



The Logic of Dispossession Capitalist Accumulation in Urban Bangladesh

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Abstract

One particular focus of world-systems analysis is to examine the historical trajectory of capitalist transformation in peripheral regions. This paper investigates the capitalist transformation in a specific peripheral area—the country of Bangladesh. In particular, it examines the role of dispossession in transforming an agricultural society into a neoliberal capitalist society by looking at the transformation of Panthapath Street in Dhaka, Bangladesh, since 1947. Building on the existing literature of dispossession, this article proposes an approach that explains the contribution of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. The proposed theory consists of four logics of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, redistributive, and hegemonic. These four logics of dispossession, both individually and dialectically reinforcing one another, work to privatize the commons, proletarianize subsistence laborers, create antagonistic class relations, redistribute wealth upward, and commodify sociopolitical and cultural aspects of urban life. This paper's central argument is that dispossession not only converted an agricultural society into a capitalist society in Bangladesh, but that dispossession continues to reproduce the country's existing capitalist system. This research draws on a wide range of empirical and historical evidence collected from Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2017 and 2018.

Keywords: Peripheral Regions, Dispossession, Urban Transformation, Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession, Logic of Dispossession, Dhaka, Bangladesh



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World-systems analysis has studied the historical journey of the modern capitalist economy since 1450 (Amin 2011; Arrighi 1978; Frank 1978; Wallerstein 1983). One specific focus of world-systems analysis is to understand capitalist transformation in peripheral territories. This paper investigates the historical trend of capitalist transformation in Bangladesh—a peripheral region of global capitalism. More particularly, this paper uses the lens of dispossession to examine Bangladesh's transition from an agrarian society into a capitalist society. This close study of the capitalist transformation in Bangladesh adds to our understanding of the historical path of the capitalist world-economy.

From 1793 to 1947, British colonial rule in India helped create a land ownership system in which the primary land-owning class, the *Zamindars*, controlled the land, while peasants had to pay taxes in order to live on the land and to use it for agriculture and fishing (Alavi 1972; Islam 1979; Kochanek 1993). In 1947, Pakistan (West and East) and India emerged as independent nation-states. In 1950, after the abolition of the *Zamindari* system, these newly independent states and their nascent bourgeoisie had gained access to most of the land. In the mid-1960s, global capitalism, coercive developmental practices, and unplanned urbanization began in Bangladesh (known as East Pakistan from 1947-1971), which dispossessed millions of people in rural and urban centers, including Dhaka (Feldman 2016; Feldman and Geisler 2012; Muhammad 1992; Siddiqui et al. 2010; Zaman 2008). Due to these capitalist interventions and multiple waves of dispossession from 1947 to 2021, Bangladesh transitioned from an agricultural society with over 96 percent of its population living in rural areas into a neoliberal capitalist society with nearly 36 percent of its population living in urban areas. Even more drastic changes have been seen in Dhaka, whose population exploded from 343,740 in 1951 to 21 million in 2021. Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh and is now one of the world's largest megacities.

The Panthapath area, the focus of this study, was a peripheral zone of Dhaka in 1947 and had a traditional¹ agricultural economy. Meanwhile, the original part of Dhaka was a colonial urban settlement with traditional capitalist sectors (Muhammad 1992; Siddiqui et al. 2010; Zaman 2008). In the 43 years from 1947 to 1990, industrialization- and urbanization-induced dispossession transformed Dhaka from a small urban settlement into a modern megacity. During this time, dispossession also transformed the Panthapath area from a rural agricultural region into a mixed economy with both agricultural and capitalist enterprises. Between 1989-1993, a deep canal running through the Panthapath area was filled in and turned into a one mile long street, fundamentally transforming the area. This street project (L.A. case no: 40/89-90 and 40B/89-90) created a new wave of dispossession and completely wiped out all traditional economic sectors in the area (Government of Bangladesh 1993). Between 1947 and 1990, dispossession evicted nearly

¹ Panthapath had a traditional society based on several criteria. First, it was an independent agricultural zone with non-capitalist economic sectors. Next, economic activities in the area included farming, fishing, and domestic work. Third, people lived in community-owned traditional houses called *Tong-Ghar* or non-commercial slums. Finally, people had rural sociopolitical and cultural life. I constructed this narrative of traditional life based on my extensive fieldwork and some archival documents, including the map of 1912-1915. Many examples of this traditional life can be found in all sub-sections of the Findings.

6,000 peasants—about 1,600 families—in the study area and opened up approximately 200 acres of land to development. Since 1990, the area has remained one of the premier urban sites of neoliberal capitalism in Dhaka. While this study focuses on Panthapath Street, Dhaka, this case study reveals the larger pattern of transformation through dispossession, which has been repeated in urban areas throughout Bangladesh and in much of the developing world.

The rich existing literature on historical and contemporary dispossession can be broken down into three distinct frameworks for analyzing dispossession: classical primitive accumulation, ongoing primitive accumulation, and accumulation by dispossession. These debates examine how dispossession contributes to creating, expanding, or reproducing the capitalist mode of production. However, the debates raise several questions that require further investigation. How does dispossession contribute to converting the physical environment into potential capitals? How does dispossession turn subsistence workers into proletarians, non-capitalists into capitalists, and middle-class people into consumers? How does dispossession contribute to redistributing existing surpluses to reproduce the capitalist system? And, how does dispossession contribute to commodifying sociopolitical and cultural aspects of life? Together these questions constitute the overarching research question of this article: How does dispossession contribute to transforming an agricultural society into a capitalist society as well as to expanding or reproducing the existing capitalist system?

To examine the questions posed above, this article proposes an approach to dispossession² that consists of four logics of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, redistributive, and hegemonic. First, transformative logic refers to the role of dispossession in capitalizing the physical environment, including land. Next, the exploitative logic of dispossession denotes a process of creating antagonistic class categories, including proletariats, bourgeoisie, and professionals. Third, the redistributive logic shows how dispossession redistributes existing wealth and surpluses in order to reproduce the capitalist system. Finally, the hegemonic logic describes the role of dispossession in commodifying traditional sociopolitical and cultural aspects of urban life, including politics, the legal system, education, and health. Together these logics constitute the very logic of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. Each logic creates a distinct form of dispossession and each form of dispossession plays a partial role in capitalist accumulation. They then reinforce and interact with one another to create and expand the capitalist mode of production.

