

## Representation of Ethnic Diversity in the Collections of Fashion Brands – 2005-2020

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**Abstract:** *With the gradual development of modern aesthetics, ethnic elements in clothing design are increasingly attracting the attention of consumers. Through the selection of traditional national elements and the combination of modern technology, modern clothing design aims to reach more people, realizing inheriting and advancing the traditional national process. At the same time, redesigning elements such as traditional patterns, styles, modeling, craft techniques through deformation gives a new perspective to modern clothing design.*

*This article aims to reveal the distinction between modern and ethnic by analyzing the national elements in modern clothing design and the application of ethnic elements in the collections of fashion brands in modern clothing design. For this purpose, ethnic collections were examined by making evaluations specific to the collections of fashion brands. These collections were subjected to content analysis and the effects of ethnic elements were revealed.*

**Keywords:** *ethnic style; fashion design; traditional elements;*

### 1. Introduction

Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through verbal or material means, such as traditional clothing and heirlooms. All the elements that have passed down from generation to generation clearly show all the different details of ethnic clothing and its components, as well as representing indigenous riches. This is a way of transmitting not only wealth but also a history from generation to generation.

Ethnic clothing in a culture is a way of keeping the culture alive and reminding past generations<sup>3</sup>, it is also a way of keeping the culture cumulative and preserving meaning by being transmitted continuously. Ethnic dress is “the shared meaning that constructs one as a member of a cultural group”<sup>4</sup> and attributing it to another social group would drain it of this known meaning. Ethnic clothing often consists of indicators that are held constant to ensure familiarity. Both fashion and ethnic dress consist of clothing and body modifications that act as signifiers in a society.

Ethnic style clothing first took its place on the podium in the 10s of the XX century. It was then that the famous designer Paul Poiret showed the whole world an extraordinary collection of clothes in the East Asian style. It was the ballet Scheherazade that inspired Poiret's ethnic style<sup>5</sup>. Since the beginning of western fashion at the turn of the century, designers like Paul Poiret have made constant references to 'exotic' cultures outside of the

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffroy-Schneiter, Berenice. 2001. *Ethnic Style: History and Fashion*. New York: Assouline, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Barnard, Malcolm. 2007. *Fashion Statements: Communication and Culture In: Malcom B. ed. 2007. Fashion Theory: A Reader*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Saydinosirovna, Saydiganieva Azizaxon. 2021. “The Design of Combining Ethnic Clothing with Modern Fashion”. *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)* 5 (4): 140-144.

west in their quest to bring something new to their clients. Poiret was known for his "measured and tasteful treatment of oriental elements"<sup>6</sup>.

In the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic style provided rich space for fashion without designers. Such as Palestinian scarves, Latin American skirts, Indonesian batik sarongs, Moroccan djellabas, Chinese jackets, rattan baskets, embroidered purses, leather sandals and tribal jewellery.

Today we live in a world in which there is an ethnic, religious and linguistic conundrum. It is a world in which one of the most difficult tasks of modern societies is to respond to different demands from different cultural groups, and they are all trying to preserve their own culture and identity<sup>7</sup>.

An ethnic group is a cultural group with various distinctive features and can be defined as a group that shares a common history, tradition and sense of being human"<sup>8</sup>. Ethnic style, on the other hand, involves the use of various elements of national costumes and clothing. Ethnic elements are an external form, but also include national long-term development in the connotation process of national culture, include many nations in the world, and form a bright variety of national culture and elements. National elements not only indicate clothing in the design, decoration, fabric and style of clothing, but also include clothing with national cultural connotations.

Traditional dress represents a national culture and historical heritage and includes all clothing and body modifications that embody the past for certain members of a particular group<sup>9-10-11</sup>.

While the application of ethnic elements in clothing design enables modern clothing designers to find new inspirations and trends of thought, it has also obtained and increased more important results in the use of national elements. Through the flexible transformation and application of national elements, national elements are becoming the favorite clothing style of more and more consumers.

