

THE MOST FASHIOANABLE DREAM OF THE 20TH CENTURY: TURKISH NATIONAL FASHION*

20. ASRIN EN ALAMOD HAYALİ: TÜRK MİLLİ MODASI

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ÖZ

Gündelik hayata dâhil olduğu 19. asırdan itibaren modanın çoğu defa bireyi ve toplumu yönlendirmede aileden, toplumsal değerlerden ve idarî kurallardan daha güçlü olduğu görülmekte ve farklı cepheleriyle ciddi bir problem olarak değerlendirilen bu durum, modanın ürünlerden ziyade simgesel yapısıyla ilişkilendirilmektedir. Erken modernleşme döneminin roman ve süreli yayınlarından faydalanılarak yapılan bu çalışmada, Batılı moda alternatif olarak yaratılmak istenen millî moda ve olgunlaşma enstitüleri ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Millî moda, modernleşme, Batılı moda, Batılılaşma, olgunlaşma enstitüleri.

ABSTRACT

From the 19th century onwards when fashion was included in daily life, it is often seen as a stronger force than family, social values and administrative rules in formalizing and directing individuals and social life, and this situation, which regarded as a problem, is associated with the symbolic value of fashion rather than with its products. This article, drawing on novels and periodicals of the early modernization period, first addressed the issue of constructing a national fashion as an alternative to the Western fashion and then focuses on maturation institutes.

Key Words: National fashion, modernization, Western fashion, Westernization, maturation institutes.

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INTRODUCTION

In the earlier studies by sociologists and economists like Veblen and Simmel, fashion is often regarded as a phenomenon that is fed from individual's desire for separation and differentiation or fueled by capitalism. These arguments, thought found insufficient to understand the power of fashion in the following years, are still important in our conceptualizations of fashion works. Indeed, the period when fashion began to become widespread throughout the world was at the same time the period of social mobility between classes, thus the individual's search for identity and status was affected undeniably in keeping up with the fashion. This situation can be understood with the symbolic value of fashion. Because before anything else, fashion is a sociological phenomenon and is a "symbolic product" associated with cultural references rather than being direct product.¹ But an effort to acquire symbolic values through fashionable products cannot always be said to be beneficial for the individual or society. Sometimes trying to reach those values that fashion symbolizes leads to loss of existing values.

This paper aims to identify influences of the Western fashion that was introduced to the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century on national/local identity and economy by focusing the attention on attempts to create a local and national fashion conception in order to protect the local identity and economy against the domination of Western fashion. In this context, first, the historical development of Turkish national fashion in the first half of the 20th century will be summarized with references to literary and periodicals of the of the prominent intellectuals of the time. Then attempts toward building a Turkish national fashion vis-à-vis the universalizing Western fashion will be outlined with a focus on the efforts of the maturation institutes established during the Republican era as an outstanding example of such attempts. The reason for focusing on maturation institutes is that they are one of the most prominent and successful outcomes of symbolic and material accumulation regarding attempts to nationalize fashion that started in the Imperial years.

From Being Western to Being Genteel

Despite the considerable human and land losses, and more importantly, the absolute monarchy being handed over to the republican administration, The Republic of Turkey established in 1923 is actually a continuation of the Ottoman Empire, and there was and still is a strong organic link in social life between the two states. Therefore, the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic of Turkey are collectively termed as "the early modernization

¹ Nilay Ertürk, "Moda Kavramı, Moda Kuramları ve Güncel Moda Eğilimi Çalışmaları", *ART-E Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi Dergisi*, V. 7, May 2011, p. 7.

period”, and taken as a whole by historians and researchers of social and cultural studies.²

The most important and striking characteristic of the early modernization period is Westernization. In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire experienced a political, military, and economical backwardness vis-à-vis the West in the form of a “loss of civilization”.³ And despite some objections, a great majority of administrators and intellectuals believed that Westernization was the only to overcome this state of backwardness. As a result of this strong belief, Ottoman citizens clung to all kinds of ideas, concepts, objects, phenomena, and lifestyles coming from the West. Because for them, Westernization meant overcoming decay and extinction; so everything that was Western symbolized liberation and progress in their estimation.

In the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire struggled to survive through Westernization, fashion entered the daily life of the Empire. And like all Western concepts introduced to the daily life of the citizens of the Empire, it was extremely valuable, meaningful and important. Even if it simply seemed to deal with clothing, fashion surrounded and penetrated all aspects of life in a short period of time. So much so that Karakışla, emphasizes: “Fashion was the most important dynamic of the rapid transformation that occurred in Muslim Ottoman society who perceived modernization as Westernization or Europeanization.”⁴ This is an important point in identifying how modernization was perceived in Ottoman society and the role of fashion in this perception. Because it is this strong association between fashion and Westernization that made fashion highly effective in daily life.

