

# THE WOMEN IN WHITE: TRADITIONS AND ASSETS THE PHOTO REFLECTS

## Beyazlı Kadınlar: Fotoğrafın Yansıttığı Gelenek ve Değerler

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, a photo shot in Dağköplü, a mountainous village located in Eskişehir /Turkey, is discussed. In the photo, women who turn their backs to the camera with mostly white headscarves (*örtme*) are seen. In this study, it is suggested that one can gain knowledge about symbolic use of weaving and fabric through this one photo only. The photo, for this purpose, has been interpreted using cultural / social history approach of the image. As a result of the analysis, the following findings were obtained: almost all women are dressed in accordance with village dressing syntagm which makes them identical. Women's weaving white headscarves is not a coincidence and gives us knowledge that they are in the middle of a ceremony environment. Moreover, the details of the *örtme* reflect the knowledge that most of the women are married. Edges of the *örtme* and the quality of their fabric also allow us to speculate about weaving in the village. In this context, a shift from cotton weavings to ready-made scarves is observed. Furthermore, the women decorate the edges of ready-made scarves with modern techniques such as dyeing and ready-made lacework.

### Key Words

Weaving, handloom, headscarf, dressing, cultural change.

### ÖZ

Bu yazıda, 2008 Mart - 2009 Ekim tarihleri arasında etnografik alan araştırması yürütülen Eskişehir / Sarıcakaya ilçesine bağlı bir dağ köyü olan Dağköplü'de çekilmiştir bir fotoğraf konu edilmektedir. Fotoğrafta köyün yemek ve düğün salonunun önünde toplanmış çoğu beyaz başörtülü ve sırtı kameraya dönük kadınlar görünmektedir. Çalışmada, sadece bu bir fotoğrafın aracılığıyla köydeki dokumacılık ve dokumaların simgesel kullanımı hakkında bilgi sahibi olunabileceği ileri sürülmektedir. Bu amaçla fotoğraf, imgelerin kültür / toplumsal tarihi yaklaşımından yararlanılarak yorumlanmaktadır. Çözümleme sonunda elde edilen bulgular şunlardır: Kadınların hemen hepsi, onları birbirinin aynı yapan köyün giyinme (*dressing*) dizimine uygun giyinmiştir. Beyaz başörtüsünün kullanımı bir tesadüf olmayıp kadınların bir tören ortamında bulunduğu bilgisini vermektedir. Ayrıca örtmelerin ayrıntıları kadınların çocuğunun evli olduğu bilgisini de yansıtmaktadır. Örtmelerin uçları ve bezinin niteliği köydeki dokumacılık hakkında da bir yorum yapılmasına olanak tanımaktadır. Buna göre köyde pamuklu dokumadan hazır tülbentlere bir kayış söz konusudur. Ayrıca kadınlar hazır tülbentlerin uçlarını geleneksel tekniklerinden farklı olarak boyama, hazır dantel gibi çağcıl tekniklerle süslemektedirler.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Dokuma, el tezgâhi, başörtüsü, giyinme, kültürel değişme

### Introduction

In this paper, a photo shot (figure 1) in Dağköplü, a mountainous village located in Eskişehir /Sarıcakaya district, where an ethnographic fieldwork was carried out between March 2008 and October 2009, is discussed<sup>1</sup>. The village is famous for cotton and silk products woven on handlooms Eskişehir-wide.

Photos are generally taken to support field notes or strengthen memory of ethnographer; therefore a photo is not preferred as the main transmitter of ethnographic information. In Dağköplü field research, photos were taken and used for same functions. But while all field research notes were been reexamining, a photo was noticed, used in the book as well. The

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photo (figure 1) reflected the history of head scarf in village and summarized all field work notes. In the study, this photo is discussed. Originality of this study is methodological difference. It is gave chase to ethnographic information on the photo, not ethnography of the people. The study is suggested that one can gain knowledge about symbolic use of weavings and fabrics through this one photo only. For this purpose, the photo was analyzed and interpreted by examining its details.

