

Domestic Conquest: Land Reform and Bounded Rationality in the Middle East

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the rise and fall of projects for land reform - the redistribution of agricultural land from large landowners to those owning little or none - in the Middle East in the mid 20th century, focusing on Egypt, Iraq, Palestine/Israel, Syria, and Turkey. Following the end of World War II, local political elites and foreign advisors alike began to argue that land reform constituted a necessary first rung on the ladder of modernization, a step that would lead to political consolidation, development, industrialization, and even democratization. Unfortunately, many land reform projects resulted in grave disappointments, leading to reduced agricultural output, increased rural poverty, political conflict, and more authoritarian rather than more democratic forms of government. As many policymakers and development experts themselves came to understand, an underlying cause of these problems was their failure to adjust land reform models to account for crucial variations in local political, economic, and ecological conditions.

Using a method of similarity approach, this project asks why land reform projects so often sought to apply imported models in vastly different local contexts and then failed to

adequately adjust these policy models to suit local realities. Through the examination of texts produced by international land reform advisors and local political elites, including books, parliamentary debates, letters from archival collections, diplomatic correspondence, academic works, and published articles, I trace the decision-making processes that led to the land reform programs and their failures. Drawing on research in cognitive psychology and bounded rationality, I argue that mistakes occurred under the influence of certain cognitive heuristics, i.e., inherent human biases in information processing. Policymakers and policy shapers often chose inappropriate land reform models because their attention was focused on high profile countries' land reform programs, leading them to downplay differences such as low administrative capacity, relative lack of irrigation water, and threat of soil salinization. Describing an understudied episode in the political, social, and economic development of the postcolonial world, this dissertation offers a new empirical look at the roots of conflict in the Middle East while testing a political psychology argument for recurrent problems in the spread of development projects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Bounded Rationality and Land Reform: Explaining the Rise and Fall of a Policy Model.....	15
Chapter 2: <i>We Must Conquer the Country from Within</i> : The Quest for Land Reform in Turkey	56
Chapter 3: Diminishing Returns: Land Reform in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.....	95
Chapter 4: Land Reform and Agrarianism in the Zionist Imagination.....	126
Chapter 5: The Ideational Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.....	168
Conclusions.....	201
Bibliography.....	210

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By now it is certainly a tired cliché for an author to introduce a work with the claim that this is not the project he or she originally intended to write, but in my case I feel that I have earned the right. I came to the Interdisciplinary PhD in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at UW-Seattle some years back as a student of literature, planning to compare novels critiquing the failures of nationalist and development projects in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s. Looking back now as I submit this dissertation, an interdisciplinary social science work engaging primarily with the political science subfield of comparative politics, I feel boundless gratitude to both the people and the program that allowed my miraculous transformation from literary scholar to political scientist. I can see now that though my disciplinary focus and methodology changed radically, my main theme - disappointing projects for social transformation - remained the same. Perhaps these wise souls saw that too, and that's why they let me find my own way. So I will begin by thanking Reşat Kasaba and Joel Migdal for leading the interdisciplinary program through thick and thin, and Jean Rogers for being the best program coordinator a person could ask for.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Middle East, the early and middle of the 20th century witnessed new states emerging from Ottoman, British, and French rule. Struggles for national independence on the international stage were accompanied by domestic struggles over access to land and the distribution of its produce. Increasingly from the 1940s to the 1960s, the idea of *land reform* - state policy to take agricultural land from those who own much and redistribute it to those who own little or none – appeared as a critical new political imperative throughout the region. Land reformers, whether new political leaders, local intellectuals, or foreign development experts, echoed the anti-feudalist language of the French Revolution in seeking to dissolve large estates, redistribute land more equitably, and modernize the mode of agricultural production.

But why would political elites who already had their hands full establishing and building new states dedicate so much of their limited time and energy to the highly risky and uncertain project of land reform? The reasons offered by the experts were many. Land reform was said to improve the output of agriculture – key in a region whose populations and economies were overwhelmingly rural – as smaller farms were claimed to be more efficient than larger farms. Sharecroppers were believed to neglect investing in the lands they worked due to lack of security in their tenure. Absentee landowners were also believed to care little about investing in their properties to increase output, because they saw land as a source of prestige and power rather than an economic concern. Depriving them of land, it was thought, would lead them to become rational investors and divert their remaining wealth into urban industrial enterprises. Less openly discussed was the fact that land reform appeared to give rulers, whether incumbent or aspiring,

the means to establish new political pacts with their peasants and eliminate the politically powerful landowning class, useful for those seeking to seize or consolidate power.

The benefits of land reform were lauded by local political elites and foreign advisors alike, whether they hailed from the capitalist West or the communist East, in a complex yet appealingly simple narrative. From the United Nations to the International Labor Organization, from the United States to the Soviet Union, by the middle of the 20th century land reform was being promoted by almost every major international player providing technical expertise and financial support for development projects (Aktan 1945; Atkins 1988; Barrawi 1952; Ladejinsky 1977; Tannous 1951; United Nations 1951; Warriner 1957). Land reform promised to reduce poverty, promote economic and political equality, transform feudalism into modernization and democracy, vanquish imperialism, and unleash the engine of economic take-off.

And yet, in the Middle East as elsewhere, the land reform programs adopted in the decades after World War II often fell far short of these promises. Land reform was supposed to increase agricultural productivity. Small cultivators tending their own family farms were supposed to have greater incentives to invest in their land than the supposedly lazy absentee landlords they replaced. Their intimate knowledge of the lands they tilled was also supposed to give them superior information, enabling them to extract far higher yields than they had as sharecroppers or mere wage laborers. Small family farms were also supposed to promote more efficient labor, with small groups of highly motivating workers cooperating together, eliminating the transaction costs of supervising disgruntled rural wage laborers. These arguments, going back at least as far as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, were broadly accepted as common sense in development circles in the 1950s and 1960s (Warriner 1969). And yet, in the Middle East land

reforms too often helped lead to precipitous declines in agricultural production rather than the promised gains (Baali 1966; Fernea 1969; Keilany 1980).

Gandhi famously once said, “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West” (Guha 2011, 9). ‘Famously,’ because his anti-industrialist philosophy ran so thoroughly counter to the goals of his countryman Jawaharlal Nehru and almost every other postcolonial political leader of the 20th century. For most land reformers, the end goal of increased agricultural production was not to remain an agrarian society, but rather to open the floodgates of industrialization. Land reform would increase rural wages, which would feed the demand for domestically produced industrial goods. Peasants would remain on the land, secure in their land tenure, rather than fleeing the poverty of the farm for the promise of the city. In this way, the economic and the social development of the countryside were seen as inextricably linked (Mare’i 1968, 104-15; Oppenheimer 1926). Stemming the flight from the land would in turn reduce the downward push on urban wages caused by the flood of migration to the cities. Wages would rise and urban workers would join the farmers in becoming consumers of the expanding array of locally produced goods. Former landed elites, prevented from investing in large estates by the new ceilings on landownership, were then expected to sink their capital into productive industrial ventures rather than inefficient plantations (Goldberg 2004, 123-24; Ibrahim 1994; Parvin and Hiç 1984; Vitalis 1995).

Unfortunately, very little of this worked out the way most planners claimed it would. Land reform programs often preceded declines rather than gains in agricultural productivity, and in many cases, accelerated rather than stemming migration to the cities. Large landowners often did not respond to the forced land sales and ceilings on land ownership by loyally investing in urban enterprises. Rather, they feared for the safety of their wealth and, sometimes, their lives,

leading to capital flight rather than capital accumulation (Fernea 1969; Haddad 2012; Ibrahim 1994; Keilany 1980). Initial disappointments in land reform as a tool of shunting investment capital into industrialization helped pave the way to the later nationalization of businesses and industries, which later culminated in their own economic disappointments (Haddad 2012; Ibrahim 1994, 28-9; Waldner 1992; Waterbury 1993).

This dissertation examines the history of land reform in five cases in the Middle East – Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine/Israel – over the course of the 20th century, concentrating on its heyday from approximately 1945 to 1980, seeking to understand how land reform projects that promised so much so often went astray. The broad history of failures in the formulation and execution of land reform in the Middle East remains an important question today for a number of reasons:

First, land reform has, in many times and places, been an effective policy helping to reduce social and economic inequalities in the countryside (Deininger 2003a; Lipton 2009; Ünal 2012). Under the right conditions, it can help reduce poverty in the rural sector, where the majority of the world's most severe material deprivation is concentrated. Unlike the now discredited idea of the state-run agricultural collective, exemplified by the *kolkhoz* of the Soviet Union, land reform still commands legitimacy today as a means of reducing rural poverty and inequality. It is even seeing a sort of global resurgence, being high on the political agenda in a growing number of countries including South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, and even Scotland. As populations increase globally and dwindling water supplies and global climate change renders arable land more scarce, land reform will be increasingly discussed and attempted as a means of managing these ecological, economic, and political crises. Understanding how and why a previous era of land reform commanded such hopes and produced such disappointments

can potentially help today's and tomorrow's land reformers learn from the mistakes of the past, crafting and executing policies that do more of what they are supposed to do.

Second, what I term the 'second wave of land reform' (approximately 1945-1980) was a global event of great significance whose impact on subsequent economic, political, and social development is sadly understudied. Land reform was *the* most extensive and the most contentious redistributive social policy project of the mid 20th century in the Middle East, as in much of the rest of the developing world (Parvin and Hiç 1984, 208-9). Although land reform attracted widespread scholarly attention during its heyday in the 1940s-1970s, by the beginning of the 1980s political scientists, sociologists, and historians began to lose interest in the issue, and studies of land reform came to mostly be limited to the fields of anthropology and development economics (but for welcome recent exceptions within political science, see Albertus and Kaplan 2013; Boone 2014). Projects to carry out land reform, whether they were successful or disastrous, have had enormous impact on a large number of societies throughout the world. Severe poverty has been primarily a rural phenomenon, and some argue that land reform has been one of the main policy interventions responsible for its decline over the past 50 years (Lipton 2009, 1-2). At the same time, attempts at land reform and, later, the collectivization of land led to the killing of millions in the Soviet Union and Maoist China (Dikötter 2014; Scott 1998). And yet, despite this importance the issue of land reform, both as a contemporary question and a historical legacy, is understudied.

Third and finally, the second wave of land reform in the Middle East shows us an example of a social policy model that fared poorly as it spread rapidly from country to country, being championed by a bizarrely diverse host of actors challenged by radically different local conditions. We are confronted by a policy that a) was claimed to bring about a host of benefits it

in retrospect could not realistically achieve (such as industrialization and democratization) and b) a policy that often failed to achieve the goals it could have achieved, such as reducing rural inequality and poverty. Both its rapid expansion and broad record of disappointments make land reform a worthy object of study to better understand how, in the words of James Scott (1998), “certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.” Taking land reform as merely one example of a broader pattern of disappointments in crafting and implementing social policy and development projects, this dissertation addresses the broader question of why and how certain policy models fly, and crash, with surprising regularity.

A Review of the Cases

Throughout the world, land reform programs have also frequently suffered from a number of common pathologies: There have been states that promised land reform but failed to carry out significant redistribution of land, with powerful players able to subvert the plans from behind the scenes. Other states have redistributed land, but only to farmers already possessing a fair amount of land and wealth, neglecting the neediest landless peasants and leaving the worst of rural poverty untouched. Many states have promised to increase prosperity and agricultural productivity through land reform, but instead carried out botched agricultural interventions that actually increased rural poverty and reduced agricultural output. And finally, there have been states that have used the tools and rhetoric of land reform for ethnic demographic engineering purposes, leading to ethnic violence and human rights abuses (Lipton 2009; Low 1994; Tai 1974;

Warriner 1969). The history of land reform in the Middle East provides examples of all these problems and more:

Turkey

In 1950, the Turkish agronomist Reşat Aktan (1950, 380) celebrated his country's recently passed land reform legislation, declaring it to be more than just a means of redistributing wealth and income in the countryside, but rather proclaiming it to be "a form of domestic conquest" that would open a new chapter in Turkish history. He championed the redistribution of privately-owned agricultural land from larger landowners to farmers who owned little or none as being a necessary stage in the process of modernization, a vital prerequisite for economic development, state-building, nation-building, and even democratization. Sixteen years later, however, Aktan (1966) was castigating the Turkish state's lack of progress in actually carrying out land reform despite repeated efforts to do so. For the next half-century, scholars and activists would continue to lament that substantive land reform has never been carried out in Turkey (Ahmad 1975; 1993; Karaömerlioglu 1999; 2000; Morvaridi 1990; Parvin and Hiç 1984; Seddon and Margulies 1984; Ünal 2012). Turkey presents a case of a country where land reform was often on the agenda but, despite the passing of land reform legislation and repeated promises to redistribute land, land reformers were only barely successful in actually implementing their plans.

Egypt, Syria, and Iraq

Elsewhere in the post-Ottoman world, we can see that three states that did manage to carry out land reforms at the time that Aktan was writing suffered increasingly diminishing returns as land reform spread from Egypt to Syria and then to Iraq. Egypt was the first to carry

out land reforms, shortly after the Free Officers coup of 1952 that eventually brought Gamal Abd al-Nasser to power. In 1958 Egypt and Syria merged to form the United Arab Republic, and land reform was carried out in Syria as well. Shortly after this merger, Iraq experienced a revolution in which the new regime, patterning itself on Nasser's model, offered land reform to help cement its rule. Intriguingly, land reform performed relatively well at reducing rural inequalities and maintaining agricultural output in Egypt, but experienced considerably more problems in Syria and led to great problems in Iraq. While the model of land reform was well suited for the fertile banks of the Nile, with its consistent access to water, it translated poorly to the arid rain-fed agriculture of much of Syria and Iraq. The much more developed Egyptian regulatory and legal institutions similarly proved more up to the challenge of land reform than those of Syria or Iraq, where land reform disrupted local methods of production and marketing that states proved poorly equipped to replace. Peasants found themselves having to flee the land for the shantytowns of Baghdad and Basra, while some coped by re-entering into the same sharecropping relationships that land reform was supposed to eliminate. Not surprisingly, in none of these cases did land reform deliver on its loftier promises of industrialization, political emancipation of the peasantry, or democratization.

Palestine/Israel

The Zionist movement sought to build a Jewish society in Palestine to create a Jewish state. And yet, even before the central Zionist organizations had succeeded in attracting many settlers from Europe to Palestine, they had already decided on the need for an agrarian society and the adoption of principles of land reform to create and maintain it. Leaders of the main Zionist land purchasing and management institution, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), sought to

purchase land and allot it to individuals and families to prevent the growth of privately-owned large estates employing wage labor. In this, the Zionist leaders shared a model for a healthy agrarian society with other land reformers. Some Zionists even sought to apply principles of land reform to Palestinian Arab society, attacking large landowners as ‘feudalists’ and employing the same vocabulary articulated by land reform advocates in the Arab world and Turkey in their struggles against landed elites. And yet, the decision to pursue agrarian development and what they somewhat idiosyncratically termed ‘land reform’ brought them into conflict with private Jewish landowners as well as Palestinian peasants and landowners, creating the main flashpoint of what would become the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The course of land reform Zionist-style was pursued up until the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, even as it defied economic logic through paying high wages to agriculturally inexperienced Jewish urbanites in its quest to turn them into farmers.

Explaining the Pathologies of Land Reform in the Middle East

A survey of the history of land reform in the Middle East presents the inquiring mind with three puzzles:

First, land reform rapidly became immensely popular in the early and mid-20th century, becoming the common wisdom throughout the political spectrum, but then lost its popularity just as precipitously in the late 20th century. This rise and fall from grace occurred despite the facts that rural poverty and economic inequality both long predated and long survived political elites’ interest in land reform (Bush 2007; Cole 2003; Sabra 2003). If land reform was a response to the crises of poverty and inequality in the countryside, why did land reform not happen sooner, and

why would policy-makers drop it from their agendas in the late 20th century without having fulfilled their stated goals of greatly reducing rural poverty and inequality?

Second, land reform models were often copied from one region and applied in others with little modification, despite radically different political, ecological, social, and economic conditions. This failure to account for crucial differences, such as the lack of the necessary administrative institutions or the suitability of the local climate for intensive agriculture, helped lead to sharp declines in agricultural output. Why did political elites execute land reform plans so hastily and without sufficient adjustment for local conditions, without first determining if their states had the administrative capacity to carry them out or if the adopted plan was appropriate for the local ecological conditions?

Finally, Middle Eastern intellectuals, local political elites, and foreign experts all repeatedly promised that land reform would not merely become the means for achieving greater social harmony and economic growth, but would even provide the social foundations for democracy (Aktan 1950, Barrawi 1952; Tannous 1951). Despite this, land reform programs often paved the road not to democracy and stability, but to autocracy and conflict. In the Palestine/Israel case, the set of agrarian settlement policies that Zionists identified with 'land reform' was not merely the cause of economically specious policies but the main instigation for what became the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Why did land reform projects promising democratization and stability so often lead towards de-democratization and conflict instead?

Bounded Rationality and Land Reform

A popular explanation for these failures is that the fundamentals of land reform were solid, but the hopes for redistribution, development, and equality were unfortunately corrupted

by the pursuit of political power (Atkins 1988; Deininger 2003a; Low 1994; Pidal and Roses 2011). In the chapters that follow I will try to convince the reader that while the interference of political self-interest played a role, this can only explain part of land reform's economic, social, and political shortcomings in the Middle East. Rather, I claim that a fuller understanding of the roots of social policy failure in land reform must instead begin with understanding the processes through which experts and political elites adopted land reform plans in the first place.

My core argument is that the mid-20th century witnessed a land reform 'policy wave' in which a suboptimal policy model was adopted without sufficient adjustment to render it effective in its local contexts, leading to various failures of land reform to achieve its stated goals. The political scientist Kurt Weyland (2006; 2010) defines a policy wave as the rapid diffusion of a policy model that local policy makers adopt without first adequately and critically evaluating its effectiveness, its applicability to their local political, social, or economic conditions, or the need to adjust it as evidence mounts that it is not working according to plan. These mistakes are caused by cognitive biases, inherent tendencies in human perception and decision-making, and lead to mistakes that increase the chance that the policy will produce disappointing or negative results.

While Weyland's work has focused on the diffusion of neoliberal reforms in Latin America in the late 20th century, the research presented in this dissertation reveals very similar pathologies at work in the spread of land reform in the Middle East in the mid 20th century. After World War II land reform was increasingly promoted as an extremely effective, and even necessary, reform that would produce a host of political, social, and economic benefits. For the most part, these claims were made in the absence of strong evidence. The promises made about land reform were not based on a thorough evaluation of its applicability or its long- or even

medium- or short-term impacts in countries where it had been carried out. Rather, both politicians and technical experts, from local intellectuals to international advisors with groups as diverse as the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and the World Bank, spoke with unwarranted confidence that land reform would promote economic development, modernization, political stability and the building of state infrastructural power. Unlike so many other issues on the global policy agenda, such as nationalizing industries and banks, land reform straddled the left-right division and thus came to appear as ‘common sense’ for policymakers seeking to modernize their countries in the post-World War II era.

As time went by, social scientists increasingly saw that land reform projects had fallen well short of their goals in a great number of places around the world. Even strong supporters of land reform would be forced to produce a growing list of caveats for what conditions and additional actions would be necessary to successfully redistribute land in a way that would benefit rural workers (De Janvry and Sadoulet 2005; Rashid 2000, 2012). Unfortunately, many of these necessary conditions for a successful land reform, such as effective administrative and legal institutions and abundant and informed credit provision, were not yet present in the postcolonial countries that were encouraged to carry out land reforms. Provisions such as heavily taxing properties above a certain size, which might have redistributed land and provided states with extra revenue, were typically rejected or not even discussed in the debates of the land reform heyday.

The puzzle of why so many political leaders and policy experts would adopt or promote such a model with such confidence begs us to consider the social science literature exploring the role of ideas, perception, and representation in the failures of development and social policies.. Through applying models for analyzing the inherent defects in boundedly rational policy

diffusion (Weyland 2006, 2010) and in “high modernism” (Scott 1998), I offer an explanation for why land reform policies tended to promise much but once executed, offered increasingly disappointing results.

Understanding the Middle East Today

In March 2015, Egyptian leader Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi unveiled a plan for a new Egyptian capital city to replace Cairo, which has been the seat of the Egyptian state for centuries. The plan, estimated to cost some 66 billion dollars, would create an entire city for five million inhabitants de novo in the desert about 50 kilometers east of the current capital. About two months afterwards, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, chairman of the Republican People’s Party, the leading opposition party in Turkey, revealed his vision for Turkey’s future: a new city, costing 200 billion dollars, to be built on virgin ground in the middle of Anatolia.¹ Needless to say, skepticism about the costs and wisdom of these projects is warranted. The Songdo project in South Korea may provide an encouraging sign that building brand new cities is feasible, but any plan with a reasonable chance of success must account for the stark differences between South Korea, Egypt, and Turkey in terms of economies, politics, and administrative capacity.

The point of studying land reform in the mid-20th century is, of course, not to criticize social policies from a half-century ago but rather to analyze the why and how of the decision-making that led to these policies in order to better grasp the limitations and possibilities for creating better policies in the future. An understanding of the role of bounded rationality may be able to help us better understand the recurring history of dramatic and unrealistic development projects in the region, whether ill-advised land reclamation projects in the desert (Springborg 1979) or the building of a new Egyptian capital city or Turkish megacity in the middle of

¹ Okan Konuralp, “CHP Genel Başkanı Kılıçdaroğlu partisinin yeni vizyon projesini açıkladı,” *Hürriyet* 21 May, 2015.

² Significantly, the translator of this work into English was the anthropologist Paul Stirling, who defends the state

Anatolia. By better understanding how boundedly rational policymaking has led to problems in the past, perhaps similar failures can be better identified, and perhaps even avoided, in the future.

CHAPTER 1

BOUNDED RATIONALITY AND LAND REFORM: EXPLAINING THE RISE AND FALL OF A POLICY MODEL

(...) to understand human behavior, we have to understand how people think, interpret their environments, and reach decisions. Simple stimulus-response models rarely will do.

Robert Jervis (2002, 293)

The Puzzle: Explaining Policy Failures In Land Reform

The political scientist James Scott famously asked why so many “projects to improve the human condition have failed” throughout the 20th century. A large number of the high modernist disasters he discussed in *Seeing Like a State* (1998), his classic account of roads paved with good intentions were, in fact, agricultural development projects. State attempts to remake rural society have been particularly prone to misfortune. ‘Land reform’ under Mao Tse-Tung’s armies and the Soviet Union’s collectivization of agriculture under Stalin stand out as the 20th century’s two most horrific instances of ostensibly egalitarian projects for land redistribution, with victims numbering in the millions (Dikötter 2014; Scott 1998). And yet, while these were the most extreme cases, throughout much of the developing world we can also find a bitter history of disappointment in attempts to redistribute land in the name of development, equity, or social justice.

The land reforms of the mid-20th century were ambitious. Their proponents, whether local policy makers or foreign development experts, often claimed that they would provide the “big push” needed to achieve goals such as reducing rural poverty and inequality, increasing

productivity through creating more productive, smaller farm units, and freeing peasants from patron-client ties. Moreover, supporters promised that land reform would politically empower peasants and create the social micro-foundations for democratization.

Scholars are far from consensus in evaluating the land reforms that were attempted between 1945-1980, but the trend in judgment has been increasingly critical (Fernea 1969; Keilany 1980; Low 1994; Mitchell 2002; Rashid 2012; Tuma 1966). Leading World Bank land economist Klaus Deininger (2003a, xxxix-xl) reflects recent mainstream opinion in stating that land reforms in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have been very successful and that there have been some success in post-independence reforms in African countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, but claims that land reforms in the rest of Asia, Latin America, and much of Africa have generally failed to meet their goals. The historian of decolonization Anthony Low (1994, 2) has more curtly stated that the egalitarian land reforms attempted in the postcolonial countries after World War II have, like Soviet Communism, all been failures, creating a new rural elite and leaving the poorest farmers largely untouched by the benefits. Significantly, these critics mostly argue that the 1945-1980 land reforms have failed on their own terms, falling well short of achieving the land reformers' stated goals of improving the lives of farmers or increasing the economic, social, or political wellbeing of their countries.

Land reform scholars and practitioners have noted how many land reforms have failed to

- a) adequately redistribute land,
- b) deliver lands to the recipients in a timely manner,
- c) provide land that is sufficiently productive, sometimes not even providing enough yield for subsistence
- d) provide adequate credit for farming,
- e) provide security of title,
- f) provide effective marketing infrastructure,
- g) reduce social and political domination of the small cultivators by larger cultivators or the state,
- h) increase agricultural production,
- i)

prevent high levels of migration from the countryside to the cities, and j) induce investment in industrialization and urban enterprises (Deininger 2003a; Fernea 1969; Goldberg 2004; Keilany 1980; Low 1994; Mitchell 2002; Rashid 2000, 2012; Vitalis 1995). One could add to this list the failure of land reforms to lead to the democratization that both international experts and domestic policymakers had promised, a widely proclaimed justification for land reform that has been mostly ignored in contemporary studies of land reform.

Given that many prominent experts who made optimistic claims for the effectiveness of land reform during its heyday in the 1950s-1970s concluded later in their careers that these projects had mostly failed in their social and economic objectives, we might conclude that the evolving skepticism about redistributive land reform is attributable to the steady accumulation of evidence and data rather than the mere cyclical waning of an intellectual trend (Rashid 2000, 2012). How, then, is this recurrent history of failure to meet the stated goals of land reform to be explained?

Explaining Policy Failures: The Corrupting Influence of Politics

Many scholars, particularly development economists, have attributed the failure of land reform programs to the distorting role of political interests trumping social or economic concerns (Atkins 1988, 943; Deininger 2003a; De Janvry and Sadoulet 2005; Pidal and Roses 2011). They argue that land reform was often carried out by self-interested political players to deprive landed elites of the economic bases of their political power in an effort to eliminate their political rivals, rather than effect a good faith attempt to increase equity or prosperity in the countryside. In this view, the execution of land reform was based more on political expediency rather than economic rationality or social justice, and, not surprisingly, failed to fulfill these latter goals. Just as the

selection of targets for expropriating land was sullied by political motives, the distribution of land was also fatally politicized. Land was allocated not to those who could make the best use of it, but to those cultivators who successfully exercised their political clout through political pressure, whether violent protests or, more rarely, their votes (Deininger 2003a). State leaders' initial enthusiasm for land reform and their failure to follow through are thus explained away as the unwelcome intrusion of power politics into the economic and social realms.

Arguments for the failure of land reform focusing exclusively on the spoiler effect of political interests are also common throughout other disciplines. Historians Feroz Ahmad (1975; 1993) and Asım Karaömerlioğlu (1999; 2000) have both seen the failure of the Turkish state to redistribute privately held agricultural lands as the result of the behind the scenes political machinations of the landed elites. These evaluations echo the blame placed on recalcitrant feudalists by land reformers such as Egyptian president Gamal Abd ul-Nasser who, 14 years after implementing a land reform meant to emancipate Egypt's peasants from the domination of large landowners, was forced by an embarrassing case of landlord violence against peasant activists to concede that his land reforms had not yet succeeded in achieving their goals. In a speech in the rural town of Damanhour in 1966, Nasser (1966, 6) confessed to the gathered crowd that his triumphalism in the early years of land reform had been premature:

We ask ourselves today, after 14 years – did feudalism and exploitation understand the logic of this [land reform], and did they respond to it? We ask ourselves, did they become apprehensive and intimidated when they saw that the political authority was antagonistic to exploitation and feudalism? No; they did not understand or respond, or become intimidated.

I used to say to you that we had done away with feudalism, but in actual fact we had not done away with feudalists; that we had wiped out capitalist exploitation, yet actually we had not actually wiped out the capitalists.

In all these models, the failure of land reform to deliver a more prosperous, egalitarian, or democratic order is attributed to political opposition. And yet, the failures of land reform were not solely the outcome of a zero sum political conflicts, whether between a state and “society” or between social classes, in which resources were mobilized, interests were pursued, and the stronger hand won. Rather, I argue that to more fully understand the reasons for the pervasive record of disappointment in land reform between 1945-1980, we must not merely examine the reactions of land reform’s opponents, we must also understand how land reform’s proponents misjudged the potential of land reform to achieve the goals they identified.

Failures in Land Reform: Just Politics?

While there is much truth to the argument that land reform was undermined due to struggles over conflicting political and economic interests, in the pages that follow I will argue that the struggle for power or wealth is incomplete as an explanation. Such an explanation seeks to render these episodes into intelligible stories of struggles between opposing sets of actors, rationally mobilizing the available resources to achieve what is in their interests, whether in terms of money or power. And yet, this framework risks overestimating the extent to which political actors are capable of choosing the optimal strategies that will best maximize such interests. Even many scholars who would never dream of labeling their work ‘rational choice’ tend to fall into the habit of presuming that political actors adopt plans of action that, unless opposed, will successfully produce the results they intend to happen.

In such a framework, the failure to produce successful results must then be attributed to another set of actors successfully mobilizing resources to defeat the initial project. And yet, when we look carefully at many of the land reform projects in the Middle East in the 1940s and 1950s,

we can see that no such political opposition was necessary to subvert these projects. Rather, we see that the projects *themselves* were usually not very tenable given the limited state resources and ecological conditions that prevailed. Despite these prior limitations of state capacity and environmental constraints, both state leaders and domestic and international advisors all somehow seemed to ignore or misunderstand these realities in their rush to carry out land reform.

Given these errors in formulating and executing appropriate land reform policies, another factor besides political opposition must be included to provide a more perfect explanation for the repeated failures of land reform to produce the promised results in increasing equity or productivity. For while land reform programs were often aimed more at achieving self-interested political goals rather than selfless social benefits, to see only this as the sole cause of policy failure is to risk missing something crucial. To better understand the failures of land reform policies or other policies that fell short of their promised results, we also need to consider why and how policymakers would adopt specious or flawed policy models in the first place. To go beyond the comprehensive rational choice paradigm and the reliance on political struggle as the fly in the ointment of sound economic policymaking to reach a fuller understanding of the failures of land reform, we must examine not only the role of political self-interest, but the importance of issues of perception and cognition as well.

The economist Fiona Atkins (1988) argued that the neoclassical economists who advocated land reform never succeeded in creating an internally coherent *economic* justification for the state's appropriation or redistribution of land, failing to explain just how land differed from other factors of production in a way that would necessitate state policies of confiscation and redistribution. She accuses influential classical economists such as Leon Walras and Alfred Marshall of supporting land reform because of the political legitimacy it enjoyed rather than

compelling theoretical or empirical evidence for its economic efficiency. In this, Atkins argues that they were following the cues of changing power relations between classes, leading them to offer faulty economic justifications for what was ultimately a political rather than an economic debate, hence the intellectual gymnastics so many economists went through to argue that the state had a duty to confiscate land while respecting the sanctity of property in other factor markets. Her basic conclusion is that land reform ultimately failed as a project of enhancing the efficiency of markets because it was shaped by a norm shift following a change in political power between classes, justified *post hoc* by a flawed neoclassical economic argument. Given that the economists she discusses were not themselves political actors placed to directly benefit from the rewards of carrying out a land reform program, they did not need to eliminate a rival class of politically powerful landowners or create corporatist institutions to capture political support from peasants. They themselves seem to have been free of the incentive to create deliberately flawed economic arguments for reasons of political expediency. Why, then, would these thinkers allow their economic reasoning to be corrupted by the logic of political struggle? If they were influenced by a norm shift in favor of more egalitarian forms of distribution, why would this lead them to make mistakes? Why did they create an argument within the framework of neoclassical economics that led to a flawed conclusion, one they had already arrived at under the impact of an emergent political-ethical reasoning norm that a high level of inequality in land ownership was wrong? A constructivist theory of norm change can help us to understand the change in preference for greater equality, but to explain the errors this process resulted in we also need to consider the boundedly rational nature of the ensuing decision-making processes.

Shortcomings in Land Reform in the Middle East: An Overview

While Middle Eastern political leaders often sought to use land reform as a tool for eliminating foes in the landed gentry and building support coalitions among the peasantry, they also seemed to suffer from a broad overconfidence in adopted land reform models and fundamental misunderstandings about how easily and affordably they could be executed (Ibrahim 1994, 28-9; Mitchell 2002; Scott 1998; Simmons 1965; Vitalis 1995). This in itself is hard to ascribe solely to political machinations. Redistributive land reform, to be effective in increasing productivity or equity, would require extensive transaction costs and information costs. For most postcolonial states in the mid-20th century transaction costs, the expenses necessary to execute a land reform program would have included developing a large and capable administrative apparatus to manage the expropriation and redistribution of land and the rapid construction of new credit and marketing institutions to replace the roles filled by the landowners and their hired managers. Information costs, or the resources that must be expended to acquire the knowledge necessary to carry out the policy, would have included carrying out up to date cadastral surveys and acquiring detailed knowledge about the quality and productivity of individual plots of land in order to avoid giving unworkably poor plots of land to farmers. And yet, in many cases these necessary conditions for carrying out a successful land reform seem not to have been recognized.

DeJanvry and Sadoulet (2005, 2) summarize some of the necessary conditions – and challenges – for a land reform to succeed in providing economic benefits:

To result in output and income growth, access to land must not only be secure, it must also be accompanied by access to complementary inputs and occur in a context favorable to productive use of the land. Empirically well-established complementary inputs include other types of natural capital such as water, working capital, and human capital. Access to land without these complementary inputs in the agricultural production function is not useful for development. In addition, the context where land is used affects its productivity. This includes institutions (such as credit, insurance, and product and factor markets with low

transactions costs), public goods (such as infrastructure, market intelligence, research and extension, land registration, and contract enforcement mechanisms), and policies (macroeconomic and agricultural policies favorable to the activities in which the land is used). If complementary inputs and a favorable context for land use are not provided, it is quite evident that access to land will achieve little for output and income. Access to land is thus necessary but not sufficient. Providing what it takes beyond access to achieve income and growth – complementary inputs and a favorable context – can be highly demanding.

And yet, the importance of investing in these preconditions for successful land reform was frequently ignored in the course of land reforms in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Underequipped and dysfunctional state agencies failed to redistribute land in a timely manner, keeping lands in legal limbo for years, expropriated but not yet redistributed. The Iraqi economist Fuad Baali (1966, 62) summed up his frustration with the slow pace of the Iraqi land reform program initiated just after the revolution of 1958. Despite its fiery rhetoric, these land reforms failed to transfer possession of much of the lands that had been confiscated or even credibly assure the peasants that they would actually receive land in the future, reducing their willingness to invest in improvements:

The five-year plan to expropriate the large landholdings and redistribute the land among the peasants has been extended to ten years. Eight of the ten years have already (1966) elapsed and still agrarian reform is in its beginning stages. Hence, in many parts of Iraq the peasants have few incentives to improve the land which they till, and the migration of peasants to the city continues on a large scale.

When peasants did receive title to land, a great number of these plots were of such limited size, had such poor quality soil, and/or lacked water to the extent they could not provide the food to support a farming family, much less produce agricultural surpluses. The disruption of the credit, seed, and water providing functions of the former landlords and the state's and market's failures to adequately replace these services led many recipients of redistributed land to abandon their lands completely or even re-sell them illegally, often to the former owners. Thus

many peasants who had received land came to work them once again not as owners but as sharecroppers, completely contrary to the intent of the laws (Baali 1966; Fernea 1969; Keilany 1980; Perthes 1997, 81-4).

To replace the local systems of credit provision with centralized state credit provision is to sacrifice the knowledge about local conditions that local lenders had acquired. It is not hard to see how it would be difficult for the state to replace local credit providers, whether landlords or professional moneylenders. In a classic autobiographical work on conditions in a poor Turkish village, Mahmut Makal (1954, 40) describes how the new state agricultural cooperatives that worked as agents for the central Agricultural Bank (*Ziraat Bankası*) were repeatedly misled about the collateral that peasants owned:

The majority [of peasants in the village] are unable to pay off their debts. They have to pay interest on what they still owe; and when this is doubled, they get to a point when they are quite unable to meet them.

As a result, the villager is prosecuted, and then it is that the demon of want appears. In the villages of this neighborhood more than half the villagers who are associated with the Co-operative have been prosecuted. If you were to examine the property of the villagers who are in debt – as entered in the registers of the Co-operative – you would think each one is a millionaire. In order to borrow money, they have declared unlimited property: oxen, cows, donkeys, horses, buffaloes. As for land...as many acres as you like! And indeed even those with no land at all will declare a whole list of property merely in order to get out of debt. And when the Executive Officers come to distraint the property, they find that there is nothing there at all, and they are left helpless.

Makal (1954, 41) goes on to explain that when his family fell into debt with the state lending authority, they did what so many other villagers did: “I saw that things were pretty bad. I swallowed my pride, and applied to a few Agas [large landowners] who were known to be men of wealth, and deposited 300 lira, with interest, with the Co-operative.” This passage makes clear

that the state lending agencies in Turkey actually relied on the informal credit sector to function, as they did in Mandate era Palestine and other places in the Middle East (Nadan 2005, 2006).

Peasants would often be forced to resort to black market lenders for higher interest loans to pay off their debts to the state institutions.² The fact that these state-initiated institutions were called “cooperatives” may lead us to believe that they would, in fact, be able (or willing) to accurately determine the amount of collateral that their individual members possessed. However, Makal shows that this was not the case, at least in his village. The losses from the defaulted loans then would be born by the state, drawing public funds away from other, potentially more effective programs to promote development and equity.

Nadan (2005; 2006), in a study of the agricultural economy of Mandate-era Palestine (1920-1948), has shown how an attempt by the British authorities to replace local moneylenders with banks charging lower rates of interest failed.

In this study Nadan challenges the widespread view that local moneylenders charged unnecessarily exorbitant rates. Nadan argues that, given the high risk of default and the high levels of competition between moneylenders, the credit system in Palestine was not excessively inefficient or exploitive given the limited available resources. Peasants were able to bargain with competing moneylenders, which drove down interest rates. As part of the evidence for this, he shows that a program introduced by the British Mandate authorities to replace local moneylenders with cheaper credit from banks failed, with Palestinian peasants instead continuing

² Significantly, the translator of this work into English was the anthropologist Paul Stirling, who defends the state lending institutions in his footnotes in this volume, contradicting Makal’s own claims in the text. Makal was a poor villager himself who learned to read and write and became a teacher in a state school, and after publishing this work (entitled *Bizim Köy* or “Our Village”) in 1950 he arrested on charges of (communist) subversion. When later in the text Makal (1954, 41) complains that his family owes a large amount of debt and interest, Sterling claims that this interest was merely 6% in a footnote, giving the official maximum interest rate for state loans. However, Makal makes it clear that his family owed money both to the state *and* to the Agas, which as a black market loan had no official limit.

to use the services of the local moneylenders to repay their debts to the official lenders, with their fixed 9% rate of interest. Barclays, the one private bank that agreed to lend money directly to small farmers at the 9% interest rate established by law, started a program to lend directly to the small landowners but was forced to discontinue the program in 1938 during the uprising against the British and Zionists (Nadan 2005, 708).

Khalaf (1991) similarly describes a functional credit market for farmers in the Raqqa region of Syria prior to the land reforms of 1958 and the state's attempts to supplant local moneylenders, the *khanjis*. While, as Barrington Moore (1966) pointed out, exploitation of peasants is difficult to objectively identify, it seems that in much of the post-Ottoman Middle East credit providers gave loans to peasants without causing them to fall into excessive debt and lose access to their lands, as many critics have alleged. And, as with the Turkish and Palestine examples, the state effort to end the system of informal moneylending ironically came to rely on the black market in credit in order to function.