A rapid introduction of fashion into Ottomans’ life naturally ignited a lot of objections and great deal of debate, which increased and intensified as Western fashion became more visible in daily life. One of the strongest and the long-lasting objections raised against the domination of Western fashion concerned its damages to national culture/identity and local economy. This objection originating in the imperial years continued in the early years of the Republic, so it remained on the agenda throughout the early modernization period. At this point, it is important to note that pro-Westernization intellectuals and administrators also agreed with this objection. Because they were primarily proposing Westernization in matters such as education or institutional restructuring but they were not comfortable with the fact that the main reflection of Westernization in daily life was primarily fashion. Besides the idea of nationalism was rising in the Ottoman

² Serpil Sancar, *Türk Modernleşmesinin Cinsiyeti: Erkekler Devlet, Kadınlar Aile Kurar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, p. 81.

³ Serpil Sancar, op. cit, p. 81-82.

⁴ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı Hanımları ve Kadın Terzileri (1869-1923)*, Akıl Fikir Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, p. 86.

Empire from the beginning of the 20th century as this was in the whole world and nationalist ideas triggered significant multifaceted debates around Western fashion dominating the country and its national values.

Being Genteel

In the *Tutuşmuş Gönüller (Hearts Afire)*, a novel by Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, Nâzıma Nevhayal's mother says angrily when she saw her daughter and her friends talking about fashion and clothes with enthusiasm and liking:

“- (...) they say there is no money. There is no way I could believe in it... Show me a young woman in the street with short heels and thick stockings. How much do those elegant five-inch high-heel shoes and veil-like transparent silk stocking cost to our men, or husbands and fathers? And how long do they last?”⁵

These words about elegant high-heel shoes and silk stockings, which were once so precious fashionable accessories to go on the black market all over the world, were spoken by a woman in a novel about the Imperial years. Another novel, Mahmut Yesari's *Bahçemde Bir Gül Açtı (A Rose Bloomed in my Garden)*, about the first years of the Republic again depicts such an incident about silk stockings: Rasih warns his uncle Hürrem Hakkı to tip the housekeeper and says she bought silk stockings with the money given to her. According to Rasih, the housekeeper wastes money. But Hürrem Hakkı does not agree with his nephew. He says smilingly: “Bravo to Emine... What a genteel girl!”⁶

When these two examples of silk socks are taken together, it is seen that fashion is seen to be highly associated with class and social status. Nâzıma and Rasih finds expending for expensive fashionable products as a waste. However, Hürrem Hakkı approves and appreciates Emine because she uses a fashionable product. Approval of a “housekeeper” by a member of ruling class illustrates cultural codes that may account for important reasons that fashion was so dominant despite all deprivations and limitations and criticism. In Turkish literature of the early modernization period, realist styles in which the real world was reflected in the fiction world come to the forefront. Thus, fashion was often addressed and discussed in novels alongside with other social problems. So it is easy to find many more similar examples in the Turkish novels of this period and this also applies to periodicals.

In the periodicals of the early modernization period, the ways in which fashion was treated were paradoxical. On the one hand these periodicals published articles that addressing individual and social problems that were associated

⁵ Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, *Tutuşmuş Gönüller*; Kütüphane-i Hilmi, İstanbul 1926, p. 45-46.

⁶ Mahmut Yesari, *Bahçemde Bir Gül Açtı*, Semih Lütü Sühulet Kütüphanesi, İstanbul 1932, p. 169.

with by fashion or obsession with. On the other hand, these were the journals that helped to popularize fashion trends rapidly and efficiently. Nonetheless especially in the years when the conditions of war worsened and the idea of nationalism had strengthened, there had been a significant increase in the number of articles against fashion published in these periodicals. Actually during the imperial years when the country was overwhelmed with appalling war conditions, “the call not to spend handfuls of money on latest fashion European fabrics, ‘European tailors’ and superfluous dresses when people die of hunger and misery in the far corners of the country” never fell from the intellectuals’ agenda.⁷ The issue of being “national” was added to this call in the beginning of the 20th century.