In Dağküplü village, to date, two established handlooms exists, one of which still functions. Weaving now stays out of multiple relations network, such as source of income, manner of production and role separation. However, woven fabrics still reflect valuable data concerning admiration, women, ethics and heritage. It could be found sufficient to compile these aspects of weaving through interview techniques. However, despite the current aspect of weaving, the fact that women walk away silently with woven headscarves on the heads in daily life is an issue that might be determined more effectively with photography compared to other techniques. Hence, it is suggested that figure 1 mentioned in the study, fills such a gap and bears more meanings than the impression gained at first sight.

### **Taking a Look at the Photo**

There exists no ethno-photographic study in Dağküplü village which is “an ethnographic study to be carried out with the photo” and which the photo and accompanying text are in compliance (Kutlu 2006). Yet, this basic question of the approach was

predicted during the photo shots; “To what extent does this photo fill the space which is pending by means of research and which could not be filled with other research techniques?” (Kutlu 2006). Because, according to Barthes (1981: 28)

“photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else (it is always *something* that is represented) –contrary to the text which, by the sudden action of a single word, can shift a sentence from description to reflection- it immediately yields up those ‘details’ which constitute the very raw material of ethnological knowledge”.

From this aspect, as Burke as ascertained (2003: 24), the photo is precious especially as evidence of tangible culture of the past. Yet, meaning of a photo is arbitrary and subjective depending on whoever examines it. For this reason, the image of the same photo, as noted by Pink (2007: 67-68), could be equipped with various meanings at a different stage of ethnographic research and in representation in the looks of different eyes and of the audience in alternative historical, spatial and cultural contexts.

In the scope of this study, figure 1, as suggested by Burke (2003: 24), is presumed as a “historical” record and an “evidence” regarding weaving and is interpreted as a “referent” for weaving in absolute past reflected by the pose in accordance with Barthes’s (1981: 96, 98) view.

In presenting the meaning of the photo in question, cultural / social history approach of the images was used. Burke (2003: 203) affirms that the approach aims to “rebuild deliberate

and indeliberate rules or models that direct the perception and interpretation of the images within the bounds of a certain culture". Thus, each sign in figure 1, as suggested by Geertz (2007: 131–132), is handled with value and function without being isolated from its natural environment along with the meaning given by those who create or possess them.

In interpretation of figure 1, Burke's (2003: 212–213) proposals, who reassessed the pattern analysis levels composed of Panofsky's (1983: 53–67) iconographical description (natural subject), iconographical analysis (conventional subject) and iconological interpretation (content). Accordingly;

a) as images allow to reach not only to the community but also to "modern views towards that world", while interpreting figure 1 in the study, both the expressions belonging the local culture and fashion trends are also considered.

b) since it is obligatory to place" the witness of images on a 'context' or rather with its plural meaning on a series of contexts", one should also consider the quality of the participants, environment, supplementary elements, acts such as gesture, consciousness and intention which are the elements of context (Van Dijk 1997: 11–16) in figure 1.

c) Figure 1 is also interpreted with the support of various photos<sup>2</sup> shot in the field as it presents "more reliable witness in terms of series of descriptions, serial historical approach rather than a work of art".

d) It is important to fill in "the line spaces of the images", to use the clu-

es "regarding assumptions that those who design the descriptions know, do not know or do not realize". Thus, figure 1 is analyzed through both the details it bears and ethnographic data that could make these details significant.

### General Understanding of the Photo



*Figure 1. The women in white örtme.*

In the figure 1 frame it is possible to see more than 20 women and four children. Moreover, at the left side of the photo it is seen that two women were displayed while they were about to appear in the frame.

The women are at a narrow area in front of a building used both as dining and wedding ceremony hall of the village with a slight incline whose pavement is not built. At the background of the photo several houses can be seen. These are houses with red roofs, whitewashed, but without much maintenance. One can notice that the frameworks of the houses are wooden but mortared with mud.

The women, except for five, wear big white headscarves which are called *örtme*<sup>3</sup>. Except for a woman at the right side of the door of the wedding hall appearing at a further background, the rest wear *şalvar* and most of them wear waistcoats.

