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(1908-1918)**

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Abstract

Clothing can be thought as a mirror which reflects the identities of people. This is very applicable especially for the Ottoman Empire. Clothing was like an identity card in the Ottoman society. While men's clothing was transformed as a part of the modernization movement starting with the *Tanzimat* Era, orders and edicts were proclaimed to keep women's clothing intact. On the other hand, during the 19th century, Turkish elite women tried to adopt European fashion. The long wartime caused many social changes which had also effects on women's clothing habits. These tendencies were also observed during the Constitutional Period. In a nutshell, the modernization and social changes brought important changes not only to women's lives in Istanbul, as well as their clothing style. This paper aims to examine the changing women's fashion during the Ottoman Constitutional Period in order to understand the effects of modernization and social changes in Turkish women's life on the their clothing style. The paper is mainly based on the articles published in the women's magazines of the period.

Keywords: Ottoman Women, Women Fashion, Clothing Habits, Ottoman Constitutional Period

Introduction

Viewed from a different perspective, clothes in the Ottoman Empire – and in other parts of the world as well- formed an essential part of the presentation of one's self. The images of clothing can be taken as statements of an official position, wealth, modernity or sophistication. Moreover clothes might refer to cultural relations with the outside world that the wearer either was involved in or that he/she wished to advertise. Therefore, clothing is a mirror which reflects the identity of people especially in the Ottoman Empire. Clothing showed differences among communities, religions, professions group, gender and age in the Ottoman Empire. Communities and individuals always used dressing as a means to show their differences. They showed their belonging to a particular group or community or rejected to be part of other groups with their clothing. In the Ottoman Empire different clothes were worn according to rank, status, and profession, as well as religious affiliation. It was a well-known principle that Muslims and non-Muslims should not resemble one another physically (Argit, 2005, p. 170). People who did not obey the clothing rules were subject to warnings.¹

During the 19th century, Turkish elite women adopted European fashion. The goal of this paper is to investigate the process of westernization within the Ottoman Empire and the changing of identities of women from the perspective of fashion transformation. This will help understand social changes within the Ottoman society. Firstly, the paper will give brief information about Ottoman clothing habits in the Classical Period. Secondly it discusses the clothing habits of Ottoman women in the Second Constitutional Period. Lastly it explores changes in the fashion as reflected in magazines of the contemporary period. The conclusion emphasizes the fact that the changing clothing habits of Turkish women reflect the changing identity of the Ottoman society.

Women's Clothing in the Classical Period

Clothing always had a political and social importance in the Ottoman Empire, because the color, style and type of clothing were significant indicators of the identity of the people who lived in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society. There is no doubt that difference in appearance made it easier to differentiate people's religion, race, job, richness and poorness. As far as the history of the Ottoman dress is concerned, it will be appropriate to analyze in two periods: before and after the *Tanzimat* Edict of 1839 (İpşirli, 2002, p. 510).

In the Ottoman classical period costumes were the reflection of identity. According to the classical Ottoman clothing codes, Muslims were supposed to wear yellow shoes, Armenians red shoes, while Greeks were supposed to wear black headgear and shoes; the Jews wore blue colored clothing. In a decree

¹ BOA, *HAT*, 1408/57104, 23 Ramazan 1211 (22 March 1797); *HAT*, 658/32153, 29 Zilhicce 1253 (26 March 1838).

issued in 1580, it was indicated that during the period of Mehmed II, Jews were assigned red headgear and black shoes and Christians had to wear black headgear (Argit, 2005, p. 171).

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries certain Ottoman Christians began to dress in European clothes, not only during their visits to Western Europe but also in the empire's major cities (Faroqhi, 2004, p. 16). The daily lifestyles of the people changed with the social transformation and these changes affected their identity as well. The understanding of beauty changed, too. Women who wore western clothes were considered beautiful, but others not. Fashion spread as a part of social status in the society (Barbarosoğlu, 1995, p. 120).

From the 1870s and 1880s onwards, upper class women; princesses included, first incorporated features of European fashion into their own clothing and by the end of the century, usually wore European-style dresses and hairstyles at home and also when socializing with friends and relatives. Where clothes and the Ottoman administration were concerned, the social order was a public order (Faroqhi, 2004, pp. 23, 24).

The adaptation of the European costume did not take place at the same time among all women in the Ottoman Empire. European clothing firstly spread among elite people. Some women were able to afford many fashionable dresses but most were not. In this term, social position played a significant role. Thus, women of the non-Muslim communities adopted European fashion more quickly than Muslim women because they were in close contact with foreign visitors. In addition, the adaptation of clothing was easy for them as they were Christians too. Although Greek and Armenian women adopted European clothing more quickly than Turkish women, the latter could not stay away from these changes.

