

## Contemporaneity of Primitive Accumulation in Understanding Current Trends in Capitalism and Capitalist State <sup>1\*</sup>

### Kapitalizm ve Kapitalist Devletteki Güncel Eğilimleri Anlamada İlkel Birikimin Çağdaşlığı

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#### Abstract

*Today the social functions of the state and commons, which have been able to escape capital's transformative effect so far, are under attack around the world. Discussions around the concept of primitive accumulation are attempts to understand the reasons, mechanisms and results of such attacks. Primitive accumulation in historical sense refers to a precapitalist separation of peasants from the means of production, which creates the necessary conditions for capitalist development. On the other hand, many scholars since Luxemburg argue that primitive accumulation is a continuous process throughout capitalism's history and it is intertwined with capitalist accumulation. Bringing primitive accumulation from precapitalism to contemporary era has created theoretical problems. Since the state is traditionally the perpetrator of primitive accumulation, the proposed way to solve them is to revisit the capitalist state debate and to scrutinize its role in contemporary developments, such as land, water and resource grabbing, simultaneously happening around the world.*

**Keywords:** Primitive Accumulation, Capitalism, Accumulation by Dispossession, Capitalist State

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<sup>1</sup> Yazarlar bu çalışmanın tüm süreçlerinin araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olduğunu, etik kurallara ve bilimsel atıf gösterme ilkelerine uyduğunu beyan etmişlerdir. Aksi bir durumda Pamukkale Journal of Eurasian Socioeconomic Studies Dergisi sorumlu değildir. İntihal raporu alınmıştır.

The authors declared that all processes of this study comply with research and publication ethics, and comply with ethical rules and scientific citation principles. Otherwise, Pamukkale Journal of Eurasian Socioeconomic Studies is not responsible. A plagiarism report is received.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of neoliberal attack to the state and its functions, which guard the society from market failures, many societies either in north or south have more and more faced with the harsh market conditions with cuts in social securities, educational and healthcare services, unemployment wages and pensions, agricultural subsidies or any other social net that protects societies from the market. Societies also witness impacts of privatization and deregulation in many aspects of their lives, violent expropriations, land, water and natural resource grabbing. As the enclosures in Britain, theft and plunder in the colonies in the past created a resistance to the “new” way of business, people all around the world are resisting such violent attacks on their lifestyles. These have been so common around the world that many scholars have turned their eyes on them in order to understand the nature of capitalism today. Reintroduction of primitive accumulation<sup>2</sup> or a renewed version of it, is one of those theoretical attempts.

Since Marx, many scholars have interpreted the concept of primitive accumulation in many different ways and for many different purposes. The main axis of these Marxist debates has always been on the contemporaneity of the concept. While some of them argue that primitive accumulation has its theoretical significance in the prehistory of capitalism explaining the origins of capital, others propose that it is actually an on-going process throughout the history of capitalism and side by side with capitalist accumulation. Especially after the invasion of Iraq, which also marked the beginning of a “new imperialism debate”, David Harvey (2003, 2004), in relation to his imperialism arguments, made an attempt to reinvent a ‘new primitive accumulation’, by not only highlighting the continuous character of primitive accumulation, but also expanding its original meaning.

Especially with Harvey’s attempt to reinvent a ‘new primitive accumulation’, bringing primitive accumulation from prehistory of capital in order to explain today’s capitalism eventually led to a significant distortion in the meaning and the explanatory value of the concept. Despite primitive accumulation and capitalist accumulation are originally separate, but complementary processes with significant explanatory power, they ended up referring identical processes. This paper suggests that in order to escape such unproductive unity of two accumulations, the role of the state as the perpetrator of primitive accumulation has to be highlighted with a special interest in the profound differences between the precapitalist state and capitalist state.

This paper is composed of four sections. First section attempts to explore Marx’s writings on primitive accumulation. Second section evaluates the contours of contemporaneity of primitive accumulation debate. Third section discusses the novelty of Harvey’s ‘Accumulation by Dispossession’ and its shortcomings. The last section aims to provide suggestions for the

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<sup>2</sup> Derivations of the term due to use of different adjectives, such as original, previous, or primary, exist in many texts either as mistranslations or theoretical preferences. I will employ “primitive accumulation” as in the first translation of Marx’s Capital to English.

resolution of theoretical problems stemming from bringing primitive accumulation from precapitalism to today.

