

From Interpretative Disjunction to Dialectical Conception: A “Representation–Power–Ethics–Resistance” Framework for Spatial Justice and Its Application to *Brick Lane*

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Abstract

This article proposes a four-dimensional “representation–power–ethics–resistance” framework to engage with the interpretative disjunction in literary spatial justice studies. The framework draws on widely recognised insights from Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward W. Soja, and Fredric Jameson as interconnected analytical prompts, seeking to transform theoretical tensions into a productive dialectical structure. As a flexible heuristic, it facilitates a dialogical movement across ideological decoding, political-economic critique, ethical engagement with marginalised subjects, and utopian spatial resistance. Its reflexivity is brought into dialogue with Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, where the novel’s textual complexities challenge and refine the framework’s presuppositions. The analysis attempts to bring to light the interwoven mechanisms of racial, gendered, and capitalist power in immigrant spaces, while highlighting how the protagonist reconstructs spatial meaning and subjectivity through conditional practices understood as a form of internal spatial transformation. The article suggests that the framework may function less as a definitive model than as a dynamic analytical terrain, one that directs critical attention to specific configurations of spatial justice while remaining receptive to revision by textual particularities. In this capacity, it seeks to illuminate how literature opens cognitive and practical pathways towards imagining just spaces.

Keywords: spatial justice; four-dimensional analytical framework; theoretical tensions; heuristic device; *Brick Lane*

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Introduction

Global urbanisation is reshaping the human living environment at an unprecedented pace. It brings latent structural contradictions in spatial resource allocation to the forefront and transforms them into acute social crises. Whether manifested in waves of gentrification, the proliferation of gated communities, or spatial discipline shaped by racial and gendered power mechanisms, these phenomena attest to a pervasive lack of spatial justice. At the heart of this deficit lies the comprehensive infiltration of political power and capitalist logic into the production and distribution of space. Against this backdrop, literary narrative, with its unique capacity to capture spatial experience and employ metaphor creatively, has become an incisive medium for responding to these pressing issues.

As a bearer of social imagination and affective experience, literary narrative functions in its own right as a cognitive lens that resists spatial injustice. On the one hand, it encodes spatial imagery to expose the collusion between power and capital. For instance, Charles Dickens's depiction of polarised communities in *Oliver Twist* (1838) reveals how industrial capital and legislative power collaborated during the Victorian era to confine the impoverished to designated urban zones. On the other hand, literature translates abstract theoretical critique into concretised affective structures and individual lived realities. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the kitchen of Dinah, an enslaved Black woman, is portrayed as a site of dual disciplinary power under race and gender; her act of defying her mistress's instructions regarding the kitchen layout transforms this mundane space into a "space of power struggle and opposition" (Park 2020, 158). This narrative move not only vividly materialises the micro-mechanisms of power under slavery, but also endows a marginalised figure with spatially embodied practices of resistance, evoking in readers both ethical consciousness of and emotional resonance with structural oppression. In this way, literary narrative renders invisible power relations perceptible, relatable, and open to potential subversion. This dual capacity of literary space for critique and construction has profoundly redefined the scholarly landscape of contemporary literary studies.

Literary spatial studies have now moved beyond the contextualised scenic depiction of spatial backgrounds to actively engage with issues of social justice. Scholars widely conceive of space as a field co-constructed by social forces like power, capital, and law. From this critical perspective, several distinct but linked research paths have developed, each centred on different analytical scales and contextual frames. First, from the perspective of material structures and political-economic critique, studies reveal how inequality is embedded and solidified within physical space. For instance, Lia Sloth Calhoun (2018), by analysing the representation of "bad housing" in literature, argues that spatial injustice is a product of systemic power operations. Michael P. Hatch (2021) dissects how the collusion of law and capital in *Bleak House* (1853) produces London's consequential stratified geography. Second, research focusing on specific spatial types and paradoxes of justice examines how spaces such as oceans and frontiers, with their

distinctive attributes, shape particular power dynamics and ethical dilemmas (Bernstein 2025; Porto 2024; Puxan-Oliva 2018). Third, studies centring on the experience and subjectivity of marginalised groups investigate the intersection of race, gender, class, and other social axes within space, exploring how the embodied experiences of refugees, Indigenous peoples, and others challenge existing power frameworks. For example, Paola A. Nardi (2022) analyses the systemic spatial dispossession faced by African-American communities, while Christopher Pexa (2023) draws on the relationality between human and non-human ecologies in Indigenous worldviews to offer a decolonial ethical perspective for reimagining spatial justice.

Spanning macro structures, specific spatial fields, and micro experiences, these three trajectories constitute a rich interpretative spectrum, demonstrating the vitality and depth of literary spatial studies. However, alongside this multidimensional expansion, a methodological segregation and imbalance have quietly taken shape. Research on material structural critique prioritises deconstructing power-capital collusion but neglects individual ethical depictions and resistant agency; studies on marginal spatial/experiential narratives vividly show oppression and identity formation yet fail to anchor them in macro-politico-economic analysis. This separation creates a critical interpretative rift: Existing research diagnoses a particular facet of spatial injustice incisively but lacks a coherent, flexible framework to analyse how literary narratives dynamically engage with it through integrated, dialogical analysis. This engagement ranges from ideological decoding and ethical experience to resistant imagination. In short, it excels at deconstruction but falters in constructive, integrative interpretation.

