THREE GENERATIONS OF MOROCCAN FASHION DESIGNERS: NEGOTIATING LOCAL AND GLOBAL IDENTITY

M. Angela Jansen, PhD
Centre Jacques Berque, Morocco

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. Social studies on fashion continue to focus on the West, while changes in non-western clothing styles are continuously considered to be a 'result of Western influences.' It is clear by now that globalization will not lead to 'cultural uniformity.' This is simply because external influences are not passively received; they are adjusted, translated and turned into local realities [1].
The history of the Moroccan fashion industry provides a schoolbook example of how local clothing styles have developed and adjusted to important socio-economic changes in society. A first generation of Moroccan fashion designers, which flourished in the sixties, was confronted with the consequences of the French Protectorate, a nationalist independence movement and a free Morocco facing the West. In the nineties, the democratization of fashion introduced local lifestyle magazines and Western confection brands, creating a second generation of designers that thrived on a general longing for 'a Moroccan type of modernity' translated through dress. Contrary to what may be expected, the introduction of Western fashion brands on a large scale did not threaten the existence of local clothing styles but on the contrary boosted its development through the introduction of new consumption patterns.
The turn of the century has not only been met by a growing impact of globalization on Moroccan society, but also by important local developments such as increasing urbanization, growing religious extremism and mounting social segregation. A new generation of Moroccan fashion designers finds itself analyzing its cultural heritage against a global background and reinventing Moroccan identity far from 'folkloric stereotypes.'

ETAT DES LIEUX

While it is not necessary to give a complete overview of contemporary Moroccan history for this paper, it is important to highlight a few historical events that have had an impact on the development of Moroccan urban dress in the last century. First of all, although Morocco was only a French protectorate for fifty years, the French presence influenced Moroccan society considerably. For example, by deciding to build the European city centers, *villes-nouvelles*, next to the existing Arabic city centers, *mdun*, they created a cultural buffer, leading to a gradual introduction of European cultural influences. Over time, almost two parallel worlds managed to coexist, geographically only separated by a few blocks but centuries apart in lifestyle (Janet Abu-Lughod. 1980). While Western clothing styles became associated with these *villes nouvelles*, Moroccan urban dress continued to develop in the *mdun*. Furthermore, in order to break the power of the ruling elite in Fes and Meknes, the French decided to move the political and economic power to Rabat and Casablanca (William Hoisington. 1984). This geographic shift from old Arabic city houses, *riyad*, to new Western villa's in the new city centers, again had an important impact on people's lifestyle and therefore on their sartorial behavior.

Secondly, as a counter reaction to the French presence, an independence movement started to grow in the first half of the 20th century. One important philosophy of this movement that had a considerable impact on female dress in particular, was the schooling of girls. The idea was that Moroccan women, who represented at least half of the population, were not actively contributing to the development of their country and since they were raising the next generation's leaders, they were to be educated themselves (Anita Baker. 1998). But since women never participated in public life before, they had no suitable garments to wear. The long piece of cloth, *hayk*, in which women would wrap themselves when trespassing the male dominated public space, was far from being practical for young girls. Therefore they were dressed in the male outer garment called the *jellaba*, to go to school. In no time, the adoption of the *jellaba* by women became a symbol of female emancipation and their claim to participate in public life. For men, dressing 'their women' in the *jellaba*, was not only a way of showing that they were modern but also supporting the independence cause (Claire Nicolas. 2005). At first, it was worn with the hood over the head and a face veil, but this style was slowly abandoned. Now, it is worn with the hood down and

without a face veil. Over time, this originally male garment has become a predominantly female garment and has become strongly subject to fashion trends. The *hayk*, on the other hand, has almost completely disappeared.

Finally, the main supporter of the independence movement was king Mohamed V, the grandfather of the current king Mohamed VI. Although he started out by collaborating with the French who first put him on the throne, he ended up siding with the Moroccan freedom fighters. He publicly showed his revolt through his daughter, princes Aicha, who gave a speech in Tanger in 1947, omitting a phrase referring to the French power (Roger Le Tourneau. 1992). Although he himself enjoyed a traditional education and did not speak any languages, he clearly used his children to promote an image of modernity by giving them European educations and dressing them in Western dress. Princess Aicha was the first female member of the royal family to appear in public with her face uncovered, wearing Western dress. This was an important justification for many Moroccan women to adopt Western dress and discard any type of veil in public (Claire Nicolas. 2005). Over time, three generations of post-independence Moroccan monarchs have used Moroccan urban dress to materialize their political ambitions, thereby confirming its position in contemporary Moroccan society. Although Western dress has become dominant in public life and especially in the *ville nouvelle*, Moroccan dress remains unquestionably the attire for religious and social ceremonies and to some extent, the attire worn in the *medina*.

