

Article

Fatherhood, Memory, and Modernity: Paternal Identity in Orhan Pamuk's *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*

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Abstract

A Orhan Pamuk's first novel, *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* (*Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*), published in 1982, follows three generations of an Istanbul bourgeois family from the late Ottoman period to the 1970s. Set during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, the novel explores the social and cultural tensions accompanying Turkish modernization. This article examines father-child relationships in the novel through the theoretical framework of multiple modernities. Rejecting the assumption that modernization follows a singular Western model, the study approaches Turkish modernization as a historically specific and layered experience shaped by local social and cultural dynamics. Within this context, the article focuses on paternal authority, masculine identity, intergenerational expectation, and memory across three generations of the family. The study further analyzes how photographs, domestic spaces, rituals, and everyday narratives preserve the symbolic presence of the father after death, allowing paternal authority to persist across generations. The article argues that the novel presents a representative portrait of an Istanbul bourgeois family negotiating the tensions between tradition and modernity during the Ottoman-Republican transition.

Keywords: Orhan Pamuk; Turkish modernization; fatherhood; multiple modernities

1. Introduction

The period extending from the final decades of the Ottoman Empire to the foundation of the Republic of Turkey witnessed a state-centered modernization experience that transformed political institutions, social life, and cultural identities. Beginning with a series of reforms in the nineteenth century and accelerating during the late Ottoman era, this process was largely shaped by centralization, secularization, and orientation toward the West (Zürcher 2017). Following the establishment of the Republic, the project of modernization expanded to encompass law, education, and everyday life; the new regime implemented a comprehensive program of social transformation aimed at creating a modern and secular society (Ahmad 1993). Turkish modernization developed largely within a top-down political framework in which the state occupied a constitutive role in reorganizing social relations (Köker 2000).

This transformation profoundly affected political structures, family relations, intergenerational dynamics, and forms of authority embedded in everyday life. The tension between tradition and modernity reshaped the family as the smallest social unit; while Western lifestyles, secular values, and new urban middle-class identities became increasingly widespread, traditional hierarchies and paternal authority continued to persist within daily



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interactions (Göle 2002). Orhan Pamuk's *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* gains particular significance in this historical and cultural context. Spanning the period from the late Ottoman era to the 1970s, the novel narrates the distinctive trajectory of Turkish modernization through the multigenerational story of a single family.

Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları is Orhan Pamuk's first novel. Born in Istanbul in 1952, Pamuk left architecture school in order to pursue writing and enrolled instead in the School of Journalism, where attendance was not compulsory. He began writing *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* at the age of twenty-two and completed it in 1978, when he was twenty-six. The novel received the Milliyet Publications Novel Award in 1979 (Pamuk 1999b, pp. 127–28) and was first published in 1982; in 1983, it was also awarded the Orhan Kemal Novel Prize.

Since 1974, Orhan Pamuk has continued writing regularly. Although he has produced essays, memoirs, and short stories, novels have remained the central focus of his literary career and the primary reason for his international recognition and readership. As one of the most prolific figures in contemporary Turkish literature, Pamuk received thirty-three awards in Turkey and abroad between 1979 and 2021. Undoubtedly the most prestigious among them was the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded to him in 2006.

According to Pamuk, who stated that he intended to write a family novel with *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*, the book is both the story of his own family and the story of another family constructed through reading and imagination (Pamuk 1999b, pp. 128–29). By following the members and acquaintances of a bourgeois family between 1905 and 1970, Pamuk also presents a broad panorama of Turkey's socio-cultural life over a sixty-five-year period (Aytaç 2006, p. 36). Although the novel functions as a “family chronicle,” it may also be regarded as a “novel of the age” insofar as it examines a crucial historical and social crossroads in modern Turkish history (Gögebakan 2006, p. 12).

Recent scholarship on fatherhood in Turkey has examined how paternal authority has been reshaped under changing social and cultural conditions. Earlier studies have largely described the father as the principal authority and economic provider within the family, whereas recent research emphasizes greater emotional involvement and caregiving while acknowledging the continuing influence of traditional paternal expectations (Kanadıkırık 2020; Corapci et al. 2025; Uslu et al. 2026). These studies suggest that fatherhood in contemporary Turkey is increasingly understood as a hybrid practice in which established forms of paternal authority coexist with changing expectations concerning emotional intimacy and family relationships (Kisbu et al. 2023).

