

ID-ENTITY IN QUESTION:  
TURKISH TOUCH IN DESIGN IN 'İLK' IN MILANO

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BAHAR EMGİN

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Yrd. Doç. Dr. Alp Limoncuoğlu  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts

---

Prof. Dr. Tevfik Balcıoğlu  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts

---

Prof. Dr. Gülsüm Baydar  
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Gülsüm Baydar

Asst. Prof. Dr. Neslihan Demirtaş

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Xander Van Eck

## ABSTRACT

### ID-ENTITY IN QUESTION: TURKISH TOUCH IN DESIGN IN 'İLK' IN MILANO

Emgin, Bahar  
MA, Department of Design Studies

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Gülsüm Baydar

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This study analyzes the construction and representation of Turkish style in design through the discourse of *'İlk' in Milano*, an industrial design exhibition which took place within the Milan Design Week of 2007 with the theme “Turkish touch in design.” Within this context, first of all, the ways that the notions of national culture and cultural identity inform industrial design practice and impose cultural meaning upon products are elucidated. Then the discursive territory of the exhibition is analyzed so as to explicate the framework that is drawn for Turkish-ness. Finally, the ways that Turkish-ness is utilized and expressed through industrial design products within the exhibition are analyzed and exemplified under specific strategies of appropriation of cultural identity.

Key words: Turkish design, cultural identity, national culture.

## ÖZET

KONU EDİLEN KİMLİK:  
'İLK' IN MILANO'DA TASARIMA TÜRK DOKUNUŞU

Emgin, Bahar  
Yüksek Lisans, Tasarım Çalışmaları Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, tasarımda Türk tarzının kuruluş ve temsilini, 2007 Milano Tasarım Haftası kapsamında gerçekleştirilen 'İlk' in Milano sergisi örneği üzerinden incelemektedir. Bu doğrultuda öncelikle, ulusal kültür ve kültürel kimliğin endüstriyel tasarım pratiğini nasıl şekillendirdiği ayrıca bu kavramların ürünlerin kültürel anlamlarını nasıl etkilediği ortaya konmuştur. Daha sonra sergi, Türk-lük algısına ilişkin yapıyı açıklamak üzere, söylem düzeyinde ele alınmıştır. Son olarak sergideki ürünlerde Türklüğün nasıl kullanıldığı ve ifade edildiği incelenmiş ve örneklenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk tasarımı, kültürel kimlik, ulusal kimlik.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1. Problem Definition**

The discipline of industrial design in Turkey has recently been marked by debates regarding the construction of a genuine Turkish identity in design. As a result, a particular notion of Turkish culture is accentuated as the basis on which an authentic style should be constructed. Especially as Turkey has entered into the global market, the emphasis on the necessity of such a peculiar design identity has gained prominence as a marketing strategy that places Turkish design as a brand name, and hence Turkish-ness as a brand value in the global market. This study argues that the notion of Turkish style in design needs to be unpacked in order to avoid a reductive definition of Turkish-ness loaded with nationalist connotations to meet the expectations of the global audience.

In this context, the recent design exhibition '*İlk*' in *Milano* with the motto "Turkish touch in design" emerges as a conspicuous attempt to promote Turkish identity in design at an international scale. The exhibition promotes design from Turkey as a representative medium that transforms Turkish cultural heritage into contemporary design through novel production techniques and aesthetic understanding in the name of modernization

or westernization.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the discursive construction and visual expression of Turkish-ness in the exhibition addresses questions of identity as well as oppositions like modern / traditional, East / West or Orient / Occident. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is how such a definition of Turkish-ness is imposed upon the products exhibited in *'İlk' in Milano* and how these representations work in the maintenance of the discursive framework in the exhibition.

## **1.2. Aim**

The aim of this thesis is to supply a framework to materialization of Turkish-ness in design through the example of *'İlk' in Milano*. Taking into consideration the fact that the concept of Turkish design is yet a controversial issue in ongoing debates, the study does not attempt to favor or despise any particular approach to the construction of Turkish design identity. Besides the thesis does not intend to judge the objects in question themselves, but rather focuses on the discursive network that frames them. The purpose is to mark the strategies of interpretation evident in the context of *'İlk' in Milano* based

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the discourse of the exhibition, notions of modernization and Westernization have been used interchangeably. Most of the time, both terms are applied to refer to modern design, which is characterized by emphases on Cartesian geometry, functionalism and use of advanced technology in the production process as exemplified by twentieth century Western design. At this point a third concept comes to the scene, which is universal. Similar with Westernization in design, the term universal design style too comes to depict the precepts of modern design that sought to form a common, homogeneous universal design language. Moreover, widespread application of modern design precepts are taken as signs of the political, social, economical and ideological stimulators of modernization in Turkey, which are reduced and identified with characteristics of Western culture such as progress, technological advancement and economic prosperity. Henceforth, throughout the thesis the terms modern, Western and universal are used interchangeably to signify modern design understanding.

on prevalent critical theories on cultural criticism to understand the way that design products maintain historical attributes of cultural identity.

