

**Title: Critical Dialectic Geography: Overcoming the Antinomies between Physical and Social Spaces**  
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## Abstract

This paper offers new insights on how a synthesis between Bourdieu's relationalism and Lefebvre's sociology can pave way for 'critical dialectic geography' (CDG) that overcomes apparent antinomies of spatiality between physical spaces entrenched in realist notions, and social spaces located purely in the 'cultural realm of experiences, discourses and dynamics'. Through synthesizing the locus of fields and habitus in the context of the multi-dimensional (but interlinked) productions of space- a critical ontological and epistemological schema of social reality can be developed that problematizes and localizes the peculiar dynamics of how spatiality is produced, experienced and contested within urban centers. CDG can thus be applied to explore the specific dynamics that structure and frame experiences of ethnic marginalization and residential segregation in neighborhoods, to demonstrate how urban space is not a-priori geographical entity but rather a field of contested representations between localized experiences of minorities and generalized discourses and representations of majorities.

## Introduction

It is the contention of this paper that while sociological theory has seen a rise in relational and spatial approaches these theories have developed in relative isolation from each other. However, evidence suggests that they share numerous conceptual overlaps. Silber (1995) argues that the diversity of spatial metaphors should be seen as explicit theoretical tools in conjunction with the relational turn against earlier substantive approaches. An explicit synthesis between the two would be beneficial for the study of complex and locally embedded phenomena that recognizes the intimate connections between the micro and macro, local and the national and regional/global. This synthesis would contribute to the study of complex urban dynamics and lived experiences, by developing a theoretical schema of social reality that problematizes and localizes the peculiar dynamics of spatiality, marginalization and inequalities in urban centers.

It is crucial to note that this paper is not the first to propose a synthesis between relational and spatial theories. In fact, the past decade have seen a rise in such literature- although it remains limited to a handful of scholars. However, the underlying rationale and basis upon which these theories are seen as complementary has been usually neglected or only implicitly evaluated. In explicitly underscoring convergence, a dialogue between relational and spatial theories can be opened, which paves the way for a synthesis between Bourdieusian field theory and Lefebvrian production of space. Through synthesizing the locus of fields in the context of the multi-dimensional (but interlinked) productions of space- a critical ontological schema of social reality can be developed which recognizes different subject positions, identities, discourses and orientations towards the 'same' space. Additionally, this synthesis contributes to the development of a critical dialectic approach to geography which recognizes that both the constitution and study of space are not value neutral but involve normative orientations towards society and knowledge production.

There are numerous interpretations of both Bourdieu and Lefebvre. Where Bourdieu has been envisioned as a structural constructivist (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), a critical realist (Ignatow & Robinson 2017), a relational Phenomenologist (Atkinson, 2019) even as a critical realist 'relationalist' (Donati 2015). While Lefebvre has been more narrowly interpreted within the scope of space based ontologies of critical phenomenology (Kinkaid 2020) and recently relational spatiality (Low 2016; Pierce & Martin 2015). It is

therefore unlikely that any paper can do justice to the wide spread interpretations of these scholars. At best, this paper attempts to provide a ‘reading’ of Bourdieusian fields and the Lefebvrian dynamics of space production to underscore how collective engagement with these ideas can pave a way for a critical dialect approach to geography.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section explores the overlaps between both sets of theories in their rejection of earlier substantive approaches, the ontological critique of structural determinism, the emphasis on overcoming ontological dualism and the rejection of value neutral theory. This section also demonstrates how considerable overlaps between the two sets can be seen in their treatment of space providing the possibility to utilize relational approaches to studying space. The second section reviews the most notable and recent scholarship within the relational spatial turn by drawing mostly on the work of Martina Low. This section demonstrates how Low synthesis between Bourdieu and Giddens inspired relationalism with theories of spatiality paves way to conceptualize space as a relational dynamic between objects and people. Moreover, the section traces some of the limits of her work to explore how a deeper engagement with Bourdieusian field theory in the context of Lefebvrian production of space would benefit the study of migrant urban spaces as contested spaces between migrants and society at large. The third section traces this synthesis on ontological and epistemological grounds, while the fourth section locates how such a synthesis should be viewed as a critical dialectic approach. The section further develops an analytical field through which ethnic differences (inequalities and marginalization) in and about residential space can be understood as contested dynamics between localized experiences of residents and generalized discourses from wider society. The fifth section provides a conclusion.

