
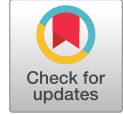




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**“Social Relations between the Sexes in Athena Farrokhzad’s
Morals According to Medea”**



Pelin Doğan Özger¹  

¹ Munzur University, Faculty of Letters, English Language and Literature Department, Tunceli, Türkiye

Abstract


This paper explores how patriarchal power relations construct the idea of “nature” in Athena Farrokhzad’s *Morals According to Medea* (*Moral enligt Medea*, 2022), an adaptation of Euripides’ classic play *Medea* (431 BCE). The analysis will concentrate on Medea’s subversion of patriarchal “appropriation” tactics from a feminist perspective, particularly through ideological codes embedded in the dialogues between Medea and Morality, the only other character in the play. By doing so, it seeks to understand women’s position in relation to patriarchy through a materialist feminist lens, with particular attention to the conflict between Medea and Morality. The focus will also be on how Medea challenges traditional discourses of motherhood, constructed within male-dominated societal structures. The study will further discuss the ways in which she raises her voice in resistance, both as a local and as a refugee, within the spaces where she is either confined or expelled. The discussion will be framed within the context of the theory of social relations between the sexes highlighting the specific impact of women’s resistance and militancy in examining the mechanisms of sovereignty.

Keywords

Materialist feminism • *Medea* • Athena Farrokhzad • social relations between the sexes • adaptation studies



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 Corresponding author: Pelin Doğan Özger pelindogan@munzur.edu.tr



Introduction

Canonical works of classical literature have long served as a profound source of inspiration for writers, stimulating their creative processes and encouraging them to revisit, refashion and engage with timeless themes and ideas within the broader field of adaptation and appropriation studies. In her *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon accentuates the “palimpsestic” (2006, p. 9) nature of an adaptation and offers a general description of the concept as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works”, “a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” and “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (2006, p. 8). Literary adaptations are, thus, cultural products that refer to a wider world and contain aesthetic pleasure. Julie Sanders argues that the act of adapting and appropriating is heavily reliant on the common denominators of canonical narratives within the mythical universe, with their reference points to a shared memory of characters, themes, and insights. Myths have been a wellspring of inspiration for literary adaptations, with their nature transcending cultural boundaries and renewing every time they cross borders (Sanders, 2006, p. 45). What is particularly alluring about the adapted or appropriated works is that they give pleasure via acts of recognition and reminiscence (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 4). However, the act of adapting or appropriating “is not an act of sly plagiarism; it is a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to engage with an original text and offer a new approach or direction” (Rees, 2017, p. 3). Rees further argues that the act of adaptation and appropriation is inevitably a “political act where the new dramatist seeks to challenge or critique either the assumptions of the earlier text or their own national and cultural environment” (Rees, 2017, p. 179). Thus, adaptations recontextualise the source material to offer new ideological, or ethical or artistic investments and purposes (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 28; Sanders, 2006, p. 2; Rees, 2017, p. 3). The adapted or appropriated product is relocated in a new social and cultural territory on each occasion. The palimpsestic character of this reformulation unquestionably opens up a space for the reader/audience to seek for political purposes.

This paper scrutinises Athena Farrokhzad's play *Morals According to Medea*, which is an adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*. The powerful mythic archetype of Medea has been revisited by many authors who have sought to rework or reimagine her story. Euripides' *Medea* transformed this myth into a canonical literary work that has inspired numerous adaptations. In the original myth, Medea kills her brother and leaves her country for the sake of her love for Jason. After fleeing to another country, Medea first kills the woman (the king's daughter) for whom her husband Jason has abandoned her and then murders her own children to take revenge on Jason for his betrayal. The character of Medea has been reimagined across different centuries and geographies within varying cultural and political contexts. In some of these adaptations, Medea is portrayed as a tyrant, held accountable by the patriarchal judiciary. In others, she is depicted as a victim with weak-willed traits. In contrast to these versions, some 20th- and 21st-century adaptations¹ signify the resistance of the oppressed, expose power relations, and critique systems of exploitation (Yetim, 2019, pp. 56–59). Farrokhzad's *Morals According to Medea* reinterprets Euripides' play with substantial modifications, offering a fresh take on the classic tragedy. The new narrative is structured in the form of an imagined conversation between Medea and Morality in the aftermath of Euripides' *Medea*. After having murdered her own children, Medea engages in this discussion with Morality, personified on stage as a reflection of societal norms. The play, which begins where Euripides leaves off, is highly influential as it chooses to re-interpret Medea from the margins. In her adaptation, Farrokhzad changes, condenses, and shifts the focus of Euripides' *Medea*. *Morals According to Medea* adeptly examines the tension between Medea's pride and anguish as a woman,

¹For instance, in the context of Turkey, two adaptations of *Medea* were staged simultaneously during the 2024 season: Athena Farrokhzad's *Morals According to Medea* (2022) and Hanane Hajj Ali's *Jogging* (2018). Seemingly, Medea's story and words still resonate today, delivering a potent political message on women's rights and representation.

highlighting her defiance of social norms and the disruption of the established order, while embodying the nuanced suffering that comes with resisting the prevailing social structure.