“I wonder if we can ever create a national Turkish fashion movement as opposed to the Western fashion like Germans did it with French fashion? (...) I believe that we would succeed more than Germans in creating a national fashion of our own. (...) The East as the cradle of most ancient civilizations and Turkish culture in particular abound with riches that could inspire a relatively authentic fashion for us. If we discover these riches and find a way to use them, then we could free ourselves from apish imitation of Western fashion. And evidently, this would bring great cultural and economic benefits.”⁸

This article called “National Fashion” by Zehra Hakkı was published in İnci magazine in 1919. If it carefully examined, it can be easily seen how seriously fashion and factors in creating national fashion were treated. In the final sentence, it is particularly emphasized that national fashion will provide great benefits to culture and economy. And in above quotes from the novels, it was said that fashion causes waste. However, while the novels discuss personal or family budgets, the article addresses state economy from a broader perspective. Indeed, fashion is a large market that encourages rapid consumption of imported goods, and it is obvious that high consumption of imported products would damage local economy. Well, how does fashion damage culture? Because clothing constitutes the most salient indicator of identity, which itself is a part of culture. Thus, individuals dressed in Western fashion was perceived to create cultural alienation. This also resulted in a loss of some cultural elements that are conserved in pieces of clothing, accessories, and cloth patterns etc. If so, what should be done? According to Zehra Hakkı, apish imitation of Western fashion should be stopped and, in order to preserve local culture and economy, “a Turkish fashion movement as opposed to Western culture” should be initiated.

⁷ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, op. cit, p. 93.

⁸ cited by Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Kadın Özgürlüğü ve Feminizm*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2015, p. 258.

These ideas of Zehra Hakkı should be regarded as a common opinion among prominent intellectuals of the period but should not be understood as a rejection of the West. Because in the beginning of the 20th century, being national was also considered as an important necessity in order to keep in touch with the West and being a part of it. Karakışla explains how this is reflected in fashion:

“The nationalist movement that started to gain strength in the Ottoman Empire together with the First World War accompanied many nationalist and statist tendencies in the economic field, such as ‘buy national’, ‘benefit from local labor’ and ‘create a national fashion’. (...) A movement of ‘creating a national fashion’ was launched both to break the economic and cultural hegemony of the West, particularly in clothing at least, and to get Ottoman Muslim women have ‘Islamic tailoresses’, who are also Ottoman Muslim women like themselves, sew home product fabrics.”⁹

It is obvious that the poverty caused by war conditions required fight against waste in fashion like in every other area; but in an attempt to create a national fashion, the idea of nationalism was much more effective than fight against waste. Hence, Zehra Hakkı’s trust in the richness of Eastern, particularly Turkish culture clearly reveals the strong relationship with the idea of nationalism.

In the early Republican years, similar ideas continued to exist much more powerfully among the administrative staff of the Turkish Republic. The war was over; but the people were impoverished after long years of war. Besides, in this period of adopting a new conception of the world, “protection and survival of culture” was deemed necessary. With economic and cultural concerns, the republican administration, which adopted the principles of nationalism and statism, launched “buy national” campaigns that would remain on the country’s agenda for a long time to come and made breakthroughs in producing its own goods and creating skilled labor.¹⁰ One of the most notable steps taken in this process was the establishment of maturation institutes.

The first of the maturation institutes was established in Beyoğlu in 1945. Its aim was to provide training for specialization among the graduates of Girls’ Institutes and Girls’ Art Schools, which were first founded in 1927. Its main difference from other educational institutions was that it also served as a commercial workshop. Graduates of girls’ institutes and art schools underwent compulsory internship. In those years, businesses like sewing, embroidery, flowers, etc. were

⁹ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, op. cit, p. 91-92.

¹⁰ Çağla Ormanlar, “Giyim Kuşam Modaları: Püsküllü Bela’dan Şapkaya”, *75 Yılda Değişen Yaşam Değişen İnsan: Cumhuriyet Modaları*, Ed. by Oya Baydar-Derya Özkan, Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, İstanbul 1999, p. 50-51.

mostly handled by non-Muslims or the minorities. There were only two workshops run by Turkish women and they could only provide jobs for a few people.¹¹

Beyoğlu Maturation Institute achieved great success in a short period of time. It provided many young girls with occupation; supported modeling as a profession; and introduced Turkey with fashion shows, exhibitions and fairs which were held domestically and in foreign countries such as England, Belgium and France.¹² This success led to the establishment of maturation institutes in other districts and cities. The aims of the maturation institutes can be summarized as follows:

1. To teach dressmaking and fashion design, handled by non-Muslims since the imperial years, to Muslim Turkish girls and thus provide them with occupation.
2. To create a new Turkish fashion by using domestic fabrics and modernized traditional clothing styles, Turkish handicrafts and embroideries.
3. To maintain and pass down the cultural heritage.¹³

The objective of founding the maturation institutes, first established in 1945, reminds of the “National Fashion” that in the first years of the century Ottoman intelligentsia demanded to be created in order to preserve national identity and economy in the face of Western hegemony. It was as if an old dream came true... Unfortunately, no... Maturation institutes achieved success in many respects but despite all the intellectual background and state support, they did not succeed in creating a Turkish or national fashion. Because high-quality fabrics, beautiful patterns or perfect tailoring skills are not enough to create effective and popular fashion. Before anything else, fashion is a sociological phenomenon and is a “symbolic product” associated with cultural references rather than being direct product.¹⁴ Fashion is the “silk stockings” that could turn a “housekeeper” in to a “genteel girl”.

