


Bourdieusian Reading of Bessie Head's Short Story "Let Me Tell a Story Now..."

Bessie Head'in "Şimdi Bir Hikaye Anlatayım" Kısa Öyküsünün Bourdieucu Bakış Açısıyla Okunması

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine "Let Me Tell a Story Now..." by Bessie Head, specifically focusing on the social field and habitus that the Colored characters in the story experience through the method of close reading. A working-class family, Ma and her unnamed husband are the main characters in the story. Their brief vacation planned to Durban, populated by Black Africans, exposes their anxiety regarding their identity and sense of belonging. Thus, they focus on the distinction between the interconnected forms of capital that shape their identities and those of people in Durban. It becomes a test when they start to worry about how they will interact with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds with distinct habits, lifestyles, dispositions, languages, and emotions. All the characters in the story feel that venturing beyond their social circle is a certain path to their own downfall, so none of them ever dares to exit. Based on this, I argue that the characters' subjective experiences in a social field, along with the specific quantity and type of capital supplied to them, basically form their habitus and affect their sense of identity and belonging. It is because the characters' ability to survive depends on the particular type and quantity of capital they encounter in their social standing to the point where they develop attachments to and associations with those forms of capital, which ultimately become ingrained in their identities, thoughts, and emotions. Consequently, in this study, I build on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of field and habitus by using close reading techniques to investigate the characters' experiences of leaving their social spheres.

Keywords: Capital, Habitus, Social field, "Let Me Tell a Story Now...", Bessie Head.

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Bessie Head'in "Şimdi Bir Hikâye Anlatayım..." adlı eserini, hikayedeki karakterlerin deneyimlediği sosyal alan ve habitus kavramları üzerinden yakın okuma tekniği ile analiz etmektir. Hikâyenin ana karakterleri olan Ma ve isimsiz kocası, siyahi ırk kategorisinde işçi sınıfı bir ailedir. Ağırlıklı olarak siyah Afrikalıların yaşadığı Durban'a planladıkları kısa tatil, kimlikleri ve aidiyet duygularıyla ilgili kaygılarını açığa çıkarır. Bu sayede kimliklerini ve aidiyet duygularını oluşturan iç içe geçmiş sermaye türlerine (kültürel, sosyal, ekonomik ve sembolik sermaye) işaret ederek Durban'da yaşayan farklı sosyal sınıfa ait insanların sahip olduğu farklı kimlikler üzerine düşünürler. Böylece kendilerinin ve Durban'daki farklı sosyal pozisyona sahip insanların kimliklerini şekillendiren birbirine bağlı sermaye biçimleri arasındaki ayrımın farkına varırlar. Farklı sosyoekonomik kökenden gelen, farklı alışkanlıklara, yaşam tarzlarına, eğilimlere, dillere ve duygulara sahip insanlarla nasıl etkileşime girecekleri konusunda endişelenmeye başladıklarında bu planlanan seyahat bir sınava dönüşür. Hikayedeki tüm karakterler, sosyal çevrelerinin dışına çıkmanın ilmek ilmek inşa ettikleri kimliğin yıkılışına neden olacağını düşünür, bu yüzden hiçbir çıkıma cesaret edemez. Buradan yola çıkarak, karakterlerin toplumsal bir alandaki öznel deneyimlerinin, onlara sağlanan belirli miktar ve türdeki sermaye ile birlikte temel olarak habituslarını oluşturduğunu ve kimlik ve aidiyet duygularını etkilediğini iddia ediyorum. Bunun nedeni, karakterlerin hayatta kalma yeteneklerinin, sosyal konumlarında karşılaştıkları sermayenin belirli türüne ve miktarına bağlı olması ve karakterlerin bu sermaye biçimlerine bağlılıklar ve özdeşleşme geliştirmeleridir. Nihayetinde, deneyimlenen sermaye karakterlerin kimliklerine, duygu ve düşüncelerine sirayet eder ve kim olduklarını belirler. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmada, Pierre Bourdieu'nun alan ve habitus kavramını temel alarak ve yakın okuma tekniklerini kullanarak, hikayedeki karakterlerin sosyal çevrelerinden ayrılma deneyimlerini araştırıyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sermaye, Habitus, Sosyal alan, "Şimdi Bir Hikâye Anlatayım...", Bessie Head.

