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URBAN LAND FOR THE POOR: A CASE STUDY OF BANGKOK, THAILAND

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Urban poverty remains persistent. Both the housing and employment needs of the urban poor remain key features of this social problem. Existing research has tended to explain these conditions as a function of the concentration of capital and the exploitation of labour. These are necessary, but they leave out a crucial element: urban land. The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to close this loop. Drawing on the urban land approach pioneered by Anne Haila (1988; 2016), this dissertation provides a discussion about land, not only as an explanation but also as a contributory current to ameliorating urban poverty. To do so, the dissertation examines three types of urban land—public land, private land, and religious land—and attempts to answer the following research questions: what are the urban problems concerning the uses of each land type by the poor?; why do these problems persist?; and how can they be addressed? To answer these questions, empirical materials were collected through interviewing diverse local actors; observing land use practices; and analysing official documents including laws, regulations, policies, and plans. This dissertation focuses on the interrelated notions of the right to land, the regulatory and licensing systems of public land, urban informality, gated communities, and the urban commons. Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, provides the context for the empirical part of this research. In addition, this dissertation includes an analysis of the uses of Buddhist temple land in other Thai cities to show different characteristics of the Thai urban land system and how it can instantiate one way of enhancing the livelihoods of the urban poor.

The main body of the dissertation consists of three articles. Each article investigates the uses of each land type—and the findings in these three articles flesh out the arguments, making up the substance of this dissertation. The first article analyses the goals, practices, and effects of a street clearance plan by the city government of Bangkok. Published in *Cities*, the article discusses street vendors' rights, property claims, conflicting interests, and varied survival strategies for coping with the eviction that affected the vendors' lives and livelihood. The second article concerns gated communities in Bangkok. This article, published in *Social Sciences*,

develops a context-specific conceptualisation of gating. In contrast to the prototypical Western concept of gated communities—which holds that gated communities are enclosed private residential space built exclusively for the middle class, while the poor are found in ‘informal’ settlements—the article shows the diversification of gated communities. It points out that gated communities are not only spatially constructed but also socially constructed. That is also the aim of the third article of this dissertation, accepted for publication by *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. Buddhist temples are built on a type of land where the property relations are quite distinct from both private and public land systems. Do such alternative systems of urban land tenure produce different urban forms from those of private and public tenure systems? Drawing on original data collected from Thai cities, this appears to be the case. Thai Sangha law prohibits temples from selling their land. This religious land, then, is inalienable, acting as ‘urban commons’.

The results of this dissertation are summarised as follows. Firstly, the study of a city government’s plan to reorganise public land aimed at removing street vending activities from streets and using these socially ‘purified’ streets as a magnet for attracting investors and tourists unmasks the harmful effects of implementing spatial order and discipline. Street vendors were evicted, tensions between the vendors and city authorities increased, and streets became unsafe. Secondly, in examining the uses of private land, the dissertation discusses residential segregation by income and the proliferation of gated communities in Bangkok. The findings illustrate that there exist gated communities in which the urban poor are the residents; amenities and club services in gated communities are available to non-residents as well; and, the residents of gated communities seek contact and socialise with outsiders. Thirdly, the results of the empirical study on the uses of religious land demonstrate a radically different urban form. While still maintaining their role as ‘landlords’, Thai Buddhist temple caretakers are not utility-maximising. Instead, they maintain their role as social and communal landlords by leasing their land for the urban poor to use for housing, vending, and farming with nominal rents being charged. In turn, in temple urban spaces, where the moral aspect of religious land and ethical considerations on land prevail, social marginalisation is minimal. Indeed, not only are residents decently housed, their livelihoods are far more certain and rewarding.

This dissertation argues that how urban land in Bangkok is currently used is overbearingly based on exchange value rather than use value. Laws and regulations concerning land and real estate development have prioritised the development of private land over the uses of land for wealth and income redistribution and poverty eradication. Moreover, as this study shows, in managing the urban land, the city government of Bangkok has apparently failed to treat public land as a public good. These are forces that have led to the persistence of urban poverty, wealth and income inequalities, and marginalisation of the poor, which together represent the pressing urban problems concerning the uses of urban land by poor people.

This dissertation calls for a type of urban policy that takes into consideration the rights, interests, and livelihoods of public land users and their contributions to the city. It also questions the usefulness of the Western gated community concept and points to the importance of emphasising local and historical conditions concerning land and housing development, highlighting social norms and practices, and zooming in on socio-spatial characteristics of the neighbourhood in which gated communities are situated when analysing enclosed residential spaces and the social relations in and around them. While clearly still problematic in the sense that gating creates a spatial tension between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, a contrast which is often resolved by emphasising the former over the latter, appreciating local nuances within a wider global context can pave the way for alternatives. This dissertation encourages urban scholars to investigate further the existing types of urban land (non-private forms of urban land tenure such as communal land, collectively owned land, and other types of religious land) in other cities, which could be considered as alternatives to land commodification and financialisation.

Tiivistelmä

Urbaani köyhyys on säilynyt pitkäaikaisena yhteiskunnallisena ongelmana, ja kaupunkien köyhien tarve asunnoille sekä työlle on säilynyt tämän ongelman ominaispiirteenä. Aiemmat tutkimukset ovat selittäneet tilannetta pääoman keskittymisellä ja työvoiman hyväksikäytöllä. Nämä ovat välttämättömiä ehtoja, mutta yksi tärkeä tekijä on jäänyt tutkimuskirjallisuudessa huomiotta: kaupunkialueiden maa. Tämän väitöstutkimuksen tavoitteena on vastata tähän tutkimustarpeeseen. Tukeutuen Anne Hailan (1988; 2016) urbaania maata koskevaan ajatteluun väitöskirja pohtii maankäyttöä kaupunkiympäristöissä: ei pelkästään köyhyyttä selittävänä, mutta myös sitä lieventävänä tekijänä. Väitöskirja tarkastelee kolmenlaista urbaania maatyyppeä: julkisia tiloja, yksityistä maata ja uskonnollista maata. Tavoitteena on vastata seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin: mitä kaupunkiympäristön ongelmia liittyy kyseisten maatyyppeiden käyttöön köyhien asukkaiden osalta? Miksi nämä ongelmat ovat jatkuneet? Miten näitä ongelmia voisi ratkaista? Empiirinen aineisto on kerätty haastattelemalla paikallisia toimijoita, havainnoimalla maan käyttöä ja analysoimalla virallisia asiakirjoja kuten paikallisia lakeja ja määräyksiä, toimintalinjauksia ja suunnitelmia. Tutkimuksessa ovat keskeisiä seuraavat toisiinsa liittyvät käsitteet: maankäytön oikeus, julkisten tilojen sääntely- ja lupajärjestelmät, informaalit elinkeinot, aidatut yhteisöt ja urbaanit yhteismaat (urban commons). Thaimaan pääkaupunki, Bangkok, on tutkimuksen empiirinen konteksti. Lisäksi väitöstutkimus sisältää analyysin buddhalaisen temppelemaan käytöstä muissa thaimaalaiskaupungeissa, esittelee Thaimaan maankäyttöjärjestelmien erityispiirteitä ja arvioi kuinka maankäyttöjärjestelmät voisivat edistää kaupunkialueiden köyhien asukkaiden toimeentuloa.

Väitöskirjan runko koostuu kolmesta artikkelista. Artikkelit tutkivat maankäyttöä edellä mainittujen kolmen maatyypin kautta. Artikkeleissa tehdyt löydökset muodostavat väitöskirjan keskeiset argumentit. Ensimmäinen artikkeli analysoi Bangkokin kaupunkipäättäjien suunnitelmaa katujen siivoamisesta ja kyseisen projektin tavoitteita, käytäntöjä ja vaikutuksia. Artikkelit on julkaistu *Cities*-lehdessä, ja se käsittelee katukauppiaiden oikeuksia, omaisuusvaateita, eturistiriitoja ja selviytymisstrategioita liittyen häättöön, joka vaikutti heidän elämäänsä ja

toimeentuloonsa. Toinen artikkeli käsittelee aidattuja yhteisöjä Bangkokissa. Artikkelin on julkaistu *Social Sciences* -lehdessä ja se kehittää kontekstisidonnaisen aidatun yhteisön käsitteen. Vastakohtana prototyyppiselle länsimaiselle käsitteelle – ajattelulle, että aidatut yhteisöt ovat väistämättä yksinomaan keskiluokalle suunnattuja suljettuja yksityisiä asuin ympäristöjä, köyhien asumismuotojen ollessa ‘informaaleja’ – artikkeli esittää aidattujen yhteisöjen monipuolistuneen. Artikkelin osoittaa, että aidatut yhteisöt eivät ole vain fyysisiä rakenteita vaan myös sosiaalisesti rakentuneita. Tämä tutkimustavoite on keskeinen myös väitöskirjan kolmannessa artikkelissa, joka on hyväksytty julkaistavaksi *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* -lehdessä. Buddhalaiset temppelit on rakennettu kaupunkimaalle, jonka omistussuhteet poikkeavat ratkaisevasti yksityisestä ja julkisesta maankäyttöjärjestelmästä. Tuottavatko kaupunkialueiden vaihtoehdot maanomistusjärjestelmät toisenlaisia urbaaneja rakenteita kuin yksityinen ja julkinen omistusjärjestelmä? Tutkimukseni empiirinen aineisto tukee tätä väitettä. Thaimaan Sangha-laki kieltää temppeleitä myymästä maitaan, ja uskonnolliset maat toimivat täten pysyvinä kaupunkiympäristön yhteismainana.

Väitöstutkimuksen tulokset ovat tiivistetysti seuraavat: Ensimmäisenä tuloksena tutkimus paljastaa tilallisen järjestyksen toimeenpanon ja kurinpidon haittapuolet tapauksessa, jossa Bangkokin virkamiesjohto pyrki julkisen tilan uudelleenjärjestämiseen, kaupustelun siivoamiseen jalankulkualueilta ja tätä kautta hyödyntämään ‘puhdistettua’ kaupunkikuvaa sijoittajien ja turistien houkuttelemiseksi. Kun katukaupustelijat häädettiin, jännite kaupustelijoiden ja kaupungin virkakoneiston välillä kasvoi, ja kadut muuttuivat turvattommiksi. Yksityistä maankäyttöä koskeva toinen tutkimustulos liittyy asuinalueiden eriytymiseen tulotason mukaan ja aidattujen asuinalueiden nopeaan kasvuun Bangkokissa. Väitöskirja näyttää toteen, että on olemassa myös köyhien asukkaiden asuttamia aidattuja yhteisöjä. Näiden aidattujen yhteisöjen palvelut ovat kuitenkin ulkopuolistenkin käytettävissä, minkä lisäksi kyseisten yhteisöjen asukkaat hakevat ulkopuolisia kontakteja ja ovat sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuksessa myös aidatun yhteisönsä ulkopuolisten kaupunkiasukkaiden kanssa. Kolmas tutkimustulos kytkeytyy uskonnollisen maan käyttöön ja osoittaa muusta kaupunkitilasta perustavanlaatuisesti poikkeavan urbaanin rakenteen olemassaolon. Vaikka

buddhalaisten temppelien ylläpitäjät toimivat 'vuokranantajina', he eivät tavoittele taloudellista hyödyn maksimointia. Sen sijaan he ylläpitävät rooliaan yhteiskunnallisina ja yhteisöllisinä vuokranantajina vuokraamalla maata kaupunkialueiden köyhien asuin-, kaupustelu- ja maanviljelykäyttöön nimellistä vuokraa vastaan. Temppelien muodostamissa kaupunkiympäristöissä uskonnollisen maa-alueen käyttöä ohjaavat moraaliset ja eettiset periaatteet ovat keskeisiä ja sosiaalinen syrjäytyminen tämän seurauksena vähäistä. Temppeleiden köyhien keskuudessa asumistaso on suhteellisen korkea ja myös asukkaiden toimeentulo varmempi kuin muualla kaupunkitilassa.

Väitöskirjassa esitetään, että kaupunkimaan nykyistä käyttöä Bangkokissa dominoi maan vaihtoarvo suhteessa sen käyttöarvoon. Maan ja kiinteistöjen käyttöä koskevat lait ja määräykset ovat asettaneet yksityisen maankäytön ja omaisuuden tulojen uudelleenjaon ja köyhyyden poistamisen edelle. Väitöstutkimuksesta käy lisäksi ilmi, että Bangkokin kaupungin johto ei ole kohdellut julkista tilaa julkishyödykkeenä. Nämä voimat ovat johtaneet pysyvään köyhyyteen, omaisuuden ja tulojen epätasa-arvoiseen jakautumiseen ja köyhien syrjäytymiseen, jotka yhdessä muodostavat köyhien maankäyttöä koskevan haastavan ongelman.

Tämä väitöskirja peräänkuuluttaa kaupunkipolitiikkaa, joka ottaisi huomioon julkisten tilojen käyttäjien oikeudet, edut ja toimeentulon sekä heidän kontribuutionsa kaupunkikehitykselle. Tutkimus myös kyseenalaistaa länsimaisen aidattujen yhteisöjen käsitteen hyödyllisyyden ja osoittaa paikallisten ja historiallisten olosuhteiden tärkeyden maankäytössä ja asuinalueiden kehittämisessä. Väitöskirja korostaa sosiaalisten normien ja käytäntöjen merkitystä ja fokuoimista asuinalueiden sosiaalisiin ja alueellisiin piirteisiin analysoitaessa suljettuja asuin ympäristöjä ja niiden sisäisiä ja ulkoisia sosiaalisia suhteita. Vaikka aidatut yhteisöt luovat ongelmallisia jännitteitä nykyaikaisuuden ja perinteisen välille – asuntotuotannon ratkaisuisissa edellistä yleensä arvostetaan jälkimmäisen kustannuksella – voi kaupunkitilan 'aitautumiskehityksen' alueellisten vivahteiden huomioiminen viitoittaa tietä vaihtoehdoille laajemmassa globaalissa kontekstissa. Väitöstutkimus kannustaa kaupunkitutkijoita tarkastelemaan muissakin kaupungeissa sellaisia urbaanin maan olemassa olevia tyyppisiä (ei-yksityisiä

maanhallinnan muotoja kuten yhteisöllistä maata, kollektiivisesti omistettua maata, ja erilaisia uskonnollisen maan tyyppejä), jotka voidaan nähdä vaihtoehtoina maan hyödykkeistymiselle ja finansialisaatiolle.

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Chaitawat Boonjubun
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October 2020

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List of original publications

- I Boonjubun, Chaitawat. 2017. Conflicts over streets: The eviction of Bangkok street vendors. *Cities*, 70, 22-31.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.06.007>
- II Boonjubun, Chaitawat. 2019. Also the urban poor live in gated communities: A Bangkok case study. *Social Sciences*, 8 (7), 219.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8070219>
- III Boonjubun, Chaitawat; Haila, Anne; and Vuolteenaho, Jani. (Accepted for publication). Religious land as commons: Buddhist temples, monastic landlordism, and the urban poor in Thailand. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

Report on the co-authored original publication

Article III

Boonjubun, Chaitawat; Haila, Anne; and Vuolteenaho, Jani (Accepted for publication). Religious land as commons: Buddhist temples, monastic landlordism, and the urban poor in Thailand. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*.

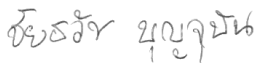
For Article III, Boonjubun co-authored the paper with Anne Haila and Jani Vuolteenaho.

Boonjubun's contributions to Article III include developing the idea; conducting the literature review; conducting fieldwork and data collection; analysing data; and writing the manuscript.

Haila's contributions to Article III include developing the idea; conducting the literature review; conducting fieldwork and data collection; analysing data (for the first version of manuscript); and writing manuscript (the first version).

Vuolteenaho's contributions to Article III include developing the idea; conducting the literature review; and writing the manuscript.

Sincerely yours,



Chaitawat Boonjubun
Helsinki, 3 June 2020



Jani Vuolteenaho
Helsinki, 3 June 2020

Remarks: Anne Haila passed away in September 2019. Jani Vuolteenaho is a secondary supervisor.

1 Introduction

The city is a place of contradictions and tensions. In Robert Beauregard's (2018: 15) *Cities in the Urban Age: A Dissent*, the city is a puzzle; it is 'more than elusive and mysterious, complex and ever-restless; it harbors contradictions'. One of the key contradictions is growing poverty along with increasing wealth. Beauregard points out that in cities, poverty (and inequality) and wealth (and prosperity) coexist, and the two are 'inseparable' (Beauregard, 2018: 17). Cities have a flair for generating wealth, but the wealth is not equally distributed because it is concentrated in the hands of 'a few businesses, institutions, and households' (Beauregard, 2018: 25). This effect has widened wealth inequalities between the rich and the poor. According to Obeng-Odoom (2017: 16), 'cities have served as a locomotive for national economic growth which, in turn, has supported much urban development'; however, 'inequality levels have for most cities been rising steadily over the years both in terms of income, access to and control of urban services and resources'. The unequal distribution of wealth and income coupled with economic liberalisation has brought about not only wealth and income inequalities, but also an increase in tensions and competition among different groups and individuals over economic, social, and political opportunities (Hyötyläinen, 2019; Obeng-Odoom, 2020; Piketty, 2017).

