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Silent Capitals: Institutionalized Reproduction, Subalternity and the Right to the City

Sessiz Sermayeler: Kurumsallaşmış Yeniden Üretim, Maduniyet ve Şehir Hakkı

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Abstract This article examines the structural reproduction of inequality by tracing the interplay between cultural capital, institutional and urban spatial politics. Drawing upon the theoretical insights of Pierre Bourdieu, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Henri Lefebvre, reframes the problem of unequal access to higher education not as a policy failure, but as a manifestation of deeper epistemic problem. While many analysts propose technical solutions to inequality—particularly through access programs for first-generation students—this study problematizes such efforts as symbolic compensations that obscure the foundational logics of exclusion. By situating education within broader processes of capitalist reproduction and colonial legacies, We critique how institutions aestheticize inequality while presenting themselves as inclusive. We argue that the dominant class not only defines what counts as legitimate knowledge, but also controls the spatial and institutional arenas in which recognition is possible. In this context, the subaltern is not simply excluded from education, but rendered unintelligible within its discursive and spatial regimes. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, We foreground the need for a rethinking of how educational access problems are framed, by whom, and through which structures. Through the triangulation of Bourdieu's theory of capital, Spivak's conception of socialized capital and Lefebvre's right to the city, the study offers a critical lens through which to reconsider the limits of educational justice under conditions of institutionalized inequality.

Öz Bu makale, kültürel sermaye, kurumsal ve kentsel mekânsal politikanın kesişiminde yer alan yapısal eşitsizliği incelemektedir. Pierre Bourdieu, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak ve Henri Lefebvre'in kuramsal katkılarından hareketle, yükseköğretime erişimde eşitsizlik sorununu bir politika başarısızlığı olarak değil, daha derin bir epistemik sorunun yansıması olarak yeniden çerçeveler. Pek çok analist, özellikle ilk kuşak üniversite öğrencilerine yönelik erişim programları aracılığıyla eşitsizliğe teknik çözümler önermektedir; oysa bu çalışma, bu tür çabaları dışlamanın kurucu mantıklarını görünmez kılan sembolik telafiler olarak sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Eğitimi kapitalist yeniden üretim süreçleri ve sömürgecilik mirası bağlamına yerleştirerek, kurumların eşitsizliği nasıl estetikleştirip kapsayıcıymış gibi sunduğunu eleştiriyoruz. Egemen sınıf yalnızca neyin bilgi sayıldığını tanımlamakla kalmaz; aynı zamanda tanınmanın mümkün olduğu mekânsal ve kurumsal alanları da kontrol eder. Bu bağlamda, madun yalnızca eğitimin dışında bırakılmaz, aynı zamanda onun söylemsel ve mekânsal rejimleri içinde anlaşılmaz kılınır. Reçeteci çözümler önermek yerine, biz, eğitim erişimi sorunlarının nasıl, kimler tarafından ve hangi yapılar aracılığıyla kurulduğunu yeniden düşünme ihtiyacını öne çıkarıyoruz. Bourdieu'nün sermaye kuramı, Spivak'ın toplumsallaştırılmış sermaye kavrayışı ve Lefebvre'in şehir hakkı bu çerçevede birlikte ele alınmaktadır.

Keywords Institution · cultural capital · subalternity · right to the city · educational inequality

Anahtar Kelimeler Kültürel sermaye · kurum · mekânsal adalet · madun · şehir hakkı

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Introduction

As two researchers from the peripheries of Istanbul and Tehran, we frequently returned to questions of educational inequality. Drawing on personal experiences and situated observations, we aim not merely to recount the particularities of our respective contexts, but to identify the institutional patterns underly them. In doing so, we came to realize that seemingly disparate challenges were, in fact, shaped by remarkably similar social and spatial dynamics. This article should therefore be read both as a product of this encounter and as a reflection of the transformative potential embedded in shared, cross-cultural inquiry.

Educational inequality continues to deepen the problem of intergenerational transmission of academic success. The academic success of parents is frequently reproduced in the lives of their children, resulting in a pattern that is now too widespread and empirically evident to be denied. This phenomenon has been consistently supported by a growing body of statistical data and empirical research. As the number of studies on this issue have proliferated, they have collectively demonstrated that academic success cannot be fully explained by individual ability or effort alone, but is also closely tied to broader familial and social conditions. The following examples illustrate this dynamic.