To move from diagnosis to imagination and to weave together the presently fragmented insights of the field, this article proposes a four-dimensional analytical framework for spatial justice: “representation–power–ethics–resistance.” Rooted in Henri Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space as its philosophical foundation, the framework critically incorporates several distinct theoretical perspectives, including David Harvey’s critique of political economy, Edward W. Soja’s Thirdspace ethical concerns, and the resistant aesthetics within Fredric Jameson’s cognitive mapping. What distinguishes the framework is its attempt to hold these dimensions in productive friction rather than synthesising them into a seamless whole. A text may intensify the contradiction between structural determination and experiential possibility without resolving it; the framework is designed to track such movements. The framework’s engagement with these theorists is necessarily selective, isolating those emphases—representation, capital logic, ethical spatiality, utopian cognition—that have proved most productive for literary analysis. What follows is a laying of the groundwork for this framework; its fuller systematisation and application across a wider corpus remain tasks for future work.

This study pursues three interrelated aims: first, to transform the theoretical tensions into an operative analytical structure by synthesising the insights of Lefebvre, Harvey, Soja, and Jameson into the four-dimensional “representation–power–ethics–resistance”

framework; second, to operationalise this framework through an interpretation of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), demonstrating how it directs critical attention to specific configurations of spatial injustice; and third, to test the framework's presuppositions against the novel's textual complexities, treating points of resistance or excess not as failures but as productive provocations that can refine the framework's own dimensions. The article thus follows a trajectory in which framework and text are brought into reciprocal questioning. Rather than claiming to resolve all theoretical tensions, the analysis proceeds by putting the framework at risk in the encounter with textual specificity, allowing the text's resistances to the framework to become part of the argument. Ultimately, the article seeks to illuminate the distinctive role of literature in mediating between the critique of unjust spaces and the difficult work of imagining just ones.

Anchoring Theoretical Tensions: Literary Translation and the Interpretative Predicament of Spatial Justice Theories

Spatial justice, emerging from the contemporary urban context, has become a core category within theories of justice, paralleling the increasing socialisation and politicisation of spatial production. Since South African geographer Gordon H. Pirie first explicitly introduced the term "spatial justice" in his 1983 article "On Spatial Justice," research in this field has continually expanded in both theory and practice. Its conceptual foundation lies in a critical reflection on the relationship between space and social justice. Lefebvre's political proposition of the "right to the city" emphasises that residents have the "right to be present in all circuits of decision making leading to the control and development of the organisation of social space" (Martins 1982, 183). Harvey, in *Social Justice and the City* (1973), points out that "considerations of social justice have not been incorporated into geographical methods of analysis" (96). Soja further links spatial justice to the right to the city, defining the pursuit of spatial justice as "fighting for the right to the city," that is, for "greater control over how the spaces in which we live are socially produced" (2010, 7), thereby steering related research from philosophical reflection towards empirical investigation. In recent years, case studies by scholars such as George Francis-Kelly (2020) and James W. Scott (2024) have revealed the crucial role of community self-determination and local empowerment in addressing structural spatial injustice.

However, while sociological studies of spatial justice excel at using political economy to analyse macro mechanisms such as capital monopoly and institutional exclusion, they often fail to adequately capture the lived experiences and affective structures of individuals impacted by spatial injustice. This absence of the human dimension creates an opportunity for literary studies to intervene. Spatial justice concerns not only resource distribution but also emotional belonging and meaning-making. As Yi-Fu Tuan observes in *Space and Place* (2001), a sense of place stems from the emotional bonds between individuals and their surroundings, a space where "our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss" (137). When dominant spatial discourses neglect or

deny the emotional attachments of marginalised groups to specific places, this act itself constitutes a form of covert spatial injustice. Literature is particularly adept at exposing such injustices: Contemporary literary depictions of urban transformation, migrant conflicts, and class stratification resonate deeply with and complement these sociological critiques. Through unique narrative strategies, literature translates abstract ethics of spatial justice into affective cues perceptible and relatable to readers. As Winfried Fluck argues, literature can “articulate aspects of individual experience that are erased by broad social classifications” (2003, 27–28) and “make up for experiences of injustice by increased recognition and by establishing justice on a symbolic level” (2003, 22).

However, when literary studies seeks to invoke spatial justice theory to deepen its critique, it first confronts the inherent complexity of the theoretical resources themselves. After half a century of development, theories of spatial justice remain pluralistic, fragmented, and often disconnected. The theories of Lefebvre, Harvey, Soja, and other spatial critical theorists do not constitute a smoothly evolving sequence, but rather a contested terrain of ongoing dialogue and debate regarding the roots, critical focuses, and emancipatory paths of spatial injustice. Yet the difficulty for literary criticism lies not merely in their complexity, but in the competing demands they place on interpretation: How can a single interpretative framework address ideological coding and capitalist logic simultaneously, while also attending to both immediate micro-experiences and the need for systemic transformation?