This doctoral dissertation seeks to unravel this puzzle of the city. Explaining the city's contradictions and tensions is, crucially, one way of resolving it. The dissertation attempts to develop an approach to the study of cities in the political economy lineage. This approach is not in the Marxian political economy¹ tradition but is in the 'urban land approach' introduced by a renowned urban scholar, Anne Haila (1988; 2016), and it is part of critical urban studies². To undertake this exercise, the focus is on land, particularly the urban land used by the poor in

¹ Based on the three volumes of Karl Marx's *Capital* (see Harvey, 2017).

² 'Critical urban studies' can be explained by Neil Brenner's 'critical urban theory' (2009). According to Brenner (2009: 198), critical urban theory deals with 'the critique of ideology (including social-scientific ideologies) and the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities'.

Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. The origin of the thesis is both professional and personal.

With regard to the professional origin which is based on the academic works of 'land' scholars, land theory was once the core of economics but has recently often been ignored by economists and social scientists, notwithstanding that land theories emerged as efforts to fight social ills. In *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George ([1879] 2009) advocated for a land reform movement and proposed taxing land rent as a solution through which to eradicate poverty. Neil Smith (1979) used the rent-gap theory to explain the gentrification process. According to him, gentrification, a process in which low-income residents are displaced by wealthier ones, is a consequence of the disparity between actual and potential rents (Smith, 1979). Modern land economists have continued to develop the land approach. Some have shown how urban economics in general can be reconstructed by making land central to its explanations (Obeng-Odoom, 2016b). Others are more specific. For example, Ryan-Collins and his colleagues (2017), in *Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing*, show how the financialisation of land in the UK can explain the British housing crisis and demonstrate the ways that crisis drives and maintains inequality and fragility. Brett Christophers (2018), in *The New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain*, discusses the land privatisation programme in Britain and its social, economic, and political consequences. These contributions have been well-received (e.g. Buyuklieva, 2019; Fields, 2020; Kay, 2020; Sivaraman, 2019). The call for their further development strengthens their potential for urban research.

Its academic connections and precursors aside, the origin of this thesis is also personal. It started in July 2014 when I was working as a research assistant for Anne Haila on her book project, which led to the publication of her *magnum opus* entitled *Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State* (2016). This book inspired the development of this dissertation. My contribution to the project began with the two chapters of her manuscript: 'Land Reforms: Practical Solutions and Politics of Land', and 'Financial Crises and Real Estate' which she shared with me and asked for my feedback. Reading those two chapters was an eye-opening experience. I was instantly

motivated to conduct my doctoral dissertation on land. In *Urban Land Rent*, Haila (2016: xxi) argues that ‘Land matters in the sense of an area and the location, but land occupied by people matters also because land tenure makes land development processes social, political and cultural processes’. Yet, ‘[land] is all too often ignored in contemporary economic and social theories’ despite that ‘every now and then land ownership and land use become a social problem as their forms and policies are debated, fought over, and transformed’ (Haila, 2016: xxi). Her book is about land, and her message delivered to urban scholars is that ‘land matters, and urban studies should pay attention to land development processes’ (Haila, 2016: 21).

Following Anne Haila’s legacy, this doctoral dissertation is also about land, and I explicitly pay attention to three types of land in urban areas:

- (i) public land for street vending;
- (ii) private land, in the case of gated communities; and
- (iii) religious land used by the urban poor.

In analysing these three types of land, in the dissertation I seek to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the urban problems concerning the uses of each land type by the poor?
- 2) How do these problems arise?
- 3) Why do these problems persist and how can they be addressed?

This doctoral dissertation is comprised of three scholarly publications: each publication investigates each type of land and elaborates on my arguments. Article I is a discussion about public land (type i). It pays attention to the uses and management of public streets. In particular, the article examines the implementation of the 2014 street clearance plan by the city government of Bangkok and its social impact. Article II is an analysis of private land (type ii) and tackles the issue of residential segregation by income class in Bangkok. With an aim to contribute to the ongoing studies on the diversification of gated communities, this article unpacks gated communities in which people with diverse levels of income reside, which is a form of gated community that has been little explored in urban and housing

research. Article III is about religious land (type iii) and how it is used and preserved as the commons by Thai Buddhist temples. Through these three articles, the dissertation highlights the issues of inequality, the right to land, urban informality, gated communities, and the urban commons. The results of the three articles point to: the harmful effects of modernist city planning on the urban life of the poor; the limited understanding of gated communities simply as a fixed, distinct form of enclosed living space serving the rich; and, a need to investigate the ‘urban commons’ embedded in religious land.

In analysing the uses of urban land by the poor, it is necessary first to discuss the identity of the ‘urban poor’ who are the focus of this dissertation. Poverty is a pressing social problem; it is ‘one of the world’s most persistent and unsolved’ social issues (Brady and Burton, 2016: 1). Since the industrial revolution, poverty has been increasingly associated with urban settlements rather than rural areas as before. Friedrich Engels published *The Condition of the Working Class in England* ([1845] 2001), which describes the hardship and poor living conditions that the working class in industrial cities such as Manchester and Liverpool faced. In *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Charles Booth ([1889] 1904) discusses the living and working conditions of the working class in London. Keeping a distance from defining poverty based on income or deprivation, George Simmel ([1903] 1997; [1908] 1965) suggests that poverty should be understood through the lens of sociological relationships. In particular, he refers to the social response concerning rights and obligations (legal and moral obligations) of public institutions, citizens, and the poor. According to Simmel ([1908] 1965), the poor are constructed by other individuals, institutions, or communities because of their status as the recipients of assistance, and they are often treated as the outsider.

In contemporary literature, ‘the poor’ have been defined according to a range of characteristics. These characteristics include social exclusion, as well as lack of capabilities, opportunities, or necessary materials (Sallila et al., 2006). Along the same lines, Gordon and Townsend (2000) maintain that the poor are referred to as those who (1) do not have basic necessities; (2) are unable to do things that most people take for granted; and, (3) are excluded from everyday forms of living,

customs, and activities. Amartya Sen (1992: 110), a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, in *Inequality Reexamined*, sees poverty associated with those who are fundamentally lacking capabilities. In his words, ‘Poverty is not a matter of low well-being, but the inability to pursue well-being precisely because of the lack of economic means’. Hence, there are various ways to define poverty: poverty measured through resources (e.g. income); poverty determined by needs (e.g. consumption); poverty defined by aspects of well-being including life expectancy, access to public goods and services, literacy, and capacity to improve their own well-being; and, there is also subjective poverty, which is based on an individual’s perception of his or her financial and material situation (Rojas, 2008; Townsend, 2013; Wratten, 1995; for international organisations, see the ADB³ and the World Bank⁴). Considering these various measures of poverty, ‘the urban poor’, or poor people living in urban areas, specifically in this dissertation, are defined by income, consumption, aspects of well-being, and individuals’ own perceptions. In the dissertation, the three articles define the urban poor differently based on the specific context and who the informants are (see Chapter 3).

In this dissertation, I employ the urban land approach (Haila, 1988; 2016). Not only does it provide a framework for the analysis of how urban land is used, but it also facilitates the analysis of land use decisions and the explanation of social relations around the land. I am interested in urban problems in connection with the uses of land. In this dissertation, qualitative research methods were used: I collected data from interviews with key actors including street vendors, residents of gated communities, developers, abbots and senior monks, landlords and tenants, and city and state authorities; observed land use practices; and conducted an analysis of policies, plans, and legal documents. Bangkok was selected as a case study. Bangkok is the capital city of Thailand, which was recently ranked as the country with the world’s widest income inequality (Global Wealth Databook by Credit Suisse, 2018; see the Bangkok Post, 2018⁵). It is one of the world’s fast-growing metropolises and

³ <https://www.adb.org/themes/social-development/poverty-reduction/inclusive-growth> (accessed 28 May 2020).

⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview> (accessed 28 May 2020).

⁵ <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1588786/report-thailand-most-unequal-country-in-2018> (accessed 28 May 2020).

megacities, but inequality remains a critical urban problem (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2016). Bangkok is a 'primate city'; it is the economic, political, administrative, cultural, and social centre of the country of Thailand, around which economic growth has been heavily concentrated (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2016; Walsh and Amponstira, 2013).

My study of public land discusses the implementation of the 2014 street clearance plan by the city government of Bangkok, which led to street vendors being evicted from their authorised vending spots and unintended consequences including protests and violence. This case demonstrates that by deploying modernist city planning in reorganising public land in Bangkok, the city government implemented a spatial order aimed at eliminating street vending without realising the contributions of the informal sector and the importance of urban land to the poor. Street vendors were marginalised, and the city government prioritised the needs concerning the uses of public streets of pedestrians and tourists over those of street vendors. As to the issue of private land, Bangkok has experienced residential segregation by income class and gated communities have become widespread. At the same time, there is a shortage of public housing in Bangkok,⁶ while an oversupply of land and real estate resulting from buying based on speculative purposes continues to worsen inequality in the city. In terms of religious land, Buddhist temples are known for their role as a traditional welfare provider and their land being used for social purposes. Nonetheless, some temples have been criticised for their unusual ways of raising funds, their focus on wealth accumulation, and their involvement in corruption and land disputes.

These problems arise because of the following three forces. Firstly, city authorities have failed to recognise the importance of non-private forms of urban land tenure and have treated public land as a magnet for attracting investment and tourism instead of using it as a public good. Moreover, laws and regulations concerning land and real estate development encourage developers to develop land

⁶ Statistical data from the National Housing Authority (NHA, 2013: 10) shows that only 12% of the total housing units in Bangkok are public housing.

with open arms. Secondly, the uses of private land in Bangkok are apparently based on exchange value rather than use value, and there are utility-maximising landowners and investors who share a questionable 'property mind' (Haila, 2017: 500) or mindset. Thirdly, there is a widespread practice of what Haila (2016: 127) called the 'property lobby'. These interests are powerful among landowners and developers who influence the state or municipality for a change in land and real estate policies and market conditions (Haila, 2016). As this doctoral research shows, the city government of Bangkok had been under pressure from the military government to draw up a street clearance plan and claim property rights over the public land. This study is shedding new light on the 'property lobby' concept in the sense that politicians and state governments themselves can be part and parcel of the property lobby, aside from landowners or developers. In addressing these urban problems, various governments have tried but not succeeded.

So, why do these problems persist? This dissertation argues that the problems persist because of the widespread institutionalisation of private urban land tenure. This land regime, in turn, leads the property lobby and practice to treat land as a commodity and as a financial asset. These roots are deep. Similar to what has happened in other Southeast Asian countries, land ownership was introduced to Thailand by Western colonial powers (even though Thailand was not 'directly' politically colonised). Private ownership has been widely encouraged ever since the enactment of the first land code in 1954. Together with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, or other Western development 'partners', similar programmes have been rolled out not only in Thailand but also in Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia (Obeng-Odoom, 2018). The promotion of land titling in Thailand by the World Bank in the 1980s has had its harmful effect: Thai land tenure systems have been dominated by private forms of land tenure, while land ownership by *de facto* occupancy (according to the old customary law) and the common land are harmed.

Thus, these forces are at play in Thailand, but they do not end there. Indeed, in his seminal study *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George ([1879] 2009) argued that poverty and inequality are produced through the appropriation of common land. In

urban settings, urban inequality is a consequence of ‘the commons’ becoming ‘private’ (Obeng-Odoom, 2016b). In the current era when urban land is treated as an object of investment and speculation (Haila, 2016: 28) rather than as nature and social relations, common land is believed to belong to ‘backward cultures’, and is therefore outdated and inefficient. This domination of private forms of land tenure in Thailand demonstrates a legacy of colonial, imperial, and neoliberal manipulation of urban land.

How can these urban problems be addressed? First, this dissertation calls for a type of urban policy regarding the management of public land that does not aim to use the land based on its exchange value. This policy must seriously take into account the needs of the poor, who are also public land users, and especially street vendors, who are the lifeblood of the city. Second, previous studies on gated communities have shown that especially in less developed cities, the rich live in gated communities while the poor are found in informal settlements. This dissertation acknowledges the existence of gated communities built for the rich who isolate themselves inside the gates. However, the dissertation found that there exist gated communities in which the poor are the residents, and they share club services with non-residents and socialise with others outside. These findings illustrate that the poor do not live only in informal settlements. They have the ability to adapt this Western-style enclosed housing to benefit their urban life. This could be considered as a ‘modern-meets-traditional’ way of life. Third, instead of treating their urban land as a commodity and as a financial asset, Buddhist temples allow the community to use their land for social events and also lease the land, with nominal rents being charged to the poor for housing, vending, and farming. This study of religious land shows that Buddhist temples and monks in urban areas are the *longue durée* guardians of the urban commons which is embedded in religious land. This type of commons can be considered to be an alternative to the commodification and financialisation of urban land.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows. The next chapter, Chapter 2, focuses on theoretical approaches and concepts in urban studies and related fields, with an aim to position this study in the wider academic landscape. In this chapter,

I will discuss the positivist and postcolonial approaches that have been among the most prominent approaches in the study of cities. I will also introduce the urban land approach which has been selected as the analytical framework for this dissertation. In Chapter 3, I will present a brief history of urban transformations in Bangkok and describe the administration and situation of land and housing in Thailand's capital city. After that, the research methods, informants, data collection and analysis, and self-reflexivity in the research will be introduced. The findings of this doctoral study will be discussed in Chapter 4. Then, in Chapter 5, I will present the main arguments, contributions of the dissertation, and also give attention to its limitations. The conclusion, Chapter 6, includes a summary of key findings, answers to the research questions, lessons for theory, policy, and practice, and the future research to be drawn from this dissertation.

2 Theoretical approaches and concepts

In theoretical terms, urban studies is presently a multidisciplinary and internally heterogeneous academic field (see e.g. Jayne and Ward, 2017; Peck, 2015; Scott and Storper, 2015). Instead of delving into the diversity of its strands, in Section 2.1, I will position the dissertation in relation to wider theoretical approaches in contemporary urban studies. In Section 2.2, I will then discuss critically in part positivism-influenced modernisation theories and associated negative understandings of urban informality, and categorisations and hierarchies of cities in literature based on their arguably varying levels of ‘global’ importance and connections. In this regard, I will also detail the strengths and weaknesses of postcolonial urban theory from the viewpoint of this study. Lastly, in Section 2.3, I will introduce this dissertation’s framework for analysis: the urban land focused approach that draws especially from Anne Haila’s work (Haila, 1988; 2016)

2.1 Positioning the thesis in relation to positivist and postcolonial urban studies

This section highlights two key approaches to the study of cities, particularly in examining ‘what the city is’ and ‘how the city is organised’, which are positivism and postcolonialism. In what follows, I will discuss the characteristics of these two antipodal paradigms as a way to position this thesis in relation to them.

Within and outside urban studies, positivism can be referred to as ‘a distinctive stock of methods and procedures that fuse quantitative practices with principles of scientific vision, rigor, and endeavor’ (Wilson, 2014: 633). Positivism can be understood as being based on the following foundations:

an ontology of metaphysical realism (which holds that there is an external reality), a methodology of observational representation (which holds that external reality can be observed, and that it is best represented with languages like mathematics that clearly distinguish facts from value statements), and a correspondence theory of causality

(privileging tests for repeated conjunctures of events and logical hypotheses of the sort, “if A, then B”) (Wyly, 2009: 314).

In the study of cities, the earliest manifestations of positivism have been traced back to the modelling and measurement techniques initiated by the Chicago School, and the pursuits by post-war geographers to redefine their discipline as a “hard science” of the city’ in which ‘scientific concepts and methods allowed theoretical projects to model land use, migration and land values, residential behaviour...and so on’ (Jayne and Ward, 2017: 7–8). In other words, positivists of the time saw cities as ‘the prime terrains in which people and transportation systems were numericalized, in order to guide the search for universal scientific principles’ (Wilson, 2014: 633). Such approaches have been powerfully criticised by radical urban theorists since the 1970s (e.g. Harvey, 1973). Even so, positivist theorisations and studies, in which cities are treated as if they were ‘value-free’ ecosystems shaped by flows of resources (functioning like blood vessels), continue to exist (Bettencourt and West, 2010). Since the late 1990s, newer attempts of institutionalising a positivist ‘urban science’ or the science of cities by architects, geographers, urban planners, and natural scientists have occurred, as with the renowned urban science institutions like the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at University College London and the SENSEable City Lab at MIT. Also, in the last decade, new urban science institutions, most notably the Center for Urban Science and Progress of New York University (founded in 2012), have been established (Townsend, 2015: 206). These new urban science institutions are larger and have received more funding than their precursors; hence, they have been able to access the newest, state-of-the-art technologies in gathering and analysing large amounts of data.