This study will trace how Medea challenges the “appropriation” tactics of patriarchal domination that are deeply entrenched in the ideological codes of the conversation between Medea and Morality in the play. Drawing upon the conceptualisation of ‘social relations between the sexes,’² the discussion will explore Medea’s subversion of the motherhood discourse constructed within social structures shaped by the patriarchal mindset. According to Daniele Kergoat (2022, pp. 123–124), this concept is fundamentally based on the fact that the power relations that produce observable social practices use biological determinism as their justification. Social relations between the sexes signify a kind of class relationship organised by gender relations that are ideologically constructed at the discursive level. This class relationship between men and women reveals itself through the reduction of women to the position of material objects. Against this backdrop, this study aims to understand the ‘materialist feminist’ origins of women’s struggle against patriarchy through analysis of Medea’s counter-discourse. In other words, the aim is to examine how Medea’s clash or tension with Morality reflects constitutive relational dynamics between male and female classes and to understand how exploitation and its legitimation (rooted in notions of nature) are articulated through Morality. From a materialist feminist perspective, Colette Guillaumin (2005, pp. 76–80) relates the reduction of women to the idea of nature as a fundamentally ideological construct. The idea of nature, which serves as the source of legitimacy for the patriarchal order, is reflected in the discourses embedded within social relations. These discourses are both inclusive and pervasive, ranging from the description of female social actors by their gender to the characterisation of various social roles through gendered identification. Ultimately, these discourses reflect everyday power relations between men and women, manifesting in complex and ambiguous ways. Drawing on Danielle Juteau’s insights (2022, pp. 262–263), a materialist feminist perspective—which can be seen as a critique of the concept of nature in its most basic form—views male dominance as a historical social relationship in which women, as a class, are exploited by men, another class. It interprets the identities of women and men, built within this exploitative relationship, as deeply interconnected. This social relationship—between male and female classes—is not determined solely by economic factors; materialist feminism offers a reading practice that includes the exploitation of women’s paid labour but also extends beyond it. This relationship, conceptualised as gender-based slavery, involves the appropriation of the body, time, bodily products, space and sexuality.

The discourse of nature under male domination tends to position women as a kind of property to be owned. The patriarchal order, which builds property relations on the objectification of women, operates an ideology of gender-based slavery. In a relationship of slavery, it is assumed that individuals within gendered or racialised social groups inherit and retain specific social characteristics throughout their lives, from birth to death. This assumption is reinforced by positivist science, which is shaped by power relations. Women are portrayed as underdeveloped, prone to being owned, lacking a consciousness of freedom, and possessing an intuitive, control-oriented mind, thereby reducing them to mere “objects”. According to this concept of nature, the functioning of the world order relies on the male class’s appropriation of women, as “evidenced”

²Danielle Kergoat, a French academic and feminist sociologist, along with her colleagues, represents the school of social relations between the sexes. While this theoretical perspective emerges from the tradition of materialist feminism, it offers a distinct viewpoint from that of Christine Delphy and her circle, who are associated with the journal *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*. Despite deep theoretical connections and significant continuity between the two schools, they diverge in two fundamental ways. First, the school of social relations between the sexes places the con-substantiality of patriarchy—or its articulated, relational structure—at the core of its theoretical framework. Second, it argues that domestic labour is not merely exploited; it generates ideology, culture, and the very routines that shape everyday life (Acar Savran, 2022, pp. 7–22). The representatives of the theory of social relations between the sexes introduced the French term “rapports sociaux de sexe”, previously translated into English as “social relations of sex” (Adkins and Leonard, 2005, p. 15). However, as Adkins and Leonard point out, “this translation loses the oppositional flavour of the phrase in French” (Adkins and Leonard, 2005, p. 23). Drawing on Acar Savran’s insights in her introduction to *Cinsiyetler Arası Toplumsal İlişkiler ve Kesişimsellik [Social Relations Between the Sexes and Intersectionality]* (2022, pp. 7–22), I prefer to use the phrase “social relations between the sexes.”

