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Urban Land in Honiara: Strategies and Rights to the City

JOSEPH FOUKONA

ABSTRACT

Urban Honiara is increasingly a space in which the poor and even the ‘middle class’ are excluded from both market and regulatory orders. This paper discusses the strategies that urban residents employ to access land in the face of these multiple exclusions. Drawing upon the work of Henri Lefebvre and recent case studies of urban spaces in the global south, I apply the ‘right to the city’ framework as a heuristic with which to analyse these strategies. I demonstrate that both settlers from other islands and Indigenous people from Guadalcanal deploy identity narratives – underpinned by claims to moral legitimacy – in their struggles over Honiara’s urban space. The paper is in three parts. The first part discusses the right to the city framework and how it has been productively applied in other urban contexts. The second part examines how the history of land alienation in the Honiara area contributed to its contemporary conditions of exclusion. The final part discusses the strategies that people use to access urban land in Honiara and suggests that these might be best understood in terms of the claims to moral legitimacy that are central to the right to the city framework.

Key words: land alienation, urban land, right to the city, Honiara, exclusion, strategies, informal settlements

The rapid growth of settlements in Pacific towns and cities has caused the supply of urban land to become increasingly limited.¹ Much of the literature on urbanisation in the Pacific highlights informal settlement as a critical dimension of contemporary

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¹ Paul Jones, ‘Searching for a little bit of utopia – understanding the growth of squatter and informal settlements in Pacific towns and cities’, *Australian Planner*, 49:4 (2012), 331. See also John Connell, ‘Elephants in the Pacific? Pacific urbanisation and its discontents’, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 52:2 (2011), 121–35.

urban land problems, including their potential to contribute to violent disputation.² The key areas of disputation concern land access issues and the policies and legislation or custom that regulate land rights. Some scholars place the debate on rights of access to land in Melanesia within a broader analysis of an ideology of landownership and a politics of exclusion.³

This paper examines the strategies people use to claim and access urban land in Honiara, Solomon Islands. These strategies have the potential to translate into various forms of illegality in the context of poor planning and the maladministration of urban land. I argue that many lower- and middle-class inhabitants of Honiara deploy identity narratives strategically to claim and access urban land as a response to exclusionary market and regulatory orders. I use Henri Lefebvre's notion of the 'right to the city' as the theoretical basis for discussing these strategies. The right to the city is a form of human right that city inhabitants draw on 'to reshape the processes of urbanisation'.⁴ Urbanisation is driven by capitalism, which produces class struggles in the contemporary context of 'accumulation by dispossession, where things are taken away and commodified'.⁵ These things, which include urban land, are usually controlled by affluent individuals and private interests. As a result, class struggle becomes an ongoing urban issue. Central to this struggle is the creation of social movements as a collective force in reaction to urban experiences of exclusion, which can translate into violent contestations. One way to understand these struggles, as Harvey has pointed out, is through a right to the city as a political ideal that focuses on the relationship between urbanisation and capitalism.⁶ Building on Harvey, I use right to the city as a moral framework to analyse the connection between strategies that Guadalcanal landowners and settlers from other islands use to access urban land and contestations due to urbanisation.

This paper has three parts. First, I introduce the 'right to the city' framework and briefly outline its usage and application in various contexts. I move on to examine

² See Paul Jones, 'Placing urban management and development on the development agenda in the Pacific Islands', *Australian Planner*, 44:1 (2007), 13–15; Paul Jones and John P. Lea, 'What has happened to urban reform in the island Pacific? Some lessons from Kiribati and Samoa', *Pacific Affairs*, 80:3 (2007), 473–91; John Connell, 'Regulation of space in the contemporary postcolonial Pacific city: Port Moresby and Suva', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 44:3 (2003), 243–57; Connell, 'Elephants in the Pacific?', 121–35.

³ Matthew G. Allen, 'Land, identity and conflict on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands', *Australian Geographer*, 43:2 (2012), 163–80; Siobhan McDonnell, 'Exploring the cultural power of land law in Vanuatu: law as a performance that creates meaning and identities', *Intersections: gender and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 33 (2013), <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue33/mcdonnell.htm> (accessed 1 June 2014). See also Gina Koczberski and George N. Curry, 'Divided communities and contested landscapes: mobility, development and shifting identities in migrant destination sites in Papua New Guinea', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 45:3 (2004), 357–71.

⁴ David Harvey, 'The right to the city', *New Left Review*, 53 (2008), 23.

⁵ Matt Mahon, 'Interview with David Harvey', *The White Review*, <http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-david-harvey/> (accessed 28 July 2015).

⁶ Harvey, 'The right to the city' (2008), 40.

Honiara's historical development from its initial alienation to its present-day urban landscape and how this provided the conditions for exclusion. Next, I discuss strategies people use to access urban land by locating this within a right to the city framework. I conclude with some reflections on the efficacy of this theoretical framework for understanding the contemporary political economy of land in urban Honiara.