This paper draws on the 71-year (1947-2018) history of dispossession of land, labor, and means of subsistence in Panthapath Street in order to explore a framework that explains capitalist accumulation through the four logics of dispossession. In the next section, I will provide a critical review of the relevant literature on dispossession and develop the theoretical approach. Then, I

² In this article, I define dispossession as a political-economic process by which someone loses traditional or modern means of subsistence, while someone else gains those resources and capitalizes on them in order to generate a new cycle of capital. Traditional means of subsistence refers to land, labor power, ground rent, and the natural environment; while modern means of subsistence refers to wage work, profit, stock, interest, and rent. In short, dispossession is a political-economic process that generates capital by capitalizing on traditional and modern forms of material and social relations.

will discuss the methodology and the sources of data for my research. Next, I will closely examine the transformation of Panthapath Street over the last 71 years using the theoretical framework of the four logics of dispossession. Finally, in the discussion section, I will analyze the findings of this paper to highlight its contribution to the broader literature on dispossession.

Theorizing Dispossession

As previously mentioned, existing literature on dispossession can be divided into three distinct theoretical debates about how dispossession does or does not contribute to creating or expanding the capitalist mode of production. This section critically draws on the existing theories to develop the proposed framework of the four logics of dispossession.

Classical Primitive (and Capitalist) Accumulation

Marx (1995) famously offers a systematic analysis of the role of dispossession at the origin of capitalism. He develops the idea of primitive accumulation—“an accumulation not the result of the capitalistic mode of production, but its starting point”—to explain how the sources of potential capital, such as land, labor, money, and raw materials, were invested in the first round of production at the dawn of capitalism (Marx 1995: 507). This primitive accumulation by dispossession created preconditions for capitalism by converting peasants into wageworkers, their means of subsistence into means of production, and social property relations into capitalist relations. Capitalists created the first cycle of profit, the new capital, by exploiting human labor-power that converted means of production into commodities. Marx calls it capitalist accumulation proper—a process of profit generation. Marx’s (1996) formula for the rate of profit ($s \div [c+v]$) shows how this accumulation occurs: profit (r) = [surplus-value (s)]/[constant capital (c), i.e., means of production] + [variable capital (v), i.e., the total cost of labor]. In sum, primitive accumulation is not accumulation proper—the former is the mode of gathering potential capital at the genesis of capitalism, while the latter is the process of converting those potential capitals into commodities to generate profit through labor exploitation.

Marx also shows that “every social process of production is...a process of reproduction” (Marx 1995: 401), and accordingly, capitalist production “produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage laborer” (Marx 1995: 407). Marx argues that this capitalist reproduction occurs in two ways: the concentration of capital, or expanded reproduction, and the centralization of capital. For him, the concentration of capital generates new capital or profit through the successive investment of profit. However, he argues that centralization is a means of capital redistribution, not the creation of new wealth, by which “Capital grows in one place to a huge mass in a single hand, because it has in another place been lost by many” (Marx 1995: 441). This centralization occurs among different groups of capitalists, where one capitalist gains and the other one loses. As such, Marx identifies three types of accumulation processes: primitive accumulation, the concentration of capital, and the centralization of capital. Marx’s ideas have

shaped and reshaped all contemporary debates regarding dispossession. Those debates further can be divided into two groups: ongoing primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession.

Ongoing Primitive Accumulation

One group of scholars argue that primitive accumulation is an ongoing process that contributes to generating or expanding capitalism as well as redistributing existing surpluses (Adnan 2013, 2016; Baird 2011; Borrás and Franco 2012; De Angelis 2001; Hall 2013; Harriss-White 2012; Harvey 2003; Luxemburg 2003; White et al. 2012). Luxemburg (2003) critiques Marx's narrow understanding of primitive accumulation by arguing that the idea of expanded reproduction does not alone contribute to expanding or sustaining capitalism; it is dispossession—driven by imperial force, war, fraud, and plunder—that continuously provides capital (raw materials and labor force) to the production sites. De Angeles (2001) also argues that ongoing primitive accumulation in the North, East, and South follows “phenomenally different but substantially similar” strategies to separate direct producers from their means of subsistence (De Angeles 2001: 20).

Harvey (2003) argues that “All the features of primitive accumulation that Marx mentions have remained powerfully present within capitalism's historical geography up until now” (Harvey 2003: 144). He then argues that “it seems peculiar to call an ongoing process ‘primitive’ or ‘original’” and reconceptualizes the term primitive accumulation as “accumulation by dispossession” (ABD) (Harvey 2003: 145). He shows that dispossession primarily redistributes various forms of surpluses and wealth from the bottom to the top rather than generating new capital. According to Harvey, the major function of ABD is to solve the crises, such as inflation, unemployment, and overaccumulation, created by the expanded reproduction of capital at home. It does so by releasing a set of assets and labor power at very low cost abroad and immediately turning them to profitable use. Though Harvey provides no specific definition of ABD, he discusses four major features of it: (1) corporatization, privatization, and commodification of previously non-commodified assets, (2) predatory, speculative, and fraudulent forms of financialization, (3) the creation, management, and manipulation of financial or debt crises; and (4) state's redistribution of wealth. Similar to Harvey, Sassen (2010, 2014) argues that a predatory form of financialization of the economy shows the “return of primitive accumulation,” (Sassen 2010: 51), which not only extracts surpluses around the globe but also coercively expels people from their homes and livelihoods.

Adnan also argues that “it is self-evident that primitive accumulation must be an ongoing process when capitalist expansion takes place in the context of co-existing non-capitalist sectors” (Adnan 2013: 94). Adnan shows that primitive accumulation not only co-exists with the capitalist sector, but also that it “interacts with the capitalist sector...without being subsumed by it” (Adnan 2015: 41). Adnan accordingly finds a recursive causal relationship between primitive accumulation and capitalism: where primitive accumulation is concurrently seen as cause and consequence of capitalist accumulation.

Accumulation by Dispossession

Another group of scholars argue that (classical) primitive accumulation ended in the pre-history of capitalism—what now exists is merely dispossession (Bin 2016, 2017; Levien 2012, 2015; Zarembka 2002). They also argue that the theoretical assumptions of ongoing primitive accumulation are ambiguous; that they cannot explain the relationship between contemporary dispossession and capitalist accumulation. Zarembka (2002) shows that primitive accumulation is historical, which occurred in the initial stage of capitalism, transforming feudalism into capitalism. However, dispossession is a transhistorical phenomenon, which “can refer either to the transition to capitalism or to the capitalist mode of production proper” (Bin 2016: 78). Levien (2012, 2015) similarly argues that contemporary dispossession is not primitive accumulation because it does not create preconditions for capitalism; capitalism already exists either in a traditional or advanced form. He also critiques Harvey’s idea of ABD by arguing that contemporary dispossession is neither a result of the “functional response to over-accumulation” nor organized by market mechanisms. Levien accordingly develops the theory of the regimes of dispossession: “a form of coercive redistribution that states use to facilitate different forms of accumulation and class interests in different periods” (Levien 2015: 147).