### **Tracing the Overlaps between Relational- Spatial theories**

This section seeks to contextualize the theoretical overlaps in relational and spatial theories on five aspects:

1. Rejection of substantive theories
2. Structuralism vs Structural determinism
3. Replacing ontological dualism with ontological duality
4. Rejecting Value neutral theory
5. In the Treatment of Space

### **Opening Up the Black Box of Constitution – A Rejection of Substantive Theories**

The manifesto for relational sociology has become a cornerstone in relational theories. In which Emirbayer (1997) contends that the relational turn indicates a move away from seeing social objects and categories through a static lens where structures/agents act or interact remaining fundamentally a-priori to social contexts. In contrast, the relational approach perceives social reality in dynamic terms emphasizing the ‘emergence’ of social reality in trans-action (located in webs of relations that constitute the phenomena). At stake is the notion that social phenomenon cannot be studied in ‘isolation’ from the wider web of social dynamics that constitute it where constitution itself can be an area of investigation. key debates within the relational turn complicate the picture even further, where heterogeneous relational theories such as dialectical relationalism (based on the structuration theories of Giddens and/or structural theories of Bourdieu), and deep processual relational theories (based on the works of Dewey-Bentley) are advocated to conceptualize ‘the locus’ of constitution (for a larger theoretical discussion see Depelteau 2018). Despite

these differences the underlying emphasis on the significance of webs of relations in constituting social phenomena provide an umbrella term for relationalism.

Theories of spatiality are even more heterogeneous leading to key ontological and epistemological divides between scholars (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011). However, generally at stake in these theories is the move away from space as a stationary background upon which social processes unfold, towards a recognition that space plays a constitutive role in society (Elden, 2009). Simonsen (1996) reviews the conceptualizations of space to show how it has been viewed in 3 broad categories; namely space as material environment, as difference and as social spatiality. In the first category an emphasis is placed on built environments (seen mainly in the literature of architecture, Harvey's analysis of constructed space as fixed capital and Foucault's analysis of materiality disciplining society found in the ideas of panoptic, as well as other applications). In the second category, space is conceived either in realist, post-Structuralist or post-modernist theories where difference (in material and symbolic aspects) among spaces plays a constitutive role in social processes. Although there are many differences between these conceptions, space can largely be understood as one element of constitution in a wider set of constitutive elements of social reality. In the third category, space is considered as a fundamental aspect of constitution at all levels (from localized daily practices to large scale global organization of labor, wealth, power etc). It is in this orientation towards space that this paper seeks to provide a synthesis between relational and spatial theory.

In short, while relational theories invert the analytical relation between substance and process (prioritizing processes in the constitution of phenomena), theories of spatiality open up the realm of 'constitution' by underscoring the significance of space as a lived, social dimension and product. This departure from substantive theories is thus the first aspect of complementarity.

### **Structuralism versus Structural Determinism**

Both sets of theories also share an emphasis on the examination of 'whole' webs of relations and their interconnectedness, rejecting possibilities of studying phenomena in isolation. Although the term 'wholes' invokes a knee-jerk reaction in defining certain theories as 'Structuralist', substantive and thus in sharp opposition to relational views - a critique of structuralism is often a critique of structural determinism (in spatiality see Simonsen 1991, in sociological theory see Nash 2001) or overdeterminism (Amin 2014). Moreover, there is often a wrong coalescence between the ontological and analytical usage of 'structural/structuralism'. It is therefore important to underscore that the ontological basis of relationalism is the rejection of ontological structuralism (Emirbayer, 1997).

However, if structuralism is broadly understood in its analytical capacity as a tool to conceptualize the relational constitution of socio-cultural (spatial) elements in a particular context, and not as inherent properties of the system (Benveniste, 1971), then the theories converge. Lizardo (2010) argues that analytical structuralism 'opens' up the possibility to examine (rather than reduces) the patterns of relations in a 'social phenomena'. In short, the emphasis on patterns of relationships constituting social reality and the 'opening up' of the conception of space beyond mere background, reflect how these theories have similar orientations towards seeing social reality in 'whole' webs of social dynamics/processes.

### **Dualism versus Duality**

Both critique ontological structuralism and its inescapable antinomies of agent/structure, individual/society etc. In investigating the differences between dualism and duality, Langenhove (2017) demonstrates that the

while the former views agency and structure as separate mutually exclusive aspects, the latter sees both aspects as two sides of the same coin. Namely, duality offers the viewpoint by which agent and structure can simultaneously be understood as the medium and outcome of social action. It is in the rejection of dualism and the ontological insistence of duality that both sets of theories converge.

For relationalism, the antinomies between agent/structure are a reification of social processes into ‘reductive entities’ seeking to explain the world from the viewpoint of either aspect without opening itself for investigation (for a detailed discussion see Crossley, 2011). Instead, it is important to see the agent (or structure) as emergent properties in specific relationships that are meaningful and constitutive (Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Burkitt 2016). Evident is the ontological claim that the agent structure dualism predominating substantive sociology needs to be removed to focus on emergent properties in context.