Finally, many small peasants who did receive land found themselves harmed by the host of new regulations that were introduced along with the land reforms. Many states forced the poorer farmers to join state-controlled agricultural credit unions that then forced the farmers to plant certain crops and sell them back to the state for a fixed price, usually well below the market rate, much less the price they could achieve by planting other, more profitable crops. As a means of resistance, many farmers instead grew for the black market, undercutting the state's efforts to extract surplus from them. A notorious incident in the Egyptian province of Daqhiliyya in May 1982 revealed the limitations of these policies. Police and military units raided the homes of thousands of farmers, bringing some 14,000 into custody. Their crime was growing rice and selling some of it on the black market, where they could get twice as much as the price at which

the state was forcing them to sell to the state agencies (Sadowski 1991, 51-3). While there is debate about the extent to which states like Egypt or Syria have shown the kinds of urban bias that Robert Bates (1981) argues was responsible for broad agricultural, economic, and social problems in sub-Saharan Africa, it is clear that such policies punishing the poorest recipients of land have not delivered on the promise of land reform to empower peasants both economically and politically (Perthes 1997; Sadowski 1991; Waterbury 1983).

Le Dernier Cri: Land Reform as Policy Wave

In part, the need to act quickly to outmaneuver political rivals contributed to these mishaps, prioritizing political power struggles over effective social policy and causing policymakers to focus more on finding effective ways to destroy the political power of landowners rather than to empower rural workers. However, this is not the whole story. The political leaders who carried out these flawed land reform projects all drew heavily on the writings and advice of experts who had been studying these issues for years and who themselves were not actively engaged in the quest for political power. Economists and activists who promoted land reform with a conviction that cannot be attributed to their own political interests often also seemed oblivious to the problems that an unconsolidated postcolonial state would confront in trying to carry out something as challenging as a comprehensive land reform.

The British development economist Doreen Warriner, who was the most respected foreign land reform expert in the Middle East during the 1940s-1960s (or at least the most widely cited), exemplified the strange mixture of caution and recklessness with which land reform experts would make the case for land reform. By 1969 Warriner repeatedly made important points about the limitations of the applicability of land reform models in the Middle East,

arguing that claims that it would increase productivity are unfounded, that arguments that smaller size farms are more productive, and in general warning caution. Her work in the earlier years of the land reform wave, by contrast, show a tendency to cheerlead rapid action rather than soberly evaluate the prospects and challenges of the proposals. In (1957, 9) she wrote:

Now land reform has become respectable and fashionable. Efficiency has been won, and something has been lost. The older reforms had one merit: they gave the people what they wanted. After a lengthy and expensive international seminar on land reform, ‘I am afraid’, said an Arab civil servant, ‘that they make it all seem too difficult.’ In the pomposities of international debate, it would be good if the old authentic note – of Zapata, for instance, or Stambulisky – could sometimes break through, so that it would not seem so difficult as experts like to make it.

Land reform in its initial and crucial stage is emphatically not a question for experts; it cannot be advised into existence, but must be based on an impetus arising within the country. Once that impetus is there, and recognized in a decision to legislate, experts can help in overcoming technical difficulties. (...) If there is no real drive for reform, experts can produce expensive little demonstration projects, but they will not be able to achieve any general and genuine improvement in the position of the cultivators.

This is obvious enough, but it needs saying, because there is a slightly morbid confidence in experts in the Arab world, even a belief that lack of experts is an obstacle to reform. Good farming, of course, does need experts and costs money, while bad farming costs the earth. *But good laws cost nothing, and need no experts* [emphasis added]. Fortunately there are in the Arab world today politicians who can speak, and some who can even act, for the fellahin. Even the authentic note can be heard at times. In Egypt the impetus is obviously there; it certainly owes a little to the new ‘climate of opinion’, and so justifies the talk in the conference rooms in New York and Geneva.

To claim that land reform is “emphatically not a question for experts” is perhaps a strange position for the premier land reform expert of her generation to take, as is her statement that “good laws cost nothing, and need no experts” (Warriner 1957, 9). Given that laws will affect farming and that “bad farming will cost the earth,” it is not clear why she would make these statements simultaneously. Laws, good or bad, at the very minimum have both opportunity and transaction costs, and these are often quite sizeable. Land reform laws can be among the

most costly laws of all for developing countries with limited budgets to execute. Some land reforms compensate the landowners for the expropriated lands at some price in relation to its market value. While in practice this has often been below the market rate, in some countries, such as the Philippines, it has been higher.

In the Middle East there has been some confiscation without payment, such as in later land reforms in Iraq, but for the most part states have paid the landowners for the land that has been taken. This cost has been turned over to the recipients to an extent, but of course, in some cases they have not always been able to keep up with the payments. These are just the inevitable costs, not including the risks, unfortunately realized in many cases, of disruption in production and marketing. The dauntingly high costs of land reform projects have been recognized by local land reform advocates throughout the Middle East but were justified given the expected benefits (Aktan 1950, Barrawi 1952). Warriner's discounting of these costs in this text, even as she shows awareness of them elsewhere, is a good example of the mixed messages of caution and bravado that local policymakers in land reforming countries were subjected to by international and domestic experts.

Even though political power would change hands, the state would often continue with the same mistakes, indicating a suspiciously slow learning curve that cannot easily be dismissed as merely the consequence of political haste. What, then, can explain not only the failure of so many aspects of these land reform projects, but the apparent failure of these land reformers to anticipate or address these problems in a timely fashion?

Explaining Social Policy Failures: The Role of Ideas, Cognition, Perception, and Representation

One influential body of work in the social sciences has sought to explain the recurring failures of social policy and development plans through a focus on the role of ideas, models, cognitive heuristics, and epistemologies (Easterly 2014; Mitchell 2002; Scott 1998; Weyland 2006; 2010). Generations of what the economist William Easterly (2006) derisively terms “planners,” whether colonial administrators, postcolonial state officials, or World Bank economists, have sought to unleash the motor of economic growth through transforming the institutions regulating the lives of urban and rural workers. This ‘planning skeptical’ body of scholarship looks at the behavior and choices of these expert administrators *themselves* to try to pinpoint the root causes of underdevelopment and failed economic projects. Turning the concept of the top-down development project on its head, these scholars have searched for the roots of dysfunction through investigating the performance of those seeking to govern, not those who are the objects of governance.

This body of work has largely proceeded without reference to the sizeable scholarship on bounded rationality. Rationality is perhaps the cardinal premise underlying social science research, particularly in economics and, to somewhat lesser extents, political science and sociology. It is a theory of motivation and action that predicts that in general, actors will think through their situations, evaluate their courses of action and the resources at their disposal, and act in a way that maximizes their utility (or wellbeing), often through acquired material goods, security, or power. Bounded rationality, by contrast, is a framework that also posits that human actors are typically goal oriented but, through observation and experimentation, has sought to include the limits that real world people face when deciding on a course of action to maximize their utility. Scholars working on bounded rationality contrast their work with “comprehensive

rationality,” the basic attributive rationality that most scholars working within a rationalist framework adopt to model their subjects’ actions.

Forester (1984, 23-24) has provided the following lists contrasting the underlying presumptions underlying the comprehensive rationality and bounded rationality approaches to studying of policymaking:

Comprehensive Rationality Presumes:
• <i>a well-defined problem</i>
• <i>a full array of alternatives to consider</i>
• <i>full baseline information</i>
• <i>full information about the consequences of each alternative</i>
• <i>full information about the values and preferences of citizens</i>
• <i>fully adequate time, skill, and resources</i>

Bounded Rationality Presumes:
• <i>ambiguous and poorly defined problems</i>
• <i>incomplete information about alternatives</i>
• <i>incomplete information about the baseline, the background of the ‘problem’</i>
• <i>incomplete information about the consequences of supposed alternatives</i>
• <i>incomplete information about the range and content of values, preferences, and interests</i>
• <i>limited time, limited skills, and limited resources</i>

Research in bounded rationality owes its origins to the work of Herbert Simon (1947), a political scientist who first coined the term and won the Nobel Prize for Economics for his work in 1978. While theories of comprehensive rationality are ascriptive if not normative, deductive rather than inductive, bounded rationality drew on the behavioral sciences to actually observe human behaviors in order to understand how real world decision-making takes place. Simon's early work focused on the seemingly sub-rational behavior of decision-makers in bureaucracies, who did not pursue the maximum gains predict by theories of comprehensive rationality, but instead showed "satisficing" behavior, accepting that which was merely good enough rather than optimal – or, in the words of economist Charles Lindblom (1959), they were perfecting "the science of muddling through." While the early work on bounded rationality focused on what seemed to be the puzzle of a relative lack of ambition displayed by real world administrators, more recent work (Weyland 2006) explores how bounded rationality can also explain the reasons why policymakers stray into error through overreach and not just 'underreach,' as we will explore more below.

Jones (1999, 297) sums up the position of bounded rationality scholars succinctly in arguing for how real world empirical studies have supported it over the comprehensive rationality/classic expected utility model:

Do people make rational decisions in politics and economics? Not if by "rational" we mean that they demonstrate conformity to the classic expected-utility model. There is no longer any doubt about the weight of the scientific evidence; the expected-utility model of economic and political decision-making is not sustainable empirically. From the laboratory comes failure after failure of rational expected utility to account for human behavior. From systematic observation in organizational settings, scant evidence of behavior based on the expected-utility model emerges.

While bounded rationality and Simon's work have made a major impact in many fields, particularly psychology, it has unfortunately been understudied in Simon's own home field of

political science (Jones 1999, 299-301). For scholars seeking to understand the disappointments of social policy diffusion, whether agrarian reform or other ambitious projects, this is a particularly discouraging omission, leading to more than one attempt to reinvent the wheel. This can be seen in many works, among which is James Scott's seminal book *Seeing Like a State* (1998).

In this work, Scott develops the concept of 'high modernism' to describe an ideology that has excessive confidence in the abilities of states to quickly and effectively remake societies in order to make them more productive, more efficient, and more just. And yet, these projects often fail because the state administrators are unable to grasp the complexity of the societies they are trying to refashion, and so their efforts lead to disruptions in the established and effective modes of action that had kept the social systems working. He borrows the term *metis* (1998, 7, 309-43) from classical Greek to describe the complex local forms of practical knowledge that evolve through doing a task or series of tasks over time and are unique to a particular community. Unwritten and largely illegible to outsiders, *metis* is actually the set of practical skills that are necessary to actually carry out a harvest, produce a good in a factory, police an urban block, or perform any other complex task.

For Scott (1998), many projects "to improve the human condition" led to unanticipated problems, and even humanitarian disasters, because of this limited vision of state planners. In the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the rapid pace of scientific and technical progress gave many a strong confidence that scientific solutions could be applied to solve not only problems in the natural world, such as forestry and agriculture, but the problems of complex social systems as well. While states initially sought to map and survey their societies in order to raise armies and grow economies in competitive international environments, even social reformers joined in this

new mode of vision, coming to see the state as responsible for shaping and improving social conditions for the good of humanity.

These twin impulses – strengthening the state and improving the human condition – combined with a faith in the power of reason and planning to motivate projects to transform social systems believed to be mired in backwardness and superstition. A key problem undermining such projects was the inability of planners to comprehend the complexity of the social systems they were seeking to transform. These planners, typically coming from outside the communities they sought to reform, lacked an understanding of the *metis* that was key to keeping the systems running. The result was frequently a host of unintended and unanticipated negative consequences, resistance from the people subject to these plans, and a worsening rather than an improvement in the human condition.

Explaining how and why state policy makers made these mistakes in the pursuit of concrete goals based on the limits of their understanding is, of course, at its heart a discussion of bounded rationality. Scott (1998, 328) even concedes, albeit relatively late in his masterwork on social and development policy gone awry, that his work on the limitations of rationality in policy making actually shares much in common with the work of economists Charles Lindblom and Albert Hirschman, two scholars whose work built upon the theories of Herbert Simon:

Taken together, Lindblom's and Hirschman's positions amount to a well-reasoned strategic retreat (*sic*) from the ambition to comprehensive, rational planning. If we can make allowances for the social science jargon, the concepts behind such terms as "bounded rationality" (rather than "synoptic mastery") and "satisficing" (rather than "maximizing"), terms invented to describe a world working by educated guesswork and rules of thumb, sound very much like *metis*.

Perhaps it would have been more accurate to say that the principles underlying Scott's study (1998) sound very much like those Simon (1947) first addressed a half-century earlier. But this is not to single out Scott who, admirably, did in fact refer the reader to this other body of

work, but rather to emphasize the gains that could be made were knowledge within the social sciences more cumulative and scholars were more willing to explore related fields and subfields for already developed bodies of work that address their core questions.

Bounded Rationality: Kurt Weyland on Cognitive Psychology, Policy Diffusion, and Mistakes

One political scientist who has succeeded in bridging these disciplinary divides is Kurt Weyland. In his book *Bounded Rationality and Policy Diffusion: Social Sector Reform in Latin America* (2006), Weyland explores the role of the perceptions of political elites in order to explain why finance ministers and other policymakers in Latin America seemed to make so many mistakes in adopting and implementing neoliberal reforms in the late 20th century. What sets his work apart from that of so many other scholars exploring social policy or development failure is his use of bounded rationality and cognitive psychology to understand flaws in policy choice and implementation. This has the great advantage of drawing on an entire field of research that is based on experimental psychology, offering social scientists the benefits of laboratory experimentation as a means of collecting data and testing hypotheses, something that is generally denied to them in the real world.

Weyland's (2006) work seeks to explain why officials responsible for social policy in various Latin American countries so often selected policy models from countries that had economic and political conditions that were different from their own – sometimes radically so. For example, he finds that El Salvador adopted a pension privatization policy model from Chile which led to disaster, as El Salvador, unlike Chile, had much less developed financial regulatory institutions and consequently, very risky financial markets. Lifetimes of savings that had been protected by the state wound up being sunk into unstable stocks and lost quickly, causing disaster

for thousands of workers who had to face the prospect of retiring with little left to live on. Weyland asks: why would El Salvador's highly trained financial planners make such a mistake, betting their workers' pensions on the volatile local stock market? Based on extensive interviews with these ministers and their staffs, Weyland disputes the argument that they were forced into doing so by World Bank conditionalities and political pressures from more powerful states, finding that the El Salvadoran officials actually had sufficient autonomy to select and implement policies that they thought would be effective. Rather, he sees the adoption of the Chilean pension fund privatization model, and the recurrent adoption of other poor policy models from inappropriate countries more generally throughout Latin America, to be the result of relatively free decisions made according to the cognitive processes of bounded rationality.

Weyland's approach models policymakers as being essentially rational in their decision-making, as they are focused on achieving specific material benefits for their states. However, he also argues that classical models of comprehensive rational choice have suffered greatly from highly limited and unrealistic models of human decision-making. Harshly criticized as a "flight from reality in the human sciences" (Shapiro 2005), such models erred on a number of levels, including a) failing to observe if any humans actually pursued the proposed decision-making processes in real life and b) assuming a fixed and stable hierarchy of preferences and complete information. Bounded rationality, by contrast, focuses on individual goals but also draws on experiments in cognitive psychology to more accurately model how real life people actually interpret and process information (Tversky and Kahnemann 1974). That is to say, bounded rationality models people as pursuing certain goals but accounts for the fact that exposure to information and the ways that people analyze information are not the dispassionate, limitless, computer-like calculations suggested by classic rational choice approaches. Rather, we

are limited in our ability to process messy realities, and must simplify our models of the world in order to do so. That entails selecting models that explain how things work and what will happen if we take actions x or y . This is complicated by the fact that we have hardwired into our minds certain cognitive heuristics and biases that affect the models we select, the ways we understand them, and our willingness to abandon or adjust a model in the face of evidence that it is not working in the real world (Weyland 2006).

Weyland identifies three cognitive heuristics (or, consistent biases in processing information that are hardwired into the human mind) germane to our study of land reform (2006, 6-8):

*The **availability heuristic** induces people to assign disproportionate weight to particularly striking, vivid, memorable information and to overstate the significance of relative frequency of such cognitively available information (...)*

*Once a new model has appeared on policy-makers' radar screen, the **representativeness heuristic** shapes assessments of its quality and promise. This inferential shortcut induces people to overestimate the extent to which a small sample represents true population values; for instance, they tend to draw excessively firm conclusions from a limited set of data, such as a short time series.*

*Finally, the **heuristic of anchoring** limits the adjustment that policymakers introduce to adapt a foreign import to the specific characteristics of their own country. According to this inferential shortcut, initially provided information – even of an arbitrary nature – significantly ties down later judgments; while not predicting modifications, it keeps them limited and confines them to peripheral aspects.*

This is a promising approach to understanding what would otherwise be a confusing imprudence in the rapid adoption of policy models in other countries. Its strength lies in its grounding in experimental cognitive psychology. Social scientists using rational choice approaches have long used models of human behavior without bothering to verify them with empirical studies. The advantage of drawing on the field of cognitive psychology is that these studies actually use the experimental method to try to understand how humans process

information and make decisions. Of course, limitations abound. Psychology experiments can rarely, if ever, come close to accurately simulating the kinds of real world decision-making contexts that social scientists are interested in. Results are always tentative and theories are in flux as psychologists debate the significance of their findings. And yet, such studies do provide insights into political decision-making, which social scientists cannot and should not avoid.

Additionally, Weyland contrasts his understanding of ‘bounded rationality’ with other arguments, such as constructivism. The concept of rationality is based on the premise that people identify certain goals and are able to (more or less) correctly use the resources at their disposal to try to achieve them. Constructivist scholars instead posit that political elites are often not merely goal-oriented in the sense of blindly pursuing wealth or power, but also develop identities through social interaction that renders them susceptible to normative claims, such as human rights activists’ use of “naming and shaming”, in order to avoid feeling discomfort (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse-Kappen, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). And yet, Weyland argues that constructivist theories of norms fail to explain the seemingly irrational behaviors he witnesses among the policymakers he studies. He finds that policymakers often identify specific problems and focus on finding the best way to resolve them, being very focused on the concrete end goals of increasing GDP, reducing debt, boosting exports, and so on and so forth. They are interested in finding feasible and practicable solutions, a process in which norms and logics of appropriateness may play a role but, Weyland argues, not a leading one. However, as both constructivist and the bounded rationality theories that Weyland entertains predict conformative behavior falling short of the predictions of comprehensive rationality, it is not clear if he is correct in claiming that his evidence supports bounded rationality while discounting constructivist theories. Rather, given that in his cases both constructivist and bounded rationality

arguments predict more or less the same outcomes, I would argue that they are more compatible rather than in competition.

Seeing Like a State: James Scott on High Modernism

Scott described high modernism as not dangerous when unrestrained by democratic political institutions or a strong civil society. Such conditions often prevailed in both colonial and post-colonial or revolutionary contexts. Under colonial regimes, local populations typically had little ability to resist the policies put into effect by local states whose power was backed up by that of foreign states. It is true that such colonial states were often greatly limited in terms of their infrastructural power, hobbled by tight budgets and forced to share power with local elites. This managed to curtail the appetite for ambitious projects in many colonial settings. However, in colonized territories where colonial governments had more access to resources, such as French Algeria, the combination of a disenfranchised local populace and a state claiming a mandate to ‘uplift’ or ‘modernize’ local society could lead to major projects. In revolutionary settings, there was an even stronger sense that the state had to be responsible for rapid modernization and development, aided by the feeling that such projects were the expression of an authentic popular will. As such, the scope for democratic checks and balances were weaker, and the potential for state violence and disastrous outcomes such as famines or economic collapse far greater.

Scott sees a root cause of high modernism as originating in the way political elites perceive the societies or communities they seek to transform. As no person could hope to understand an entire country in all its complexity and fine details, state leaders rely on tools to simplify the messy realities with which they must grapple. They have certain things they wish to extract from the societies over which they govern: labor, natural resources, and money. In order to better determine what resources are available and how they may best be procured, they

commission maps and surveys. However, these maps and surveys must reduce huge amounts of potential data into manageable size, producing something legible for the state experts to analyze. The problem arises that such oversimplifications cannot capture all the relevant information of the processes that allow the social system to function. The experts ultimately lack the understanding needed to craft an effective intervention into the society. Their maps and models create an illusion of simplicity that conceals complex webs of interconnectedness and cause and effect. Thus, when an intervention is attempted, it can lead to unanticipated consequences as it disrupts hidden mechanisms, whether social or ecological, that had evolved over time and were key to keeping systems running effectively.

Scott sees the growth of scientific forestry in Europe in the 18th century as a precursor to state efforts to map, organize, and rationalize societies. By the 18th century, forestry had become a highly important asset for state leaders who were finding themselves in need of new means to raise resources to maintain armies and fight wars. Mapmakers were commissioned to map forests in order to determine how much of various forms of timber they contained. Natural forests being dynamic, biodiverse, and (in the eyes of state leaders) ‘messy’ environments, efforts were made to extend techniques used for the growing of other crops to trees, including monocropping only the most valuable types of trees.

In his discussion of the attempt to force villagers into new, ‘scientifically’-designed villages in Tanzania in the 1970s (a project that was a spectacular failure), Scott (1998, 224-5) elaborates on what he sees as high modernism’s “powerful aesthetic dimension”:

Certain visual representations of order and efficiency, although they may have made eminent sense in some original context, are detached from their initial moorings. High-modernist plans tend to “travel” as an abbreviated visual image of efficiency that is less a scientific proposition to be tested than a quasi-religious faith in a visual sign or representation of order. As [Jane] Jacobs suggested, they may substitute an apparent visual order for the real thing. The fact that they look

right becomes more important than whether they work; or, better put, the assumption is that if the arrangement looks right, it will also, ipso facto, function well. The importance of such representations is manifested in a tendency to miniaturize, to create such microenvironments of apparent order as model villages, demonstration projects, new capitals, and so on.

Important in this passage is the emphasis on the ways in which an information-economizing mind must reduce complex realities into manageable portions to be processed. Although Scott does not explicitly address the work of cognitive psychologists and mentions the term bounded rationality only once (1998, 328) in *Seeing Like a State*, comparing that to his own concept of *metis*, his focus on the limits of information and the rapid spread of reformist ideas are very much compatible with Weyland's (2006) attempt to explain the often sub-optimal adoption of foreign policy models in his work.

In conclusion, Weyland has sought to explain sub-optimal policy adoption and execution through the identification of cognitive heuristics that cause policymakers to look to the wrong models (availability heuristic), exaggerate the effectiveness of these models (representativeness heuristic), and fail to change course when evidence that the policy is not working as planned became available (anchoring heuristic). Scott's insights were that a) many policymakers are more likely to adopt certain political projects they deem to be 'modern' and b) that state officials generally discount the importance of local, unwritten rules – or *metis* – for running complex social, political, and economic systems, leading to breakdowns in the system when radical changes are introduced. In the next section I will examine how both Weyland's heuristics and Scott's arguments about high modernism can help us to better understand the great popularity, and the great disappointments, that bookended what I term the *second wave of land reform* that took place roughly between 1945-1980.

Explaining the Second Wave of Land Reform through Bounded Rationality

The first wave of land reform occurred in the second and third decades of the 20th century. The Mexican (c. 1910-1920) and Russian (1917-1922) Revolutions witnessed the first great modern land reforms, with land seizures first initiated by peasants rebelling against their landlords and the state. In both cases a revolutionary armed struggle sought to promote, profit from, and eventually tame this wave of grassroots activism, radically transforming the whole political structure of these countries in the process. The Mexican and Russian examples in turn triggered a less dramatic but nevertheless transformative wave of land reform throughout Eastern Europe, with leaders seeking to preempt the peasant rebellions that they feared would arise in response to the Russian Revolution and the peasants' new potential for collective action after having seen combat in World War I. The example of the Romanian province of Bessarabia, in which peasant-soldiers returned from the front at the end of World War I and turned their newly-acquired rifles against their landlords loomed large in not just Romanian state leaders' eyes, but resonated throughout the continent. This first wave affected almost every country from the Baltic to the Balkans, with Albania being the only Eastern European state to not participate in this land reform wave (Jelavic 1983). Land reform later emerged on the other side of Eurasia in the 1920s and 30s as a key goal of Mao's Red Army, which later, as in the Soviet Union, gave way to collectivized agriculture under state command.

This first wave of land reform was more the product of state or para-state elites responding to uprisings. Jha and Wilkinson (2012) show evidence that increased combat experience as part of the Indian Army in World War II led communities to be more effective in carrying out violence and ethnic cleansing during Partition in India in 1947. Similar processes seem to have led peasants returning from the front in World War I to be able to effectively

organize to use violence to demand land from their landlords and the state, not just in Romania but elsewhere as well. State weakness at the end of the war was presumably an additional factor, while the loss of life and hence labor power may have rendered holding on to large estates less attractive, with neither the people nor animals left to fully work the land. Over all, these land reforms were responses to *faits accomplis* or preemptive moves by political elites, rather than ambitious state-down political programs.

The second wave of land reform emerged during and after World War II. US occupation forces oversaw far-reaching land reforms in Europe and East Asia, with Japan and South Korea being frequently cited as having been extremely successful in achieving the goals of eliminating pro-fascist landed elites while reducing the rural grievances that could have led to communist movements in the countryside (Ladejinsky 1977; Dore 2013). In a case of too little too late, American advisors also sought to urge the Chiang Kai-Shek government to carry out land reform as a counter to the Maoist armies, who were bringing a particularly violent version of land reform to the territories that they conquered (Dikötter 2014). However, by this point Kai-Shek's armies had already lost the momentum, and it would be in Taiwan, which they colonized in retreating from the Red Army, where land reform would finally be carried out (Ladejinsky 1977; Olson 1974).

Not long after the end of World War II, land reform exploded into an immensely popular policy goal for the newly decolonizing countries, particularly in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Latin America, with its vastly unequal land tenure arrangements, began to realize land reform in the 1950s and 1960s. Here the Cuban Revolution (1961) played a catalyzing role, goading into action both leaders seeking either to emulate Castro's land reform achievements and those seeking to avoid the deposed Cuban dictator Batista's fate. The enormous rural populations of

South Asia were also promised land reform by their new post-independence leadership, with Nehru making great promises to India's farmers. However, in both India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) land reform lagged well behind its promises, and redistribution did not meet the expectations of the politicians' rhetoric (Low 1996; Tai 1974; Warriner 1969). This time around, while land reform was often offered in response to a certain amount of contentious political action by peasants demanding improvements in their lives, it was also proposed and offered by political elites in a much more top-down fashion. In some countries, such as Turkey (see Chapter 3), it was even proposed and partially enacted in the absence of significant contentious political activism.

This second wave of land reform further differed from the first in that its proponents had developed a complex and comprehensive theory of land reform, claiming that it would be a necessary stage in a country's development, overthrowing feudalism, securing the countryside, shunting wealth into industrialization, enabling economic take-off, and even banishing imperialism and creating democracy (Aktan 1950; Barrawi 1952; Ladejinsky 1977; Nashrty 1966; Nasser 1963; Tannous 1951). It was no longer a means for a reluctant state leadership to achieve a pragmatic *modus vivendi* with an empowered peasantry, but now offered to serve a host of goals that political elites in the decolonizing countries passionately desired. As such, it became part of a blueprint for political, economic, and social development that could be widely discussed and adopted.

Significantly, although the first wave of land reforms were done to avoid revolutions and not for reasons of economic rationality or increasing agricultural output, by the time of the second wave, land reform experts were making strong claims that land reform would not only help achieve these goals, but was even necessary for them (Aktan 1950; Barrawi 1952; Gorni

1944). Later scholars could find little to no evidence that the land reforms of the first wave had increased per capita agricultural output or had led to net gains in national economic growth (Jackson 1982; Teichova 1985; Warriner 1969) and economic development was not even a primary goal of these reforms. Incidentally, up until the 1920s the consensus among economists and agronomists was that land reform would in fact lead to a decline in output, and not an increase (Jørgensen 2006, 65). And yet, by 1950 we can see land reform experts such as Turkey's Reşat Aktan making confident claims that "the general result of the land reforms in other European countries [i.e., in the first wave of land reform] was an increase in total output."

Remarkably for such a seemingly radical instrument for redistributing private property, after World War II land reform received the blessings of *both* the United States and Soviet Union at the beginning of the Cold War. Prior to World War II, the International Labor Office (later the International Labor Organization), based in Geneva, was the main international organization advocating land reform. When Turkish state leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk sought to initiate a land reform in Turkey in the 1930s, he sent a request to the ILO for guidance. The ILO commissioned the Italian agronomist Olindo Gorni to write a report on land reform and the experiences of the Eastern European land reforming countries, which was later translated into Turkish and formed much of the basis for the parliamentary debates on land reform that would ensue (see Gorni 1944).

The US formally adopted land reform as a policy goal in 1950, when in a bold move to "steal communist thunder" in the words of top US land reform official Wolf Ladejinsky ([1951] 1977), the US backed and helped pass a Polish proposal at the United Nations for a resolution supporting land reform (Egand 1956). By 1950, land reform thus had won the ideological imprimatur of East and West, and Left and Right. While communists often argued that state-

owned and managed collective farms were superior to the private ownership of farms as promised by land reform, they understood that land reform was popular with peasants and thus supported it, even if it was only a way station on the way to eventual collectivization.

As Warriner (1969) explained, this surprising bilateral support was in part due to the fact that land reform attacked the idea of feudalism, which, however vague as a concept, was something that both free market liberals and command economy socialists had long sought to destroy in their pursuit of modernization. The idea of destroying feudalism has its origins in the French Revolution, which preceded the intellectual split between the free market and the command economy in European political thought. Thus, at the dawn of the Cold War both Left and Right could champion it – with one side seeing it as an anti-monopoly weapon that creates functioning and competitive markets in land and would forestall more radical threats to private property, while the other side regarding it as a necessary attack on a backwards and conservative rural social order and a stepping stone to a more socialist society. And just as the original French Revolutionaries had difficulty distinguishing between archaic feudalism and modern rights of property, with feudalism being used as much as a term of abuse than a rigorous analytical category (Markoff 1996), latter day land reformers would also face opposition from those who argued that strong property rights were the key to an efficient and modern economy.

Returning to Warriner's longing for the "old authentic note" of a Zapata or a Stambulisky (1957, 9), we can see that her frame of reference for a desirable sequence of land reform is based on the first wave which took place c. 1910-1920, in which states were largely enacting an emergency response to widespread contentious action by the peasants themselves. She celebrates the leaders Zapata and Stambulisky as authentic grassroots actors, as to a great extent this was true given that the Mexican and Bulgarian land reforms were to a large extent articulated as part

of a wave of peasant contentious political action. And yet, while land reform proponents of the second wave, such as Nasser in Egypt or Qasim in Iraq, sought to identify themselves as organic representatives of the peoples' interests, they seemed to be more inspired by the arguments of international and local intellectuals who saw land reform as a method of modernization and increasing the power of the state rather than empowering the peasants themselves (Meijer 1999). Land reform's reframing as a tool of modernization can help to explain its broad appeal among political elites in completely contexts, ranging from situations where farmers were engaging in moderate collective action to demand land (Egypt), were engaging in little to no collective action to demand land (Turkey), or even where the farmers had not even arrived yet and, in fact, were not yet farmers (the Zionist movement in Palestine and, after 1948, in Israel) (Granott 1926; 1940; 1956; List 1951).

As we review these facts, we can see that land reform had by 1945 come to acquire the legitimacy of a modernizing policy model. No longer a means of placating assertive peasants, it had become an implement of high modernism, a tool by which ambitious leaders could achieve a number of benefits for their states and for themselves. Just as it fulfilled Scott's definition of a high modernist project, it also suffered broadly from failures to recognize the role of *metis*, the sum of acquired local knowledge that had kept the agrarian economies running. The more abruptly and the more forcefully state leaders sought to push through revolutionary land reform programs, the more severely would the negative outcomes of disrupting *metis* be felt.

Weyland's heuristics also illuminate the rapidfire spread of the second wave of land reform and the many problems it encountered. As per the availability heuristic, policymakers sought to emulate the land reform programs of countries to which they paid attention for reasons other than similarities in terms of the issues most relevant to carrying out land reform - ecology,

population to land ratios, strength and competence of state administrative agencies, infrastructure, and the like. Rather, they tended to notice countries that were nearby, with which they had historical connections, cultural, or linguistic connections, or which were prominently featured in international news, ignoring or downplaying how different these countries along the relevant variables.

Thus, we can see prominent Turkish land reform expert Ömer Lütfü Barkan ([1943] 1946), the most influential domestic land expert in the Turkish land reform debate of 1945-1950, arguing that Turkey could learn much from ex-Ottoman countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe due to the fact that they had a shared history and, to an extent, shared institutional heritage. While this may initially seem plausible, it leads Barkan to downplay the facts that their political institutions diverged radically after their departure from the Ottoman Empire and, much more importantly, the fact that they were the polar opposites of Turkey regarding the most important issues suggesting land reform: while Turkey had abundant land and a small and mostly politically inactive peasantry, the countries of the Balkans and Eastern Europe had scarce land, high populations and peasants threatening rebellion.

Syrian land reform proponent Mohamed Sarrage (*Sarraj*) made even more specious claims for the right models for Syrian land reform. Writing in 1935, he claims that Spain's recent land reform provides the optimal example on which Syria should base its land policies. Among the reasons that he provides are that the "customs and characters of the peasants of Syria and Spain resemble each other" and that the "Arabs of Syria have ruled over Spain," (Sarrage 1935, 63), by which he refers to the Umayyad dynasty transition from ruling in Damascus (661-744) to establishing a new reign in Cordoba (756-1031) in Spain, the period known as *al-Andalus*. This basically irrelevant and even factually debatable information seems to have led the author to

increase the extent to which he perceives an essential similarity between Spain and Syria, pushing him to identify Spain as a model for land reform even though these facts in themselves give no useful information for comparing Syria and Spain along measures relevant for land reform.

While the above references to facts ultimately unrelated to the viability of Spain as a model for Syrian land reform show evidence of the availability heuristic at work, another claim made by Sarrage (1935) shows the effect of the representativeness heuristic. This heuristic leads policymakers to overestimate the proven effectiveness of a policy attempt, drawing unwarrantedly confident conclusions from a small sample size and jumping to conclusions before the policy attempt has had enough time to reveal whether or not it can be considered a success. Sarrage (1935, 62-5) also argues that Syria adopt the Spanish land reforms enacted in September 1932 because they were the most recently enacted, and so they must have then benefitted the most from the accumulated experiences of all the land reforms that had been carried out prior to them. While this arguments has a certain logic to it, it also fails to see that every land reform attempt and every country in which land reform is attempted (or even every region) is different in crucial ways, and that success or failure will only be revealed in time. So, the fact that Spain's land reform is the most recent should also be considered a drawback, as scholars have yet to have time to analyze whether it had been successful in achieving its goals or if unanticipated problems arose.

In fact, as Pinar and Rosés (2011) have pointed out, the land reforms passed by the Spanish legislature in September 1932 were never actually executed, making whatever evidence that they had already had a positive effect by 1935 illusory. Incidentally, these authors also argue that these land reforms were unnecessary, as land concentration and rural poverty had both been

decreasing steadily in the decades leading up to 1932 as an expanding industrial sector brought the peasants into the cities, increasing rural wages and the ability of the remaining *campesinos* to buy their own farms if they chose and reducing the number of landless agricultural workers from about two million in 1860 to a mere one million by 1930 (2011, 2). This leads Pidal and Rosés to ask why the Spanish government would feel a need to intervene in the land market that was moving in the direction of more prosperity and equality on its own. Their conclusion was that political factors intervened (2011, 17), which, while no doubt true to an extent, nevertheless ignores the fact that a huge number of countries in Europe had just carried out land reform over the preceding 15 years, giving land reform an ideological momentum that cannot be fully reduced to domestic political considerations alone.

Finally, the anchoring heuristic describes the tendency of policymakers to ‘cut and paste’ policy models with minimal modifications to their local circumstances and to show an inertial reluctance to modify the model in the face of evidence that it is not performing according to plan. This heuristic helps explain why so many political actors, whether policymakers or planners, championed land reform as a solution for rural poverty, underdevelopment, and lack of democracy when their actual agrarian conditions did not merit a costly and contingent project of redistributing state land.

Land reform is an idea that works best when certain conditions are met. And yet, due in part to the anchoring heuristic, land reformers often adopted land reform models that had evolved in radically different contexts and sought to apply them to their home environments without adequate, if any, adjustment. To illustrate this point let us examine just two basic preconditions for a successful and efficient land reform involving demographics and ecology: First, there should be a high population-land ratio, i.e., if lands are not available for farmers who

wish to work them, then a redistribution of land can deliver what poorer farmers want and need. Second, lands must be of sufficient quality and have access to adequate water in order to support consistent and reliable harvests, so that an individual plot that will be given to a farming family will be able to support them. In many cases, land was abundant while people were scarce, and poverty was a result of the poor quality of soil, lack of labor power and capital (such as animals), and lack of marketing facilities and infrastructure. As we will see in the following chapter, in Turkey these were the prevailing agricultural conditions (Keyder 1989). Under such conditions, sharecropping can actually be better than ownership for the sharecropper who works the land, as it divides risk between the cultivator and the landowner (Stiglitz 1974). If a plot of land becomes unproductive, a sharecropper can move on to another plot, while an owner of land cannot, especially when he or she is forbidden from selling or renting the land, as was usually the case in land reforms. Ownership of a small plot of land, especially when they are forbidden to sell or rent it, as was usually the case in land reforms, effectively traps a family on that plot. If that plot cannot provide for them, they are the ones who suffer.

Furthermore, land reform is based on the premise of private property in the Roman law sense of exclusive ownership, based on the theoretical superiority of this system of managing scarce natural resources. Land reformers have both targeted not only large landowners, but also forms of collective property rights in their crusades. For example, British land reform expert Doreen Warriner (1957, 58), following in the footsteps of colonial land administrators such as Ernest Dowson (Baali 1966; 55-6; Forman 2002; Home 2006), attacks the institution of *musha'a*, a collective property institution common to agricultural communities in the Middle East, claiming that it merely reflected the presumably irrational lack of enterprise on behalf of the landowners. And yet, as a large body of research has successfully demonstrated, exclusive

individual ownership rights are far from a panacea for problems of natural resource management and in many cases collective management is more efficient and rational (Cole and Ostrom 2012; De Janvry and Sadoulet 2005; Eggertsson 1990; Nadan 2003; 2006; Ostrom 1990).

The economist Harold Demsetz (1967) famously argued that exclusive property rights evolve through the actions of rational actors seeking to manage a natural resource, with private property emerging at the point at which that resource becomes scarce enough to make the transaction costs of building and maintaining private property institutions to govern its management worthwhile. While this in itself has been critiqued as a “the naïve view of property rights” (Cole and Ostrom 2012; Eggertsson 1990) for its failure to recognize how contemporary property rights systems actually incorporate both exclusivist and non-exclusivist practices, it at least suggests that local actors can understand their local situations well enough to find rational ways of managing the scarce resource at hand.

Land reformers like Warriner and colonial administrators like Dowson, however, failed to see the benefits of the collective institution of *musha'a*. *Musha'a* provided an effective means of managing risk in the uncertain soils of the Middle East, as it allowed peasants to farm multiple strips of land in various areas of the collective land of the village. If one part of the village's land failed, the individual farmer would not lose all his or her crops. Had the farmer a contiguous consolidated plot, by contrast, the odds would be more all or nothing, with the likelihood of total crop failure increased. Given James Scott's (1977) argument that peasants, often existing close to a subsistence level and needing primarily to avoid famine, tend to be risk averse in their agricultural choices, seeking to ensure a minimum rather than pursue a maximum of output, it is even more clear how diversifying one's 'portfolio' of crops is an adaptive move in the uncertain agricultural conditions that prevailed in most of the Middle East.