by heredity, supported by scientific or social thought, and reflected in the “inner nature” of women. For this reason, women’s resistance to this appropriation, both as individuals and as a class, is seen as going against what is considered “natural,” and their resistance is thus deemed “perverted” (Guillaumin, 2005, pp. 89–94). In *Morals According to Medea*, Medea’s objection to Morality clashes with this idea of nature. Medea, who breaks away from the natural roles assigned to women by the dominant patriarchal order, also bears the marks of being stigmatised as deviant in her language. Militantly seeking to dismantle gender relations constructed socially rather than biologically, Medea’s tension with patriarchal domination or patriarchal law (Morality) generates a sense of endless ambiguity in both readers and audience, until she buries Morality beneath the stones and concludes the drama.

Morality’s Construction of Woman Versus Medea’s Construction of Woman

I am a woman, a refugee, a mother, and a child killer.

A criminal despised by humanity.

(Farrokhzad, 2022, p. 5)³

The way men relate to their children is one of the most visible indicators of power dynamics. While the mother is held responsible for the child’s care, upbringing, and safety, the child—being the product of the female body—is considered to be the property of the father. Children represent the father’s lineage and take his surname. According to customs, traditions, norms, and laws, the privilege of ownership belongs to man. However, it is not only the child who is reduced to the status of a material object; the mother, who is responsible for the child’s care, is also considered to be the property of the man. Women are compelled to dedicate their time and labour in accordance with an unwritten contract, which is essential to sustaining the man’s comfort zone and the status quo. This phenomenon manifests as a form of social relationship. What renders this phenomenon a constitutive element of everyday life are ideological discourses such as “the mother understands best the care of the child” (Guillaumin, 2005, pp. 76–78). In this context, Medea’s response to Morality’s questioning of her motherhood is significant:

MORALITY: There are plenty of hungry mothers who do not kill their children.

There are plenty of cheated women who do not feel that they are entitled to be master over both life and death.

There are plenty of refugees who do not steal other refugees’ rights in the world.

[...]

MEDEA: Show me a country where children are not within the borders of the woman.

Tell me, have you ever heard the expression: women and children?

It is mostly used to describe a disaster:

“An unacceptable attack on women and children...”

“Civilians, including women and children, have been shot in recent wars...”

“Women and children were reported to have been killed by snipers...”

“Among the victims there are many women and children...” (Farrokhzad, 2022, pp. 18–19)

³Throughout the paper, all translations of the play from Turkish into English were done by the author, as no English translation of the play was available.

Medea's emphasis on the co-existence of women and children can be evaluated from two perspectives. First, Medea engages in a power struggle over the children, who are the products of her own body but have been appropriated by men. According to her, children belong to women because it is women who give them life. Consequently, children are born through women and, in times of war, often die alongside them. Medea's statements can also be assessed in the context of discourses that construct and sustain patriarchy, which reduce women to the status of material objects. Patriarchy, while defining gender roles, obscures the specific qualities of women as individuals (Guillaumin, 2005, p. 74) and leaves them with only one generic social identity: being a woman. Masculine power structures that dictate what it means to be a woman continuously build their discourse on the objectification of womanhood. As can be understood from Medea's response to Morality, a woman is also like a child. A child cannot possess any quality other than simply being a child; it has no profession, ideology, or belief. However, a child has an owner and a ruler. In the patriarchal order, women are closely aligned with their children. Women do not own children; like children, they are anonymous and are responsible for the child's care. Perhaps this is why, in wars, they are not recognised as militants, guerrillas, soldiers or civilians but only as women and children. In this context, what does a woman have within the system? What does the system provide to women to enable their existence? And what happens to a woman if the system takes away what it gives her? Medea's rebellion in the opening scene of the play can be interpreted through this lens:

MEDEA: [...] What becomes of someone who has lost everything?
 What can desperation drive a woman to do?
 What is the final act of a mother before she leaves the stage?
 Humanity had certain questions, and I answered them carefully.
 [...]
 Now no one will wriggle in doubt.
 But what drama will unfold when the play ends?
 What will happen when I kill my children and my rival?
 When I have fulfilled my duty and the crime is completed,
 what drama will begin? (Farrokhzad, 2022, p. 5)

Medea's sense of remedy and despair, along with the underlying issues of human existence, are all rooted in patriarchy. This system gives women the illusion of possessing everything they have, while in reality, it reduces them to mere property within an ownership dynamic. Patriarchy, as a system of social structures where women are objectified, deprived, and exploited for male use, systematically permeates social relations (Walby, 1991, p. 40). This system arises from the interrelated dynamics of autonomous structures such as production relations, labour exploitation, state domination, male violence, gender-based slavery and cultural norms (Walby, 1991, p. 40). Ultimately, the patriarchal system continually reconfigures itself within each societal structure, sustaining its dominance through both continuities and distinctive characteristics, from the primitive tribal organisation to the contemporary global order shaped by neoliberalism (Gültekin, 2021, p. 119).

