

Refereed article

The Blight in the Center: Dhaka's Kawran Bazar in the Context of Modern Space Production

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Summary

The focus of this article is on the planned relocation of Kawran Bazar, the largest traditional food market of Dhaka, Bangladesh, from the city center to three new locations on the urban periphery. We are interested in this specific case as the plans for relocating and decentralizing the market are by now already 20 years old, but have not as yet actually been implemented. In the public discourse, the explanation for this relocation remaining in limbo is often grounded in the narrative of planning failures and a general lack of capacity on the part of the municipality to take decisive action. In contrast, in this paper we develop an argument for understanding the case of Kawran Bazar as the result of a conflict between a newly emerging "globalized elite" that works toward bourgeois urban renewal and a well-established "localized elite" that seeks to protect the rents brought in from the spaces that it controls. With this argument we strive for contributing to the current debate on the "entrepreneurial city" in South Asia, which is currently polarized as to how to best interpret contemporary dynamics of power and resistance there. One perspective focuses solely on the agency of globally networked capitalists, and runs the risk of conceiving of entrepreneurialism as an unstoppable force. A second perspective, in contrast, focuses on the self-organization of the urban poor, and contrariwise runs the risk of overestimating both the benevolence and effectiveness of such movements. In this paper, we aim to develop a middle ground between these two perspectives by applying Henri Lefebvre's (1972; 2012) notion of "centrality."

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Introduction

Spurred on by economic globalization and the political hegemony of the neoliberal doctrine, in recent decades cities worldwide have become subject to strong inter-urban competition over private sector investments (Altvater 2005). This competition has become manifest in the growing influence of the economic interests that shape the design of today's cities. City centers are restructured by means of high-rise buildings, office complexes, and shopping malls that together convey the impression of modernity and progress. As a consequence, in recent years locally active public-private alliances have taken the lead in brokering the regeneration of erstwhile derelict industrial areas and the renewal of city centers as aesthetically enchanting business districts, themed zones of entertainment, or gentrified housing compounds (MacLeod and Jones 2011). While such processes might have reinvigorated the profitability of many city centers, the price of such measures has been the widespread displacement of specific marginalized groups like beggars, homeless people or street vendors — not to mention a general sharpening of socioeconomic disparities (Smith 1998, 2002).

David Harvey (1989) has named this trend the “entrepreneurial city.” Much of the discussion surrounding the entrepreneurial city has been empirically grounded in the Global North, with examples from Baltimore (Harvey 1989), New York (Smith 1998), Glasgow (MacLeod 2002), Rotterdam (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008), and Frankfurt (Schipper 2013). However, in more recent years, a number of studies have added to this empirical base with examples from Quito and Guayaquil (Swanson 2007), Ahmedabad (Chatterjee 2011), and Mumbai (Björkman 2014; Weinstein 2014; Whitehead and More 2007). Numerous scholars have thus contributed to the analysis of the multiple manifestations of particular versions of so-called “home-grown neoliberalism” (Roy 2011).

In the South Asian context, the current debate on entrepreneurial urbanization is polarized as to how to best interpret contemporary dynamics of power and resistance there. Two major approaches have been dominant in defining the parameters and perspectives for investigating contemporary cities and urban conditions in the region: (a) the political economy of globalization and (b) the postcolonial focus on subaltern agency (Shatkin 2014). The first of these focuses solely on the agency of a “globalized elite” (for example, Davis 2006; Sassen 2002; Smith 2002) and has tended to present globalization and global urbanism as a process of convergence around certain sociospatial manifestations, such as Central Business Districts, shopping malls, and gated communities (Ong 2011). This approach has largely conceived of cities as being merely passive stages, ones acted upon by the representatives of “free market forces” (Benjamin 2008). In so doing, it has ended up helping to reproduce the narrative of entrepreneurial urbanism as an unstoppable truth — specifically by forgetting that there have been and are cases of local resistance and the blockage of modernist projects by grassroots organizations. The second perspective,

in contrast, focuses on the self-organization of the urban poor: Studies of local NGOs and self-help groups have provided a fruitful critique of simplistic models of urban convergence (for example, Appadurai 2001; Benjamin 2008; Holston 2007). However, they have applied a similar logic of singular causality and have thus tended to view significantly different sites as instantiations of the same political form of resistance (Ong 2011). In the process, such studies have run the risk of misinterpreting the goals of the powerful actors who are or were behind grassroots organizations and of overestimating the significance of such movements in their efforts to transform the state and to craft more inclusive urban policies (cf. Roy 2011). They have helped to elevate the urban poor's daily struggles for survival to the stature of heroism, whereas, more often than not, these practices are actually being facilitated by well-established patron–client relationships that ultimately serve only to enrich a few at the expense of the most vulnerable.

In order to overcome these shortcomings, Aihwa Ong (2011) and Gavin Shatkin (2014) call for the crafting of a new conceptual middle ground that integrates the premises of the two perspectives — in other words, one that takes into account both that globalization has led to a restructuring of the urban political economy with the emergence of newly empowered actors who lobby for the renewal of city centers according to their own private wishes and that urbanization in South Asia is profoundly shaped by grassroots movements, street-level politics, and informal governance schemes that are between them capable of thwarting the manifold development processes of the entrepreneurial city. These two authors call for an approach that sees the city as an inherently unstable, always incomplete, and inevitably conflictive terrain of ambitious visions and speculative experiments on the part of both capitalists and the subaltern, whose success or failure is never predestined. This proposed perspective calls for place-sensitive studies that address the following questions:

1. How do the powerful strategize in order to overcome the developmental impasse created by local politics?
2. How do the urban poor organize themselves so as to challenge the plans of the powerful?
3. How and why are the urban poor successful in shaping urban development according to their own interests, and in which circumstances do the forces of urban entrepreneurialism succeed?

With this paper, we aim to provide answers to these questions for a specific, concrete case based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The focus of our attention is thus on the modernization of one of the commercial centers of that city, specifically on the planned relocation of Kawran Bazar — Dhaka's largest traditional food market — from the city center to three new and separate locations on the urban periphery. This case is of special interest insofar as the plans to relocate the market are by now already 20 years old, but have not as yet actually been implemented. Against this backdrop, we raise a simple question: Why is Kawran Bazar still there? In the public

discourse, explanations as to why both this and other, similar development projects remain in limbo is often grounded in the narrative of planning failures and a general lack of capacity on behalf of the municipality to take decisive action — the governing body itself is reduced to a corrupt bureaucracy and accused of “bad governance” (Roy 2009). In contrast, in this paper we seek to develop an argument for understanding the case of Kawran Bazar instead as the result of a conflict between a newly emerging “globalized elite” that works toward bourgeois urban renewal and a well-established “localized elite” that seeks to protect the rents brought in from the spaces that it controls. With this argumentation we aim to contribute to the current debate on entrepreneurial urbanization in South Asia by adopting the perspective of a new middle ground, as per Ong (2011) and Shatkin (2014), and by adding empirical evidence of the factuality of the — albeit temporary — blockage of the onward march of the entrepreneurial city (Roy 2011). For the purposes of the latter aim it is necessary to analytically refine the terms “blockage” and “resistance” more precisely. To this end, in the next section we refer to the considerations of Henri Lefebvre (1972; 2012) on the notion of “centrality.”

