

Deborah Reed-Danahay

# Bourdieu, Social Space, and the Nation-State. Implications for Migration Studies

(doi: 10.2383/88198)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 2, maggio-agosto 2017

**Ente di afferenza:**

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

## **Licenza d'uso**

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

# **Bourdieu, Social Space, and the Nation-State**

## **Implications for Migration Studies**

*by* Deborah Reed-Danahay

doi: 10.2383/88198

### **1. Introduction**

Pierre Bourdieu used the lens of social space to study the ways in which groups form and take shape in society, and to explore metaphors of social distance and proximity that are connected to processes of inequality and social domination. In order to better understand migrant belongings [Fortier 2000] and emplacements [Korac 2009], it is useful to take into consideration migrant “positionings” in social space, adapting the work of Pierre Bourdieu to the study of contemporary migration. In this article, I explore the ways in which Bourdieu’s concept of social space can be relevant to studies of migration, with a particular focus on the question of how we might better understand movements across social space, and also the permeability of the nation as social space – its thresholds and limits. Drawing upon Bourdieu’s insights on social space and the positionings of habitus, I suggest that a focus on national space does not need to imply a bounded view of people and territory.

In order to explore the relevance of Bourdieu’s approach to social space for studies of migration, I will focus on two key moments in his work that help trace the development of this concept: the early ethnography from the 1960s in rural France – in particular, his essay on bachelors [1962] where he first introduced ideas of social proximity and distance; and later work on the State – in particular, his published

lectures from the Collège de France [2014 (2012)]<sup>1</sup> on this topic, that explain the role of the state in shaping national ideas about social affinities and social distances that underlie social hierarchies. Below, I will briefly introduce Bourdieu's concept of social space, before turning to his work on habitus and the matrimonial area in rural France and then moving on to his lectures on the State. In a final section, I will identify those features of Bourdieu's understanding of the relationship between the social and territorial space of the nation that have potential applications in migration studies.

## 2. Bourdieu and Spatiality: Overview

I agree with Charles Lemert [2006, 231] that social space is Bourdieu's "second most inventive concept" after that of habitus. However, grasping what Bourdieu means by social space, a concept that he was less explicit in defining than he was with habitus or field, requires a broad view of the ways he approached spatiality and its relationship to sociality. Bourdieu's concept of social space has significance for contemporary approaches to migration because it regards emplacement or displacement in national social space not primarily in terms of the territorial boundaries of the nation-state but, rather, in terms of commonsense ideas about the world and various people's place in it that are fostered by the state and its institutions (especially education).

Even though social space is such a central concept in his work, Bourdieu's relevance for the "spatial turn," an influential trend in the social sciences and humanities since the late 1980s that interrogates the relationship between power and spatial organization is, however, rarely acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> Few who cite the work of figures such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, or Michel de Certeau recognize Bourdieu's potential contributions to spatial studies [e.g., Tally 2013; Warf and Arias 2009; Zieloniec 2007]. The neglect of Bourdieu's contributions to understandings of spatiality has also been evident in work on transnational social space [e.g. Faist and Özveren 2004; Crang and Thrift 2000]. For example, Pries' statement that Bourdieu's concept of social space was primarily a spatial metaphor and not "an explicit concept of the relations between social and geographic space" [2001] can only be understood as based on a very narrow reading of Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu's main significance for spatial studies is that he developed a conceptual framework for connecting social

<sup>1</sup> In this article, when I cite the English translations of Bourdieu's works, I will also indicate the original date of the French publication in brackets because the chronology of his original publications is important to keep in mind.

<sup>2</sup> Several key texts that bear mentioning include Soja [1989 and 2001], Harvey [1989], Lefebvre [1991(1974)], Massey [1994], Gupta and Ferguson [1997], and Low and Lawrence [2002].

practices and modes of sociality with physical space. He adopted a more symbolic approach to understandings of the relationship between physical space and social space than did writers such as Henri Lefebvre [1991 (1974) and 2009], who was focused more on the materiality of space.<sup>3</sup>

The phrase “social space,” which can be traced back to Durkheim, appears frequently in recent scholarship, although, as I have previously shown [Reed-Danahay 2015a], the meanings and uses of “social space” are quite varied – especially regarding the degree to which emphasis is placed either on the material and built environment or on issues of social distance or proximity.<sup>4</sup> Often lost in partial readings of Bourdieu is that he understood social space not as the physical space where social interactions take place but, rather, in terms of a structure of symbolic classifications that is expressed by positionings of and relationships between habituses in physical or geographical space. Bourdieu wrote that even though we can only understand the structure of social space by observing interactions, it must be kept in mind that “structures are not reducible to interactions between two people talking. There is far more going on than meets the eye” [2014 (2012), 111-112].

In his approach to the nation-state, Bourdieu was more interested in its symbolic and cognitive aspects – the commonsense knowledge that classified people, places, and things – than he was in its physical boundaries and physical divisions within it. This raises the question of territorial boundaries and of how Bourdieu’s approach to the nation-state as a social space both draws upon earlier approaches and complements those of his contemporaries. Earlier approaches to social space in sociology and anthropology dealt primarily with small-scale societies, with a focus on the ways that spatial organization is a reflection of social structures. Bourdieu was influenced by the structuralist perspectives of Lévi-Strauss as well as by the more interactionist perspectives of theorists such as Simmel [1950], Goffman [1963], and Halbwachs [1950], who wrote about social proximity and distance among social actors or groups of people in social space.

