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### Textile Tales

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# ARTEX Journal

OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION FOR THE STUDY OF COSTUME,  
TEXTILES AND TEXTILE RELATED MATERIALS

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Volume 1, 2022







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# **ARTEX Journal**

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Weaving workshop by ARTEX at the Multifunctional Centre for Refugees in Athens.



# Introduction

## The Fabric of My Life (FABRIC)

Christina Margariti and Stella Spantidaki

The Fabric of My Life (FABRIC) was a collaborative project between cultural institutions in DK, GR, and DE, and Creative Europe of the EU Commission, with the aim to innovate and test new methods in the cultural sectors concerning migration history, to empower refugee women and to train cultural workers and design students.

FABRIC worked together with migrant and refugee women to generate new digital and cultural products, such as art-making, craft practices, podcasts and education in awareness of non-European audiences. Clothing was seen as a shared means of communicating our identities, our histories and the future at which we aim.

This special issue of ARTEX Journal is a compilation of articles reflecting the actions of FABRIC throughout its duration. Annette Paetz gen. Schieck and Christina Schulte from the Deutsches Textilmuseum in Krefeld, talk about how they participation of migrants in

professional college and vocational school projects, raised awareness in the local community. Else Skjold, from the Royal Danish Academy and Anne Louise Bang, from VIA University College, describe the multilingual podcasts produced, where narrators talked about their special connection with specific textiles. Chrysoula Kapartziani, Spyros Koulocheris, and Myrsini Pichou from the research team Dress & the Law, discuss clothing legislations and issues of democracy and public safety. Gülzar Demir, Rabia Ilhan Korkmaz, and Marie Louise Nosch from the Centre for Textile Research, Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, discuss the clothing and headgear legislation in the Ottoman Empire and the Kemalist dress laws passed in the 1920s in Turkey. Marie Louise Nosch, and Else Skjold, interview two textile artists from Tehran and Thisted. Heidi Kincaid-Askanazy, journalist, presents the interviews taken by fashion journalist students from key participants of the FABRIC project.





**Fig. 1:** Dr. Tagrid Yousef, head of the integration department at KI, city administration of Krefeld. Tagrid wore the gown of her Palestinian grandmother at the AMD-photo-session for FABRIC in December 2019.  
© Photo: Niklas Breuker for DTM Krefeld.

# 'The Fabric of My Life' at the Deutsches Textilmuseum Krefeld

Annette Paetz gen. Schieck & Christina  
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Germany

## Keywords

Deutsches Textilmuseum Krefeld,  
Akademie Mode und Design Düsseldorf,  
Kommunales Integrationszentrum  
Krefeld, Berufskolleg Vera Beckers Krefeld,  
Cooperations

## Abstract

Being the German partner of the European 'The Fabric of My Life'-project (FABRIC), the Deutsches Textilmuseum Krefeld (DTM)-team sought to attract several additional partners and initiate cooperative subprojects. Migrants of various backgrounds were invited to participate in professional college and vocational school projects, creating a new awareness of migrants and their cultural backgrounds in the Krefeld region.

Keys to these projects are the DTM, the Akademie Mode und Design Düsseldorf (AMD), the Berufskolleg Vera Beckers Krefeld (BKVB), and especially the Kommunales Integrationszentrum Krefeld (KI) – a most important partner of the city administration, helping to establish long-term-projects in the spirit of the FABRIC-project.

## The German Textile Museum (DTM)

The heart piece of the DTM<sup>1</sup> is its textile collection, today embracing 30.000 textiles of historic value. Founded in 1880 as a study collection it served the purpose of teaching. Textile design students and weavers who studied at the 'Höhere Webeschule Krefeld' were to investigate the textile samples in terms of their techniques and to draw inspiration from the historic designs.<sup>2</sup> In the 1970ies the collection received the status of a museum's collection and became the Deutsches Textilmuseum initiated by the city council of Krefeld.

From its very beginning, when about 4.000 textile samples were bought for the school at Krefeld, the heads of the collection pursued a universal approach. They acquired textiles of high quality and historic relevance, originating from various cultures and continents, representing nearly every epoch and culture.<sup>3</sup> Still, the focus was laid on collecting representative examples of textile techniques and designs rather than – as it was common in late 19th century – dealing with sociological aspects, or preserving complete textiles and garments.

Since conservators of textile collections maintained a closely meshed international network of experts and they used to exchange samples, objects at Krefeld match fragments of other famous textile collections such as the Victoria and Albert (V&A) and the British Museum.<sup>4</sup>

As it is to museums in general it is the mantra of the DTM as well, to save the textiles in its collection, to investigate them, and make them available to the public by publications and exhibitions. Since textiles are highly fragile, the museum's concept is to set up series of temporary exhibitions, rather than having objects on permanent display. In general, the DTM composes and presents two exhibitions per year, one dealing with a topic drawn from and illustrated by its collection, and the other exhibiting contemporary textile art.

In order to gain knowledge about the DTM-collection, the museum initiated research projects, inviting researchers to investigate, publish catalogues and work on exhibition concepts, in close cooperation with the museum's team.<sup>5</sup>

Besides its own research initiatives, the DTM also joined in several research-cooperations, rather focusing on historical subjects.<sup>6</sup> 'The Fabric of My Life' (FABRIC), though, inspired the DTM-team towards a more creative and spontaneous approach towards general topics of dress and identity employed in textile research of any epoch in history.

## **DTM Activities within the FABRIC-Project**

The great difference of the FABRIC-project is the presence of the modern migrants willing to talk about their dress and traditions, as well as about their individual stories, opening up a cosmos of information not available when dealing with historic material. Still, it calls for sociological and psychological skills, sensitivity, tolerance, political knowledge and interest.

Textiles, especially personal belongings of individuals, which they brought with them when having to leave the homeland, are of highly emotional importance and value to their owners. When asked to talk about the fabrics of their life, people opened up and started telling their very personal, individual stories, sharing emotional moments with the DTM-team.

It is evident, that textiles wonderfully work as vehicles to discuss topics of social, economic, and even environmental relevance. The DTM's mission is strongly directed towards pedagogical programs for children, adults, specialists, non-professionals, migrants etc. All activities start from the textiles and spread out to include a broad variety of topics and handicrafts.

As part of 'The Fabric of My Life'-project, the DTM took the opportunity to cooperate with several social groups, institutions, and organizations located in the North Rhine-Westphalia region. Among them:

- Students of the 'Akademie Mode und Design' (AMD) Düsseldorf;
- individuals of migrant background and their communities;
- the 'Kommunales Integrationszentrum' (KI) Krefeld, an institution of the city council caring for integrative projects;
- the 'Berufskolleg Vera Beckers' (BKVB) Krefeld, a vocational school;
- volunteer collaborators like the film-maker Reimund Meincke.

Like the rest of the project partners, the DTM initiates interaction and participation of various and numerous protagonists and institutions. The aim of the DTM is to consolidate these FABRIC initiatives in both the museum's and the city's agenda. The following paper gives insights into these activities.



## **'Kommunales Integrationszentrum' Krefeld (KI) – Door opener to Migrant Communities**

KI is part of the Krefeld city council and takes care of migrant groups.<sup>7</sup> Pursuing the integration of foreigners to the local society, KI has become the most important connecting point, with the staff being the intermediate between the city council and the migrant communities. The staff identifies their needs, supports their initiatives, and enables activities, in order to foster a better understanding among Krefeld's citizens and enable integration.

KI became a key partner of DTM in addressing migrant communities in the region. Thanks to the KI-network, the DTM-team met Bulgarian, Ghanaian, Peruvian, Palestinian, Kosovarian, and Turkish individuals, who were happy to join the DTM-projects carried out in collaboration with the 'Akademie Mode und Design Düsseldorf' (AMD).

The DTM-team is more than grateful to have received additional funding by KI to support collaboration on joint FABRIC tasks in Krefeld. One of these projects is a 'salon', meant to become a steady activity institutionalized at DTM, where migrant women are invited to conduct meetings and workshops, accompanied by tea parties. Due to the COVID 19 crisis, these gatherings are meant to take place in fall 2021.

The second project is to be carried out with the vocational school 'Berufskolleg Vera Beckers' (BKVB) at Krefeld in September 2021.<sup>8</sup> DTM and BKVB composed a one-week-project-workshop on decorative techniques in fashion, inspired by ethnic ornaments. The workshop was formerly scheduled for November 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19-pandemic.

The program foresees a week of project-work at BKVB with a group of approximately ten students. Two BKVB teachers will assist the free-lance textile-designer Jeni Josten, an expert in traditional ethnic embroidery, who is of Albanian background. Josten will teach decorative techniques to the participants carried out by hand and by computer. Since she owns her own company that creates and produces embroidered elements for the fashion industry, she will provide insights into the fashion business and share her network with the young designers.

The workshop is structured in several phases: Starting from Jeni Josten's private collection of historic, ethnic embroidery, she will introduce exemplary designs, in order to explain the methods and materials of production, and will help decipher ornamental codes, characteristics of ethnic groups and cultural diversity. She will then supervise the students in executing embroidery by hand. Additionally, she will teach programming stitching machines, offering the students insights into industrial production.

In the second phase of the workshop students will be asked to design outfits. Starting from sketches, they will then execute the embroidered elements on hems, collars, or button borders. Since several students have migration background themselves, it is very likely that they will draw inspiration from traditional decorative techniques, and motifs of their familial provenance.

The last day of the workshop will be dedicated to the dissemination of the outcomes to the public. The students will present their creations in a final show, open to public audience and the press media. In addition, free-lance filmmaker Reimund Meincke will document the course of the program. The film will then be added to the virtual FABRIC-exhibition of DTM.

## **Akademie Mode und Design Düsseldorf' – Long-Term Partner in Various Projects**

AMD is a private Fresenius-college teaching fashion, starting from design and cultural context, to marketing strategies and journalism.<sup>9</sup> Its branches are located in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Wiesbaden, and Düsseldorf. The latter has been in collaboration with DTM several times before, but not to such an extent as with the FABRIC-project.<sup>10</sup> The current collaboration exceeds former projects in terms of the number of classes and students, duration, and outcomes. This time, eight classes of different levels were involved in the period from 2018 to 2021. The following activities will terminate in July 2021:

### **(1) 'Fashion in Context', 'Fashion Journalism and Communication', and 'Fashion and Design Management'**

In the 2019 summer term, Dr. Uta-Christiane Bergemann taught several classes connected to the FABRIC-project. Sixth grade students of 'Fashion Journalism and Communication' created a questionnaire on the fabrics of people's lives, especially addressing people of migrant backgrounds. The class investigated the composition of the city of Düsseldorf's population, defining the five largest migrant communities: Japanese, Ghanaian, Turkish, Syrian, and Moroccan.

The actual surveys were carried out in the streets of Düsseldorf by second grade students, interviewing 34 individuals from

Japan, 42 from Ghana, 70 from Turkey, 100 from Syria and 62 deriving from Morocco. Complementary, sixth grade students of 'Fashion & Design-Management', investigated the textile traditions of these five regions. They defined typical dresses, collected their names, studied traditional outfits and how they were made and composed essays on their results. All questionnaires and reports were handed over to the DTM to be utilised within the DTM-exhibition.

### **(2) 'Brand- and Communication Design'**

Professor Ralf Lobeck, 'Studiendekan' of Brand and Communication Design Department, and free-lance photographer Felix Dobbert, taught visual communication to first grade students in winter 2019/2020. Dobbert instructed the students in portrait- and fashion-photography in terms of technical features of a professional camera, the composition of images, arrangement and application of artificial light and visual effects, setting a professional studio, image editing, and provision of image rights. In the second phase, students were to practice their so far theoretical knowledge in groups of two. Each student had to experience the actual photographing as well as being the assistant. The student-photographers were asked to take two types of images, bust portraits and full body images.



**Fig. 2:** AMD-student Jasmine Scheid taking pictures of a Turkish woman, wearing her folkloristic dancing outfit. Studio setting at the AMD-photo-session 2019. © Photo: Laura Römer for DTM Krefeld.



**Fig. 3:** Canadian make-up artist Heidi Kincaid is preparing a Ghanaian woman for her AMD-photo-session 2019. © Photo: Lina Tersteegen for DTM Krefeld.



It was the DTM-team's responsibility to provide the topic, the models from migrant communities, who would wear the fabrics of their lives, and to organize the logistics.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to KI and personal contacts, 16 models from nine countries were willing to join the project. Among them two Bulgarian, three Peruvian, two Turkish women (Fig. 2), one Palestinian (Fig. 1) and one Japanese woman, as well as a woman and two men from Ghana (Fig. 3), one gentleman from Great Britain, one from Kosovo (Fig. 4), and one from Bangladesh. Two photo-sessions, one in November and one in December of 2019, were initiated according to tight schedules organising the models, occupying the dressing room, and conducting make-up and photo-sessions.

Hundreds of pictures were taken, which had to be sorted out and edited in the last phase of the course. Students selected their best images, presented and explained their choice to the class and the DTM-team. In advance, they had to edit the images with the Adobe Photoshop®-program, and brand them with the FABRIC-logo as watermark.

The photo-sessions were a great experience to all participants, and the images are of exceptional quality (Figs. 1-4). They were handed over to the models, who shared them with their communities, as well as to the DTM-team to be used for public relation purposes and the DTM-FABRIC-exhibition.



**Fig. 4:** Rifat Krasniqi of Kosovar origin presenting the 'Plis', a cap of finest felt worn as national symbol. AMD-photo-session 2019. © Photo: Anouk Weyna for DTM Krefeld.

The professional setting of the photo-sessions and studio (Fig. 2), as well as the make-up, created by the make-up artist Heidi Kincaid (Fig. 3), turned out to be essential to this project, creating confidence among the non-professional models and little experienced students. A trustworthy yet professional atmosphere comforted the persons not used to pose for photography, especially since they presented themselves to the public in their very private traditional garments, which they seldom wear in public. The great sensitivity of the students in respectfully establishing contacts, as well as their efforts in creating a pleasant atmosphere by seeking for conversation, offering them beverages and snacks, and even playing music from their homelands, quickly created a very positive spirit among the participants.