Furthermore, as Nadan (2003; 2006) points out, *musha'a* helped peasants manage conflicts over land. Land conflicts are one of the most serious sources of violent conflict in areas with weak rule of law, where self-help rather than state-supplied policing is the primary means of providing security. A study cited by Aktan (1966, 324) claimed that half the murderers in Turkey's prisons were there because they had killed someone in a conflict over agricultural land. While exclusive property rights advocates since at least the time of Thomas Aquinas have been celebrating exclusive property in land as a means of preventing such conflicts, Nadan (2003; 2006) shows how in the context of weak rule of law in Palestine under the Ottoman and British Mandate periods, *musha'a* actually was a means of averting costly if not deadly conflicts over access to agricultural lands.

Given these arguments for collective land tenure and resource management under certain conditions, why then did we see exclusive property rights coming to be seen as the sole rational means of managing land, leading thinkers like Dowson and Warriner and the countless foreign and local players who were influenced by them to reject collective property so soundly? I suspect that the anchoring heuristic played a strong role. Land reform has many intellectual roots, with some tracing the principles of modern land reform at least as far back as Classical Greece and the Roman Empire (Tuma 1965). However, its strongest source may be the well-watered and verdant lands of Ireland in the 17th century. Rashid (1985) argues that Ireland was the crucible for the field of development economics that was later to blossom in the 20th century, serving as the main reference point of the study of poverty and underdevelopment in British intellectual life, which went on to dominate the field of economics. The images of the lazy absentee landowner and the exploited sharecropper that came to dominate debates about land reform throughout the world in the 20th century had their roots in 18th and 19th century critiques of the English absentee

landowners who lived in England and owned land in Ireland and their treatment of their poor Irish sharecroppers. Adam Smith and other late 18th century political economists had the Irish example in mind as they critiqued the evils of absentee landlordism, arguing that it led to inefficiencies and underproduction (2000, 22). Later, the Irish Potato Famine (1845-1852) drove later thinkers like John Stuart Mill to formulate ideas of land reform. Given that such a terrible agricultural crisis occurred on the 'Emerald Isle,' whose abundant rainfall should have rendered it an agricultural success story rather than an example of agrarian disaster, the solutions to the disaster were thus to be sought in reforming political and economic institutions.

Ireland had both rich and well-watered soil and a very high ratio of population to land, particularly before the Famine, which in just four years saw its population drop from 8.5 million to 6.5 million through starvation and emigration (O'Rourke 2005). As such, the redistribution of small plots of land to farmers appeared to be a sensible solution given its agricultural and economic conditions. A relatively small plot of land in Ireland could support 'intensive' agriculture, in which the farmer invests much effort into rendering a concentrated plot of land productive, making the small plot a reliable resource for sustaining a farming family. In hotter, dryer countries, by contrast, the soil is prone to becoming salty through repeated plantings and losing its fertility. In such contexts the optimum technique is 'extensive' farming, or, the use of a large territory on which one portion will be cultivated one season, another the next, and another the next, so as not to exhaust the soil. Parliament would enact a number of reforms to help protect sharecroppers' rights beginning in 1870 that, while not amounting to land reform in the sense of forced redistribution of privately owned land, nevertheless provided inspiration for later land reformers in the Middle East and elsewhere (Aktan 1950; Barrawi 1952; Granott 1956).

As I will discuss in Chapter 3, among of the Middle Eastern countries Egypt had the ecological and demographic conditions most akin to Ireland's, with a large population and extremely productive soil, regularly and predictably watered by the Nile, allowing for intensive agriculture. In most of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, by contrast, extensive farming was optimal, as it allowed farmers to move from plot to plot to avoid depleting the soil and being left with barren earth. And yet, these differences do not seem to have been recognized by the land reformers, or at least were not given the importance they deserved. The very premise of land reform based on redistributing small plots of land as exclusive private property needed to be adjusted to local circumstances to accommodate the differences in demographic and ecological realities, but it too often, the essential differences in land scarcity and intensive and extensive agriculture were overlooked as the policy was imported from one region to another. The anchoring heuristic seems to have led land reformers to take the original land reform model, with its roots in the Irish and, later, the Egyptian experiences, and seek to transplant it into soils where it could not grow well.

CHAPTER 2

WE MUST CONQUER THE COUNTRY FROM WITHIN

THE QUEST FOR LAND REFORM IN TURKEY

It is impossible that such a great people's movement would not find a reflection in revolutionary Turkey!

Ömer Lütfü Barkan, Turkish land reform proponent ([1943] 1946, 384)

Any reform thought to have an effect on the social structure must be studied and researched within the framework of Turkey's general level of social and economic development. This is because by doing so, it then becomes possible to distinguish between those measures that will actually have a significantly positive effect on our general economic and cultural progress and those fantasy solutions that bear only a psychological value, and are, in fact, merely a mirage.

Mümtaz Turhan, Turkish land reform skeptic (1964, 3)

The struggle for land reform in Turkey has been a confusing one, to say the least. While in countries like Egypt land reform assumed the air of the historically inevitable given the inequalities in land and the increasingly violent protests by *fallahin* (Brown 1990; Ikeda 1998), in Turkey the land reform movement seemed to make little sense, confusing even to its advocates (Aydemir 1969). From the first years of the Turkish Republic (est. 1923) until the 1970s Turkish political elites would repeatedly propose plans to redistribute land, speaking with great urgency, but somehow never managed to follow through. On five separate occasions Turkish governments launched land reform initiatives, occurring in the early 1920s, the late 1930s, the mid 1940s, the early 1960s, and the early-mid 1970s. Although considerable amounts of state-owned land were given to farmers in the first decades of the republic, all these attempts at land reform proper ended with either little or no successful redistribution of private land.

Puzzlingly, the recurrent zeal for land reform among Turkey's political elite occurred in the absence of significant peasant protest or demands for land reform (Hansen 1990; Keyder 1989). While land reform would be very difficult to carry out in the absence of the imminent threat of peasant unrest or grassroots demands for redistribution of land, it is also hard to justify in conditions of land abundance and relative equality in landholding. Land reform arose as a solution to problems of inequality in land holding that fed revolutionary moments in Mexico and Russia and caused horrible disasters in Ireland, leading to its adoption as a means of pacifying peasants and forestalling revolution (Lipton 2009; Warriner 1969). And yet in Turkey, unrest was absent, landholdings were relatively equal (Gerber 1987; Keyder 1987; Kurzman 2008) and land was abundant in relation to labor (Arıcanlı 1986, 1991; Hansen 1991; Keyder 1987; 1989; Rodrik 1982). The economist Bent Hansen (1991, 9, 257) states that in terms of the availability of agricultural land, Turkey was a "frontier society" in the "American sense of the term" which only reached the limits of its capacity for expansion by the late 1950s, whereas Egypt reached its land frontier around 1900. That is, fifty years after reaching its limit on land, Egypt enacted land reform, whereas Turkey attempted land reform *before* reaching its limit.

Even more curious is that in recent decades, as inequalities in agricultural land holdings have increased and new lands to bring under cultivation have become scarce (Ünal 2012), land reform has not made much of a comeback as a burning political issue. Now more than ever would be the time to expect land reform if one believes that land reform emerges as a political issue in response to objective demographic and agricultural realities. And yet, in contrast to the early and mid-20th century, land reform has been largely absent from the Turkish political agenda.

This wide gulf between the political classes' interest in land reform, peasant demands for land reform, and agrarian conditions has long been noted by scholars and activists alike. Even

the pro-land reform intellectual Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, founder of the renowned statist-leftist journal *Kadro* in the 1930s, described Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's announcement of a “revolutionary” land reform bill at a random moment in 1937 as arriving like a “bomb” in the parliament. Reflecting back on the 1930s from the 1960s, Aydemir marveled that the reasons for the proposal and its timing were still unknown decades later (1969, 121).

This 1937 proposal was dropped, however, interrupted by World War II, which kept Turkey out of the war but in a state of tense mobilization. When land reform returned to the agenda in 1945, it came in the form of Law 4753, featuring Article 17, a radical bill that would have allowed the state to give agricultural workers, whether wage laborers or sharecroppers, ownership of the lands they worked, expropriating lands until the original landowner was left with a mere 50 *dönüm* (12.4 acres). The purpose of this bill was to completely eliminate sharecropping and agricultural wage labor, an incredibly ambitious notion in the Turkey of the 1940s, where sharecropping was common, rural communities fairly self-governing, and state capacity to effectively shape the organization of rural life limited.

In the end, Law 4753 was passed, but without the radical Article 17 which allowed for the confiscation of almost any land that was worked by someone other than the owners. The final bill contained provisions for expropriating estates of above 5000 *dönüm*⁴ (1,236 acres) in territories with abundant land and estates above 2000 *dönüm* (494 acres) in territories with more land scarcity, leaving the owners fairly decently sized farms after redistribution. However, even these ceilings do not appear to have lead the state to actually confiscate and redistribute much

⁴ In 1928, the Turkish government officially fixed the measurement of a *dönüm* at one decare, or 1,000m², but as explained later in this chapter, this unit of measurement was difficult to standardize in practice. It originally referred to the amount of land a farmer could plough in a day and thus varied not only from village to village, but even from farmer to farmer.

privately-held land (Fotos 1956), although the state did distribute much state-held land in the years following 1945 as part of the same program.

Remarkably, even state leader İsmet İnönü (r. 1938-1950), who was the main force behind the land reform bill of 1945 and Article 17 promising radical land redistribution, recanted his position within a few years. The debates over land reform literally tore apart the Republican People's Party, the single ruling party at the time. Anti-Article 17 dissidents formed their own party in 1946, the Democrat Party, paving the way for transition from single-party autocracy to multiparty democracy. The Democrat Party would win Turkey's first competitive elections in 1950 by a landslide, ruling for a decade before being deposed in a military coup in 1960. And yet, even before the full effects of this rupture had been felt, by 1948 İnönü denounced his own land reform bill as having been "too extreme," a remarkable political *volte-face* reversing his previous decade and a half of commitment to land reform (Karaömerlioğlu 2000, 121). Writing on the land reform attempts of the 1930s and 1940s, the Turkish historian Asım Karaömerlioğlu (2000, 117) opined that "even today, we know little of the motives behind the land reform attempts of this period. It is no exaggeration to characterize this as one of the most puzzling issues of the early Republican period that still needs to be fully explained."

Before land reform could make a comeback, a strong center-right coalition had emerged to oppose it through the Democrat Party. A center-right party extolling the virtues of private initiative while triggering an inflationary crisis through its generously populist economic policies, the Democrat Party ruled for a decade before being deposed in a military coup in 1960. The new military government sought again to carry out land reform, but as Turkey resumed elections, the Justice Party, another center-right party, came to power and once again stood in the way of redistributive land reforms (Aktan 1966). 1971 brought another military intervention and

renewed attempts at land reform by the military-backed politicians, this time leading to some limited land reform in the province of Urfa (Ulus 2011). However, the courts and opposition politicians managed to limit the land reform movement, and little redistribution actually took place (Parvin and Hiç 1984, 216). The next coup, falling on September 12, 1980, would bring about three years of martial law interested not in repeating the statist economic projects of the first two coups but rather the emerging neoliberal trend (Adly 2012). From this point onwards, land reform would mostly disappear from Turkey's elite political discourse.

In short, the alternating senses of urgency and disinterest that characterized the Turkish political elites are difficult to explain as direct, rational responses to changing agrarian conditions or political incentives if we accept the suppositions of comprehensive rationality. For the ruling Republican People's Party in the 1940s, land reform seemed to offer little politically or economically. Its pursuit triggered a revolt within the party that led to its division and its collapse as the dominant power in Turkish politics. The Democrat Party was destroyed by the 1960 coup but its legacy continued, with the center-right being dominant from 1950 until the present day, handily defeating the Republican People's Party, even when it promised land reform, in election after election. While the Republican People's Party has managed to survive as an opposition party up until the present day, it has only enjoyed the shortest of moments as a top party over the past 65 years.

Land Reform and Bounded Rationality

How to explain the boom-bust cycle of land reform in Turkey, and its seemingly independent life, divorced from social movements or objective conditions demanding land reform? This chapter argues that Turkish political elites, lacking good information on the

political, social, and economic realities of the Turkish countryside, adopted the cause of land reform less in response to local realities than in response to the international policy wave of land reform. Turkish land reform proponents thus made relatively weak arguments, at least in the eyes of their opponents in the Turkish political elite. Unlike land reform proponents in countries like Egypt or Iraq, Turkish land reformers had little if any grassroots support for land reform or convincing threat of revolution to point to as justification for their plans (Baer 1962; Batatu 1979, 1999; Brown 1990; Gerber 1987).⁵ In Turkey, by contrast, little to no violent peasant protest against land inequalities occurred until the 1970s, when peasants began to organize against landlords in the predominantly Kurdish southeast, an opening salvo in what would become the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish nationalist group, the PKK (Bozarslan 2006; Romano 2006).

And so, while other scholars have highlighted the defeat of Turkish land reform as the result of vested interests, with landowners manipulating the political process to save their own landholdings (Ahmad 1975; 1983; 1993; Karaömerlioğlu 2000), in this chapter I argue that the ultimate reasons for both the rise and fall of Turkish land reform campaign are to be found in the boundedly rational decision-making processes that led Turkish political elites to champion a policy model inappropriate for their interests given Turkey's political, economic, social, and ecological realities.

In short, while we can see that Turkish political elites used land reform to pursue certain political and economic goals, we can also see that simply ascribing their failures to the mixture

⁵ For a counterargument that Turkish state elites were in fact convinced that the peasants were about to rise up in revolution and that this prompted democratization, see Karaömerlioğlu 2006. This explanation, however, seems weak as the limited peasant unrest that did occur, which was extremely minimal, only occurred in response to the passing of the land reform bill in 1945 and did not precede it. Furthermore, the democratization argument is also questionable when we compare Turkey with Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, where peasant protest helped lead to land reform and de-democratization rather than democratization. Turkey, by contrast, offered democratization and not land reform, which strengthened the hand of landowners more than landless peasants.

of the political with the economic is not enough. Rather, we must focus on the greater question of why they sought such implausible means to achieve these objectives. Fortunately, a rich record of academic writings, state documents, and parliamentary records gives us insight into the decision-making processes that made land reform appear as not just a solution to certain economic, social, and political problems, but even an imperative stage for Turkey's progress and development.

Land reform, which was carried out in every country in Eastern Europe except Albania during and after World War I (Jelavich 1983), powerfully impressed Turkish policy-makers who kept a steady eye on the Balkans and Eastern Europe in their search for adoptable policy models (Aktan 1950; Barkan [1943] 1946). Their willingness to adopt land policies from these countries seemed to arise not from the close similarities these countries bore to Turkey in the relevant variables of population-land ratio, peasant unrest, or possibilities for developing intensive agriculture. In the parliamentary debates over the land reform bill of 1945 we can even see land reform opponents quoting government reports to show that Turkey differed greatly from these land reforming countries, having an underpopulated rather than overpopulated countryside (TBMM 5.14.1945). Rather, the close attention paid to these Balkan and Eastern European countries appeared to emerge from geographical proximity, shared Ottoman history, and the backgrounds of many of Turkey's political leaders, who themselves grew up in or had family roots in the Balkans before ethnic conflict forced Muslims to relocate to what became Turkey.

The importance given to Balkan and Eastern European countries by Turkey's political elite on the issue of land reform cannot easily be explained by theories of comprehensive rationality, given the extreme demographic, economic, and ecological differences between these

countries on the relevant indicators. They can, on the other hand, be explained fairly easily by Weyland's models of boundedly rational policy diffusion (2006):

The availability heuristic, which predicts that policymakers will be more likely to adopt policy models from countries that they focus greater attention on for reasons unrelated to the specific policy issue at hand, helps us to understand why Turkish leaders took a disproportionate interest in these countries, exaggerating the extent to which they resembled Turkey in the relevant criteria for land reform.

The representativeness heuristic also seems to have been at work, as Turkey's land reformers were quick to see the land reforms that had taken place in Eastern Europe as an unqualified economic and political success, even a necessary stage in the process of modernization (Aktan 1950; Barkan 1946).

Finally, the anchoring heuristic, which predicts that policies will be adopted and maintained with less than the optimal amount of modification for local circumstances, also may help explain the case of Turkish land reform, as land reform proponents sought to adopt models from Balkan countries while minimizing how different were the relevant agricultural and demographic conditions.

Land Reform: Right For Turkey?

Land reform seems to have been a logical and effective policy in many countries, succeeding in reducing inequalities and averting peasant revolts, just as its advocates promised (Lipton 2009). Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are typically offered as the success stories of 20th century land reform. It often led to great disappointments in a number of fields, particularly in terms of increasing agricultural production and industrial investment, but on the whole there

were many countries in which landholdings were highly unequal, new lands were scarce, and land reform, when carried out well, seems to have been a just and sensible solution to these issues.

The Turkey of the 1940s and 1950s, however, was not a place in which land reform would have been easy to carry out or particularly helpful in reducing poverty or promoting social stability, with the possible exception of the predominantly Kurdish Southeast, a borderland where the Ottoman and, later, the Turkish state had long had to rely on local strongmen rather than exercising direct rule, which led to the formation of large estates and local authority fitting to a great extent classical definitions of modern feudalism (Kaligian 2003; Klein 2011). There was little or no grassroots demand for land reform, as there was in most other countries where it was carried out. The Turkish state at the time would have had great trouble measuring and dividing the lands appropriately, unlike other countries where cadastral records were accurate and legal and administrative infrastructure was well-equipped to deal with the problem of measuring land, determining ownership, and redistributing plots of adequate size and productivity. Finally, agricultural poverty was less the result of insufficient or unequal access to land, and more the lack of infrastructure, credit, and marketing facilities. In short, land reform was doomed to be opposed, if not to fail, simply due to the fact that there were so many arguments to be waged against it. In the Turkey of the 1920s-1950s, it would have been an expensive and difficult policy to carry out with few benefits for peasants outside of the Southeast.

What, then, did Turkey's political elites hope to gain through land reform? As described in the previous chapter, by the early 1950s the idea of land reform had grown into a complex narrative promising to deliver general economic development, industrialization, security, state-building, an end to imperialist domination, and more. In the Turkish land reform debates of 1945,

by contrast, these more majestic claims had yet to fully develop. And yet, we can still see that Turkish land reformers saw in land reform the solution to a number of problems that land reform probably could not have solved given the conditions of that time and place.

The arguments for land reform revolve around three interrelated issues which will be dealt with in turn: modernizing property rights, ending sharecropping and wage labor, and extended state authority into the countryside, particularly in the Kurdish areas.

Modernization and Property Rights

The Hagia Sophia is a masterpiece of world architecture, with its magnificent dome having influenced succeeding generations of churches and mosques alike. Opened in 537 C.E. as a church and turned into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, its dome continues to be an inspiring sight, refusing to be lost in Istanbul's increasingly crowded skyline. And yet, the Hagia Sophia was not the most important legacy that the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (r. 527-565) left to today's Turkey. Justinian also ordered the codification of the Empire's laws, and the resulting work, the Justinian Code, became the main source for the Roman law that was to be rediscovered centuries later in Europe in the Middle Ages. Among other keystones of the Western legal tradition, this text contains the concept of exclusive private property that grew to dominate European legal systems as feudalism ended. This notion of private property went on to conquer the world, as it were, becoming normatively hegemonic even if in practice exclusive private property is less dominant than many of us believe (Cole and Ostrom 2012).

Although the Ottoman state made moves towards private property with the Land Code of 1858 and later laws, the system of European-style exclusive private property rights in land would

only fully arrive in Turkey via the Swiss Civil Code, adopted by the Turkish Republic in 1926 (Aktan 1950, 309-10; Arıcanlı 1991). Intriguingly, as Turkey adopted the Swiss civil code, in part due to the leading state legal expert Mahmut Esat Bozkurt having studied law in Switzerland, there were sections of the code that were left out, including, significantly, provisions allowing the local governments in the cantons to modify many of the laws, including laws governing private property, as they saw fit in order to incorporate local practices and customs (Aktan 1950, 325-6; Barkan 1946, 502-5).

In retrospect the Swiss Civil Code, with its great allowances for local authority in Switzerland's famously decentralized federal system, seems an ironic choice as a source for law for a new state that aspired to a high degree of centralized control. The discussions that took place in the 1940s in the Turkish parliament surrounding land reform make it clear that the parliamentarians in Ankara aspired to use land reform to consolidate the central state's power over the Turkish countryside. From the report of the committee that drafted the bill to the debates that ensued, we can see that many if not most of the land reform proponents valued land reform less as a way of redistributing land to poor farmers than as a means of replacing communal and informal land tenure practices with a new land regime enforced by state power (TBMM 1.17.1945). This renders the choice of a Swiss model doubly ironic, as the local customs of land management in Switzerland that were permitted by the Swiss Civil Code in the sections not adopted by Turkey were later to become celebrated by students of land tenure systems not for their strict adherence to exclusive private property models of Roman law, but rather for their shared management of pastureland and communal forms of landed property (Cole and Ostrom 2012; Netting 1976; 1981; Ostrom 1990).

And yet, while the Turkish land reform seemed to be a move to replace local communal land practices with the new model of exclusive private property, it also rejected the redistribution of land as fully private property. Instead, and in keeping with standard land reform practice, the 1945 land reform bill sought to keep the distributed lands off the market for a period of 25 years, preventing the recipients from leasing, selling, or using their land as collateral for loans.

Sharecropping and Renting Land

Sharecropping in particular was singled out as an inefficient mode of production. In the report of the Temporary Commission (1/386 TBMM 5.14.1945) the role of sharecropping is portrayed as a fetter on the economy. However, the report asserts rather than seeks to demonstrate this point with evidence. It does not go into much specific analysis of how sharecropping harms output or cite any study demonstrating a harmful impact from sharecropping. It does claim that sharecropping is a relic of the Ottoman Empire, descended from the *timar* and *zeamet* systems of landholding that were common in the early centuries of the Empire, and stresses that it should be replaced with more “rational” techniques (TBMM 5.14.1945, 48). In numerous statements, advocates of land reform refer to Ottoman history as a condition that Turkish agriculture has yet to fully transcend to enter into modern production practices. And yet, these claims are quite vague in describing the Ottoman land regime as they are in detailing what exactly should be and could be reformed in the current system of land usage.

The anti-sharecropping discourse reflected the argument that smaller properties farmed by their owners were more productive than large estates employing wage labor or sharecropping. In what later came to be known as the ‘Small is Beautiful’ argument after a popular book by the economist E.F. Schumacher ([1973] 2011), the claim that sharecropping or wage labor inhibits

economic efficiency was widespread in land reform circles at that time. This is premised on the ideas that sharecroppers and wage laborers lack sufficient incentives to invest in improving the land they work, and that these incentives will greatly increase once they enjoy secure title to that land. Having had its first wave of popularity throughout Northwest Europe in the late 18th century after being put articulated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (Baack 1977; Warriner 1969), it became widespread again by the 1930s and the attack on economic liberalism that arose with the Great Depression. This argument helped to paint large landowners as inefficient, lazy, and derelict in their contributions to the national economy. Such portraits became commonplace in the political rhetoric of struggle against ‘feudalism’ that emerged in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine (Nashrty 1966).⁶

Another point stressed by Turkish land reform proponents was that land reform could help build a stable regime of property rights. This is an intriguing linkage that I have not seen mentioned elsewhere in the study of land reform, as these are usually considered two separate processes. In fact, the creation of stability of tenure through cadastral surveys, registration of land, and the granting of title may logically be considered a precursor to land reform. The French colonial authorities in Syria sought to carry out a land reform project, but first they needed to carry out a cadastral survey of the country. Due to rebellions against the Mandate and other problems they were only able to survey half the country in two decades, and ended up never even beginning their land reform project there (Khoury 1987). Turkish land reformers, by contrast, seem to have imagined land reform and surveying as a single project, from the 1945 proposal to the land reform efforts of the 1960s.

⁶ The converse of this argument is that modern agricultural techniques would benefit from economies of scale delivered by large estates owned by capital rich landlords (Warriner 1969, 37-44).

State Building, Nation Building, and the Kurdish Southeast

Feudalism was mentioned occasionally as a public bad, but one more afflicting rural society than trapping the central Turkish state in relations of imperialist domination or dependency. The idea that land reform would free Turkey from imperialism, liberating not only its peasants but also its politics from feudalism, and lead to industrialization, higher urban wages, and economic take-off did not appear in the debates of 1945-50. Had Turkey's land reform debates occurred but five years later, they may have been very different, for by then domestic intellectuals and international experts from the US and the UN were making these very claims.

The Turkish state elites also sought to extend the power of the state in the few regions where large landowners did exist. Turkey was mostly a country of smallholding peasants, but the exception to this was the Southeast. The Ottomans had long had difficulty governing this region, and satisfied their desire for order through making deals with the local Kurdish elites (Gözel 2007; Klein 2011). In the last years of the 19th century, the Ottoman state, anxious to stabilize the borderlands, accepted the limits of its rule and created a new military regiment called the *Hamidiye*, named for Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Formed in 1891, these regiments effectively deputized Kurdish local elites willing to work with the Ottoman state as auxiliary members of the Ottoman military. Many of them were able to take advantage of their positions to accumulate vast landholdings, displacing many Kurdish and Armenian peasants in the process (Kaligian 2003; Klein 2011). The process of accumulation led to this region being, in addition to the cotton-producing areas around Adana, the one part of Turkey in which large landowning predominated. A report from 1966 found that of the 693 villages that were owned by a family or an individual, over 85% were in the Southeast (Sağlam 1973, 116).

The following section from the 1945 Temporary Committee Report makes the goal of using land reform to create a direct link between state and peasant explicit:

Finally, a landed property regime and the structure of property it gives rise too has is related to a country's domestic politics. An unproductive landed property structure can open the way to conflicts between the individual and the state just as it can lead to strife between individuals. It is often seen how local populations dependent on large landholding regimes weakens the authority of the State. In this way every country must create a landed property regime suitable to the mentality of the State it has created.

(TBMM, 5.14.1945, p. 45)

This section refers in veiled language to a pressing issue at the time, as it is today, how Turkish nationalist state leaders could promote Turkish language and identity among non-Turkish speakers, particularly Kurds living in the East and Southeast of the country. This was an argument that was explicitly made in articles supporting land reform in the leftist journal *Kadro* by the writer İsmail Tökin (1932, 1933, 1934). And yet, it was not only in the Kurdish region that state elites realized the limits to their ability to influence or coerce the peasantry. In the Kurdish regions at least a powerful intermediary class of landowners could be blamed for the lack of success in transforming the social structures in ways that would render these areas more legible to Turkish state power. The relative poverty and low levels of agricultural production of these regions also made continuation of Ottoman policies of cooperation with local Kurdish elites palatable, there was not so much to be gained from increasing the state's share of the region's surplus, and much to be lost in waging costly campaigns to bring the local powers to heel.

In much of the rest of the country, peasants spoke Turkish and land was held by smallholders who were not dependent on a local wealthy *Ağa* or *Şeyh* (words used to refer to powerful landowners and tribal or religious leaders). Still, as Turkish policymakers had

discovered to their dismay during their efforts to commandeer grain to provision the troops they had mobilized during World War II, their capacity to successfully regulate agricultural production was rather limited (Kasaba 1993; Pamuk 1991). It was asserted that transforming the landed property regime in Turkey to divide land and prevent sharecropping would improve the power of the State (and in these government-published texts, it is telling that the word “State” - *Devlet* - stands out as almost always being capitalized). Given the sensitivities of the subject at the time, it is not surprising that the official policy report would be vague in describing objectives such as transforming Kurdish-speakers into Turkish-speakers with Turkish identities and a loyalty to the Turkish state. However, this vagueness could result from another cause as well, an actual lack of clarity as to what objectives land reform should carry out in the Turkish context.

Where did these ideas originate? While there were important domestic land reform experts such as Ömer Lütfü Barkan and Reşat Aktan, the first expert advice sought out by the Turkish state came from abroad.

Epistemic Communities: The ILO and Turkish Land Reform

While Turkish elites looked to neighboring countries for inspiration and information about the nature of land reform, they also sought out transnational expertise. In 1937, as Atatürk and İnönü were engaging in the first big push for land reform, the Turkish government contacted both the League of Nations and the ILO⁷ for help in understanding the ins and outs of land reform (NARA LR2 8/54). An Italian agricultural economist named Olindo Gorni provided the government of Turkey with a full report on land reform (Aktan 1950, 305; Gorni 1944). It seems that his ideas were widely adopted by many parliamentarians by the time of the 1945 debates on

⁷ Then called the International Labor Office, now the International Labor Organization.

land reform. His report, originally delivered in French (which many but not all Turkish state elites could read), was later translated into Turkish and published in Ankara in 1944.

Gorni's report makes the following arguments about land reform, most of which are later repeated in the main document outlining the Turkish government's rationale for the 1945 Land Reform Bill, the Temporary Committee's Report on Land Reform (TBMM 5.14.1945, 43-50):

First, he defines land reform in terms of the "division of large estates into small and medium sized farms" (Aktan 1950, 305, fn 11). He states that changes in technology, population, and society make a transition to more intensive forms of agriculture necessary. By *intensive agriculture* one means farming that invests in the land with inputs such as fertilizer, irrigation, removing of rocks, etc. to derive more output from a more limited area. This is an approach that is naturally suited to farmers with capital to invest but also with limits on the amount of land at their disposal. The converse is *extensive* farming, which refers to the increasing of the amount of land under cultivation in order to produce more crops. It is appropriate for farmers who wish to save money on fertilizer and the like but have access to additional lands suitable for planting. Intriguingly, while Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s was a country more suitable to extensive more than intensive farming due to the vast tracts of unused land and low levels of capital to invest, Gorni's recommendations for land reform still seemed to point the way forward.

Next, Gorni argued that agrarian reform was necessary for settlement purposes to take advantage of locations well suited to hosting agricultural communities, something that would not occur through private decisions alone. Additionally, the state could play a positive role in creating part-time agricultural communities in the vicinity of urban areas, to help provision the cities as well as benefit the laborers themselves. He lists additional reasons for land reform, to settle returning soldiers (which was a very relevant issue in Turkey in 1945), to increase the

state's capacity to increase agricultural production in the event of an emergency (ditto), and to ease transitions from one form of agriculture to another, as in the shift from grain to the planting of industrial crops.

Gorni described land reform as having been incredibly widespread in Europe, with Germany, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia carrying it out immediately after World War I and Spain and Greece carrying out land reforms in the 1930s. He identifies Turkey and Hungary as exceptional for being the only two states in the east of Europe to have failed to carry out land reform.

In short, Turkish state elites both observed the states around them carrying out land reform and also sought and received advice from international experts telling them that this was the right and necessary thing to do for a country seeking to modernize. It was through these demonstration effects from Turkey's neighbors that land reform came on the agenda of Turkey's state elites. Land reform came to be seen as one of the modernizing reforms that nation-states emerging from multinational empires carried out in order to overcome their feudal traditions and compete in the modern world. In the modernization process, Turkish elites kept their eyes on their neighbors in the Balkans and Eastern Europe to a considerable extent. The high prestige countries of Western Europe were long used as sources of inspiration, with Turkey adopting (and adapting) the Swiss Civil Code and the Italian penal code in 1926 (Ansary and Wallace 2005). However, Turkish elites also identified similarities between their political economic positions and those of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and such countries were frequently referred to in parliamentary debates and scholarly works (Barkan 1946; Barlas 1988). Thus, as land reform appeared as part of a sequence of modernizing reforms in the surrounding countries, this suggested its utility to Turkish policy makers as well.

The ‘land reform as civilizational stage’ attitude can be seen quite clearly in the following statements by İsmet İnönü on the topic of land reform, delivered during the first significant push to redistribute privately-held land, which took place in in 1936-7:

The number of landless farmers in our country is at the forefront of all thoughts and proposals. Even in the areas with the most widespread distribution of land close to half the farmers are landless. They are forced to work lands belonging to others in terrible conditions and with very poor remuneration. We would never think of seizing by force any man’s property. But in no way would we be willing to leave the villagers condemned to landlessness forever. The issue of distributing land to peasants is one that civilized countries have each passed through, one by one, and under the name “régime agraire” has become a common stage in the path of agricultural progress. For our country to pass through this stage will be an act of evolution.

(quoted in Keyder and Pamuk 1984, 53)

This passage illuminates İnönü’s thought in many ways, and its significance is greatly enhanced when we consider İnönü’s leading role in Turkey’s decades-long struggle with land reform. İnönü was the prime mover behind the most significant episode of land reform in Turkey’s history, the 1945 Land Reform Bill. He inserted its most controversial and radical section, Article 17, late in the legislative process in an effort to railroad it through the drafting committee without opposition (Koçak 2010). He later headed the CHP in opposition and worked to bring about land reform after the 1960 military coup, whose short-lived military-technocratic government sought to carry out land reform.

What İnönü expresses in this passage is the belief that land reform was something that was done by successful modernizing states and thus should be done by Turkey as well. He makes clear the belief that land reform is simply a necessary stage in a linear progression that civilized countries pass through. Sağlam (1972) argues that Atatürk himself also believed in a progressive stages approach to state and nation-building, in which land reform was a sequence in the long process of constructing a modern society. He argues that Atatürk arrived at the land reform stage

just as he was falling ill and losing his effectiveness as a political leader, passing away in 1938, hence the government's failure to follow through on the land reform project it undertook in the late 1930s. While the existence or importance of an Atatürk 'master plan' for Turkish development is open to discussion, the notion that the Turkish Republic had a duty to transform Turkish society sector by sector is one that recurs throughout the political discourse and practice of the state.

Significant in İnönü's passage is also his use of inaccurate statistical information to make his case. He claims that even in the areas with the greatest amount of land distribution, about half of the peasants are landless, which was certainly an enormous exaggeration based on all other sources. In a footnote to this quote, authors Keyder and Pamuk (1984, 53) note sharply that "no one who has done any work on Turkish agriculture and has even a passing familiarity with the numbers could accept such a claim." While the authors are correct when they write that the task of explaining where this number came might be the subject of an entirely different research project, here we can speculate that such exaggerated claims were inspired by the source countries for land reform where landlessness was indeed much higher.

As Weyland's work (2006, 2010) makes clear, this sort of adoption of foreign policy or institutional models is not exceptional, but rather given the constraints on information-processing and decision-making, is almost a given in politics. We can see the ready adoption of foreign models repeatedly throughout not only Turkish Republican history, but in late Ottoman history as well. Ottoman reformers in the 19th century drew from European models of constitutionalism to seek to rejuvenate the Ottoman state in the face of foreign threats. Davison (1990, 105) notes that Ottoman statesman Fuad Pasha once complained of Midhat Pasha, the main author of the

first Ottoman Constitution in 1876, “This man sees in the parliamentary regime a remedy for all evils, without suspecting that politics rebels against panaceas even more than medicine.”

Sohrabi (2002, 46) describes how even the Meiji Restoration in Japan, which only created an extremely circumscribed system of checks and balances on the sovereign, inspired the Young Turks in their pursuit of constitutionalism against Sultan Abdulhamit II as a means of curing the ills of poor governance in the Ottoman state. The Young Turks seemed to draw exaggerated and unsubstantiated inferences that the Meiji constitution itself was responsible for the inspirational Japanese victory against Russian forces in the war of 1905, and they seemed to identify constitutionalism with the successful development of military power. Such an inference makes little sense according to the presumptions of comprehensive rationality, but can be explained by the considering the roles of the availability and representativeness heuristics.

Historical Models

The political scientist Yuen Foong Khong (1992) has studied the issue of the impact of historical narratives at length in his book *Analogies at War*, a work seeking to explain how historical analogies, mainly the example of the appeasement of Hitler through the Munich Agreement, helped lead US policy makers to make disastrous decisions to deepen their engagement in the Vietnam War in 1965. In this work he develops an approach he terms the “Analogical Explanation Framework” that describes how a historical analogy can be used to guide political action. He argues that a historical narrative contains information that appears to help the actor to a) explain and define a given situation, b) assess the importance of the situation, c) identify solutions and strategies for action, d) estimate the chances of success of given actions,

e) judge the morality of certain paths of action, and f) acquire information about the dangers of different paths of action or inaction.

The Turkish parliamentary records and other primary and secondary sources of the era show that the land reform debate featured extensive historical analogies focusing on two regions, Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. These references to other historical periods do not appear to have been just epiphenomenal rhetorical flourishes used to add eloquence to parliamentary debates but rather seem to have been indicators of the actual thought processes leading to the land reform proposals.

Turkish political elites in the early decades of the Republic lacked good information about the nature of the Turkish countryside. Trying to manage complex realities in conditions of uncertainty, these elites looked to other places and other times in search of models that would provide courses of action as well as lessons for what to expect when the action had been completed. Land reform opponents such as Democrat Party leader and Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who as a landowner and farmer had more familiarity with Turkish agriculture, were able to exploit the incoherence of these arguments to undermine the land reform campaign.

Ottomania

It is important to note the frequent use of one remarkable ‘foreign’ country as a source of inspiration in these debates (that is, if we take literally the aphorism “the past is another country”) and that was the Ottoman Empire. To the end of creating loyal Turkish citizens, H.T. Dağlıoğlu, MV from Antalya, drew lessons from both recent and early Ottoman history in support of Article 17. He describes the Turks as having been horribly routed in the Balkans (Rumeli), driven out in a tragic defeat. The reason, he explains, was that *ayan* and *beylerbeyleri*

(lords) used the cheaper “foreign” (*yabancı*)⁸ peasants to work their land rather than granting these lands to Turkish farmers. In essence, he argues that it was the landowners’ greed that led them to exploit their workers, and this undermined the position of the ruling Turkish⁹ elites among the peasant population, and decreased the demographic predominance of ethnic Turks in the region. He argues dramatically that the “Then disasters struck, those who yesterday ruled abandoned their lands, the State lost its authority, and those who yesterday were slaves became the masters (owners) of those lands” (TBMM 6.4.1945, 73).

The argument here is that if more Turks had been encouraged to settle in these territories rather than employing non-Turkish labor, they could have held these lands in the ethnic conflict that was to ensue. This points to a somewhat different twist on the argument that the state can establish rule over peasants by dissolving their patron-client bonds with their local lords, as this analogy points in the direction of not just using land reform to break these ties of dependency but rather, to engage in ethnic demographic engineering through moving populations of Turks into non-Turkish areas. Such thinking was abundant in the early decades of the Turkish Republic, as the state engaged in various demographic engineering schemes, such as the 1934 Settlement Law, to attempt to create ethnic concentrations thought to be conducive to the cause of Turkish nationalism and security (Jongerden 2007; Ülker 2007; 2008).

Dağlıoğlu goes on to offer a positive counterexample to this case of demographic land mismanagement, this one from a happier chapter in Ottoman history, that of Ottoman Bosnia. He argues that Etienne Dusan, who founded the Serbian Empire in the 14th century, oppressed the common people and reduced them to slavery. When Mehmet the Conqueror arrived and

⁸ By the word “foreign” he seems to mean non-Turkish or at least non-Muslim, referring instead to the local Christian populations of Greeks, Bulgarians, Macedonians, etc.

⁹ At the time of these debates, many Muslims from the Balkans had been retroactively imagined as ‘Turkish’ even if they spoke Albanian, Macedonian, etc. because of their religious identity and positions in the Ottoman Empire.

conquered these lands in the 15th century, he banished the wealthy and gave their lands to the commoners, and because of this, the people became Muslims. To this he adds, “Of course, at that time being Muslim basically meant becoming Turkish” (“*Tabii, o devirde İslamiyet yarı Türkleşmek demektir*”). He goes on to say that “if in Serbian Bosnia today there are a million Muslims, it is because of Mehmet the Conqueror’s land policy” before enjoining his colleagues with the spirited words “Friends, we must conquer the country (i.e., Turkey) from within.” (“*Arkadaşlar, biz memleketi içinde fethetmek mecburiyetindeyiz.*”)

Intriguing here is the linking of land reform, demographic engineering, social justice, the obligations of rulers, Islam, and Turkification. The verb *fethetmek* used above is usually translated as meaning “to conquer”, as it has been in the sobriquet of the Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror (*Fatih Sultan Mehmet*, with *Fatih* - “conqueror - being a verbal noun coming from the same root as *fethetmek*, “to conquer”). However, the word has a richer meaning than mere brute military conquest, coming from the Arabic verb *fataHa* meaning “to open.” Lands brought under Muslim rule were considered to have been ‘opened’ to Islam, with Islam considered as not merely a set of religious practices but more fully a system of values and ethics superior to those that had been previously practiced. Therefore, to use the term *fethetmek* to describe land reform does not necessarily express a domination of these lands by the raw power of Leviathan (or at least, does not exclusively express this), but may also be used to suggest a civilizing process in which these lands are brought from darkness into light, much as many Europeans and North Americans of the era regarded colonialism as a *mission civilisatrice*.