The notion of centrality

In recent years, the works of Henri Lefebvre (1972; 2012) have become an important frame of reference for numerous both theoretical (Korff and Rothfuss 2009; Schmid 2010; Vogelpohl 2011) and empirical (Bertuzzo 2009; Hackenbroch 2013a; Hossain 2012) studies in Geography and Urban Planning. Even though the French philosopher is notorious for his opaque language and somewhat woolly concepts, and despite the fact that his theories date back to the Paris of the 1970s, Lefebvre’s approach has still not lost its attractiveness. On the contrary, in fact, in more recent years an entire new wave of interpretations thereof has arisen alongside the “Right to the City” movement that is now spreading around the world (Harvey 2003; Holm and Gebhardt 2011). One reason for this is certainly Lefebvre’s “transductive” mode of thinking, which combines analyses of present-day conditions with specific — though open-ended — political utopias (cf. Elden 2004; Goonewardena et al. 2008; Kipfer et al. 2013). It is this methodological approach that we consider to be crucial, as it provides us with a suitable foundation for refining the notions of blockage and resistance.

For a start, Lefebvre’s approach to cities and urbanization can be described as a historical narrative of loss (Vogelpohl 2011). In his eyes, cities are historical products that existed in ancient times but ones that have almost completely ceased to exist in our contemporary world — or else continue to exist only in fragments (Lefebvre 1972, 2012). According to Lefebvre the rise of capitalism led to the loss of a particular social coherence that had until then been characteristic of cities. This process of loss and destruction was triggered by the idea of a functional partitioning of cities in modern urbanism. Whereas previously cities had been places where

people worked and lived side-by-side, in modern times residential areas were defined and separated from business centers — which were separated out from recreational spaces, which were separated out from religious places, and so forth. From this spatial order, family life, political life, work, and leisure came to be experienced as disconnected elements, whereas before they had not been clearly separated from each other. In consequence, people's everyday lives became sequences of different thematic programs enacted in places separated out from each other. Through their functional partitioning cities became more and more fragmented, while at the same time they became homogenized, from a global point of view, in accordance with the generalized principles of an "abstract space" that was quantified, measured, and planned in order to produce the aspired to new order of the powerful (Lefebvre 1972, 2012). From the 1980s onward, the principles of abstract space correspondingly merged with the paradigm of the entrepreneurial city and thus served to reproduce the various geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

According to Lefebvre, however, the expansion of abstract space is not a one-way street. Instead, he argues, the abstract space bears the potential for its own overthrowing. This potential is not grounded in any counterhegemonic ideology or in other counterstructures, but rather first and foremost in the everyday practices of the people. In other words, today we are facing an era in which the constellations of the abstract space are still dominant while at the same time a new society is now already on the horizon. This new society is characterized by the dissolution of homogenizing and fragmenting tendencies and by a reinvention of cities as places of inclusion and diversity. These new cities are not held together by universalistic worldviews or despotic hierarchies, but rather by the needs and desires of the very people who inhabit them (Lefebvre 1972, 2012). They are characterized by a decreasing standardization of everyday life, by reduced control of people's behavior through hegemonic forces, and by increased political self-determination — a new type of society that Lefebvre describes as a "differential space" (1972: 148f.; 2012: 52). This differential space must be addressed as a utopia that transcends the entrepreneurial logic of today's urbanism, and which opens up space for encounters between people of different socioeconomic backgrounds as well as for the simultaneity of different conceptions of life that can be lived out without any fear of one's persecution. From Lefebvre's viewpoint, however, this utopia is not pure fiction but represents a possible other world that becomes apparent at concrete moments in human history when present-day constraints meet with specific visions of an alternative future (Lefebvre 1972).

To grasp these moments, Lefebvre (1972, 2012) introduces the notion of centrality. A particular situation can be said to be "central" if it is the result of specific historical conditions, while at the same time being a place wherein the differential space can potentially be realized. It is a real situation that is taken as a fracture zone where past conditions and future possibilities collide (Lefebvre 1972, 2012). The crucial

point with the notion of centrality is that Lefebvre conceives it to be characterized by contest and conflict, where the interests of different groups clash and where people struggle over scarce resources and the hegemony of interpretation. On the one hand, there are the forces of the abstract space that seek to prolong and expand their spheres of interest. On the other, there are counterforces that try to hamper the spread of abstract space and to overcome the entrepreneurial city's dominion. This blockage, however, does not automatically represent the rise of the differential space. The clash of advocates and opponents of the abstract space provides only the possibility for the differential space to come into existence. Against this backdrop, there is a need to distinguish counterhegemonic activities from potentialities for creating the differential space. While blockage represents the hampering of the abstract space, we use the term resistance to address the actualization of the differential space.¹ These twin concepts serve us in two ways. First, with the term blockage we realign our compass toward cases where grassroots organizations and local actor groups organize themselves to protest against modernist projects. We do this in order to help dispel the narrative of the entrepreneurial city as an unstoppable force. Second, with the notion of resistance we introduce a normative criterion that protects us from assuming the benevolence of the powerful actors behind such grassroots organizations, and from overestimating their effectiveness in transforming the state and in crafting more inclusive urban policies. We do this in order to help create a more realistic picture of the goals and potentialities of today's street-level movements.

In our study we take the pending relocation of Dhaka's Kawran Bazar as a case of Lefebvrian centrality, and analyze the present situation by portraying both the market as a historical product and as a potential instantiation of differential space. For the following empirical study we refer to Lefebvre's considerations on the production of space as a process that is driven by three moments — namely, hegemonic conceptions, spatial sets or formations, and everyday life (Lefebvre 2012; Schmid 2010).

The contested market

In the following sections we put the focus on Kawran Bazar, located in the midst of one of the most important commercial business zones in the center of Dhaka. Kawran Bazar and the surrounding business district have a combined area of approximately 1 square kilometer, and are part of the local administrative unit (*thana*) of Tejgaon (RAJUK 2010). It is a contested area, where high-rise buildings, shopping malls, and a recently completed megaproject of urban renewal and flood protection meet with the street vendors and market stalls of Kawran Bazar, Dhaka's largest traditional food market (see Figure 1). By following Shatkin's (2014) pro-

1 It goes without saying that such a distinction must be made in each respective case on the basis of the empirical material available.