To address this dilemma, we first map the key tensions between these theoretical demands, beginning with their respective accounts of the core dynamics of spatial injustice. Lefebvre views space as a dynamic field of ideological encoding and contested social relations, emphasising power’s infiltration of everyday life through representation. Harvey anchors the root of spatial injustice in the inherent contradictions of capitalist accumulation, highlighting the determining force of political-economic structures. This divergence forms a fundamental tension between them: Whereas Lefebvre centres on space as a social process and a battlefield of meaning-making, stressing cultural representation and everyday life, Harvey prioritises space as capital’s immanent logic and coercive structure, emphasising economic determinism and material structures. Their divergent yet complementary perspectives pose the fundamental question of spatial injustice’s primary cause: ideological coding, or the logic of capital?

Beyond these tensions over the core drivers of spatial injustice, theoretical paths further diverge significantly regarding emancipatory possibilities for spatial justice. Soja’s Thirdspace epistemology focuses on the embodied experiences of marginalised groups, seeking immediate empowerment by deconstructing centre-periphery power structures. At its core is the project of opening possibilities for differential coexistence within the immediacy of everyday space. In contrast, Jameson’s cognitive mapping confronts the “hyperspace” dilemma produced by global capital expansion—one in which the urban

fabric is reshaped by the logic of capital, and individual experience grows increasingly disconnected from macro-economic structures. This project aims to construct cognitive bridges for individuals through cultural practices like literature and art, pointing towards a future-oriented and collective political imagination. The former emphasises concrete, localised ethical intervention, leveraging micro practices to enact spatial justice; the latter focuses on totalising, forward-looking political vision, coalescing emancipatory forces through macro cognition.

This dual tension, which exists between ideological critique and political-economic critique and between present empowerment and future projection, places literary criticism at a hermeneutic crossroads. How can a single work both decode the ideological inscriptions within spatial imagery and reveal the underlying, inexorable logic of capital accumulation? How can it vividly render the embodied experiences of marginalised groups for empowerment, while also constructing within its narrative a holistic imagination that transcends the present and points towards future alternatives? Existing literary criticism, often reliant on a single theoretical approach, frequently faces a dilemma when encountering complex texts: Focusing on political-economic critique may reduce sensitivity to micro experiences and subjectivities, while immersion in thick descriptions of marginal experience may compromise the grasp of macro structures.

On this basis, the central task in fostering a deeper dialogue between literary studies and spatial justice theory is to construct a comprehensive analytical framework that actively engages with and mediates the aforementioned theoretical tensions. Such a framework seeks to transform these two key tensions into a productive dialogical structure for literary criticism, prompting researchers to ask: How do texts reveal the complicity between the naturalisation of ideology and the reification of capital's logic? And how does their sustained engagement with marginal experience nurture a utopian impulse to reconfigure totalising relations? The four-dimensional framework of "representation–power–ethics–resistance," proposed below, is a direct response to these theoretical impasses and practical challenges of literary analysis: Lefebvre's theory of ideological representation and Harvey's critique of capital accumulation primarily inform its "representation" and "power" dimensions; Soja's Thirdspace ethics and Jameson's cognitive mapping of resistance underpin its "ethics" and "resistance" dimensions. Rather than a mere synthesis of theories, it converts the two key tensions into a dialectical analytical chain to enable fruitful dialogue across different levels of inquiry. It is thus intended to equip literary criticism with a flexible mechanism for moving between macro and micro, deconstruction and construction, critique and imagination, thereby more fully revealing the complex logic and holistic dynamics of literary narrative's engagement with spatial justice.

Towards the Dialectical Construction: The Four-Dimensional “Representation–Power–Ethics–Resistance” Analytical Framework

To effectively reconcile the dual tensions between ideological critique and political-economic analysis, and between micro empowerment and macro planning, this article attempts to construct a four-dimensional critical framework of “representation–power–ethics–resistance.” It commits to forging the core theoretical insights of Lefebvre, Harvey, Soja, and Jameson into a set of interconnected, dynamically dialogical analytical dimensions, all serving as analytical prompts for interpreting spatial justice narratives in literary texts. Rather than treating these concerns as separate analytical compartments, the framework interweaves them into four continuously interacting dimensions. “Representation” begins with the ideological coding of spatial imagery and attends equally to the subjective decoding processes through which readers and characters resist or reproduce these codes. “Power” traces the politico-economic roots and institutional violence behind spatial production, asking whose interests are served when urban space is restructured. “Ethics” turns to the embodied experiences of those displaced or silenced by these arrangements, examining how marginal subjects construct place identity against the grain of dominant spatial logics. “Resistance” explores the utopian impulses embedded in narrative practice itself: how texts prefigure alternative spatial schemes through the imaginative reconfiguration of lived space. What holds these dimensions together is not a fixed sequence but a dialectical rhythm: Each dimension, when pursued far enough, calls the others into play. The critic might enter at any point, decoding a single spatial sign, tracing a displacement narrative, or mapping a character’s utopian detour, and find the analysis pulling towards the remaining dimensions. This open structure is deliberate. It refuses the temptation to collapse literary complexity into a linear diagnostic procedure, insisting instead that the passage between symbolic representation and social structure, between individual experience and historical totality, remains perpetually in motion.