In the course of the photo-project, the DTM-team became aware of two types of traditional garment choices:

**(1)** Truly traditional ethnic garments or accessories, formerly worn by family-members (e.g. Fig. 1); newly made dresses of traditional type, worn in ritual contexts, such as weddings (e.g. the Turkish henna-gown and the Ghanaian outfits shown in Fig. 3); and elements of high national and even political symbolic meaning (e.g. Fig. 4).

**(2)** 'Folkloristic' dresses, newly made after traditional ethnic models, created for dancers and dance companies, keeping up traditional rituals (e.g. Figs. 2, 5, 6). It became evident, that these garments rather stand for an ethnic group, than an individual wearing them. Best examples were the Peruvian outfits, which represent the traditions of the coastline, the Andes, and the tropical forests, while all of the models themselves originate from the coastline (Fig. 5). The same phenomenon occurred with the two types of Bulgarian dresses, the green representing the North, the red the South (Fig. 6).

The authors curiously observed the transformation processes of the models, from arriving in their everyday clothes, to changing dresses, having a professional make-up, and taking position in the photo-studio. Gradually, they gained confidence; they became calm, and felt safe. As the pictures were taken, the models had changed posture and attitude, completely differing from that upon arrival: They showed pride of being noticed and appreciated in their migrant identity.

**Fig. 5:** Peruvian models from the coastline represent three traditions: Alfa Otto (left) personifies the Andes, Ingrid Villena Sandoval (center) the jungle and Kathy Molina Benavente (right) the coastline. AMD-photo-session 2019. © Photo: Paula Timmermann for DTM Krefeld.



In order to document the stories of the people, the DTM-team invited the models to interviews on the fabrics of their lives, held at the DTM. Starting at the beginning of 2020 three of the interviews were postponed to June and July 2021. All of the meetings were documented by the freelance filmmaker Reimund Meincke, and will be worked out in two versions: individual films of each interviewee, and a film combining all interviews, structured according to the questions asked. Images and films will be integrated into the virtual DTM-exhibition.

### **(3) 'Fashion in Context'**

Professor Dr. Elisabeth Hackspiel-Mikosch conducted a class on 'Fashion in context' with sixth grade students in summer 2020. She taught theoretical approaches and critical perspectives towards ethnic positions on subjects like 'cultural appropriation' in fashion. Topics to be investigated were for instance the Beatles wearing Indian clothes, designer Carolina Herrera taking over Mexican traditions, the Asian and British production of ethnographically ornamented wax-prints for African consumers, etc.

The aim of the class was to create a critical awareness and moral attitude towards inspiration in fashion design and business. The topics were prepared by the teacher in cooperation with the DTM-team and in accordance to the FABRIC project.

Students held lectures and the DTM-team participated in several sessions. The results were documented in written reports, which were handed over to DTM to be integrated in the virtual exhibition.

### **(4) 'Fashion Journalism'**

Heidi Kincaid (Fig. 3) conducted a fashion-journalism class in English language to sixth grade students in summer 2020. Students were to develop a questionnaire and interview the genuine FABRIC partners on the fabrics of their lives, their motivation to participate in the project, and individual migrant experiences. Colleagues at Athens, Copenhagen, and Krefeld – all of them represented in this volume – were interviewed in telephone-conferences, and the results were turned into written reports. – For a detailed description of this project see Heidi Kincaid in this volume.

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conferences, and the results were turned into written reports. – For a detailed description of this project see Heidi Kincaid in this volume.

### **(5) 'Formfinding Dress'**

Dean Markus Wirz, professor Claus Bortas and professor Ines Majowski conducted a class on 'Formfinding Dress' with second grade fashion design students in summer 2020. Future designers were to learn methods of constructing dress, starting from theory, sketch, mood-board, realisation, to photo-shooting, and presentation to the public. Being a partner of the FABRIC project, students had to take traditional and ethnic garments as inspiration, and chose additional topics such as sustainability, fashion trends of the 1980s etc. According to the FABRIC concept, students were to study traditional and ethnic dress, find individual and personal affiliation to a certain culture and its expressions that inspired them.

The students of this class faced extraordinary challenges during the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020, since they were not allowed to enter the AMD-studios where technical support in terms of sewing machines, puppets etc. is provided. Besides, being at first term just starting to learn how to construct and sew dresses, they especially needed the supervision of their teachers.



**Fig. 6:** Bulgarian models representing the Bulgarian tradition dress: Dessislava Holzschneider (left) wears the red dress of the coastline and Sevdalina Komitova (right) the green 'Tracht' of the countryside. AMD-photo-session 2019. © Photo: Luna Böker for DTM Krefeld.



**Fig.7:** Screenshot of the zoom-classes held by Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Hackspiel-Mikosch on 'Fashion in Context', summer 2020. © Screenshot by Christina Schulte, DTM Krefeld.



**Fig. 8:** Mariya Naneva, designer and model, dressed in her Bulgarian inspired traditional and futuristic gown. Creation of the 'Formfinding Dress'-class at AMD 2020. © Photo: Denislav Iranov.

They were forced to execute the project at home, using the equipment they had, and met their teachers only virtually. Due to the lockdown, all shops were closed and cloth was not available, and DTM supported by providing textile materials, such as lace, velvet, yarns, buttons, decorative applications etc.

The DTM-team participated in several of the zoom-meetings, and in the final presentation, which took place in physical presence at AMD, in the middle of October 2020. Each of the 19 students had to present a model wearing their designed gown, give a lecture on the cultural inspiration, individual approaches and developments towards the final version, the sketchbook, accompanied by a slideshow of professionally arranged photos. Originally, three of the best designs and presentations were to be awarded by the DTM-team – a difficult mission due to the high quality of all designs – instead five designs were selected:

- Anna Peters and her evening robe illustrating the close connection of Africa and Asia, symbolised by two elephant-heads, an African and an Indian, arranged on the chest, combined with a printed African fabric;
- Mariya Naneva, of Bulgarian background, who studied her homeland's traditional dresses and ornaments and created a very modern, nearly futuristic gown (Fig. 6);
- Ana Mothes worked with traditional Korean 'Tracht'-elements;

- Paula Terhardt who intensely studied Scottish history and cultural expressions that inspired her to design a punk-like robe;
- Gerlind Werner investigated the typical crown of the German Black Forest 'Tracht' and interpreted it in a very modern and abstract way.

Reimund Meincke, who also documented individual interviews with the young designers, filmed the final presentations. The film as well as sketches and images of the awarded designs will also be included in the FABRIC-exhibition.

## **(6) 'Brand- and communication design'**

Professor Ralf Lobeck, 'Studiendekan', and Uwe Stoklossa dedicated the summer term of 2021 to a second grade class creating corporate design proposals for the virtual exhibition. Nine teams of students create individual concept embracing the print media such as the invitation, poster and the flags, and then augment it on the design of the virtual exhibition. Results will be introduced to the DTM-team by July 20.



## Challenges and Perspectives in 2021

The unforeseen COVID 19-crisis hit Germany in February 2020. It challenged the DTM-activities within the FABRIC-project, as well as the AMD-classes. Fortunately, the AMD very quickly adapted to virtual teaching methods enabling the students to continue their curriculum, and fostering the FABRIC-cooperation. Even though classes were held virtually, as videoconferences, telephone-interviews, and films, the students still created both written documents, and physical designs. Despite the extraordinary situation, the cooperation of DTM and AMD was extremely fruitful, providing DTM with a great amount of material to be arranged to the virtual FABRIC-exhibition.

Originally, this exhibition was scheduled for summer 2021, in physical presence, but DTM-team decided to create an online exhibition, that turned out to be the first online-exhibition ever created by a Krefeld cultural institution. The publication of the online-presentation is scheduled for the second half of 2021. The digital and virtual products of the various projects executed are being collected and arranged according to a new scenario. The virtual exhibits consist of digital portrait photography, images of pieces of artwork, filmed interviews, filmed presentations, written reports and interviews, podcasts, and images of traditional ethnic dresses of the DTM-collection. Exhibits will complement them, and other documents created and provided by FABRIC-colleagues in Athens,

Copenhagen, and Paris. The design will be created in close connection of the DTM-team and another AMD-class conducted by Ralf Lobeck and Uwe Stoklossa, teaching corporate design, in summer 2021.

The advantage of virtual exhibitions is that they can reach a much wider and even international audience, especially when the English language is also provided. Moreover, since it will take place at the World Wide Web, there will be no need to close it after six months, as would be the case with a physical exhibition at Krefeld. The virtual exhibition will therefore serve a pan-European integrative.



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Senger D. 2020 Von Oktober bis Oktober. In: *Die Heimat* 91, 2020, 6–13, esp. 7 fig. 3.

## End Notes

- 1 See [www.deutschestextilmuseum.de](http://www.deutschestextilmuseum.de) for further information.
- 2 Now 'Hochschule Niederrhein'.
- 3 Paetz gen. Schieck 2013, 47–61.
- 4 See for example Paetz gen. Schieck 2020, 95–113, Pls. 4, 13, 14.
- 5 'Ans Licht!' financed by the Sparkassen-Kulturstiftung Krefeld (2017–2021) embracing the European 'Trachten' collection, East Asian, pre-Columbian, and early Islamic textiles. Publications: Bergemann, Fleischmann-Heck & Paetz gen. Schieck 2018; Brix 2020 (edited by A. Paetz gen. Schieck & I. Fleischmann-Heck).
- 6 'Weltbunt' funded by the BMBF (2017–2020). Partners: HS Niederrhein, Museum Schloss Rheydt, TH Cologne, Historische Farbstoffsammlung Dresden. Task: Interdisciplinary approach towards the invention of synthetic dyestuffs and the democratic influence on society from 1856 to the 1930ies. Results were presented in the DTM-exhibition 'Zeitkolorit' (2019–2020), and published: Paetz gen. Schieck & Fleischmann-Heck 2019. – 'Parvenue' funded by the BMBF (2018–2022). Partners: HHU (University of Düsseldorf), Hetjens-Museum Düsseldorf, Museum Burg Linn Krefeld, AMD. Task: Object-based investigation on social climbers and their goods in 18th Century and their goods. For further information see [www.parvenue-projekt.de](http://www.parvenue-projekt.de) (last visited on February 2nd, 2021).
- 7 For further information see [www.krefeld.de/de/migration-integration/kommunales-integrationszentrum/](http://www.krefeld.de/de/migration-integration/kommunales-integrationszentrum/) and [www.krefeld.de/familienportal/familienkompass/kommunales-integrationszentrum-der-stadt-krefeld/](http://www.krefeld.de/familienportal/familienkompass/kommunales-integrationszentrum-der-stadt-krefeld/) (last visited on February 2nd, 2021).
- 8 For further information, see [www.bkvb.de](http://www.bkvb.de) (last visited on February 2, 2021).
- 9 For further information see [www.amdnet.de/standort/amd-akademie-mode-design-duesseldorf](http://www.amdnet.de/standort/amd-akademie-mode-design-duesseldorf) (last visited on February 2nd, 2021).
- 10 In 2013, students designed futuristic children's clothes which were exhibited in the 'Der Kinder bunte Kleider – aus eigener Sammlung'-exhibition of DTM from March 17 to September 29, 2013. In 2016 students composed 'Silk now!', an addition to the DTM-exhibition on 'Seide. Textile Pracht aus 2000 Jahren', from March 6 to 28, August 2016.
- 11 Senger 2020, 6–13, esp. p. 7 fig. 3.



# Textile Tales

## How textile objects build connections between individuals and across time

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### Keywords

Modest Fashion, Textiles, Biographical Wardrobes, Dress Practice

### Abstract

Everyday garments, party dresses, school uniforms, garments for celebrations and special occasions and a plethora of household and interior items are made of textiles. The stories in the Fabric of My Life podcast archive reveal a world of personal development, memories, societal development, migration, traditions, rituals and values. They are archived as podcasts told in 12 different languages, e.g. Greek, French, Danish, Arabic and Farsi, and each story is presented on the website by a headline and an image. They tell fact-oriented stories about the textiles and techniques used for garments, accessories and interior textiles combining it with culture, timespan, heritage and lived lives. The result is very personal stories in a context of use patterns and knowledge about textiles and garments. From a design perspective, it is interesting

to dive into this treasure box listening to the stories while exploring the fabrics and the construction techniques in a time and life perspective. Is there something we can learn from the past by studying techniques, construction, materials, use and memories; in other words, reasons for keeping garments and textiles? And what does a selection of stories about inherited garments tell us? With this paper, we want to investigate the relation between the micro- and macrostructures of dressing in the perspective of time meaning the relation between material, technique, personal narratives, societal issues and history. Thus, this paper looks more closely at six selected podcast narratives from a Danish context as examples of the 78 podcasts recorded throughout the project.

## Introduction

Textile knowledge embedded in garments and textiles is often passed on from generation to generation and across borders; knowledge that is internalised in the body through sensorial memories such as touch, scent, auditory experience, visual stimuli and whole-body experiences of wearing.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, textile knowledge is also embedded in the craft of making, be that sewing, weaving, knitting/crocheting, mending or embroidering, but also in the way we use all our senses to experience everyday textiles.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, textile objects are carriers of knowledge in the form of specific textile techniques connected with specific sites and time periods, societal norms and etiquettes for silhouettes, colour combinations, styling and wearing. This comes out particularly vividly in intercultural contexts as changes of cultural setting and climate conditions affect individual dress practices. The wardrobe of each individual hereby becomes a site of negotiation of identity, and thus textile objects eventually turn into identity anchors, connecting the past, present and future life situation.<sup>3</sup>

This article will present six exemplary stories about textile objects from the research project the Fabric of My Life told by Danes but with far reaching connections to both history and the world.

## Methodology

The Fabric of My Life podcast archive consists of 78 podcasts recorded by the research team from January to November 2020.<sup>4</sup> The guidelines for the podcasts consist of 10 questions. Briefly explained, the storyteller introduces him/herself by name and actual residency. This is followed by the story about a favourite textile object, which can be interior textiles or a garment of their own choice.