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Introduction

"Let Me Tell a Story Now..." is a short story that belongs to Bessie Head's second collection of short writings, namely, *Tales of Tenderness and Power*. Because it incorporates observational elements from the author, the story is classified as semifictional. Moreover, the writing is semi-autobiographical as it incorporates aspects of her own life story and experiences. She firstly presents her descriptive insights and memories, which form a basis for the story's subject matter and underlying gist, then begins to recount the story in the third person. The descriptive section is very useful for analyzing the story she will tell later. Through these observations, Bessie Head clearly lays out the gist and background on which she bases her narrative of "Let Me Tell a Story Now..." In this regard, with reference to the hierarchically distinct social positions of "Coloured man," "African man," and "a White" in her literary works, she makes explicit that the context of her stories is South African society and its identity politics (Head, 1989, p. 17). She also adds that she consistently contextualizes the distinction between the social classes resulting from segregated racial categories in South Africa. More specifically, in such a social structure where distinction matters, she explains she knows the ways to interpret one's identity and social position based on the habitus they manifest through their occupation, dispositions, thinking, or emotions. According to Bessie Head, one's position in South Africa's hierarchical social system can be detected by observing how people exhibit their habitual behaviors, regularity, and access capital (economic capital, e.g., wealth; symbolic capital, e.g., prestige; social capital, e.g., supportive neighbors; cultural capital, e.g., humor). Bessie Head's understanding of the social structure of South Africa and the identities she perceives according to the distribution and type of capital forms the basis of my research, which is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's field theory.

Because her knowledge of identity politics is founded on her own experience of racial discrimination since birth in South Africa, Bessie Head refers to the stances of white, black, and mixed-race groups as "always the same old pattern" (Head, 1989, p. 17). Bessie Head, a writer of mixed racial heritage from South Africa, was born in 1937 to Bessie Amelia Birch, a rich white woman, in a mental institution in Pietermaritzburg. Her father was an unidentified Black African. Bessie Head's birth brought shame onto the South African Birch family, who decided to place her for adoption due to the fact that "since 1927 extramarital sexual intercourse between a white and a black person in South Africa had been a punishable offense" (Eilersen, 1995, p. 7). The racial classification of babies was critical due to the South African government's execution of segregationist policies. It had been a customary practice until the Population Registration Law, which went into effect in 1950, formalized this well-known and long-standing procedure. Bessie was identified as white by the mental facility where she was born. After being disowned by her own family, she was given to a white foster family; however, due to her "strange" appearance, which implies that she was not of the pure blood white race, she was returned to the institution from her foster home (Eilersen, 1995, p. 8). Foster family of African descent also declined to take in baby Bessie. Finally, Bessie was given to a Colored family where she was mistreated and never felt at home. Consequently, Bessie Head was cast out of her family and all South African institutions that executed racial segregation because of her mixed-race origins. She gained a deep comprehension of the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion through this experience, which occurs when shared properties, like language and skin color, are given a certain value on a national scale. She had the anguish of perpetually not fitting in, of being neither completely black nor completely white. As an illegitimate child, the author embarked on a lifelong investigation of identity politics and the desire for belonging that is prevalent in all her works.

As is typical of her work, the short story "Let Me Tell a Story Now..." from *Tales of Tenderness and Power* narrativizes the problem of identity politics and what it takes to build identification and belonging. Bessie Head's experiences in South Africa, where a racial hierarchy and the creation of social strata based on the perceived value of different races mark the social structure, have equipped her with a comprehensive understanding of social domain distinctions and the allotted forms of capital, such as common language, skin tone, economic income, job profiles, and so on. The attributes such as prestigious job, the place of residence,

level of education, humor, language, and physical appearance all have social, cultural, economic, and symbolic value, shaping the nature of the social sphere and the identity of those who live within it.

Bessie Head alludes to the social field of South Africa and the subpositions within them, that is, the hierarchical positions of White, Black and Coloureds. These positions are differentiated from one another according to the distribution and forms of capital, allowing for the identification of social spaces through field-specific capitals. Pierre Bourdieu's field theory provides the greatest framework for analyzing these fields as such:

as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97)