Almost all the women act natu-

ral unaware of the camera, and do not give a look at the camera and turn their backs against the camera. Some of these women hug each other. Only the woman with colorful headscarves seen over the right shoulder of the woman in blue looks directly in the camera.

#### Hidden Context of the Photo

Figure 1 has been shot in a *mawlid* organized for the third time on April 13 2008 on Sunday<sup>4</sup> in order to celebrate the birth of Mohammed the prophet in the scope of “holy birth week”<sup>5</sup> activities.

Aforesaid *mawlid* is a ritual hosted by the whole village with voluntary contribution and solidarity of the village people as in the celebration of *hudrellez*. In addition to the village residents, those living at Eskişehir centrum, in neighbor villages and in settlements were also invited to *mawlid*.

For this day the villagers raised donations among each other as money, rice or yogurt. The meals to be offered were prepared by two female cooks of the village and with the help (cutting bread, making salad, washing dishes, serving food on the dishes, etc.) of approximately 20 women. The meals prepared were served by young women to women and by young men to men. Furthermore, those who were not able to come to the feast area, those who had guests or patients at home and the elder people were also sent the same meals.

Although religious ceremonies in the village are performed by contribution of both women and men, *mawlid* was carried out among two separate groups as usual. For this *mawlid*, men were gathered at the mosque court-

yard and women at the dinning and wedding hall. This is the reason why figure 1 was shot at this location and only women appear in the photo frame.

#### What the Photo Illustrates

##### *Facing Back Women*

Figure 2 and figure 3 illustrate how lonely the village is among the mountains and how high it is. However, this loneliness is avoided with dense settlement, adjacent two flat or three flat houses and narrow streets. Although the houses are so close to each other, women hide themselves through their traditional manner of dressing<sup>6</sup> when they go out.



Figure 2. General view of the village



Figure 3. A street of the village.

The women of Dağküplü village sew their inner (*göyneke*<sup>7</sup>, long underwear) and outer (*şalvar* and shirt) clothing pieces by hands or with sewing machines (Kara 2009: 158). A shift from handmade to ready wear in the

manufacture of these clothing pieces can be seen. For instance, the quality of the fabric could change. They are likely to use textile products such as combed cotton, chintz, headscarf fabric instead of cotton and silk fabrics they weave themselves. Quality of needlework of the fabrics might also change: They might be hand sewn, machine sewn and tailor sewn. Accordingly, acquiring the fabrics could also differ: although ready wear opportunities are benefited from in our day the habit of women's knitting (i.e. their vests) or sewing their clothes (i.e. their *şalvars*) still continues.

However, dressing manner of women who do not take part in business world and public life "always modern: it always seeks to keep abreast of the time" (Blumer 1973: 334) seems to remain unchanged inside fashion. Women's dressing syntagm consists of; *şalvar*, blouse, vest, headscarf and an *örtme* on it. These loose clothes which hide the body and face lines are a part of a dressing custom with which the women become the same and allow them to act and live without attracting attention in the village.

In this respect, only by considering the dressing style of the women, except for five with colourful headscarves in figure 1, it can readily be said that the others are from Dağküplü village people since they are dressed in the same manner mentioned above.

#### *White Örtme*

In the village, *örtme* from two different woven fabrics are used; cotton and silk. No silk cocoons have been produced since 1991 in the village. Yet, the former manufacturers reta-

in silk hanks. These hanks, however, cannot be woven since the handlooms were removed. Although it is still possible to see women wearing silk *örtme* in the village, these *örtme* were woven approximately 20 years ago. Silk *örtme* are distinguished from cotton ones by dyeing them to green. These *örtme*, preferred to be used mostly in chilly weather and in winter, are different from white *örtme* by means of wearing manner. The fact that only white *örtme* are seen in figure 1 needs reconsidering.

Despite the fact that green is the symbol of elegance and wealth, it is a tradition in the village to wear only white *örtme* in the ceremonies. That is, considering the majority of white *örtme* in figure 1, it may be claimed that the photo illustrates a ceremony.

