

AN ANALYSIS OF ABDURRAHIM BEY HAGVERDIYEV'S STORY MIRZE SEFER FROM A BOURDIEUSIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Pierre Bourdieu, one of the prominent sociologists of the 20th century, examined social structure in great detail. He built his sociology around the concepts of field, habitus and capital. Using these concepts, he conducted analyses related to social structure. Bourdieu viewed society as a space where individuals behave in accordance with the environment in which they were born and raised and where they struggle to succeed by developing strategies within the fields they enter, using the different forms of capital they possess.

Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev is one of the prominent writers who contributed to the literary scene in Azerbaijan at the end of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century. In his works, he critically examined the social structure using a refined literary style. He strongly criticized the ignorance of the people of his time, their belief in superstitions and their resistance to change. His story *Mirze Sefer* vividly portrays the social structure of Azerbaijan during that period and highlights how reactionary the people were.

In the story, the fact that the main character differs from the general structure of society and possesses a certain level of knowledge, yet suffers and is marginalized as a result, is delicately conveyed. The author, in a way, positions progressiveness against backwardness, offering a literary interpretation of the social structure. In this context, the work contains rich content for analysis through Bourdieu's sociological concepts. The characters' distribution of capital, the fields they inhabit and the habitus they develop within these fields are particularly noteworthy. Considering these aspects, the importance of conducting a Bourdieusian reading of the story becomes evident once again.

Keywords: Bourdieu, field, habitus, capital, Hagverdiyev, Mirze Sefer.

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1. Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) sought to analyze social structure, particularly through the lens of French society in which he lived. In 1955, he went to Algeria for compulsory military service and during his time there, he conducted ethnographic fieldwork on the Kabyle society. These field studies led to his transition from philosophy to the discipline of sociology. The research he conducted in Kabylia played a significant role in the formation of his core sociological concepts (Kaya, 2018). In explaining social structure, Bourdieu employed the concepts of field, habitus and capital and he was influenced by the theories of his predecessors - Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim (Swartz, 2018). However, instead of adopting their theories wholesale, he rejected aspects he found problematic and addressed what he saw as their shortcomings.

Marx explained social structure through class conflict, asserting that the economic base determines the superstructure and emphasizing economic capital. Bourdieu rejected this approach, finding it insufficient to explain society solely through class struggle and

economic relations (Kaplan & Yardimcioğlu, 2020). According to him, class distinctions are not as clear-cut in modern societies and social and cultural factors are just as important as economic ones in shaping social structure. He argued that focusing solely on economic determinants is inadequate in defining social classes. In his view, social environment, habits, lifestyle and patterns of production and consumption are as important as economic factors (Palabiyik, 2011).

Weber distinguished between the concepts of class and status in his sociology, asserting that class is related to economic factors, while status is tied to lifestyle and prestige. Bourdieu, unlike Weber, did not draw a strict line between these concepts. For him, the respect an individual receives in society can stem from class, status, cultural factors or other sources (Swartz, 2018). Durkheim, on the other hand, tended to explain social structure from an objectivist perspective, claiming that an individual's thoughts and behaviors are shaped by society. Bourdieu argued that analyzing social structure solely from an objectivist standpoint is insufficient and incomplete (Swartz, 2018).

As can be seen, Bourdieu viewed society as a more complex structure and unlike his predecessors, attempted to analyze social phenomena through a broader conceptual framework.

Sociology seeks to understand and analyze society through real social phenomena. A subfield of sociology, the sociology of literature, focuses on examining the social realities constructed within literary works. In literary texts, the characters created by authors tend to exhibit behaviors and tendencies shaped by the environments in which they were raised. When these characters enter new social fields, the dispositions they previously acquired may either adapt to the new context or remain unchanged. These details point to a constructed society within the narrative, where the progression of events reflects broader social dynamics.

In this context, the aim of this study is to analyze Mirze Sefer, a short story by Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev - one of the prominent figures in Azerbaijani literature - through Pierre Bourdieu's key sociological concepts: field, habitus and capital. The events in the story unfold in a rural region of Azerbaijan, which was part of Tsarist Russia at the time. The narrative incorporates two main social fields: Azerbaijan and Russia. The story draws attention to the characters' habitus, which emerges from the environments in which they were raised and the types of capital they possess. Analyzing the story through Bourdieu's conceptual framework thus offers a new reading of social dynamics embedded within the text.

This study is based on a qualitative research method. The qualitative research approach refers to a subjective and interpretive process aimed at perceiving known or previously unnoticed problems and addressing related phenomena in a realistic manner (Seale, 1999). In this study, document-based research was chosen as the data collection technique. The defining feature of this method is the detailed examination of documents and the creation of a new holistic understanding from the gathered information.

Initially, a literature review was conducted within the scope of the topic and sources such as books, statistics, letters, information found in various works of art, published or unpublished reports and both regular and irregular records were used as document-based data sources (Gökçe, 1992). In this study, Bourdieu's own writings constitute the primary sources, while works written about his theory serve as secondary sources. In this context, Mirze Sefer, a story by Hagverdiyev, is analyzed from a Bourdieusian perspective using both primary and secondary sources.

