

From Dispossession to Surplus Production:  
A Theory of Capitalist Accumulation in Neoliberal Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Dispossession has been playing a central role in capitalist accumulation over the last four-hundred-year history of modern capitalism. This dissertation theorizes how dispossession contributes to producing and reproducing the capitalist mode of production in Bangladesh. To do so, the dissertation empirically examines three interrelated aspects of dispossession in its three analytical chapters. First, it explores how the state and the market work in tandem to organize and control dispossession while grabbing land and expelling peasants from their places. Next, it investigates how dispossession contributes to providing ‘potential capitals,’ such as grabbed land and dispossessed peasants, to the production sites to be converted into ‘constant capital’ and ‘variable capital’ and to creating antagonistic class relations. Finally, it explores how market and non-market actors control those dispossessed peasants-turned-workers inside and outside factories to produce surplus values in order to reproduce the capitalist system locally and globally. These three interactive components of dispossession show three successive phases of capitalist accumulation: land-grabbing by divorcing independent producers from their livelihoods (the initial phase), converting land into capital, peasants into wage workers, and non-capitalists into capitalists (the intermediate phase), and controlling and exploiting those wage workers to produce surpluses or a cycle of new capital (the final phase). This dissertation accordingly advances a full-scale theory of dispossession in its concluding chapter by examining how the starting, intermediate, and ending points of dispossession contribute to capitalist accumulation. The dissertation draws on a wide range of empirical evidence collected from Panthapath, Dhaka, Bangladesh. These include 77 life histories, 50 interviews, a land-use survey of 1,007 structures, and a short survey of 147 slums. It also uses various historical records and archival documents. The three major findings of this dissertation are as follows. First, the dissertation shows that the state acts as a class to organize land grabs, often working in tandem with the private sector, but also in direct competition with the market. Not only does the state monopolize extra-economic means to grab land, but the market also often gains access to extra-economic means. Next, the dissertation shows that dispossession works to privatize the commons, proletarianize subsistence labor, create antagonistic class relations, and redistribute wealth upward. Finally, the dissertation identifies a new regime of labor control, called social despotism, that dominates and exploits workers in factories to produce surpluses. I conclude this study with policy recommendations designed to address the various dimensions of structural injustice described in this dissertation.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This dissertation theorizes how dispossession contributes to producing and reproducing the capitalist mode of production in Bangladesh. In its three analytical chapters, the dissertation empirically examines three interrelated aspects of dispossession. First, it explores how the state and the market work in tandem to organize and control dispossession while grabbing land and expelling peasants from their places. Next, it investigates how dispossession contributes to providing grabbed land and dispossessed peasants to the production sites and to creating various class hierarchies. Finally, it explores how market and non-market actors control peasants-turned-workers inside and outside factories to produce surplus values in order to reproduce the capitalist system. These three interactive components of dispossession show three successive phases of capitalist accumulation: land-grabbing by evicting peasants from their places (phase 1), converting land into capital, peasants into wage workers, and non-capitalists into capitalists (phase 2), and exploiting wage workers to produce surpluses (phase 3). This dissertation accordingly advances a full-scale theory of dispossession in its concluding chapter by examining how the starting, intermediate, and ending points of dispossession contribute to capitalist accumulation. The dissertation draws on a wide range of empirical evidence collected from Panthapath, Dhaka, Bangladesh. These include 77 life histories, 50 interviews, a land-use survey of 1,007 structures, and a short survey of 147 slums. It also uses various historical records and archival documents. Some of the major findings of this dissertation are as follows. First, the dissertation shows that the state acts as a class to organize land grabs, often working in tandem with the private sector, but also in direct competition with the market. Not only does the state monopolize extra-economic means to grab land, but the market also often gains access to extra-economic means. Next, the dissertation shows that dispossession works to privatize the commons, proletarianize subsistence labor, create exploitative class relations, and redistribute wealth upward. Finally, the dissertation identifies a new regime of labor control, called social despotism, that oppresses and exploits workers in factories to produce surpluses.

## DEDICATION

For my parents:

Renuka Mondal, my mother, the most intelligent woman that I know, who taught me how to work hard and thrive through the best or worst moments of life.

Budhimanta Mondal, my father, a successful businessman and a politician, who taught me how capitalism and politics shape and reshape human life at the grassroots level. The best lesson that I learned from him: *Karma e Dharma*.

For my teachers:

All teachers at home and abroad, who taught me, enlightened me, challenged my thoughts, broadened my understanding, and developed my critical perspective.

For my respondents:

All the respondents that I interviewed for this dissertation, whose thoughts and experiences generated many ideas for this study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Noble Laureate Albert Camus once said: “You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.” Camus, however, does not tell us how our work gives us meaning in our everyday life. We do not need to look for meaning—we continuously re-create meaning in our personal and social life. To do so, however, one cannot create meaning through their own work unless other social actors participate in this interactive world (as Symbolic Interactionism teaches us). This dissertation, as a work, somehow makes such a case: I could not have done this work without the help of some special social actors; I could not have created any meaning (if I did so at all!) in this work without the help of those people. The committee members of my dissertation constitute the prime group of such social actors: David Brunisma, Nicholas Copeland, John Ryan, and Dale Wimberley. I found them as critical scholar-activists, reputed teachers, amazing mentors, and wonderful human beings. While I was walking by his office, Professor Neal King once told me: “you got some fine scholars on your committee.”

Dr. Brunisma and Dr. Copeland led my dissertation committee as co-chairs. It was one of the best decisions in my graduate life at Virginia Tech to have two critical scholars as chairs. They simply made this project possible by guiding every step of my work: from defining the project to defending the proposal, from designing the fieldwork to processing data, and from writing chapters to writing articles to submit to journals. They know very well, at least in my case, how to help a student who needs not only intellectual support but also moral/emotional support to stay on track and be productive. Not only did they seriously care about my work but also guide and support me to produce a work that I wanted to do. Many of Dr. Brunisma and Dr. Copeland’s advice significantly contributed to shaping and reshaping my existing intellectual capabilities. There are no words to fully acknowledge their contributions to this work and to my life.

Many students in my cohort knew that I had the intention of moving to another school to complete my PhD. However, once I realized that Dr. Brunisma and Dr. Copeland met all the criteria that I wanted to see in a prospective mentor of my work, I immediately stopped planning to move. Those criteria include being nationally/internally reputed scholar-activists who are advocates of the global justice movement as well as being critical to neoliberal capitalism and to social injustice. I came to know Dr. Brunisma well once I took a class with him in fall 2015. I then decided that I need a mentor like him: one who matched with all of the above criteria as well as made a significant contribution to the field of his research. In addition to those criteria, I found Dr. Brunisma to be a mentor who cares about his students, cares about his students’ work and careers, and who responds to students’ emails within the shortest possible time.

I came to know Dr. Copeland while I was assisting him as a GTA for his three undergraduate classes. As I was attending his classes, I realized how a professor can be both a serious scholar in his field while also being super critical to an unjust social world. His classes provided me with some ideas to understand the nature of global capitalism—the focus of my work. While I was walking with him from a class and talking about my ignorance about American academia, he asked me: Do you think you are “a piece of clay” that needs to be molded to make something good? I instantly agreed with him. Now I feel confident that my mentors have reshaped my intellectual world, which I will continue to nurture as I set out to produce good scholarship. Dr. Brunisma and Dr. Copeland: I am so grateful to you both.

Dr. Wimberley’s class (The Global Division of Labor) significantly helped me to define my dissertation proposal, construct questionnaires for the fieldwork, understand the lives of

workers living at the bottom of the global value chain, and frame my idea for Chapter Four. He was the first person from my committee who insisted that I select Panthapath Street as my field (instead of selecting slums to study) in order to understand capitalism globally, locally, and historically. Understanding how this one-mile long street transitioned from canal to a premier urban site of neoliberal capitalism has been invaluable to my intellectual development. Thanks Dr. Wimberley, for all these contributions. Finally, Dr. Ryan also provided me with some very important ideas, helping me define the project and narrow down the focus. When I met him at his office one day, he told me that I would be famous in my field if I could do this project properly. His expectations motivated me to work hard and produce this work. Thanks for your contributions to this project, Dr. Ryan.

Going well beyond my dissertation committee, my work has been benefitted from the help of many professors at Virginia Tech, with whom I took classes, including Dr. Smith, Dr. Harrison, Dr. Ovink, and Dr. Precoda. Thank you for teaching me some classes which were directly connected to understand global capitalism and global inequality. Dr. Smith introduced a new world of critical scholarship to me while I took two classes with her: how global capitalism functions and survives by re-producing space and how Marxist/Socialist feminist scholars understand capitalism and gender inequality. I am grateful to Dr. Smith. The theoretical part of my project is tremendously benefitted by the readings I have done while taking prelim exams in two areas: The Global Political Economy and Inequality. Thanks Dr. Calasanti, Dr. Cook, Dr. Ellington, and Dr. Wimberley for helping me to understand not only global capitalism but also capitalism and social inequalities in American society. I am also thankful to Dr. Ted Fuller due to his assistance for preparing the IRB materials.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 1995, P. 418

The capitalist world order has produced two grand political philosophies—colonialism and postcolonialism and two dominant economic philosophies—imperialism and neoliberalism. Together these four philosophies of global capitalism have arguably made a significant contribution to the advancement of human civilization. In order to accumulate capital and reproduce the capitalist system, however, capitalistic civilizations have regularized violence, genocide, slave trade, war, famine, plundering, imprisonment, and dispossession in every society across time and space. Of these means of accumulation, dispossession has attracted the serious attention of a diverse group of scholars globally over the last two hundred years. Many world-renowned scholars, from Marx to Lenin, and from Luxemburg to Harvey, showed that dispossession has the power to generate resources for the bourgeoisie and reproduce the capitalist system. Marx (1995) identified dispossession as one of the central means of acquiring potential capitals that gave birth modern capitalism in Western Europe. These potential capitals, including land, labor power, and raw materials, were extracted by capitalists by dispossessing millions of peasants from their land and livelihoods (i.e., the “English Enclosure Movement”). Marx calls this type of accumulation the “primitive accumulation.”

Both Lenin (1963) and Luxemburg (2003) showed that dispossession—driven by imperial force, war, and plunder—contributed to expand capitalism by continuously providing land, raw materials and labor force to the production sites. By critically drawing on Marx and Luxemburg, Harvey (2003, 2004, 2005, 2006) revolutionized the field of dispossession by developing the idea of “accumulation by dispossession.” Since the 1970s, accumulation by dispossession, according to Harvey, has remained a central mode of global capitalist accumulation. This accumulation process involves predatory, speculative, and fraudulent forms of financialization, corporatization, privatization, and commodification.

Why has the discussion of dispossession remained central to most global political economists? A possible answer to this question within the Bangladeshi example can be found in three spatiotemporal factors regarding dispossession: global, regional and national. The structure of global capitalism fundamentally reshaped in the last half of the twentieth century due to anti-colonial wars, the civil rights movement, the Cold War, technological revolution, neoliberal economic policy, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The 9/11 terrorist attack, the global war on terror, the 2007-08 economic recession, forced dispossession, global migration, and authoritarian populism further reconfigured the spaces of capitalism in the 21st century. When western capitalism took a neoliberal turn during the 1970s to solve the problems of stagflation, deindustrialization, and overaccumulation, the traditional structure of capitalism fundamentally transformed throughout the Global South. Global capitalism then explored new sources of raw materials and cheap labor across the Global South and created new

outlets for capital investments. It then began to extract raw materials and mineral resources, dispossessed millions of peasants, created a vast number of proletariats and reserve armies, exploited that dispossessed labor power, and transformed the traditional economic system of nations. Bangladesh is one of the most prominent examples of such neoliberal globalization (Harvey, 2003: 134, 2005: 76; Smith, 2016: 9-21), where dispossession has played a central role in capitalist accumulation. Chapter four of this dissertation examines the global connection to Bangladeshi capital.

Next is the regional aspect of dispossession. The Indian Subcontinent, including present day Bangladesh, experienced nearly two hundred years (1757-1947) of British colonial plundering and dispossession (Adnan, 2015, 2016; Marx, 1853a, 1853b; Mohsin, 1997). The transformation of land ownership from common to private (e.g. *Zamindari* system) created large indigo and tea plantations instead of cropland, destroyed the major urban industrial bases (e.g. handloom and other cottage industries), and initiated large destructive projects such as mining operations, large dams, and thousands of miles of railroads. Together these factors dispossessed millions of peasants from their homes and livelihoods and created over a dozen artificial famines that killed some 17 million people (Lohman and Thompson, 2012; Marx, 1853a, 1853b). Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, also experienced 24 years (1947-1971) of internal colonial rule. During this time, the West Pakistani state and capitalists dispossessed thousands of East Pakistani peasants and minority communities from their land to build factories and create businesses (Feldman, 2016; Muhammad, 1992). Chapter Two of this dissertation partly focuses on this reality: dispossession and accumulation under internal colonial regime.

The national aspect of capitalist accumulation by dispossession began right after the independence of Bangladesh. The massive decolonization process during the 1940s-1980s created over 93 new countries in the world. The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 was an outcome of that decolonization process (Raghavan, 2013). During the war between West Pakistan and East Pakistan in 1971, more than 10 million people were displaced from their homes (Dasgupta, 2016; Raghavan, 2013). After independence, the socialist-democratic government nationalized all industries. However, Bangladesh moved from its nationalization project, that lasted for four years (1971-1975), to the neoliberal market economy in 1975. It was at this point that the IMF and World Bank began intervening in Bangladesh's finances and politics (Muhammad, 1992). The army then established control over the state and ruled up to 1990. The military regime privatized more than 90 percent of state-owned businesses within a decade, creating a model of neoliberal economy (Kochanek, 1993, 1996: 711; Muhammad, 1992). Though Bangladesh officially adopted and implemented neoliberal policy during the military regime (1975-1990), it gained momentum when Bangladesh entered into an authoritarian form of democracy in 1991. Since then, the Bangladeshi state has remained extraordinarily supportive of the market while also demonstrating its authoritarian neoliberal character. According to a report from the Pew Research Center (2014), Bangladesh is the second most pro-free market country in the world. It also has the world's second-largest apparel industry. Also, though only 13 percent of lawmakers were businesspersons in the first parliament of Bangladesh in 1973, over 72 percent of them were in the previous parliament and over 61 percent of them are in the current parliament (The Daily Star, 2019a).

Due to the above transformation at the national level, massive evidence of dispossession is found in scholarly works. Adnan and Dastidar (2011: xvii-xxxii) show that between the 1970s and 2010 hundreds of thousands of indigenous people experienced dispossession due to land acquisition by security forces, civil administrators, political leaders, commercial NGOs, business corporations, the Forest Department, plantation leaseholders, land dealers, settlers, and other stakeholders. Evidence also shows that millions of people lost their land and livelihoods due to forced mining for gas and coal, constructions of large dams, power plantations, housing, and industrial zones, as well as climate change (Banks et al., 2011; Feldman and Geisler, 2012; Siddiki et al., 1990). Other numerous projects regarding gentrification, suburbanization, beatification, modernization of agriculture and microfinance programs also dispossessed thousands of people in rural and urban areas (Banks et al., 2011; Baten et al., 2011; COHRE & ACHR, 2001; Hossain, 2011; Nazrul, 2003; Nawaz, 2004; Paul, 2006; Pryer, 2003; Siddiki et al., 1990). The reduction of more than one million hectares of arable land in peri-urban and rural Bangladesh between 1990 and 2010 provides significant evidence of such dispossession (Feldman and Geisler, 2012).

Bangladeshi cities have been receiving 300,000-400,000 new poor migrants annually since the 2000s (Mohit, 2012). Due to development projects and climate change, the poor have continuously been migrating to the cities (Center for Urban Studies, 2006; Islam and Shamsuddoha, 2017). The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) shows a nearly 61 percent increase of slum dwellers nationally over a 17-year period, i.e., 1.39 million in 1997 to 2.23 million in 2014. BBS (2014) found 3,394 slums, 293,883 slum



households, and over 1.1 million slum dwellers in Dhaka. The Center for Urban Studies (2006), a Dhaka-based research organization, shows that slums in Dhaka occupy only 5.1 percent of the city's total land (1,542 hectares), but 37.4 percent of the entire city population reside in that territory (Mohit, 2012: 615). One can find a long history of dispossession in Dhaka (the prime city of Bangladesh) in the existing literature (COHRE & ACHR, 2001; Guhthakurata and Begum, 2005; Nawaz, 2004; Nazrul, 2003; Paul, 2006; Siddiki et al., 2010). Since 1975, the state and private capitalist interventions evicted more than 150 large slums from major areas of Dhaka (Nawaz, 2004). Chapters Two, Three, and Four of this dissertation focus on such urban dispossession and its contribution to capitalist accumulation.

Under a unified theoretical framework, this dissertation examines global, regional, and national aspects of dispossession and capitalist accumulation in the context of Bangladesh. The central research question of the dissertation is how not only dispossession contributes to the transformation of an agricultural society to capitalist society, but it also expands or reproduces the capitalist mode of production. In particular, the dissertation examines how the state and capitalists organized and controlled urban dispossession in Bangladesh to transform an agricultural society into a capitalist society. It also investigates the roles of dispossession in developing a home-grown urban neoliberal economic sector and creating various social classes including proletariats. Finally, the dissertation explores how foreign capital, in collaboration with the national capital, exploits those peasants-turned-workers to produce surplus value and reproduce the capitalist system.

### *Theoretical Perspective(s)*

This dissertation critically engages two distinct but relevant sets of literature: scholarly works that focus on (i) dispossession and capitalist accumulation (for Chapters 2 and 3), and (ii) labor control and labor exploitation that produces surplus values (for Chapter 4). If dispossession is the first stage of a full circuit of capitalist accumulation process, then surplus production by labor exploitation is the last stage of such an accumulation process. And thus, these two different types of literature.

Existing theories of capital accumulation by dispossession as well as labor exploitation are extraordinarily rich and voluminous. One group of scholars theorized how dispossession plays a historical role in capitalist accumulation across time and space (Adnan, 2013, 2015, 2016; Akram-Lodhi, 2012; Araghi, 2009; Bin, 2016, 2017; Borrás and Franco, 2010; De Angelis, 2004; Feldman, 2016; Feldman and Geisler, 2012; Hall, 2013; Harriss-White, 2006; Harvey, 2003; Levien, 2012, 2015; Marx, 1995; Moyo et al., 2012; Sassen, 2014; Walker, 2008; White et al., 2012; Zarembka, 2002; Zoomers, 2010). Another group of theorists examined how workers are managed and controlled under various regimes of labor control in the factory to produce surplus value. These regimes include market despotism, ideological hegemony, managerial hegemony, hegemonic despotism, structural violence, and hybrid regimes (Anner, 2015; Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979, 1983, 1985; Cho, 2001; Copeland, 2019; Degiuli and Kollmeyer, 2007; Farmer, 2005; Galtung, 1969; Gramsci, 1971; Gupta, 2012; Harvey, 2005, Knights and Willmott, 1990; Lee, 1996; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Marx, 1995; Thompson, 1983; Wardell, 1990; Zhang, 2015).

I critically engage many of the ideas from the above-mentioned theories. However, these two types of scholarship lack a relevant theoretical framework to understand the starting, intermediate and ending points of dispossession and its contributions to capitalist accumulation. This dissertation theorizes how dispossession contributes to producing and reproducing the capitalist mode of production in Bangladesh. To do so, the dissertation empirically examines three interrelated aspects of dispossession. First, it examines how the state and the market work in tandem to organize and control dispossession while grabbing land and expelling peasants from their places. Next, it investigates how dispossession contributes to providing ‘potential capitals,’ such as grabbed land and dispossessed peasants, to the production sites to be converted into ‘constant capital’ and ‘variable capital.’ It also examines how dispossession contributes to creating capitalist class and middle class. Finally, it explores how social actors (market and non-market) control those peasants-turned-workers inside and outside factory to produce surplus values and reproduce the capitalist system. These three interactive components of dispossession show three successive phases of capitalist accumulation: land-grabbing by divorcing independent producers from their livelihoods (the initial phase), converting that land into capital, peasants into wageworkers, and non-capitalists into capitalists (the intermediate phase), and controlling and exploiting those wageworkers to produce surpluses (the final phase). This dissertation accordingly advances a full-scale theory of dispossession by examining how the starting, intermediate, and ending points of dispossession contribute to capitalist accumulation. The concluding chapter (Chapter 5) further illustrates the theoretical contribution of this dissertation.

### *Methodology and Evidence*

The dissertation uses a wide range of empirical evidence collected from Panthapath, Dhaka, Bangladesh. These include 77 life histories, 50 interviews, a land use survey of 1,007 structures, and a short survey of 147 slums. I collected this data from 2017 to 2018. The dissertation also uses various historical records and archival documents. Of the total number of life histories and interviews, I used a particular set of interviews and life histories for each analytical chapter. Because of this, relevant and specific methodological information can be found in each chapter.

Panthapath is a one-mile-long street and a premier urban site of Dhaka, Bangladesh (Figure 1). The study area had an agricultural economy up until 1947 and in 1989 a deep canal was transformed into Panthapath street. Since 1990, the Panthapath area has become one of the major sites of neoliberal capitalism in Dhaka. Between 1947 and 1990, elites evicted some 700 peasant families in Panthapath to build various kinds of manufacturing factories, real estate companies, and other commercial spaces. The construction of Panthapath street in 1989-1993 also dispossessed nearly 900 families and many small enterprises. Together, the state and elites evicted nearly 6,000 peasants (nearly 1,600 families), a dozen old factories, and hundreds of small independent businesses in this area. In total, dispossession opened up approximately 200 acres of land in Panthapath for commercial activities.

I collected all of the life histories and many of the interviews from people who have been living in private slums located in the 500-meter buffer zone on both sides of

Panthapath street since 1947. I also conducted a survey of 147 slums located in the same area. However, the land use survey of 1,007 structures was based on the 200-meter buffer zone on both sides of the same street (Figure 2). And interviews with professionals were collected from different places of Dhaka, including Panthapath.

I collected archival and historical documents from national and international media reports and Dhaka-based urban research centers such as the Center for Urban Studies. I collected numerous land records (1912-2018) and GIS maps from various government offices, including the office of Land Records and Surveys, the land office of Dhanmondi Thana, the District Commissioner office of Dhaka, offices of two city corporations, and RAJUK office. Finally, I collected remote sensing maps of Google Earth (1985-2018) from the website of the United States Geological Survey to explore the trend of transformation of physical structures in Panthapath area. These images are analyzed by the software called ERDAS Imagine (version 2010).

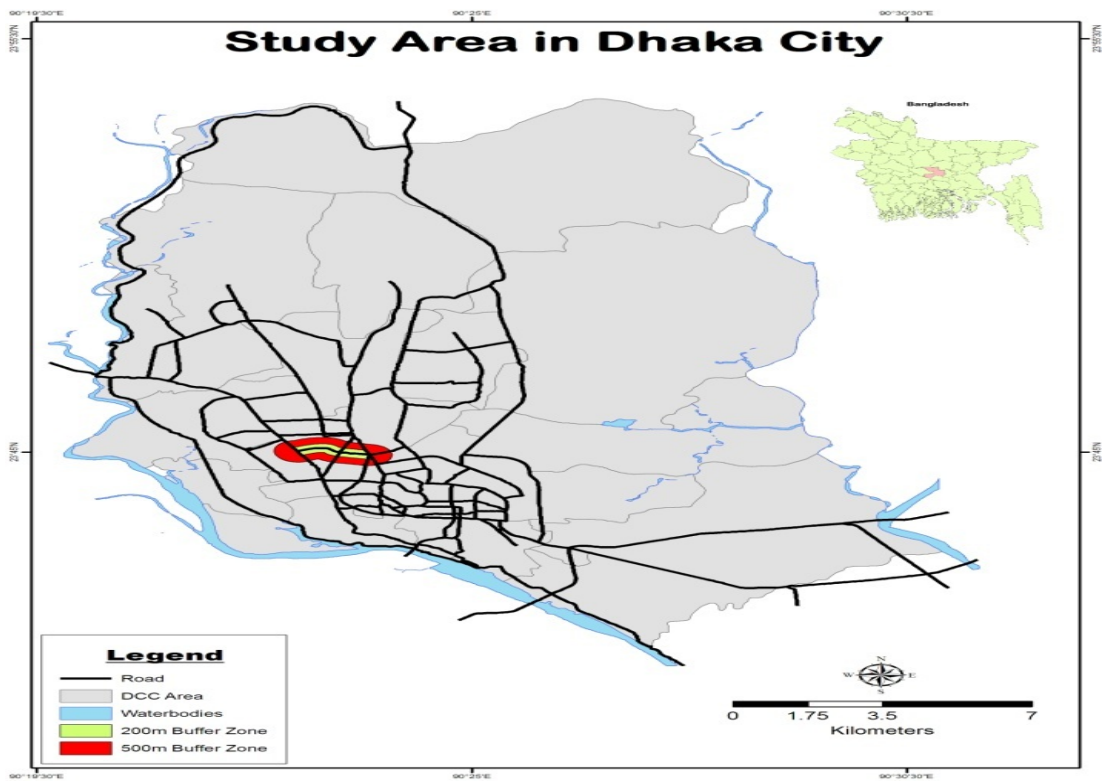


Figure 1. Panthapath Street, Dhaka, Bangladesh

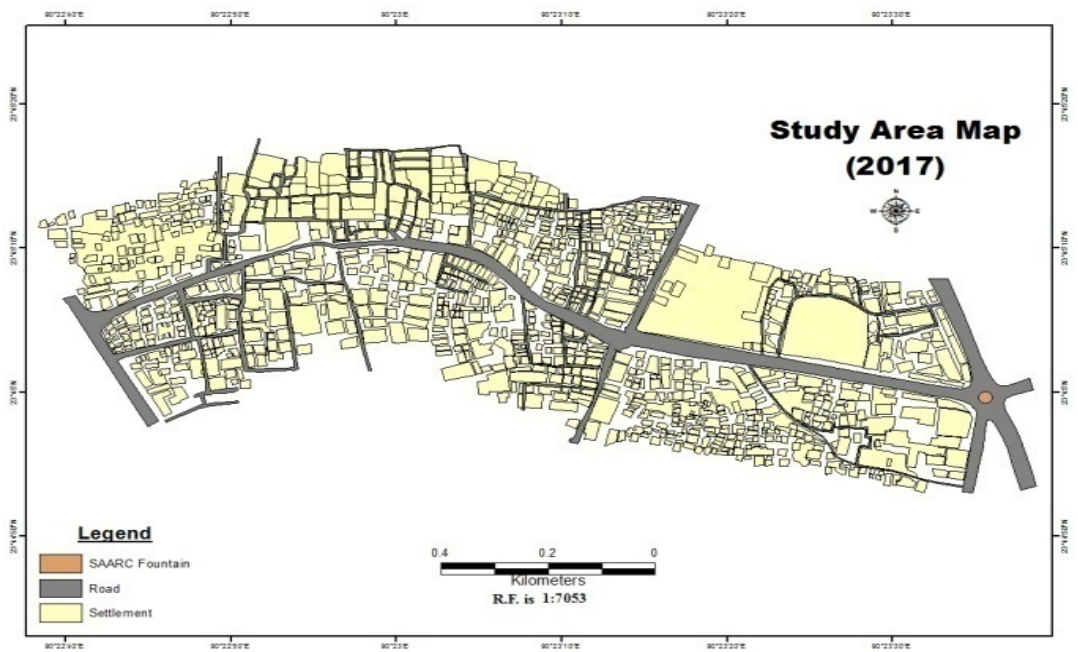


Figure 2. Plots of the Land in the Study Area (Source: Land Use Survey, 2017-2018)

As per IRB guidelines, all respondents' names in this dissertation are kept anonymous to protect human subjects. However, I reveal the names of public scholars who I interviewed and gave me consent. A research assistant helped me to collect some life histories and interviews for this study. Also, six research assistants helped me design and conduct the land use survey since it required sophisticated technical skill on Geographic Information System (GIS).