In the context of gendered social relations, materialist feminism posits that women's sexuality is also controlled by male dominance. For women, sexuality is often framed as a duty or responsibility, while for men, it is seen as something that enhances the value of women. This dynamic creates an asymmetrical exchange, establishing a social relationship where one party is positioned as the provider and the other as the receiver. The male recipient in this exchange participates by providing the woman with money, status, or

his surname (Tabet, 2022, p. 157). Medea's involvement in an unequal exchange and the exploitation of her labour start when she flees with Jason, who then becomes the central force shaping her life. With Jason, she loses everything—her homeland, her family, and eventually her children. The only thing that transforms her nothingness into revolutionary uniqueness is her rebellion against her husband, who owns her and acts as her master. Medea's depiction as a helpless woman can be understood as representing her loss of status, both as a property and as a woman without a husband or master. According to Christine Delphy (2022, p. 80), within the patriarchal order, a woman who belongs to her husband possesses nothing of her own; her only possession is the control exerted by the dominant man, which is essential for her existence within the system. Consequently, a married woman is inherently powerless and has lost everything. Medea is also aware that this system renders her children as mere extensions of her husband. As will be explored, Medea's response to social judgement goes beyond mere individual defence and resistance:

MORALITY: Medea first killed her brother.

Then she killed her rival.

Next, she killed her children.

Then she killed the remnants of decency.

Now she wants to kill Morality.

(Medea begins to place stones on top of Morality's body.)

MEDEA: To become a feared refugee, I had to kill my brother.

To be branded as an unwanted madwoman, I had to kill my rival.

So that they wouldn't have a murderous mother, I had to kill my children.

I killed them to prevent anyone else from harming them.

To create a story for us, I had to kill my children.

To establish my place in world history, I had to kill.

And now, to free myself from the drama, I must kill Morality.

Medea will rise from the ashes of the dead.

Medea, the child of the sun and the mother of myth, will outlive everyone.

This is the beginning of Medea.

A beginning for Medea.

A beginning according to Medea.

The beginning of the world thanks to Medea. (Farrokhzad, 2022, p. 31)

Apparently, Medea recognises that the patriarchal system assigns men the power to both give and take life. According to the "idea of nature," which forms the ideological foundation of patriarchy, the children are regarded as the product of Jason's sexual act. Therefore, it is seen as Jason's right to determine their fate, including banishing them from the new country where they have sought refuge with their mother. For this reason, Medea's act of murdering her children directly challenges the "idea of nature." By doing so, she strips the patriarchy of her sexuality, creativity, and motherhood. Medea understands that this attack on the "idea of nature" comes at a significant personal cost, and she is keenly aware that she will be judged by societal norms, in addition to the burdens imposed on women. Morality represents these norms; it functions as a powerful contract, consensus, and law between society and its rulers. Throughout the play, Medea attacks

this contract. While she sometimes feels regret and reflects on the pain of her actions, she consistently seeks to undermine Morality and, in doing so, reconstructs her own womanhood.

In addition, women experience various forms of oppression, rendering their experiences diverse. A materialist feminist approach to the theory of social relations between the sexes views gender-based social relationships as a specific yet horizontally evolving structure. Therefore, this structure of gender-based subjugation can intersect with and integrate other social relationships. Women's experiences differ based on factors such as ethnicity, economic relations, sexual orientation, and citizenship status, which shape the specific forms of their oppression. However, underlying all these diverse forms of oppression is the fundamental reality of gender-based subjugation, or the ideological influence of the male class's "idea of nature" (Juteau, 2022, pp. 244–247). As a woman who voices shared experiences of oppression, Medea is also conscious of the distinctive nature of other ideologically constructed, hierarchical and differentiated social relationships. In Euripides' *Medea*, Medea speaks to the Chorus of women as follows:

MEDEA: I'd rather take my stand behind
a shield three times than go through childbirth once.
Still, my account is quite distinct from yours.
This is your city. You have your fathers' homes,
your lives bring joy and profit. You have friends.
But I have been deserted and outraged –
left without a city by my husband,
who stole me as his plunder from the land
of the barbarians. Here I have no mother,
no brother, no blood relative to help
unmoor me from this terrible disaster. (Euripides, 2008, p. 13)

The underlying reality of her problem is connected to her being a woman, and this reality is defined not by biology but by male dominance. However, her status as a refugee, her role as a mother, and her lack of economic resources contribute to the multiplicity of her experiences of oppression. Within this complex web of social relations, her identity as a woman constantly reshapes both herself and others. As Jason's dominance expands, the ways in which other women (the Chorus, the princess) experience oppression are either softened or altered. Similarly, in Farrokhzad's adaptation, Medea often articulates similar complaints:

MEDEA: [...] Let those who have lost their land...
Let those who have lost their brother...
Let those who have lost their husband...
Let those who have lost their right to refuge...
Let those who have lost their sanity...
Let those who have lost their chil... chil... chil... children...
Let those who have lost their children cast the first stone. (Farrokhzad, 2022, p. 7)

MEDEA: [...] When I have fulfilled my duty and the crime is complete,
what drama will begin?
Who will take me into their home?
Which children will come after me?
Which man will love me?
Which king will grant me asylum?
Where will I go?

I am a woman, a refugee, a mother, and a child killer—
a criminal despised by humanity.

[...]

From this point, imagining the future is impossible.
It is impossible to foresee any path from this place.
This is the end of Medea.
This is the end for Medea.
This is the end according to Medea.
This is the end of the world according to Medea. (Farrokhzad, 2022, p. 5)

Medea is a refugee who has been betrayed by Jason and then faced an exile decree. Under the male-dominated ideology, she has endured both physical and psychological oppression, with her identity manipulated. Despite fulfilling all the “requirements” of womanhood, Medea initially struggles to comprehend Jason’s betrayal but eventually begins to question it. Her refugee status has further exacerbated her oppression. If she resists, she must seek a new refuge. Medea is keenly aware of the power imbalance between a woman resisting in her homeland and one resisting in a foreign land.

Exploring Constitutive Relationality in the Conflict Between Medea and Morality

Those in power seek to maintain their authority and oppressive practices, while the oppressed aim to dismantle or weaken this power. This conflict between opposing forces is a fundamental aspect of social practices and representation. Ultimately, this conflict represents a dialectical form of social relationship, characterised by contradictions both within and between each opposing side. The theory of social relations between the sexes posits that social relations produce gender and highlights how these relations arise from conflicts between the classes of women and men (Dunezat, 2022, pp. 101–102). In the play, Morality continuously reveals that the opposing classes of male and female are produced by each other, and that the idea of nature on which gender roles are based necessarily arises from this relationship, that is, from the processes of material life:

MORALITY: How could you be so reckless
as to betray your family and forsake your country?
How could you kill your own brother just to help a stranger escape?

How could you follow a stranger into enemy territory?

How could you believe in the permanence of his love?

That he would always protect you?

How could you forget that the most dangerous thing for a woman is to follow a man? (Farrokhzad, 2022, pp. 8–9)

In judging Medea, Morality bases its assessment on the reified “nature of men and women.” It views a man’s betrayal of the family as entirely natural, while a woman’s betrayal is deemed unusual. Moreover, Morality considers love within the marital relationship to be primarily the man’s domain. A man’s love is seen as dangerous, deceptive, and transient, while a woman’s love is deemed insignificant in itself. Its value is determined by the protection and ownership of a man. A man can end this ownership bond at any time, and the woman’s objections are disregarded. Medea also accepts her position as property within the dynamic of ownership as “natural,” as she says, “He should not have any other woman but me,” and again, “How could he prefer that woman over me, the one who bore his children?” (Farrokhzad, 2022, p. 9). Therefore, it is clear that in the original play, Medea’s conflict with Jason is not an effort toward liberation; rather, it is the result of fear, anger, frustration, and a desire for revenge resulting from the loss of ownership or male dominance. Medea believes that she has fulfilled all the requirements of being a woman. She has confronted her family and killed her brother for the sake of a man’s ownership. She has left her country and, as a refugee wife, dedicated her time and labour to Jason. She has surrendered both the sexual use of her body and its products, namely her children, to the man’s domain. However, Jason’s betrayal causes her to question what it means to be a woman. In Euripides’ *Medea*, Medea’s appeal to the Chorus can be interpreted within this context:

MEDEA: My husband, who was everything to me—

how well I know it – is the worst of men.