The clothing design trend presents the diversified development trend. In this context, many designers create many clothing designs inspired by ethnic costumes. The future will further deepen the development trend of diversity and individualization, in the face of the influence of the international popular culture brand, how to keep the national culture in open cultural exchange, effectively preserve and follow each other national elements<sup>12</sup>.

As Calderin puts it, a designer should stretch, go beyond what is expected, but not bypass the ethnic and cultural symbolism associated with clothing. Fashion can use the idea of a cliché as a starting point and allow the idea to evolve into an entirely new expression of the source<sup>13</sup>.

In the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium, ethnic style was one of the strongest influences in fashion. Designers such as Kenzo, Christian Lacroix, Dries Van Noten,

<sup>6</sup> Troy, Nancy J. 2002. "Paul Poiret's Minaret Style: Originality, Reproduction, and Art in Fashion". *Fashion Theory* 6 (2): 117-144.

<sup>7</sup> Kymlicka, Will. 1996. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford: Scholarship online.

<sup>8</sup> Jikyeong, Kang, Youn-Kyung, Kim. 1998. "Ethnicity and Acculturation: Influences on Asian American Consumers' Purchase Decision Making for Social Clothes". *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 27 (1): 91-117.

<sup>9</sup> Roach-Higgins, Ellen Mary, Eicher, Joanne B. 1992. "Dress and Identity". *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10 (4): 1-8.

<sup>10</sup> Eicher, Joanne B., Sumberg, Barbara. 1995. *World fashion, Ethnic and National Dress*. In J. B. Eicher (ed.), *Dress and Ethnicity*. Oxford, England: Berg.

<sup>11</sup> Yu, Haekyung L, Kim, Chanju, Lee, Juhyeon, Hong, Nayoung. 2008. "An Analysis of Modern Fashion Designs as Influenced by Asian Ethnic Dress". *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 25 (4): 309-321.

<sup>12</sup> Wu, Guohui. 2016. Ethnic Elements in the Application of the Costume Design. 3rd International Conference on Education, Management and Computing Technology (ICEMCT 2016): 734-736.

<sup>13</sup> Calderin, Jay. 2011. *Fashion Design Essentials*. USA: Rockport Publisher. p.142.

John Galliano, Vivienne Tam, Yeohlee and others have drawn their inspiration and created from a variety of Native American, Asian, African, Arctic and many other dress forms and aesthetic styles. Fashion brands and designers have created colorful, syncretic styles that evoke the past or distant lands. They also found sources for ethnic fashion in the West, for example in the folk traditions of Northern and Eastern Europe.

In this context, historically, fashion design - and the images that define it - have shown us where our limits lie and how we alternately try to embrace or break them. This applies not only to the clothes we wear, but also to the way fashion appeals to the social and cultural norms of the era or country in which they are designed, presented and advertised<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Method

This study will focus on fashion brands, because fashion has historically been an industry that strongly determines and maintains signs of social status, cultural unity, self-identity and differentiation. In the study, collections of fashion brands were examined and evaluated in the context of ethnic diversity. The aim is to find some of the effects that different representations of ethnic diversity can have on contemporary consumer preferences in the collections of fashion brands and to explore how they are represented. While there are other factors that can also inspire a designer, this article deals with why ethnic dress is used as a constant source of inspiration and how its meaning changes when translated into trendy clothing.

After a comprehensive literature review in the study, qualitative content analysis was used as a method to analyze the selected images (collection products). The universe of the study consists of all the visuals used by fashion brands on online platforms between 2005 and 2020.

In this context, the aspects of the visualization of ethnicity in modern clothing were examined with examples of ethnodesign as well as ethnic style in design.

## 3. Multicultural Fashion

Ethnic style in fashion is an important but somewhat neglected area of fashion research. While fashion continues to adapt to the multicultural situation both within each western nation and at the transnational level, ethnic style provides a particularly rich and diverse field of study.

In the 1970s, the ethnic style has become one of the most popular styles in fashion, and neither in the 1980s, nor in the 1990s or 2000s, it has not lost its popularity, and only sources of inspiration have changed. Sometimes the source of inspiration for fashion designers has changed from the East to North Africa, the Southeast, the Balkans, Asia.