Bin (2016, 2017) contends that classical primitive accumulation and ongoing primitive accumulation lack the precise theoretical insights to understand how exactly dispossession reproduces capitalist social relations. He argues that dispossession should be understood on its own merit; particularly how it relates, or even does not relate, to capitalist accumulation. He thus offers a new theoretical framework by identifying three forms of dispossession. The first type is the redistributive dispossession (RD), which only redistributes already available capital or surpluses, making no contribution to capitalist accumulation. The second form of dispossession is called expanding capitalizing dispossession (ECpD)—a form of dispossession that creates conditions for the expansion of capitalism through capitalization and proletarianization. The third form is expanding commodifying dispossession (ECmD), which expands capitalism through commodification and proletarianization.

The Logic of Dispossession

My research reinforces Levien’s (2012, 2015) and Bin’s (2016, 2017) critique that the theories of classical primitive accumulation and ongoing primitive accumulation lack precise theoretical formulations explaining the relationship between contemporary dispossession and capitalist accumulation. Since Marx confines the necessity of primitive accumulation in the early history of capitalism, he does not find any functions for dispossession in a mature capitalist system. While Harvey (2003) shows that ABD creates new outlets in the global south for the investment of over-accumulated capital, he remains unclear about how exactly dispossession alters an existing mode of production, or how dispossession generates or expands local outlets for reinvestment of potential capitals. Although Levien denies the necessity of Marx’s idea of primitive accumulation and modifies Harvey’s idea of ABD, he confines his theory of dispossession to understanding how Indian states organize dispossession to coercively redistribute wealth from the poor to the rich.

Levien thus focuses on the redistributive function of dispossession, while he underemphasizes how dispossession creates preconditions for capitalism, re-creates capitalists and the middle-class, and expands market relations within sociopolitical and cultural life.

For Adnan (2013), primitive accumulation creates capitalist social relationships, but when capitalism further deploys primitive accumulation for its own expansion, both primitive accumulation and capitalist accumulation maintain a recursive causal relationship between them. However, this causal model ultimately breaks down in a loop of circular reasoning. I seek to clarify which particular aspects of capitalism and primitive accumulation are causally connected, and how they interact and co-exist to expand capitalist accumulation. While Bin's (2016, 2017) approach of identifying three forms of dispossession and analyzing how each contributes, or even does not contribute, to capitalism lays the groundwork for the present paper; I aim to further explore how exactly those forms of dispossession interact and reinforce one other while contributing to altering or expanding an existing mode of production.

My critical engagements with the theories discussed above allow me to offer a new approach to understanding the role of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. This article's proposed theory consists of four logics or types of dispossession: transformative dispossession, exploitative dispossession, redistributive dispossession, and hegemonic dispossession. First, the transformative logic refers to the role of dispossession in capitalizing or converting means of subsistence into means of production. In other words, transformative dispossession works to convert agricultural land, bodies of water, forests, mountains, and open space into outlets for capital investment or into potential capital. This form of dispossession provides constant capital (c) to the production site in order to produce commodities at a lower cost. It can also directly convert nature into a commodity; for example, land as a stock. In all cases, this form of dispossession contributes to capitalist accumulation.

The exploitative logic examines how dispossession reorganizes antagonistic class relations by converting peasants into the working class (i.e., proletarianization); non-capitalists, such as politicians, landlords, and bureaucrats, into capitalists (i.e., bourgeoisification); and the middle class into consumers and professionals (i.e., the formation of the middle class). All groups are interconnected by the overarching logic of exploitation: the production of surplus value by the workers, the management of surplus value by capitalists and professionals (middle class), the realization of surplus value through consumption by consumers, and the extraction of surplus value by capitalists. While exploitation of labor power in order to generate surplus value is an economic process and dispossession is a sociopolitical force, they interact with each other to create the very logic of exploitative dispossession. This dispossession contributes to creating preconditions for capitalism by providing workers, that is, variable capital (v), to the production sites. Other forms of proletarianization (such as self-employed or semi-proletariats and reserved army) also contribute to capitalist accumulation by raising the profit rate by suppressing the costs of variable capital (c) (see Bin 2016). Also, exploitative dispossession transformed many non-capitalists into capitalists by making land, labor, and other resources accessible to them. Finally, once proletarianization and bourgeoisification created capitalist relationships and produced consumer

goods and professional positions, exploitative dispossession creates a vast middle class—the professional and consumer class, whose participation converts commodities into surplus value.

The redistributive logic shows how dispossession redistributes existing wealth and surpluses from capitalists and other propertied classes to other capitalists. Scholars call this the centralization of capital. Although in this case dispossession does not contribute to proletarianization, capitalization, or commodification, it increases the wealth of a group of capitalists and reproduces or reinforces the existing capitalist system. Under this logic, capitalists are the primary group who experience dispossession. Redistributive dispossession can be both direct—loss of wealth due to visible capitalist intervention; and it can be indirect—loss of assets due to predatory or discriminatory property laws and regulations. Also, it can be either absolute—losing everything due to dispossession; or it can be relative—partially losing property or income due to dispossession. Lastly, the hegemonic logic examines the role of dispossession in commodifying traditional sociopolitical and cultural aspects of life. This form of dispossession contributes to expanding the consumer market into all spheres of social life, including politics, the legal system, education, and health. This dispossession also contributes to capitalist accumulation by increasing the profit margin for capitalists.

While each form of dispossession plays a partial role in capitalist accumulation, together these forms of dispossession constitute the very logic of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. In this context, all forms of dispossession co-exist and dialectically reinforce one another to create, reproduce, or expand the capitalist mode of production. In the discussion section, the article further elaborates on this interactive logic of dispossession in capitalist accumulation.

Methodology and Data Sources

This paper uses empirical evidence collected in 2017-2018 from Panthapath Street, Dhaka, Bangladesh, including life histories, surveys, and interviews. It also uses archival and historical documents. I used purposive sampling to select Panthapath Street as my field site because it is a typical place to observe how an agrarian society transformed into an urban capitalist society. Moreover, evidence of land dispossession, various forms of capitalist development, and socio-spatial inequality is plentiful. In addition, I have personally lived near and studied this area for nearly two decades.