Guido Heineck and Regina T. Riphahn have examined how parents' education levels have affected their children's educational success among cohorts born from 1929 to 1978 in Germany. Based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), they find that, despite major educational reforms and increased public investment aimed at promoting equal opportunities, the impact of parental background continues to be notably strong. Children from highly educated families continue to be far more likely to attain advanced secondary education than those from less educated backgrounds. Furthermore, disadvantages associated with growing up in large families or rural areas have not declined—and in some cases, have worsened—over time. While overall educational attainment has increased and gender gaps have narrowed, relative educational mobility has not improved. These findings mirror similar trends observed in the United Kingdom and the United States, where expanded access to education has likewise failed to reduce intergenerational inequality significantly.[1]

Despite extensive educational reforms, intergenerational inequality in educational attainment in Turkey mirrors patterns observed in Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Aysit Tansel has examined how parental education influences children's educational outcomes, using data from TURKSTAT's (Turkish Statistical Institute) Adult Education Survey, which reflects intergenerational trends from the mid-20th to the early 21st century. That analysis revealed a strong correlation between parents' and children's education, with mothers' education having a slightly stronger influence than fathers'. While intergenerational mobility has increased across time—particularly among younger cohorts—educational attainment continuous to be shaped by parental background, especially in families with low education levels. Gender and urban-rural disparities persist, although they have narrowed across generations. A striking finding shows that children of university-educated fathers have a 70–80% probability of completing university, whereas this probability drops to just 5% for children of fathers with only primary education.[2]

Despite significant educational expansion in post-revolutionary Iran, intergenerational inequality in educational attainment remains pronounced, particularly in the nation's urban centers including Tehran. Drawing on global data, Leone has found that Iran exhibits moderate upward mobility (around 50–55%) but strong educational persistence at both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum—more than 60% of children with university-educated parents also attain tertiary education, while fewer than 15% of children whose parents lack primary education reach that level.[3] National data highlight these patterns: a study of more than one million university applicants in 2009 has demonstrated that

[1] Guido Heineck and Regina T. Riphahn, "Intergenerational transmission of educational attainment in Germany–the last five decades." Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik 229.1 (2009): 36-60.

[2] Aysıt Tansel, "Intergenerational educational mobility in Turkey." IZA Discussion Paper Series No. 9590.

[3] Tharcisio Leone, Intergenerational Mobility in Education: Estimates of the Worldwide Variation. No. 2. UNRISD Occasional Paper-Overcoming Inequalities in a Fractured World: Between Elite Power and Social Mobilization, 2019.

parental education, income, and occupation significantly predict entrance exam performance and university admission. Students from high-income, university-educated families consistently outperformed peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, suggesting that, as in Germany and Turkey, expanded access to education in Iran has not significantly reduced the impact of family background on educational outcomes.[4]

For much of the existing literature on educational inequality, attention has missed to be primarily directed toward identifying the challenge, while proposed solutions tend to be superficial, repetitive, and imbued with an ungrounded optimism. These recommendations often call as policymakers and institutional actors: to ensure equal access to higher education for children from families without a university background. However, these proposals frequently neglect the structural complexity of educational inequality. By reducing the issue to a technical challenge, they sever it from the deeper historical and social contexts in which it is embedded. We seek to draw attention to the intricate and multi-layered nature of the problem—arguing that its solution is far more elusive than commonly assumed. Rather than offering yet another set of remedies, our primary objective is to problematize the solutions that are often taken to be appropriate. For when a problem is misformulated at its core, no proposed solution, however well-intentioned, can lead to genuine transformation. A fundamental rethinking of how the problem itself is constructed—one that calls for new theoretical approaches capable of moving beyond dominant paradigms. We aim not to invent such approaches from scratch, but to revisit and reassemble existing critical frameworks to construct a fresh theoretical lens. In doing so, we propose that three thinkers—Pierre Bourdieu, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Henri Lefebvre—must be brought into dialogue. To reconsider the reproduction of cultural capital, the workings of epistemic violence, and the politics of urban space, in order to reframe the question of educational inequality.