RIGHT TO THE CITY, EXCLUSION AND IDENTITY

Lefebvre developed the right to the city framework in the late 1960s. He defined it as 'like a cry and a demand' that is 'formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life'.⁷ Peter Marcuse has explained that the 'cry' is of those experiencing alienation, and the 'demand' is of those experiencing exclusion.⁸ The right to the city in this context refers to the 'rights of all city dwellers to fully enjoy urban life with all its services and advantages'.⁹ It is 'a moral claim founded on fundamental principles of justice, of ethics, of virtue, of the good – not as a legal claim enforceable through a judicial process'.¹⁰ This definition of right to the city has been interpreted, used and applied in writings on urban citizenship, urban social movements, evictions of the urban poor and urban land development policy.¹¹ The right to the city has been used to imagine new notions of citizenship that resist the global forces of capitalism. The traditional notion of citizenship is based on nation-state membership. The new form of citizenship articulated through the right to the city framework 'bases membership on *inhabitation*'.¹² That is, anyone living in the city should be entitled to a right to the city. These new notions of citizenship are 'pursued by social movements that emerge out of the poorer half of the global city ... rooted in the politics of identity and difference'.¹³

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford 1996 [1968]), 158 and 174.

⁸ Peter Marcuse, 'From critical urban theory to the right to the city', *City*, 13:2–3 (2009), 185–97. See also David Harvey, 'The right to the city', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27:4 (2003), 939–41; Eugene J. McCann, 'Space, citizenship, and the right to the city: a brief overview', *GeoJournal*, 58:2 (2002), 77–79; Eugene J. McCann, 'Race, protest, and public space: contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City', *Antipode*, 31:2 (1999), 163–84.

⁹ Edésio Fernandes, 'Constructing the right to the city in Brazil', *Social & Legal Studies*, 16:2 (2007), 208.

¹⁰ Margit Mayer, 'The "right to the city" in the context of shifting mottos of urban social movements', *City*, 13:2–3 (2009), 367.

¹¹ On citizenship, see Mark Purcell, 'Citizenship and the right to the global city: reimagining the capitalist world order', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27:3 (2003), 564–90. On eviction processes, see Gautam Bhan, '"This is no longer the city I once knew". Evictions, the urban poor and the right to the city in millennial Delhi', *Environment and Urbanization*, 21:1 (2009), 127–42. On urban development and land use policy, see Joceli Macedo, 'Urban land policy and new land tenure paradigms: legitimacy vs. legality in Brazilian cities', *Land Use Policy*, 25:2 (2008), 259–70.

¹² Purcell, 'Citizenship and the right to the global city', 577 (emphasis original).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 573.

Social movements are formed and rallied, both in the First World and in the global south, in reaction to struggles against ‘privatisation, speculation, eviction and displacement’.¹⁴ While these social movements use the right to the city as a moral claim, they apply it in different ways. For example, NGOs and advocacy groups use the right to the city as the basis to advocate for social equity and justice in urban development. Other social movements build on the right to the city where inhabitants in cities experience dispossession and exclusion. In this manner, the right to the city is sought through ‘political and social action’ and is ‘an opposition demand, which challenges the claims of the rich and powerful’.¹⁵

In South African cities, and in Durban in particular, the state employed three strategies to eradicate informal urban settlements known as shacks. First, it withdrew services such as water and electricity. Second, it used state violence to prevent the expansion of settlements. Third, it destroyed settlements.¹⁶ The state’s action towards inhabitants in shacks in cities such as Durban has stimulated the emergence of important social movements since 2001. These social movements used ‘road blocks and vote strikes’ as strategies to demand that city residents should ‘make their own decisions about where they would like to live’.¹⁷ The demand of such social movements ‘has been generalised into a collective demand for the right to the city’.¹⁸ For example, in Durban a ‘shack dwellers movement’ emerged in 2005 ‘to pursue a politics of the poor, by and for the poor’, owing to their experiences of exclusion.¹⁹

A more recent example comes from a study by Victoria Stead on Aitarak Laran, an urban settlement located in Dili, the capital city of Timor-Leste. The state issued an eviction order to residents of this settlement in 2010 to move within 30 days so that construction of a new National Library and Culture Centre could proceed.²⁰ This caused residents of Aitarak Laran to assert their claims to urban land on which they have lived for many years. The strategy they used to demand that they be allowed to continue to live on this land was through a ‘language of rights, and appeals based on citizenship and membership of the nation’.²¹ This strategy was pursued with the support of several civil society organisations and resonates with the right to the city as a moral framework for political action and resistance.²²

Although these cases demonstrate that the ‘right to the city’ is a useful theoretical tool for analysing social movements and struggles over urban land, the framework

¹⁴ Mayer, ‘The “right to the city” in the context of shifting mottos’, 367.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard Pithouse, ‘Abahlali baseMjondolo and the struggle for the right to the city in Durban, South Africa’, in Ana Sugranyes and Charlotte Mathivet (eds), *Cities for All: proposals and experiences towards the right to the city* (Santiago 2010), 135.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 136.

²⁰ Victoria Stead, ‘Homeland, territory, property: contesting land, state, and nation in urban Timor-Leste’, *Political Geography*, 45 (2014), 1.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

²² Ibid., 10.

has not been explicitly employed in the analysis of similar struggles in Honiara or in other Pacific Islands towns and cities. Taking as my point of departure Stead's recent and productive application of the framework in the case of Dili, I explore how the right to the city framework can help illuminate the strategies people use to access land in Honiara. I suggest that many lower- and middle-class residents of Honiara city have responded to their ongoing experience of exclusion by employing discursive strategies to access urban land that resonate strongly with Lefebvre's concept.