2. The Concepts of Field, Habitus and Capital

Bourdieu analyzed social structure through the interconnected concepts of field, habitus and capital in his sociological framework. These three concepts are closely related to one another. In the sociological system he developed, Bourdieu integrates the concepts of field, habitus and capital at various stages, thereby offering a broader conceptual framework for understanding social structure (Kaplan & Yardimcioğlu, 2020).

Bourdieu explains the concept of field using the metaphor of a game. He draws an analogy between field and game, where the “game” refers to a space shaped by power relations in which individuals develop strategies to avoid losing and struggle to win. He explains this analogy through the concepts of *illusio* and *doxa*. While *illusio* refers to the belief that the game is worth playing and the investments made by the players, *doxa* represents the belief in the game and the stakes involved (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2021). From this perspective, for Bourdieu, all individuals in society are players striving to win within the fields they enter (Yarim, 2019).

One of the core concepts of Bourdieu’s sociology, habitus, consists of the knowledge and experiences a person acquires from the culture they are born into, the environment they live in, their family and friend relationships and their teachers (Bahadır, 2020). In this context, habitus can be defined as “everything that determines what a person should do within a field, based on the knowledge and accumulation gained from their family, environment and education” (Maharramov, 2023). Habitus is thus a system composed of the dispositions and tendencies individuals acquire throughout their lives with specific goals (Doğan, 2018).

In his book *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Bourdieu defines the concept of capital as follows:

“Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2021).

Put simply, capital refers to the resources or tools that players use in their struggle within a given field. Bourdieu identifies three main types of capital: economic, cultural and social (Aksoy, 2018).

- Economic capital refers to the material wealth or financial assets an individual possesses.

- Cultural capital includes the knowledge and intellectual competencies that individuals acquire, often through education, which align with the values esteemed by society.

- Social capital represents the networks and group affiliations an individual holds in society. Bourdieu explains an individual’s mutual relationships within a group, their position, tendencies and the support they receive from the group through the concept of social capital (Omurtak, 2019).

To summarize Bourdieu’s analysis of social structure using these concepts: an individual living in any society is a player who, through their habitus and the capital they possess, enters a field and competes to win.

Bourdieu, unlike his predecessors, sought to construct a deeper conceptual framework. The discipline of sociology aims to explain society based on real social phenomena. A subfield of sociology, the sociology of literature, focuses on analyzing the social realities constructed within literary works. In this context, the comprehensive

conceptual framework developed by Bourdieu provides a means to analyze both real societal structures and the fictionalized social realities depicted in literary texts.

3. An Analysis of the story Mirze Sefer through Bourdieu's Concepts of Field, Habitus and Capital

Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev (1870-1933), one of the prominent writers of Azerbaijan, was born in the city of Shusha. He began his primary education in 1880 at Yusif Bey's temporary summer school in Shusha and later continued at the Shusha Real School. After completing his education there, Hagverdiyev continued his studies in 1891 at the Tbilisi Real School. He later enrolled at the St. Petersburg Institute of Railway Engineering. However, in 1897, he withdrew from the faculty without stating any reason. His attendance as an auditor in the courses of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the university indicates his disinterest in pursuing a technical field.

Hagverdiyev, who had a deep passion for literature, made significant contributions to Azerbaijani literature with his dramatic works such as *The Unlucky Youth* (1900) and *The Fairy's Spell* (1901), as well as notable stories like *My Deer*, *Sheikh Shaban*, *The Ghost*, *The Hungry Men* and others (Asgarli & Abdullayeva, 2018).

Hagverdiyev consistently drew attention to social problems in his literary works. In *Mirze Sefer*, he highlights such issues once again in an effort to enlighten society. In this story, the author conveys some of his political views to the reader. He expresses his discomfort with the dominance of the Russian language over national languages, the discrimination people faced based on their national identity and the fact that Azerbaijanis were not entrusted with high-ranking positions in Tsarist Russia.

The author emphasizes that the main character, Mirze Sefer, holds a low-ranking position in the treasury and works for a meager salary due to his insufficient knowledge of the Russian language (Hagverdiyev, 2005). In fact, what Hagverdiyev aims to reveal here is the national discrimination rooted in the nature of the political system. He conveys these issues within the plot of the story with literary subtlety.

The primary field in the story is Azerbaijan, which, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was part of Tsarist Russia. The story highlights the discrimination present in Tsarist Russia, particularly the preferential treatment of Russians and the marginalization of Azerbaijanis. Although most of the events in the story take place in Azerbaijan, Russia is also mentioned as another field. In addition to these geographical fields, the narrative also includes subfields such as literature, education and the public sector.