In the late 19th century, various kinds of indoor clothing changed into outdoor clothing. In this period dresses had puff sleeves, like Europeans dresses. Therefore, it wasn't suitable to wear the *ferace* with this kind of dresses. The *çarşaf* was the best way to wear puff sleeve dresses and women made the *çarşaf* suitable for European fashion (Toprak, a: 1998: 58). The *çarşaf* had not been accepted immediately by everyone. Before the second Constitutional Period there was some opposition to the *çarşaf* in different ways. For example, conservative people were opposing the *çarşaf* for not being suitable for religious clothing. With the order of the ruler, police forces in the street cut the skirt of the *çarşaf* with scissors. Rulers could not prevent the wearing of the *çarşaf*, which was regarded as part of the fashion at that time, and eventually it replaced the *ferace* (Toprak, 1998, p. 56). In the end, the passion for fashion won over the control mechanism of the state.

The changing of clothing was initially related to the presence of Europeans in the Ottoman Empire. During the nineteenth century, many European visitors came to Istanbul, additionally; Istanbul had numerous foreign residents. Another reason for these changes was that European literature and magazines circulated widely in Istanbul. Women began to learn foreign languages and they could follow these publications. In the late nineteenth century, the number

of educated women increased tremendously and they participated in the public life. All these changes of clothing were seen at home and then in the street, even the wedding dress.

Clothing during the Second Constitutional Period

The proclamation of constitutional monarchy in 1908 and the entrance into force of the constitution again became the beginning of a new era for the Ottoman Empire, labelled as the Second Constitutional Period. During this period women began to articulate a demand for relative freedom and this was a positive progress for Turkish women. (Berktaş, 2006, p. 97). The second Constitutional Period was a time of rising aspirations for the Ottoman women. Seclusion and veiling were challenged in this period. Ottoman women became increasingly more integrated into public life. Fashionable women especially began to substitute the thin veil for the traditional covering. After the Second Constitutional Period, the veil not covered the face but was thrown off to one side and the fabric was no longer always black. *Çarşaf* was made of every type of fabric and the color of veil matched the *çarşaf* in this period. After the Second Constitutional Period, young women preferred to wear a light colored *çarşaf* within the relative atmosphere of freedom (Os, 2002, p. 136). By 1909, wide skirts were not used by women anymore and cloaks became shorter. Women began to wear the *çarşaf* which had a close fitting skirt. These changes continued during World War I, that is why, fashion would be determined in accordance with this period. Because of economic troubles, women wore only what they needed, ornament was not important anymore. They just wore a cloak over their daily dresses, and a veil with the *çarşaf* was not worn anymore (Toprak, 1998, p. 62). During World War I, many women simply wore a scarf and they gave up wearing a veil. Their *çarşaf* turned into a European coat (Toprak, 1991, p. 446). In addition, puff sleeves went out of fashion. It was time to incorporate buttons on dresses with buttons. Another change was that first the veil (*peçe*) became thinner and then it disappeared. Some women wore cloaks and some others used an umbrella to hide their faces (Toprak, 1998, p. 61).

The roles of the Balkan Wars and World War I are undeniable in forcing Ottoman women to work outside their homes. While men were fighting at the battlefield, women replaced them in the workforce as, tailors in the factory, street cleaners or barbers. Under these conditions, women's clothing changed and the *çarşaf* changed too. Urban women dressed like western women during this period. In addition, they followed London and Paris fashions in their clothing and hair style (Toprak, 2002, p. 17). Paris set fashion trends in Istanbul, as it did throughout the world. Turkish women read British and French magazines (Toprak, 1998, p. 60)

In this context, one of the main factors that changed women's roles in the society was the increased opportunity for women's education. The number of secondary schools increased during the reign of Abdülhamit II (1786-1909),

these schools were often run according to the French educational systems and teacher training facilities for women were expanded since 1870. In addition to the state schools, different nationalities also ran their own schools. These schools were brought under state control after 1869. Moreover, in the Second Constitutional Period, higher education opportunities for women increased, though with limited access. There were women-only classes at the university in Istanbul. In 1914 a university for women (*Inas Darülfünunu*) was founded. Training for women in the fine art and music started in 1917 (Lewis, 2004, p. 80)

Concerning women's education, Elizabeth B. Frierson mentions that "many late Ottoman women used tradition to write their own contracts with modernity and they were able to make these attempts because of patriarchal reforms instituted from above, notably a vast expansion of schools and workshops for girls and women with this education increased economic and public rights and responsibilities." (Frierson, 1995, p. 57). An increasing number of women now began to work. The moderately more liberal atmosphere of the Constitutional Period facilitated the participation of educated women in civil associations (İnankur, 2001, p. 2). Education has always had the power to change issues such as women's social life in the Ottoman society. The Second Constitutional Period saw an increase in the number of women employment outside their home, but public and political anxiety concerning their dress and demeanor remained properly modest (Lewis, 2004, p. 80).

