should be the extents to which it redistributes power and land access, rather than hectares or percentages that may only matter on paper. Table 3 reviews the two models of institutional change in landholding in the five ‘Tiger’ states. Both models of de-commodification – redistribution of land in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, and state management of land in Singapore and Hong Kong - entailed setting boundaries on the ability of markets to affect the distribution of land, and consequently limited the capitalization of land itself. All cases undeniably also impacted access to land in the short term.
As far as the longer-term results, outcomes have been more mixed. While none of the ‘Tiger’ countries have regressed to pre-War states of inequality, the economic troubles experienced most notably by Japan, but also by Taiwan (not to speak of the regional financial crisis in the late 1990s, which involved more complex factors), have clearly not been prevented by the land reforms taken decades earlier. Here we must ask about the role of enduring institutions of land reform, and in that the city-states appear to have the upper hand. As Kay discussed in a landmark article comparing the successes of the East Asian ‘Tigers’ to Latin American countries, timing of reform, in terms of the broader progression of capitalist industrial development, matters a great deal in whether reform will be effective. This is because economic conditions at different stages of industrialization put wholly different pressures on land allocation. In the agrarian post-War ‘Tigers’, the social and economic pressures were clearly on the countryside. However, in urban Hong Kong and Singapore, as in Latin America where industrialization was more advanced, the major pressure lay in housing urban proletariats. This, I believe, is the key to understanding, in economic terms, the shared success of the ‘Tiger’ countries following two models of seemingly different land policy.

Looking at the question as one of economic context or temporal stage, it is evident that land wealth means different things in different places and at different times. An idea of land reform that is not matched with present conditions (e.g. classic agrarian reform in a highly urbanized country) may therefore not be able to effectively achieve the de-commodification and transfer of land wealth (reents, in the form of agricultural surpluses or speculative / growth driven value increases). It may even be that both of these models, or a hybrid of the two, are required in the same country. China, for instance, has adopted elements of Hong Kong’s urban land leasehold system (Haila, 2007) while also enacting ‘land to the tiller’ type reforms in its countryside since the start of its capitalist transformation in the 1980s (Griffin, Khan, & Ickowitz, 2002).

As far as political legacies, meanwhile, profound levels of spatial inequality and tenure insecurity, which marked the pre-reform situation, have been substantially reduced in all five countries. By cementing the security of the rural farming majority on their land in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and by guaranteeing affordable and decent housing to working-class citizens in Hong Kong and Singapore during a period of profound social and economic change, reformist politicians were given the protection of social stability that previous regimes had not had, and this planted the seeds of public engagement. The ‘Tiger’ states had an interest in maintaining
stability, and decision-makers feared the potential of their peoples to turn to either violent conflict or communism. At the same time, this social compact avoided the “bureaucratic collectivism” (Sandbrook, p. 425) of analogous land reforms in neighboring countries that followed the socialist path\textsuperscript{18}. Similar land reforms enacted under the banner of collectivization in states such as China and North Korea, while successfully taking land out of the grasp of oligarchic forces, really only exchanged one type of dis-embeddedness for another by placing land in the hands of political, rather than economic, elites who were unaccountable to the masses and their needs (Sandbrook, 2011). Further, even developmentalist wealth transfer, used to enhance access to housing and social services, has been far more notable in the ‘Tiger’ countries than in their communist neighbors.

3.5 Conclusion: re-embedding land

As Karl Polanyi argued in his historical masterpiece The Great Transformation (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]), economic relations are always to some degree embedded in social, political, and environmental contexts and norms, which affect each other dynamically and which do not always follow the strict laws of ‘the market’. When development occurs in a manner that respects this embeddedness, it can lead to growth that coexists with social and political stability, and an overall “expansion of freedom” (Sandbrook, 2011, p. 423); however, when one aspect, such as a land or labor market, is dis-embedded from the whole and given unique priority to rule over the others, the social, political, and environmental reactions can be both unpredictable and destructive. The inherent tension between different forces in society can, as Polanyi showed, lead to social and economic disasters such as those experiences in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century. As Sandbrook (2011) argues, Polanyi’s dialectical treatment of institutional embeddedness and dis-embeddedness gives us a useful discursive tool by which to evaluate development, allowing us to view it as a process of managing paradoxes and dilemmas, such as those which arise in the operation of a market economy alongside other social institutions. It is this understanding of re-embedding as a process that, while fraught with dilemma and compromise, can lead to greater distributive justice that I ultimately apply to the question of land reform.

