

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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