Finally, I have had a long-time attachment with the field. I used to live in and around Panthapath for some 14 years. I have observed numerous sociopolitical, economic, and cultural aspects of community life in the area. Hundreds of residential and commercial buildings were built in front of my eyes. I observed poor people's lives when they were threatened by slum owners for not to follow their rules of illegal slum-housing business, when they were threatened by thugs for allowing the media into their homes for interviews and letting them know about their miserable lives. I also observed the struggles of middle-class people as well as their participation in the culture of mass consumption. Finally, I observed the dynamics of local politics in the study area as well as formal and informal connections between business elites and politicians.

### ***Outlining the Study***

This dissertation has five chapters (Figure 4), including three analytical chapters as well as an introduction and conclusion. Chapter Two examines the 71-year (1947-2018) history of land grabbing practices in urban Bangladesh. It investigates two interrelated questions. How does the state act as a class to organize urban land grabs, often working in tandem

with the private sector, but also in direct competition with the market? How do the state and the market deploy primarily extra-economic means to grab and re-grab land under various state and market regimes? By critically drawing on existing theories of land dispossession, this chapter develops a theoretical framework to better understand three interconnected features of land grabbing practices in urban Bangladesh. First, the *class* dimension of land grabbing, which examines the strategic nexus of the state and market that secures their mutual class interests to pursue land grabbing and the conflicting relationship between them that protects their individual class interests. Second, the *power* dimension of land grabbing, which explores how not only the state monopolizes extra-economic means to grab land, but also the market often gains access to extra-economic means. Third, the *spatiotemporal* dimension of land grabbing, which shows how land grabbing is simultaneously a historical and everyday life phenomenon.

Chapter Three examines what roles dispossession plays in re-producing or expanding the capitalist mode of production in Bangladesh. In particular, the chapter investigates how dispossession contributes to (i) converting common goods dedicated to subsistence production into privately owned means of capitalist production and accumulation, (ii) re-producing a class division between proletarianized workers who sell their labor for a wage and create surplus-value, and those who control and extract it, (iii) commodifying sociopolitical and cultural aspects of urban life, including politics, legal system, education, and health, and (iv) redistributing existing surpluses upward. By critically engaging existing literature of dispossession, this chapter develops a theoretical framework to understand how dispossession works to privatize the commons,



proletarianize subsistence labor, create antagonistic class relations, and redistribute wealth upward. This framework consists of four logics of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, hegemonic, and redistributive. Each logic creates its respective form of dispossession. Each form of dispossession plays a partial role in capitalist accumulation. Together, they create a new or expand the existing capitalist mode of production by dialectically reinforcing one another.

Chapter Four identifies a new regime of labor control that dominates and exploits workers in factories to re-produce surpluses. I take the Bangladeshi apparel industry as a case for examining how workers, who were once peasants and became wageworkers after they were evicted from their homes, are controlled and exploited. The chapter critically draws on existing theories regarding various regimes of labor control, such as market despotism, ideological hegemony, managerial hegemony, hegemonic despotism, structural violence, and hybrid regimes, to understand how market and non-market actors dominate and exploit workers in the RGM industry to create surplus values. To do so, the chapter offers an alternative approach to understanding a new regime of labor control. I call this regime ‘social despotism:’ a coercive process of creating surplus values by controlling and exploiting labor inside and outside the factory. It uses legal power, political and structural violence as well as informal coercion to control and exploit workers. It consists of four phases of the labor process, including finding the cheapest labor and building factories, recruiting workers to the factories, organizing workers, and socializing, rewarding and punishing workers. Each phase is distinct from another in terms of their roles in the labor process. Two forms of oppression exist in these four phases of labor control: instrumental

oppression inside the factory (by market actors) and structural oppression outside the factory (by market and non-market actors). Here instrumental oppression regularizes coercion in the factory and creates forced consent of workers to be exploited in the factory. However, structural oppression annihilates workers' collective bargaining power outside the factory and diminishes individual worker's agency in social life. Both forms of oppression reinforce each other to serve the interest of capital and constitute the very regime of labor control: social despotism. This regime contributes to reproducing the existing capitalist system.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 5) advances a full-scale theory of dispossession by examining how the starting (Chapter 2), intermediate (Chapter 3) and ending (Chapter 4) points of dispossession contribute to capitalist accumulation and the expansion of capitalism. I end this chapter with some policy recommendations, derived from my findings, to address the various dimensions of structural injustices, including landlessness, slum evictions, extremely low wages, and the super exploitation of workers in the RMG industry.

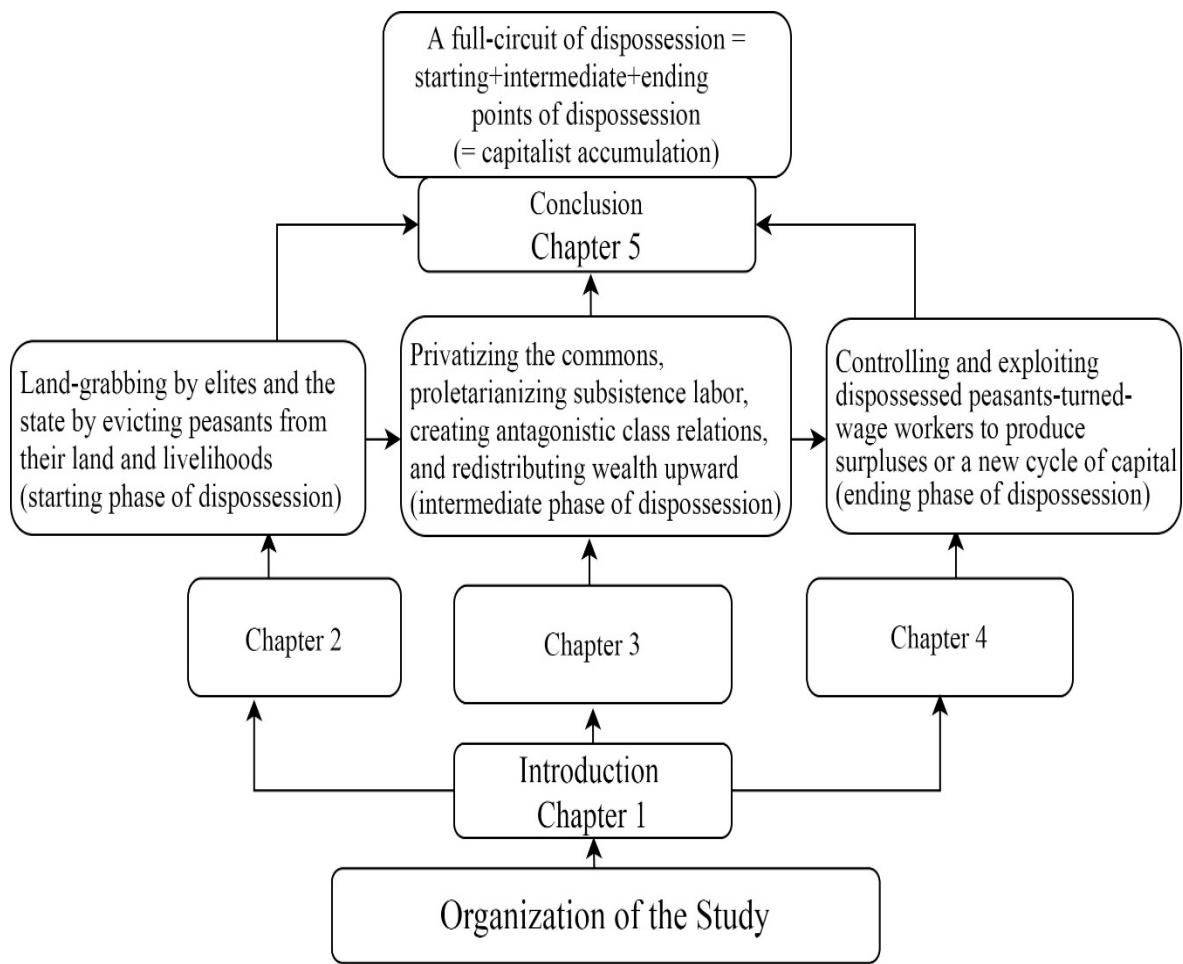


Figure 3. Organization of the Study

## CHAPTER TWO

### UNDERSTANDING LAND-GRABBING STRATEGIES IN BANGLADESH

The lord of an entailed estate, the first-born son, belongs to the land. It inherits him.

Karl Marx, 1844, *Manuscripts*. Quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, 1980, “Land and Matrimonial Strategies.” *The Logic of Practice*, p. 147

#### **Introduction**

The literature of land dispossession makes a significant contribution to understanding land accumulation by dispossession and its relationship to the capitalist mode of production (Adnan, 2013, 2015, 2016; Akram-Lodhi, 2012; Araghi, 2009; Bin, 2017; Borrás and Franco, 2010; De Angelis, 2004; Feldman, 2016; Feldman and Geisler, 2012; Hall, 2013; Harriss-White, 2006; Harvey, 2003; Levien, 2012, 2015; Marx, 1995; Moyo et al., 2012; Sassen, 2014; Walker, 2008; White et al., 2012; Zoomers, 2010). This vast literature examines land grabbing practices from historical and contemporary perspectives, emphasizing on the actors and strategies attached to land grabbing. Marx brings the idea of primitive accumulation to show how capitalists used extra-economic forces, such as political as well as legal power and violent force, to grab land. Harvey, however, offers the idea of accumulation by dispossession (ABD) to modify Marx’s notion. He argues that contemporary land grabbing is driven primarily by market mechanisms, such as voluntary

purchases. For both Marx and Harvey, the capitalists, as primary actors, seek the support of the state to enact and regulate land grabbing.

Contemporary literature on land grabbing is critically built on the foundational ideas of Marx's primitive accumulation and Harvey's accumulation by dispossession. This literature identifies various mechanisms of land grabbing under neoliberal capitalism. The two most updated theories regarding land dispossession are Levien's (2012, 2015) idea of regimes of dispossession and Adnan's (2013, 2015, 2016) theory of land alienation (Hall, 2013: 599). Other scholars, including Akram-Lodhi, 2012; Borras and Franco, 2010; Hall et al., 2011; Walker, 2008; and Zoomers, 2010, also offer substantial insights in order to understand land grabbing strategies from national and global perspectives. They talk about a wide range of economic and extra-economic means of land grabbing deployed by the MNCs, states, national capitalists, and non-capitalists.

The above literature, however, remains unclear about how the state and the market work in tandem to design, enact and regulate urban land grabbing, and how state agents pursue their own class interest, often competing with the market to grab<sup>1</sup> and re-grab<sup>2</sup> land. They provide limited insights about how not only the state, but also the market primarily use extra-economic means to grab land. Moreover, they offer inadequate analyses for understanding how land grabbing and re-grabbing practices, considering their concurrent presence in history and everyday life, are distinct under various state and market regimes. This chapter thus develops a new analytical framework by critically engaging existing theoretical debates and closely examining land grabbing practices in urban Bangladesh.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I define land-grabbing in a particular sense: coercive or non-coercive enclosure of land by power elites in both historical and everyday life, and at both small-scale and large-scale.

<sup>2</sup> Re-grabbing refers to grabbing the grabbed land either by the previous owners or new parties.

The analytical framework examines three interconnected features of land grabbing in urban Bangladesh. First, the *class* dimension of land grabbing, which examines the strategic nexus of the state and market that secures their mutual class interests to pursue land grabbing and the conflicting relationship between them that protects their individual class interests. Second, the *power* dimension of land grabbing, which explores how not only the state monopolizes on extra-economic means to grab land, but also the market often gains access to extra-economic means. Third, the *spatiotemporal* dimension of land grabbing, which shows how land grabbing is simultaneously a historical<sup>3</sup> and everyday life<sup>4</sup> phenomenon.

In this chapter, I use a wide range of empirical and secondary evidence regarding land grabbing. I use four sets of empirical evidence: 32 life histories of the dispossessed people living in private slums located in the 500-meter buffer zone on both sides of Panthapath since 1947, a survey of 147 slums located in the same area, a land use survey of 1,007 structures located in the 200-meter buffer zone on both sides of the same street, and 17 interviews of different individuals with specific knowledge about land grabbing. For secondary sources, I use archival and historical documents, including GIS maps and land records from various government offices in Dhaka. Among the 32 respondents, 19 are men (59.4%), and 13 are women (40.6%). Their ages are between 43 and 77 years. Their family monthly income ranges from USD40 to USD210. Their occupations are as follows: Rickshaw-cycle pullers (26%), domestic workers (20%), day laborers (18%), service

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<sup>3</sup> Historical form of land grabs refers to the continuation of land grabs (mostly large- and medium-swath of land) that began in 1947 in Panthapath and ended in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> The form of everyday life land grabs refers to a regular practice of losing only one or more small plots of land by one party and gaining that land by another party. Though this practice began in 1947, it has been a predominant form of land grabs in Panthapath since 1991.

workers (15%), factory workers (11%), street vendors (5%), gatekeepers (2%), and others (3%). Among the 17 respondents from interviews, professions ranged from landlords (n=5), businesspersons (n=4), politicians (n=3), land officers/clerks (n=3), and housewives (n=2) are included. Their ages are between 47 and 80 years old.

In the next section, this chapter will critically engage existing theoretical debates to develop the proposed analytical framework. Next, the chapter will present findings by dividing the sections into four subsections under four power-regimes: internal colonial (1947-1971), socialist/communist (1971-1975), military (1975-1990), and democratic (1991-present). The concluding section will provide an overall summary and analysis guided by the proposed analytical framework to further understand land grabbing in Bangladesh.

### **Background Literature: A Critical Review**

Two foundational theories regarding land dispossession—primitive accumulation (PA) and accumulation by dispossession (ABD)—identify distinct mechanisms of land grabbing. While Marx shows that the capitalists used extra-economic forces to grab land at the dawn of capitalism, Harvey argues that contemporary land grabbing is driven primarily by market mechanisms. Marx argues that PA created preconditions for capitalism through coercively transforming common, collective, and state land into private property and converting the dispossessed peasants into wage workers. Marx (1995: 512-513) shows that English bourgeoisie acquired land owned by the state and peasants through direct coercion and legal means, which he calls “parliamentary form of the robbery.” Marx’s ideas are

partly relevant to understanding how the Bangladeshi capitalists engaged the state in order to grab land by using violent coercion and legal means. His theory, however, remains unclear to understanding how the state and market have their own class interests, and how they individually or collectively deploy extra-economic means to grab land in urban Bangladesh. Marx's PA also provides limited insights to understanding the re-grabbing of land in everyday life, where a particular group of capitalists, as well as the powerless, are the victim of land grabbing.

Harvey (2003: 137-182) argues that market mechanisms—such as privatization and financialization—are the primary means of capital and land accumulation under neoliberal capitalism. He calls it accumulation by dispossession since it primarily redistributes existing resources rather than generating new wealth. Harvey shows state-sponsored means of accumulation as the secondary mechanism of land grabbing. Harvey's market mechanism, including the act of voluntary selling and buying, is useful in a limited sense; they are visible in urban Bangladesh mostly when it is a case of second-round purchasing or selling of land rather than the first round of coercive land acquisition. In many cases, however, this purchase is involuntary; elites buy land by threatening landowners into selling. Many real estate companies acquired land by this means in Panthapath. Harvey's theory also provides limited insights on how the state acts like a class to pursue land grabbing. Harvey does not discuss how the market competes with the state and uses extra-economic force to grab land.

Several alternative versions of theories regarding PA and ABD exist in land grabbing literature. Among those, Levien's (2012, 2015) theory of regimes of



dispossession and Adnan's (2013, 2015, 2016) idea of land alienation are most useful to understand land grabbing strategies from the South Asian context. Levien (2012, 2015) argues that contemporary land grabbing in India or elsewhere is not Marx's PA because it cannot create preconditions for capitalism. For Levien, capitalism is already in place, either in a traditional or advanced form. While Harvey claims that ABD is the market-led means of accumulation, Levien (2012: 939, 2015) argues that ABD should be understood as "the deployment of extra-economic coercion in the process of accumulation." His reconceptualization of Harvey's ABD considers "state-mediated force" as the defining character of ABD. Levien (2015: 147) accordingly develops the concept 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 concludes that land dispossession is "ultimately a political process mediated by states."

While Levien argues that states use extra-economic coercion to grab land, he overlooks the importance of the market's direct involvement in using of extra-economic means to grab land. Though Levien emphasizes coercive redistribution of land from the traditional capitalist sector to advanced capitalism, land grabbing in Panthapath from 1947 to 1990 was predominantly the coercive transfer of land from a traditional agricultural sector to capitalist one. In this process, both the state and the market had direct involvements, and they both deployed extra-economic means. Levien argues that Indian states organized land grabbing under developmental regime as direct land grabbers and under neoliberal regimes as land brokers. The realities in Panthapath show that the state and market worked in tandem, often competing with each other to grab land under internal

colonial, socialist/communist, and military regimes. Also, the neoliberal democratic regime shows a different reality than what Levien portrays; here, mostly the politically organized market, i.e., capitalists-turned-lawmakers, are used to grab and re-grab land. More than 180 top business elites are lawmakers in the current parliament, over 62 percent; they were nearly 50 percent (in an average) since 1991 (The Daily Star, 2019a). Here is the idea about how the state acts as a class to pursue land grabbing.

While scholars emphasize the use of direct violent force to accumulate land under PA and ABD, Adnan (2013, 2016) highlights unforced mechanisms of land grabbing, including informal mediation, persuasion, negotiation, agreement, incentive, or temptation. He (2016, p. 4) develops a comprehensive approach to understanding contemporary strategies of land grabbing, which shows a four-fold classificatory schema: direct-forced, indirect-forced, direct-unforced, and indirect-unforced. According to Adnan, land grabbers in neoliberal India and Bangladesh use not only the direct and indirect force but also the direct and indirect unforce. Though the land grabbing mechanisms identified by Adnan are mostly present in Panthapath, they were deployed by different factions in different ways in order to grab and re-grab land. Here, not only the state but also the market-actors used those strategies to pursue their mutual and individual class interests to grab land. Adnan's ideas accordingly lack insights to understanding how the strategic nexus or conflicting interest of the state and market ultimately enacts a wide range of land grabbing strategies in urban Bangladesh. Adnan's indirect and unforced mechanisms only helped organize land grabbing in Panthapath, but they were unsuccessful in grabbing land, which required force and political power. Moreover, reclaiming of the grabbed land further challenges

Adnan's thesis of 'zero-sum game'—when one party gains a parcel of land, another one loses.

Hall (2013: 1586) argues that PA and ABD are “more or less synonymous with enclosure and dispossession in general.” The following scholars interchangeably use and disuse the ideas of PA and ABD to understand coercive and non-coercive mechanisms of global land grabbing. Borras and Franco (2012) show that contemporary land grabbing occurs primarily because of “the convergence of multiple crises” created by neoliberal capitalism. These crises include debt manipulation, financial crisis, food shortage, the rising cost of energy/fuel, and climate change. Sassen (2014: 1) also argues that foreign governments and firms expropriate land by coercively expelling people from the “core social and economic orders.” Several approaches to land dispossession also explain the nature of global land grabbing, which includes the idea of new enclosures (De Angelis, 2004; White et al., 2012), global land grabbing, (Borras and Franco, 2012; Hall, 2013; Zoomers, 2010), and global enclosure (Araghi, 2009).

While the above literature makes substantial contributions to understanding global land grabbing practices, it underemphasizes how the state and market within the national territory pursue their own class interests through land grabbing. This literature also remains unclear on how the politically-organized market uses extra-economic coercion to grab land. They also provide limited analysis about how land grabbing is not only a historical phenomenon, but also an everyday life event, where multiple markers of “othering” are used in land grabbing. Feldman (2016) fills this gap in understanding how land grabbing occurs in history and everyday life by referencing the religious identity in Bangladesh. She

argues that elites create an “othering” identity for Bangladeshi Hindus to grab their land through discriminatory land laws and legal coercion. Feldman’s (2016) ideas are useful in order to understand the religious dimension of land grabbing in Dhaka. However, field data presented in the findings section show that there are also three groups of “other” within the majoritarian Muslim community who are the victims of land dispossession: the poor or non-political persons, elites in the opposition political parties, and women.

Since the above literature remains unclear about the realities of land grabbing in urban Bangladesh, this chapter provides insight into understanding those issues under a relevant analytical framework. This framework examines three issues. First, it explains the relationships—both strategic and competitive—between the state and market that organize and control land grabbing and re-grabbing under different power-regimes. In other words, it examines how the strategic nexus of the state and market serves their mutual class interests to pursue land grabbing and how the competitive relationship between them secures their individual class interests. The chapter calls it the *class* dimension of land grabbing. Next, it shows how not only the state but also the market primarily uses extra-economic means to grab and re-grab land. The chapter defines this factor as the *power* dimension of land grabbing. Finally, it analyzes the simultaneous presence of land (re)grabbing in history and everyday life, making land dispossession practically unavoidable, if not inevitable, under existing capitalism. The chapter labels it as the *spatiotemporal* dimension of land grabbing. Together these issues—class, power, and time-space—show how land grabbing practices have transformed an agricultural sector into a premier urban site of neoliberal capitalism in Bangladesh.

### **Findings: Understanding Land-Grabbing Strategies**

Land grabbing is a recurring feature of colonial and post-colonial Bangladesh. The British colonial administration imposed the notion of private property in India in 1793, allowing Zamindars, or landlords, to buy land from the state, who then taxed tenants to use that land. The Zamindari system was abolished in 1950 after the creation of Pakistan and India in 1947. West Pakistan maintained a colonial relation to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, from 1947 to 1971. During this time, the Pakistani state acquired land from each Zamindar who had over 33.3 acres of land and enlisted those as *Khas* (public) land. Then the state—led by military, bureaucrats, businesspersons and politicians—created and implemented over half a dozen discriminatory land laws to grab land primarily owned by Hindus—one of the Bangladeshi religious minority communities who owned 80 percent of the country’s total urban land in 1947 (Lambert, 1980). The state declared all land-owned wealth from Hindus, who moved to India during the partition of British India and did not come back to East Pakistan by 1950, as “abandoned property.” Both types of land became eligible for a public lease. West Pakistani and East Pakistani elites then began to take this land from the state to create commercial spaces, violently evicting the poor tenants and minority communities from that land. During the India-Pakistan war of 1965, the Pakistani state passed laws to label all landed property of Hindus as “enemy property”, making it eligible for confiscation.

Global capitalism and discriminatory developmental practices entered East Pakistan in the mid-1960s. These interventions further dispossessed millions of people

from their land and homes both in rural and urban centers, including Dhaka (Feldman, 2016; Siddiqui et al., 2010). The continuance of enemy property laws and the introduction of new land laws in Independent Bangladesh after 1971 further dispossessed millions of Hindus, Muslim peasants, the middle-class, and indigenous people from their land. Land grabbing gained momentum after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 into modern day (Adnan, 2013, 2016; Feldman, 2016; Feldman and Geisler, 2012; Muhammad, 1992; Siddiqui et al., 2010).

A similar historical trend of land grabbing is found in Panthapath, Dhaka, between 1947 and 2018. During the partition of British India in 1947, the study area and its surroundings had an agricultural economy. The Hindu Zamindars and Hindu elites then had over 60 percent of land in the area, and the colonial state and Muslims owned the rest of the land. Mostly Muslim peasants were the users of this land. However, some peasant families had their own land. All peasants had their own houses called *Tong Ghor*, adjacent to their farmland. There was a deep canal, plenty of open spaces, and other water bodies (*Jheels*) in the area. People used to commute from one side to another of the city by using this canal, and the poor used it for irrigation and fishing. Most women used to do traditional (economic) activities at home. Men had three major works: farming, fishing, and pulling Rickshaw-cycle or chariots to carry passengers. As such, the poor had an independent livelihood system in this area up until 1947.

However, between 1947 and 1971, elites evicted some 300 peasant families from their places in Panthapath to build factories for products such as glass, cigarettes, electronics, and clothing, real estate companies, and other commercial spaces. They further

evicted some 400 peasant families and many landlords from 1971 to 1990. The Panthapath street project (L.A. case no: 40/89-90 and 40B/89-90) that began in 1989 also removed some 900 peasant families from their places (Government of Bangladesh, 1993). In sum, nearly 6,000 peasants (nearly 1,600 families) were evicted between 1947 and 1990 in the study area and opened up approximately 200 acres of land to grab. Though land grabbing in everyday life began in 1947 in Panthapath, it became the dominant practice after 1990. Since then, every plot of land with small structures has been the target of grabbing and re-grabbing. Since 1991, the Panthapath area has remained one of the premier locations of home-grown neoliberal capitalism in Dhaka. Below, I present detailed findings under four subsections.

### ***Internal Colonial Regime, 1947-1971***

Between 1947-1971, half a dozen discriminatory land laws existed in East Pakistan, including the East Bengal (Emergency) Requisition of Property Act (XIII of 1948), the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act (1950), the Order XXIII of 1965, the East Pakistan Enemy Property Administration and Disposal Order (1966), Evacuees Acts of 1949-57, Disturbed Persons Rehabilitation Ordinance of 1964, and Continuance of Emergency Provisions Ordinance of 1969 (Barkat et al., 2008; Feldman, 2016; Muhammad, 1992; Siddiqui et al., 2010). These land laws helped the state and the market to grab and reclaim land from Hindu Zamindars, elites, and the poor. West Pakistani capitalists then forced the Pakistani state to reduce the amount of land owned by a West Pakistani family from over 2,000 acres to 500 acres. This allowed the industrial

bourgeoisie to access that land in order to build their factories and businesses. However, they pressured the government to increase the land ceiling from 33.3 acres to 125 acres in East Pakistan so that no bourgeois class can emerge (Muhammad, 1992). This is the time when the strategic relationship was formed between the state and the market to grab land by deploying extra-economic means. The state's own class interest was at the nascent phase.

