

A woman is shown from the waist down, wearing a short, sleeveless dress with a bold floral pattern in red, blue, and black. She is also wearing a brown leather belt and red high-heeled sandals. The background is a solid reddish-brown color.

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# BURDA KADIN (WOMAN)

AND TRANSLATION OF FEMININITIES  
IN 1980S' TURKEY

**Christine Haydar  
Türkiye'yi böylesine  
komsu kapısı  
yapabilir miydi?**

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the impact of globally circulating print media not only on the distribution of fashion models, but also on providing Turkish women with a space to negotiate gender roles. It takes the Turkish edition of *Burda Moden*, a Germany-based fashion and style magazine, as a case study to argue that the lack of translation opened up a space for women to articulate visions of gender equality and sexuality. Even though *Burda Moden* was first published in Turkey in the 1960s, the original magazine was first fully translated into Turkish in the 1990s. In the 1980s, the original magazine was accompanied by a booklet in Turkish called *Burda Kadın* (Woman in Turkish), which replaced the original content with different articles on women, celebrities, or the family.

This paper builds on the wealth of recent literature detailing the history of fashion and / or style<sup>1</sup> and women's magazines<sup>2</sup> in order to fill two lacunae. Firstly, it brings the topic into the field of contemporary history by examining the 1980s. While a few earlier studies went back to the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>3</sup> it was the 1980s that were a formative period both internationally and in Turkey, with increased reflection on the role of women in Turkish society. This decade was nonetheless also marked by a coup d'état at its beginning and by the rise of political Islam, resulting in a volatile political environment where conservative politics shaped free speech and visual representations. Hence, secondly, while recent research on the intersection of gender and fashion in Turkey has focused on the headscarf or veil, this paper focuses on other performances of fashion and gender that have either mostly been ignored or emphasized fashion shows rather than the media.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, it highlights the importance of absences for cultural appropriation: *Burda Kadın* demonstrates that a lack of translation opened up new possibilities for negotiating the role of women in Turkish society.

This paper serves as an exploratory probe of *Burda Moden* and *Burda Kadın*, showcasing their high potential for further studies on gender, class and nationalism in modern Turkey. After elaborating the historical context in which *Burda Kadın* published its content and images in Turkey, the paper takes three exemplary pages of *Burda Kadın* that serve as spotlights on, first, the complex relationship between gender, nation-building, and orientalism in connection with a specific fashion item, the *şalvar*. The second example engages with the relationship between class and gender in the depiction of a Turkish businesswoman. The third part deals with discussions of sexuality and gender based on the relationship between fashion and the body.

## STATE FEMINISM<sup>6</sup>: THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk paved the way for the westernization and modernization of Turkey, terms that were used interchangeably. The 1926 Civil Code gave women the right to take part in public life as equals to men. It replaced Islamic law, giving women equal rights to divorce and inherit while abolishing polygamy and making civil marriage compulsory. Subsequently, in 1930, women were given the right to be elected in regional elections. Yet, women's private lives and individuality were still constructed to a great extent according to patriarchal relations, for example, in the family, in marriage, or in the welfare state. As Şirin Tekeli also states, women became an instrument in the creation of a democratic, modern, and western image of Turkey during the one-party regime, despite the international community's accusations that the country was a dictatorship.<sup>7</sup> But even though women were emancipated, they were not yet truly liberated since they did not enjoy individual rights.

## COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL FEMINISM: THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN

1980 was a critical turning point for Turkey. It was marked by a violent military coup, following a decade of political instability, economic decline, and conflicts between nationalist and leftist groups. Before the generals handed over the government to civilians in 1983, they prepared a constitution in 1982 that limited civil rights, but also granted extensive civil and social liberties without gender discrimination. In the 1980s, feminists thus sought liberation beyond emancipation, and women began criticizing the state and demanding civil and social rights. The role of women was nonetheless ambivalent: Women and their protests were deemed unthreatening as a result of the shelter provided by Republican state feminism, in which these rights were not fought for but given.<sup>8</sup> This perception of women's passivity might be one of the reasons why feminist movements in Turkey were still able to evolve and intervene in the public sphere during the rise of authoritarian and conservative politics.

Although the 1980s were a crucial period for feminist movements in Turkey, it would be too simplistic to regard *Burda Kadın* as a publication that was related directly to the movement. It is more precise to say that it shared certain issues with the women's liberation movements, without entirely breaking ties with a Kemalist<sup>9</sup> vision of women's role in society. *Burda Kadın* provides a case study for examining how the role of women was being negotiated at the time based on media representations and content production.