### **1. PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION IN MARX**

The concept of primitive accumulation is originally derived from Adam Smith's assumption that "the accumulation of stock must, in the nature of things, be previous to the division of labour, so labour can be more and more subdivided in proportion only as stock is previously more and more accumulated" (Smith, 1977: 361). This stock is understood as stock of goods, which has to be produced beforehand and made ready to be traded in the market for the producers' other needs since the modern industrial society necessitates a division of labour. Following this initial stock, division of labour is introduced and leads to an increasing accumulation of stock, which is eventually transformed to capital. Here the concept of previous accumulation in its practice has a methodological value since Smith utilizes it for explaining the origins of capital. However, it is detached from history and does not really say anything about the social developments that lead to the formation of capital.

Marx, on the other hand, criticizes Smith from that very point and called it "the so-called primitive accumulation" and reintroduced it with a deeper historical significance in the development of capitalism (Marx, 1887: 508). Therefore, he devotes the last part of Capital Volume I to the concept of primitive accumulation and defines it as "the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production [and] ... it forms the prehistoric stage of capital and of the mode of production corresponding with it" (Marx, 1887: 508).

Since the capitalist system presupposes a complete separation of peasants from the means of production so that they are free to sell their labour in the market, the primitive accumulation is the means to achieve this. When capitalist production sets in, "it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale" (Marx, 1887:507). In other words,

"The process [of primitive accumulation], therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage labourers" (Marx, 1887: 507-8).

According to Marx, therefore, the process of primitive accumulation as the separation of peasants from the means of production is significant for the capital accumulation in two ways: Firstly, it creates a labour force free from land, a wage labourer, so he can travel wherever there is a market for his labour. As well, he is also free from guilds of old order, which have strict regulations for labour. Secondly, the emancipation of labour from old ball and chains could be enough for a bourgeois historian, he claims, but the path to being a free labourer necessitates being "robbed of all their means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements" which will be transformed into capital

(Marx, 1887: 507-508). Like the separation of an atom into small pieces and releasing energy, practices of primitive accumulation separates the peasants from the means of production and this process leads to the creation of capital and, consequently, to the accumulation of it.

In other words, from other way around, from the end to the beginning, “the accumulation of capital presupposes surplus-value; surplus-value presupposes capitalistic production; capitalistic production presupposes the pre-existence of considerable masses of capital and of labour power in the hands of producers of commodities” (Marx, 1887: 507). These presuppositions need one more to escape this “vicious circle”: a primitive accumulation “preceding capitalistic accumulation which does not depend on capitalistic mode of production” (Marx, 1887: 507).

Marx clearly exemplifies this process of separation of peasants from the means of production, and how it was a bloody one. He calls the Acts for Enclosures of Commons, beginning as early as 17th century, as “robbery”, “a parliamentary coup d’etat”, “bloody legislation against the expropriated” (Marx, 1887: 507-522). Landlords were robbing the land, which was previously common, transforming communal property into private property. Here the landlords are the real perpetrators of primitive accumulation through utilization of state and laws, not the protocapitalists. Protocapitalists mainly benefited from this new class of expropriated free workers and privatized property, which are crucial for capitalist accumulation. When labourer is free to sell his labour in the market, he becomes the sole creator of surplus value, which eventually transforms into capital and reinvested in production leading to capitalist accumulation. Rather than private property as a concept for itself, this transformation of peasants into waged workers and the process of losing their direct access to the means of production becomes the core of the argument because without it the capitalist accumulation would not be possible.

While analysing the English case in detail, Marx also reminds that there is not one single form of primitive accumulation. The expropriation of the peasant from the soil, from the means of production as well of the means of subsistence, is not specific to the development of capitalism in England. He claims “the history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. In England alone... has it the classic form” (Marx, 1887: 508).