Many Turkish political elites of this era were quite concerned with grasping the lessons Ottoman history, particularly in seeking to understand how its initial triumphs descended into centuries of decline. From the 18th century onwards Ottoman elites had been trying to

understand the Empire's challenges through reading the works of the 14th century North African sociologist Ibn Khaldun, who offered a cyclical account of the rise and fall of states (Kasaba 2009, 5). Theories of what enabled the Ottomans' rise to power and what caused their fall were offered in both support and in opposition to the land reform bill.

Scholars have long emphasized that the modernizing Kemalist movement held a good deal of antipathy for the Ottoman Empire. Holbrook (1994) argues that nationalist elites in all the nation-states that emerged from the Ottoman Empire portrayed the Empire as its backwards 'Other' - including the Turks themselves. However, more recent scholarship has reexamined the production of knowledge on the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the Republic and found that there were also many voices which celebrated aspects of the Empire's greatness (Gürpınar 2013; Danforth 2015), providing positive and not just negative examples from the six centuries of Ottoman history from which Turkish policy makers, such as Dağlıoğlu, could draw.

Intriguingly, many parliamentarians described the "land issue" as having been the main cause of Ottoman decline, although they did not often go into details as to what specific aspects of the Ottoman agrarian situation brought about its collapse (TBMM 5.14.1945; TBMM 6.4.1945). While land reform was often portrayed as a modernizing reform necessary to overcome the lingering Ottoman traditions in the countryside, these traditions were seen as a product of Ottoman decline, rather than problems that had plagued the Empire throughout its whole existence. In this, there was some debate in Turkish intellectual life at the time. The Marxist-inspired early Republican historian Muhitten Birgen argued that the Ottoman Empire was more or less decadent throughout its history, dominated by a corrupt and feudal elite. However, Ömer Lütfü Barkan, another influential historian who also wrote directly on the land reform issue in the 1940s, saw the Ottomans in a much more positive light, arguing that they had

avoided the traps of feudalism that Europe had succumbed to (Gürpınar 2013, 158-161). His analysis seems to have been the more popular one among Turkish parliamentarians as the debates reveal a number of instances in which the Ottoman's non-feudal *timar* landholding system is celebrated as a model for what Turkey's land tenure system could be (TBMM 5.14.1945).

Criticism of Land Reform

Article 17 may have had the imprimatur of the head of the Turkish state, however, it was vulnerable to critique on many accounts. While students of the period tend to dismiss the criticisms of Article 17 as simply the result of landowners or their pawns pushing for their selfish interests, in truth many of these critiques had validity and deserve to be examined on their own merits. When we examine cases like Iraq, Palestine, and Syria, we readily understand that land reform could become something quite different than what its proponents had promised, especially given the limits on infrastructural power and political instabilities common in the mid-20th century Middle Eastern state.

A quick overview of conditions in Turkey in its first decades shows that few of the expected factors that would recommend land reform were present. First, there was the matter of the low ratio of population to arable land. Intriguingly, Turkey's abundance of land was a point that was made strongly in the report of the Temporary Committee. That this would seem to undermine the necessity of an extensive redistributive land reform was not mentioned. Presumably, the text justifying the committee's land reform proposal was prepared before Article 17 was adopted and not modified afterwards. At any rate, the report boasts that Turkey enjoys a very low population to land ratio of 23 people per km², calculating its population from the 1940

census at 17,820,950 and its land at 767,119 km². The report notes that even when Turkey reaches a population of 75 million (incidentally, approximately today's population) it will still only have a ratio of 97/km², itself a "gladdening situation" in that at this level of population density would not be excessive in light of the contemporary "level of civilization" (TBMM 5.14.1945, 46).

While this was indeed good news for the people of Turkey in general, the availability of this bit of data was less of a boon for the proponents of the land reform bill. Opponents seized on it to demonstrate the inapplicability of land reform for Turkey. The MP Hikmet Bayur used this to point out that in the other countries that had carried out land reform, the population density was much greater than in Turkey. He notes that in Bulgaria and "the Balkans" the ratio is about 40/km², Greece and Yugoslavia 50/km², Romania 60/km², and Poland and Czechoslovakia 70/km². And yet, he accuses, Turkish lawmakers want to deprive even "children, women, and those (too poor) to have oxen" of lands when there are abundant lands elsewhere that could be distributed to the landless (TBMM 5.14.1945, 51-2). In this, he is making the argument that expropriating land would be unnecessary and that landowners who are not in fact well off would have their lands taken from them. Was this a valid critique?

Turkey certainly had an abundance of land. More than a decade of war, ethnic cleansing, starvation and outmigration had reduced the population of Anatolia from about 18 million in 1911 to around 13.5 million in 1923 (Findley 2010). While land was a relatively abundant factor of production compared to labor or inputs such as draft animals or tractors, the concentration of this land was by no means highly unequal. This was used to undermine another argument for land reform, the rectifying of gross inequalities in land distribution. Turkish agriculture was

characterized not by large estates such as the *izba* of Egypt or the *iqta* of Iraq, but rather by the small family farm (Gerber 1987; Hansen 1991; Keyder 1987; 1989).

The economist Bent Hansen (1991, 280), while noting that the data from Turkey's agricultural censuses show obvious flaws, nevertheless is able to use them to conclude:

The results, in terms of both Gini coefficients and quintile shares, indicate a relatively equitable distribution of land in Turkey. This is what should be expected for frontier agriculture when the distribution of public land has favored small holdings, and it is one of the reasons why land reform has never become a vital issue in Turkish agricultural policy.¹⁰

If land was fairly abundant and landholding relatively egalitarian in its distribution, was sharecropping really such a widespread phenomenon? It does seem to have been fairly common, however, it did not necessarily, or even often, indicate the sorts of inequities or labor exploitation that we may associate with the term (Keyder 1989). As Arıcanlı (1991) points out, land is but one factor of production in the agricultural economy and, for Anatolia, its relative abundance led it to be of less significance than other factors of production. Labor and capital, such as oxen or ploughs, were also important. As indicated by Bayur, landowners were often lacking in these inputs, whether because they lacked family members to help with the work (labor), they themselves were not as efficient as other workers (he gives the example of “women and children”, which depending on age and other conditions may have been less optimal workers than adult men due to reasons of physical strength¹¹), or they lacked the wealth to afford a plough animal or a plough itself. In such cases, these smallholders would often rent out part of

¹⁰ While Hansen is right about the distribution of land being relatively equitable, the statement that “land reform has never become a vital issue” must be amended to read “land reform has never *successfully been carried out*.” As we have seen, land reform was, nevertheless, fiercely debated with about as much vitality as any other issue in Turkish political life.

¹¹ He seems to be referring to children too young to work or the widows of landowners who passed away, indicating older women. Of course, we should not be blind to the crucial roles played by the labor of women and children in agricultural production or the fact that, as Bayur's comment indicates, they were usually unfairly considered to be less valuable, as workers and as people, than adult men (Goldberg 2004).

their land to sharecroppers, who were often landowners themselves, or perhaps were landless but had more wealth than the landowner her or himself. In much of the Turkish countryside, then, sharecropping often did not indicate a great disparity in wealth or the exploitation of the sharecropper by the landowner (Keyder 1989; Stirling 1965).

The typical Anatolian village was poor, it is true, but in much of Anatolia the poverty seems to have been a relatively egalitarian poverty. As we can see, such a system of land tenure lacked the sort of “Big Men” (Lipton 2009), or feudal lords, that were the target of attacks, whether verbal, legal, and physical. Creditors, whether larger landowners or professional moneylenders, often exploited the weak position of peasants, as they had done since the growth of the cash economy in the 18th century (Kasaba 1988). But as for the kinds of local lords who commandeered rents, forced corvee labor, and enforced their will through armed gangs - types found from Egypt to Brazil to Malaysia (Brown 1990; Warriner 1969; Scott [1985] 2008) - these were found mostly in the East and Southeast and were the exception rather than the rule.

This is no doubt the main reason why, among countries considering land reform throughout the 20th century, in the Middle East or elsewhere, Turkey stands out in its lack of grassroots mobilization and political activism for land reform (Rodrik 1982). Land reform is a difficult process to carry out even with a strong constituency exerting pressures for its success. Turkish leaders who supported land reform lacked that almost entirely until the 1960s, when the emerging Turkish left added it to its program (Avcioğlu 1968; Landau 1974; Seddon and Margulies 1984; Ulus 2010).

Turkish politics, moreover, did not have actors like the Syrian politician Akram al-Hawrani, who successfully worked to bring peasants out of the countryside and into the cities in boisterous demonstrations meant to intimidate urban elites, both literally and figuratively

amplifying the peasant's voice in national policy-making. Just as links between state and society in Turkey have long been considered weak (Mardin 1973), links between socially progressive urban politicians or intellectuals and the rural poor have also been tenuous. The deficiency of rural-urban crosscutting linkages has been cited as a problem by land reform proponents themselves, from state land reform policy planners such as Reşat Aktan (1966) to the later generation of leftist politicians such as the Turkish Workers Party leader Ali Aybar (Ulus 2011).

The reasons why Turkish peasants during the Turkish Republic did not engage in significant collective action to contest the terms of their economic positions deserves to be studied; to date, little work has been done on this topic (Rodrik 1982). For those arguing that land reform was an imperative to correct conditions of exploitation in the countryside (Ahmad 1975, 1983; Karaömerlioğlu 1999, 2000), this would be an important question to answer. Other scholars have painted a different and, I believe, more accurate picture of the Turkish countryside as one typified by poor but relatively independent smallholding farmers plagued by debt but not 'feudal' relations typical of large estates in Egypt or Iraq (Keyder 1987). To the extent this portrait holds true, peasants would have less visible targets for their displeasure and engage in less violent action. Whereas Egyptian peasants availed themselves of everything from the subtle foot-dragging "weapons of the weak" (Scott [1985] 2008) to "arsenic, arson, or rifles" (Brown 1990, 47) in their struggles with estate owners and their agents, the great majority of Turkish peasants owned their own property in small villages or worked land owned by other peasants (Gerber 1987; Hansen 1991; Stirling 1965). They thus did not often have the personalized and confrontational principal-agent relationships that led to the kinds of peasant movements or individual acts of defiance found elsewhere in the Middle East.

As numerous thinkers have pointed out, grievance does not automatically generate collective action. Rather, collective action emerges depending on a host of factors, including political opportunity structures (Tilly et al 2001), emotion (Aminzade 2001) and availability of repertoires of contention (Tarrow [1998] 2011). Unfortunately, there may not be sufficient archival sources available at present to paint a very complete picture of peasant resistance to economic or political grievances in the first decades of the Turkish Republic. However, we can conclusively say that Turkish state elites, while concerned with rural problems and wary that such movements might occur, did not have to contend with the kinds of explosive situations that Egyptian, Iraqi, or Syrian leaders so often confronted (Batatu 1978, 1999; Brown 1990; Goldberg 1992; Gordon 1992; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 1987; Haj 1997).

Turkish land reform opponents thus did not have to place themselves in the untenable position that Egyptian land reform opponents did. In fact, even staunch opponents of land reform in Egypt prior to the 1952 Free Officers' Coup dared not speak ill of land reform in parliamentary sessions or in public. Such a stance would have given them the impression of playing the fiddle while Rome was burning. The miserable conditions and increasing resistance of Egypt's *fellahin* even became an international issue, which both Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt lecturing the Egyptian King Farouq on the necessity of land reform in private meetings during the Second World War (Ikeda 1998).

Turkish land reform opponents, by contrast, seemed well aware that conditions in Turkey were not such that peasant violence was an imminent threat. The MP Cavit Oral noted that in Romania they only placed a 1000 donum limit on landholdings "under conditions that we are all familiar with" (i.e., peasant uprising and armed occupation of private estates), showing not only

that Turkish politicians were generally familiar with the Romanian example, but that they were also aware that Turkish rural realities were not nearly so volatile (TBMM 5.14.1945, 15).

The use of numbers and statistics was extremely limited at that time in Turkey, and the few numbers that were used in debates were data indicating the relative *abundance* of unsettled agricultural land in Turkey, which is ironic in that this was seized as one of the main reasons *not* to carry out land reform by land reform opponents in the Parliament.¹² Perhaps, the relative lack of reference to statistics in the land reform debates was due to an understanding that much of the data was not useful in analyzing Turkey's agricultural conditions. As late as 1966 the top land experts in Turkey were still lamenting the lack of good data on conditions in the countryside (Aktan 1966, 321):

Since cadastral surveys and mapping are not complete and land titles do not provide accurate and up-to-date information about the agricultural lands, little satisfactory data on Turkey's tenure situation are available. Detailed information collected by the 1950 agricultural census could not be fully tabulated because too many local measurements were used in answers to the questionnaires.

The difficulty in collecting and assessing data was based in part on the lack of standardized measurements in Turkey. The most common unit used to measure land was the *dönüm*. Although the Turkish government decided to establish the *dönüm* as equal to one decare (1000m²) in 1928, the *dönüm* continued to be used locally according to quite individualized local standards. Anthropologist Paul Stirling noted the following during his fieldwork in two central Anatolian agricultural villages named Sakaltutan and Elbaşı, from 1949-1952:

To make matters worse, the units of land measurement are by no means fixed. The common unit is a *dönüm*, (from *dönmek* - to turn) traditionally the amount of land a man can plough in a day. The government has fixed the *dönüm* for official

¹² Incidentally, this could also be used to support Keyder and Pamuk's (1984) argument that land reform was primarily about increasing the amount of land under the plow.

purposes as equal to one decare, about a quarter of an acre. But the village *dönüm* varies not only from village to village, but also from man to man, and field to field. Most informants in Sakaltutan and the surrounding villages said the *dönüm* was forty paces by forty paces, but in Elbaşı people said sixty by sixty or eighty by eighty, and one man even said a hundred by a hundred. They had not, I am sure, grasped that the smallest of these areas, very roughly one decare, is about one-sixth of the largest. Informants stated that a village *dönüm* was twice or three times a government *dönüm*.

The psychologist and sociologist Mümtaz Turhan wrote scathingly of Turkey's land reform attempts in his 1963 work *Toprak Reformu ve Köy Kalkınması* ("Land Reform and Village Development"). He argued that Turkey, like all other developing countries, lacks realistic development goals and realistic means of achieving them. This skepticism about state power and his explicit attacks on Marxism (Turhan 1964, 7) have earned him a reputation as a conservative thinker, although his arguments, inspired directly by Saint Simon and Auguste Comte, tend more to endorse the role of intellectuals and social engineering, but rather express the belief that Turkey's planners have yet to reach the level of being able to successfully carry out such interventions.

Power Politics

Finally, while Turkish policy makers may have considered land reform to be an effective means of increasing state power, modernizing, improving the economy, and forestalling peasant unrest, it may also have been meant to serve a less publicized purpose. İnönü also may have had a darker purpose in seeking to push through the radical Article 17, which would have given the Agriculture Ministry the authority to reallocate land to sharecroppers and tenants leaving the owner with a mere 50 *dönüm*, a very small amount. Such power, if exercised, would have given the Agriculture Ministry the ability to expropriate land almost at will, giving it great leverage over even relatively small landowners. Note that the decision to redistribute this land would have

been in the hands of the ministry, not something that would be automatically carried out accordingly to an explicitly formulated set of criteria.

Certainly, it would have left much to the discretion of local administrators to carry out, with the Minister of Agriculture holding much power over decisions of expropriation and allocation. These would have been incredibly powerful tools to use at a time when the ruling RPP was moving towards more competitive elections. İsmet İnönü had decided to move the country towards a more competitive political system (Heper 1998; Vanderlippe 2005). In 1943, the RPP introduced competitive elections within the party, where different candidates from the RPP could compete for the same seat. This in itself brought in a new cadre of parliamentarians, some of whom joined the rebellion against Article 17 and pushed for further democratization. The move towards more electoral competition would have given İnönü and others at the RPP's helm the incentive to create a means to control the outcome of these less predictable elections. In this, the ability to threaten landowners or to grant land to landless or land hungry peasants based on flexible and arbitrary criteria would have given the RPP and whoever controlled the Agriculture Ministry extremely useful powers for determining the casting of votes. Observers within the US State Department as well as many within the RPP certainly saw this as a main reason for the law (NARA LR2 44-46/58).

Przeworski and Maravall (2003) argue that for the principle of the rule of law to be meaningful and effective, the execution of laws must be predictable, allowing agents to coordinate their action in anticipation of what response legal authorities will carry out. Such a law would have been utterly contrary to this principle, given that there were hardly any guidelines offered as to how the Agriculture Ministry would make such decisions.

Critics seized on the vagueness of the law to warn that it would concentrate an enormous amount of power in the office of the Agriculture Ministry. An anonymous source complained to Edward B. Lawson, a commercial attache at the American embassy in Ankara, that the bill was not suited to Turkish realities, as Turkey lacked the large estates that were predominant in the European countries where land reform was carried, stating that the bill was “merely a political expediency of the Turkish government, designed to place in the hands of the Agriculture Minister tremendous vote-controlling powers” (NARA Doc RG 84, Box 77).

The usefulness of using land reform to punish political opponents was questionable for an incumbent party. An incident in June 1946 shows how the politicized expropriation of land could backfire. In Tire, close to Izmir, the three largest landowners, who were allied with or members of the Republican People’s Party, were exempted from having their lands confiscated, while members of the newly emerging opposition, including a cousin of the Democrat Party’s leader Adnan Menderes, had their lands taken by the state. This led to an uproar and even forced Agriculture Minister Raşit Hatipoğlu to call a press conference apologizing for these actions and noting how politics and land reform do not mix, as evidenced by problems in land reform in other countries (Fotos 1956, 161-166). This embarrassing episode cost the incumbent Republican People’s Party political capital and even forced them to admit that land reform could have its dark sides, which no doubt helped lead to their defeat in rural regions in the upcoming elections.

Such concerns may have been a convenient excuse for landowning opponents of land reform, but if so, they resonated widely among even those who did not stand to lose under Article 17. The government tried to use the land reform bill to increase its popularity, with the Grand National Assembly even passing a bill to celebrate the first Sunday after June 11 as “Soil and Festival Day” to commemorate the passage of the bill (NARA LR2 32/54). The lack of

specificity in the bill also came in for critique. One parliamentarian, using a common Turkish expression of the time, cited these seeming inconsistencies by comparing the bill to an “African’s hair” (*zenci saçı*) in terms of its tangled complexity (TBMM 5.14.1945, 31).

It is hard to gauge the reaction to the bill among peasants or others in the countryside. One piece of evidence we have is a report from a Vice Consul Johnson at the US Consulate in Izmir (NARA LR2 47/54). This report observes:

This law is very unpopular in Izmir. Even some peasants in this district who are likely to benefit by the passage of this law appear to be apprehensive of the great complications that may result owing to the authority granted by this law to minor officials in redistributing land. Even those who are in favor of the principle of redistribution do not conceal their fear in connection with the bureaucratic methods by which the law will inevitably be enforced, the delays which will occur until final allotments will be effected, the plight of peasants who will be unable to find employment owing to the absence of large landowners, and who will be faced with starvation until assistance in the form of funds, credit, and agricultural implements and livestock will be available.

We may be skeptical about this assessment, and unfortunately the document tells us little about the source of the Vice Consul’s information. We can see that Turkish intellectuals or politicians who spoke English, such as the Columbia University-educated Ahmet Emin Yalman, often gave consular officials information with their own specific slant. Other documents show US officials of the time in touch with land reform opponents within the Republican People’s Party (NARA). And yet, we also have a good amount of anthropological and other literature showing the great amount of distrust and antipathy that many Turkish peasants of the era felt towards the ruling Republican People’s Party, particularly at the end of World War II (Makal 1951; Pamuk 1991; Sterling 1965). The results of the first competitive elections in 1950 showed a great preference for the Democrat Party over the Republican People’s Party despite the land reform that had taken place, even if limited. And so, perhaps this report does reflect actual

opinions in the countryside and not just words being put in the mouth of peasants by American or Turkish officials.

On the other hand, we have some records of how peasants responded favorably to the land reform, believing that it had given them ownership of the lands they worked and leading to some seizures of property by sharecroppers and renters (Aktan 1950, 388; Karpat 1959, 319). However, this does not seem to have been nearly as widespread or as violent as it was in the wake of the announcement of land reforms in Egypt or Iraq, where the new leaders feared that the peasant land seizures would get out of control and lead to a broader uprising, if not a revolution (Gordon 1992).

Ironically, while peasants and small farmers may have been worried about the impact of the execution of the new law on their own ability to sustain themselves, we also have evidence from the American consular sources that at least some large landowners were rather blasé about the whole affair, quite unlike their landowning counterparts in Egypt, Syria, or Iraq. Large landowners around Adana, the center of well-capitalized, large scale cotton farming, apparently considered the threat of actual expropriation taking place as miniscule, and proceeded to seek out new land purchases even as the government was threatening to expropriate their large estates! (NARA LR2). This may lead one to wonder to what extent connections with the state were seen as effectively protecting a landowner from land reform. In the case of these powerful Adana landowners, it is hard to think of another reason why they would be so unconcerned about the rhetoric coming out of Ankara at that time. And if mere landowners felt safe in their property due to informal connections or other means, one may also wonder to what extent landowning members of the Turkish Assembly truly feared that their own lands would be expropriated in the event of the passage of the bill.

Finally, we should see the strong criticism that the land reform bill ignored the true sources of poverty, which were the lack of credit and capital. Coşar drew on his experiences as banker in the depths of Depression-era Turkey to note that lack of access to agricultural credit was the main problem (TBMM 6.4.1945, 84). Many of the other critics of the bill invoked their professional backgrounds in agriculture, business or finance as expertise. While it may be tempting to see this as evidence of class-based self-interest, it also gave these MPs greater familiarity with the issues at hand, compared to the military or bureaucratic proponents of land reform who had much less experience with the nuts and bolts of the social and economic dimensions of Turkey's hinterland.

Conclusions

It is significant that Turkey's land reform efforts even today lead scholars to express a sense of confusion (Beinin 2001; Karaömerlioğlu 2000). Certainly, precious few people have been confused that land reform appeared on the agenda in Egypt, Iraq, or Syria. This confusion results from the strangely wavering attitudes of Turkish elites towards land reform, which was attempted in a country lacking all the typical reasons for the redistribution of land. Turkey had a large amount of unused land and held few large landowners in comparison with other countries that carried out land reform. Turkey's large landowners had an ambiguous and perhaps not so dominant role within the state, unlike the pashas of Egypt and the sheikhs Iraq who were widely seen as collaborating with the colonial enemy to keep their countries underdeveloped and weak. Turkey lacked a mobilized peasantry using violence against landlords and the state, as was happening in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria at the time. Why then did Turkish elites support land

reform? And why did they not succeed in redistributing any significant amount of private lands? Why did the center-right's counter-project triumph instead?

My answer is that state elites sought to achieve basic goals with land reform, advancing state interests and personal interests. They did not merely act as servants of the landed elites, they did not lose sight of practical goals due to a vague ideology, and they did not act according to the extensive calculations predicted by classic rational actor theory. Rather, because people need to use cognitive shortcuts to understand and decide on action in the face of messy realities, they looked abroad for concrete models for action. Land reform seemed to present a means of increasing state capacity, improving the overall economy, preventing rural unrest, spreading Turkish language and national identity, building a stable regime of property rights in the countryside, even while decommodifying land and bolstering the power of the ruling clique within the state. Its opponents were able to demonstrate the inconsistencies and inaccuracies in their arguments, and advanced instead a more economically and politically liberal model for agricultural development, one that achieved a lasting success at the ballot box when competitive elections began to be held starting in 1950.

In the wake of so many academic critiques of state power, from neoliberal to neo-Heideggerian to anarchist (Bates 1981; Krueger 1974; Mitchell 2002; Scott 1998, 2009; Waterbury 1993), the anti-radical land reform arguments of Menderes and his clique deserve to be read as more than just as a tool for entrenching the class privileges of landowners, although they did serve these ends as well. Rather, Turkey's anti-land reform skeptics brought up valid issues of corruption, state power, democratic accountability, and the gap between state planners and ordinary citizens that still haunts Turkish politics today.

CHAPTER 3

DIMINISHING RETURNS: LAND REFORM IN EGYPT, SYRIA, AND IRAQ

A Role in Search of a Hero

I do not know why I recall, whenever I reach this point in my recollections as I meditate alone in my room, a famous tale by a great Italian poet, Luigi Pirandello – “Six Characters in Search of an Author.” The pages of history are full of heroes who created for themselves roles of glorious valor which they played at decisive moments. Likewise the pages of history are also full of heroic and glorious roles which never found heroes to perform them. For some reason it seems to me that within the Arab circle there is a role, wandering aimlessly in search of a hero. And I do not know why it seems to me that this role, exhausted by its wanderings, has at last settled down, tired and weary, near the borders of our country and is beckoning to us to move, to take up its lines, to put on its costume, since no one else is qualified to play it....

Gamal Abd al-Nasser, *Philosophy of the Revolution* (1955, 71)

It does not follow that what works well in Egypt will also work well in Iraq, or that what Persia has done could also be done in India; simply because these countries are different in so many ways.

Doreen Warriner (1969, xvii)

Introduction

Two years after the 1952 Free Officer’s Coup that exiled Egypt’s king and disbanded its parliament, Nasser published a book entitled *Philosophy of the Revolution*. This work narrated in very general terms the development of Nasser’s political thought through a life of heroic activism, moralistic soul searching, and political engagement. In the section of the text quoted

above he refers to European modernist theater in order to explain his reasons for deciding to act to try to change the course of Egyptian, Arab, African, and even post-colonial history.

Whether these lines were actually penned by Nasser himself or, as many suspect, ghostwritten by his literary friend Muhammad Hassanein Haykal,¹³ they reveal an author who saw the revolutionary program as a set of actions – the “role” in the above text – that were already in existence as a template and were merely waiting to be performed. The Arab world had been waiting too long for change, a change that would be spontaneous and new and yet, would also follow historical scripts leading a nation from colonization to independence, from poverty to prosperity, and from slavery to freedom. If he did not act, someone else would, because this was the nature of historical progress.

It might seem a bit of a stretch to attempt to deduce a broader point about something as complex as a revolution promising to eradicate feudalism by picking a short passage that, perhaps, is meant to do nothing more than impress the Egyptian reader with the author’s knowledge of European avant-garde literature. And yet, this quote can tell us as much about a key factor guiding ambitious political projects: the role of the historical script.

Between 1952-1958 in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, military coups brought to power new leaders making land reform the centerpiece of their ambitious programs to remake their societies. Their land reform programs were presented not just as means to reduce inequality and poverty in the countryside, but as crucial steps in the processes of modernization, development and emancipation from imperialism, symbolically linking nation and peasant in a twin struggle against colonial and feudal oppression. They promised to rewrite the social contract anew

¹³ Many believe that the journalist and Nasser confidant Muhammad Hassanein Haykal wrote much or all of this work, while others claim he merely edited writings Nasser gave to him. To the extent he did compose the work, he did so with Nasser’s approval.

through eliminating the entire system of rural domination that had prevailed since the beginnings of large-scale capital formation. They were not merely isolated policy ideas, but stages in a complex project presented as a needed correction to a deviation in the historical development of the entire region.

Despite the great fanfare and genuine joy that accompanied these coups, the ability of land reform to solve the problems of rural poverty or free the peasants from their subjugation remained limited. In Egypt, land reform was in fact fairly limited, redistributing merely 15% of the privately-held lands, mostly benefiting the medium-sized landowners who could afford to buy the lands that were being sold in distress sales before the law could confiscate them. Many scholars have criticized the Egyptian land reform for failing to significantly benefit the impoverished masses of landless rural workers (Ibrahim 1994; Low 1996; Mitchell 2002; Waterbury 1983).

Land reform produced increasingly diminished returns as it travelled from Egypt to Syria to Iraq. Many have also alleged that the economy-wide economic benefits Egyptian land reformers had promised have largely failed to materialize (Hansen 1991; Sadowski 1991; Springborg 1993). Syrian land reform, which accelerated after Syria's merger with Egypt into the United Arab Republic (1958-1961) and continued during the 'radical' early years of Baath Party rule beginning in 1963, suffered grave problems, many of which were due to the excessive reliance on Egypt's land reform policies (Keilany 1980; Springborg 1963).

However, of these three cases the greatest failure by far was in Iraq, where land reform was broadly acknowledged to have been a policy disaster even in the opinions of many of those officials whose task it was to carry it out (Fernea 1969; Palmer 1971). In Iraq, the application of a land reform program based on the original Egyptian model by Col. Abd al-Karim Qasim's

government after his coup of 1958 quickly led to a sharp decline in agricultural output, a flight of peasants from the countryside to the cities, and an economic and social crisis that helped lead to Qasim's overthrow in 1963.

The following sections will narrate the experiences of land reform in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in the 1950s, describing how the success of land reform programs increasingly came to grief as the policy wave traveled from Cairo to Damascus to Baghdad. In all countries, land reform served as a tool for the establishment of populist authoritarian regimes, replacing the fractious parliamentary systems that had, whatever their deep shortcomings as true mechanisms of democratic rule, at least held greater promise for democratic deepening than the systems that were to replace them. More will be said about this in Chapter 5, which explores in greater detail the impact of land reform on the pursuit of pathways to democracy or dictatorship. This chapter will instead seek to explain the economic and redistributive disappointments of land reform, as well as the intriguing rapidity with which it spread and the remarkable optimism with which it was promoted.

Egypt

When a young Army officer named Anwar Sadat addressed the nation on July 23, 1952 to explain why he and other conspirators from the military had just seized control of the Egyptian state, the objectives he listed appeared fairly humble given the dramatic coup they had just staged. Claiming to act in the name of the 1923 Constitution, the Free Officers (as his clique was known) first demanded the appointment of a new prime minister and a purging of certain officers from the military high command. Within four days, however, they had expanded the scope of their actions dramatically, forcing Egypt's King Farouq to abdicate, sending him into exile in Italy on his royal yacht. And yet, these actions remained at the level of effecting political reform

rather than direct social change. A few months after seizing power, the Free Officers had a showdown with Ali Maher, a veteran politician whom they had appointed as Prime Minister, over the issue of land reform. When Maher, overplaying his hand, tried to refuse the Free Officers' request to pass the land reform bill they had demanded, they not only deposed him, but assumed direct control of the Egyptian state themselves, banning opposition parties in January 1953 (Barrawi 1952, 24-29; Gordon 1992). This conflict over land reform turned out to be a turning point in Egyptian history, leading to the replacement of a parliamentary monarchy with an ambitious military-based dictatorship whose efforts to crush challenges to its rule even today are headline news, more than half a century after its establishment.

These Egyptian Free Officers were famously said to share no common ideology. In the words of Steven Cook (2011, loc 817): "(...) they had no program, no means, and no framework of thought to turn abstract notions about reform into a reality. Essentially, they made it up as they went along." Similarly, in a major study of the 1952 coup the historian Joel Gordon (1992: 12) states: "From the day they seized power, the Free Officers confronted the quandary of the extent and style of their rule. They had no clear vision of what they hoped to achieve except in the most abstract sense.(...) The Free Officers were not ideologues. Their ideology, to the extent they had one, reflected general views of nationalism and social reformism that crossed all political lines, views shared by a generation that had grown disaffected from the country's political elders." Springborg (1975, 86-87, quoted in Hansen 1990, 110) stated that Nasserism was not a philosophy developed by Nasser, but by "theoreticians who sought to give continuity to his ad hoc decisions." Leading land reform expert Doreen Warriner (1957, 10) had made a similar appraisal of the lack of ideology in the Free Officers a half-century earlier, claiming in 1957 that

the “present Government of Egypt has ideals but no ideology, as revolutionaries nowadays are expected to have.”

And yet, the appearance of lacking a commonly recognized political ideology does not necessarily mean that one sees reality precisely ‘as it is,’ or that one is not swayed by policy models and ideas. In fact, the lack of a strong a priori commitment to a system of beliefs identified (within that given historical epoch) as a specific ‘ideology’ does not make a political leader less susceptible to the fashionable policy and institutional models that travel in waves, coming and going, but always cloaked in the garb of common sense. John Maynard Keynes’ classic insight is worth recalling here: “Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any ideological influences, are usually slaves of some defunct economist.”

In the 1950s, land reform was consistently portrayed as a non-ideological, commonsense approach to the problems of underdevelopment, feudalism, and poverty in agrarian countries by command economy socialists and free market economists alike. By 1950 a consensus emerged on the desirability of land reform that linked both the Eastern and Western Blocs. Land reform received strong support from both the United States as well as its adversaries in the Soviet Union (Egard 1956; Tai 1974; Tannous 1951; Warriner 1969).

Understanding the spread of land reform as a boundedly-rational regional policy wave helps us to understand the timing of the popularity of the land reform paradigm, which rapidly appeared in the 1940s in Egypt and then faded away under Mubarak in the neoliberal 1980s and 1990s (Bush 2002). Landlessness and inequality were identified as severe problems as early as early as the beginning of the 19th century by influential Egyptian thinker (and landowner) Rifat al-Tahtawi, who argued that Egyptian landowners should divide their earnings equally with their laborers rather than paying them the starvation wages they received (Cole 2003). Peasant

dissatisfaction shaped both the 1882 Urabi Revolt and the 1919 revolts against British influence and palace rule (Abbas and el-Dessouky 2011; Goldberg 1992). And yet, the redistribution of land did not arrive on the political agenda as a serious policy suggestion to the problems of the countryside in the Egyptian public sphere until 1942, when a massive malaria outbreak in Upper Egypt claimed thousands of victims (Baer 1962; Ikeda 1998). Were Egyptian political and economic elites perfectly rational actors with complete information, they theoretically would have been able to coordinate their response to rural crisis earlier. The rapid transition from land reform as a non-issue to land reform as a burning issue and back again cannot easily be explained through the assumptions of comprehensive rationality.

A compelling new vision of land reform emerged in Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s, one that would link inequality in land ownership to political corruption, economic stagnation, and imperial domination. Land reform was largely a non-issue in Egyptian politics in the 1930s, despite the growing recognition of the economic deprivation and growing anger of the Egyptian peasant. Then, partly in response to a catastrophic malaria outbreak in Upper Egypt in 1942, land reform suddenly became a key issue in Egyptian politics (Baer 1956; Mitchell 2002). Within a few years after the malaria outbreak land reform went from being invisible to inevitable, such that even the politicians who privately opposed land reform were reluctant to fully voice their opposition in public debates (Ikeda 1998).

By the time the Free Officers seized power on July 23, 1952, groups of advisors from Italy and the United States were already present in Egypt to advise the government on land reform, and some kind of land reform bill seemed to be on its way to being passed when the parliament reconvened that fall (Vitalis 1995). While it would probably have been less extensive than the land reform enacted under Nasser and would have certainly excluded the main

properties redistributed under the Nasser regime – that of the royal family and the top political leaders – it is significant that such a plan was already underway.

Shortly after having seized power, the Free Officers came to discuss an article about land reform published on August 4, 1952 in the newspaper *Zaman* by the economist Rashid al-Barrawi. This article led the Free Officers to enlist Barrawi to draft their land reform plan and serve as the key economic adviser to the new regime (Meijer 1999, 71; Waterbury 1983, 265). Educated at the University of London, al-Barrawi had an extensive knowledge of the work of the Fabian thinkers Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the British Labor Party's Harold Laski, and Lenin's theories of imperialism (which he translated into Arabic). Barrawi's impressively comprehensive explanations for the relationship between feudalism and imperialism offered Nasser and the other Free Officers not merely a tool for agrarian reform, but a complex narrative for Egypt's political and economic failures and the responsibilities of its new rulers to take action to return Egypt to the path of successful modernization.

Barrawi provides a pithy summary of his anti-feudalist narrative (1952, 73-74) in *The Military Coup in Egypt: An Analytic Study*, a text celebrating the Free Officers published only months after the coup itself:

It is in the nature of the bourgeoisie that it should spare no effort in destroying feudalism. But in the case of Egypt, however, there was a strange anomaly. The bourgeoisie, in their quest for social prestige according to the traditions of the day, began to acquire land and so were directly interested in the maintenance of that obsolete feudal system. They also sought the titles of Bey and Pasha which, besides being a source of prestige in an under-developed society, proved to be a sure means of facilitating connections particularly with the civil service. These civil titles seem to have had an economic function, evil as it was, and this explains why companies never hesitated to appoint titled people as members of the board of directors. As it was the Palace which had the right to confer those titles, big capitalists began to curry favor with it, supporting its pretensions to absolute rule, its rights and prerogatives which were all used to the detriment of democratic principles.

Within this passage we can see the key points of the anti-feudalist narrative. Barrawi is arguing that a bourgeoisie, a new class created by capitalism, has the historical role of overthrowing feudalism. This narrative of modernization, based on popular historical accounts of the French Revolution, argues that in a 'normal' passage to modernity the growth of industry and commerce will create a new dominant class that will wipe away the old order based on inherited privileges and land ownership. However, as Barrawi explains above, a "strange anomaly" occurred which prevented this class from fulfilling its historical role. Rather than developing as a class opposed to the trappings of nobility, landed titles, and the authority of the monarch, the Egyptian bourgeoisie somehow succumbed to the general underdevelopment and instead merely became a neo-feudal elite. The need for courtly connections in turn led the employees of the state bureaucracies and the modern capitalist companies, both potential modernizing forces, to adapt to the neo-feudal order, abdicating their responsibility for modernization as well. This situation trapped Egypt in a state of arrested development which only a heroic military coup, an articulation of the popular will, could break through (Barrawi 1952, 45).

Syria

Syria's engagement with redistributive land reform had somewhat older roots than Egypt's. Officials of the French Mandate, which sought to rule Syria from 1920 until 1943, initially promised a land reform transforming Syria into a nation of smallholding farmers (Khoury 1989; Sarrage 1935). However, the threat of nationalist resistance among Syria's economic elites caused the French to think twice about antagonizing Syria's powerful landowners. The threat of violent rural protest, which came to a head during the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-27, further encouraged the French to look to the landowners as allies in managing

the rural populations of the countryside. Additionally, the difficult security situation for the French and the lack of local cooperation disrupted the Mandate Authority's plans for the cadastral survey needed to carry out land reform. In the end, despite the initial promises of land reform, the time of the French Mandate seems to have witnessed a gradual increase, rather than a decrease, in the inequality of agricultural land holdings (Khoury 1989, 61-64).

Syria gained independence in stages between 1943 and 1946. Its parliament, which was elected in general elections, offered landowners a fair amount of influence over legislation. However, the voice of the landlord was not entirely dominant thanks to the pro-peasant advocacy of the Arab Socialist Party (ASP), which in 1952 merged with the Baath Party. The ASP founded by an enterprising political leader named Akram al-Hawrani. Al-Hawrani was from the region of Hama, which featured a highly unequal distribution of land in relation to the rest of Syria, and was dominated by the effective political rule of just three large landowning families. The middle class Al-Hawrani rejected this state of affairs, introducing socialist political vocabulary to the region and urging peasants to use extreme measures, even violence, to push back at the abuses of the local landowning elites.