The Reproduction of Cultural Capital by the Family as a Social Institution

One of the central questions posed in the first volume of Capital by Karl Marx was: How does the working class reproduce itself within the social and economic conditions of capitalism, and what does that reproduction imply for the continuity of the capitalist mode of production? The question of how the working class sustains its existence from one generation to the next lies at the heart of Marx's conception of social reproduction. At first glance, the formula appears simple: the capitalist transforms their capital into commodities, circulates them on the market, and converts the proceeds—through sale—back into capital. The production process thereafter repeats. This is the most basic and fundamental sense of reproduction. As Marx famously puts it: "Every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction. The conditions of production are also those of reproduction."[5] The production—or rather, reproduction—process begins with the purchase of labor power for a certain period (weekly, monthly, yearly, etc.). The worker receives compensation (a definite sum of money) only after the labor power has been utilized. If they wish to receive compensation again, they must once again enter the production process. Importantly, Marx does not frame this analysis in terms of an individual capitalist and an individual worker, but in terms of the capitalist class and the working class. To maintain themselves and their families—that is, to obtain subsistence—workers spend the wages they have received in exchange for their labor to purchase commodities, which they themselves have produced. In doing so, they essentially return their earnings to the capitalist class. As a result, the worker—and by extension, their family—remains deprived of the means through which wealth might be realized for themselves. Marx argues that this particular mode of social reproduction of the worker constitutes "the sine qua non of capitalist production".[6]

Pierre Bourdieu, in his seminal essay "The Forms of Capital", drew attention to a parallel process of structural reproduction at work within academia, specifically through educational institutions. Departing from conventional perspectives that confined the concept of capital to the domain of economics and capitalism, Bourdieu sought to expand

[4] Seyed Bagher Mirashrafi; Georg Bol; Gholamreza Nakhaiezadeh, The Effect of Family Background, Socioeconomic Status and Individual Factors on University Admission in Iran. International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education 4.2., 2013.

[5] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, (New York: Random House, 1906), 620.

[6] Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 625.

its analytical scope and significance. He posed a fundamental question: What is the relationship between the academic success—or lack thereof—of children from different social classes and class fractions, and the processes of capital accumulation and reproduction? Is academic achievement simply and solely the result of natural ability? Or can it be sufficiently explained by a hypothesis that treats education as an economic investment yielding proportionate returns? Bourdieu challenged these assumptions, arguing instead for a deeper, more structural and strategic understanding of educational inequality and its reproduction. Educational investment, he contends, does not begin at school but within the family—that is, in the domestic transmission of capital. A child born into a dominant-class family begins accumulating capital from the very outset of the socialization process. At capital—while intangible—can be converted into economic capital under legally secured conditions. According to Bourdieu, this cultural transmission within the family plays a decisive role in shaping what economists often misinterpret as "ability or talent", overlooking the formative impact of embodied cultural capital.[7]

For example, in language acquisition: mastering the language of the dominant class—used by educational and state institutions—can greatly influence academic success. For children who acquire this language only after entering school, the delay can result in marked disparities in educational outcomes. Consequently, the time spent at home prior to formal schooling is perceived as lost time, requiring the child to exert significantly more effort in order to make up for the deficit and bridge the gap. Accent, in particular, offers another illustrative case. While it may not hold direct economic value, an accent serves as a marker of social class, facilitating or impeding access to elite networks and improving or constraining one's chances in the education and job market. This transformation of cultural capital into economic capital highlights the intricate structural interplay between capital accumulation and social dynamics.