From Marx’s handling of the concept of primitive accumulation, there appears three conclusions. Firstly, primitive accumulation is a process of creating a free work force and private property. Secondly, the perpetrator of primitive accumulation is a class, aristocratic class in this sense, and it is pursued by the use of state power. Therefore, there is a need to define the relations between classes or class fractions and the state. Thirdly, it seems relatively clear in Marx’s writings that spatial variations of primitive accumulation in different regions exist. Considering the expansion of capitalism into other countries and into other modes of production did not have a strict time frame, primitive accumulation has occurred in different regions at different times. Later scholarship, therefore, disagrees on these variations across time, and discusses whether it is a phenomenon of the past or a contemporary one.

## 2. LOOKING AT THE LITERATURE ON CONTINUITY OF PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

Considering the continuity of the primitive accumulation two positions have developed since Marx. The scholars in the first position argue that primitive accumulation refers to a specific moment in the past, a part of precapitalist history, and sometimes a specific geography, England. Therefore, the utilization of primitive accumulation as a tool in understanding contemporary capitalism becomes impossible. The second position, on the other hand, claims that the primitive accumulation is not only precapitalist setting for creating the conditions for capital accumulation, but also an inherent and continuous process of capitalism. De Angelis (2001: 3-4) names these two traditions as “historical primitive accumulation” and “inherent-continuous primitive accumulation” respectively.

Vladimir Lenin can be considered as the earlier figures of historical reading of primitive accumulation based on the understanding of primitive accumulation in his work ‘The Development of Capitalism in Russia’ (Lenin, 1974). In this work, primitive accumulation is understood as a process amid feudal and capitalist modes of production. The utilization of the concept in his book manifests itself as the classical divorcing of people from the means of production, from which the capitalist accumulation flourishes. He strongly stood at that position in order to challenge the Narodnik claiming that the absence of a developed market would hinder capitalist development in Russia. Lenin argued that the feudal relations of production were already in the process of dissolution, local markets were being replaced by a national market, production moved beyond subsistence and a class division had already occurred in the rural between landowners and agrarian workers. Therefore, the setting for capitalist development and accumulation were already at its place. Here, Lenin defines and utilizes primitive accumulation as a precursory phenomenon for capitalist development.

There are successive scholars who follow this path to highlight the precapitalist history of primitive accumulation and utilize it as a tool to explain transition from feudalism to capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Dobb, for instance, makes a distinction between “accumulation of means of production themselves”, capitalist accumulation, and “an accumulation of claims or titles to wealth, capable of being converted into instruments of production although they are not themselves productive agents”, primitive accumulation (Dobb, 1946: 177). Accumulation of means of production is hardly specific to precapitalist history since there is no reason for capitalists to stock machines or raw materials until a future point where they will be enough for initiating production; they are also able to provide any means of production during the capitalist production. Therefore, what is called primitive accumulation as “in prior in time” has to be understood as “an accumulation of capital claims – of titles to existing assets which are accumulated primarily for speculative reasons” and the class that holds these assets has to be capable of transforming this stock of wealth into the means of production. “In other words, when one speak of accumulation in an historical sense, one must be referring to the ownership of assets, and to a transfer of ownership, and not to the quantity of tangible instruments of production in existence” (Dobb, 1946: 178). Even though there are differences among their

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<sup>3</sup> The main contours of the debate can be found in Hilton, Rodney. (ed). (1978). *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*. London: Verso.

ideas, many scholars from Paul Sweezy (1950; 1986) to Robert Brenner<sup>4</sup> and later on others (Gottlieb, 1984; Leibman, 1984; McLennon, 1986) have shown interest in the issue of primitive accumulation as an important part of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and abstained from extending it to a period when capitalist (expanded) production had achieved its dominance on other types of production.

The second tradition of “inherent-continuous primitive accumulation”, on the other hand, stands that primitive accumulation has a continuous character. This point flourished from Rosa Luxemburg’s approach to primitive accumulation. Luxemburg in ‘The Accumulation of Capital’ (2003) accepts historical primitive accumulation as discussed above, that is a process of transition between modes of production, but her theoretical position is to give primitive accumulation a continuous character and intertwine it with capitalist development. In her words, “the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day” (Luxemburg, 2003: 351). This coincides with her efforts to explain the violence of colonialism, militarism and imperialism at her times. Luxemburg argues that primitive accumulation, in this sense, can be both a part of the past and today and the future of capitalism.