Lévi-Strauss [1963] outlined an approach to social space in traditional societies that linked social space and social time to perceptions of time and space. These perceptions were products of the social phenomena (underlying structures) that, as he phrased it, “furnished” them. According to Lévi-Strauss, there is a relationship between social structure (as “surface structure”) and “spatial structure,” but these are not identical. In clarifying this point, he wrote that:

<sup>3</sup> A thorough discussion of Bourdieu’s concept of social space and its relationship to other theorists is outside of the scope of this article, and part of a larger work in which I am engaged.

<sup>4</sup> See also Claval [1984], Simonsen [1996], Marchetti [2011], and Susen [2014] for overviews of approaches to “social space.” Of these, only Susen mentions Bourdieu, but very briefly.

A large number of native societies have consciously chosen to project into space a schema of their institutions [...] Study of these spatial phenomena permits us to grasp the natives' own conception of their social structure; and, through our examinations of the gaps and contradictions, the real structure, which is often very different from the natives' conception, becomes accessible [1963, 332].

Lévi-Strauss viewed social groups as “cultural units” and as communication structures. The borders of these units were the thresholds to their social space – the limit where rates and forms of communication weaken. Bourdieu retained some influences of this structural approach in his work, in that he viewed social space as a structure underlying the surface of social interaction. However, he was more interested in seeing the interrelationships between these two aspects of social life than was Lévi-Strauss, who did not adopt the idea that social practices shape social structure, which was at the heart of Bourdieu's theory of practice [see Bourdieu 1972].

Bourdieu was also influenced by the work of Simmel, who described the figure of “the stranger” [Simmel and Wolff 1950, 402-408] as:

fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries. But his position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself [Simmel and Wolff 1950, 402].

Simmel addressed issues of “nearness” and “remoteness” that are part of social space more so than physical space, noting that the stranger is near but socially remote. Goffman, who is frequently cited by Bourdieu, developed the concept of “territories of the self” [Goffman 1971] and “regions” [Goffman 1959] as a way to explore an individual's social space and its contours and limits. Rather than take a group as a unit for analysis, Goffman defined region as “any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers of perception” [*Ibidem*, 106]. He also questioned claims made about the boundaries of territories, distinguishing between a “fixed” territory such as a house, and “situational” territory such as a park bench [*Ibidem*, 29]. A third influence on Bourdieu that I will mention here is Halbwachs, who described the role of spatial surroundings in collective memory. In the chapter on “Space and Collective Memory” in his book *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs [1950] argued that groups produced and existed in “spatial frameworks” so that place and group were linked, and groups can only be remembered and imagined in their physical settings. Bourdieu's understanding of social space draws from the ideas of Simmel regarding the ways in which those close in physical space can be distant in social space, from the ideas of Goffman regarding the individual and their sense of place, and from Halbwachs regarding the emotional component of group affinity being linked to physical surroundings.

Although he was not the only person to use the concept of social space, among Bourdieu's contemporaries, this term is most often associated with Henri Lefebvre,<sup>5</sup> and I will now turn to a brief discussion his work in relationship to Bourdieu. Although both Bourdieu and Lefebvre used the phrase social space, and there are many affinities between their approaches, there are also significant differences. Both scholars investigated the ways in which distance and proximity to power could occur in both social and physical space. Lefebvre viewed physical, mental, and social space as domains that cannot be seen to neatly overlap [1991 (1974), 11], and argued [*Ibidem*, 38-39] that space in capitalist societies includes social practice (linked to particular societies and economic structures); representations of space (that associated with planners and architects who create the dominant physical spaces in society); and representational spaces (space as lived and understood through symbols and images by users who are primarily those of the dominated classes in society). Lefebvre was also interested in structural relationships (by which he meant, in the Marxist sense, relations of production) that generate social space. Lefebvre placed more emphasis on the physical and material aspects of social space than did Bourdieu. Bourdieu, like Lefebvre, saw social space in terms of a system of relations, but not so much as relations of production (as did Lefebvre), than as relations of power based on different forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic).

The main difference between Bourdieu's and Lefebvre's understandings of the relationship between the state and space is that between a more symbolic or cultural and a more materialist approach, although we must recognize that both scholars attempted to incorporate the two perspectives. Just as Bourdieu sought to broaden Weber's argument that the state held the monopoly on force within its territory by adding the concept of symbolic violence, he saw the state as influencing our perceptions of and ways of classifying the social world (*doxa*) which, in turn, affect our understandings of the material world and our actions upon it. This expanded the view of the state as a territorial unit by looking at the ways of thinking about the world that are shaped by the state. Lefebvre, who coined the term "state space" was primarily interested in the ways in which the state administered physical space and articulated its power through spatial organization [Brenner and Elden 2009, 353]. When Bourdieu used the phrase "state space" he meant the social space of the nation,

<sup>5</sup> The relationship between the ideas of Lefebvre and Bourdieu is a topic that needs further elaboration, although it is outside of the scope of this paper to do so here. The two figures were born a generation apart, with Lefebvre born in 1901 and Bourdieu in 1930, but Lefebvre's most influential writings appeared after the 1970s. Significantly, Lefebvre is not of one of the academics mentioned in Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* [1988 (1984)], even though he was quite active in the events of May 1968. Pierce and Martin [2015, 6] claim that Lefebvre was influenced by Bourdieu in the development of his concept of social space, even though he never cited his work.

the commonsense understandings that have been instilled by state institutions such as the school. For Lefebvre, it was the physical territory of the state and its divisions.

Key to Bourdieu's concept of social space is the habitus. The two ideas cannot be separated if one wants to understand either of them. This is the primary contribution of Bourdieu's approach, in that he understood social actors as embodied habituses and interrogated the articulation between habitus and social space – between the individual, the social, and the spatial. For Bourdieu, a person is an habitus and each habitus is positioned differently in social space and in physical space. Our embodied habitus informs our everyday, common sense understandings of our social world and how to behave within it, as well as our aspirations (that is, our understandings of what is possible).