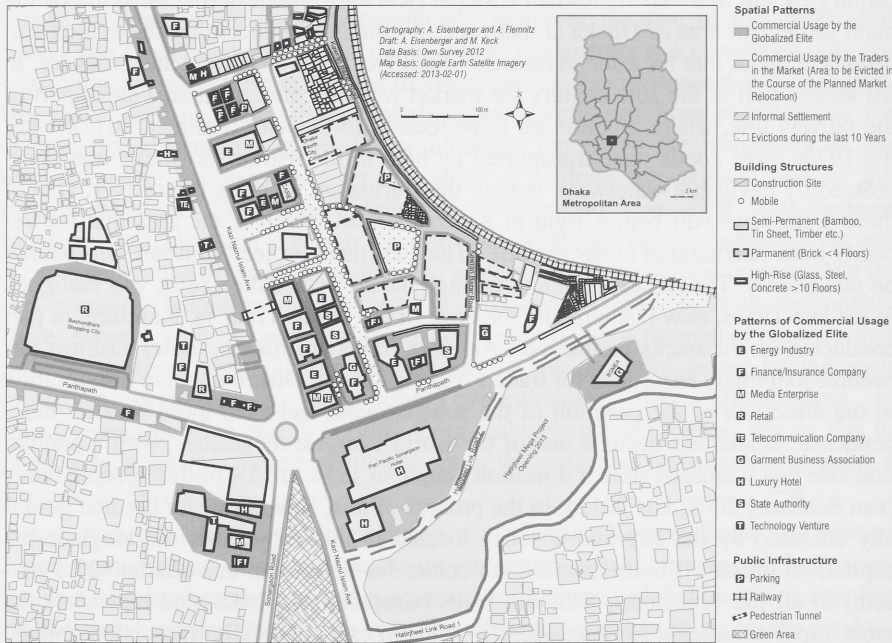
posal, on the next pages we will (a) highlight the contest that exists today around the market, (b) illustrate the interests and strategies of the conflicting alliances of actors, and (c) reflect on the meaning of this conflict for our understanding of change in South Asian urban politics and space.

Kawran Bazar — also known as Karwan Bazar — was established in the late 18th century by the Marwari tradesman Kawran (Karwan) Singh on the outskirts of the main settlement area of Dhaka at that time. By the late 19th century the market had become a major hub for trade in household products such as pottery and crockery. In the second half of the 20th century the market was relocated to an area along part of the railway line, where it continues to be located to this day (Rahman 2012). Until the 1970s most goods were transported by boat to the market as Dhaka was crisscrossed by navigable waterways linking the Buriganga with the Balu River. One of these waterways still begins right at Kawran Bazar, which is the area that has recently been restructured under the title “The Hatirjheel Project” (further information on this below). The railway, running through the area since the 1880s, was realigned in the late 1950s, now just clipping the edge of the bazar. Trade is, therefore, in part conducted on the tracks themselves. As more trains are running now, business has become extremely hazardous for traders and customers. Due to massive in-migration in the aftermath of the partition of the subcontinent, and even more so after independence, Dhaka has become one of the world's largest megacities, with a population size that increased from 1.4 million people in 1970 to 15.4 million people today (van Schendel 2009; UN 2012). In the process of this, Kawran Bazar became gradually enclosed by the city and is today located in the very center of Bangladesh's capital. At present it is the distribution center for more than one-quarter (27.3 percent) of all the vegetables, fish, and fruits consumed in Dhaka, and represents the most important market in Bangladesh — with an estimated daily transaction volume of Bangladeshi taka 5 crore (~450,000 euros) (Keck 2015b). The market provides work for approximately 20,000 people and covers an area of 13.5 hectares.

In 1984 President Ershad declared his intention to develop the whole area around Kawran Bazar and to turn it into the second-largest commercial zone in Dhaka after Motijheel (Khan 2004). This modernization drive was part of the dominant political and economic policy of that time, as Ershad privatized state-owned enterprises (especially in jute-processing industries), promoted export-oriented sectors (primarily the textile and shrimp industries), and opened the country up to the global market (Lewis 2011). For Kawran Bazar this drive was meant to be the starting point for the restructuring of the area around the market, the draining of existing flood-retention basins, the renewal of the road network, and the construction of numerous high-rise buildings (Authors' own interview: D2; RAJUK 2010). In 1995 the plan to develop Kawran Bazar was adopted by the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) and the market, along with adjacent areas, became a designated Commercial

Business Zone (CBZ) (RAJUK 2006: 46).² In the course of this process the use of the land around Kawran Bazar changed from being that of a marketplace with single-story houses made of tin roofs to a modern business center with high-rise office buildings and shopping malls.

Figure 1: Kawran Bazar in the context of modern space production



Source: Cartography: A. Eisenberger and A. Flemitz; draft: A. Eisenberger and M. Keck; data basis: own survey 2012; map basis: Google Earth satellite imagery (accessed: 2013-02-01).

Once the plan to establish a new CBZ in this area was fixed in the broader DMDP, the first democratically elected government, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) from 1991 to 1996, declared its ambition to relocate the market to a more suitable location. During the subsequent period of government rule by the Awami League (1996–2001), the relocation idea regarding the wholesale market was put on hold (Khan 2004). However, in 2004 the reelected BNP government (2001–2006) presented a new initiative for the market's relocation and finally decided to decentralize Kawran Bazar in 2006. The wholesale enterprises, officially numbered at 1,782, were to be divided and relocated to three preselected locations: Aminbazar (549 wholesalers), Jatrabari (895 wholesalers), and Mohakhali (360 wholesalers). With the exception of Mohakhali, the proposed markets are located on the geo-

² The DMDP serves as the urban master plan, and is valid from 1994 until 2015. It was introduced and financed in cooperation with UNDP/UNCHS and the national planning authority RAJUK (2006).

graphical fringes of today’s Dhaka (DCC 2006; Khan 2004; Mahmud 2013). The construction period was scheduled to start in June 2010, but was ultimately put back several times. Most recently the relocation was due to be realized in June 2014, but at the time of writing it is again not clear when the market relocation will finally end up actually taking place. This brings up the question of why this is even the case: Why is it so difficult to actually implement the longstanding plans for the market’s relocation? What are the underlying forces that work for and against the restructuring of Dhaka’s city center? And does this blockage of the entrepreneurial city give rise to the formation of a differential space? In order to uncover answers to these key questions we conducted an in-depth study during a one-month field stay in Dhaka in October 2012, and collected empirical data by means of qualitative methods.

Research methods

To investigate, first, the contestation of Kawran Bazar we conducted semistructured observations (cf. Atteslander 2010) in the market and mapped the entire area frequented by a member of the vegetable traders association. We focused especially on building structures and on visible spatial conflicts, and we sought to reveal the specific land tenure in the market and the spatial changes therein over the last ten years. To study, second, the interests and strategies of the conflicting actor groups we had to distinguish between two coalitions. The first comprises the political institutions, private business organizations, urban planning authorities, and specific segments of civic society that together are working toward the relocation and restructuring of the market area. We call this coalition the “globalized elite.” The second consists of the market associations, wholesalers, and representatives of local governmental bodies that are working to maintain Kawran Bazar in its present condition. We call this coalition the “localized elite.”