FIRST GENERATION OF MOROCCAN FASHION DESIGNERS

By the mid-sixties, the little bourgeois schoolgirls of the independence movement had grown up and had become accustomed to an active life. Some of them had even gone to France to finish their education, growing accustomed to a more European way of life (Anita Baker. 1998). Also Casablanca, where they had moved with their husbands, represented a much freer environment compared to the imperial cities where social control was much higher.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the first generation of Moroccan fashion designers in the sixties were women of the privileged elite. They grew up with the decadence of *fasi* ceremonial dress consisting of layers of heavy velvet and brocade fabrics, decorated with heavy metallic thread, which made it very substantial and uncomfortable. Cuts were wide and long, combined with large brocade belts, which

severely limited women in their movement. With the rapid lifestyle changes introduced in Moroccan society, these bourgeoisie ladies no longer considered their local clothing styles suitable and in a way, they did for Moroccan female dress what Coco Chanel did for European female dress. They 'liberated' women by making comfortable and elegant garments with a 'modern' look, suitable for an active lifestyle. Although they had no or little formal training in fashion design, they had learned how to sew and embroider at a young age, since this was considered part of a respectful young girl's education [2]. They revolutionized Moroccan urban dress by introducing European haute couture fabrics, by reducing the amount of layers, the cuts and the decorations and by giving Moroccan dress a more 'modern' look. By shopping in the European fashion capitals, they had become familiar with Western fashion, which influenced them in their 'reinvention' of Moroccan dress. What defined them as 'designers' is that they were the first ones to offer prêt-a-porter in luxurious boutiques –as opposed to tailor-made in anonymous workshops– signing their designs with their name or brand. Through their extensive networks, they were given the opportunity to present their collections abroad where they met with remarkable success.

This international success resulted from a fascination for Morocco in the West in that period. In the 1940s, Morocco was put on the map of the occident through the legendary film *Casablanca*. Although not one scene was actually shot in Morocco, the movie met the expectations of what the West would like Morocco to be like. A fashion-spread in Elle Magazine shot in Morocco in 1953 confirms that Morocco was considered fashionable in Europe. Also, in the hippie movement of the 60s, clothes were strongly inspired by non-western clothing styles. Soon movie stars, iconic musicians and even royalty started to be seen in Moroccan dress. For example, the iconic musician Jim Morrison, lead singer of the mythical music group The Doors, had himself pictured in a caftan, as did the Dutch princess Beatrix, now queen of the Netherlands, wearing a caftan by the first Moroccan fashion designer Zina Guessous. There are also pictures of the French fashion icon Catherine Deneuve in a caftan of that period, as well as of the controversial Polish Princess Radziwill. This international success uncontestably contributed to the national success of this first generation of Moroccan fashion designers, giving them the credibility to have 'modernized' and 'fashionablized' Moroccan urban dress, since international fashion

icons were wearing it. For the first time, they gave Moroccan women the possibility to express their 'modernity' through Moroccan urban dress [3].

SECOND GENERATION OF MOROCCAN FASHION DESIGNERS

However, until the nineties, both Western and Moroccan fashion trends were limited to an exclusive Moroccan elite. It was only with the introduction of Moroccan fashion magazines on the one hand and Western confection brands on the other, that fashion became democratized in Morocco [4].

Although French fashion magazines were available on the Moroccan market before this time, only the elite could afford to go to Europe and buy the products that were featured in them. Moroccan fashion magazines became successful not only because the products presented were available on the local market, but also because the topics were more adjusted to a Moroccan context (Loubna Skalli. 1996). These first so-called lifestyle magazines made it their primary goal to propose an alternative to a 'European type of modernity,' that is, a 'Moroccan type of modernity.' Their main goal was to show Moroccan women that they could be Moroccan and modern at the same time and they used Moroccan urban dress to illustrate this [5]. It was only logical that, since Western fashion was hard to come by in Morocco at that time, they would turn to what was available, namely Moroccan dress [6]. But it was hard to find 'modern' Moroccan dress since only a few Moroccan designers were actually designing it. The majority was designing Western dress due to the fact that the few fashion schools that had opened up in Morocco in the mid-eighties were teaching Western fashion design [7]. The production of Moroccan dress continued to be a craft that was mastered by becoming an apprentice of a skilled tailor. In order to stimulate the design of 'modern' Moroccan dress, one of the first Moroccan fashion magazines, *Femmes du Maroc*, launched a yearly fashion event called *Caftan*, which initially showed 'oriental' fashion by designers from Morocco, the Middle East and Europe. Due to the growing success of the *Caftan* event, however, more Moroccan designers gradually started developing Moroccan dress collections, combining Western pattern making that they had learned in school with the production of Moroccan dress executed by traditional craftsmen.