But how and why primitive accumulation is a continuous and inherent feature of capitalism? In order to answer this question, firstly, I have to explain the difference that Marx drew between simple and expanded production. According to Marx, simple production is where the revenue gathered from selling the products (realization of surplus value) is not invested or hoarded by capitalist, but consumed periodically (Marx, 1887: 401). Capitalists spend some of the surplus value to renew the machinery and labour force for the sake of the continuous process of production and keeping the levels of subsistence for both workers and themselves without investing in new means of production or more labour in order to increase production levels. In this case, therefore, there is no accumulation of capital. Expanded production, on the other hand, necessitates that at least some portion of the surplus value is transformed into new capital to be reinvested. This new capital can be utilized by purchasing labour power, fixed capital or raw materials. A capitalist economy is similar to the latter. Transformation of surplus value into new capital occurs because of the pressure of competition, which drives capitalists to produce more and/or more efficiently (Callinicos, 2009: 37). Thus, expanded production is increasingly producing more and consuming more and it necessitates an ever-expanding market. In both models, production is in balance with consumption, even in the latter it is assumed that increasing production is met with increasing consumption. Therefore, in expanded production accumulation of capital is assumed infinite.

Luxemburg questions Marx’s model of expanded production with two classes, capitalists and workers, and argues that expanded production is impossible in a purely capitalist economy (Brewer, 1989: 60). A part of the commodities is sold in order to renew the means of production and to keep the level of subsistence of workers and capitalists in simple and expanded production models. This part does not create a problem for her analysis since all

<sup>4</sup> Brenner’s arguments were collected in Aston, T.H. & Philpin, C. (eds). (1985). *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

consumption is met for the continuation of the production. However, the demand for rest of the commodities, which are surplus to be transformed into capital to be reinvested, is not met. Her question is: who buys these commodities?

Since capitalists consuming each other's commodities cannot be the definitive feature of a capitalist system, she presupposes that there has to be non-capitalist buyers for these commodities, a third party outside capitalist production. "The decisive fact is that the surplus value cannot be realized by sale either to workers or to capitalists, but only if it is sold to such social organisations or strata whose own mode of production is not capitalistic" (Luxemburg, 2003: 332). Without their existence, accumulation cannot be achieved since the production is ever increasing and there are only capitalists and workers in this model of society, shortage of effective demand will inevitably occur (Tarbuck, 1972: 21-22). She contends that this shortage has to be met with non-capitalist buyers, either within the national economy or as a non-capitalist country. Thus, accumulation is "more than an internal relationship between the branches of capitalist economy; it is primarily a relationship between capital and a non-capitalist environment" (Luxemburg, 2003: 398).

Marx presupposes that consumption is only met by capitalists and workers and that there is "the universal and exclusive domination of the capitalist mode of production", however, "real life has never known a self-sufficient capitalist society under the exclusive domination of the capitalist mode of production" (Luxemburg, 2003: 328). Luxemburg argues that not only capitalist accumulation necessitates non-capitalist buyers (or societies), but also it transforms them. Non-capitalist countries, which trade commodities with capitalist countries, eventually will be broken up (Brewer, 1989: 58-59). Their natural economies will be substituted by simple commodity economies since the ultimate aim of the accumulative process is "to establish the exclusive and universal domination of capitalist production in all countries and for all branches of industry" (Luxemburg, 2003: 397).

To summarize, "the capitalist process of accumulation is inherently dependent on dominating a non-capitalist 'other'" (Callinicos, 2009: 36) and it is inescapable since it is rooted in the dynamics of capitalist reproduction. In other words, "capitalism necessarily and always creates its own 'other' which is paramount for the stabilization of capitalism" (Harvey, 2003: 141), without which the dynamics of capitalist expansion is imperilled.

Similar to Luxemburg, world-systems (Wallerstein, 1979) and dependency school theorists also highlight the continuous character of primitive accumulation. For instance, Amin suggests that while wealth from primitive accumulation is essential for development of capitalism in core countries, it is also the reason for underdevelopment in the periphery (Amin, 1974: 22). For Amin, primitive accumulation is not a part of the past, it is structural and contemporary, and it is the essence of relations between a capitalist and a pre-capitalist modes of production (Amin, 1974: 3).