To read space representationally is to refuse the temptation to treat setting as mere backdrop. Lefebvre’s production of space theory provides the initial impetus for this refusal. Space, he insists, is never a passive container but a dynamic “(social) product” continually reshaped by the trialectics of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. The force of this insight for literary criticism lies in its methodological corollary: When representations of space “intervene in and modify spatial textures which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology” (Lefebvre 1991, 42), they do so not only in the material world but in the textual world as well. A novel’s stark demarcation between slum and upmarket residential area, for instance, does not simply reflect social reality; it actively encodes class division as natural, inevitable, and as if it were not historically produced. The critic’s task, then, is to treat such spatial signs as sites of ideological labour, to ask not merely what they mean but how they come to mean, how they obscure their own historical production, and how literary writing itself might function as a counter-practice of representational spaces that challenges hegemonic spatial codes.

Yet ideological coding, however densely woven, does not exhaust the forces that produce spatial injustice. Harvey's historical-geographical materialism offers a way to move beyond the signifier towards the politico-economic roots and institutional violence that structure resource distribution in the first place. Capitalist spatial production, Harvey argues, operates as a continuous "spatial fix," which is a strategy of geographical restructuring designed to "re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (2005, 19). What this means for literary analysis is that gentrification, eviction, and spatial segregation cannot be treated as symptoms of ideological mystification alone; they are structural operations with identifiable material agents. Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" names one such operation: the appropriation of "already accumulated wealth ... by certain sectors of capital without any regard for investing in production" (2020, 121). In narrative texts, this logic surfaces not as abstract theory but as concrete scenes of predatory development, the legal mechanisms of displacement, the coalition of real-estate capital and zoning regulations that enforce social cleansing. The critic working in this register asks: Which forces, legal or economic, are shown to produce and police spatial arrangements? And how does the text make palpable the violence of dispossession not merely by representing it but by registering its pressure on bodies and communities?

Structural oppression, however, does not operate in the abstract. It lands on specific bodies, in specific places, at specific times. The question that follows is not simply what forces produce spatial injustice, but whose lives are rendered superfluous in the process, and whether the text makes space for experiences that dominant spatial logics deem invisible or expendable. Marshall W. Gregory's observation that human actions, being the result of imagination and choice, are "always subject to moral and ethical evaluation" (1998, 196) acquires particular urgency here: The production and distribution of space are never neutral technical operations but ethical practices with differential consequences. Soja's Thirdspace epistemology complicates this further. Rather than treating space as either material container (Firstspace) or mental projection (Secondspace), Thirdspace names "the simultaneously real and imagined 'other spaces' in which we live" (Borch 2002, 113). It is a realm that deconstructs the binaries of material/mental and centre/margin, opening towards what is not yet codified by dominant spatial regimes. For literary criticism, Thirdspace offers a methodological injunction: to read not only what the text says about marginal subjects, but how the text itself might become a space where suppressed voices reconstitute their subjectivity, where the sensory textures of displacement (the smell of temporary housing, the sound of a severed community) resist translation into the administrative language of urban renewal. Ethical practice, in this sense, exceeds the depiction of the Other's lifeworld; it involves tracing how literary form itself might transform space from a disciplinary instrument into an arena where multiple subjects coexist without being subsumed into a single hegemonic order.

To render visible the silenced is not to guarantee their liberation. The articulation of marginal experience carries within it a further potential: the possibility that established spatial orders might be not merely endured but actively dismantled, and that alternative configurations might be imagined from within the very constraints they seek to transcend. Jameson's aesthetics of cognitive mapping provides a vocabulary for this double movement. Conceived as a response to the disorientation of postmodern "hyperspace," cognitive mapping seeks to restore the connection between personal experience and the totality of global capital through cultural practice, enabling us to "again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle" (Jameson 1991, 54). Yet this mapping is not a passive cartographic exercise. As Eva T. H. Brann reminds us, imagination "serves our worldly existence by pulling us out of its dumb immediacy" (1991, 798). Raji Vallury makes the political stakes explicit: Utopian imagination is no "abdication of the present for the escape into an impossible future" (2016, 292); rather, it shares with cognitive mapping a commitment to continuously probing what else space might become, thereby reshaping political subjectivity and collective agency in the here and now. What emerges in literary texts is a poetics of resistance articulated through concrete spatial practices: diasporic transgression, communal self-determined restructuring, and the reclamation of abandoned places. These are not merely thematic contents but formal operations, ways of re-routing spatial meaning that forge individual or collective experience into critical spatial manifestos.

These four dimensions form a dynamic system that is interpenetrating and cyclical. In concrete analysis, the unfolding of any single dimension inevitably summons the intervention of the others. Consider a novel set against the backdrop of an ongoing gentrification process in a certain locale. Analysis guided by the "representation" dimension would first decode the promotional rhetoric and luxury architecture as ideological signs that mask social cleansing. The "power" dimension would then connect these signs to the coalition of real-estate capital and zoning regulations that enforce displacement. Turning to "ethics," the critic would attend to the textures of loss (the sensory deprivation of temporary housing, the severing of community ties) while the "resistance" dimension would examine how characters' practices of squatting, memorial-making, or storytelling reconstitute space as a site of solidarity, thereby articulating a counter-cognitive map that links individual suffering to systemic forces.