A similar call to abandon dualism can be seen in spatial theories. Since their point of departure from substantive theories is somewhat different, very few scholars explicitly engage in conceptualizing how spatiality overcomes dualism. Rather, it is by examining the central claim in spatiality (as discussed above –where space is seen as a constitutive dimension on all levels) that moves beyond dualism can be detected. Kinkaid (2020) provides a synthesis between Lefebvrian production (to be discussed in detail below) and perceptions of minorities (race, gender etc) to demonstrate how categories of social difference are different embodiments of politics and space. He argues that dualism between agent and structure hinders the possibility to recognize how politics, space, agency and structure act as mediums and outcomes in social interaction creating differences among and between bodies. At stake is the ontological emphasis where individuals are seen in society and/or society is seen in individuals, rather than the dualism separating individual or society as a priori entity (Gregson, 1986).

A more explicit engagement envisioning space as a medium and an outcome of social reality can be found in the works of Edward Soja. A key figure in contemporary studies of space, he has contributed extensively to theories of spatiality in urban contexts, advocating a departure from substantive theories (See: Soja 1989, 1999, 2003). His work grounds the means by which spatiality contributes to critical evaluations on constitution of space, bodies and structures (See Borch 2002; Soja 2009b). In advocating the duality of space, he argues that the ontology of spatiality is best understood in the concept of the socio-spatial dialect. Where the ‘emergent’ constitutive elements of spatiality rests in the dialect relation between social and spatial aspects in which neither can be considered prior to the other in producing social reality (Soja 1980, 2009a).

### **Rejecting Value Neutral Theory**

Epistemic claims on the impossibility of objective value neutral sociology are shared by both sets of theories. Similar to the different ontological positions, a variety of epistemological orientations can be seen. This subsection therefore does not provide an overview of the different epistemological orientations but instead aims to demonstrate how these theories overlap in rejecting positivist explanations.

In arguing the socially constructed nature of reality both relationalism and spatiality deny the possibility of value neutral science. In exploring the ‘relations’ between researcher, research ‘object’, positionality – relational theories admit that knowledge production does not occur in a vacuum but in a web of relations embedded in history and ‘rationales’ of the scientific community (Kivinen & Piironen, 2006). Moreover, scholars often propose a pragmatic relationalism (based on works of Dewey) - embedded in the recognition that it is fundamentally impossible to withdraw from the actor’s viewpoints and/or ‘boundaries’ of language

in describing and analyzing social reality (Kivinen & Piironen, 2004). Perhaps the most explicit engagement with issues of epistemology in relationalism can be seen in Bourdieu's call for epistemic reflexivity. He argues that any knowledge production requires an epistemic break from ordinary experiences towards a theoretical development of relations and constructs to explain those relations. In short, theoretical constructs are not 'reflecting' social reality but 'partially' constructing aspects of social reality under investigation (Rutzou, 2016).

Similarly, spatial theories have rejected the possibility of value neutrality for both historical and theoretical reasons. Interest in spatial theories has been linked to the sociological investigation of urban spaces, its impacts in the context of the industrial revolution and subsequent re-organization of society. In exploring the means by which life and experiences in the city set the 'metropolis' apart from other locations- scholars of spatial theories focus on underscoring the means by which city spaces should be seen as 'complex' social phenomena from a variety of preconceived historical, cultural, regional and social values (Simmel 1950; Low 2012). Moreover, an emphasis on critical theories in the context of cities (and the transformative capacities of the city) can be seen across scholarship of space from the Chicago school to the Frankfurt school (for a detailed historical overview of theories in space see: Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011). The emphasis on critical analysis as well as the insistence that spatiality is produced from viewpoints, removes the possibility of analyzing space objectively, rather –the analysis of space requires explicit engagement with researcher positionality in space and knowledge relations (Jackson & Nexon, 2019).

### **The Treatment of Space**

The treatment of space across theories often causes a proliferation of antinomies in the conceptualization of space. Merriman et.al (2012) argues that space has been viewed in either abstract or concrete, absolute or relative, real or imagined terms which has hindered the possibility to develop a cohesive approach towards investigating space.

In analysing the various means by which space has been treated across social science, Harvey contends that three main frames can be detected, namely; the absolute, relative and relational approach to space (Harvey, 2006). The absolute conception of space was the dominant model for a long period of time in substantive science mirroring the ethos of Newtonian space in the physical science-where the natural world was a rigid homogenous space impartial to the objects, entities, and observers within it (Peters & Kessl, 2000). It is crucial to note that within the absolute conception there was no singular approach to space, but different modes of envisioning space as a fixed container or background category. At stake was the treatment of space as a continuous backdrop upon which elements of the social were played out. The assumptions that the physical, natural and material world were real and stood outside of the social, symbolic and mental worlds led to a dualism between physically inert spaces and socially active spaces (DeLanda, 2005). As a point of departure, the relativist and relational view embed themselves in an Einsteinian (and/or more popularly Leibniz's) conception where space cannot exist independent of the bodies and positions in it. However, subtle differences between the two conceptions remain, while the relativist view prioritizes action-centric approaches often clinging to the classic dualism, the relational view abandons the dualism to envision space as a constitutive force in social relations.

