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**THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION of 1917 and ITS IMPACT ON
FASHION IN TURKEY**

Abstract

In 1921, the number of Russian refugees reached one hundred fifty thousand and İstanbul became second homeland for them. Tendencies of fashion that became different together with the alterations in social life, perception of beauty and cultural diversities collated in Turkey and affected costume fashion.

The purpose of this study is to set forth the changes took place in culture of wearing by analysing the effects of Russian refugees that are settled in Turkey after 1917 Russian Revolution on Turkish clothing fashion.

In this research; it has been made out that dressing culture of the Russian refugees affected Turkish fashion within visual concept on the way to westernization and the usage of such details as frills, flounces and tulles were started to be more common after this social event and the refugees settled in Turkey after Russian Revolution affected costume preferences of Turkish women in a great deal.

Keywords: Clothing culture, fashion history, sociological event, Russian Revolution

1917 RUS İHTİLALİ ve TÜRKİYE MODASINA ETKİSİ

Özet

1918'den 1940'lara kadar Rus mülteciler İstanbul ' un ve sonrasında göç ettikleri Avrupa şehirlerinin sosyo-kültürel yaşamını oldukça etkilemişlerdir. Sosyal yaşamın değişmeye başlaması ile beraber farklılaşan moda eğilimleri değişen güzel

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algısı kültürel çeşitlilik kavramlarının harmanlanarak Türkiye 'de giysi modasını etkilediği düşünülmektedir.

Bu araştırmanın amacı, 1917 Rus ihtilalinden sonra Türkiye'ye yerleşen Rus Mültecilerin Türk giysi modasına etkisini inceleyerek, giyim kültüründe gerçekleşen değişiklikleri ortaya koymaktır. Araştırmada belgesel tarama ve araştırma verilerini toplamak için doküman inceleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Ulaşılan kaynaklar ve fotoğraflardan dönem giysileri, aksesuarlar genel özellikleri incelenmiş, kaynaklara dayalı olarak etkileri ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Araştırmada; Türkiye modasının Batılılaşma yolunda, ilk görsel değişimi, Rus mülteciler ile birlikte gelen giyim kültürünün etkilediği, giysilerde firfir, volan ve tül gibi kullanılan detayların bu sosyal olaydan sonra daha da yaygınlaştığı, Rus ihtilalinden sonra Türkiye'ye yerleşen mültecilerin Türk kadınlarının giysi tercihlerini önemli bir şekilde etkilediği sonuçlarına ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Giyim Kültürü, Moda Tarihi, Sosyolojik Olay, Rus ihtilali

1. INTRODUCTION

The 1917 Russian revolution, sparked by its own economic, cultural, national and political reasons, is without doubt one of the most important events of modern history. The Russian revolution is the first intentionally planned and executed large-scale revolution (Carr, 2007: 18). It not only impacted Europe, America and Turkey for years, but also paved the ground for cultural changes.

It is common knowledge that until the Russian revolution, the country was ruled by the Czar partly under a capitalist and partly under feudal rule, and that adherence to the Orthodox Church was common. According to feudal rule, the Czarist leadership declared lands obtained through military occupation parts of Russia and distributed lands from these occupied countries to Russian feudal aristocrats. One of the main reasons leading to the Russian revolution is held to be social injustice. Before the revolution, the rich landowners and the poor workers and serfs were, so to speak, on opposing sides of a divide. As a consequence of social unrest among the intelligentsia, the educated middle and upper class in Russia, ideological movements became stronger, and the intellectuals turned against the state. Other reasons for the revolution include the estrangement of inner politics from the people and the economic and ethical depression brought about by World War I (Gündüz, 2005: 2). The all-encompassing expansion of the revolution and its deep impact transforming all class relations brought all social and economic issues to maturity (Luxemburg, 2009: 19). As protests became widespread, different fractions and groups advocating reform banded together, and Russian revolutionaries agreed that the Czarist regime must be abolished (Çimen, 2011: 57).

Opponents of the Russian revolution had to leave the county as refugees and chose Turkey as their first stopover. Their main reasons for choosing Turkey as their bridge to freedom was that for the majority fleeing from the Ukraine, this was the closest and safest country. The tolerance and historically famous hospitality of the Ottomans was also an important factor (Deleon, 2003: 11), as were the harsh rules of other countries limiting the influx of refugees (Özdemir, 2011: 216).