\textsuperscript{18} On the roundabout paths to effective land reform in China and Vietnam, see Griffin et al (2002).
While many studies have explored the roles of state-led development or *laissez-faire* capitalism in the East Asian experience, I conclude that the East Asian ‘Tigers’ should also be noted for having embraced the historical role of landholding as a socially embedded institution, amidst a global context that had moved in the opposite direction. Explicitly or otherwise, state administrations that wished to gain legitimacy and to rebuild their societies rejected the idea that land could be both fairly and efficiently managed by liberal markets; instead, they selectively re-embedded the governance of landholding into bigger-picture policies of development. The intentions and results of these policies have of course not been purely progressive in social or economic terms. Yet, I follow scholars such as Kay (2002), Griffin et al (2002), Adelman (1979), Ladejinsky (1970) and others in arguing that they have on the whole spread the benefits of economic development, while supressing the forces of spatial inequity that have accompanied growth elsewhere. Further, I argue that the agricultural bias in land reform literature, while well founded, allows only a partial view of land policy’s role in the ‘Tigers’, because it misses reforms to landholding that don’t fall under the usual definition of “land reform”. It is, as Borras (2015; 2007) has noted, the distribution of *access to* and *power over* land’s affordances that really counts.

Since the experiences and historical circumstances of these particular cases have varied, and since their stories are far from immaculate, we must be cautious about adopting policy lessons that are too specific. We also must not idealize the abilities (or even the intentions) of states to equitably and efficiently allocate access to land; history has shown that the state has its own bureaucratic interests, and indeed a tendency towards uneven influence. Yet access to and control over land’s affordances are prerogatives that fall, even in liberal contexts, under the authority of the state, since it is the ultimate mediator and registrar of landholding. Thus the state has an unavoidable role to play in land reform. Further, research shows that alternatives to state-led reform such as the ‘market led’ land reform approach face no fewer political influences or obstacles (Bobrow-Strain, 2004).

Though dominant thought long ago shifted towards the ideals of voluntary, market-based reforms, in light of the failures of these market-based approaches (Musembi, 2007; Bourbeau, 2001), it is increasingly being argued that we ought to return to the model of radical land reform for the Global South. Study after study has reaffirmed that contextually appropriate state-led land reforms like those undertaken in the ‘Tigers’ indeed play a major role in fuelling and equalizing
growth. In fact, that role is likely much larger than even its own proponents believe, with applicability to the urban, state, and leasehold lands often disregarded in land reform scholarship. That, of course, does not mean that the ‘Tiger’ land reforms can or should be copied directly, because every development challenge has its own context. However, these examples clearly illustrate that the applicability of land reform is much broader than many believe.
Concluding remarks

Discussion

As Karl Polanyi so eloquently wrote in *The Great Transformation*, ‘what we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man’s [sic] institutions’ (Polanyi, 1957 [1944], p. 178). In the most basic sense, this weave is one of mutual survival and coexistence: ‘labour forms part of life, land remains part of nature, life and nature form an articulate whole’ (ibid). And yet, our contemporary relationship to ‘land’ manifests as anything but an articulate whole. Land is home, security, and subsistence, but it is also territory, sovereignty, and power; it is grounds for conflict and dispossession; and it is an asset, a resource, and an investment; by extension, even violent conflicts that are nominally classified as religious, ethnic, or nationalistic tend to feature land as a defining prize and prerequisite to self-determination. The distribution of land amongst people and groups is linked to questions of distributive, environmental, and social justice via all of these channels.