My field data revealed that many peasant families were evicted from their places after the partition in 1947 because land ownership was transferred to capitalists via the state. Then, the West Pakistani businesspersons and bureaucrats, as well as East Pakistani elites, came forward to grab land. Three stories below provide more insights about land grabbing in Panthapath.

Taiyab Sarker, a 68-year-old retired *Tahsildar* (land officer), explained a new world to me while I met him three times to understand the lived effects of land grabbing in the Panthapath area since 1947. Before the abolition of the Zamindari system in 1950, Mr. Sarker's father was a clerk to Kalam Maulavi, one of the tax collectors of Rajeshwar Roychowdhury, a renowned Hindu landlord in this area. Mr. Sarker, who knew about this Zamindari system from his father, told me that Mr. Rajeshwar had over 300 acres of land in Panthapath and its surrounding areas.

Mr. Rajeshwar left for India after the abolition of the Zamindari system. The Pakistani state took over a portion of that land for its own purpose and made the rest of the land available for a public lease. Mr. Sarker claimed that "in most cases, West Pakistani *Borolok* (elites) acquired most of that land without paying anything to the state and took



possession by violently evicting the poor.” Most of this land was agricultural land and wetlands. Mr. Sarker also reported that some elites received a significant portion of Mr. Rajeshwar’s land from their connections to bureaucrats who provided the elites with false documentation (see Adnan, 2013). Mr. Sarker estimated that less than five out of 300 acres of land are now state-owned, and the rest of the land, 99.98 percent, was grabbed and privately owned.

Moktar Ali—a 70-year-old Muslim farmer—was evicted from his own land, a 15-decimal plot, during the mid-1960s. A West Pakistani glass-factory owner, a sibling of a military officer, grabbed his land without paying him. He told me that “it was the land which his grandfather got from a Zamindar as a gift some 100 years back... We had no legal document of its ownership.” Shahid Miya, a 66-year-old landlord, also told me that a West Pakistani bureaucrat-turned-businessman took .86 acres of land owned by his family by violently evicting nearly 50 peasant families who used this land. He reported to me that “My father was killed by thugs, hired by the land grabber, to take possession of our land.”

### ***Socialist-Communist Regime, 1971-1975***

During the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the provisional government continued all land laws in force on 25 March 1971 through the Laws of Continuance Enforcement Order, 1971. This law mimicked many of the same rules that made Hindu property enemy property before independence. The Bangladesh Parliament merely brought a change by replacing “enemy” with “vested” and renamed the enemy property Bangladesh (Vesting of Property and Assets) Order in 1972. Though the government later created the Vested

Property Act 2001 to return the land to Hindus who lost their land due to the discriminatory land laws, this law has not been implemented yet.

The newly created Bangladeshi socialist democratic state nationalized all industries and business institutions left by West Pakistanis and created by the East Pakistani elites. However, within some years, the state failed to make a profit out of those. Many bureaucrats, military officers, businesspersons, and politicians then bought most of those factories with land by paying nothing or next-to-nothing. Muhammad (1992: 40) claims that the new bourgeoisie emerged in independent Bangladesh by “grabbing the abandoned landed wealth of Hindus and plundering state’s resources.” Three stories below show an overall picture of land grabbing in Panthapath under this regime.

My interview with a Hindu woman, Shikha Talukder, a 67-year old retired elementary school teacher, explored an exciting and traumatic story of land grabbing. Ms. Talukder lost her 13 decimals of land in writing because the land office purposefully labeled her land as vested property—a well-documented way of stealing land owned by Hindus. A month before the killing of the former President Mujibur Rahman in 1975, a few musclemen hired by a politician-turned-real estate owner came to her house one evening and showed her a lease contract document. They told her that the government officials listed the land as “Vested Property.” She responded to them: “We have been living in this place for three generations, we are not leaving. It is our property; we will save it...we will go to the court tomorrow to get back our land.” The following night, those men came to her house and threatened to kill all members of the family. After two weeks, they evicted the family from their home and land. Once Ms. Talukdar lost her land, she started

renting a one-room tin-shed house in a nearby slum where she remained for the past 25 years, waiting for her retirement benefits.

The famine of 1974 created numerous opportunities for the elites in Panthapath to grab land and secure their grabbed land (see Adnan, 2016). My interviews with a famine-stricken slum dweller, Kamal Hosen, 64, and a landlord, Sazzad Khan, 73, explored three significant pieces of evidence. First, many famine-stricken, rural-living, people migrated to urban centers including Dhaka. Some landlords in Panthapath then grabbed land to build slum houses and rented them out to the migrant poor to protect the land from other potential land grabbers. Mr. Hosen told me that “five new slums appeared during this time in the northern side of the canal.”

Next, thousands of young adults and rural middle-class families then moved to Dhaka, including Panthapath, for work. The emerging real estate companies—owned by bureaucrats and retired military officers—began to grab land used for constructing houses in order to meet the demand of the new urban middle class. Mr. Khan told me that he had three plots of land in Panthapath, ranging from four decimals, six decimals, and seven decimals. A real estate company, jointly owned by a military officer and a bureaucrat, grabbed his seven-decimal plot of land by evicting 20 peasant families who had been living on that land for generations.

Third, during this famine, the nation faced a severe crisis, including the economic downturn, conflict among mainstream political parties, and underground militia activities (Muhammad, 1992: 102-105). Then, the former President Mujibur Rahman created the BAKSHAL, a one-party system under communist government, in January 1975. Many

members affiliated to this party grabbed a vast amount of land across the country, including Panthapath. This time, Mr. Khan lost his four-decimal plot of land. Muhammad (1992: 42) has a relevant observation about this: “the famine of 1974 was the golden period of the emergence of millionaire” in a newly born Bangladesh.

### ***Military Regime, 1975-1990***

Officially, autocratic rule began with President Mostaq Ahmad—a former member of the executive committee of BAKSHAL—right after the assassination of Mujibur Rahman in 1975. Two other military rulers continued it up until 1990. Between 1977 and 1985, the Ministry of Land empowered land officers to enlist the lands of Hindus as “vested property” (Panday, 2016), keeping much of it for themselves, and leading Hindus to flee in massive numbers. These constitutional amendments and land reform policies made Hindus landless and marginal subjects.

Under this regime, the IMF and World Bank-sponsored Industrial Policy of 1982 inspired capitalists to grab land for building factories and businesses. Muhammad (1992: 107) shows that “the country’s richest persons grabbed 3,000 acres of land in different names in Dhaka and its outskirts” during this time. Siddiqui et al. (2010: 7), in their 1985 study, showed that housing companies “illegally occupied” more than 600 acres of *Khas* land in Dhaka. The Asia Development Bank, in their 1992 study, found that (Table 1) seven government agencies during the military regime grabbed 1,265 acres of vacant land for official and commercial purposes, where the poor used to squat and work (Shafi, 2008:

3). State-agencies also gave much of that grabbed land to the politicians and real estate companies, mostly owned by the retired army officers.

Table 1. The Ownership of Vacant Land by the Government Agencies		
Name of the Government Agencies	Area in Acre	Total Land (%)
Housing and Settlement Directorate (NHA)	826	65.29
Bangladesh Railways	145	11.46
Bangladesh Telephone and Telegram Board	92	7.27
Bangladesh Water Development Board	83	6.56
Roads and Highways Department	66	5.21
Public Works Department	33	2.60
Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority	20	1.58
Total	1,265	100

Two stories below show how the military regime organized and controlled land grabbing. Sayma Khatun, a rice-cake vendor in her late 60s and a former worker in a cigarette factory, told me that nearly 300 peasants and working-class families, including her own family, were evicted from their places in the first year of the military regime. During that time, the Water Development Board (WDB) took that land. Ms. Sayma reported that “We protested their uninformed eviction but failed. The authority demolished our houses while most of us were in the workplace... We lost most of our belongings, including our houses where we had been living for generations.” She also told me that one of the country’s top industrialists was behind the land-grabbing, since that person received

ten decimals of land via WBD. This industrialist had a strong connection with a military officer who directed the WBD to evict the slums in order to clear land.

A 67-year old TV mechanic, Shahidul Bari, was a worker in the Nikkon TV factory owned by a West Pakistani Bihari businessperson named Alauddin Shams. It was the largest factory in the Panthapath area, located on 0.83 acres of land and employed nearly 300 workers. Mr. Shams left for West Pakistan while his wife—Aleya Khanam, an East Pakistani woman—took over that business. Ms. Khanam lost half of her land during the mid-1980s when a real estate company, owned by a military officer, grabbed that land from the southern side of the TV factory, where nearly 30 peasant families were living in *Tong Ghor*. They used false legal document and violent force to grab that land. Ms. Khanam, her workers, and peasants protested against this land grabbing, but they failed due to a lack of political power. She continued this business until 1988 when another real estate company owned by a lawmaker forced her to sell the factory and the land.

### ***Democratic Regime, 1991-Present***

Neoliberal capitalism gained momentum when Bangladesh officially restored its so-called democracy in 1991. An important restructuring is found in both rural and urban economies after 1991, including rapid urbanization and industrialization. Between 1990 and 2010, the government agencies, lawmakers, politicians and business elites grabbed 1.3 million hectares of public and private land, where over 6,000 acres of land grabbing occurred in Dhaka (Muhammad, 1992; Shafi, 2008; Siddiqui et al., 2010). State's so-called developmental projects and urban elites evicted more than 200 slums and nearly 317,665

people in Dhaka between 1989 and 2017 (Ahmed, 2012; Islam, 2006; Nawaz, 2004; Shafi, 2008; The Dhaka Tribune, 2016, 2018).

A top business conglomerate, Bashundhara Group, which owns the country's second-largest shopping mall located in Panthapath, recently grabbed approximately 100 acres of public land in Badda, Dhaka and "sold out every single plot without caring for approval from the city development authority" (Chowdhury, 2007). Siddiqui et al. (2010: 192) characterized this trend of land accumulation as an "outright plunder and loot of state and abandoned property." Due to this overarching influence of the capitalists, the President of Bangladesh recently commented that the country's politics has "gone in the pockets of businessmen" (Liton, 2015). Two case studies and two surveys below show the overall pattern of land grabbing practices in Panthapath.

My respondent, Rashed Khan, 73, a landlord and influential political leader, provided me a written document about some land grabbers in the area. He told me that he still owns 60 decimals of land in this area after losing over 80 decimals of land during 1990-1995. This large amount of land was taken by three different persons: a lawmaker, a politician, and a real estate company, all of which were from the ruling party at that time. Mr. Khan told me that "I lost many plots of land when I was in the opposition political party, but I gained some of those when my party came to power." He informed me that grabbing and re-grabbing land was a normality from 1991 to 1999 in Panthapath. He told me that most powerful land grabbers often used political connections and illegal forces, involved private professional gangs, engaged land officials, bureaucrats and law enforcement agencies, and influenced courts.

Another significant strategy I found for grabbing land is the use of patriarchal views. Different elite groups used to compete with one another to grab women’s land. Humayra Akter, 47, a nurse in a hospital, reported to me that “women landlords are more susceptible to lose their property than men due to their least political and social supports...men find a woman landlord as an easy target.”

The land use survey (Table 2) provides the recent trend of land grabbing in Panthapath. It finds 20 neighborhoods in the study area, where 1,007 plots (163 acres) of land exist. Of them, 1,003 plots have commercial and residential structures and four plots have an open space. Of them, 989 are privately owned plots, and 18 (in parenthesis) are government-owned plots. Out of all, 129 plots of land, or 4.22 acres, are reported as illegally grabbed and currently disputed, where 33 plots are *Khas* land, 36 plots are Vested Property (VP), and 60 plots are privately-owned land. Finally, a short survey of 147 slums provides examples of grabbing and re-grabbing of land. In the study area, most slums of 147 are located in grabbed or disputed land—one of the crucial strategies of controlling grabbed land.

Name of the Neighborhoods	Number of Population	Number of Plots	Plot Areas (in decimal; 100 decimals =1 acre)	Grabbed and Currently Disputed Plots	Types of Grabbed Land			Types of Land Ownership (private vs. public)
					Khas	VP	Private	



N001	2,621	20	345	2	0	1	1	18 (2)
N002	1,330	30	451	3	3	0	0	28 (2)
N003	758	11	302	3	0	4	1	9 (2)
N004	2,074	92	538	5	1	1	3	90 (2)
N005	1,429	79	1,641	15	2	9	5	79 (0)
N006	876	70	944	8	1	2	5	68 (2)
N007	2,790	134	3,214	23	5	8	9	133 (1)
N008	1,969	27	313	0	0	0	0	27 (0)
N009	70	3	49	1	1	0	0	3 (0)
N010	150	1	192	0	0	0	0	0 (1)
N011	1,760	116	2,054	17	2	7	7	114 (2)
N012	992	17	290	1	0	0	1	16 (1)
N013	937	36	284	4	1	2	1	36 (0)
N014	2,122	30	239	4	1	0	3	30 (0)
N015	30	2	68	0	0	0	0	2 (0)
N016	1,023	54	536	9	2	1	6	53 (1)
N017	85	3	55	1	1	0	0	3 (0)
N018	2,005	147	1,792	16	6	0	9	146 (1)
N019	1,890	98	1,106	14	7	0	7	98 (0)
N020	1,236	37	1,043	3	0	1	2	36 (1)
Total		1,00	16,300	129	33	3	60	
	26,147	7				6		989 (18)

Source: Land Use Survey, 2017-2018

## Discussions and Conclusions

This chapter argues that existing theories of land dispossession—whether classical or contemporary—are not adequate for understanding land grabbing in urban Bangladesh. It provides an analytical framework for examining three interconnected issues regarding land grabbing. First, it explores the historical relationship, e.g., strategic and competitive, between the state and market that arranges and controls land grabbing and re-grabbing. Here the *class* dimension of land grabbing is present: where the strategic nexus of the state and market defends their mutual class interests, but the conflicting relationship between them illustrates their individual class interests. Next, it investigates how both the state and market use primarily extra-economic means to grab and re-grab land. The *power* dimension of land grabbing exists to grab land, where the market gains access to using extra-economic means such as violent coercion. Finally, it analyzes how land grabbing is practically unavoidable, though it is not inevitable, considering its simultaneous presence in history and everyday life. The *spatiotemporal* dimension of land grabbing appears here, which regularizes land grabbing under different power and market regimes. Together these dimensions—class, power, and spatiotemporal—explain how land grabbing practices have turned an agricultural sector into a premier urban site of neoliberal capitalism in Bangladesh. Though evidence presented in the findings section clearly support the central arguments of this chapter, they require further analyses.

During the internal colonial regime between 1947-1971, urban land grabbing was organized and controlled by the strategic nexus of the West Pakistani government and

West Pakistani elites. At the same time, there was a conflict among the West Pakistani and East Pakistani elites. West Pakistani elites then used legal means and coercion to grab land owned by East Pakistanis, mostly by Hindus who had over 80 percent of the country's total urban land in 1947. The state also showed its own class interests, unlike what Marx (1995) and Harvey (2003) suggest, by using the grabbed land for its own commercial purposes and selling land to the capitalists. My interviews with Mr. Sarker, Mr. Ali, and Mr. Miya provided me with formative ideas regarding land grabs in Dhaka. Mr. Sarker's story shows how elites grabbed 99.98 percent of land of 300 acres through legal means and violent coercion. Mr. Ali's and Mr. Miya's stories illustrate how a business elite and a bureaucrat grabbed their land by making false document and killing people.

The socialist-communist regime (1971-1975) helped the state and business elites to grab land and businesses left by West Pakistani elites and East Pakistani Hindus during the liberation war. Shortly after independence, however, the socialist democratic state, acting as a class, took the land and other assets owned by big landlords and industrialists. Later, the landlords and capitalists regained that land and assets when they found wholesale privatization under the one-party communist regime. This regime laid the very foundation of home-grown neoliberal capitalism in Bangladesh. Both the state and market grabbed land using legal means and violent force, e.g., paramilitary, as well as capitalizing on social crises such as war and famine. The state-market conflict was visible, unlike what Levien (2015) shows, when the state took land from the landlords and nationalized industries built by capitalists. At the same time, the state-market nexus was evident, while wealth and land were transferring from the state to capitalists once the wholesale

privatization process began. Ms. Talukdar's story shows how a minority woman lost her land due to the use of legal means, deception, and the deployment of violent force by the politician-turned-businessman. Mr. Hosen's and Khan's stories show how a socio-political crisis, e.g., famine, created enormous opportunities for the capitalists in Panthapath to grab and re-grab land (see Adnan, 2016; Muhammad, 1992). Together, the three stories from Ms. Talukdar, Mr. Hosen, and Mr. Khan show how the state and market worked together to re-produce a four-dimensional "othering" identity, unlike what Feldman (2016) suggests, to grab land in Panthapath—where Hindus, opposing political party members, women and the poor became the victims of land grabbing.

In the third phase from 1975-1990, land grabbing practices across the country were different since either land grabbers had direct connections with military, or the army officers themselves grabbed land. The evidence shows how state-agencies, directed by the military government, grabbed nearly 1,300 acres of public land, mostly for their commercial purposes. They also sold a significant portion of that land to many private companies. This is an example of how the state acts like a class. It also shows how the state and market are internally linked when it is a question of land grabbing, and how they pursue their own class interests. Ms. Khatun's story demonstrates that the state agency (i.e., the Water Development Board) acted for the market (i.e., an industrialist) to grab land, while it was directed by an army officer. Mr. Bari's narration about Ms. Khanam shows how an industrialist was dispossessed from her land and factory, contrasting with Feldman's ideas, because of her three "othering" identities: Bihari as an ethnic Muslim minority, non-political, and women. Ms. Khanam's story also shows, unlike what Levien

(2015) and Adnan (2016) argue, how the state and market pursued their mutual class interests by grabbing land while involving in conflict with an elite.

In the last phase from 1991-present, a vibrant neoliberal capitalist social order emerged in urban Bangladesh due to the structural adjustment policies. Though business elites gained comparatively more power over political, military and bureaucratic-elites, capitalists-turned-lawmakers began to dominate both the state and market. Together, elites grabbed millions of hectares of public and private land across the country and Dhaka by engaging themselves into their mutual and conflicting class interests. Land re-grabbing and everyday land grabbing became dominant forms of land dispossession in this period. The case of Mr. Khan about land re-grabbing shows us the strategic nexuses and conflicting relations among the state and market. This story also demonstrates, unlike what Harvey (2003) and Levien (2015) suggest, how a business elite grabs land by using violent force and political power. Ms. Akter's story illustrates how land grabbers target women landlords who lack political and social connections. The land use survey (Table 2) shows that over 12 percent of the total land in Panthapath still has a grabbing-related legal issue. This evidence shows how land grabbing practice simultaneously resides in history and everyday life. Due to this practice, the land administration is recognized as the third most corrupted sector in Bangladesh (Feldman and Geisler, 2012). The slum survey further provides evidence to understanding how land grabbers control their grabbed land by building slums.

Finally, while Bangladeshi Hindus lost 2.6 million acres of land since 1947 (Barkat et al., 2008; Panday, 2016), they have lost almost all land in Panthapath. Their

landownership declined from 60 percent in 1947 and 20 percent in 1971 to .006% in 2018. Land grabbing in Panthapath between 1947 and 1991 evicted nearly 6,000 independent peasants. It also created a tremendous level of spatial segregation, where 78.62 percent of wealthy and middle-class people live in 95.73 percent of the land, 21.38 percent poor live in only 4.27 percent of the land. Though more than 95 percent of Bangladeshi women are landless, more than 99 percent of women are landless in Panthapath. This systemic social inequality can be addressed through reforming land policies and redistributing public lands that are grabbed by the state and elites among the poor.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**THE LOGIC OF DISPOSSESSION IN CAPITALIST ACCUMULATION IN**  
**BANGLADESH**

Labour is its [wealth] father and the earth [land] its mother.

Sir William Petty, Quoted in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 1995, p. 31

**Introduction**

Existing literature on historical and contemporary dispossession is extraordinarily rich and voluminous. A diverse group of scholars have explored three distinct frameworks for analyzing dispossession, including 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. The debates, however, raise several questions that require further investigation. How does dispossession<sup>5</sup> contribute to converting the physical environment into potential capitals to create the capitalist mode of production? How does dispossession turn subsistence workers into proletarians who produce surplus value, at the same time as it empowers a bourgeoisie to extract that value, and create a middle-class to produce, control, and realize surplus value? How does dispossession contribute to creating and expanding market relations that commodify sociopolitical and cultural aspects of life? And how does dispossession contribute to redistributing existing surpluses to reproduce the capitalist

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<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I define dispossession as a condition by which someone loses land, means of subsystem and other resources while someone gains those through coercive and non-coercive ways. Dispossession as a social force contributes to generating capital and commodifying material and social relations.

system? Together these questions constitute the overarching question of this chapter: How does dispossession contribute to transforming an agricultural society into a capitalist society as well as expanding or reproducing the existing capitalist mode of production?

Existing theories lack a relevant analytical framework to understand the above questions. The chapter proposes a new approach. This approach consists of four logics of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, hegemonic, and redistributive. 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 proletarianization as well as bourgeoisification and middle-class formation. Third, the hegemonic logic suggests the role of dispossession in commodifying traditional sociopolitical and cultural aspects of urban life, including power relations, legal system, education, and health. Finally, the redistributive logic shows how dispossession redistributes existing wealth and surpluses in order to reproduce the capitalist system. Together, these logics create their respective forms of dispossession, which constitute the very logic of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. Here 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 chapter uses empirical and historical evidence collected from Panthapath street, Dhaka—the capital city of Bangladesh. It draws on the 71-year (1947-2018) history of dispossession of land, labor, and means of subsistence and their individual and aggregate contributions to capitalism. It uses 41 life histories<sup>6</sup> of the dispossessed poor.

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<sup>6</sup> Of these 41 respondents, 30 respondents are common for Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. For this Chapter, 9 new respondents are added. As such, the total number of life histories used for this Chapter is 41.



Among these respondents, 24 (58%) are men, and 17 (42%) are women. Their ages range from 31 to 73 years. Their occupations are as follows: domestic workers (31%), day laborers (22%), Rickshaw-cycle pullers (15%), factory workers (12%), street vendors (7%), restaurant/hotel workers (6%), gatekeepers (3%), street cleaners (2%), and other (2%). Their family income (monthly) ranges between \$70-230. This chapter also uses a land use survey of 1,007 plots located in the 200-meter buffer zone on both sides of Panthapath street. Moreover, the chapter uses a short survey of 147 slums located in the 500-meter buffer zone on both sides of the street. Also, I conducted 20 individual interviews with businesspersons, landlords, politicians, land officers, scholars, housewives, and human rights activists, aged 37-76 years old. Finally, I look at archival and historical documents, including remote sensing maps of Google Earth (1985-2018), land records (1912-2018), and GIS maps from government offices.

In the next section, the chapter will provide a critical review of relevant theories in order to develop the proposed framework. Next, it will present the findings. In the discussion and conclusion sections, the chapter will reformulate its theoretical arguments to highlight its contribution to the literature.

### **Theorizing Dispossession**

As previously mentioned, existing literature on dispossession can be divided into three distinct theoretical debates to understand how dispossession contributes, or even does not contribute, to creating or expanding the capitalist mode of production. Here the chapter

discusses those debates, and then critically draws on the theories to develop the proposed approach to dispossession.

### *Classical Primitive (and Capitalist) Accumulation*

Marx (1995) famously offers a systematic analysis of the role of dispossession at the origin of capitalism. He (1995: 507) brings the idea of primitive accumulation—“an accumulation not the result of the capitalistic mode of production, but its starting point”—to understand the sources of potential capital, such as land, labor, money, and raw materials, invested in the first round of production at the dawn of capitalism. This primitive accumulation by dispossession created preconditions for capitalism by converting peasants into wagers, 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 (1995: 401, 407) also shows that “every social process of production is... a process of reproduction,” 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 labourer.” Marx (1995: 401-455) 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. He (1995: 441), however, 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.” 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*

Scholars argue that primitive accumulation is an ongoing process that contributes to generate or expand capitalism as well as redistribute existing surpluses (Adnan, 2013, 2015, 2016; Baird, 2011; Borras and Franco, 2010; De Angelis, 2001; Hall, 2013; Harriss-White, 2006; Harvey, 2003; Luxemburg, 2003; Sassen, 2010; White et al., 2012).

Luxemburg critiques Marx’s narrow understanding of primitive accumulation by arguing that the idea of expanded reproduction does not alone contribute to expand or sustain

capitalism, it is dispossession—driven by imperial force, war, fraud, and plunder—that continuously provides capital or raw materials and labor force to the production sites. De Angeles also (2001: 20) 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.

Harvey (2003) popularized the concept of accumulation by dispossession (ABD) by redefining the term primitive accumulation. He argued that dispossession primarily redistributes various forms of surpluses and wealth from the bottom to the top rather than generating new capital. According to Harvey (2003: 149), the major function of ABD is to solve the crises created by the expanded reproduction of capital at home through releasing a set of assets and labor power at very low cost abroad and immediately turning them to profitable use. Though Harvey (2003: 137-182) does not provide any definition of ABD, he discusses four major features of it: i) corporatization, privatization, and commodification of previously non-commodified assets, ii) predatory, speculative, and fraudulent forms of financialization, iii) the creation, management, and manipulation of financial or debt crises; and iv) state’s redistribution of wealth. Similar to Harvey, Sassen (2010: 51) argues that a predatory form of financialization of the economy shows the “return of primitive accumulation,” which not only extracts surpluses around the globe but also coercively expels people from their territory and livelihoods (Bin, 2016).

Adnan (2013: 94) 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: 122-124, 2015: 26-27, 37-41) shows that

primitive accumulation not only co-exists with the capitalist sector, but also it “interacts with the capitalist sector...without being subsumed by it.” Adnan accordingly finds a recursive causal relationship between primitive accumulation and capitalism: where primitive accumulation is concurrently seen as cause and consequence of the capitalist accumulation.

### *Accumulation by Dispossession*

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; they cannot explain the relationship between contemporary dispossession and capitalist accumulation proper. 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 “functional response to over-accumulation” nor organized by market mechanisms. Levien (2015: 147) accordingly develops the concept 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.”