That the analysis circulates non-linearly among the four dimensions lends the framework a dynamic openness, yet this is not to say that it lacks theoretical emphases or inherent blind spots. Focused on socio-political critique, it excels at systematically revealing the core issues of spatial justice, yet its preoccupation with textual representation means it says little about real geographies of cultural production and consumption, and the reader it posits is an ideal or normative one rather than an empirical audience. Furthermore, it has limited capacity to capture pre-linguistic, affective, and atmospheric dimensions of spatial experience. Such affective resonances, difficult to decode semiotically, require a supplementary analysis of textual aesthetic

qualities. Similarly, with regard to narrative formal elements that constitute the metalanguage of spatial politics (such as shifts in narrative perspective and rhythmic variations), the framework tends to embed them into its dimensional analyses rather than conduct independent formal critique. Therefore, applying the framework demands heightened sensitivity to textual particularities: The weighting of each dimension can be flexibly adjusted; when textual details exceed its interpretive boundaries, they should be embraced as opportunities to revise and supplement the framework or to initiate dialogue with other theories. The value of this framework does not lie in exhausting a text's meanings but in serving as a heuristic tool that directs attention to specific dynamics and, crucially, remains open to correction through dialogue with the text.

In summary, this four-dimensional dialectical framework aims to serve as a dynamic medium connecting theoretical critique and textual practice. It requires researchers, in close textual analysis, to move between and shift focus across multi-dimensional perspectives, anchoring spatial justice in concrete historical and social contexts while discerning the inherent political potential of literary form. The following analysis, using Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* as a case study, concretely demonstrates the framework's analytical logic and application approaches, revealing how the work presents the multiple operational logics of spatial injustice within the complex field of cultural conflict, gendered politics, and identity formation, and examining how textual details challenge the framework's presuppositions and contribute to its further theoretical refinement.

Reflective Intertextuality: Testing and Critically Refining the Framework through the Spatial Justice Narrative of *Brick Lane*

Brick Lane renders the apartment of a Bengali immigrant couple in London as a microcosm of the tensions generated under global capitalism. These tensions arise amidst racial marginalisation, capital penetration, patriarchal spatial discipline, and the awakening of individual subjectivity. This cramped apartment functions both as a protective shell against external racial discrimination and as an arena for internal power struggles and ethical conflicts. It is this dual nature that makes its spatial production and the contestation over meaning-making a vivid illustration of the dynamic interplay within the "representation–power–ethics–resistance" four-dimensional framework. Here, the symbolic performance of representation and the spatial arrangement of power reinforce each other, while the inscription of ethical sensibilities and the permeation of everyday resistance continually loosen the boundaries of this structure. Through the dual construction of spatial meaning by Nazneen and her husband Chanu, and through the entanglement of oppression and resistance, the novel not only provides a concrete test case for the framework but also, in doing so, brings into sharp relief the structural contradictions of immigrant spatial justice and the complexity of individual subversion. It should be stressed that the reading that follows is not intended as an original or exhaustive interpretation of the novel. Its primary purpose is to demonstrate how the

four-dimensional framework can be operationalised, and to test its presuppositions against the complexities of the text.

On the “representation” dimension, the flat embodies the impulse to symbolise diasporic experience. Chanu builds a wall of certificates as a symbolic bastion against racial discrimination and a means of affirming his self-worth, thereby concealing his own economic marginality. “There were plates on the wall, attached by hooks and wires, which were not for eating from but only for display. ... His certificates were framed and mixed with the plates” (Ali 2004, 21). These framed certificates, intermingled with the ornamental plates, imply Chanu’s attempt to convert cultural capital into displayable material signs in the hope of acquiring exchange value. Yet this accumulation of signs fails to translate into either economic or effective social capital. Pierre Bourdieu argues that cultural capital can be converted into economic capital only “on certain conditions,” its efficacy depending on “the field in which it functions” (2002, 281). If the realisation of economic capital still depends on recognition within the field, then social capital, which relies even more on social relationships and group acknowledgement, is all the more rootless in Chanu’s case. His certificate wall, therefore, is not a productive investment but a purely symbolic declaration. He boasts to Dr Azad: “‘Within months I will be a fully fledged academic with two degrees’” (Ali 2004, 33). The novel reveals, however, that when cultural capital is relocated to a field that refuses to acknowledge its legitimacy, all conversion attempts fail: For six years he has “not been late on one single day” yet has never received a promotion (Ali 2004, 33); he arrives in Britain with his degree from Dhaka University, believing “there would be a red carpet laid out for me [Chanu]” (Ali 2004, 34), but these qualifications are systematically ignored in the racialised labour market. Certificates may possess symbolic value in Bangladesh, but here, like the plates, they serve only as hollow decorations on the wall.