While the Solomon Islands constitution recognises and protects a citizen's right to property,²³ many lower- and middle-class inhabitants of Honiara struggling for inclusion continue to experience exclusion. Inclusion connotes access to services or land that the city has to offer,²⁴ whereas exclusion means the 'removal of access of people from landscapes'.²⁵ Exclusion encompasses 'regulation, force, the market, and legitimation'.²⁶ In a recent and influential book on land in Southeast Asia, Hall et al. described these four 'powers of exclusion' as follows: regulation concerns the law regulating land access and use, the market concerns the commodification of land, legitimation concerns the moral justification for exclusion, and force concerns acts or threats of violence such as forceful eviction.²⁷ Building on this schema, I consider access 'as the ability to benefit from objects, persons, institutions and symbols'.²⁸

The increasing number of informal settlements suggests that many lower- and middle-class inhabitants in Honiara struggle to gain access to urban land through the 'formal' market and regulatory orders. This reveals a tension between inclusion and exclusion that resonates with the experiences of cities in other parts of world as spaces of inequality and exclusion. How people gain access to land in the face of these multiple exclusions depends on 'social practices and values' shaped by 'indigenous morality and non-market relationships'.²⁹ When framed through identity narratives such as those of 'landowner' and 'citizen', these sorts of relationships determine entitlement and exclusion, which resonates with narratives theorised through a right to the city framework.

Several recent studies from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste highlight the importance of social relationships for access to land and how this contributes to contestations over land.³⁰ These studies focus on settler and landowner

²³ Constitution of Solomon Islands, secs 8 and 9.

²⁴ See Mayer, 'The "right to the city" in the context of shifting mottos'.

²⁵ Siobhan McDonnell, 'Exploring the cultural power of land law in Vanuatu'.

²⁶ See Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch and Tania Murray Li, *Powers of Exclusion: land dilemmas in Southeast Asia* (Singapore 2011), 4–5.

²⁷ Ibid. See also Siobhan McDonnell, 'Exploring the cultural power of land law in Vanuatu'.

²⁸ Jesse C. Ribot and Nancy L. Peluso, 'A theory of access', *Rural Sociology*, 68:2 (2003), 153. See also Pyone M. Thu, 'Access to land and livelihoods in post-conflict Timor-Leste', *Australian Geographer*, 43:2 (2012), 197–214.

²⁹ George N. Curry, Gina Koczberski and John Connell, 'Introduction: enacting modernity in the Pacific?', *Australian Geographer*, 43:2 (2012), 119. See also Thu, 'Access to land and livelihoods'.

³⁰ George N. Curry and Gina Koczberski, 'Finding common ground: relational concepts of land tenure and economy in the oil palm frontier of Papua New Guinea', *Geographical Journal*, 175:2 (2009), 98–111; Thu, 'Access to land and livelihoods'; Allen, 'Land, identity and conflict on

narratives expressed through an ‘ideology of customary landownership’. This ideology portrays landowners as automatic citizens, and the landowner identity is used to assert claims to customary land.³¹ Claims to urban land, in contrast, are ‘inextricably tied to the legitimacy of the state. The state underpins the rights of [settlers] to live within the Honiara town boundary’.³² In this sense, the state plays a critical role in producing and reproducing the categories of landowner and settler. In turn, these categories and identities shape the strategies that people employ to assert their claims to land in Honiara, with lower- and middle-class residents of Honiara using both landowner and settler narratives to advance their case for inclusion.

Honiara as an urban landscape has evolved through a long historical process of land alienation. As Filer has observed, the ‘alienation of people from land’ can transform over time to become ‘alienation of land by people’.³³ This process begins with the categorisation of land as property, and people as landowners. In the next stage, people’s ownership becomes translated into legal titles that can be transferred to others. If the original landowners are involved in transferring these legal titles to others, this counts as a case of the ‘alienation of land by people’, but if it is done without their knowledge or consent, this ‘counts as a case of expropriation’.³⁴ Expropriation is a legal conveyance process that can create dispossession or exclusion if the new owners remove or evict former owners from the land.³⁵ Following Filer, I discuss Honiara’s historical context by examining these processes of alienation and how they have provided the conditions for social exclusion in the expanding urban space.

HONIARA: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Honiara landscape was under customary land tenure during the period of British colonial rule. Under the local rules of custom, the tenure arrangement followed a matrilineal pattern. Individuals and families belonging to the Tandai, Malango and Ghaobata tribal groups owned the Honiara land area and could exercise their rights to this customary land.³⁶ A person’s membership of these tribal groups

Guadalcanal’; Gina Koczberski, George N. Curry and Jesse Anjen, ‘Changing land tenure and informal land markets in the oil palm frontier regions of Papua New Guinea: the challenge for land reform’, *Australian Geographer*, 43:2 (2012), 181–96.

³¹ Colin Filer, ‘Compensation, rent and power in Papua New Guinea’, in Susan Toft (ed.), *Compensation for Resource Development in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1997), 156–89; Colin Filer, ‘Custom, law and ideology in Papua New Guinea’, *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 7:1 (2006), 65–84. See also McDonnell, ‘Exploring the cultural power of land law in Vanuatu’.

³² Matthew G. Allen, ‘Land, identity and conflict on Guadalcanal’, 175.