Bin (2016, 2017) contends that classical primitive accumulation and ongoing primitive accumulation lack precise theoretical insights to understand how exactly dispossession reproduces capitalist social relations. He argues that dispossession should be understood by its own merit, particularly how it relates, or even does not relate, to capitalist accumulation proper. He thus offers a new analytical framework by examining three forms of dispossession. The first type is the redistributive dispossession (RD), which only redistributes already available capital or surpluses, making no such contribution to generating new capital. 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*

The above debates provide tremendous insights to understand dispossession under capitalism. Some discussions, however, have shown that classical primitive accumulation and ongoing primitive accumulation lack precise theoretical formulations to understand the relationship between contemporary dispossession and capitalist accumulation proper. Since Marx confines the function of primitive accumulation in the early history of capitalism, he finds no such functions of dispossession under a mature capitalist system. This chapter,

however, finds that dispossession plays a crucial role in capitalist accumulation under mature capitalism, including the re-production of proletariats, capitalists, and the middle class; the commodification of sociopolitical aspects of life; and the redistribution of existing surpluses.

While Harvey shows that ABD creates new outlets in the global south for the investment of over-accumulated capital, he provides no discussion to understand how dispossession creates local outlets for re-investment of (potential) capitals, which generates or expands a home-grown capitalist relation. Also, it remains unclear in Harvey's work how exactly dispossession alters an existing mode of production. The present essay addresses these issues. Although Levien denies the necessity of Marx's primitive accumulation and modifies Harvey's idea of ABD, he confines his theory of dispossession to the analysis of 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 middle-class, and expands market relations to sociopolitical and cultural life. This chapter examines these issues.

A few scholars (Adnan, 2013, 2015; Harriss-White, 2006) argue that primitive accumulation and capitalism co-exist and interact with each other. For Adnan, primitive accumulation creates capitalist social relations, but when capitalism further deploys primitive accumulation for its own expansion, they maintain a recursive causal relation between them. This causal model is, however, problematic because when a cause leads to a consequence, and that consequence becomes again a cause of the previous cause, then it

cannot maintain any form of causal relationship. It must be understood as a dialectical relationship. Also, Adnan does not discuss which particular aspects of capitalism and primitive accumulation are causally connected as well as interact and co-exist to expand capitalist accumulation. This chapter examines these dynamics.

While Bin's approach is most relevant to this chapter to understand how different forms of dispossession contribute to capitalism, it provides a limited explanation of how exactly those forms of dispossession interact and reinforce one other while contributing to alter or expand an existing mode of production. He focuses on the immediate effects of dispossession but not their collective contribution. Also, he does not specify how dispossession re-creates capitalists and the middle class, whose participation in market relations produces and controls surplus value. The present chapter sheds light on these issues.

Existing theories thus provide useful but limited insights to understand dispossession and lack a coherent theoretical framework. This chapter attempts to fill this gap. The proposed framework consists of four logics of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, hegemonic, and redistributive. 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 assists to convert agricultural land, water bodies, forests, mountains, and open space into outlets for capital investment or into potential capitals. In short, it transforms nature into capital or a commodity and a traditional physical structure into a commercial enterprise. This form of dispossession provides constant capital (c) to the production site to produce commodities at a lower cost



or directly converts nature into a commodity such as land as a stock. In all cases, this form of dispossession contributes to capitalist accumulation.

The exploitative logic of dispossession denotes a process of producing and expanding capitalist mode of production through not only proletarianization but also bourgeoisification and middle-class formation. In brief, it shows how dispossession reorganizes class composition by changing rent-generating, e.g., direct producers, and rent-appropriating class, e.g., rentiers, into profit-generating, e.g., wagedworkers, profit-appropriating, e.g., capitalists, and profit-realizing class, e.g., middle class. All groups are here interconnected by the logic of exploitation: the production of surplus value by the workers, the management (or creation) of surplus value by professionals (and capitalists), the realization of surplus value through consumption by consumers, and extraction of surplus value by capitalists. Exploitative dispossession contributes to create preconditions for capitalism by providing workers, 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 though pushing down the costs of variable capital ( $c$ ). Also, this dispossession made land, labor and other resources accessible to many non-capitalists who later turned into capitalists. Finally, this dispossession contributes to create a vast number of middle-class people once proletarianization and bourgeoisification created a capitalist relations through producing consumer goods and professional positions. The middle class appears as a professional and consumer class, whose participation converts commodities into surplus value.

The hegemonic logic examines the role of dispossession in commodifying traditional sociopolitical and cultural aspects of life. It contributes to expanding the consumer market to all spheres of social and personal lives, including national and local politics, legal system, education, and health, which ultimately increases the profit margin or surplus value (s). Finally, 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 dispossession here does not contribute to proletarianization, capitalization, and commodification, it increases the wealth of a group of capitalists. In this context, it reproduces and reinforces capitalist relations. Under this logic, capitalists, non-capitalist propertied classes, and the non-propertied poor experience dispossession. This dispossession can be both direct—when someone loses their wealth due to visible capitalist intervention and indirect—when someone loses their assets due to predatory or discriminatory property laws and regulations. Also, it can be either absolute—when someone loses everything due to dispossession or relative—when someone loses their partial property or income due to dispossession.

Lastly, the above four logics create their respective forms of dispossession, which collectively constitute the very logic of dispossession in capitalist accumulation. By definition, each form of dispossession plays a partial role in capitalist accumulation. As such, their collective roles create, reproduce, or expand the capitalist mode of production. In this context, all forms of dispossession co-exist and dialectically reinforce one another.

In the concluding section, the chapter further elaborates this interactive logic of dispossession in capitalist accumulation.

### **Findings: Dispossession and Capitalist Accumulation**

The transition of an agrarian society to a capitalist society in Bangladesh after the late 1950s reveals the striking empirical reality of dispossession. In 71 years, from 1947 to 2018, Bangladesh transitioned from an agricultural society with over 96 percent of its population living in rural areas to a neoliberal capitalist society, with nearly 36 percent of its population living in urban areas. Similarly, Dhaka city with a population of 52,000 in 1941 became a megacity with a population of 21 million in 2019. Empirical evidence collected from Panthapath, Dhaka shows an overall picture of dispossession that contributed to the creation and expansion of capitalist relations. While less than four percent of the population were urban dwellers in Bangladesh in 1947, Panthapath area had no such urban settlement. Dispossession had completely turned this place into an urban setting within 43 years, between 1947-1990. During this time, the area developed a mixed economy: agricultural and traditional capitalist system. However, during the construction of the Panthapath street between 1989-1993, dispossession completely wiped out the traditional sector. Since 1993, the Panthapath area has become one of the premier sites of neoliberal capitalism in Dhaka. In the following, I divide the findings section into four subsections to discuss how various forms of dispossession contribute to capitalist accumulation.

### ***The Transformative Logic of Dispossession***

The transformative logic of dispossession examines how traditional physical surroundings turn into a commercially organized settlement-space. The three considerable elements of the physical environment that have been capitalized in Dhaka are land, physical structures, and the natural environment. These components have become constant capitals (c) for capitalists in Panthapath. Forced land grabbing in Dhaka by capitalists was the dominant mode of acquiring land as a capital. Muhammad (1992: 20) shows that capitalists emerged in Dhaka during 1947-1971 by grabbing land mostly owned by the state and minority communities. He (1992: 107) also illustrates that “the country’s richest person grabbed 3,000 acres of land in different names in Dhaka and its outskirts” shortly after independence in 1971. Evidence also shows that over 50 real estate companies acquired hundreds of acres of the vacant land in Dhaka during the military regime for building commercial enterprises (Shafi, 2008).

Between 1947 and 1971, elites evicted some 300 peasant families in Panthapath to build various kinds of manufacturing factories, real estate companies and other commercial spaces. Elites in Panthapath 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 elites evicted nearly 6,000 peasants, a dozen old factories, and hundreds of small independent businesses in this area. Dispossession then opened up approximately 200 acres of land in Panthapath to use for the commercial activities, which ultimately created a vibrant formal and informal economic sector. Now the formal sector comprises more than 700 real estate and private

residential buildings, dozens of private hospitals, Asia's 8<sup>th</sup> largest shopping mall with over 350,000 shoppers each week, banks, universities, furniture marts, private slums, and other commercial spaces. Because of this capitalist intervention, land price 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: 32-33; Shakil, 2016: 5). Such a steep increase in land values has driven out all less profitable businesses and the old housing system. The ultimate motive behind this transformation was the capitalization of means of subsistence and material resources. The informal sector includes illegal commercial slum housing, self-employment, and domestic work. Together, the formal and informal sectors created home-grown neoliberal capitalism in Panthapath, Dhaka.

Table 3 shows the transformation (or capitalization) of the physical environment in Panthapath between 1985 and 2018. Evidence finds that the built-up area increased from 56.3 percent to 94.1 percent between 1985 and 2018, while 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 water body decreased from 2.3 percent to 0.9 percent. Findings also show that while tin-shed and wall with tin-shed housing structures were 24.7 percent and 21.2 percent respectively in 1985, now only 1.6 and 5.8 percent of such housing exists. The typical urban housing structure (i.e., building) was 48.6 percent in 1985, but now it is 92 percent. This evidence shows how capitalist intervention has converted the physical environment into capital. This massive transformation is comparable to Gottdiener's

(1985: 6) term “urban bulldozer,” i.e., the conversion of physical space into settlement-space.

Table 3. The Transformation of Land, Nature and Physical Structures in Panthapath, 1985-2018 (Land in Acres).					
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

The Figure 4 below, drawn on 26 different maps collected from government land offices, depicts the sociospatial information (1912-1915) of the northern side of the canal (within the 200-meter buffer zone) and a partial information of the southern side of the canal. The canal is shown in blue, which is now the Panthapath Street. The rest of the maps of the southern side are not available in government land offices. The figure shows that over a hundred years ago, less than fifty percent of the area was occupied by 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). The 2017-2018 map of this area (see Figure 5), however, shows the remarkable trend of the capitalization of the physical environment. While there were less than 100 structures in the northern side of the 1912-1915 map, there were nearly 550 commercial structures in the same side of the street in the 2017-2018 map (and 403 structures on the southern side).

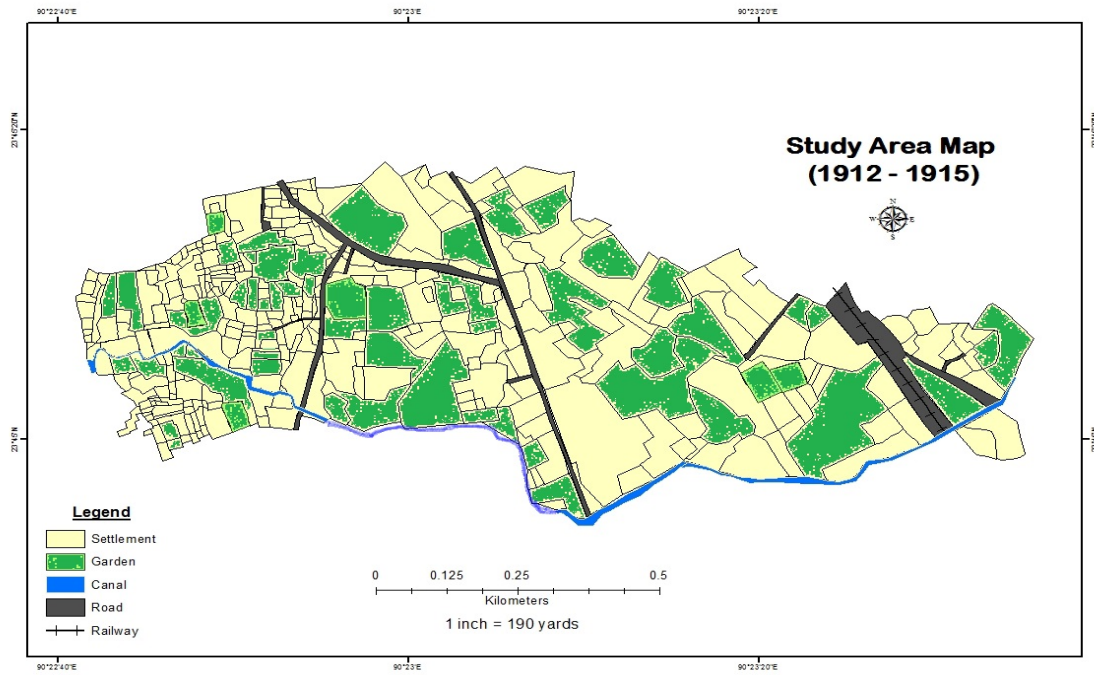


Figure 4. Sociospatial Information (1912-1915) of the Northern Side of the Canal.

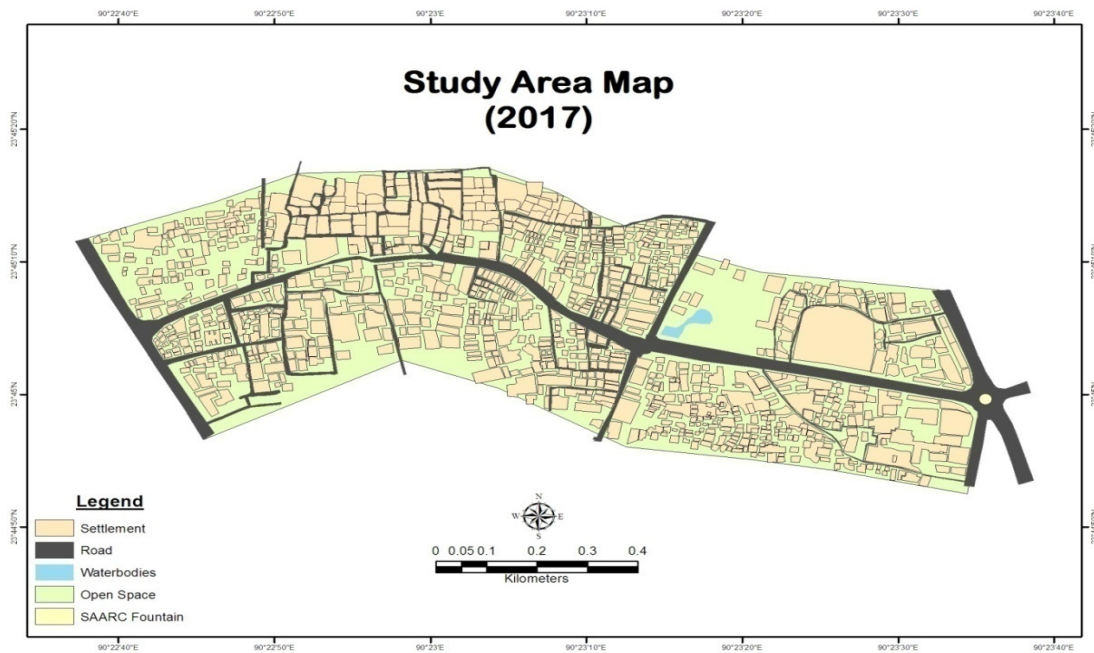


Figure 5. The Trend of the Capitalization of the Physical Environment in Panthapath, 2017-2018.



The qualitative evidence provides further insights into how dispossession created outlets to develop new businesses. Kamran Alamgir, 67, a businessman and a 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 buildings with two units on each floor. He told me that “I relocated those peasants forcefully, but I built a slum house with 50 rooms for them to rent out.” Later, he created five more businesses, including a sweatshop factory in Farmgate area where 300 workers are now employed, a garment outlet, a restaurant, a jewelry shop and a cell phone showroom in the Panthapath area. He told me that the “Panthapath street project created huge opportunities for me to access land in order to develop new businesses and convert old businesses into new ones.”

### ***The Exploitative Logic of Dispossession***

As I discussed in the theory section, exploitative dispossession plays a crucial role in capitalist accumulation by re-organizing class structure by converting peasants into working class (i.e. proletarianization), non-capitalists, such as politicians, landlords, and bureaucrats, into capitalists (i.e., bourgeoisification), and middle-class into consumers and professionals (i.e., the formation of the middle class).

### ***Proletarianization***

From 1947 to 1990, elites and the state evicted approximately 6,000 peasants from their land, homes, and livelihoods in the study area. The displaced poor have been

transformed into: proletariats or wagedworkers (56 percent), reserved army or unemployed (9 percent), lumpen proletariats (thugs) for the political parties (3 percent) and semi-proletariats or self-employed (32 percent), including street vendors, Rickshaw-cycle pullers, and Van (manual) drivers. This dispossession contributed to proletarianization in two ways: direct (wagedworkers) and indirect (reserved army and self-employed). Those who became typical wagedworkers after the eviction directly contributed to capital generation by becoming variable capital (v). However, those who became non-wagedworkers also contributed to increasing the profit rate by suppressing the wage rate in the labor market (see Bin, 2016).

Life histories, interviews, and the slum survey show that the dispossessed who became wagedworkers in the formal sector work in many places, including shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, and sweatshop factories. Bashundhara shopping mall in Panthapath, for example, recruited 763 full-time and 767 part-time employees (Fieldwork, Bashundhara City, 24 July 2017). Of them, nearly 20 percent are workers who mostly came from the dispossessed families. The businesses housed in that mall also employed 10,672 workers, with more than 30 percent coming from different slums, many of them from Panthapath.

The dispossessed who became wagedworkers in the informal sector in Panthapath are mostly day laborers, self-employed and women domestic workers. Though the former two groups directly and indirectly increased capital accumulation, domestic workers do not generate capital since they are organized by employing families. In this case, families exploit surplus labor. Also, a large group of lumpen proletariats in Dhaka including Panthapath, who work for political leaders, gang leaders, drug dealers, do not generate

capital. Finally, though nine percent of dispossessed people were found to be unemployed in 1990 in Panthapath, I recently found only four percent of respondents who are functionally unemployed. This group of people indirectly contributes to increasing the profit rate by pushing down the cost of variable capital through competition.

### *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, a new wave of bourgeoisification started. During this time, dispossession converted non-capitalists, including bureaucrats, military, politicians, landlords, 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 production sites in 1971 and 26,446 in 1991 (Habibullah, 2015). During the early 1990s, Dhaka had 11,790 industrial units. 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, I found 1004 capitalist entities in Panthapath (Land Use Survey 2017-2018).

Shafique Sardar, 71, a politician-turned-businessman, told me that he was a politician up until 1975. Later he became a businessman by establishing a private clinic. A bureaucrat helped him get a 20-decimal unit of land where 40-plus peasant families had

been living for generations. During 2001, he built two ten-storied buildings to convert that clinic into 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. He employed nearly 150 workers and 60 professionals in his hospital.

### *Middle Class Formation*

Dispossession also contributed to the formation of middle class in Panthapath. The creation of new businesses, jobs, and housing facilities by capitalists attracted middle class people to come to Panthapath for living and working. In this case, the middle class contributed to capitalist accumulation by working for the capitalists (adding values by becoming variable capital (v)) and 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, elites constitute 3.82 percent and working class constitute 21.38 percent; however, the middle class makes up the vast majority of the population—74.8 percent. This change in class composition occurred because huge job opportunities and attractive housing facilities in the Panthapath area brought hundreds of middle-class families to this area. Tomal Karmokar, 57, a manager of a chain shop in Panthapath, told me that he came to Panthapath when real estate companies offered a great price to buy apartment. He moved to this area during the mid-1990s with his family. He told me that “every month dozens of new families moved to his neighborhood to live and work nearby.”

### *The Hegemonic Logic of Dispossession*

The hegemonic assumption explains the role of dispossession in the process of commodification of (i) political and legal space, including power relations, clientelist party politics, and legal system, and (ii) sociocultural space, including family, education, health, and moral values.

#### *Political and Legal Space*

Bangladesh entered into a neoliberal market regime after a few years of independence. Dispossession contributed to this transition by providing land, labor and means of production. The power relations involved in this transition can be understood through examining the state-market nexus. Only 13 percent of lawmakers were businessmen in the first parliament of Bangladesh in 1973, yet over 61 percent of lawmakers were businesspersons in the current parliament and over 72 percent of them were in the previous parliament (The Daily Star, 2019a). This is an evidence of how national political space has been commodified. Dispossession provides land and other resources to turn some of those lawmakers into capitalists in Panthapath.

Dispossession also contributes to commodify clientelist party politics by creating conflict for gaining control over land, river, forest, and mountains. Below is a case study which shows how politics of dispossession has become a powerful mode of accumulating power and capital and how political power influences law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Khalid Hosen, 72, a 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 supporters and voters...[but] from 1974, political leaders began to focus more on making money through politics.” According to Mr. Hosen, almost every politician or lawmaker was able to increase their wealth. Mr. Hosen, however, told me that he made 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 securing the nomination from the party...so I had no choice without making money out of this politics.” 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 grabbed from a minority family with the help of a lawmaker. Mr. Hosen also mentioned that some 15 years ago one of his nieces was killed when a bus hit her in an evening at the Panthapath signal. That bus was owned by a powerful BNP lawmaker, who influenced the police to water down the charges and bribed the judicial magistrate. Eventually that killer got released during the appeal. My interview with Momin Haque, 64, a slum dweller in Panthapath, also revealed how clientelist politics have been commodified. He explained that “we used to sell our votes because we receive threats from thugs and politicians.” He also told me that candidates from different parties used to compete with one another to buy our votes.

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. A report by the Daily Star (2010) shows that the Bangladesh Army is now “one of the biggest conglomerates” in Bangladesh.

### *Sociocultural Space*

In Panthapath nearly 20 percent of households consisted of nuclear families during the 1970s; however, since 1990 evictions have turned all extended families into nuclear families. Dispossession also commodified the education system in Dhaka. Many of the new apartments built on confiscated land included commercial coaching centers. These coaching centers made almost all of the elementary and high-school students dependent on their education services. Now a 12<sup>th</sup> grade science student from a middle-class family in Panthapath must get help outside of his classes in school and needs the assistance of at least three different coaching centers. Dispossession also commodified housing facilities for the workers. While all the poor (5,591 or 21.38 percent) in Panthapath had their own houses 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. Most families must share their one-room apartment with another family because they alone cannot afford rent. A family in these slums lives in a 12-15 cubic-foot room and pays \$45-\$70 monthly, which is over 60 percent of their total income. The annual income of slum owners from these houses is approximately \$2 million.

Dispossession also commodified cultural aspects and healthcare system in city centers. Previously, Dhaka had no western-style restaurants. Now fast-food restaurants and food courts with foreign cuisines have flooded the city. The Daily Star (2019b) claims that

“Dhaka’s culinary scene is getting more and more cosmopolitan.” In Panthapath, there was no such modern restaurant before 1990. However, when capitalists got land, they created many such restaurants in the area. Now Panthapath has over fifty different places to eat. 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, a steep increase from the 33 private clinics that were open in 1982 (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 the country. In Panthapath, more than 12 private hospitals and clinics are located on grabbed land.

### ***The Redistributive Logic of Dispossession***

Competition and credit, according to Marx, are two major market mechanisms for the centralization or redistribution of capital that contributes to capitalist accumulation. Neoliberal capitalism, however, has introduced some novel mechanisms of centralization of capital, including financialization of the economy, privatization and commodification of public assets and benefits, manipulation of stock prices, fiscal incentives, and tax exemptions (Bin, 2017; Harvey, 2003). The centralization of capital in Panthapath and in Bangladesh includes all these mechanisms. The evidence from land use survey shows that both frontal sides of Panthapath street had numerous traditional forms of businesses and industrial factories. The emergence of financial capitalism in Panthapath after the mid-1990s, however, had displaced the factories and industrial sites. The distribution of the



financial sites are as follows. Together the left (the southern side) and the right (the northern side) frontal sites of the street house 11 (9) private residential buildings, 7 (13) real estate housings, 4 (6) private hospitals, 3 (1) private universities, 2 (3) shopping malls, 2 (3) restaurants, 9 (0) furniture marts, 0 (2) hotels, 1(1) Bank, 7 (0) transport offices, and 13 (16) other business institutions. (Here the numbers in parenthesis refer to the business institutions that are located on the right frontal side.) This economic transformation has brought both direct and indirect as well as absolute and relative dispossessions to Panthapath. Accordingly, many industrialists and small entrepreneurs lost their businesses and many of them became financial capitalists. The case study below provides an ideal example of redistributive dispossession.

An assistant manager, Bulbul Ahmed, 57, of a renowned business institution in Panthapath told me an emblematic story. Mr. Ahmed manages a marketing firm owned by one of the largest business groups in Bangladesh. 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. During the early 1980s, he built a sweatshop factory and employed over 200 workers. During the mid-1990s, he closed both of his factories and started a real estate business by building three eight-storied buildings. Later, he outcompeted other real estate developers to buy over 6 plots of land housing traditional businesses and factories. He replaced those businesses with financial institutions, including a bank, two supply outlets, a marketing firm, and a money exchange outlet. Next, he 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. Finally, he bought four small popular

restaurants and converted them into a modern food court. This time, the former owners of those restaurants were unwilling to sell their businesses, but Mr. Khan used political power to purchase them. As such, Mr. Khan's capitalist interventions dispossessed many workers, white-color professionals and capitalists. In most cases, these were examples of direct and absolute dispossession.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Existing theories provide tremendous insights to understand the contribution of dispossession to capitalist accumulation. However, they lack a relevant analytical framework to explain how dispossession not only alters a mode of production but can also expand and reproduce an existing mode of production. This chapter has proposed an approach drawing on a wide range of empirical evidence in Bangladesh. The framework consists of four logics of dispossession: transformative, exploitative, hegemonic, and redistributive. Each logic of dispossession creates its own form of dispossession. Together these forms of dispossession contribute to create a new mode of production or reproduce an existing mode of production. Their collective contribution comes into existence when various forms of dispossession co-exist and interact with one another. For example, first, proletarianization (exploitative dispossession) alone cannot contribute anything to capitalist accumulation unless capitalization (transformative dispossession) interacts with it. This means that a group of people (e.g., 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 produce commodities and re-create wagedworkers, capitalists, and the middle class.

Secondly, there is no real accumulation unless and until surplus value (s) comes into existence through consuming products in the reproduction site where hegemonic dispossession plays a crucial role in expanding market relations in order to commodify sociopolitical and cultural life. Finally, if there is no redistributive dispossession, there is no reproduction of the capitalist system, and there is no solution to the internal and external conflicts of capitalism. Also, redistributive dispossession (or centralization of capital) accelerates the processes of producing and realizing surplus value as well as the reinvestment of that surplus value. It makes a quick return from the re-investment. As such, an interactive dialectical relationship is always present among various kinds of dispossession, thus contributing to capitalist accumulation. In this context, Bin's (2016, 2017) typologies of dispossession and Adnan's (2013, 2015) idea of 'reverse causal relation' fall short of understanding these dialectical interactions.