This failed attempt to solidify identity through material signs is not unique to Chanu. The novel embeds a subtler counterpart in Dr Azad—the row of snow globes on his consulting desk, which equally expose the fragility and futility of representation. These “sleeping underwater towns,” when shaken, “were whipped with a white explosion” and then quickly settled back into stillness (Ali 2004, 66). Azad dismisses them as “[c]hildren’s things” (Ali 2004, 66) without explaining why they sit on his desk. The ambiguity of this image forms a critical irony directed at Chanu’s logic of representation. While Chanu’s certificate wall seeks to solidify the appearance of immigrant success through a static, ostentatious accumulation of signs, the snow globes expose the fragile nature of such representation. A “storm” of racial discrimination, economic marginalisation, and cultural dislocation can at any moment plunge them into chaos. Françoise Král points out that what truly matters is not the detail of the landscape within the snow globes but the symbol of “a world immune to change” and “the idea of preserving a place the way it used to be” (2009, 80). Azad consoles himself with the thought that “everything settle[s] back down” (Ali 2004, 429), which is no more than an aestheticising rhetoric that masks structural violence. This rhetoric aligns with the postmodern quality of the snow globe: “[I]ts solidity and the permanence it evokes work

as an antidote to the chronic lack of bearings experienced by the diasporic subject” (Král 2009, 81), but such simulated permanence is ultimately an illusion. Azad, a fellow diasporic intellectual, despite his professional identity as a doctor, likewise fails to convert his cultural capital into effective social capital and cannot truly integrate into the British middle class. Thus the snow globes and the certificate wall lead to the same destination: Both attempt to capture and fix fluid, traumatic immigrant experience through materialised symbolic forms, only to end up as props of self-deception.

On the “power” dimension, the apartment becomes a material carrier where racialised economic oppression intertwines with patriarchal discipline. As a Bangladeshi intellectual who immigrated to Britain in the 1970s, Chanu is forced into low-wage manual labour in the white-dominated labour market—his brown skin stigmatising him as one of the “dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan” (Ali 2004, 28), lumped together with Bengali peasants. His marginalisation stems from the structural segregation of the labour market under the global economic order, a macro-level oppression that is further projected onto living spaces. They are trapped in marginal neighbourhoods like Dogwood, enduring poky, squalid apartments: The spatial exile of immigrant bodies driven by the logic of capital accumulation leaves marginalised groups “dispossessed of their rights, of their access to good areas of the city to live in” (Harvey 2020, 123). Meanwhile, Chanu’s racialised disempowerment is compensated for, at the microscopic level, through patriarchal discipline. He monopolises spatial arrangement and forbids Nazneen from going out alone, forging the family space into a gendered disciplinary power field. He declares: “If you [Nazneen] go out ... I will look like a fool” (Ali 2004, 45). Under such discipline, Nazneen is confined to private spheres like the kitchen and bedroom; her bodily movements and spatial practices are subordinated to husband-centred rules, reducing her to a dominated spatial object. The racial discrimination and disempowerment Chanu suffers in the external workplace find relief through his absolute control over her.

Chanu and Nazneen’s apartment illustrates the direct repression of power in space, while the characters of Mrs Islam and Karim reveal a more covert logic of capital penetration. Mrs Islam represents a veiled female economic agency within the immigrant community. She lends Chanu money to buy a sewing machine. On the surface, she is a well-off, helpful, and “respectable” widow in the Bangladeshi community (Ali 2004, 82). In reality, she is a moneylender in the informal economy, lending to vulnerable women like Amina at “[t]hirty-three per cent” interest, while her sons enforce the debts through violence (Ali 2004, 128–129). She carries handkerchiefs, Ralgex Heat Spray, and cough syrup, using the image of a frail old lady as a moral shield while actually controlling the flow of money within the community. Her economic practices are deterritorialised: They are neither regulated by British formal finance nor bound by the moral constraints of traditional Bangladeshi society, constituting a female-led shadow economy thriving in the interstices of diaspora. In contrast to Mrs Islam’s inward-oriented economy, Karim embodies the outward-oriented logic of global capital. As a middleman in the garment trade, he brings semi-finished clothing pieces that need

overlocking, zip insertion, and lining to Nazneen's flat, turning this intimate space into a terminal node of the global garment chain. There are no contracts, no named authorship, but only piecework passing through the hands of middlemen, by which enterprises offload production and compliance costs onto these invisible homeworkers. "If she worked fast, if she didn't make mistakes, she could earn as much as three pounds and fifty pence in one hour" (Ali 2004, 213). Nazneen's labour value is siphoned off by multiple intermediaries, and in the process she endures both economic and gendered deprivation.

The oppression of intertwined macro capital and micro patriarchy translates into a highly negative expression in Nazneen's ethical experience. Such suppression, though not equivalent to resistance itself, forms the heavy background to the awakening of her subjective consciousness and her subsequent acts of resistance. In Nazneen's perception, the flat is an alien, dismal, confining space. The cramped rooms and cluttered furniture, especially the black wardrobe that occupies much of the space, recur in her dreams: "the wardrobe had fallen on her, crushing her on the mattress" or "she was locked inside it and hammered and hammered but nobody heard" (Ali 2004, 24). These nightmares articulate, in the language of the unconscious, an intense fear of bodily entrapment by space. The window is her only link to the outside world, yet it is also a fissure through which alienating spectacles seep in. She lingers by the window daily, gazing upon nothing but "the dark flats chequered with lights" (Ali 2004, 40), sickly orange lampposts, and mottled wall cracks "like dirt caught beneath fingernails" (Ali 2004, 342). This desolate scene contrasts sharply with the green homeland fields in her memory, intensifying her ethical sense of spatial alienation. The apartment not only imprisons her body with physical boundaries but also robs her of an expansive view and steals away her spiritual solace.