The horrors faced by the Russian refugees and the mass exodus from Russia were a great tragedy. One of the most important target cities for the Russian refugees was Istanbul, then the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The Armistice period were the darkest years of Istanbul. However, the hardships did not stand in the way of Turkish hospitality. Having received as guests, and supported, sufferers who sought refuge with them throughout history, the Turks also welcomed and indulged the Russian immigrants (Bakar, 2012: 76).

The general situation in Istanbul in the Armistice period was characterized not only by political unrest and economic depression, but also by changes in cultural life. In occupied Istanbul, the population could barely make ends meet, and the misery was exacerbated with the arrival of the refugees (Baran, 2006: 64-66). In their occupied and captive city, already burdened with hundreds of thousands of other refugees and immigrants, the Turks tried to help the Russian refugees to the best of their ability. They, in turn, were aware of the difficulties of this process, and expressed their gratitude to the Turks in various ways. One of these is the letter written by Chire Aylinkov, former mayor of Vladikavkas, to a newspaper (Bakar, 2012: 113). Another is the foreword to the book *Spassibo*, printed by the Babok and Son printing press in Istanbul in 1924 and reprinted in France in the 1930s: "Spassibo Constantinople! Gratitude to Istanbul! You welcomed us, you sheltered us, you gave us work and you saved our lives! We will never forget you, beautiful city!" (Deleon, 2003: 14).

After the 1917 Revolution, a refugee was quoted on this matter as follows: "all that we were thinking when fleeing from Russia was that Turkey, the only country to open her doors to the Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, would surely not turn us back in the 1920s" (Deleon, 2003: 11).

In spite of the hardships of the Armistice period, the capital Istanbul saved the lives of, according to various sources, anywhere from 40.00 to 150.00 or even 200.000 refugees, found them shelter and employment, and helped them start new lives. From 1918 until the 1940s, the Russian refugees, had great influence on the social and cultural life in Istanbul and the cities they moved to afterwards. The period between 1920 and 1924 was the time when the impact of the Russian refugees made itself felt most strongly (Özdemir, 2011: 216, Deleon, 2003: 15).

The Russians brought artistic energy and joy to Istanbul, and made life in the city more colorful. They settled mostly in the districts of Beyoğlu, Pera and Galata, the heart of culture, art, entertainment and night life (Solano, 1922: 654, Baran, 2006: 64-66). They established cabarets, restaurants and patisseries on the main business streets, as well as furrieries, fashion houses and drugstores. The music and dance shows enriched Istanbul's night life, and the Russian immigrants contributed to the establishment of ballet and dance culture in Turkey (Vassiliev; Ölçer, Digital Video: 2004, Dökmeci, 1990: 53).

Due to the hardships and hygiene issues faced on their journey, many Russian refugees had to cut their hair to get rid of lice infestations. The Russian women covered up their short hair with tulle scarves, handkerchiefs and similar scarves, and it is known that they thus started a new fashion in headdresses in Istanbul (Koçu 1961: 225-266, Toprak, 1994: 180, Bakar 2012: 180). This new fashion was called the "Russian head." After a while, Turkish women also started to emulate the clothing fashions of the Russian women. The low necklines of the refugees, sometimes due to wear and tear caused by economic hardship, became fashionable among Turkish women. The influence of Russian women on Turkish women's fashions, leading to the gradual disappearance of the face veil while the head was wrapped in tulle like the

Russian women, and the emulation of the Russian style of clothing, prepared the women of Istanbul for the clothing reforms of the Republic as early as the Armistice period (Toprak, 1994: 180).

Belarus women were especially influential in changes in the fashion conceptions of Turkish women. The Belarus women, often fair-skinned, blond and blue-eyed, wore skirts of a style termed “cloche.” Tassels made of gilt thread, tulle vests, belts tied in bowknots and dangled from the waist, long velvet vests with lavish embroidery, skirts with ruffles or gilt thread decorations and flounces around the neckline were common in European fashions of the time, but only came to Istanbul with aristocratic Russian refugees. Tailors or even apprentice tailors who could boast of having come from Russia were very popular among women of Istanbul with great ambitions of elegance (Deleon, 2003: 32).

In the process of Westernization, the public space was redefined, and the distinction between the private and the public was given a place in the social structure. Parallel to social change, important changes also took place in clothing. In the traditional period, a person’s clothing revealed their social status to a great extent. The newspapers and magazines of the period publicized social changes, especially those in clothing, and the latest fashions to their readers at great speed. Although the change in clothing reaches further back, a more swift and pronounced change and more acceptance of clothes of a modern style can be observed from the 1920s onwards (Özer, 2014; 328-331).