While Marx (1995) shows no such function of dispossession under a mature capitalism, this chapter has shown how dispossession is simultaneously present at the emergence of capitalism and during the developed stage of capitalism. This evidence also shows that Levien's (2015) denial of the contribution of dispossession to alter a mode of production is a limited way of understanding dispossession. This chapter further has examined how Marx's idea of centralization of capital is similar to redistributive dispossession. This idea is also present in Harvey (2003), who argues that dispossession plays a crucial role in redistributing existing surpluses under neoliberal capitalism.

However, although Harvey provides no explanation of how dispossession creates outlets in developing countries to release overaccumulated capital, this chapter has examined how dispossession locally creates such outlets in Dhaka.

Finally, the proposed approach has outlined a framework to understand how dispossession plays a historical role not only to alter a mode of production or not only to expand/reproduce the existing capitalist system, but also to manage internal and external conflicts of capitalism. This chapter concludes by leaving a further research agenda: to understand how dispossession contributes to re-create urban movements against the predatory and destructive practices of capitalism.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL DESPOTISM: LABOR CONTROL AND SURPLUS**  
**PRODUCTION IN BANGLADESHI APPAREL INDUSTRY**

If money...“comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek,”  
capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.

Karl Marx, 1995, p. 538

Anarchy in the market leads to despotism in the factory.

Michael Burawoy, 1983, p. 588

**Introduction**

The Bangladeshi apparel industry, widely known as the Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry, began its operation in 1977 with two factories named Reaz Garments and Juwel Garments and exported USD40,000 worth of merchandise to France and Germany that year (Ahmed et al., 2014: 259). Another factory, named Desh Garments, came into existence in 1978, and partnered with a South Korean plant called Daewoo. After that, the volume and contribution of this industry, consisting of woven and knitwear sectors, increased at an exponential rate. Today, this industry has over 4,500 factories employing more than four million workers. Eighty-four percent of the country’s total export earnings in 2018 came from this sector and its contribution to GDP was more than 13 percent, some \$32.2 billion. After the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 in Bangladesh, a globally known

“industrial homicide” that took the lives of 1,113 workers, this sector closed its 1,250 unregulated plants and opened 350 new factories (Akter, 2019). Now it is the second largest apparel industry in the world and the US is the second largest importer of Bangladeshi apparel. Recently, Bangladesh has explored new bazaars beyond its traditional US and European markets. These include India, Australia, China, Japan, Russia, Brazil, Turkey, Chile, Korea, Mexico, and South Africa (Akter, 2019).

Although the western world has over three-hundred years of history in the modern clothing industry, Bangladesh has just passed thirty years of manufacturing clothing on a large scale. Western societies experienced stagflation, inflation and unemployment in the 1960s and 1970s due to the overaccumulation of capital (Harvey, 2004). In addition to this, urban riots, labor unrests, and environmental laws impacted the profit margins of western capitalists. Together these factors created an opportunity for western corporations to increase profit margins by relocating their plants offshore where exploitable, cheap labor power is available as well as market and state regulations are favorable. While the appearance of the Bangladeshi apparel industry was the direct result of the globalization of the production system, providing a cheap labor force to those factories was the direct function of dispossession. Harvey (2004) sees this process as the creation of new outlets (e.g., building factories) abroad by western capitalists to release their overaccumulated capital at home; dispossession plays a central role in providing land and labor to build the factories of the global south.

In Bangladesh, climate- and land-grab-induced dispossession sent millions of peasants from farmlands to factories. Now, over seventy percent of workers are landless

rural migrants in the RMG industry. Dispossession also converted a significant number of peasants into wageworkers in Panthapath, Dhaka, Bangladesh. This chapter primarily focuses on those workers whose families and themselves experienced dispossession and now work in this industry, i.e., dispossessed peasants-turned-proletariats. The overarching research question of this chapter: How do market and non-market actors dominate and exploit workers in the Bangladeshi RGM industry to create surplus values in order to reproduce the capitalist system locally and globally? Three specific and interrelated questions are as follows. How do market actors create and recreate different phases of labor process in the RMG industry? How do they adopt and deploy labor control strategies in those phases inside factories? And how do market and non-market actors deploy other strategies to control workers outside factories?

This chapter identifies six different regimes of labor control in existing literature: market despotism, ideological hegemony, managerial hegemony, hegemonic despotism, structural violence, and hybrid regimes. These regimes primarily focus on how capitalists and the state use a wide range of labor control mechanisms, such as coercion or consent, to dominate and exploit workers in a manufacturing plant. Though many ideas of those regimes are useful to this chapter, they lack a significant engagement with how market and non-market actors manage, govern, and exploit workers by adopting various labor control strategies in different phases of labor process. Accordingly, the chapter proposes an alternative approach to labor control. I call this ‘social despotism:’ a coercive process of creating surplus values by controlling and exploiting labor inside and outside the factory. This regime type deploys legal power, political and structural violence as well as informal

coercion to control and exploit workers. It consists of four phases of labor process, including hunting the cheapest labor and building factories, recruiting workers to the factories, organizing work and socializing, rewarding and punishing workers. Each phase is distinct from another in terms of their roles in the labor process. Two forms of oppression exist in these four phases of labor control: instrumental oppression inside the factory (by market actors) and structural oppression outside the factory (by market and non-market actors). Both forms of oppression reinforce each other to serve the interest of capital and constitute the very regime of labor control: social despotism.

This chapter uses two sets of empirical evidence collected in 2017-2018 from Panthapath and Dhaka in Bangladesh: 30 life-histories of workers from 17 factories and 13 interviews of different professionals, including a factory manager, supervisors, labor leaders, news reporters, politicians and scholar-activists. It also uses a wide range of historical documents and media reports. The next section of this chapter critically discusses existing theories of labor control in order to develop the proposed alternative approach. The following section details the methodological issues and the sources of data. The chapter then presents findings by dividing the section into four sub-sections, followed by the concluding section.

### **Theorizing Labor Control**

Marx (1995) introduced the most systematic study of labor control under industrial capitalism. Though the next famous Marxist theory of labor control is found in Gramsci's (1971) work, it was Braverman (1974) who renewed Marxist analysis of work under



monopoly capitalism and provided an influential theory of labor control (widely known as “Labor Process Theory” or LPT). (Here the LPT refers to a process of managing and controlling work and workers.) These three theorists, particularly Braverman, re-shaped almost all subsequent studies—both theoretical and empirical—of labor processes up to the late 1990s (Burawoy, 1979, 1983, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Littler, 1990; Knights et al., 1985; Knights and Willmott, 1990; Thompson, 1983; Wardell, 1990). From the early 1990s to date, numerous important studies appeared from the perspectives of the global north and global south to analyze labor control under neoliberal capitalism (Anner, 2015; Cho, 2001; Degiuli and Kollmeyer, 2007; Fishwick, 2018; Harvey, 2005; Holmes, 2013; Lee, 1995; Zhang, 2015). Another group of theorists also demonstrate how structural violence constitutes and reinforces highly coercive labor control practices in a factory (Copeland, 2019; Das, 2007; Galtung, 1969; Gupta, 2012; Farmer, 2005). This chapter will now discuss theories of regimes of labor control, and then will critically draw on these existing theories to develop the idea of social despotism.

### ***Market Despotism***

Marx (1995: 451) argues that capitalism produces an “accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, and mental degradation” and transforms the “workplace into a despotic, degrading, alienating environment” (Gurley, 1980: 31-61). Marx (1995: 286) shows that a capitalist, like a private legislator, uses “factory code” to exercise their autocratic power over workers in the factory. This code refers to the social regulation of

the labor-process, by which “All punishments naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages” (Marx, 1995: 286). For the factory owner it is more profitable when workers violate the factory rules. Burawoy (1983: 588) calls this “market despotism” or the “economic whip of the market.” According to Marx, market despotism emerges only when workers are solely dependent on wages.

This regime functions in the factory in three ways: it eliminates opportunities for workers to develop specialized skills, knowledge, and bargaining power; it increases the degree of exploitation of workers to sustain competition in the market; and it creates a “dangerous and unwholesome” factory environment by the systematic robbery of space, light, air and other facilities (Marx, 1995: 286-290; Burawoy, 1983: 588). Zhang (2015: 206) summarizes the characteristics of market despotism in the following way:

“...workers are closely monitored by management; wage is tied directly to output targets (e.g., piece rate prevails); rules and regulations are oriented toward control, discipline, and punishment, with military style of management as its extreme; workers are frequently exposed to the discretion of management and even abusive treatment; low trust exists between workers and management; high turnover rates are typical; etc.”

In sum, employers exercise coercive power over workers in the factory under market despotism. While this regime is crucial to understanding labor control and labor exploitation inside the factory, it does not show the whole picture. Market despotism cannot explain how western buyers are involved in controlling and exploiting the labor

force in a local factory of the global south. It also cannot explain how workers are controlled and oppressed by other workers inside factories as well as by slum owners, street men, and family outside the factory.

### ***Ideological Hegemony***

Critically drawing on Marx, Gramsci (1971) argues that elites under monopoly capitalism maintain their domination over workers by creating a hegemonic ideology, which generates “consent within the workplace and other spheres of economic life” (Degiuli and Kollmeyer, 2007: 500). According to Gramsci, hegemony refers to a cultural, moral and ideological authority by which elites dominate power relations and justify class oppression. Due to this hegemony, social classes, including the working class, embrace capitalism over other viable alternative social systems such social democracy and communism. Elites engage civil society, political society, religious organizations, trade unions, educational institutions, the media and local communities to construct consent in the broader society and gain consensus over conflicting issues (Gramsci, 1971: 206-278).

Gramsci provides an example of how hegemony works in the empirical world. He shows that Fordism—an economic model of mass production and mass consumption—constructed consent over conflict by using two strategies: providing relatively better financial incentives to workers (a material foundation of hegemony) and creating a new working class who would embrace values, expectations, success and consumption patterns of the middle-class (a cultural foundation of hegemony) (Gramsci, 1971: 279-318; Degiuli and Kollmeyer, 2007).

By reflecting on Gramsci, Harvey (2005: 39-63) argues that capitalists and neoliberal states work in tandem to employ think-tanks, academia, international and national apostles of free-market ideology in order to construct political “consent” and culturally acceptable “common sense” in broader societal levels. According to Harvey (2005: 39), this common sense “disguise[s] real problems under cultural prejudices.” Because of this construction of consent, big corporations and financial organizations justify their oppression of workers, dispossession of peasants, and even killing of people all over the world. This ideology is “hostile to all forms of social solidarity,” which eliminates any obstacles to capitalist accumulation. For Harvey (2005: 76), “labour control and maintenance of a high rate of labour exploitation have been central to neoliberalization all along.” Harvey concludes that the working class are the direct victims of this ideological warfare.

Degiuli and Kollmeyer (2007) bring contemporary examples from the “temporary help industry” in Italy to examine Gramscian idea of ideological hegemony of labor control. The authors (2007: 501-506) show that many corporations have developed “new modes of controlling and influencing the behavior of their workers” by empowering lower-level workers to make decisions in the company. Because of this, workers “voluntarily regulate their own behavior” and internalize organizational norms and management skill. This replaces the “explicit and bureaucratic” forms of labor control in the firms by creating a “new culture of work.” This new culture creates a prospect of permanent employment among part-time workers.

Although ideological hegemony works through motivating workers' behavior or creating a new culture of work in a factory, this culture is rarely practiced in the RGM industry due to the presence of coercion inside and outside factories. Employers find coercion more useful than ideological hegemony because their businesses are extremely competitive inside the industry and totally dependent on western buyers. This dependency, or market despotism in Anner's (2015) sense, however, only one part of the story of labor control.

### ***Managerial Hegemony***

Braverman (1974) argues that the modern technical management of work, consists of mechanization and automation, dominates employees in workplaces. According to Braverman, "the separation of the conception (management) from the execution (labour) of tasks...provides the driving motive for the modern organisation and control of the labour process" (Knights and Willmott, 1990: 7). More particularly, Braverman argues that the scientific management of work, known as Taylorism, restricts workers from developing creative skills and forces them to merely learn how to use the machine to speed up production. This process blocks the path for upward mobility in the workplace for workers and diminishes their bargaining power. This idea corresponds to Braverman's thesis of deskilling and management strategy: on the one hand, the "extreme concentration" of knowledge (e.g., scientific, technical and engineering) in the hands of management, on the other hand, an "awfully inadequate" set of skills (e.g., a particular and repetitious task, specific dexterity, and speed as skill) in the hands of workers (Knights and Willmott 1990:

8). Braverman also discusses how the labor process is connected with the “full circuit of capital”—from capital investment to surplus extraction and the ontology of class relations—the objectivist understanding of workers’ social position (Knights and Willmott, 1990: 10). Many scholars have critiqued and updated Braverman’s theory, including Friedman (1977), Edwards (1979), and Burawoy (1979, 1983, 1985).

In a recent study, Zhang (2015) shows that Chinese capitalism initially developed market despotism in private firms, but it soon created a managerial hegemony to control labor. Now management motivates and persuades workers to cooperate with capitalist accumulation and does not “rely entirely on the economic whip of the market.” The authority offers and promises various material incentives, including profit-sharing, on-the-job training, off-the-job programs, a certain degree of job security, several bonuses, upholding workers’ dignity, empowering workers, even sharing leadership with the workers (Zhang, 2015: 207). Zhang further argues that this form of managerial philosophy has built consent and trust between authorities and workers. To support his argument, he provides examples from three renowned Chinese companies: Huawei, Joyea, and Tecsunhomes.

Although technical management of work by automation and mechanization is a form of labor control (i.e., deskilling) under managerial regime, this deskilling thesis cannot explain how formal and informal coercion and capital-labor relation dominate and exploit workers in a factory. Also, while a managerial hegemonic regime deploys primarily noncoercive “shop-floor discourses” to control workers, this type of construction of

consent of workers to their exploitation is almost entirely absent in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

### ***Hegemonic Despotism***

Burawoy (1983) argues that hegemonic despotism became the dominant form of labor control in advanced capitalist countries during the 1970s and 1980s. For him, the hegemonic regime refers to a form of labor control where capitalists and the state play a complementary role. While the state regulates various aspects of the economy in the workplace—i.e., the “political apparatuses of production,” management organizes work in the production sites—i.e., the “labor process” (Burawoy, 1985: 596; Lee, 1995: 379-380). In particular, while the state supports the workers through welfare programs and enhances their bargaining power in the workplace, capitalists help the state to establish and fund the welfare state. Here the state supports the workers to increase their purchasing power so that overproduction cannot pose any threats to the sustenance of capital. Capitalists support the state because the state protects their interests through creating business friendly laws and regulating competition as well as conflicts among firms.

Burawoy (1983: 590) also discusses the role of workers in this state-capital-labor relationship: “Workers must be *persuaded* to cooperate with management. Their interests must be coordinated with those of capital.” Burawoy thus discusses the subjective dimension of class or “possessive individualism”: where workers give consent to be exploited by capital, organize collective action to protect their interests, and develop class-for-itself consciousness. Due to these mutual interests, Burawoy argues, consent prevails

over coercion in the workplace, where a “balance of power” exists instead of the Bravermanian notion of the separation of conception from the execution. This entire process is called the “making-out” game: a game that generates consent to its rules of exploitation at the point of production (Burawoy, 1985: 11-30; Knights and Willmott, 1990: 19)

Many contemporary scholars have critiqued and modified Burawoy’s ideas (Clawson and Fantasia, 1983; Harris, 1987; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Knights and Willmott, 1990: 19; Lee, 1995; Thompson, 1983). Lee, for example, critiques and reconstructs Burawoy’s theory by drawing on empirical evidence collected from two factories in Shenzhen and Hongkong. She (1995: 378) finds two different labor control regimes: “localist despotism” in Shenzhen and “familial hegemony” in Hongkong. Burawoy argues that a despotic regime emerges in a factory when workers lose their independent livelihood system and completely depend on wages. Lee, however, shows that though women workers in the Shenzhen plant have ties to their agricultural life and are not fully dependent on wages, a despotic regime emerges. Lee demonstrates that despotism exists in this plant because of an abundant supply of cheap labor and the state’s minimal intervention into the local market system. According to Lee, workers depend on local network ties to come to factories from farmlands and the management “exploit these ties to control labor” (Lee, 1995: 380).

Unlike Burawoy, Lee further argues that though women workers in the Hongkong plant lack any secondary supports including social insurance, a hegemonic regime emerges. This labor control strategy exists because “the manufacturing jobs are declining



and women workers desperately want to cling to their factory employment” (Lee, 1995: 380) Workers in this plant depend on their families and kin beyond their wages. Management seriously considers women’s responsibilities to their families and creates a family environment on the shop floor. And thus, familial hegemony prevails in the Hongkong plant. Lee also claims that Burawoy completely misses the gender dimension of labor control and labor relations in the plant. While a coercive disciplinary regime exploits women workers and treats them as docile “maiden workers” in the Shenzhen plant, a hegemonic regime reproduces familial relations on the shop floor to control workers and subject them to veteran and domineering “matron workers.” While Burawoy argues that the state plays a crucial role in determining market relations and regulating labor processes in the factory, Lee shows that the state plays no such role in those two factories. Accordingly, she (1995: 389) shows that a “high managerial autonomy” prevails in those factories.

Burawoy’s idea of hegemonic despotism, consent over coercion to control workers who solely depend on wages, is useful to this paper to understand how RMG workers are solely dependent on wages and lack any other forms of income support or benefits. However, this theory cannot explain how informal coercion and abusive managerial teams dominate workers on the shop floor. It also lacks insight to understand how buyers influence labor control strategies and non-market actors participate in controlling workers. Lee’s idea demonstrates that workers use local network ties to come to factories and the management exploit those ties to control labor under localist despotism. This idea, however, cannot explain how factory owners or managerial teams maintain a fictive-

kinship network in the RMG factory to recruit workers who mostly come from rural areas of factory owners. Once those workers are employed, the authority never hesitates to coercively exploit them. This is why it is imperative to understand labor control strategy attached to different phases of labor process. Lee's idea of familial hegemony is also almost entirely absent in the factories I studied. Finally, although Lee's idea of gender segregated shop floor is an important aspect of labor control, it cannot explain how women workers are oppressed by other women workers inside factory and by male members in the family.

### ***Structural Violence***

Galtung (1969) describes structural violence as any situation in which people cannot achieve capacities to their full potential. For example, extreme poverty, a form of structural violence, makes peasants so vulnerable in rural Bangladesh that they cannot escape the coercive and abusive working condition in a clothing factory and cannot earn as they deserve. It is structural because no single actor commits this violence; it is "impersonal," produced and reproduced by the "structure of power." (Galtung, 1969: 170-171; Gupta, 2012: 20). Scholars have used this concept to understand the social and historical determinants of health (Farmer, 2005), labor conditions for migrant workers (Holmes, 2013), effects of bureaucratic state practices (Gupta, 2012), and how indigenous people relate to democracy (Copeland, 2019), among other areas.

Though little scholarly work examines how structural violence contributes to controlling workers inside and outside factories, structural violence is present in

Burawoy's (1983) argument that a despotic regime emerges in a factory when workers solely rely on wages for their livelihoods. Burawoy, however, does not specify how dispossession, extreme poverty, exclusion from state programs, political violence, and corruption—a particular configuration of structural violence in Bangladesh—not only makes laborers dependent on wages, but also makes them especially vulnerable to egregious forms of employer oppression and exploitation.

Copeland (2019) argues that political and structural violence reinforce authoritarian democracy and neoliberalism in Mayan communities in Guatemala. The combination of a long history of political violence, racial and class inequality, and poverty force indigenous villagers into a very narrow set of political options. He (2019: 112) describes: “a neoliberal democratic political imaginary and affective formation in San Pedro [in Guatemala] and elsewhere that meshes radical desire with a lack of faith in collective agency and the belief that meaningful change is impossible.” This “radical pessimism”—a shared desire for radical change combined with a belief that that change is impossible—works alongside clientelist political strategies that foment community divisions and resentment to rationalize short term, self-interested politics, including support for authoritarian populists who villagers know will only make their lives worse. Yet they feel they have no other options.

I engage the ideas of structural violence and radical pessimism to develop two concepts for the proposed approach: instrumental oppression (inside factory) and structural oppression (outside factory). (An elaborated discussion on this can be found under the subsection of social despotism.) However, I find some limitations in these ideas. Although

these ideas show why and how workers are vulnerable inside or outside factory, they cannot explain how managerial teams organize work, socialize workers, distribute rewards, and discipline and punish workers inside factories. Putting in different way: these ideas lack adequate insights to understand how workers are oppressed in various phases of labor process that are internal to the production site and directly connected to surplus production.

### ***Hybrid Regimes***

This subsection discusses theories which are built on a several factors of labor control. Cho (2001: 65) finds three types of labor control mechanisms in Korean Maquiladora firms: repressive, remunerative and consensual. For the repressive mode of labor control, management use coercion, physical force, and threat, while workers show forced subordination to the management in fear of losing their job or suffering physical harm. Under the remunerative type, authority offers various material incentives while workers demonstrate a sense of being rewarded. In the consensual type, management constructs consent and build trust among workers through moral and cultural leadership, while workers grow a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Anner (2015: 292-293) argues that three models of labor control are observable in ten top apparel exporters in the world: state labor control regimes, market labor control regimes, and employer labor control regimes. He shows that the state labor control regime uses legal and extra-legal means to eliminate any sort of potential or actual collective action in the factory. He provides examples from China and Vietnam. Market labor control regime engages despotic measures, including disciplining workers and sabotaging labor

unions by the threat of factory shutdown. In other words, firms in low-income countries justify their exploitative labor control strategies by arguing that they lack bargaining power with the buyers due to the fear of capital-flight. He finds Bangladesh and Indonesia as appropriate examples of this regime. Finally, employer labor control regime is highly repressive because employers use coercion or violent means to control workers. Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia are some examples of this regime. Anner (2015: 293), however, argues that these regimes of labor control “are not mutually exclusive or static; all countries have had elements of each system.”

Since hybrid regimes of Cho and Anner combine two or more distinct coercive and noncoercive strategies to control workers, some of them are useful to understand Bangladeshi realities. For example, Anner argues that market labor control regimes (mostly dominated by buyers) exist in Bangladesh that adopt despotic strategies in the factory to control workers. Anner’s idea, however, cannot tell us how a wide range of labor control strategies exist in distinct phases of labor process, where buyers’ roles are almost absent. Also, unlike Anner, not only market, state, or employers control labor, but also slum owners, family, friends and local ties play important roles to control workers. While Cho’s ideas of repressive and remunerative regimes are found in the RMG industry, his consensual regime is rarely existent.

### ***Social Despotism***

The above discussions show that the existing literature lacks a relevant theoretical framework to understand how market and non-market actors organize and control workers

inside and outside factories. Here market actors involve buyers, factory owners, managerial teams, hired thugs, trade union leaders, and even coworkers. Non-market actors include various state agencies, politicians, bourgeois intellectuals, mass media, slum mangers, street men, friends, and family members. These social actors (market and non-market) play distinct roles in four interrelated phases of labor control or labor process. These include hunting the cheapest labor and building factories, recruiting workers, organizing work, and socializing, rewarding and punishing workers. Here each phase is distinct from another in terms of their roles in the labor process.

Such labor control begins in the hand of western capital while exploring the source of the cheapest labor power, making capital available to manufacturers, and providing guidelines to process work and workers. Also, in this phase, local manufacturers develop formal and informal relationships with global capital and local power structures to build and organize factories suitable for the effective control of labor. Second, factory owners recruit managerial teams capable of gaining effective control over workers. The managerial teams recruit workers by following their employers' guidelines and by using their local and personal ties to communities and workers' families. Next, authorities organize the work in a factory in such a way that maintains a balanced division of labor, maximizing workers' output and eliminating actual and potential obstacles to work. Finally, in addition to managerial teams, police, lumpen proletariats (thugs), labor leaders, coworkers, slum owners, friends and family participate to socialize, reward and punish workers inside and outside factory.

Two forms of oppression exist in these four phases of labor control: instrumental oppression (by market actors) and structural oppression (by non-market actors). I engage the ideas of “structural violence” and “radical pessimism” along with the idea of market despotism, to develop these concepts. Those ideas are useful to build the concepts because they can explain how garment workers have no option to escape the coercive and abusive environment in the RMG industry and how they render themselves to capital and the state despite the persistence of “radical common sense” among themselves.

Controlling workers inside the factory through instrumental oppression represents only one part of the reality, the other part exists outside the factory where structural oppression exists. Workers experience various forms of formal and informal coercion inside the factory because of their inability to quit the workplace as well as their forced consent to their own exploitation. Their entire world has been reduced to two options: work or starve. Here is the necessity of the term of instrumental oppression: a system of labor control that normalizes coercion on the shop floor and creates forced consent of workers to their exploitation by capital. This oppression not only increases profit by effectively exploiting workers, but also reproduces workers’ sense of collective vulnerability as a class. It thus eliminates any collective actions in the factory despite the persistence of workers’ radical common sense against their oppression.

Workers also experience oppression outside the workplace, including in the street, public places, slums, and family. Though each garment worker has agency, they cannot exercise it in the way they want to. Because, non-market actors, e.g., specialized police forces, thugs, and slum-owners, leave no room for them either in the street to organize a

protest or in the slums where thugs and slum owners spy on workers when they are giving interviews to local/foreign media. Street men often sexually harass and oppress women workers on their walking-way from slum to factory and factory to slum. This creates an extreme form of insecurity and fear in their daily life. It adds an extra oppression to women workers' existence, which reinforces their vulnerability in the factory. According to Das (2007), this is a form of structural violence, or a "violation of everyday sociality of life-worlds" (in Gupta 2012: 20). Many male members in the family also leave no room for women workers to have decision-making power. Women workers also experience domestic violence in the family despite their significant contribution to the family. Many men even do no housework in the family. These all are a few instances of structural oppression outside the factory.

Both forms of oppression, instrumental and structural, continuously remind workers about their vulnerable existence in factory and social life. While instrumental oppression regularizes coercion in the factory and forces workers to give consent to be exploited in the factory, structural oppression annihilates workers' collective bargaining power outside the factory and diminishes agency of individual worker in social life. Both forms of oppression reinforce each other to serve the interest of capital and constitute the very regime of labor control: social despotism. It refers to a coercive process of creating surplus values by controlling and exploiting labor inside and outside the factory. This regime type deploys legal power, political and structural violence as well as informal coercion to control and exploit workers. The ultimate function of this regime is to secure



an exploitative and repressive system of surplus production in order to reproduce the capitalist world order.

The figure 6 below shows the interactive processes of creating and maintaining the regime of social despotism. These processes include: 1) various labor control strategies in four phases, 2) actors who are involved in these processes, 3) forms of oppression that exist in the phases, and 4) creating surpluses in order to reproduce the capitalist system locally and globally.