The ‘new urban science’ is typically pursued by ‘statisticians, applied mathematicians, physicists, and computer scientists’ (Townsend, 2015: 207) who are interested in modelling urban systems, and contend that urban processes can be best understood through efficient scientific instruments, digitalised technologies, and ‘big data’ (Townsend, 2015).

From the 1960s onwards, positivist urbanism emphasising ‘the industrial city, with a positivist, Chicago-inspired modernism as its foundation’ (Dear, 2005: 250)

has been a prominent approach in urban studies, and particularly in urban policy and planning. Positivist science offers ‘the foundation for an elite, exclusive and oppressive regime of urban theory, policy and planning’ (Wyly, 2011: 890) due to ‘its propensity for quantitative modeling and analysis, belief in state-directed futures and the existence of a single “public interest”’ (Baeten, 2001: 57). ‘The ‘quantitative and positivist realms’ of urban research are clearest when connected to cities, theories and politics of the past’ (Wyly, 2011: 890). According to Dessler (1999), there are two research strategies characteristic of the positivist model. The first strategy refers to the way that ‘researchers treat the event to be explained as an instance of a certain *type* of event, which is then shown to accompany or follow regularly from conditions of a specified kind’ (Dessler, 1999: 129). In other words, positivist researchers believe that there is a general statement or law that can be used to explain groups of people, things, or situations. The second strategy concerns the way that researchers believe that all events can be explained by ‘the sequence of happenings leading up to it’ (Dessler, 1999: 129), or to put it simply, there is a developmental sequence encompassing the stages of process which can be applied to events or behaviours of groups or individuals. These strategic foundations of the positivist approach have influenced international relations and politics between countries and consequently shaped the nation-state and city development in the post-war era.

Particularly after 1945, the U. S. witnessed rapid economic growth and became an increasingly dominant superpower across the world alongside the Soviet Union. The ‘new U. S. – dominated post-war global regime reinforced the positivist program of using a single model to analyze both ‘other nations’ and ‘one’s own country’ (Steinmetz, 2005: 302). The positivist programme which Steinmetz (2005) referred to was based on the modernisation theory (Rostow, 1960) that divides countries into the ‘developed’ and the ‘underdeveloped’ worlds (on the ramifications of this, see Section 2.2.). Attempts to categorise countries and cities have continued. For instance, the arrival of the ‘global city’ concept in the 1990s has influenced many city governments to follow the footsteps of a few world-leading financial cities by implementing the Western-imported modernist planning style, leading to the

removal of what is perceived to be ‘informality’ (such as street vending and illegal land use) from cities.

Importantly adding to the earlier criticisms of positivism, since the beginning of the new millennium, a growing number of urban scholars have realised the limitations of the universalist claims of western epistemology and associated geographical biases in urban studies which cannot explain the complexity of inequalities in today’s cities. Arguing against the putatively value-free pretensions of positivism, this group of scholars has also acknowledged that the efforts to categorise cities have urban policy implications and harmful effects on the lives and livelihoods of marginalised groups in many cities. Postcolonial urban studies, in particular, has emerged as an attempt by urban scholars to deploy a postcolonialist approach in urban studies (Robinson and Roy, 2016; Roy, 2009; 2016). In countering the idea of city categorisation, postcolonial urban theorists (e.g. Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009) have advocated for decategorising cities and accordingly prefer to conceptualise all cities as ‘ordinary’ (Robinson, 2006; 2008) or to promote the Global South as a new centre of urban theory-making (Roy, 2009).

As a research paradigm, postcolonialism can be understood ‘not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism’ (Loomba, 1998: 12). Often contrasted precisely with the tenets of positivism and otherwise generalising theoretical pursuits by urban scholars, postcolonialism ‘appears to critique the universalist pretensions of Western knowledge systems’ (Loomba, 1998: 242). Postcolonial urban scholars see the city as an essentially complex, ever-changing, and power-infused construct. Every city is unique due to its own history, culture, and intricate local conditions. The city thus must not be portrayed simply as the primary centre of economic growth, progress, and innovation (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009). As Robinson and Roy (2016: 181) explain:

From the remaking of the developmental state at the urban scale to fierce struggles over land, housing and urban services to ambitious visions of the world-class city, these urban processes cannot be

understood as simply a postscript to the urban transformations of the North Atlantic.

To summarise, the major difference between the positivist and postcolonial urban approaches is that the former rests upon computational methods intended to uncover generalisable processes or ‘objective’ models that can be used for explaining the complex systems in and between all cities, whereas the latter rather investigates individual cities by employing usually qualitative research methods or comparative research tactics. Yet, the importance of discussing positivism and postcolonialism for this study extends beyond their differences in strictly academic or theoretical terms. As examined in the following section, positivism-influenced modernisation theories and associated categorisations have had a strong impact on how the world and cities across it have been divided into the Global North and the Global South in ‘developmentalist’ and Western-biased ways (see e.g. Ish-Shalom, 2006; Riley, 2007). Subsequently, the historical roots, theoretical assumptions behind this process, as well as its societal and urban implications have been powerfully criticised by postcolonial theorists, as detailed in the following section. For the purposes of this dissertation, a critical examination of positivist and postcolonial approaches in urban studies is instructive because it has guided positioning this study in relation to these two powerful paradigms, and in turn, to select the urban land approach (Haila, 1988: 2016) as the dissertation’s framework for analysis.

2.2. Categorising and decategorising cities in modernisation and urban theories

The modernisation theory

The post-war world witnessed poorer nations setting their national goals of increasing their gross domestic product (GDP) (Latham, 1998). The modernisation theory, initiated between the late 1950s and the early 1960s as a product of the post-WWII and Cold War period, was based on ‘a set of fundamental assumptions about

the nature of global change and America's relationship to it' (Latham, 1998: 200). In March 1961, Walt W. Rostow, a modernisation theorist, proposed his anti-communist manifesto entitled *The Stages of Economic Growth* to John F. Kennedy. In this positivism-spirited manifesto, Rostow (1960: 4) generalised that there are five linear phases of economic growth that all nations have to pass through: the traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, the take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption. This universal claim on economic growth ladders had its policy implications. American policymakers deployed this 'traditional to modern' society discourse to develop foreign aid programmes aimed 'to persuade third world nations to adopt the tenets of liberal democratic capitalism instead of socialism and communism' (Pearce, 1999: 396). Rostow was not alone in this as there were also other modernisation theorists, especially Almond and Coleman (1960), Deutsch (1953), and Lerner (1958) sharing the following modernist principles: First, a dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' society. Second, political, economic, and social changes are integrated and inseparable. Third, the path towards achieving a modern society is common and linear. Fourth, 'the progress of "developing" societies can be dramatically accelerated through contact with the knowledge and resources of modern ones' (Latham, 1998: 200). It was believed that transferring foreign investments and technological advancement from the wealthier nations would convert the 'traditional' or 'backward' societies into 'modern' ones (Rostow, 1960). In this, 'borrow, import, imitate, and rationalize' were policy prescriptions that the less developed nations must follow (Roberts and Hite, 2000: 10).

Modernisation theory has received harsh criticism for its Western-centric assumptions and biases against less-modern societies. This is because modernisation theory has its narrow focus on internal problems and it apparently blames the victims for causing underdevelopment and poverty themselves while overlooking external causes (Roberts and Hite, 2000: 11; see also, Obeng-Odoom, 2020). There was a group of economists in Latin America called the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) who criticised the modernisation theory for ignoring the legacies of colonisation and accused the local elites who took advantage of transnational trade and banking (Roberts and Hite, 2000). In 1969, Andre Gunder

Frank launched *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* ([1969] 2009) which showcases the ideas of dependency theory. Frank ([1969] 2009) argued that the underdevelopment of Latin American societies was a product of a long-running involvement in the development of global capitalism. In his words (Frank, [1967] 2009: xi), 'It is capitalism, both world and national, which produced underdevelopment in the past and still generates underdevelopment in the present'. The dependency theorists (e.g. Dos Santos, 1970; Frank, [1969] 2009) claimed that the richer countries (as the 'centre' of the world capitalist system) have exploited the poorer countries (as 'periphery') for cheap labour and resources, and this created the inevitable, permanent underdevelopment conditions. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974; 2004) discusses world-systems; he divides the world into three zones: core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries. Unlike dependency theory, this world-systems theory claims that it is possible for poor countries to move up the economic ladder of the world's hierarchy. Even though the world-systems theory has been praised for the attention it pays to global inequality, it has been criticised for having a narrow focus on the economy and the state (Shannon, 1996).

As a legacy of the modernisation theory and other theories that emphasise the role of the state and the economic growth, our world has been divided into 'developed' and 'developing' societies. By utilising cheap labour and resources, developing societies believed that investment and industrialisation would be the key solutions for climbing up the development ladder (Roberts and Hite, 2000). Between the 1950s and the early 1970s, cities in both the developed and developing worlds witnessed rapid urbanisation derived from rural-to-urban migrants who migrated to cities in search of a better life (AlSayyad, 2004; Cline-Cole, 2020; Nwoke, 2020). This brought about concerns that the labour market would not have enough jobs for them. Sassen (2018) argues that rapid urbanisation has led to increasing levels of unemployment in cities. However, this was not always the case, as I show next by discussing the relationship between formal and informal economies and the interconnectedness between the formal and informal sectors.

The informal sector and informal workers' struggle in 'developing' cities

Keith Hart (1973), in his much-cited article *Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana*, studied economic activities performed by Frafra migrants in Accra, Ghana. He found that most workers who lacked formal employment were not necessarily 'unemployed' because they took wage jobs. Hart (1973: 67) saw the significance of petty capitalism, which 'offers itself as a means of salvation'. He drew the distinction between 'formal and informal income opportunities' which is based on 'wage-earning and self-employment' and argued that 'the key variable is the degree of rationalisation of work... whether or not labour is recruited on a permanent and regular basis for fixed rewards' (Hart, 1973: 68). In fact, the ILO report entitled *Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya* (1972) had already discussed such informal activities. The report distinguished 'the formal sector' and 'the informal sector'. The following characteristics define the informal-sector activities: easy to enter; unregulated; dependence on indigenous resources, low technology, and low-skilled labour; and family-owned or small-scale business. Whereas the formal-sector activities are opposite, their features include: difficult entry; reliance on overseas resources; corporate ownership; large scale of operation; capital-intensive and often imported technology; formally acquired skills, often expatriate; and protected markets (through tariffs, quotas, and trade licenses) (ILO, 1972: 6). More recently, however, Ojong (2011: 10; see also Chen, 2007) has argued that the informal sector must not be regarded as opposition to the formal sector because these two sectors are connected 'to form a continuum of economic relations'. The boundaries between the formal and informal sectors are blurring as workers can be found working in both sectors (Obeng-Odoom, 2011; 2016b). Scholars (e.g. Ojong, 2011; 2020; Roy, 2005) point out that the term 'informality' should not be constrained to a specific sector of economic activity. Informality refers to not only the informal economy but also informal settlements because the two are connected, and lower-wage labour usually lives in informal housing (Obeng-Odoom, 2011; 2016b).

According to Rakowski (1994), dominant schools of thought to the informal sector research and debates in the 1980s-1990s include: structuralist and legalist.

The roots of structuralists are in Neo-Marxism and dependency theories. Structuralists (e.g. ILO labour market approach, see ILO, 1972) emphasise the unequal capitalist development and the missing role of the state as a regulatory actor in equalising the differences between formal and informal economies. They point to the importance of the informal economy as a growth economy and call for 'structural changes in the economy' and 'a new social contract with laws protecting workers' rights' (Mukhija and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014: 7). By contrast, the legalist approaches (e.g. De Soto, 1989) focus on institutional constraints and entrepreneurship (Rakowski, 1994). The legalists have seen 'in the informals the hope for competitive capitalist development if only the state will get out of the market and eliminate the bureaucratic maze and costs associated with legalizing business operations' (Rakowski, 1994: 40). Seeing informality as a rational economic strategy, the legalists have tried to 'reposition informals as entrepreneurs whose spirit is stifled by state-imposed institutional constraints' (Kudva, 2009: 1616). Informal income-generating activities resulted from rural-to-urban migration and urbanisation are regarded as 'survival strategies' of the poor (De Soto, 1989: 243). Studies of the legalists on informality have emphasised 'income-generating efforts and expenditure saving activities' (Rakowski, 1994: 40). This work of the legalists has greatly influenced the poverty alleviation programmes (such as microcredit for the poor) of non-governmental development organisations and donor agencies.

As regards the various forms of the informal economy, street vending is of particular interest for this dissertation. On the one hand, street vending has been acknowledged as a type of self-employment that helps fighting poverty, an initial step in climbing up the economic ladder for the poor, and the economic lifeblood of many cities (Bromley, 2000). On the other hand, arguments against street vending activities include: street trade has been regarded by planners and policymakers as an 'urban informality' which is a 'non-modern' activity, a nuisance, and a threat to a planned city or 'global city'. Meanwhile, street vendors in cities are criticised for contributing to the underground economy and paying less or no tax, and there have been NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) movements against street vending, or occurrences in which neighbourhood residents and owners of business premises point an accusing finger at street vendors for destroying the liveability of their

neighbourhoods (Bromley, 2000; Crossa, 2009; Hunt, 2009). These arguments against the existence of street vending have had an impact on the lives and livelihood of street vendors. For example, in Indian cities, street vendors are regarded by the governments as belonging to the informal sector who do not have the same rights as other groups of city dwellers, and they are outcasts of the constituted society (Chatterjee, 2004). In Johannesburg, according to Spel's doctoral dissertation on informal migrants (2017), street vendors are regarded as 'unworthy entrepreneurs', and thus their lives and livelihood are often excluded in political debates (Spel, 2017: 33).

Globalisation and the 'global city' concept

In a globalised world, cities' role in the global market and international trade has expanded. This globalisation produces 'global versus local tensions'; as a result, the elements of local people and their authenticity and diversity have been often ignored in the place-making efforts of cities (Ho and Douglass, 2008: 208-209).

Sassen (2003) maintains that in the system of globalisation, 'The dynamics and processes that get territorialized at diverse scales can in principle be regional, national or global' and, 'In the case of global cities, the dynamics and processes that get territorialized are global' (Sassen, 2005: 27). Prior to the arrival of the 'global city' idea, John Friedmann (1986: 72) introduced the term 'world city', which means cities that are 'integrated with the world market economy'.

There are at least two ways of analysing global cities and world cities. First, there is a descriptive approach which uses a set of benchmarks (Friedmann, 1986: 72) including financial centres, headquarters of transnational firms, international institutions, a business services sector, manufacturing centres, a transport node, and population size. Second, many studies investigate the role of cities in the world economy through their networks and interconnectedness (Grant and Nijman, 2002; Shatkin, 1998). Sassen (2018: 7) argues that global cities function as 'command points in the organization of the world economy' and as strategic locations and marketplaces for the leading industries and major sites of production of these

industries. Brenner and Keil (2006: 5) conclude that the term ‘global city’ refers to any of a group of cities which are considered to be world economy’s command and control centres, ‘that are connected in transnationally networked hierarchies of economic, demographic and socio-cultural relationships’.

Critiques of the world city/global city centre on the hierarchical typologies of cities (see e.g. Haila, 2000; Robinson, 2006). Friedmann (1986: 72) categorised world cities into ‘primary core’ (e.g. London, Paris, New York, Rotterdam, Frankfurt, Zurich, Tokyo), ‘secondary core’ (e.g. Brussels, Milan, Vienna, San Francisco, Sydney), ‘primary semi-peripheral’ (e.g. Sao Paulo and Singapore), and ‘secondary semi-peripheral’ (e.g. Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Seoul). In the list, smaller urban centres like ‘peasant periphery’ cities are excluded. In *The Global City*, Sassen (1991) considers only the three cities, namely New York, London, and Tokyo, to be global cities. In her later works (Sassen, 2003; 2005), other cities, such as Miami, Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich, and Shanghai are identified as new emerging global financial and business centres. However, this selection of a small number of ‘command and control centres’ reflects the hierarchical city typologies.