In this village, single girls cover their heads cross passing the ends of their headscarves from their napes (figure 4).



**Figure 4.** At left, unmarried young girl dressing with jean, tied waist hooded sweater, and short-sleeved t-shirt..

Young girls are also accustomed to wear white *örtme* traditionally, tho-

ugh not as common as for the married women. However, these *örtme* have more ornamented ends and are called *buckled (tokalı)* (figure 5). Hence, one can readily conclude that the women with white *örtme* in figure 1 are all married.



**Figure 5.** Buckled (*tokalı*) *örtme*.

In brief, whiteness in figure 1 is not a coincidence and it gives us the information that it is a religious ceremony and that the women of Dağküplü in veils are mature and married.

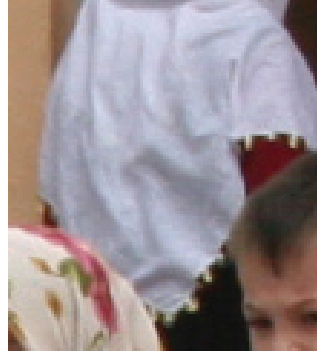
#### *Details of White Örtme*

Considering the details of figure 1, it can be noticed that not every white *örtme* is equal. Some *örtme* have two lines of thick red or black bands on two edges (*örtme* on the left in detail 1). Some have no ornaments and their point laces are ready made (on the right in detail 1). Some have handmade point laces (detail 2). Two edges of some *örtme* are decorated with ornaments made by dyeing technique (on the right in detail 3). The details mentioned cannot be interpreted as a ‘taste’ only. Each of them is also an expression of condition of weaving and changing handcraft ornament techni-

ques in the village.



**Detail 1.** On the left, *örtme* and on the right ready headscarf.



**Detail 2.** Headscarf with handmade point lace.



**Detail 3.** The headscarf are decorated with ornaments made by dyeing technique.

Weavings of Dağküplü village were said to be the reason why this village is well-known throughout Eskişehir. The *örtme* with red or black ends is called *twisted (bükmeli)* due to the quality of their fringes (Detail 4).



*Detail 4. On left, twisted (bükmeli) örtme with black band on edge, in the middle colourful ready headscarf with handmade point lace, and on right, headscarf with ornaments made by dyeing technique.*

These are said to be woven by young girls and young women, when they are not busy with vegetable planting and livestock farming and when they are available, on the handlooms to be used by them or for their trousseaus to be given as presents. In addition to the income from agriculture performed in restricted and tough land conditions, women, as in today, used to sell their woven products (they now sell unused pieces left from their trousseaus) (Kılıç ve Kara 2008: 291–292). Indeed, for these örtme they used to cultivate cotton in a small part of their lands.

Weaving no longer exists in the village due to reasons, such as tending other business apart from farming, securing their future by retirement system, increasing vegetable produc-

tion with hybrid seeds, not taking the handlooms with while migrating, exogamy with people from other settlements who do not know weaving, infeasibility of cotton örtme due to their heavy thick nature, etc. (Kılıç ve Kara 2008: 292–295). This can be understood from the new location of handlooms at the houses. They are either uninstalled (or even used as firewood) or not situated where they should be (figure 6)8.



*Figure 6. New location of handloom at outside of house.*

Although the custom of weaving was changed, women maintain the habit of veiling by changing their veiling manners. At the first stage of these changes is skipping from örtme fabric to readymade fabrics (muslin headscarves or prayer örtme). Purchasing the fabric also revealed various ornament techniques. Crocheting lace on the örtme is one of these novelties. However, this technique may not be considered as a complete novelty since hand-dyed kerchiefs used as bottom örtme are crocheted lace. Decoration by dyeing the edges of the fabrics points out a differentiation in traditional ornament techniques and in unders-

tanding. Because this ornament style that emerged as a result of an innovative admiration is unknown and was not tested earlier, it can only be acquired through courses of public training center. That is, a disparity can be seen in the traditional way followed in learning the ornament techniques. However, dyeing which requires certain cost is simplification of labour, compare with the effort and time spent for weavings made on a handloom. The last stage of the change consists of *örtme* on the edges of which ready-made crochet lace or ready-made lace is knitted. Therefore, these *örtmes* give clues for the replacement of handmade goods with fabricated goods.