³³ See Colin Filer, Siobhan McDonnell and Matthew G. Allen, ‘Introduction’, in Siobhan McDonnell, Matthew G. Allen and Colin Filer (eds), *Kastom, Property and Ideology: land transformations in contemporary Melanesia* (Canberra forthcoming).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Colin H. Allan, *Customary Land Tenure in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate: report of the special lands commission* (Honiara 1957).

through birth determined their right of access to this customary land. Other special arrangements such as compensation, marriage, warfare or gifts would also make it possible for a person to access and use this land.³⁷

The alienation of customary land in the Honiara area commenced through a historical series of land transactions. First, in 1886, European traders Thomas Gervin Kelly, John Williams and Thomas Woodhouse purchased approximately 60 square miles of land on the north coast of Guadalcanal for £60 worth of trade goods. This land area included the core of the present city of Honiara from Point Cruz to Tenaru, including Kukum and Lunga. The vendors were Woothia (Uvothea), chief of Lungga; Allea, chief of Nanago; and his son Manungo.³⁸ The traders then sold this land on to Karl Oscar Svensen's Marau Company in 1898.³⁹ In 1907, Svensen and his partners Alex Rabuth and Joe d'Oliverya bought an additional area to the west, bordering on Point Cruz and known as 'Ta-wtu' or Mamara Plantation. William Dumphy, an employee of Svensen, then bought an additional area to the east of Tenaru, named Tenavatu, around 1910.⁴⁰ The language of the land deeds for these transactions was based on Western legal constructions, which categorised land as property, and vendors as landowners.

When the British established Solomon Islands as a protectorate in 1893, the colonial government introduced land laws that recognised and protected the property interests of the traders.⁴¹ The laws also allowed for the conveyancing of the core land area comprising Kukum and Lunga to Levers Pacific Plantation Company (later Levers Solomon Ltd).⁴² Mamara plantation estate remained Svensen's property, and following his death in 1943, his children sold all his property to R.C. Symes Plantation Company. The original landowners were not consulted or involved in these land conveyances, which could also be regarded as instances of further expropriation under Filer's typology. Levers Pacific Plantation Company, as the new owner of the Kukum and Tenavatu estates, controlled much of this landscape and proceeded to exclude the original landowners.

Guadalcanal landowners have drawn upon customary landownership principles in continuing to reassert their rights to the Honiara landscape. This resonates with Filer's suggestion of a 'double movement' of property rights. He has observed that 'steps taken towards the partial or complete alienation of customary rights are continually compensated or counterbalanced by steps taken in the opposite direction,

³⁷ See Gideon Zoleveke, 'Traditional ownership and land policy', in Peter Lamour (ed.), *Land in Solomon Islands* (Suva 1979), 1–9.

³⁸ For a copy of the land deed, see Great Britain, High Commission for Western Pacific Islands, land claims registers 1886–1936, Auckland, University of Auckland Special Collections (hereinafter UASC), WPHC 18/I/2, carton 1227358, register B. See also Clive Moore, 'Honiara: arrival city and Pacific hybrid living space', this issue.

³⁹ Graeme A. Golden, *The Early European Settlers of the Solomon Islands* (Melbourne 1993), 203.

⁴⁰ Ibid. See also Moore, 'Honiara: arrival city'.

⁴¹ The early colonial land laws were the Queen's Regulation No. 4 of 1896 and Queen's Regulation No. 3 of 1900, with subsequent amendments.

⁴² Moore, 'Honiara: arrival city'.

towards the reassertion of such rights'.⁴³ This 'double movement' characterisation provides a useful basis for explaining the ongoing reassertion of claims by Guadalcanal customary landowners to the Honiara landscape.

Landowners first complained to the colonial authorities, claiming that the core land area, known as Mataniko Kukum Estate, where Honiara is situated, was unfairly alienated. Gilchrist Gibbs Alexander, the lands commissioner⁴⁴ appointed in 1919 to investigate previous land alienations in the protectorate, dealt with the Honiara claim.⁴⁵ He recommended a survey at the expense of Levers Company of 'all the land to the east of the Mataniko river' and the titles held by the company. He also recommended that 'the land to the west of the Mataniko river including all coconut trees planted by Levers Pacific Plantation ... revert to the native owners and to be excluded from Levers Pacific Plantation title'.⁴⁶ Alexander resigned towards the end of 1920 and was replaced by Frederick Beaumont Philips to complete the work of the lands commission, referred to as the Philips Commission. Philips reviewed the land claim and confirmed Alexander's recommendation. The secretary of state formalised this recommendation by publishing it in the *Western Pacific High Commission Gazette* in 1924. An indenture in 1926 between the high commissioner for the Western Pacific and Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd of land situated at Kukum and elsewhere was confirmed by a conveyance registered in the Land Registry Office.⁴⁷

After World War II, the colonial government decided to move its administrative headquarters from the small island of Tulagi in the Central District to Honiara on Guadalcanal on at least two grounds. First, the withdrawal of US forces in 1945 had left substantial infrastructure built on alienated land in Honiara, which the colonial administration wished to utilise.⁴⁸ Second, Guadalcanal was identified as having potential land area for agriculture development.⁴⁹ During this period, Honiara was also regarded as having an 'underpopulated and largely alienated hinterland'.⁵⁰

In 1947, Levers Pacific Plantation Ltd sold its freehold Kukum estate to the colonial government for £2,174, a substantial amount compared with when the land

⁴³ Colin Filer, 'The double movement of immovable property rights in Papua New Guinea', *Journal of Pacific History*, 49:1 (2014), 78.