I collected 41 life histories of the dispossessed poor, all with a monthly family income of USD70-USD230. Among these respondents, 24 (58 percent) are men and 17 (42 percent) are women, with ages ranging from 31 to 73 years. Their occupations are as follows: domestic workers (31 percent), day laborers (22 percent), Rickshaw-cycle pullers (15 percent), factory workers (12 percent), street vendors (seven percent), restaurant/hotel workers (six percent), gatekeepers (three percent), street cleaners (two percent), and other (two percent). I talked with these respondents³ to learn about their past experiences as independent farmers, what they observed during the political-

³ As per IRB guidelines, all respondents' names in this paper are kept anonymous to protect human subjects.

economic and socio-spatial transformation of Panthapath over the decades, and how they were coping with forced evictions, violence, poverty, and slum life.

This paper also uses a land use survey of 1,007 plots (1,003 structures and four open plots) located in the 200-meter buffer zone on both sides of Panthapath Street. I recruited five research assistants to collect information from 1,007 commercial and residential buildings and plots of the study area. We spoke with the owner, the senior resident, or the security guard of each house/building. Our discussions were based on an 18-item questionnaire that covered issues including the landownership history, conflicts over landownership, and the illegal expropriation of land.

The article also uses a short survey of 147 slums located in the 500-meter buffer zone along both sides of Panthapath Street. These are privately-owned commercial slums, housing seven to 400 working-class families in each slum. I administered a questionnaire with 26 questions to better understand how the informal capitalist sector emerged through corrupt land dealings, illegal land occupation, and an informal/illegal housing system. I also conducted 20 individual interviews with businesspersons, landlords, politicians, land officers, scholars, housewives, professionals, and human rights activists, aged 37-76 years old. We discussed various issues, including the political economy of land dispossession, development, and everyday life in Panthapath. Finally, I looked at archival and historical documents, including remote sensing maps of Google Earth (1985-2018), land records (1912-2018), and GIS maps from government offices.

Findings: Dispossession and Capitalist Accumulation in Dhaka

The Transformative Logic of Dispossession

The transformative logic of dispossession examines how traditional physical surroundings are transformed into a commercially organized settlement-space. The three elements of the physical environment that have been capitalized in Panthapath, Dhaka are land, physical structures, and the natural environment. These components have become constant capital (c) for capitalists. Acquiring land by illegal means and brute force has been the dominant mode of land acquisition by capitalists in Dhaka since 1947. According to Muhammad (1992), capitalists emerged in Dhaka during 1947-1971 by grabbing land that was mostly owned by either *Zamindars* or the state. Shortly after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, “the country’s richest person grabbed 3,000 acres of land in Dhaka and its outskirts” (Muhammad 1992: 107). Also, over 50 real estate companies, some of them owned by mostly retired army officers, acquired hundreds of acres of public land in Dhaka during the military regime in order to build commercial enterprises (Shafi 2008).

Between 1947 and 1971, political, business, and military elites evicted some 300 peasant families in Panthapath to build various kinds of commercial spaces, including manufacturing factories and real estate companies. They further evicted some 400 peasant families and many landlords from 1971 to 1990. The construction of Panthapath Street in 1989-1993 also dispossessed some 900 families and many small enterprises. Together, the state and various elite groups evicted nearly 6,000 peasants and tore down a dozen old factories and hundreds of small

independent businesses in this area. Dispossession opened approximately 200 acres of land in Panthapath for commercial use, which ultimately created a vibrant formal and informal economic sector.

Currently the formal sector is comprised of more than 700 real estate and private residential buildings, dozens of private hospitals, Asia's 8th largest shopping mall with over 350,000 shoppers each week, banks, universities, furniture marts, private slums, and other commercial spaces (Land Use Survey 2017-2018). Because of these new capitalist enterprises, land prices in the Panthapath/Dhanmondi area increased 2,900 percent from 1947 to 1966, 12,000 percent from 1966 to 1983, 1,222 percent from 1983 to 2005, and 809 percent from 2002 to 2010 (Islam et al. 2007; Shakil 2016). This steep increase in land values has driven out all of the less profitable businesses and the old housing system. The informal sector includes 147 commercial slum houses and numerous small enterprises (Slum Survey 2017-2018). While the formal sector generated USD114 million (yearly) by renting out 1,003 apartment buildings and commercial spaces, the informal sector generated USD2 million by renting out 147 slum houses. These features of formal and informal economic sectors refer to the capitalization of means of subsistence and material resources. In sum, both economic sectors have made Panthapath Street into a premier site of neoliberal capitalism within Dhaka.

Table 1 shows the transformation or capitalization of the physical environment in Panthapath between 1985 and 2018.⁴ The built-up area increased from 56.3 percent to 94.1 percent of the total land area between 1985 and 2018; vegetation and low-lying land decreased from 33.6 percent to 2.7 percent; open space decreased from 7.7 percent to 2.3 percent; and bodies of water decreased from 2.3 percent to 0.9 percent. From 1985 to 2018, the percentage of buildings described as "typical urban housing structures" increased from 48.6 percent to 92 percent. Tin-shed and wall with tin-shed housing structures decreased from 24.7 percent and 21.2 percent of the housing stock respectively in 1985, to only 1.6 and 5.8 percent of such traditional housing remaining in 2018. Capitalist interventions have been able to convert the physical environment into capital (or "settlement space"), a process that Gottdiener describes as an "urban bulldozer" (Gottdiener 1985: 6).

⁴ I take this period (1985-2018) to illustrate the most significant trend of transformation of the physical environment in Panthapath.

Table 1. The Transformation of Land, Nature and Physical Structures in Panthapath, 1985-2018

Year	Built-up area	Vegetation and low-lying land	Open space	Water body	Total
1985	91.57 (56.3 %)	54.75 (33.6%)	12.58 (7.7%)	3.81 (2.3%)	162.71 (100%)
2000	126.72 (77.9%)	25.63 (15.8%)	7.43 (4.6%)	2.93 (1.8%)	162.71 (100%)
2015	146.51 (90.0%)	9.74 (6.0%)	4.65 (2.9%)	1.81 (1.1%)	162.71 (100%)
2018	153.23 (94.1%)	4.33 (2.7%)	3.71 (2.3%)	1.44 (0.9%)	162.71 (100%)
<i>The Transformation within the Built-up Area (in Percentage)</i>					
Built-up area	Tin-shed	Wall with tin-shed	Building	Others	Total
1985	24.7	21.2	48.6	5.5	100
2018	1.6	5.8	92.0	0.6	100

Sources: Land Use Survey, 2017-2018; The United States Geological Survey, 1985-2018

Figure 1 below, drawn from 26 different maps collected from government land offices, depicts the socio-spatial features (1912-1915) of the northern side of the canal (within the 200-meter buffer zone) and partial information of the southern side⁵ of the canal. As mentioned earlier, this canal, shown in blue, disappeared in 1990 from the study area when the government built the one mile long Panthapath Street. Figure 1 also shows that over a hundred years ago, less than fifty percent of the area was occupied by traditional residential structures. The rest of the land was uninhabited, consisting of gardens, agricultural fields, and low-lying land (they are shown in green color in the map). However, the 2017-2018 map of this area (Figure 2) fully reveals the remarkable transformation of the physical environment. While there were less than 100 structures on the northern side of the 1912-1915 map, the 2017-2018 map reveals nearly 550 commercial structures on the same side of the street and 403 structures on the southern side.