Existing research concerning global cities has focused narrowly on the archetype of global cities or ‘a few champion examples’ (Olds and Yeung, 2004: 513). The goal of becoming a global city has had influential policy implications (see Vogel et al. 2020). Empirical studies in non-Western cities, for example, Delhi (Dupont, 2011), Jakarta (Bunnell and Miller, 2011), and Metro Manila (Shatkin, 2004) found that to become a ‘global city’, city governments usually choose to follow the footsteps of ‘champion examples’ cities in achieving global competitiveness through the formation of spatial order and implementation of modernist city planning aimed to modernise their cities. Part of this modernisation includes improving urban infrastructure and eliminating ‘informality’, or what is perceived by city authorities to be ‘non-modern’, ‘traditional’, or ‘primitive’. The results of these Delhi, Jakarta, and Metro Manila studies show that the consequences of the modernist city planning have in each case included slum clearances, bans on street vending, and evictions of the poor.

Haila (2006) proposed that instead of emphasising the economic process in achieving the global city status, urban scholars should rather be critical about how the city managers attempt to improve the image of the city (e.g. by prohibiting street vending) to attract investors. They could also examine how urban politics prioritises investments (through, for example, offering tax breaks and donating industrial sites) over social justice within society.

Dynamics and processes that constituted globalisation have paved the way for cities to become new international financial centres through global networks. Nevertheless, criticism of globalisation theory points out that globalisation is based on 'a view of the world from the Global North' (Connell, 2007: 63) that ignores non-Western cultures shaped by colonial histories (Robinson, 2006). Vis-à-vis a hierarchical dualism between global and local, it is often that 'the local is reified as 'traditional' or 'indigenous' (and therefore static), exemplifying an urban cultural heterogeneity under threat from serial and homogenous Western culture' (Edensor and Jayne, 2012: 12).

The evolution of postcolonial urban studies

Many modernisation and urban concepts and theories, included those already mentioned, are based on the academic literature of the twentieth century. Problematically, these theories have been used in urban studies as well as utilised as guidelines in urban policy-making, particularly in explaining urban phenomena and steering urban development in the Global South. Through them, 'colonial prejudices' of the early decades of the twentieth century have been 'sedimented into contemporary [urban] theory' (Robinson, 2006: 4). The late twentieth century, in particular, witnessed a development in which cities and their metropolitan regions became 'the powerhouse' of economic development, and scholarship shifted its focus to studying networks between cities rather than territories as before (Amin and Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2006). A handful of cities, such as Los Angeles, 'are wheeled out as paradigmatic cases, alleged conveniently to encompass all urban trends everywhere' (Amin and Graham, 1997: 411). While urban scholars and

researchers have emphasised their intellectual works on global cities, little attention has been paid to other cities that did not fit into the ‘champion examples’; as Robinson calls them, cities ‘off the map’ (Robinson, 2002: 531). ‘In the Chicago School tradition in particular, the (Western) society is the paragon of *modern* society – rational and individualistic – as opposed to more traditional ‘primitive’, ‘irrational’ modes of organization and ways of life’ (Pattaroni and Baitsch, 2015: 123). In response to this hierarchy of cities based on the ideas of modernity and development, contemporary urban scholars (e.g. Amin and Graham, 1997; Pattaroni and Baitsch, 2015; Robinson, 2002) claim that all cities, whether located in the Global North or in the Global South, have their own distinctions.

In the face of these long-standing biases, postcolonial urban theory influenced by postcolonial studies (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012; Said, [1978] 2003; Spivak, 1988) has become one of the significant paradigms in contemporary urban studies. Postcolonial urban theory is built on criticism of the dualism of the North-South cities and the hierarchy of cities embedded in, particularly, modernisation theory and the global city discourse. ‘The notion of ‘the modern’ was firmly and powerfully fixed in ‘the West’ and then conveyed to other parts of the world through the uneven relationship of colonialism and global capitalism’ (King, 2004: 71). The ‘modern is just a synonym for the West (or in more recent writings, the North)’ as Mitchell (2000: 1) argues. The modernity and modernisation projects have produced ‘other (traditional, primitive, backward)’ and these projects have been understood as a model for urban development in non-Western cities (Robinson, 2006: 19).

The gated community, a type of enclosed residential development, can be considered a good example for illustrating how an archetype of modern housing development born in the U.S. has subsequently travelled and been adopted (and adapted) in other parts of the world. Early discussions on the issue emphasised the gated communities found in the U.S. and other Western cities, but more recent studies have been extended to gated communities in non-Western cities as well (e.g. Coy and Pöhler, 2002; Ehwi, 2020; Falzon, 2004; Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002; Leisch, 2002; Wissink and Hazelzet, 2016). Blakely and Snyder (1997: 2) describe gated communities as ‘residential areas with restricted access in which normally public

spaces are privatized'. Atkinson and Blandy (2005: 178) maintain that gated communities reflect 'more than a simple constellation of particular physical and socio-legal characteristics' because gating is 'an attempt to boost defensible space and the means to exclude the unwanted'. Being 'gated' means living in a walled or fenced residential development project equipped with security guards restricting public entry and offering a protected living environment (Pow, 2009). 'Communities' in this context means the ways that residents share amenities and services, called 'club services', and the residents are bound together by legal frameworks that manage them and control space (Low, 2003; Pow, 2009). 'Gating does not necessarily create [a] community; it only selects for a certain type of person and level of income' (Low, 2003: 71). Being considered as 'polymorphic real estate products tailored to care for the middle classes' (Morange et al., 2012: 890), gated communities create 'a socially and spatially fragmented urban landscape where security concerns dominate and where citizens culturally, physically and symbolically segregate themselves from others' (Tedong et al., 2015: 112). Gated communities as 'self-imposed exclusion from the wider neighbourhood, as well as the exclusion of others from the gated community' could contribute to social exclusion and territorial injustice, undermine social integration, and increase fear from seeing other groups as their threat (Atkinson and Blandy, 2005: 178; see also, Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002). Davis (1990) goes further by raising a concern that gated neighbourhoods which strictly prohibit outsiders from accessing the neighbourhoods by means of gates, walls, guards, and signs jeopardise freedom in the city.

Security, lifestyle, and prestige living are understood to be the underlining reasons why people isolate themselves in gated communities (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). Nonetheless, the motivations for people choosing to live in gated communities are complex. The socio-cultural context also plays a crucial role in shaping how residents of gated communities maintain social interactions between themselves and outsiders. For example, the legacy of segregated neighbourhoods during the colonial era has influenced ethnic groups in Indonesian cities to live in gated communities (see Leisch, 2002). Moreover, Ehwi et al. (2019) found that one of the primary reasons driving Ghanaians to live in gated communities is the avoidance of penalties

from poor land administration, ineffective planning, and inadequate infrastructure, such as poor public safety measures and sanitation, and lack of public recreational amenities. Other urban scholars (e.g. Caldeira, 2000; Leisch, 2002; Lemanski and Oldfield, 2009) claim that gated communities in non-Western cities are not a copycat of the Western model because of the local context concerning the history of settlements, culture, tradition, and how different cities connect to other cities and global networks in a different way. Hence, there is a need to reconsider the Western concept of gated communities and critically emphasise the investigation of different types of gated communities in cities in different parts of the world.

If each city has its own distinctive urban development, then cities should not simply be divided into the developed/the developing or the Global North/the Global South based on economic performance. Postcolonial urban scholars have advocated seeing all cities as 'ordinary'. The term 'ordinary city' was coined by Amin and Graham (1997) and has been discussed and developed further by other scholars, e.g. McCann (2004) and Robinson (2002; 2006; 2011). Known as an influential critique of the 'global city' concept, the 'ordinary city', which is based on postcolonial arguments against the hierarchical relationships between rich and poor cities, calls for urban scholars to look at the diversity of cities in the world. According to Simone (2004: 408), the city is where urban dwellers engage in 'complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices'. In the same vein, Robinson (2008: 74) sees 'all cities as unique combinations of social, political, and economic configurations'. Thus, scholars should not generalise cities in the Global South simply as 'interesting, anomalous, different, and esoteric empirical cases' (Roy, 2009: 820). Instead, they should view all Western, non-Western, Third World, developing, global, and non-global cities as 'ordinary' cities. Robinson seems to suggest that if all cities are treated as 'ordinary', the hierarchies and categorisation of cities would be discarded, and this 'world of ordinary cities' idea would demolish 'the long-standing divide in urban scholarship between accounts of 'Western' and other kinds of cities, especially cities that have been labelled as "Third World"' (Robinson, 2006: 1).

Nonetheless, the concept of 'ordinary cities' advocated by Robinson (2006) in particular, has been criticised for its attempt to provincialise urban studies, as

scholars tend to overlook the ‘vast asymmetries of power and influence between cities’ and often fail to address the ‘complex negotiations between globality and locality’ within today’s cities (Huysen, 2008: 11). Further, Storper and Scott (2016: 1121) criticise postcolonial urban theory for its ‘highly selective critique of modernism-developmentalism’. Although individual cities, both in the Global North and Global South, have different paths of economic growth as claimed by postcolonial urban theorists, there is still a need to examine ‘how specific forms and levels of economic development shape specific variants of agglomeration’ in different cities (Stoper and Scott, 2016: 1123). Moreover, while some postcolonial urban theorists have endorsed the view of all cities as ‘ordinary cities’, some others have put their efforts into promoting the studies of cities in the Global South. For instance, Roy (2009: 828) argues that ‘the centre of theory-making’ must relocate from the Global North to the Global South. Also, some scholars seem to assert that the Global South cities have shared particular urban themes including poverty, informal employment, and informal settlements (see Roy 2005). In response to this claim, Stoper and Scott (2016) argue that such urban themes are not confined merely to the Global South since they can be found in the Global North, too. Thus, resting on their ‘sophism of particularism’ approach (Stoper and Scott, 2016: 1124), postcolonial urban theorists ‘effectively shift questions about the interrelations between economic development and urbanisation into the distant background as nothing but Northern theoretical fantasies irrevocably marred by Eurocentric parochialism, reductionism, and teleological thinking’ (Stoper and Scott, 2016: 1123).

The aforementioned critiques of categorisation and decategorisation of cities are acknowledged in this dissertation. The dissertation concurs with postcolonial urban theorists (e.g. Robinson, 2006; Robinson and Roy, 2016; Roy, 2016) in that it shares a critical stance towards theories and concepts developed and used in urban studies that are generated from studies on a small number of Western cities. Hence, there is a need for urban scholars to be aware of Eurocentrism and economism embedded in urban theories, as well as to be critical of the global city discourse. However, this dissertation agrees with Storper and Scott (2016) on their critique of particularism rooted in the postcolonial urban theory.

By employing the term ‘Global South’ in this dissertation, my aim is neither to reinforce the hierarchy and categorisation of cities nor to emphasise the binaries: the Global North/the Global South, the developed/the developing, the Western/the non-Western, or the First World/the Third World. Instead, I have considered empirical evidence from studies of other cities that have shared experiences of colonial histories and economic development after WWII to support the arguments in the dissertation. It is important to note that unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand has never been politically colonised by European powers. Nevertheless, the country has been heavily influenced by colonialism in the Southeast Asia region, which has shaped its cities, urban development, and human settlements.

Arguably, Bangkok is a little-studied city in the field of urban studies. In analysing Bangkok and its complex urban problems, in this dissertation, the analysis has gone beyond treating Bangkok as just another ‘ordinary city’ in Southeast Asia or merely attempting to put Bangkok ‘on the map’ of urban research (see Robinson, 2002); or, viewing that Bangkok’s urban development has simply been a follower of the footsteps of a few ‘modern’ Western cities. This dissertation centres on urban land in Bangkok. Above all, it draws on the urban land approach (Haila, 1988; 2016), and is critically positioned both in relation to positivism-inspired and Western-based urban and modernisation theories, as well as postcolonial urban theory.

2.3 The urban land approach

In addition to having a use value, land is also an investment object and asset, increasingly so today (Haila, 2016: 220).

Outlining the study’s conceptual approach

This dissertation is about urban land. It adopts and contributes to ‘the urban land approach’ (following Anne Haila, 1988; 2016) which seeks to explain how cities and

their built environments are produced and sustained, from the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of urban land use.

Theories and concepts of urban land are many, but mostly they discuss urban land and its development in general with little or no attention paid to social aspects. It is a political economy perspective that provides a lens for understanding urban land and how urban land development is associated with the capitalist mode of production (Yeh and Wu, 1996). Urban scholars (e.g. Card et al., 2020; Yeh and Wu, 1996) highlight two prominent approaches to studying urban land pertaining to the political economy, which include the urban land nexus, and the circuits of capital and urban process research orientations. The urban land nexus, introduced by Allen Scott ([1980] 2013; see also Scott and Storper, 2015), views cities as a system of urban land which is utilised on the logic of the capitalist society and shaped by state intervention (using urban planning as an instrument). David Harvey's idea of circuits of capital and urban process (1978) unpacks the flows of capital investment and the production of the built environment. Certainly, these two theories offer theoretical frameworks in analysing the concentration of capital, the exploitations of labour, and the spatial conditions that underlie the system of land development in the built environment.

The urban land approach introduced by Anne Haila (1988; 2016) differs from Scott's urban land nexus and Harvey's circuits of capital and urban process research orientations in the sense that Haila's urban land approach also keenly takes into account the social and cultural aspects (and thus not only the political and economic, including labour, dimensions) when analysing how urban land is used. This dissertation has a specific focus on urban inequality in connection to land use in the urban context, and it studies the forms of land tenure, how urban land is used and managed, and the social relations around the land. In particular, for this dissertation, the urban land approach offers a framework for analysis which is a lens for examining the uses of urban land and urban problems related to them, and how these problems arise and how to address them. In *Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State*, Haila (2016: 46) states that her approach is 'to analyse land and landownership, and explain urban development processes'. Card et al. (2020)

discuss the contribution of Haila's *Urban Land Rent*; they pointed out that Haila emphasised the history of land and housing development and institutional changes in analysing Singapore's land and housing policies, practices, and markets. According to Haila (2016: 44), questions concerning the distribution effects of urban land use is not merely 'an economic question but also a moral, social and political question'. 'Land matters in the sense of an area and location, but land occupied by people matters also because land tenure makes land development processes social, political and cultural processes', Haila (2016: xxi) explained. Thus, theoretically, Haila (2016) argued that how the urban land is used and managed results from not merely the political and economic, but also social and cultural processes, and this is considered to be the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

This leads to the explication of the dissertation's conceptual framework. Following Haila (2016), this study considers first the underlying land regimes illustrating how the land is treated, the forms of property, the justifications for how the land to be treated and its ownership, the forms of social relations around the land, and the types of rent and associated development modes. Second, to be able to explain the phenomenon in Bangkok, this study analyses the different types of urban land and investigates the private and non-private forms of land tenure, the history of land development, and the socio-spatial and socio-cultural embeddedness of land. Thus, the dissertation highlights ideas and concepts including land as a commodity and financial asset, land rent, public land, and land as the urban commons. These ideas and concepts will be discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

Land regimes and land rent

In her study of urban land rent, Haila (2016: xxi) pays special attention to 'the institutions and actors, landownership forms and social relations in which land is embedded', and she argues that land is 'not another name for nature...but a social relation affected by laws and customs.... Every now and then land ownership and land use become a social problem as their forms and policies are debated, fought over, and transformed'. To analyse the forms of land ownership and how the land is

treated and used, there is a need to understand the historical evolution and variations of land regimes. Haila (2016: 28) divided the land regimes throughout history into four phases: indigenous, feudal, capitalism, and financialisation (see Table 1). Haila (2016) highlights that these phases are not a trajectory that all cities have followed; land regimes have varied from country to country and from city to city.

Land regimes	Land treated as	Form of property	Relationship	Justification	Rent	Development modes
Indigenous	Nature	Shared and common	Man & nature	Use	No	Sustainable
Feudal	Social relation	Leased	Landlord & tenant	Power	Feudal rent	Municipal land for public good
Capitalism	Commodity	Private	Production & built environment	Market	Differential, absolute, monopoly, fiscal & global	Uncontrolled development suburbs & gated communities
Financialisation	Asset	Investment object	Real estate & other investments	Speculation	Derivative	Corporatisation and selling municipal lands

Table 1: Land regimes

Source: Haila (2016: 28, Table 2.1), *Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State*.