The storyteller describes the object in detail and finally talks about emotional experiences and memories connected with it. Thus, the main focus is on textile objects that express generational, cross-border or personal perspectives. The procedure is inspired by wardrobe studies<sup>5</sup> as well as the idea of all wardrobes being biographical and life-documenting in nature.<sup>6</sup>

There are 31 podcasts lasting from three to five minutes, 14 last from five to seven minutes, and one is 25 minutes long. Between them, 32 podcasts last less than three minutes and of these six are shorter than two minutes. The shortest one is half a minute long. All podcasts are accompanied by one photograph to document them. They are recorded in 12 languages including Kurdish (1), Faroese (1), Turkish (1), Spanish (1), Farsi (2), Arabic (2), Polish (2), French (3), German (4), Greek (9), English (16) and Danish (36).

In this article, we analyse and compare six archived stories of the 36 told in Danish. Many listeners will not understand Danish and therefore not the stories told in this language. Accordingly, it makes sense to discuss these stories and share them with an international audience.

The selection criteria were that the objects had been used for a long-time and across generations in a Danish context. The coding was conducted with the purpose of highlighting the objects as carriers of knowledge at many levels; 1) situational knowledge in the form of techniques and materials deriving from specific regions/ countries; 2) contextual knowledge in the form of norms for appropriateness or practices of use; 3) historically-embedded knowledge in the form of family tales and stylistic references tied to specific time periods.

Our data consists of audio recorded stories and photo documentation on the website. We analyse and discuss the material with a coding based on the following keywords: general introduction, generational story, material, technique, form, memories, feelings, reasons for keeping, reasons for using, historical issues and societal issues. There are several textile techniques involved in manufacturing the selected objects of which not all were known to the authors. Therefore, our analysis of the objects is based on the photo documentation since the storytellers use everyday language to describe the techniques.

**Table 1:** Overview of the selected podcasts.

	<b>TITLE</b> ( <i>translated into English by the authors</i> )	<b>SPEAK</b>	<b>LENGTH</b>	<b>DATE</b>
1	My Grandmother's knitted Blouse	Danish	2:28	Nov 2020
2	A knitted Cardigan in Fair Isle Technique	Danish	5:26	Nov 2020
3	A Dress from the 1940ies	Danish	5:59	June 2020
4	A Knitted Sweater	Danish	3:08	June 2020
5	The Blue Cardigan	Danish	2:31	May 2020
6	A Christening Gown	Danish	4:19	Mar 2020



## Empirical Findings

The objects represent four knitted and two sewn garments. One is probably a souvenir from a travel in East Europe, and the remaining five are handmade. The selected respondents for this article are five women and one man. Four respondents are based in Copenhagen, one in North Sealand and one on the Faroe Islands. One of the criteria for selecting the stories was that they described an inherited object still in active use. Therefore, it is no surprise that all stories focus on family relations and that the storytellers know exactly who made or bought the garment and talk about how the garment was inherited and also about the person who made it. In this case, all the makers were women.

## A knitted blouse

The object is a womenswear knitted blouse made of fine white wool, which means that it has a yellowish tint (Fig. 1). The knit pattern is a combination of many different knitting techniques inspired by traditional Aran knitting such as cable knit, lace knitting and combinations of purl and knit.<sup>7</sup> The sleeves are sewn on to the body. It has a very special ribbing on the sleeves and body that forms a diamond pattern. The owner Katrine, who is 23 years old, has lived in many places but currently lives in Copenhagen. Her family is spread around Denmark, and she has a lot of family in other countries and places like Africa. She inherited the blouse when her grandmother passed away.

The blouse probably originates from Eastern Europe, and it makes Katrine remember her grandparents and all their travel activity. There is a hole in the left sleeve resulting from her grandmother's use of the blouse. It speaks to Katrine about passing times and the blouse being old. Katrine wants to mend the hole in what she calls a "relevant way", and she is considering the aesthetics of mending and who should take care of it. Katrine's grandmother is alive through the blouse, and it makes her reflect on things that her grandmother appreciated, such as details, aesthetics and traveling.



**Fig. 1:** Image of podcast  
'My Grandmother's Knitted Blouse'.

## A knitted Fair Isle cardigan

The object is a womens cardigan knitted in a medium-quality wool in the Fair Isle technique, which is a stockinette stitch typically using two differently coloured threads to create the patterns. It often consists of horizontal patterns in colours that shift between stripes in monochrome colours and stripes with different types of motifs. This pattern became very popular with the hippie movement of the 1970s in Denmark and often represented feminist symbols, such as the symbols of women, peace, witches, etc. (Fig. 1/2).

It is striped in different blue colours and each stripe has its own motif/pattern in a different colour, like pale and dark pink, violet and white. There is a dark blue stripe between each patterned row with motifs. The motifs are figurative, e.g. men, women, animals and symbols. The cardigan closes with a vertical row of buttons down the front. The storyteller Johanne, who is 23 years old, is from the Danish city Hillerød and now lives in a suburb of Copenhagen. When Johanne was around 12 to 15 years old, she inherited the cardigan that her grandmother made for her mother.

It means a lot to Johanne that the cardigan was made by her grandmother and that her own mother used it as a child when she was playing. One of the motifs – the symbol for women – makes her reflect on the ongoing gender debates of today. Johanne has worn a hole on one sleeve, and this saddens her. She and her mother mended it with patches on both elbows, so now she is very satisfied to have put her personal mark on it. When she first got it, it smelled like her grandparents' house, a place that meant a lot to her. The cardigan also reminds her of her own mother, thus representing safety and security.





**Fig. 2:** Image of podcast  
'A Knitted Cardigan in Fair Isle Technique'.



**Fig. 3:** Image of podcast 'A Dress from the 1940s'.



**Fig. 4:** Image of podcast 'A Knitted Sweater'.





## A sewn dress

The object is a womens dress made of a soft, shiny fabric that feels like silk. The upper part has a multiple square pattern that could be characteristic of the 1940s in black, white, yellow and orange colours (Fig. 1/3). The skirt of the dress is a navy colour. The dress is tailormade with wide shoulders unique to 1940s fashion. The skirt is a so-called "princess cut", a bias cut skirt with fluid lines that are complicated to make. The storyteller Else lives in Copenhagen and is at the time of writing 50 years old. She spent her childhood in Jutland, but her family comes from Sealand. She has inherited the dress from her grandmother who made it in the 1940s. Else has a photograph of her aunt Molli's christening (daughter of her grandmother) where her grandmother is wearing the dress.

Else's grandmother was a dress maker before she got married. She had five children and used her textile skills to make ends meet economically. Else loves the dress both because there are a lot of family memories connected with it and also because it is of an exquisite tailormade quality. Else is a dress researcher, and she feels that the circle closed with her now passed away grandmother. A thread in the shoulder construction broke when she wore the dress at her own daughter's name giving. The dress means a lot to Else, and now she has found a skilled dress maker in Copenhagen who knows how to fix it.

## A knitted sweater

The object is a pale blue mens sweater made in a medium fineness quality wool (Fig. 2/4). It has a relief pattern made by seed stitch knitting that alternates between purl and knit stitches. There are different patterns on the body, sleeves and yoke, and they are separated by differently patterned stripes. It is a light slim fit sweater with a round neck. The storyteller Morten has lived for almost 7 years in Copenhagen. He is originally from Jutland where he also finished high school. Morten was a high school student when his grandmother gave him the sweater because it did not fit his grandfather anymore.

Morten is very happy about the sweater, and he describes the pattern as complex. It reminds him of his high school years as it was his preferred school attire. The fact that it was inherited had an important signal value as it was considered cool to wear second hand among his friends. Another reason why the sweater means a lot to Morten is that it makes him remember his grandmother being a very dedicated and proud housekeeper. When his grandmother got married, she did not know how to cook, and his grandfather suggested she went to his sisters to learn. However, she refused to do that and instead taught herself how to cook, knit and sew.

## A knitted childrens cardigan

The object is a pale blue childrens cardigan made of a medium fineness woollen yarn (Fig. 2/5). It is a size 50, European size, which is a very small size for new-borns. It has a diagonal lace pattern and pale blue buttons that look like stylised flowers. The storyteller Mia is 29 years old. Mia is pregnant and lives with her boyfriend and her two-year-old daughter in Tisvildeleje in Northern Sealand but originally comes from Helsingør. When her grandmother was pregnant with Mia's mother, she knitted this cardigan to her. Mia got the cardigan when she was pregnant with her first child, which was also the first grandchild in that generation.

The cardigan is of great importance to Mia. It does not have a high monetary value but a very high sentimental value for the whole family as all children in her family have worn it. It has become even more valuable now that her own daughter has used it, and she is looking forward to giving birth to her son and dress him in the cardigan. Mia looks forward to passing it on to her youngest sister when she is going to have children. She also hopes that her grandchildren will wear the cardigan when that time comes.

## A sewn christening gown

The object is a sewn traditional Danish christening gown for children in a thin woven, white cotton fabric (Fig. 2/6). It is trimmed with lace on the neck while the sleeves and skirt are decorated with vertical tucks (stitched pleats) on the yoke. It is an empire cut gown with the wide long skirt directly connected to the yoke. The storyteller Ingrid is 77 years old and was born on the Danish Island Funen. In 1964, she married a man from the Faroe Islands and has lived there for 55 years. Ingrid's Swedish grandmother and her husband were tailors working from their apartment in Helsingborg. In 1951, the grandmother decided to make the christening gown for her daughter, Ingrid's sister.

Since then, 33 children have been christened wearing that gown with number 33 being Ingrid's great grandchild. The story about the christening gown initiates stories about being born in hard times and growing up after the war when Sweden - in Ingrid's eyes - was a country of abundance. She talks about lack of commodities and food, rationing and blackouts, and she describes it as a hard and sad period. She remembers a trip to Sweden when she was 3 years old where the family bought various goods and fabrics, one of which was flannel fabric for a nightgown and a teddy bear for Ingrid.



Fig. 5: Image of podcast 'The Blue Cardigan'...

## Concluding discussion and perspectives

In this article, we use a selection of local, Danish stories as an entrance point to the discussion about knowledge embedded in textile objects. The Fabric of My Life archive contains 78 podcasts where respondents have contributed with a story about a specific textile object. The fact that the invitation to participate in the podcast series was open to anyone is reflected in the storytellers bringing testimonies from many different backgrounds, cultures and phases of life.

Through the six selected examples, it is showcased how textile objects act as carriers of passed on textile skills and techniques, including maintenance and repair skills (or lack of the same), carriers of patterns, family narratives from across the country and beyond and carriers of feelings and emotional attachment as they are usually objects of high sentimental value. We would like to address the main objective of Fabric of My Life which is to understand how textile objects have a particular value to migrants or cross-cultural identity building in a temporal perspective. Refugees are typically not able to carry many objects with them as they need to escape their country of origin under very difficult circumstances.



Fig. 6: Image of podcast 'A Christening Gown'.

As previous research has shown, garments and textiles are often among the few objects they bring along since they are relatively light to carry and can be worn on the body. Furthermore, the same research shows how activities of styling and making (e.g. crocheting, knitting, embroidering or sewing) form a potential non-verbal 'third language' between people of different native tongues which makes it possible to exchange dress experiences across language- and cultural borders.<sup>8</sup>

The internal pressure of adapting to external expectations of dressing has been termed 'dressing dilemmas' by Tarlo as displayed in her study of young Indian college students finding themselves in conflict between submitting to demands for dressing traditionally Indian from their homes and from fellow students at college expecting them to dress in Western dress styles.<sup>9</sup> Similar dilemmas are documented by Hansen in her study of the way in which Zambian customers on the second hand market make much effort to appropriate Western garments to local norms and silhouettes through styling, remaking and adjusting.<sup>10</sup> But similar dilemmas affect all daily routines of dressing as all wearers are under internal and external pressure of feeling appropriately dressed for an occasion, for family life, friends and for professional settings.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas these scholars address the many conflicting issues involved in engaging with textile objects, we will urge the reader to embrace how these objects also carry a great healing potential.

Textile objects connect the user with past personal experiences, with family history, with the world and with present and future life perspectives. Altogether, they represent a micro-cosmos of time and context representing individual acts of wearing and making and also hundreds of years of textile history that intertwines and connects all of us globally across regions, cultures and time.<sup>12</sup>

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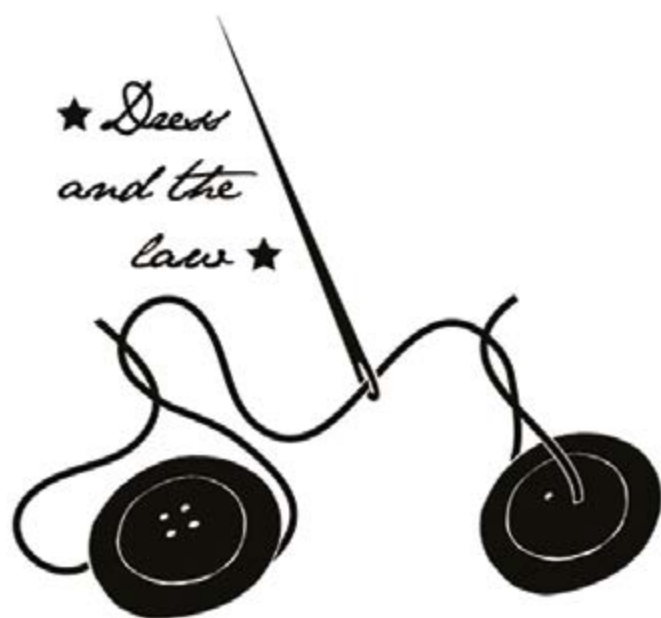
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## End Notes

- 1 Skjold 2018; Ræbild 2015
- 2 Albers 2017; Bang 2013; Hasling & Bang 2016; Skibsted 2020
- 3 see, for example, Guy, Green & Banim 2001
- 4 <https://www.thefabricofmylife.com>
- 5 Fletcher & Klepp 2017
- 6 Skjold 2016

- 7 Hollingworth 1982
- 8 Skjold et al. 2020
- 9 Tarlo 1996
- 10 Tranberg? Hansen 2003
- 11 Skjold 2014
- 12 Lemire 2018





# The Fabrication of fear, democracy, legal culture and the argument of public safety

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## Keywords

public safety, corona virus, face covering,  
ECtHR, living together

## Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 crisis most of the EU State-Members have announced plans or have already passed legislation to make face masks compulsory as a measure against the spread of coronavirus. At the same time, the relevant legislation and legal principles governing the covering of the face and head for Muslim women in the European Union are prominent.