In addition to the data on changes in land use discussed above, qualitative evidence further illustrates the role of dispossession in transforming land and livelihoods in the region. Kamran Alamgir, 67, a businessman and politician, was born and brought up in Panthapath. Mr. Alamgir started a real estate business in 1991, converting his land (housing 30 peasant families at the time) into two eight-storied apartment buildings with two units on each floor. He told me that in order to clear space for the two apartment complexes, “I forced those peasants to relocate and built a separate 50-room slum house for them to rent.” Later, Mr. Alamgir created five more businesses, including a garment outlet, a restaurant, a jewelry shop, and a cell phone showroom in the Panthapath area, and a sweatshop factory in the Farmgate area that employed 300 workers. He told

⁵ Many maps of the southern side of the canal are not available in government land offices.

me that the “Panthapath Street project created huge opportunities for me to access land in order to develop new businesses.”

Figure 1. Socio-spatial Geography (1912-1915) of the Northern Side of the Canal

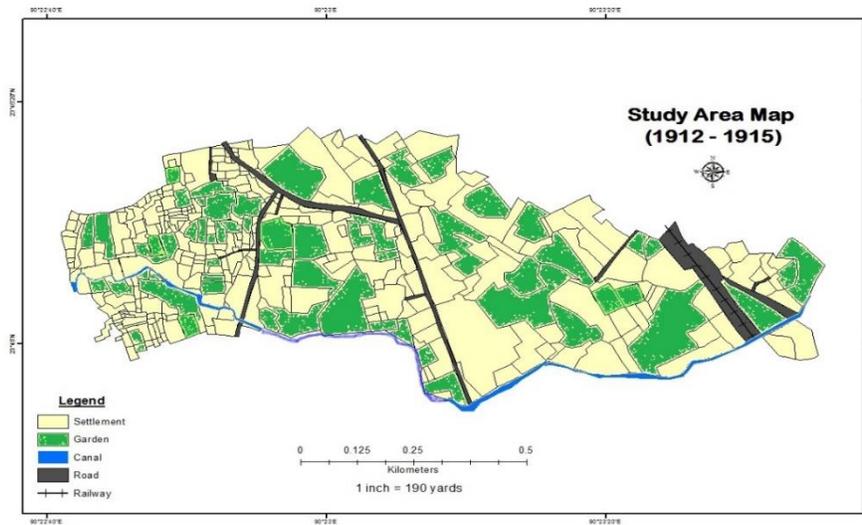
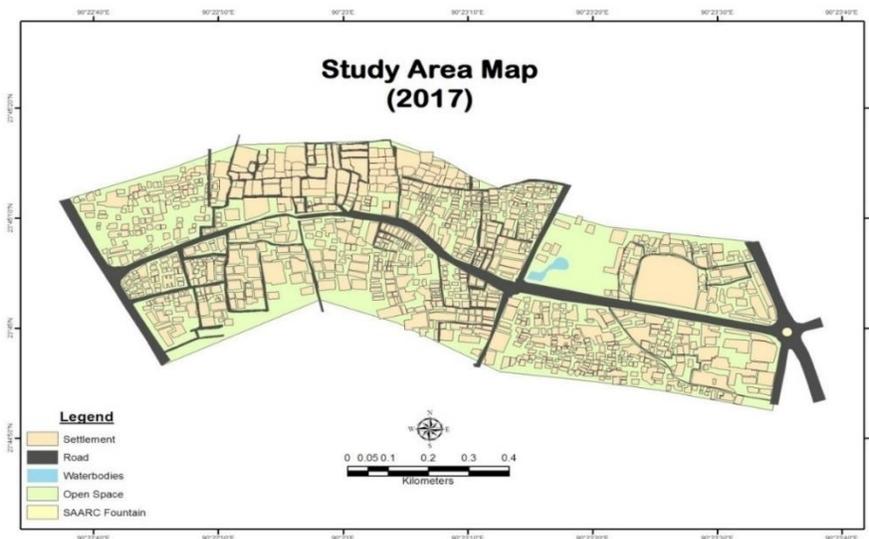


Figure 2. The Trend of the Capitalization of the Physical Environment in Panthapath, 2017-2018



The Exploitative Logic of Dispossession

As I discussed in the theory section, exploitative dispossession plays a crucial role in capitalist accumulation by reorganizing antagonistic class relations, transforming peasants into the working

class, non-capitalists into capitalists, and the middle-class into consumers and professionals. The following discussion is divided into these three sub-sections.

Proletarianization. Life histories, interviews, and the slum survey show that political, economic, bureaucratic, and military elites evicted approximately 6,000 peasants from their land, homes, and livelihoods in the study area between 1947 and 1990. Dispossession transformed these peasants into proletariats or wageworkers (56 percent), semi-proletariats/self-employed (32 percent), reserved army or unemployed (nine percent), and lumpen proletariats or thugs (three percent). Those who became typical wageworkers after the eviction directly contributed to capital generation by becoming variable capital (v). However, those who became non-wageworkers also contributed to increasing the profit rate by suppressing the wage rate in the labor market (see Bin 2016). Within the formal sector, the dispossessed became wageworkers in shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and factories. Bashundhara shopping mall in Panthapath, for example, recruited 763 full-time and 767 part-time employees.⁶ Of them, nearly 20 percent were workers who came from the dispossessed families. The businesses housed in that mall also employed 10,672 workers, with more than 30 percent coming from various slums, many of them (approximately 200) from Panthapath.