Al-Hawrani's effectiveness at mobilizing peasant support in his native Hama was remarkable. In the 1949 elections, he was the only member of parliament out of six from Hama to represent peasant interests, whereas by 1954 these numbers were reversed, with al-Hawrani and four other members of parliament coming from pro-peasant parties, and only one being a landowner (Moubayed 2006, 246). He organized a peasants conference in Aleppo in August of 1951, bringing a large and vociferous crowd of some 40,000 peasants from the countryside straight into the heart of Syria's main commercial center as an impressive display of populist force (Batatu 1999, 729). This helped lead to the passing of a land reform a few months later in

January 1952, although this was later rescinded due to pressure from parties representing landlords (Commins and Lesch 2014; Seale 1986).

Land reform returned to the political agenda in Syria with the remarkable merger of Syria with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic in 1958. This move, initiated by members of the Syrian Ba'ath Party in the spirit of pan-Arabism, was intended to help bolster Syria against both Soviet and Baghdad Pact threats to its sovereignty.¹⁴ Unfortunately for most Syrians, this led not to a partnership of equals but rather to the heavy-handed domination of Syria by Egyptian administrators and personnel (Seale 1986). It was in this context that an extensive land reform bill was finally carried out. Based, not surprisingly, on the Egyptian land reform laws, this policy would prove to disappoint in a number of areas.

Sayed Marei, the leading figure in administering Egyptian land reform and the first overseer of the Syrian land reforms under the UAR, was in fact of the opinion that "land reform was both unnecessary and unwise in Syria" (Springborg 1993, 21). He argued that limiting the size of agricultural holdings made little sense in a country like Syria, where, unlike Egypt, much of the agriculture was extensive rather than intensive; that is, based on the use of large amounts of land with frequent movement of the planted areas rather than the repeating planting of the same lands. In Egypt, the extremely fertile soils along the Nile provided one of the world's best locations for agriculture, with the management of the water supply, rather than the question of water's availability, the main issue (Warriner 1957). In Syria, however, the majority of lands lacked the Egyptian alluvial soil's fertility, while the comparative scarcity of water was a question in Syria's rain-fed and irrigated regions alike. Larger estates could much better grapple

¹⁴ Of course, Soviet or Baghdad Pact involvement was a threat according to the worldview of members of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, not to members of the Communist Party or pro-Western Syrians, of which there were many. The main reason for the decision to try to join with Egypt was the hope that this would allow the Ba'ath Party to counter the rising power of the Syrian Communist Party. Rising tensions with Turkey, which had earlier threatened to invade Syria, were another.

with these issues of fertility and water supply than the smaller estates that the Egyptian-derived land reform plan was designed to create (Keilany 1980). The three years following the 1958 land reform were also marked by low rainfall and a general crisis in Syria's agriculture, which made it a particularly unfortunate time to be attempting a radical restructuring of the system of capital allocation, production, and marketing.

A key argument for land reform has long been the superiority of the incentives driving the small producer to invest in land. Adam Smith famously made this argument in his *Wealth of Nations* ([1776] 2003), stating that absentee landowners were generally inattentive and lazy, and that it was the smallholding farmer who derived the greatest profit from his land, because he had the most intimate knowledge and the greatest incentives to work the soil productively. Remarkably, the accusation that the larger landowners were essentially lazy and parasitic came to dominate both the discourse of populist authoritarian state officials in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq as well as the American and European experts who wrote about them. However, Springborg (1993, 18) brings our attention to a passage by Doreen Warriner (1962, 71) that argues that even absentee landowners based in cities care about profits and are willing to invest the time, energy, and capital needed to accrue them:

It is now fashionable to believe that the economic development of underdeveloped countries needs foreign capital, foreign experts, good public services, long-term planning, agrarian reform, plus, for good measure, a revolution. But Syria has had none of these things, and in the north, where progress has been so fast, every one of these conditions is lacking.... But one essential factor in development Syria has had, the fourth factor of enterprise, so unaccountable and so often forgotten. The merchant class of Syria, and chiefly of Aleppo, famous as traders in other countries, has turned its business acumen back into its own country, and has used its capital to mechanize agriculture.

It was this precisely this class of capitalists that the administration of the UAR sought to curtail, and the Ba'ath Party, following their usurpation of power in 1963, sought to crush

(Haddad 2012). However, despite the land reformers promising that redistributing land would create not only more equality in the countryside but boost overall agricultural output as well, this gain did not come to pass (Keilany 1980). It seems that disrupting the evolution of a growing agricultural sector through an externally-developed model for land reform damaged Syrian agriculture in a number of ways. The Syrian patterns of landholding, unequal and exploitive as they may have been in many but not all regions, did evolve in the context of local realities. As such, it was the result of a long series of adaptations seeking to derive the greatest possible output from the local ecology and market structures. Applying a model that emerged from the radically different soils of Egypt thus resulted in throwing away much of this accumulated knowledge. Furthermore, eliminating the wealth of the landowning class may have been promoted as the destruction of feudalism, an inefficient and anti-modern mode of production, but the truth was that landowners and their hired managers added not merely monetary capital, but also contributed knowledge and skills derived from their experience in the financing, production and marketing of agriculture.

Iraq

Iraq followed Egypt and Syria's lead in land reform in a dramatic way, with a military coup launched on July 14, 1958, directly in response to the forming of the UAR. As heads of a Western-aligned Hashemite monarchy, Iraqi leaders were alarmed by the wave of enthusiasm for Nasser that was spreading like wildfire throughout the region in wake of the merger of Egypt and Syria on February 1, 1958. In response, Iraq formed an alliance with Jordan, a fellow Western-backed Hashemite kingdom. The Iraqi government ordered troops to head to Jordan to offer their support in putting down pro-Nasser protests that were threatening to unseat the king. The

battalions never reached their goal, opting instead to head to Baghdad and depose the royal family and the head of state Nuri al-Said.

A colonel named Abd al-Karim Qasim came to the fore as the leader of this military coup, basking in the symbolism of having overthrown the monarchy on Bastille Day, July 14, 1958. Basing the legitimacy of his new regime on the promises of social revolution and the ending of both feudalism and imperialism, Qasim, like Nasser before him, offered his new subjects land reform as his main political offering. This was not the first obvious influence of Nasser on the new Iraqi leader. In response to the news of the Free Officers Coup in Egypt in 1952, Qasim and a handful of other like-minded military officers created their own clandestine organization named, not surprisingly, the Free Officers. Qasim, unlike his co-conspirator Abd al-Salam Arif, did not seek to place Iraq's sovereignty at Nasser's disposal but rather sought to pursue its own path with help from the powerful Iraqi Communist Party during the five years that he would rule Iraq. And yet, his coup, his political program, and the centrality of land reform all spoke to the massive influence of the charismatic Egyptian leader.

The land reform that Qasim promised would revolutionize not merely Iraq's agriculture but its very social structure, however, proved to be beyond disappointing in its results. As in neighboring Syria, Iraq suffered a series of droughts from 1958-1960, harming its agricultural output. And yet, this was not in itself sufficient to explain the massive decline in productivity that immediately followed the attempts to implement land reform. The following table shows the precipitous decline in the production of wheat and barley, the two main crops that Iraq had been self-sufficient in prior to 1958:

Production of Wheat and Barley in Iraq, 1952-1964

	Wheat (1,000 metric tons)	Barley (1,000 metric tons)
1952-1955 (average)	653	761
1956	776	800
1957	1,118	1,000
1958	754	950
1959	572	725
1960	599	803
1961	816	911
1962	1,086	1,125
1963	450	790
1964	707	750

(Source, Fernea 1969, 360, from Treakle 1966, 32)

A 1965 article published by a visiting researcher from Oxford contained this pithy summary of the progress in land reform (Simmons 1965, 131):

The agrarian reform accomplished its political goal of removing the landlords. There has hardly been any progress toward the social and economic goals. Cooperatives were to fulfill those services of credit and management once provided by the shaykh. Moreover, cooperatives were to help raise the standard of living, encourage self help and provide a channel for agricultural extension advice. Cooperatives have hardly begun to replace the supervision and control of the landlords. Six years after the reform only the political goals have been achieved.

As for the average size and quality of the plots distributed to recipients of land, there were even worse problems than those in Syria. The following table provides information on the

amount of lands distributed and the average size of the plots in the various regions of Iraq as of May 31, 1964:

Province	Distributed Land	Recipients	Average Size of Redistributed Holding (dunams)	Average Size of Holding in 1958-1959 (dunams)
Northern				
Mosul	648,904	7,835	82.8	169.4
Arbil	133,686	1,843	72.5	257.8
Kirkuk	226,215	2,034	111.2	257.7
Suleymaniya	33,747	1,549	21.8	68.0
Central				
Baghdad	165,855	3,903	42.5	217.4
Diyalah	82,949	1,572	52.8	167.4
Hilla	195,313	5,030	38.8	93.2
Karbala	11,415	722	15.8	46.1
Ramadi	6,226	148	42.1	49.7
Kut	445,117	10,757	41.4	946.8
Southern				
Diwaniya	57,586	1,973	29.2	89.0
Nasirya	0	0	0	278.3
Amara	11,156	700	15.9	319.2
Basra	3,866	700	5.5	14.9
Total	2,022,035	38,766	52.2	138.6

Source: Baali 1966, 30, 60

In summary, it seems that the further the land reform policy wave spread out from Egypt to Syria and on to Iraq during these years, the less effective it was at achieving its goals of increasing agricultural output, promoting social stability, keeping farmers on the land, or preventing flight to the cities and the concomitant downward push on urban wages.

High Modernism, Bounded Rationality and Land Reform

Key to James Scott's work is the argument that throughout the world there are forms of local knowledge necessary for the successful performance of a variety of economically or

socially significant tasks. These forms of knowledge are accumulated by individuals and communities through trial and error over long periods of time, even generations, and are difficult to communicate to those outside the community, profession, or region. While technical ‘expertise’ – the possession of knowledge that is certified by universities or bureaucracies – is recognized and valued by states or development agencies, this local knowledge frequently is not valued, if it is recognized at all by the outsiders who design plans for these groups.

Scott defines these forms of knowledge as *metis*, borrowing a term from classical Greek, describing them as “the practical skills that underwrite any complex activity” (1998, 313) that high modernist planning ignores or treats with disdain, considering them to be “insignificant at best and as dangerous superstitions at worst” (1998, 311). *Metis* is crucial for any complicated set of actions to occur, whether the planting, growing, and marketing of crops, the running of a factory or hospital, or the functioning of a community. The danger of high modernist planning, Scott writes (1998, 311), is that it tends to ignore or even seeks to suppress *metis*, which can lead to broader dysfunctions as tried and true means of carrying out complex tasks find themselves disrupted.

One perhaps controversial area in which *metis* was practiced was in the role of the landowners and their managers in the producing and marketing of crops. Land reformers have been prone to accusing landowners of being little more than parasites who play no valuable role in the production of agriculture. As we have seen, the ideology that undergirded much of the revolutionary land reforms that swept Egypt, Syria, and Iraq (but not, to nearly the same extent, Turkey) was based on an identification of the local rural society as feudal. This analysis alleged that the agrarian society in which there were great inequalities in landowning suffered not merely from conditions of exploitation (which was, of course, to a large extent true) but also from

economic inefficiency and technological backwardness. The landowners, in turn, were denounced as a feudal elite dedicated to exploiting their workers but not to making their farms profitable. As we have seen, this accusation has also been widespread in much of the writing of Western academics, economists, and land reform advisors discussing the Middle East and other developing regions (Springborg 1993). In a phrasing typical of both Nasserist officials and many Western experts and scholars, the scholar Raymond Hinnebusch (1976, 8) claimed that landlords typically “were absentees, with little interest in management or investment on their estates.” Egyptian economist Ahmed Nashrty (1966) gives an example of the framing common in the Middle East when he tells us that “Big landowners used to lead a luxurious life and to spend lavishly the returns of large estates, purchasing imported luxurious commodities; this trend caused great harm to national economy by draining profits, savings and rents out of agriculture” (Nashrty 1966).

This claim that landowners were broadly uninterested in profit-making or inherently a force obstructing the modernization of agriculture has been challenged by a number of writings (Springborg 1993; Vitalis 1995; Warriner 1962). It was never clear why these agrarian capitalists would go to such efforts to exploit their peasant workers but then refuse to invest in their own properties. As Warriner (1962) notes of pre-land reform Syria, and as we can see from the Turkish case, landowners, even those living in cities, could and would be enthusiastic investors in new technologies when the opportunity arose. Land reform advocates in the 1950s tended to reject the idea that landowners or their estate managers were a necessary part of the production process. And yet, the crises that followed their rapid displacement shows us that, exploitive as they may have been, their services were also vital for the distribution of credit, the resolution of conflicts between peasants, and for the maintenance of irrigation works. Such activities depended

on a high degree of local knowledge that, despite the claims of so many land reform advocates, only landowners and their managers had.

The threat to carry out land reform had an immediate impact on the activities of landowners. Many immediately ceased to expend money or effort on their farms, fearing that they would be lost. Some fled the countryside to the cities, while others fled the countries entirely. This left behind a vacuum of both investment capital and skill that the state agricultural bureaucrats were unable to fill (Palmer 1971, 174). Exacerbating the situation was the fact that many of the state officials with the greatest amounts of local experience – or *metis*, if you will – were recalled to the capital cities to replace their former superiors who had been purged in the revolutionary housecleaning, greatly reducing the number of agricultural experts who could have potentially filled the knowledge gap left by the departing landlords (Fernea 1969, 377-78).

In addition to the dismissal of *metis*, Scott also notes how states tend to view the societies that are the objects of their high modernist projects through modes of vision that condense, distort, or oversimplify realities in dangerous ways. These modes of viewing, such as guide the making of maps, are vital for the management of the enormous amounts of data that planners must deal with in seeking to manage social or economic activity. And yet, such modes of representation exclude the vast multitudes of unassimilable information in the pursuit of a simple set of facts that tell the viewer what he or she wishes to know. Such processes risk oversimplifying the realities they seek to describe beyond recognition, leading not to increased legibility of complex systems, but rather dangerous blind spots.

Such has been the case with the representation of land in the land reform wave that swept the Middle East in the 1950s. Land reform was based on a notion of dividing land into units of area, in itself based on a form of property that made land a commodity which could be bought

and sold in a market for land. And yet, the exchange value of land is one issue, while the ability of land to produce agricultural goods is quite another. Land reformers tacitly or explicitly based their work on the premise that a unit of land possessing the same size, measured in areas of measurement such as hectares, *dunams*, acres, etc., was equivalent to another unit of land the same size. However, the reality was that in terms of the production of crops, different parcels of land are in fact radically different in terms of their productivity depending on constantly fluctuating factors such as the amount of rainfall, the upkeep of their irrigation systems, the degree of human security, access to fertilizers or credit, and a host of other factors.

Perhaps it is not surprising that land reform would find its greatest supporters, and report its greatest successes, in Egypt. Unlike Syria and Iraq, in Egypt the ecology of the Nile and the reliability of its waters after the introduction of the great dams of Upper Egypt produced a situation conforming fairly closely to that of the Western Europe and North American territories where the strong forms of private property in land developed. In both the England where such notions of property first emerged and in Egypt, where British colonial land experts sought to spread the Anglo-Saxon mode of managing land, there was a high equivalence between the amount of land and its agricultural productivity. Thanks to the high fertility of the soil and the relative predictability of the water supply (true for both regions like Egypt that enjoy steady access to river water or to rain-fed agriculture in countries with fairly consistent rainfall such as England) one could make a reasonable supposition that a certain area of land would produce a similar amount of yield as another plot of land equal in size.

This equivalence between size of territory and agricultural productiveness does not, however, hold well for much of the world. Unpredictable and scarce rainfall can render one unit of territory very productive in one season but completely unproductive the next. High

temperatures and high salt content in the soil can lead land to suffer from excessive salinity if drainage systems, which are difficult to maintain, are not assiduously cared for (Brown 2009; Postel 1999). In such climates, land must often be left fallow for long periods of time to avoid salinization and maintain productivity. In Egypt, farmers were able to practice multiple cropping, i.e., the planting and harvesting of more than one crop on the same land in a single year. However, successful multiple cropping is a privilege reserved for areas with good access to water and long growing seasons (Gordon 1975, 78-79). Such heavy cultivation of single areas is termed *intensive farming*, in which much investment is expended on a single unit of land and the yields are correspondingly high. For the great majority of lands in Syria and, even more so, Iraq, the only feasible mode of agriculture is *extensive farming*, or the use of vaster territories of land with frequent periods of letting fields lie fallow to recover moisture or lose salinity through rainfall. Land reform, with its fixation on allotting relatively small, precisely-delimited territories to single farmers or families, is a mode of redistribution better suited to areas with the ecological, political, and economic conditions conducive to intensive rather than extensive farming.

The very concept of the value of land, and the role of the state, can vary dramatically due to such differences in the ratio of land to people and ecological conditions. In sub-Saharan Africa, where ecological conditions are mostly suitable for extensive rather than intensive farming and the land-person ratio has been high, populations have incentives to move from place to place with great regularity. And so, rather than ruling over fixed territories in a Weberian notion of a state, pre-colonial African states were often more akin to voluntary groupings of mobile tribes, in which the component tribes could follow or abandon a ruler depending on the fortunes of the confederation. Herbst (2000) compares this to the development of Leviathan in Western Europe and East Asia, where the value of agricultural land led to the growth of powerful states with

fixed borders, zealously guarding the lands that were the source of their wealth. Given Charles Tilly's (1975: 42) maxim that "war made the state, and the state made war," powerful states evolved through the violent competition for immobile territories.

Herbst goes on to argue that much of the dysfunction in political and economic life experienced in Sub-Saharan Africa over the past two centuries has been the result of the imposition of this territorially-fixed notion of state sovereignty, which suits well the ecological realities of Europe or East Asia where populations are high and land is productive, but does not accommodate the more mobile populations of the savannahs. In such conditions, fixing borders and demanding that new states exercise a Weberian monopoly over violence "in a given territory" (Weber 2009) was apt to lead to more conflict rather than the building of infrastructural power. Extending this analysis from the level of the territorially-bound state to the level of the territorially-bound family farm, we can see that a similar dysfunction arose when planners sought to import a system of small family farms from Egypt, where it worked relatively well, to the drier and more capricious farmlands of Syria and Iraq. Such parceling of land frequently trapped farmers on lands that could become suddenly unproductive depending on variations in rainfall, increased amount of salinization of the soil, and changes in access to irrigation and drainage.

And so we see that in Iraq shortly after the beginning of land reform in 1958, there was a massive flight from the countryside to the cities, where impoverished migrants gathered in shantytowns, living in *sarifas*, small handmade structures made from reeds (with the term *sarifa* coming to be used to describe the Iraqi shantytown itself). The point of land reform was to give peasants land that they could and would occupy for decades to come, with legislation including long term leases and provisions to prevent the renting, mortgaging, or re-sale of land, rather than allowing them turn around and sell their newly acquired lands for a temporary profit before

returning to the ranks of landless and property-less proletarians with nothing to sell but their labor. In fact, the Iraqi Communist Party came out against land reform on this basis – that the redistribution of land as private property would do little to keep peasants on the land or to stem the trend of increasingly large estates and a swelling rural proletariat, as they would quickly lose their newly-acquired lands in the capitalist market (Gabbay 1978). Land reform proponents, seeking not just increasing equality throughout society but also wishing to keep peasants in the countryside to prevent excessive urbanization, had to respond to these challenges. In this sense, Iraqi land reform was an even greater failure, accomplishing the opposite of what land reformers had aspired to do, which was to create a virtuous cycle in which land reform would slow migration to the cities and raise urban wages.

In summary, Scott's description of high modernism offers a powerful explanation for why land reform, based on the reduction of the agricultural productivity of unit of property to a simple measurement of spatially bounded territory through the act of mapping, failed to produce the expected positive results in Syria or Iraq. But why did Syria's leaders, in seeking union with Egypt, or Iraq's Free Officers try to apply Egyptian-style land reform in their countries? Scott tells us that high modernism held a powerful appeal through its promise of rapid progress through scientific knowledge and the aesthetic appeal of the simplicity of its plans. But that does nothing to tell us why certain political leaders will choose to implement one high modernist plan over another. To try to understand this aspect of the spread of land reform in the Middle East in the 1950s, we need to return to Weyland's notion of bounded rationality.

Let us examine again the question of why land reform went from being a non-issue to a central issue in Egyptian political life in such a short stretch of time. The transformation in the discussion was sudden, with land reform going from a marginal topic to a key political debate in

the course of a year or two. The scholar Gabriel Baer was puzzled enough by this rapid transition that he was led to pose this in the form of a question (1962, 201):

Though the distribution of landed property seriously impeded Egyptian economic development¹⁵, the question engaged Egyptian public opinion only to a slight degree before the 1940s. Apart from the proposal advanced by the insignificant Communist Party in the early 1920s, no demand was made to limit the size of the great estates or to confiscate them, and there was no public discussion of the question.

This may appear strange in the light of two other facts; first, the inimical effect of the prevailing distribution of land was noticeable before the 1940's, and two attempts to stabilize smallholdings – the Five Feddan Law and the sale of State Domain – had already ended in failure; secondly, the agrarian reforms carried out in East European countries during the 1920's might well have prompted, in not the Government and its leaders, at least certain circles of public opinion to demand similar action in Egypt, where it was desperately needed.

Baer's question is a good one: Throughout the 1920s, land reform had swept Eastern Europe from Finland in the Baltic to Greece in the Aegean, leaving only tiny Albania outside its reach (Jelavich 1983; Jörgensen 2006). How then was it possible that this epochal transformation in the relations between states, landowners and laborers could have left Egypt untouched? For not merely was the Egyptian political leadership unwilling to discuss land reform prior to 1942, which in itself may be explained by vested interests of a landowning elite, but the 'chattering classes' who were already engaging in issues of social and political reform by the 1920s also seemed to have a blindness to the very subject of land reform (Baer 1962; Ghali 1953; Johnson 2004). But that changed radically in 1942, with land reform coming to the fore of the Egyptian public sphere, and from there spreading to Syria and Iraq.¹⁶

¹⁵ Note that the belief that unequal land holdings were an impediment to economic growth was a commonly held belief of the 1950s and 1960s, later losing favor with development economists.

¹⁶ Land reform ideas also spread directly to Syria and Iraq from the intellectual mileux of Paris and London via key actors such as Michel Aflaq and Salah ad-Din Bitar, two Syrians who studied at the Sorbonne in the 1920s and 30s and later returned to Syria to found the Ba'ath Party, which would carry out extensive land reforms after seizing power in 1963.

So why did Egyptian intellectuals, activists, and politicians all remain indifferent to the vast spectacle of land reform that transformed half of Europe in the 1920s? Weyland's *availability heuristic* predicts that political actors will give disproportionate weight to policy models that have attracted their attention more strikingly than others, whether because they have come to global attention through the actions of a world power (such as the Reagan-era tax reforms by the United States) or because they were carried out by a state which commands attention due to linguistic, geographical, or historical ties (such as the Chilean pension system reforms that were emulated by its neighbor Bolivia and other Spanish-speaking states throughout Latin America). Weyland (2006, 37) notes that it would have been more logical for Bolivian political and economic advisors to look for models for pension reform coming from other countries at similar levels of economic development, such as in Africa or Asia, rather than its much more economically developed neighbor Chile. And yet, he found that they failed to investigate such models despite the fact that the World Bank and other international institutions with a global focus made such reports readily available.

Such a logic emerging from the availability heuristic may well explain why both Egyptian elites and intellectuals failed to respond to the issue of land reform as it spread across Eastern Europe. Egypt was primarily Arabic-speaking, with a vigorous printed media in Arabic, French and English. Intellectually, the Egyptian public sphere was more in tune with new developments arising in Paris or London than in the East of Europe (Meijer 1999). Although it was once a part of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt had been fairly autonomous of the Ottoman capital Istanbul for some time even preceding the rise to power of the modernizing leader Muhammad Ali, who came to power in 1805 and established Egypt as a formidable power in its own right. As such, it lacked the connections with Eastern Europe that Turkey felt. In the

Turkish case (see Chapter 2) Eastern Europe was not only a neighboring territory, but it was the home of much of the ruling elite or their families, who had fled their homes in the long wars that tore apart the Ottoman Empire from the early 19th century until the First World War. For them, Eastern Europe and particularly the Balkans represented a highly important part of the world, one that they were closely attuned to because of both its current geopolitical relevance as well as its historical role as the site of the major Turkish population centers of the Ottoman Empire as well as many of the Empire's most glorious battles.¹⁷

In considering the availability heuristic, we can see why, due to geographic remove, the lack of a shared language, and the lack of a shared history, most of Eastern Europe remained a low priority area for Egyptians of the early 20th century. And, with the same heuristic, we can understand how Syrians and Iraqis alike were moved to follow events in Egypt and seek to emulate them when they seemed to bring success. They had a language in common and, equally important, an increasingly strong shared identity of pan-Arabism (Dawisha 2003). Arabs in the post-Ottoman states in the Levant had, much less than Egyptians, the sense that the borders of their new countries were externally imposed and illegitimate. The search for new borders, whether through shared ethnicity or shared religion,¹⁸ motivated many to search outside of their home countries for allies and inspiration. Pan-Arabism thrust Cairo into the spotlight as the most advanced and intellectually productive Arab city, which was perhaps ironic given the relatively strong Egyptian identities that were and are present there. Thus, Syrian and Iraqi reformers had

¹⁷ Note that the new Turkish identity that was formed in the 20th century allowed large numbers of people from what would today be considered non-Turkish ethno-linguistic groups to be considered Turkish. Among these groups, who were almost exclusively Hanefi Sunni Muslim, were Bosnians, Pomaks, Albanians, Macedonians, Circassians, Abkhazians, and others (Kirişçi 1991). This transformation of identity did not prevent members of these groups from imagining a shared Ottoman Muslim past through the lens of 'Turkishness,' even if at the time their ancestors would not have spoken Turkish and would have considered themselves mostly through the lens of religion (Islam), sect (Hanefi), or family/region.

¹⁸ Of course, while the search for new borders based on shared Arab ethnicity has declined remarkably since the mid-20th century, the search for new territorial sovereignties based on religion is as strong as ever in the actions of the Islamic State movements to establish a new caliphate in the MENA region and even beyond.

their eyes fixed on Cairo as much as on any other site for political direction. As noted above, Qasim and some colleagues in the Iraqi military formed a clandestine group named the Free Officers in 1952 in emulation of Nasser's group that had just seized power in Egypt. The fact that he followed Nasser's direction in the carrying out of land reform should then not come as too great a surprise.

While having tried to illustrate that land reform had increasingly disappointing results as it spread from Egypt to Syria to Iraq, let me take a step back and say that Egypt's land reform was a success in some ways but in others proved to be a failure. In particular, it could not live up to its egalitarian rhetoric that was emphasized in countless public speeches and publications. A 1963 Egyptian state publication on land reform by the Minister Of Agrarian Reform, Abdel Mohsen Abou Nour (1963, 3-5) declares:

Eleven years ago, authority emanated from only two sources, colonialism and the palace; and relied on two things, capitalism and exploitation of influence.(...) But today there is no colonialism, no palace, no capitalism, no exploitation, and no discrimination in the chances of work, of living for of (*sic*) realization of equity. (...) Since the first moment of the advent of the Revolution and the movement of agrarian reform, everything in the countryside seemed to spring to life; the dust which hung on for many generations was shaken off and a progressive activity was started.

Not surprising, this was a fantastically exaggerated evaluation of Egyptian land reform's success in leveling social inequalities and promoting growth in the agricultural sector (Mitchell 2002; Sadowski 1991). Egyptian land reform's success was driven by its relative conservatism. Landowners who had to sell land had an opportunity to do so before the law confiscated their lands, and those who stood to benefit from these sales were the already established strata of middle-sized landowners. Furthermore, the Egyptian land reform was aimed at providing lands to these small- and middle-sized peasants in the belief that only such farmers would have the capital and experience to benefit from more land. Redistributing land to landless and

impoverished peasants would, it was feared, harm overall agricultural output as these individuals would lack the capital and equipment to make these lands flourish. And so, while Egyptian land reform succeeded in eliminating the top stratum of large landowners, it actually did little for the landless, and indeed may have replaced the domination of the giant estate owner with the domination of the middle-sized estate holder (Mitchell 2002).

An incident in 1966 forced even Nasser to publicly admit the failure of Egyptian land reform to carry out a true social revolution. In what came to be known as the Kamshish incident, a villager named Salah al-Din Husain, a member of the Arab Socialist Union,¹⁹ was found to be teaching peasants about Marxism and protesting abuses by local landowning families placed under state investigation. In April 1966 he was shot dead by the landowners he was denouncing, and, unlike similar incidents, this time the murder led to a broader demand for an investigation. To manage the mounting wave of criticism, Nasser established the Higher Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism and placed it under the command of his close ally, Field Marshall Abd al-Hakim Amir. The committee investigated a limited number of cases involving abuses by landowners and resulted in little substantive change in the state's willingness to confront such abuses – and, in fact, after Egypt's defeat in the 1967 War the state would curtail its posture of fighting for the rights of peasants, instead seeking to reconstitute its power through a new alliance with landowners (Ibrahim 1994). Nasser (1966, 11) made a landmark speech at Damanhur on June 15, 1966, in which he admitted that the revolution against feudalism was, in its own terms, far from complete despite the previous decade of rhetorical triumphalism:

The worker or the farmer is supposed to be socialist and revolutionary; he should understand that this change is for his interest, he should understand that when land is taken, it is distributed among him and his fellow farmers, he is supposed to

¹⁹ The Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was a corporatist institution developed under Nasser to, among other things, control political dissent and create an institution for his support (Bianchi 1989).

understand that he is one of the working powers of the people; but he does not know this owing to the lack of consciousness or to domination. Due to the old social relations, he is obliged to pursue the same road and accept the fait accompli. The social relations which we establish are for the benefit of the farmer and the worker. But today, after 14 years, we find examples of the old social relations in spite of the fact that we used to say that we liquidated feudalism. Yet, as we said that we liquidated feudalism, we also said that we did not liquidate the feudalists.

We had liquidated feudalism by law, but the feudalists still exist. As we have said today, the feudalists will always make use of devious methods and try by every possible means to circumvent the law in order to preserve their wealth, and their exploitative ownership, thus preserving the pattern of social relations which was built on class distinction, based on the existence of a class of masters and of a class which obey. Today I say that this is the challenge which we are facing but the revolution proceeds to surmount every challenge and to eliminate every deviation.

Despite the fact that a policy of land reform that aims at true social transformation would take many years before one could judge it a success, and despite the fact that even in Egypt land reform came to be seen by many as an incomplete revolution (particularly by critics on the left), we still see that Iraqi leadership seized upon Egypt's model of land reform as a solution to its twin problems of feudalism and imperialism. Why were they so quick to conclude that Egyptian land reform was a smashing success even before the facts were in? This behavior easily falls under Weyland's *representativeness heuristic* that predicts decision-makers will tend to quickly decide that certain policy models are a success even before they have had the time to show their effectiveness in the original context.

Finally, there is the manner of one of the most surprising aspects of the adoption of Egyptian land reform law – the fact that in both Syria and Iraq, leaders sought to apply the law that had originated in Egypt, where small plots of land are regular producers of harvests thanks to the fertile soils and predictable water supply delivered by the Nile. As we have established, Syrian and Iraqi ecological conditions are generally greatly different from those presiding in

Egypt, with the need for extensive rather than intensive farming to cope with the uncertain supplies of water and salinity of the soil. And yet, even in Iraq, which was free to write its own land reform code, planners chose to cut and paste the Egyptian law even though it was not suitable for the realities of Iraqi farming. Why?

Weyland's *anchoring heuristic* describes this behavior perfectly. This heuristic leads policy-makers to adopt foreign policy models without making adjustments to accommodate differences in conditions between their country and the one in which it was developed, and also prevents them from adjusting the adopted policy even after evidence that it must be changed starts to mount. Iraqi officials proceeded to carry out a land reform as if their hot, dry, sparsely populated agricultural regions were exactly the same as the wet, fertile, overpopulated farmlands of the Nile Valley. Weyland's work argues that this was not a remarkable mistake, but rather, an error to which humans are systematically prone.

The theory of bounded rationality and the policy wave also helps us to understand the curious failure of land reform to return as a policy goal in later decades after its heyday in the 1950s-1960s expired. Although Nasser himself began to scale back on his own land reforms in the few years before his death in 1970, the greatest reversal of the Egypt's land reform program came in 1992 when state leader Hosni Mubarak enacted a very neoliberal land tenure reform (Bush 2002; Hinnebusch 1993). If land reform was an imperative of capitalism and modernization, its reversal after a few decades would be puzzling. If land reform was a rational response to increasing unrest in the countryside, in which state leaders weighed the costs of inaction with the threat of violence that the peasant dissatisfaction represented, it would be hard to explain why the threat appeared so pressing in the 1950s but was no longer a concern by the 1990s. The changing fortunes of land reform for the Egyptian elite seems to be more reflective of

its international popularity rather than a response to changing conditions in the Egyptian countryside or political economy.

CHAPTER 4

LAND REFORM AND AGRARIANISM IN THE ZIONIST IMAGINATION

Whoever would attempt to convert the Jew into a husbandman would be making an extraordinary mistake.

Theodore Herzl

From the earliest Zionist settlements in Palestine in the 19th century, the question of land and not merely territory has been a focal point for both the Jewish nation-building project and the Palestinian resistance to it. The Zionist movement was a political project to create a new, territorially-bound Jewish society to protect Jews from anti-Semitism. It began with vague ambitions for what sort of independence this new society would strive for, but by the turn of the century, the movement had started to consolidate its position on achieving a fully sovereign state.²⁰ While the charismatic Zionist leader Theodore Herzl and his followers sought to first achieve a guarantee for Jewish political sovereignty prior to settlement, earning themselves the name “political Zionists,” others sought to begin colonization of the new land without delay. Dubbed the “pragmatic Zionists,” these activists supported the purchasing of land and the immediate settlement of Zionist Jews on them, creating the basis for what they hoped would become the new Jewish country.

²⁰ While Zionism is most commonly identified as a nationalist movement that sought to build and maintain a fully sovereign and independent Jewish state, many thinkers and leaders accepted as part of the movement were vague or even dismissive of the need for full sovereignty. Much of the philanthropic work of French Jewish organizations in 19th century Palestine are seen as Zionist, although at the time statehood was not on the agenda for most of them. The influential Ukrainian Zionist thinker Asher Ginsberg, known by his pen name Ahad Ha-Am (Hebrew, “One of the People”), was supportive of a Jewish nation-state but thought it would take a long time to develop, while also arguing that it could never absorb more than a fraction of the world’s Jewish population. Accordingly, he saw the development of a Jewish community in Palestine as more important as a source of cultural inspiration to other Jews rather than a solution to anti-Semitism itself. This position came to be known as ‘cultural Zionism’ (Laqueur 1972, 162-71).

To carry out this mission, the central Zionist political institutions established at the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1897, debated a plan to acquire and ‘publically’ own and manage agricultural land as the basis of nation- and state-building. Alternately adopting the language of a sovereign state and a colonial company, the early Zionist institutions rejected the proposal to merely buy, develop, and resell land to Jews, instead deciding to form a corporate body to maintain ownership of the lands in the name of the Jewish people, providing access to plots through 49-year leases. These plots would be limited in size in order to prevent the development of large estates, aiming to create small family farms that would employ no hired labor or sharecropping. These principles were adopted by the Jewish National Fund (“JNF”), founded in 1901 as the main land purchasing and managing institution of the World Zionist Organization (Lehn 1988).

The JNF came to develop approaches to land and agricultural labor that in many ways mirrored those of the land reform projects carried out in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. And yet, while ethnic criteria played some role in the land policies of these other countries, the basis of the JNF’s land policy was to promote the settlement of Jews and the exclusion of Palestinian Arabs and other non-Jews. The JNF applied strict restrictions on the lands it controlled, preventing the formation of anything larger than a small family farm, the hiring of non-Jewish labor, and the reselling of land to non-Jews. This, it was argued, would promote the maximum Jewish settlement on the soil by preventing Jewish landowners from employing the cheaper and generally more skilled local Palestinian workers, as well as preventing them from re-selling land to non-Jews (Granovsky 1926; PEC; Ruppin 1926). The more cynical observer might also note that these policies provided the unmentioned additional benefit, as with other cases of land

reform, of granting the state (or para-statal institution) great power over the distribution of land and thus political leverage over the rural population, both non-Jewish and Jewish alike.

This chapter will attempt to evaluate these Zionist, and later Israeli, policies towards land in the light of our discussions of land reform, policy diffusion, and bounded rationality. The outstanding puzzle is: Why did Zionists pursue a primarily *agrarian* mode of development through techniques of land reform, defying economic rationality and increasing conflict with Palestinians displaced from access to rural land and labor? Why did top Zionist organizations seek to build a rural Jewish society in Palestine, rather than a primarily urban one?

The rationality of this decision is far from evident using standard models of comprehensive rationality. As a workforce, Jews possessed great comparative advantages as urban industrial workers while Palestinians possessed the comparative advantages in rural labor. Palestinian rural laborers not only had lifelong experience in the farming techniques specific to agriculture in Palestine, they also usually had access to rent-free housing with their families and a share of the food grown on family or village farms. Thus they could profitably engage in rural wage labor at a relatively low wage, in comparison to Jewish immigrants who had to pay rent and purchase their food themselves, increasing their need for income to sustain themselves in their new lives in Palestine (Shafir 1989). Jewish immigrants to Palestine, in contrast to Palestinian Arab laborers, were often literate urbanites with experience in manufacturing or commerce, giving them a comparative advantage in the cities.

Of course, as Atkins (1988) has pointed out, land reform has been primarily a social and political issue that later came to be framed in terms of its economic consequences. And yet, the Zionist choice for agrarian colonization had many negative social and political consequences as well. As with our other cases, the campaign for land reform within the Zionist movement (and, I

believe, land reform is a term that can be applied to these Zionist efforts to limit the size of and regulate employment on agricultural lands²¹) created schisms within the society, leading to a fight between those seeking greater public control of agricultural lands and those trying to preserve the privileges of private property rights. The *Yishuv* (Hebrew, “settlement”), or Zionist community in Palestine prior to the establishing of the Israeli state in 1948, did not only consist of the WZO and its affiliated institutions. The majority of the Jewish immigrants to Palestine lived and worked outside of lands owned by the JNF, including a large body of independent Jewish farmers (Karlinsky 2012, 4-5). These independent Jewish landowners often challenged the land policies of the WZO and the JNF, defending their right to employ local Palestinian Arab laborers, to acquire large private estates and even, albeit much less frequently, to sell these properties to the highest bidder regardless of religion or ethnicity (PEC Box 99). The internal conflict between left and right within the *Yishuv* grew so severe by the 1930s that Zionist leader Harry Viteles of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee wrote to his colleagues in New York that the community was on the brink of a civil war (PEC Box 88).

In the end, it was the JNF and their allies in the Zionist labor movement that emerged victorious over their more economically liberal opponents. Although the lands managed by the JNF were relatively small before 1948, the property restrictions of the JNF were later extended to apply to the vast lands expropriated from the expelled Palestinians by the new state of Israel after its establishment. The semi-constitutional Basic Law: Israel Lands, ratified in 1960, officially applied a version of the JNF’s restrictions on the use of land to state-owned lands as well. Today, some 75% of the land in Israel is state-owned while the JNF continues to own about 18% of the land. Together, 93% of the land in Israel falls under the basic restrictions drawn up by the JNF at

²¹ Zionist land officials themselves constantly described their efforts as “land reform”, situating it within the global wave of land reform and openly referring to and borrowing foreign land reform models (Granott 1956; Oppenheimer 1926).

its founding more than a century ago. Although confronting legal challenges on the basis of discrimination in the early 2000s (Barzilai 2007), these restrictions have weathered assaults based in both political and economic liberalism and continue to exist for the most part today.