In this research, I employ a Bourdieusian perspective and consider the South African context as an objectively defined "network" or field where the apartheid regime establishes racial classifications in exchange for social class allocation and the "species of power (or capital)" that go along with it. (Ibid.). In order to clarify the idea of field, Bourdieu draws an analogy with a football field and the positions and responsibilities of the players on it. Bourdieu contends that the field can be most accurately conceptualized as a football field, and the social interactions in which individuals engage in conflict resemble a game played on that field. The football field has certain physical limitations and certain facilities that the players use during the game. A player's on-field position, or the objective physical conditions in which they find themselves, dictates the activities that can or cannot be done by them during the game. This creates hierarchy among on-field positions. There exist clearly established rules governing the game. Similarly, in South Africa, the social field is defined by racial categories, the hierarchies between them, and the opportunities, resources, and limits that are allotted to each racial group. What can or cannot be done by people of different social positions, such as a White man, Black man, or Colored man, is determined by the regulations of the apartheid regime. These rules comprise the place of residence, the profile of jobs they perform, the amount of money they earn, the races they can marry, the education they can get, the facilities they use, etc.

Like football players, Bourdieu argues that social agents need to be well-versed in the game's regulations and adhere to them. Fields of social agents' positions form social fields, similar to football fields. In a similar vein, the apartheid regime in South Africa exercises rigorous control over the social sphere, enforces racial segregation, and limits the mobility of social actors within the nation. Therefore, the social agents accord themselves to these strict regulations of the field structure. In this way, the field structures the lifestyle of the agents within it. That is, social agents are shaped and constrained to form *habitus*.

According to Cristina Nicolaescu, "selective affinity with objective structures" causes "inculcation of subjective structures of *habitus*," and this can be observed (2010, p. 124). In other words, prolonged and regular exposure to specific forms and amounts of capital causes individuals to continually associate themselves with the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital that is allocated to them. These encompass both concrete and abstract elements such as social status, financial resources, educational and artistic sophistication, and job prospects that demand varying degrees of proficiency. In short, anything that can be exchanged for the purpose of maintaining or improving their present status corresponds to capital in the hierarchical social structure of the field. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as follows:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53)

Habitus both shapes and gets shaped by the field. In other words, lifestyle, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, professional position, and similar abilities are defining aspects of the field. The formed habit, style, inclination, identity, or disposition that serves to balance off the preexisting structure with its limits and resources. Bessie Head gives an example for the formed habits, or habitus, of the people of District Six, stating that “the neighbors make it their business to know all about you, and they don’t mind what your sins are” (Head, 1989, p. 17). According to the author, it is regular practice in their area for everyone to pry into each other's affairs. This behavior indicates their inclination, namely habitus. Then, she adds information on how this behavior has gotten structured, and she states that “because we’re all piled up on each other” (Head, 1989, p. 18). Stacking up is a constraint imposed by the field’s hierarchical social classes and the perception of superiority or inferiority among social positions within the social field of South Africa. The place of residence of each racial category and the amount of income are determined by regulations such as the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953). This corresponds to the limitations imposed by the social field of apartheid South Africa, while the habit of prying into each other’s business and forging intimate relationships is the structured structure, that is habitus.

“Let Me Tell a Story Now...”

The story is about a couple, Ma and her unnamed husband, who live in District Six, Cape Town, and plan a trip to Durban for their annual leave. They make ready for the trip, making ready everything like tickets and food for the journey, etc., but the minute they are about to board the train, the husband gets terrified to go to Durban and changes his mind, calling his wife to get off the train. On that, the neighbors who have assembled to say goodbye to Ma and her husband remain silent, although all of them understand and support their decision to forgo the journey to Durban. Everyone there concurs that they would not be able to blend in anywhere other than District Six.

In the story, there are details regarding the social field and habitus, alluding to the social positions, propensities, and predispositions people inherently acquire. Hence, I analyze the characters, Ma and her husband, as well as the depictions of the neighborhood and the characteristics of the residents, in relation to the notions of field and habitus. The author gives details of the nature of their neighborliness, tendency, and habits they have formed in District Six. Then, she refers to the objectively structured physical condition of the social space, District Six, to provide an account of the social field in which their behavioral patterns have developed. For example, the narrator first states that there is a strong sense of community among neighbors and then adds that “we can’t help it because we’re all piled up on top of each other” (Head, 1989, p. 18). As a result, the narrator introduces the community on two levels. On one level, she refers to the “existence” and “network” of the neighborhood as giving objectively established physical circumstances, indicating the social field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). On the other hand, she describes how their inclinations, preferences, emotions, and behaviors are fashioned in a specific position in the social sphere, a concept known as habitus.