As ideal types, land regimes reflect the changing forms of land ownership, which ‘are many and have changed through history, from being common, then enclosed, commodified, privatised and securitised’ (Haila, 2016: 27). The first regime is indigenous. Land was treated as nature, and it was used as the commons and shared among commoners who were farmers and indigenous people. Later, under the feudal regime, land was leased out and landlord-tenant relationships emerged. The landlord received feudal rent by means of labour and produce. During this phase, in some areas land was still jointly used by villagers as the commons, for instance, in the case of raising livestock in pre- and proto-capitalist England. The following regime, capitalism, began when the enclosed land was commodified, resulting in ‘a market for land developed, [where] prices were attached to land, and

the built environment became subordinated to production' (Haila, 2016: 30). Brought by the European colonisers to outside Europe, the practice of enclosure and the idea of private ownership have caused the local 'customary ownership of land' or 'land as something non-alienable to be used by the community' to tumble down (Haila, 2016: 31). Since then, the capitalism regime has dominated the land use system in many parts of the world including Southeast Asia. Haila (2016) states that the arrival of gated communities can be the result of treating 'land as a commodity' and the uncontrolled development of peri-urban areas and suburbs. The last regime is financialisation. This refers to an era during which land is treated as 'an asset and object of speculative investment. The real estate market has become intertwined with the financial market and investment in land assessed from the point of the view of the yield from other assets' and in the case of urban development, this 'means further submission of the built environment to market forces and financial speculation' (Haila, 2016: 33)

Through the commodification, privatisation, and financialisation of land, private forms of land tenure have become the norm (having a tendency towards replacing the state forms, and common ownership and customary land tenure), and private land ownership is believed to be a solution in securing property rights and offering an opportunity to generate revenue (see Obeng-Odoom, 2012; 2020). Three instances of this include: First, states and municipalities sell their land or lease it to private firms instead of using it as a public good (Haila, 2016). Second, the real estate market is driven by the 'property mind' (Haila, 2017: 500) which means that people are motivated to invest in land and real estate based on particular ideas, culture, propensity, and institutions and laws. For example, the notions of 'land as a scarce resource' and (typically rising) land prices, 'nostalgic feelings' (i.e. ethnic Chinese Singaporeans invested in China due to their nostalgic aspiration), pressures from friends, family, and society, and the legislation that allows people to sell and buy public housing. Third, there has been the practice of a 'property lobby' (Haila, 2016: 127) which means that landowners and developers lobby the government to change land and real estate policies as well as to 'influence market conditions'. In addition, international development organisations, such as the World Bank, have played a

vital role in promoting private land ownership through its financially supported land titling programmes especially in Asia and Africa (Obeng-Odoom, 2012).

With regard to land rent, Anne Haila (2016: xx), a rent theorist *par excellence*, defines 'land rent' as sums 'paid to the landowner for the use of land. It represents a social relation, and is a basis for social control and power'. She emphasises that the land rent theory reflects 'the relationship between the use and price of land' (Haila, 2016: xxii). In her article, *Land as a financial asset: The theory of urban rent as a mirror of economic transformation*, Haila (1988) distinguishes between the two directions of land rent theory. The old rent theory considers rent to be 'a non-capitalist and pre-capitalist remnant' and it has 'no active role in accumulation'. This old theory emphasises social relations. By contrast, the new theory is regarded rent as 'an organic and endogenous ingredient of the capitalist system' having its active role in the accumulation and this new theory focuses on rational land use (Haila, 1988: 80-81).

Jäger (2003: 233) argues that 'land rent theory proves to be a very useful tool for providing an integrated political-economic perspective for analyzes of urban phenomena'. Even so, the work of Haila (2016) on urban land rent demonstrates more than a political-economic outlook that was contributed by the land rent theory. Her work also reflects socio-cultural aspects embedded in the leased land. It emphasises the significance of the local context, particularly customs and histories of land development, which have impacted the uses and management of land.

In particular, in her *Urban Land Rent: Singapore as a Property State*, Haila (2016) discusses Singapore's exceptional conditions: a land regime that is 'one of regulating public land' with 90 % of land owned by the state (Haila, 2016: 17), and where state land is treated as 'a use value (public housing and industrial space), as an exchange value (leased for private developers) and as a source of public revenue (land leases and property tax)' (Haila, 2016: 16). 'At a time when European cities are privatising their public land, the exceptional case of Singapore offers a real-world alternative showing the benefits of land as a public good' (Haila, 2016: 17). As pointed out by Haila (2016), especially the treatment of public land based on use

value has enabled Singapore's city-state government to provide public housing to the majority of its population.

To encapsulate Haila's (2016) and this dissertation's approach to land regimes and land rent, how land is treated is not solely a matter of economic efficiency 'but also requires justification of ownership, affects social relations and defines the mode of urban development' (Haila, 2016: 33).

Land and the urban commons

In the current era in which urban land in many parts of the world is treated as a commodity and a financial asset, common land has been understood as primitive, outdated, and rare or impossible to find in urban areas. Notwithstanding that the financialisation of urban land has become one of the most researched subjects in urban studies, there is still a need to look for and study real-world cases of urban land which is used as the commons.

The city is 'the melting-pot of races, peoples, and cultures, and a most favorable breeding-ground of new biological and cultural hybrids', said Louis Wirth (1938: 10) who was a professor of sociology and a member of the Chicago School of Sociology. Likewise, Richard Sennett (1992) emphasises that the city is a place where human beings learn to live with others. In the present day, the following trends of urban restructuring have threatened the city's civilising effect and intensified the socio-spatial polarisation: the privatisation of public land through the processes of enclosure (Christophers, 2017; 2018) and surveillance of public space (Marcuse, 2006); land speculation and land appropriation (Peters, 2013; Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018); and, the isolation of city dwellers in gated communities (Atkinson and Blandy, 2005; Wissink and Hazelzet, 2016). In consequence, local housing and social relations at the neighbourhood level have been dissolved, urban residents—especially the urban poor—are displaced, and public goods are being eroded (see Hackworth, 2007). These trends of urban restructuring have also stimulated urban scholars and activists to invoke and claim 'the commons' in the built environment, under the banner of the 'urban commons'. Before discussing the

concept of ‘urban commons’, there is a need to first examine the origin of the common land.

Historically, common land was agricultural land, and it was shared and used by the commoners, rent-free (Haila, 2016). Faith-based organisations also considered land to be commons (Obeng-Odoom, 2016a). Karl Polanyi ([1944] 2001) in *The Great Transformation* maintains that land, alongside labour and money, is not a commodity. As such, it originally was not a product of labour. He argues that ‘land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man’ (Polanyi, [1944] 2001: 75). After the arrival of a land market, land became a commodity—an object to be bought and sold. Thus, according to Polanyi ([1944] 2001), land is a ‘fictitious commodity’ in the sense that it was not created for the market. Treating land as a mere commodity, with no ethical considerations, can destroy the neighbourhoods and environment because land is ‘tied up with the organizations of kinship, neighborhood, craft, and creed—with tribe and temple, village, guild, and church’ (Polanyi, [1944] 2001: 187). More recent literature in the twentieth century, instead, mainly portrays the commons as problematic and thus focuses on the challenges of managing the commons. Garrett Hardin (1968), in *The Tragedy of the Commons*, one of the most cited pieces of the literature on the commons, argues that the common resource systems were endangered due to overgrazing, and this practice was derived from self-interested individuals and overpopulation. Elinor Ostrom (1990), in *Governing the Commons*, emphasises the conflicts in managing common-pool resources (CPR) and suggests that forming a self-organising ‘collective action’ is an answer to the overuse of the commons, as well as, a solution to the free-rider problem.

Recently, the ‘urban commons’ concept has gained considerable momentum in urban studies. It has been understood as practices, spaces, places, or amenities that evade the capitalist market logic. The uses of the ‘urban commons’ are justified by use value, not exchange value. The ‘urban commons’ is a movement opposed to the avarice and mercenary found in capitalist society. Nonetheless, different scholars seem to define the ‘urban commons’ differently, and this makes the ‘urban commons’

concept difficult to articulate. Many urban scholars (e.g. Blomley, 2008; Bresnihan and Byrne, 2015) have pointed to a need to conceptualise the ‘urban commons’.

According to Foster (2013: 58), city dwellers ‘share access to a number of local tangible and intangible resources in which they have a common stake’, and the examples of the ‘urban commons’ range from ‘local streets and parks to public spaces to a variety of shared neighborhood amenities’. Other scholars claim that the ‘urban commons’ is associated with space and commoning practices. Based on key characteristics of urban space, Huron (2015: 963) described the ‘urban commons’ as ‘enacted in saturated space...that is already densely packed with people, competing uses, and capitalist investment; and the urban commons is constituted by the coming together with strangers’. Thus, to claim the ‘urban commons’ requires collective work among strangers (Huron, 2015). Eizenberg (2012: 766; see also De Angelis, 2003; Hardt and Negri, 2009) introduced the following characteristics of the ‘urban commons’: they are produced; they provide ‘a set of livelihood qualities over which rights are negotiated’, such as ‘dwelling, open space, recreational and social space, movement in space, and control over space’; they fulfil ‘social needs ‘in a non-commodified manner’, and they require ‘communities to operate them through collaboration, cooperation and communication...rather through private interest and competition’. In *Common Space: The City as Commons*, Stavrides (2016: 2), attempting to link commoning to the processes of opening, asserts that common space is ‘a set of spatial relations produced by commoning practices’. These efforts to define the ‘urban commons’ as shared amenities, places, spaces, and practices have been rather ambiguous ones, instead of offering a clear definition of the concept.

Arguably, claiming the urban commons is associated with claiming the ‘right to the city’. The idea of ‘right to the city’ was introduced by Henri Lefebvre in *Le Droit à la Ville* ([1968] 1996). ‘The right to the city is like a cry and a demand’, argued Lefebvre ([1968] 1996: 158). As a cry, the right to the city unpacks the everyday struggle of the working-class inhabitants in the city. As a demand, it calls for attention to be paid to class struggles in the city and asks urban life to be transformed to become less alienated and more meaningful. ‘We live in a world, after all, where

the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights one can think of', David Harvey (2012: 3) observed. In *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Harvey (2012) discusses social movements, right claims, and the importance of the right to the city in today's cities where inhabitants are driven by 'individualistic and property-based' idea(s) (Harvey, 2012: 3). According to Harvey (2012: 25), the right to the city reminds us to think of 'who it is that commands the inner connection between urbanization and surplus production and use'. Don Mitchell (2003: 19) sees 'the right to the city' as a demand for the use value, which is 'the necessary bedrock of urban life', especially in capitalist society that is dominated by exchange value. The right to the city has long been utilised as a slogan for urban social movements aimed to build a more democratic and just society, for example, 'transform life, transform the city' (Mayer, 2009: 363; see also Mayer, 2012). Along similar lines, the right to the city has also become a slogan for urban social movements aimed at claiming the 'urban commons' (see Vradi and Dayal, 2016). Today, the focus of the right to the city is apparently not restricted to class struggles as in Lefebvre's original idea (see Lefebvre, [1968] 2000). The concept of the right to the city has become fashionable, and seemingly everyone can claim the 'right to the city' of any kind. Harvey (2012: xv) reflects on the problem of right claims that

the right to the city is an empty signifier. Everything depends on who gets to fill it with meaning. The financiers and developers can claim it, and have every right to do so. But then so can the homeless and the *sans-papiers*... The definition of the right is itself an object of struggle, and that struggle has to proceed concomitantly with the struggle to materialize it.

Likewise, to claim the 'urban commons', it is necessary to define the kind of the 'urban commons' that is being identified, and who the claimants are; otherwise, the urban commons will be just 'an empty signifier' as well.

How does the 'urban commons' connect to the issue of land? The literature, particularly the most cited works of Hardin (1968) and Ostrom (1990), focuses on rural common land and resources, and how to resolve the conflicts of common-pool

resources (CPR). The 'urban commons', which is a newer concept and a slogan for urban social movements that seek social justice in cities, has been conceptualised with broad-ranging definitions covering shared amenities, spaces, places, and practices. In this light, 'urban land' is a missing element in the contemporary literature of the commons. In the 'urban commons' discussions, the issue of 'land' has not been the centre of attention.

In recent literature, however, there have been openings to bring the concepts of urban land and urban commons into dialogue. One such question has been: Is public land a form of common land? According to Christophers (2018: 10), the term 'public' in 'public land' reflects 'the identity of the possessor of rights of ownership of land'; whereas, the 'common' in 'common land' refers to 'the identity of the possessor of rights of land access and use'. Thus, public land means 'land owned by public bodies' (Christophers, 2018: 6). 'Common land' refers to 'land to which rights of common (public) access and use apply' (Christophers, 2018: 10). Hence, 'common land' is defined by its use and access, not ownership rights. 'The term 'common land' says absolutely nothing about who the land's owner is'; therefore, this land type can be owned by public authorities, corporations, community groups, non-governmental organisations, or private individuals (Christophers, 2018: 10).

For this dissertation, I, therefore, define 'urban commons in the context of urban land' as 'urban land that is: collectively owned, or collectively managed, or collectively owned and managed by its members or users, and valued for its everyday use instead of for its exchange value' (adapted from Huron, 2015: 963, see also Nonini, 2007). Usually, it is 'either produced through struggle or lost to or successfully defended against enclosure' (Blomley, 2008: 320). Based on the discussions of 'commons' by Christophers (2018), Huron (2015) and also Blomley (2008) as already presented, I argue that 'urban commons in the context of urban land' detaches itself from the dichotomy of public and private space, and operates outside the ideas of ownership and market logic.

Also related to the concept of urban commons, urban land is at the heart of this doctoral dissertation. Urban land differs from rural land in the sense that urban land is produced 'through the agency of the State and the collective effects of innumerable

individual social and economic activities' (Roweis and Scott, 1981: 142). Through case studies in the context of Bangkok and smaller Thai cities, the development, management and uses of urban land, as influenced by pressures caused by land use densification, redevelopment, investment, speculation, and competing economic and social interests, and shaped by historical and socio-political conditions of land and housing development, and social norms (see Haila, 2016), are analysed in this dissertation's scholarly articles.

3 Context, data and methods

3.1 Context

According to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's (BMA) official statistics as of 2015 (BMA, 2015: 2), the Bangkok Metropolitan Area was home to 5.7 million people occupying an area of 1,569 km² with a density of 3,631 persons per km². If the regional areas of Bangkok are included, the population increased from 7.8 million to 9.6 million from 2000 to 2010, and Bangkok's urban area accounted for approximately 80% of Thailand's total urban area (the World Bank, 2015). In terms of the labour market, in 2010 out of 39 million employed people in Thailand, approximately 24 million were informal workers, accounting for 62.4 % of total employment. The largest group of informal employment is workers in agricultural and fishery businesses, followed by service and wholesale and retail trade workers (ILO, 2013: 30). In the following subsections, a brief history of urban transformations in Bangkok, and the administration and situation of land and housing will be discussed.

Bangkok and its urban transformations

Prior to 1782, Bangkok was a fishing and rice farming village. After Burmese armies were victorious at Ayutthaya (the former capital), groups of soldiers moved south and built a new capital, Bangkok, and the Rattanakosin Period (1782 to present) began (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009). The city is known to Thais as Krungthep, the abbreviated version of a much longer auspicious name, manifesting the city's role as the 'symbolic nucleus of social order and culture' (Askew, 2002: 19). The building of Bangkok as a new capital was based on the belief in 'the Hindu/Buddhist cosmological models of the universe' (Sintusingha and Mirgholami, 2013: 124) which means the sacred symbols, the important Buddha image, and the walled Grand Palace were centrally placed on land surrounded by the nobles' residences. At the same time, the ordinary people lived in 'water-based' settlements. Askew (2002: 23) has depicted that Bangkok's landscape in the early Rattanakosin was dominated by 'the royal citadel, its trading areas, and its mosaic of villages and *yan*

[neighbourhood] connected by canals and river through nodal points of activity, such as floating markets of various sizes and importance’.

Hypothetically, the Thai King owns all the land in the country. From the Suthkhotai period to the early Rattanakosin period (around 13th-19th century), the property rights regime reflected the relationship between the King and citizens. Groups of farmers enjoyed the *de facto* occupancy of the communal land which they jointly used for cultivation. Through this custom, farmers had the right to use communal land (Yano, 1968), but they were neither allowed to sell nor buy the land plot that they were using. What is more, if this common land were abandoned, the right to use the land would be terminated instantaneously (Damrongchitanon, 2007). Between the King and the citizens, there were nobles who held significant power in the social hierarchy of Siam (the former name of Thailand). The social structure and social relations between people of different classes at the time were determined by the *sakdina* system (the term is equivalent to ‘feudalism’ in English). Under this type of patron-client relationship, Reynolds (1985: 141) explained the *sakdina* system as follow:

[The] Thai term, *sakdina*, found in the Thai civil and administrative code...refers to positions in a socio-political hierarchy underpinned by economic relations. The positions were differentiated by amounts of land allocated, e.g., from 100,000 units for the highest-ranking prince, to 10,000 units for a noble, and down to 25 units for a commoner and 5 for a slave. The Old Thai term is a Sanskrit-Thai hybrid: Skt. *sakti* (power, the power of the god) bound to Thai *na* (ricefield).