In these conditions, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had 40 female members in Rumelia in 1908. Emine Semiye, who was one of these female members of the CUP, made a speech representing the female branch of the CUP at a conference in Salonika in 1908. In her speech she criticized the pressure regarding the veiling of women and argued that Islam did not require the kind of veiling which was seen in the late Ottoman period. It was not necessary to cover the whole face with the veil. These women aimed to make new styles of clothing for women. Under these conditions women demanded more freedom. They wanted to have a job, be an individual and live a public life. For this reason their clothing had to be suitable for their new lifestyle. Integration with the public life and being individuals resulted in significant changes in women's clothing (Zihinoğlu, 2003, pp. 54, 177).

After 1908, the presence of women and men together in Istanbul was viewed by some as signifying freedom, modernity or progress; on the other hand, it was viewed as signifying license, immorality by many others (Brummett, 1995, p. 444). A foreign writer Juliette Edison mentioned that Turkish women were quite free in Pera and she supposed that all Turkish women were like that. On the other hand, women who were in Fatih, Topkapı, Edirnekapı seemed more uptight and they were veiled and they seemed to be real Muslim women, according to her.²

² Juliette Edison, "İstanbulda Gördüklerim: Türk Hanımları", Seyyale, no: 1, 22 Mayıs 1330 (4 June 1914), p. 7, 8.

While women continued to be dressed in half eastern fashion and half western fashion, the women's clothing movement caused opposition from conservative people even in the Second Constitutional Period. Although western style clothing was criticized for not being suitable for Islam, women continued to wear this kind of clothing during the Constitutional years and in time the conservative opposition began to weaken. There was another argument, from those opposed to western style clothing which claimed that importing western clothing caused economic damage (Özer, 2005, p. 339).

People who supported Islamic thought on fashion claimed that western styles were not suitable to the Islamic religion. On the other hand, nationalists with an anti-imperialist motto criticized western style of clothing and were against wearing this kind of clothing because they were not suitable to Turkish culture and traditions (Özer, 2005: 335). For these people, Turks should wear clothes that were suitable and unique to Turkish identity and traditions.

The clothing of Ottoman women in Parisian style became a symbol of subversion in Ottoman culture and this was reflected in the cartoons. In these cartoons, the critical message of European fashion went beyond desirable and elegant. In fact, their clothing represented the hierarchies of power and the ability of the empire to control its own social customs. European fashion was used to illustrate the loss of Ottoman women onto the streets and the exposing of their faces and hair to the male gaze (Brummett, 1995, p. 444).

Here is an example concerning cartoon in magazines to criticize fashion of the time. Sedad Nuri, one of the most innovative cartoonists in the press of the revolutionary period, summed up the equation for women, torn between old values and European styles, in a cartoon lampooning women's options. It was titled: "Either prisoner of the Harem or slave to fashion." But there was a third option for the Ottoman women in the revolutionary cartoons: that of symbolizing the honor of the nation and the unity of the Ottoman people against the unjust aggressions of the European "other." Such images are found in cartoons on the boycott of Austrian goods launched in autumn of 1908 as a response to Austria's annexation of Ottoman territory. In this setting, the image of women as thoughtless consumers of European fashion was subverted into another image of women as patriotic consumers, preserving the honor of the state (Brummett, 1995, p. 446).