## PLUDERHOSEN/PUMPHOSEN/HAREM PANTS / ŞALVAR: LIBERATING OR SELF-ORIENTALIZING?

Although *Burda Kadın* accompanied a fashion magazine, it often included just one page of fashion-related content or even none. This makes the appearance of one fashion item particularly distinctive: *Pluderhosen* or *Pumphosen* in German, harem pants or bloomers<sup>10</sup> in English, and *şalvar* in Turkish were found in both *Burda Moden* and *Burda Kadın*. At the same time, it also demonstrates that the global circulation of fashion items was not merely a transferral of Western styles and related gender roles. They instead took on a specific, localized meaning in gender relations.

In the 1980s, power dressing became popular in Western fashion styles. While research so far has particularly focused on power suits, the *şalvar* was part of such attires as well. Historically, this was linked to a much earlier circulation of fashion: In nineteenth-century Europe, wearing trousers

was a distinctive marker of masculinity. While Europeans first wore such trousers in orientalized promenades and masquerades or to amuse their spouses,<sup>11</sup> *şalvar* also played a role in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when women began wearing trousers, for instance, in sports like cycling, which were connected with the women's liberation movement.<sup>12</sup> Another multidirectional exchange of clothing took place in the context of feminist reform in nineteenth-century Europe and accelerating attempts at modernization in the Ottoman Empire, when women from both cultures were influenced by their sartorial choices by European women travellers, who also had access to the harem and private family space of women. While urban Ottoman women replaced their indoor clothing,<sup>13</sup> from the *şalvar* and the *gömlek* to the *entari*,<sup>14</sup> to enable themselves to wear the corset, European women who were interested in feminist reform adopted Turkish dress, including the *şalvar*, as an expression of their autonomy.<sup>15</sup>



1 'Exotic flowers are blooming', 'funny *Pluderhosen*'. The page illustrates *şalvar* with flower patterns for everyday clothing, although they were still considered exotic and associated with being unusual and funny through the text.

# Goldene Zeiten für Modemutige

Das steht Ihnen glänzend: Rückenbluse 105, Gr. 38–40, mit aufgesteppten Borten (aus dem Rockstoff), darüber das mit Goldfäden besetzte Bolero 106, Gr. 38–40. Uni Knopp: N&K Stoffe. Musselin: Hs.

**E**in Schuß Romantik, eine Prise Orient und viel Fantasie. Das Ergebnis: fünf Gute-Laune-Modelle, die leicht zu arbeiten sind und die Sie untereinander immer wieder neu und effektiv kombinieren können. Machen Sie die Probe aufs Exempel!



105  
Größe  
38–40

Passend dazu der schwungvolle Wickelrock 105, Größe 38–40, mit Borten-, Blumen- und Reigendessin. Musselin: Hs. Service. Schuhe: Palmroth.

103/104  
Größe  
38–40

# für Modemutige



108  
Größe  
38–40

107  
Größe  
38

Eine ganz aktuelle Kombination: Spenserjacke 108, Gr. 38–40, zur Pumphose 107, Gr. 38, mit Hüfttettel und Treddeln. Mairé: Weinstrod-Zürcher; Borten: N. A. Schmitz.

Hier sehen Sie eine andere Kombinationsmöglichkeit der gezeigten Modelle untereinander: das Spenserjackchen zum Wickelrock.

Wenn Sie mit passenden Accessoires effektiv Akzente setzen – wie hier mit dem dekorativen Gürtel –, können Sie mit dieser „Grundausstattung“ im Mittelpunkt jedes Festes stehen. Gürtel: Mifitz; Schuhe: Pfister.

2 'A dash of romance, a pinch of orient and a lot of fantasy.'

In issues of *Burda Moden* from the 1980s, the two tendencies can be observed based on their relation to pants as both everyday attire and exotic apparel. The introduction of patterned textiles integrated them into everyday fashion (fig. 1), but most of the designs were accompanied by gold, thus taking them out of the context of everyday fashion and associating them with either a costume for festivities or part of an elevated outfit highlighting its historical connotations with the Orient as feminine, mysterious, and exotic (fig. 2). Similarly, *Burda Kadın* included the *şalvar* several times, for example showing it at fashion shows in Turkey (fig. 3). As fashion had undergone an intense westernization since the late-nineteenth century, the *şalvar* now not only took on an ambivalently gendered meaning, but was also connected at the same time to the ongoing Turkish nation-building project.<sup>16</sup> Although there was an attempt to modernize the *şalvar* by combining it with tailored jackets, this revival linked the post-junta Republic to the imperial Ottoman tradition, but even more importantly to Central Anatolia, the central reference point of Turkish nationalist ideologies since the founding of the Republic.