However, historians and social scientists have long been debating whether the Siamese noble ranks, according to the *sakdina* system, were defined by the size of the labour force (one unit equals to one person) or by the actual amount of allocated land plots (Reynolds, 1985). Following this *sakdina* system, it can be implied that the property rights system in this period relied on social relations between the King, the nobles, the commoners, and slaves, and this Thai version of feudalism could be different from those found in the Western world. To conclude, property rights in early Bangkok can be divided into three types. First, the King’s property, which refers

to all land in the kingdom belonging to the King. Second, private property, which does not mean a bundle of rights but the usufruct rights to land granted to individual citizens (usually, the nobles). Third, community property, which refers to the usufruct right to the agricultural common land which was given to communities (Nartsupha, [1984] 1999).

In the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), Siam began establishing a relationship with the Europeans, and 'their 'superior' land-biased culture and industrial technologies signaled the beginning of a permanent transformation' (Sintusingha and Mirgholami, 2013: 125). To escape the colonisation brought to Southeast Asia by the European powers, modernisation was adopted as the goal of Siam. The two Thai Kings, Rama IV and Rama V applied tremendous efforts to make Siam into a modern state in order to exhibit to the Europeans that the country had already become 'civilised' and must not be considered 'primitive'. A 'European' city was used as a model for Bangkok's urban development and 'colonial administration practices were adopted, and centrally appointed nobles replaced hereditary lords in the hinterlands' (Sintusingha and Mirgholami, 2013: 125).

Owing to economic pressures from European powers, Siam started to open its door to the world economy after the country signed trade agreements with European countries. The most significant moment was when Siam signed the Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855. This Treaty asked Siam to adopt free trade policies: monopolies became illegal, import and export duties were reduced, and the role of external markets and international trade increased (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995). A path towards modernisation required infrastructure such as railways and irrigation systems, which are costly. These made ruling elites seek to increase revenue by expanding rice production for trade; as a result, serf duties were monetised, and slave labour was gradually abolished (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995). In Bangkok, the city landscape had been drastically transformed. City walls were torn down, canals were filled in and turned into roads, floating markets were substituted by shophouses, and a large avenue inspired by the Champs-Élysées in Paris was erected in the city centre (Askew, 2002; Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009; Sintusingha and Mirgholami, 2013). Nevertheless, these spatial transformations were found solely in

Bangkok—for instance, King Rama V constructed 120 new roads, but the routes were still limited to the inner-city areas (Askew, 2002).

In the 1890s, King Rama V introduced the idea of land ownership and implemented a Western-style land titling project for the first time, and the first land titling code was launched in the early 1900s. In effect, ownership of unoccupied land was claimed, and head taxes were replaced by taxes based on land and usufruct rights over land (Nartsupha, [1984] 1999; Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009). Villagers inevitably needed to cultivate more crops (Nartsupha, [1984] 1999). It is important to note that aside from the Kings and the nobles which have been emphasised in the history of administration and governance, ‘village community’ or the Thai term ‘ban’ (or baan), is believed to have been the pivot of Thai agrarian society (Potter, 1976; Tambiah, 1970). Instead of following other historians who wrote Thai history based on solely the role of the state, Nartsupha ([1984] 1999: 120), wrote ‘the history of the village as seen from the village’. He (Nartsupha, ([1984] 1999: 73) explains that in the early 1900s, ‘Bonds within the village were strong. Control of land was mediated by membership of the community. Cooperative exchange labour was used in production. Individual families were self-sufficient’. In 1905, the Abolition of Slavery Law was enacted, leading to the termination of the sakdina system (Aphornsuvan, 1998). Before the 1900s, people lived close to the centres of cities. In the early 1900s, as a result of suburbanisation, they began to move their settlements along waterways, and new villages were established. However, it ‘did not mean [that] they lacked a heritage or distinctive culture. Indeed, the strength of village culture arose from its ability to survive such disruptions through communal cooperation’ (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009: 85).

Thailand experienced a revolution in 1932. It was the year that the country changed its regime from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2009). Industrialisation and the formal economy were promoted; however, particularly in Bangkok, wealth remained in the hands of a few groups owning land and real estate in the city (Askew, 2002). The Sangha Act (1941; the current version: 1962, and its amendments in 1992, 2017, and 2018) together with ecclesiastical laws have been used as tools to manage and govern Buddhist monks as

well as to control the uses of Buddhist temple land and other assets (see Suksamran, 1981). As a consequence of the 1932 revolution, the Sangha Act (1941) could be seen as a tool for maintaining political stability. Swearer (1994) argues that keeping the Buddhist community in order enabled the Thai state to better control its citizens. However, after WWII, there was a *coup d'état* in November 1947. In the 1950s, Thailand received large sums of development funding from the U.S. because at the time the U.S. deployed Thailand as a key anti-communist ally opposing Indochina (Chaloemtiarana, 2007). In the 1960s, the World Bank provided loans to Thailand's water and electricity authorities in supporting the construction of dams and power plants, and the country began to follow economic policy prescriptions (aiming for GDP growth; see 'the modernisation theory' as discussed in Chapter 2) introduced by the World Bank (Rich, 1994).

In 1974, King Bhumibol Adulyadej or King Rama IX (reigned from 1946 to 2016) introduced the 'Sufficiency Economy', which is regarded as 'an alternative socioeconomic system of thought' (Drechsler, 2019: 534). This Sufficiency Economy concept as 'a development theory rooted in Buddhist Economics'⁷ (Puntasen, 2004: 30) is based on the Buddhist concept of the middle path and the principles of 'moderation, honesty, not too much greed and not taking advantage of others' which is 'a proper way to carry out economic activities according to *Buddha Dhamma*' (Puntasen 2004: 12). Some scholars see the Sufficiency Economy as a one-size-fits-all solution. For example, Mongsawad (2010) argues that practicing Sufficiency Economy would bring about human well-being, social and human capitals, and environmental sustainability. As to its implications, the current government has integrated the Sufficiency Economy into its development policy, although with a 'subtle' 'Buddhist connotation' included (Drechsler, 2019: 537) or covering a (too) broad range of subjects. For instance, the Prime Minister announced that the

⁷ Puntasen (2004: 8) defines Buddhist Economics as 'A subject related to economic activities with the goal for both individuals and society to achieve peace and tranquillity in a material world under the condition of resource constraint'. Drechsler (2019: 523) points out that Buddhist Economics nowadays 'is usually constructed from Buddhism, rather than something that emerges directly from the authoritative texts' and he argues for a need to study how Buddhist Economics has been practiced in different societies, for example, the application of the 'Sufficiency Economy' in Thailand.

government are taking forward the Sufficiency Economy in the implementation of national development plans to achieve national security, prosperity, and sustainability in all aspects including political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Royal Thai Government's press release, 4 December 2019⁸).

In terms of city planning, from the 1950s onwards, the Bangkok landscape changed from a European-style city to become an automobile city, following the U.S. model (Askew, 2002). The Town and Country Planning Act was enacted in 1952. Eight years later, the city government of Bangkok attempted to draw the first comprehensive plan. In 1960, Litchfield, Whiting, Bowne & Associates, an American consulting firm, was given the assignment to prepare the first 'Greater Bangkok Plan' in response to a request by the National Economic and Development Board (Sintusingha, 2011). Nonetheless, Litchfield's plan was never implemented. It was 32 years later, in 1992, that the city government of Bangkok launched its first official master plan to manage the urban development and land use of the city. Urban scholars sharply criticised the city government for the belated arrival of the city's first master plan. For example, Sintusingha and Mirgholami (2013: 128) argue that 'Bangkok's growth over the period from 1960 to the early '90s was *laissez faire*—characterized by uncontrolled environmentally degrading sprawl, dictated by and responding to the local and global market forces'. Concerning the land use plan, in 1971 the city government of Bangkok, in preparation for the city's sprawl, began an idea to convert agricultural land to urban land (Sternstein, 1982). This initiative has paved the way for the land authorities to allow developing land to serve the extension of the built environment to the peri-urban and suburban areas of Bangkok. As a consequence, as Kritsanaphan and Sajor (2011: 265) found, this expansion to the peri-urban Bangkok by conversing 'agricultural land to urban uses' has changed clean canal water into wastewater, causing the deterioration of the 'traditional water-based livelihood activities and domestic use' of local communities.

⁸ <https://www.thaigov.go.th/news/contents/details/25005> (accessed 8 October 2020).

Land and Housing after the arrival of the Land Code

The Land Code Act was launched in 1954. This Act advocated for land registration and promoted land titling following the Western notion that land titling is the only way to safeguard and secure property ownership for individuals (Chalamwong and Feder, 1986; Yano, 1968). This Land Code Act ratified ‘three different stages in acquiring land –occupancy, utilization and legal possession’, yet it set some restrictions on private landholdings (Yano, 1968: 854). The Proclamation of Revolutionary Council No. 49, introduced in 1959, removed the restrictions, and instead, encouraged private developers to purchase and develop the land. This led to speculative development with land and real estate becoming speculative objects. Due to the rise of the middle class which sought its own private and safe residential space close to the city, gated communities in suburban Bangkok emerged in the early 1960s (Askew, 2002). Later, the Condominium Act was enacted in 1979. This Act allowed multiple ownership of land and offered the title of the land to condominium owners (Askew, 2002). Since then, high-rise gated communities have become popular in Bangkok and other Thai cities.

Despite economic growth, since the 1980s Thailand has witnessed wealth inequality. The reasons for this include: favours have been given to capital ‘while repressing labor’; the concentration of growth occurred in and around Bangkok, whereas in the rural areas people continued to struggle; and, ‘there was no political interest or will to combat growing inequality’ (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2016: 8).

The 1984 Thailand Land Titling Project, supported by the World Bank and the Government of Australia, was one of the largest land titling projects in the world, according to Rattanabirabongse et al. (1998). The negative effects of this land titling project seemed to hit rural farmers rather than urban dwellers. Based on the World Bank’s project report (1993), the main objectives of the land titling project in Thailand included: to speed up the issuance of title deeds; to advance the effectiveness of land administration; and, to draw up base maps and cadastral maps in both urban and rural areas. Scholars (e.g. Damrongchitanon, 2007; Leonard and Narintarakul Na Ayutthaya, 2006) have pointed out that this land titling project has worsened the already-existing inequality between the rich and the poor. This is

because the project benefited investors with purchasing power, while small-scale farmers and poor people (the real land users) have been under pressure to sell their land (usually land ownership by *de facto* occupancy according to the old customary law) and also land jointly used by community members (Damrongchitanon, 2007; Leonard and Narintarakul, 2006).

Because of the blooming of the industrial sector and the loss of agricultural land, rural farmers decided to migrate to big cities. In the 1980s, informal settlements became visible in Bangkok. A survey of 'slums' in Bangkok conducted in 1985 showed that there were 845 'slums' and 166 squatter settlements (Pornchokchai, 1985: 1-2). Yap and Wandeler (2010: 333) claim that unlike those in other cities, informal settlements (so-called 'slums', crowded communities, or urban poor communities) in Bangkok are scattered around the city, 'usually on relatively small plots of land, in between other land uses, including high-income residential areas'. Private property owners usually allow the poor to use their unused land for housing. 'The poor may pay a minimal rent; but the land may also be provided free of charge. When asked to vacate the land, the residents are expected to do so...without protest or compensation' and because of 'an explicit or tacit consent by the landowner for the settlement, most residents are not really squatters in the legal sense' (Yap and Wandeler, 2010: 333). According to Askew (2002: 79), 'officials renamed slums 'crowded communities'...to remove the stigmatic title 'slums' from official discourse: it was part of a programme to refashion state policy towards Bangkok's poor as development policy'.

In July 1997, the Thai government decided to float its currency, the Thai Baht, and this incident provoked an Asian financial crisis. This bursting of the economic bubble in Thailand was widely understood to have been caused by 'state failure', or precisely the effects of the capital-market liberalisation and the mismanagement of monetary policies (Lauridsen, 1998). Additionally, the effects of the growing property sector also contributed to the causes of the crisis (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1998). According to Haila (2016: 201), 'Foreign investors were not interested in firms producing commodities, but instead invested in speculative projects offering the prospect of windfall capital gains —property, finance and telecoms' and there had

been an increase in investment in property 'to meet [the] increased demand for office, industrial and shopping space due to the growth of the Thai economy. But some of the investments were speculative, and in the wrong places'; thus, this property speculation had led to oversupply problems. 'Real estate was bought for speculative purposes, and the excessive buying of housing units led developers to flood the market' (Haila, 2016: 201). Thailand's financial market had started to improve in the early 2000s, but the speculation in land and real estate remains. It was reported in 2018 that there were 454,814 unsold housing units across Thailand (Bloomberg, 2019).

As to the issue of public housing, the role of administration of public housing belongs to the state, particularly the National Housing Authority (NHA), which was established in 1973. Even though between the 1970s and 1980s, the NHA built 20,000 apartment units across the country to be let at a low monthly rent (300 Baht or 8.6 USD) and implemented 132 'slum-upgrading' programmes between 1978 and 1991, they could not meet the increasing demand from the poor (Yap and Wandeler, 2010: 334-335). The NHA programmes seem to be problematic: not only were the programmes lacking in their capacity to provide adequate public housing but also politicians used these programmes to generate 'extra income'. Seemingly, politicians 'used NHA's land purchases and house construction programmes as opportunities for corruption' (Yap and Wandeler, 2010: 335). Due to the inefficiency of the NHA, the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) was established in 1992 to provide loans to urban communities for land purchase and housing construction or improvement. In 2000, the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI), a public organisation, was founded. The CODI was created by merging UCDO and the Rural Development Fund. The CODI launched the Baan Mankong (literally, secured house) programmes in 2003, aimed at providing loans to communities to upgrade houses and improve common spaces, to re-block or rearrange plots and spaces, and to relocate communities to a new site in case upgrading or re-blocking is not possible. However, these Baan Mankong programmes limited their targets to poor communities already living in informal rental settlements, rather than new low-income households who needed shelter (Yap and Wandeler, 2010).

Statistical data from the NHA (2013: 10) on housing supply demonstrates that in Bangkok and its vicinity, 535,371 housing units (out of the total of 4,451,540 units) were supplied by NHA and CODI, and 12% of all housing units in Bangkok are public housing. Aside from this small proportion of public housing units provided by NHA and CODI, the State Railways of Thailand (SRT), the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT) and the Royal Irrigation Department (RID), the Crown Property Bureau (CPB), and Buddhist temples are the significant landowners who lease their land for the poor to live (Angel and Pornchokchai, 1989; Yap and Wandeler, 2010).

According to the land statistics from the Department of Lands (2016), Thailand occupies a total land area of 321 million rai (126.9 million acres). Of this total, 194 million rai (76.7 million acres) are state land accounting for 60.4 %, while 127 million rai (50.2 million acres), or 39.6%, are private land. It is important to note that 42% of total state land is defined by law as national forest.

Overall, the enactment of the 1954 Land Code Act, and especially the arrival of the Proclamation of Revolutionary Council No. 49 which was introduced in 1959, could be considered as the turning point in the land tenure system. This Proclamation lifted restrictions concerning 'land transaction, subdivision, and speculation' (Bello et al., 1998: 107), and paved the way for private developers to acquire land and encourage private land development. The implementation of the 1984 Land Titling Project, which promoted private land ownership, has negatively impacted on the non-private forms of land tenure systems including common land. In terms of current land development procedures, according to the Land Development Act (enacted in 2000), a land developer is required to apply for a licence and have their project approved—in compliance with zoning laws, ministerial regulations, and environmental regulations—by the Land Development Commission, which is comprised of members from a range of offices under the Department of Lands and chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior. As to the recent effort to reduce income disparity and to prevent wealth accumulation, the new land law entitled the Land and Building Tax Act B.E. 2562 (2019) came into force in January 2020, after over 30 years of drafting. This Act aims to improve tax collection efficiency, reduce inequality, and increase public revenue

by introducing a progressive tax system and changing the tax rate from a 12.5% flat rate to new rates based on appraised value, which varies depending on how the property is used. This new law has forced absentee landlords and owners of abandoned land and properties to begin to pay tax.

3.2 Data and methods

This dissertation uses the urban land approach (Haila, 1988; 2016) as the framework for analysis. According to Haila (2016), the ways in which urban land is used and managed are the consequences of not only the political and economic processes, but also cultural and social processes. This framework facilitated the dissertation to consider the relevant theories, concepts, and ideas (as discussed in the previous chapter) in examining the uses of public land, private land, and religious land in order to answer the following questions: What are the urban problems concerning the uses of each land type by the poor? How do these problems arise? Why do these problems persist and how can they be addressed? The framework for analysis also guided the research design, methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis, which will be discussed next.