The thesis is based on the claim that an attempt to generate a marketing identity for Turkish design implies the existence of a specific national culture peculiar to Turkey. The latter derives from an essentialist understanding of homogeneous national communities, which limits the scope of identity to the stereotypical imageries. Critical theoretical study on the notion of national identity enables the analysis of Turkish design, based on a critique of cultural identity as an *a priori* entity. This analysis is framed around the question of identity in the phenomenon of globalization where Turkish design discourse is mobilized as a marketing strategy.

Assuming a link between design and culture requires defining both design and culture as identity categories. Based mostly on postcolonial literature, the study claims that Turkish culture utilized in the discourse of '*İlk*' in *Milano* is a construct, marked through a strategic selection of particular values to be preserved. This involves a critique of the notion of culture as a self-evident and unified essence informing the practices of homogeneous communities.

In the context of '*İlk*' in *Milano*, Turkish culture is defined as an anachronistic one including influences from a wide range of periods and regions. In addition, it is mostly emphasized to have influences both from the East and the West as a result of its geographical location. This basic concept of Turkish design based on the cultural

distinction between East and West in the exhibitions discourse is conceptualized with regards to the self-orientalizing attitude of Turkish-ness placed within a historical and cultural background that marks the ideology behind the construction of Turkish nation.

### **1.3. Structure**

This thesis is a case study on '*İlk*' in *Milano*, based on theoretical discussions on the problems of identity and representation. The discursive field of the exhibition catalogue and the publications about the exhibit are explicated and supported by interviews with the curators and the participant designers.

In chapter II, the background that motivated the organization of '*İlk*' in *Milano* is clarified within the context of the historical development of industrial design practice in Turkey. The emergence of the discourse on Turkish design style is traced through the social, cultural and economical shifts that influenced the evolution of the discipline in Turkey through a survey of design magazines and scholarly researches. Finally, after introducing the organization process, selection criteria and aims of '*İlk*' in *Milano*, its results and significance is explicated both in the national and international design arena.

In chapter III, the notion of Turkish culture in the discourse of '*İlk*' in *Milano* is analyzed based on two different roots that are presumed to underlie the national identity of the products: Geographical and ideological. In this respect the possible resources utilized in the inventory of Turkish culture and the effects of the binary of East / West,

modern / traditional and history / progress evident in definitions of Turkish culture are discussed.

Having clarified the idea of Turkish identity evident in the discursive territory of '*İlk*' in *Milano*, the focus of chapter IV is based on the visual repertory of products exhibited in '*İlk*' in *Milano*. Different approaches to the utilization of Turkish culture are exemplified and analyzed under the following strategies, which characterize the use of the historical heritage: Transformation, re-contextualization and implication.

## CHAPTER II

### A MILESTONE IN TURKISH DESIGN

Milan Design Week 2007, held between April 18-23, was of much greater importance than previous international design events for the Turkish design community. Until then, companies from Turkey had held exhibitions, Turkish designers had exhibited their work individually, and design departments of Middle East Technical University and Istanbul Technical University had exhibited student works. But it was for the first time in 2007 that a group of Turkish designers came together to organize a collective exhibition aiming at playing a pioneer role for Turkish design in the global arena. The exhibition entitled '*İlk* in Milano' was introduced as a collaborative effort of a group of renowned Turkish designers named *ilk* to share their design approach with the international design community. The press release enthusiastically announced that:

The "ilk in milano" exhibit will provide an opportunity to experience "The Turkish touch in design" with a group exhibition and series of events coordinated by Nurus, the leading international furniture company of Turkey. (...) Designers in Turkey recently have been responding to new needs and requirements to produce work that is more individual yet at the same time contemporary, creating successful design solutions that have resonated internationally with their forward looking sensibility.

The "ilk in milano" exhibition will be one of the first opportunities for the global design community to see this recent creative development coming out of Turkey and by Turkish designers from around the world.

The products shown in "ilk in milano" will show the harmonious synergies of the richness of Anatolian heritage transformed into contemporary design through leading-edge technologies and manufacturing processes. (...) The

qualities of this design exhibited, will undoubtedly be a revelation to exhibition audiences who for the first time in Milan, will see the unique vision produced by this community of designers based largely in Istanbul, Turkey. (İlk in Milano Press Release, 2007)

Although a series of international industrial design exhibitions have recently been organized by different institutions, *'İlk' in Milano* is considered to bear a prominence in marketing design from Turkey since it is realized in the design capital of the world, Milan, within one of the most important design events, Milan Design Week. Despite the other preceding attempts, it is widely accentuated as the “first” exhibition organized at a global scale attracting the largest number of participants.