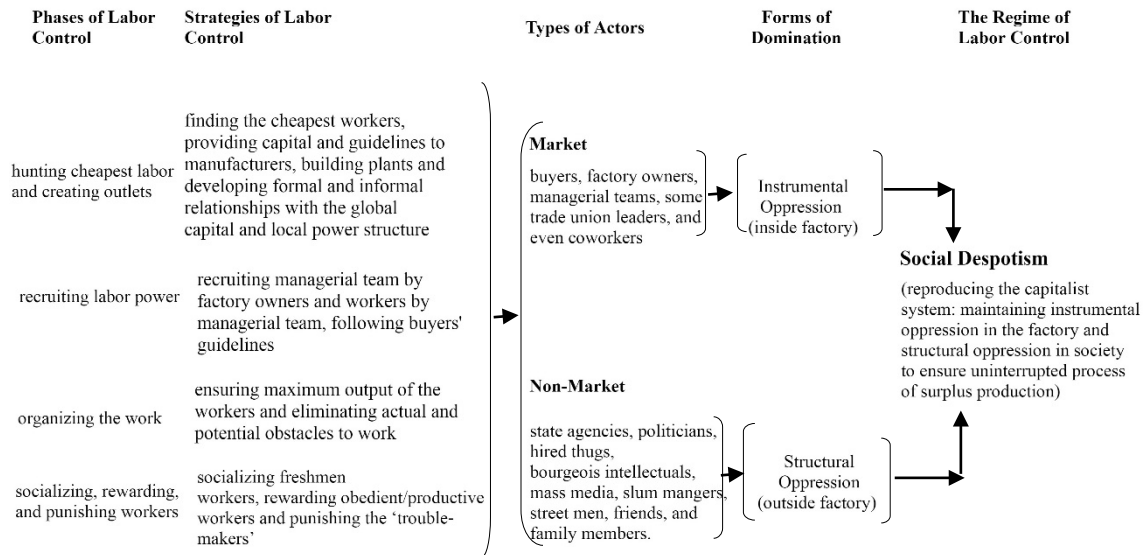


Figure 6. Interactive processes of creating and maintaining the regime of social despotism

### Methodology and Data Sources

This chapter uses two sets of empirical data, life-histories and interviews, as well as historical documents and media reports to understand how market and non-market actors dominate and exploit workers in the Bangladeshi RGM industry to create surplus values in

order to reproduce the capitalist system. The study collected life-histories of thirty workers, twenty-six women and four men, who live in Panthapath area, Dhaka, Bangladesh. At the time of the interviews, they worked in seventeen sweatshop factories located within the four-square miles of Panthapath, i.e., an inner-city area of Dhaka. Of 17 factories (Table 4), 12 are subcontracting (non-compliant) plants and 5 are contracting (compliant) factories. These workers previously worked in 26 factories located in different sites of Dhaka, including Panthapath. Of 30 respondents, 26 were born and brought up in the Panthapath area and are coming from dispossessed peasant families evicted due to land grabs. The other four respondents have been living in the Panthapath area for over 10 years after their migration to Dhaka due to their loss of agricultural land in villages due to climate change.

Table 4. General Characteristics of the Factories and Respondents						
Number and Types of Factories	Number of Workers (Approximately)	Number of Respondents	Gender (Male and Female)	Age of the Respondents	Startin g of Work at Age	Times of changing factories
<i>Contracting Factories (CF)</i>						
CF1	1,100	2	F	31	16	2
CF2	700	1	F	29	15	3
CF3	600	1	M	27	15	4
CF4	600	1	F	24	16	2
CF5	500	1	F	30	14	3

<i>Subcontracting Factories (SCF)</i>						
SCF1	900	3	M1, F2	47, 27	16, 14	4
SCF2	600	2	F1	35	15	3
SCF3	500	2	F	20	14	5
SCF4	500	3	F	33	16	5
SCF5	450	5	M1, F4	22, 30	15, 16	6
SCF6	400	2	F	23, 26	17, 12	4
SCF7	400	1	F	26	13	3
SCF8	400	1	F	21	16	3
SCF9	400	2	M1, F1	25, 30	13, 15	3
SCF10	350	1	F	36	12	4
SCF11	350	1	F	30	14	5
SCF12	300	1	F	24	14	3
n= 17 (CF5 + SCF12)	N= 9,500	n= 30	n= M4, F26			3

This study also interviewed thirteen people, including a factory manager, three supervisors, two labor leaders, two media persons, two politicians, and two scholar-activists. Many of the respondents for interviews also lived in the Panthapath area. Their ages are between 27-84 years. In addition to these data, the article also uses national and international media reports and archival records.

## **Findings**

An effective model of labor control in order to produce surplus production requires maintaining both instrumental and structural oppression in the Bangladeshi apparel industry. The following subsections show evidence of how these oppressions exist in the four phases of labor control that constitute the regime of social despotism.

### ***Hunting the Cheapest Labor and Building Factories***

While overaccumulation of capital, strict labor and environmental laws, labor movements and urban unrests were threatening the existence of urban manufacturing industries and lowering profit margins in western countries, the cheap labor forces of the global south and weak market and state regulations attracted foreign capital (Harvey, 2004). One hundred years earlier, Marx (1867) observed this reality:

In order to oppose their workers, the employers either bring in workers from abroad or else transfer manufacture to countries where there is a cheap labor force. Given this state of affairs, if the working class wishes to continue its struggle with some chance of success, the national organisations must become international” (quoted in Smith 2016: 39)

The appearance of the Bangladeshi apparel industry was the direct result of this globalization of production. This neoliberal globalization has provided guidelines to control labor and maintain high rates of labor exploitation in both western nations and many developing countries, including Bangladesh (Harvey, 2005: 75; Copeland and

Labuski, 2013: 64-73, 96-112; Smith, 2016: 9-21). Accordingly, labor control in the Bangladeshi apparel industry began in the hands of western capitalists who, deploying exploitative and repressive labor control strategies at home, provide such mechanisms to their suppliers at abroad. They provide capital, training and various guidelines to local entrepreneurs to build factories, organize and control labor and produce goods for them. They also provide instructions to determine wages for workers. Here is the crucial rule of the game: labor control strategies in a manufacturing country depend on how much buyers are paying to workers per hour (i.e., time rate) or per piecework (i.e., piecework rate) (see Burawoy, 1983: 592). An exploitative and repressive relationship between the north and south is developed at this stage. Drawing evidence on Bangladeshi apparel industry, Smith (2016: 12) accurately observes this reality: “capital-labor relation has become a relation between Northern capital and Southern labor.”

My interview with Sifat Chowdhury, 54, a manager of a subcontracting (noncompliant) factory reveals that they “try to follow the guidelines” provided by buyers and the Bangladeshi state to manage their factory. Mr. Chowdhury informs me that international certifiers, national and international trade unions, different human rights groups, NGOs, local and international thinktanks as well as various research organizations often provide instructions and suggestions to become a compliant factory. He further informs me that managerial teams from compliant factories used to visit western countries to receive training from their buyers and physically observe labor management system in their buyers’ business institutions. They then adopt those strategies in their factories. Subcontracting factories sometimes receive such ideas from their contracting factories. Mr.

Chowdhury told me that he attended several meetings to receive some guidelines from their contracting plants. However, he told me that they devise their own strategies of management and labor control in their factory. He also told me that “we cannot make any profit if we properly follow instructions of any local producers, buyers, or international organizations... We follow some of their guidelines those are mandatory, but we run our factory by our own rules.” The evidence shows how a factory becomes a despotic workplace.

This relative autonomy of the authority in the factory, however, cannot hide producers’ collective powerlessness and strategic loyalty to foreign capital when there is a crisis in western consumer market. A recent research report shows how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Bangladeshi workers (Anner, 2020). The reports shows that one million RMG workers in Bangladesh recently lost their jobs because many US and European buyers cancelled orders either already completed or previously placed with Bangladeshi factories. Bestseller, C&A, JCPenney, Kohl’s, LLP, Marks & Spencer, Mothercare, Primark, Tesco, and Walmart refused to pay for any such orders. Anner (2020: 1) says “buyers have a contractual obligation to pay for these orders” but they are violating the terms of the contract. Anner (2020: 1) further mentions that “the extreme fragility of a system based on decades of buyers squeezing down on prices paid to suppliers” made factory owners dependent on foreign capital and left unpaid workers without any savings for hard times. Also, tax breaks for buyers prevented the Bangladeshi state from providing “meaningful support to workers and the industry” (Anner, 2020: 1).

Another example of the powerlessness and loyalty of suppliers is manifested in a public plea to buyers made by Rubana Huq, the president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Ms. Huq said: “We will have 4.1 million workers literally going hungry if we don’t all step up to our commitment to the welfare of the workers...Please don’t give up on us. I appeal to your good senses not to let us down ... kindly do not let go of our hands” (Quoted in NPR, 2020). This form of powerlessness in the manufacturing sites has seriously affected workers’ rights and livelihoods (Imran, 2020). It also contributes to increasing the rate of exploitation and oppression in the factory, including layoffs, unpaid overtime work, and termination without severance. All evidence in the above shows why and how instrumental and structural oppression exist in this industry.

My interviews, with the manager, Mr. Chowdhury and a supervisor, Khalil Ahmed, 41, from a compliant factory, explored the roles of buyers in creating apparel factories in Bangladesh. They told me that every buyer used to bring various first-hand experiences from their home countries to share with Bangladeshi suppliers. They often taught factory owners how to develop a good relationships with the state, how to influence the state to create business-friendly rules and regulations, how to earn a tax break, how to handle labor unrest and labor union and how to secure the profit-generating system. Buyers often simultaneously work with manufacturers and the state to set the rules of the game: buyers urge them to pay the low trade-tariff, permanent supply of cheap labor, uninterrupted delivery of goods, union-free industrial sector, and special law enforcement for the industry. Once a relationship is developed between northern capital and southern capital

and the state, local manufacturers not only mobilize their economic resources but also their sociopolitical capital to build factories. Burawoy's idea of "production politics" can be understood as the pre-production politics.

Though Bangladeshi manufacturers initially exported goods to only three countries during the late 1970s, they have now extended their markets to over thirty countries. More than 2,000 suppliers run over 4,000 factories (Anner, 2020). Of those suppliers, many have their own compliant plants along with other own facilities. However, many suppliers have older and non-compliant factories, mostly located in rented buildings in the inner city, including near the Panthapath area. Gaining access to these noncompliant factories is not an easy task considering their location in crowded neighborhoods with narrow connecting streets. Most of these factories have extremely poor work environments: congested machinery, lack of ventilation, inadequate number of bathrooms and fire exits, insufficient space for dining or even no space for any first-aid facilities. Marx called this kind of factory environment a systematic robbery of space, light, air and other facilities. A few compliant factories in this area have relatively better work environment. These realities are some examples of the instrumental oppression.

Rebeka Sultana, 30, an operator in the sewing section, who worked nine years in two non-compliant factories and 6 years in a compliant factory, told me that factory owners always want to hide their location due to the extremely poor work environment and violation of laws. Ms. Sultana also told me that all those three factory owners violated building codes and had serious safety concerns. She further informed me that her former employers in two subcontracting factories used to bribe the safety and security team to



avoid any inspection. She again told me that factory owners in an inner-city area don't want to relocate their factories to a suburban area because of three reasons: using an old building for a factory is more profitable, organizing workers against the owner is very difficult, and buyers, trade unions and media reporters are less visible.

My interview with Mr. Ahmed also revealed that when a compliant factory is built in a suburban area, factory owners often build a wall around it. However, most non-compliant factories appear in congested neighborhoods of suburban areas, where no such wall is necessary. He told me that "the ultimate purpose of choosing the factory location is to develop an effective labor control mechanism...and maintain uninterrupted supply chains." Mr. Chowdhury had similar observations on this, but he spoke from an administrative perspective. He thought that it is not possible to control "organized" and "violent workers" without a secure physical environment around the factory. According to Chowdhury, "since violent workers used to throw bricks or stones to the buildings, a wall or other nearby buildings can create obstacles for them." This evidence shows how a factory is designed to instrumentally oppress workers.

Factory owners used to spend time, money and energy to develop mostly an informal relationship with the state, ruling political party and trade unions. They dismantle any effective attempt of collective action in the industry by using an informal private force and informal connections with the state. And police always serves the interests of factory owners when workers protest in the streets for increasing salaries and bonuses. Ms. Sultana told me that when any group of workers tries to organize in the factory or bargain with the authorities, the manager "used to phone police to visit the factory...police used to show up

and then the manager gives some money to them.” This an example of both instrumental and structural oppression.

Although, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a million of workers lost their jobs in the industry and went home without any severance, no government organization has taken any such effective measure to protect workers’ rights and interests because the factory owners have a strong connection with those agencies. A labor leader, Joly Talukdar, told a reporter that though at least 18 different government organizations’ approval are required to open a factory in Bangladesh, no one is protecting workers’ rights (Imran, 2020). She also said that the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIEF) “directly” serves the purpose of factory owners. In most cases, these factory owners maintain oppressive labor control practices.

My interview with a labor leader, Keya Khatun, 34, explored a similar reality. Ms. Khatun told me that “informal power relation is a strong and effective mechanism of labor control in this industry.” She also told me that because of this informal relationship, abusive and unregulated subcontracting factories exist. This type of factory, in most cases, does not qualify to get orders from buyers. Contracting factories use this facility to increase their production and profit volume. Accordingly, subcontracting factories make a profit under the shadow of contracting factories. Due to these informal and unregulated profit-making practices, buyers get cheap products, contracting factories make more money, state agencies and politicians receive monetary benefits, and ultimately, factory owners make their business profitable.

There is an open competition among factory owners in this sector to attract buyers by offering the cheapest market rate for their products. According to Mr. Chowdhury, buyers always gain in this situation. He terms this competition as “self-killing,” because it “completely annihilates the bargaining power of suppliers and empowers buyers.” He also told me that there is no coordination among suppliers to “reasonably” and “proportionally” distribute buyers’ orders among them. This competition is one of the strong reasons of why the world’s second lowest wage rate as well as exploitative and repressive labor control exist in the RMG industry. Mr. Ahmed also told me that this competition contributes to making irregular payments by factory owners to workers, which often leads to labor protest. Here is another place where an informal relationship develops between local manufacturers and global buyers. The above evidence show how local and global factors contribute to re-creating instrumental and structural oppression in the factory.

Compliant factories have an expert team who lobby buyers to receive orders. They also use their political capital and local reputation to keep receiving orders from buyers. However, to remain in the market, they also work with other international bodies associated with this sector, including trade regulating agencies such as WTO, global certifiers such as ILO, foreign states such as the US and EU and raw materials suppliers such as China and India. Successful factory owners must know how to use politics to get work orders in order to remain in the market. Subcontracting factories also do politics locally: they compete with other similar firms to receive orders from contracting factories using various political and social capital. These subcontracting plants, however, also try to directly receive orders from buyers (which is more profitable), but in most cases, they fail

due to their unregulated and abusive work environment. Karim Sikder, 27, a worker in a finishing section of a subcontracting factory, told me that different buyers group visited his factory seven times over the last two years, but buyers did not directly place any order with the factory due to the “extremely” poor work environment. The above evidence shows how instrumental oppression exists in the factory to generate a higher profit margin.

Some scholars argue that giant retailers (e.g. Walmart) control and dominate power relations in the “buyer-driven” global production network or global value chain (Anner, 2011; Appelbaum and Lichtenstein, 2006; Bonacich and Appelbaum, 2000; Collins, 2007; Copeland and Labuski, 2013; Gereffi, 2002). One of the central focuses of these giant companies is to influence labor control policies and strategies in their foreign production sites. Drawing on Gereffi and Bair’s (2010: 14, 46) observations on backward linkages and power relationships in the Nicaraguan value chain, it can be argued that there are three major groups who dominate power relations in the value chain of Bangladeshi apparel industry: 1) the super dominant groups—the marketers, retailers, and regulators (such as WTO and ILO, U.S., EU and Chinese/Indian foreign policies); (2) the dominant groups—manufacturers, the state, certifiers, loan providers, and INGOs/NGOs; and (3) the subordinate groups—workers, unionists, and local human rights organizations. In sum, the global and local power relations—both formal and informal—in this industry can be understood by the following diagram (Figure 7). These power relations directly and indirectly contribute to adopting and implementing labor control strategies in the RGM industry, further reproducing instrumental and structural oppression.

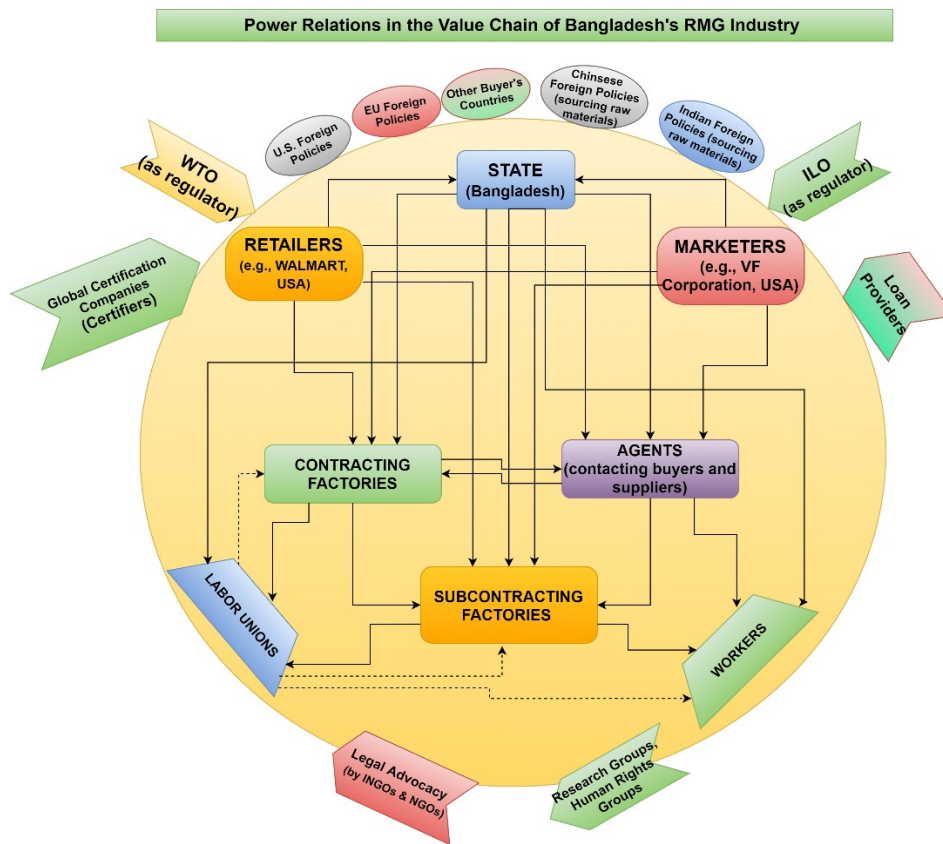


Figure 7. Power Relations in the Value Chain of the Bangladeshi Apparel Industry

### *Recruiting Labor Power*

My interviews with Mr. Chowdhury, Mr. Ahmed, and several workers reveal how formal and informal practices of hiring employees are closely connected with labor control. A factory owner recruits a managerial team capable of gaining effective control over work and workers. This team usually includes a group of people, including a general manager (GM), a production manager (PM), an assistant production manager (APM), and a couple of supervisors, in-charges and line chiefs. Also, a second group of employees, including HR officials, local and international contact persons, various experts, exist in a factory. Though a factory owner, in many cases, follows a formal process (such as public job

advertisement) to recruit a managerial team, they consider several things: political identity, affiliation with the state agencies, attachment to local community, personal reputation, and work experience in administration such as dealings with workers and trade unions. In the factory, the upper managerial team, such as GM, PM, APM, often recruits members in the lower managerial team such as supervisors, line-chiefs, and HR officials. There is another group of employees—either temporary or permanent—in the factory, including a doctor, a nurse, a baby sitter, and a religious instructor. This particular hiring process uses either personal networks or public advertisements.

There is also an informal practice in the recruiting process of the managerial team, particularly the GM, PM, and AGM. The factory owner sometimes hires people in these positions who are closely connected with their own personal networks. The upper managerial team, however, follows bureaucratic rules to recruit member in the lower managerial team: expert, senior, and obedient workers often get those positions. This is what Burawoy calls “internal labor market.” The above-mentioned recruiting processes and practices are key to success of a factory: these are the people who organize, control, and oppress (instrumentally) hundreds or even thousands of workers in a factory.

The lower managerial team recruits workers by following their employers’ guidelines and by using their local and personal ties to communities or workers’ families. The recruiting process of workers is entirely different. Prospective workers often gather in front of the factory. Then, the lower managerial team comes to the gate and ask a few questions to the group, including: who can do what type of work? And how many years of experience do they have in that position? Once they find a group of workers who fulfil

hiring criteria, they take those people inside the factory. Those workers are then asked to show their skill. Once the hiring authority likes someone's work, she or he gets the job. This practice of hiring workers are mostly for the cutting, sewing, dyeing, washing and finishing sections. When they need helpers (the beginners), they pick-up some workers from that gathering who are "tall," "looking smart," "women" and "young." A factory used to recruit some workers in a specific day of (almost) every week: prospective workers know which factory is conducting job search in which day.

The recruiting authority often hires workers from the factory owner's or manager's local areas to minimize labor unrest in the factory. Samia Tanni, 37, an operator in a subcontracting factory, told me that "99 percent workers in her factory came from the local area of the factory owners." She also told me that many of the members in the administration are also from the same area. Age is also an important factor for hiring and controlling workers in the RMG sector. Recruiting workers who are under 18 is always profitable to the factory owners because they are paid less and are easily manageable. They often avoid attending any protest movements. According to Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, a "child" laborer is defined who is in work under the age of 14 and an "adolescent" labor is defined who is over 14 but below the age of 18. So, hiring a worker in the formal sector who is below 14 is illegal. But a child who is under the age of 14 can enter into an informal sector to do "light work" (42 hours a week).

Each and every worker I interviewed started their job between 12-16 years of age. Prospective workers who are under-aged use a fake birth certificate for the authorities. This practice is rampant and still in place. A survey of 3,000 household in Dhaka slums reveals

that majority of girls who are below 14, are employed in apparel industry, while 13 percent of boys under 14 are working in this sector (Overseas Development Institute, 2016).

Another survey of 3,367 RMG workers (only women and girls) shows that three percent of workers are between the age of 10-13 and 11% of them are between 14-17 (Asadullah and Wahhaj, 2017). In 1992, nearly ten percent of workers were children (below 14) in the RMG industry. One of the authors of the Overseas Development Institute report, Maria Quattri, told NPR that these underaged workers are mainly “working for subcontractors in informal garment factories that produce a part of the product that is then sold to formal businesses. And the formal businesses export the product” (NPR, 2016).

Samia Tanni, 43, an operator in a subcontracting factory, told me that recruiting authorities follow certain strategies to hire underaged workers. In many cases, supervisors tell their current workers to bring their family members who are underaged to work as helpers. They then put those workers on temporary payroll and pay them less than the regular workers. Also, in some cases, existing workers in the factory request their supervisors to hire their underaged daughters or girls close to their families. The third case is that factories recruit underaged workers directly from the factory gate. In all cases, these girls collect false birth certificates to show to the authorities. Ms. Tanni told me that she began work at the age of 11 as a helper in the first factory built at Panthapath area, which later moved to a suburban area. She also told me that “I brought my daughter to the factory two years ago with me when she was almost 14 years old.” Both of them are now in the same factory and same section and do the same work (operators in sewing section), but her daughter is paid 20 percent less than her. All the above evidence of recruiting process



shows how various factors, such as regionalism, gender, and age, contribute to maintaining both instrumental and structural oppression in a factory.

The last group of employers (informal, and fairly small in numbers) in the factory are called thugs, what Marx says: “lumpen proletariats.” They are not registered workers and are entirely informally recruited. They work both inside and outside the factory. Some of their tasks include: spying on lower managerial team members, workers, trade union leaders, threatening employees who are not obedient at their “expectation,” crushing any attempt to organize workers in the factory, acting violently with workers who protest inside the factory as well as with workers who come from other factories to join their workers. This particular group of people are directly involved in using instrumental oppression inside a factory and structural oppression outside a factory to control workers.

In sum, the above evidence show that various factors influence recruiting process in this sector, including gender, age, physical appearance, political affiliation, fictive kinship such as regionalism, and real kinship such as family members or close relatives. These are both formal and informal mechanisms of labor control in terms of recruitment.

### ***Organizing the Work***

Since division of labor in a factory itself is an effective strategy of labor control, the authorities organize work by creating and maintaining a ‘balanced division of labor.’ It ensures maximum output from workers, eliminates obstacles to work and increases production and profit rates. A typical or ‘balanced’ form of division of labor in a woven factory has two dimensions: primary and secondary. The primary dimension refers to the

major sections of work in the factory, including marking and cutting, sewing, and finishing. The secondary dimension refers to further segmentation of work. For example, a worker in the sewing section does only one small part of total sewing work: either sewing only one pocket or attaching a zipper, or fitting buttons for a pair of jeans. No two people are doing the same job. Another example of this division of labor from the finishing section shows the following steps. The first worker removes dust/spot from a shirt when it comes from the sewing section, the second one puts a piece of paper and folds the shirt, the third one puts a piece of plastic sheet under collar, the fourth one attaches two or more clips to keep the shirt folded, the fifth one attaches a price tag, the sixth one wraps the shirt with a piece of thin paper, the seventh one checks the quality of the work, the eighth one puts it in a packet, the ninth one puts it in a shipping box, the tenth one seals the box and the last one takes it to shipping storage.

This form of division of labor automatically keeps workers busy in order to reach her hourly or daily output target. It gives workers no break when the work is running. A worker is controlled by her own work in the entire day. Additionally, supervisors, floor in-charges, and line chiefs are used to monitor workers' production output every single hour. This also puts extra pressure on their work. Diya Najnin, 21, works in the finishing section of a compliant factory and folds shirts or pants. The daily target for their group of nine is completing 2,000 individual packages of shirts or pants in eight hours. She told me that because of this work arrangement "no worker finds any scope to get even a glass of water or go to the bathroom." She also told me "sometimes I feel like I am in a prison cell where criminals have no human rights." However, she informs me that by this kind of work,

management forces every worker to be productive at the same level. The above forms of labor control are ideal examples of instrumental oppression.