Time – in particular, the speculative idea of parallel possible futures - plays a central role in how land figures into these issues. Indeed, the very idea of capturing, marking, and *holding* land in order to gain from its possession in the future, or to ‘improve’ it for future benefit, would seem to require a conception of time that allows for speculation of future eventualities and needs. This is reflected in the development of ontologies of land in some societies (and in most of the world today) as the kind of thing that can be planned, used, ‘improved’, held onto, transferred, and conquered, with all of the social and environmental impacts that those things entail. Functionally, it has involved the creation of institutions and regimes centred on the demarcation and allocation of land and its many affordances over time. This has become particularly crystallised in the commodification of land under modernity and the ‘market society’ (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]). These are the themes that I have followed in this study.

Review of sections and their conclusions

Landholding and relations around landholding are not only as ancient as the oldest sedentary civilisations – they are a major part of what sets those ways of life apart from other forms of dwelling on earth. *In the first paper (Paper A)*, I framed my project with this in mind, as I interrogated the basic notion that land is ‘worth’ holding. Highlighting the forms of symbolism
intrinsic to sedentary forms of landholding vis-à-vis more fluid (and historically more common) forms of territoriality, I explored the institutionalised notions of time and forward-looking gazes that render institutionalised land regimes thinkable in the first place. I concluded the paper by suggesting that we investigate the roles of temporal ideas (such as time limits and conceptions of time) in structuring and mediating the benefits of landholding in sedentary societies and states.

In the second paper (Paper B), I engaged more directly with contemporary political-economic treatments of land in modern theory and policy, extending the observations from Paper A to challenge the market-centric doctrine of land commodification, and the associated idea of land value as a simple capitalisation of foreseeable ‘benefit streams’. In the paper’s conclusion, I suggested that partial de-commodification could be used to avoid some of the pitfalls mentioned.

Finally, in the third paper (Paper C), I explored the de-commodification of land in practice, using post-WWII land policies in the so-called East Asian ‘Tiger’ economies - Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore – as case studies. In this paper, I noted that, although their landholding institutions have followed different models, all five can be seen as having treated land value as a public benefit, with the state channelling the long-term benefit streams of land value into the maintenance of broad social stability and the formation of economic growth. These experiences provide a challenge to the idea that only a fully commodified and privatised land market can effectively or fairly govern land use and allocation in capitalist contexts.

Recognition of the incredible range of effects associated with inter-temporal landholding is what inspired me to write this thesis – not only for its role in creating the anthropocenes of past and present, but also for the potential of creating alternate, more equitable and stable ones in the future. The present time is indeed an auspicious one in which to be considering and debating such things. In the Global South, existing regimes of landholding are being replaced by constructed property systems and by markets on a massive scale, while large swathes of land, newly identified as ‘resources’ brimming with potential, are being purchased or otherwise appropriated by large multinational investors (and speculators) rushing to capture land’s value in the globalised economy. Meanwhile, in the North, bifurcated realities of increasingly unaffordable housing in prosperous regions, and evaporating household equity and foreclosure in the less prosperous ones, have come to a head in the wake of on-going global financial crises. On a global scale, ecological limits are
being tested as urbanisation progresses at breakneck speed, and as more and more uninhabited land is being converted to anthropogenic uses. At the same time, on-going geopolitical crises, ostensibly based on ethno-national, religious, and economic issues, are, as always, nearly all operating with reference to territory – which, as discussed in Paper A must also be framed in terms of particular ontologies and temporalities of land and landholding.

From a practice confined to a few small corners of the world a mere thousand or two years ago, the conquest and inter-temporal holding of land has come to play a part in nearly all of our present global challenges. These challenges manifest not only through landholding as space, place, and territory; they also raise questions of the temporal perceptions, ontologies, and institutions that mediate our ways of dwelling on earth altogether. Considering the inter-temporal and speculative dimensions of landholding in our studies of land use and land policy can help us to keep this perspective.
Bibliography


Concluding Remarks


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