The line of international industrial design exhibitions that includes Turkey actually started with *Design from East to West – Designers from Turkey*, which was held within the Tendence Lifestyle Fair 2004 in Frankfurt. It was organized by ETMK (Industrial Designers' Society) with the participation of seventeen designers. *Turkish Blossom* in 2006 Saint-Etienne Design Biennial followed this exhibition. It was the smallest in scale and composed of a selection of five projects exhibited in İstanbul Design Week 2005. Then came *'İlk' in Milano* with the cooperation of thirty-six remarkable design figures with the idea of bearing collective social responsibility to promote Turkish design.

Cooperation was a fundamental theme in the organization process of the exhibition. Moreover, it is the power of the idea of collaboration what endows *'İlk' in Milano* its status as the first exhibition and hence its pioneering role is emphasized in almost all of the introductory texts on the exhibition. In one of the leading newspapers of Turkey,

*Sabah*, the exhibition is promoted as the effort of leading Turkish designers who got together as “one heart” to represent Turkish design in the fair (Şahinbaş, 2007). Another widely circulated newspaper, *Radikal*, underlines that the exhibition is considered as a “social responsibility” and “a mission on behalf of art” by the participant designers who are now “a single body” to promote Turkish design (Karakartal, 2007).

Relying on these criteria, Alpay Er accepts the exhibition as “the first and the most severe examination concerning whether Turkish design could have established an authentic design language depending on a common identity” (2007a, p.30). (Translation by the author) Advertising the exhibition as a prideful event analogous to the country’s sporting, political and cultural successes such as organization of Formula 1 motor racing in İstanbul in 2007, participation in the NATO in 1952 and selection of Istanbul as culture capital of 2010, Serhan Ada poses the same question: “Would it be appropriate to look for some kind of identity at this exhibition, of a *genius loci* in a country which inevitably finds itself on migratory routes, where the most ancient civilisations crossed and where different cultures and religions peacefully co-exist” (2007, p.162)?

In the same manner, Tevfik Balcıoğlu mentions that *‘İlk’ in Milano* has supplied the chance for Turkish design to be recognized globally and climb to “the first league” whereby it became inevitable to determine the basis for a Turkish style in design (2007a, p.63). However, in a subsequent evaluation he (2007b) underlines that the exhibition does not point to the existence of a Turkish design style, but it rather reveals the enthusiasm to generate one. He argues that there are obvious reasons to do so, which can be enumerated



as: taking place within the existing national design styles such as Italian or Japanese design, creating difference through forming an original global brand, making it easier for Turkish designers and products to be recognizable, improving trade and contributing to national economy.

These ambitions, along with their righteous causes were not brought up all of a sudden as a result of this exhibition. The ongoing debates regarding the construction of an authentic Turkish design identity have emerged as a popular topic in Turkish designers' agenda as a result of Turkey's integration into the global market, especially accelerating with Turkey's participation in European customs union in 1995. In addition, as a result of increasing industrial and social interest in the field from the late 1990s onwards, industrial design in Turkey has entered into a productive period in terms of the number and quality of products designed in various sectors. The repertoire of those products laid down the groundwork regarding whether it is possible to talk about a style that is unique to design from Turkey. Consequently, discursive and visual frameworks of Turkish design were constructed through the search for the specific characteristics that those products share.

*'İlk' in Milano* is expected to be a milestone in the evolution of industrial design in Turkey because it is believed to pave the way to question the state of Turkish design by supplying a contemporary documentary of the design work created during this period. Therefore, in order to understand the emergence of Turkish design and the organization of the exhibition *'İlk' in Milano*, contemporary definitions, debates and issues

surrounding industrial design practice in Turkey need to be elaborated from a historical perspective.

## **2.1. The Background**

The construction of Turkish style in design is accompanied by the developments in the practical field. Therefore, the emergence of such a discourse cannot be analyzed independent from the historical development of the practice of industrial design in Turkey. In this respect, before clarifying the issues around the emergence and rise of local emphasis in design, the economical, social and cultural context behind the formation of the professional field in Turkey will be elaborated.

### **2.1.1. Historical Development**

The emergence of the first accounts of industrial design in Turkey is relatively recent and there has been a considerable progress in the field only in the last decade. Since the early 1990s there have been quantitative developments in the industry as observed in the increase in the number of companies that resort to design as a competitive strategy. The establishment of design consultancy firms generating self-employment opportunities for designers followed this. Likewise, there has been a sudden rise in the number of events and publications dedicated to industrial design to meet the growing public and professional interest in the field. In addition to these activities are the developments in design research and education. Especially design research has become such an extensive

field that design history, theory and practice in Turkey has started to be elaborately documented.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence and evolution of industrial design in Turkey has widely been studied in relation to the development patterns of the practice in Newly Industrialized Countries (NIC). For instance, the study conducted by industrial design scholars Alpay Er, Özlem Er and Fatma Korkut (2002) supplies a detailed overview of the development patterns of industrial design in Turkey as a NIC. In this study, NICs are defined as the countries whose economic development is grounded on industrialization from the 1960s onwards. Scholars trace the development of industrial design in Turkey focusing on seven different levels, which are: governmental development strategies, sectorial scope of industrial design, industrial design at firm-level, institutionalization of the industrial design profession, governmental policy developments for industrial design, industrial design education and research, and industrial design discourse (Er et al., 2002). Governmental