⁴⁴ Alexander resigned towards the end of 1920 after investigating 29 of 55 land claims.

⁴⁵ This is known as Claim 17.

⁴⁶ Resident commissioner, British Solomon Islands, Land claim no. 17, Matanikau, Kookoom Estate. – Transmits a report on the claim by Mr. G.G. Alexander lands commissioner, 24 Jan. 1922, UASC, WPHC 4/IV inwards correspondence, MP series, 1875–1941, MP no. 5/1922 – MP no. 3523/1922, WPHC MP no. 450/1922.

⁴⁷ Levers Plantation Limited Pty Ltd/Lever Solomon Limited archives, legal papers continued from reel 1, 1932 to 1986, available from Canberra, Pacific Manuscript Bureau, PMB 1121, reel 2.

⁴⁸ Morgan Wairiu, 'History of forestry industry in Solomon Islands: the case of Guadalcanal', *Journal of Pacific History*, 42:2 (2007), 236.

⁴⁹ Michael E.P. Bellam, 'The colonial city: Honiara, a Pacific Islands "case study"', *Pacific Viewpoint*, 11:1 (1970), 70.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

was first sold for £60 of trade goods. The conveyance was done without the consent of original landowners, another instance of expropriation. Later, the crown surveyor undertook yet more surveying work during 1953–54, to create the Honiara township boundaries.⁵¹ The state assumed a monopoly over the Honiara landscape, which was divided from north to south into three sections with separate titles. The commissioner of lands applied to the registrar of titles to register the title of government to these sections in accordance with the Land and Titles Ordinance.⁵² This legislation introduced the Torrens title system of land registration, which grants an indefeasibility of title to parties with a registered property interest.

In November 1963, Baranamba Hoai of Mataniko village disputed the commissioner of lands' application to register title to the Honiara landscape. He claimed that the land to the east of the Mataniko River known as Kukum estate belonged to the Habala and Kakau lines of Mataniko, on the grounds that no agreement had been signed between the government and landowners for the sale of this land area, nor had any payment been made.⁵³ The registrar of titles conducted an inquiry on the claim and requested that Hoai and his witnesses give information regarding the reasons and grounds for the claim. Following this inquiry, the registrar rejected Hoai's claim because no reliable evidence supported it. I suggest that Hoai's claim was an instance of a 'cry' and a 'demand' as discussed above. He was influenced to make such claim based on moral justification, but it was bound to fail because the alienation of the Kukum estate was based on a series of land transactions validated through a legal process.

Later the registrar applied to the Western Pacific High Court to make a ruling on his decision and whether he was authorised to register the title of government to the land area under dispute. The court affirmed the registrar's decision and held that Hoai was resurrecting an old claim that had been settled in 1924 and was binding on parties concerned.⁵⁴ It also held that the 'application of government for the registration of the land under dispute should be granted'.⁵⁵ The court's decision legitimised the state's property interest to Honiara by allowing its title to be registered. The court acted 'not only as an arbiter of justice but also as a parallel administrative and executive body'⁵⁶ responsible for perpetuating the alienation of Honiara land from its original landowners. This experience provided the conditions

⁵¹ Lands and Mines Dept B.S.I.P. annual report 1953/54, 1955, UASC, WPHC 16/II/165/3/2. For an outline of the amount of survey work required in and around Honiara, see Duties surveyor B.S.I.P., 1956, UASC, WPHC 16/II/165/3/7.

⁵² This land legislation was enacted in 1959, then amended in 1964. Land and Titles (Amendment) Ordinance No. 22 of 1964. It was later revised and consolidated as the Land and Titles Ordinance 1968.

⁵³ See *In the Matter of the Lands and Titles Ordinance, 1959 and in the Matter of certain questions reserved for consideration by the Court under section 113 (1) thereof*, exhibit A, civil case no. 3 of 1964, High Court of the Western Pacific, Civil Jurisdiction, available from Solomon Islands National Archives.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See also Moore, 'Honiara: arrival city'.

⁵⁵ *In the Matter of the Lands and Titles Ordinance, 1959.*

⁵⁶ Bhan, "'This is no longer the city I once knew'", 134.

for the ongoing struggle by Guadalcanal customary landowners over the Honiara land area and has shaped the kinds of strategies that they have developed to assert their claims.

Honiara became recognised as the capital city of Solomon Islands, established on land purchased by the state through a series of alienations during the 19th and early 20th century. It became the hub for people from various parts of Solomon Islands to claim residency and automatic citizenship. In 1960 the government introduced temporary housing area (THA) schemes on state land within the town boundary to cater for the influx of people to Honiara and to address the issue of squatters and peri-urban growth.⁵⁷ The government allowed people to settle on state land through the grant of a temporary occupancy licence (TOL) and the payment of an annual nominal fee of SI\$5 or \$10.⁵⁸ The issuing of TOLs provided people with some form of legal security to access urban land in order to discourage 'large scale illegal settlement on other urban lands'.⁵⁹ While the TOL system may be read as an attempt by the state to recognise the claims of settlers over urban land they have occupied, it has done little to address the issue of Guadalcanal landowner grievances associated with the alienation of land for Honiara.

