

Three Generations of Moroccan Fashion Designers Negotiating Local and Global Identity

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Abstract

That fashion trends are not arbitrary but manifestations of social, political, cultural and economic developments in society is widely accepted by social scientists around the world. But that this phenomenon is not limited to Western societies has not been debated and illustrated enough. The case-study of the Moroccan fashion industry provides a clear example of 'traditional dress' that is far from static, but rapidly changing as a result of important socio-economic changes in society. A first generation of Moroccan fashion designers in the sixties was confronted with the consequences of the French Protectorate, a nationalist movement and a free Morocco facing Europe. They succeeded in adjusting Moroccan fashion to a cosmopolitan and active lifestyle while incorporating European aesthetics and notions of 'freedom'. The nineties brought the democratisation of fashion through the introduction of national lifestyle magazines, fashion schools and European fashion brands, turning a second generation of designers into national celebrities. Moroccan fashion became the materialisation of a general longing for a 'Moroccan type of modernity'. Simultaneously, and contrary to what may be expected, the introduction of European fashion brands on a large scale did not threaten the continuity of Moroccan fashion, but boosted its development through the introduction of new consumption patterns, resulting in the commodification of Moroccan fashion. The turn of the century has not only been met by the growing impact of globalisation on Moroccan society, but also by important local developments such as increasing urbanisation, growing religious extremism and mounting social segregation. A new generation of Moroccan fashion designers finds itself analysing its cultural heritage against a global background and reinventing Moroccan fashion far from folkloric stereotypes. What is really being negotiated are the concepts of tradition and modernity in the construction of (national) identity.

Key Words: Morocco, anthropology of dress, fashion, globalisation, consumption.