Illness becomes a direct physiological manifestation of spatial oppression. Nazneen endures persistent headaches, abdominal pains, and other discomforts, even fainting suddenly while working in the kitchen. This is no accidental physical disorder, but somatisation caused by prolonged spatial confinement and psychological repression. Arthur Kleinman observes that somatisation is "the communication of personal and interpersonal problems in a physical idiom of distress" and "an unconscious expression of life problems" (1988, 57). Her daily life is reduced to mechanical housework repeated without variation: cleaning, cooking, and washing (Ali 2004, 41). Crucially, this spatial imprisonment is reinforced by a cultural imperative. The pressure to "fit into the decent woman figure in her [Nazneen's] own culture" transforms domestic labour into an obligatory ethical performance, thereby intensifying, rather than relieving, the psychic burden of confinement (Çameli 2025, 59). The subjectivity she invests in this performance is continuously drained, and its cost materialises somatically. In this sense, somatisation is the body's protest against both the physical walls of the flat and the invisible walls of gendered cultural norms. However, such suffering never receives genuine care or attention. Chanu dismisses her nervous exhaustion as a "[w]omen's

thing” (Ali 2004, 339), trivialising her bodily pain as merely a gendered physiological phenomenon.

It is under the pressure of this experience of oppression that Nazneen’s resistance unfolds. This resistance is rooted in her ethical reflection on power structures and the order of representation, and it strives to create new spatial realities and subject positions through concrete spatial practices. Unlike overt declarations, her resistance permeates everyday practices: street wandering, sewing labour, and emotional transgression. Each act of resistance reconfigures the relationships among power, representation, and ethics, propelling the gradual awakening of her subjectivity through their dynamic interplay.

Street wandering allows Nazneen to break through spatial boundaries demarcated by patriarchal discipline and racial segregation. The novel recounts her first solo outing: She is confronted with English prohibition signs, “No dumping. No parking. No ball games”—words she only half understands (Ali 2004, 18), which constitute the city’s first rejection of her. Walking the streets, she gradually becomes aware of the gulf between herself and the surrounding white world: “They could not see her any more than she could see God” (Ali 2004, 56). This invisibility is both the humiliation of being overlooked and a kind of reverse anonymity. Éva Pataki suggests that Nazneen’s invisibility as an anonymous observer “may simultaneously generate a sense of smallness and of intimacy, a fear of being lost and—surprisingly for Nazneen—the empowering experience of finding the way” (2014, 174). Using her footsteps as a pen, she redraws her own routes on the urban fabric of London, creating “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality” (Jameson 1991, 51), thereby transforming the street from an alien territory into a legible field of experience.

Set against Chanu’s family outing to central London, the resistant meaning of Nazneen’s walking becomes clearer. Chanu’s excursion is a spatial performance: Dressed in shorts, a baseball cap, a bum bag, and new sandals, guidebook in hand, he plans the route and selects the sights with patriarchal authority, attempting to claim the central space as a city insider. He asks a bus driver whether the British Museum or the National Gallery is better, only to receive the retort, “‘Where’ve you come from, mate?’” (Ali 2004, 290–291). In this brief exchange, Chanu’s effort to obtain cultural information as a local is dismantled; he is repositioned as an outsider. The journey reaches a symbolic climax of alienation in an encounter. A friendly American tourist asks, “Whereabouts are y’all from?” Chanu replies, “We are from Bangladesh,” only to be met with the blank query, “Is that in India?” (Ali 2004, 296). At this moment, not only does Chanu fail to occupy the centre, but he is objectified by its gaze. His nationality, identity, and even existence are erased or misrecognised. The more Chanu tries to take possession of the city as an insider, the more the city’s code system excludes him. By contrast, Nazneen’s aimless walking unexpectedly grants her a freedom of invisibility, which she converts into a resistance to spatial discipline. Chanu’s failure lies not in personal incompetence, but in

his attempt to earn a sense of urban belonging through an elaborate situated performance that is doomed to futility under the racialising gaze.

Unlike the outward spatial extension of street wandering, sewing labour reconfigures the power layout of the apartment from within. The meagre income from sewing breaks Nazneen's economic dependence on her husband. Meanwhile, the workbench set up in the living room quietly reshapes the functional organisation of domestic space. The flat thus shifts from a space onto which Chanu projects his immigrant respectability into a productive space where Nazneen realises her own worth. Labour allows her to forge a sense of selfhood that does not rely on Chanu's validation, as she realises: "work in itself, performed with a desire for perfection, was capable of giving satisfaction" (Ali 2004, 301). Yet this resistant practice immediately falls into a structural paradox. Her labour does bring economic independence, but that independence rests on her unwitting participation in a global deterritorialised labour chain. Her home, a battlefield of resistance to patriarchy, is simultaneously absorbed as a production workshop for the flexible accumulation of global capital. As Lisa Lowe contends in analysing the situation of immigrant women, "The immigrant's lack of the civil rights promised to citizens of the nation permits the 'private' space of the immigrant home to become a workplace" (1997, 367). Lacking the protection of citizenship rights, Nazneen's home can be transformed into a hidden workshop of global capital, and the fragile agency she gains within this space is, from the outset, entangled in structural inequality.