Specifically, several aspects are examined in the dissertation: the goals, implementation, and impact of Bangkok's 2014 street clearance plan on the lives and livelihood of street vendors; the diversification of gated communities and the extent to which the residents of gated communities have socialised with neighbours outside the gates; and how Buddhist temples lease their land for social and communal purposes. Considering the complexity of the subjects and the need to conduct research with human beings in real-life environments, in this dissertation, I employ a qualitative approach and use case studies. The dissertation drew on empirical data collected from: interviews; observation of land use practices; and analysis of official documents including laws, regulations, policies, and plans. Empirical data were gathered between July 2014 and August 2019. The data collection was conducted in three overlapping phases: from July 2014 to March 2015 (Article I), from December

2015 to June 2019 (Article II), and from April 2016 to August 2019 (Article III). A summary of the data collection methods and phases for each article are presented in Table 2.

In detail, for Article I, data were gathered through policy document analysis; observation; and, semi-structured interviews with street vendors in Tha Chang (part of the Bangkok old town), city officials from the City Law Enforcement Department under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), pedestrians, and an assistant of the senior Buddhist monk who mediated the conflicts between street vendors and city authorities, between street vendors and powerful gangsters, and among street vendors themselves. For Article II, data were collected from: semi-structured interviews with the residents of five gated high-rise housing estates in Bangkok; semi-structured interviews with representatives of development firms; field notes from staying in these five gated communities, including observation of the physical forms, architecture and security measures of gated communities, the uses of club services and shared amenities, and the physical and social features of the neighbourhoods; and an analysis of relevant land and housing policies, laws, and regulations. For Article III, empirical data were gathered from: semi-structured and in-depth interviews with Buddhist abbots and senior monks, a representative from the National Office of Buddhism, Head Office (NOB), a representative of the Chiang Mai municipality, and street vendors; an analysis of policies, laws, and regulations; and observation of how Buddhist temple land is used in eleven urban temples in six cities (Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Khon Kaen, Surat Thani, and Chiang Mai).

Regarding the definition of the urban poor, AlSayyad (2004: 9) observed that urban scholars often use the terms ‘urban marginals’, ‘urban disenfranchised’, and ‘urban poor’ interchangeably. Instead of taking the term ‘urban poor’ for granted, for this doctoral dissertation entitled *Urban Land for the Poor*, it is necessary to deliberate over how the urban poor are defined. In each article, ‘who the urban poor are’ is based on the specific context and the informant groups (see Table 2).

Article number and title	Data collection phase	Data collected by	Who are the urban poor?
Article I: Conflicts over streets: The eviction of Bangkok street vendors	July 2014 - March 2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Semi-structured interviews with street vendors, pedestrians, city officials, and a senior monk's assistant 2) An analysis of official documents including laws, regulations, policies, and plans 3) Observation on how public streets are used 	Those who have no savings or only a small amount, less capacity for consumption, lower level of education, and less opportunity for political participation; those who can only afford to live in the informal settlements; and, those who consider themselves as the poor.
Article II: Also the urban poor live in gated communities: A Bangkok case study	December 2015 - June 2019	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Semi-structured interviews with the residents of gated housing estates and developers 2) An analysis of official documents including laws, regulations, policies, and plans 3) Field notes including observation of architecture, the uses of club services, and the physical and social characteristics of the neighbourhoods 	Those who earn less than 100,000 baht (2,900 USD) a year, according to the state's 2016 social welfare programme (Government of Thailand, 2018).
Article III: Religious land as commons: Buddhist temples, monastic landlordism, and the urban poor in Thailand	April 2016 - August 2019	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Semi-structured and in-depth interviews with Buddhist abbots and senior monks, street vendors, and city and state officials 2) An analysis of official documents including laws, regulations, policies, and plans 3) Observation on how the temple land is used 	Those who cannot afford market-priced rent for housing; those who are not able to acquire a vending pitch in weekend markets; and, those who asked the temple (landlord) to reduce the rent of farmland when rice farming was unprofitable.

Table 2: List of data collection phases and methods, and how the urban poor are defined in each article.

For Article I on Bangkok's street vending, the street vendors whom I interviewed had no savings or only a small amount, less consumption capacity, a lower level of education, and less opportunity for political participation; can only afford to live in the informal settlements; and, consider themselves as poor. For Article II on gated communities in Bangkok, since this paper is based on an analysis of the linkages between income class and gated communities, the urban poor were primarily defined by income, based on the state's 2016 social welfare programme (Government of Thailand, 2018) aimed at providing benefits for the poor, defined as people earning less than 100,000 baht (2,900 USD) a year. Article III on Buddhist temple land focuses on three groups of temple tenants: those who cannot afford market-priced rent for housing; those who have no capacity to acquire a vending pitch in weekend markets; and those who asked the temple (landlord) if they could pay the rent at a lower rate when farming was unprofitable.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). Thematic analysis is a suitable method for examining the people's concerns about an incident, as well as why and how people use or do not use objects, goods, or services (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In doing so, the analysis of the data began by transcribing and reviewing the data, followed by identifying the themes, organising the data by theme, reviewing themes and the relationship between themes, and finally, producing the analysis report.

The position and background of the researcher have an impact on the research process and the data analysis. A clear explanation of the research purposes was given to the informants. Also, all informants were asked if they would like to be anonymous, and they were not required to answer all the questions and could stop the interview at any time. As a Thai Buddhist and once an ordained monk, I was aware that when conducting the research design, doing interviews with informants (in particular, but not limited to, Buddhist monks), and analysing and interpreting the data, I needed to be neutral, and keep away my personal beliefs and assumptions so that they would not impact the research process, the data, and the findings.

4 Results

This dissertation has ‘urban land’ as its theoretical and empirical focus. It analyses the uses of public land, private land, and religious land in urban areas. The dissertation has attempted to answer the following research questions: what are the urban problems concerning the uses of each land type by the poor?; how do these problems arise?; and why do they persist and how can they be addressed? As an article-based doctoral dissertation, this dissertation consists of three articles, and each article is a critical study of the uses of each land type. The results are discussed as follows.

Article I ‘Conflicts over streets: The eviction of Bangkok street vendors’ is an analysis of the uses and management of public land which draws from the implementation of the 2014 city plan to bring back ‘safety and orderliness’ to pedestrians and tourists. The implementation of such a plan involved reclaiming streets from street vendors in all districts across the Bangkok Metropolitan Area and relocating the vendors to designated marketplaces in the suburbs.

In this article, I examine the aims, implementation, and effects of such a spatial reorganisation plan on the street vendors’ lives and livelihood, and on the atmosphere of the city. The case is Tha Chang, one of the city’s oldest neighbourhoods. Tha Chang streets are located between the Grand Palace and the Chao Phraya River, the city’s main river. Nearby, there are temples, universities, marketplaces, and piers serving public and tourist boats. Hence, before the eviction took place, the Tha Chang neighbourhood was busy and crowded with street vendors selling a wide variety of goods, tourists (both Thai and foreign), students, and other pedestrians. Tha Chang street vendors were authorised to trade on the public streets managed by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). The vendors held permits and were asked to follow the rules and regulations strictly, including days and hours of operation, the size and location of a vending pitch, and the requirement to pay a cleaning fee to the city government. However, the BMA had never collected rent from the vendors.

This street clean-up plan came as a surprise to the Tha Chang street vendors because they had not been invited to participate in any public hearings or town hall meetings. According to the data from an analysis of policy documents and an interview with a senior-level city official, the reasons for drawing up this plan were based on complaints from pedestrians and tourists on street vending activities making streets unsafe, unclean, and untidy, and also from street vendors who had been harassed by city officials and powerful gangsters collecting illegal rent and protection fees. In addition, the BMA was also under pressure from the military government's national campaign on reorganising public spaces across the country.

As to the effects of this street clearance plan by the BMA, there were emerging conflicts: between street vendors who fought against eviction and city authorities; among street vendors themselves, because aside from the vendors who insisted on staying put, there were also other vendors who wanted to move out and those who just wanted to postpone the move-out date; and between street vendors and powerful gangsters who kept collecting illegal rent. Tha Chang street vendors protested in front of the city hall but received no response from the BMA. It was a senior monk who acted on behalf of the vendors in negotiating with city authorities and asking for an extension of the street occupancy. It was also this monk who mediated the conflicts between the vendors and powerful gangsters as well as the conflicts between the vendors themselves. After the eviction date, the streets became unsafe because of tensions between city authorities and some vendors who came back to occupy the streets, and the lack of 'eyes on the street' (see Jacobs, 1961). This study shows that Tha Chang streets are vital to street vendors; they mean 'lives and livelihood' for the vendors since they had given them a commercial space, and at the same time offered a space for social relations with other vendors, customers, and residents in the neighbourhood.

While Article I examines public land, Article II, 'Also the urban poor live in gated communities: A Bangkok case study', investigates private land with a focus on gated communities. In particular, this article aimed to find out why gated communities, a type of Western enclosed private housing, were built in Bangkok; to what extent this modern type of housing has been adapted to the local conditions;

who lives in this type of housing; and, whether and how Bangkok gated communities and their gated living are different from those found in the Western cities. It is understood that a gated community comprises the following features: gates, walls, fences, and security guards; club services and amenities offered only to the residents, and legal frameworks governing the residents and controlling shared spaces. Gated communities are understood to be a driving force for residential segregation that divides the city into the rich and the poor neighbourhoods.

The motivation for conducting this study came from my observation that previous studies on gated communities especially in non-Western cities have claimed that the middle-class live in gated communities, whereas the poor only reside in 'slums', self-builds, or informal settlements, and these two income groups have socially interacted only to a minimal degree. The assumption regarding the wealthy reside in gated communities, while the poor live in informal settlements could lead to poverty stigma and deepen the divisions between the rich and the poor. With an aim to contribute to the ongoing debates on the 'diversification of gated communities', rather than analysing gated communities from solely their physical forms and middle-class residents, this dissertation has its focus on a type of gated communities in which people of different income groups are the residents. The study explores the forms of enclosed residence in Thai history, the emergence of suburban gated communities in the 1960s, and the prevalence of gated communities as high-rise housing estates since the 1980s. It discusses the urban planning and the morphology of the city and considers the relevant laws and regulations concerning land and housing development, and the roles of the state and city authorities in administering the development of private housing estate projects.

Based on empirical data gathered from five high-rise gated communities in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, residents of three gated communities are the middle class, whereas two gated communities have low- and middle-income earners as their residents. The latter two gated communities share club services and amenities with non-residents. Moreover, in this study, it was also found that the residents of these two gated communities socialise with outsiders as a continuation of the 'village community' life which has been rooted in Thai society. Also, data from interviews

with developers demonstrate that ‘gating’ has become a standard feature in all recent residential projects. This gated communities study illustrates the following: there are gated communities in which the poor are the residents in Bangkok; these gated communities are not fully enclosed because outsiders are allowed to use their club services and amenities, and the residents of gated communities socialise with neighbours living outside.

Urban scholars have not paid enough attention to the uses of religious land. One reason for this, as Haila (2019) points out, could be that particularly Asian religions have been conceptualised as an ‘otherworldly matter’. Article III, ‘Religious land as commons: Buddhist temples, monastic landlordism, and the urban poor in Thailand’ aims to shed light on the understanding of religious land—in particular, how this land type is used in urban settings. The case is the Buddhist temple land in Bangkok and other five cities, namely Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, Khon Kaen, Surat Thani, and Chiang Mai. A Buddhist temple is a legal entity, and according to the legal definition, temple land is private. In practice, the land has long been traditionally used as the commons. Thai Sangha Law prohibits temples from selling their land. This type of land is considered to be inalienable.

In this article, I investigate: how Buddhist temples in urban areas treat their land, whether as the commons, a commodity, or a financial asset; how the temple land is used by the poor and to benefit the community; and how Buddhist temples, as faith-based, traditional welfare institutions, manage to resist the temptation of accumulating wealth from leasing their urban land according to the rent it can yield. To do so, the article examines the origin of Buddhist temple land, the practices of donating land to the temples, and the sacred aspects of the temple land. It also looks at how Buddhist temple land in Thailand is managed by considering the role of the state and relevant laws and regulations that control and monitor the uses of temple land as well as prevent the accumulation of temples’ wealth.

The results show that the abbots and monks were aware of the increasing prices of urban land and the option to gain revenue by leasing their land. However, the Buddhist temples which were studied have managed to resist this temptation and still maintained their long-standing role as a social and communal landlord by

leasing their land for housing, vending, and farming to the urban poor with nominal rents being charged. Moreover, the temples have acted as the stewards of art and heritage objects. Some temples have schools located inside the temple compounds. They also allow the community to use temple land for social events. Urban temple land serving communal functions reflects the role of Buddhist temples as ‘the spiritual anchor for the people’ in the community, as one abbot said.

Based on the results, it was argued in this article that Buddhist temples in the study have used their land as the urban commons. This religious land is used for purposes such as housing, farming, vending, and social activities to serve not only the needs of the poor but also those of community members. The land use decisions were justified not by exchange value but use value based on moral concerns and ethical considerations. The Buddhist temples, their trustees, and the authorities (and local people, according to one case found in this research) made decisions on how the temple land was to be used. However, the land users including the temples and monks, the trustees, the tenants, and community members have jointly used and taken care of the temple land (the commons) as a way to fight poverty and benefit the whole community.

Even though each article analyses each urban land type, the results demonstrate that the three articles are interconnected. Private forms of land tenure have dominated Thailand’s urban land systems and land use practices in Bangkok, and the urban land use decisions are apparently based on exchange value rather than use value. As to the case of public land, the BMA applied the rights of property over public land when defining how public streets were to be used and by whom. According to Haila (2016: 15), in the case of Singapore, ‘governments can use their land bank for the public good or maximise revenue from their land assets’. In the Thai case, the BMA decided to utilise the regulated, socially ‘purified’ public streets as a good image of the city to attract tourism and investment, rather than to use them as a public good. Gated communities are regarded as a consequence of treating land as a commodity (Haila, 2016). Thai legislation also facilitates the development of land for private use and developers see ‘gating’ as a necessity for their housing estate

projects. Moreover, landowners have faced the temptation to monetise their urban land and religious institutions are no exception.

In lieu of ‘following the money’ or focusing only on the exchange value of land (as has been done in many studies), aside from the political and economic aspects, this dissertation has also considered the social and cultural aspects including social relations around the land and ethical considerations on the uses of public land, private land, and religious land. Public land is a place of economic and social life where conflicts, competition, and social interactions and organisation emerge. In terms of private land, residents of some gated communities in Bangkok continue their ‘village community’ life by socialising with non-residents and allowing them to use club services and amenities. What is more, religious land in this study has been used by community members as the commons. As to the perspective on religion, Buddhism has been deeply integrated into Thai society as seen included into the development policies (e. g. the Sufficiency Economy) and it also plays a key role in shaping land use practices and social relations between different groups of city dwellers as shown in this dissertation. A respected Buddhist monk represented street vendors when negotiating with city authorities on the eviction plan. Furthermore, this dissertation found that Buddhist temples and monks have maintained a long-standing traditional role as guardians of the commons embedded in the temple land.

5 Discussion

The aim of this dissertation is to unpack how three types of urban land (public land, private land, and religious land) are used by the poor in Bangkok. The dissertation has identified the problems regarding the uses of each land type, investigated the causes of these problems, and discussed why the problems persist and how they can be addressed.

In the case of public land, this dissertation examines a city plan to reorganise public streets by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). The implementation of this draconic street clearance plan to all districts across Bangkok has brought about urban problems: the eviction of street vendors and the confrontation between the vendors and city authorities leading to violence. The causes of these problems are as follows. First, street vending was regarded by the city authorities as an ‘urban informality’ which hinders the city’s aim of becoming a modern, rational city. Street vendors were accused of making streets unorganised and untidy. This study shows that prior to the BMA’s street clearance plan, the vendors were authorised to use public urban land, and many had traded on the public streets for several years. They provided reasonably priced goods and services to other urban citizens. Some vendors had been exploited by officials and powerful gangsters. This ‘blame-the-victim’ type of urban policy resulted in street vendors being stigmatised owing to their informal income-generating activities, and the vendors were excluded from all planning processes. They were neither given an opportunity to participate in public hearings nor invited to attend any consultation meetings concerning the implementation of the plan. The marginalisation of street vendors by the city authorities became visible when the BMA ignored the vendors’ claims for their rights to public streets. Ignoring them in this way led the vendors to ask a senior monk to be a mediator in negotiating with the authorities. This study points to the weaknesses of modernist city planning and spatial order that brought about street vendors’ resistance, protests, and unsafe public streets. Second, this Bangkok case study illustrates how the city government portrayed the ‘lifeless’ public streets as a good image for the city. As Haila (2006) argues, the image of the city, which city managers have attempted to improve, is believed to serve as a magnet

attracting investors and tourists. As to this study, the BMA treated public land as a means that would bring about investment and tourism for economic prosperity, instead of using it as a public good to support the urban poor socially and economically. Third, one rationale behind the implementation of this street clearance plan arose due to the pressure from the central government. This was not the first time that this happened to the city government. Bangkok's policy on street trade is known for its inconsistency depending on whether the land development and economic policies, at both local and national levels, are directed at pro-poor, pro-rich, pro-rural, or pro-urban aims. When local and national governments have different focuses and strategies, especially on the issues of land management and the informal economy, the BMA unavoidably must change its policy to put it in line with the national one. Fourth, apparently, local politicians did not consider street vendors as their voters because many vendors did not have housing registrations in Bangkok. According to Christophers (2018: 5), public land is represented and 'owned' by the state and municipality because they can sell it; however, the public, 'in a democratic society', has the power—'through the apparatus of the government it elects—to shape how this land is used.' The case of street vendors in Bangkok who are not eligible to vote shows that local politicians did not pay attention to the voices of street vendors because the vendors are not significant to them politically.