The Russian immigrants who came to Istanbul from the 1910s onwards after the Russian revolution had different cultural structures, physical attributes and conceptions of fashion than the population of the city where they arrived. These differences motivated the women of Istanbul to change. One of these differences, the focus of our study, is the conception of fashion. This conception encouraged Turkish women to recognize and adopt novelty and led to important changes in their appearance. These changes clearly manifest the direct mutual influence of fashion and social events.

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of pro-Czarist Russian immigrants settling in Turkey after the 1917 Russian revolution on changes in social life and cultural perceptions, and the impact of these changes in clothing design culture.

In order to determine the impact of the 1917 Russian revolution on cultural life in Turkey and the ways in which this influence was reflected in appearances of Turkish women, visuals of period clothing were examined in this study.

2. Materials and Method

The document examination method was used in the study. The research universe consists of magazines, newspapers and visual material published between 1917 and 1930. Visuals from the sources accessed showing the general features of clothing of the period were selected as samples and included in the study.

The document examination method is the term for the gathering of data through the examination of existing documents. The sources examined can be identified as pictures, letters, reports, books, encyclopedia, formal or private writings and statistics, memoirs and biographies, written at the time of or after any events in the past (Karasar, 1995: 183).

The material of the study consists of 16 visuals of women’s clothing and accessories. Details of clothing and accessories found in the visuals from documents and sources published between 1917 and 1930 were examined. After the completion of the data gathering process, the visual data obtained was analyzed. Details of clothing and accessories from the period between 1917 and 1930, selected as samples, were identified and interpreted without taking the variable of clothing type into account.

3. Findings and Interpretation

This section includes visuals and photographs accessed through examination of newspapers and magazines published between 1917 and 1930 and examined as part of this study, as well as information from academic literature on the subject. The data gathered and findings were organized under the headings of hair and headscarf styles, gown and skirt shapes, use of furs in clothing and neckline shapes.

Hair and Headscarf Styles Used Between 1917 and 1930



Figure 1-a: 1919 Hairstyles, *İnci*, Issue 81, September 1919.



Figure 1-b: Styling long hair to look like short hair, *Resimli Ay*, Issue 4 (May 1924) p. 27

Figure 1-a from a 1919 issue of *İnci* magazine shows a variety of women’s hairstyles. Hair is cut in a bob at ear length and styled in waves or curls. It is also dyed in shades of blond.

Figure 1.-b shows long hair being styled in different ways to look like short hair, in line with the popular ear-length bob style of the period.

This hairstyle, already popular in Europe, became widespread among Turkish women after becoming prevalent among Russian immigrant women (Toprak, 1994: 72, Mahir, 2005: 133).

The short hair, popular among Russian refugees coming to Turkey after the 1917 revolution, met with approval among Turkish women. Hairstyles of this kind were to be found in visuals often used in newspapers and magazines of the period.

Among refugees who faced serious hardships on their way to Istanbul, lice infestations were widespread, and women were especially likely to shave off their hair and cover their heads with whatever material was at hand. The resulting short hair style, called the “Russian head” or the “cloche cut,” inspired a popular fashion among the ladies of Istanbul (Celep, 2013:19).



Figure 1-c: Headdresses in “Russian Head” style, back cover of *Yeni İnci*, Issue 2 (July 1922).



Figure 1-d: “Headdresses in “Russian Head” style. *Resimli Ay*, Issue 2 (March 1924), p. 32.

Figures 1-c and 1-d, published in *Inci* magazine in 1920 and in *Resimli Ay* in 1924, show different methods of tying headscarves and various accessories. It is probable that these accessories and methods of using headscarves were popular during this period.

Due to economic hardships and problems achieving hygiene that characterized the period, Russian women often kept their hair in cloth caps. Wanting to look like the Russian women, women of Istanbul began to emulate them, and the practice became popular as a fashion (Celep, 2013:20).



Figure 2- a: Turkish woman in fashionable *çarsaf*, 1873



Resim 2- b: Turkish women in fashionable *çarsaf*, from the postcard collection of Yavuz Selim Karakışla.