Conversely, giving children from lower-performing classes early access to the cultural capital of the dominant class—often through academic credentials—does not address the root of inequality. There are two main reasons for this. First, according to Bourdieu, cultural capital is primarily transmitted in a hidden, hereditary manner. Additionally, it cannot be transferred instantly; it is gained unconsciously and without explicit teaching. As such, managing cultural capital is far from as straightforward as managing economic capital:

> Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value.[8]

The second reason is that the difference in cultural capital among different social classes is itself a condition for the dominant class to distinguish and reproduce itself. Families belonging to the dominant class define themselves through the distinguishing, exclusionary, and oppressive nature of cultural capital, and thereby gain social privileges. A specific cultural practice is not adopted by the dominant class because it is valuable; rather, it is marked as valuable by the dominant class, validated academically, and recognized institutionally. Contrary to the promise of class mobility through economic capital alone, cultural capital is also used as an indicator of class. Access to strong cultural capital is only possible through access to educational institutions where such capital is legally secured. Furthermore, gaining cultural capital requires a voluntary performative act that exists solely to be acknowledged by the dominant class. Even as a result of this effort, there is no guarantee of recognition by members of the dominant class, and individuals are subject to constant and unceasing surveillance by them. This is because, under certain conditions, the bourgeoisie conceals or disregards the convertibility of cultural capital into economic capital, and instead presents and markets its own cultural

[7] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu, P. (1986), 'The Forms of Capital', in J.G. Richardson (ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 17.

[8] Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, 18.

practices—to which it attributes superior value as "a realm of disinterestedness"[9]; as instruments of self-improvement, refinement, etiquette, virtue, elegance, and intellectual taste etc.

Socialized Capital as Institutionalized Reproduction

Although Gayatri Spivak frequently uses the term "socialized capital" in the most crucial parts of her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", She does not provide a definition of the term. In a dense and multilayered work, attempting to clearly delineate the meaning of this term is speculative endeavor. Yet speculation, despite its historically negative connotations, should not be dismissed. When understood as an act of imaginative courage, speculation is deeply indebted to critical theory's struggle against dogmatism. Moreover, to dismiss speculation is often—an act of dominance. The phrase *this is mere speculation* is frequently used to suppress alternative views or to devalue oppositional thinking. For this reason, dismissing speculation is not only an intellectual issue, but also a political one. Therefore, while fully acknowledge—and even admits—that every interpretation offered regarding socialized capital is indeed speculative, it must also be said that there is nothing to hide in such an undertaking.

The central thesis of Spivak's text can be formulated as follows: No matter how critical they may be, everything European intellectuals read and write contributes to the reproduction of the European subject and the positioning of its counterpart—the Other (non-European, colonized communities). This subject—the colonized Other is repressed in such a way that it cannot be imagined as possessing its own Desire and Power. The textual materials through which this subject could articulate itself are obliterated—both through the erasure of precolonial narratives and the creation of new ones that define the subject in passive terms. Spivak offers a subtle critique of French thinkers (particularly Deleuze and Foucault) who seek to move beyond economic determinism. Yes, purely economic analysis may seem reductionist. However, economic interests were in fact crucial to the construction of the colonial order. Therefore, to declare that the economic is an outdated analytic framework risks obscuring how that very economy functioned and, in doing so, risks reproducing the hegemonic order it enabled. In this way, Spivak critiques thought—for the way it analyzes the postcolonial world. The subject constituted through colonialism—via economic, ideological, and legal mechanisms—remains silenced. And the intellectuals who speak on behalf of this subject, however well-intentioned, may inadvertently reproduce that silencing.[10] Yet, to claim that the subaltern can simply speak on its own is equally problematic, as it overlooks the complex institutional conditions that have historically rendered this group unvisible and inaudible. This dynamic is closely tied to Spivak's notion of epistemic violence, which refers to the ways in which colonial and intellectual discourses erase or distort the knowledge systems and subjectivities of the colonized. By denying the Other the conditions to speak or be heard on its own terms, Western intellectual production enacts a form of violence that operates not through physical force, but through the structures of knowledge and representation.

"Socialized capital" refers to a global capitalist structure in which capital is no longer managed solely by individual capitalists but also by national and international institutions. According to Spivak, socialized capital designates a legal subject who is neither strictly labor nor strictly management—someone who holds a "strong" passport, uses a "hard" currency, enjoys unquestioned access to legal due process, and is recognized and authorized by institutional frameworks.[11] This subject appears to embody the universal, impartial, and rights-bearing figure of capitalist modernity, but in fact, it belongs to a specific geopolitical and class location. Colonialism and modern regimes of knowledge have systematically erased the capacities of the Other to produce knowledge and to speak. Socialized capital enacts this epistemic violence precisely by rendering the crisis of representation invisible. Even when the oppressed are said to be speaking "for themselves," their speech is already structured by the discursive conditions of socialized capital. Any voice not produced by socialized capital becomes unrepresentable within this system. This system claims to create the

[9] Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, 16.