Studies on *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* have approached the novel from a variety of perspectives, particularly Turkish modernization, bourgeois identity, and the transformation of family life (Aytaç 2006; Gögebakan 2006; Turna 2021). More recently, the novel has also been examined in relation to questions of cultural identity and Orientalism (Özsert and Güven 2023), further enriching our understanding of its historical and social context. Comparatively less attention, however, has been devoted to fatherhood as the principal analytical perspective through which modernization, memory, and intergenerational relations can be examined together. This gap provides the point of departure for the following analysis.

This study examines *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* through the framework of multiple modernities in order to analyze the effects of Turkish modernization on family structures, fatherhood, and intergenerational relations. Rather than conceptualizing modernization as a Western-centered and linear model of historical progress, the multiple modernities approach understands it as a plurality of experiences reproduced within the distinct historical, cultural, and political dynamics of different societies (Eisenstadt 2017; Gaonkar 2001; Dirlik 2003). From this perspective, the novel is interpreted as a multilayered modernization process shaped by everyday life, family relations, paternal authority, class belonging, and

memory practices. The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic unfolds not only at the level of institutional and political transformation but also in intimate social relations and domestic life. Methodologically, the study employs interpretive close textual analysis. Father figures, intergenerational relations, spatial transformations, everyday rituals, and memory practices in *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* are therefore analyzed within their historical and cultural context. In this respect, the study seeks to discuss how macro-level processes of modernization are reflected in family structures and experiences of fatherhood. The analysis is limited to *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*, which portrays the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic through the experience of an Istanbul-based bourgeois family. Accordingly, the study concentrates on the family structure, forms of paternal authority, and intergenerational relations of the urban Muslim bourgeoisie. The diverse class, regional, and ethnic experiences of modernization in Turkey therefore remain outside the primary scope of the analysis. Although the study does not disregard the gender dimension of the novel, its primary emphasis remains on father figures and the various forms of paternal authority.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Modernization theory emerged within a Western-centered paradigm that presented the economic, political, and cultural transformations experienced by Western societies over the last four centuries as a universal and normative model. Classical modernization theory, informed by the structural-functionalist approaches of [Parsons \(2014\)](#) and [Lerner \(1964\)](#), rests on the assumption that societies follow a linear trajectory from the “traditional” to the “modern.” Traditional structures are therefore characterized as static and dependent upon religious references, whereas modern societies are positioned as secular, rational, and dynamic systems. This perspective, however, has been subjected to extensive criticism for universalizing Western values and equating modernization with Westernization. As [Przeworski and Limongi \(1997\)](#) argue, modernization does not unfold uniformly across societies, nor does economic development necessarily lead to democratization. Such critiques paved the way for alternative approaches that rejected reading modernity solely through a Western-centered narrative of progress.

[Eisenstadt’s \(2017\)](#) paradigm of “multiple modernities” argues that modernity cannot be reduced to a singular Western experience. Rather, modernity constitutes an “open-ended horizon” reinterpreted by different societies according to their own historical legacies and cultural dynamics ([Kaya 2004](#), p. 35). From this perspective, modernity is understood not as the complete elimination of tradition but as a hybrid formation reconstructed by the agency of local actors. The multiple modernities approach rejects the assumption that the Western model represents the only “authentic” form of modernity and instead places historically specific experiences of modernization at the center of theoretical inquiry. In this context, modernity in non-Western societies such as Turkey, Russia, Japan, Iran, and India has developed not through the direct imitation of the West, but through processes of “selective appropriation” ([Gaonkar 2001](#)).

Turkish modernization may likewise be interpreted as a hybrid transformation shaped through the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity, not as a linear narrative of Westernization. The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic generated a state-centered modernization project that regarded secularization and rationality as the primary markers of social progress ([Aydeniz 2026](#), p. 204; [Göle 2002](#)). Yet this project never produced a fully homogeneous social response; modernity was appropriated differently by diverse social actors. In Turkey, modernization produced a historically specific process marked by both conflict and accommodation, while traditional structures continued to shape social life ([Lüleci 2014](#), p. 164). Beginning in the final century of the Ottoman Empire

and accelerating during the Republican era, this transformation was implemented largely from above under the influence of pro-Western intellectual and military elites (Köker 2000).

Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları emerges as an important literary text that stages the familial dimensions of Turkish modernization. Spanning the period from 1905 to the 1970s, the novel centers on three generations of an Istanbul-based bourgeois family while tracing the effects of modernization on everyday life, family relations, and paternal identities (Aytaç 2006, p. 36; Pamuk 1999b, p. 127). The coexistence of traditional, modern, authoritarian, and emotionally distant forms of fatherhood within the same family frames modernization as a layered and contradictory experience shaped by tensions, discontinuities, and historical continuities. While the characters adopt aspects of Western lifestyles, they also continue to reproduce traditional forms of authority within everyday relations. The novel explores these tensions through multiple father figures who embody distinct responses to modernization.

The study employs interpretive textual analysis, an approach that treats literary texts both as linguistic structures and as cultural productions carrying the symbolic worlds of social actors (Lacity and Janson 1994, p. 140; Gephart 1997, p. 585). Drawing upon Geertz's (1973) notion of "thick description," the analysis interprets father figures, family relations, spatial arrangements, everyday rituals, and memory practices within their historical and cultural contexts. Particular attention is devoted to the ways paternal identities are associated with specific forms of authority and redefined within the experience of modernization. Memory also becomes a central analytical category enabling paternal authority to circulate across generations through photographs, domestic spaces, narratives, and everyday rituals, even after the father's physical absence.

3. Tradition and Modernity in Conflict: Family, Space, and Social Transformation

The tension between tradition and modernity emerges in *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* through everyday practices, family relations, and spatial transformations. In this respect, the novel approaches Turkish modernization not as a historical rupture in which tradition disappears altogether, but as a layered social terrain where modern lifestyles coexist with enduring traditional values.

Cevdet Bey's vision of family life is shaped by admiration for Western lifestyles. His remark, "I wanted to establish an alafranga family, but in the end they all became alaturka" (Pamuk 1999a, p. 110), articulates the unresolved tension between the aspiration toward Westernization and the persistence of inherited habits. Likewise, his desire for a family life resembling those he encounters in French novels (p. 181) reflects his attempt to imagine the modern family as both a cultural ideal and a marker of class mobility. Yet the effort to construct a modern household repeatedly encounters the resilience of traditional authority structures embedded in everyday relations.

One of the clearest examples appears after Cevdet Bey's death, when Osman reacts harshly to his sister Ayşe's relationship with Cezmi, a young man from a lower social background (p. 294). Osman regards Cezmi as socially unworthy of Ayşe, revealing how anxieties surrounding class decline continue to shape the moral boundaries of the family despite its economic and cultural ascent. Following the father's death, Osman gradually assumes paternal authority within the household. His statement to Ayşe—"I am no longer your brother; I am your father now" (p. 314)—marks the intergenerational transfer of paternal power. Although the urban bourgeois family appears receptive to individual freedom and romantic attachment, traditional mechanisms of surveillance and control regain force whenever the integrity of the family is perceived to be at stake.

Ayşe's abrupt removal to Switzerland in order to separate her from this relationship (p. 338) further demonstrates that modernization carries aspirations toward Western culture alongside disciplinary forms of social control. When Ayşe returns from Switzerland "changed" and eventually consents to marrying someone from her own social class (pp. 359–60), Westernization becomes associated less with individual emancipation than with class conformity and social regulation. Osman's perception of Ayşe's marriage to Remzi, the son of a merchant, as a commercial opportunity as well (p. 530) reinforces the extent to which the family institution is shaped by economic calculation and class strategy.

Another major dimension of the conflict between tradition and modernity unfolds through spatial transformation. Within the framework of multiple modernities, space constitutes a historical site in which social memory, identity, and experiences of modernization are negotiated (Oakes 1997; Oakes and Price 2008). In *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*, shifts in spatial organization parallel changes in both class position and family structure. The Haseki neighborhood of Cevdet Bey's childhood represents a traditional and impoverished social environment. The discomfort and claustrophobia he experiences upon returning there (p. 35) stem less from material poverty than from confrontation with a past he seeks to leave behind. In this environment, the desire for wealth accumulation is treated with suspicion and disdain. Despite these attitudes, Cevdet Bey perseveres as a Muslim merchant and steadily expands his commercial influence.

Nişantaşı, by contrast, is imagined as the secular living space of the emerging Muslim bourgeoisie. Even before establishing his family, Cevdet Bey becomes determined to move there. On his way to see the mansion he plans to purchase, he imagines the future life he will inhabit in Nişantaşı (p. 49). Space thus acquires a central role in the construction of modern identity and the modern family.