In this context, fashion designers and brands that have achieved great success with their ethnic style collections have also emerged. Yves Saint Laurent was a true ethnic style icon in the late 1960s and 70s with his African, Hispanic and Chinese collections, and the most famous collection in the series was “Russian ballets/operas”. The fashion houses Kenzo, Gianfranco Ferré, Romeo Gigli and Etro have also worked in ethnic style. In the 1990s and 2000s, ethnic models appeared in collections presented by Jean-Paul Gaultier, Dries Van

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<sup>14</sup> Werner, Thomas. 2020. “Preconceptions of the Ideal: Ethnic and Physical Diversity Fashion”. Cuaderno 78, Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación 2020: 183-193.

Noten, Antonio Marras and John Galliano, who were the first to combine ethnic style with historicism<sup>15</sup>.

Zuhair Murad, one of today's fashion designers, is among the fashion designers who prepare original collections by feeding on ethnic elements. As the designer loves to travel and discover new places, the places he visits and sees provide the starting point as well as being a source of inspiration for his collections. The designer was recently invited to a gala that allowed him to explore Morocco for the first time in Marrakech and was impressed by what he saw, saying "Marrakech is heaven, I fell in love. It is a very cosmopolitan city. There's a lot of heritage and tradition there, but it also has a modern feel to it." As a result of this influence, he transferred to his collections the colors and craftsman motifs that he admired, especially in tile work and carpets. In this collection, he used especially jeweled, sequined silk chiffon and taffeta. The designer, who embroidered an intense embroidery collection with decorative motifs, also preferred tile motifs in desert colors such as amber and amaranth, especially in jacquard fabrics developed for lightness (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Zuhair Murad Couture Fall 2019

Source of image: <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2019-couture/zuhair-murad#review>

Likewise, another fashion brand that draws attention with its ethnic collections is Valentino. Valentino is romantic, exotic and ethnic. Especially the new spring summer Valentino collection created by Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pierpaolo Piccioli has been truly breathtaking and very impressive. The designers stated that the place that sparked their imagination was the Roman Opera. Such great wealth has become the basis for creating these elegant lines. Suede pieces, tasseled ponchos, long-sleeved dresses (with folk embroidery), capes or slip-on coats with tassels draw attention in the collection (Photo 2).

<sup>15</sup> Ermilova, Daria Yurievna. 2020. "Costume as a Form of Visualization of Ethnicity: From Tradition to Modernity". *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* (ISSN 0975-2935) 12 (6): 1-14.



Photo 2. Valentino Spring / Summer 2014 / Valentino's Spring 2015  
Source of image: <https://fulloftaste.com/valentino-sprin-summer-2014/>

Photo 2 Valentino's Spring 2015 collection used traditional Bulgarian embroideries as an inspiration for the pieces on the catwalk (first row, far right image). When each design in Photo 2 is subjected to content analysis in terms of shape, clothing type, silhouette, color, fabric feature, surface pattern, ornament, how to wear and accessories, the effect of ethnic style can be clearly seen.

Photo 3 also includes John Galliano's collections. John Galliano's fall-winter 2009/2010 collection is inspired by the traditional Ukrainian costume. Fashion journalists have named this collection the frozen bride, as Galliano designed traditional Ukrainian hats as a veil and the embroidered shirt (vyshyvanka) like a wedding dress in this collection, which is a very fresh look at our ethnic culture and very creative with forms, cuts and embellishments.

The highlight of this collection is the traditional ethnic embroidery, the primary design element. As Kukhta (2015)<sup>16</sup> also states, ethno-design, like ethnic style, can apply various methods of source interpretation - citation, stylization, interpretation of shapes, materials and ornaments. However, these motifs should aim to preserve as much as possible the original meaning, especially the symbolism of traditional ornaments.



Photo 3. John Galliano 2009-2010

Source of image: <https://modoslav.wordpress.com/2014/07/19/inspired-by-ukraine/>

In terms of aesthetics and visual impact, the overall design integrates the color palette of traditional embroidery with a distinctly more modern silhouette. The use of silk organza on the blouse and the circle skirt add an interesting movement in contrast to the tailored vest. The back of the vest features an embroidered central embellishment. The skirts consist of rich traditional embroidery and incorporate traditional elements in terms of overall appearance, while at the same time innovative and the overall design is harmonious and professional.