A second important development that contributed to the democratization of fashion in Morocco was the introduction of Western confection brands at the turn of the 21st

century. With the increasing liberalization of the Moroccan market by the end of the 20th century and a steadily growing economy, the Moroccan market started to attract foreign fashion brands in the form of franchises. Low and middle priced Spanish and French brands like Zara, Massimo Dutti, Mango, Stradivarius, Bershka, Promod and Etam were the first ones to venture into the Moroccan consumer market, and soon high end brands like Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Yves Saint Laurent were ready for the experience, opening up stores in the economic capital Casablanca and the tourist capital Marrakech. Although official numbers are lacking, it is estimated that only 10% of the Moroccan population can afford to buy products offered by foreign fashion brands (Samuel Vallée. 2006: 33). Nevertheless their introduction on the Moroccan market has had a significant impact on consumerism in Morocco.

Contrary to what may be expected, the introduction of Western fashion on a large scale in Morocco did not threaten the continuity of Moroccan urban dress, but on the contrary, boosted its development through the introduction of new consumption patterns. First of all, under the influence of Western fashion boutiques, the anonymous workshops of traditional tailors and fabric merchants in the old city centers have become overshadowed by 'stylish' boutiques and showrooms of Moroccan stylists and designers in the new city centers. These settings correspond more to an image which has come to inspire clients' confidence, suggesting a range of services and qualities Moroccan consumers have grown accustomed to through their shopping for Western fashion. Secondly, in the same way that Moroccan customers have grown accustomed to shopping around for Western dress, they have started shopping around for Moroccan dress. In order to stimulate consumption, specific social and religious events in the year have become commercially exploited. The month of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, and summer time when the majority of the weddings take place are two good examples of this. Since these are occasions when Moroccans buy new garments, the whole industry has become focused on these two periods, whether it is through an array of fashion events promoting the latest fashion trends, fashion magazines featuring special editions or boutiques offering promotions in order to stimulate sales [8].

What characterizes a second generation of Moroccan fashion designers is that they are no longer necessarily members of the Moroccan bourgeoisie. Due to the democratization of fashion on the one hand and the introduction of fashion schools in

Morocco on the other hand, the profession became accessible to a much larger group. Furthermore, this second generation uncontestably owes its success to the Moroccan media and their fashion events on the one hand and the commercialization of Moroccan urban dress under the influence of Western confection brands on the other. The fact that Moroccan designers were featured in glamorous fashion spreads and broadcasted on national television not only allowed them to reach a large audience, but also gave them 'star status.' Simultaneously, by taking Moroccan dress out of its original contexts of social and religious gatherings and putting it on magazine covers and catwalks –the icons of fashion– the Moroccan lifestyle press contributed to an important image change of Moroccan urban dress; they made Moroccan urban dress 'fashionable.' Furthermore, under the influence of Western fashion brands, Moroccan urban dress has been commodified to a (neo)liberal market, shifting from consumption based on demand to consumption based on offer.

THIRD GENERATION OF MOROCCAN FASHION DESIGNERS
At the turn of the 21st century, a third generation of Moroccan fashion designers has started to form, of which the pioneers are the misfits of the second generation of fashion designers. They did not fit the criteria of the Moroccan fashion press and their established fashion events, and therefore called for a new platform. In age they do not necessarily differ from the second generation of designers, nor do they differentiate themselves by social class or schooling. The best way to define them, is to consider them in a larger context of an artistic movement taking shape in Morocco around the turn of the 21st century across disciplines, going from music, dance, cinema, theater to applied arts. Referred to as *naida*, meaning 'to move' in Moroccan Arabic, it is not (yet) a conscious artistic movement to which contemporary artists necessarily auto-identify. However, they all have certain characteristics in common. First of all, unlike previous generations, this new generation of Moroccan artists did not consciously live under severe political, social and cultural censorship. Therefore, they are seizing a growing freedom —although still not absolute— to express critical ideas and convictions through art. Secondly, these artists are part of a generation that is increasingly confronted with the consequences of both local developments, like increasing urbanization, growing religious extremism and mounting social segregation, and the effects of globalization on Moroccan society. Thirdly, this is a

generation that wants to break with 'folkloric stereotypes' surrounding Moroccan artistic expressions. Moroccan artists, like many non-western artists, for a long time felt like they had to refer to their 'rich cultural heritage' by, for example, incorporating motifs of Moroccan tapestry, mosaic (*zellij*), woodcarvings, tattoos, embroidery, etc. into their work. But this new generation wants to break with this colonial heritage where non-western art needs to be 'exotic.' They want to express themselves 'freely,' which does not mean that they are looking to deny their cultural heritage or their Moroccan identity, but to interpret and materialize it as they see it.