It is within the relativist conception that space is seen as to move away from emphasis on objects towards an emphasis on subjects, intentionality, perceptions, and imagination (Stoetzer, 2008). In this frame, analysis is often based on the ways in which natural spaces are turned into social spaces thereby shaping the usage

of space- where use, users and effects of space are considered primary in analysis (Ganz, 2002). It has been noted that such conceptions tend to be one-sided, often lacking an explanation of how larger structural, macro dimensions intertwine with the local, lived, and experiential contexts. This treatment tends to reproduce ontological reification of both social structures and agency across actor-centric approaches (Dépelteau, 2008). It is in this treatment that the antinomies between natural space as a phenomena removed from the social, and the social space as a 'process' located in and among individuals persist.

In contrast, the relational conceptions offer a multi-dimensional approach, where space is not only understood from the viewpoint of agents and positions, but also intimately connected to real, material and structural aspects which themselves hold symbolic and real meaning in constituting space. It is in the relational emphasis on space as a constitutive 'force' -it being constituted by the dynamic interplay between materials, structures, agents, actions- that socially emergent space is real but relational (Vandenbergh, 1999), material and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1991), natural and social (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2011).

### **Towards Relational Spatiality**

This section moves to an evaluation of the most notable scholarship within the relational-spatial turn. Moreover, this section seeks to demonstrate how the limits of this approach can be overcome by a more explicit engagement with Bourdieusian fields and Lefebvrian production of space.

Martina Low (2016) develops a theory synthesizing the materiality of objects and bodies to the structural, symbolic and experiential dimensions of the social world. She sees space as a relational arrangement of living things and goods, and offers the treatment of absolutist versus relativistic spaces from the lens of duality. By advocating complementarity between these conceptions of space, she advocates that the constitution of space emerges from the arrangement of bodies and objects. She further contends that arrangement should be seen in both the actions and structures reproduced by these actions. In following the general emphasis of relational thought she develops an action-theoretical conception of space in which spatiality (or the constitution of space) rests on 2 interlinked processes termed 'spacing' and 'synthesis'. She contends that spacing should be understood in terms of placement of people and social goods that are primarily symbolic while synthesis should be seen as the simultaneous linking of goods and people via perception, imagination and memory. It is by the operation of synthesis that goods and people come to represent duality between materials and symbols. In short, her conceptualization of constitution rest on the following dimensions:

*"...the routine paths of action, the structural dimension of the spatial, the deployment of the body, habitus, the potential for change, the significance of symbolism and matter, and finally the constitution of places and atmospheres."* (p.136, Low, 2016).

Although her conceptualization of places and atmospheres add theoretical dimensions to the analysis of 'bounded' spaces, the treatment of these differences remains outside the scope of this paper. Rather, by examining the points of departure from relational theories namely from Bourdieu towards Giddens, the next section analyzes some of the key 'critiques' to Low's conceptualization and offers insights on how a more explicit engagement with Bourdieu field theory would have benefited a relational-spatial approach.

Moreover, In line with the epistemological overlaps of relational and spatial theories, Low contends that value neutrality in knowledge production is impossible. She argues that determining the boundaries and relevance of a space under analysis always has the observer's perspective in constituting said space.

Although she recognizes the epistemic differences in the construction of space as an object of research, she primarily advocates methodological reflexivity towards the study of space.

Her approach has been positively received within the relational-spatial turn. However, limits of her approach have also been underscored on ontological and epistemological grounds. The next sub-section turns to the task of highlighting these limits.

### **Critique of Low, Insights from Low**

This sub-section demonstrates how an explicit synthesis of Bourdieusian fields and Lefebvre enables a recognition that different subject positions emerge (in space) and have different constituting effects on space and social difference. Moreover, this sub-section contextualizes the need for epistemic reflexivity beyond methodological reflexivity underscored in Low's approach.