Figure 2.a shows the street clothing of a Turkish women in the year 1873. When leaving the house, Turkish women wore an outer piece of clothing called the *ferace*, a loose gown made of baize, merino wool or cashmere, according to the season, cut very wide with sleeves that could be rolled up (De Launay 1999: 33). The word *ferace* was adopted into Turkish from the Arabic. This apparel, the back of which hung down to the hem of the inner clothing, worn over the clothing when leaving the house, is one of the apparels that was popularized by women of the Ottoman period. The word “ferecciye”, from the Arabic word root “ferc” meaning “to open, cleave, refresh”, means “refreshing apparel open in the front” (*İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 1995:349, Sarıtaş et al. 2007:196).



Figure 2-c: Bedia Muvahhit, Women’s magazine *Süs*, 1921.

<http://www.Istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en/bedia-muvahhit/?tur=Tematik>



Figure 2-d: Neyyire Neyir, *Milliyet İlkler Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 1985, p.289.

<http://www.Istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/neyyire-neyyir/?tur=Tematik>

Figures 2 b, c and d show that in the years following the Russian revolution, Turkish women continued wearing *çarşaf*, *ferace* and similar outer apparels over their regular clothing, but tied their hair like the Russian immigrant women instead of completely covering them like before the Russian revolution.

Istanbul ladies emulated the colorful scarves of the refugees. The “national fashion,” a current issue after the Armistice, combined with “Russian fashion.” The *çarşaf* became unfashionable, and clothing changed to the point of becoming virtually indistinguishable from Western clothing (Özer, 2003: 252).

Gown and Skirt Shapes Used Between 1917 and 1930



Figure 3-a: 1922 Russian Orphanage in Constantinople

<http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/deepLinkResults?kw1=%22Charles%20Claflin%20Davis%22&index1=Anywhere&repositoryLimit=Harvard%20Law%20School%20Library>



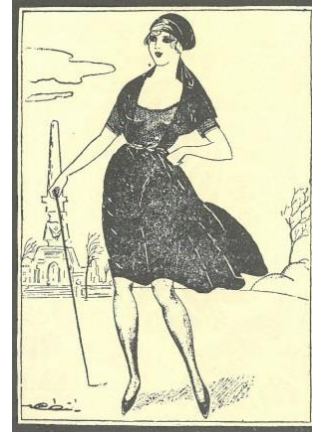
Figure 3- b: Deleon, 2003: 194

Figures 3 a, b and c show the shapes of skirts worn by Russian immigrant women photographs taken in 1920s Turkey. A woman’s apparel, the skirt became widely popular after the *Tanzimat* period. The Western-style appearance was accepted by the public to be indicative of belonging to a high social class (Koçu, 1996:106). Whereas skirts were loose, wide and at ankle length at first, they were in cloche or demi-cloche shape and at knee length or even above the knee later (Koçu, 1996: 67). The changes in appearance began in the 1920s. The waistline returned to its original position and the smallness of the waist was again emphasized. This effect was most often achieved with a thin belt. Skirts were cut close to the hips, fanning out in a bell shape towards the legs (Gerçek, 2006:143).



Figure 3- c: 1920-1923 View of Russian refugee immigrants from Constantinople.

<http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/deepLinkResults?kw1=%22Charles%20Clafin%20Davis%22&index1=Anywhere&repositoryLimit=Harvard%20Law%20School%20Library>



Resim 3- d: Akbaba Magazine, 1923; Koçu, 1996:67

Figure 3-d shows a drawing published in *Akbaba* magazine in 1923. Skirts, previously worn at ankle or floor length by Turkish women, are here seen to be as short as to be above the knee. These skirt shapes, prevalent especially among non-Muslim and refugee women, are thought to have become popular among Turkish women shortly afterwards. A study by Gerçek has shown that Russian women usually wore either one-piece gowns or skirts with blouses (Gerçek, 2006:109).

Use of Furs and Neckline Shapes in Clothing from 1917 to 1930



Figure 4- a. Gowns with Fur, page 12 of *İnci*, Issue. 2 (1 March 1919), p. 12.