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<sup>2</sup> The furniture sector is an apparent example in which such companies like Koleksiyon, Derin and Nurus have emerged as design oriented companies working either with in-house or freelance designers. On the other hand, most of the designers participating in *'İlk' in Milano* have their own design consultancy firms working with a wide range of national or international clients. Today, the design press is relatively rich in the country including such industrial design oriented magazines like XXI, Tasarım and Icon in addition to the more mainstream interior architecture and decoration magazines like Maison Francaise and Elle Décor. Design events have also witnessed a recent rise marked by the series of Istanbul Design Week initiated in 2005, a series of seminars organized by the cooperation of ITU Industrial Design Department and Icon and annual design competitions organized by such institutions like IIMB (The General Secretariat of İstanbul Mineral and Metals Exporters' Association) and ETMK.

To give a very recent example to the research conducted on Turkish design practice and discourse, the proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Design Conference entitled "Discussing Design in Turkey" gathers the research of scholars and practitioners of the field under the titles of design education; design theory, methodology and criticism; design, production and industry; design and identity; Turkish design history; design law; media, discourse and design and communication and interaction in design.

development strategies regarding industrialization, trade and foreign investment are given particular emphasis as these are taken to be considerably influential on the progress of the rest. The development of industrial design is examined in five phases depending on the developments in these levels.<sup>3</sup>

The proto-design phase includes the period until the late 1950s and is marked by the absence of a design practice in the country. It includes two sub-periods. The first one, the pre-industry phase, lasts from the foundation of Turkish Republic to the beginnings of the 1950s. The absence of industrial design practice in this period is related to the agricultural based closed economy especially during 1930s and '40s. The second sub-period starts with the 1950s, when Turkey began to follow a comparatively liberal economy that resulted in the emergence of private companies and a national market of industrial goods.

The second period is called the embryonic phase and it starts with the initiation of ISI policies in the 1960s. ISI policies in Turkey, aiming at the industrialization of the country were based upon protective strategies against foreign contention by means of high import tariffs, countenance of national industry with government subsidies and attempts to extend the domestic market through high wage policies (Er et al., 2002). Industrial design in Turkey has also emerged in this period as a result of ISI policies. While architects and craftsmen could be marked as first designers in design oriented industries like furniture,

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<sup>3</sup> The original model developed by Alpay Er to depict the development patterns of industrial design in the NICs consists of seven phases. The last two phases are excluded from this study since they are not yet believed to occur in Turkish context. For the original model see: Er, H.A. (1997) The Development Patterns of Industrial Design in the Third World: A Conceptual Model for Newly Industrialised Countries, *Journal of Design History* (10) 3, pp. 293-309. (Oxford University Press, UK).

in investment driven industries such as electronics and white goods design was perceived as technology transfer. What is significant in terms of design practice in this phase is that design is generally behold as a cultural practice rather than a commercial activity (Er et al., 2002).

The so-called emergence phase of industrial design in Turkey takes place in the 1970s. This is the period when ISI policies were intensively applied, marked by a highly protectionist economic policy and Turkey was defined as a NIC. Industrial design in this period started to take place as an industrial activity within a limited number of industries such as furniture, ceramics and consumer durables. Designers adopted an imitative role adapting the products in the international market to the demands and production capabilities of the domestic market (Er et al., 2002). The 1970s also witnessed the initiation of the first undergraduate design programs in İDGSA (İstanbul State Academy of Fine Arts) in 1971 and in the Middle East Technical University (METU) in 1979. These educational endeavors were supported by the foundation of The Society of Industrial Design (ETD) and promotional design events such as the first industrial design competition in 1970 and two exhibitions organized by METU in 1972 and by IDGSA in 1976 (Er et al., 2002).<sup>4</sup>

The next stage is named as development phase I or stagnation phase. It started with the shift from ISI policies to export oriented ones in the context of the liberal economic policies adopted in the 1980s. The initiation of free market policies led to a reduction in

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<sup>4</sup> ETD was closed shortly after its establishment in 1978; however, in the study the reasons behind its closure are not introduced.

the investments in the manufacturing sector although the amount of exports reached their peak especially in industrial goods. With the neo-liberal economic policies of the 1980s Turkey's definition as a NIC was further accentuated (Er et al., 2002). However, export oriented growth policies did not encourage developments in industrial design and design witnessed a recession in this period. This is because the industrial sector was largely ignorant of design's prominence in market success, with few exceptions like electronics where the need for design was beginning to be recognized (Er et al., 2002).