The emphasis on the materiality of spatiality (including the symbolic dimensions of social goods) leaves little room for explicit engagement with concepts of spatial difference and its constitutive effect on inequalities. Low recognizes that both the constitution of space and repetitive actions (leading to a structuring effect) are aspects in producing and maintaining social inequality and relates this analysis to the notion of Bourdieusian habitus. Further, she contends that the synthesis of space is shaped by gender and class differences-often leading to social exclusion from particular spaces due to habitus preferences. However, Knoblauch (2016, as cited in Low & Weidenhaus 2017) argues that such an ontological focus obscures the fact that spacing occurs not just in the arrangement between goods, people, habitus and social structure but in a relational triad between goods, people and others. Therefore, the social constitution of space is not only limited to gender and class differences of the 'occupants' of space but involve those 'external' to a specific spatial arrangement. In short, he advocates an approach to spatiality that recognizes the means by which different subject positions (identities, and habitus) shape the constitution and meaning of space within and outside a specific space. Therefore, in explicitly recognizing the role of different subject positions, the contested constitutions of space can be brought to light. It is the contention of this paper that Bourdieusian field analysis opens up the possibility for recognizing these differences of subject positions in the constitution of social phenomena.

It is therefore necessary to explore why Low develops her theoretical framework in light of Giddens's, incorporating only a few concepts such as habitus from Bourdieu and leaving aside Bourdieu's analysis of fields. Luckily, she provides a rationale for this choice. She argues that though structure and action converge in social space for Bourdieu – his treatment of space in both absolute and relativist terms sets two spaces apart from each other. In his treatment, social space is used metaphorically, and socially acquired geographical space (or reified social space in the physical context) remains a backdrop to relational arrangements. She further argues that this reified conception of space limits the possibility for a relational-spatial analysis. For her, Bourdieu's treatment of spaces has two limiting effects:

1. Ontological monism of the social apart from the spatial, as a move away from relational ontology.
2. The inability to study the constitutive effects of spatiality

It is the contention of this paper that conceptualizing Bourdieusian fields from the perspective of ontological monism undermines the inherent relationality of Bourdieusian thought (King 2000; Depelteau 2013). Moreover, in incorporating lessons from spatiality and Lefebvre in particular, a synthesis aims to empower Bourdieusian fields with the ability to study the constitutive effects of spatiality.

As is evidenced in this section, Low has contributed extensively in paving the way for a synthesis between relational and spatial theories with an emphasis on the processes of spatial arrangement and its intimate connections to 'synthesis' in the social realm. However, a deeper engagement with Bourdieusian fields would have been ontologically beneficial in recognizing different subject positions within the field and epistemologically beneficial in problematizing field constructions beyond methodological considerations.

### **Bourdieusian Fields and Lefebvrian Production of Space – Towards a Synthesis**

The section seeks to explain how the work of Bourdieu and Lefebvre can be synthesized on ontological and epistemological grounds.

#### **Explaining Bourdieusian Fields and its Relation to Migration Studies**

Bourdieu conceptualizes the social world in a relational terms combining material and symbolic aspects within a social space (Bourdieu & Nice 1977; Schatzki, 1987). He posits that the social world should be conceptualized in terms of fields (of production, circulation and consumption) - where the web of relations (and social positions) within the field are determined by forms of material, social and cultural capital. At stake is the notion that the constitution of fields is intimately tied to forms of power –where the amount of power a person has within the field is connected to the dialectic interplay between a person's position in the field and the person's habitus (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Moreover, Bourdieusian fields need to be understood in the wider context of field theories-where fields are not seen as 'limiting' structures. Rather fields are understood in dynamic terms with the capacities to 'orient, structure, change, develop and transform' social relations and positions (Martin & Gregg, 2015). Bourdieu's treatment of fields rest on a dialectic relationship not only between capital, habitus and field but also between the structuring and structured effects of the field (Lizardo, 2004). As with all other aspects of Bourdieu, the implications, extent and limits of fields continue to be widely debated in social science. However, for the purposes of this article the notion of fields has two implications for a relational spatial theory. Firstly, the notion of differentiated subject positions within the field and its connection to asymmetries of power. Secondly the realm of knowledge production in determining and analyzing the field.

As the section on Low demonstrates, dismissal of the relevance of Bourdieu renders the possibility of explaining the emergence and continuous presence of different social positions within a specific social context (or material-social space) relatively undertheorized. In recognizing how power asymmetries shape the constitution of the field and subject positions, the possibility to recognize different subject positions within and external to the field become attainable. The relational language of the field is particularly insightful to the study of migration within the relational turn. In addition to the explicit advantages of conceptualizing migrants, Diasporas, communities and nations in relational rather than substantive categories- field analysis opens up the possibility to examine degrees and differences in ethno-political identities, politics, struggles and negotiations within the singular 'migrant' category (Wimmer 2008; Kim 2019). Moreover, recognition of differences in subject positions (within a migrant field) and in relation to 'host' community paves way for a deeper engagement with differences in the socio-political context of migrant studies etc. Vetik (2019) exemplifies how Bourdieusian field analysis paves way for the study of national identity in recognizing the plurality of subject positions (migrant and host) and their relations to one another (for a detailed empirical case see: Vetik et al, 2017). In short, explicit engagement with Bourdieusian field theory provides the possibility to examine the set of relations within a social space and allows for the possibility to recognize different subject positions vis-a vie positions in the field (asymmetrical power