Fashion in the Ottoman Press

There had been a great increase in the number of magazines and newspapers thanks to the environment of relative liberty emerged with the proclamation of Second Constitutional Monarchy. These magazines sometimes described the fashion of the day and gave examples of dresses and they also gave patterns to women for sewing the same dresses. They described how to

sew dresses with pictures.³ These magazines aimed to show fashion of day to female and they gave supplements almost every week for new styles of dressing.⁴ Women could follow the fashions of the day and sew new dresses with the help of these supplements from magazines. Moreover, umbrellas were frequently preferred by women as accessories and they could follow the new umbrellas trend with the help of the magazines.⁵ Some magazines gave special recipes for hair care cream which women could make at home, recipes of pomade for the hand and lips and showed some kind of hairstyles.⁶

It seems that magazines gave much more information about new trends before the Balkan Wars and World War I. On the other hand fashion was criticized by some authors. Perihan in *Türk Kadını* claimed that war upset many things but fashion. Women continued to follow fashion as much as they could. Dresses which were fashionable in Istanbul were already out of fashion in Europe. When women noticed that these dresses were out of fashion in Europe they tried to have new dresses and spent a lot of money for the sake of fashion.⁷

Discussions about dressing, veiling and covering were frequently on the agenda of the era's newspapers and magazines. Writers from these magazines presented discussions on veiling, dresses, and clothing habits and criticized fashion positively and negatively. For example Semiha Nihal discussed fashion in her article "What is Fashion" in *Kadınlar Dünyası*. According to her, women had to wear dresses which were suitable, and they should not have copied other women's clothing. Women could be attractive by wearing simple dresses. Some dresses were very suitable for some women, but not for everyone. If dresses were not suitable, they could make women ugly. Women had to wear proper clothing for their bodies. Instead of spending money for ornaments, women should have spent money for their children's education. She argued that it is absurd to avoid wearing the same dresses in different places. It is not necessary to follow fashion to be lady. Being a lady did not mean following fashion and being dressy. It was necessary to be educated and have good manners to be real ladies, rather than following fashion.⁸

National fashion was also discussed in women magazines and local manufacture and fabric were encouraged instead of imported fabric. Fashion became an important issue in Turkish women's life and it was better to use traditional Turkish fabric for the sake of the country's economy.⁹ *Türk Yurdu*, another well-known journal of the Second Constitutional Period, considered

³ Until 1908 *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* was one of the leading women magazine and it showed fashion of day to female and they gave supplements almost every week for new style of dressing.

⁴ "Elbise Modelleri", *Mehasin*, No: 3, Teşrin-i sâni 1324 (November/December 1908), p. 2; "Elbise Modelleri", *Mehasin*, no: 4, Kanun-i evvel 1324 (December/January 1908), p. 2; "Elbise Modelleri", *Mehasin*, no: 5, Kanun-i sâni 1324 (January/February 1908), p. 2.

⁵ "Son Moda Şemsiyeler", *Kadın (İstanbul)*, no: 1, 26 Nisan 1328 (9 May 1912), p. 4.

⁶ Hüseyin Naim, "Yeni Saçlar", *Mehasin*, no.2 Teşrin-i Evvel 1324, p. 73-80.

⁷ Perihan, "Moda: Şehrazad", *Türk Kadını*, no: 2, 6 Haziran 1334, p. 26-28)

⁸ Semiha Nihal, "Moda Nedir?", *Kadınlar Dünyası*, no:1, 4 Nisan 1329 (17 April 1913) , p. 3.

⁹ C. H. "Milli Moda", *Kadınlar Dünyası*, no: 26, 29 Nisan 1329 (12 Mayıs 1913), p. 4.

clothing as a national issue. Turkish women had to wear the national Turkish clothing instead of imitating European clothing according to this magazine (Gündüz, 2006, p. 537).

During the constitutional period there were critiques against clothing habits both positive and negative in terms of Islam. In this sense, *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, and *İçtihad* presented opposing ideas. According to *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, women began to ignore Islamic regulations on clothing with the declaration of the first Ottoman Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*). *Sebilü'r-Reşad* emphasized that women have to be veiled and to cover their hair when they are with men according to the Islamic law (Shari'a). In addition, it was written in this magazine that women must stay at home and look after their children. People who follow European fashion and criticize veiling are not right in this context (Albayrak, 2002, pp. 69, 73-77).

Writers of *Sebilü'r-Reşad* advocated that veiling was a religious duty and it is not part of the custom. Hence, women have to obey this religious obligation. F. Latife, who is one of the writers of *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, criticized the articles which were published in *İçtihad* because they praised the Russian Muslims' clothing. According to writer, the most important problem about Islam was protecting veiling. It was not necessary to change clothing; it was significant to obey Islam.¹⁰ Fatma Zehra was another writer of *Sebilü'r-Reşad* who supported veiling in her articles. She argued that Muslim women did not complaint veiling thus men could not try to change the clothing habits of women.¹¹