The primary habitus is acquired through informal mechanisms of socialization from early childhood and onwards, and is linked to the particular positioning of the child's family both geographically and socially within the broader social space. Habituses, which share affinities with those who grew up in a similar milieu, have orientations, dispositions, and aspirations that have differing amounts of value within social space. Bourdieu referred to these values as forms of capital – not only economic but also cultural, symbolic, and social. His intent was to show that the economic resources of a person are not the primary way in which they gain a particular status or position in social space. Those in dominant positions in society often mask the influence of their economic resources through the use of more symbolic forms of capital (including educational credentials) and social capital (social connections).

Social space is connected to physical space through the habitus as a body, which is in a “place” both physically and socially. For Bourdieu, the habitus feels “at home” and at ease if there is harmony between the criteria for social hierarchy in the social space where they are positioned and the understandings of that by the habitus. Bourdieu explained the relationship between physical and social space thus:

Human beings are at once biological beings and social agents who are constituted as such in and through their relation to a social space. As biologically individuated bodies, they are – like things – situated in a locus [...] where they occupy a place [1996a, 11].

Bourdieu's theory of practice aimed to bridge what he viewed as a false dichotomy between the structure of social space and social practices, by proposing a continual process of mutual shaping between the two, with habitus as central. Bourdieu wrote in his book *Pascalian Meditations* that

the structures of the social space [...] shape bodies by inculcating in them, through the conditionings associated with a position in that space, the cognitive structures that these conditionings apply to them [2000 (1997), 183].

For Bourdieu, the habitus is a position within social space and is comprehended only through an analysis of its position and positionings, as well as its trajectory over time, within social space. The concept of “point of view” was used by Bourdieu to describe understandings of social reality, which will vary according to habitus. Those who are dominant are generally more effective than others in imposing their point of view as the most legitimate one. Bourdieu viewed social space as “the relatively stable site of the co-existence of points of view” [*Ibidem*, 183], and an “invisible reality that can neither be shown nor handled, and which organizes agents’ practices and representations” [1991, 635].

Physical and social space as closely related, in that “social space tends to be translated, with more or less distortion, into physical space, in the form of a certain arrangement of agents and properties,” and Bourdieu argued that physical space is “reified social space” [2000 (1997), 134]. Those distant in social space will often, although not always, be distant in inhabited or physical space. Modes of appropriating or consuming physical space can be displays of power. With these insights, Bourdieu shows that struggles for dominance in social space can be connected to strategies for occupying physical space. Bourdieu noted that

the locus and the place occupied by an agent in appropriated social space are excellent indicators of his or her position in social space [Bourdieu 1996a, 11].

More so than Bourdieu’s concept of field, social space expresses articulations between physical space, embodied habitus, and sociality. Social space is a broader concept than field and it is only by understanding how the habitus is generated through its position in social space that one can grasp how it operates in and constitutes a field. Bourdieu described a field as a

field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure [1998, 32].

Like the concept of social space, field is one that employs a spatial metaphor, and it draws from physics as much as from the idea of the playing field. However, Bourdieu’s uses of field do not articulate physical and social space in the same way as social space. The concept of field provided Bourdieu with a framework to explain the ways in which power and knowledge coalesce in particular realms of society (education, literature, journalism) that are relatively autonomous “fields.” Although Bour-



dieu occasionally seemed to use the concepts of field and social space interchangeably, the field is a region in wider social space [Bourdieu 1985]. Habitus is a position in social space, but individuals participate in multiple fields in which the value of the different forms of capital they possess will vary and in which they attempt to maintain or enhance their position in social space.

### 3. The Peasant Habitus and Social Space

In order to understand Bourdieu's understanding of social space as a concept that links physical and social space, it is instructive to turn to his ethnographic work in rural France [1962],<sup>6</sup> where he first began to develop his theory of habitus. Bourdieu effectively conveyed the idea of embodied habitus as location in both physical space and social space through his now-classic analysis of rural bachelors at the Christmas dance in a French village in the region of Béarn. The social distance between them and the others in attendance was explained by Bourdieu as related to differences in *habitus*. In later publications, Bourdieu [1989, 17] cited Goffman's concept of "a sense of one's place" to describe the feeling of being out of place experienced by the bachelors at the dance. Although that study was based not on migration but on a changing social space for those who stayed in place, Bourdieu's focus on distance and proximity in both social and geographical space is a valuable one with which "to think" in the context of migration.

Bourdieu argued that what he called the "matrimonial area," a social and geographic space in which young people found spouses, had altered over the course of the Twentieth century. Geographic and social space had expanded to include more urban regions and also urbanization was influencing the villages in the township. As Bourdieu argued, the eldest sons of farming families who had been dominant in that social space were now relegated to a dominated position due to changes in the marriage market. Those who had no problem finding a wife before were now the bachelors. Bourdieu illustrated this in part through an ethnographic description of the village dance, in which physical proximity did not align with social proximity because the dance had become a space that made the exclusion and exile felt by a new category of peasant bachelors painfully visible.