relations) and habitus. This is particularly advantageous to contextualize and explore how a similar space can be constituted to have different meanings and values for different subject positions. For Bourdieu these differences in positionality are articulated as ‘distinction’ (as a social strategy to differentiate oneself from others based on habitus and location in the field). Where the term distinction emphasizes asymmetric power relations in the field(s) leading to hierarchies in and among people (groups etc) (Bourdieu, 1984). Although Lefebvre critiques Bourdieu’s concept of distinction as an abstract principle of classification of objects (Aronowitz, 2007). His conception of urban inequality rests on similar dynamics (termed as difference) between and among social ‘identities’ where everyday practices (re)produce the contested qualities of urban lifestyle, culture, taste, and knowledge.

Once Bourdieu field analysis is coupled with the Lefebvrian production of space the explicit means by which spaces in urban centers come to take of different meanings, modes and forms becomes more explicit.

### **Reading the Production of Space in Bourdieusian Language of Fields**

In seeing space as a produced reality as opposed to a neutral background Lefebvre draws heavily from Marxist dialects. However, his dialectical approach should not be equated with Marxist interpretations that reproduce static, totalizing, ideological conceptions (Sheppard, 2008) but should be seen as a triad in which the third term incorporates fluid social processes (Gottdiener, 1993). In developing a spatial dialectic approach Lefebvre argues that space is a politically contested field (Elden, 2007). Where the production of space and its ‘reality’ rests on three elements coming together, namely representations of space (conceived space), representational space (perceived space) and spatial practice (lived space) (Lefebvre, 2009).

For Lefebvre representations of space have physical manifestations (ranging from material aspects such as infrastructure and built environments to symbolic aspects such as maps, ‘material referential). These representations delineate the features of spaces that are explicitly or tacitly prioritized in the conceptualization of space which signify and structure spatial contexts/interactions (Watkins, 2005). While, representational space radiate the prominent and often conflicting ideas that shape a space, and therefore tend to be marked by complex symbolism. Moreover, representational spaces are linked to the clandestine and passively experienced aspects of daily life. Representational space is therefore best understood as a discursive sphere relatively embedded in representations of space and further framed by spatial practice. Additionally, spatial practices are spaces coded by active human interaction embodying the daily practices and actions of the users of a space. These actions and interactions thus frame social experiences within a space and in doing so further reaffirm the ideals, values, symbols and asymmetries embedded in a place (Bauer, 2018). Once the spatial triad is located within the wider temporal and historical dimensions, the social production of space is further complicated to reflect the changing dynamics and representations of spaces (White, 2010).

It is in this ontological orientation towards the production of space that the place of contestation and struggle within each element of the spatial triad, and among components of the spatial triad can be identified (Leary-Owhin, 2015). Moreover, it is by exploring how tensions between representations of space and spatial practice reflect different power dynamics within the city that empirical operationalization of Lefebvre can be seen (See: Quansheng 2014; Ghulyan 2019). Additionally, exploration of how elements of the triad converge to produce urban spaces, neighborhoods, regions, and locations can be seen across studies of geography and are too large to review here. At stake is the need to recognize that politically contested dynamics, representations, and discourses in the production of space underscore the means by which

different orientations to space emerge. By advocating an explicit merger between Bourdieu and Lefebvre the language of different positions within the production of space can be systematically studied in the context of asymmetries of the field. In short, the explicit synthesis between Bourdieu and Lefebvre calls attention to means by which different subject positions in and about space are produced, and creates possibilities to analyze the context in which these positions relate to wider systems/forms of power. (The means by which this benefits the study of ethnic marginalization in residential spaces is discussed in the next section).

### **Epistemological insights**

As has been argued above, an additional benefit of explicitly engaging with Bourdieusian concepts of field is the epistemological insight by which fields as analytical constructs stand apart from the field of study. It is in this context that field analysis needs to be critical not just of researcher positionality, but also the epistemic, and normative implications of social-scientific representation (Lizardo, 2010). In acknowledging how research is related to the fields of knowledge production, the researcher needs to explore how her actions contribute to the wider scientific field. Moreover, the ontological conception by which space plays a productive role in Lefebvrian analysis has direct epistemic consequences for the study of space. The epistemological consideration of space requires that no analytical study be devoid of the study of spatiality. It is in the epistemic insistence to include space (and its effects) in all dimensions of the social that scientific knowledge on the social should be produced. It is by incorporating spatiality that the investigations in space can move beyond both geographical materialism (where the role of geography is seen only in natural, real and material terms) and spatial fetishization (where a reified primacy of space is advocated) (Soja & hadjimichalis, 1979).

