

Does Patriarchy Only Oppress Female: The Role of Masculinity and Fatherhood in Our Social Realm

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Abstract:

Many civilizations have patriarchic structures in which males represent the authority figure while females have passive roles both at home and in the society. However, are only females affected negatively in a patriarchic system, or does the dominant system control the roles of males as well? By depicting different male characters, *Babam ve Oğlum (My Father and My Son, 2005)* shows how patriarchy plays a crucial role defining the roles of men and the concept of masculinity in conventional perceptions. *My Father and My Son* portrays how essentially the gender roles are constructed, shifted, and defined according to our social norms. The relationship between the fathers, male characters, and the generations describes the ways in which patriarchy becomes the dominant power dynamic, which has the ultimate control over gender roles. In the film, Hüseyin, as a dominant father figure, symbolizes the patriarchal structure of the whole nation. Hüseyin and the male dominant society function for the same purpose in order to shape, control, mold individuals, and restrict them with prescribed roles, and assumptions. Representing the traditional Turkish family, the director Irmak actually mirrors the society, and illuminates the power relations between males both at home, and in our social realm. As a core structure of a society, the family becomes a model for the social order in which even males are oppressed, and subjected to perform the roles allotted to them. *My Father and My Son* addresses patriarchy through a different angle, and suggests a distinctive perspective to the issues of fatherhood, masculinity, gender roles, and family dynamics in a male-dominant society.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Masculinity, Fatherhood, Babam ve Oğlum

Ataerki Sadece Kadına mı Baskı Yapar: Sosyal Alanda Erkeklik ve Babalığın Rolü

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Özet:

Pek çok medeniyet, erkeğin otorite figürü olduğu, kadının ise hem evde, hem de toplumda pasif roller aldığı ataerki yapılaraya sahip olagelmıştır. Ataerki sistemden olumsuz anlamda etkilenenler yalnızca kadınlar mıdır, yoksa erkeklerin rolleri de kontrol altında mıdır? *Babam ve Oğlum* filmi (2005), farklı erkek karakterlerin tasviri üzerinden, ataerkinin, alışlagelmiş algıda erkeklerin rollerini ve erkeklik kavramını nasıl şekillendirdiğini göstermektedir. Babam ve Oğlum, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin nasıl inşa edildiğinin, nasıl yön değiştirdiğinin, ve sosyal normlara uygun olarak nasıl tanımlandığının resmini çizmektedir. Filmdeki erkek karakterler, babalar ve kuşaklar arasındaki ilişki, ataerkinin toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri üzerinde kontrol sağlayan temel güç dinamiği olarak işlev görme yollarını ortaya koyar. Filmde baskın baba figürünü temsil eden Hüseyin, tüm ulusun ataerki yapısını sembolize etmektedir. Hüseyin'in amacı, erkek egemen toplumun amacıyla ortaktır: Bireyleri önceden belirlenmiş rol ve varsayımlar doğrultusunda şekillendirmek, kontrol etmek. Yönetmen Çağan Irmak, geleneksel Türk ailesini tasvir ederken, erkek ve kadın arasında evde ve sosyal alanda hüküm süren güç ilişkilerine ışık tutmaktadır. Toplumun çekirdeğinde yer alan kurum olarak aile, erkeklerin de baskı altında olduğu ve paylarına düşen rolü icra etmek zorunda bırakıldıkları sosyal düzenin modeli olmaktadır. Babam ve Oğlum, ataerkiyi farklı bir açıdan ele alarak, erkek egemen toplumda babalık, erkeklik, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve aile içi dinamikler üzerine kendine özgü bir bakış açısı ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ataerki, Erkeklik, Babalık, Babam ve Oğlum

Babam ve Oğlum (My Father and My Son, 2005) reflects a crucial era including the 12 September military coup in 1980, which affected many people and their lives as an “outsider force that disrupt[ed] the internal harmony of home” in Turkey (Suner 29). Çağan Irmak portrays social conditions of the 1980s by embedding history into a highly dramatic family story, which arouses sympathy and causes tears. In one of his interviews Irmak says, “in Turkey, everybody was influenced by the military intervention in some way”. It intervened in social and cultural life, used imprisonment, restrictions, torture, and the death penalty as main tools to spread fear, depoliticize, and silence the society (Tekin 4).