Table 1: Interview partners

Representatives of the globalized elite:
A1: Senior Reporter/Newspaper; A2: Knowledge Management Coordinator/International NGO; A3: Public Relations Manager/Luxury Hotel; A4: Manager/Domestic NGO; A5: Senior Deputy Secretary/Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association
Representatives of the localized elite:
B1: Chairman of Market Association; B2: Treasurer of Market Association; B3/B4: Vegetable Wholesalers; B5: Rice Wholesaler
Traders of Kawran Bazar:
C1/C2: Vegetable Retailer; C3: Edible Oil Retailer; C4: Tea Stall Owner; C5: Garment Retailer; C6/C7: Street Vendor; C8/C9: Carpenter
Key informants:
D1: Chairman (AMRF); D2: Journalist and Local Businessman (Electronics)

In total, we conducted 21 qualitative interviews. Five interview partners were representatives of the globalized elite (interview partners A1–A5), in other words of public media, luxury hotels, governmental institutions, and international NGOs. All these conversations followed the logic of problem-centered interviews (cf. Witzel 2000). In this context we also studied official documents on land use patterns around Kawran Bazar and screened more than 100 reports that were published on that topic in both English- and Bangla-language newspapers. Another five interview partners were representatives of the localized elite (interview partners B1–B5), that is executive members of market associations and wholesale traders. These interviews were carried out in a semi-structured way (cf. Brosius et al. 2008; Komrey 2006). As a third category we conducted interviews with a number of manufacturers, retailers, street vendors, and tea stall owners who did not belong to either the globalized or the localized elite (interview partners C1–C9). The focus here was specifically on understanding the everyday lives of the market’s businessmen, for which we chose participatory observation as our data collection method (cf. Atteslander 2010; Przyborski and Wohrab-Sahr 2010). Finally we interviewed two persons in the capacity of key informants, as they have been knowledgeable observers of Kawran Bazar for many years now (interview partners D1–D2). We analyzed our interviews with the computer-based evaluation program AtlasTi, which helped us to organize our information through categorizing and grouping our interviewees’ answers according to different parameters.

Why Kawran Bazar needs to be relocated

As mentioned above, we analyze here the pending relocation of Kawran Bazar through the lens of Lefebvre’s (1972, 2012) notion of centrality. On the one hand, centrality represents situations where difference, encounter, and simultaneity become possible. On the other, there is a tendency for centrality to be controlled by those actors who are seeking to limit people’s access to it and to dominate its configuration. As such, centrality serves as a mediator between hegemonic forces and different modes of everyday living — and thus must be seen to be a contested terrain (Lefebvre 1972, 2012). In our case, it is the globalized elite that actively tries to control the area around Kawran Bazar and that is comprised of people involved in national governments, planning authorities, and private business organizations. These people mostly belong to Dhaka’s emerging middle class and form an alliance with each other in order to reach their aspirational goals. We use the word “globalized” to underline that these people are oriented in their daily rhythm toward international business, with representative enterprises that range from national to multinational corporations in the energy (such as Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Limited, BAPEX), finance (for example Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd), technology sectors (for example Siemens), and telecommunications (like Software Shop Limited Wireless), and from international NGOs (like Care) and media (such as ATN News TV) to luxury hotels (for example Sonargaon Hotel) and

shopping malls (like Bashundara City). In the following we examine the interests of the various stakeholders of the globalized elite and discuss their strategies in working toward the restructuring of the market area.

The feint

The Dhaka City Cooperation (DCC) was appointed as the executive authority to oversee the construction of the three new markets and to implement the plans for the relocation of the vending units of the Kawran Bazar.³ Interestingly, the official statement given by the DCC did not correspond to the earlier idea of developing a modern city center. Instead, the planned market relocation was legitimated by the stated need “to improve the marketing and supplying facility of agricultural products, to ensure the real price of agricultural products produced by the peasants, to reduce price discrimination among different markets, [and] to introduce a monitoring system in favor of consumer interest” (DCC 2006). In other words, an attempt was made to present the market's relocation as a necessary step for improving the food system of Dhaka. In subsequent years, however, the validity of this claimed motive became more and more porous: First, during the planning period in 2006, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) decided to reduce the project's costs at the expense of improving the supply chain. In fact, plans for the installation of cold storage systems — one of the technologies indispensable to the improvement of food distribution — were actually cancelled (DCC 2006). If the enhancement of Dhaka's food system had been the driver of policy, other ways of saving money would have taken priority instead. Second, a recent study of the National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme (NFPCSP 2013) showed that consumer prices for eggplant, mango, okra and potatoes are similar in Kawran Bazar, Jatrabari, and Mohakhali. In light of this, doubts can be raised about the suggestion that the planned market relocation would lead to decreasing market prices.

These facts suggest that the upgrading of Dhaka's food system was never a key priority in the planned market relocation. Instead, it appears that the proposed relocation of Kawran Bazar followed other considerations. In this regard an official document of the national planning authority Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (RAJUK) speaks more frankly.⁴ It states that the bazar “poses as a blight to the entire area,” which is the reason why the “relocation to somewhere else within the city is essential” (RAJUK 2010: Annex 3). Similarly, the former minister of commerce

3 In the wake of the local Government Amendment Act of December 4, 2011, the DCC was later divided into the Dhaka South City Corporation and the Dhaka North City Corporation. Today, Kawran Bazar is located in the administrative area of the Dhaka North City Corporation (DSCC 2014).

4 RAJUK was founded in 1987 and replaced the former Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT). The national planning authority has the responsibility “to develop, improve, extend and manage the city and the peripheral areas through a process of proper development planning and development control” (RAJUK 2014).

found clear enough words to articulate the elite's visions and objectives with regard to the new city center: "We want to turn the area into a posh trading hub by relocating the existing shops to other places" (*The Independent* 2011). From these statements it seems evident that the food system argument was nothing but a feint that primarily served to generate support for the market's relocation among a wider public audience. The renewal of the market area and the overseeing of the increased profitability of the city center that are aspired to through the upgrading of local structures were the genuine primary interests here.

The offense

For the globalized elite, the upgrading of the city center is indispensably connected to the market's relocation. When talking to our interview partners, we found that the displacement of the traders was being actively called for. This push is legitimated by frequently used strategies of "othering," as the following comments show:

It is essential; this market must be relocated, because this is the place for Dhaka. There are different types of institutions: Offices, media — among them the most renowned dailies in this country — TV channels, governmental offices, international NGOs. All are located at Kawran Bazar, but in this bazar people are not very civilized (own interview: A2).

They [the traders] are not properly maintaining this space. If you go inside the market than you will see that the roads are not clean. Many dirty things are on the roads and it gets worse during the rainy season [...]. So, whatever the initiatives are; you have to make the people understand: keep it clean, do your business here, but keep it clean. But this will not work and will not happen, because the people involved in the market cannot keep it in that way (own interview: A5).

The traders used to occupy half of the road and the government evicted them. This is definitely needed, because if you are a common citizen and if you go to Kawran Bazar [...] then you have to wait for hours to go 50 meters (own interview: A1).