Paying workers equally for different types of work or paying unequally for the same type and amount of work creates conflict and chaos in the factory. Accordingly, determining different wage grades (Table 5) for workers based on their skill and experiences in their particular portion of work is another dimension of labor control. In the Bangladeshi RMG industry, a wage board usually determines minimum wages for workers. This board is led by a senior district judge and joined by representatives from employers and workers and approved by the Law Ministry and the Ministry of Labor and Employment. A minimum wage refers to “the lowest amount of remuneration given to a worker in a specific sector by employers” (Ovi, 2019). The country’s first wage board for this industry was formed in 1984 and set \$7.67 for monthly salary (which covered 33% of living cost for a family of three: spouse and a child). In 1994, the minimum salary was \$12.57, followed by \$21.87 in 2006, \$37.5 in 2010, \$66.25 in 2013, and from 2018, it is \$96 (covers 47% of the living cost).

Table 5. Grades and Gross Wage in 2013 and 2018 (in Taka and USD [\$1=84TK])				
Grades	Job Types	2013 (gross wage)	2018 (gross wage)	Percent increase (gross wage)
1 <sup>st</sup>	Pattern Master, Chief	13,000	18,257	
	Quality Controller	(\$155)	(\$217)	40.44

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mechanic, Electrician, Cutting Master	10,900 (\$130)	15,416 (\$184)	41.43
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sample Machinist, Senior Machine Operator	6,805 (\$81)	9,845 (\$117)	44.67
4 <sup>th</sup>	Sewing Machine Operator, Quality Inspector, Cutter, Packer, Line Leader	6,420 (\$76)	9,347 (\$112)	45.59
5 <sup>th</sup>	Junior Machine Operator, Junior Cutter, Junior Maker	6,042 (\$80)	8,875 (\$106)	46.89
6 <sup>th</sup>	Operator of General Sewing/ Button Machine	5,678 (\$68)	8,420 (\$100)	48.29
7 <sup>th</sup>	Assistant Sewing Machine Operator, Assistant Dry Washing Man, Line Iron Man	5,300 (\$63)	8,000 (\$96)	50.94

Sources: Bhuiyan, 2013; Salam and McLean, 2014: 10; The Daily Star, 2019c

The trend of monthly minimum wage, increased in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of this industry between 1984-2018, shows that \$6.60 was the monthly minimum wage for workers in 1984, which now increased up to \$95 in 2018. (Here the currency conversion from BDT to USD is estimated based on the currency rate of 31 May 2020.). This is the second lowest wage in the world in this sector after Sri Lanka. In January 2019, the minimum salary of

workers in this sector was \$136 in Vietnam, \$160 in India, \$ 170 in Philippines, \$197 in Cambodia, but \$95 in Bangladesh (The Prothom Alo, 2019).

The division of labor also refers to the distribution of power in the factory, which is directly related to labor control strategies. While a manager exercises and enjoys a great deal of power over other members of the managerial team and workers in the factory, workers have almost no power in the factory. However, the managerial team is not an all-powerful body: they can exercise absolute power over workers, but they are often powerless in relation to their employers. Accordingly, two types of power relations exist: vertical—owner vs. managerial team, managerial team vs. workers and horizontal—owners vs. owners, upper managerial team vs. lower managerial team, and senior workers vs. junior workers.

There is also a gender dimension within this power relation. Men usually dominate both groups of administration. While men dominate the marking/cutting and washing/dyeing/ironing sections, which offer higher salaries, women dominate the sewing and finishing sections where salaries are lowest. Fajila Khatun, 26, an operator in the sewing section, told me that administration usually do not want to hire men for the sewing and finishing sections. She also informed me that when a factory faces any financial issue, workers from these sections suffer most: they receive payment irregularly, month after month. She further told me that a “salary cut” is a regular occurrence in these sections. Finally, she explored a unique idea about how the authority instrumentalizes gender relations in the shop floor. She said to me that “supervisors want an obedient woman but a strong worker who can work like a strong man in the factory.” She left her jobs twice

because of this unrealistic demand for production output. She used to weep every day after returning from work. However, her needy family cannot allow her to stay home, nor can she find a new job in another sector. This is an ideal example of both structural oppression and instrumental oppression. This evidence also shows how structural violence reinforces both forms of oppression.

Granting leave for medical conditions or maternity purpose is another area of organizing work and labor control by the factory management. The administration takes these situations seriously. Asking for a leave—paid or unpaid—by a worker is a huge loss to the authority in this sector, where every single minute counts. Workers' work satisfaction and the justification of their own exploitation, however, depend on how they are being paid and granted leave by the authority. Ms. Najnin took both maternity leave and medical leave over the last two years. She told me that she got 110 days maternity leave and 14 days medical leave. Also, the third type of leave in her factory is 10-days annual leave. She further told me that “my pregnancy leave was partially paid, my supervisor gave me TK15,000, but I was supposed to get TK30,000. She told me that “the administration discourages us to have babies by paying less than we deserve.” She also told me that some factories give TK 40,000 to workers who go for a maternity leave. Another aspect of the organization of work is giving a break during lunch. The time of the lunch break differs from floor to floor so that workers from one section cannot meet and talk with workers from other floors. This is a way of minimizing the chances of organizing any type of collective action.

### *Socializing, Rewarding, and Punishing Workers*

My interviews with workers reveal a wide range of strategies of socializing and disciplining workers inside and outside factories. Not only managerial teams but also police, thugs, labor leaders, coworkers, slum owners, friends and family members participate in socializing and disciplining workers. Though the managerial team is coached and monitored by the factory owner, they are usually self-controlled and self-responsible in the workplace. Other non-worker employees are also self-controlled. These employees contribute to socializing and disciplining workers in numerous ways by playing their individual or collective roles. The managerial team also offers various kind of rewards to workers who are obedient and productive in the factory. They also use various means to punish workers who are disobedient or organize workers against the interests of capital.

### *Socializing Workers*

A senior operator, Jorina Begum, 37, from a compliant factory reported to me that the authorities used to deny their roles in paying us a low wage for our hard work. She said that the authority used to say: we are not paying you less, we are not stealing your wages, we are not demanding overtime work; buyers are making profit on us, and we are helpless to them; we cannot bargain with them because they can leave us anytime; if they leave us, you will lose your job, we will lose our business, and the country will suffer a lot. The managerial team thus simultaneously creates a sense of ‘collative interest’ and ‘collective vulnerability’ to control labor in the factory. Many researchers, media persons, market experts, economists, and even civil society members share and uphold both of these senses.

Though the authority creates the sense of collective interest, they divide workers to dominate them. For example, when a group of workers bargains with the authorities to protect their interests in the workplace, the administration then motivates another group of workers not to join them. This creates a division among workers and prevents any chance of developing collective action against capital.

Visits to factories by buyers serve to demonstrate a typical case of how the managerial team socializes and disciplines workers. They teach workers how to tell “a bunch of lies” to buyers. Workers call it a ‘complete lie.’ The authorities announce the date of the buyer visit ahead of time and clean the entire factory, including bathrooms. They provide all necessary safety and protective equipment (such as glass, gloves, facemask, and gown) that workers need to use for their work. They alert workers to work properly, with care, sense and responsibility. They coach workers about how and when to show their smiling faces to buyers, how to respond to their questions, how to speak well about the factory and management. The authority also instructs workers to tell buyers that they are happy with their job and wages, that their wages are regularly paid, and that their families hugely benefit from their income. Copeland and Labuski (2013: 99) write about this kind of inspection culture in factories where Walmart used to source their products: “factory owners are typically warned prior to inspections, and bosses routinely coach employees about how to lie to inspectors about conditions and wages.” These are examples of hiding instrumental oppression in the factory.

One respondent, Nabila Tabassum, 18, told me that when any inspection team visits the factory, the owner, GM and other important people join them. They walk through floor



to floor and talk to workers. The authority always warns young workers not to talk much to buyers if they are called. Ms. Tabassum told me that “during the inspection day the authority used to grant forced leave without pay to young workers to hide them from buyers.” And if any worker tells the truth to the inspection team, they are fired immediately without any severance. This evidence shows how the authority seeks forced consents of workers to their exploitation—an example of instrumental oppression.

The lower managerial team sometimes allows some senior workers to instruct freshman workers about how to operate machines in the factory. Once these workers receive free training inside factory and become operators, they show their loyalty to the authority and avoid any collective action. A significant number of such workers are found in all factories, as my interviews revealed. The authority also allows Muslim workers to say their prayers during the one-hour lunch break. During this time, a religious instructor also teaches workers how to read the holy Quran, how to learn Namaj. Mina Hoque, 19, a helper in the sewing section, told me that previously we had a 40-minute lunch break, now the authority extended this up to one hour to teach Quran and Namaj. Rikta Begum, 23, a sewing operator from a compliant factory, also told me that her factory offers three breaks (15 minutes each) in a 14-hour-shift to say prayers to Allah. Mr. Ahmed told me that this sort of service to workers makes “workers less violent and happy in a factory.”

The managerial team also warns workers that once they are in the factory, they are not allowed to go outside for any reason. The gateman maintains this rule very strictly. Close-circuit cameras are everywhere for constant surveillance of workers’ movement and activities. The entrance of a worker with a mobile phone is strictly prohibited in the

factory. Also, the entrance of news reporters to the factory is restricted, except in special cases such as a fire or workers' protest. The authorities also instruct workers to share nothing with media persons about the factory, their work, or their salary. They also instruct workers not to allow media persons to visit their house to talk to them. Both instrumental and structural oppression can be found in the above evidence.

Verbal abuse (e.g., bullying) is another strong mode of disciplining workers in the factory. All workers I interviewed reported to me that they were bullied by the lower managerial authority almost every day in the factory. Any kind of mistake in workers' production work did not go unnoticed: if the supervisor finds any fault (or alter) in any work, they used to throw that product (a shirt or a pant) toward that worker's face and cut hours or demand unpaid overtime work. In this context, supervisors never hesitate to humiliate workers in front of their coworkers. A supervisor's aggressive bullying towards a worker warns other workers in the shop floor. Supervisors react aggressively because they are also bullied by the upper administration if workers under him/her fail to reach to the production target. A failure for making a production target by a worker is considered the failure of the supervisor. Workers become used to working and surviving under this systemic practice of bullying. A worker called it "institutionalized terrorism," which has been normalized in the shop floor. This is a typical example of instrumental oppression.

Ms. Tabassum told me that "we [workers in this industry] are the most unfortunate people who have no way to avoid bullying and quit the job. We came to Dhaka for this job after losing everything in the village." The reaction of verbal assault does not end in the factory. While it creates a 'sense of worthlessness' for a worker in the factory, it extends to

their personal and social life. Thugs, police, slum owners, even men in the family avoid showing proper respect to women garment workers. This treatment of workers contributes to maintaining the structural oppression in society.

Workers are socialized to give forced consent to their own exploitation in the factory. Lata Rahman, 20, a helper in a subcontracting factory, told me that the garment industry brings jobs for many poor women who had no other way to earn even a penny. She told me that before starting this job, my father and mother advised me many times to avoid all conflicts (*ganjam*) at the factory, obey seniors, respect colleagues, and make a good relationship with the employer. As such, she never protested against her abusive supervisors who behaved rudely with her. Rather, she blamed herself for her own fate working in this sector: “Allah has determined our fate; we cannot change it...He wants me to live and survive with this struggle.” She further told me that she always tries to make her siblings and parents happy by continuing this job and earning regularly. And because of this, she tolerates all bullies and insults in the workplace and remains silent to injustice with unpaid hard work. This is an example of how instrumental oppression, i.e., experiencing bullies and insults in the factory, interacts with structural oppression, i.e., remaining silent to injustice due to family obligation, to reproduce an exploitative labor control strategy.

Sexual harassment and violence by the lower managerial team is an aggressive form of disciplining women workers in the factory. Women workers try harder to do their work properly to avoid this harassment. However, when violence occurs, they do not report it to the higher authority because of the fear of losing their job and losing respect

from colleagues. Paton (2020) in her NYT piece shows that after the Rana Plaza disaster significant progress was made in the apparel sector in terms of building and fire safety. However, she mentions that many issues continue to be ignored, including low wages and abuse. She cites a research report of Labour Behind the Label and shows that “80 percent of garment workers in Bangladesh say they have experienced or witnessed sexual violence and harassment on the job.” My interviews with all workers revealed only a few such cases. Ms. Rikta told me that she always works hard to avoid any such harassment by her bosses. She also told me that a supervisor forced one of her coworkers into a sexual relationship. But after two days, that supervisor and the worker lost their jobs. The authority did not inform police—they just fired them. She also told me that male supervisors in most cases show their masculine power (“*purushalee bhab*”) to dominate women workers in the factory. This reality exists in the factory due to both instrumental and structural oppression.

More than 95 percent of women workers in the RMG industry used to walk from home to the factory and from the factory back home. Industrial police both protect and dominate women workers while they are on their way to the factory and walking back to their home. They discourage women workers from joining any workers’ protest in the street. They also threaten women workers’ family members if any worker joins the protest movement. Ms. Rikta told me that “this country makes the police force a terrorist group.” Many thugs in the street also harass women workers when they are on their way to home after dusk. This is almost a regular phenomenon on the street. These are some examples of structural oppression.

Slum owners also play a big part of the role to socialize and discipline women workers. They monitor women workers when they are giving interviews to local or foreign media reporters or researchers. They also restrict entrance of any unknown person to the slum. Hired thugs of a factory also spy on workers. Slum owners also increase workers' vulnerability by increasing house rent yearly. Also, once salary increases, house rent increases immediately. The effect is that workers struggle to save even a dollar, which further makes them vulnerable in the factory. This is how structural and instrumental oppression interacts each other.

#### *Rewarding and Punishing Workers*

The administration that directly works with workers and successfully manages them is rewarded by factory owners. Mr. Chowdhury told me that factory owners set various goals for them to achieve, including the effective management of workers to maximize the level of output per day. He also told me that there are numerous rewards (e.g., five bonuses) for them when they show success, but there are some punishing measures (e.g., delayed promotion or no bonuses) when they fail to do so. However, when it is a question of rewarding and punishing workers, internal management as well as other social actors are found involved in the process of labor control.

The managerial team offers various kinds of rewards to workers who are obedient and productive in the factory. They also punish workers in numerous ways who are disobedient and “trouble-makers,” i.e., who organize workers against the interests of capital. There are various rules of rewarding workers in the factory, which markedly vary

factory to factory. The first rule for workers is to show seriousness to assigned work and finish each day's work. If a worker in a contracting factory can produce more than her target level each day (beyond overtime), they are informally offered some extra benefits. Such as 10 hours of payment added to their monthly salary, two extra days of leave annually, five extra days of pregnancy leave, or a two percent increase of one major bonus. In subcontracting factories, workers are rewarded for over-performance by simply getting their monthly wages regularly- they don't receive any other extra benefit. This unpaid extra work sometimes creates hope for them to get promoted.

Promotion in the factory is another kind of reward. When a helper is found skillful and productive, she is offered a position of operator. When an operator is found obedient, skillful, productive, and committed to the interest of the factory, the operator can be offered a position of a supervisor. In subcontracting factory, this kind of promotion is rare. Some qualified workers remain in the same position over five or even ten years. Workers may continue to request a promotion, but often, the authorities make verbal promises, and yet take no action. If workers do lose their patience, authorities directly ask them to leave the factory. Workers can only create a 'passive bargain' with the authority, ending without any meaningful result or quitting the factory. This practice has been regularized in the factory. It is a case of instrumental oppression.

Reward and punishment simultaneously exist when it is a question of entrance into the factory. The management cuts the salary by one day if a worker enters into the factory even a minute late (8:01am) for three days in a month. They also then lose TK400 (\$5) for

regular presence in the factory. Fear of losing even a dollar for late entry makes all workers “anxious” and “extremely busy.”

Another source of reward as well as punishment for workers is the offer of doing overtime. In contracting factories, overtime work is not frequent. Thus, workers who are obedient and experts are given this opportunity. It adds a significant amount of money to their salary. However, during winter, most workers are required to do overtime work because factories receive more orders. In a subcontracting factory, overtime can be used to reward some workers, but also as a punishment when it goes unpaid. Before the Rana Plaza incident in 2013, overtime work (3-4 hours) was almost unpaid in most of the subcontracting factories I studied. After that, some factories began to pay half the rate of regular work. And a few factories openly steal hours from workers who do overtime work. Workers move from factory to factory to find overtime work since their regular salary never covers even half of their living cost. For them, overtime means “some extra money.” Though they know that they are being exploited at a higher rate (since it is partially paid) during the overtime work, workers give their consent because they need the extra money. This is how instrumental oppression exists in the factory.

Shaila Monira, 27, an operator in a subcontracting factory, told me that she used to do overtime work because she cannot pay the house rent without this money. Ms. Monira, however, told me that there are some serious costs of doing overtime work, including developing backpain, mental torture, anxiety, inadequate rest, and constant fear of developing any unknown diseases. Ms. Monira also told me that “three hours of work in any day at any section in the factory makes our monthly salary. We work free for them for

the rest of the hours and days.” She also told me that because of this, now one factory owner has built many factories. Her employer started with one factory in Panthapath (which no longer exists now) during the early 1990s; now that person has six factories in different locations of Dhaka.

Another respondent, Dalia Begum, 22, a helper in another subcontracting factory, told me that she does overtime work since she has a school going child who needs support. She also needs to send some money to her parents who live in a village. Ms. Begum told me that she feels “dishonored and worthless” when supervisors bully her and pressure her to finish the work that she could not do during the regular office time. She told me that “if supervisors find any error in my work, I must do that work without any pay after my regular office hours. If I resist that, they just tell me don’t come back to the factory tomorrow. We don’t need you here.” She also told me that some supervisors increase their own income by stealing hours from us. Because of this, she adds, supervisors behave like a “ferocious animal.” She further told me that though every worker has a lot of grievances about their low salary for hard work and for the bullying and insulting behaviors of supervisors, they lack power to protest against this injustice. This is what Copeland (2019: 112) says “radical pessimism.” Finally, she told me that “like many workers, I used to cry after returning home from work, no one can see our weeping and pains except my family members.” Ms. Monira and Ms. Begum’s stories remind me Marx’s observation on capitalist accumulation. He (1995:538) mentions, by citing Marie Angier and T. J. Dunning, in Volume One of Capital: “If money...“comes into the world with a congenital



blood-stain on one cheek,” capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”

Another case study below shows how factory and family meet and mesh to oppress women workers. Zobeda Tasnim, 25, a worker at a subcontracting factory, told me that she gets up at 4:30am to access a shared kitchen to cook meals for her family (husband, a construction worker and two school-going children) for the entire day. If she is late, she finds the kitchen occupied by her coworkers from other families. She feeds her children, prepares herself and takes two meals with her and starts walking to the factory. She walks 50 minutes to get to the factory. After working 12-13 hours a day, she returns home by 9-10pm. She then cleans dishes, takes shower and eats dinner before going to bed by 11pm. She told me that “I give my salary to my husband every month...and he takes all decisions in the family.” If she does not give the money, he “badly behaves” (*chorom durbyabohar*) with her, even threatens her children to stop going school. She tried to leave the job three years ago due to a sexual assault by her boss, but her husband forced her to work in the factory. She told me that her husband does not much care for their children. She informed me: “I wanted to divorce him, but I could not because of my children’s future and higher house rent in this area.” She can’t get support from her family, nor can she find well behaved bosses in the factory. This is her life for the last seven years. And this is another example of how instrumental and structural oppression reinforces each other.

Punishing workers for their connections with protest movements is the most effective and worst form of labor control for factory owners. A report by TIB shows that workers organized some protest movements in different areas of Dhaka in 2019 to increase

their minimum wages that the government and factory owners set for them. Because of this, factory owners filed 35 lawsuits against 5,000 workers and fired 10,000 workers from 168 factories (Prothom Alo, 2019). There is no legal provision for filing a case against a factory owners in labor court in Bangladesh. This legal provision allows factory owners to exercise absolute power over workers to dismantle any organized movement.

If the authority suspects that any worker of having connections with labor leaders or protest groups, they spy on them and warn them about the possibility of job loss. Since every single minute of work matters in the factory, the authority is most concerned about any unrest in the factory. A labor leader, Kamrul Sheikh, 41, told me that “factory owners are always prepared to take any military-style action against protesters.” To dismantle any protest movement, they use their hired thugs, deploy industrial police, and even inform border guards. He also told me that sometimes “anger and accumulated pains” of workers make them “violent” and often destroy property inside and outside the factory. Because of this, according to Mr. Sheikh, “lumpen proletariats” exist in this industry, who patrol in the factory, in the streets, in slums and everywhere to find any clue of labor unrest.

Foujunessa Talukder, 32, an operator in a subcontracting factory, told me that every worker somehow connected with any protest movement is black listed not only in the factory but also in this industry. Once he or she is fired from a job, he/she never gets a job in any factory unless they change their identity. My respondent, Hosne Ara, 26, told me that the managerial team is not enough to control workers when there is any labor unrest inside or outside the factory. In these cases, the police force, local politicians, thugs, and biased media reporters are also needed.

Finally, a few male workers informed me that some workers who have strong connections with the administration tend to dominate other workers in the factory. They often share information to the authority about workers from different sections and set-up a trap for them to explore their hidden motives about organizing workers inside or outside factory. One of the male workers, Lablu Miya, 30, told me that he has been offered some money by a supervisor to collect information about workers' position to organize a protest in the factory. He also told me that he rejected the second such offer of a supervisor who wanted him to collect information from another factory. One factory needs internal information from another factory because aggressive workers from one factory usually vandalize factories of other companies, but they do not usually harm their own factories. The other aggressive group of workers used to follow the same rule. They do so to avoid termination from their jobs and make things harder for the administration to find and punish the "criminals." This is a widely practiced form of labor protest in the factory. And thus, factory owners spy on workers.

## **Conclusion**

Existing theories of labor control discuss how different versions of capitalism create and practice distinct strategies of labor control to reproduce the global capitalist system. Though this chapter has directly benefited from many of those ideas, it has proposed an alternative approach to labor control in the context of Bangladeshi apparel industry. It examines how social actors (market and non-market) create and reproduce a new regime of labor control—what I call social despotism. The chapter shows that four phases of labor

control constitute this regime: searching the cheapest labor and building factories, hiring workers, organizing work, and socializing, rewarding, and punishing workers. It finds two forms of domination in the four phases of labor process: instrumental oppression and structural oppression. Instrumental oppression normalizes coercion in the factory and demands forced consents of workers to their own exploitation. However, structural oppression limits workers' collective bargaining power outside the factory and undermines individual worker's agency in social life. Both forms of oppression reinforce each other and constitute the very regime of labor control, i.e., the social despotism. The central function of this regime of labor control is to reproduce existing capitalist system and capitalist power structure.

How much modification is required in labor control strategies to reproduce the capitalist system depends on how workers are controlled by the capital and the state and how workers are organized by themselves. When workers develop bargaining power against the capital and the state, a change initiates in the capitalist system. State-capital alliance then becomes stronger to gain control over workers by modifying existing strategies of labor control and adopting new ones. Workers thus create a dual contradiction in the capitalist system: while they bring change in it by organizing themselves to develop their bargaining power (intended consequence), they contribute to adopting various labor control strategies by capitalists/states to suppress their emerging power (unintended consequence). Accordingly, the state-capital alliance are always concerned about how to dismantle workers' collective action (which emerges from "radical common sense," according to Copeland, 2019) and reproduce an exploitative and repressive labor-

capital/state relationships. Due to this labor-capital relationship, a systemic injustice exists in this industry: while buyers withdraw up to 65 percent of profit and factory owners appropriate up to 31 percent of profit, workers only receive up to four percent of profit (Salam and McLean, 2014: 3-4).

My interview with a Marxist scholar-activist of Bangladesh, Badruddin Umar, 88, reveals how capital-state alliance creates and maintains a neoliberal logic of surplus production in Bangladesh by systematically controlling and exploiting workers. He told me that bourgeois politics have polluted student politics at all public universities in Bangladesh. Because of this, we do not have creative left leaders who could frame and guide any effective labor movement in the country. And thus, capitalists have captured both market and state power in order to reproduce the exploitative capitalist system. He said that it is imperative to empower students in order to empower workers in this country.

Finally, when the entire society wants a stable RMG industry in the country, it creates pressure on workers. They think twice before organizing themselves. They sacrifice their own interests for the interest of the nation. They work every single hour to create a sense of dignity, but they fail to protect their self-esteem. While they are tired, malnourished, and unable to carry their own bodies, they carry the burden of the whole country. Their hearts bleed to keep society healthy. While they are ruining themselves every day, they are protecting the capitalist system. Now the burning question is how to improve the working conditions in the industry, how to protect workers' rights, how to eliminate instrumental and structural oppression in the sector, and how to ensure justice for workers. Scholars suggest few options to fight against such injustices: developing bargaining

power against capital through “collective action” (Copeland and Labuski, 2013: 69), organizing non-workers (such as students) to fight for workers’ rights (Wimberley et al., 2015) and organizing a global justice movement, a “human rights discourse,” against globalization and capitalism (Brunsmas, 2010: 5).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **A THEORY OF DISPOSSESSION IN CAPITALIST ACCUMULATION**

The problem is that most research on contemporary manifestations analogous to primitive accumulation has related them to capitalist accumulation proper in a way that virtually collapses the concepts of dispossession and accumulation into one another.

Daniel Bin, 2016, p. 75

Over the last five hundred years, western societies advanced from a feudal mode of production to an early phase of industrial capitalism and then to an advanced form of neoliberal capitalism. A few non-western societies entered into the world of capitalism nearly a hundred years ago. But most of the countries of the global south embraced modern form of capitalism between the 1940s and 1970s. This evidence shows that capitalism is an ever-expanding system: it is either bringing new territories into its system or reproducing itself from time to time. Dispossession was and is present everywhere: In the transition from traditional agricultural society to capitalist society and in both early and advanced capitalism. This dissertation has examined how dispossession contributes not only to transforming an agricultural society into a capitalist society, but it also expanding or

reproducing the capitalist mode of production. In doing so, it has critically engaged two relevant sets of literature: theories of dispossession and theories of labor control strategies.

Existing theories provide tremendously important ideas to understand the contribution of dispossession in capitalist accumulation as well as labor control strategies in the surplus production sites. Some major theorists of dispossession, such as Marx (1995), Luxemburg (2003), De Angelis (2001, 2004), Harvey (2003, 2005), Adnan (2013, 2015, 2016), Levien (2012, 2015), and Bin (2016, 2017), provided very insightful ideas to understand how state and non-state actors organize land dispossession in Bangladesh. They also identify a wide range land grabbing strategies—e.g., economic and extra-economic—deployed by state and market actors. Moreover, they discuss some particular roles of dispossession in capitalist accumulation, including converting means of subsistence into means of production as well as the conversion of peasants into wageworkers. However, some scholars show that dispossession does not always contribute to capitalist accumulation. For example, Levien said that contemporary dispossession does not create the preconditions for capitalism. Adnan showed that dispossession sometimes cannot convert peasants into wageworkers due to existing pool of a reserve army; they become either semi-proletariats, self-employed or part of the reserve army. Harvey argued that dispossession under neoliberal capitalism mostly redistributes already existing surpluses. Bin also showed that dispossession in some cases does not even contribute anything to capitalism; it only redistributes already existing surpluses from the bottom to the top. This scholarship lacks a relevant theoretical framework to understand how various phases of



dispossession contribute differently to capitalist accumulation or the expansion of capitalism.