In spite of the restrictions, censorship and ongoing suppression in the following years of the military intervention, the aftermath of the coup and its impact on socio-cultural life was projected through cinema. In many 12 September films, fear and suppression is in the center of the narratives surrounded with the problems, conflicts, and melancholy of individuals. Lives turned upside down by the 12 September military coup, sorrow, and trauma aftermath are analyzed to portray and criticize the chaotic system. Silence and trauma are voiced by the directors of 12 September films and projected through different perspectives. The common theme focuses on a revolutionist character released after many years of imprisonment, coming back home and the dramatic changes the society went through due to the impact of the coup. Confronting the new society, his old friends, and family, the male character reflects the transformation, alienation, and conflict amongst broader social change. However, directors who implicitly criticize the negative impact of military intervention on politics and social life in 1980s replace with those who easily address the military regime, generals, accurate victims and stories in 2000s. Besides, the narrative is woven with nostalgia, humor, and tragicomic elements in *Beynelminel (2006)*, *Babam ve Oğlum (2005)* and *Vizontele Tuuba (2004)* produced in 2000s, while drama and tragedy was popular in films released between 1980s and 1990s.

Cinema is considered a significant tool reconstructing the past and transmitting the memories from one generation to another. It structures

the history through a reflective and interpretative way of communication. Reflecting the social and political unrest through private lives, *My Father and My Son* tells us our stories, “by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely space, time, and causality and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely attention memory imagination and emotion” (Singh 51). Past and present, memory and imagination, private and public significantly intertwined so that characters’ travels to their past, in other words, to their selves reveal their desires, mistakes, regrets and give them a second chance to fix injured feelings and damaged relations.

My Father and Son tells the story of Sadık, a revolution supporter, leaves his parents, becomes a journalist as opposed to his father’s wish and settles in İstanbul with his wife. However, Sadık loses his wife and learns that he is going to die soon. He comes back to his village in order to find a shelter for his son Deniz and the film began to be intriguing after their arrival. Although *My Father and Son* revolves around the memories of individuals, both “personal and collective remembering” play an important role in the films which have themes about the coup of 12 September (Tekin 5). As Suner states, such stories also “enable the audience to revisit their own past and consider new ways of representing their cultural identity” (40). *My Father and My Son* creates empathy, identification and triggers the process of remembrance of the audience within the idea of nostalgia. It not only “contributes to the dialectic process of the history” but also provides a space to re-think the past within a broad perspective (Tekin 5). The film reflects the oppression that caused traumas in individuals’ lives and played a significant role in which those individuals confront their pasts and issues that remain unsolved.

Irmak uses melodramatic elements such as “the interrelated family of the characters and repressive small town,” which essentially “lead the audience focus on the tragic stories rather than the reason of the tragic events” (Wambach 114). According to Kolker, “melodrama sutures the viewer into its fabric and makes the viewer’s emotional response part of that fabric’s pattern” (237). *My Father and My Son* hooks and does not

release us through the film. It blends our emotions with the characters' and makes us a part of the story. Irmak combines melodramatic elements with the themes of family relations, self-discovery, patriarchy, masculinity, social pressure, trauma, and its effects on individuals (Wambach 98). By doing so, he shows how political and public issues affect individuals through the domestic sphere where men and masculinity are portrayed according to conventional perceptions. I will examine how patriarchy affects not only women but men as well in our social realm and focus on the reciprocal relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor in terms of gender roles. I want to show how masculinity and fatherhood are represented in patriarchy and function as a significant determiner in social relations.

Identity Formation

Turkish society is considered “highly patriarchal with clear-cut gender role differences” (Uğurlu 649). The institutions such as family structure and marriages are under the control of patriarchy. The father is considered the dominant sex, “the ruler of the family and is regarded as the formal authority to whom the wife and the children must ultimately respond” (Uğurlu 649). The father is the decision-making mechanism and head of the family who is responsible for making basic income. According to traditional values, the father or the oldest male figure—grandfather in extensive families, is the authority who demands respect and obedience. The roles are clear-cut so that the father is the protector, provider, and representative of the family while the mother has to take care of the children, their upbringing, and domestic duties. In recent decades, although women have participated in the job market in considerable numbers, their responsibilities at home do not decrease. However, the expected roles for both males and females in the family are gradually changing in recent years because of urbanization, educational, economic, and social opportunities.