The dispossessed who became wageworkers and non-wageworkers in the informal sector in Panthapath were mostly day laborers, service workers, and the self-employed. These groups directly and indirectly increased capital by engaging themselves in the market relations. Though nine percent of dispossessed people were found to be unemployed in 1990 in Panthapath, I recently found only four percent of respondents who were functionally unemployed. This group of people contributed to increasing the profit rate by pushing down the cost of variable capital through competition in the labor market. Finally, the dispossessed who became lumpen proletariats worked for political leaders, gang leaders, and drug dealers. They made no direct contribution to the capitalist accumulation.

Bourgeoisification. Dispossession in Bangladesh not only contributed to the diverse process of proletarianization but also to bourgeoisification. During the 1960s, bureaucrats, military, and politicians in East Pakistan were joining the capitalist class by grabbing land and purchasing traditional businesses. After the independence in 1971, a new wave of bourgeoisification started. During this time, dispossession converted non-capitalists, including bureaucrats, military officers, politicians, bankers, land officers, and thugs into capitalists by making land and resources available to them. Accordingly, while less than 200 industrial units were found in Dhaka during the late-1960s, industrial units increased to 1,580 in 1971 and 26,446 in 1991 (Habibullah 2015). In Panthapath the number of capitalist entities increased dramatically after independence, going from nearly 30 in 1971 to 200 in the late 1980s. In 2018, the land use survey found 1,004 capitalist

⁶ Source: Fieldwork, Bashundhara City, July 24, 2017.

entities in Panthapath. The explosion in businesses and capitalists over the last 50 years contributed to the dramatic accumulation of capital in the area.

The following example shows how dispossession helped a politician become a capitalist. Shafique Sardar, 71, a politician-turned-businessman, told me that he was a politician up until 1975. Then, he became a businessman after a bureaucrat helped him get a 20-decimal unit of land where 40-plus peasant families had been living for generations. He first established a private clinic on that land, and then in 2001, he built two ten-storied buildings to convert that clinic into a hospital. He told me that, “I would never have become a hospital owner if I did not get that land.” His two sons and a daughter are also engaged in this business and he employs nearly 150 workers and 60 professionals in his hospital.

Middle Class Formation. Dispossession also contributed to the formation of the middle class in Panthapath. The creation of new businesses, jobs, and housing facilities by capitalists attracted members of the middle class to come to Panthapath to live and work. In this case, the middle class contributed to capitalist accumulation by working for the capitalists—adding value by becoming variable capital (v) and by buying commodities—the realization of surplus value. While Panthapath was mostly occupied by landlords and peasants between 1947 and 1971, the middle class began to outnumber those groups after independence in 1971. Among 26,147 people in Panthapath in 2018, elites⁷ constitute 3.82 percent, and the working class constitutes 21.38 percent; however, the middle class makes up the vast majority of the population—74.8 percent. The story of Tomal Karmokar, 57, a manager of a chain shop in Panthapath, exemplifies how job opportunities and attractive housing facilities in Panthapath brought middle-class families to the area. He told me that he came to Panthapath in the mid-1990s when a real estate company offered him an apartment at a great price. He added that “every month dozens of new families moved to his neighborhood to live and work nearby.”

The Redistributive Logic of Dispossession

Competition and credit, according to Marx (1995), are two major market mechanisms for the centralization or redistribution of capital. However, neoliberal capitalism has introduced some novel mechanisms for the centralization of capital, including financialization of the economy, privatization and commodification of public assets, and manipulation of stock prices and fiscal policies (Bin 2017; Harvey 2003). The centralization of capital in Bangladesh includes all of these mechanisms. The land use survey documents the transition along both sides of Panthapath Street from traditional businesses and industrial factories to financial sites, especially after the mid-1990s. In 2018, the distribution of such financial sites in Panthapath were as follows. Together the left (the southern side) and the right (the northern side) frontal sites of the street housed 20 private

⁷ Considering the realties in Panthapath, I define an elite as someone who earns over TK20 *lacs* or USD23,000 annually, the middle-class as people who earn between TK3 *lacs* or USD3,500 and TK20 *lacs*, and a working-class person as someone who earns less than TK3 *lacs*.

residential buildings, 20 apartment buildings, 10 private hospitals, four private universities, five shopping malls, five restaurants, nine furniture marts, two hotels, two banks, seven transport offices, and 29 other business institutions. This financialization of capital, the process of replacing the profit-bearing capital under industrial capitalism with interest-bearing capital under financial capitalism, is the major form of the centralization or redistribution of capital in Panthapath. Due to this transformation, many industrialists and small entrepreneurs lost their businesses, many of them became financial capitalists and some of them became professionals, waged workers, and migrant workers abroad. This redistribution of capital did not generate new capital but reinforced the existing capitalist system in Panthapath: one group of capitalists lost their capital, but another group of capitalists gained it instead.

The following story, told by Bulbul Ahmed, 57, a former assistant manager of a well-known marketing firm in Panthapath, further illustrates how capital is redistributed and the capitalist system is reproduced. Mr. Ahmed had worked for this firm for 23 years. Sattar Khan, a pseudonym, 70, owns this business. Mr. Ahmed told me that, during the 1960s, Mr. Khan began his business with a glass factory, which was built on a plot of land that he expropriated from a businessman by using fake legal documents. This is an example of indirect and relative redistributive dispossession because that businessman lost a portion of his land without his prior knowledge, but he managed to save another parcel of land that housed a traditional textile factory. During the early 1980s, Mr. Khan built a textile factory employing over 200 workers. During the mid-1990s, he closed both of his factories and started a real estate business by building three eight-storied apartment buildings on the same land where those factories were located. Later, he outcompeted a real estate developer to buy over 30 decimals of land containing two factories and one commercial slum. He replaced those businesses with financial institutions, including a bank, two supply outlets, a marketing firm, and a money exchange outlet. This is an example of absolute and direct redistributive dispossession because the capitalist who sold his 30 decimals of land containing two factories and the slum to Mr. Khan ended up completely losing all of his businesses.

Next, Mr. Khan bought three traditional furniture shops and transformed them into one of the largest furniture marts in the area. During this time, the former shop owners went out of business. This is another case of absolute and direct redistributive dispossession. Lastly, Mr. Khan bought four small popular restaurants and converted them into a modern food court, using his political connections to overcome resistance to the sale from the owners of those restaurants. This is the third example of absolute and direct redistributive dispossession organized by Mr. Khan. Overall, this dispossession contributed to redistributing existing wealth from various capitalists to Mr. Khan as well as to expanding his businesses and profit volume, further reinforcing the capitalist system in Panthapath.