The last phase, which began in the mid-1990s is called development phase II or re-emergence. In this period Turkey entered into the international market with the impact of the boost in economic liberalization policies. Export led strategies, integration into the global economy and the growing trade between European Union and Turkey mobilized intensive developments in industrial design. At this stage, it became indispensable for Turkey to resort to competitive strategies in product design and technology. Consequently, design was adopted as a value increasing strategy for market success in the process of rapid globalization. There has also been tangible development in the employment opportunities for designers with newly established design consultancy firms and independent design studios apart from the increasing number of in-house designers (Er et al., 2002). The first international design symposium, Design, Industry and Turkey was also organized in this period by METU. In 1988, designers attempted to found a professional institution for the second time, which resulted in establishment of Industrial Designers' Society (ETMK) in Ankara. The publication of the first industrial designers' catalogue following the Designers' Odyssey '94 Industrial Design Exhibition and the

distribution of first design awards by ETMK in the exhibition are other developments of this period (Er et al., 2002).

### **2.1.2. Emergence of Turkish Design Discourse**

The historical development pattern developed by the scholars of the field clarifies the economical framework behind the emergence and development of industrial design in Turkey. As the scope of the discipline expanded following these economical and political shifts, debates on the stylistic and formal aspects of industrial design practice intensified. Gökhan Karakuş, industrial designer and author of the book *Turkish touch in design: contemporary product design by Turkish designers worldwide* published right after *‘İlk’ in Milano*, (2007) depicts design development in Turkey focusing on the shift in the understanding and formal vocabulary of design. The heart of his analysis is the emphasis on the application of modern design approaches in Turkey in certain periods. He starts his analysis from the 1980s during which economic reforms gave rise to the birth of the concept of design in Turkey. He views this period as the prelude to internationalization following the growth in especially manufacturing industries like automotive, textile, consumer electronics and furniture. Industrial design in this period was established as a corporate strategy rather than being perceived as merely a matter of surface embellishment. Karakuş also refers to the role of consumer preferences as an influential factor in design practice in that period. As he argues, with the impact of the upper classes that were the design consumers of period, design in Turkey was mostly dependent upon Western models, because these classes were displaying a great interest in Western lifestyle. Yet, this interest was considerably superficial and was concentrated merely on

mimicry of the prominent fashions of the term especially observed in European centers like Paris and London and partly New York.

According to Karakuş (2007), design in Turkey has entered a totally new period with the pick up in the economy in the late 1990s followed by the big economic depression in 2001. Consequently, the developments procured in the practical field of industrial design in Turkey in the 1990s come to supply the basis for the local emphasis in design that especially occurred right after the economic depression. Henceforth, rather than solely following Western design models designers started to seek inspirations from historical heritage, traditions and popular Turkish culture in this period. Therefore, Karakuş sees this development as the rise of a pragmatism approach to design.

However, Er (2007b) criticizes Karakuş's contention regarding the emergence of local emphasis in design. Rather than explaining this in terms of pragmatism, he suggests that the emergence of such an emphasis is inextricably related with the dynamics of globalization. So, as he underlines, utilization of cultural resources in product design is not an internal transformation aiming to ameliorate the domestic market, but aims to satisfy the interminable demand for innovation in the global market. In the same manner, Balcioğlu (1999) refers to the impact of globalization in reinforcing the emphasis on local influences in design. He argues that the main determinant giving birth to local design is the influence of cultural interaction reinforced by globalization. As he further explains;

(...) the serious privilege local designers have, is the unprecedented creative design inspired from their culture which is understandably not well known in the West. Novelty is what design perpetually insists upon and instigates. Unknown territories always promise serendipity and unexpectedness. The



potential of local design is within its capacity and promises of new designs.  
(Balçioğlu, 1999, p.66)

In any case, the generation of a locally defined design approach denotes the role of design as a significant component in the production strategies of the global market. As design started to be handled as a branding tool, the emphasis on local themes gained popularity among Turkish designers and industry pursuing international recognition and success, in order to survive in the harsh competitive conditions of global economy.

Apart from offering advantages in the global market, the use of local themes in design became an influential element in the national arena as well. In the discourse analysis that industrial design scholar Harun Kaygan (2006) conducted on the popular design magazine *Art Décor*, he examines the issues published from 2003 to its closure in 2005 to figure out the criteria that are engaged to evaluate design products and designers. The findings of the study reveal that, in the evaluation process of products, the stakeholders in the field such as designers, academicians, magazines and professional institutions adopt the expression of Turkish-ness as a prominent criterion.