Therefore, the most significant difference between the two previous generations of Moroccan fashion designers and this third generation, is that this last one consists of artists who use the medium of dress to express their ideas, while the first and second generations were/are primarily tailors who design collections to dress their clients. This third generation of fashion designers has found its audience through a new fashion event created in 2006 called *FestiMode* and which today is known as the *Casablanca Fashion Week*. This event turned out to be a welcome alternative to the fashion event *Caftan*, which due to its success practically monopolized the Moroccan fashion scene, forcing new designers to develop Moroccan dress collections in order to get attention. *FestiMode* is a platform for Moroccan fashion designers who do not wish to limit themselves to the design of Moroccan urban dress, but who can distinguish themselves on the international fashion scene by conceptualizing their cultural and vestimentary heritage.

LOCAL VERSUS GLOBAL, TRADITION VERSUS MODERNITY

Social scientists agree by now that globalization does not automatically lead to 'cultural uniformity,' since external influences are adjusted, translated and adapted to local realities (Arjan Appadurai. 1996; Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo. 2002; Frank Lechner & John Boli, 2008). What the Moroccan case study shows is that the development of Moroccan urban fashion is a constant negotiation between global influences and local realities.

When we take a closer look at what has been referred to as the 'modernization' of Moroccan urban dress by three generations of Moroccan fashion designers, it seems to mean the increasing introduction of western components in Moroccan dress. For example, the first generation of Moroccan fashion designers 'modernized' Moroccan

dress by introducing European haute couture fabrics into Moroccan dress, and by reducing the width of the garments and the amount of decorations. This not only made the garments more 'comfortable' (according to western standards Moroccans had grown accustomed to), but also more in harmony with the prevailing aesthetic that had become influenced by Western fashion. The second generation continued to 'modernize' Moroccan dress by increasingly introducing western cuts, including corsets, skirts and even pants and western fashion trends, including revealing and tight fitted designs. A third generation of fashion designers, in its turn, is looking to completely break with 'folkloric stereotypes' determined by the West and by reinventing and conceptualizing their cultural and vestimentary heritage the way they see it themselves.

What is really being negotiated here, however, is 'tradition' versus 'modernity' with 'tradition' representing local realities while 'modernity' representing global (western) influences [9]. As the well-known Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi puts it, *Moroccans want to reconcile both realities by constantly traveling back and forth between tradition and (post)modernity. (...) They want, as it were, the mosque and the satellite without sacrificing the one or the other. (...) The mosque provides them with cultural anchorage and rootedness, while the satellite seems to offer alternatives to some repressive mechanisms of tradition* (in Loubna Skalli 2006: 6).

The most important reasons why Western and Moroccan dress do not threaten each other's existence is because they have different values, fulfill different needs and therefore represent different markets. They are both crucial in the expression of dynamic multiple contemporary Moroccan identity. Simultaneously, they are by no means mutually exclusive, but on the contrary, ineluctably connected and cannot be seen separately (Joanne Eicher and Barbara Sumberg 1995). While the boundaries between 'Western' and 'Moroccan' blur in contemporary Moroccan urban society, mutual influences have been resulting in new hybrid clothing categories.

Finally, although the dynamics of a commercial fashion industry may have developed in the West and were introduced in Morocco through the dynamics of globalization, these mechanisms have been adopted to the commercialization of Moroccan urban dress.

NOTES

[1] As was argued extensively by Arjan Appadurai (1996), Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo (2002), Frank Lechner & John Boli (2008), to name a few.

[2] Tamy Tazi (influential Moroccan fashion designer from the first generation), interview with author, Casablanca, July 9, 2004, notes on file with author.

[3] Chedlya Rachid Salah (sister of Zina Guessous, who is considered the first Moroccan fashion designer and passed away in 1998), interview with author, Casablanca, Dec. 8, 2006, notes on file with author.

[4] Karim Tazi (Moroccan textile industrialist and founder of the Moroccan confection brand Marwa), interview with the author, Casablanca, Jan. 29, 2006, notes on file with author.

[5] Aisha Zaim Sakhri (first editor-in-chief of the Moroccan lifestyle magazine *Femmes du Maroc*), interview with the author, Casablanca, Dec. 15, 2006, notes on file with author.

[6] Ilham Benzakour (editor-in-chief of the first Moroccan lifestyle magazine *Citadine*), interview with the author, Casablanca, Dec. 27, 2006, notes on file with author.

[7] Zineb Joundy (influential Moroccan fashion designer of the first generation), interview with the author, Casablanca, Nov. 21, 2006, notes on file with author.

[8] Meryam Al Alami (director of the fashion department of College Lasalle), interview with the author, July 13, 2006, notes on file with author.

[9] It is interesting to note here that although Moroccan society is in a large extent influenced by the Middle East through, for example, the import religion, this is not considered as 'modernity.'

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