All three references show in one way or the other how the representatives of the globalized elite distinguish themselves from the "bazar people," who are considered unable to keep their workplace clean. Eventually such comments help reproduce a discourse that establishes a distinction between "common citizens," who are eligible to obtain access to the new CBZ around Kawran Bazar, and the "not very civilized" traders, who are not entitled to stay in this area. Local traders are held responsible for blocking the road and for creating traffic congestion. The market as a whole, meanwhile, is presented as a breeding ground for crime and prostitution (own interviews: A1–A5). On the basis of these arguments the local traders are not only refused the right to centrality; they are also thought of as a factor that disturbs public communication systems and urban functionality. From the perspective of the globalized elite, Kawran Bazar represents a place that no longer fits the ideal of a modern, sophisticated, and clean business area — either spatially or socially (own interview: A1–A5).

With such an understanding in mind, the globalized elite are pursuing a couple of different strategies in order to get Kawran Bazar relocated. To promote and accelerate the relocation process initiated by the government the media started campaigns against the market, as one journalist knows:

Prothom Alo has shifted to our old building close to the market. Those two newspapers [*The Daily Star*, *Prothom Alo*] made campaigns for the relocation of the market from Kawran Bazar to other places. We wrote a number of news reports, articles — many things — but nothing happened so far (own interview: A1).⁵

These campaigns, which portray the particular perspective of the globalized elite, did not have the desired effect, but they nevertheless still help to continuously reproduce the discourse of the need to relocate the market in the name of the general public interest. Beside such media campaigns, the globalized elite also try to put direct pressure on the national government. This strategy is described as follows by the public relations manager of the nearby luxury hotel:

From our perspective we can say that our main priority is [the relocation of] the market. Several times we put forward our request to the government [...]. Therefore, I would say, we actively interfere; we do not just sit back and [...] leave actions to the government. The hotel management is continuously in talks with the government (own interview: A3).

Since the market's relocation has been in planning limbo for many years now, in more recent times the general manager has decided to increase the pressure on the government by simply taking action himself. Due to the high levels of traffic congestion experienced around Kawran Bazar, the road to his hotel was extended through the appropriation of a stretch of approximately 200 meters of one of two public lanes of the Panthapath Road. This was done with the aim of disburdening potential guests on their way to the hotel (own interview: A3; cf. Figure 1). Against this background the globalized elite not only work for a discursive separating out, but also for a clearly visible physical demarcation line to isolate the market from the modern city center.

Another example of *faits accomplis* is the construction of the head office of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in the middle of the designated development area of the Hatirjheel megaproject. The Hatirjheel project is located in the south of Kawran Bazar (see Figure 1) and is part of a strategy to develop a new, modern city center with a connection to Gulshan in the northeast and to Shahbag in the south. This project is financed entirely by taxpayers' money, and has served to create a flood protection zone as well as a new waterfront for recreation and leisure. It has been realized on an area of 245 acres and included the construction of three bridges and a ring road 11 km long around a huge

5 *Prothom Alo* is one of the most widely read Bangla-language newspapers in Bangladesh, while *The Daily Star* is the country's most famous English-language newspaper. Both publications have their headquarters in Dhaka.

expanse of water (RAJUK 2011). While the first budget plan in 2007 projected the total costs to be Tk 542 crore (~53 million euros), in 2010 the revised version estimated them to be Tk 1,474 crore (~151 million euros) — almost triple the original estimate. In 2013 the project costs were stated as Tk 1,971 crore (~185 million euros), with Tk 1,048 crore (~107 million euros) spent on land acquisition and the rest on the construction of various structures (*The Daily Star* 2013). One of our interview partners enthused in this regard:

If you go there, you think you are in a different country, not in Bangladesh. You can feel these things. They have modernized the complete area. This will be the most beautiful area of the city. You feel like in a foreign country (own interview: A1).

In the course of the construction period, running from 2007 to 2013, a total of nearly half a million people from adjacent slums were displaced or forcibly evicted (Hossain 2013). In the case of the urban poor, the government showed rigor in its eviction endeavors. In contrast it was more lenient with regard to the head office of BGMEA, which as noted was built in the same area. While the settlements of lower-income groups were razed to the ground, the continued presence of BGMEA headquarters was tolerated by the officials responsible — that despite the fact that both the slums and the BGMEA building lack any official authorization. In subsequent years, environmental NGOs started to protest against the BGMEA building and, in April 2011, they applied for an order from the high court requiring relevant structures to be demolished within 90 days. However, in the absence of a verdict being reached by the high court, in the following months the lawyers of BGMEA obtained several stay orders from the appellate court. Two years later, in March 2013, as the high court's decision was finally published the lawyers of BGMEA responded again with an appeal to the supreme court to legalize the building *ex post facto*. This time, they stated procedural errors as their reason to stay (*The Daily Star* 2013; Hisham 2013; *News Today* 2013). At the time of writing this appeal is still pending approval, and thus the building still stands. This shows how the argument of illegality is used by the globalized elite to limit the access of unwanted groups — mostly the poor — to (Lefebvrian) centrality, while the same elite also try to talk themselves out of it.

Next steps

These examples show how the globalized elite try to control the centrality of Kawran Bazar and adjacent areas through different forms of campaigning, through direct talks with political representatives, and through the creation of *faits accomplis*. Even though not all of their activities have led to direct outcomes, overall the globalized elite have been highly successful in achieving their goals — as official planning documents prove. As mentioned above, the national planning authority of the RAJUK argues in the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) (2010–2015) that Kawran Bazar “clashes with the existing land use of locality, as the area is filled up with prestig-

ious offices of national importance.”⁶ It asks why a wholesale market would be located in the midst “of a modern sophisticated office block” (RAJUK 2010: Annex 3), and the advice is given to relocate Kawran Bazar somewhere else. For the near future, the DAP planners have proposed to redesignate the area around Kawran Bazar from a CBZ into a Commercial Office Zone “encompassing surrounding office blocks through removal of large-scale retail markets” (RAJUK 2010: 248). This proposal of a new zoning scheme can be read as the next step in legitimizing the relocation of Kawran Bazar and the possible future eviction of its traders.

As it is written in the DAP, “zoning regulates the use of land or bulk control over land and buildings” with the aim to “protect the natural and living environment” (RAJUK 2010: 237). It is linked to the land management technique of “urban renewal” and “comprehensive (re)development,” which is defined as a program for derelict industrial areas to be “cleared and replaced mostly by high-rise apartment blocks with provision of other types of housing, open spaces, parks, better basic services and roads, and [...] a revitalized neighborhood” (RAJUK 2010: 236). These prescriptions call into question what facts actually justify an urban renewal process. The authors of the DAP make clear that restructuring becomes “necessary for an urban area where it [the area] is considered a blight and obsolescent and derelict and not fit for human habitation. It is necessary for those areas already threatened by degradation of the physical environment due to over population, unplanned development, and haphazard, unsystematic, and incompatible land use” (RAJUK 2010: 235). This planning document reflects in surprisingly clear words the perspective of the globalized elite, and can be seen as a powerful tool for helping them accomplishing their goals. The ostensibly neutral city planners thus turn out to in fact be part of the alliance that is working for the relocation of the market.