[10] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Refections on the History of an Idea* (eds Morris, R. C.). (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2010), 35.

[11] Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 25.

conditions under which the subaltern can speak, but in fact only allows such speech to occur within its own codes—thus resulting not in genuine voice, but in ventriloquism, where the subaltern is spoken for through the language of dominant discourse. Spivak as critiques the theories that claim the oppressed are able to speak directly as problematic because those who make them fail to distance themselves from their own, Western intellectualist positions.

In short, Spivak uses the term socialized capital to designate:

(a) the institutionalized, law-backed structure of capital, and

(b) the privileged legal subject it reproduces—one with access to legal protections, global mobility, and decision-making power (typically Western, educated, and often male), whose experience remains profoundly detached from that of the subaltern.

The subaltern, under the regime of socialized capital, finds themselves either within or excluded from the epistemic violence of educational institutions—and in both scenarios, they are rendered voiceless. This silencing occurs because, whether the Other chooses to articulate themselves through the language of the dominant class or opts to remain outside of it, its speech is either assimilated or dismissed, ultimately failing to be understood on its own terms. It is at this juncture that Bourdieu's framework proves insufficient, and Spivak's intervention become essential. The central issue, therefore, is not the subaltern's lack of access to the cultural capital of the dominant class, but rather the dominant class's refusal to recognize the subaltern's own cultural capital as legitimate. Within the logic of socialized capital, the subaltern is confronted with a double bind: they may either reproduce its subalternity by resisting cultural hegemony and deploying their own cultural resources in spaces untouched by norms, or they may reproduce it by striving to acquire dominant cultural capital within institutionalized public arenas.

According to Spivak, nineteenth-century territorial imperialism was not merely a military or administrative occupation but also an ideological and institutional transformation project. At the center of this effort were standardized education systems, because it was necessary to create a new labor force in the colonies to ensure the circulation and expansion of industrial capital—workers who were cheap, obedient, but equipped with certain skills. Thus, education functioned both as a disciplinary tool and as an instrument of capital. In addition, Spivak argued that the development of standardized education occurred alongside the transformation of local industries, land ownership, and social structures. In other words, as traditional forms of production were being dismantled, a shift in mentality was needed to legitimize and sustain that destruction. The education system was the mechanism through which the local population was mentally adapted to this new capitalist order. What changed in the education system after so-called decolonization? Spivak emphasizes that following the so-called decolonization processes of the twentieth century, central (former colonial) countries were no longer interested in establishing new education systems in former colonies. Because, circulation of capital now takes place through multinational corporations, eliminating the need for direct administration and infrastructure building. This shift has hinder of the development of consumer culture in former colonies, as education systems are either in a state of collapse or are insufficiently widespread and effective. Without education, it is not possible to create a qualified consumer base or workforce, and thus these countries remain reservoirs of cheap labor.[12]

Antonio Gramsci's analysis of subaltern classes emphasized their historical modes of organization and the pivotal role of their autonomous institutions during periods of political crisis. In his view, one of the central elements of hegemonic struggle lies in the capacity of these classes to organize independently of the dominant order. While feudal guilds and peasant communes once functioned outside the control of ruling elites, the modern state increasingly forecloses such autonomy by incorporating or neutralizing subaltern institutions.[13] Standardized education systems play a crucial role in this process. Far from being neutral instruments of enlightenment, they function as mechanisms for reproducing hegemonic ideology, disciplining dissent, and preempting the emergence of alternative worldviews. In contrast to

[12] Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 41.