The mansion in Nişantaşı stands as the spatial embodiment of an orderly, Westernized, and "alafranga" family ideal. Over time, however, this space also undergoes transformation. Refik's questioning of the extended family's collective life under one roof, followed by his relocation to an apartment in Cihangir with his wife and children after Cevdet Bey's death (p. 220), signals the gradual disintegration of the traditional patriarchal household. The large mansion accommodating the extended family is replaced by apartment flats designed for nuclear families. As individualization becomes increasingly prominent, the extended family structure begins to fragment. Nigan Hanım, as the oldest member of the family, attempts to preserve familial continuity through space itself and opposes the idea of demolishing the mansion by insisting, "This house will not be destroyed" (p. 458).

Space in the novel therefore does not signify a linear narrative of progress. Rather, it stages an ongoing negotiation between past and future, tradition and modernity. The movement from Haseki to Nişantaşı, and from the mansion to the apartment, traces the simultaneous reconfiguration of family structure, class belonging, and paternal authority within Turkey's plural experience of modernization.

4. Forms of Fatherhood

Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları approaches the modernization process extending from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic not only at the level of social and political transformation but also through changing forms of fatherhood within the family. Throughout the novel, traditional, authoritarian, modern, deficient, and melancholic models of fatherhood coexist within the same familial structure, each corresponding to different dimensions of Turkey's plural experience of modernization. According to the alternative modernities approach, modernity emerges not as a singular and linear Western model but as a plural field of experience reinterpreted through local cultures, historical legacies, and social relations

(Gaonkar 2001). Father figures in the novel become carriers of tensions surrounding modernity, class mobility, authority, state power, and individuation.

As the symbolic “founding father” of the rising Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie, Cevdet Bey occupies the central position in the novel. In a historical context where commerce remained largely under the control of non-Muslim minorities (p. 18), his desire to rise through trade reflects both economic ambition and a longing for cultural transformation. His decision to name his shop “Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları” before even having children reveals an imagined paternal lineage projected into the future. Throughout the novel, this name becomes a symbolic extension of paternal continuity that persists even after Cevdet Bey’s death. His repeated desire to establish a “proper” family (p. 46) further demonstrates that he perceives the modern family as inseparable from class advancement and bourgeois respectability.

Cevdet Bey’s father-in-law, Paşa, represents a more traditional form of paternal authority. Traditional fatherhood positions the father as the moral guide, protector, and guardian of hierarchical order within the family (Lamb 2013, p. 5; Rotundo 1985, p. 12). Particularly widespread in non-Western societies, this model privileges discipline, restraint, and economic responsibility over emotional intimacy (Li and Lamb 2012, p. 25; Shwalb et al. 2013). Paşa’s description of Cevdet Bey as “calculating” and “cautious” (p. 52) reflects the younger merchant’s recognition by traditional authority. His repeated emphasis on seriousness, moderation, and masculinity (pp. 55–57) situates him as the custodian of an older paternal ethic grounded in discipline and social control.

Cevdet Bey himself places work at the center of his existence. The concept of “time” in his life is consistently tied to economic productivity. When asked whether he pursues extramarital affairs, his response—“Who has time for that?” (p. 55)—together with his tendency to explain his emotional distance from his family through lack of time (pp. 37, 47), reflects the impact of capitalist work discipline upon domestic relations. At the same time, this attitude reproduces a traditional paternal role in which fatherhood is primarily defined through the responsibility to provide material security for the household. Emotional intimacy gradually recedes into the background as Cevdet Bey comes to resemble a “breadwinner father” shaped by discipline, productivity, and relentless labor.

The transmission of fatherhood across generations constitutes another major theme in the novel. This process concerns the ways cultural inheritance and authority pass from one generation to another, as well as the moments at which this continuity fractures. In *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*, the order established by a bourgeois merchant father undergoes transformation as it passes to subsequent generations oriented toward industrial production (Osman) or intellectual and artistic pursuits (Refik and Ahmet) (Naci 2006, p. 19; Akerson 2006, p. 23). The family’s movement from the mansion to the apartment symbolizes the transition from the “horizontal” expansion of traditional patriarchal authority toward more fragmented and individualized modern identities (Naci 2006, p. 21). The younger generation’s desire to leave the “father’s house” therefore reflects less a rejection of paternal inheritance than the struggle of the modern subject to carve out an autonomous sphere of existence (Gögebakan 2006, p. 15).