An even more serious risk posed by the pursuit of Zionist agrarianism was the antagonism it generated with the local Palestinian population. Agrarian settlement committed the Zionists to a maximalist territorial strategy, triggering a costly conflict with the Palestinians. The purchase of lands and the expulsion of the Palestinian sharecroppers or workers from those lands was the major cause of the violent conflict that erupted between Jews and Palestinians (Morris 2000). A higher density urban development strategy, rather than an agrarian one, would have required less land for overall settlement and avoided those aspects of the conflict arising from Zionist ethno-religious discrimination against Palestinians in the agricultural land and labor markets. This would have greatly reduced a key Palestinian grievance against the Zionists: the loss of access to agricultural land and its produce, whether as owners, sharecroppers, or wage laborers.

While one could argue that the agrarian strategy was of military rather than economic value given that the project was to extend sovereignty over as much land as feasible, this also requires one to evaluate the rationality of seeking to create a territorially maximalist nation-state in a fairly heavily populated area. The Israeli army and its component militias proved successful against both the local resistance and the invading armies in the war of 1948, repelling the efforts of military units from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan and other Arab states to expel them (Rogan and Shlaim 2007). The Israeli military was later able to defend itself and even conquer territory in the war of 1967. However, these military victories were not foregone conclusions, and as the mismanaged war of 1973 demonstrated, Israel was not an invincible military power. Given that

Israel's military successes were not foregone conclusions, the territorially maximalist agrarian strategy was not only economically suspect, but high-risk from a security standpoint as well. Besides the larger wars, Israelis have also suffered from decades of low-level conflict and threats, from the border wars and War of Attrition with Egypt to the deadly bombings of civilians in the Second Intifada. These conflicts led to long-term ethnic and religious antagonisms that most people would probably prefer to do without.

Furthermore, from its earliest days Zionist agrarianism was carried out with a great deal of rhetoric indicating the influence of foreign models for colonization, nation-building, and state-building. For Zionist leaders and rank and file Zionist settlers alike, a superabundance of writings and practices show them seeking to apply models from the wheat fields of Russia, the Eastern Marches of Prussia, the vineyards of France and Algeria, the orange groves of California, and the villages of Greece and Turkey (Herzl [1897] 2012; Karlinsky 2005; Penslar 1990; 1991; Ruppin 1926; Shafir 1989). To what extent were these agrarian models the optimum models that could be applied to the task of Zionist nation-building, and to what extent were the Zionists flexible in their application, changing strategies as new evidence emerged?

Zionist Land Policy: What Kind of Rationality?

In the previous two chapters I argued that bounded rationality was crucial for explaining both the recurring lack of success of land reform in Turkey as well as the diminishing effectiveness of land reform as it spread from Egypt to Syria to Iraq. The assertion that these policy attempts resulted in broad failures is, I believe, fairly uncontroversial. Iraqi land reform administrators themselves proclaimed their own land reform project to have been a failure after the fact (Palmer 1971, 172), while the chief Turkish land reform proponent İsmet İnönü later

denounced his own land reform proposal for having been too extreme, effectively blaming himself for its failure to be carried out (Karaömerlioğlu 2000, 121). By contrast, the question of the rationality, or success or failure, of land policies in the Zionist nation-building movement is much more complex.

Unlike the Iraqi or Turkish cases, Zionists and later Israeli leaders never loudly declared their own land policies to have been a failure, although they readily changed course from the agrarian focus that dominated the first half-century of nation-building to an industrial and urban development model shortly after achieving statehood. In 1950, Israel Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion helped push through the Sharon Plan, named for its author Aryeh Sharon, which switched the Israeli state's investment priorities from agrarian into urban and industrial development, seeking to create a society which would be about 80% urban (Troen 1988). However, although the Sharon Plan essentially accepted the urban character of the new society that was forming despite the leadership's attempts to impose a pattern of agrarian settlement, the early decades of land reform-based attempts at agrarian nation-building have not been officially renounced by Israeli leaders. The issue of Zionist land policy's ultimate rationality, or its success, from the point of view of the objectives of its executors poses a special challenge.

On the one hand, Zionist agrarianism led to the movement to create exclusively Jewish territories and land markets in Palestine. Together with the publically stated goal of creating an independent Jewish nation-state on Palestinian soil, endorsed by the British in 1917 and promoted during the years of the British Mandate over Palestine (1920-1948) as per Britain's agreement with the League of Nations, the competition for land and jobs in the countryside was the main cause of the Arab-Jewish conflict. This agrarian conflict helped lead to the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, resulting in ethnic cleansing and the Palestinian refugee crisis, the wars that

wracked Jordan and Lebanon after the Palestinian refugee inflows, and subsequent Arab-Israeli and Palestinian Israeli conflicts, including the ongoing occupation and colonization of East Jerusalem and the West Bank and the siege of and sporadic warfare with Gaza.

On the other hand, the Zionist agrarian nation-building project can also be seen as having succeeded in filling many of its architects' initial goals, with agricultural settlements serving military as well as economic functions. The small farms and agricultural communities became the heart of the Zionist armed forces (Ben Eliezer 1998). Territories containing agricultural settlements, whether they actually succeeded in growing any crops or not, gave the Zionists control of the lands they were able to seize in the 1948 war. In time, Zionists succeeded in fulfilling their main goals, creating a fairly prosperous, predominantly Jewish nation-state in Palestine. Additionally, immigration to Palestine probably saved many thousands of Jewish lives from horrible deaths at the hands of Nazis and other anti-Semites during the Holocaust, if we assume that these immigrants would not have been able to go elsewhere had they not managed to immigrate to Palestine. By the time that Hitler came to power in 1933 nativist racist movements and the Great Depression had caused many countries, including the United States, to greatly restrict immigration. Those Jews who had left Europe before this time or were able to reach Palestine before the beginning of the war were spared the fate that met their friends and families left behind.

However, even the Zionist right wing hardline leader Vladimir Zeev Jabotinsky, who used the metaphor of an "Iron Wall" to describe the harsh military action that he argued would be necessary to create a Jewish state in the face of Arab hostility, did not foresee an eternal state of conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. Rather, he argued that decisive military action was necessary to establish the state, and that once the Jewish state was a *fait accompli*,

relations with the Arab neighbors would normalize (Shlaim 2000). This has not been the case. The Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts have been ongoing, and in recent years Israel has engaged in a high-risk showdown with Iran over its nuclear program. Israel achieved a military victory in six days in the 1967 War, but has yet to normalize its borders or resolve the issue of the occupation and settlement of the Palestinian territories occupied at this time, leading to a growing campaign of boycotts and threatening relations with its main supporters in North America and Europe. Israeli governments have wavered between trying to please the Jewish settler movement, furthering antagonism and risking international isolation, and trying to extricate themselves from the occupation, leading to the assassination of Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin by a right wing extremist. In short, the militaristic strategy has led to chronic problems for the Israelis, and the decision to pursue agrarian settlement was a critical juncture in this path.

Given these provisos, I will make a few hopefully not too questionable assumptions for the purposes of this chapter: a) that the semi-public (as opposed to private) investment of Jewish labor and capital in agriculture was typically economically inefficient, relying on overseas donations to stay solvent, much like a costly state-owned enterprise, and b) that exclusivist agrarian settlement exacerbated, if not created, the conflict with Palestinians. Both of these were costly moves for the Zionist movement. However, I will reserve judgment on whether the pursuit of an independent nation-state was itself irrational, as it may be impossible to judge the pre-1950 Zionist pursuit of an agrarian nation-state as simply an attempt to solve the problems of anti-Semitism at a minimal cost.

Unfortunately for those seeking to provide simple questions, much less simple answers, the concept of rationality itself is complicated by its grounding in the presumption of a fixed and stable hierarchy of preferences. It is hard to evaluate an action or series of actions that *unfold*

over time in terms of rationality when the preferences, information, and even identities of the actors involved change through the process of acting. This makes evaluating the rationality of the Zionist decision to pursue a nation-state, and to do so through agrarian development, a complicated task. We can imagine a hypothetical moment of collective decision-making to pursue a solution to the problems of anti-Semitism – whether the violence of the pogroms, the poverty and exclusion from economic opportunities, or the emotional damage of the racist contempt of non-Jewish society²² – that chooses to establish a territorially contiguous Jewish national community. However, once that decision was undertaken, the preferences would begin to change. We can see from the commitment to the Zionist project expressed by its members, judging from both words and actions, that creating a Jewish society and nation-state had become objectives in themselves related to, but also independent from, escaping anti-Semitism. Strong affective commitments to the project developed, and identities and values changed. An alternative course of action (such as immigration to the United States) would have produced different realities, different identities, different affective commitments, and thus, different preferences than those we tried to account for at the beginning of the experiment. This in turn makes any evaluation of rationality and nationalism, for Zionists or any other community with national commitments, much more difficult than, say, a study of the rationality of a certain social policy with regard to increasing wealth or economic equality.

My solution, however unsatisfying it may be, is to meet the affective commitments of the Zionists halfway and to accept the desire to create a national community in Palestine as a given preference of the Zionists. I thus investigate the rationality of pursuing nation-building through *agrarian exclusivist development* in order to achieve the goal of building a Jewish society in

²² To my knowledge not even the Zionists, who were the political faction among European Jewry who had most despaired of an improvement in the conditions of anti-Semitism, predicted a disaster as severe as the Holocaust.

Palestine, rather than evaluating the policy in terms of the initial goals of protecting Jews from anti-Semitism that Zionism was designed to serve.

Agrarian exclusivist development was the attempt to create a separate Jewish society within Palestine through agricultural settlement and production, as opposed to urban or semi-urban development, while seeking to exclude non-Jews from working in or living on Jewish-owned properties. Through exploring alternatives to such a nation-building project in Palestine by exploring some of its alternatives, I investigate the impact of boundedly rational decision making on the choice for Zionist agrarianism.

The Roots of Zionist Agrarianism

The pursuit of a nation-state featuring a large agricultural society in the late 19th and early 20th century seemed to move against the tide of urbanization and industrialization that was rapidly becoming the dominant model for the development of newly emerging countries. Zionist leader Elazari-Volcani admitted this challenge in writing that, “The stream of modern life draws the countryman to the town. To exchange the town for the country is to swim against the tide,” noting that for Jews to abandon the city after 2,000 years of exile and urban life, “an effort of quite unusual intensity is required to overcome the obstacles” (quoted in Troen 1988, 7). Throughout the course of Zionist immigration to Palestine, leaders were frustrated by the tendency of the new immigrants to seek lives in the cities rather than the agricultural settlements (PEC). And so, they turned to models of land reform to try to engineer a Jewish agricultural society in spite of market, political, and social incentives for Jews to live in cities and not on farms.

Zionist sought to build a radically modern new society even while seeking to imitate non-Jewish societies that were believed to provide the model for what a 'normal' society should look like. Like other nationalist movements that arose in 19th century Europe, Zionism was the adoption of a model for how to organize a human community politically in a changing international system that was moving away from the models of empire or tribe and towards the model of the nation-state (Sternhell 1998). But what made Zionism radically different from other ethnonationalist movements that emerged in the turbulent late 1800s was its strong emphasis on creating an agrarian society *de novo* in the course of nation-building. While other ethnonationalists extolled the virtues of their long-established peasant communities in the course of nation-building, looking to peasant life and folk culture for images of the pure essence of the nation, Zionists instead sought to create a brand new agrarian society whose virtues they could then extol. To understand why a political movement that stridently defined itself as modernist would explicitly seek to go against the stream of history, reject urbanization, and focus on agrarian development requires some explanation. The reasons can be found partly in the history of anti-Semitic practices that shaped the preferences of the movement's rank and file, and partly in the political, intellectual, and professional backgrounds of the movement's leaders.

The Zionist Theory of anti-Semitism

The premise of Zionist agrarianism lay in the Zionist belief that Jews needed to become a national majority in a Jewish homeland, which they believed necessitated a Jewish countryside populated by Jewish farmers, which in turn led to the pursuit of land reform as a means of creating such a society. Zionism, which was the European Jewish political movement which had most despaired of any improvement in the Jews' position as a national minority living within a

non-Jewish society, was broadly based on the theory of anti-Semitism as being caused by the Jew's status as a minority residing within a larger majority culture. This theory was pithily expressed by the pioneer Zionist leader Theodore Herzl ([1896], 66) in the foundational Zionist text *Der Judenstaat* (literally, 'The Jews' State', often translated as 'The Jewish State'):

What is achieved by transporting a few thousand Jews to another country? Either they come to grief at once, or prosper, and then their prosperity creates Anti-Semitism.

Zionists came to believe, contrary to the arguments of liberal, assimilationist, and leftist Jews, that there was no future for Jews in societies in which they were a minority. They would either suffer the sort of oppression and hatred that trapped them in the position of an impoverished and marginalized minority, as in Eastern Europe, or they would benefit from the new economic and politico-legal opportunities of liberal Western societies, whether Western Europe or the Americas, become prosperous and successful, and then arouse the jealousy and hatred of their non-Jewish economic competitors, leading once again to anti-Semitism. The hope that social revolution in Russia and elsewhere would mean the end of anti-Semitism, as the popular Russian Jewish leftist *Bund* organization argued, was rejected by Zionists. The liberal hope that anti-Semitism would wither in the face of democratic historical progress was shaken by the Dreyfus Affair, which began in 1894. The Dreyfus Affair saw mobs chanting "Death to Jews" marching through the streets of Paris, the city formerly idealized by many assimilationist Jews as the heart of progressive republican values. Incidentally, it was this traumatic event that led the Austro-Hungarian Herzl, then a journalist in Paris, to despair of liberal solutions, turn his back on assimilation, and dedicate the rest of his life to Zionism.

And yet, the perceived need for a nation-state with an overwhelming Jewish majority, including in the countryside, was not the only reason why Zionists attributed to agrarianism.

Many Zionists understood the causes of anti-Semitism as arising from flaws existing within Jewish society itself and its ostensibly lopsided distribution of labor. Leading JNF official Avraham Granott (1956, 23) provided a clear example of this way of thinking:

American Jewry suffers from all those defects which characterized the unsound social and economic fabric of Central European Jewry; they are city dwellers (over 70 per cent. of Jews throughout the USA live in ten large cities); their social conformation is defective, particularly in respect to the high proportion in liberal professions (more than twice that among non-Jews); the ratio of those in commerce is more than two and a half times that of non-Jews; and that of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers is low.

This lop-sided development, involving an occupational distribution faulty to a degree, was the organic cause of the economic weakness of Diaspora Jewry. The persistence of this instability among the Jewish Community invites dangers and crises, which in turn and apt to lead to social and economic repercussions.

The belief that being twice as likely to be employed in a liberal profession as the general population is evidence of a “defective” economic structure in Jewish American society requires some explanation. The fear here seems to have been that this success in the white-collar professions was the reason for middle class anti-Semitism. Members of the non-Jewish middle classes had often been supporters of liberalism and Jewish emancipation early in the 19th century, but when Jews used the new opportunities for education and employment to enter the white-collar professions, they came to be seen as competitors with the non-Jewish majority. This led to antagonism and attempts to protect the privileges of the Christian middle classes through anti-Semitism. Thus, even a society such as the United States was seen as only being temporarily welcoming, but, Zionists predicted, in time the very accomplishments of the Jewish immigrants in the professions would cause a backlash against them, recreating the cycle of anti-Semitism and persecution they had escaped from in Europe.

On the other hand, there was also the critique of the Jewish roles in commerce and finance that portrayed agricultural work as ‘productive’ while buying, trading, and lending as ‘parasitic.’ A striking example of how widespread and internalized this stereotype was, and its relevance to the Zionist colonization project, can be seen in this quotation from the preface to a pro-Zionist text by a (presumably non-Jewish) member of the British Parliament, the Rt. Hon. J.C. Wedgwood, D.S. M.P.:

Moreover, the ethical or moral value of the successful colonization of Palestine by the Jews depends on showing that, given a chance, Jews can be as good producers (even producers of food by hard labor) as any other colonial race - that they are men, not middlemen. (Wedgwood, forward to Granott 1926, ix)

This distinction between “men” and “middlemen” shows us a bit what was at stake in terms of identity politics, stereotypes and self-esteem in the Zionist attempt to create almost *ex nihilo* a class of Jewish agricultural laborers. Zionist thinkers often absorbed the anti-Semites’ critique of Jews as being economically parasitic, while they also adopted broader understandings of what constituted productive or unproductive labor from the critiques of capitalism that were in circulation in Europe at the time. They came to endorse the view that agricultural labor constituted productive work, while commercial or clerical professions were not truly productive.

The Zionist theory of anti-Semitism proved to be largely wrong about North and South America (at least so far), where anti-Semitism flourished but never came to make life unviable for the bulk of the Jewish populations in the ways that they had predicted. On the other hand, the Zionists, despite their pessimism about the continuing rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, could not, it seems, predict just how bad the situation would get after 1933.

The drive to create a Jewish agricultural stratum was in many ways a reflection of what Jews were denied throughout the long years of discrimination in Europe: access to agricultural land. The basis of the poverty and political and social marginalization of the Jewish masses of

the Russian Empire was their denial of rights to farmland. This began to change in 1806, when for the first time, Russian authorities permitted Jews' access to land. Seven Jewish agricultural settlements were founded in what was then known as "New Russia" (*Novorossiya*), territories north of the Black Sea that had recently been taken from the Ottoman Empire and were being colonized by Russian subjects. While these and subsequent Jewish colonies faced only moderate success, by 1882, a series of anti-Semitic laws called the May Laws reversed these modest gains in civil rights. Enacted in response to the role of a few Jews in the assassination of Czar Alexander II, these laws and the accompanying pogroms convinced many Jews it was time to leave Russia. Most headed to North America to live as a religious minority within a non-Jewish society, with some 2.5 million emigrating over to the 'New World' over the next 30 years. A small minority rejected the idea of continuing to live as a minority and instead began to formulate plans for creating an all-Jewish society somewhere where, they believed, such a project would be possible.

The drive towards finding land for agricultural work also reflected an internalized negative self-image of Jews as physically weak. The writer Aaron David Gordon, who emigrated to Palestine at the age of 50 and devoted the rest of his life to agricultural labor, popularized the notion of the redemptive power of working in the fields in overcoming the supposed physical weakness and cowardice of Diaspora Jews. Pogroms, or state-supported ethnic violence, had caught Jewish communities helpless and unprepared throughout the Russian Empire. The need for self-help had become a critical issue, with Jewish self-defense units being formed, some of them later moving collectively to Palestine.

Gordon also provided an important argument connecting agricultural labor to landed property rights as means of justifying Jewish colonization in Palestine (quoted in Sternhell 1998, 70):

The problem is expansion. The question is: who has more right to expand on a soil that has not yet been acquired through work and creativity? Quantity is not the main factor here but quality: the force of life and growth (as we see in the vegetable kingdom) and the force of work and creativity. Whoever works the most, creates the most, and shows the most dedication will gain the moral right to the land and the most power over it.

These arguments echo those made in John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, which provides a justification of the European colonists' usurpation of land from the Native Americans. Locke argued that the Native Americans did not maximize the yield of the lands they inhabited, and so they had less right to it than the European settlers who, with their superior technology and industriousness, would make the land more productive, creating more bounty that would then creating a greater collective benefit for all. Gordon and other Zionist thinkers combined utilitarian arguments like Locke's with more mystical and chauvinist claims to the land rooted in Jewish history and Henri Bergson-esque notions of superior racial vigor.

The Role of Models in Zionist Land Policy

If one were to try and make a synthesis in dealing with land policy one would say that the purpose is to co-ordinate the Zionist idea, which gives priority to the establishment of Jewish agriculture, with the principles of modern Land Reform, which call for intervention wherever the land problem causes the greatest social disadvantage, primarily in the town.

Avraham Granovsky (later changed to Granott), Chairman of the Jewish National Fund (1940, 95)

Zionist land policy changed through the ages, as models for how to manage land, and the objectives of the Zionist movement evolved. Models of land reform that sought to keep farmers

on their lands, forbidding them from selling or renting the lands that they have been given, were early seen as a necessity by the key Zionist organizations. The following sections describe the shifting phases of land administration in the Zionist movement.

Philanthropy and Uplift

The initial model applied to the development of Jewish agriculture in Palestine was that of the overseas charity. Since the middle of the 19th century, Jewish philanthropists sponsored projects for the uplift of impoverished rural Jewish communities. The *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, a French philanthropic organization founded in Paris in 1860, provided funds for teaching the techniques of modern agronomy to Jews throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. They established a school called Mikve Israel near Jaffa in 1870, the first institution promoting modern agriculture for the Jews of Palestine (Penslar 2000, 204). These efforts coincided with a growing interest in establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. However, these early philanthropic projects were not focused on creating a national community, but rather elevating the economic and social levels of impoverished local Jewish communities. They did not only focus on Palestine, but rather provided funds to assist struggling Jewish communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Philanthropy was matched by a wave of grassroots efforts to establish Jewish agricultural communities, stretching from Palestine to North and South America. A Major Mordecai Noah purchased 17,381 acres on an island in the Niagara River for Jewish settlement in 1825, ambitiously naming the community-to-be “Utopia.” Unfortunately for Major Noah, Jews did not respond to the invitation to take up farming there, and the project quickly fell into disrepair (Goldstein 1921, 12). As the 19th century progressed, however, there was an increasing number

of small scale attempts to create Jewish agricultural communities throughout North and South America, often of a progressive and experimental social nature. However, despite the moderate success of some of these experimental communities, the vast majority of the millions of Jewish immigrants to the Americas settled in the cities, sticking to the urban occupations they had become accustomed to or taking advantage of new opportunities in the white collar professions.

Colonial Models: Local Labor, Comparative Advantage, and Global Markets

With the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1882 and the subsequent epidemic of anti-Semitic violence, the first wave of politically-minded Jewish settlers came to Palestine from Russia. Called the First Aliyah, or wave of settlement (*Aliyah* is Hebrew for “ascent”, derived from the notion of going up to Jerusalem, a religious metaphor), this wave saw the first nationalist settlements with foreign support. The French Edmond James de Rothschild financed the settlements Rishon le-Zion and Zichron Ya’akov, employing French agronomists with experience in France and Algeria to develop a wine export industry. While earlier settlements had sought to grow subsistence crops, such as the grains that grew well in the immigrants’ home countries in Eastern Europe, the switch to viticulture represented two significant moves. First, it sought to create Jewish settlements that would survive through international trade rather than mere subsistence farming, being integrated into expanding global markets. Second, the agronomists selected grapes and wine as they believed that these high value goods were the optimal produce for the ecological conditions of Palestine, which they compared to North Africa and the south of France. While wine would prove to be only a moderate success, the idea of foreign investment for high value monoculture would later pave the way for the very successful citrus industry that came to dominate the Palestinian agricultural economy by the 1920s and 30s.

From Colonies to Nation-Building through Land Reform

The vineyards of the first Aliyah employed local Palestinian Arabs as agricultural laborers. The second Aliyah (1904-1914), begun in response to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 and the wave of pogroms that accompanied the 1905 Russian Revolution and halted by the outbreak of World War I, saw the arrival of a new generation of Jewish immigrants who would go on to dominate the state-building institutions and later the Israeli state itself. This aliyah saw the movement for what was called the “conquest of labor” and the “conquest of land,” terms that were coined by the Zionist labor movement to describe their efforts to create Jewish-only labor and land markets excluding cheaper Palestinian workers, seeking to force Jewish landowners to only hire Jews.

Shafir (1989, 3) argues that the works of the Zionist labor movement were essentially pragmatic, seeking a way to achieve a ‘European’ standard of living in an underdeveloped economy.²³ Just as I have argued that Nasser was not merely a pragmatist free of ideology but rather, a policy-maker very much subject to the models fashionable in his time, I also believe one must be cautious in viewing the movements for the conquest of labor and land as merely the trial and error fruits of the Jewish workers’ struggles for higher wages. Shafir was writing against a long line of Israeli nationalist historiography that, reflecting the self-image of the dominant Israeli labor parties, portrayed the settlers of the Second Aliyah as idealistic heroes selflessly seeking to implement European socialist ideals on Palestinian soil. He is right to introduce the

²³ Shafir (1989, 3) writes that “to survive, let alone to thrive, the immigrants of the Second Aliyah had to become eminently practical-minded (...) In fact, when Second Aliyah members and leaders had to make choices, adopt or reject models, and change strategies of action, they constructed these not so much from the grand cloth of general ideologies as from the simpler materials of concrete methods of settlement.” While Shafir offers a very informed discussion of the role of models in Zionist leadership circles, he tends to dismiss their importance in favor of the pragmatic bottom up action of the workers.

concept of self-interest as a motivating factor in their activism, and to see this as one of the key reasons for the development of new modes of collective settlement such as the kibbutz. However, the claim that this was carried out as a direct response to the labor conditions of Palestine without a strong intermediary role of ideational models for political action is to overstate this argument.

Models of colonization and settlement were eminently important from the beginnings of the Zionist state-building project. The first Zionist congress took place in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, marking a shift from primarily French supported efforts at creating successful but individual exporting colonies to a comprehensive nation-building program dominated by German Jewish thinkers. It was here that a mathematics professor named Zvi Hermann Schapira stood up to suggest a model by which the newly-envisioned Jewish state would acquire and apportion agricultural land, essentially using the demographic engineering techniques of the brand of land reform that had recently emerged in Prussia. Jews around the world would donate money to a collective fund that would purchase land on behalf of the Jewish people. The fund would be forbidden to resell this land as private property to any private buyer, even if Jewish, as the fund would not be the ultimate owner of the land. Rather, the owners of the land would be, collectively, the entire Jewish people, and the land would remain their inalienable property in perpetuity. Instead of acquiring and giving away or reselling land, the administrators of this fund would lease parcels of land to Jewish settlers for periods of no more than 49 years.

Why 49 years? Schapira was not merely a religiously observant Jew, he was also a trained rabbi, and he claimed that his plans had come straight from the Bible. In Leviticus 25:23, God instructs Moses that, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but sojourners and my tenants.” Rather than allowing the Israelites to take land as

permanent holdings, the Lord tells Moses that land may be held for 49 years, the end of which period is the *jubilee* year, from the Hebrew word *yovelim* (יובלים). “Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan” (Lev. 25:10).

Schapira died the year following the Basel Conference, in 1898. His proposals did not. At the 1901 Zionist conference, they were adopted by the World Zionist Organization (WZO), the main central body of the global Zionist movement, and were included in the charter of the WZO’s land purchasing agency, the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

Scholars disagree about the timing and inspiration of Schapira’s proposal. Walter Lehn (1988, 15), in his history of the JNF, claims that Schapira presented ideas for a fund that would hold land in perpetuity on behalf of the Jewish people at an early conference of the Hovevei Zion (“Lovers of Zion”) in Kattowitz in 1884. Shafir (1987, 155-6), by contrast, citing Doukhan-Landau (1979, 55), argues that Schapira’s early proposal at Kattowitz did not include a reference to “national ownership” of land, and instead claims that his ideas developed under the influence of the evolving European land reform movement, leading to a new proposal for national ownership of land at the Basel conference in 1897. Given that Schapira could not actually attend the Kattowitz conference and could only send a telegram, perhaps the necessary brevity of the message led to the ambiguity of his proposals. Penslar (1991, 55) argues that Schapira was probably not directly inspired by land reform movements in Germany, England and the United States, arguing that Zionists like Schapira “employed the vocabulary of the land reform movement, but not necessarily its grammar,” concluding that “(t)he case of the JNF demonstrates that although foreign models played a role in the formation of the WZO’s settlement strategies, that role is not always easy to measure.”

And yet, as time went on the reference to foreign models became increasingly prevalent in Zionist debates and practices. A Jewish Agency report from 1928 entitled “Comparison Between the Economic Effects of Jewish National Fund Hereditary Leasehold System and Unrestricted Ownership of Land in Palestine” from August 10, 1928, makes abundantly clear the close attention being paid to foreign models of land management, particularly in the British and French colonies close to Palestine in the Middle East and North Africa, both as examples of success and failure (PEC Box 99):

One difference in favour of freehold consists in the possibility of sale of land to Arabs who can make land pay where Jews cannot.

That the National Fund rule preventing lease of land to non-Jews may diminish the capital of mortgageable value of the land is admitted. The problem of colonization in Palestine is administration for the purpose of making immigrants capable to become independent settlers after a time. To expose settlers from the first day to the risk of losing their land owing to the possibly superior ability of the local population to extract a larger net income from agricultural land would mean reversal of the colonizing practice adopted in any country where small or economically weak agricultural holders are settled.

The 5 feddan law in Egypt probably diminishes Egyptian land values, but this disadvantage was purposely accepted by English Colonial administrators for the purpose of securing tenure to small holders; France tried in Algiers the introduction of a land code giving unrestricted effect to the working of a free land market; its experience was such that the Algerian law was modified and that more and more restrictions were placed upon the freedom of the land market in Tunis and Morocco, which were colonized after Algiers. Such examples could be multiplied.

Note that this report admits the economic drawbacks of the Zionist version of land reform, but makes reference to land policies carried out by neighboring colonial states in North Africa as legitimation for the ‘market irrationality’ of the practices. The Egyptian five-feddan law, to which the author refers, was a law passed in 1912 to limit the loss of amortized lands by smaller farmers who were defaulting on their debts in an economic crisis. This law had the unfortunate

consequence of depriving smaller farmers from using their lands as collateral for loans, as it forbade banks and moneylenders from confiscating them in the case of default, a problem that would afflict later land reforms in the Middle East as well (Hamid [Abbas] and el-Dessouky 2011). This reference appears to show elements of the availability heuristic, in that the author compares Egypt, Algeria, and Moroccan land tenure legislation with that of the very different *Yishuv*, due presumably to geographic proximity and colonial status.

Furthermore, land policies were also greatly shaped by the German experience of both internal colonization and overseas colonial investment in exportable commodities. The influence of internal colonization techniques were most evident in during the reign of Arthur Ruppin, a German Jewish sociologist who headed the first Palestine-based office of the Zionist Organization in Jaffa, opened in 1908, becoming the primary architect of Zionist land policy. Many innovations, including the development of the kibbutz and kvutza forms of collective settlement, emerged during his tenure. Ruppin was greatly influenced by the models for ethnic colonization developed by the Prussian authorities to increase the German ethnic presence at the expense of ethnic Poles in the eastern regions of Prussia, where Ruppin was born and raised (Bloom 2011; Shafir 1989). These models were developed to try to populate the *Ostmark* (Eastern Marches) with German workers in conditions where Polish laborers were generally cheaper. Ruppin had a thorough understanding of how land policy could be applied to ethnic competition before joining the Zionist Organization.

A less recognized influence on Ruppin's demographic practices was the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1924-5. Ruppin traveled to Greece in 1925 to inspect the villages where the Greek government had resettled refugees forced to leave Anatolia under the terms of the agreement with the government of Turkey (Ruppin [1927] 1949, 163-65). However, while

Ruppin spoke with admiration of the Greek government's success in resettling such a large number of people in the population exchange, he also noted that it would not be feasible to apply it to the problem of settling Jews in Palestine, as they would not immigrate if they were provided with a standard of living close to what they were used to in Europe or could achieve elsewhere. He argues that the low cost per capita of the Greek resettlement plan led to problems such as an epidemic of fatalities from malaria due to insufficient draining of swamps in the areas where there new arrivals were settled. In arguing this, he was also responding to criticism that his agency had wasted money on fruitless agricultural settlements, so we may also need to keep in mind Ruppin's need to defend himself in making these claims.

Although Shafir (1989) argues that it was the workers themselves that created the conquest of labor and conquest of land strategies to achieve living standards on par with what they could enjoy in Europe, this semi-structuralist argument based on workers pursuing their interests independent of the Zionist leadership's desire to settle as many Jews as possible needs to be questioned. We can see that Ruppin had an image of a prosperous and advanced Jewish society in Palestine that served to discourage maximum immigration. Alroey (2014), in a study of letters written to Ruppin and other leaders of the local Palestine Office of the Jewish Agency, found that they often discouraged prospective immigrants to Palestine who they deemed to have too little money or those who wanted to invest in urban as opposed to agricultural businesses. Ruppin's ([1925] 1949, 144) attitudes towards poverty can be seen in his dismissal of the Greek resettlement project and the new Greek immigrants themselves, who had just been resettled in Greece after being expelled from their homes in Anatolia: "But the difference between these colonists and ours is that the former simply continue to vegetate in the standard of life they brought with them out of Asia," arguing that a low material standard of living leads to a "moral

collapse.” Such statements show how firmly the objective of creating a ‘European’ style civilization in Palestine was not just a rational objective of self-interested workers, but was a goal promoted by Zionist leaders in accordance with their own preference for a society modeled on the European societies that served as their reference points. Despite the stated goals of rescuing Jews from anti-Semitism in Europe, this selectiveness sacrificed bringing maximum numbers of Jews in exchange for maintaining a general middle class character for the Yishuv, with the added confusion of trying to maintain this character through rural rather than urban enterprise.

As for the supposedly non-ideological character of the Zionist labor movement, the impact of the European workers’ movement on Jewish workers’ labor activism in Palestine was obvious to Franz Oppenheimer, a German-Jewish sociologist who himself was quite influential in Zionist land policy circles. In a 1926 report prepared for the Palestine Economic Corporation, Oppenheimer complained of the excessive demands of Jewish workers in Palestine, claiming that their wage demands were completely unreasonable given the constraints on Jewish-owned businesses in the weak Palestinian economy. Mocking the workers’ tendency to see European style capitalist exploitation in the low wages offered by the struggling Jewish businesses of Palestine, Oppenheimer wrote, “(a)gainst this non-existing Capitalism, the working class is attired in full trade-union armor, which may be in place in countries of highly-developed industry such as England, Belgium and Germany, but is quite out of place here” (PEC Box 16, Folder 3), concluding:

The reason for this [unproductive labor activism] is that the immigrants bring with them from Europe or from that worst of all capitalistic monarchist countries Russia, fixed opinions which they intended to realize. It means that the ideological superstructure does not correspond to social-economic bases but is imported. (...) In reality, and this is the key to nearly all problems, people do not

subordinate ideas to facts, but on the contrary, in nearly every branch, facts and deeds are made to suit ideas.

Oppenheimer was an influential socialist and land policy expert in Germany, and his reaction to the militancy of the Zionist workers was hardly just a conservative kneejerk response to worker activism. His willingness to use public power to control markets can be seen in his attitude towards land speculation and his harsh criticism of JNF head Menachem Ussishkin for failing to properly harness the techniques of modern land reform (PEC Box 16, Folder 3):

Were European mentality absent, nobody in Palestine would overlook the fantastic thought that only one kind of dangerous Capitalism exists here: That of Land Ownership: the agrarian Capitalism of large Effendis, and town capitalism, mainly Jewish. If Tel-Aviv, our window to Europe has proved an unsuccessful settlement in so many respects, only this agrarian capitalism is responsible for it. In this respect the management was completely incompetent, and is such even today, if reports are true in regard to the agrarian politics for instance, such a distinguished person as Mr. Ussishkin. The leader should base his activities upon the full orientation of the whole economic science which demands the politics of agrarian reform: the administration of town-planning areas of large parts of them by the Municipalities themselves; their submission for hereditary tenure and not absolute possession; and the elimination of every kind of speculative activity to inflate values. It is quite enjoyable to note that the wild manifestations of agrarian speculation at Tel-Aviv have been meritoriously punished in the crash last year. I hope that the politics of the township will secure against the recurrence of such manifestations. If this should lead to the decrease of the number of immigrants, it will be welcome: people who have the psychology of speculators are not a desirable element in a country where only bees and no drones should subsist.

As this passage illustrates, it was not only Palestinian landowners who were subjected to harsh criticism for betraying national interests when they sold lands for the highest price they could get. Many Zionists also condemned Jewish landowners for what they derisively termed land speculation, ranging from the leaders of the JNF and the labor organizations to the head of the economically liberal Jewish Farmers' Association, Moshe Smilansky (PEC Box 38; Smilansky 1934). We can see Oppenheimer here urging "hereditary tenure and not absolute possession," common features of land reform meant primarily to prevent recipients of land from

reselling their lands to large landowners, keeping them on the land and forcing them to produce to pay off their payments to the state for the land. In the Zionist version, intriguingly, this feature is repurposed to try to prevent primarily urban land speculation, which was helping to drive land prices out of the reach of the JNF, and avoid the danger of selling land to a non-Jew. These practices in part emerged from the use of land reform as a tool of ethnic demographic engineering as developed in Prussia in the context of German-Polish ethnic competition over land.

While these techniques may have been effective to an extent in creating Jewish-dominated land and labor markets, using semi-public power to try to create Jewish-only land and labor markets not only led to waste economically speaking, more importantly, it also exacerbated the conflict between Zionists and Palestinians, combined with the obvious Zionist aspirations for statehood on a large part of Palestine, if not all of it. The territorial maximalist strategy gave the Zionists the security advantage they needed to win the war of 1948, seizing a much larger amount of territory than that provided in the partition schemes of the United Nations, but also incurred terrible costs. To evaluate the rationality of the agrarian nation-building scheme that led to this outcome, we need to risk a counter-factual thought experiment and ask what might have happened had Zionists pursued a less territorially ambitious and less confrontational approach with the local Arab populations.

The Iron Wall Revisited: Could An Urban Yishuv Have Survived Decolonization?

In short, what would have happened had Zionists not pursued the pure settlement approach based on land reform techniques, seeking the conquest of land and labor, and instead allowed mixed labor markets and provided opportunities for Jewish urbanites to follow their

individual preferences to immigrate to the cities? Would this have resulted in a coastal, urban settlement policy? Could this have ameliorated or avoided the conflict of 1948, producing a binational state or a smaller Israeli state concentrated along the coast, alongside a Palestinian state, as per the United Nations partition plan?

This is an extremely wild counterfactual speculation. Fortunately, I am not the first to have attempted to answer it. Shafir (1989) argues against the claim that the move to exclude Palestinians from the agricultural labor market significantly exacerbated intergroup relations, predicting that even a policy of allowing the free employment of Arab agricultural workers on Jewish-owned farms would have still led to a breaking point between the groups. He points to other colonial situations in which an ethnic hierarchy in land existed to argue that Jewish ownership of farms, even if they freely employed Palestinian workers, would still have led to a bitter Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine (1989, 80-81):

(...) it seems, on the basis of comparison with full-scale European ethnic plantations or ethnic plantation segments of larger colonial drives in Africa, that even the hostility generated among the African or Arab populations by employment on expropriated land was powerful enough to undermine moderately dense European populations that relied on native labor forces to do their work, during decolonization. And if the local opposition was limited, plantation colonies were habitually taken over from the outside by competing, usually pure settlement, types of colonization.

Shafir's brief comparative aside is informative but does not seem to fully illuminate the Palestinian case. To start with his final point, it was unlikely that a pure settlement (presumably European?) colonization drive would have arisen to displace Zionist Jews and Palestinians alike in the first half of the 20th century. While European immigration to the Americas and other territories where Europeans could achieve privilege through racial hierarchy continued throughout the early 20th century, Palestine does not seem to have been an attractive site for

European mass immigration other than for Jewish immigrant escaping anti-Semitism. For example, few if any non-Jewish (and few Jewish) British subjects decided to try to displace the Jewish farmers and their Palestinian workers in Palestine during the years of the British Mandate through an attempt at pure settlement. I think it is safe to discount the idea that, had the Zionist labor movement not sought to pursue pure, Jewish-only settlement, some other group would have emigrated to Palestine in order to do so.