Highlighting primitive accumulation's continuous character and intertwining it with capitalist accumulation brought its own problems, which will be discussed below. The historical and inherent-continuous versions of primitive accumulation dominated the discussion of the

concept in the 20th century. However, the 21st century discussion is more based on whether or not to transform the concept in a way to explain the widespread atrocities of neoliberal capitalism.

### 3. A NEW PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION?: EVALUATING HARVEY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE

After the invasion of Iraq 2003, many scholars suggested that it was the beginning of a new era for global capitalism. 'The New Imperialism' is one of these approaches, which became popular after the identically named book of David Harvey in 2003, published right aftermath the invasion<sup>5</sup>. By the turn of the 21st century, the events highlighted the debate around state and capitalism within the Marxist tradition in social sciences. What was new at that time in world politics is the shift from a hegemony based on multilateralism to unilateralism of the US. Despite the arguments on the demise of the state power, the 21st century began with a demonstration of state power. This part includes Harvey's main arguments about imperialism and accumulation by dispossession<sup>6</sup>, how he associates them to understand contemporary global capitalism and criticisms towards his concept of 'accumulation by dispossession'.

David Harvey in 'The New Imperialism' defines "capitalist imperialism" as "a contradictory fusion of 'the politics of state and empire'... and 'the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time'" (Harvey, 2003: 26). Following Arrighi, he differentiates between two logics of power: territorial and capitalist, the former representing the state and the latter representing the capital. Despite the previous approaches to imperialism, which assumes a rather easy correlation and coordination between the state and the capitalists, these two logics are contradictory. Although it is hard to achieve, the intertwining of these two logics in a dialectical sense is the core of his argument on imperialism (Harvey, 2003: 29-30). It is important to mention that he also differentiates capitalist imperialism from other conceptions of empire. In capitalist imperialism, he argues, there is the domination of capitalist logic over the territorial logic, with exceptions (for example, Vietnam War) (Harvey, 2003: 30-33). Thus, while assuming the contradictory fusion of these to separate logics, he is criticised for not providing a distinctive territorial logic and even sometimes reducing territorial logic to the capitalist one in his analysis (Brenner, 2006: 81-82).

Harvey argues that the imperialist expansion is driven by the problem of overaccumulation, which creates periodic crises and pressure to outlet the abundant capital and labour (Harvey, 2003: 109). In other words, in accordance with Marx's theory of falling rate of profit, capitalism produces crises of overaccumulation of capital, which can be absorbed by:

<sup>5</sup> There are previous work on the novelty of imperialism, such as Panitch, L. (2000). The New Imperial State. *New Left Review*, 2(2), 5-20; Gowan, P., Panitch, L. & Shaw, M. (2001). The State, Globalisation and the New Imperialism: A Round Table Discussion. *Historical Materialism*, 9, 3-38; Amin, S. (2001). Imperialism and Globalisation. *Monthly Review*, 53(2), 6-24.

<sup>6</sup> He claims that he did not want to use the term primitive accumulation because it is not a part of the past, but an ongoing process (Harvey, 2004: 74). In other article, he claims that "an shift in language can be far more politically effective" (Harvey, 2006: 158).



“(a) temporal displacement through investment in long-term capital projects or social expenditures (such as education and research) that defer the re-entry of capital values into circulation into the future, (b) spatial displacements through opening up new markets, new production capacities, and new resource, social, and labour possibilities elsewhere, or (c) some combination of (a) and (b)” (Harvey, 2003: 109).

In this sense, for instance, while the post-World War II welfare state period corresponds greatly to a temporal displacement, imperialist periods such as period from late 19th century to end of World War II and new imperialism in neoliberal era mostly correspond to spatial displacement of capital. Either the overaccumulation is absorbed with opening up more spaces for export of capital, nevertheless not without crises of deindustrialization or devaluation, or global competition intensifies into trade or currency wars, even into military conflicts (Harvey, 2003: 122-124).