Following Cevdet Bey’s death, paternal authority within the household passes largely to his eldest son, Osman. Refik’s shock while looking at his father’s “dry body” (p. 206) reflects the collapse of the figure that had held the family together. Osman gradually comes to resemble his father, and this resemblance reshapes his position within the family. His determination to expand the company (p. 305), his exhaustion caused by constant work, and his inability to devote time to his private life (p. 306) all mirror the life pattern established by Cevdet Bey. His assumption of paternal authority toward Ayşe following Cevdet Bey’s death (p. 314) demonstrates that paternal authority does not disappear with the biological

father's death. Although Osman appears to embrace the lifestyle of the modern bourgeoisie, he continues to reproduce traditional mechanisms of control within family relations. In this sense, transformation in *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* proceeds less through the disappearance of older authority structures than through their reconfiguration under new social conditions and by different actors.

Within the image of the urban father consumed by work, the time spent with children diminishes, and emotional intimacy weakens accordingly. Osman becomes part of this pattern as well; he eventually realizes that he has never truly shown affection toward his daughter Lale (p. 309). While the responsibility of maintaining the family economically remains intact, emotional fatherhood recedes into the background. The gradual transformation of Osman's chair into Cevdet Bey's chair (p. 529), followed by the transfer of authority to his son Cemil (pp. 577–609), further reinforces the persistence of paternal inheritance across generations.

In contrast to the continuity represented by Osman's fatherhood, Refik represents the most significant rupture in the family's intergenerational continuity. He emerges as a restless and "bohemian" intellectual who struggles to situate himself within the bourgeois order established by his father. Finding business life incompatible with his temperament (p. 240), he compares himself to Oblomov¹ while oscillating between idleness and intellectual yearning (p. 241). As Turna (2021, p. 195) observes, Refik's dissatisfaction with commercial life gradually develops into a broader search for meaning, distancing him from the bourgeois ideals embodied by Cevdet Bey. In this respect, Refik distances himself from a model of fatherhood centered upon economic success and productivity. His rejection of commercial life is more than a personal career choice. By turning away from the family business, Refik refuses the role assigned to him within the family's economic continuity established by Cevdet Bey and instead pursues an intellectual life shaped by personal meaning rather than commercial success. Although he feels affection and emotional closeness toward his children (pp. 219, 251–54), he proves unable to sustain familial responsibilities in a stable manner. His departure from the family home (pp. 258–59), his absence during his daughter's birth (pp. 446, 522), and his occasional perception of his children as a "burden" (p. 484) reflect the tension between the modern individual's desire for self-realization and the obligations imposed by family life. Refik's experience of fatherhood thus produces a fragmented paternal identity that rejects traditional authority without establishing a coherent alternative in its place.

This sense of "incomplete fatherhood" becomes even more visible through Refik's relationship with his children. Ahmet's disappointment upon reading his father's diaries (p. 593) exposes a rupture in the intergenerational transmission of authority. Similarly, Ahmet criticizes his father for having "consumed everything he had" materially (p. 565), suggesting that Refik also fails to fulfill the paternal role of providing economic security. Having rejected the role expected of him within the family's commercial order, Refik pursues intellectual autonomy but leaves behind neither the economic continuity established by Cevdet Bey nor a stable paternal legacy for the next generation. The paternal model embodied by Refik therefore departs from traditional authority while simultaneously remaining deficient in emotional, economic, and symbolic terms.

Modern understandings of fatherhood define the father both as an authority figure responsible for financial provision and as a parent who establishes emotional intimacy with children and participates more actively in caregiving processes (Lamb 2013, p. 6; Tan 2016, p. 106). This transformation was not limited to fatherhood alone; it also reshaped gender relations within the modern family. As Kandiyoti (1997) argues, late Ottoman and early Republican modernization introduced new expectations regarding emotional companionship, marriage, and domestic life, while simultaneously challenging traditional

patriarchal structures within the household. In this sense, the transformation of fatherhood should also be understood as part of a broader reconfiguration of gender roles and family relations in the modern Turkish family. Muhtar Bey, who openly embraces and kisses his daughter (p. 196), departs from the emotionally distant model of traditional fatherhood. Yet this comparatively liberal relationship does not imply the disappearance of paternal authority. His statement, “As long as I am here, nobody can make you unhappy” (p. 427), reveals the persistence of his determining role in his daughter’s life. Likewise, his reaction upon seeing Nazlı drinking alcohol with her fiancé Ömer (pp. 439–41) demonstrates how a father figure associated with modern lifestyles may revert to a more traditional and morally authoritarian position during moments of crisis. Muhtar Bey thus exemplifies a hybrid paternal identity in which Westernized appearances coexist with continuing forms of paternal supervision.