As for the question of whether Palestinians or other surrounding Arab leaders would have sought to eject Zionist settlers immigrants from Palestine had displacement from the land and labor markets not been the strategy, it is hard to say. The JNF's land purchases were significant in that much of the land purchased was of poor or marginal quality, and thus, while it displaced poor Palestinian peasants, it did little or nothing to enrich the overall Zionist movement, being supported by overseas donations and loans. Had the Zionist institutions such as the JNF not bought unprofitable land in strategic areas, but only pursued the purchase of economically viable farms, then much less dislocation of Palestinian peasants would have occurred, and those funds could have been used for profitable enterprises in the cities, where some non-Jews could have even been employed.

The conquest of labor strategy was effective in creating a Jewish agricultural workforce beginning during the Second Aliyah (1904-1914). And yet, by the 1930s it confronted a crisis much more serious than Palestinian protest or Jewish landowners attempts to hire non-Jews. The growing urban economy of Tel Aviv and Haifa had created increasing opportunities for Jewish workers, especially in the booming construction sector. The Zionist leader Harry Viteles, in a special report to the Palestine Economic Corporation, described a mass exodus of Jewish laborers from the agricultural communities to the cities, leading to the groves being in sorry

condition due to the lack of maintenance work given the refusal to hire Arab workers to replace them (Viteles Memo 6/20/35, PEC Box 88).

This was an important juncture in the development of the Yishuv and intercommunal relations. Had the Zionist institutions been less committed to the conquest of land, they could have begun to sell land and focus development activity on the cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa, concentrating on the narrow coastal strip where profits were higher and leaving more agricultural lands to the Palestinians. Admitting to the fundamental economic irrationality of much of the Zionist movement's land policy, a 1928 Jewish Agency report reflected thus on the economics of Zionist agrarianism (PEC Box 99):

It should be clear, moreover, that the National Fund's system, whether right or wrong economically, is itself a source of capital inflow into Palestine measured by the annual net receipts of the National Fund. Whether the economic considerations here set out are right or wrong the people's belief, religious, economic, and national, has been mobilized by a collection system all over the world, which secures a steadier inflow of capital than speculative incentive.

The argument that the Zionist movement had to adopt the conquest of land and conquest of labor practices to settle the maximum number of Jews in Palestine needs to be rethought in the context of the obvious preference of leaders like Arthur Ruppin for a prosperous Yishuv managed according to 'modern' principles of land reform (Alroey 2014; Granott 1926; 1940; 1956; Ruppin 1926). It is clear that many of the leaders of Zionist institutions sought not the maximum amount of immigration, but rather, the management of a society along the lines of principles that they envisioned in ways that would guarantee their power within the new society they were helping to build. They sought certain goals, but these goals were based on models of development from Europe that, to the extent they provoked conflict, wasted money, and even,

perhaps, failed to maximize Jewish immigration, could be considered to be pursued through bounded rationality.

Zionist Jews, most of whom came from Eastern Europe, had the disadvantages of being perceived as non-Arab, foreign, European, and Jewish, regarded by both Muslims and Christians as a traditionally subordinate religious community within the Middle East (Morris 2000).

However, they also were not the directly occupying power, that role was taken by the British. That may have served to deflect some of the animus of the local populations or surrounding states waging their own struggles for decolonization.

Upon decolonization, the nationalizing or redistribution of resources owned by 'Others,' whether former colonial elites or ethnic and religious minorities, often arrived on the agenda. For example, in Egypt, the seizure of the lands and other property of the royal family was partly justified in nativist terms, as they were a Turkish-Albanian family descended from Muhammad Ali, who had come to Egypt from the Ottoman Balkans in the early 19th century and founded a dynasty. Other elites of Turkish, Albanian, and Circassian background had their lands confiscated as well. Europeans were also deprived of properties and, in time, petit bourgeois Greeks, Jews, and Italians, many of them from families long resident in Egypt, were forced to leave as well. However, these populations were vulnerable to expropriation and expulsion because they were comparatively small in number.

And yet, in this counterfactual experiment, the expulsion of the Jews of the Yishuv from Palestine would not be assured. The American government's support for the Yishuv, whether it existed as a separate state or part of a binational Palestinian state, would presumably have remained constant given the Holocaust and strong domestic support for military and financial aid. A July 7, 1953 memo from the State Department to the US Ambassador in Beirut clearly affirms

the American commitment to protecting the fledgling state of Israel in the face of State Department criticism that such support was harming American relations with Arab states (NARA Box 59):

Our assistance to Israel at the present time is based on the premise that Israel cannot survive as a state without a certain amount of American governmental aid. We have decided we must meet the Israeli balance of payments deficit because, if for no other reason, our consciences would not allow us to let Israel be wiped out, whatever the moral rights and wrongs of the creation of that state may have been.

Given this degree of support, it might have been difficult for ethnic cleansing of Jews to be practiced if they were part of a binational state, if they were unable to defend themselves through force of arms. However, the time it would take for military aid to arrive, and the commitment of the US to defending Jews in the absence of the goals of independent Jewish statehood, is not something we can predict with certainty.

Perhaps a tenable case for comparison for how a binational Palestine might have emerged is Lebanon. Although Russian Jews were considered more alien than Maronite Christians, Lebanon itself had, from the beginning, a fraught set of intercommunal relations and an important role for an overseas power, first France, then the United States, in maintaining the local balance of power. Spatial and economic stratification separated the various communities, with the Maronite Christians being dominant and the Shiite Muslims in the South being the poorest and most excluded. And yet, Lebanon has managed to survive for many decades in relative peace, while its years of civil war (approx. 1975-1990) were to a large degree the outcome of tensions resulting from the Palestinian refugee inflows ultimately caused by the war of 1948. We could also recall Fredrik Barth's (1969) observation that perception of cultural similarity can actually increase, rather than decrease, antagonisms between groups.

Another example we could look to in order to imagine what an urban Zionism might have produced is, perhaps at first sight, an unlikely one: Singapore. And yet, Singapore offers many parallels to what an urban Zionist movement might have led to. Singapore was a product of British colonialism that, as in the British Mandate in Palestine, produced separate Chinese and Malay political communities organized under separate communal political institutions. The dominant community in Singapore was Chinese, linguistically and religiously distinct from the local Malay populations. Similar to the Jewish immigrants to Palestine, the Chinese of Singapore were not an indigenous group but rather, emigrated there in vast numbers in the late 19th and early 20th century. As in Palestine, their immigration and the status they achieved was the direct result of British colonial rule.

Another similarity with the Arab-Jewish conflict was the role of religious holidays as flashpoints for intercommunal violence. The Nabi Musa procession in Jerusalem in 1920 produced one of the first major battles raising the tensions between Jews and Palestinians. In Singapore, which had merged with the new country of Malaysia in 1959, violent street battles between Muslim Malays and Christian and Buddhist Chinese erupted on the occasion of the celebration of the Muhammad's Birthday festival on July 21 in the year 1964. In large part to defuse the Malay-Chinese tensions that threatened the stability of Malaysian society as well as the fragile political coalition that had emerged in the new government, Malay leader Tunku Abdul Rahman managed to achieve a unanimous vote to expel Singapore from Malaysia in 1963. This was in large part because the political party PAP, headed by Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, represented a challenge to the hierarchy of Malay over Chinese that formed the basis of the Malaysian political order (Baker 2014). Perhaps, if a zero-sum war had not erupted upon the British withdrawal and given the political difficulties of maintaining a large Jewish population

concentrated in the coastal cities within a bi-national Palestinian state, a Muslim-majority Palestinian political leadership would have similarly agreed to separate from the Jewish-majority regions for the sake of political stability.

An urban settlement pattern would have also sacrificed the military value of the scattered settlements. Granott (1956) speaks of how the settlements hastily erected in the Negev in the last few years of the Yishuv served to greatly expand the territory that the Israeli military was able to appropriate in the war of 1948. Without the ability to rapidly establish control over these territories, the Yishuv would have been highly vulnerable to attack, and it is not hard to imagine a situation in which it was the Jews and not the Palestinians who were ethnically cleansed. While American and British military support may have been forthcoming, it is of course impossible to predict what the outcome of such a military confrontation would have been. But if we imagine that the Zionists tempered their territorial ambitions, perhaps a zero sum ethnic conflict could have been avoided.

Uri Ben-Eliezer (1998) argues that it was the Palestine-born generation raised in the collective agricultural settlements who pushed the Yishuv towards a military confrontation with the Palestinians, forcing the elder political leadership to abandon the field of political negotiation and back their attempts to establish facts on the ground through force. While the all-Jewish collective settlements engaged in violent quarrels with their Palestinian neighbors, urban Jews often had closer relations with non-Jews, as in the joint trade union in the railroad sector (Lockman 1996).

Varshney's (2002) study of Indian intercommunal violence in India produced evidence that the strength of cross-group civil society connections greatly reduced the intensity of intergroup violence. Between the potential for greater civil society connections and the greater

ability for Mandate authorities to maintain order in the cities as opposed to the countryside, where self-help prevailed, there are reasons to believe that a primarily urban Zionism would have found more ways to accommodate itself to the Palestinian national movement that evolved alongside it. Nadan (2006, 22) notes that the Zionist leadership's attempts to organize a boycott of Palestinian goods largely failed in the mixed cities of Haifa and Acre, indications that *doux commerce* may have helped forge cross-cutting ties in the urban setting.

While a primarily urban Zionist settlement pattern could have done much to diffuse tensions between Jews and Palestinians, allowing market mechanisms to determine the number, sizes, spatial distributions, and employment patterns of the Jewish agricultural sector may have also led to less conflict. First, market-based decisions on land purchases would have limited the amount of purchases by Jews, removing some of the grievance of Palestinians expelled from the lands they had worked. Second, open employment would have given Palestinians more employment opportunities and improved their overall conditions, reducing grievances against Jews. Third, Zionists treating their identity as an ethnicity and not a competing national group could have helped depoliticize these identities.

Colonial Liberalism: An Alternative to the Conquest of Labor in the Countryside?

There are people here who preceded us. Fate has destined us to be their neighbors forever. We cannot alienate ourselves from them by building a Chinese Wall. We are committed to dwelling with them, producing with them, and trading with them...

Moshe Smilansky, 1933 or 1934, quoted in Karlinsky 2005, 44

Someone familiar with Israeli politics today would probably identify the above statement with the Israeli left. And yet, Smilansky's words, with their prophetic foreboding of building a "Chinese Wall" – which the author seems to have chosen as an absurdist metaphor, not

anticipating that 70 years later an actual physical wall would be erected – were written not by a leftist, but a leader of a group of relatively economically liberal Jewish landowners, the Jewish Federation of Farmers, and a leader of the right.

Beginning in the 1980s, a new generation of historians and social scientists began to challenge the taboos of Israeli nationalist historiographies and examine afresh the roots of the Israeli-Arab conflict. These new works often proceeded from the tacit or explicit assumption that the most promising starting point to look for cross-group collective action would be the political left (Beinin 1990; Lockman 1996). However, this disappointment in the Zionist left's failure to nurture a cross-cutting Jewish-Arab political movement has unfortunately not led scholars to pay much attention to the inter-communal positions of the economic right or the voice of Smilansky, an economic liberal who advocated an ethnically mixed society, albeit one that obviously continued to accept the idea of labor markets stratified by the ethnic hierarchy of Jews over Arabs and other non-Jews.

Today, Smilansky's name is better known more for his short stories describing the early years of Zionist settlement rather than his political thought or activity (Peleg 2005; Ramraz-Ra'ukh 1989). However, for most of the 1920s and 30s, Smilansky was one of the most important leaders of the Yishuv. He was the head of the Jewish Farmers' Association (*Histadrut ha-Ikarim*), the main representative body of Jewish private landowners in the Yishuv, a group that included or employed more than half of the Jewish rural population (Karlinsky 2005). And significantly, he was the most prominent Zionist leader demanding the right of Jewish farmers to employ Arab workers as well as the most important opponent of efforts to exclude Arabs not only from Jewish-controlled places of work, but from Jewish society more generally. This represented a clear alternative to the labor Zionist position, which used principles of land reform

to create Jewish-only farming communities. The evolution of his political and nationalist positions on land issues and Jewish-Arab relations over the course of lifetime make him a fascinating figure to study, as he shifted from an anti-Arab to a more pro-integrationist position through a shifting identification of sectoral interests.

Smilansky published an article at the beginning of the Arab revolt in 1936, which would shake Palestine for the next three years and transform relations between Palestinian Arabs, Jewish settlers, and the British. In this article, Smilansky had the temerity to blame the Yishuv in part for the outbreak of violence, citing their attempts to exclude Arabs from jobs, land, and homes. He (1936, 73-4, 78, PEC) wrote:

Not by increased separatism shall we build up, or save ourselves from danger. Nor can we separate entirely. We must meet in the street, in the central institutions of the country, and in the mixed towns. (...)

There are two peoples in this country. We must reduce the disadvantages of that fact, and that will be done by unity rather than separatism - unity in life, deeds, labour and business. If we combine in the economic sphere peace will prevail gradually also in the cultural and political spheres. I do not deny the difficulties and I realize that the solution is not dependent on us alone, but we must have the will thereto.

Smilansky's position in many ways seems to be a more standard colonial or semi-colonial one, similar to those found in other regions of the world where Europeans had settled and formed privileged landowning ethnic groups, from North America to Latin America to South Asia to Southeast Asia to Africa. His position is significant in that his voice, while not necessarily representing the entire Jewish landowning sector, does display a sectoral interest in maintaining a mixed society. The Great Revolt (1936-39) led to increased polarization and a decline in the attempts to maintain a mixed society. From this point on, the Arab-Jewish conflict increasingly became regarded as a zero sum game, and Smilansky and other voices trying to maintain a mixed society became drowned out.

Smilansky himself is known for the patronizing and colonialist tone he took towards Palestinians and other Arabs in his early writings, particularly his fiction. This, however, was to change over the course of his lifetime and, even in this early stage, his writings often displayed sympathy for Arab characters and critiques of the Zionist project's impact on the local people (Ramraz-Ru'akh 1989, 13-21). When his message changed in the 1930s and he became a prime voice urging coexistence as opposed to ethnic exclusion, he was subject to accusations of hypocrisy from his political opponents in the Zionist Labor movement. A response letter objected to an article which Smilansky had published in the journal *Boustenai*, the main publication of the Jewish independent farmer movement, defending the employment of Arab labor on Jewish-owned farms and questioning whether it was worth it to pay such a high extra wage for Jewish labor, which he argued cost the Yishuv some 500,000 pounds a year.

The angry reader, a B. Ostrovsky from Ra'anana, fumed that Smilansky had the gall to praise Arabs and criticize Jewish laborers when he himself had once called Arabs "leprous sheep"! He argued that Jewish employers in fact often cheated Palestinian workers when they could, and defended the conquest of labor strategy as benefitting not only Jews but Arabs as well, freeing them from exploitation of the greedy capitalist Jewish landowners. Ostrovsky cited one such scheme in which a Jewish landowner would cheat Bedouin workers by bringing 20 from the labor market, demanding that they work for an hour or two for free as a 'trial,' then dismissing 15 without payment and only keeping five to do the rest of the work. These and other labor abuses were common, with not only lack of payment or underpayment, but physical abuse, including whippings, being criticized even within the Zionist movement itself (Morris 2000).

It is clear that Smilansky's attitudes towards Palestinians had changed quite a bit over the years that he had been publishing, so in that respect the reader from Ra'anana's criticism was

perhaps unfair. And yet, he or she also had a point: Smilansky and other landowners seem to have largely been driven by sectoral interests rather than a deep commitment to coexistence. We can perhaps see this in complaints Smilansky made in an article published in *Boustenai* on May 16, 1934 (PEC Box 88), urging the British Mandate authorities to intervene to restrict the farmers' ability to plant more orange trees, arguing that overproduction was driving down prices and that this would affect Jewish farmers more than Palestinian farmers because Palestinians could live with lower profits than Jews. In this, he seems to be chastising the authorities for harming the Jewish community and the Zionist objective of promoting maximum Jewish immigration. And yet, elsewhere he seemed indifferent to the demographic struggle, arguing that Palestine had enough Jewish workers.

Smilansky's attitudes towards land reform, thus, were in accordance with his own economic interests and those of his constituents in the Farmers Association. Citrus fruits, mostly the Jaffa orange, were the main exports of Palestine and the source of wealth for the independent Jewish farmers. The cycle of planting and harvesting of the citrus groves, which required a large number of laborers during harvest time but fewer laborers during the rest of the year, also made them particularly keen on maintaining their ability to hire cheap, seasonal Arab labor. The initial successes of the citrus industry in Palestine led many farmers to invest in citrus groves, leading to overproduction and a lowering of the returns. One British response was a proposal to carry out a land reform in the citrus sector, putting a ceiling on orange estates at 20 dunams. Smilansky objected to this, arguing that landowners could easily acquire larger properties by putting them in their relatives' names, and insisting that the state intervene to prevent further planting rather than bothering with land reform, which he thought would do little to prevent flooding the market with Jaffa oranges (Viteles Memo 3/3/35, PEC Box 88). In this, his interests aligned with the existing

Palestinian citrus grove owners and against prospective Jewish farmers wishing to enter the citrus market, whether as private or part of JNF or other Zionist organizations. Similarly, we can see Smilansky (1929, PEC Box 38) arguing that Jewish farmers should continue to employ Arab workers, even at the cost of inhibiting Jewish immigration, for not merely economic but political reasons as well:

With all our desire to assist in a greater Jewish immigration into Palestine we do not see that we can more rapidly change over to dearer labor. There are firstly, agricultural branches in which dear labor cannot be employed without financial loss to the farmer, and secondly, it appears inopportune on political grounds to exclude the cheaper labourer (the Arab) who has been employed on the farm for many years.

Tracing Smilansky's positions over time reveals a powerful figure shifting from a more exclusionary Zionist nationalism to a sectoral thinker willing to challenge the Zionist establishment to promote his sectoral group's interests, which included promoting cooperation with Palestinian agricultural capitalists and the employment of Palestinian workers, even if it meant less jobs to support Jewish workers. It would be naïve to suggest that economic rationality always leads actors to oppose racist segregation. Robert Vitalis (2009) has demonstrated how Jim Crow-style racial segregation of ARAMCO camps in Saudi Arabia was used to keep labor costs low, a practice employed in American mineral extraction industries throughout America and the world. And yet, in the case of Palestine it seems that economic interests also managed to bring at least some actors in both Jewish and Arab communities to seek ways to coexist, challenging the exclusionist rhetoric and practices of the JNF.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the rationality of the Zionist movement's pursuit of an agrarian strategy given the impact it had on the Yishuv's economic development and, more critically, the Arab-Israeli conflict. It found a large role played by external models in shaping the decisions of the Zionist movement towards building and maintaining rural settlements, as well as arguing that agrarian development caused significant harm to intercommunal relations, helping lead to the zero sum ethnic conflict that solidified in the late 1930s and exploded in the ethnic cleansing of 1948.

The question of the rationality of the pursuit of Zionist agrarianism has, however, been more difficult to evaluate than the previous case studies. Zionists developed a preference for an independent nation-state and a life of rural labor beyond the instrumental uses of these practices for avoiding anti-Semitic violence, discrimination, and political-economic marginalization. Nationhood and agrarianism thus both became their own goods, independent of what they delivered individual Zionists in personal security or material payoffs. Bounded rationality helps us to understand the extent the pursuit of agrarian Zionism was a 'mistake,' but only to an extent, as it suffers from the same fatal flaw as classic models of rational choice: the presumption of a fixed and stable hierarchy of preferences.

CHAPTER 5

THE IDEATONAL ORIGINS OF DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

Unfortunately some of our discussion of land reform proceeds as though this were something that a government proclaims on any fine morning - that it gives land to tenants as it might give pensions to old soldiers. In fact land reform is a revolutionary step. It passes power, property and status from one group in the community to another.

John Kenneth Galbraith (1970)

When we compare the cases of regime type change in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey in the years 1945-1958, an apparent inverse relationship between land reform and democratization emerges. We witness a Turkish political movement both rejecting land reform and demanding democratization while in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq military coups replaced semi-democratic parliamentary systems with populist authoritarian dictatorships.

Egypt was a semi-competitive multiparty democracy in the years leading up to 1952, albeit a democracy sharply curtailed by a powerful monarchy, an ongoing British presence, and a parliament dominated by large landowners able to use patron-client ties to manipulate the votes of the countryside. However, since 1923 Egypt had steadily been gaining independence from the UK both politically and economically (Vitalis 1995) and its political system, despite its democratic deficits, provided fairly substantive freedoms of the press, speech, and association. Then, in 1952, in the words of economist Bent Hansen (1990, 4): “An imperfect democracy was replaced by autocracy.”

The Free Officers Coup that seized power on July 23rd of that year used land reform as its main policy offering to justify its refusal to return power to the parliament. Although Nasser and

the other Free Officers had initially promised to ‘clean up’ (*taThir*) the parliament rather than liquidate it, through a struggle with premier Ali Mahir over the issue of land reform they eventually, in a piecemeal fashion, came to permanently usurp power for themselves (Gordon 1992; Meijer 1999).

Similar events transpired in both Syria and Iraq. After a little more than two decades of French rule, Syria emerged as an independent country in 1946, ruled by an alternating succession of democratically-elected governments and military officers who seized power through coups and counter-coups. This long cycle of alternating governments, which included three years of union with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (1958-1961), would be decisively put to an end by the Ba’ath Party’s seizure of power in 1963. The Ba’ath Party, which still clings to power today after years of internecine civil war, had based the legitimacy of their authoritarian rule, like Nasser, on their claim to be successfully battling feudalism through carrying out land reform (Batatu 1999; Hinnebusch 1989; 2001).

The Iraqi state was created by the British to rule over the three Ottoman provinces that they had conquered in World War I. The Iraqi state, like Iraqi society, would prove difficult to control from London and increasingly the new country would act on its own, even succeeding in being admitted to the League of Nations as an independent state in 1932 (Dawisha 2003). The system was an often unstable parliamentary monarchy which, while providing even less in the way of political rights or meaningful elections than Egypt, nevertheless possessed the institutional infrastructure for deepening democratization. However, the political potential of the parliament would suffer an irrevocable blow when Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim seized power through a military coup on July 14, 1958. Borrowing heavily from the Nasserist anti-feudal dictatorship model, from his very first speech to the people Qasim justified his actions through

the promise of land reform (Dann 1969). He would be deposed in a coup in 1963, leading to a half decade of rule by other Nasser-inspired officers before the Ba'ath Party seized power in 1968, ruling Iraq until the US-led invasion of 2003. These groups continued the legacy of unelected rule using the struggle against feudalism and the redistribution of land as key arguments for their legitimacy.

In an intriguing counterpoint to these processes, the year 1945 saw Turkey, which had been ruled by an autocratic single party regime since its founding in 1923, experience a rebellion from within the upper ranks of its ruling party. This movement initially arose in *opposition* to a land reform bill that was being debated in the parliament, but it soon set its sights on loftier goals, the pursuit of substantive democratization and a free and fair election (Ahmad 1977; Koçak 2000; Zurcher 1998). This movement succeeded on both counts and went on to form the Democrat Party, winning Turkey's first free election in 1950 and going on to rule for a decade before being deposed in Turkey's first military coup.

The 1960 coup would not be the last military intervention in Turkish politics, but neither would this be the end of democracy. The country would return to elections in 1961, experience a coup in 1971, return to elections, and then face another coup and a period of military rule lasting from 1980-83, and then a semi-coup in 1997. Other than these two periods of military rule and the two interventions in which the military deposed an elected government, Turkish leaders would be chosen by the ballot. Electoral democracy would prove to be both vulnerable and durable. Intriguingly, in both the 1960 and 1971 interventions, members of the military-backed governments sought to make land reform the basis of new state-society pacts giving power to statist politicians and their allies in the military. However, the return to elections in both cases brought anti-land reform parties back into power, averting substantive land reform.

	Land Reform	Democratization
Egypt	Yes	No
Iraq	Yes	No
Syria	Yes	No
Turkey	No	Yes

Examining these cases together seems to point to an inverse relationship between land reform and democratization. Was this a spurious correlation, or could land reform have actually played a role in fostering dictatorships in these countries?

In the following pages, I seek to answer the questions: why did political movements that instituted authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria all carry out land reform, while in Turkey, the political movement opposed to land reform led the first successful campaign to hold competitive elections? Why do we see a seemingly inverse relationship between land reform and democratization, which is especially intriguing given that many proponents of land reform argued that land reform would in fact provide the social microfoundations *for* democratization? (Aktan 1950; Barrawi 1952; Ladejinsky 1977; Tannous 1951) Did a shared underlying factor, such as a high level of inequality in land, lead to both authoritarianism *and* land reform? Or did land reform itself somehow facilitate the transition to authoritarianism or the longevity of authoritarian regimes? And finally, in Turkey, what was the connection between opposition to land reform and opposition to single-party rule?

First, I examine the past sixty some years of theorizing the relationship between land reform and regime type, from the argument, widespread in the 1950s, that land reform was a necessary precursor to democratization, to the most recent social theories linking land,

redistribution, protest, revolution, and regime type. Then I offer an overview of the cases of Turkey, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, making the argument that structural transformations in the agricultural sector did not directly produce the transitions from one regime type to another, but rather, political entrepreneurs responded to different structural *and ideational* conditions through the adoption of different historical scripts.

In Turkey, the liberal-democratic script was employed successfully by those seeking to challenge the rule of the top echelons of the single party, while in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, a land reform-revolution script was put into action to varying degrees of success. The importance of these scripts show the insufficiency of structuralist or classic rational actor models to explain these cases of regime type transition, and I conclude by asserting the importance of demonstration effects and ideational and historical approaches to the spread of democratic or autocratic institutions (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010, 933-4; Weyland 2010).

Land Reform and Democracy: Elective Affinities?

The issue of land tenure in the Middle East is one of grave and immediate concern, not only to the various countries involved, but also to the United States and the United Nations. Becoming fully apparent to them is the relation of this problem to the development of a solid and stable foundation for peace in this strategic part of the world. (...) We are suggesting land reform as the key answer to this vital national quest. (...) The Middle East (particularly the Arabic speaking portion of it) constitutes a major and strategic field for this sort of *democratic* operation.

(Tannous 1951, 1-2, emphasis added)

The year is 1951, and the words belong to Afif Tannous, a Lebanese-born American official with the US Department of Agriculture. Tannous was tasked with heading the Middle East division of the development assistance project announced by President Harry Truman in

1949, the Point Four Program. Point Four, which combined diplomacy with technical assistance, was a remarkable expansion in the use of technical assistance as an instrument of geopolitical strategy. The project was initiated to help the US in its worldwide struggle against the Soviet Union, seeking to prevent the spread of communism through fostering the “right kind of revolution” (Latham 2011) in developing countries. The goal was to preempt communist revolution through capitalist evolution, avoiding violent upheaval through encouraging modernization and the expansion of market-based development, albeit with a strong degree of state intervention (Maxfield and Holt 1990). In this struggle, land reform played a leading role (Ladejinsky 1977; Muller and Seligson 1987, 426-7; Olson 1974).

From the occupation of Japan following World War II up to the present day conflict in Afghanistan, American officials have sought to use land reform to create the microfoundations for social stability and, as they frequently argued, democracy as well (Ladejinsky 1977; USAID 2015). And yet, in the Middle East the connection between land reform and democracy rarely seemed to materialize. American land reform proponents could point to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan as great success stories where land reform seemed to have achieved much of what it promised, relative social stability and, in time, even the development of competitive electoral democracies (Dore [1984] 2012; Ladejinsky 1977; Yoo 2005). And although American diplomats and development experts tried their best to encourage land reform among Middle Eastern allies such as Egypt, Iraq, and Iran, in most cases of political change in the Middle East following World War II we see a positive correlation between land reform and the development of *autocracy* rather than democracy (Adams 1963; Ikeda 1998; Latham 2011, 144-52; Moghadam 1996; USAID 1970; 1981; Vitalis 1995, 177).

Tannous argued that the land tenure systems of the Middle East were responsible for much of the area's poverty and political instability, threatening the peace of the region and the world beyond. While he blamed the land problem in the Middle East on the long history of Middle Eastern despotism and the lack of clear and stable property rights, he nevertheless identified the main crisis as being the concentration of land in the hands of a few semi-feudal elites:

The major, and gravest aspect of the land tenure problem, however, is the prevalence of the semi-feudal and absentee ownership of the land resource. In this we discover a basic cause for the arrested socio-economic development of the region, and for its political instability. The evidence is clear and ample that, with a few minor exceptions, most of the agricultural land in the Arab countries is controlled by a relatively small number of semi-feudal chiefs or large absentee owners. The majority of the cultivators (the producers of the agricultural wealth of the region and the mainstay of its economy) exist as sharecroppers and tenants of one type or another, as laborers and as owners of insufficient land. These are the landless millions at the foundation of the Middle East socio-economic and political structure. Neglected and deprived, barely making enough to live on, denied the opportunity to own the land they occupy and cultivate, unable to secure decent terms of tenancy, they have long lost heart and hope. They have ceased to be the initiators and sustainers of progressive movements on the land, the builders of a sound agricultural economy. This, we believe, constitutes the greatest national loss in the Arab world. (Tannous 1951, 8)

These arguments were also produced by the most influential thinkers on land, politics, and economics in the Middle East itself. The Egyptian economist Rashid al-Barrawi, the key advocate of land reform whose articles led the Free Officers to insist on land reform immediately after seizing power in 1952 (see Chapter 3), described the link between landownership and democratization in much the same terms (1952, 86).

The Nasserist revolution borrowed much from the globally circulating ideas of the nature of feudalism and the necessity of land reform for stability and progress, ideas that were being spread by American and British experts as much as, if not more so, than by Soviets (see Barrawi

1952). But to this Western condemnation of landlordism and underdevelopment came to add theories of imperialism and underdevelopment that were supported by the global left, even as he wasted no opportunity to denounce his domestic communist opposition. These ideas added up to a comprehensive historical script prescribing the creation of a developmental dictatorship that would uproot feudalism and imperialism alike. In Egypt, where colonialism was an ongoing threat and peasant protest more ominous, land reform lent itself to a project that combined promises of national emancipation, rapid development, and social justice.

This model argued that feudalism-dominated parliaments were incapable of reform through the democratic process, and that the key to development, modernization, and independence lay in a long eradication of feudalism through land reform. Political corruption and agrarian crisis were linked in numerous statements such as, “We have wiped out agrarian feudalism (*iqta* ’) in order to eliminate political feudalism” (Egyptian Lt.-Col. Hussein al-Shafi’i, quoted in Baer 1956, 221). Barrawi (1952, 86), writing on the heels of the 1952 coup, explained that:

The feudal landowners obtained immense profits from their lands. However, they never did anything in favor of their peasants. No attempt was made to improve their social standard.

The improvement of the conditions of life of the land workers became a primary necessity if the democratic way of life was to be established in the country. It could never be attempted while they were dominated by the powerful landowners.

By 1958, this model had spread to Syria and Iraq, becoming the rationale of the new regimes that came to power in this year, and continued to be the narrative justifying the regimes of the two Ba’ath Parties that were to later seize power in each state.

Core to these arguments was the notion that inequality in land resulted in a condition called feudalism or semi-feudalism. This was believed to be a cause of both authoritarian

government and the social conditions that would lead to communist revolution. Many American officials and thinkers expressed the belief that the existence of smallholding independent farmers was a necessary precondition for a democratic society, creating the conditions of economic and social equality upon which political equality could be built. Peasants dominated by large landowners would be politically helpless as their lords built the state in their own authoritarian image, creating a dictatorship of the right. But too much oppression would invite a rural revolution that, so frustrated with the failures of feudalism, would not demand democracy but rather a dictatorship of the left. American officials and academics contrasted the American experience, with its open frontiers, family farms and the Homestead Act of 1862, with that of the large estate-owning *Junkers* in Germany and the *Daimyo* in Japan. The American occupation authorities in both countries oversaw extensive land reforms that reduced the power of the large landowners that they blamed for both providing the social pillars of fascism before the war and threatened to provoke the peasants into a communist revolution after the war as well.²⁴

Such ideas were popularized by the historian Frederic Jackson Turner's 1883 classic, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. In this seminal work, which has had a huge impact in the development of theories of 'American exceptionalism,' Turner argued that the open spaces of the frontier created a means of escape from the types of oppression and hierarchy that had typified European society, with its feudal nobility, serfdom, overcrowding, and limited lands. However, he was not the first to make a link between America's abundance of land, comparative equality of wealth, and democratic institutions. In the first two paragraphs of *Democracy in*

²⁴ Intriguingly, Barrington Moore's 1966 book *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* echoes many of the ideas connecting large landowners to fascism and communism that had been in circulation among policy makers and academics since McArthur's occupation of Japan at the end of World War II, ideas to be found in Max Weber's work on Prussia as well (Ziblatt 2008).

America, first published in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville presented his ([1835] 2002) argument that increasing economic equality weakens the power of monarchs and leads to the creation of democracy in both state institutions and in civil society:

Amongst the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of conditions. I readily discovered the prodigious influence which this primary fact exercises on the whole course of society, by giving a certain direction to public opinion, and a certain tenor to the laws; by imparting new maxims to the governing powers, and peculiar habits to the governed. I speedily perceived that the influence of this fact extends far beyond the political character and the laws of the country, and that it has no less empire over civil society than over the Government; it creates opinions, engenders sentiments, suggests the ordinary practices of life, and modifies whatever it does not produce. The more I advanced in the study of American society, the more I perceived that the equality of conditions is the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived, and the central point at which all my observations constantly terminated.

I then turned my thoughts to our own hemisphere, where I imagined that I discerned something analogous to the spectacle which the New World presented to me. I observed that the equality of conditions is daily progressing towards those extreme limits which it seems to have reached in the United States, and that the democracy which governs the American communities appears to be rapidly rising into power in Europe.

When Tocqueville spoke of equality of conditions, he was referring as much to land tenure as to money in the bank. Similar beliefs in the connection between economic and political equality would reverberate throughout the following centuries on both sides of the Atlantic, shaping the European and American imaginations as to the preconditions for democratic government. These ideas would find new life in American academic and policy circles in the confusing years following World War II. American scholars would join American state officials like Afif Tannous in attempting to theorize a relationship between modernization, economic equality, land tenure, revolution, democracy, and dictatorship. While *Realpolitik* would often conflict with American statements in favor of democracy and modernization, which were

themselves frequently flexible to the point that they risked losing their analytical rigor (Danforth 2014), we can nevertheless see these ideas promoting land reform as a key policy goal.

These arguments set the stage for the academic industry that was to emerge around democratization studies after World War II (Huntington 1993; Lipset 1959; Moore 1966; O'Donnell 1979; Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992; Rustow 1970). I will turn to these models now, testing them against my cases to see how well they explain Turkey's transition from single party rule to competitive multiparty electoral democracy and Egypt, Syria, and Iraq's parallel pursuit of authoritarian developmentalism through land reform.

Democratization Theory and the Cases

The literature on democratization and dictatorship that arose in the 1950s can be divided into two dominant approaches: On one hand, we have the long tradition of looking for explanations in structural variables portrayed as being largely exogenous to the political realm, such as modernization, capitalism, economic growth, religious/traditional values, empathy, and increasing socioeconomic equality (Gerber 1987; Huntington 1968; Lerner 1958; Moore 1966). Such approaches tend to explain the actions of political elites who create democratic or autocratic state institutions as largely being the fruit of these changes, with much less attention paid to their individual decision-making processes or human agency to pursue different paths.

A frustration with the limitations of structuralist approaches led scholars away from examining the broad changes of the *longue durée* and towards an examination of the actual moments of transition from one set of political institutions to another (Skocpol 1979). Such works, later dubbed the 'transitology school,' have focused instead on the strategic interactions of political elites at times of rapid change and uncertainty. While not denying the importance of

the social and economic conditions that shape these moments, such works instead prioritize the agency of well-positioned actors at the critical junctures in which new institutions are formed from the old.

After examining works from the structuralist approach I then explore two influential works that, rather than focusing on structural variables, seek to explain regime type and durability as the outcome of elite strategic action and redistribution. These are Daron Acemoğlu and James A. Robinson's *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (2006) and Dan Slater's *Ordering Power, Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (2010). I choose these two works not only because they directly address the issue of the impact of distribution of wealth and contentious political action on the transition from one regime type to another, but because they also offer directly contrasting arguments. Acemoğlu and Robinson's work predicts that higher degrees of mass protest demanding redistribution would lead elites to construct democratic institutions, while Slater's argument would predict the opposite, forecasting instead that higher levels of contentious politics will frighten elites into overcoming their collective action problem and forming an "elite pact" (Slater 2010) with an authoritarian state in order to protect their economic (as well as security) interests.

Unlike Acemoğlu and Robinson's work, which explicitly aspires to a timeless and universal law of democratization, Slater maintains that his work is focused on explaining the outcomes of seven cases in Southeast Asia in the years after 1945 (Case et al. 2011). Despite this geographic specificity, I examine his argument by testing it against our four cases to see if it travels well to the post-World War II Middle East, as both regions grappled with many of the same issues of postcolonial independence, weak states, agrarian unrest, and superpower rivalry in the early, hot years of the Cold War. I find that the cases support Slater's argument more

strongly than Acemoğlu and Robinson's, but that here, too, there are limitations, particularly in the Turkish case.

Finally, I provide what I hope proves to be a more compelling explanation for these cases of regime transition based on an understanding of land reform, historical scripts, and bounded rationality (Khong 1992; Weyland 2010). My starting premise is that the class interests of the economic elites, working class, or destitute masses can offer only partial explanations of elite behavior as, whatever pressures they exert or opportunities they offer must still be filtered by the boundedly-rational decision-making processes of political elites. The ability of an individual actor, a group of actors, or even a whole class to articulate preferences and communicate them to state leaders, incumbent or potential, is always limited by their ability to agree on needs and to signal them, and on the ideational filters that interpret such signals in the minds of leaders. Scholars of international relations (IR) have long realized that state leaders, responding to threats from other states, are doing much more than simply responding objectively to the severity of the threat at hand (Jervis 1976, 2002; Mercer 1996). The same must be said for threats coming from within one's own country, such as the threat of peasant revolution.

Structural Explanations for Transitions to Democracy

Barrington Moore (1966) argued that liberal democracy evolved in countries where the traditional peasantry had been freed from their bondage to the landholding elites through an often brutal process of capitalist modernization, citing England and France. Moore, seeming to draw on Max Weber's arguments about the political evolution of Prussia, argued that in countries such as Japan where capitalist agriculture did not lead to the diminution of the political power of the large landowners and the emancipation/proletarianization of the peasantry, right wing fascism

resulted from an alliance of urban state elites and large landholders in the countryside. In countries where the desperate conditions of the peasantry led to revolution, as in China, an authoritarianism of the left would emerge. In short, the argument is that the presence of a large, traditional peasant class creates poor conditions for democratization, as it either empowers large landowners, who oppose democracy, or it empowers Communist movements, who also oppose democracy. Moore, like Marx and many other theorists before him, saw a revolutionary democratizing role for the new bourgeois classes produced by capitalist modernization. In one of the social sciences' more pithy aphorisms, Moore (1966, 418) summed up his argument as “No bourgeoisie, no democracy.”

However, trying to apply this argument to Turkey renders its transition to democracy confusing, if not utterly incomprehensible. Turkey hardly had a powerful bourgeoisie at the time of its transition to democracy in 1946-1950, having lost much of its commercial and some landowning bourgeoisie in the ethnic conflicts and population exchange that resulted in the expulsion or destruction of the vast numbers of Greeks and Armenians in the years 1911-1924. In fact, as Çağlar Keyder (1987) argues, Turkey's early decades of capitalist development mostly involved an attempt to nurture a “state bourgeoisie,” to create an investor and entrepreneur class through the tutelage of the state. In the 1930s, the Turkish state became an early innovator in adopting a strong role in managing the economy, trying to replace the missing investment from the private sector. This statism preceded that of most other developing countries experiencing “defensive modernization” by some decades. And to the extent that there was a Turkish bourgeoisie in 1945, this group of actors was not well positioned to play a solo revolutionary role in transforming the institutions of the state.