We will analyse this oxymoron under the Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union according to which the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom of democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect for human rights.

The new COVID-19 legislation uses the argument of public safety in order to make the covering of the face the new normality. Previous legislation used the argument of public safety to ban the covering of the face of Muslim women. How is this argument translated today in the light of the new reality?

## Introduction

At the time of submitting this article, Coronavirus disease had become a global pandemic. The mitigation of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic globally includes the action of face covering, since this is the main practice to combat the virus. Wearing face masks was at first recommended but gradually became compulsory, as part of the personal protective equipment and as a public health measure to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. This article aims to identify how the face covering legislation for the protection of public health correlates with previous legislation that banned the Islamic veil (hijab, jibab, burqa, niqab)<sup>1</sup> for public safety reasons.

The 2019 coronavirus pandemic was perceived as a public health emergency, as well as a threat to the global economic and social stability. World Health Organization (WHO) identified the infectious disease as a public health emergency of international concern in accordance with the International Health Regulations (IHR). WHO also adopted the decision to declare the existence of a public health emergency of international concern in accordance to the Articles 12 and 49 of the IHR,<sup>2</sup> -an international treaty for the coordination of all health emergencies- that stipulates that Member States must notify WHO of any event that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern, independently of its origin (including biological, chemical or environmental).<sup>3</sup>

## The 'refugium' of face covering

A variety of public health and hygiene measures were initiated; the most noticeable was the wearing of face masks. The medical advice on the use of face masks as personal protective equipment (PPE) against the severe acute respiratory syndrome resulted in conflicting guidance from health officials initially.<sup>4</sup> WHO's initial advice, was updated several times, shifting from initial statements that face masks are not to be worn by healthy individuals, towards the gradual general adoption of face masks as useful in slowing community transmission.<sup>5</sup> There was also a plethora of opinions about the proper material for the face covering. Last but not least the wearing of a 'surgical' face covering, an N-95 protective mask or double layered fabric, also became an issue. Gradually, the use of a face mask was recognised as a suitable measure within the scientific community<sup>6</sup> if nothing else, due to the application of the 'precautionary principle' in the face of an acute crisis.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the face mask served as a visual communication tool providing a new way to communicate during the pandemic. It became a dual symbol, a public health measure, as well as a means of personal expression in raising awareness, collective solidarity, or even as a part of the new pandemic-related aesthetics. But how did we move from recommendation to criminalisation?

## **The argument of 'living together' of ECtHR and face covering**

Country policies, initially differed across a rather wide spectrum of approaches; ranging from legally mandated instructions to cover one's face in all public spaces, reinforced by financial penalties (i.e., payable fines); to recommendations only. In some countries, face mask-related policies did not need to be prescribed as this was part of existing established habits.<sup>8</sup> Enquiries into the legal culture try to understand puzzling features of the role and the rule of law within a given society. Legal culture, in its most general sense, is one way of describing relatively stable patterns of legally oriented social behavior and attitudes.<sup>9</sup> Why do we use the same argument in order to ban an attire practice as well as to make it mandatory? Such contrasts can direct us to reconsider the broader theoretical issues in the study of law and society. How does the importance of 'enforcement' as an aspect of law vary in different times? What can be learned, and what is likely to be obscured, by defining 'law' in terms of litigation rates? How do fear cultures condition the boundaries of law and in what ways does law help shape those self-same boundaries?

Nowadays face coverings, are literally 'all around us'. But what about the face coverings that were present long before COVID-19? As they relate to legal culture, face covering practices in Europe had great gravity in human rights discourses. Article 8<sup>10</sup> and Article 9<sup>11</sup> of the European Convention of Human Rights<sup>12</sup> are particularly relevant to this debate about clothing. Both articles specify that these rights can only be subjected to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interest of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Those who have argued for the general ban of the burqa and the niqab, managed to persuade 'legal thought'<sup>13</sup> that these garments undermine democracy and public safety.<sup>14</sup>

The wearing of the full-face veil in public has been a subject of debate in a number of European States. Even if in Europe there is no consensus as to whether or not there should be a blanket ban on the wearing of the full-face veil in public places, more and more European countries have adopted restrictive legislature based on the argument that 'islamic dress' infringes upon constitutional principles such as secularism. The last country to forbid face covering in public space during the pandemic, was Switzerland.

In most European countries, there are laws that prohibit wearing Islamic dress in public spaces<sup>15</sup> and schools, based on the aforementioned argument. Many cases<sup>16</sup> reached the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on the grounds that national laws and court decisions have infringed upon women's right to manifest their religion according to Article 9<sup>17</sup> of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Such claims have been also brought on national level under other legal provisions such as discrimination.

In many cases, the ECtHR, held that the legislations that prohibit the wearing of hijabs in schools and universities, are compliant with democratic principles<sup>18</sup> and meet the requirements of proportionality and necessity. Additionally, many ECtHR cases<sup>19</sup> regarded gender equality as well as social interaction and safeguarding public order as objectives that justify limiting the freedom of religion.

We are going to study the argument of a particular ECtHR case<sup>20</sup> in which the Court stated that public order and safety "... could be attained by a mere obligation [of women] to show their face and to identify themselves where a risk for the safety of persons and property has been established."

The core of the argument is that face veil is a practice that threatens the 'possibility of open interpersonal relationships'.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, is presented as a threat to 'social interaction' and to 'feeling of safety'.<sup>22</sup> Such are linked to the philosophy of full-face veil and the interpretations of its symbolic meaning.<sup>23</sup> The full-face veil was also linked to the 'self-confinement of any individual who cuts himself off from others whilst living among them'. Women who wear such clothing have been described as 'effaced' from the public space.

According to that Judgment, the authorities have given much weight to the argument being used that such a ban is legitimate in order to ensure the observance of the minimum requirements of life in society as part of the 'protection of the rights and the freedoms of the others'.<sup>24</sup> 'The Court also states that interaction between individuals may be adversely affected by the fact that some conceal their faces in public places'.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the Court finds that the impugned ban can be regarded as justified as it seeks to guarantee the conditions of 'living together'.

Furthermore, the Court highlights the arguments that only a small number of women is affected<sup>26</sup> and that the ban is based on the fact that it conceals the face and not to religious connotation of the clothing in question.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the Court states<sup>28</sup> that the ban can be regarded as proportionate to the aim pursued, namely the preservation of the conditions of 'living together' as an element of the 'protection of the rights and freedoms of others'.<sup>29</sup> The impugned limitation can thus be regarded as necessary in a democratic society. Accordingly, there has been no violation of either articles 8 or 9 of the Convention.<sup>30</sup>

However, it is worth drawing attention to the dissenting opinion of judges Nussberger and Jäderblom<sup>31</sup> who argue that the judgment 'sacrifices concrete individual rights guaranteed by the Convention to abstract principles', 'infringes the right to one's cultural and religious identity' and that the blanket ban on wearing a full face veil does not 'pursue a legitimate aim' and therefore violates articles 8 and 9 of the Convention. In the same dissenting opinion they argue that the need to identify individuals by revealing of facial features, can be regarded as proportionate only in a context where there is a general threat to public safety<sup>32</sup> pinpointing how disproportionate is the blanket ban.

Furthermore, they disagree that the concept of "living together" and so the wearing of the veil, infringes by any means the rights and freedoms guaranteed within the Convention. They argue that not only veil cannot be interpreted as a 'barrier to communication or integration', but contrary as a symbol of respect towards different models of cultural or religious identity, strange to European lifestyles. The Court has repeatedly stated in the context of freedom of expression, that Convention protects both opinions those which 'are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also... those that offend, shock or disturb', like for example dress codes demonstrating radical opinions, because, as it is well stated by the Court, 'such are the demands of pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness without which there is no 'democratic society'.<sup>33</sup>

It is of great significance their argument that 'the right to respect for private life also comprises the right not to communicate and not to enter into contact with others in public places – the right to be an outside'. They present, deep rooted in western culture practices of full face coverings, such as skiing or motorcycling with helmets, in order to prove that 'people can socialize without necessarily looking into each other's eyes'.



They also refuting in other accepted European practices of concealing the face, such as excessive hairstyles or the wearing of dark glasses or hats in order to highlight their argumentative dissenting opinion, that it is dubious whether the rights protected by the restrictive measure outweigh the rights infringed. It is note worthy that the Court refers to the values of pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness, that used as a blanket ban on wearing a full face veil, 'as hallmarks of a democratic society',<sup>34</sup> stating that they can above all justify the acceptance of such a religious dress-code and the adoption of an integrationist approach.

The two judges believe that the applicant is right to claim that the French legislature has restricted pluralism since "the measure prevents certain women from expressing their personality and their beliefs by wearing the full-face veil in public" and they conclude that "we cannot, in any event, agree with the majority that the ban is proportionate to the aim pursued."

## Conclusion

Health and safety measures aim to increase control over society.<sup>35</sup> Both, the banning of veil and the prohibition of unmasked face in public spaces, can be considered as the consequences of biopolitics and biopower in modern society. Do these regulations attempt, on the part of the state, to regulate bodies via the imposition of normal or exceptional measures?<sup>36</sup>

We cannot forget that there is another argument of 'living together', that of Roland Barthes. According to him "living together, implies a science, an ethics living together, an art of distance and proximity at the same time, a way of managing the relationship between proximity and desire".

In the case of veils,<sup>37</sup> governments have not explained why it would have been impossible to apply less restrictive measures, instead of criminalising attire, the concealment of the face in all public places. Additionally, no account has been given to public as to whether or to what extent any efforts have been made-before the restrictive policy- to discourage the use of full-face veils, by means, for example, of awareness-raising and education. On the other hand, in the case of face masks that measure was adopted at a global scale in order to tackle a cross border public health crisis. However governments, have also not explained why they opted to criminalise the un-masking of the face in all open public places.

The legislative process shows that much less intrusive measures have not been discussed or applied first. At issue here are the autonomy and public safety, which may conflict. Health and safety are communal goals whereby everyone in the community must work toward the same end, described in the mantra “we’re all in this together”.

In view of this reasoning, we find that the criminalisation of the wearing of a full-face veil, and the criminalisation of the “un-masked face” are using exactly the same argument, the aim of protecting the idea of “living together”. This paradox puzzles us and is something that should be addressed by legal thought. Not only is there incoherence between the two legislations, but there is also internal incoherence in each.

Clarity and Consistency in legislation is of paramount importance within the EU in order to obtain consistency and accuracy in the messages communicated to the public, and to preserve confidence in the ability of the authorities and legislators to face up to an emergency and prevent any kind of crises. In the current socio-economical turmoil it is more important than ever to focus on actions in areas where the added value is evident, such as minimising the confusion of contradicting laws and building a consistent, robust, tolerant and democratic legislative corpus.

There is a flawed conception in the relationship between appearance and identity. Just as appearance and identity can never fully overlap so appearance and identity cannot be completely disconnected. The current practice of wearing masks in public spaces moves away from the prevailing judicial tendency to diagnose a citizen's status or identity as a means of deciding whether his or her appearance is coherent with their identity. Until now the judicial inquiry remained at a level of social interaction, for this is where the discrimination occurred. The cases that arrive in Court raise much more mundane and straightforward questions of appearance, than anything else. They involve reasonable people who recount stories of the fragility of having a social presence and a concrete appearance.

Our legal arrangements should respond to the social pains involved in having an appearance. Law should accommodate the complexity and vulnerability of appearance's meaning without subjecting it to an interpretive framework but with clear-cut answers. Understanding of the appearance should be incorporated to the law, as politics of dress are currently obsolete. Ultimately, studying the personal and social meaning of face-covering wearing in different contexts is also necessary for the assessment of the effectiveness of face-covering measures.

The contradiction between prohibition of unmasked face and criminalisation of a 'masked one', is already evident, which makes far than evident that something is quite wrong.

The reflections instituted here aim to shed light to the problem and to make clear that these 'oxymorous' regulations generate uneven living conditions. It is necessary to exercise respect and responsibility towards individuals in a society. In conclusion, there is a need for an in-depth understanding of the various social, cultural, religious, health-related and ethical considerations on appearance habits and attitudes. Additional knowledge about the variety of personal and collective understanding of face-covering wearing is essential for designing legislation. The hope is that law may be the means to resolve current problems by transforming society into a more democratic place. After all the rhythms of law and life are in some ways similar. The current pandemic crisis is an opportunity to develop new ethical and legal frameworks to guide collective and individual decision making around face-coverings.