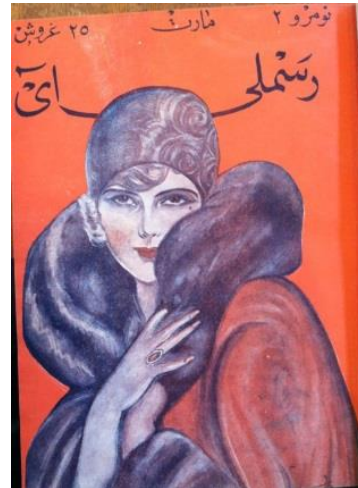


Figure 4-b: *Resimli Ay* Issue 2, March 1924

Figures 4a and b show the use of furs in clothing shown in magazines from 1919 and 1924. The article “The Lady at her Sewing Machine: A Gown That Even the Least Experienced Can Sew,” published on June 21, 1923 in *Süs*, the author mentions the use of fur among other advice regarding fashion (*Süs* 1923:12, Mahir 2005:41).

Furs sent from Russia were offered for sale to the ladies at Istanbul market places, and some of these found their way into the street clothing of ladies. This led to a race of sorts among

ladies in the area of fashion (Celep, 2013:3). The fashion house Ferajal, established by Natalya Nikolayevna Lazareva and her daughter Irina Feodorovna in the fashionable district of Pera in 1920, quickly turned the foible for fur of Istanbul ladies, no strangers to fur that was often used at the Ottoman court, into a lucrative business. The Sidan Russian fashion house, established by Crimean prince Takhtamysh Girey in 1920, further popularized the use of fur by providing its customers with evening gowns, coats and suits decorated with fur (Mahir, 2005: 44).

The findings indicate that the existing tendency to use fur, coupled with the Turkish women's ambition to look like the Russian refugee women and the availability of furs in the fashion houses and boutiques established by Russians, led to the popularity of fur.

The Russian refugees who gathered in Istanbul came from a variety of social classes. In an article on Russian refugees living in Istanbul in 1920, a reporter for *The Daily Telegraph* wrote:

There can be nothing more bizarre than the processions of Russian refugees arriving here every day. Among them you may find princes resplendent in precious furs, Cossacks wearing black greatcoats and empty casings around their waist, and women of elegance, beauty and grace reminiscent of Paris ballrooms, yet wearing rouge in a style no European woman would ever dare attempt (Bakar 2012; 16).



Figure 4-c: Anonymous. *Sûs Magazine*, 1923.



Figure 4- d: *Resimli Ay* 1923, Sarıkaya 2012:168

Figures 4 c and d show neckline shapes in pictures from magazines published shortly after the Russian revolution. The changes that women attempted with their hair styles in order to emulate the Russian refugees continued with clothing details. Fashion drawings from magazines and newspapers published in 1923 show boat necklines revealing the shoulders. Low necklines showing hints of cleavage were also popular.

In his book, Bakar comments: “Some Istanbul ladies mistook the colored scarves and worn clothes, torn at the shoulders, of these miserable refugee women for fashion. The Russian women's scant clothing made them conspicuous” (Bakar, 2012; 180).

It is probable that due to the hardships and poverty they faced, the Russian refugees also removed the lace and embroidery from the necklines and shoulders of their clothes and did not have the means to replace them, so that they were left with loose boat and square necklines.

4. Conclusion

This study is important since it presents the changes in social life and cultural perception brought about by Russian refugees arriving in Turkey after the 1917 Russian revolution, as well as the impact of these changes on clothing design culture.

With the arrival of Russian refugees in Turkey between 1917 and 1930, culture, art and entertainment in Turkey experienced great changes. The Russian refugees popularized cabarets, restaurants, patisseries, furrieries, fashion houses and drugstores, as well as song and dance shows and ballet in Turkey.

Certain accessories that Russian women used to adorn their clothing, as well as the Istanbul ladies' desire to emulate them by tying their heads with scarves in the Russian fashion, instead of using the face veil and by copying their skirt and gown shapes, have likely prepared these Istanbul ladies for the clothing reform that began in the *Tanzimat* period, continued in the Armistice period and reached its apex during the Republic.

The Russian refugee women often cut their hair and covered their head with various scarves due to economic hardship. Other Russian women, especially the more wealthy, wore Western-style clothes, such as gowns and skirts with blouses. The gowns and blouses often had boat or square necklines or were cut low. The skirts were often in cloche shape, and the hemlines were usually higher than those common among Turkish women.

The cultural make-ups, physical attributes and conceptions of fashion of the Russian refugees who arrived in Istanbul after the Russian revolution were very dissimilar to those of the women of Istanbul, which motivated them to change and emulate these Russian women. It would not be wrong to argue that one of these dissimilarities, the conception of fashion, led Turkish women to adopt and represent novelties, and led to reforms in their appearance.

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