In this analysis of bachelorhood and what he referred to as "the peasant condition," Bourdieu was interested in the ways in which social space had expanded, leav-

<sup>6</sup> I have previously written about Bourdieu's early ethnographic work in both France and Algeria in Reed-Danahay [2004 and 2005]. The present analysis represents further consideration of the French material in relationship to the concept of social space.

ing the male peasant habitus both “out of place” and “out of time.” Bourdieu focused on the increasing social marginalization of the eldest sons of farm households. Bourdieu was puzzled by nostalgic complaints among residents (particularly older males) that there was a marriage crisis in the township of Lesquire, in that farmers were having trouble finding wives. Because marriage records showed little change in the marriage rate for rural men since the late Nineteenth century, Bourdieu posited that this perception was based not on the statistical frequency of marriages but, rather, on the fact that the type of man who remained unmarried had changed. In the recent past, it had been the younger sons of farm families who most frequently remained unmarried, in a system of primogeniture, and this had been accepted as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the family. Now (circa 1960), the bachelor had increasingly come to be the eldest, rather than the younger, son.

Bourdieu argued that two related factors had led to this situation. First, a breakdown of patriarchal society and family socioeconomic relations had been accompanied by an ethos based more on free choice and individualism among younger generations (male and female) that was replacing one based on family obligations and traditional values. It was not only that rural girls had become more attracted to urban men (and this included younger sons who were more “urbanized” than their older brothers), they were now repulsed by farmers, especially those from the remote hamlets. Their tastes had changed as a result of urban influences and increased access to higher levels of public education, which led to the breakdown of traditional values. Foreshadowing *Distinction*, Bourdieu wrote that girls now held “the monopoly on the judgment of taste” [1962, 104; my translation].

Second, there was an enlargement of the geographic area within which people married each other. Therefore, the social distance between farm girls and farm boys was growing and geographic distance was widening as rural girls left to marry men living in towns and cities. Rural women, Bourdieu argued, could now more easily find husbands in areas outside of the township and, since they had come to prefer urban men, this explained the “extension of their matrimonial area.” Men from the village were also experiencing a matrimonial area of greater geographic distance. For farmers in remote hamlets, however, the situation was quite different. Any enlargement of the matrimonial area for them was based on the difficulty, rather than ease, they faced in attracting a wife.

The influx of urban values had thus affected peasant youth differently according to their position within a household. Eldest sons, socialized into and subject to structural expectations based on the more “traditional” system, were both emotionally and structurally attached to the farm and family (the *maison*, the patrimony) and therefore, and their habitus was slow to change in the face of an expanding social

space (constituting a new social hierarchy) related to urbanization. Consequently, the eldest sons no longer held positions of high status and were now the ones placed lowest and in the most dominated position.

Whereas social distance in the past had been based primarily on the “rank” of the different families (or *maisons*/houses), social distance was now based on geographic distance – that between the remote hamlet and the village, and between the township (which included the village and its surrounding hamlets) and the town or city. Bourdieu explained that

whereas, in the older society, bachelorhood was closely linked to the situation of the individual in the social hierarchy, itself the reflection of the distribution of landed property, it is now seen as linked above all, to distribution in *geographical space* [2008, 39; my emphasis with italics].

The shared physical space of the dance did not reflect social closeness. Rather, social distance was keenly visible. Bourdieu vividly described how the bachelor habitus is both positioned in social space at the dance and on display in the physical space of the dance. Whereas this dance had been a festive gathering in the past, through which the traditional marriage system operated to introduce young men and women (who normally had little contact with each other), now, Bourdieu observed, it had become a space of exclusion and exile for the peasant bachelors, the farm heirs from remote hamlets.

In the essay on rural bachelors, Bourdieu viewed social space as what he called “the matrimonial area” – the geographic and social space in which marriage partners were found. In the traditional system, the geographic and social space overlapped to a large extent. The social hierarchy was based around land and the family systems and groups whose livelihood depended upon it. This had changed with urbanization. Taking a region within France as his unit, Bourdieu showed that as the geographic space in which people found marriage partners expanded, the structure of the social space had altered. This example suggests that the geographic boundaries relevant to social relationships can shift – expanding or possibly even contracting (although his example shows the expansion of the matrimonial area). When the boundaries of social space are connected to a shared “commonsense” about the world and the value of different attributes (social, cultural, and material), rather than to physical borders, this leaves open the possibility that even the social space of the nation-state might not depend on the physical borders of state territory.

#### 4. The Nation and the State

For Bourdieu, the social space of a nation, just as in the case of the village of Lesquire, entails a shared “common sense” – that is, a perception of the world, and a way of classifying the social order. In contrast to Lefebvre’s concept of “state space,” Bourdieu sees the social space of the nation-state as one primarily of ways of thinking (“state thought”).<sup>7</sup> As he argued in *Pascalian Meditations* [2000 (1997), 98], this common sense view of the world is what permits people to agree to disagree (“agreement in disagreement”), so that they agree on the divisions and classifications of social life, but may interpret individual social actions differently depending upon their own position in social space. For example, Bourdieu notes, a behavior might be judged as “shameless” by some but “unpretentious” by others. National common sense is, according to Bourdieu, transmitted primarily through schooling. He wrote that the major role of educational institutions is to “construct the nation as a population endowed with the same categories and therefore the same commonsense” [*Ibidem*, 98]. This is why, he adds, being in another country provokes feelings of strangeness, not only due to language differences but to “discrepancies between the world as it presents itself at each moment and the system of dispositions and expectations constituting common sense.” [*Ibidem*, 98]. Bourdieu was interested in the question of how the state constitutes and maintains national social space. He wrote:

All those boundaries of inside and outside that are linked with the national character are largely products of the state, by way of the educational system, literature and all kinds of paths for the transmission and inculcation of these deep and unconscious dispositions bound up with the state [*Ibidem*, 144].