The diverse forms of fatherhood represented in *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* may therefore be read as historical figures embodying the class-based, cultural, and political tensions of Turkey’s modernization experience. In a social world where traditional authority weakens yet never fully disappears, fatherhood becomes a contested terrain shaped by economic discipline, class mobility, emotional distance, individualization, and political authority.

In non-Western societies such as Turkey, the state has frequently been perceived both as a political institution and as a symbolic “father” responsible for maintaining social order, directing individuals, and providing protection. Rooted in the patrimonial political culture inherited from the Ottoman Empire, this understanding positions the state as a transcendent authority standing above society (Kanadikırık 2020, p. 51). Although modernization efforts during the Republican era acquired a secular and bureaucratic character, the state’s disciplinary and constitutive role within society persisted. Consequently, individual demands were often subordinated to the preservation of the state and the broader modernization project (Keyman 2007, p. 219; Aydeniz 2026, p. 203). The attitudes of the novel’s characters toward the state operate in parallel with paternal authority within the family. Cevdet Bey’s economic rise through his connections with the municipality and the *Şirket-i Hayriye*² (p. 20) illustrates how bourgeois advancement in non-Western societies frequently depended upon proximity to state structures. Similarly, Paşa’s insistence on the importance of personal connections in state affairs (p. 54) underscores the symbiotic relationship between economic mobility and political authority, linking the father’s protective and regulatory role within the household to the broader position of the state in society.

Within this political culture, loyalty to the state is constructed in a manner closely resembling obedience to the father within the family. The deputy’s declaration—“First the state, then our own desires!” (p. 125)—encapsulates a paternal political logic that legitimizes the subordination of individual aspirations to state interests. The debates among Refik, Muhtar Bey, and Süleyman Ayçiçek further illustrate this mentality. Süleyman Ayçiçek’s insistence that “the state must become stronger first” (p. 407) frames the Republic less as a project of individual emancipation than as one of state-centered discipline. Refik’s response—“I want what is good not for the state but for the country” (p. 410)—introduces a competing understanding grounded in individual autonomy and civic responsibility.

The novel also presents Atatürk’s death within the atmosphere of “the death of the founding father” (p. 404). The uncertainty surrounding who will assume authority afterward parallels the tensions that emerge within the family following Cevdet Bey’s death. In both cases, paternal authority appears as a structure requiring continuity, succession, and symbolic preservation. Through these parallels, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* frames paternal authority as a multilayered phenomenon operating simultaneously within the family, society, and the political sphere.

5. Memory and the Persistence of Paternal Authority

In *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*, fatherhood constitutes a symbolic form of authority transmitted across generations. The physical absence of the father does not signify the disappearance of his determining role within the family; rather, absence itself acquires a new mode of presence in memory. As Olick and Robbins (1998) argue, social memory extends beyond individual recollection and operates as a collective process structured by familial and cultural relations. Following Cevdet Bey's death in particular, his continuing symbolic presence in photographs, his armchair, the family house, and everyday rituals reflects the transformation of fatherhood from a material body into an abstract structure of memory.

The first *Bayram*³ scene after Cevdet Bey's death (p. 244) offers one of the clearest examples of this transition. After the father's death, the holiday ritual becomes a collective space in which his absence is continuously felt. In the same section, the hanging of Cevdet Bey's photograph in the house (p. 244) signals the movement of paternal authority from the physical body to a symbolic register. The photograph repeatedly returns to the center of domestic conversation, allowing memory to reproduce paternal authority within everyday life. Because Nigan Hanım constantly turns back toward the past (pp. 246, 253, 335, 459), Cevdet Bey remains at the center of familial dialogue through recollection and storytelling. Her request that Ayşe play Cevdet Bey's favorite alaturka song on the piano (p. 246) further reinforces this commemorative structure. Music and ritual transform remembrance into a nostalgic practice that sustains the continuity of familial hierarchy.