As the imperialism becomes new, in Harvey, primitive accumulation has also become a new concept, which he names ‘accumulation by dispossession’, which is “the heart of what contemporary imperialist practice is about” (Harvey, 2003: 182). He argues that Marx excludes primitive accumulation from his general theory of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2004: 73). Primitive accumulation is precapitalist practices, which could only be possible with the active involvement of the state “with its monopoly of power and definitions of legality”, such as the commodification and privatization of land, commodification of labour power, conversion of various forms of property rights into exclusive private property rights; imperial policies to appropriate natural resources in other countries etc. (Harvey, 2004: 74). Today, Harvey sees similar processes of “predation, fraud and thievery” around the world which has become central features of capitalism, especially in finance, such as:

“Stock promotions, ponzi schemes, structured asset destruction through inflation, asset stripping through mergers and acquisitions, the promotion of levels of debt encumbrancy that reduce whole populations, even in the advanced capitalist countries, to debt peonage, to say nothing of corporate fraud, dispossession of assets (the raiding of pension funds and their decimation by stock and corporate collapses) by credit and stock manipulations” (Harvey, 2004: 74-75).

There are also new mechanisms for accumulation by dispossession: “escalating depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water) and proliferating habitat degradations that preclude anything but capital-intensive modes of agricultural production”, “the patenting and licensing of genetic material, seed plasma”, “the commodification of cultural forms, histories and intellectual creativity”, “corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets (such as universities)... the wave of privatization (of water and public utilities of all kinds) that has swept the world, indicate a new wave of ‘enclosing the commons’” (Harvey, 2003: 147-148).

Harvey also utilizes Luxemburg's idea that "capitalism must perpetually have something 'outside of itself' in order to stabilize itself" (Harvey, 2003: 140). Therefore, accumulation by dispossession means an on-going process of primitive accumulation around the world; i.e. promoting privatization of public goods by international institutions, accessing cheap raw materials and labour power, speculating in financial markets, etc.; in order to provide profitable outlets for overaccumulation of capital. In his own words, in a crisis of overaccumulation "what accumulation by dispossession does is to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use" (Harvey, 2003: 149).

In Marx, state and the landlords were the perpetrators of primitive accumulation. In several occasions, Harvey agrees that state "with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality" achieved the precapitalist separation of peasants from the means of production "even against popular will" (Harvey, 2004: 75). Today state is "rolling back of its own laws that protect labour and the environment from degradation", reversing of common property rights such as "the right to a state pension, to welfare, to national health care to the private domain" (Harvey, 2003: 148). Even in some contexts, the state "decides" that certain industries not in private hands be privatized or close (as in China) (Harvey, 2003, 154; Das, 2017: 595). To sum up, Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession, similar to other scholars of inherent-continuous primitive accumulation camp, proposes that primitive accumulation is not only a phase which set the conditions on which capitalism is thrived and from which it moves on to expanded reproduction, but also a continuing process.

The main problem with the intertwining of capitalist and primitive accumulation is that it becomes hard to understand where capitalist accumulation (or reproduction) begins and ends. Harvey is criticized for extending the scope of accumulation by dispossession and treating capitalist accumulation and accumulation by dispossession as the same thing by putting "workers' loss of employment through their firm's bankruptcy, which is a standard result of a well-established process of capital accumulation, and the expropriation of peasants from their land – in the English enclosures of the eighteenth century ... – which is about creating the conditions for capital accumulation" (Brenner, 2006: 101) in the same bag. His examples of accumulation of dispossession are so wide that it eventually means everything and nothing. From lost pensions in Enron's collapse to intellectual property rights in TRIPS agreement, from degradation of environment to commodification of cultural forms, from privatization of universities to attacks on national health care (Harvey, 2004: 75), he exemplifies many processes as accumulation by dispossession and, eventually, the new term loses its explanatory power since it becomes the logic behind every process that is associated with capitalism. Even in 2010 he claimed that "the extraction of surplus-value is, after all, a specific form of accumulation by dispossession of the laborer's capacity to produce value in the labour process" (Harvey, 2010: 311). In the end, even extraction of surplus value, the basis of capitalist accumulation and exploitation, has become a part of accumulation by dispossession.

In addition, he dismisses all kinds of difference among these processes of accumulation. For example, "privatization of village common property which was of use to peasants working on their own land should be seen as different from the privatization of the government-funded

education which reproduces what is already a wage-labor class that existed before such privatization took place" (Das, 2017: 600).