In *My father and My Son*, a traditional Turkish family and the relationships between its members are represented in a striking way. Sadık, the main character of the film, resists his dominant father Hüseyin's plans for him and challenges his prescribed role which is to show complete obedience towards his elders especially his father. Sadık not only repels his dominant father's ideas but also the culturally accepted assumptions and the undemocratic system processing under a military coup that takes away people's freedom of speech and imprisons them into silence. When the military intervention "shatters the protective shell of small town life," Sadık protests the social order, raises his voice against the outsider force as an earnest journalist, and struggles with his father's supremacy as a rebellious son (Suner 33). It is hard to define which identity Sadık has when he argues with his father. Does Sadık leave his journalist identity and be the youngest son of Hüseyin or does he still have those so-called anarchist ideas and bring them back to the house? On the surface, it seems that the fights between son and father can be considered ordinary or common; however, it is more than a father-son conflict that gains a deeper meaning when it becomes a battle of ideologies.

Sadık's journey to his father's farm in a town in the Aegean coast begins right after he learns his serious illness whose symptoms show that he is going to die soon. With a desire of finding a safe and permanent place for his son, Deniz, Sadık decides to come back to the house in which he spent his childhood and which he hopes will be a warm place and protection for Deniz. Deniz lost his mother while she was giving birth to him at the coup night. We see Sadık's pregnant wife opening the door at the beginning of the movie and questioning her husband in a nervous mood because of his being late and drunk. She shows her anxiety about the tense condition of the country and warns Sadık about being more careful since they will have a baby very soon. Sadık defends himself by saying that he is upset because his article was not published due to the new editor who is scared of someone or something. Sadık touches his wife's stomach and calls the baby "breast" which has both positive and negative connotation in Turkish culture and is mostly associated with masculinity. He implies that the baby could be energetic and naughty

which are considered as common and obvious characteristics of a boy. Sadık's wife's reaction "what if it is a she?" verifies that he is expecting a boy instead of a girl and supports the idea of the secondary status of female in male's world.

This scene shows the ongoing discussion about the issue of gender construction and the prescribed roles allotted to the sexes by our surroundings and the social forces. Sadık starts to define his baby's behaviors by attributing to it certain roles although it is still in its mother's womb. His wording about the baby reveals his unconscious desire for a boy who will bring him honor since boys are considered superior to girls in paternalistic cultures in which lineage is traced through the father. The idea of being the father of a boy will bring him prestige among his friends and strengthen his masculinity, which parallels with the concept of power over femininity. Ironically, Sadık has to practice the role of both motherhood and fatherhood after he lost his wife at a park while giving birth. His wife has labor pain in the middle of the night; however, the military takes control and bans anyone from being outside. So Sadık and his wife cannot understand why there are no people on the streets to take them to the hospital. Their despair becomes more touching when it unites with their screams for help and with the music, which triggers sympathy. In the next shot, we see Sadık's exhausted face in blood, holding the baby covered with his shirt and his dead wife's bloody body in a blurred image. Then a soldier comes, asks if it is an accident, and says that he will call the ambulance. Sadık says, "My wife is dead. The baby was born and she lost too much blood" with dull eyes and a senseless expression, then asks where everybody is. When the soldier says, "There has been a military coup," the melting music starts and the camera first zooms into Sadık's face, then the moving eyes of the baby who has been separated from his mother by 12 September which means a sad and an orphan start for Deniz (Başçı 167). The role of the military invention on the communication between the generations is clear in this scene. It scatters the family, cuts the link between the son and the mother with death, and causes social alienation. Irmak suggests that the military coup separated children from

their parents and the nation from its past by not keeping its promises such as peace, social welfare and development.