Why Kawran Bazar is still there

Despite influential advocates and the manifold strategies of the globalized elite, Kawran Bazar is nevertheless currently still there. The first debate about the moving of the market started in 1994, followed by the relocation concept presented in 2004, and then the proposed implementation of the plan in 2006. As noted the construction period was originally scheduled to begin in June 2010, but the deadline for this was subsequently pushed back several times. Most recently the relocation was intended to be realized from June 2014 (Mahmud 2013), but this date could not be met either. This brings up the question of what processes have made this delaying of the market's relocation possible. We argue that this continual postponement is not the result of a general lack of bureaucratic capacity on the part of the municipality, as the view put forward by external observers might suggest (cf. Roy 2009). It is,

6 The DAP is part of the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (1995–2015), and serves as the action plan for implementing the guidelines of the Structure Plan (1995–2015) and the Urban Area Plan (1995–2005).

rather, the outcome of a conflict between the globalized elite that works for the market relocation and the localized elite that is seeking to conserve its space rents. In the following section, we present organizational patterns of Kawran Bazar and discuss the factors that speak against the market relocation from the perspective of that localized elite. We use the word “localized” to highlight the fact that this alliance of actors — comprised mainly of land brokers, tradesmen, and ward-level bureaucrats — is involved in this particular place, and they — for reasons that will be revealed — cannot easily just shift to another location.

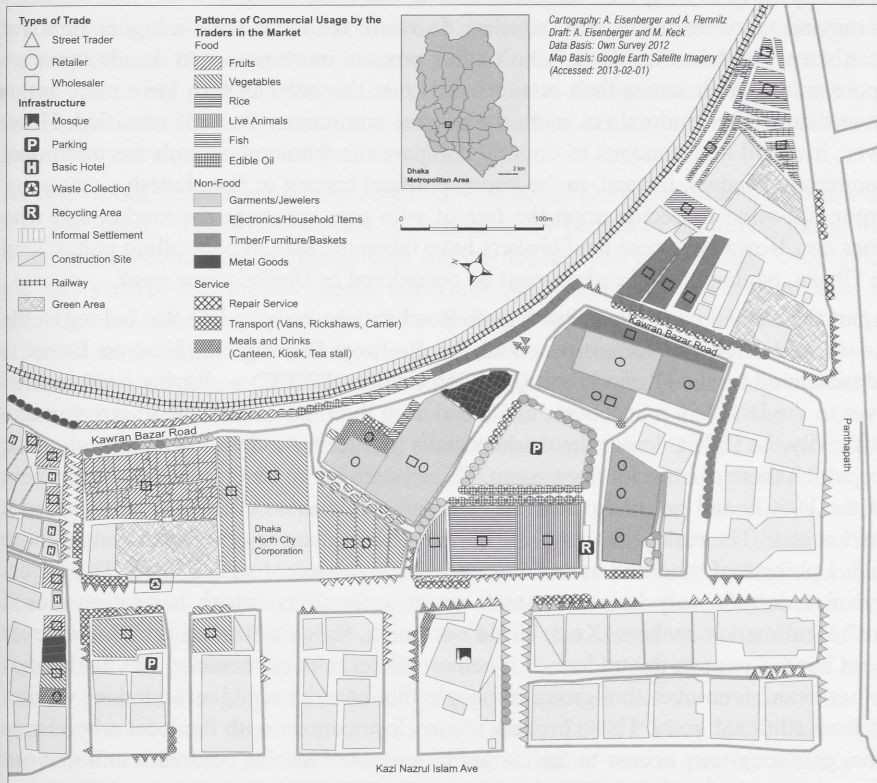
The rural *samaj*⁷

When one first enters Kawran Bazar the market appears to be a vibrant chaos. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the various traders do not occupy places arbitrarily. The market is divided into spatial patterns according to the products on sale, which again are offered by different groups of traders — from wholesalers through retailers to street vendors (see Figure 2). We use the historical notion of the *samaj* as a descriptive model for presenting the basic functioning patterns of the market.

Traditionally, Bangladeshi communities in rural areas were dominated by local leaders and their supporters — often members of better-off families and those who belonged to influential local lineages (*gusti*). Among other duties, these leaders were in charge of organizing the village people’s access to agricultural land and were responsible for the sale of the crops harvested. They often served the villagers as moneylenders in times of financial shortfalls, and mediated conflicts over resources together with the village elders (known as *matbars*). From this perspective the local communities were highly dependent on the local leaders of the *gusti*, since they could hardly make a living without their concessions. At the same time, however, the *gusti* were obliged to provide charitable donations to community members during religious festival times and to maintain a kind of local security net for times of crisis (Lewis 2011). As such, the *samaj* cannot be viewed as a purely exploitative set-up. It was rather a local system of patron–client relationships characterized by uneven power relations and mutual dependence. Since many of the tradesmen of Kawran Bazar are first-generation migrants born in rural Bangladesh, the market can be considered to be a transformed version of the rural *samaj*. In Dhaka, of course, other actor groups also come into play, such as bureaucrats, criminals, land brokers, and local political leaders.

7 The *samaj* can be said to be the (ideal of the) rural community system of Bangladesh.

Figure 2: Commercial structures of Kawran Bazar



Source: Cartography: A. Eisenberger and A. Flemitz; draft: A. Eisenberger and M. Keck; data basis: own survey 2012; map basis: Google Earth satellite imagery (accessed: 2013-02-01).

The urban *samaj*

The food traders of Kawran Bazar can be compared with the broad community base in the *samaj* who seek access to the market's land in their role as clients. This community is organized into several product-related market associations. The steering committee of each association is usually elected every two years by all of its members. Each member contributes to the association's administration costs, while the body is responsible for organizing the market's security guards, the distribution of electricity, gas, and water supplies, and handling the savings that are deposited in a social insurance fund for times of hardship (own interview: B4). The association convenes a general assembly every three to six months to discuss issues regarding the market's organization and to settle any disputes among members (own interview: B1, B3-4, D2). Having this role to play means that the market association

generally holds the same responsibilities as the *matbars* in the traditional *samaj* do. Naturally there is a type of hierarchy among the traders, since wholesalers usually command more resources than retailers do while the latter have a higher turnover than street vendors. Similarly, wholesalers possess more power to decide upon responses to market issues than retailers do while the latter in turn have more influence than street vendors. As such, the market community is itself stratified. However, it would be erroneous to directly compare the wholesalers with the traditional community leaders. Instead, in the young political history of Bangladesh a new actor group appeared to decide upon the fate of who gets access to the market and who does not. Nowadays local land brokers have taken the lead in controlling public land in Dhaka, while political cadres must be considered as Dhaka's new *gusti*.

Apart from small parts along Panthapath Road and the railway line that belong to the Roads and Highway Department and the Railway Department, Kawran Bazar is administered by the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) — having been handed over to the DNCC's predecessor in 1985 during the time of the Ershad government. Officially the DNCC leases the market stalls to traders for a period of several years, for which there exists a lottery system. This system is run by the revenue department of the DNCC and promises each businessperson an equal chance to be awarded a market stall. The reality, though, is different. Our own surveys revealed that no more than 1 percent of food traders in Dhaka are in possession of such a lease. The majority of tradesmen only have short-term rental agreements, which have been closed with local market brokers (Keck 2015a). As such, Kawran Bazar has *de facto* never been handed over to the traders — whether wholesalers or retailers. The market has rather been given over to a group of people that have emerged as a modern version of the traditional *gusti*. These brokers are in close contact with the local administration, gain long-term access to the market by means of leasing contracts, and rent out their plots to the local traders for business purposes.