Secondly, some of the processes that the concept of accumulation by dispossession refers are actually the processes of capitalist exploitation and production, which are already covered in Marx's theory of capitalism. For instance, he suggests that whenever there is a crisis of overaccumulation, accumulation by dispossession processes come to rescue capital from the diminished profits. However, for imperialist activities in the South, one can also expect that since:

"imperialism is (increasingly) a system of exploitation –and indeed, super-exploitation- of workers of imperialized countries, by capital of the imperialist countries, with the aid of their militarized states, and complicity of pliant states and capital in the periphery, ... such system of exploitation in the periphery, by putting pressure on wages in imperialist countries, increases the rate of exploitation in these countries as well" (Das, 2017: 602).

Harvey would call it, too, a process of accumulation by dispossession since he came to use the term interchangeably with capitalism even though it is how labour market in capitalism served this purpose throughout centuries.

Thirdly, Harvey borrows from Luxemburg the idea that capitalism needs 'others' outside of the capitalist system in order to maintain its continuity. However, he mistakenly identifies it with not only precapitalist structures wherever it prevailed around the world, but also proposes that the state is non-capitalist in the sense that privatization of state enterprises facilitate capitalist accumulation as a response to the problem of overaccumulation. However, it has to be asked: "how can the state in capitalist societies be an outside of capitalism?" (Das, 2017: 603). Marxist debate on the state has eventually reached a general definition that state provides and sustains the conditions for capitalist development. It is integrated in capitalist system; whether this integration may be instrumentalist, parasitical, developmental or relatively autonomous etc. depends on positions of scholars. However, in Harvey's writings, sometimes state or a strong state is the perpetrator of accumulation by dispossession, other times, it is the victim of it. This ambiguity surrounding the position of the capitalist state has to be addressed properly.

The concept of accumulation by dispossession has these shortcomings and ambiguities waiting to be discussed. The continuity debate originally does not necessitate such an expansion in the meaning and scope of primitive accumulation. Yet, Harvey undertook such a task, which only led to the conclusion that accumulation by dispossession became a concept not only for the explanation of primitive accumulation practices today, but also for already explained capitalist accumulation processes.

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

As it can be seen in the previous section, intertwining capitalist and primitive accumulation is a slippery road that it may end up with many theoretical complications. Yet, considering capitalism today, it is hard to limit the explanatory power of primitive accumulation to a precapitalist history. The world has become predominantly capitalist since then. However,

this does not necessarily mean that other modes of productions have disappeared or there is not a single group of farmers who owns or shares means of production. Thus, the concept of primitive accumulation has still much to offer. Still, there are several points that have to be made to escape any complications stemming from bringing the primitive accumulation from precapitalism to capitalism.

First of all, there is the problem of state. Every scholar I mentioned in this article is convinced that state is the perpetrator of primitive accumulation. This is its fundamental distinction from capitalist accumulation. However, throughout texts, scholars forget about the state and its agency and tend to treat state from an instrumentalist perspective. There is an absolute need for actively reintegrate a Marxist state approach and also class conflict to the core of the theory in order to reveal not only the core differences between primitive and capitalist accumulations, but also how they are linked to one another.

Instrumentalist state is “an essentially repressive instrument which is manipulable exclusively and at will by a single, economically dominant, unitary class subject” (Poulantzas cited in Jessop, 1985: 54); such as Lenin’s description of the state as “bureaucratic and military machinery”. This definition reduces state or political to economy and/or to the interests of the dominant class and dismiss the constitutive element of class conflict in the establishment of state and in its functions. As Gramsci would put, “when the administrative, executive, and coercive apparatus of government was in effect constrained by the leading class of a whole social formation, it became meaningless to limit the definition of state to those elements of government” (Gramsci cited in Cox & Sinclair, 1996: 126).