At the beginning of the story, Sefer's desire to write poetry indicates his wish to enter the literary field. However, his inability to write poetry, despite his desire, shows that he lacks the necessary accumulation of cultural capital required for that field. Therefore, no matter how much he wants it, he cannot enter the literary field, since the type of capital it demands is cultural. Even though Sefer possesses a certain level of cultural capital, his lack of poetic skill becomes a barrier to his entry into this field (Hagverdiyev, 2005).

The fact that Sefer's two sons receive university education in Russia shows that, in terms of cultural capital, Russia is ahead of Azerbaijan. Sefer's consistent interest in science and learning, his friendship with Master Zeynel - who, like him, is passionate about poetry - and his determination to send his sons to study in Russia despite financial hardship are all significant indicators of cultural capital (Hagverdiyev, 2005).

In the story, the people living in Azerbaijan are divided into two categories: the rich and the poor. This division is significant in terms of economic capital. The main character, Sefer, earns 25 manat a month and an additional 10 manat from extra paperwork at the treasury office where he works. Although this income is below average, he does not complain about his situation. However, his colleagues accept bribes for the work they do. When a villager comes to Sefer for paperwork, he offers him a bribe. Sefer rejects this, stating that accepting bribes is a despicable act. Even though he lives in hardship, he never accepts bribes. Sefer's greatest goal in life is for his children to receive a good education. Although he faces financial difficulties in sending them to school, he neither accepts bribes nor associates with rich people for money.

Sefer's closest friend is Master Zeynel. Zeynel has an income below average, yet he, like Sefer, is content with his modest earnings. In the story, Hasan Agha is portrayed as a villain. Economically, Hasan Agha is very powerful and sees himself as superior to everyone else. Even though he surrounds himself with people who flatter him to satisfy his ego, he does not want people like Sefer and Zeynel, who refuse to bow down to him, to be around him and he does everything in his power to make their lives difficult (Hagverdiyev, 2005).

From Bourdieu's conceptual framework, it can be seen that the work has a rich content in terms of economic capital.

In the story, Mirze Sefer and Master Zeynel are friends with similar economic and cultural backgrounds. In contrast, Hasan Agha surrounds himself with a network that has the appropriate economic and cultural capital for his needs. When Hasan Agha's relative tried to take his paperwork out of turn at the treasury, Mirze Sefer mocked him, telling him to wait his turn instead of allowing him to bypass the queue (Hagverdiyev, 2005). Hasan Agha's relative attempted to use his social capital to gain special privileges. This is quite significant in terms of social capital. Additionally, Hasan Agha used his network to cut the scholarship for Mirze Sefer's sons, which points to the concept of social capital (Hagverdiyev, 2005).

In the story, the contrast between Mirze Sefer and Hasan Agha highlights two distinct forms of habitus. Mirze Sefer's interest in poetry led him to accumulate cultural capital and in this context, develop a corresponding habitus. As a result, he prioritized cultural values over material ones and sent his sons abroad for their education. His friendship with Master Zeynel, who shares similar traits and his opposition to individuals like Hasan Agha - who represent the opposite of his values - are also tied to the habitus he has developed. On the other hand, Hasan Agha's prioritization of material wealth over cultural values has shaped a very different habitus of his own.

4. Conclusion

In his Mirze Sefer story, Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev creates a fictional framework that reflects the social structure of Azerbaijan, which was part of Tsarist Russia at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The author's aim is to point out the corruption, the relationships of interest, injustice and generally all the negativities in society using a refined literary language. When the Mirze Sefer story is evaluated within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital, it becomes evident that Hagverdiyev critically portrays the socio-cultural structure of the period by deeply observing and describing events with a critical perspective. It is understood that the main field where the events of the story take place

is a struggle arena that determines the class position and power relations of individuals. The main character, Mirze Sefer, occupies a lower class position in the field and possesses a certain level of cultural, limited economic and social capital. This situation places him in a passive position within power relations. His thoughts, behaviors and responses to the events he encounters can be explained by the structure of the habitus shaped by the historical and cultural conditions in which he was raised. His actions in the field are directly related to both his habitus and the various forms of capital he possesses.

In the story, Mirze Sefer and his two sons, as well as Usta Zeynel, have a certain accumulation of cultural capital, but they do not possess strong economic capital. On the other hand, Hasan Agha has a strong accumulation of economic capital, but he lacks cultural capital. Both the positive and negative characters in the story possess capital accumulations. Hasan Agha, who is economically strong, has a circle of people with similar material wealth, while Mirze Sefer, with his limited material wealth and certain cultural capital, has a circle that suits his position in terms of social capital. Each of the fields in the story has its own habitus and the field preserves the players who possess these habitus.

Hagverdiyev's story has a rich content in terms of economic, social and cultural capital types, as well as the concepts of field and habitus. Bourdieu's theory facilitates the understanding of the sociological background of the work rather than its literary aspects. In this context, analyzing the story from a Bourdieusian perspective serves as a different resource for future research in the fields of literary sociology and Azerbaijani literature.

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