Hackenbroch (2013b) showed in this context that access to public land in Dhaka is strongly politicized and is dependent on the support of — or even one's active membership in — one of the leading political parties. In order to make this clear, one needs to look at the system underpinning Bangladesh's national politics, which is generally dominated by two opposing parties — the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. In recent years both parties have repeatedly behaved in antagonistic ways toward each other, and have not refrained from using violence to defend their own interests (Lewis 2011). In this context a specific mode of governance has emerged that is based on the active control of public land, which is distributed after elections among the supporters of the victorious political party. Benefits arise for the party from this system, as the conceded access to public land guarantees them a pool of votes in return — which in turn helps them to succeed in the next elections (cf. Benjamin 2008). This system is not openly enforced by political activists, but by local criminals known as *mastans*. Van Schendel (2009: 252f.) describes these *mastans* as “streetwise, rowdy [...] local tools in the hands of national

politicians and bureaucrats — and some of them move on to become national politicians themselves.” They are “local tools,” according to Van Schendel, because they are handed such duties as “to recruit and manage crowds for mass gatherings, to enforce general strikes, and to generate party funds” (van Schendel 2009: 253). In return the ruling political party turns a blind eye to the *mastans*' illegal activities such as the collection of protection money or extortion, which for the latter serves as satisfactory compensation for their services.

As one of our interview partners reported, this political system is also effective in Kawran Bazar: “The whole market is dominated by people of the ruling party, but when the government will change then the institutions will also change. Other people will control this market” (own interview: A2). Especially when it is close to election time, membership of one of the leading political parties becomes a crucial criterion in determining whether one gains access to the market or is instead excluded. For example, in 2008 the Grand Alliance took power — a coalition government, led by the Awami League, that consisted also of the Jatiya Party, Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal, the Workers Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, as well as of nine other parties. Shortly after the elections, two businessmen were murdered in Kawran Bazar. One of them was the president of the fruit traders association, while the other was the former vice-president of the traders association of the so-called DIT market (which is part of Kawran Bazar). As it turned out later, both of them had also been political activists. The former was the general secretary of a local unit of the Jatiya Party, based in Tejagon, and the latter was senior vice-president of the local ward and politically active in the Awami League. In the aftermath, four local leaders from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party were accused of the murders with the motive given being “disputes over business” (Karim 2009; Piplica 2009). What had happened? From 2001 to 2006 the Four-Party Alliance was in power, which consisted of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, the Jatiya Party, and Islami Oikya Jote. At that time these parties also controlled Kawran Bazar, and guaranteed the local land brokers the freedom to collect their rents (in return for organizing political support). In 2007 however, when the military-backed interim government took power, this source of revenue was put at risk, and after the elections in 2008 it turned out eventually that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party had lost the elections — while the Jatiya Party became part of the Grand Alliance. From those days forward, the new ruling alliance tried to fulfil its claim to power and to expand its sphere of influence by means of collaborating with *mastans*. Against this background, the claims of the land brokers who had been operating in Kawran Bazar at that time were now renegotiated. As such, the murder of the two businessmen was directly connected to the takeover of market control by new land brokers backed by the parties now in power (Awami League and Jatiya Party) — as well as to the strenuous opposition thereto of the hitherto active land brokers (backed by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party).

Blockage of, or resistance to, the entrepreneurial city?

In such a politicized and violent environment, what is the role of the traders in the market's relocation process? What actions do they take against the market's planned relocation, and how can their actions be assessed from a normative point of view? From Lefebvre's perspective, the power to dominate in a space of centrality is not an exclusive attribute belonging only to hegemonic forces. Even in the most controlled places he sees scope for resistance and the potentiality to establish so-called "counter spaces." These emerge out of the differences that "arise at the margins of the homogenized realm" (Lefebvre 2012: 373). These differences can be broken down into minimal (induced) ones that remain "internal to the dominant form of [social] space," and into maximal (produced) ones that "escape the system's rules" (2012: 382). While induced difference can lead to blockage in the sense of the hampering of the abstract space, it needs produced difference to bring about resistance and to realize a differential space. It is the aim of this section to discuss the agency of the subaltern, in other words the food traders of Kawran Bazar. Is their protest against the proposed relocation to be taken as a form of blockage or rather as a form of resistance? Let us discuss this question for each actor group individually.

Street vendors are not considered to be fully part of the market and are therefore left almost entirely to themselves. Since food trade on the street is forbidden by law, they can be evicted at any time by the police with little effort. Evictions from their work sites are part of their daily rhythm. Usually they inform one another before the "clean-up drives" arrive, and leave their vending spots if necessary. As soon as the officers disappear, the vendors return and reclaim their spaces (Etzold 2013; own interview: C6–7). On this basis, no serious political agitation can be expected on the part of the street vendors — as the planned relocation of Kawran Bazar is not anything really tangible for them. One of our interview partners, for example, stated in this regard that:

I do not care much about the relocation, because if they move the market I will move my business to another place (own interview: C6).

In the case of wholesalers and retailers the situation is different. They have invested money to rent their market stalls and they cannot simply move their vending spots to another location. Furthermore some of them (mainly retailers) are not taken into account as regards the allocation of new vending sites at the planned markets in Aminbazar, Jatrabari, and Mohakhali (own interviews: B3, C1–2, C4, D2). As such the pending market relocation is a direct threat to the survival of their businesses, to their investments, and to their livelihoods, which has made them acutely aware of themselves as political actors. Consequently they have unionized in market associations, organize protests, and make demands for guarantees that not only some but all traders — be they wholesalers or retailers — will get a vending site at one of the three new market locations (own interview: A1, B5, C8–9, D2). They also call for appropriate compensation for all those who cannot be considered (own interview:

B3–B4, D2). If their demands are not complied with they will refuse to leave, as the chairman of the vegetable association stated defiantly:

We have a right to stay here as we are paying taxes. If the government will tell us to shift from here we will not listen. [...] We will inform the media and file a case at the court (own interview: B1).

From statements like this it becomes apparent that the traders of Kawran Bazar are politically dedicated and continue to struggle for their rights. They do this in an adaptive and creative way, as the following example will help to show: In 1985, when Ershad governed the country, a three-acre plot in Kawran Bazar's vegetable market was taken over to build a children's park, as it had previously been designated in the DMDP as part of the overall plan to redevelop the city center. When Ershad was overthrown, however, the playground lost its political legitimation and, at the beginning of the 1990s, the traders reappropriated it as a market plot, with the support of Dhaka's former mayor Mohamad Hanif (1994–2002). Despite its designation in the DMDP, Hanif allotted the plot to the traders on a "temporary basis" (*The Daily Star* 2003).