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WHO, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

## End Notes

- 1 Hijab is the headscarf, niqab is the full face veil that leaves only eyes uncovered, jilbab is a garment like a coat covering the body excepts the hands and face, burqa is the garment worn over daily clothes covering the entire body from the top of the head to the ground
- 2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0866:FIN:EN:PDF>
- 3 <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0866:FIN:EN:PDF>
- 4 Chan & Yuen 2020.
- 5 World Health Organization. 2019A
- 6 Chu , et al.2020
- 7 Leung ,et al.,2020
- 8 Martinelli et al.,2021
- 9 Nelken,,2004
- 10 the right of respect for one's private life and personal identity
- 11 the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief 'in worship, teaching, practice and observance
- 12 [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention\\_eng.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf)
- 13 At this text this term is used in its broader sense including legal reasoning, legal methodology, legal techniques, legal practice and legal theory
- 14 Ricca ,2021
- 15 In France, Article L141-5-1(v) of Educational Code regulates under the principle of Laïcité the wearing of symbols and clothing denoting religious affiliations in universities, schools and colleges.
- 16 See: Case of Lucia Dahlab v. Switzerland, Sahin v. Turkey, Şefika Kose and 93 others v. Turkey, Dogru v. France.
- 17 [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention\\_eng.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf)
- 18 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶120,119
- 19 see the case of Leyla Sahin v. Turkey, Dahlab v. Switzerland and S.A.S v. France
- 20 S.A.S v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶121
- 21 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶50
- 22 The first report 'on the wearing of the full-face veil on national territory', by a French parliamentary commission, saw in the veil 'a symbol of a form of subservience'. The explanatory memorandum to the French bill referred to its 'symbolic and dehumanizing violence S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶82
- 23 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶121,122,140
- 24 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶122,143
- 25 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶144
- 26 This distinguishes the aforementioned case from that in Ahmet Arslan and Others
- 27 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶157
- 28 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶158
- 29 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶159
- 30 Two of the judges of ECtHR in the aforementioned case
- 31 .A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶139
- 32 see, among other authorities, Mouvement raélien suissev. Switzerland [GC], no. 16354/06, ¶ 48, ECHR 2012, and Stollv. Switzerland [GC], no. 69698/01, ¶ 101, ECHR 2007-V
- 33 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶128
- 34 See Foucault's concept of the panopticon which is established in the discourses of public health.
- 35 See Agamben
- 36 S.A.S. v. France (Application no.43835/11) 1 July 2014 ¶24 of dissenting opinion

**Fig. 3 The Hat (sapka)** Caption: The hat. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk wearing a black high hat. Şapka means 'hat' in Turkish. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk mentions the word 'şapka' several times in his speeches, where he refers to the western male headgear of the bowler hat and black high hat (Kastamonu speech 01.09.1925). From: <http://www.marmaragrubu.org/on-the-80-anniversary-of-his-death-we-commemorate-our-great-leader-mustafa-kemal-ataturk>



# Ottoman clothing regulations and the Kemalist clothing legislation in the early 20th century\*

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## Abstract

This paper describes the clothing and headgear legislation in the Ottoman Empire and the Kemalist dress laws passed in the 1920s in Turkey. These laws prescribe a modern look and dress practice designed to reflect the modern Turkish state.

The hat and dress laws of 1925 illustrate the politicised aspects of clothing and how clothing regulations can be a tool for political action and the shaping of ideological beliefs. The hat and dress regulations in the late Ottoman Empire form a significant backdrop to the Kemalist modernist legislation of the 1920s.

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## Introduction

Historical research on the formation and early history of the Turkish republic was generally politicised until the 1960s, with the Ottoman and Kemalist periods studied as two separate eras. In more recent scholarship, such as Vaughn Findley's 2010 book *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*, scholars have instead emphasised the continuation between these periods and have taken a more comprehensive view on the modernisation process, encompassing the Ottoman period until the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we will present a selection of Turkish sources that present political visions and illustrate how clothing became instrumental to reaching them: two speeches given at political rallies by Atatürk, and the core document, the so-called 'Hat Law' of 1925. We will include the terminology of headgear used in these texts (Figs. 1-4). We draw our interpretations from historians specialised in Turkish political history,<sup>2</sup> from feminist analyses of women's history in Turkey,<sup>3</sup> and from clothing and textile researchers.<sup>4</sup>

We have chosen not to contextualise the speeches and the Hat Law in other political documents, but to compare them with two other kinds of sources from the 1920s: Albert Kahn's photographs and Turkish fashion magazine covers. This allows us to compare how the idealised (city)-women would look, with Kahn's observations of the rural population in Turkey. In our analyses, we will focus especially on women's headgear.

## The late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Ottoman Empire appeared to be stagnating. The state no longer had the necessary military, technological, and economic means to defend its territories against external interference and attack.<sup>5</sup> Participation in various wars and internal unrest weakened the foundations of the Ottoman Empire. Territories that the empire had conquered during its time were liberated through bloody wars leading to military losses. Along with these territorial losses, several structural changes occurred in the empire.<sup>6</sup>

According to Nereid, there was an "Ottoman dress rehearsal to Kemal's sartorial westernisation."<sup>7</sup> The fez (Fig. 1) was in Ottoman times a fashionable item for men. The Ottomans introduced it as symbol of pan-Ottoman identity for the many ethnic and national groups under Ottoman rule. The fez was therefore associated with a certain modernity in the Ottoman Empire and became a popular piece of headgear among men, in addition to the turban (Fig. 2), which has a longer history as a popular item of headgear for men.

The Ottomans sought to modernise the empire and change its military structure, state institutions, and legislation. Among the rebel groups and political communities that argued for modernisation, the most dominant group was the Young Turks, also known as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). After the 1908 revolution, in which the Young Turks deposed Sultan Abdülhamid II from the throne, they implemented profound changes in culture, economy, and language. The Young Turks led the empire into World War I allied with Germany and transformed the regime into a dictatorial nationalist regime, which ended disastrously.<sup>8</sup> After the Ottoman defeat in World War I, western powers occupied the country. In reaction to this, Atatürk and his allies started the War of Independence to liberate the country and in 1923, they declared Turkey a secular state.

In Ottoman times, women began to play the role of guardians of the moral fabric of society, torn between traditional lifestyles and Islam versus urbanism and European influence. These negotiations were exacerbated in the early years of the modern republic when westernisation became a dominant ideology for the new nation, and Islam, rather than male society, was framed as the main oppressor of women.<sup>9</sup>

## Atatürk's modernisation of Turkey

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was born in the late Ottoman period, in 1880 in Selanik (today Thessaloniki, Greece). The years of Atatürk's presidency are controversial in Turkish history. Today, Atatürk's political conviction is expressed as Kemalism, which is still considered a national ideology in many districts in Turkey.

Atatürk's reform project aimed at modernising Turkish society, as he regarded the population's traditional lifestyles as the main reason for the country's backwardness. Atatürk changed his rhetoric and began to talk about his goals of progress (terakki), renewal (teceddüd), and reconstruction (tecdid). He was inspired by the concept of civilisation, which he considered a source of inspiration for the Turkish population. He preferred a European mindset for a new national identity, and as the main pillar to facilitate the modernisation of Turkish society. The Hat Law was one of Atatürk's initiatives to modernise Turkey. The Hat Law, as well as Atatürk's speeches about clothing, reveal how clothing played a prominent role in attaining these goals.

Photographs from the period illustrate how the civilian population dressed during Atatürk's reign, both before and after the Hat Law was enforced.

Atatürk's modernisation efforts included both men's and women's clothing, since he wanted Turkish women to appear modern and civilized through clothing. Atatürk used his wife Latife Hanim and his adopted daughters to demonstrate the exemplary modern and civilized Turkish woman. The Kemalist reforms of the 1920s impacted women's lives strongly when the rights to inheritance and divorce were established and expanded. However, while the Kemalist rulership also attempted significant change in women's clothing norms, it never went as far as to ban the veil.

**Fig. 1 The Fez** Caption: The fez is red and cylindrical and was a fashionable item introduced under Ottoman rule to create a (male) pan-Ottoman identity and a community of national unity in the Ottoman Empire's diverse population. It was prohibited after Atatürk's Hat Law in 1925. To the Kemalist regime, it was a symbol of the orthodox Ottoman Islamic tradition and of an old lifestyle and backward mentality (Kaya 2004, 119). Photo from <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/fes>



**Fig. 2 The turban** Caption: The turban. Portrait of Suleyman the Magnificent wearing a royal turban. The turban is a traditional headdress worn by men in the Middle East. The most prestigious was the royal turban, which was popular amongst the highest echelons of society, particularly the Ottoman sultan and his court (Richardson 2012, 6). It consisted of "countless folds of whitest silk, and bright raiment of every kind and hue" (Foster 2005, 61). The middle echelons of society could also wear an affluent turban. From [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/4439/suleyman\\_the\\_magnificent](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/4439/suleyman_the_magnificent)



**Fig. 4 The bowler hat (sapka)** Caption: The bowler hat. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk wearing a western suit and bowler hat. The bowler hat is a hard felt hat with a rounded crown. It was popular among the working classes in 19th-century Europe and North America. In the early 20th century, bowler hats became associated with businessmen. From <https://tailoredetails.com/en/the-coke-hat-the-bowler-hat/>



## The Hat Law of 1925

The Hat Law was passed in the Turkish Parliament on November 25, 1925, with the purpose to replace the Ottoman headgear for men (the fez, Fig. 1) with the western hat (şapka, Figs. 3, 4).

### “Law for Wearing Hat:

**Article 1:** Members of TGNA, officials and the employees in public, private and local administrations, are obliged to wear the hat that the Turkish Nation adopted. The general headdress of the people in Turkey is the hat, and the persistence of any habit in opposition to hat is prohibited by the government.

**Article 2:** This law is valid as soon as it is published in the official gazette.

**Article 3:** The Council of Ministers is responsible for the execution of the law. TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi (1925).”

The Turkish Hat Law has three sections, which explain for whom it is mandatory to wear the western hat ‘şapka’ in public. The target group is “officials and the employees in public, private and local administrations”, and in particular “Members of TGNA” who are the members of the Turkish parliament. The Hat Law required all persons in a public role to wear the ‘şapka’ hat and forbade the use of any other headgear. It especially targeted the much-used fez, although this is not explicitly stated in the law text.

The Hat Law was a direct intervention in the life and culture of the individual Turk and incited resistance, against which the government took violent action. This resulted in several men wearing the fez or turban being sentenced to death and executed. The law was a radical change for the Turkish population and especially for Turkish men who wore the turban or fez in public. The law mainly concerns men’s headgear but could also include women in public or private functions. Even though the law only targets men’s headgear in public, it was a general statement by the regime to engender change in the nation’s mindset and identity to become more modern. Utilising the symbolic value of clothing and headgear as indicative of modernity, Atatürk wanted to modernise the Turkish population through these regulations.

## Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's three political speeches on dress

The speech in Konya of 29th March 1923 was organised by the female nurses of the organisation Kızılay. Atatürk begins his speech by thanking the nurses for their efforts during the Turkish War of Independence. In this speech, Atatürk aims to broaden the horizons of the population by giving comparisons and examples of the correct modern attire; however, he also seems cautious not to upset his audience, which mainly consisted of women. While praising the Anatolian peasant woman's hard work for the nation, he also compares her to other women around the world. Atatürk criticises Turkish women's clothing and blames their dress practices for western prejudiced ideas of oriental women living secluded and uneducated lives.

"Our enemies and the superficial perceptions that have no idea about the spirit of Turkish women attribute some prejudice to our women. There are claims that accuse our women of living a lazy life, that they have no relation to knowledge, development, and not least that they do not have a civil and social life. Furthermore, that our women are deprived of everything and that they are kept away from life, the world, humanity and working life, by Turkish men."

In 1925, Turkish women wore attire that covered their bodily form and their hair. Atatürk criticises this attire since foreigners, because of the way women

dress, wrongly accuse Turkish women of living an antisocial, lazy life, deprived of their independence by Turkish men.

"They [the foreigners] are being deceived by the Turkish women's outward appearance. They generalise the Turkish woman through the perception they get from the outward appearance of those few and worthless women."

Atatürk remarks openly that the Turkish woman dressed in this manner cannot be a part of the modern nation. According to Atatürk, it is the clothing that is to blame for these prejudices. Furthermore, Atatürk states that these types of clothing are not commanded by Islam and that only a very practical and simple veil is necessary. "We need to examine the Islamic and Turkish lifestyles from the beginning to the present. If we do so, we will see that our current clothes are different from the past. (...) The method of covering should be practical and not inconvenient. The veil is accepted in the natural and simple form, which is commanded by religion, the ancient national traditions, reason, logic, morality, and virtue. It is sufficient to take advantage of the way our religion describes the veil and apply it in our lives."



So, while condemning the 'too-covered' Islamic attire, Atatürk likewise criticises women who imitate European clothing. He believes that every nation has its own unique traditions and style of dress and a proper Turkish woman should adapt to the norms of her own nationality. Atatürk concludes that a simple attire that also conforms to traditional, national, and religious values for women is the most sensible attire.

In his Inebolu speech of 27th August 1925, Atatürk argued for a civilised nation expressed through clothing. He asked polemically: "is our clothing national?" and "is our clothing civilised and international?" By asking these rhetorical questions, Atatürk aimed to reform the Turkish people's mindset to become more modern, western, and civilised. Atatürk explained what type of clothing is modern for men, and how Turkish men must change their wardrobes:

"Our most valuable nation [millet] is deserving of civilised and international attire. That is how we shall dress. On our feet, shoes, or ankle boots; on our legs, trousers, then waistcoats, shirts, ties and jackets; and in order to complete the outfit, a sheltering headgear. And this I want to express most clearly: the name of this headgear is 'hat'."

Finally, in his Kastamonu speech of September 1st 1925 about dress, he pointed out how important civilisation (medeniyet) is for the progress of the Turkish people: "The only right way is civilisation". He lamented and resented the Ottoman past and blamed it for the backwardness of the Turkish population. Atatürk argued that the Turkish people should embrace civilisation, including a new form of clothing. He openly stated he was ashamed of the fez, the turban, and Islamic attire in general, for both men and women. According to him, men who are dressed like this will never be treated with respect in a civilised society. Atatürk also spoke of women and characterised women's behaviour as opposed to civilisation. He openly criticised Islamic female behaviour and clothing as strange and ridiculous:

"In some places, I see women covering their face and eyes with something resembling a cloth or pestamal. They turn their backs to the men who pass them. What is the meaning of this behaviour? and what does it signal? Gentlemen! How can the nation's civilised mother and daughter end up in such a state? This situation looks ridiculous. This should be rectified immediately."

## Photography as source for the Turkish population's clothing

Atatürk stated that the Turkish people should adapt to civilisation, which includes new forms of clothing, and he added that those who dress in this religious way are largely ignorant and illiterate. During the speech, Atatürk singled out a man from among the congregation and criticised his garments as follows:

"What is this outfit now? Would a civilised person wear this strange outfit and make the world laugh?"

In the speeches, Atatürk employs two rhetorical tools to emphasise his message: he names his opponents as primitive and backward and he ridicules them for their attire.

In the 1920s, French photographer Albert Kahn photographed civilian life during Atatürk's reign. The photographs give a sense of the female and male dress that Atatürk criticised in his speeches. In Kahn's photographs from Turkey, men wearing the fez are frequently seen in photographs before the year 1925. But even though Kahn continued to photograph in Turkey after 1925, in his later photographs there are no men wearing the fez, but still many fully covered women. This demonstrates the impact of the Hat Law on the male population. A photograph dated 1925, probably taken in the months before the Hat Law was passed since the men still wear fezzes and turbans (Fig. 5), captures the male headgear of the time.



