

## MIGRATION AND THE DYNAMICS OF SPACE AND SOCIETY: A REVIEW OF THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

### MIGRATION ET DYNAMIQUES DE L'ESPACE ET DE LA SOCIÉTÉ: REVUE DU LIVRE "LA MISÈRE DU MONDE"

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#### **Abstract:**

This article analyses the relationship between space and society by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's book, "The Weight of the World". The article examines how the social system, as a system of things, excludes people and things within the structures of the social world, including Maghrebian immigrants in France. The article focuses on how this exclusion perpetuates a reality of discrimination, social stigma, poverty, inadequate housing, deviance, and various other social problems.

**Keywords:** migration, space, society, exclusion, social problems.

#### **Résumé:**

Cet article analyse la relation entre l'espace et la société en s'appuyant sur l'ouvrage de Pierre Bourdieu, "La Misère du monde". Il examine comment le système social, en tant que système de choses, exclut les personnes et les objets au sein des structures du monde social, y compris les immigrés maghrébins en France. L'article se concentre sur la manière dont cette exclusion perpétue une réalité de discrimination, de stigmatisation sociale, de pauvreté, de logement insalubre, de déviance et de divers autres problèmes sociaux.

**Mots-clés:** migration, espace, société, exclusion, problèmes sociaux.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French sociologist considered one of the most prominent sociologists of the twentieth century. His sociological contributions spanned various fields of knowledge, and his works analyzed the phenomena of education, power, violence, culture, media, poverty, and migration.

Some of his most notable works include: "Reproduction", "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste", "Symbolic Violence", "Masculine Domination", "On Television", and "The Weight of the World"<sup>1</sup>.

In his book "The Weight of the World" (French: *La misère du monde*), French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, along with his collaborators, embarks on a profound journey to explore the manifestations of collective dysfunctions through the lens of individual cases. Bourdieu weaves a tapestry of narratives of poverty and marginalization, shedding light on the plight of immigrants crushed by an unjust social system that condemns them to misery, destitution, and deprivation.

I will focus on examples of interviews related to immigration and use the information in the book to analyze these interviews from the perspective of the phenomenon of misery.

This book presents an in-depth social analysis of individual cases. Through these interviews, Bourdieu and his collaborators analyze the social structure of our contemporary world. In the introduction to the book, which is addressed to the reader, Bourdieu calls for understanding and accepting people as they are<sup>2</sup>. This is because human emotions represent an

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<sup>1</sup> BOURDIEU, et al, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

obstacle that must be overcome to know the truth of the social world described in this book as misery.

In 1993 the book "The Weight of the World" was published, becoming a landmark in understanding our contemporary reality. The book's publication coincided with radical historical transformations, including the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of neoliberalism, and the decline of the nation-state's role in the face of the power of transnational corporations.

These transformations exacerbated poverty and inequality, especially among the lower classes in capitalist societies. France, which had welcomed immigrants from North Africa since the 1960s, faced significant challenges in integrating them into society. Immigrants and their children faced unemployment and housing problems, leading to their concentration in the suburbs of major cities.

This reality sparked widespread debate in the media, government, and academia. The book "The Weight of the World" contributed significantly to this debate, critically analyzing the social and economic phenomena that led to the exacerbation of misery.

## I. MIGRATION AND THE DYNAMICS OF SPACE AND SOCIETY

Sociology emerged from a physical metaphor with Auguste Comte (Social Physics<sup>3</sup>), and a biological metaphor with Herbert Spencer (the organic analogy<sup>4</sup> between the functions of social institutions and the organs of the human body). Pierre Bourdieu follows the same approach, drawing parallels between the physical and social space. This distinction is essential for understanding the problems of Maghrebi immigrants in France. It is the starting point of this project. This led Bourdieu to start by defining place as the point in the physical space where a human or object is positioned and exists. This means either a position, or a status relative to others, and a rank in each system. As for the occupied space, it can be defined as the extension, surface, and volume that an individual or object occupies in the physical space.

An individual is positioned in a place in the social space, which can be distinguished by the position it occupies relative to other places (above, below, between, etc.)<sup>5</sup>, and the distance that separates it from them.

The social space is defined by the mutual exclusion (or differentiation) of the positions that it is composed of. Social hierarchy is omnipresent, and our habitual way of seeing the world only serves to further obscure its existence. An individual's position in the social space is revealed by the place they occupy in the physical space. The social space is determined materially and objectively, through the distribution of wealth, and power. This results in the concentration and overlapping of the scarcest goods and their owners in certain places of the physical space (upmarket areas: Faubourg Saint-Honoré)<sup>6</sup>, which in turn are completely opposed to the places where the poor sometimes gather (such as slums and ghettos).

The space is a social engineering of class inequalities, where individuals and deprived groups are pushed to the margins. The margin is an indicator of social exclusion and evidence of the violence of the space. Various manifestations of misery, poverty, violence, and deviance are reflected on this margin. This has led to the emergence of neighborhoods that include large groups of Maghrebian immigrants living in France.

A new discourse in the press about the problems of the suburbs has developed since the beginning of 1980 as a result of the sudden events in the Minguettes district - a district in Vénissieux on the outskirts of Lyon with a high population density of immigrants - drawing attention to a new category of people, namely the young people from immigrant families "the

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<sup>3</sup> COMTE, 1852, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> SPENCER, 1876, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> BOURDIEU, p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

keur": These are categories that suffer from school failure, unemployment, lack of training, and the poor condition of the suburbs. This led to the adoption of new measures by the left-wing government to rehabilitate this new type of shantytown.