When photograph 4 is examined, Jean Paul Gaultier's spring-summer 2006 pret-a-porter collection draws attention with its richness in terms of ethnic elements, especially embroidered blouses (vyshyvanka - the Ukrainian traditional clothing). After visiting the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest in Kiev, Jean Paul Gaultier has created beautiful collections in which the influence of traditional Ukrainian costume is very evident. Inspired by Ukraine in

<sup>16</sup> Kukhta, M. S. 2015. Etnodizain Kak Osnova Formirovaniia Tolerantnogo Otnosheniia K Traditsiiam Raznykh Kultur [Ethnodesign As the Basis for The Formation of Tolerance Towards the Traditions of Different Cultures]. Vestnik of the Tuva State University. Social and Human Sciences. Kyzyl, No. 1.

Gaultier's 2005/2006 fall-winter haute couture and spring-summer 2006 ready-to-wear collections.



Photo 4. Jean Paul Gaultier Fall Winter 2005-2006 Haute Couture and Spring Summer 2006  
Source of image: <https://modoslav.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/inspired-by-ukraine-jean-paul-gaultier/>

2011 French designer Philippe Guilet exhibited his ethno-collection in Bucharest. The designer was inspired by the traditional Romanian costume. Collection include interesting embroidered blouses (vyshyvankas) and maden in haute couture techniques.



Photo 5. Philippe Guilet (2011)  
Source of image: <https://modoslav.wordpress.com/2015/04/26/ethno-fashion-by-philippe-guilet/>

This study analyzes modern fashion brands that show the effects of ethnic clothing by focusing on the collections of fashion designers. The collections presented between 2005 and 2020 were collected from different platforms and fashion brands' own web pages. These collections show the effects of different geographies and countries. Each design has been subjected to content analysis in terms of features such as shape, clothing type, silhouette, color, fabric feature, surface pattern, ornament, how to wear, accessories. At this point, symbolic similarities, repetitions and changes can be measured. The results showed that the effect of ethnic clothing was most evident in the aspects related to materials, namely surface pattern, fabric properties and color.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The increasing demand and requirement for ethnic, age-based and body diversity on runways and advertisements is changing the way fashion designers and brands publish and produce products, fashion shows and advertising campaigns.

In the background of today's world, it is an important issue how to create national elements in order to achieve the heritage and development of countries. In this context, ethnic elements cause the traditional clothes in our country to be revealed not only in color, pattern and different shapes, but also in many other aspects, as they include many elements.

It is extremely important to determine that national culture will be the direction of future development, with the international environment, innovative design idea, integrated into the national elements of clothing design, making the traditional ethnic culture with new vitality. In this respect, it is among the aims of fashion brands that the components of the ethnic costume, which are included in modern clothing and accessories, lose their old functions and gain new forms and reach the masses. Today, "quoting" in the costume of a particular tradition is not regulated by the ethnicity of a person, that is, the costume no longer fulfills the function of ethnic identity, does not carry a sacred burden. Motifs or elements that attract ethnic groups can be made for an aesthetic purpose or for demonstration purposes.

It is a practice that has been practiced and accepted for many years that fashion brands advertise on the internet and social media, carefully select the products belonging to ethnic minorities and present them to consumers by processing them in a highly original way in their collections. It is a very impressive practice for fashion brands to include ethnic diversity in their collections and to do this through the costume, which has been the most important tool of human visual and instant identity since the Paleolithic ages. The different representations of these ethnic elements not only inherit traditional ethnic culture, but also make a difference in terms of the innovation and use of modern clothing designs. In this context, the reflection of ethnic elements belonging to different geographies to the collections with great skill by many fashion brands and fashion designers in the world was supported by the examples given in this study and presented examples at the point of representation. In this respect, the use of ethnic elements as a source of inspiration by modern fashion brands can also affect the legacy and development of traditional clothing.

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