**Fig. 5** Photograph of local inhabitants in the city Manisa in 1925. It depicts circa eight men and six women. The women are covered in niqab (carsaf) in dark colours and the men are dressed in different styles. A couple of the young men wear suits and the fez as headgear. The older men in the picture wear long coats and vests. The men also wear a combination of fezzes and turbans on their heads, which was a popular way to cover the head among imams and other religious scholars. With permission from <http://collections.albert-kahn.hauts-de-seine.fr>

## Fashion magazines from the early period of the Turkish Republic

The fashion magazines of the time display a different image of the young Turkish (city) woman compared to Kahn's photographs of the (rural) population. An example can be seen in the front page of the fashion magazine *Inci* in 1922-1923 (Fig. 6). *Inci* was a women's magazine, which was first published in the late Ottoman period, when Istanbul was under occupation. The magazine reflects modernist views on women's clothing and behaviour. On the covers of *Inci* magazine, Turkish women appear modern and western in their style. This reflects Atatürk's political vision as expressed in the Konya speech, for women and men to be more equal and to dress and behave like Europeans.

In a 1925 issue of the women's magazine *Türk Kadın Yolu* (Fig. 7), the cover shows a woman wearing the female version of the black 'şapka' hat that Atatürk introduced with the Hat Law in 1925. The woman appears to be dressed more simply and less ornately compared to the other women's magazines. These women's magazines aimed to create a new identity for women in which traditional women's clothing and attitudes were abandoned thereby supporting the Kemalist political vision of a more westernised Turkey.

The women's magazines display prescriptive images of how modern woman ought to dress, and a few proscriptive illustrations of what was considered old-fashioned and backwards. The women's magazine *Türk Kadın Yolu* (The Turkish Woman's Way), published in 1923, shows a graphic transition from the Ottoman woman in 1904 to the modern Turkish woman in 1923. A woman is shown wearing a niqab with flat shoes to the left, and another woman wearing a tight fitting, knee-length dress to the right (Fig. 8). At the bottom of the picture is an illustration depicting the development of shoe heels and the shortening of skirt hems. The image aims to explain the developmental differences in women's dress and their chronological development. It reflects an evolutionary approach to history by framing women's shoes and dress by the idea of society evolving from primitive to modern and civilised.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Fig. 6: İnci 'Perle' Published: 1922-1923. On this cover of İnci magazine, the young Turkish woman appears modern and western in style. It shows a young woman playing the piano with a man wearing a suit playing the violin. They are dressed in western bourgeois style, and they play music as equal partners. From [https://www.beykoz.edu.tr/content/editor/5656ef7a7aadf\\_toplumsal-tarih-2020-mart.pdf](https://www.beykoz.edu.tr/content/editor/5656ef7a7aadf_toplumsal-tarih-2020-mart.pdf)

Fig. 8

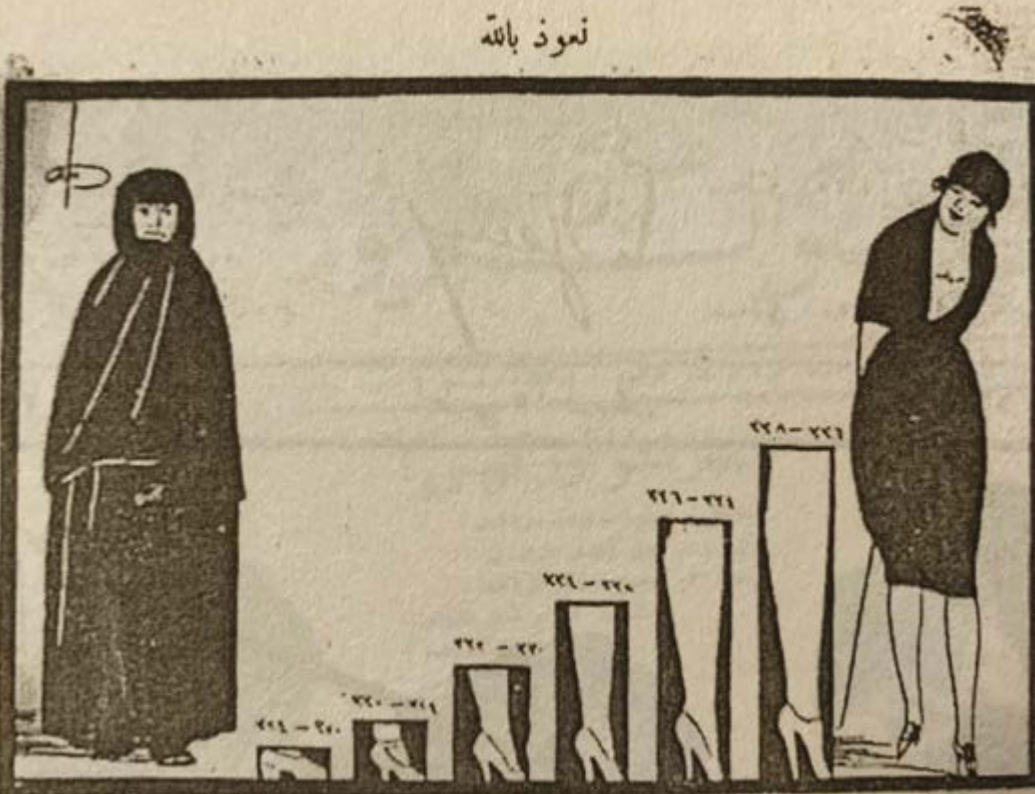


Fig. 7: Illustration from the Turkish women's magazine Türk Kadın Yolu 1925 (Özer 2006, 3).

Fig. 8: Illustration from the Turkish women's magazine Türk Kadın Yolu 1923. A graphic evolution of female dress from the Ottoman woman in 1904 to the modern Turkish woman in 1923 (Özer 2006, 3).

## **Economic ramifications and the American press views on the Kemalist dress regulations**

The Hat Law and the reform of dress seems first and foremost political and symbolic, but it also had significant economic ramifications and affected Turkish trade. Despite ambitions for a European look, the Kemalist regime enforced a ban on import of wool cloth and forced all public servants to wear only clothing made in Turkey. This protective measure would impact European and US American exports to Turkey considerably. The size of the Turkish domestic need for cloth was estimated at 3 million meters of cloth worth 7 million US \$ annually.

The Turkish dress regulations and the Hat Law were followed closely in the US American media.

While Kemalist propaganda tried to label the female veil and practice of head covering as old-fashioned and backward, US American newspaper The Springfield Republican instead saw the traditional 'oriental' female dress as attractive. "But Some of Them May Cling to the Veil because They Know It is Attractive and Cannot Lightly be Discarded" was the headline in 1926. The Springfield Republican saw the political enforcement of a western dress code in Turkey as positive for women: "The Turkish woman is no longer the hothouse creature she still is pictured to be in western imagination. Gradually, but surely, she is discarding her veil and showing her face in public. She is becoming an ardent sports woman, especially in tennis and swimming, and

also she is taking up the hat and other habiliments of her western sister. (...) Progressiveness among Turkish women is being applauded."

The Spanish language US American newspaper Prensa was less positive towards the Kemalist dress regulations. An article in 1926 criticises the disrespect of the fundamental human right of choosing one's clothing, and warns against political ambitions of dictators to use clothing as a form of repression. The article criticises and compares Mustafa Kemal in Turkey with the Greek dictator Pangalos for their clothing regulations – the first for criminalising the secular Ottoman dress (especially the fez) and the second for his moralising regulation of women's fashion. The newspaper reports on the resistance in the Turkish population and the implementation of mobile military tribunals throughout the country to condemn and punish wearers of the fez, with punishments ranging from fines to the death penalty.

## **The Power of Clothes: discussion and conclusion**

Clothes affect political, economic, and social circumstances. In his book *Dresses to Rule*, Mansel explores the power of clothes in world societies and what effect clothes can have. Mansel states: "Dress was a political instrument. It was believed to transform behavior." Clothing regulations can have two functions: prescriptive and proscriptive, each with different gendered meanings and ramifications. Prescriptive clothing regulations are often used for political and social alignment, from the military to school uniforms, while proscriptive clothing regulations ban, prohibit, or shame dress practices. Both strategies were employed in the Kemalist project, yet the impact was much harder on men than on women.

Wearing western dress came to symbolise a progressive mindset in many parts of the world in the 19th and early 20th century, and in many countries, the ruler and his family would choose to wear western costumes or would alternate between the local dress to ensure stability and legitimacy, and the western dress to signal progressiveness and modern thinking. The Japanese emperor would wear the *sabiro*, the Japanese term for the suit, and the Indian maharajahs would alternate between formal western dress and Indian princely dress. The Afghan emir and then king of 1919 to 1929, Amanullah Khan, in his attempt to modernise and westernise the new Afghan state, would wear western attire but did not impose it on his subjects.

Greek dictator Pangalos imposed a dress law aimed at women and their moral habits, stipulating a ban on dresses less than 30 cm from the ground.

The Turkish Hat Law is a historical example of how clothing regulations are used as a political instrument. Atatürk believed that the Hat Law was able to change the mentality of individuals and of the entire society. The Turkish historian Yasemin Doganer concluded that "the new way of understanding and structuring of the newly founded Republic in every area of life was also reflected in the dressing". In Atatürk's speeches, we can perceive how he linked, politically and rhetorically, the understanding of modernity, the modern Turkish state, and clothing. Clothing became the illustration of the modernity of the nation in public, but it also became a symbol of the individual citizen's adherence to the ideas of the modern nation. Consequently, Atatürk first questioned, and then penalised, citizens who rejected the modern look, of which the western men's hat had become emblematic.



The Turkish Hat Law had a significant political impact and was a political tool for Atatürk and his government during the early period of the newly established republic. It was not only a regulation of men's headgear but a regulation of mentality and loyalty to the Kemalist political project for the whole society.

The Kemalist regime wanted to use the power of symbols to influence the Turkish mentality, making it more receptive to further reforms. The Hat Law therefore became not only a political marker and a symbol of power, but a marker and manifestation of an official identity. This meant that the hat expressed the citizen's loyalty to the Republic and the Kemalist Regime. Clothes thus became a marker of mindset.

The Turkish clothing regulations are gender-specific and the difference between men and women in the wearing of headgear was marked by law. It was mandatory for all men to wear the hat in public due to the Hat Law, whereas for women, it was not mandatory to change clothes or headgear to achieve a more modern style, but it was highly recommended.

Although women were not directly targeted by the Hat Law, the political speeches given by Atatürk, followed by the imagery in women magazines, illustrate how the modern Turkish state had clear expectations toward the female population: to abandon modes of religious dress and embrace the secular state and western lifestyle.

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## End Notes

- 1 Lewis 2002, 70.
- 2 Such as Lewis 2001 and 2002; Mardin 2006; Findley 2010; Simsek 2013.
- 3 Yegenoglu 1998; Kandiyoti 1991, 22-47; Çinar 2008.
- 4 Baker 1986; Mansel 2017.
- 5 Simsek 2013, 15.
- 6 Simsek 2013, 11.
- 7 Nereid 2011, 709.
- 8 Simsek 2013, 46.
- 9 Yegenoglu 1998, 126-136.
- 10 Mango 2001, 25.
- 11 Mango 2001, xi. According to Oxford English Dictionary, Kemalism means: The political, social, and economic policies advocated by Kemal Atatürk, which aimed to create a modern republican secular Turkish state out of a part of the Ottoman Empire.
- 12 Simsek 2013, 22.
- 13 Poulton 1997, 1.
- 14 Çalışlar 2006, 198-99; Çinar 2008, 898-900; Mardin 1996, 68.
- 15 Hat Law 1925: [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmcoo4/kanuntbmmcoo4/kanuntbmmcoo400671.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmcoo4/kanuntbmmcoo4/kanuntbmmcoo400671.pdf)
- 16 Nereid 2011, 724 note 1; Simsek 2013, 96.
- 17 <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423873168.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2otodsMrDxlOisDYgTAPMfehZsBbDWufoCjGIYRJ3EyE3Tz19KFZ-2Pos> Translated from "BİRİNCİ MADDE — Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi azaları ile idare umumî ye ve hususî ye ve mahallî ye ve bîlûmum müessesata mensub memurîn ve müstah demin Türk milletinin iktisa etmiş olduğu şapkayı giymek mecburiyetindedir. Türkiye halkının da umumî serpuşu şapka olup buna münafî bir itiyadın devamı nı Hükümet meneder."
- 18 Nereid 2011, 722-724; Simsek 2013, 96.
- 19 Konya speech 1923: <https://www.atam.gov.tr/ataturkun-soylev-ve-demecleri/konyada-kadınlar-ile-konusma>
- 20 The Turkish War of Independence was fought between Turkey and the Allied powers.
- 21 "(...) düşmanlarımız ve Türk kadınının ruhunu bilmeyen yüzeysel bakışlar kadınlarımıza bazı yüklemelerde bulunmaktadır. Kadınlarımızın hayatta tembelce yaşadıklarını, bilgi ile gelişme ile ilişkileri bulunmadığını, medeni ve sosyal hayat ile ilgili olmadıklarını, kadınlarımızın her şeyden mahrum kaldıklarını, onların Türk erkekleri tarafından, hayattan, dünyadan, insanlıktan, iş gücünden uzak tutulduğunu söyleyenler vardır." (Konya Speech 29.03.1923) <https://www.atam.gov.tr/ataturkun-soylev-ve-demecleri/konyada-kadınlar-ile-konusma>
- 22 "Türk hanımlarının dış görünüşlerine bakarak aldaniyorlar (...) çok sınırlı ve değersiz olan o kadınları, onların dış görünüşlerinden çıkardıkları manayı bütün Türk kadınlığına yayıyorlar"
- 23 İslâm ve Türk hayatını başlangıçtan bugüne kadar hakkıyla araştırmamız ve etraflıca aydınlatmamız gerekir. Bunu yaparsak görürüz ki, şimdiki giyim şeklimiz ve kıyafetimiz onlardan başkadır. (...) Örtünme şekli görünümde kolaylıkla, güvenle yürüyebilmek dinin, eski milli geleneklerin, akıl ve mantığın, ahlâk ve faziletin emrettiği doğal ve basit şekli kabul etmektir. İslâm dinimizin tarif ettiği şekilden yararlanmak ve onu hayatımıza uygulamak amaca varmak için yeterlidir.
- 24 İnebolu Speech, 27.08.1925 <http://www.inebolu.bel.tr/inebolu.asp?Id=21&inebolu=turk-ocagi-ve-sapka-nutku>
- 25 "Bizim kıyafetimiz milli midir?", "Bizim kıyafetimiz medeni ve beynelmilel midir?" <http://www.inebolu.bel.tr/inebolu.asp?Id=21&inebolu=turk-ocagi-ve-sapka-nutku>. See also Nereid 2011, 711-713.
- 26 "Medeni ve beynelmilel kıyafet bizim için çok cevherli, milletimiz için layık bir kıyafettir. Onu iktisa edeceğiz. Ayakta iskarpın veya fotin, bacadta pantolon, yelek, gömlek, kravat, yakalık, caket ve bittabi bunların mütemmimi olmak üzere başta siperi şemslî serpuş." <http://www.inebolu.bel.tr/inebolu.asp?Id=21&inebolu=turk-ocagi-ve-sapka-nutku>. Translation from Nereid 2011, 713.
- 27 The second Kastamonu speech 01.09.1925: <https://www.atam.gov.tr/ataturkun-soylev-ve-demecleri/kastamonuda-ikinci-konusma>
- 28 "En doğru, en gerçek yol, medeniyet yoludur".