In one of his first books on methodology, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu defines field as “the social space in which interactions, transactions, and events occurred” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 48) and habitus as “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 95). In this sense, field structures the habitus. From this point of view, I examine the objectively established power structures and social rankings, known as field, as well as subjectively experienced representations and dispositions that generate certain sensations, ideas, and actions, known as habitus. As a result, I examine the field of District Six, Cape Town, and Durban using both the author's observations and evidence from the story, followed by habitus, which refers to the tendencies, feelings, and actions of the characters in “Let Me Tell a Story Now...” within the field divisions of the society they inhabit.

The story begins with the author pondering why people ask each other about their profession, which she regards as intimate and intrusive behavior. However, she adds that she also poses the same question, reasoning that “I have to find a quick and superficial way of piecing him together so that I know where I stand” (Head,

1989, p. 16). This statement pertains directly to the distribution of capital in the concerned field. And, by “where I stand,” the narrator refers to her designated social position within the social field, as well as the characters she crafted in the narrative (Ibid.). In subsequent sections, the narrator explicitly identifies the social field she is referring to by mentioning District Six and Durban. Bessie Head also adds that the material for her narrative includes “always a Colored man here, an African man there, and a White somewhere around the corner,” implying that the upcoming story is set in apartheid South Africa, where she and her characters are subjected to racial stratification as physical constraints and are assigned amenities based on the social division they occupy (Head, 1989, p. 17). In this way, Bessie Head contextualizes her story on the axis of subject positioning based on racial stratification, place of residence, and profession of White, Coloured, and Black African social agents in District Six and Durban, which is legally and institutionally structured by the South African government.

Bourdieu’s concept of field can also be compared to “a social arena within which struggles or maneuvers take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 52). By “specific resources,” Bourdieu refers to the four distinct forms of capital that go beyond economic capital; the distribution and quantity of these forms of capital determine the field (Jenkins, 2006, p. 52). These are economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Social networks, or habitus, are formed by people who are equipped with the flow of different kinds of tangible or intangible resources, namely economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. And by “maneuvers,” Bourdieu means that social actors of specific fields “engage in negotiations to acquire or distribute different kinds of capital (Jenkins, 2006, p. 52; Corbett, 2024, p. 2). In this regard, “piecing him together” reflects the awareness that one’s habitus—their sense of self—is constructed piece by piece from a variety of resources, including economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Head, 1989, p. 16). Within the social field, a dynamic is created by the interactions between social actors who are pursuing capital and the unequal distribution of various types of capital among those agents. This creates a hierarchy in habitus, which is why habitus is considered a subjective experience of the capitals that are in place.

Analyzing the characters’ social field, including its limitations and amenities, helps to explain their behaviors and emotions. The apartheid regime and the racially divided society of South Africa are objective aspects of Bessie Head and her characters’ social context; that is their social field. In South Africa, the ideology of apartheid was based on the belief in white supremacy, leading to the imposition of social, economic, and political segregation and the marginalization of nonwhite identities. Accordingly, South Africa was characterized by four main racial categories: Whites, Coloreds, Indians, and Black Africans. In this way, the South African government created “a separate universe governed by its own laws,” that is, social fields specific to a certain racial category (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 7). In this situation, by taking advantage of the restricted social, political, and occupational opportunities accessible to them, those who are confined or compelled to live in different social zones are more fitted to interact with others in their field.

The apartheid racial stratification clearly involves an internalized oppressive relationship between White residents possessing the highest social rank and the corresponding allocation of capital, Coloreds and Asians occupying the second position in the hierarchy, and Black Africans occupying the lowest social position. South Africa’s social field is made up of such positions filled by people of various races. In addition to race, a person’s place of residence also plays a role in defining their social field, especially in the South African context. The Group Areas Act (1950) and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953) separated residential neighborhoods and basic amenities such as hospitals, post offices, trains, stations, and swimming pools. The Population Registration Act (1950) required all citizens to carry an identity certificate indicating their race, which in turn “amplifies the psychological impact of their isolation and estrangement” (Gültekin, 2024, p. 753). In this way, the racist government secured class distinctions and the allocation of place of residence, wealth, capital, conveniences, and facilities to the specific social class. The South African government uses these laws to establish racial segregation in housing, educational opportunities, occupational classification, economic status, and other areas. In this regard, Fatton (1989, p. 48) writes that “in Africa, class power is state power; the two are fused and inseparable,” which supports the idea that the concept of field is tied to

long-established yet ongoing social, political, and historical structure. Within that rooted social field, people adjust themselves according to the limits of their social fields and inhabit the designated locations within the social domains established by legal frameworks.