The movie continues with a couple shots of Sadık's torture scenes in a prison, his trial in a court, and the maid who takes care for Deniz when his father is in prison. It is ambiguous what Sadık's crime is and what he is accused of. However, under a military regime and an undemocratic political milieu, individuals do not have right to question the justice. The scene in which Sadık comes home and hugs his two year old son tells us that he spent two years in the prison and implies his deadly illness is due to those tortures. Sadık's illness gives his life another direction, which brings him to his father's house where he left years ago. Contrary to his Father's wishes, Sadık studied journalism instead of agriculture, stayed in Istanbul instead of coming back to the town, and married Aysun, instead of Birgül from the same town. Sadık's decisions show his independent character, and rebellious soul which does not want to accept another sovereignty in his territory. However, both his father and the undemocratic system try to pull Sadık into their own regions where there is no free will but limited choices and prescribed roles. In this respect, Hüseyin and the military government function as a mutual mechanism to control individuals, leading them in the direction of its ideals and desires. Both father and government take the individual's freedom and prevent them from seeking their own rights.

Sadık is one of those rebellious individuals who goes for his own goals and achieves them by ignoring the barriers in his way. In one flashback, while Sadık's mother Nuran is shouting at him not to leave the house, Hüseyin tells Nuran that neither of them can come back to the house if she goes with Sadık. Young Sadık does not say anything or look back but just walks away with his backpack. His silence in this scene is a defeat against Hüseyin's threat. However, it is actually a victory for him. Sadık shows his courage by leaving a place and people that limit his freedom. His walking away without looking back shows his ambition and indicates that he does not care for his past but future and own plans. This is Sadık's first journey in order to pursue self-fulfillment and the desire of

defining who he is without his landowner father's power over him. He believes that he cannot express himself thoroughly and be the person he wants under his father's shadow, which encloses each of the family members.

Fatherhood

The conflict between the father and the son appears essentially as a contradiction between two men whose expectations do not match with their perceptions of masculinity. Hüseyin is a stereotype and a traditional Turkish father figure who wants to control everything and everybody around him. His understanding of fatherhood, normative practices, and assumption about his masculine role in the family are learned through culture. Hüseyin constructs his role according to the norms and values of the social realm. He can never leave his landowner self and be a father for his sons or a husband for his wife. Drawing borders for everyone and ordering the people around him makes Hüseyin satisfied about his status and keeps his reputation alive. He acts like a landowner at home, expects absolute respect from family members, and practices his landowner identity in his social relations. Hüseyin's obstinacy is one of the reasons why he does not talk to Sadık for years and why he does not welcome Sadık and Deniz when they first meet. His prestige among the other family members is threatened, his steady status in the town is shaken, and his authority is diminished by Sadık. Now, Sadık becomes a rival and a threat for Hüseyin rather than a son.

Another father-son relationship represented in the film is between Sadık and Deniz. Sadık represents an unselfish, patient, keen father figure. There is an intimate relationship and strong communication between the two. Sadık is Deniz's only friend and his hero who protects him all the time. Deniz's inner world is projected by the stories he tells. Deniz reads comic books that inspire him to create his own world in which he tells stories as a narrator. The narrative becomes complicated and multilayered by Deniz's dreams and stories since they are stories

within a story. He filters those fictional events and superheroes in the books through his imagination and adopts them to the accurate events and people. By doing so, he becomes mature and forms his own memories. The structure of the narrative is enhanced by Deniz's imagination and the books which make the movie intertextual.

In one of the scenes, when he first enters his grandfather's house and sees the wooden door of their room, Deniz's voice is heard telling a story about little Deniz and his father who have to pass through the door cursed by a witch and the forest full of monsters. After the camera zooms into the wooden door from Deniz's point of view, the next shot starts with a dark forest scene in which Deniz and Sadık are walking by the monsters. When the bat-like monsters block their road, Sadık scares them with his sword so they can continue walking. Until they pass the door, his father becomes a brave hero who saves him from being kidnapped and thrown into the well by the monsters. Deniz continues his story, telling that Deniz is not scared because his brave father is with him. The forest scene ends in the next shot when we see the inside of the bedroom and they open the door and come in with their luggage.

The dark forest scene takes us to a child's imagination and shows how he interprets the real life events and how they take different shapes and meanings for him. The tense environment also affects him as much as it does the adults. Although he is too young to understand properly, what happens around him and cannot express himself, his stress, concerns, and fears are conveyed through the stories he tells. It is clear that there is always a fear about being away from his father, which is one of the main themes of his stories communicating with us on behalf of Deniz. Those comic books not only become a bridge between the audience and Deniz but also between the grandson Deniz and the grandfather Hüseyin. They turn into a good reason to develop a close relationship with Deniz and his grandfather. After learning Deniz's interest into comic books, Hüseyin goes to town to buy some and give them as a present. Thus, the comic books function as a communication tool not only connects the character and the audiences but the generations as well. On one hand, they make the

structure complex and multilayered by forming a story within the story of the film; on the other, they clarify the narrative by reflecting the inner thoughts and feelings of the youngest male character, Deniz.