Secondly, one has to bear in mind that the precapitalist state and the state in the expanded (capitalist) production are significantly different from each other due to different class structures, conditionings towards then proto-capitalists and today’s capitalists, functions and tools available to them for executing these functions. Today the workings of capitalism are not transparent. Even if we acknowledge the transfer of surplus value from labour to capitalists, from periphery to core, due to the fact that coercion is hidden in the operations of markets it becomes hard to detect the relations of exploitation (Wood, 2003: 1-3). In other words, extra-economic force – political, military, and judicial; which is supplied primarily by the state – becomes detached from economic force of capital leading to an understanding of neutrality of the state (Wood, 2003: 4-5). It is important that the detachment of economic power from political power is specific to capitalist mode of production or expanded production. Since market has its own power, which is imposed on capitalists and labour alike, social relations are regulated by the impersonal laws of the market (Wood, 2003: 28). However, this does not necessarily pave the way for an assumption of decline of the state power or instrumentalization of it. State preserves its indispensable functions for “maintaining the system of property [and property lessness] and social order, least of all the function of coercion that underlies all others” within the national borders (Wood, 2003: 20). In other words, the state is the provider of necessary conditions for capital accumulation. Although capitalism reaches far beyond the boundaries of the nation state, it still requires coercive power of the state since no other entity possesses such a power of guaranteeing “the regularity and predictability that capital needs in its daily transactions” and “compensate for its own

disruptive tendencies” (Wood, 2003: 24-25). Due to the detachment of economic power from extra-economic power, capital was able to globalize. On the other hand, because of this detachment capital depends on the nation-state even more. Therefore, unveiling the contemporary nature of the relationship between extra-economic force and economic force, the state and the capital, becomes crucial in understanding capitalism today.

Lastly, beyond theoretical work, in order to understand how state and capital come together for primitive accumulation there is a need for more empirical studies. For example, since the mid-2000’s the increase in the prices of primary commodities led to a rush of capital to extraction of natural resources, food production and other raw material productions. This rush has been discussed through several conceptualizations such as land grabbing, water grabbing, green grabbing, neo-extractivism, new extractivism, extractive imperialism etc.<sup>7</sup> The horror of and resistance to vast expropriations of land, water and resources have come to draw attention. Such a phenomenon can provide us with a palette where one can observe and analyse different processes of expropriations in different countries and how state and capital are positioned in the making of these processes.

## CONCLUSION

Since the 1970’s attacks to the social functions of the state and commons like land, water and natural resources, privatizations and deregulations of markets have become modus operandi of contemporary capitalism. Among scholars, these developments occurring simultaneously around the world have created the need to understand and explain them. This led to the revitalization of the primitive accumulation debate, specifically of its continuous character and its position vis-à-vis capitalist accumulation. It is highly likely that the contemporaneity of primitive accumulation debate will continue in the near future. Critical scholars will continue to discuss concepts like primitive accumulation or develop new ones like accumulation by dispossession in order to explain contemporary capitalism and even offer a political strategy to deal with them.

The historical understanding of primitive accumulation as a definitive part of transition from feudalism to capitalism has become shadowed by this need to explain this contemporary phenomenon. On the other hand, the continuous-inherent understanding of primitive accumulation has become widespread. Especially with Harvey’s concept of accumulation by dispossession it draws much attention to the discussion of primitive accumulation. However, while bringing the concept of primitive accumulation from precapitalism to capitalism today, highlighting its continuous character, there appeared several theoretical shortcomings.

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<sup>7</sup> Veltmeyer, H. (2013). The political economy of natural resource extraction: a new model or extractive imperialism? *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 34(1), 79–95; Borras Jr., S. M., Kay, C., Gómez, S. & Wilkinson, J. (2012) Land grabbing and global capitalist accumulation: key features in Latin America. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 33(4), 402-416; Brand, U., Dietz, K. & Lang, M. (2016). Neo-Extractivism in Latin America: One Side of a New Phase of Global Capitalist Dynamics. *Ciencia Política*, 11(21), 125-159; Gudynas, E. (2010). The New Extractivism in South America: Ten Urgent Theses about Extractivism in Relation to Current South American Progressivism. Accessed in 15 June 2021, URL: <http://postdevelopment.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NewExtractivism10ThesesGudynas10.pdf>; Sosa, M. & Zwartveen, M. (2012). Exploring the Politics of Water Grabbing: The Case of Large Mining Operations in the Peruvian Andes. *Water Alternatives*, 5(2), 360–375.

The essence of primitive accumulation lies in accumulation by extra-economic forces, mainly by the state. Thus, this article highlights the necessity in the debate for a more comprehensive and clear understanding of state in capitalism today. In addition, further research in case studies; i.e. the reasons, workings and results of global rush of capital to land, water and resource grabbing, may provide us an empirical cradle from which such an approach can flourish.

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