By the mid-1980s, 'THAs accommodated 23 per cent of Honiara's population ... those THAs outside the town's boundaries numbered around 15, with an estimated population of 1,308 persons'.⁶⁰ Over the years, however, THAs have become overrun owing to the increase in rural-to-urban migration. The increase in people settling in and around Honiara as a result of the Tension has also contributed to this trend. Many of those migrating to Honiara have an expectation as citizens to share in the benefits that the national capital has to offer. Poor town planning, expensive housing and inefficient administration of urban land have all contributed to the breakdown of the TOL system. In 2006 a household survey funded by AusAID through the Solomon Islands Institutional Strengthening Lands and Administration Project reported that only ten out of 3,000 households had a valid TOL.⁶¹

Today the number of informal settlements has increased to about 30 within the Honiara town boundary, and at least six others have 'encroached on customary land'.⁶² Although on a much smaller scale, the increase in Honiara's informal settlements resonates with Maia's analysis of squatter settlements in Brazil. She has argued that

⁵⁷ Donovan Storey, 'The peri-urban Pacific: from exclusive to inclusive cities', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 44:3 (2003), 269.

⁵⁸ See Milner Tozaka and James Nage, 'Administering squatter settlements in Honiara', in Peter Larmour, Ron Crocombe and Anna Taunga (eds), *Land, People and Government* (Suva 1981), 115–18; Storey, 'The peri-urban Pacific', 269.

⁵⁹ Storey, 'The peri-urban Pacific', 269.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Cited in United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 'Solomon Islands: Honiara urban profile', 2012, 15, <http://unhabitat.org/books/solomon-islands-honiara-urban-profile/> (accessed 13 Oct. 2015).

⁶² Ibid., 8 and 15.

illegal occupation reflects the incapacity of the state to adequately attend to the demand for housing by the poor. Excluded from the official housing programmes and at the margin of the market, the poor adopt their own informal strategies to gain access to land for their housing needs.⁶³

Following Maia's analysis, I suggest that the increase in informal settlements in Honiara is shaped by the ongoing struggle over urban land engaged in by both Guadalcanal landowners and settlers from other islands. These Honiara urban dwellers establish informal settlements as a political reaction justified through a moral lens owing to experiences of alienation and exclusion associated with the processes of urbanisation.

HONIARA: URBAN CONTEXT AND STRATEGIES

Honiara town is located on 22.73 square kilometres of state land and has a current population of approximately 60,000. The land in Honiara is used predominantly for government and commercial offices, private homes, stores, hotels and small-scale industry. With the rapid increase in rural-to-urban migration and population growth, land in Honiara has become a limited resource. As a result, within and around Honiara, many lower- and middle-income earners coming from other parts of the country as well as Guadalcanal landowners continue to struggle to access and acquire urban land.

Several actors involved in the conveyance of urban land engage in speculative dealings. Certain individuals with money, including politicians and government officers associated with the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey, have secured more than one area of land within the Honiara town boundary. Some of these individuals are transferring their property rights to these lands at high market values affordable only to high-income earners and investors. Some officers in the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey are also alleged to have been involved in mismanagement and corrupt land dealings.⁶⁴ This has caused land prices in Honiara to be highly speculative.

The individual market transactions in land are occurring in Honiara at prices that many lower- and middle-class residents of Honiara cannot afford. For example, in 2010 the premier of Guadalcanal expressed concern over Levers Solomon Limited (LSL) subdividing and selling land in the Lunga area at very expensive prices.⁶⁵ He requested that Levers sell land at 'reasonable and affordable prices' to encourage 'individuals and businesses' to invest in Guadalcanal Province.⁶⁶ Although the concerns of the premier were reasonable, no mechanism exists to regulate land markets

⁶³ Maria L. Maia, 'Land use regulations and rights to the city: squatter settlements in Recife, Brazil', *Land Use Policy*, 12:2 (1995), 177.

⁶⁴ See Mike Puia, 'Woman heads top post in lands', *Island Sun*, 31 Jan. 2012.

⁶⁵ Ednal Palmer, 'Land row ... Guadalcanal wants to be part of Lungga land sale', *Solomon Star*, 31 Mar. 2010.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

in Honiara. Hence, Levers, as holders of the fixed-term estate over the Lunga land area, continued to sell land to individuals and investors at a high price.

One of the strategies adopted to claim land in and around Honiara by many lower- and middle-income earners who are either Guadalcanal landowners or settlers is through landowner and settler narratives. These narratives demonstrate how people frame entitlement and exclusion claims within the sort of moral discourse that has been theorised under the rubric of the right to the city.⁶⁷ For example, in a study of land, conflict and settlement in the rural areas east of Honiara, Allen has demonstrated that Guadalcanal landowners' 'claims to land' are 'framed by claims of indigeneity', whereas Malaitan settlers frame their claims in terms of being the 'the workers and builders of the nation'.⁶⁸ These sorts of narratives shaped the strategies and contestations over land in and around Honiara, which in turn contributed to the violent conflict from 1998 to 2000.