As Kaygan further underlines, interpretation of Turkish culture and appropriation of traditional elements in design came to indicate high status for both products and designers. He argues that, in the evaluation process on the basis of Turkish culture, designers are constructed as subjects who are responsible for representing Turkey and Turkish design, perpetuating and promoting Turkish culture through a process of appropriation of traditional and historical elements. In this respect, the products and

designers that successfully represent Turkey and Turkish culture at the international arena are endowed with a “representative status.” This status is further justified in the light of the hierarchy between the categories of Turkish and Western, whereby Western institutions and mediators in the design field have been granted with the authority to judge. This hierarchy is apparent in the comparison made between the work of Turkish and foreign designers wherein the latter is appraised and shown as a model to follow.

Research on design discourse and practice in Turkey reveals that the hierarchy between Turkey and the West is an important concept in understanding the emphasis on the appropriation of cultural and traditional elements in local design discourse. The case study that Ali İlhan and Alpay Er (2007) conducted on the ETMK Platform e-mail list draws attention to the role of xenophilia in the construction of such a discourse. In this study, İlhan and Er examine 4051 mails sent to the ETMK platform e-mail list between 2004 and 2006 in order to analyze the ideological construction of the field. Among the mails that have been sent to the platform, comparison among Turkish and foreign designers has been one of the most popular topics discussed by the designers, students and academicians in the list. In most of those discussions, Turkish industry and society were accused of admiring foreign and particularly Western designers while underestimating the talents and potentials of Turkish ones. In this respect, foreign designers emerge as the “big negative other” of Turkish designers. Most of the designers claim this to be a result of xenophilia, an intrinsic value of Turkish culture and the illness of Turkish modernism. Through their study İlhan and Er argue that cultural emphases in design emerged as a response to the hierarchical position of Western

designers and design models in the minds of companies and the public. Turkish culture has started to be accentuated as the potential of Turkish designers in creating a global brand such as Italian or German design. Consequently, the idea to construct and promote an original Turkish design style that appreciates and utilizes Turkish values came to play a prominent role in the professional development of industrial design in Turkey.

The enthusiasm to generate an original Turkish design style did not rise only in the media and among design practitioners as scholars also participated in the discussions. For instance Seçil Şatır (2006) with a relatively historicist and essentialist understanding suggests that the most proper way to follow international recognition and success for Turkish designers is to adopt a design style that is representative of the essence of the Turkish nation. For this reason, she cites a number of sources that form the basis of Turkish cultural heritage including examples from traditional handicraft and arts such as miniatures, tiles, calligraphy, wood carving, tanning and glass-ware. According to Şatır, the transformation of these cultural values into added-values within the contemporary global market by means of a vivid, colorful and simple mode of appropriation is the key responsibility of Turkish designers.

In the light of all these developments, exhibitions organized both in Turkey and particularly abroad, gained a prominent role in the construction and promotion of Turkish style in design. This intention is manifest in two design fairs organized by the Art Décor magazine entitled ADesign Fair, in 2003 and 2004. Both exhibitions were primarily organized to support the establishment of a strong design culture as a response

to recent developments in industrial design as well as to promote Istanbul as a design center. Especially the second ADesign Fair with the motto *From Turkish Delight to Turkish Design*, explicitly disclosed the recent tendency towards the establishment of a national design brand (ADesign Fair 2004, 2004).

The ABC design exhibition with the theme *global Turk* followed the ADesign Fair series. The exhibition was planned by Ali Baba design Lab. as a parallel activity to the UIA (Union International Architects) congress in 2005, which was realized in Istanbul and was announced in the congress catalogue. Addressing the international audience participating in the congress, the exhibition aimed to highlight the products that introduced Turkish style to the international field and hence participated in the formation of Turkish design (abc tasarım sergisi : 'Türkiye'den bir tasarım hareketi', 2005).

Fesorient International Ethnic Lifestyle, Fashion and Design Festival, organized two times in 2006 and 2007, was also devoted to the dissemination of Turkish design style aiming at “gathering all commercial, artistic and cultural actors that produce work that is inspired by ethnic and authentic values that form the keystones of our culture and integrate them into our contemporary aesthetical approaches” (Özler, 2006). (Translation by the author)

Such a substantial popularity of national design exhibitions laid down the groundwork for the inventory of the visual and discursive frameworks of Turkish design. A satisfactory repertoire of products constituted through these exhibitions inspired a

number of designers to introduce this novel approach fashioned by *Turkish touch in design* to the global design field.