[13] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Vol. II, Trans. Joesph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 24 (§18).

earlier periods in which subaltern groups could form counter-hegemonic structures, the uniformity and centralization of modern schooling limit spaces for organic intellectual development. Authoritarian regimes intensify this tendency by dissolving independent unions, parties, and educational spaces, thereby centralizing ideological production within the state. Gramsci warned that, when subaltern institutions are weakened or absorbed, political crises are more likely to result not in transformative new hegemonies, but in the rise of charismatic leaders and authoritarian consolidation. The standardization of education is not merely a pedagogical concern, but a political strategy that shapes the conditions of possibility for subaltern resistance.

Lefebvre and the Right to the City: Space, Power, and Resistance

We problematize socialized capital or unrecognized cultural capital of the subaltern and underscore the significance of history in this article. To offer a constructive contribution to studies concerning the right to the city. The query "Can the subaltern speak?" holds not just political weight but also poses revolutionary epistemological ramifications. Moreover, the question "Where are 'the subaltern' groups?" carries geopolitical implications and therefore necessitates continual reevaluation. We aim to position Lefebvre, a pioneering figure in studies in this sphere. Lefebvre, an advocate of radical democracy, into the correlation between space and human interaction and analyzed it critically.

Human agency within lived space differs significantly from that of perceived and conceived spaces as it affords inhabitants the opportunity to engage in creative practices that can facilitate the reproduction of diverse social and spatial configurations. Lefebvre discerns this multi- faceted dimension within the prevailing capitalist context, in which unequal social relations serve both as influences and outcomes of societal, political struggles, and resistance.[14] Lived space has the potential to reshape social constructs and therefore emerges as a locus for contention and resistance among its residents. Lefebvre redirects the focus of geopolitics from international relations and politics towards local groups and their historical, social, and political power dynamics. Essentially, this shift entails a move from the macro-level landscape of power relations and conflicts to a micro-level perspective. Moreover, Lefebvre viewed space not only as a site for political struggles and a product of social control but also as essential for spatial reproduction and the alteration of social relationships. Within Lefebvre's framework, lived space constituted the critical arena in which inhabitants can confront exclusionary relationships in their daily lives. While his rationale for involving inhabitants in the production of space was valid, he also suggested that, the effective realization of a transformative social milieu depends on strategies for citizen engagement in social reproduction.[15] Lefebvre drew inspiration from scrutinizing spatial relationships in everyday urban contexts, that underpinned his critiques of state planning practices and informed his theory of the nexus between inhabitation and 'the right to the city':

> Only groups, social classes and class fractions capable of revolutionary initiative can take over and realize to fruition solutions to urban problems. It is from these social and political forces that the renewed city will become the oeuvre. The first thing to do is to defeat currently dominant strategies and ideologies... The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life... Only the working-class can become the agent, the social carrier or suppoty of this realization.[16]

[14] Henri Lefebvre's concepts of perceived space, conceived space, and lived space offer distinct perspectives on understanding the complexities of spatial experience. Perceived space refers to the immediate sensory experience of space, while conceived space pertains to abstract representations and plans created by societal actors. Lived space, on the other hand, encompasses the subjective, everyday experiences and interactions that individuals or communities have with space. Together, these concepts illuminate the multifaceted nature of space, bridging the gap between its physical reality and social construction, thus providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing spatial dynamics. Henri Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith Donald, The Production of Space, vol. 142. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

[15] Neil Brenner, "Geographies of Globalization," *Public Culture*, 1997, 10.1: 135-167.

[16] Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, Trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) Lebas, 154:158.

Lefebvre asserted that when referencing the right to the city, the 'periphery' of the city and its marginalized informal environments must also be considered His theory lies at the core of broader approaches for modern societies, aiming to enable democratic citizen involvement in decisions and processes leading to societal transformation and development.[17] The periphery of the city holds a unique position as a geopolitical space. The relationship of these spaces to the socialized capital of the city (the different forms of capital reproduced by dominant groups) is highly complex. The term "marginalized informal environment" also refers to more than just economic-political dimensions a daily life in such communities, provides a critical perspective to think beyond marginalized groups deprived of legal rights and excluded from economic capital, towards social relations that reproduce subalternity. In parallel to Spivak's criticisms, Lefebvre critiqued the social relations that reproduce subalternity, going beyond the individual rights of people living on the outskirts of the city. He called for revitalized right to urban life based on a comprehensive understanding of the city and its urban fabric, emphasizing collective dynamics that shape and sustain society rather than individual entitlements.[18]