Bourdieu conceptualized a nation as a social space containing a variety of habituses, each taking a different position and having a different trajectory. He referred to *Distinction* as a study of “French social space in 1970” [1991, 628], in which he focused on the modes of affiliation and shared systems of classification associated with different social class positions within the nation of France. Taking the case of France, Bourdieu [1984 and 1996b] argued that it constitutes a national social space in which different embodied habituses are positioned and positioned themselves in relationship to each other (moving either toward higher or lower status over time and moving closer or farther away from each other). Moreover, the position a person (or a social group) occupies in social space is vital to understanding their location

<sup>7</sup> In a recent introduction to Bourdieu’s theory of the state, which does not engage with issues of space, Loyal [2017, 56] points out that the concept of “state thought” draws much from Durkheim’s work, although he feels that Bourdieu does not sufficiently emphasize this link.

in physical or geographic space. Any diverse and stratified nation, such as France, will contain several different types of habitus related to social positions and social positioning within the social space of the nation. For example, people who work in small family owned companies will have a different position in social space than executives in large corporations, related to having different forms of cultural and economic capital. And those who hold dominant positions in social space typically live in nice neighborhoods.

The recent compilation of Bourdieu's 1989-1992 lectures at the Collège de France, *On the State* [2014 (2012)], is a useful new addition to his corpus of published work that deepens knowledge about the way Bourdieu conceived of the state and nation in terms of social space. Well into his lectures, Bourdieu [*Ibidem*, 144] told his audience that the question of how the state gets people to obey it is "really the underlying problem" he sought to address. His approach to answer this question is to view the state as engaged in "the production and canonization of social classifications" [*Ibidem*, 9]. He also notes that he did not begin to use the term "the state" in his writing until the late 1980s [*Ibidem*, 113], primarily because he hesitated to use a word whose meaning was unclear. In a reflection upon dictionary definitions of the state, Bourdieu [*Ibidem*, 31] suggested that these generally entail viewing the state as both a "bureaucratic apparatus that manages collective interests" and "the territory on which the authority of the apparatus is exercised." When people think of the French state, Bourdieu interjected as an example, they think of its government, armed forces, and bureaucracy but also of France as a physical territory. This links both social and physical/geographic "space," - a key element in Bourdieu's theory of social space.

The geographic boundaries of the state do not receive as much attention by Bourdieu, however, as do the cognitive and classificatory space of "social reality" associated with and promoted by the state. He was more interested in social borders and boundaries, rather than physical ones. When he mentions that "we do not investigate the notion of national borders" [*Ibidem*, 114], he refers primarily to what it means to be French in terms of language. Bourdieu contended that Algerian independence [*Ibidem*, 115], provoked questions such as "Do you need to speak French to be French? And if you don't speak French are you still French? Is it enough to speak French in order to be French?" In this example, we can see that he understands the boundaries of the French nation as based in large part on linguistic capital and the value of French in relationship to other languages (regional as well as those of the former colony).

For Bourdieu, the state seeks to construct a "unified space" through the centralization of power. He wrote:

The unification of space, the development of which is accompanied by the birth of a central power implies the unification and uniformization of both the geographical and the social space [2014 (2012), 223].

This “national social space,” constructed by the state, leads to the dominant cultural forms being viewed as “universal” and not particular or local. Regional or local ways of speaking or other cultural characteristics become marginalized in this centralizing project. The formation of state territory superseded other forms of belonging, according to Bourdieu, especially those linked to lineage groups. Bourdieu maintains that the state

establishes a unified space, and makes geographical proximity predominate in relation to social, genealogical proximity [*Ibidem*, 224].

Here, he links social and physical space and the role of the state in undermining previous forms of affiliation based on lineage in ways that harken back to his early work in Béarn cited above. Although he did not make explicit reference to the state in his 1962 essay on Béarnaise bachelorhood, Bourdieu argued that the marriage market had changed as urbanization had changed the geographical thresholds for marriage partners that had previously been tied primarily to a more local level and relationships between lineage groups.

Bourdieu clarified the relationship between state and nation by referencing an earlier article, noting that

I was in fact referring to the national social space that is constructed at the same time as the state is constructed, that the state constructs as it constructs itself [*Ibidem*, 223].

He suggests with this comment that he views the national as an invention of the state that, in turn, helps constitute and maintain the state. In some historical and comparative reflections, Bourdieu contrasted Germany and France along these lines. He argued that in Germany, national affiliations and sentiments preceded the construction of the state. In France, by contrast, the state constructed the nation [*Ibidem*, 347]. For Germany, according to Bourdieu, “the state expresses the nation”. In France, on the other hand,

The French revolutionaries [...] made the universal state, and this state would go on to make the nation through the school, the army, etc. [*Ibidem*, 347].

For Bourdieu, “the state is a space” [2014, 368] that involves various struggles, and here he is referring to social space more than physical space. National social space is divided along what he depicted as left-right binaries, somewhat mirroring the political field in terms of the division of France into the Left and the Right but not com-

pletely congruent with that [*Ibidem*, 368-9]. One binary involves what he refers to as the left and right sides of state space, in an imagination of the geometric composition of social space, following his analyses in *Distinction*. Those social agents positioned on the right side have high economic capital but relatively lower cultural capital. Those positioned on the left side have high cultural capital but relatively lower economic capital. The state is a field of power within social space, which includes what Bourdieu refers to as the left and right “hands” of the state, having to do with social policies and practices. The left hand is the part of the state involved in service and welfare; the right hand of the state engages in control, discipline, and coercion. Bourdieu departed from Marxist theorists of the state (and such writers as Foucault and Elias who stress the disciplinary role of the state), by arguing that the state engages in both control and service. As he puts it, state institutions “control all the better by serving” [*Ibidem*, 142].

For Bourdieu, a focus on education is key to understanding the relationship between the state and national identity. Although he admitted that this was a position he came to gradually, rather than one he started with in his earlier studies of education, Bourdieu contends that

all analyses of the school are in fact analyses of the state and the reproduction of the state [2014, 346].