The Hegemonic Logic of Dispossession

The hegemonic logic explains the role of dispossession in the commodification of (1) political and legal space, including power relations, clientelist party politics, and legal system, and (2) sociocultural space, including family, education, healthcare and culture.

Political and Legal Space. Only 13 percent of lawmakers were businesspersons in the first parliament of Bangladesh in 1973, over 72 percent of them were in the last parliament (2014-2019), and now over 61 percent of them are in the current parliament (The Daily Star 2019a). This is a peculiar nexus of the state and market in a country of the global south. Bangladesh entered into a neoliberal market regime within a few years of independence, driven by the nexus of the state and market, in which political power gave access to land, labor, and means of production through dispossession. My fieldwork reveals that dispossession provided land and other resources to turn some lawmakers into capitalists in Panthapath during the construction of the street. Zaman Bhuyan, 61, a politician-turned capitalist, informed me that “over the last four decades, at least five lawmakers that he knew illegally gained access to land in Panthapath and became capitalists.” He also told me that one retired lawmaker still has five distinct capitalist enterprises in the area. According to a recent report, two politicians-turned-businesspersons who are closely connected with a lawmaker in the current parliament of Bangladesh, grabbed more than 940 acres (300 hectares) of land by dispossessing peasants and less powerful landlords (The Economist 2020).

Dispossession also contributed to bringing clientelist party politics under market relations by creating conflict for gaining control over land, river, forest, and mountains. Below is a case study which shows how politically organized dispossession has become a vital mode of accumulating power and capital and how it has influenced law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Khalid Hosen, 72, a former ward commissioner who served three terms between 1986 and 2005, told me that “during the first few years of Independence [in 1971], most political leaders were honest and concerned about the wellbeing of their voters...[but] from 1974, political leaders began to focus more on making money through politics.” According to Mr. Hosen, most of the lawmakers in Bangladesh’s parliament were able to increase their wealth by using political power (see also The Daily Star 2019a). Mr. Hosen told me that he obtained some property using his political power during his second and third terms. He rationalized his action by saying that “I had to invest a lot of money in order to secure the nomination from the party...so I had no choice other than to make money from my participation in the political system.” He also told me that he owned two residential buildings and three commercial buildings in Panthapath. He built these properties on a 20 decimal plot of land that he illegally acquired from a minority family with the help of a lawmaker. Mr. Hosen also mentioned that he lost an eight decimal plot of land when a powerful lawmaker in the opposition party illegally expropriated that land. Though Mr. Hosen filed a court case to get back his land, the lawmaker won the case by bribing the police, land officers, and a judicial magistrate.

My interview with Momin Haque, 64, a slum dweller in Panthapath, also reveals how dispossession created a space for the poor to participate in the clientelist politics attached to the market economy. He explained that “we used to sell our votes because we would be threatened by thugs and politicians who are involved in the slum housing business...though candidates from different parties used to compete with one another to buy our votes, we would vote for the candidates suggested by our slumlords.” He further told me that slum dwellers often experience forced evictions when they do not vote for the politically powerful person in the area.

Dispossession also transformed government agencies into profit generating machines. During the 1980s and 1990s, state agencies grabbed nearly 1,300 acres of land in Dhaka (Shafi 2008). They used this land to create numerous business institutions and industries, including real estate, textile and apparel, cement, hotels, banks, restaurants, and shopping malls.

Sociocultural Space. The slum survey shows that nearly 20 percent of the working class families in Panthapath lived as nuclear families and 80 percent of them as extended families in the 1970s. However, during the construction of the street, forced evictions have turned the extended families into nuclear families. This type of family structure increased the demand for commercial slum housing. While the poor (5,591 persons or 21.38 percent of the total population) in Panthapath had their own houses, called *Tong Ghar*, some four to five decades ago, now each and every family lives in a rented house. The poor are now dispersed among the 147 slums in the Panthapath area. A family with three to five persons in these slums lives in a 729 (9x9x9) cubic-foot room and pays USD45-USD70 monthly, which is over 60 percent of their total income. The annual income of slum owners from these houses is approximately USD2 million.

Dispossession also contributed to extending the educational market in Panthapath. Many of the new apartments built on confiscated land included commercial coaching centers and private elementary or high schools. A great number of students from middle-class and working-class families in Panthapath use these services. Dispossession was further responsible for the commodification of cultural aspects and the healthcare system in Panthapath. Below are two such examples. Previously, Dhaka didn't have any western-style restaurants. Now fast food restaurants and food courts with foreign cuisines have flooded the city. The Daily Star (2019b) claimed that "Dhaka's culinary scene is getting more and more cosmopolitan." Panthapath now has over 50 different places to eat and the Bashundhara mega mall alone houses more than 100 food courts. This is a huge change from 1990, when Panthapath didn't have a single modern restaurant.

Finally, a report published by Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) in 2018 shows that 63.3 percent of the country's households use private healthcare services at 15,698 facilities. This is a huge increase from 1982, when there were only 33 private clinics in the whole country (Bay 2018). TIB claims that the private healthcare sector has turned "the facilities into business outlets." Dispossession contributed much of the land to build these hospitals and clinics throughout Dhaka (Shafi 2008; Siddiqui et. al 2010). After the 1990, more than 12 private hospitals and clinics appeared on different sites in the Panthapath area where the poor had lived and worked for generations. The residents who were previously using traditional healthcare facilities in Panthapath are now choosing modern medical services available at newly created healthcare facilities. The above interventions directly or indirectly contributed to capitalist accumulation in Panthapath by expanding market relations to every corner of urban social life.

Discussion

This section discusses how extant theories of dispossession and the theoretical arguments of this paper interact with the findings presented above. The paper's central argument is that each form of dispossession (transformative, exploitative, redistributive, and hegemonic) plays a partial role in capitalist accumulation, and also dialectically reinforces one another to first convert an agricultural society into a capitalist society, and then to continue reproducing the existing capitalist system. For example, proletarianization, a function of exploitative dispossession, alone cannot contribute anything to capitalist accumulation unless capitalization, a task of transformative dispossession, interacts with it. This means that a group of people, for example, capitalists and professionals, need to be in the production site to employ and control labor power (v) to convert means of subsistence into means of production (capitalization [c]) in order to create surplus value (s) through labor exploitation. At this point, these two forms of dispossession contribute to producing potential capitals, commodities, and surplus values. Their interactions also create and recreate wagedworkers, capitalists, and professionals.