## **2.2. The Foreground**

'*İlk*' in *Milano* is the first of the series of exhibitions planned by a group of designers entitled *ilk*. The foundation of the group was laid during the Wallpaper exhibition that took place within Milan Design Week 2006. Turkish designers participating in the exhibition proposed to gather together with other internationally renowned Turkish designers in a collective exhibition to be organized within Milan Design Week 2007 (Kuzu, 2007). In an interview conducted by Arkitera, one of the founders of the group İnci Mutlu states that the idea of organizing such an exhibition came to her mind after seeing European governments organizing their own design exhibitions and encountering negative conceptions about Turkish design in some foreign design magazines. She further states that:

We have a common purpose of announcing the existence of Turkish design identity and paving the way of Turkish manufacturers and designers by improving the image of Turkish design. Those that take place in this project, (...) are the ones who carry a social responsibility to their country. This project should actually have been organized and budgeted by the Turkish government. Because, it is an important work which also benefits the improvement of Turkish economy. (Mutlu, 2007b) (Translation by the author)

Hence, the group is founded on the self-initiative of a number of designers who are willing to share their design approach with the international design field and industry. When Mutlu first announced the establishment of group in the design appendix of *Radikal*, it included 25 members: Alev Ebuuzziya Siesbye, Ayşe Birsnel, Defne Koz, Ela Cindoruk, İnci Mutlu, Nazan Pak, Oya Akman, Seyhan Özdemir, Adnan Serbest, Alper

Böler, Arif Özden, Atilla Kuzu, Aziz Sarıyer, Bülend Özden, Can Yalman, Derin Sarıyer, Faruk Malhan, Koray Özgen, Kunter Şekercioğlu, Mehmet Ermiyagil, Ömer Ünal, Sefer Çağlar, Sezgin Aksu, Tanju Özelgin and Yılmaz Zenger (Mutlu, 2007a).

To accomplish the organization of such an extensive exhibition, the group first established a platform over the Internet to communicate with each other about possible projects for the development of Turkish design (Mutlu, 2007b). As they started to share their plans with other Turkish designers the size of the group increased to 36 designers with the participation of Ali Bakova, Aykut Erol, Erdem Akan, Gamze Güven, H. Demir Obuz, Jülide Arslan, Mehtap Obuz, Meltem Eti Proto, Mirzat Koç, Nil Deniz and Sema Obuz.

Afterwards, preparations for the exhibition speeded up and an execution council was devised to determine the products to be exhibited, consisting of Adnan Serbest, Aziz Sarıyer, Can Yalman, İnci Mutlu and Sezgin Aksu. Each designer was asked to send four of their products for the exhibition (Gökyay, 2007). However the decision of products to be exhibited was not based upon any particular criteria and the exhibition emerged as a collective effort without the aid of a curator (Mutlu, 2007b). The execution council only paid attention to maintain variety in the kind of the exhibited products to ensure that they did not consist exclusively of furniture (Gökyay, 2007).

After the completion of the selection process, the designers started to search for sponsorship to cover the high amount of required expenditures. At that stage Nurus, one

of the leading international office furniture companies of Turkey, came into the picture and undertook the organization of the exhibition with a sense of duty (Mutlu, 2007). Nurus is well known for its efforts to support the dissemination of a design culture in Turkey and up to date they have sponsored a number of design events.<sup>5</sup>

The preparations for the exhibition started by the end of November 2006 and were completed in a considerably short time (Gökyay, 2007). An exhibition area of nearly 400 square meters was hired by Nurus in Superstudio Piu in Zona Tortona, which was designed by Silvia Suardi and Sezgin Aksu.<sup>6</sup> Beril Tokcan conducted the graphic design works of the exhibition. The promotion of the exhibition was not limited to the press releases published by the design media. The event was also announced through the medium of the Chamber of Commerce in Italy and the Turkish-Italian Labor Council (Gökyay, 2007).

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<sup>5</sup> The 27th Graphic Works Exhibition by Graphic Artists Professional Organization (GMK) in June 2008, Arkimeet Zaha Hadid Conference held in İstanbul in 2007, Scale 1/X Conference in 2006 in İstanbul and UIA World Architecture Congress which was held in İstanbul in 2005. In addition the student exhibition of ITÜ Industrial Design Department, 5 Senses of İstanbul which also took place within Milan Design Week 2007 was sponsored by Nurus (Nurus, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Milan Design Week, originally named as Salone Internazionale del Mobile, is actually composed of two different exhibition areas. The first one is Milan Fair (Fierra Milano). In 2007 the area used for exhibition in Fierra Milano was 150.000 square meters for a sum of 1305 exhibitors 1097 of which consisted of Italian exhibitors and 298 non-Italian. The fair was visited by a total number of 270.000 including Italian and non-Italian public and journalists (Cosmit, 2008). The second exhibition arena consists of different districts in the city. Zona Tortona is one of the most popular exhibiton areas which has been used to organize parallel design events with Salone Internazionale del Mobile since 2002. In 2007 it included 150 exhibitions including 'İlk' in Milano, covering an exhibition area of 28.000 square meters in 50 different locations attracting attention of 80.000 visitors (Zona Tortona, 2008).

The endeavor of designers and Nurus was well received and the exhibition witnessed close attention of media, public and other designers. *'İlk' in Milano* received invitations from other esteemed design events in around the world such as *Paris via*, *London 100% Design*, *Rome*, *Florence* and *Palermo Design Week* (Balçiođlu, 2007a).