Bourdieu’s view of education is broad, and includes forms of inculcation that are associated with family upbringing and less formal modes of training than those of schools. His theory of habitus rests upon a view of inculcation in childhood that shapes the worldviews and dispositions of a person.

Although schools and educational institutions were primarily viewed in terms of social class in Bourdieu’s earlier work, in his later work [Bourdieu 1996b], Bourdieu turned to an analysis of how schools, especially elite institutions of higher education, shape national identity and contribute to the processes of centralization, unification, and standardization that are elements of the contemporary nation-state. He argued that the educational system

involves the making of normalized individuals, who are homogenized in terms of writing, spelling, their way of speaking [...] [*Ibidem*, 121].

Schools help constitute what Bourdieu refers to as “national emotions” – and ideas about

those things “that only we can feel,” or “that you have to be born in the country in order to feel,” things for which people are prepared to die, like spelling [*Ibidem*, 158].

The relationship between literacy and education is another aspect to Bourdieu’s argument because, following Jack Goody, he understands writing as crucial to the

development of the state. Bourdieu saw “the viewpoint of the state” as “the viewpoint of writing”, which transcends time and objectifies [*Ibidem*, 215]. The school shapes habitus and is instrumental in shaping memory: “our memory is largely structured by our school career” Bourdieu wrote [*Ibidem*, 177], following Halbwachs.

Bourdieu investigated the ways in which the French educational system consecrates a “state nobility” who work to construct and maintain the contemporary state. His Prologue to *The State Nobility* [1996b] is instructive in understanding how he viewed the state as a social space. Bourdieu [1996b, 1] defined social structure here as “objective divisions of the social world – especially the division into dominant and dominated in the different fields;” and he understood mental structures to be those “principles of vision and division that agents apply” to social structures. He stated this also in terms of the “cognitive structures” that inform the “practical knowledge of the social worlds thus structured” [*Ibidem*, 1]. Bourdieu was interested in “classificatory acts and their products” [*Ibidem*, 1], meaning that he wanted to understand how educational institutions were structured but also how teachers and students within them applied their mental structures in their social practices and judgments about each other. Bourdieu tends to use the terms “social space,” “social structure,” and “social order” interchangeably in his discussion of academic judgments. For him [1996b, 38], social space is the “objective structure,” and habitus is the “subjective consciousness of the positions in this space”. Habitus, as a set of dispositions, is the basis for action and brings “objective structures and embodied structures” into proximity with each other, and agents “are only effective and efficient because they are not reduced to what is ordinarily meant by the notion of the individual” [*Ibidem*, 38].

This consecration operates through rites of institution in the most prestigious institutions of higher education in France, through the educational titles they confer which constitute a form of academic capital. In his analysis of the state, Bourdieu focused on its mechanisms of reproduction and he noted in his lectures at the Collège de France (no doubt in answer to critics who charge him with having a theory only of social reproduction and not transformation or resistances) that he found the reproduction of the state, and questions about how it shapes obedience to it, more interesting and important than those about resistance or challenges to the state.

Bourdieu was interested in the question of how the state constitutes and maintains national social space. This raises questions of relevance to studies of migration and mobility because it gestures toward possibilities of citizens participating in national social space even when they do not live within the territory of the state and,



conversely, of immigrants and their children living within a national territory but not being full participants in that social space.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Bourdieu, Social Space, and Migration Studies

With a focus on social space as positionings of habitus instead of as physical space and territory, Bourdieu's approach helps ask the right questions about how people can inhabit a national social space even when they are not living within the territory of that nation. He did not address the reach of "state space" outside of the borders of the nation, but his early work in Béarn on geographic area and social space as something that can expand and contract suggests that it may be possible to adapt his ideas to the study of international migration. At the same time, Bourdieu's approach to positioning in social space can help us to understand how migrants who are living within the physical territory of a nation to which they have relocated, may be quite marginal to the social space of that nation because they do not possess the appropriate forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital that "place" a person in social space. Bourdieu's observations about the formation of groups in social space is another contribution, with the potential to help understand the ways that various categories of immigrants are positioned both in geographic space and social space (the space of power relations) in relationship both to other immigrant groups and those perceived as "mainstream."

Bourdieu's concept of social space can be placed in dialogue with recent approaches to globalization that emphasize flows, scapes and transnationalism. This work questions nation-state boundaries and seeks new ways of understanding social spaces that may transcend national borders. There has been attention, especially since the 1990s, to what Pratt [1991] called "contact zones" – permeable borders of social spaces. Appadurai [1996, 48] introduced the term "ethnoscapes" to

get away from the idea that group identities necessarily imply that cultures need to be spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or ethnically homogeneous forms [*Ibidem*, 183].

Along similar lines, Gupta and Ferguson have noted that the social sciences tend to represent space in terms of distinctive societies divided spatially and occupying "'naturally' discontinuous spaces" [Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 6]. They drew attention to the ways in which space comes to be viewed as a place with a particular iden-

<sup>8</sup> See Fassin and Mazouz [2009] for an analysis of French naturalization as a "rite of institution" that serves to differentiate between natural-born and naturalized citizens.

tity [*Ibidem*, 8], when a demarcated physical space is associated with particular forms of social interaction. Gupta and Ferguson's focus on interstitiality and Appadurai's focus on flows and scapes both remind us that social space cannot be assumed to overlap with bounded physical spaces or territories.