Space likewise serves as a carrier of paternal memory. The family house constitutes both a physical setting in which the past once unfolded and a site where accumulated memory and paternal authority take material form across generations. Nigan Hanım's references to Cevdet Bey's armchair (p. 531), together with her continued awareness of his absence through domestic objects years after his death (p. 355), demonstrate how memory becomes embedded in material objects. Similarly, Osman's encounter with Cevdet Bey's photograph while spending time with his mistress (pp. 310, 506) suggests that moral supervision persists symbolically even after the father's death. In these moments, the photograph turns into an object that generates guilt and regulates behavior. Pease's (2000) notion of the "father wound" becomes relevant here, since the father continues to occupy a determining place within the emotional and psychological worlds of his sons despite his physical absence.

The transmission of memory across generations becomes even more pronounced in the final sections of the novel. Even after many years have passed, Nigan Hanım continues to recount memories of Cevdet Bey despite the weakening of her own memory (pp. 549, 555, 574), indicating that paternal authority still occupies the center of familial memory. Even the rhythm of everyday life in the house continues to be organized according to the date of Cevdet Bey's death (p. 509), so that the family's perception of time itself becomes structured around his absence. One of the most striking examples of this symbolic continuity appears when Ahmet, Refik's son, wishes to paint a portrait of his grandfather Cevdet Bey by looking at his photograph (pp. 552, 572–73). Ahmet's powerful attachment to the image of a grandfather he never personally knew reveals how fatherhood survives through memory across generations. The father may die, yet his authority continues to circulate within the family through photographs, domestic objects, rituals, and narratives.

6. Conclusions

Orhan Pamuk's *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* does not portray the experiences of three generations of a family as a linear narrative of Westernization. Instead, the novel concentrates on the ways traditional forms of authority survive by adapting themselves to new social conditions. In this sense, *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* may be read as a micro-level narrative of

modernization that traces the effects of political transformation upon everyday life, family relations, and intergenerational tensions.

Within this transitional world, the novel presents multiple father figures shaped by different historical and cultural pressures. Cevdet Bey's role as the industrious and founding "breadwinner father," Osman's assumption of paternal authority within the family, Refik's fragmented and restless fatherhood, and Muhtar Bey's modernized yet still supervisory paternal identity all reflect the contradictions embedded in Turkey's modernization experience. Different forms of fatherhood coexist throughout the novel; traditional values and modern lifestyles appear not as mutually exclusive structures but as overlapping elements of the same social reality. Fatherhood therefore exceeds its domestic function and becomes intertwined with class mobility, masculine identity, moral authority, and social belonging.

The study further demonstrates that traditional relations persist through hierarchical family structures, class anxieties, and mechanisms of moral supervision despite the rise of urban bourgeois values. Spatial transformation sometimes alters these relationships and at other times reproduces them in new forms. Family relations and paternal authority evolve through the movement from impoverished Haseki to bourgeois Nişantaşı, and from the traditional mansion inhabited by the extended family to the apartment designed for the nuclear household. These spatial shifts reshape the experience of intimacy, authority, and intergenerational distance within the modern family.

Another significant dimension of the novel concerns the extension of paternal authority beyond the family into the sphere of political culture. The political imagination structured around the figure of the "State Father" reproduces a hierarchical logic parallel to paternal authority within the household. The state is positioned as a protective, disciplinary, and guiding force standing above society, intensifying tensions between individual autonomy and authority. Paternal authority in the novel thus operates as a broader cultural continuity shaping both family relations and relations between state and society.

Fatherhood in the novel does not end with death; paternal memory continues to circulate across generations through recollection and through the objects left behind. Following Cevdet Bey's death, photographs, domestic objects, his armchair, family rituals, and everyday narratives preserve his symbolic presence within the household. Memory consequently functions less as a passive repository of the past than as a cultural medium through which paternal authority is transmitted and sustained.

Future studies may comparatively examine the relationship between fatherhood, memory, and modernization in other family novels within Turkish literature. Comparative analyses of how paternal authority is represented in the literatures of non-Western societies may also contribute to broader interdisciplinary discussions in the fields of multiple modernities, masculinity studies, and family sociology.

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Notes

- ¹ Oblomov is the protagonist of Ivan Goncharov's 1859 novel *Oblomov*, whose name has become synonymous with passivity, inertia, and chronic indecision.
- ² Şirket-i Hayriye was an Ottoman ferry company established in 1851 to operate regular passenger services across the Bosphorus.
- ³ Bayram is a major religious holiday in Turkey during which families traditionally gather to visit relatives, exchange greetings, and commemorate deceased family members.

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