Furthermore, "segregation was also an ideology and set of practices seeking to legitimize social difference and economic inequality" (Beinart & Dubow, 1995). Skin color becomes an important factor to determine the place of residence, occupation, and, therefore, social status. District Six, Cape Town, which served as the story's setting, then, represents another indicator of Ma and her husband's social field. They live in "one of the tumbling down, leaky houses in District Six" (Head, 1989, p. 17). As mentioned before, the place of residence serves as an indicator of the racial group that is assigned to that particular area. Accordingly, while Black Africans have traditionally lived in Durban, Coloreds primarily inhabit Cape Town. Given this information, it is possible to make a precise determination that Ma and her husband, who live in District Six, Cape Town, are classified as Colored.

That is, District Six denotes not only Ma and her husband's racial identification but also their social class and employment status. Since "the labor market is stratified by race," it is accurate to say Ma and her husband, like the rest of the Coloreds, are "segregated into low-paying occupations" (Gradin, 2018, p. 554). Concerning the profession of the unnamed husband in the story, the narrator defines his occupation as a "packing hand at the railways" (Head, 1989, p. 17). In addition to their low-profile job, the couple's excitement over free train tickets illustrates the poverty they experience. White people were the only ones eligible for better-paying specialized jobs and public services like hospitals, train stations, and schools. This is where the necessity of the question "What work do you do?" rests (Head, 1989, p. 16). Articulating what you do almost certainly exposes your racial identity, social class, economic status, and hence your place in the hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. Knowing this, in "Let Me Tell a Story Now..." Bessie Head emphasizes that she needs to know where she "stands" in the racially hierarchical social structure of South Africa, which is the outcome of the rigid racial classification and the given social rankings for them (Head, 1989, p. 16). Conversely, Bessie Head pays attention to the peril of encountering someone of higher social standing who might "bust your ego to bits" due to the perceived superiority of one group over another (Ibid.).

The positions of the social agents in the field both shape and get shaped by the field; therefore, they experience their actions, predispositions, feelings, and, eventually, identity. The narrator points to this interplay between field and social agent's adjustment in line with the position in the field by stating that "a person's character type makes him gravitate to a certain type of work" (Head, 1989, p. 16). Throughout the story, the narrator explains how she and the characters, Ma and unnamed husband, regulate their actions and emotions in accordance with the limits and resources of their social field. Otherwise, she emphasizes the possibility of "pulling to shreds" (Head, 1989, p. 16). Being cognizant of the constraints of the hierarchical structure enforced by South Africa, she feels compelled to ascertain her position and asserts, "I have to do this" to highlight the fact that this circumstance is an external or structural imperative. In time, the narrator, similar to others within the same social group who were born and raised in the nature of a specific field, develops a sense of identification with her own assigned social position when she comes across someone in a higher or lower level. I further elucidate this by Bourdieu's assertion that "the habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63). Indeed, when people are born and raised inside a certain social space, they gradually acquire knowledge of its boundaries and potentialities, leading to its automatic operation.

Naturally, within the setting of Southern Africa, where the story takes place, structured racial classifications provide information about representation of Coloreds and social status by insinuating superiority or inferiority. As being Coloreds, thus occupying the second position in terms of racial hierarchy in South Africa, social and political power, and economic distribution, Ma and her husband are expected to own an esteemed social standing when compared to the Black Africans. Yet, that is not the case. Both Ma and her husband, who are of mixed race, are cognizant of the reality that people of color experience symbolic violence and get marginalized and despised by both essentialist racial ideologies. As a result, they renounce the once-in-a-

lifetime opportunity to go for "one year for his annual leave" due to their insecurity over the predominately Black African community in Durban (Head, 1989, p. 17). They forgo the Durban trip because they do not want to lose face. Concerning this matter, the narrator spells out that it is a question of dignity and asserts that "it would result in the complete annihilation of his human essence" (Head, 1989, p. 18). This unanticipated threat and possible aggression coming from the lower social class is a conflict that occurs between the social field, which is known as the "structured structure" with its objective laws and standards, and the individual's subjective experiences and feelings, namely habitus (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53). In other words, this contradiction results from indeterminism "between objective givenness and subjective meanings... constituted by the reciprocal interaction of what is experienced as outside reality... and what is experienced as being within the consciousness of the individual" (Berger et al., 1974, p. 12). That is, the South African government gives the Coloreds more legal, institutional, and economic authority than the Black Africans; nonetheless, the Colored people encounter symbolic violence such as threats, insults, and nonrecognition.