One of the fundamental principles underpinning the concept of 'the right to the city' is the utilization and reclamation of both the physical and social aspects of urban spaces to address the diverse needs of its inhabitants as they navigate their daily lives within the urban environment.[19] These needs extend beyond those typically prized by dominant classes in affluent societies. For instance, the right to education cannot be reduced to merely providing access to schools for marginalized groups residing on the outskirts—an approach that risk perpetuating subordination, as highlighted by Spivak's critique. The essence of the right to the city lies in the act of appropriation, which goes beyond mere physical occupation of urban spaces to encompass the assertion of residents' entitlement to engage with, structure, and cultivate social relationships to reflect their aspirations.[20] This caution serves as a reminder that the concept of the right to the city should not portray marginalized urban dwellers as passive groups devoid of rights, reliant solely on concessions from the dominant segments of society. Likewise, the right to the city should not be co-opted to serve the interests of the dominant factions within urban communities. Rather, citizens must have the capacity to counterbalance the authoritative influences of both the state and market mechanisms when necessary.[21] Thus, the notion of the 'right to participation' transcends mere presence in designated and has enbodied a deeper significance for urban governance.

Moreover, the concept of the right to participation highlights the inadequacies of existing mechanisms in effectively engaging marginalized groups.[22] Calls for not only acknowledging the cultural capital inherent in these groups as a result of their societal position but also fostering the exchange and integration of these diverse capitals into the public discourse. Implementing Lefebvre's theoretical framework and offering actionable recommendations for reforming legal and governance structures in alignment with it has presented significant challenges. Lefebvre's innovative scholarly contributions extend the discourse beyond traditional analyses centered on economic and political factors to include social, cultural, and ideological dimensions in understanding urban processes. Nevertheless, the transition from theoretical propositions to practical applications has been by the absence of well-defined legal strategies delineating the path forward.[23]

Lefebvre claimed that knowledge accumulates and becomes capitalized like objects and money. This capitalized knowledge reproduces 'ideology of hierarchy.' Academic knowledge is marked, administered, and institutionalized by the ruling class. Students from marginalized backgrounds become alienated from this knowledge. The organization,

[17] Lefebvre, Writings on Cities, p. 65;86. See the chapter 'Industrialization and Urbanization'.

[18] David Harvey, "The Right to The City," In: *Citizenship Rights* (Routledge: Routledge Publishing, 2017), 465-482.

[19] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 147;160, see the chapter "The Right to the City".

[20] Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York City: Guilford Press, 2003).

[21] Mario Rui Martins, "The Theory of Social Space in the Work of Henri Lefebvre," *Forrest, R., Hendersen,[19]*, 1982.

[22] Peter Marcuse, "From Critical Urban Theory to the Right to the City," *City*, 2009, 13.2-3: 185-197.

[23] Edésio Fernandes, "Constructing the Right to the City'in Brazil," *Social & Legal Studies*, 2007, 16.2: 201-219.

administration, content, and language of education, as well as administrative relations within educational institutions, leisure time, and many other factors, are regulated solely by the ruling class. For children raised with the cultural capital of the ruling class, these public spaces do not represent a 'sharp break' from their private spaces. The schoolchildren of ruling class families continue their 'habitual' spatial practices, essentially continuing their everyday lives. Conversely, for children from marginalized families or groups, school environments represent an 'inhabituall' spatiality, a struggle for recognition. The ruling class's socialized capital, alienated from the unrecognized cultural capital of the subaltern, coexist within the same space but remain unrecognized by each other. The ruling class lives in these 'lived' spaces by attributing historical and cultural meanings to them, thereby, reproducing historical and asymmetric power relations. Lefebvre emphasizes that humans do not simply produce material things or services but also produce history.[24] Lefebvre's critiques of bureaucratized schooling, along with his emphasis on the importance of history in that criticisms, bring him close to Spivak. Furthermore, his discussion of the role of capitalized knowledge in education opens up a dialogue with Bourdieu.