Although it is possible to see headscarves in figure 1 reflecting the handmade and aesthetic taste of different periods in the same stage of the history, there is still one more veiling style that does not exist in figure 1, but produced in this village and still kept in the trousseaus. These first alternative *örtme* that arose as an alternative to woven *örtme* are made of muslin cloth and the part which meets the forehead is stitched with canvas and the narrow parts in the line of arms have bead work or crochet lace from thread. However, this style designed with traditional handmade ornament techniques no more exists since it is as demanding as weavings and “is not worth such endeavour”.

### Conclusion

It was aimed in the study to depict a Dağküplü panorama in the guidance of cultural history approach of image examining figure 1 through the elements that it displays or that it does

not contain. This one photo, apart from being a memory and record of that moment, reflects an understanding about the economical structure, aesthetic perception, religious life and social values of the village. By this means, it is possible to conclude that the village is devoted to its beliefs but that it has a changing structure. It is also possible to deduce about gender perception of women and its appearance. Moreover, the progress of manufacture of women based on handmade within time was summarized.

As a result of analysis, we could conclude for the five women with colourful headscarves in figure 1 that one or several of the following arguments may be true: 1) Although five women have colourful headscarves, only one of them has a different style of veiling (the woman in blue at the center of the figure 1). This style implies that she is single. Considering their veiling styles, it may also be claimed that others are married. 2) Although these four (married) women are originally from Dağküplü, they wear colourful headscarves in direction of their personal choices. 3) These four (married) women wear colourful headscarves since they are not from Dağküplü (as they are guests and also due to their personal choices). 4) These four (married) women are people who came to Dağküplü since they were married to men from Dağküplü, in which exogamy became common along with internal migration. Despite the fact that they live in this village on account of their husbands now, they haven't changed the syntagm of their dressing.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 The field research was published as a book which called *Eski Bir Dokumacı Köyün İzinde* (Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi Yayınları No: 2048, 2010).
- 2 All the photos used in the interpretation were shot by me, and except figure 2 (March 23 2008), figure 3 (April 16 2009) and figure 5 (March 27 2008), all the photos were shot at the same date as figure 1.
- 3 *Örtme* is the name given by the people of this village for silk headscarves made of cotton or dyed into green which women coat on their headscarves large enough (1mx1.50cm) to cover shoulders and chests.
- 4 Not only this mawlid but also all the ceremonies in the village are performed on Sundays so that Dağköplü people living in the center of Eskişehir could participate.
- 5 This is the name given by the Turkish Republic Department of Religious Affairs and Turkish Religious Foundation since 1989 for the week in which the Islamic prophet Hz. Mohammed's birthday is celebrated both domestic and international for the Gregorian calendar (Bardakoğlu t.y.). Moreover, in Lailat al Mawlid, when the birth is celebrated with respect to the Islamic calendar, mawlid is performed but people are not served food.
- 6 In the study, dress and dressing are used in accordance with Barthes' definition frame (2006: 8-10).
- 7 *Göynek*, is an inner cloth woven with thick cotton rope on the handlooms used by both men and women and worn as under coat, but also used as night dress.
- 8 The villagers used to allocate one of the rooms of their houses for handlooms. Although this narrowed the space, keeping the weavings clean was a preferable situation for the slashed (boiling the rope with flour for robustness) ropes to be available for weaving. One of the installed handlooms in the village is in one of the rooms of the house since the owner still uses it for weaving for commercial purposes. The other handloom, however, is at the upper balcony of a double flat house as the owner uses it for demonstration (figure 6).
- 9 Fact: All the women in figure 1 are from Dağköplü. The women with colourful headscarves live out of the village in different regions. The reason why they don't wear white *örtme* is their personal choices only. For there exist women with white *örtme* in figure 1 even though they live out of the town.

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