Guadalcanal landowners continue to claim through print media and submissions to the government that the alienation of Honiara was unfair and that they were not compensated for being dispossessed of their land. Their claim is part of a list of demands by Indigenous people of Guadalcanal submitted to the central government in 1988 and resubmitted in 1999. These demands included returning alienated land in and around Honiara to landowners, paying rental for Honiara to landowners, and the state enacting legislation to control settler migration to Honiara.⁶⁹ The state's failure to address these demands adequately was central to the formation of the militant group first known as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) but later known as the Isatabu Freedom Fighters (IFF) and then the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). This group was encouraged by the political rhetoric from the Guadalcanal provincial government in relation to the demands for the return of alienated land and compensation. Considerable support occurred throughout Guadalcanal for the movement, and its members were mobilised to evict settlers forcefully.

Guadalcanal landowners use the landowner and indigeneity narrative as a strategy to reassert their claim to the entire Honiara land area. Chief Andrew Kuvu, who represents north Guadalcanal Indigenous tribal groups, reasserts their ownership of the alienated land from Lunga to Tenaru.⁷⁰ Andrew S. Orea, one of the landowners, has alleged that Kuvu was illegally harvesting cocoa and coconut from this land. He also alleged that another landowner, Jemuel Gu, was selling plots of land from within this contested land area.⁷¹ George Vari, another landowner and chairman of the Lunga Tenaru Trust Board, argued against the claim of

⁶⁷ Filer, 'Compensation, rent and power in Papua New Guinea'; Filer, 'Custom, law and ideology in Papua New Guinea'. See also McDonnell, 'Exploring the cultural power of land law in Vanuatu'.

⁶⁸ Matthew G. Allen, 'Land, identity and conflict on Guadalcanal', 172.

⁶⁹ 'Petition by the Indigenous people of Guadalcanal', 1988, <http://www.comofinquiry.gov.sb/claims/Petition%20by%20Indigenous%20People%20of%20Guadalcanal.pdf> (accessed 13 Oct. 2015). See also Alfred Sasako, 'The day and forces that changed Solomon Islands', *Fiji Islands Business*, July 2003, 38–41.

⁷⁰ See 'Landowners caution', *Solomon Star*, 4 July 2011.

⁷¹ A.S. Orea, 'Who is Kuvu?', *Solomon Star*, 15 Dec. 2009.

Guadalcanal provincial leaders that the Lunga land belongs to the Guadalcanal Province and its people, and asserted that Lunga specifically belongs to the Malango people, its tribe and families.⁷²

These claims and counterclaims to the entire Honiara landscape by Guadalcanal landowners are not homogenous. Recourse to the landowner or indigeneity narrative to claim ownership of the Honiara land area would almost certainly fail in law because such claims are best seen as underpinned by moral discourses that cannot be enforced through a judicial process.⁷³ The commissioner of lands holds the perpetual estate title of alienated land in and around Honiara on behalf of the state. Fixed-term estate titles created from this landscape are held by individuals or business entities. For example, LSL holds the fixed-term estate of the land known as the Tenavatu estate, from Lunga to Tenaru, despite Guadalcanal landowners' ongoing demands for the return of alienated land.

The growth of informal settlements in Honiara has been driven by the migration and settlement of people from other islands on state land.⁷⁴ Perceived development and socio-economic opportunities shape the pattern of internal migration, as elsewhere in Melanesia. The concentration of educational, medical and employment opportunities in Honiara and surrounding areas of north Guadalcanal act as 'pull motives' attracting people to Guadalcanal.⁷⁵ People move to Guadalcanal and develop strategies to access plots of land in and around Honiara because of all the opportunities and attractions offered by the town. But as Paul Jones has highlighted, 'many hoping for improved life-styles and some form of utopia invariably end up in despair, as reflected in increasing poverty levels' and the rapid growth of squatter and informal settlements.⁷⁶ The increase in informal settlements continues to put a lot of stress on Guadalcanal landowner resources such as land.

Given the limited supply of urban land and the cost of housing, many Honiara residents, mostly lower- or middle-class Solomon Islanders, find it extremely challenging to access well-located and affordable urban land for residential purposes. Consequently many of these people end up living in informal settlements or build and settle on land to which they have no legal title. As Robert Neuwith has observed based on his experience of living in squatter communities in various developing countries, people build on land they do not own because they are 'desperate for work and a place to live that they can afford'.⁷⁷ This is true for the Honiara urban context,

⁷² George Vari, 'Lunga land ownership', *Solomon Star*, 16 May 2012.

⁷³ Mayer, 'The "right to the city" in the context of shifting mottos', 367.

⁷⁴ See Bellam, 'The colonial city'; Nicholas K. Gagahe, 'The process of internal movement in Solomon Islands: the case of Malaita', *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 15:2 (2000), 53–75; John Connell on behalf of the South Pacific Commission and the International Labour Organisation, 'Migration, employment and development in the South Pacific: country report no. 16: Solomon Islands', 1983, http://staging.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1983/83B09_735_engl.pdf (accessed 13 Oct. 2015).

⁷⁵ Matthew G. Allen, 'Land, identity and conflict on Guadalcanal', 168.

⁷⁶ Jones, 'Searching for a little bit of utopia'.

⁷⁷ Robert Neuwith, 'Squatters and the cities of tomorrow', *City*, 11:1 (2007), 71.

where people become informal settlers out of desperation and despair at not being able to access urban land through formal mechanisms.