As Bayhan says, “During a process of cultural interaction, the ‘cultural codes’ and ‘cultural models’ of dominant countries influence other countries.”¹⁵ So one first needs to nationalize cultural codes and models in order to create a national fashion.

¹¹ Sebahat Bağbars, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Giyim Kuşamında Bir Marka: Beyoğlu Olgunlaşma”, *Popüler Tarih*, February 2006, p. 78-79.

¹² Sebahat Bağbars, op. cit, p. 80-82.

¹³ Ayten Sezer Arıç, “Türkiye’de Kız Enstitüleri: Gelenekten Geleceğe”, *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Spring 2014 (20), p. 208-210.

¹⁴ Nilay Ertürk, Ibid.

¹⁵ Vehbi Bayhan, “Tüketim Toplumunda Bireyin Ontolojik Mottosu: ‘Tüketiyorum Öyleyse Varım’”, *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, 2011 (43), p. 230.

CONCLUSION

Fashion have often a strong role in formalizing and directing individual and social life. This is because of it symbolic value. In the choice of a fashionable product, what the product symbolizes is more important than what it will serve. Actually, the price of a fashionable product is rated by its symbols. In that case, one of the first things to do is to determine and understand what the fashion symbolizes for in the early modernization period. Thus, the ways in which fashion become a key dynamic within the late Ottoman and the early Republican society were mainly associated with its symbolic value of Westernization.

Given the conditions characterizing the post-war years, spending on Western fashion products was not welcomed. Additionally, increasing nationalism longed for a national fashion. But neither deprivation nor nationalism were able to prevent the Western domination in fashion. In order to understand this failure, differences between the formal understanding of Westernization and its reflection in daily life should be attended. Those who attempted to modernize the society and create a national fashion have different socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds than those who were supposed to materialize these ideals. Thus, what a national fashion symbolized for the ruling elite did not have a real correspondence in the society.

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20. ASRIN EN ALAMOD HAYALİ: TÜRK MİLLİ MODASI

Yakın zamanlı çalışmalardan hareketle modanın simgesel bir ürün olduğu fikri üzerine inşa edilen bu makalede, erken modernleşme döneminin önemli sosyal ve ekonomik meselelerinden biri olan “millî moda” konusu ele alınmıştır. Bu bağlamda, öncelikle modanın bir toplumsal olgu olarak ne şekilde değerlendirilebileceğinden ve erken modernleşme döneminde ne şekilde anlamlandırıldığından bahsedilmiştir. Bu önemlidir, zira kılık kıyafete dair en ufak unsurlar dahi simgeledikleriyle gündelik hayata dâhil olurken bireysel ve toplumsal düzeyde ciddi problemlere, sınıflar içinde veya arasında ayrılıklara yol açmaktadır. Aslında moda, yaygınlaştığı ve hızlandığı 19. asırdan itibaren görünüşleriyle birlikte tartışmaları da peşinden getirmiş ve toplumsal değişimin genellikle olumsuz taraflarından sorumlu tutulmuş bir olgudur. Ekonomik endişelerle başlayan ve 20. asrın başında yükselen milliyetçilik fikriyle beslenen itirazlar ve bunların neticesinde doğan “millî moda” hayali uzun yıllar gündemde ve canlı tutulması sebebiyle süreçte ayrıcalıklı bir yere sahiptir. Öyle ki Batılı modaya alternatif olarak yaratılmak istenen “millî moda” hayali, İmparatorluk ve Cumhuriyet arasındaki bağlardan biri; ilki Beyoğlu’nda kurulan olgunlaşma enstitüleri ise bu hayalin devamı olarak kabul edilebilir. Kuruluş amaçları “millî moda” hayali ile örtüşen Beyoğlu Olgunlaşma Enstitüsü, kısa sürede büyük başarılar kazanmasına rağmen neden bir “millî moda” yaratılmadığını da anlamaya imkân vermektedir. Yapılması gereken kaliteli veya güzel ürünler üretmek değil; üretilen ürünlerin simgelediklerini ve simgelerin değerini tayin edebilmektir. Nitekim erken modernleşme döneminde, modanın sosyal ve ekonomik problemlere sebep olacak kadar güç kazanması da Batılı bir olgu olması ve modernleşme ile neredeyse bir tutulmasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Millî moda, modernleşme, Batılı moda, Batılılaşma, olgunlaşma enstitüleri.