As to the study of private land, gated communities, a type of enclosed housing which originated in the West, were investigated. Previous studies on the issue have claimed that gated communities offer the middle class a fortified residential space to isolate themselves, and gated communities can be regarded as a modern way of self-segregation⁹. As found in this study, gated communities have proliferated in Bangkok, and this has been linked to residential segregation by income class. The reasons for this are described as follows. First, there has been a trend that members of the middle class seek safe and private housing in the city; this trend started in suburban Bangkok in the early 1960s. Furthermore, land and housing legislation, particularly the Land Code Act and the Condominium Act, encourage developers to purchase land, support the development of land, and promote private ownership and

⁹ Usually, self-segregation refers to people who belong to an ethnic or religious group living together and separating themselves from the rest of society.

land titling. Lastly, the BMA has limited power over land administration. The Bangkok Metropolitan Area is officially a special administration area. Based on this special administration, the Bangkok governor is elected, and the city government of Bangkok has its own city planning department in charge of zoning, flood prevention, and historical buildings conservation. However, it is the central government's Department of Lands which has the power over land administration and grants land use permits. In examining who lives in gated communities in Bangkok, instead of emphasising only gated communities in which the middle class live (as many studies already have), the focus in this study is the diversification of gated communities. The results of this study challenge the current understanding of gated communities from the following perspectives. The poor living as residents in gated communities challenges the notion that gated communities are built exclusively for the middle class. The finding that club services in gated communities are shared with non-residents contradicts the function of gated communities as 'enclosed' residential spaces. In Bangkok, developers have applied 'gating' to all new housing projects. Therefore, gated communities in this sense are far from a distinctive type of residence or a fixed form of modern housing, as widely understood. Even though this is a case-based and context-specific study, the results may urge urban and housing scholars to be cautious about the universal concept of gated communities. This is because gated communities can be found in diverse forms, which are characterised by historical and socio-political conditions of land and housing development, the ways of life of the residents, and socio-spatial characteristics of the neighbourhoods in which gated communities are located.

The last type of land considered in this dissertation is religious (common) land. This dissertation acknowledges the urban problems that stem from the commodification and financialisation of urban land, e.g., the oversupply of land and real estate and the eviction of the poor. Certain incidents of Thai Buddhist temples allegedly being involved in corruption and other forms of dishonesty were also considered in this dissertation. For example, there is a land dispute case regarding Wat Phra Dhammakaya, which was accused of occupying 2,400 rai (949 acres) of farmland resulting in farmers being evicted (Scott, 2009: 136), and allegedly 1,900 rai (751 acres) of land part of the temple's assets was titled under the name of a monk

instead of the temple (Scott, 2009: 143). This case and other occasions of corruption arguably perpetrated by other temples have done harm to the reputation of faith-based organisations as a traditional moral educator and welfare provider in Thai society. In this dissertation, the uses of Buddhist temple land in urban areas were studied. The results demonstrate that Buddhist temples and monks have, in the analysed cases, kept their enduring role as custodians of the commons which is embedded in Thai Buddhist temple land.

Based on the results, the arguments put forth in this dissertation are as follows: First, for street vendors, public streets mean much more than just a walkway; they are a source of livelihood and a place where the vendors have established and maintained social relations with others. Deploying modernist city planning in managing Bangkok's public streets without social and ethical concerns has proved to be a mistake. As shown in this dissertation, street vendors were evicted, the tensions between the vendors and city authorities escalated, and urban streets became unsafe. Second, in Bangkok, there are gated communities in which the urban poor are the residents, and they socialise with outsiders. Also, club services and amenities in some gated communities are available to non-residents. The results of this study point to a need to consider historical conditions of land and housing, social norms, the way of life of the residents, and socio-spatial features of the neighbourhoods around gated communities when examining enclosed housing spaces and the social relations in and around them. Third, the case of Buddhist temple land in urban areas being used as the urban commons demonstrates the significance of ethical considerations in land use decisions and a long-standing role of Buddhist temples as a social and communal landlord. Correspondingly, the role of the state, through legal instruments used in monitoring and controlling the wealth and assets of the temples, should also be taken into consideration.

Overall, managing urban land is a political game, as it brings about winners and losers. In the Thai case, the losers are the poor who are marginalised by land policy and land development legislation. This dissertation identifies three forces that have paved the way for landowners to maximise the utility of land, generate revenue, and accumulate wealth through land commodification and financialisation. These

interrelated forces are: (i) the dominating private forms of land tenure, and the exchange value which has been prioritised over the use value of urban land, (ii) the 'property mind' (Haila, 2017: 500) which has motivated people to invest in land and real estate, and (iii) the 'property lobby' (Haila, 2016: 127) which aims at reforming land policy and regulations to be beneficial to groups of landowners and developers. Even public land (i. e. public streets) has been treated by the city government of Bangkok as a magnet to attract investment rather than as a public good. Also, as this Bangkok case study shows, politicians and state government could be part and parcel of the property lobby that influenced Bangkok's policy on public land.

The urban land approach has provided this dissertation with a lens to examine how urban land is used from the political economy as well as socio-cultural perspectives. Given the results, the history of the land and housing development, social norms, ethical considerations, and social relations between landlords and tenants, between public land users and city authorities, and among land users have influenced how the urban land is (socially) used and managed. What is more, for the case of Thailand, where Buddhism is deeply rooted in Thai society and integrated into Thai culture, Buddhist temples and monks can still be considered (notwithstanding the mentioned exceptions) as social landlords and traditional welfare providers who treat their land according to its use value to serve community members and hence contribute to social and spatial equality in Thai society.

The results from the dissertation can contribute to the development of the urban land approach, especially to a greater theoretical understanding of the uses of urban land and to advance the ongoing debates and discussions in urban studies on 'gated communities' and the 'urban commons' through case studies of Bangkok and other Thai cities. Also, this dissertation has implications for urban policy and practices. The analysis of the 2014 street clearance plan by the city government of Bangkok points to the harmful effects of modernist city planning which narrowly focuses on spatial changes without a concern for social impacts. This dissertation calls for a type of urban policy that recognises and respects the rights, needs, and interests of public land users, acknowledges the contributions of the urban poor and the informal sector, and treats urban land as a public good. In terms of gated

communities, this dissertation questions the applicability of the prototypical Western definitions of the concept. Land and housing scholars should not define gated communities simply by their physical features or middle-class residents because gated communities are spatially and socially constructed, and they can be found in different forms. Regarding the ‘urban commons’, it is recognised in this dissertation that mainstream economists tend to see common land as being outdated, belonging to a primitive culture, and unable to bring about economic efficiency. Also, the contemporary literature on the ‘urban commons’ has ignored the centrality of land. This dissertation offers an unusual study of religious land by using the case of Thai Buddhist temple land in urban areas. The results of this study reveal the existence of religious land being used as the (urban) commons.

In addition, this dissertation can be useful for further social research in several fields of study. Firstly, studies on streets and culture of the city could benefit from the dissertation’s openings. In *The Culture of the Indian Street*, Edensor (1998: 215) argues that people and activities on streets, which are a space of social and cultural life, can contribute to ‘human pleasure and an understanding of difference and ‘otherness’’. Secondly, new insights in neighbourhood studies can be gained from focusing on whether and why working-class residents are more neighbourhood bound when compared to the middle-class residents, as this doctoral study’s findings suggest (in the specific context of gated communities in Bangkok). Thirdly, the studies of religious institutions and entrepreneurship can benefit from this dissertation. For instance, it would be important to understand how various types of religious institutions, besides leasing their land (to the poor), have adopted ‘alternative’ financial survival strategies or business (friendly) practices (for example, the Sufficiency Economy).

In common with most doctoral dissertations, this dissertation has its limitations. Its first limitation relates to the limited academic literature on the topic. As Haila (2016) points out, land has not been taken seriously by contemporary economists and social theorists. Moreover, the issue of non-private forms of urban land tenure, particularly common land, has received little attention in urban studies because scholars tend to believe that such forms are outdated or difficult to find in

urban areas. Previous studies on the land issue in the Thai context have their focus on agricultural land in rural areas rather than urban land. Further, it is rare to find studies on the uses of religious land in the political economy literature, despite there being a growing number of studies criticising the wealth of faith-based organisations. Given this limitation, rich empirical data and case studies were of crucial importance for the dissertation.

Another limitation concerns conflicts of knowledge. As I am Buddhist and was an ordained monk in my young adulthood, I have received considerable amounts of first-hand background knowledge about Buddhism from my upbringing. When conducting this doctoral research, I found that some of my background knowledge conflicted with the data that were collected from the interviews with monks. On the positive side, my 'emic' position made me notify my co-authors (of Article III) about the conflicts between my own knowledge and the collected data immediately, re-examine my positionality, attempt to be neutral in my judgements, and abstain from expressing my personal values and assumptions as a potential bias in interpreting the data.

In order to ensure further validity of the information and the reliability of the research findings, in this dissertation, the empirical data collected from interviews and observation were triangulated with the data from the analysis of policy texts, legal documents, and the results from existing literature and previous studies on similar topics. Data from these sources were compared and analysed. A triangulated matrix for identifying and assessing the findings was employed. This triangulation, coupled with the rigorous peer review of the three publications in this dissertation, makes the results of my study sufficiently reliable.

6 Conclusion

The dramatic inequalities in today's cities require renewed analyses. Yet, neither the western-biased and positivism-influenced urban approaches (generalising and categorising cities based on economic performance) nor the turn to postcolonial urban studies (particularising and decategorising cities) seems to be capable of fully addressing these new complexities. The urban land approach adopted and developed in this dissertation is an attempt towards overcoming methodological problems in analysing the complexities of urban inequality and poverty in association with urban land use in particular.

The ways in which land is used and managed are not only a matter of economic gain or loss based on market logic, but also a social issue that requires socio-political and ethical considerations. In examining the public land, private land, and religious land used by the urban poor, the roles of concerned authorities, public and private institutions and individuals, relevant policy and legal documents, and socio-cultural context are considered in this dissertation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, positioning this thesis in relation to positivist and postcolonial approaches to the study of cities is useful in the sense that it gives methodological and theoretical directions for conducting this doctoral research (and possible for developing the third approach in analysing the uses of urban land). Bangkok offers the context for the empirical part of this doctoral research. Instead of seeing the city of Bangkok simply as an 'ordinary city' and a city 'off the map' as the postcolonialists would have claimed, or understanding the land development processes in Bangkok as following the same path as other cities (analysable through the big data, for instance) as the positivists would have argued, in this dissertation I employ and at the same time aim to develop the third approach, which is the urban land approach pioneered by Anne Haila (1988; 2016). By placing land as the centre of analysis, I have analysed social relations around the land and paid attention to not only the economic and political aspects, but also the social and cultural aspects including ethical considerations. I have also considered the history of land and

housing development, the socio-spatial dimensions, and the social norms that have had an impact on land rent, land use decisions and practices.

The aim of this dissertation is to discover: the urban problems concerning the uses of public land, private land, and religious land by the poor, the causes of these problems, and how these problems can be addressed. The dissertation is comprised of three studies published as three academic articles. Each article is an analysis of each type of land. Article I is a study of public land. It considers the 2014 street clearance plan by the city government of Bangkok and its effects on the lives and livelihood of the urban poor and the atmosphere of the city. Article II is an investigation of the uses of private land. This study is interested in the diversification of gated communities. It attempts to find out why gated communities were built in Bangkok, who lives there, and whether the residents of gated communities socialise with outsiders. Article III deals with the uses of religious land in the urban context. It examines the ways in which Thai Buddhist temples lease their land to the urban poor, the relationship between the state and Buddhist temples concerning the management of religious land, and the challenges that Buddhist temples have faced in making land use decisions.

The key findings from these three studies can be summarised as follows. First, before the arrival of the analysed street clearance plan in July 2014, the city government of Bangkok used to treat public land as a public good. Street vendors were authorised to use public streets for their livelihood; they offered reasonably priced goods to residents and tourists in the neighbourhood, and the vendors, at the same time, enjoyed social relationships with them. After the introduction of this street clearance plan, the city government regarded public land as no longer a public good but as an ingredient of the city's image enhancement. It considered the cleared and 'lifeless' public streets as a magnet pulling investors and tourists to the city. In this context, street vending was regarded as an 'urban informality', a bad image for the city, and this led to the eviction of street vendors. Second, undeniably, Bangkok has faced the oversupply of land and real estate problems, residential segregation by income class, and the proliferation of gated communities. Unlike previous studies which have emphasised gated communities of the rich and their poor neighbours

living in informal settlements, this dissertation focuses on a type of gated communities in which people of diverse income classes are the residents. The findings that there exist gated communities having the urban poor as the residents who socialise and share club services with non-residents demonstrate the agency of the urban poor in the sense that they have the ability to adapt and alter this Western style of enclosed living in response to their needs and to fit their urban life. Arguably, however, living in gated communities is a challenge for the urban poor to balance between 'modern' and 'traditional' ways of living. The results of this study reflect how gated communities can be spatially and socially constructed. Third, Buddhist temples and monks in urban areas have continued their pivotal role as a social and communal landlord by using their land as the commons. This finding points to the ethical considerations in land use decisions and challenges the mainstream economists' (narrow) understanding of the commons as inefficient, outdated, and creating free-rider and other problems.

The qualities of urban land are determined by how the land is treated as a commodity, a financial asset, a non-commodified resource, or the commons, and the urban land use decisions are justified by use value and exchange value. Questions around land use in cities are complex, as the variations include its uses as an object to be bought and sold, as an object of investment and speculation, or as a public or common good. It is determined not only by economic incentives but also socio-political reasons, cultural norms and practices, moral concerns, and ethical considerations. Notwithstanding this complexity, how urban land is used and managed to fight poverty and bring about equality and social justice to the wider society has been discussed in this dissertation.

One way of tackling the urban problems concerning the uses of urban land is to examine the harmful effects of private forms of land tenure and the commodification and financialisation of urban land. As discussed in this dissertation, the dominating private ownership of land has led to land speculation, oversupply problems, and increased land prices, resulting in the poor losing their land, and the state and municipality selling public land or using it as a source of public revenue instead of a public good. These effects are driven by the 'property mind' (Haila, 2017: 500) and

‘property lobby’ (Haila, 2016: 127), since the motivations to invest in property and the practices of lobbying affect how urban land is treated and steer land policies and programmes in ways that usually benefit powerful groups of politicians, developers, and landowners, rather than society as a whole.

Another way of addressing these urban problems is to look for possible ‘alternatives’. In this dissertation, specific alternatives to land commodification and financialisation have been deliberated: gated communities which are not fully enclosed (also providing welfare to the surrounding community by allowing non-residents to use club services and amenities), and the Buddhist temples in which land is used as the commons. Since these empirical findings are case- and culture-specific, urban and land scholars should be cautious with making generalisations based on them. For instance, according to the Thai cases analysed in this dissertation, one cannot claim that gated communities in the Global South are welfare providers, or that the religious land in Southeast Asia is managed and used as the commons. However, it is expected that this dissertation’s findings can provide future research with beacons for studying the uses of urban land and the non-private forms of urban land tenure in other contexts as well.

Future research could explore the existing non-private forms of urban land tenure further, for example, church land, mosque land, and communal land in other cities, both richer and poorer. The aim of this future research should be to examine the causes and effects of the non-private forms of urban land tenure on urban life, especially on the lives and livelihoods of the urban poor who have apparently been hit hardest by the harmful effects of private land tenure systems. In the meantime, the research should assess whether these non-private forms of urban land tenure can be considered to be effective alternatives to the commodification and financialisation of land, which provide solutions for fighting poverty, inequality, and social exclusion in the city.

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