Of all the living creatures with a soul

and mind, we women are the most pathetic.

First of all, we have to buy a husband:

spend vast amounts of money, just to get

a master for our body to add insult

to injury. And the stakes could not be higher:

will you get a decent husband, or a bad one?

If a woman leaves her husband, then she loses

her virtuous reputation. To refuse him

is just not possible. When a girl leaves home

and comes to live with new ways, different rules,

she has to be a prophet – learn somehow

the art of dealing smoothly with her bedmate.

If we do well, and if our husbands bear

the yoke without discomfort or complaint,

our lives are admired. If not, it’s best to die.

A man, when he gets fed up with the people
at home, can go elsewhere to ease his heart – he has friends, companions his own age.
We must rely on just one single soul.
They say that we lead safe, untroubled lives
at home while they do battle with the spear.
They're wrong. I'd rather take my stand behind
a shield three times than go through childbirth once. (Euripides, 2008, pp. 12–13)

Understanding the socially constructed representations of women and men also necessitates examining the practices associated with these representations. Trying to interpret the meaning emerging alongside actions reveals the constructive power of interactions between groups (Dunezat, 2022, pp. 102–105). In the aftermath of Jason's betrayal, Medea begins to reassess how power relations are woven into the fabric of daily life. She critiques the appropriation practices of the dominant male and reveals her desire for liberation. By highlighting that giving everything to a man leads to a pitiable condition for women, Medea challenges the dominant system's construction of "gender-based slavery." The statement "we buy a master for our bodies" reflects the concept of the "material appropriation of the body," as discussed by materialist feminism in its analysis of gendered social relations. After losing Jason, Medea begins to question the reduction of women to objects, their subjection to direct physical appropriation, and ultimately their commodification. In a patriarchal system, being abandoned by a man feels like being left exposed, and with nothing left to lose, Medea turns towards complete liberation and militancy. When she says, "I'd rather take my stand behind a shield three times than go through childbirth once," Medea reveals her yearning to overturn traditional gender roles (Euripides, 2008, p. 13). Confronted by a man exercising his privilege of divorce, Medea refuses to be seen as a flawed woman; instead, she raises her voice in resistance.

As previously noted, Euripides' *Medea* primarily focuses on Medea's anger and her quest for revenge against Jason. Medea cannot understand why Jason would choose to marry another woman and abandon both her and their children. She sacrifices everything for Jason, leaving her homeland, killing her brother, accepting a life of exile and statelessness, and bearing him two children. By dedicating her time, body, labour and identity to Jason, she has become increasingly deprived of her own sense of self. Her only social value lies in her relation to a man, and even that is ultimately taken from her. In response, Medea takes revenge by murdering Jason's new bride, the bride's father, King Creon, and her own children. Farrokhzad's adaptation continues Medea's rage through her clash with the new character, Morality. The dialectical dimension of this conflict is evident throughout the play. What creates Morality or masculine judgement is Medea's resistance. Just as there is a dialectical relationship that continually reconstructs itself between the classes of women and men, there is also a dialectical relationship between Medea and Morality. Medea's words are crucial for understanding this dynamic interplay:

MEDEA: I will begin by killing the Chorus.
They must not continue telling the story.
I want to stop the course of history, to escape from the drama.
I wish to control the flow of time and the fate of the world.

My children have already died enough for you to prove your righteousness.
To demonstrate that you are superior to me.
That I am a dangerous criminal.
That I cannot distinguish right from wrong,
and that I am the antithesis of reason.
To show that my husband's choice of me was foolish.
That a relationship with a refugee woman would end this way.
That I am a threat to be eliminated.
I exist as your terrifying example—the deviant you must fight against.
You gave me poison to gain from the drama.
You had my children killed to prove your own greatness.
And now you will judge me, will you?
You are the executioner. (Farrokhzad, 2022, pp. 25–26)

Medea recognises that Morality, which proclaims itself as the source of truth, correctness and knowledge, is inherently a manifestation of power. The discourses of Morality are upheld by complex and interwoven power structures. To strengthen itself, Morality needs a deviant—a woman who is cast as a figure of monstrosity. Medea assumes this role of the monstrous figure that Morality requires. According to Rosi Braidotti (1994, pp. 80–81), in a patriarchal system that relies on binary oppositions, the figure of the enemy or the monstrous woman is not merely a problem but a structural necessity. Associating women who are already deemed worthless with “immoral” or “deviant” situations is crucial to constructing the image of the “monstrous woman.” Narratives about monstrous women are also important in understanding the obedience of marginalised women to those in power. Ultimately, the demonisation of women enables men to reshape their laws. Even when a man betrays, he remains aware that he can retain his virtue, as his laws dominate. This perspective helps explain Jason's justifications for his betrayal in Euripides' *Medea*:

JASON: (...) As for my marriage
to the princess, which you hold against me,
I shall show you how I acted wisely
and with restraint, and with the greatest love
toward you and toward our children – Wait! Just listen!
When I moved here from Iolcus, bringing with me
disaster in abundance, with no recourse,
what more lucky windfall could I find
(exile that I was) than marrying
the king's own child? It's not that I despised

your bed—the thought that irritates you most—
 nor was I mad with longing for a new bride,
 or trying to compete with anyone –
 to win the prize for having the most children.
 I have enough—no reason to complain.
 My motive was the best: so we'd live well
 and not be poor. I know that everyone
 avoids a needy friend. I wanted to raise
 sons in a style that fits my family background,
 give brothers to the ones I had with you,
 and treat them all as equals. This would strengthen
 the family, and I'd be blessed with fortune.
 What do you need children for? For me, though,
 it's good if I can use my future children
 to benefit my present ones. Is that
 bad planning? If you weren't so irritated
 about your bed, you'd never say it was.
 But you're a woman—and you're all the same! (Euripides, 2008, pp. 24–25)

Jason's words illustrate how binary oppositions operate. The legitimacy of a man abandoning a woman is deemed less immoral and even justifiable compared to the monstrosity of a woman leaving a man. In the patriarchal system, Medea and her children are positioned as property, while Jason is seen as the owner of that property. Jason uses this framework to legitimise his marriage to the king's daughter. According to this view, a man may acquire another woman as property for the benefit of the woman he already possesses. Men are considered to be the embodiment of knowledge, reason, norms, and morality, and their actions are aligned with these values. In contrast, women are perceived as being governed by emotion, distant from reason. Jason's statement, "You would even approve of me if you weren't writhing in jealousy," can be understood in this context. Jason needs Medea, who is jealous and enraged, to establish and legitimise himself as a lawgiver. Medea, along with all other women, had already been demonised even before killing her children: "If everything goes well between the sheets you think you have it all. But let there be some setback or disaster in the bedroom and suddenly you go to war against the things that you should value most. I mean it—men should really have some other method for getting children. The whole female race should not exist. It's nothing but a nuisance" (Euripides, 2008, p. 25). Jason labels the female as responsible for all evil and interprets childbirth occurring in the female body as an anomalous and repulsive condition.

The monstrous emerges in a realm that eludes the boundaries of reason and rationality, existing as a foundational element of discourse. It is not within the boundary but directly engages with it. It shapes the boundary and is simultaneously shaped by it. Monstrosity begins with birth. While the male-dominated order constructs rationality, the fact that women are the bearers of life is both "impossible" and real. This reality is both fascinating and disturbing, as it challenges male supremacy. Women are the first to deviate from rationality through their role as life-givers. The changes in their bodies before birth are central to the concept of anomaly. The female body extends beyond the limits of what is considered "normal" until childbirth, at which point children are handed over to men, who are regarded as their rightful owners. From

the outset, the mother is constructed as monstrous for usurping the life-giving power that is traditionally attributed to men. Ultimately, she remains monstrous because she does not have ownership of her children. While the inadequacy of men and the completeness of women originate in the body, the inadequacy of women and the completeness of men are established within societal structures (Braidotti, 1994, pp. 77-83). For this reason, Jason cannot accept childbirth as a woman's role or as Medea's. Evil, monstrosity, and deviance do not begin with Medea's act of killing her children; they begin with her giving birth to them. Medea attempts to reclaim her body's products from the male lineage by killing her children. She rejects the reduction of her body to a mere object and takes back her body's products (her children) from the male line. Farrokhzad's Medea confronts Morality, which embodies the law legitimising Jason, the concept of nature and rational thought, with a bold challenge:

MEDEA: Since I brought the children into the world, I have the power to end their lives. Since I created them from nothing, it is my right to return them to nothing.

Since I gave birth to mortals, it is within my power to determine their fate.

If mothers are expected to be infallible, then why is the concept of error even necessary?

If the immense effort to keep children alive can be dismissed so easily,
and if one person's fate doesn't concern all humanity...