Prescribed Roles through Naming

The climax of the film starts with an argument between Sadık and Hüseyin in the middle of a night. Sadık tells Hüseyin that they need to talk and the discussion will not be about asking for forgiveness. The argument starts with Sadık's question about why his father chose to give the names Sadık and Salim to him and his brother. The meanings of the names are ironic since Sadık means loyal and Salim means quiet and healthy. Sadık actually implies how Hüseyin is obsessed about controlling everything even from the beginning of their life. Hüseyin wanted them to be obedient and devoted to their family and values. These names were a reflection of Hüseyin's subconscious desire about his sons' lives.

The discussion about names reveals Hüseyin's secret intention that the audiences do not realize and lead them to question his autonomy. On the other hand, as an ideological tool, Deniz reveals the director's intention, and Sadık's subconscious. He criticizes his father for being obsessed about controlling their lives from the beginning but we witness that Sadık does the same thing for Deniz. Deniz was the name of a famous Marxist-Leninist revolutionary and political activist who was executed after another military coup in 1972. Sadık wants to reflect his leftist political view through Deniz and chooses an identity for his son. Sadık appears to be as an unselfish, indulgent, socialist father figure. However, he infuses his ideology and control Deniz, who has to carry the burden of his father's political view throughout his life. What if Deniz became an ardent supporter of the right-wing party, would Sadık still be a gentle and insightful father or act like Hüseyin who is a control freak? We do not know the answer; however, we cannot ignore the fact that Sadık chooses this name on purpose in order to emphasize his strong political view.

The shifting relationships and roles between the generations and the sons demonstrate that the roles are socially constructed and historically contingent. Sadık sometimes performs the roles that he criticizes and cannot separate from that part of the society as an individual. The former generation—Hüseyin wants to impose his ideology and ideas to Sadık who is the next generation. This cycle continues between Sadık and Deniz. The power dynamics between the characters are structured and reconstructed through the impact of military intervention and values intermingled with social norms, specific set of rules, cultural conditions. In spite of his fathers' oppression, Sadık has to trust Hüseyin and let Deniz live with them. Although Hüseyin's house is associated with suppression and family members have limited freewill, Sadık demands a place for Deniz saying, "Give him a room, dad. Let him have a home, but he could leave time to time." Sadık is in a desperate situation, has nowhere to go and no one to trust. His wife died, his revolutionary friends came over and became the spokesman of the government. On the other hand, Sadık's words demonstrate his longing for home, contradicted feelings about belonging, unconscious reliance to the security and warmth of the family. To Sadık, Deniz needs support and no one can compensate his absence except Hüseyin's house. This belief comes from Sadık's cultural values acquired unconsciously. 'Grandparents' household' is coded with a positive connotation which gathers everyone, be a shelter and is the reason why Sadık takes Deniz there.

My Father and Son provides a surface account of 12 September through a domestic sphere. It essentially projects the breaking family links because of the military intervention into private lives as well as public. The contradiction and power structures between males and the tension between the generations are analyzed in a rural setting within the perspective of past, present and future. The film questions gender roles subjected to change and based on myriad social factors in the perpetuated patriarchal relations and male privileges. Among these factors, society, parents, and peers play a significant role over individuals and their identity formation. In this respect, individuals always feel the pressure of their environment such as patriarchal masculinity, social relations, and

political unrest as a determiner of their identities and actions. Not only women but men are also subjected to the influence of patriarchal masculinity perpetuating the idea that men have the right to dominate, control and lead women, children and other men. *My Father and My Son* suggests, although people challenge the accepted assumptions in a patriarchal socio-political system, and “break culture’s rules,” they “have to pay” (Kolker 240). It can be said that Sadık pays the price heavily by suffering in between. On the other hand, he would have never known the consequences, if he did not leave. *My Father and My Son* confronts us with the possibility of what would happen if we followed a different way than the way of culture and the patriarchy want us to do. The possibilities vary according to various power relations and depend on different circumstances, surroundings, and cultures.

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