Some of the settlers who have recently built on urban land that they do not own justify their claims using the narrative of being displaced during the conflict of 1998–2003. To evict them would result in a further displacement. These settlers access and occupy urban land in groups defined by provincial areas or island affiliation, creating a strong sense of group identity, security and protection.⁷⁸ Guadalcanal landowners or the holders of a legal title to any land occupied by settlers in and around Honiara are likely to find it difficult to enforce their claim through legal means. While the court will issue an eviction order on the basis of legal title, enforcing such an order and getting people to recognise it is likely to prove extremely challenging in practice. It can create tensions around issues of inclusion and exclusion.

The Solomon Islands National Sports Council's (NSC) plan to build a national sports stadium in the Burns Creek area is a case in point. The NSC received the perpetual estate title to land in this area that was occupied by settlers. The *Solomon Star* reported in 2012 that settlers were 'given some time to leave their homes since the NSC took title over the proposed land',⁷⁹ yet settlers continued to reside on the land. With the financial help of their member of parliament (MP), they built a clinic right in the middle of the land that NSC had earmarked for a playing field. This seemingly reassured the settlers, who believed that if an MP funded the building of a clinic on the land, they gained legitimacy in continuing to occupy it. As citizens, the settlers felt they should continue living on this land unless alternative urban land was provided for their relocation. The NSC criticised the MP for failing to contact the Honiara City Council or the minister of lands to find out the status of the land before funding the construction of the clinic building.⁸⁰ In October 2013, the NSC announced that the sport stadium groundwork would not continue because the settlers refused 'to leave the land earmarked for the stadium'.⁸¹ The strategy used by the settlers to continue living on this land resonates with the kind of strategy theorised through the right to the city framework.

Finally, people make claims to access land in and around Honiara based on the notion of vacant spaces as 'waste land'. The idea of waste land originates from colonial government land laws enacted in 1896 and 1900. These land laws made land considered as waste land or unoccupied available for purchase by individuals, investors and business entities,⁸² opening up large areas of land for alienation. Today the term 'waste land' is no longer recognised in law, although some settlers

⁷⁸ Connell and Curtain made similar observations for Port Moresby and Lae. See John Connell and Richard Curtain, 'The political economy of urbanization in Melanesia', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 3:2 (1982), 127.

⁷⁹ 'NSC to put in work plan', *Solomon Star*, 27 June 2012.

⁸⁰ Carlos Aruwafu, 'NSC: Ete's excuse lame', *Solomon Star*, 24 Oct. 2012.

⁸¹ 'NSC powerless', *Solomon Star*, 30 Oct. 2013.

⁸² The Solomons (Land) Regulation No. 4 of 1896 defined waste land as 'land being vacant by reason of the extinction of the original native owners and their descendants'. Following the enactment of the Waste Land Regulation of 1900, as amended by Queen's Regulation No. 1 of 1901,

still use it to assert their claim to vacant spaces in Honiara. They consider 'waste land' as land that is not useful and that the state will not require for development purposes. But the use of waste land to claim 'swampy places, valleys, riverbanks or steep gullies' in Honiara is a basis for future struggle and contestation over urban land.⁸³

CONCLUSION

The discussion in this paper has focused on strategies that Guadalcanal landowners and settlers deploy to assert their rights to urban land owing to ongoing experiences of exclusion. Guadalcanal landowners who assert customary rights over Honiara land area consider this land area home. Settlers are migrants, and many of them have lived most of their lives in and around Honiara. Many settlers live in informal settlements and 'have limited opportunities beyond the town'.⁸⁴ The issue of access to land for residency purposes is shaped by the processes of urbanisation, which creates class struggles. Such class struggles are translated into landowner and settler categories that urban dwellers draw on to assert their rights of access to Honiara urban land.

The strategies that Guadalcanal landowners and settlers use to assert their claims to urban land in Honiara differ in scale. For Guadalcanal landowners, a collective militant group was formed to advance their land claims, and this resulted in the forcible eviction of settlers. Since then, Guadalcanal landowners have constantly reasserted their claims to the entire Honiara land area through political actions such as petitions to the central government. Settlers' claims concern patches of land in and around Honiara that they have occupied or intend to access, despite not having legal title. This difference in scale determines the kinds of strategies used by Guadalcanal landowners and settlers to assert their rights over Honiara urban land. I have suggested that these strategies can be usefully understood in terms of the right to the city, which I interpret as a moral framework for analysing political action in the context of urban exclusion.

The application of the right to the city in a Pacific context is useful because it provides a theoretical basis for discussion of the relationship between moral and legal claims over urban land in Honiara. Central to this discussion is the examination of the history of land alienation in the Honiara area and the ways in which this history has provided the conditions for exclusion. Understanding this history and the strategies that Guadalcanal landowners and settlers have deployed to assert their rights to urban land is crucial for urbanisation policy formulation as Honiara town continues to develop. In my mind, further research is needed on the relationship between 'right to the city' and urbanisation in a Pacific context.

repealed and consolidated by Queen's Regulation No. 2 of 1904, the definition of waste land was amended to mean land that was not owned, cultivated or occupied by any Native.

⁸³ Satish Chand and Charles Yala, 'Informal land systems within urban settlements in Honiara and Port Moresby', *Making Land Work*, 2 vols (Canberra 2008), II, 85–106.

⁸⁴ Gina Koczberski, George N. Curry and John Connell, 'Full circle or spiralling out of control? State violence and the control of urbanisation in Papua New Guinea', *Urban Studies*, 38:11 (2001), 2028.