Nazneen's most radical resistance lies in her extramarital relationship with Karim. Their intimate interactions in the bedroom directly challenge the ethical norms that the patriarchal order enforces upon the domestic space. Once a space that symbolised marital legitimacy, the bedroom is now infused with forbidden desire. Nazneen "bit his [Karim's] ear. She bit his lip," pulling him close to her actively, her heart surging "not with passion but with ferocity" (Ali 2004, 343). No longer a passively obedient wife, she becomes an active subject who pursues her own desires. Though the relationship ends in separation, it has nonetheless dramatically reshaped the ethical connotations embedded within the apartment space.

These threefold resistant practices, street wandering, sewing labour, and emotional transgression, unfold in an intensifying and mutually entangled progression. While they reshape the representational meaning of the apartment, they also expose the structural predicament of resistance itself: The freedom of invisibility gained through street wandering is always set against a background of racialised estrangement; sewing labour grants Nazneen economic autonomy yet unwittingly entangles her in the hidden chains of global flexible accumulation; emotional transgression breaches patriarchal ethics but leaves behind ethical fissures that cannot be easily closed after separation. Nevertheless, it is through these contradiction-ridden practices that she grows from a passive woman resigned to fate into an agentic subject who can act within oppressive power structures. When Chanu buys the plane tickets back to Dhaka, Nazneen resolutely chooses to stay: "I am not going ... The children are not going" (Ali 2004, 450). Her homeland is no

longer the only home; she redefines this Dogwood apartment as a battlefield for autonomous life and a site of belonging. This spatial remapping, forged within structural constraints, echoes Jameson's emphasis on how cultural practice can open up political subjectivity within an oppressive totality.

The foregoing reading suggests that while the framework illuminates key dynamics of spatial justice, it also encounters limits that are instructive for its refinement. Nazneen's resistances remain moderate and compromising in nature, seeking limited subjective fulfilment within existing structures rather than fully subverting the patriarchal system or the capitalist economic order. Such incomplete resistance and conditional forms of justice do not invalidate the framework. Rather, they expose the need to theorise differential degrees of resistance and their contextual constraints. Moreover, Nazneen's final choice to stay in the Dogwood apartment and remake it as a home challenges the assumption that resistance must entail escape, thus enriching the "resistance" dimension with a perspective of spatial transformation from within. These textual excesses are not the framework's flaws but productive provocations that demand its continuous recalibration.

Conclusion

This article has sought to develop and test the four-dimensional analytical framework of "representation–power–ethics–resistance." It brings together the theoretical insights from Lefebvre, Harvey, Soja, and Jameson, transforming the tensions between ideological coding and capital logic, and between present empowerment and future planning, into a set of connected analytical dimensions. Aiming to encompass critical decoding, structural tracing, ethical experience, and transcendent imagination, it offers a more systematic and reflexively flexible interpretative path for literary narratives engaging with spatial justice issues.

The framework's utility is explored through a close reading of *Brick Lane*. The apartment where Nazneen and Chanu live clearly embodies the multiple operational logics of spatial injustice: It is both a site of racial discrimination and a site of the projection of global capitalist logic, and a field where patriarchal discipline is enacted through behavioural restrictions. Nazneen's melancholic gaze and bodily suffering reveal the profound imprint of macro oppression on individual lived experience. The core of the analysis demonstrates how the "resistance" dimension directs attention to Nazneen's seemingly trivial yet meaningful everyday practices, revealing them not as outright subversions but as moderate acts of compromise that seek limited subjective fulfilment within existing power structures. This process enacts in a concentrated way the four dimensions' dialectical movement, yet crucially reframes that movement from a simple linear progression from oppression to liberation into a complex, contradiction-ridden negotiation within structural constraints.

In summary, the four-dimensional framework is put forward not as a comprehensive system but as a flexible heuristic: an integrative attempt to synthesise existing

theoretical resources, helping literary criticism navigate macro structures and micro experiences, deconstructive critique and constructive imagination. As demonstrated through the case of *Brick Lane*, the framework's reflexivity, which is its capacity to have its own presuppositions challenged and refined by textual details, confirms that its true value lies not in serving as a rigid interpretative machine, but in offering a dynamic analytical terrain. In this sense, it opens a more holistic and penetrating interpretative pathway for reading *Brick Lane* and similar literary texts concerned with space, power, and identity politics. Of necessity, this article has offered only a sketch of such a framework, grounding it in a single case study; it cannot, within its bounds, attain the full systematicity to which it gestures. A more comprehensive elaboration, involving the framework's testing and refinement across diverse literary genres, historical periods, and cultural contexts, remains a project for future work.

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