Within the borders of a social field, habitus refers to a set of established social habits or regulated maneuvers. Similarly, Ma and her husband's regulated maneuvers and subjective emotions are vividly depicted in the story "Let Me Tell a Story Now..." as they recount a free train trip that they nearly embarked on but ultimately decided against due to their fear of being misunderstood or not appropriately represented. In reference to this, the narrator says that if the couple were to visit Durban, "nobody in Durban would understand" them (Head, 1989, p. 18). The husband wants his wife to step down off the train "with real terror in his voice" (Ibid.). It is because Ma and her husband are aware of the internal dynamics of the field of apartheid South Africa, such as higher/lower social classes and superiority/inferiority among social statuses decided according to the racial category inside the field, so they struggle to save their faces.

The marginalization of Ma and her husband as being Coloreds is a consequence of the interaction between field and habitus. That is, South Africa's social field and segregationist regime, meaning structure, "not only produces the habitus which is specific to the field but is also the product of it" (Balta, 2020, p. 70). Because of white supremacist legislation such as the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950), which forbade marriages or intercourse between Europeans and people of non-European descent, people of mixed racial heritage were considered legally illegitimate others. The racial identity of the Colored individuals is ambiguous. They do not fit into any essentialist racial category. They are therefore too white to be African and too black to be categorized as White. They also have a limited history and ancestry to draw from. They are therefore considered illegitimate bastards. Lacking a sense of affiliation with any essentialist group, they are marginalized by both the black and white communities.

People's identities, dispositions, feelings, and thoughts are shaped by their interpersonal connections and the diverse resources they possess, which go beyond their rank in the social field (Meisenhelder, 2000, p. 76). The narrator discusses the social, cultural, socioeconomic, and symbolic resources of District Six to substantiate this idea. To support that, the author provides a comprehensive account of the behavior of the individuals belonging to the colored community, who share a similar level of economic resources and reside in deteriorated and substandard housing in District Six. The narrator attributes everyday instances from District Six's routine, common language, humor, and profanity to illustrate how the unnamed husband's identity, like the rest of the residents, sentiments and dispositions, are products of shared social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital. By stating "he has a very special kind of language," "those faces swear with the exact same nuance that he does," and "they eat the exact same food" and "they have the same humor," the narrator highlights the shared cultural capital (Head, 1989, p. 18). However, it is important to note that cultural capital is interconnected with other forms of capital. Having said that, swearing or profanity, for example, "possesses a cultural aspect that fosters both individual and social relations," serving as a medium of folkloric value (Parlar & Kaman, 2024, p. 42). Parlar and Kaman (2024) provide the following description of slang's exchange value to shed light on the interdependent nature of slang's cultural and social capital:

Slang carries a cultural value that builds individual and social relationships with a living structure created by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by folk culture. In addition to constituting

language data through encrypted words and constructed meaning, slang creates a folkloric/cultural production area due to both its aesthetic function and the poetic transfer created by the metaphorical meanings used. (Parlar & Kaman, 2024, p. 43)

Since “the forms of capital as mutually constitutive in” one another, each referenced source in the story pertains to distinct and interconnected types of capital (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 195). For example, even though food is one of the most well-known aspects of culture, it is nevertheless dependent on financial resources, that is, economic capital. In fact, Nesime Ceyhan Akça contends that cuisine is not a simple act; rather, it is “intricately linked to the welfare, beliefs, inclinations, technologies, power, and weaknesses of society,” which all correspond to economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Akça, 2023, p. 1007). Consequently, the aforementioned “the exact same food” is not just a form of cultural capital but also an integral component of the collective habitus that has been cultivated through other types of capital.