Bellin (2000; 2002), taking insights from Alexander Gerschenkron's *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (1962), has persuasively argued that the Middle Eastern bourgeoisies have not played the same role in democratization that they did in Western Europe because, as in so many other late developing countries throughout the world, they were too dependent on government patronage and largesse to risk biting the hand that fed them. While states had in many ways a comparatively low level of command over capital in the 18th and 19th centuries in the UK or France, allowing the bourgeoisie a fair amount of autonomy in challenging the state, by the 20th century states in the late developing countries were taking prime responsibility for investment, employment, and growth - powers that made the nascent capitalist classes hesitant about antagonizing the leaders that controlled the state and their access to state rents and licenses.

This observation applies well to Turkey. Turkey's business classes played little role in achieving, retrieving, or sustaining democracy until the 1990s, when they began urging democratic reforms and cooperation with the European Union through the leading Turkish business association TÜSİAD (Öniş and Türem 2002). The lack of willingness to get involved in the debates over democratization can be seen in the fact that TÜSİAD and other business groups focused their activities solely on economic issues during the heated years of the 1970s and 1980s, when democracy was teetering and elected governments were deposed twice through military interventions (Öniş and Türem 2002). Buğra (1994), in her study of Turkish business leaders, argued that for much of Turkey's history private enterprise has been viewed as suspect by both state and society, even when promoted by the state, and that this has led Turkish capitalists to maintain a low profile politically and not raise their voices to challenge state policies.

Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992) and Collier (1999) have argued that labor movements have played leading roles in the transition to democratization. They point out that middle class and bourgeois actors can have many of their distributional needs satisfied by a non-democratic state, but workers, by contrast, are better positioned to realize their material interests when the ballot, rather than the backroom, provides the means of influencing the state. However, this also fails to provide much insight into why Turkey transitioned to competitive elections starting in 1950. Turkey's urban labor force was miniscule in 1950, with organized labor having hardly any political influence. Labor's position was made even worse by the extreme degree of anti-communism in Turkey, which had been present even during the days of cooperation with the Soviets, but had reached a new height with the breakdown of Turkish-Soviet relations in 1945. Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, by contrast, had much more organized labor forces, stronger communist and leftist movements, stronger legal protections for organized labor, and more labor activism at the times of their transitions from semi-democracy to outright dictatorship (Batatu 1978; 1999; Gabbay 1978; Goldberg 1986; Öncü 1994; Seale 1987).

If it was not a modernizing bourgeoisie or an organized labor movement that pushed for democracy in Turkey, what was it? In *The Social Origins of the Modern Middle East*, the historian Haim Gerber (1987) contributed to this debate by focusing on the issue of land. His argument was that varying patterns of land tenure led to variations in political regime types when independent states emerged from the Ottoman Empire in the 20th century. Extending arguments from Barrington Moore's (1966) classic comparative study *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* to the Middle East, Gerber argued that the relatively egalitarian patterns of land tenure that the modern states of Turkey and Lebanon inherited from the Ottoman Empire allowed the emergence of parliamentary democracy in these two countries, while Egypt, Iraq, and Syria

all suffered from the political domination of the large landowners who emerged after the reforms of the 1858 Ottoman Land Law, which facilitated the growth of holding land as private property. This class became further entrenched under the British and French colonial regimes that seized power in the late 19th century in Egypt and after World War I elsewhere. These large landowners dominated the political systems in these states, recklessly using their leverage over state power for private gain, increasing the size of their private estates at the expense of an increasingly desperate peasantry. The end result was that, just as these societies were trembling at the brink of peasant revolutions, military officers and progressive nationalists stepped in to seize control of the state, carry out land reform, and institute populist authoritarian regimes that forestalled further democratization.

Gerber's work, while seeking to explain variations in the development of regime types in the Middle East, partakes of a broader project of trying to understand the relationship between patterns of land tenure and political regime types which can be traced back at least as far as John Locke's 1689 *Second Treatise on Government*. These explanations have tended to base their analyses on structural factors such as the relative strength of landed elites, commercial interests, and the peasantry, with particular attention paid to the peasants' material grievances and willingness to revolt (Huntington 1968; Migdal 1976). Breaking points occur when changes in structural variables, such as an increase in landlessness due to the transition to capitalism, the growth of private property, and the expansion of large estates cause peasants to threaten elites with revolt and revolution. At this point it becomes likely that some political elites, such as military officers, then step in and carry out a surrogate revolution on behalf of the peasantry, redistributing land to restore order. Applied to the Middle East, structuralist accounts such as the work of Gerber and his mentor Gabriel Baer (1962) have portrayed the military officers that

suspended parliamentary politics in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria as political actors playing historical roles along these lines, acting according to long-term historical scripts.

Land Reform, Redistribution, and the Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy

A more recent body of work has shifted our search for explanations from these broader macro-structural factors to the question of how political institutions are shaped by the rational motivations of political and economic elites faced with restive populations. These works have sought to explain outcomes of democracy or dictatorship based on the assumption that elites will choose to create and support the institutional forms that protect their material interests in the face of the threats of protest and revolt by the masses (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; 2010; Boix 2003; Slater 2010). As land reform has been a historically important, if often overlooked, mechanism for redistributing wealth and income, it also behooves us to investigate these arguments that put redistribution at the center of the study of democratization or de-democratization.

A recent popular attempt to explain democratization claims that democratization occurs when a society's have-nots engage in successful collective action to acquire more of the wealth of the haves (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). That is, democratization is a process by which economic non-elites force the state, which represents the economic elites, to agree to share power through competitive elections for leadership. Through the mechanism of representative democracy, the non-elites can then achieve sustained redistribution via the state, whereas even a redistributive autocrat could eventually stop giving pay-offs after an initial phase of generosity. Or, in the words of the authors (2006, xii):

Why does a nondemocratic elite ever democratize? Since democracy will bring a shift in power in favor of the citizens, why would the elite ever create such a set

of institutions? We argue that this *only* occurs because the disenfranchised citizens can threaten the elite and force it to make concessions. These threats can take the form of strikes, demonstrations, riots, and – in the limit – a revolution.

For now, I will put aside the obvious tautology of the term “nondemocratic elite,” which seems to allow for the possibility of elites democratizing in the absence of the preconditions for democratization that Acemoğlu and Robinson describe due to their holding some previously concealed preexisting preference for democracy. Of course, there can be preexisting and long-standing preferences and identities that will shape individual leaders’ preferences for democracy or autocracy. For example, Metin Heper (1998) has argued that İsmet İnönü was in fact a committed democrat, assisting in the transition to democracy in Turkey when the conditions presented themselves.²⁵ For the sake of examining the substance of the argument, I will bracket the term nondemocratic elite and focus on the main logic of the claim that democratization is a rational attempt to forestall revolution through the creation of a new political institution whose fundamental purpose is to redistribute wealth from elites to non-elites on a recurring basis, decided upon after a cost-benefit analysis of repression and redistribution by the economic and political elites working in tandem.

This approach likewise fails to shed much light on the reasons Turkey traded in its single party regime for a competitive democratic system that, since the first free and fair elections in 1950, has seen four governments deposed by military intervention (1960, 1971, 1980, 1998) but has always returned to democracy after relatively brief periods of military rule. Although Karaömerlioğlu (2006) provides evidence that Turkish elites were concerned about dissatisfaction among the peasantry at the end of World War II and in the years immediately

²⁵ See Karaömerlioğlu 2006 for an opposing view that İnönü was by nature an autocrat who was forced to accept democratization by conditions beyond his control.

following the war, the argument that the Turkish elites were forced to allow democracy to pacify the demands of the countryside in arms fails to persuade.

There were no recorded insurrections or campaigns demanding democratization in the Turkish countryside at this time. There were some peasant actions occupying and dividing land in the villages in Denizli and Bursa, however, these occurred after the 1945 land law was passed (without Article 17, which would have provided for major redistribution) and democracy was promised, leading these peasants to believe that they were doing so with the government's support (Karpas 1959, 319). After 1945, journalists began to show an increasing interest in the problems of rural poverty in the more open press environment of the years after 1945, after the land reform project had already been enervated. Mahmut Makal's autobiographical book *Bizim Köy* ("Our Village") came out in 1950. Written by a young schoolteacher who worked for one of the state's Village Institutes in his own village, this work shocked segments of Turkey's literate classes with its depictions of rural poverty (see Chapter 1, 28-9). However, the concern for the welfare of peasants and the amount of collective action for the redistribution of land was extremely mild compared to the great concern about rural poverty that exploded among the political class and the increasingly bold actions that peasants used to attack their landlords in Egypt after the malaria epidemic of 1942 (Brown 1990; Rodrik 1982). And so, the amount of peasant activism and intellectual debate about the problems of rural society was quite minor in Turkey in comparison to other countries in the region or in the world at large. The states that experienced much greater amounts of contentious politics and collective action, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, responded to their rural protest movements not through democratization but through implementing land reform, suspending parliaments and instituting dictatorships.

Additionally, the single party in Turkey itself had not hesitated to use state power on a number of occasions to violently crush rural insurrections, harshly repressing anti-state rebellions of a religious and/or Kurdish nature in the years 1925, 1937 and 1938. Nor were they averse to using the security forces and courts to censor critics of the state. Thus, fear of a not-yet existent resistance movement in the countryside seems to be an implausible explanation for Turkey's transition to democracy, given the courage they displayed in confronting much greater challenges to their power in previous episodes. At the very least, fear of a violent uprising is an incomplete explanation.

Looking elsewhere in the Middle East, we see that in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, contentious street politics and violent protest led not to the deepening of democracy but its abolition via military coup in the years 1952, 1958, and in 1963, respectively. Thus, it seems that while regime change can be precipitated by protest or the threat of revolution, it does not have to be a regime change from autocratic to democratic. As Egypt, Iraq, and Syria have shown, it can also result in a limited semi-democracy being transformed into a rigid and enduring autocracy.

Democratization is a means of collective action by elites that manages conflict between them as much as, if not more than, between state and society. *Pace* Acemoğlu and Robinson, modeling democratization as solely occurring between two actors – only rulers and ruled – threatens to simplify the messy reality beyond the point of usefulness. Rather, in trying to understand the turn to democracy or autocracy based on contentious politics and redistribution, we should first understand that democracy and autocracy, while not the same, produce different distributional and social results in different contexts. In the Turkish case, elite collective action seems to have been the precursor not to the forming of autocracy but electoral democracy, unlike what Slater found in Southeast Asia. Had Turkish or Israeli elites been more divided on key

issues, it is unlikely that they could have or would have settled on competitive elections as a means of determining the state's leaders.

And yet, we see here also a problem in the category of elites. Acemoglu and Robinson collapse state elites and economic elites into one category, a very problematic move given that state elites often seek to confiscate, rather than protect, the wealth of the wealthy. Slater's model is superior in that it does not presuppose joint collective action between political and economic elites (or religious or ethnonational elites, whom he also examines). His work views elite collective action as contingent on the degree of threat from non-elites.

And yet, a problem remains. Elites can come and go, losing power and gaining power. To some extent, elite status, both economic and political, is strong, tenacious, and capable of surviving under the surface (Hagopian 1996). As two gentlemen from Palermo can tell us, local elites have a habit of weathering changes in the capital city and retaining much of their power through the shifting political seasons. Sociologist Gaetano Mosca's classic work of elite theory *The Ruling Class* and author Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* both vividly illustrate how local socioeconomic elites are able to maintain their status throughout the surface drama of political and economic revolutions.

Slater's (2010) work on dictatorship and contentious politics in post-World War II Southeast Asia provides us with a rather different set of predictions for how our cases would play out. Covering roughly the same time periods as my four cases, Slater found that in the seven countries that he studied (Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, South Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and Burma) the strength of a state's infrastructural power as well as the endurance of its authoritarian regime correlated strongly with the amount of contentious politics that country experienced. He argued that this was the key variable, that in cases where strong contentious

politics (urban protests, Communist movements, rural insurgencies) threatened the interests of the elites in society, then they would engage in collective action with the state to overcome the threat. And so, his model predicts that states react to contentious politics not through the creation of democratic institutions, but rather that they will develop autocratic states with higher levels of state capacity in response to the prospect of popular revolt.

While Slater's work seems to do a better job than Acemoglu and Robinson's in explaining these four cases, it too falters in explaining the case of land reform. With land reform, we see peasant protest leading not to an elite pact but rather, providing an incentive for elites in the military to seize power and confiscate and redistribute much of the wealth of landowning elites in order to eliminate them as political opposition and create a new class of semi-elite patrons in the countryside. Perhaps the main problem in trying to transfer Slater's arguments from his cases in post-World War II Southeast Asia to our cases in the Middle East is that he keeps the elites constant over time. In the Middle East in the turbulent 20th century witnessed an excess of economic, social, and demographic upheaval. Elites came and went, often quite violently. States carried out revolutionary social changes, eliminating one group of elites and creating another, sometimes inadvertently.

What land reform enables in our cases, however, is the destruction or demotion of one group of elites and the creation of another. Therefore, seeing the growth and durability of authoritarian regimes or their capacity to extract resources from society as contingent on elite collective action needs to contend with the question: Who are the elites? In the Middle East, the answer to this question could change from one year to the next. And so, rather than predicting that elites will cooperate together to support either a democratic state or an authoritarian state to protect their interests against the threat of mass collective action, we learn more by seeing how

political elites, themselves a category in flux, seek to manage the power configurations in their societies in order to gain or maintain power.

Elite collective action theories often fail to accommodate the fact that elites can change rapidly through social and political upheavals. Such theories tend to model the population of elites as a fixed group through time, static and unchanging. Unfortunately for this model, elites often do change, and that renders such theories unable to keep up with their moving targets. Through land reform, for example, one group of elites may be demoted or destroyed, such as members of a royal family or a political party representing large landowners, while another group, such as marginal officers in the military, may step forward and establish themselves as the new political elites. Medium-sized landowners may rise to become the new force in the countryside while large landowners are deprived of land and wealth, either becoming medium landowners, using their old connections to join the new political regime, becoming urban merchants, industrialists, and/or financiers, or fleeing the country. And, in situations of ethnic conflict and ethnic cleansing, entire strata of political and economic elites might be wiped out in relatively short periods of time, either dying, fleeing as refugees, or remaining with a vast diminution of status as part of the marginalized minority population.

Democracy, Dictatorship, and Land

The material aspect of land reform as a tool for creating an enduring dictatorship was an important factor, but this constituted a necessary rather than a sufficient condition. It was true that land reform provided an essential material basis for forming a populist authoritarian regime. Aspiring state leaders could use land reform to redistribute land, enabling them to simultaneously clip the wings of one set of political opponents – landowners – while cultivating a support base

among peasants and smaller farmers. In a sense, it served as a one-time payoff from the state to a large segment of the population, which helped the new regimes to gain popular acceptance despite depriving the recipients of land from the right to exercise political influence through the ballot box. However, merely noting that land reform provided a resource that could be used as a sort of payoff for the denial of democratic rights does not fully help us to explain why land reform accompanied the growth of developmental dictatorships in the Middle East at this time.

As noted above, land reform itself does not threaten the establishment or maintenance of democratic government. It does seem to have successfully served to level inequalities in land and wealth that had been hindering democratic politics in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Land reform has been used by a number of democratically elected governments from Brazil to South Africa without an accompanying move away from democracy.

The land reform debate that emerged in Turkey in 1945 was very different from the land reform programs that later emerged in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. It was many things, an attempt to increase rural output, a move by a ruling clique within a single ruling party to increase its political leverage over the countryside at a time of increasing liberalization, a move to modernize property rights in agricultural land, and an attempt to build infrastructural power in hinterlands that were relatively removed from the state. It was apparently meant to serve authoritarian ends, and was a key policy offering by single party in 1945 and afterwards by the military elites who seized power in 1960 and in 1971. However, in 1945 land reform was *not* discussed as a mechanism for ending imperialism or for freeing the state from feudalism. For those Turkish politicians who argued that feudalism was a problem, it was a problem mostly impacting the countryside, and not a direct threat to Ankara's autonomy.

Post-World War II Turkey was much more independent of foreign political and economic influence than Egypt, Iraq, or Syria. It did not share the same prolonged colonial traumas of these countries, with their long struggles for national sovereignty vis-à-vis European powers either incomplete or unconsolidated. In 1945-1950, the link between feudalism and imperialism was not an easy one to make in Turkey, although in later years many leftists would try to make that argument (Avcıoğlu 1969; Margulies 1984; Ulus 2010). Turkish parliamentary debates in 1945 show no evidence that land reform advocates saw large landowners as working with foreign powers, even though they shared much the same language condemning feudalism and sharecropping as did Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi land reform proponents.

With post-World War II Turkey newly menaced by the Soviet Union and seeking to move closer to the Western Bloc, the frames of political and economic liberalism were both ascendant. It was these frames that land reform opponents used, both to counter the radical Article 17 in the land reform bill, which would have permitted the state to make extensive and arbitrary confiscations of land, as well as to demand political freedoms and free elections. Rather than seeing this as merely the outcome of broad structural changes or as the fruit of mass elite collective action, a more accurate picture emerges when we see political elites using the policy and institutional tools available to them, whose usefulness they process via bounded rationality, to achieve their goals and compete for political power.

The international environment that shaped Turkish land reform was significant. The Turkish debate on land reform in 1945 was to a large extent a continuation of the debates from the 1920s and 1930s (Aydemir 1969). The references were to Eastern European and Balkan countries' experiences with land reform, particularly Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, as well as to somewhat stylized episodes from Ottoman history (TBMM). These Eastern European

examples were attempts to pacify countrysides and prevent, rather than execute, revolutions. The ethnic conflict element was at the forefront of much of Eastern Europe's post-World War I land reform wave, as land reform was used to take land from one ethnic group and give it to another. This in itself weakened the land reform movement in Turkey, as critics could point out that both landowners and peasants were Turkish, and ask why a Turkish state would be motivated to take land away from fellow Turks. Under the paradigm of ethnic and religious competition that characterized both the land reforms of Eastern Europe as well as the land struggles of the Ottoman Empire, a Turkish state had no business stealing land from their co-ethnicists in the countryside.

An altogether different concept of land reform emerged in Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s, one that would link inequality in land ownership to political corruption, economic stagnation, and imperial domination – issues largely absent from the Turkish debates of the mid-1940s. Land reform was largely a non-issue in Egyptian politics in the 1930s, despite the growing recognition of the economic deprivation and growing anger of the Egyptian peasant. Then, partly in response to a catastrophic malaria outbreak in Upper Egypt in 1942, it suddenly became a key issue in Egyptian politics (Baer 1962, 201-22). It became so widely accepted that some form of land reform was necessary that even opponents of land reform were reluctant to voice this opposition in public (Ikeda 1998, 60-61). By the time the Free Officers seized power on July 23, 1952, a group of advisors from Italy and the United States were already present in Egypt to advise the government on land reform, and some kind of land reform bill seemed to be on its way to being passed when the parliament reconvened that fall (Vitalis 1995, 177).

Although there are different accounts of the story, one member of the Egyptian Free Officers later wrote that they decided to focus on land reform after having seen an article about

land reform published in the newspaper *Zaman* by the economist Rashid al-Barrawi (Waterbury 1983), later enlisting him to draft their land reform plan (Meijer 1999, 71). Inspired by his education in London, his knowledge of the Fabian thinkers Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the British Labor Party's Harold Laski, and Lenin's theories of imperialism (whose works he translated into Arabic), al-Barrawi offered Nasser and the other officers not merely a tool for improving agrarian conditions, but rather a totalizing project through which the state could modernize society.

The structural theories involving capitalism do fairly poorly, particularly in explaining the case of Turkey, whose transition to democracy defies many of their predictions. Structural arguments involving land tenure do a better job, although they too falter when we compare these cases with cases outside of the Middle East, or with Egypt, Iraq, and Syria from the 1970s onwards, when the commitment to land reform dwindled and was even reversed. Despite increasing inequalities in land, the call for a new wave of land reform has not returned, throwing into doubt the direct relationship between socioeconomic structural change and the response of political elites (or even political non-elites) to such change. The elite collective action theories provide useful ways of thinking about elite behavior in our cases, even though they have a mixed record in providing accurate predictions. But, as I reiterate in conclusion, they must contend with the inherently boundedly rational decision-making processes of these elites if they are to provide more accurate and comprehensive explanations for what are ultimately the *ideational* origins of dictatorship and democracy.

However, if we rely on the model that changing structural factors produce changes in the calculus of political elites alone, we are left with two key puzzles unexplained:

- a) Why did some countries with great land inequality see military coups creating land reform-based developmental dictatorships while others with even greater levels of inequality and protest did not?
- b) If political elites act to forestall 'inevitable revolutions' brought on by rising inequality, why did the threat of feudalism and oligarchy produce a wave of revolutionary movements based on redistribution and land reform in the 1950s and 1960s in the Middle East but then taper off so dramatically afterwards? Why do inequality and poverty not produce a similar redistributive effort by state elites now?

Some scholars have seen the new populist authoritarian regimes established in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria in the 1950s and 60s as a direct outcome of changing structural factors resulting from the growth of capitalism and economic integration into global markets (Gerber 1987; Lockman and Beinín 1987; Haj 1997). In this model, Gamal Abd al-Nasser in Egypt, Abd al-Karim Qassem in Iraq, and the Syrian Ba'ath Party are imagined as playing the role of agents acting out the demands of their principals, the peasants, demanding that they overturn the power of the large landowners and redistribute the large estates. And yet, the explanation that these leaders were acting directly in response to societal conditions fails to answer the above questions.

In short, this chapter has argued that the elective affinity between land reform and authoritarianism in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria was no coincidence, but rather was due to the usefulness of land reform as a policy tool for establishing a ruling coalition without resorting to competitive elections. The land reform wave affected Turkey, but a different set of factors led to its defeat and the creation of competitive elections and a different means of establishing a winning coalition in a largely rural country – price supports for crops, a policy of rural rather than urban bias. These outcomes were shaped by important variables, such as the political power of landlords in parliaments, the perceptions of inequality in landholding, and amount of contentious politics in the countryside. However, these factors were mediated by the *idea* of land reform, which was promoted by a host of actors in a transnational policy wave. This helps

explain the timing of the populist authoritarian coups d'état in the Middle East, their similar rhetoric, and their choice to abrogate democracy.

Land reform was legitimated by the beliefs that it would bring a host of positive results to societies, as argued by experts in both the Western and Eastern Blocs. It was hoped to increase the output of agriculture, itself a very tempting prospect in societies that were all around 75-80% rural. It was hoped that small landowners would be more efficient producers than large landowners, who were accused of laziness, lack of connection with rural society, and excessive consumption of foreign luxury goods (Nashrty 1966). Depriving them of their lands, the theory went, should have forced them to invest their wealth in urban industrial enterprises instead of poorly managed grand estates. This would help amass the necessary capital for industrial takeoff.

However, while land reform did help autocrats gain and maintain power, it failed to produce the anticipated economic and social benefits. While Iraq's history since 1980 has been one of war, sanctions, and devastating violence, making it hard to tease out the long term impacts of land reform on its economy, it seems likely that both Egypt and Syria could have performed better economically had they avoided their socialist experiments in the 1960s, both of which were recanted by their governments after the economic costs became apparent (Waterbury 1983; Haddad 2012). The protests against these states beginning in 2011 had their roots, in part, in economic grievances. So, while the land reform-populist authoritarianism model proved capable of creating and maintaining regimes, its shortcomings can be seen in the extent of anti-state protest, leading to mass contentious politics in Egypt and a devastating civil war in Syria.

Not only did land reform travel as a policy model through transnational venues such as the United Nations, but it also spread within the Middle East as a regional 'mini-wave.' The land reform-based populist authoritarian model originated in Egypt in 1952, then travelled in a wave

from Egypt to Syria and Iraq in 1958, being solidified in Syria with the coming to power of the Baath Party in 1963. Turkey, by contrast, avoided redistributive land reform and the concomitant populist authoritarian regime. Land reform arrived in Turkey as a policy model from Eastern Europe, and was strongly supported by members of the single ruling party, eager to solidify the bases of their power, extend state authority into the countryside, and even Turkify Kurdish peasants. However, the case for land reform was rather weak in Turkey due to the lack of support from a mobilized peasant movement, and a general abundance of land in Turkey. These structural factors were, of course, processed through the lenses of politics and ideas, leading some Turkish leaders to treat the struggle against feudalism as paramount while others sought to preserve political rights and property rights in the name of freedom. This latter party won the game, and devised a new winning coalition based on crop price supports, allowing the formation of a power base in the countryside that consisted of large landowners and smallholders alike. This model proved to be enduring, resisting attempts to reintroduce land reform over the next two decades. In the absence of support from the peasants themselves, such goals would be unrealized.

Conclusions

These cases help us to see how some of the largest and most powerful countries in the Middle East came to adopt different political regime types, but also tells us a broader story about the way in which policy and institutional models, even regime types, can spread rapidly with unforeseen and even undesirable results.

Through a description the nature of bounded rationality and policy diffusion, we can see that land reform helped enable these transitions to autocracy because it came packaged in a set of

frameworks that made it appear as both a legitimate and necessary tool for modernization, broadly conceived, as well as a tool against imperialism and foreign domination. This is not to say that local political elites did not adopt and repurpose land reform policy models to suit their own political needs – to reiterate my arguments of the previous chapters, they did this in abundance. But they did so using the materials that were available, painting from the palate of the ideas about economics, revolution, imperialism, and development that were en vogue in any given region at any specific historical moment. And the years between the end of World War II to the growth of the Green Revolution and neoliberalism in the 1960s and 70s were years in which land reform was being touted by Left and Right, East and West as a necessary stage in the creation of a modern and independent country. Land reform and the idea of the battle against feudalism constituted a template for change that could be used by ambitious or simply patriotic military officers in order to seize power and seek to transform their countries' histories.

Anti-feudal and anti-imperialist rhetoric should not be seen as merely *post hoc* justifications put forward by cynical elites seeking to deceive their followers. The model of elites as fully rational actors possessing full information manipulating masses who are irrational and uninformed has been aptly criticized in the literature on ethnic conflict (Kaufman 2006) and must be criticized elsewhere as well. Why would elites alone be fully rational while other actors are not? Rather than seeing anti-feudalism merely as instrumental propaganda, we should instead view it as a script in a policy wave, a set of schemata that purported to explain political crises and provide solutions to them. However, it is important to note that such scripts are historically bounded, and thus, a relationship between land reform and democratization cannot be generalized outside of time, place, and the circulation of ideas.

In short, I argue that we should take these metaphors of ‘actors,’ ‘roles,’ and ‘scripts’ more seriously than is common in our social science literature. Historical performances have more than a bit in common with theatrical roles, and that political ‘actors’ often share something with actual actors of stage or screen, a scripted narrative instructing them how to behave in a given situation. Such roles, as in a John Cassavetes film, involve a great deal of creative improvisation, ‘method acting,’ sincere belief, and emotion. These policy models hardly predetermined what political actors adopting them would do. And yet, these historical roles were *roles* in that they provided a preexisting script giving the political actors with a set of directions, motivations, expectations, and predictions for what would happen as the script was performed.

Conclusions

Land rights in Afghanistan are governed by overlapping and conflicting legal systems, including informal systems, civil law, traditional (Sharia) law, and state laws. This has resulted in a poor land management system that has hindered private-sector investment, stunted economic growth, and fed instability. The Land Reform in Afghanistan (LARA) project seeks to develop a robust, Afghan-owned and managed land market framework that encourages investment and productivity growth, supports the resolution/mitigation of land-based conflict, and builds confidence in the legitimacy of the Afghan Government.

LARA Project, 2011-2014, US Agency for International Development (US AID 2015)

I said to Amin that his policies were too harsh -- that they were turning the Muslim population against him. Like the land reforms which did not take into account Afghan traditions. But he used to reply, "Did Stalin make the revolution in white gloves?"

Vassily Safronchuk, Soviet Foreign Ministry, recounting a conversation with Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin during the time of the Soviet-backed Afghan government, 1978-1992 (CNN 2001)

In the days after September 11, 2001, as a US-led intervention in Afghanistan seemed increasingly inevitable, public conversation turned to what NATO forces would do after bombing Al-Qaeda and Taliban bases. The term “nation-building” was introduced into the vocabularies of millions of shocked media consumers who were being given a crash course in the complexities of Afghanistan’s troubling political realities. The question put to the pundits was to what extent a functioning state could be created in Afghanistan, a mountainous and poor country divided by decades of warfare. Could such a place ever host a state that successfully claims the monopoly over violence within its borders and prevent another terrorist attack from being planned on its soil? If so, how could such a state be built? The phrase “the Soviet Union’s Vietnam” was not encouraging, while the murky history of US support for the anti-Soviet Afghan Mujahideen – compellingly fictionalized in the film *Rambo III* – led to uncomfortable

questions about who was who and what was what. By what techniques could a new, strong, healthy nation be built on Afghan soil?

Although the news cycle can be cruel to esoteric topics, on September 29, 2001 CNN treated its viewers to a crash course on Afghan history, narrated by Kenneth Branagh no less, which reviewed the history of the Soviet-Afghan war and one of its main triggers: the Soviet-backed Afghan government's attempt to divide and redistribute the land of the country's large landowners. For Afghanistan's new leftist leaders, land reform – the redistribution of privately owned land from those who have much to those who have little or none – seemed to open a passage to an egalitarian and prosperous new society of small landowners with a feeling of political loyalty to their new leaders. Instead, they found that their ability to mobilize peasant support was not matched by that of Afghanistan's powerful landowners, who were able to use their local authority to enlist fighters from the villages to wage war against the central state in a conflict over wealth and power that, usefully for the conservatives, lent itself to being expressed in religious terms.

Intriguingly, despite land reform's loaded history in Afghanistan and the role it played in the expulsion of Soviet troops and the overthrow of its leftist government in 1992, the US Agency for International Development began a program entitled LARA, or "Land Reform in Afghanistan," in January 2011. This program, described in the quote above, was not a leftist attempt at radical land redistribution, but rather, an attempt to transform Afghan land tenure systems to make them more market friendly and strengthen state-enforced property rights, citing "traditional (Sharia) law" as a potential defect in need of correction. By that point in the US occupation of Afghanistan it is hard to say what difference such a project would have made one way or another in terms of Afghan resistance or the success of the nation-building project, which

Barack Obama has been steadily scaling down since coming into office in 2009. Still, the attempt at land reform begs a few questions: Why would US AID seek the politically delicate if not disastrous task of trying to alter distributions of landholding in a country where they were steadily losing control? Would land tenure reform create gratitude or resentment amongst its intended beneficiaries?

This dissertation has offered an explanation for why state leaders, whether local revolutionaries or foreign experts, held great faith in the power of land reform. Land reform promised to reduce rural inequality and grievances, and build new bonds of affection between peasants and the state. It also offered to deprive local elites of their economic and political power, making it seem a potent weapon for aspiring leaders seeking to seize power and consolidate their authority. The redistributed lands could then be used to create a new class of less powerful elites, medium sized landowners beholden to the state and incorporated into its networks of power through corporatist agricultural collectives. The idea of the inverse relationship between farm size and productivity was another key motivation for policy-makers, who saw in land reform a means of increasing agricultural output. Additionally, land reform was also used to strengthen property rights, which was believed to lead farmers to invest more in their lands. For agrarian economies, an increase in agricultural output for export crops was necessary for importing capital goods and making a move to industrialization. Limits on land ownership were thought to help this cause, leading former landowners to invest their wealth in factories and workshops rather than haciendas. The result was meant to be a centralized state in firm control of its countryside, successfully moving from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

By the 1950s, land reform became accepted as common sense in development circles, promoted by both left and right throughout the Cold War, although Communists often saw land

reform as just a stepping stone to collectivized farming. For the American officials, land reform was based on romanticized American historical narratives of how American society and economy developed, while for socialists it appeared as a key first move in the submission of the market to the state. And yet, the model frequently ran into trouble. As the Afghan case shows, land reform could put the state into a conflict with local elites that it could not easily win. For countries where local elites were overcome, as in Syria and Iraq, the high modernist effect – the tendency for state policy makers to carry out reforms without understanding the full complexity of local social and economic systems - would contribute to drops rather than gains in productivity. Landowners, creditors, and managers, despite the often justified criticism they received for exploiting and mistreating rural workers, also were vital cogs in the system of credit, investment, management, and marketing. Abruptly removing them from the equation disrupted cycles of planting, harvesting, and selling and contributed to agricultural crises. Land reform plans developed for economies based on intensive farming travelled poorly to those based on extensive farming, as small plots that would provide well for a family in Western Europe or along the fertile banks of the Nile would prove unreliable in the hotter, dryer climates of Syria and Iraq. Collective forms of land tenure such as *musha* appeared to colonial officials such as the British land expert Ernest Dowson to be terrible sources of inefficiency in production. And yet, they also had an unrecognized value in managing land disputes in contexts where states were weak or non-existent, as well as managing the farmer's risk by diversifying their fields. Finally, the redistribution of land was celebrated as a means of freeing peasants from the patron-client relationships that kept them bound to the domination of the local landowner, rendering the franchise a joke and democracy a sham. And yet, the removal of local elites and the redistribution of their lands did not often lead to democratization, but its opposite. The central

state filled the shoes of the local elites, concentrating political and social power in its hands in a way that the earlier, more dispersed systems of power could not. Democratization, along with rural growth and industrialization, too often proved to be another false promise of land reform in the Middle East.

I have analyzed these problems through the frameworks of bounded rationality (Weyland 2006) and high modernism (Scott 1998). The starting point of these theories is the premise that policy-makers, bound by limitations inherent to the human mind, are incapable of understanding enough about the social and economic systems they seek to transform to design optimal policies. Their judgment is impacted by the need to economize information, leading them to rely on models not derived from comprehensive study of the local problems at hand, but rather to adopt pre-existing models, whether the aesthetically-pleasing representations of high modernism or the cognitive heuristics of availability, representativeness, and anchoring.

The availability heuristic leads policymakers to overestimate the applicability of policy models that originate in or are carried out in countries they pay more attention to due to similarities in language, proximity in geography, overexposure in the media, or other reasons. The representativeness heuristic leads policy-makers to conclude that a policy model they have witnessed carried out in another locale will be effective in their own, without having adequately evaluated the success in its initial location or waiting to see if its success would be replicated in other regions. Excessive optimism based on a very small and under-analyzed sample size is the hallmark of the representativeness heuristic. Finally, the anchoring heuristic is the tendency to stick to the original model despite the evidence that the model is not working. This ties down policy-makers options for adjusting to new realities as they occur, exacerbating failures and preventing learning in the course of policy application.

Scott has argued that high modernism has been a historically bounded phenomenon, encouraged by an excessive confidence in scientific and technical solutions to social problems typifying an era of high modernism peaking in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The overreach of high modernism is at its most dangerous when unconstrained by democratic checks and balances or an empowered civil society (Scott 1998, 4-5). Weyland (2006, 41), relying on the work cognitive psychologists and the ostensibly universal constants about human cognition they seek to uncover, nevertheless argues that the power of models is greater in areas of redistributive social policy where strong arguments must be waged to overcome the opposition of those inevitably hurt by the policy.

In retrospect, it is not hard to see how land reform came to acquire the popularity that it did. The just division of land has been a bewitching moral problem since time immemorial. In agrarian societies, arable land is the main resource, more or less fixed in amount and, in areas of higher population density relative to quality land, typically subject to competition. The Hebrew bible attributed land ownership to God, with Leviticus 25:23 forbidding the permanent private ownership of land, telling land tenants that they are merely “travellers and sojourners.” Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* and John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* both grappled with the moral dilemma of allowing private property in land, adopting the fairly utilitarian arguments that private property rights created incentives for the fullest exploitation of the land’s able to produce food and other goods while resolving conflicts over access, thus creating benefits that overcame the moral objections to excluding others from access to certain portions of God’s earth.

God made the earth, but the Dutch made Holland. This saying, attributed to Rene Descartes, expresses a fascination that a sizeable amount of the landmass in the Netherlands is in

fact the product of human labor. Since the 16th century, an ingenious system of windmills and pumps have allowed the Dutch to reclaim vast territories from the sea and from lakes, with some 17% of the land in today's Netherlands being the product of human artifice. Descartes was fascinated, as we are today, because the achievement of creating earth is so rare: in the rest of the world, the vast amount of lands from which humans derive their sustenance and wealth have not been a product of human labor but are rather considered to be a gift from nature or the divine. Land may be worked and improved but, except in rare cases, it is not created, and remains a vexingly limited resource. The Dutch may have 'earned' their land through their labor, but for the rest of us, the question of who deserves exclusive access to it may have to remain morally unresolved. This conundrum has no doubt contributed to the ongoing popularity of land reform, leading even liberal economic thinkers like Leon Walras and Alfred Marshall to advocate public confiscation of land which they object to on the grounds of the sanctity of private property rights for other inputs (Atkins 1988).

Adam Smith and Thomas Jefferson both attacked inherited estates as unjust. English absentee landowners owning estates in Ireland and French aristocrats came under fire as exemplars of the corrupting impact of inherited property rights. While Ireland had to wait until 1870 for state policies to redress tenants' grievances, the French Revolution (1789-99) did much to overturn social hierarchies based on land ownership, even if the *révolutionnaires français* themselves were highly inconsistent in identifying what constituted an illegitimate feudal privilege and what constituted a valid modern property right (Markoff 1996). This confusion would later echo in 20th century anti-colonial thinkers attempts to distinguish between a 'good' nationalist bourgeoisie and a 'bad' feudal-comprador bourgeoisie (Vitalis 1995).

John Stuart Mill emerged as one of the staunchest advocates of land reform in England in the 19th century, while across the pond in America, Henry George was attracting a wide following with his proposal that all taxes should come from land value, which would end speculation and force owners to exploit the lands they own for the maximum benefit of society. Today, some of these ideas are returning even in America, where prominent public thinkers like the economists Peter Orszag and Joseph Stiglitz have brought George's ideas back into the public sphere in the current debate about how best to address the increasing inequality in the United States and Europe (Orszag 2015; Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2015). In these debates, the unfairness of rents accruing to owners of land has resurfaced as a political issue. The argument that the state should reward capital employed to produce value while punishing capital that sits in land is, of course, a continuation of the land reform debates that dominated much of the 19th and 20th centuries.

While this project has concentrated on land policy, the theoretical contribution developed herein can hopefully be useful for understanding a variety of policy decisions and failures. Working on both theory-testing and theory-building, this work has endeavored to prove the usefulness of approaches complicating our understand of human decision-making, whether by policy elites or the political rank and file. Enriching the social sciences with models from the behavioral sciences, such as psychology, is a complicated undertaking, but it is necessary if we wish to understand real world human decision-making with improved accuracy. It is my hope that this dissertation contributed something to this effort.

Finally, the basis of this project was a frustration with the implementation of policy models that promised to increase equality, economic or political, and came to have the opposite effect. Modern states can serve as powerful vehicles for emancipation from both economic

exploitation and sociopolitical domination. Too often the promise of the modern state and its mechanisms for redistribution have become a farcical disappointment, particularly in the Middle East in the era of crony capitalism. Now, as the region confronts state breakdowns, civil and interstate wars, grave environmental challenges, and obstinately power-hungry state elites, understanding how and why a gap so frequently emerges between promise and reality is more vital than ever.

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NARA National Archives, College Park, Maryland

PEC Palestine Economic Corporation collection, New York Public Library

TBMM (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi) The Grand National Assembly of Turkey Transcripts (Online)

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