Examples of interactive relationships between transformative dispossession and exploitative dispossession include the conversion of 1,600 evicted peasants into wagedworkers, the creation of 1,003 capitalist enterprises on the 200 acres of expropriated land, and the earning of USD114 million (yearly) of house-rent from 1,003 apartment buildings and commercial spaces and USD2 million of house-rent from 147 slum houses. Other similar evidence from Panthapath also includes the increase of the built-up area from 56.3 percent to 94.1 percent during 1985-2018, the transformation of non-capitalists into capitalists, and the conversion of middle class (74.8 percent of the total population in Panthapath) and working class (21.38 percent) into consumers. Some case studies also provided similar evidence. For example, Mr. Alamgir's story showed how he developed six new businesses on grabbed land and created nearly 500 jobs. Mr. Sardar's case study also showed how a politician turned into a businessman and created multiple businesses and 210 jobs. Lastly, Mr. Bhuyan's story demonstrated how five lawmakers turned into capitalists when they illegally gained access to land in Panthapath.

The hegemonic logic of dispossession interacts with the other three forms of dispossession to realize surplus value and increase profit margins. Accordingly, we see no such real accumulation unless and until surplus value (s) comes into existence after the selling and buying of commodities at the sites of exchange (e.g., the market), and after consuming the products at the sites of reproduction (e.g., the family). Here hegemonic dispossession plays a crucial role in expanding market relations to political, legal, social, and cultural spheres of life. The concentration of over 5,000 poor into 147 slum houses shows how dispossession not only evicted peasants to open land for capital investment (transformative dispossession), not only converted them into workers and modern consumers (exploitative dispossession), but also into tenants (hegemonic dispossession) in commercial slums. Moreover, the story of Mr. Haque, a slum dweller, reveals how hegemonic dispossession created a space for the poor to participate in the clientelist politics attached to the market economy. Mr. Karmokar's story also shows how hegemonic dispossession created space for the middle class to live and work in Panthapath. Mr. Hosen's story further demonstrates how

hegemonic dispossession commodified political and legal spaces of urban life. The last interactive role of hegemonic dispossession is that it commodified traditional social life in Panthapath. For example, some four decades ago, there were not any modern restaurants in the area, but now one mega mall alone houses more than 100 food courts.

Redistributive dispossession under mature capitalism contributes to amassing a great amount of wealth, for example, capital or surplus value, in the hands of a few capitalists by dispossessing capitalists. This form of dispossession interacts with other types of dispossession to accelerate the processes of producing and realizing surplus value as well as increasing the amount of re-investment of already accumulated capital. This dispossession also coexists with other forms of dispossession to empower capitalists to access land, laborers, and raw materials from both agricultural and capitalist sectors. The land use survey showed how redistributive dispossession created over 115 financial sites on both frontal sides of the street by replacing industrial factories and numerous traditional capitalist enterprises. This intervention also increased the land value 800-12,000 percent in the area between 1960-2018. The story of Mr. Khan, narrated by Mr. Ahmed, exemplified how redistributive dispossession has four dimensions (absolute vs. relative and direct vs. indirect) and how it interacted with other forms of dispossession to reinforce the capitalist system in Panthapath.

The analyses above show that an interactive relationship is present among various kinds of dispossession, thus contributing to capitalist accumulation or to the reproduction of capitalism. As discussed in the theory section, Bin's (2016, 2017) three types of dispossession or Adnan's (2013, 2015) idea of "reverse causal relation" between primitive accumulation and capitalism both fall short of understanding this dialectical interaction. While Marx (1995) finds no such function of dispossession under the condition of mature capitalism, this article has shown how dispossession is simultaneously present at the dawn of capitalism and during the developed stage of capitalism. Although the logic of redistributive dispossession is built on Marx's idea of the centralization of capital and Bin's idea of redistributive dispossession, this paper has reformulated the core assumptions of redistributive dispossession by adding absolute and relative as well as direct and indirect dimensions of dispossession.

Harvey's (2003) accumulation by dispossession explains how dispossession plays a crucial role in redistributing existing surpluses under neoliberal capitalism. However, he provides an inadequate explanation of how exactly dispossession creates outlets in developing countries. This article has shown how dispossession created such outlets in Dhaka, for example, two vibrant formal and informal capitalist sectors in Panthapath. The analysis of the case of Panthapath Street, Dhaka also has challenged Levien's (2015) theory of regimes of dispossession by focusing on the interactive functions of dispossession in creating a capitalist sector and reinforcing the existing capitalist system.

Conclusion

When western capitalism (core regions) took a neoliberal turn during the late 1960s to solve the problems of stagflation, deindustrialization, and overaccumulation, the traditional structure of capitalism fundamentally transformed throughout the global south (peripheral regions). Western capitalism then explored new sources of raw materials and cheap labor across the global south and created new outlets for capital investments. This new wave of capitalist intervention in peripheral regions dispossessed millions of peasants, created a vast number of proletariats and reserve armies, exploited that dispossessed labor power, and transformed traditional socio-economic systems. Bangladesh is one of the most prominent examples of such neoliberal globalization, where dispossession has played a central role in capitalist accumulation (Harvey 2003; Smith 2016).

This paper examines the role of dispossession in capitalist accumulation in urban Bangladesh by drawing on the 71-year (1947-2018) post-colonial history of dispossession. It uses a wide range of empirical and secondary evidence collected from Panthapath and Dhaka. The article critically builds on the extant theories of dispossession to propose a new approach to understanding the contribution of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. This new approach is necessary because existing theories of dispossession are unable to fully explain how various kinds of dispossession interact not only to alter a mode of production, for example, from a traditional agrarian society to a capitalist society, but to also expand or reproduce the capitalist system in Bangladesh. This theory consists of four logics or types of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, redistributive, and hegemonic. Transformative dispossession shows how land and physical environment transform into capital; exploitative dispossession examines the antagonistic class relations; redistributive dispossession investigates how capitalists increase their wealth by dispossessing other capitalists; and hegemonic dispossession shows the way capitalist interventions commodify sociocultural and political aspects of life. Each form of dispossession plays a partial role in capitalist accumulation. Together they create the capitalist relation or reproduce the existing capitalist system by interacting with one another.

This research highlights the central role of dispossession in transforming Panthapath from an agricultural society into a full-fledged capitalist, urban society within 43 years (1947-1990). The research also emphasizes the never-ending role of redistributive dispossession—the process of continuous land expropriation, even by capitalists from other capitalists (by coercion or market competition). Finally, this paper reimagines the relationship between dispossession and capitalist accumulation as a dialectical relationship in which four types of dispossession interact to generate capital or reproduce the capitalist system.

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