On the other hand, writers of *İçtihad* put forward opposite thoughts against *Sebilü'r-Reşad*. They were in favor of westernization and thought that veiling was not necessary for Muslim women. They believed that women faced more important questions than veiling. It was necessary to evaluate women's issues, not the veiling question. Women have to escape veiling in the process of westernization according to *İçtihad*. Moreover, the writers of *İçtihad* asked that women who did not veil their face or hair should not be declared as dishonorable (Albayrak, 2002, pp. 397-401). Abdullah Cevdet was one of the writers of *İçtihad* who defended the idea that there was no place for veiling in real Islam. He believed that according to Islam people could be evaluated by their general behavior, not their clothing. Women should not wear the *çarşaf*.¹² It is clear that the *çarşaf* which women chose to wear for the sake of fashion was one of the biggest issues in the field of fashion. Women chose the *çarşaf* instead of the *ferace* because they could wear European clothing easily under the *çarşaf*. However women wanted to leave the *çarşaf* in a quite short time.

Occidentalists believed that veiling was a social question. Rıza Tevfik was one of the *İçtihad* writers who argued that the veiling of tulle and the *yaşmak*

¹⁰ F. Latife, "İçtihad'taki Hezeyanlar", *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, no: 281, 16 Kanun-i sani, 1329 (29 January 1914), p. 330.

¹¹ Fatma Zehra, "Tesettür Meselesi Hakkında Mühim Bir Mektup", *Sebilü'r-Reşad*, no: 278, 26 Kanun-i evvel 1329 (8 January 1914), p. 329.

¹² Abdullah Cevdet, "Tesettür Meselesi", *İçtihad*, no:29, 10 Ağustos 1327 (23 August 1911), p. 810, 811.

passed from the Byzantines to the Turkish people. In this context it was not a religious obligation, but it was a customary habit. He evaluated the clothing question impartially. According to him it was not necessary to be veiled for honor and good manners. The most important thing was that women should not attract attention with their dresses. For example, a woman who wore the *çarşaf* in a European city would attract attention and this situation was not suitable for a woman. He continued to argue that a piece of cloth could not protect a woman's honor; thus, veiling was not a rule of belief in Islam. In addition, he argued that to save the state it was necessary to educate women.¹³ Writers of *İçtihad* thought that the question of clothing had to be resolved in a very short period of time. Kılıçzade Hakkı was one of these writers. According to him, women could be educated, and they should participate in social life without veiling. *İçtihad* framed the clothing question only in regard to veiling.¹⁴

These magazines explained reasons for decline in the context of clothing. According to *İçtihad*, women could not participate in social life because of veiling. Veiling could not stop immorality; it serves just to hide it. It is important that women should have good spirits and good manners, veiling was not necessary. Additionally, *Sebilü'r-Reşad* opposed these ideas. It accepted political decline but veiling was not the reason for this decline (Gündüz, 2006, p. 539).

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire experienced enormous changes in many fields in its late periods and women were affected by these changes. The identity of people had been modified with these changes as well. There is no doubt that Europe was a model for Ottomans for sartorial changes. The changes which took place in women's costumes during the Constitutional Period reflected social change. The westernization and social changes brought important changes to the lives of the women Istanbul, especially to their style of dressing. The European and Ottoman clothing traditions and habits had completely different conceptions of dress and style. The adaptation of European clothing by Ottoman women brought very different type of clothing. When Ottoman women chose to wear European dresses instead of the *ferace*, the *yaşmak* or other traditional Ottoman clothing, they were choosing not just fashionable clothing, but they also the whole western costume tradition. In addition they opted to change their identities.

The adaptation of European clothing by the women of Istanbul was a reflection of the changing values of the Ottoman society. Clothing showed people's identity in the Ottoman society, but after these changes, their appearances mixed with that of non-Muslim and Europeans. By imitating

¹³ Rıza Tevfik, "Muhasebe-i İçtihad: Kadın Meselesi Etrafında", *İçtihad*, no: 94, 20 Şubat 1329 (5 March 1914), p. 2101.

¹⁴ Kılıçzade Hakkı, "Tamamen Hallolmadıkça Bitmeyecek Bir Mesele", *İçtihad*, no: 92, 6 Şubat 1329 (19 February 1914), p. 2067.

European fashion, they also copied European identities. Ottomans lost their own authentic clothing style. During this period, Ottomans could not determine their own culture, so they copied the Western style.

On the other hand, conditions of war affected women's clothing habits as well as their life dramatically. Especially during the Balkan Wars and World War I Ottoman women had to work when men were at war. Changing of clothing habits became obligatory for working women.

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İçtihad

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