3 'We watched two shows for you.'

In the context of the 1980s, the *şalvar* became the fashion item that gave specificity to Turkish identity, and some designers combined them with globally trendy jackets with wide shoulder pads, plain fabrics, and modern belts. This mix became a celebrated formula in design practices in Turkey,<sup>17</sup> asserting Turkey's and designers' liminal position between the past and present, between the Orient and the West. Through this position, women and their attire were instrumentalized to disseminate a public image that combined nationalism and tradition with modernity.

LIBERATION BASED ON 'WORK':  
'GUEST OF THE MONTH' AND 'AMONG YOU'

*Burda Kadın* had two series of articles, 'Guest of the Month' and 'Among You', in which women were depicted as entrepreneurs. However, as the titles already suggest, the two series focused on different social groups. 'Guest of the Month' portrayed high-profile, upper-class figures interviewed by the same woman reporter. 'Among You', by contrast, featured portraits of businesswomen with a working-, middle-, or lower middle-class background, and provided insights into how work, class, gender, and taste intersect.

While many interviewees in 'Guest of the Month' were men, they also included Betül Mardin, who was one of the most well-known women representing success in business at the time. Coming from a renowned half-Egyptian half-Turkish family that produced intellectuals and famous bureaucrats, she was the first person to launch a public relations firm in Turkey. She is photographed in front of an Atatürk portrait, thus connecting herself with his legacy as a modern woman (fig. 4). In the interview, she states that work facilitates women's independence. Her fashion style projects her upper-class background as well as her profession as a PR consultant: She is dressed in a colourfully patterned necktie reminiscent of the 1970s, along with a shirt and pants. But it also reflects the adaptation of male dress codes to female forms in line with the power dressing trend. Dagmar Venohr asserts that fashion is not a medium, but instead reaches us



through a combination of media and presents a different experience each time as a result of its medial transfer. This means that the media make performativity possible while also creating a social experience.<sup>18</sup> In alignment with this, fashion performs here to create a symbolic tie based on how successful people dress.

The everyday women owners of businesses in 'Among You' differed from Mardin, since they were portrayed in their occupational attire. While Mardin talked about work in terms of liberation and independence, the entrepreneurship of these women was framed in a narrative of sacrifice. They had worked hard and succeeded, but it was not always what they had expected from life. Nuran Koçanoğlu, for instance, had to take over her deceased husband's butcher shop. Nurten Özçetin had to work as a cook at a big factory to provide for her family after her husband got sick and became unable to work (fig. 5). Zühal Sözeri became the manager of a bank, since although she had wanted to be a teacher and to travel, it was necessary for her to return to her family after they lost their father. These life stories share a common motif: the replacement of men by women and their selfless sacrifice. While they did not pursue their career aspirations, they did have the potential and power to pursue 'a career'. These articles demonstrate that women were recognized and portrayed as successful businesswomen, but simultaneously reveal men's labour with respect to family relations in middle-class families in Turkey that coexisted in



4 Betül Mardin with Atatürk portrait  
5 'Among You: Nurten Özçetin'



## 6 'Look what Christine Haykar is saying: FASHION IS LIKE SEX FOR ME.'

## CONSERVATIVE SEXUALITY

Various feminist groups coexisted in the 1980s. They included radical feminists calling for freedom of sexual expression, and thus breaking with the Kemalist tradition prescribing asexual roles to women in public life.<sup>19</sup> In *Burda Kadın*, sexuality was covered in two different ways: through informative articles and celebrity coverage. These texts and images were, however, not explicit representations of sexual liberty, but instead tied to conservative assertions.

The 'Your Sexual Problems' section covered discussions around family planning based on the medical expertise of two gynaecologists. These medical experts framed their advice in a national context and stressed that these topics should be considered according to national and familial customs, in which sexuality was de facto regarded an issue within marriage. Abortion was one of the most frequently recurring subjects in this section. It became legal in Turkey in 1983, but with many restrictions. The articles in this section informed readers about the risks of abortions, particularly 'backstreet' abortions.