This section has sought to demonstrate how Bourdieu and Lefebvre converge in recognizing differences in social positions as constituted within fields (and dynamic interactions). Moreover, this section has demonstrated that a synthesis has the additional advantage whereby fields can be seen as analytical categories, and the obscure language of production can be opened up through Bourdieusian language of positionalities and asymmetries in the field to investigate spatiality. The next section moves to ground this synthesis explicitly as a critical enterprise that can facilitate the investigation of migrant residential spaces.

## **The Critical Dialectic Approach to Ethnic Marginalization in Residential Spaces**

### **Locating the Critical Dialectic in Critical Dialectic Geography**

This section seeks to contextualize how the relational spatial approach based on Bourdieu and Lefebvre should be understood as ‘critical dialectic’ approach to geography. Moreover, this section examines how such an approach can benefit the study of spatiality in residential migrant spaces.

Brenner (2019) contends that critical urban theory has a determinate socio-theoretical content in which a particular theoretical character, issues of reflexivity, critique of instrumental reason and emphasis on separation between the actual and the possible are mutually interconnected. Where the theoretical emphasis is always on the socially constructed and politically contested nature of urban space. It is a theory aimed at practice potentially informing the strategies of social actors and researchers. Moreover, critical theory is reflexive because it not only rejects totalizing theoretical orientations, but also seeks to understand how oppositional, antagonistic forms of knowledge emerge within urban contexts. In rejecting the ability to stand outside of the social context to produce instrumental knowledge, critical theory is epistemologically and

methodologically reflexive. Lastly, all critical theories take normative stances where the status quo is problematized and attempts for (various kinds) of emancipation are underscored.

It is on all four premises that Bourdieu and Lefebvre can be seen as critical scholars (Gerber, 1997). In underscoring the political nature of social constitution and in highlighting the class based dynamics of distinction (habitus, and field in Bourdieu) and capacity to produce/transform space (Lefebvre) –both contend that society has a political constitution. The call for reflexivity in knowledge production and the recognition that researcher co-produce ‘socio-spatial ‘reality’ resonates with the general focus of critical theory that rejects the possibility of objective totalizing and instrumental knowledge. Moreover the disjuncture between the status quo and ‘envisioned’ emancipated society is evident across the works of both scholars. For Bourdieu, the call for epistemic reflexivity not only theorizes social asymmetries but the production of such knowledge has a chance to play an emancipatory role in revealing tacit ‘class’ based or ‘normative assumptions about society (Navarro, 2006). While for Lefebvre the aim of theorizing production of space has been a normative framework to resist the ‘alienating’ form of capitalism by advocating a right to the city based on celebration of difference and resistance (See: Lefebvre 1996; Purcell 2014).

In addition to the emphasis on a critical orientation towards society, both have studied society in dialectical terms. Where for Bourdieu the dynamics of social processes are produced in the dialectic relations between capital, habitus and position in the field. In addition, fields themselves can be understood in dialectical relationship between the structuring and structured effects of social reality. While for Lefebvre, the dialectical relationship between the social and the spatial emerges in the context of the dialectical operations of the spatial triad discussed above. It is in this critical dialectic conception towards spatiality and fields that the specific dynamics which structure and frame experiences of ethnic marginalization and residential segregation in neighborhoods as contested arenas between local experiences and generalized ‘discourses’ can be studied.

### **Envisioning Ethnic Marginalization and Residential Inequality through Spatiality and Fields**

The first advantage of the critical dialectic geographical approach rests in recognizing that city spaces are socially constructed where power is (re)produced and contested. In recognizing that the city’s capacity for inclusion and/or marginalization not only depends on access to resources, decision making, capacities to frame discourses (Madanipour, 2015) but also on the production of space – a larger orientation to the means and forms of social exclusion can be studied.

Secondly, the conceptualization of the city as a complex space emerging from the dialectics of the spatial triad in the context of asymmetrical relational fields, provides a means to focus on city processes and dynamics among various social positions. In conceptualizing the city as relational and unequal the context in which class, race (most notably in North America) and gender shape orientations, perceptions, access and discourses to the city are already being investigated. However, the explicit recognition that the experience of ethnic marginalization is a dynamic context in which ethnic majorities and minorities partake has mostly been studied in terms of capital flight from downtowns to suburbs as well as downtown revitalization across the global north –most notably in USA (Frieden & Sagalyn 1991; Ehlenz et.al 2020). Recognizing that the structuring and structured effects of the city extend beyond capital (and its flight) to include symbolic references and discourses of ‘ghettos’, ‘gentrification’, ‘minority spaces (for instance the imagery invoked by referring to particular neighborhoods as China town in North America) is to open up the space for relational analysis among different communities, groups, diasporas and inhabitants.