The concept of transnationalism [Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Hannerz 1996], with its associated terms such as transnational social space [Faist 2012] and transnational social field [Glick Schiller 2005], has been a dominant paradigm in migration studies since the 1990s. It is viewed by most of its proponents as a way out of the so-called "container" problem with research that focuses on the nation state. Criticisms of what is termed methodological nationalism do not, however, entertain the possibility that national social space may cross geographic boundaries. It also does not sufficiently consider the ways in which national social space may differentiate migrants from others living within the same physical territory. Recent work on transnationalism overlooks Bourdieu's broader concept of social space and tends to focus on that of social field [e.g. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002; Amelina *et al.* 2012].<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the lack of attention to Bourdieu's potential contributions in much of the migration literature, his understanding of the habitus as a position in social space productively complements recent scholarship that calls into question theories of spatiality preoccupied with ideas of fluidity, transnationalism, and displacement.<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu's focus on distance and proximity in both social and geographical space is a fruitful one with which "to think." People do not live in "transnations," but within national borders and within institutional frameworks that are for the most part filtered through the nation-state (even in the case of the EU). Therefore, a consideration of "national social space" that does not depend on a view of social space as geographically bound may be a useful methodological tool.

The main point I have emphasized in my discussion of Bourdieu's concept of social space is that it incorporates the embodied habitus as positioned in both physical and more abstract social space. It is not a network or a "community,"<sup>11</sup> but a space of positions and position-takings in which social actors believe there are things "at

<sup>9</sup> This is also the case in scholarship that focuses primarily on the concept of field (along with habitus and forms of capital) in Bourdieu's work, with social space itself receiving little critical attention [e.g., Hilgers and Mangez 2015; Swartz 2013]. An exception to this, and only because social space figures so prominently in *Distinction*, is an edited collection focusing on that book [Coulangeon and Duval 2013].

<sup>10</sup> Work that takes up the idea of migrant or transnational habitus without also incorporating the concept of social space does not take full advantage of the potential of Bourdieu's contributions. Kelly and O'Reilly [2010] is one exception, although they conflate field and social space in their discussion.

<sup>11</sup> See Reed-Danahay [2014].

stake” and act accordingly. This happens at the level of a village and at the level of state bureaucracies. This perspective takes into account the ability of social actors to maintain or enhance the value of their cultural capital in social space. If a migrant seeks to position themselves within a particular social space in which they are located (and a migrant can be seen as potentially located in more than one social space), which could be considered as a form of “social integration,” then it is because they are invested in the ‘stakes’ of that space and take positions within it.

Bourdieu’s approach to social space provokes two key questions that, I suggest, are of vital importance in understandings of migration:

First, what is the relevant social space and how does this relate to geographical territory and national borders? Rather than assume a particular geographic location, Bourdieu’s approach suggests that there may or may not be overlap between physical and social space. The idea of social space as expanding (or potentially contracting) over time is a lasting one worth pursuing. If this view can incorporate a perspective that understands social boundaries as flexible, expanding and contracting over time, then this concept can be adapted to contemporary concerns about how to theorize movement across institutionalized boundaries such as those of nation-states. It articulates the distinctions between social and geographic space in fruitful ways that can help us go beyond the paradigm of transnationalism. It allows us to see that the social boundaries of national space can potentially expand beyond geographic borders.

The second question that arises from Bourdieu’s concept of social space is that of what influences feelings of being “at home” in situations of migration. When the social space changes, as for the migrant who moves to a new social space or anyone for whom social space has expanded, the perceptions of “being at home” can change among those whose habitus is ill-equipped to operate within new social arrangements, in which different dispositions, tastes, and affinities become more dominant and therefore useful to have. The role of the state in facilitating or hindering the ability of migrants to adopt “national feelings” [Simon 2012] in the countries in which they settle is a key question for future research. Bourdieu’s work encourages us to look further into the ways in which migrant belongings and migrant positionings in social space are closely connected.

### ***Acknowledgements***

*This article extends some of my earlier writings on social space [Reed-Danahay 2014 and 2015a] and Bourdieu [Reed-Danahay 2005]. It draws from two unpublished conference presentations [Reed-Danahay 2015b and 2016] in which preliminary versions of these ideas were expressed. I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a Summer Stipend and to the Humanities Institute at the University at Buffalo for a Faculty Fellowship that provided support for my research*

on Bourdieu and social space. I am also grateful for the helpful suggestions offered by an anonymous reviewer for this article.

## References

- Amelina, A., Nergiz, D.D., Faist, T., and Glick-Schiller, N. (eds.)  
 2012 *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P.  
 1962 "Célibat et Condition Paysanne." *Etudes Rurales* 5-6: 32-135.  
 1972 *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique: Précédé de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle*. Genève: Librairie Droz.  
 1984 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by R. Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [French Edition: 1979].  
 1985 "Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14(6): 723-744.  
 1989 "Reproduction interdite. La dimension symbolique de la domination économique." *Etudes rurales* 113/114: 15-36.  
 1991 "First Lecture. Social Space and Symbolic Space: An Introduction to a Japanese Reading of Distinction." *Poetics Today* 12(4): 627-638.  
 1996a "Physical Space, Social Space, and Habitus." Lecture delivered to the Department of Sociology, University of Oslo, May 15, 1995. *Report 10*. Oslo, Norway: Institutt for sosiologi et samfunnsgeografi.  
 1996b *The State Nobility*. Translated by L.C. Clough. Stanford: Stanford University Press [Orig. ed. 1989].  
 1998 *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press [French Edition: 1994].  
 2000 *Pascalian Meditations*. Translated by R. Nice. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press [French Edition: 1997].  
 2008 *The Bachelor's Ball*. Translated by R. Nice. Chicago: University of Chicago Press [French Edition: 2004].  
 2014 *On the State. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989-1992*. Translated by D. Fernbach. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press [French Edition: 2012].
- Brenner, N., and Elden, S.  
 2009 "Henri Lefebvre on State, Space, Territory." *International Political Sociology* 3: 353-377.
- Coulangeon, P., and Duval, J. (eds.)  
 2013 *Trente ans après La Distinction de Pierre Bourdieu*. Paris: Éditions La Découverte.
- Crang, M., and Thrift, N. (eds.)  
 2000 *Thinking Space*. London: Routledge.
- Faist, T.  
 2012 "Toward a Transnational Methodology: Methods to Address Methodological Nationalism, Essentialism, and Positionality." *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 28(1): 51-70.