Sexuality was also addressed in *Burda Kadın* through celebrities. Here we see Christine Haydar in 'sexy' poses in an animal-print bodysuit and leotard (fig. 6). She states: 'Fashion is like sex for me', which is the only



sexually open argument that is found in any of the issues. I would argue that this was only possible because she was not Turkish. In support of this argument, under this headline, there is a comment by the writer praising the talent of Haydar's Turkish manager in opening doors for her in Turkey, and thus highlighting her non-Turkishness.

## CONCLUSION

Though *Burda Kadın* was not a publication by radical feminists of the time, it nevertheless provided an intervention oriented towards women's liberation. This platform was nevertheless still involved in contemporary local and global debates on sexuality and gender-coded labour. *Burda Kadın*'s depiction of women had emancipatory elements, but often combined them with a nationalistic framing and conservative viewpoints. While *Burda Moden* featured fashion prominently and generally in an aesthetically commodifying way, fashion was not the actual object of visual presentation in *Burda Kadın*. This article nonetheless argues that it was still present there as a medium: providing historical reference points and associations, as with the *şalvar*, through socially and gender-coded work power relations, as in the sections 'Among You' and 'Guest of the Month', and through its intimate connection to bodily performance, as in the case of the sexually informative content.

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5 Altınay, Rüstem Ertuğ: *Dressing for Utopia: Fashion, Performance, and the Politics of Everyday Life in Turkey (1923–2013)*. Unpublished dissertation, New York University, 2016.

6 I use the term after the political scientist and feminist activist Şirin Tekeli. See: Tekeli, Şirin: *Kadınlar için: Yazılar 1977–1987* (Istanbul: Final Ofset, 1988).

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8 Abadan-Unat, Nermin: 'Social Change and Turkish Women', in Nermin Abadan-Unat / Deniz Kandiyoti / Mübeccel Belik Kıray (eds.): *Women in Turkish Society* (Boston: BRILL, 1981), 12; Arat, Yeşim / Pamuk, Şevket: *Turkey Between Democracy and Authoritarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 230–31.

9 Referring to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the founding years.

10 Named after the American women's rights activist Amelia Bloomer from the nineteenth century.

11 Inal, Onur, 'Women's Fashions in Transition: Ottoman Borderlands and the Anglo-Ottoman Exchange of Costumes', *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (2011), 25; Jirousek, Charlotte / Catterall, Sara: *Ottoman Dress and Design in the West: A Visual History of Cultural Exchange* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 202.

12 Jungnickel, Katrina: *Bikes and Bloomers: Victorian women investors and their extraordinary cycle wear* (Cambridge, MA: Goldsmiths Press, 2018), 55–76; Jirousek / Catterall 2019, 202–06.

13 Also allowed by the imperial laws as a result of the attempts at modernization.

14 *Gömlek*: a type of large blouse; *entari*: a dress like a nightshirt.

15 Şeni, Nora: 'Fashion and Women's Clothing in the Satirical Press of Istanbul at the End of the 19th Century', in Şirin Tekeli (ed.), *Women in Modern Turkish Society* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), 29; Jirousek / Catterall 2019, 29.

16 In 1981, for the centennial of Atatürk's birthyear, the Ankara Girl's Maturation Institute (the first Girl's Maturation Institute was founded in 1945 in Istanbul as the first fashion school, and these schools have since then organized many diplomatic fashion shows) organized a fashion show in which the designs were advertised as modern versions of traditional clothes, and incorporated many *şalvar* designs. Likewise, in 1983, the Department of Technical Education for Girls published 'Local Costumes for Women' to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Republic.

17 In 'Local Costumes for Women', the aim was stated in the preface as: 'Making known the local Turkish costumes, both within and outside of the country', and added: 'Turkish fashion designers, inspired by these local styles, have recently created a fresh current in fashion by modernizing these forms, colors, and designs.'

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19 Arat / Pamuk 2019; Durakbaşa, Ayşe: 'Kemalism as Identity Politics in Turkey', in Zehra Arat (ed.), *Deconstructing Images of 'the Turkish Woman'* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan / St. Martin's Press, 1998), 139–56; Sancar, Serpil: *Türk Modernleşmesinin Cinsiyeti* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012); Kandiyoti, Deniz, 'Slave girls, temptresses, and comrades: Images of women in the Turkish novel', *Feminist Issues* 8, no 1 (1988), 35–50.