Moreover, physical appearance, for instance, also functions as a type of capital in the story. Narrating that the husband “has a special kind of face that is comfortingly reflected in the faces around him,” the narrator refers to the faces of the people of District Six as a soothing property shared in the community, implying that Ma and her husband cannot find it in Durban (Head, 1989, p. 18). In this particular, Kukkonen argues that “bodies” are “places where capital accrues and is made visible and appropriable” (Kukkonen, 2021, p. 25). There are two possible interpretations of this statement, depending on how the story progresses, given that the characters find the travel to Durban frightening and anxious. The first is that the distribution of similar types of capital within the same social space brings out a well-established routine, sameness, regular and predictable behavior, a state of uniformity, familiarity, and hence, a feeling of belonging and identity among the social actors in District Six. Thus, the exchange value of a face as a kind of capital is its familiarity and consistency rather than the frightening aspect of a strange or unknown face. Consequently, the familiar one provides a sense of security, belonging, and community to the characters, which is quite comforting. That is why the narrator repeatedly uses phrases like “a very special kind,” “the exact same,” and “the same” to underscore the exclusivity and uniformity of their language, cuisine, humor, expression of anger, and household as forms of capital shared inside their society (Head, 1989, p. 18).

The second interpretation is that “each position is assigned a certain amount and kind of capital” is the case, and the members of society establish norms in accordance with this (Meinshelder, 2000, p.78). The repetitive practices and exposure to the same forms of capital “control how people see the world and their place within it,” and it also functions as “a ‘soft’ form of domination, which is accepted as part of normal reality” (Speller, 2011, p. 138). However, dominance has the potential to create an environment in which individuals who are not members of the dominant group are excluded, biased, rejected, or even ridiculed due to a lack of understanding or familiarity with habitus. In such cases, the animosity directed at the outsider is known as symbolic violence. With this symbolic violence, it may manifest itself as nonrecognition or unacceptance, conveying the message that the concerned outsider does not belong or is unwanted. For example, in the story, the narrator depicts “an American tourist” who “come and gape at the Zulu dances” as pretentious, and she underrepresents those outsiders as if they belittle themselves by visiting unfamiliar places (Head, 1989, p. 18). In the narrator’s example, there is a prejudice against unknown American identity as a form of symbolic violence. In turn, beyond their habitus, “where they feel at home without contradicting,” the characters view the outside world as a perilous place to live (Gündüz, 2022, p. 1045). As the narrator puts it, “to leave Cape Town would be like dying” while describing the social environment outside of Cape Town (Head, 1989, p. 18).

Pierre Bourdieu elucidates the influence of symbolic capital and symbolic violence that arise in the absence of symbolic power in his work on Language and Symbolic Power. Referring to the subjective nature of the experienced interpersonal setting, or habitus, Pierre Bourdieu states:

And the weight of different agents depends on their symbolic capital, i.e. on the recognition, institutionalized or not, that they receive from a group. Symbolic imposition - that kind of magical

efficacy which not only the command and the password, but also ritual discourse or a simple injunction, or even threats or insults, purport to exercise - can function only if there is a convergence of social conditions which are altogether distinct from the strictly linguistic logic of discourse. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 72)

Ma and her husband are aware that neither the white community nor the black South Africans recognize or accept them. Consequently, they lack crucial levels of symbolic capital, including ancestral legacy, a longstanding language or culture, a voice, a place in the community, and the respect and admiration of the prevailing white and black communities. In light of the fact that their identities are products of the field and habitus into which they were born, the characters are concerned that their constructed identities will not be compatible with any other field or habitus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have analyzed Bessie Head's short story "Let Me Tell a Story Now" using the Bourdieusian framework of field and habitus to understand the protagonists' reluctance to leave their home place, their prejudices against others who are different from them, and their sense of identity and belonging. Considering social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capitals, which reciprocally influence one another, I analyze the values or properties that contribute to Ma and her unnamed husband's identity, disposition, emotions, and thoughts.

Over an extended period, Ma and her husband, like the rest of the social agents, experience and become associated with a particular type and quantity of capital in District Six, Cape Town. This ultimately influences all aspects of their lives, including their physical appearance. They become emotionally invested in things with monetary or non-monetary worth, depending on the kind of capital that they have. Consistent exposure to the nature and quantity of capital in "Let Me Tell a Story Now" shapes the characters' identity, disposition, inclinations, emotions, and mental processes, shaping their entire universe.

Their social position in South Africa's social field, along with its resources and constraints, constitutes a fundamental aspect of their identity. Irrespective of their low social status within the racially stratified structure of South Africa, individuals are unable to evade the established patterns, known as habitus and social field, which foster their sense of belonging and therefore the formation of identity. In contrast, the residents of District Six consider breaking from their established pattern, or habitus, to be a disintegration of their identity. This is because the characters progressively depend on specific forms of capital, such as familiar faces, a shared sense of humor, comprehensible language, and the comforting cuisine they relish, to establish a feeling of acceptance and approval within their community.

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