Fassin, D., and Mazouz, S.

2009 "What is it to Be French? Naturalization as a Republican Rite of Institution." *Revue Française de Sociologie* 50: 37-64.

Fortier, A.M.

2000 *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Glick Schiller, N.

2005 "Transnational Social Fields and Imperialism: Bringing a Theory of Power to Transnational Studies." *Anthropological Theory* 5(4): 439-461.

Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., and Szanton Blanc, C.

1995 "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration." *Anthropological Quarterly* 68(1): 48-63.

Gupta, A., and Ferguson, J.

1992 "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1): 6-23.

Hannerz, U.

1996 *Transnational Connections*. London: Routledge.

Hilgers, M., and Mangez, E. (eds.)

2015 *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications*. New York: Routledge.

Korac, M.

2009 *Remaking Home: Reconstructing Life, Place and Identity in Rome and Amsterdam*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Lefebvre, H.

1991 *The Production of Space*. Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. Malden, MA: Blackwell [French Edition: 1974].

2009 *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, edited by N. Brenner and S. Elden. Translated by G. Moore, N. Brenner, and S. Elden. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Lemert, C.

2006 *Durkheim's Ghosts: Cultural Logics and Social Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Loyal, S.

2017 *Bourdieu's Theory of the State: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oliver, C., and O'Reilly, K.

2010 "A Bourdieuan Analysis of Class and Migration: Habitus and the Individualizing Process." *Sociology* 44(1): 49-66.

Pierce, J., and Martin, D.G.

2015 "Placing Lefebvre." *Antipode* 47(5): 1279-1299.

Pratt, M.L.

1991 "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*: 33-40. New York: Modern Language Association.

- Pries, L.  
 2001 “The Approach of Transnational Social Spaces: Responding to New Configurations of the Social and the Spatial.” Pp. 55-74 in *New Transnational Social Spaces*, edited by L. Pries. New York: Routledge.
- Reed-Danahay, D.  
 2004 “*Tristes Paysans*: Bourdieu’s Early Ethnography in Béarn and Kabylia.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 77(1): 87-106.  
 2005 *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.  
 2012 “La notion de ‘communauté’ à l’épreuve des terrains: des espaces sociaux de la France rurale à la diaspora vietnamienne.” Pp. 159-180 in *Parallaxes Transatlantiques: Pour une Anthropologie Réciproque*, edited by A. Raulin and S.C. Rogers. Paris: Editions du CNRS.  
 2015a “Social Space: Distance, Proximity and Thresholds of Affinity.” Pp. 69-96 in *Thinking through Sociality: An Anthropological Interrogation of Key Concepts*, edited by V. Amit. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.  
 2015b “Bourdieu and the Anthropology of Social Space and Migration.” Unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Anthropological Association (Denver, CO).  
 2016 “EU Citizens, Migration, and National Social Space.” Unpublished paper presented at the Conference of Europeanists. Council for European Studies (Philadelphia, PA).
- Simon, P.  
 2012 *French National Identity and Integration: Who Belongs to the National Community?* Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute.
- Soja, E.  
 2001 *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- Susen, S.  
 2014 “The Place of Space in Social and Cultural Theory.” Pp. 333-357 in *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory*, edited by A. Elliott. New York and London: Routledge.
- Swartz, D.L.  
 2013 *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Tally, R.T.  
 2013 *Spatiality*. Abington, Oxon: Routledge.
- Warf, B., and Arias, S. (eds.)  
 2009 *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Abington, Oxon: Routledge.
- Wimmer, A., and Glick-Schiller, N.  
 2002 “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration, and the Social Sciences.” *Global Networks* 2(4): 301-334.
- Zieleniec, A.  
 2007 *Space and Social Theory*. London: Sage

## **Bourdieu, Social Space, and the Nation-State**

### Implications for Migration Studies

---

Abstract: Pierre Bourdieu's main significance for spatial studies is that he understood social actors as embodied habituses and interrogated the articulation between habitus and social space – between the individual, the social, and the spatial. In order to better understand migrant belongings [Fortier 2000] and emplacements [Korac 2009], it is useful to take into consideration migrant “positionings” in social space, adapting Bourdieu's ideas to the study of contemporary migration. This article considers the significance of Bourdieu's concept of social space for studies of migration through a discussion of two moments in his work: his early research on proximity and distance in social space in rural France, and his work on the nation-state. Bourdieu's approach to social space is one that links spatiality and sociality in productive ways that shed light on the relationship between state space and state thought.

---

*Keywords: Bourdieu; Social Space; Migration; Nation-State; Habitus.*

---

**Deborah Reed-Danahay** is Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Jean Monnet Chair at the University at Buffalo (State University of New York). In addition to numerous articles, she has published five books, including *Locating Bourdieu* [Indiana, 2005]. She serves as co-editor of two book series: [\*Palgrave Studies in Literary Anthropology\*](#) and [\*New Anthropologies of Europe\*](#). She has conducted ethnographic research in France, the U.K., and the United States on topics related to national and supranational identity, citizenship and belonging, migration, education, and memoir/autoethnography.