Thirdly, the recognition that conceptions (*conception has been used to demonstrate how material, social, symbolic and discursive aspects converge*) in society about spaces not only reveal the means by which power is exercised in shaping marginalized spaces but also creates avenues for response in terms of resistance, transformation, adaptation. Although these processes and dynamics might seem too large for one study to locate and explain – the critical dialectic approach demonstrates how knowledge production requires constant reflexivity and re-engagement with the field. By acknowledging that social perception is connected to different elements of the spatial triad from conceived space (the purview of governments and agencies) to spatial practices (where residents themselves engage in social and symbolic actions in daily life) the critical dialectic approach can be applied to any aspect of the socio-spatial dialect either on its own or in relation to other elements of the spatial triad. The realms of possibility opened up by this approach thus enable researchers to explore diverse social positions, and the diversity of perceptions to a particular social space (Raco, 2018). Moreover, the precise focus of the scale of investigation (within a neighborhood, among neighborhoods, in the city, the country, and/or even transnational space and its relational dynamics to the city, country, nation, globalized context) allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics which frame spaces without the reification of one particular space.

In the collective engagement with these three aspects discussed above, a general analytical field for recognizing a socio-spatial relationality can be produced, which has the capacity to locate and explain generalized discourses and localized experiences. Although there are numerous ways to construct this analytical field in relation to the space under investigation- a preliminary attempt has been made to demonstrate how ethnic minorities and their residential spaces can be studied in this light.

<b>Contested Spatiality of Residential Space/ Neighborhood</b>		
<b>Spatial Triad</b>	<b>Majority Orientation - Outside space</b>	<b>Minority Orientation- Inside Space</b>
<b>Conceived Space</b>	Policy makers + City planners	Capacities for participation: Official, formal & informal politics
<b>Perceived Space</b>	Symbols & ideas circulating in society about neighborhoods & their connection to other spaces	Contestation between generalized social symbols & local representations, meaning making & ‘frames’
<b>Lived Space</b>	Extent of engagement & forms of interaction with residents of space	Embodied experiences, memory, livelihood, belonging

Each row and column in the table can be investigated in a dialectic relationship to another row/column. For instance:

- Majority orientation towards any one aspect of spatiality.
- Minority orientation towards any one aspect of spatiality.
- Dynamic interplay between any two elements of spatiality from majority perspective.
- Dynamic interplay between any two elements of spatiality from minority perspective.
- Majority conceptualization of space based on the spatial triad.
- Minority conceptualization of space based on the spatial triad.
- Comparison between majority and minority on any element of the triad.
- Comparison between majority and minority on the spatial triad.

It is crucial to note that the explicit recognition that both majority and minority ethnic groups are dynamic fields in asymmetric power relations helps to underscore the dynamics by which majorities and minorities come to be constituted. Moreover, it underscores the dialectic relation by which spatiality is produced/maintained. The explicit engagement with Bourdieusian fields and Lefebvrian production of space thus pave way for analyzing complex webs of relations in producing and maintaining different attitudes, associations, perceptions, discourses and orientations towards residential spaces largely occupied by minorities from both minority and majority perspectives.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that a synthesis between relational and spatial approaches benefits the study of ethnic marginalization in residential urban contexts. By underscoring the ontological and epistemological convergence between these theories, emphasis can be placed on studying the social constitution of phenomena in dynamic webs of relations. Such an approach moves beyond ontological dualism found in substantive theories and paves the way for a relational-spatial approach that overcomes the antinomies of space as real or symbolic. In recognizing the constitutive effects of space –relational spatiality sees space as a constituting force intimately tied to all levels of analysis from the micro to the macro.

Further, the paper has analyzed notable scholarship in relational spatiality to demonstrate how an explicit engagement with Bourdieusian field theory and Lefebvrian production of space can pave way for a critical dialectic geography on ontological and epistemological grounds. This paper has demonstrated that spatiality should be seen as a dialectic relationship between the social and spatial. Where Lefebvrian production of space is conceived as a dialectic between the conceived, perceived and lived space. Moreover, Bourdieusian fields are themselves seen in a dialectic relationship between structuring and structured capacities for the emergence of different subject positions within an asymmetric field. Lastly, this paper has underscored how utilizing Bourdieusian vocabulary to open up the spatial triad of Lefebvre facilitates the recognition of differences within the field, and different orientations towards conceived, perceived and lived space within a single space.

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