Some prominent theories of labor control identify various regimes of labor control (Anner, 2015; Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979, 1983, 1985; Cho, 2001; Copeland, 2019; Gramsci, 197; Harvey, 2005, Knights and Willmott, 1990; Lee, 1996; Marx, 1995; Zhang, 2015). This dissertation has categorized those regimes into six types: market despotism, ideological hegemony, managerial hegemony, hegemonic despotism, structural violence and hybrid regimes. Each regime has its particular focus on processing and dominating workers. For example, market despotism refers to a process of controlling workers by exercising coercive power over workers while offering rewards, e.g., wages and benefits or punishments e.g., termination, layoff, and imprisonment. Ideological hegemony, however, influences workers' behavior to create a new work ethic in the factory. Next, the managerial hegemonic regime applies both coercive and noncoercive strategies to control workers in the shop-floor. Then the hegemonic despotism constructs worker consent to their own exploitation. Next, the political and structural violence regime shows why and how workers are powerless and completely "abandoned" with no resources in a broader society and subject to oppression and exploitation inside factory despite the persistence of their "radical common sense." Finally, the hybrid regime focus on more than two interrelated strategies of labor control such as consent, coercion, and compensation. These theories also lack a proper framework to understand how not only market actors (inside a factory), but also non-market actors (outside a factory) organize and control workers in

various phases of labor process to produce surplus in order to reproduce the capitalist system.

While both theoretical perspectives (dispossession and labor control) explain two distinct phases of capitalist accumulation, they lack a relevant framework of understanding the starting, intermediate and ending points of dispossession and their distinct contributions to capitalist accumulation as well as to the expansion of capitalism. The above three chapters (2-4) of this dissertation have examined these three consecutive steps of dispossession by drawing on empirical evidence (77 life histories, 50 interviews, a land use survey of 1,007 structures, and a short survey of 147 slums) and historical/archival records.

In this chapter, the dissertation frames a unified theory by drawing on the arguments and evidence of the above three chapters. The overall argument of this theory is that dispossession contributes to producing and reproducing the capitalist mode of production in Bangladesh by interacting with three components of dispossession: land-grabbing by expelling independent producers from their livelihoods (the initial phase, Chapter 2), converting that land into capital, peasants into wageworkers, and non-capitalists into capitalists (the intermediate phase, Chapter 3), and controlling and exploiting those wageworkers in the factory to produce surpluses or a cycle of new capital (the final phase, Chapter 4). These are also the three successive phases of capitalist accumulation. In sum, the three phases of capitalist accumulation include: i) designing, organizing and controlling dispossession, ii) capitalizing on dispossession, and iii) organizing and controlling surplus production. This dissertation accordingly advances a

full-scale theory of dispossession (Figure 8) by examining how the starting, intermediate and ending points of dispossession contributes to the capitalist accumulation (the final outcome) and the reproduction of the capitalist system.

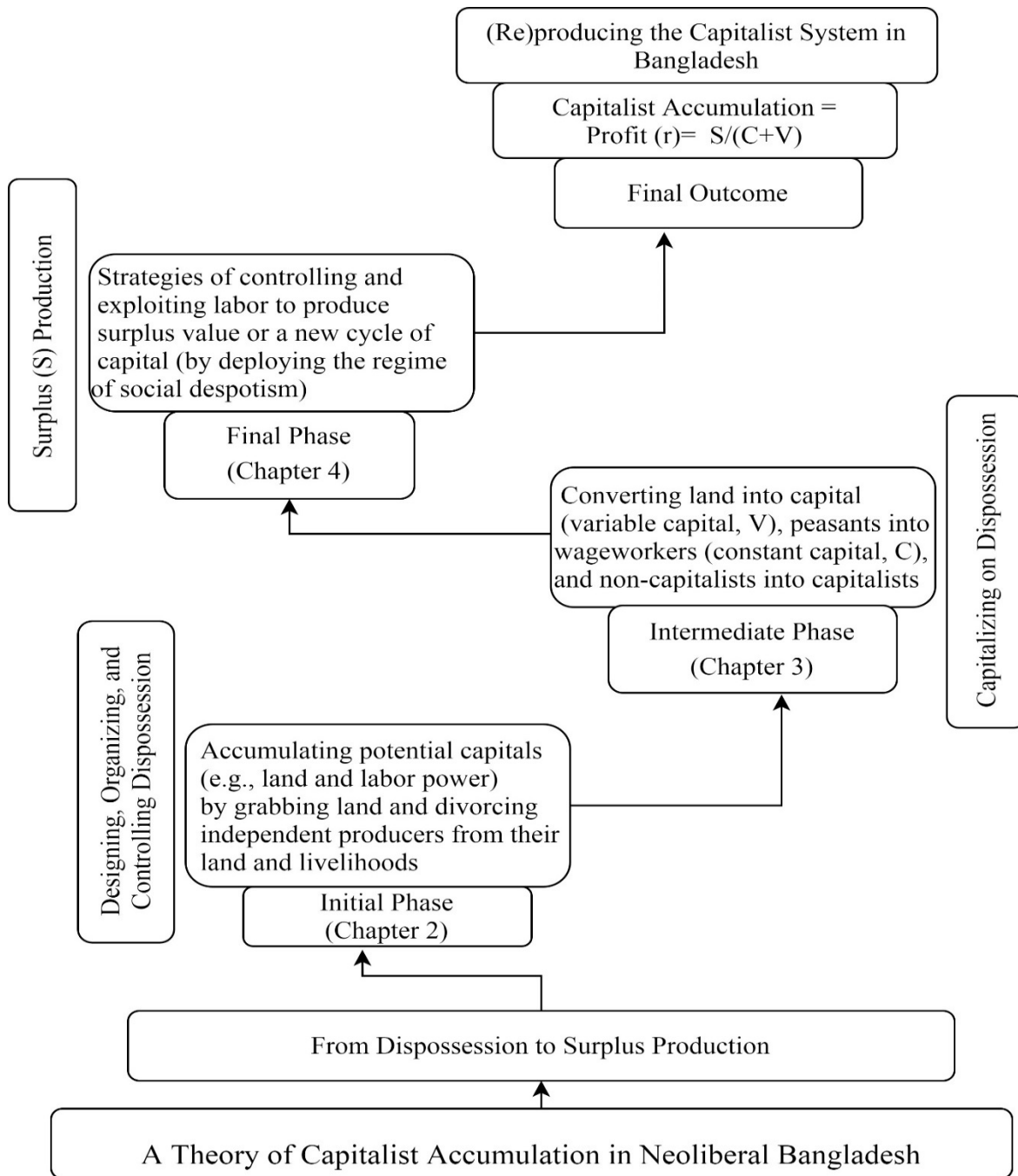


Figure 8. The Theoretical Framework of the Study

The major theoretical arguments as well as findings of the above three chapters, that constitute the idea of the unified theory of this dissertation, are as follows. First, in Chapter 2, this dissertation has argued that the state and the market design, enact and organize land-grabbing in Bangladesh. In particular, it has explored that the state and the market protect their collective and individual class interests to pursue land-grabbing: while they work in tandem to grab land, they often engage in conflict. Also, this dissertation showed that not only the state, but also the market can use extra-economic means to grab land due to their direct engagements to each other. It has further argued that dispossession created potential capitals in the study area by evicting direct producers (peasants) from their land and by sending them to earn a wage. Also, dispossession sent peasants' land to capitalists to build their factories and business institutions. This is the first step of how dispossession contributes to accumulating potential capitals: grabbed land and peasants-turned-wageworkers.

Major findings of Chapter 2 include few things. I have found various land grabbing strategies in the study area between 1947-2018 under four regimes: internal colonial (1947-1971), socialist/communist (1971-1975), military (1975-1990), and democratic (1991-present). I have also found that between 1947-1991, state- and market-led dispossession cleared nearly 200 acres of land and dispossessed nearly 6,000 peasants from their places. The major minority group (Hindus), who had over 60 percent of total land in the Panthapath area, now own only 0.01 percent of total land (i.e., 6 plots of land of 1,007 plots). National statistics show similar evidence: Hindus lost 2.6-million acres of land since 1947 in Bangladesh (Barkat et al., 2008; Panday, 2016). Although more than 95

percent of Bangladeshi women are landless, more than 99 percent of women are landless in Panthapath. Findings also show that over 12 percent of the total land in Panthapath still has a grabbing-related legal issue. Land grabbing also created a tremendous level of spatial segregation in the study area: 21.38 percent poor live in only 4.27 percent of the land. National statistics show a similar trend of land dispossession: now 20 percent of people own more than 80 percent of country's total land.

Second, in Chapter 3, this dissertation has argued that dispossession works to privatize the commons, proletarianize subsistence labor, create antagonistic class relations, and redistribute wealth upward. It has also showed that dispossession contributes to providing potential capitals to the production sites to be converted into 'constant capital' (c) or means of production, e.g., land and 'variable capital' (v) or labor power, e.g., wagers. It has also argued that dispossession not only provided potential capitals to capitalists, it also converted a non-capitalist group (such as bureaucrats, politicians, lawmakers, and army) into a capitalist group. It has further argued that dispossession contributed to creating a new urban middle class in the study area. Finally, the dissertation has argued that dispossession directly and indirectly contributed to commodifying political (power relations, politics, and elections), legal (judiciary and police) and sociocultural (education and health) spaces in Panthapath.

There are some major findings in Chapter 3. This chapter of the dissertation has found that dispossession had completely transformed the Panthapath area from an agricultural society to an urban capitalist society within 43 years, between 1947-1990. It has also found that grabbed land, a potential capital, has transformed into a constant capital

in Panthapath and created two economic sectors (formal and informal). The businesses that appeared on the grabbed land include hundreds of real estate and private residential buildings, dozens of private hospitals, dozens of shopping malls, banks, universities, furniture marts, private slums, and other commercial spaces. The evidence has further showed that the built-up area increased from 56.3 percent to 94.1 percent between 1985 and 2018, while 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 water body decreased from 2.3 percent to 0.9 percent. Moreover, findings showed that peasants (numbering 6,000) who were dispossessed from their land became proletariats or wagedworkers (56 percent), reserved army or unemployed (9 percent), lumpen proletariats for the political parties (3 percent) and semi-proletariats or self-employed (32 percent).

Finally, in Chapter 4, the dissertation has argued that a new regime of labor control—what I call ‘social despotism’—creates and perpetuates an exploitative form surplus production in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. It has examined how dispossessed peasants-turned-workers are controlled and exploited in order to produce surplus value. The idea of social despotism is that social actors (market and non-market) control and exploit workers inside and outside factory to produce surplus values, further reproducing the capitalist system. This regime works in four phases of labor process: hunting the cheapest labor and building factories, hiring workers to the factories, organizing workers, and socializing, rewarding and punishing workers. Two forms of oppression exist in four phases of labor process: instrumental oppression and structural oppression. While instrumental oppression normalizes coercion and seeks forced consent of workers in the

factory, structural oppression sabotages workers' collective bargaining power outside the factory and undermines individual worker's agency in social life. Both forms of oppression interact with each other and constitute the very idea of labor control, i.e., the regime of social despotism.

Major findings of Chapter 4 include a few things. This chapter has found that market and non-market actors organize and control workers inside and outside the factories of the Bangladeshi RMG industry. While market actors involve buyers, factory owners, managerial teams, hired thugs, trade union leaders, and even coworkers, non-market actors include various state agencies, politicians, bourgeois intellectuals, mass media, slum managers, street men, friends, and family members. The chapter also showed that while dispossession, driven by landlessness and climate change, sent more than seventy percent of workers from farmland to factories, a significant number of dispossessed peasants from Panthapath became factory workers. Despite a child labor law being in place since 1992 (when ten percent of all workers were children), a significant number of children still work in this industry. All of my respondents who work in this industry started their job between 12-16 years old. A 2017 study also showed that of 3,367 RMG workers (only women and girls), three percent of them were between the age 10-13 and 11 percent of them were between 14-17 (Asadullah and Wahhaj, 2017).

This chapter also demonstrated that an extremely low wage is offered to workers in this industry. While the minimum salary of workers in this sector in 2018 was \$136 in Vietnam, \$160 in India, \$ 170 in Philippines, and \$197 in Cambodia, it was only \$95 in Bangladesh. The minimum salary increased from \$13 in 1984 to \$95 in 2018. However,

this salary is still extremely low because it covers less than 47 percent of a worker's living cost (a family with spouse and a child). This is the second lowest wage in the world in this sector after Sri Lanka. The chapter also found imbalanced power relations in the global value chain of this industry. While the super dominant groups, such as marketers and retailers, reap a major portion of profit (65 percent), the dominant groups, such as manufacturers, receives less than one-third (31 percent) of it; however, the subordinate group, such as workers, only receive four percent of the profit (see Salam and McLean, 2014: 3-4). While buyers, in the global context, gain absolute control over suppliers and workers, suppliers gain absolute domination over workers in the national context. Another finding is that a culture of 'fictive-kinship' exists in the factory, starting with worker recruitment via rewards and extending to punishments for on the job mistakes. Finally, the findings showed that a lumpen working-class (hired thugs) group effectively contributed to punishing and disciplining workers inside and outside factories.

This dissertation has focused on some structural injustices practiced in Bangladeshi society, including landlessness, dispossession, slum evictions, gender discrimination, and illegal domination or super exploitation of workers in the RMG industry. I now propose some recommendations, building off of the findings in chapters 2 and 3, to address land injustice in Bangladesh. First, the government should implement the Vest Property Act 2001 to return land to Hindus who lost their property due to discriminatory land laws since 1971. Second, the government should create a new land management department under the Land Ministry to identify grabbed Vested/Khas land and to redistribute among the urban and rural landless poor. Next, the land administration should digitize all land-related



documents and transactions so that the land grabbing parties cannot create forged documents to seize land. Fourth, the government should create a new anti-corruption investigation cell for three things: identifying all land-related corruptions; stopping unauthorized land speculation that increases urban land price and motivates people to grab land; and, monitoring real estate companies and politicians who regularly break laws to seize lands. Next, the government should pass a new bill to provide land access to Hindu women who are deprived of their ancestral property and emphasize equal (re)distribution of land to promote gender equality (as Bangladeshi women own only 3 percent of the country's total land). Finally, the government should give especial attention to indigenous communities who lost millions of acres of communal property and are at serious risk of annihilation.

Findings in Chapter 4 also suggest that protecting labor rights in the RMG industry is an urgent need. First of all, buyers and suppliers should give serious attention to ending the unregulated subcontracting factory system, where all forms of workers' rights and human rights are brutally being violated in every single day. The authorities also should raise the minimum salary to \$200, as many labor rights organizations and trade unions have been demanding. After the Rana Plaza disaster, a significant improvements were made in terms of building and fire safety; Accord and Alliance played an important role in this regard. However, international and national media should play a more effective role in holding buyers and suppliers accountable to improving the work environment in subcontracting factories in order to save workers' lives. Although the authorities recently increased the minimum wage of workers, they are now violating workers' rights more than

ever: they have cut bonuses, increased work hours, increased production targets, and demanded overtime work without pay. These internal issues need to be addressed by international and national media, as well as by other social organizations working to protect labor rights. The authorities should also consider helping workers to develop a sense of dignity and self-esteem that workers often currently lack. This makes workers vulnerable in the factory and creates a notion of disrespect in society about workers in this industry. These workers are often stigmatized in society: calling someone a “garment worker” is now considered an insult.

This dissertation ends by delineating two further research agendas in this field. A future researcher on Bangladesh may think to investigate how dispossession is connected with other social arenas: e.g., how the practice of land-grabbing develops and perpetuates a ‘culture of lawlessness’ in a community, a region, or in the country, where not only elites, not only state agencies, but also people in the majority group violate both state laws and social norms to grab land. How the normalization of lawlessness in society weakens the implementation of the legal system. Another topic of future investigation could be how manufacturers in the apparel industry create and maintain a ‘dominion of exploitation’ in a national context to serve their own interests and the interests of foreign capital. These manufacturers create and maintain a mini-nation within the nation in order to secure the system of worker exploitation. They are able to harness many sectors of society: they have a special police force, special state laws, and special stimulus packages; they enjoy tax breaks; they have strong connections with the army; they are able to wield more power than politicians, and they often become part of the state in order to share in its power.

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**APPENDICES: A, B, C, & D**

Important Note: The data for the Land Use Survey were collected using a structured questionnaire (Appendix A). However, some additional evidence regarding this survey was gathered by asking relevant follow-up questions for the respondents. For the Slum Survey, a structured questionnaire (Appendix B) was also administered to collect the necessary evidence. Additionally, research notes were taken while visiting slums and talking with slum dwellers. All interviews with various professionals were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix C). Also, for gathering life histories from the dispossessed poor and the women RMG workers, a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix D) was used. Finally, the VT IRB guidelines were followed and maintained to collect all evidence for this study.

**APPENDIX A: LAND USE SURVEY**

**LAND USE SURVEY, 2017-2018**  
 Covering 200 meters on both sides of the street: Panthapath, Dhaka  
**Inventory Log Sheet**  
 PhD Project: Lipon Mondal, Virginia Tech, USA

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
FID	Road name	Previous plot No.	Current plot No.	Plot area (in decimal)	Types of current structure	Previous structure	No. of floors	Current usages of land	Floor-wise usages (if mixed)	Average rent of all floors/units	No. of day/night pop.	Age of structure/building.	Owner of the plot	Owner of the structure	Disputed ownership	Why disputed?	Grabbed (but currently not disputed)

**LAND USE SURVEY, 2017-2018**  
Covering 200 meters on both sides of the street: Panthapath, Dhaka  
**Inventory Log Sheet**  
PhD Project: Lipon Mondal, Virginia Tech, USA

**Coding Sheet**

Q6: Types of current structure: wall with tin-shed=61; tin-shed=62; building=63; open space=64; waterbody=65, vegetation/low lying land=66

Q7: Previous structure: polythene-tent=71; tin-shed=72; wall with tin-shed=73; building=74; open space=75; waterbody=76, vegetation/low lying land=77

Q9: Current usages of land: fully residential=91; fully commercial=92; mixed (commercial + residential + others) = 93; other (govt. offices/school/college, etc.) =94

Q10: Floor-wise usages (if mixed): commercial=101, residential=102, other=103

Q14: Owner of the plot: privately owned=141; developer=142; Sate=143; mixed (private + developer) = 144

Q15: Owner of the structure: privately owned=151; developer=152; Sate=153; mixed=154

Q16: Disputed ownership of land: yes=161; no=162; don't know=163

Q17: Why disputed: khas land=171; vested property=172; legal problem=173; don't know=174

Q18: Grabbed land but currently not disputed: yes=181; no=182; don't know=183

## APPENDIX B: SLUM SURVEY

Slum Survey, 2017-2018

500 meters on both side of the street: Panthapath, Dhaka

Wards: South 16 (old 50) & 17 (old 51)

North 26 (old 39) & 27 (old 40)

PhD Project: Lipon Mondal, Virginia Tech, USA

Q.No.	Questions	Responses
1	Respondents?	Manager of the slum:  Or, A person who lives over 20 years in this slum:
2	Name of the slum?	
3	Name of the Road?  (where the slum is located)	
4	Birth year of the slum?	
5	What was the previous structure here  before this slum?	
6	The address of the slum?	Holding No.:  Plot No.:
7	The area of the slum (in decimal)?	
8	Type of ownership of the slum?	Private (single):  Private (collective):

		Government.:
9	Types of house in the slum?	Tin-shed with wall:  Tin-shed with wood:  Polythene and bamboo:
10	Total number of families/households?	
11	Number of houses and number of rooms in every house?	
12	Total number of people living in every household?	
13	Rent of the room?	
14	Total polulation in the slum?	Total:  Male:  Female:
15	Water and electric connection?	Legal (formal):  Illegal (informal):
16	Number of kitchen, toilet, and bathroom?	Bathroom:  Toilet:  Kitchen:
17	Why is not housing company taking this land for building houses?	Disputed land:  Land-owner does not want:  Slum itself is a profitable business:  Don't know:

18	Is there any lawsuit claiming the ownership of the land of this slum?	Yes: Previously had: Never:
19	Is this land grabbed somehow from others?	Yes: No: Don't know:
20	Is there any business of drug/alcohol selling/buying in this slum?	Yes: No: Don't know: If yes, what are those:
21	Is there any illegal business in this slum?	Store-house of adulterated goods: Supplying substandard foods to restaurants: Gambling: Others: None:
22	Who are involved in these business?	Some musclemen connected with polical parties: Some slum pepole: Police: Slum onwer:
23	Does the owner of the slum give bribes to any poltical person or police to run this slum business smoothly?	Yes: No: Don't know: If yes, who are they?
24	Is there any violence/opression on	Yes:    No:    Don't know:

	slum dwellers by the slum owners?	<p>if yes, what types of:</p> <p>Increase house rent?</p> <p>Provide false criminal report to police:</p> <p>Evict from the slum:</p> <p>Threat to kill:</p> <p>Killing:</p>
25	Is there any violence/opression on slum dwellers by police?	<p>Yes:</p> <p>No:</p> <p>Don't know:</p> <p>If yes, what are those?</p>
26	Is there any violence/opression on slum dwellers by musclemen or poltical leaders?	<p>Yes:</p> <p>No:</p> <p>Don't know:</p> <p>If yes, what are those?</p>

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWS**

Note: Below I insert only one set of questions that were used for collecting interviews from businesspersons. To avoid making this section excessively lengthy, I do not bring other sets of questions for various professionals, including politicians, activists, land officers, trade union leaders, managers and supervisors in the RMG factories, and slum dwellers.

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

[Below are some of the semi-structured questions asked for Businesspersons]

What is your sex? What is your age (exact)? What is your educational status? What is your monthly income? What is your monthly expenditure? What type of business are you running recently? How many years are you in this business? How many businesses you currently own? Tell me about the success and failure of your business life? How do you tackle your failures in businesses? Do you have any affiliation with politics? How is your relationship with the state and government? Do you find political affiliation helpful for running businesses? How is your relationship with other businesspersons? How many labor force (or workers) you employed in your business or factories? Are they happy with their salaries, bonuses, and other benefits? Have you ever been found any unrest in your businesses or factories? If so, how did you resolve that? How did you acquire land for creating your businesses? Is there any legal dispute of your land? Did you ever buy any disputed land? Did you ever lose your land due to land grab? What do you know about the politics of land grabbing in this area?



## **APPENDIX D: LIFE HISTORIES**

Note: Below I insert two sets of question (i.e., study guide) for collecting life histories from the dispossessed poor and the women RMG workers.

### **STUDY GUIDE FOR COLLECTING LIFE HISTORIES**

[Below are some of the questions asked for the dispossessed poor]

What is your sex? What is your age (exact)? What is your marital status? What is your educational status? Tell me about each member of your family. Where do you live? What do you know about this area? How many years have you been living here? Where did you live before living here? Who do you do now? What did you do before this job? How many times have you changed your jobs, and why? How much you earn and spend each month? Did you have your own land? If so, how did you lose that land? Did you have your own house? Is your house/room rented now? Tell me about your experience with (forced) eviction and homelessness in Dhaka. Tell me about your experience with dispossession. Tell me about your experience with land-related crime and violence? What do you know about land grabbing in this area? Tell me about the owner of your slum house. Is your slum-house built on any disputed/grabbed land? What do you know about the politics of land-grabbing?

## STUDY GUIDE FOR COLLECTING LIFE HISTORIES

[Below are some of the questions asked for the women RMG workers]

What is your sex? What is your age (exact)? What is your marital status? What is your educational status? Tell me about each member of your family. Where do you live? What do you know about this area? How many years have you been living here? How many years have you been working in an RMG factory? How many hours do you work a day? How many days do you work a week? What is your monthly salary? Do you do overtime? If yes, how many hours a day? What do they pay for overtime work per hour? Is everyone's salary equal for the same position and same work? Tell me about the processes of workers' recruitment in the factory. Tell me about the promotion of workers at your workplace. What are your experiences dealing with your own promotion? Is there any such discrimination regarding the recruitment of workers, salary, and promotion? Is there any child labor (under 16 years old) in your factory? If yes, why are they at work? Who did hire them in the factory? Do you get your salary timely? Do you have any production target each day? If so, what is that? What product do you make every day?

Where is the current location of the factory? Who is the owner of the factory? Where is his/her home district? Where is the village of the supervisor/manager of your factory? Where did workers come from in your factory? Do the workers mostly come from the same district as the manager and factory owners? How many workers currently work in the factory? How do managers and supervisors behave with you and your co-workers? Have you ever experienced any physical assault at work? Have you ever experienced any sexual harassment/assault inside or outside the factory? If yes, and if you feel comfortable, tell me about all of those experiences. Are there any grievances among the workers? How managers control those unrests? Have you ever experienced any threat in the factory? Can you protest for any problem in the factory? Can you protest for increasing wages? Do police harass you in the

street while you try to protest? Did you experience any threat or violence due to join any protest movement? Tell me about how the authority manages labor unrest and labor movement inside and outside the factory.

Which companies buy products from your factory where you work? From which country they come from? Do they provide any training or guidelines to the authority or workers? Do managers say anything to you about buyers? How do the authority coach workers to talk to buyers when they visit a factory? Are there sufficient medicare facilities and toilets and safe drinking water supplies in the factory? Can you go to the toilet/bathroom when you need it? Are you allowed to talk to your family or friends on the phone while you are at work? Do they have fire safety in the factory? Do the managers provide you training for the safe exit during a fire in the building? Do you get maternity leave with salary and other benefits? What do you know about the discrimination and politics regarding the maternity leave in the factory? What are the main problems you face every day while you come out from home, walk in the street, enter the factory, and work in the factory?

Where do you live? Is there any surveillance on you or your co-workers by police, slum-owners, or thugs hired by factory owners? Does the slum owner allow any news reporter to interview you or your co-workers? Did you ever talk to any such reporter? If so, did you face any problem? Do you have children? If so, how many of them? Does your husband help you to take care of your children? What does your husband do? Do you give your salary to your husband or your parents? If so, why? Can you decide about anything important in your family? Are you and your family happy with your job and salary? Do you think you now have more status in the family than earlier because of this job? If so, how? If not, why? Did you experience any violence in the family? If so, why? Who does cook for the family and housework? Tell me about your everyday activities from family to factory?