- 29 "Bazı yerlerde kadınlar görüyorum ki, başına bir bez veya bir peştemal veya buna benzer bir şeyler atarak yüzünü gözünü gizler ve yanından geçen erkeklere karşı ya arkasını çevirir veya yere oturarak yumulur. Bu davranışın anlam ve işareti nedir? Efendiler, medeni bir millet anası, millet kızı bu garip şekle, bu ilkel duruma girer mi? Bu durum milleti çok gülünç gösteren bir görüntüdür. Derhal düzeltilmesi gereklidir." <https://www.atam.gov.tr/ataturkun-soylev-ve-demecleri/kastamonuda-ikinci-konusma>
- 30 "Bu şimdi bu kıyafet nedir? medeni bir insan bu tuhaf kıyafeti giyip dünyayı kendine güldürür mü".
- 31 Collections of Albert Kahn's photographs: <http://collections.albert-kahn.hauts-de-seine.fr>
- 32 Springfield Republican, 14 Jan. 1926, p. 7: "According to this enactment, all Turkish officials from the highest general, including Mustapha Kemal himself, to the humblest doorkeeper are henceforth to wear under penalty of severe punishment nothing but home-made clothes."
- 33 Springfield Republican, 14 Jan. 1926, p. 7. The Hat Law was especially much regretted in the Czechoslovakian town of Strakonice, a main producer and exporter of fezzes to Turkey, see Springfield Republican, December 5, 1926, p. 56.
- 34 Geographic News Bulletin, 8 February, Vol. IV No. 27 (1926), pages 1-3 published by the National Geographical Society, US, featured an article on how the fez and turban had been banished and the western hat introduced in Turkey.
- 35 Daily US American newspaper with national outreach, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Republican\\_\(Springfield,\\_Massachusetts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Republican_(Springfield,_Massachusetts))
- 36 The Springfield Republican 23 August 1925, page 2 (author anonymous)
- 37 Prensa was the main journal published in Spanish in the US. [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El\\_Diario\\_La\\_Prensa](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Diario_La_Prensa)
- 38 Prensa April 12, 1926 - page 7: "Se establece la dictadura en la indumentaria".
- 39 Theodoros Pangalos, dictator June 1924 to August 1926, introduced a repressive law stipulating the length of women's skirts to maximum 30 cm above the ground when in public.
- 40 Mansel 2005, xiii.
- 41 Galster, Honeyman, Nosch 2010.
- 42 From Savile Road in London, the main street for gentlemen's tailors.
- 43 Gupta 2014.
- 44 New York Times 23 March 1926 reports the title: "Girl Imprisoned a Day for Wearing too Short a Gown". A young Greek women was imprisoned in Athens for 24 hours, according to the newspaper
- 45 Doganer 2009, 33.
- 46 Doganer 2009, 35-36.
- 47 Simsek 2013, 96

# Danish Prehistory



**Fig. 1:** The two textile artists, Solveig Søndergaard and Rezvan Farsijani, photographed at the National Museum of Denmark, June 2019. Photo: Marie-Louise Nosch.

# From Tehran to Thisted via Textiles: Interviews with two textile artists on textile as a successful foundation and privileged ground for co-creation and memory

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The point of departure of this article is the artwork created within the framework of the Fabric of My Life project by textile artists Solveig Søndergaard (DK) and Rezvan Farsijani (FR). The themes of the artworks evolve around craftsmanship and heritage and the passing on of textile skills between generations which is one of the central themes of the research project. The article opens with examples of female textile artists of the 20th century, displaying how textiles skills have been employed as a tool for empowerment of women, leading then up to similar feminist movements of the early 21st century such as craftivism and mending, or the pussy hat movement. It then bridges to a framing of the two respective artists that have been working to formulate artistic responses to the activities of Fabric of My Life. As such, their artworks are embedded in the podcast-series of the project consisting

of interviews about cross-generational and cross-border experiences tied up to particular garments. The remaining article is shaped as interviews with the artists based on their artworks 'Promise of Dawn' (Farsijani) and 'Stitched Stories' (Søndergaard). The interview focuses not only on the artworks and how they have been inspired by the Fabric of My Life but also of the individual experiences of the artists of textiles skills being passed over from their own family.

How is memory and family history reflected in textiles and clothing? In The Fabric of My Life project, we explored this theme through oral narratives, podcasts, interviews, education, and research, and also via experimental and artistic activities directed by the two textile artists Solveig Søndergaard and Rezvan Farsijani, who joined The Fabric of My Life in 2019 (Fig. 1).



Textile art is closely linked to women artists in the 20th century. Today we celebrate iconic historical figures such as Anni Albers and her student colleagues at the textiles department of the Bauhaus School, and multimedia artist Sonia Delauney who greatly influenced the birth of abstract art. Another iconic textile artist is Louise Bourgeois, who developed her personal artistic expression based on a deep technical knowledge of fabrics and weaving from her family background and childhood. All are artists in their own right who influenced the art world deeply through their work with textiles. In the 1970s, a more collective and feminist movement took shape and utilised textile arts and crafts as a unique means of expression, demonstrated in Bryan-Wilson's book *FRAY: Art and Textile Politics*. Textile art and craft could address women's liberation, political rage, and feminised labour as well as trauma, bereavement, and memory visualised from a feminine and radically new angle.

In the 21st century, we see the expansion of craftivism as a powerful tool of engagement, attracting new participants to the textile world. The idea of rendering the political personal is rooted in the anti-establishment movements of the 1970s but continues to evolve in the current period in light of the planetary boundaries and their effect on the industrial practices of our time. Thus, crafts have become not only a feminist agenda but also an environmental one, and textile skills for visible mending, re-design, or repair are increasingly utilised to raise awareness and visualise critique

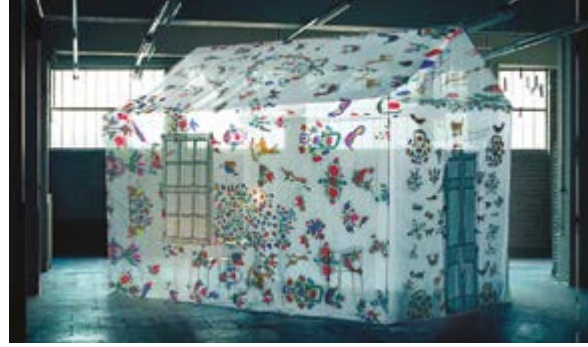
of the current, linear, make-use-waste logic of the fashion system. The women's march with pussy hats in the US knitted together political action, craft, irony, and citizenship. Craft endows political action with a new temporality and the knitted hats were a visual representation of how women had not just showed up on the day of the march, they had spent days and hours in preparation, knitting and crocheting, giving a timely new depth to female frustration.

At the centennial anniversary of the border agreements between Denmark and Germany in the aftermath of World War I, the Trapholt Museum hosted and curated the exhibition *Borderless Stitches*. Textile artist and embroiderer Iben Høj coordinated a large-scale collection of samples and embroideries and united them in a large art piece commemorating the conflicts and reconciliation of the region. In her work, embroidery as a genre represents the older generations who were in this case victims of the war and conflicts in the region; yet the museum published and circulated embroidery manuals for newcomers and for the younger generations who had not experienced the divisions of the past. Joining the project gave them the opportunity to learn a new skill and engage with a historical event in a new way. Such practices of passing on textile skills between generations is what has fuelled *The Fabric of My Life* project, as it expresses the transmission of skills, ideas, norms and values across physical borders and temporalities.

## Interviews

In the artwork, 'Promise of Dawn' (or 'Dream House') (Fig. 2), textile artist Rezvan Farsijani and her creative community of women in Iran and in Paris have worked with layers, textile techniques, and transparency as a way of illustrating the cultural mesh of time and place that characterises women's lives and in particular the reality of refugees. The house of transparent fabric becomes an icon of family, safety, and domesticity, but also of the vanishing memories of lost homes, or of the imagined futures of better lives within one's own home. With its soft walls and its instability, it references the temporary housing of refugee camps, yet with a poetic expression. The decorated fabric pieces were attached to a transparent house that can be dismantled and moved, depicting the fragility of trying to build a new home while the ghostlike memory of the lost home is still present.

In Solveig Søndergaard's artistic work 'Stiching Stories', Solveig and the participating refugee and migrant women in Kolding, Denmark, made use of their own childhood memories and handed-down textile skills as an artistic trigger. Quite literally, the women were invited to do embroidery on family photos that were printed on transparent fabric, as a way of remembering, honouring, or giving new life to a lost history (Figs.3, 4).

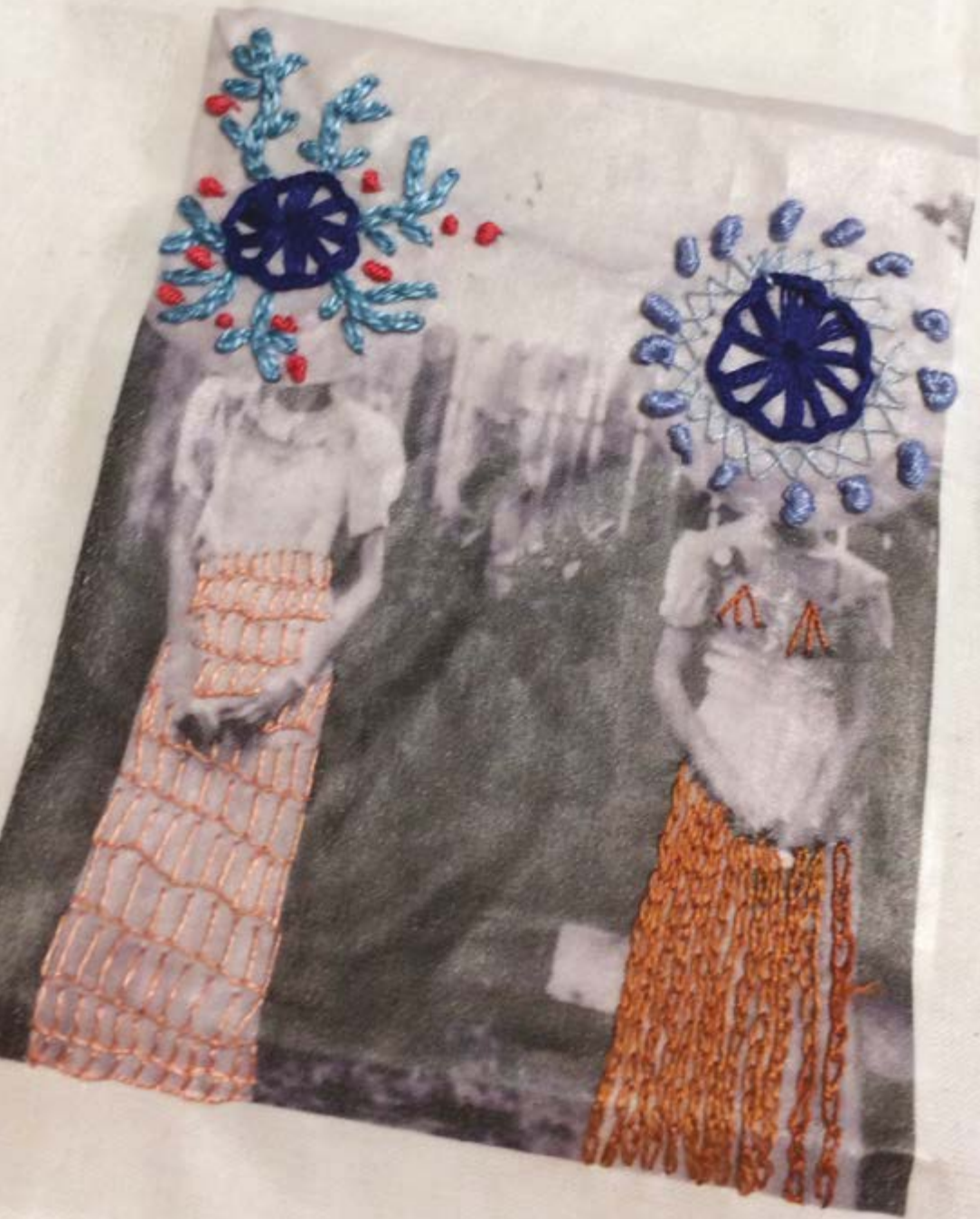


**Fig. 2:** Promise at Dawn, or Dream House.  
Photo: Rezvan Farsijani.

The printed and embroidered photos were then mounted in frames, which displayed both the front sides of the embroidery as well as the back sides with knots, coarse stitches, and loose threads. The framed embroideries invite us to reflect upon both sides of our lives and memories of both happy days and difficulties.