This step was not taken without opposition, however. Due to increasing public pressure against this encroachment, a few years later the DCC announced that the traders would be evicted. On this second occasion, however, the traders did not wait for another defender of their interests to come forward, but became active themselves. They filed a case against the planned eviction and obtained a stay order from the high court. In October 2005, after Khoka took over as the city's first elected mayor (2002–2011), the traders got semilegal leasing contracts from the DCC that would be valid until the final court ruling was announced. At the same time the DCC allowed them to build up permanent market structures prior to the 13th Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which took place in Dhaka in November 2005. The agreement between the DCC and the vegetable traders association included stipulations that all traders would pay a monthly rent, as well as contribute to the paying off of their combined debts of Tk 170 lakh (~16,000 euros) for having used the plot over the previous ten years (Ayon 2005; Sabuktagin 2006; *The Daily Star* 2007). Hence, in contrast to the legal framework of the DMDP and the declarations of the government, the local authorities legitimized the vegetable market *ex post facto*. They enabled and supported the traders' access to centrality. What is remarkable in this case is the fact that the local authorities together with the traders applied the same strategy as the globalized elite did in the case of the BGMEA building. Kawran Bazar's traders learned the rules of the game that had hitherto been played exclusively by the powerful.

This example can be taken as a success story on the part of the traders of Kawran Bazar, who eventually learned from the globalized elite and applied the same strategy to reach their own goals by creating *faits accomplis* and getting them legitimized *ex post facto*. Do such examples then also explain why Kawran Bazar is still

there today? Is it, ultimately, the agency of the traders that is responsible for the market's continued existence in the same location? In light of what we have discussed so far, we actually deem another explanation to be a more convincing one for this: So far we have learned that the leading political parties actively control the land of Kawran Bazar through local administrative bodies like the DCC (or DNCC) in order to mobilize votes. In return they sign this land over to land brokers, who themselves use it to generate income from auctioning and stall fees. Usually those traders in the market who have the most resources are the ones served first. In this way a new level of interdependency arises between the different kinds of trader in the market, who then sublet their sales stalls. As such, the entitlement to appropriate and use specific plots in the market follows the logic of cascades — becoming progressively more fragmented as one follows their course from the municipality level down to that of the street vendors. At each of these levels, the government ultimately earns money.

Wholesalers in the vegetable section, for instance, reported monthly stall fees of Tk 20,000–25,000 (~180–230 euros) — for a space with an area of approximately 30 square meters — that they have to pay to their brokers. They further reported that the sales stalls are usually auctioned off, so that the traders must also pay money in order to even gain access to the market in the first place. To acquire one of these highly sought after stalls, sums of Tk 2 lakh (~1,800 euros) commonly change hands (own interview: B1–B5). If we apply these figures only to the officially counted 1,782 wholesale enterprises (that is, without considering the further stalls owned by retailers and street vendors), Kawran Bazar generates an annual revenue of more than Tk 42 crore (~3,840,000 EUR) from stand fees alone. To this must also be added the value that comes from the auctioning off of stalls. If each wholesaler pays, as noted, an amount of Tk 2 lakh per stall, the entire market is currently worth almost Tk 36 crore (~3,300,000 euros). Finally, the amounts paid on a daily basis due to extortion and bribery must also be taken into account — which, for the market's wholesalers, Rahman and Mollah (2009) estimate to be around Tk 18 crore (~1,640,000 euros) per year.

In this context, we argue that the pending relocation of Kawran Bazar and the blockage of the renewal of Dhaka's city center must be interpreted anew. The reason for the delay is ultimately neither the government's lack of bureaucratic capacity nor the effectiveness of the counterstrategies of local traders, who are first and foremost trying only to survive. The cause of this hold up, rather, must be seen in the cascades of mutual interdependencies and the existence of a localized elite that attempts to preserve the political and economic advantages it derives from the exploitative patron–client relationships in place. One of our key informants expressed it in this way:

Millions and millions of dollars are extorted from this market, illegally of course. You just need to have control over it and take it. To evict this market means to evict a few thousand shop owners, and that has an impact on the transport business, local politics,

and the police. The government that ultimately earns all that money, they also do not want to lose it. [...] This plan [to shift Kawran Bazar] has been going on for years now. The infrastructure is there, the plan is there, but they cannot relocate the market because thousands of people are involved (own interview: D1).

Conclusion

In this paper we have focused our attention on the modernization of one of the commercial centers of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and on the planned relocation of Kawran Bazar, the city's largest traditional food market. From our perspective, two major findings can be drawn from this study: First, we have shown that the power relations between global forces and local counterforces are not as well-defined and unidirectional as they are often thought to be. In fact, the plans and strategies of the globalized elite to relocate the market are not as consolidated and assertive as the narrative of entrepreneurialism suggests. National governments, planning authorities, and private business organizations — who are all working toward the market's relocation — are confronted with a localized elite — mostly land brokers, political activists, and ward-level bureaucrats — who are using their long-established networks to work for the maintenance of the status quo. In this regard, the latter apply more or less the exact same strategies for legitimating their claims as the globalized elite do. These findings lend support to the argument of Benjamin (2008), Ong (2011), and Shatkin (2014) that contemporary cities cannot be perceived as passive stages, ones upon which capitalism is simply enacted. Instead they must be seen as contested terrains, wherein globalized and localized elites continue to struggle for ultimate hegemony.

Second, by applying Lefebvre's notion of centrality as criterion, we have been able to evaluate the pending market relocation in Dhaka from a normative point of view. None of the goals and objectives of our interview partners involved the demand for a decreasing standardization of everyday life, for less control of the people through hegemonic forces, or for more political self-determination. In fact, no one from the coalitions working either for or against the market's relocation ever called the existing governance system and the prevailing patron–client relations in the market into question. As such, none of the perspectives and strategies displayed transcended the present-day conditions and sought to “escape the system's rules.” The actions of both coalitions remained, rather, “internal to the dominant form of space [production]” — that of abstract space (Lefebvre 2012: 382) — be it in the form of campaigns for the market's relocation for reasons of global competition or in terms of protests against that proposal, with the minimum demand of receiving proper compensation. In the context of the above, and to come back to our utilized terminology, we conclude that Kawran Bazar must be addressed as a successful — albeit temporary — case of blockage but not of resistance. This blockage must be seen as the result of a localized elite at work that tries to preserve its space rents and its position of power against the claims of a newly emerging alliance of globalized stakeholders.

Overall this study has shown, by using Lefebvre's notion of centrality, that a middle ground in Urban Studies can be developed that transcends the two hitherto most antagonistic perspectives — that which takes entrepreneurialism as an unstoppable force and that which too hastily elevates subaltern counterstrategies to heroic status (cf. Shatkin 2014). Informed by Lefebvre's ideas, we see potential for future research in two key directions: (a) the study of actual cases of urban restructuring, with the aim of finding mediating positions between the claims of globalized and localized elites and the demands of the urban poor and (b) the critical examination of contemporary social movements in cities worldwide, in order to find and/or invent practicable forms of resistance.

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