European migration generally enjoys social advantages because Europeans possess qualifications that facilitate their social advancement in the host country. In contrast, most Maghrebian family men remain unskilled workers or unemployed and suffer from conflict with their children and the large number of family members. This situation leads to problems such as dropping out of school and delinquency.

Lack of cultural capital condemns young people to academic failure<sup>7</sup>. Children of French social workers suffer from a sense of being shackled, a lack of money and means of transportation, living in humiliating places destined for decline, experiencing failure, and having a troubled relationship with time and the future. Additional difficulties are faced by adolescents of foreign origin, particularly Maghrebians. Negative symbolic capital acts as a stigma (personal name, accent, place of birth, etc.). This is compounded by structural factors such as 1) Relationship with time, 2) Relationships with work, 3) Decline of mass mobilization organizations such as political and trade union organizations, and 4) Crisis of Maghreb family structures (fertility, educational gap between children and parents).

Unemployment and the exclusion of parents from economic and social life also contribute to the difficulty of integrating immigrants and disconnecting from the original community. Public housing brings families together based on the availability of apartments and income level rather than kinship ties, as was the case in shantytowns. These problems make it difficult to control the consumer aspirations of children. Through their reactions, these young people involuntarily contribute to feeding the vicious circle that marginalizes them.

This series of interviews provides a glimpse into the crisis gripping the French suburbs through an analysis of the testimonies of several French citizens. These testimonies highlight some of the tensions and divisions between the local population and immigrants, particularly those of Maghrebi origin.

**Testimony 1:** " During the month of Ramadan, Maghrebis sleep during the day and their life starts at night. They raise sheep on their balconies and rabbits in their bathrooms because they are used to living in the bush"<sup>8</sup>.

**Testimony 2:** "Not far from my house, there are neighborhoods full of Maghrebis. That's where the gangs that swarm into the residential areas looking for violence or to settle scores come from".

**Testimony 3:** " I'll vote for Le Pen, that'll scare them shitless".

These testimonies reveal some of the aspects of the crisis in the French suburbs, such as:

**1.** Differences in lifestyle between native residents and immigrants: The first testimony points to the differences in sleeping and working habits between native residents and immigrants of Maghrebi origin.

**2.** Feelings of fear and threat among native residents: The second testimony refers to the presence of gangs in some neighborhoods of the suburbs that pose a threat to native residents.

**3.** The third testimony suggests that the speaker intends to vote for Marine Le Pen, the leader of a far-right party known for her anti-immigrant stance.

These testimonies offer valuable insight into the complex and multifaceted nature of the crisis in the French suburbs. They highlight the need for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to addressing social exclusion, economic inequality, and discrimination.

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<sup>7</sup> BOURDIEU, p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-19.

Suburban issues are intricately linked to the social and political framework for which the state bears responsibility. A comprehensive understanding of these issues necessitates considering the shift towards neoliberalism that commenced in the 1970s and culminated in the mid-1980s with the adoption of this ideology by socialist leaders.

Suburban problems are a product of the socio-political transformations that have occurred in the past few decades. Neoliberalism has played a significant role in exacerbating these problems.

## **II. REVIEW OF THE BOOK**

The book “The Weight of the World” by Pierre Bourdieu is a powerful and insightful work that critically analyzes the social and economic misery created by neoliberalism. Bourdieu argues that the current capitalist system has led to a widening gap between the rich and the poor and that this inequality has resulted in widespread social unrest and suffering.

One of the strengths of the book is its clear and concise writing style. Bourdieu presents his arguments in a straightforward and easy-to-understand manner, making the book accessible to a wide range of readers. Additionally, the book is well-organized and provides a logical progression of ideas.

Another strength of the book is its comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the social and economic problems of the contemporary world. Bourdieu draws on a wide range of sources, including sociological research, historical analysis, and personal experience, to provide a nuanced and insightful understanding of the causes and consequences of neoliberalism.

However, the book is not without its limitations. One potential criticism is that it is somewhat pessimistic in its outlook. Bourdieu offers a bleak assessment of the current state of the world, and he does not provide much hope for a better future. Additionally, some readers may find the book's focus on France somewhat limiting, as it does not fully consider the global implications of neoliberalism.

Overall, “The Weight of the World” is a valuable and important book that offers a powerful critique of neoliberalism. While it may not be the most optimistic book, it is an essential read for anyone who wants to understand the social and economic problems of the contemporary world.

By making these changes, the review could be made more comprehensive, insightful, and valuable to readers.

## **CONCLUSION**

We can conclude from the book “The Weight of the World” that the social and economic violence of the space leads to the creation of tension between Maghrebian immigrants and French citizens, especially in socially isolated areas, without them being able to realize together the responsibility of the state for this situation, and the misery of the capitalist world. What is required is the construction of a shared identity based on plurality and difference and an understanding of the true economic and political factors that reproduce the tragedy of immigrants and French people from the middle and lower classes. What is required is to preserve the social character of the state and to curb neoliberalism. This is what we believe is the challenge of Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators, through the book “The Weight of the World”. The state has come to abandon entire sections of society to the forces of the market and the logic of every man for himself.

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