Since this is what life has given me, I will take back my contribution to life.

If I do not submit to nature, then nature should submit to me.

I have nullified birth and cancelled the cycle of life.

For Medea, justice is defined by what she demands for herself. (Farrokhzad, 2022, pp. 12-13)

As previously mentioned in the introduction, this study seeks to scrutinise the power relation dynamics constructed between men and women by examining the discourse surrounding the conflict between Medea and Morality. Danielle Juteau (2022, pp. 227-252) asserts that a materialist feminist analysis, framed by the theory of social relations between the sexes, must necessarily focus on the dynamic and constantly interlocking structure of these social relations. Only in this way can the similarity and divergence of the forms of oppression and subjugation be examined together. Prior to the intersection of all other cultural identities, womanhood is internally homogeneous and constructed through the concept of nature. This historical and materialist perspective establishes the concept of the "female class." Femininity is at the core of this form of oppression, and it is defined not by biology but as a socially constructed category within the social realm. As stated in the above quote, Medea also voices how being a woman, or in other words, being constructed as a woman, unfolds similarly under a shared form of social domination. It is the woman who is expected to bear children, compelled to take on the ideologically constructed role of motherhood, obliged to care for children, required not to make mistakes, and forced to submit to nature or the concept of nature. Medea is one such woman and she shares this common experience with other women.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Womanhood from Annihilation to Resistance

In *Morals According to Medea*, Farrokhzad endows Euripides' *Medea* with a political consciousness that profoundly changes her understanding of Jason's treachery. While initially she partly associates Jason's betrayal with masculinity as in the original play, she later fully recognises her identity as a woman as constructed, not innate. This newfound awareness and insight deepen her ongoing conflict with Morality. Farrokhzad, through her retelling of the Medea story, illuminates the social dynamics between men and women. In her adaptation, Morality symbolises order, law, the concept of nature and the prevailing ideology.

The interactions between Medea and Morality reveal the implications of a woman breaking free from the societal constraints imposed upon her within the established system. A woman is considered to be reasonable and acceptable as long as she conforms to the prescribed relational norms. For men, however, there is no such obligation; ultimately, each man is a creator of the dominant social relations that inform everyday life. Consequently, a man's act of betrayal does not signify an act against his "nature." A man's love may be fleeting; indeed, he is the one who defines love. For a woman, however, betrayal carries pejorative social connotations because it challenges conventional norms.

This analysis focuses on the theory of social relations between the sexes because it investigates how societal norms and representations of men and women are manifested in everyday practices. This perspective offers a deeper understanding of how gender dynamics shape and are shaped by daily life. However, the motivation for this study underscores the significance of recognising these practices not only through the lens of oppressive patriarchal systems but also by identifying the substantial impact of women's resistance and militancy, celebrating their agency and resilience. In this context, Farrokhzad's adaptation does not deviate from Euripides' *Medea* but rather offers a continuation of the original narrative. Medea carries her past with her, bearing the pain of her children's deaths and the cost of her resistance as she moves forward. *Morals According to Medea* re-examines Euripides' story in every detail; without this reinterpretation, Medea's transformation and the burial of Morality would be impossible. Medea is the creator of Morality; it is the class conflict inherent in her relationship with Jason that brings Morality into existence. Morality relies on Medea and her subversive resistance to assert and justify itself.

Resistance for Medea begins with destruction. Male-dominated ideology obscures Jason's interests and privileges. Medea becomes alienated from herself, her children, her body, her time, and her space. Alongside Jason, Medea is erased, trapped, and compelled to yield. However, her rebellion is not directed at Jason himself but at the ideology that grants him power. Thus, the representations of both Medea and Morality emerge as manifestations of the practices developed within power dynamics. In the play, Morality, as the ideology that legitimises Jason, embodies the "idea of nature," while the narrative ultimately shifts its focus to Medea rather than Morality. The primary concern of the play lies not in moral judgements but in Medea's defiant speeches that call for resistance. Medea is the play's social agent; she is the one who acts, defines, gives life, and takes it away. The play is filled with anticipation of what Medea will say or do in response to Morality. Morality is now exposed, unable to stay hidden, and reduced to predictable statements and a tedious ideology. In contrast, Medea is enigmatic, surprising, and captivating. Medea's allure lies in her unyielding resistance.



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Author Details

Pelin Doğan Özger (Assistant Professor)

¹ Munzur University, Faculty of Letters, English Language and Literature Department, Tunceli, Türkiye

0000-0002-6391-3523 pelindogan@munzur.edu.tr

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