Conclusion

This article began not with the search for a solution, but with a refusal: a refusal to treat educational inequality as a technical problem solvable by administrative goodwill and bureaucratic reform. The promise of equal access, so often repeated in policy documents and institutional rhetoric, remains a hollow gesture when the structural foundations of inequality are left intact. What is offered as reform is, in truth, the aestheticization of domination—an invitation for the subaltern to compete in a race that was never meant to be fair, in institutions that were never designed for them. We have argued that the problem does not lie in the failure to implement equality, but in the very conceptualization of what equality means, who defines it, and through which institutions it is mediated. To offer solutions without rethinking the institutions that shape the question is to misrecognize the problem. The university, the school, the city are not neutral spaces awaiting better policies. They are historically sedimented function of capitalized power, embedded in coloniality, class violence, and the strategic forgetting of resistance. Therefore, the aim should not be 'fix' or reforme these institutions but to denaturalize them—to insist that what appears as inevitable is in fact historically produced and politically maintained. This requires not reform, but rupture.

Elite universities often tout their commitment to diversity by highlighting policies that favor 'first-generation college students.' On the surface, these measures appear inclusive and progressive. In practice, however, they function as institutional cosmetics—symbolic gestures that leave the underlying architecture of privilege intact. The success stories of a handful of students from families with non-academic backrounds become highly marketable assets: they adorn brochures, grace alumni magazines, and circulate as proof that meritocracy is alive and well. Yet these students are exceptions, not the rule—they are carefully curated tokens of inclusion that do not disturb the deeper patterns of exclusion. Terms like 'holistic admissions' and 'access initiatives' are often deployed to manage crises of legitimacy. When an elite institution admits a student from a marginalized background, it does not dismantle structural inequality —it aestheticizes it. It transforms a systemic failure into a redemptive narrative, suitable for institutional self-congratulation. Meanwhile, the vast majority of those excluded remain unseen and unheard—outside the gates, beyond the discourse. These gestures reduce the concept of 'access' to a form of institutional branding. Equality cannot be achieved by inserting a few anomalies into the margins of the system; it requires interrogating the system's very foundations. Yet that is precisely what such institutions refuse to do: they will not question the accumulated history, epistemic violence, and accumulated capital that form the basis of their own prestige. The 'first-gen' label, then, becomes not a recognition of structural injustice, but a decorative signifier—something to be displayed, not dismantled. Justice in education begins not with benevolent exceptions, but with structural questions: Who gets to define merit? Whose knowledge is

[24] Sue Middleton, "Henri Lefebvre on Education: Critique and Pedagogy," *Policy Futures in Education*, 2017, 15.4: 410-426.

legitimized? Which forms of capital are rewarded, and which are erased? Without these questions, inclusion becomes a performance—and equity, a myth curated for the comfort of those already inside.

This system, under the guise of meritocracy and institutional neutrality, actively reproduces hierarchies through mechanisms that are deeply spatial, epistemic, and class-based. It is not that our institutions are broken; it is that they are working exactly as designed—to protect the privileges of dominant classes while rendering subaltern voices invisible, inaudible, and ultimately unintelligible. To challenge this regime, one must go beyond the liberal prescriptions of "access" and "inclusion" and confront the foundational violence upon which educational and urban institutions are built. When we speak of the 'right to the city,' we are not merely advocating for equitable distribution of urban resources; we are demanding the dismantling of a spatial order that criminalizes informality, erases vernacular knowledges, and conditions participation on assimilation to dominant norms. The city, under capitalism, is not a neutral terrain—it is a battleground where socialized capital is accumulated and protected through violence both soft and hard. What is at stake is not simply whether subaltern groups can access dominant institutions, but whether the very terms of recognition and participation can be transformed. Lefebvre's analysis should remind us that to reclaim the right to the city is to claim a right to inhabit, to transform, and to create space—not merely live within it under surveillance. Spivak argued that even when the subaltern spoke, her voice remained unheard because the structures that determined the conditions of hearing had not been dismantled. Bourdieu demonstrated how capital is naturalized as ability, and exclusion is rationalized as failure. Educational institutions, therefore, are not failed sites of social mobility, but critical nodes in the spatial and symbolic reproduction of class power. They are not bridges between periphery and center; they are borders.

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