From the start, the idea was that the art pieces should be made as a movable exhibition that can travel between the cities represented in the project and elsewhere, as a sort of comment or homage to migrant and refugee life and to female skills. It was also decided from the start that the artistic process should build on principles for collaborative design, allowing space for the individual voices and aesthetic or tactile memories of the refugee women involved. The artists specifically draw on early memories from their lives, in Thisted, Denmark, and in Tehran, Iran. They investigate how to express memories through their artistic practices and invite refugee and migrant women to join. Through this double interview, we explore their backgrounds, methods, and visions of textile art as a means to explore memory and female knowledge.





**Figure 3 and 4:** Stitching Stories. Examples of embroidery on fabric prints of old family photographs. Photo rights: Solveig Søndergaard.



**How did you learn textile craft (sewing, knitting, embroidery, etc.) and who taught you? Do you have childhood memories of doing textile crafts?**

**Solveig Søndergaard:** I am from a craft-loving family. Both my mother, my maternal grandmother and my great grandmother are diligent crafters. My grandmother was always a great inspiration to me through her handicraft because she knows so many different techniques, including ancient ones from different parts of Scandinavia. She has made an extreme number of patchworks, embroidery, and knitted items throughout her life. My mother inherited these skills and throughout our childhood, she would make all our clothing, which in some cases - as I look back on family photos - made us look quite avant-garde. At one point, my mother had a special type of sheep (mohair sheep) and she would produce the yarn herself and send it to England for dyeing. When it returned she would knit socks and sweaters and sell them locally. I always tell her that she was ahead of her time. She was a pioneer, and I really admire her for that. I should also mention my paternal grandmother who was educated as a tailor and my paternal grandfather who was a furrier and hatter. They had their own very popular shop in the centre of the town of Thisted where they sold hats, headgear, and fur. If you ever visit the city of Thisted, look for number 18 in the main shopping street. This was my grandparents' shop where my father grew up.

**Rezvan Farsijani:** In Iran, I grew up with my two grandmothers, who were both trained as weavers. One had been trained since childhood as a carpet weaver; the other would constantly knit. They taught me to weave, they taught me about the warp and the weft of a carpet and how to make the rights knots; they showed me how to use needles and how to knit. Later I learned more techniques and gained skills during my studies at the fashion school in Paris.

**For an artist, what are the advantages of working with fabric/yarn etc. – compared to other artistic materials?**

**Solveig Søndergaard:** I think that fabric and yarn distinguish themselves due to the fact that they are something that we hold close to our bodies throughout our lives, day and night. It means that we have a special connection with these materials. Everyone has references and preferences when it comes to fabrics. It is something that people universally understand.

**Rezvan Farsijani:** Time is a significant dimension of textile art and craft. The work processes with fabrics and yarns are repetitive, and they entail a static and stable quality and dimension, highlighting aspects such as routine and patience. Engaging with textile work processes takes time, and as textile praxis develops over time, the timely dimension is also embedded in the chronological start and end of a textile craft process.

*I believe that this time dimension was, in the past, closely associated with female life and women's work, and today, textile art and craft still maintain this identity of being closely associated with the feminine and female. A thread is not random, harmless or ubiquitous. It testifies to an ancestral process of transforming fibres into thread, of plaiting and spinning, and transforming thread into fabric through weaving. From these processes emerge tools, skills, and know-how, but also shapes, patterns, architecture, cultures, and networks.*

*A thread takes me both back in history and it also links me to contemporary issues in the fabric of our society. The thread is history and it has the capacity to develop stories and ambivalent imaginaries. But a thread, and especially fabric, is to me first and foremost a bodily, tactile, and sensual experience which echoes the body's skin in its sensuality and strength.*

*Thread and fabric create an intimate relationship with the body when worn by a human, and they reach out to the public when used in a work of art; this allows me to create forms of freedom and movement.*

*In my artistic work, it is the fabric that allows me to sensitise my audience, or the public, to engender emotions, and to replace some experiences and emotions of the tactile materiality of fibres, yarns and fabrics, with other parallel experiences.*

**How did you plan and care for co-creation with the women in your FABRIC project? Describe the processes so far.**

**Solveig Søndergaard:** *In my creative process, I concluded that all fabrics tell stories. Perhaps not all fabrics are as visual as images, so I decided to connect fabrics and images. I asked all the women to find portraits of a special moment in their life or something that gave them a special feeling that they remembered. It might seem a little bit obvious to print the photos on textile, however, the interesting part came when the women started the process of embroidering the photos printed on fabric. Then the textiles facilitated a process of reflection and a starting point for a conversation about their experiences and memories. Perhaps it also illustrates the saying: 'you cannot tell a book by its cover' meaning that you cannot judge people on the exterior, but need to know their stories to understand the very fibres of their being.*

**Rezvan Farsijani:** *Firstly, I identified the women, their past, their skills and knowledge, and the reason for their migration.*

*I met with them, in their home or in my studio and I interviewed them. I also told them about my own journey since I am an immigrant myself.*



With each woman, I explained how her experience is rich and that despite all the difficulties she has endured, she has beauty and history to share and transmit to us, to the European society, and to her children in this new country; this is a valuable gift to offer, and we must never forget it. We wish to promote and visualise her life knowledge and skills and enhance her creativity. Her artistic expressions are authentic and original; it singles her out as an individual.

From there the women started telling their stories; I took notes, and told them mine. Then I described my project in detail and what I needed, and each step there was to go through. I tried to explain how their intelligence, knowledge, and creativity was necessary for the realisation of my vision and artwork. Then we would discuss the different possibilities together, and they would give me the pictures of their previous craftwork, from their own history and culture, or images that inspire them. From these images, I drew patterns, and the women embroidered my designs and added their own ideas.

At each stage, we discussed how to find the best way to work together, and identify our needs and thoughts in the processes.

Eventually, once confidence was in place and once the women had begun imagining and going beyond simple embroidery, by dreaming, and without judging themselves, we began the final work.

### **How was the FABRIC experience? What did you learn?**

**Solveig Søndergaard:** I have learned that it can be quite difficult to manage the outcome of a co-creational art project. In my mind, I might have a visual plan and ideas, but the actual outcome will be something completely different as I leave it up to the participants - it is out of my hands, as they decide what they want to express.

However, I think it can be quite interesting how art can also facilitate a process of conversation and reflection. I am not usually a person of many words; however, I like to facilitate the process of getting other peoples' voices heard.

**Rezvan Farsijani:** It was an enriching experience, meeting each woman, hearing her story, and allowing her to travel with her skills; it was inspiring.

I learned a new language, I learned to listen and share my 'artist' ideas with them.

This joint effort allowed me to learn how to collaborate with craftswomen, how to give space to them and to promote the idea and philosophy of the artist and the artist's work but also of the handicraft women who carry it out.

**What did the women gain from participating in FABRIC?**

**Solveig Søndergaard:** I think that in the process so far it has been a joy for the women to tell their stories through textiles. The fact that someone, an artist, actually wants to portray them in an exhibition means a lot to them. I think we should never underestimate the power of feeling and being 'seen'. The actual art pieces themselves also have become cherished objects of value for the women, since all of them have asked me if they could keep them after the exhibition. I think that they want to keep them as a symbol and celebration of their heritage or story.

**Rezvan Farsijani:** Today the women believe that their knowledge can go beyond a simple traditional practice and can create links between cultures and people, forming a dialogue. They now believe that such collaboration and co-creation is possible.

## **Art work Promise at Dawn, a comment by Rezvan Farsijani**

Promise at Dawn (Fig. 2) is a house that tells a tale. It is an installation with a theatrical decor. Its form and structure are inspired by refugee children's paintings and what the concept of 'home' means, not only to them but also to children in different parts of Paris. The walls are made from transparent fabrics by refugee women from around the globe and are the result of the conversations I had with them about their love stories, sexual relationships, and their funny tales, even in the most dreadful times of their lives; waiting games at camps and passing over oceans. This artwork highlights the characteristics of these women and their uncertainties based on my observations and conversations with them; with people without a country, but with many dreams. I asked them to embroider their fantasies on the fabrics: the fantasy of their future, and that of their children's. This house, with their gentle and beautiful embroideries, is a space between dream and reality, the possible and the impossible, a space to be heard and to be imagined. Something beyond the cliché definition of immigration, 'immigrants and their lives'. I was trying to showcase their authentic life stories, beyond the image that is sadly prominent in the mind of the public.

Promise at Dawn was the name of a 1960 autobiographical novel by the French writer Romain Gary. Gary tells the story of his childhood and youth alongside his mother, a Russian actress, who showed her love and unconditional faith in her son. The novel, full of humour and tenderness, tells the story of her tireless fight against adversity, the extravagant energy she deploys so that he knows a great destiny, and the efforts of Romain, who is ready to do anything to make his life coincide 'with the naive dream of the one he loves'.

## Web resources

Archives of Women Artists Research and Exhibitions=AWARE

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# In Between the Threads

Heidi Kincaid-Askanazy

## Abstract

Fashion journalist students interview key players in the Fabric of My Life project and learn about how fabric is used to explore migration history.

As soon as I found out about the Fabric of My Life project, I knew immediately that I had to make it a part of the 6th, semester curriculum for fashion journalism students at the Akademie of Mode & Design (AMD) / Fresenius University in Dusseldorf, where I teach. Participating in such a project would give students the chance to see another dimension of fashion. Any opportunity to

interact with or to be inspired by nurtures student's talent as a writer. The project uses fabric as a catalyst for innovation and tests new methods for exploring migration history in the cultural sector. It empowers refugee women by helping them to develop new skills, or utilise existing talents to mentor other women, thus giving them an aim for the future.



The project is a perfect blend of themes that challenge students to examine the journey behind a piece of fabric. An alternative journey to the usual route of manufacturing textiles, or the factory processes of weaving, cutting and sizing a silhouette. A journey that raises a slew of questions woven within its thread. How are fabrics connected to our national identity and cultural customs? Do fabrics somehow bond us together despite our different languages, and religions? In contrast, we can also question how fabric acts as a divider between cultures. People tend to make decisions regarding colours or how to wear certain garments based on the norms connected to their culture. Flight and immigration are longstanding phenomena that have steeped in our world history. How have the narratives changed from the 20th century until now? Has modern-day technology helped us become more aware of the challenges faced by new citizens in a new country?

We know that the fashion industry often deals with severe criticism, raised by workers exploitation, inducing pollution, and following unsustainable practices. (Weforum) (Researchgate) Clothing, however, is a vital part of our lives whether we are interested in fashion or not. And a good journalist knows that what lies on the surface is only an invitation to delve deeper beyond the tangible. (Maisel) Fabric, textiles, embroidery, and colours can be an immediate form of visual communication between Europeans and the new citizens.

So, how can that be used to broaden our knowledge of the plight of immigrants and refugees? Visual communication bridges language gaps and cultural barriers, but what other outcomes could it have? When you are forced to flee your home, what would you take? What pieces of clothing hold enough value to you to take up the space of a small backpack?

The 6th-semester curriculum for fashion journalism is all about conducting interviews, therefore focusing on various aspects of train interview skills. Skills like, how to use and control your tone of voice, how to assess body language, and learn the best language approach to engage and reassure the interviewee. We also looked at the best tactics in terms of questions and how to structure an interview. Active listening is a must for journalists, as without the ability to follow up answers, the interview reduces to a question list. When writing a clear angle of a story, readers can easily follow the structure of the interview. The Fabric of My Life ( FABRIC) project was an ideal opportunity for fashion journalism students to practise and improve these skills within one interview.

Each student was paired up with a person who is involved in the project, from either of the participating countries, Denmark, Greece, and Germany. Very little briefing information was given to the student in order to encourage them to do the field research relevant to their interview partners. Since the collaboration was between cultural institutions based in the different participating countries, all interviews were conducted in English. This added an additional component to the curriculum. Having to conduct an interview in English and involving with non-native English speakers provided an excellent opportunity to improve the students' cultural awareness and build their confidence in English. As a potential fashion journalist, fashion news may come from various sources and all around the world, therefore, being cognitive of their tone, level of directness, and right choice of words is very important part when interviewing someone whose first language is not English. Often, people think it is just a matter of translating the original text, however, language is rooted in our cultural norms, and what is an accepted norm in one culture could be seen as impolite in another.

The main questions centred on each person's direct involvement with FABRIC. The students asked each interview partner about their professional career or study focus, and how this was connected to the project. Due to their research on the

interview partners, students could also pose questions related to their previous projects and endeavours. This enables readers to gain a greater insight into the backgrounds of the interviewees. It also helped make sense of the connections which were developed.

At first, it was not apparent to the students how they would connect the dots, to arrive at a meaningful interview. Nor was it obvious to them how a Syrian wedding gown could be used as a tool to track migration history. There were some definite surprises during the initial interviews. For fashion journalist students, I think it was the first time that they had interviewed an archaeologist, or a historian specialising in ancient Greek history.

One of the students seemed amazed and commented, "I could have talked to my interview partner for hours, she was so interesting". Another student admitted that although she had done the research and carefully selected the questions, she was not prepared for the answers and the incredible stories connected to them. A third student said that he was impressed to find out about the wealth of talent of refugee women, and how the mentoring and togetherness became the means to break through language and cultural barriers.

The questions acted as a guide; students were able to draw so much more from the interaction. If there was one word to describe the overall feeling of the class post interviews, it would be gratitude. This is the pedagogical joyous moment that one feels when leading a group of students. Our job as educators is to inspire students, push them to think beyond the obvious, to support their perseverance in finding the connections, despite the multiple levels and complexities of themes. To have their interviews published as part of the project is a huge benefit for young journalists. Recently graduate journalists often lack published material, and now these students have something tangible for their portfolio which in turn will improve their job prospects.

Currently, 1.31 million refugees are living in Germany, while 75,000 refugees travelled by boat in 2019 arriving to the shores of Greece. (Statista) Denmark has an immigrant population of a half million people. (ec.europa.eu) The clothing that a refugee or an immigrant brings to a new land and the sentimental value attached to each item is a story with many layers. The current refugee crisis tells us that in order to offer our help and support, we need to be aware of each story and each journey. What lies beyond the fabric, what is interwoven in between the threads can help us move forward aiming for the future.

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