Apart from the international resonances of the exhibition, its results for the national stakeholders cannot be underestimated. The definition of its representative role as a social responsibility aiming at the economical development of Turkey and the improvement of the image of Turkey and Turkish design renders the exhibition a significant role in the formation of Turkish identity in design.



## CHAPTER III

### THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

Both the background and the foreground of *'İlk' in Milano* clearly indicate that the communication of Turkish identity was a major concern in the organization of the event. The organizers believed that industrial design practice in Turkey had matured enough to be acknowledged globally. As such, Turkish design could successfully take place within the existing national design styles in the market. Güran Gökyay (2007), the manager of Nurus, states that *'İlk' in Milano* was organized to show that Turkey, which is considered to be continuing contract manufacturing by Europe, has recently witnessed an awareness of design and could design quality products in various realms of manufacturing ranging from furniture to automotive. The organizers and the participants had a common purpose of paving the way of development for Turkish manufacturers and designers by improving the image of Turkey and Turkish design. Gökyay further emphasizes that:

Among other things, we also wanted to display our emotional aspect as a Mediterranean country. By naming the exhibition not as “Turkish design” but “Turkish touch in design” we wanted to emphasize that it is a touch, a style and a fashion by avoiding nationalizing design too much. What we basically should do was to show that we are capable of creating good design, developing good ideas and producing fine products and to present this capability not only related with Turkish-ness but also as a result of the aspects that we adopted from the rich geography and cultural heritage of Anatolia. (Gökyay, 2007, pp.38-39) (Translation by the author)

Despite the attempts to avoid issues of nationality, reference to “Turkish touch in design” entails a certain degree of mythicizing national identity. Indicating a magical touch fashioned by a genuine Anatolian culture of a great historical heritage, the approach requires reducing cultural identity to some stereotypical characteristics which are reflected through the objects. Moreover, the approach builds a naturalized link between national identity and design, implying a particular design approach peculiar to Turkish culture, which has its roots deep in the archaic, historical dimension of a national essence that is Turkish-ness. Implying continuity with an imagined past, this approach indicates a primordial, unique and autonomous Turkish essence that informs the nation’s design approach as well as its social practices. In this sense, it naturalizes the concept of nation by means of defining it in terms of a shared ancestral culture. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1994) argues, such a conception of cultural identity that is presumed to be deeply embedded in a shared history of a community comes to signify a collective identity defined in terms of “one true self.” This “oneness,” Hall underlines, emerges as the immutable kernel, the true essence that supplies the nation with its particular characteristics. It is such a conception of national identity that underlies the notion of Turkish identity as represented through the textual and visual discourse of *‘İlk’ in Milano*.

However, as leading cultural critics have long argued, nations are modern constructs that are constituted through representation, rather than being a priori, autonomous and self-evident entities. Benedict Anderson designates nations as “imagined communities,” which are imagined as timeless entities that “loom out of an immemorial past, and, still

more important, glide into a limitless future” (1991, pp.11-12). The emergence of print media, newspapers and novels in particular, and their dissemination by means of capitalist enterprises lies at the center of Anderson’s argument. Both forms of the print media are considered as the representative mediators through which imagining the nation becomes possible. According to Anderson, the notion of “homogeneous, empty time” as represented in these mediators is the core to imagine the nation as “a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (p.26), providing a sense of connectedness among the members of the community. In similar fashion, Eric Hobsbawm (1983) also refers to the necessity for nations to ground themselves in an ancient past to create the illusion of primordality and uses the term “invention of traditions” to refer to the modern origins of nations. As Hobsbawm argues, traditions that are supposed to be preexisting are actually recent constructs and are invented through “a process of formalization and ritualization” (p.4). Invented traditions signify “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (p.2). So, invention of tradition is an indispensable process to represent the nation as natural and timeless as well as to provide a sense of belonging to its members.

Hall (1992) points out that such a conception of cultural identity that is embedded in the nations’ timeless essence played a prominent role in the construction of individual identities during the modern period. Having a national identification was considered as an inherent necessity, as “a man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two

ears” (Gellner quoted in Hall, 1992, p.291). At the level of national identity, each nation could then be defined and differentiated from the others in terms of the cultural characteristics inherent in its inner core. Indeed, the notion of national culture has played a prominent role in the process of industrialization and modernity as it supplied the emerging nation states with distinctive cultural and political institutions such as national ministries of defense and education.

As Edward Said (1993) contends, conceptions of monolithic, unified and autonomous national cultures were made possible by colonization and further reinforced through the processes of decolonization. Nations were formed on the basis of imageries of an ancient past, which came prior to colonization, as in the way that ancient Greek culture has supplied the background for European nations or Islamic culture for the ones emerging in the Middle East. Said further argues that, this conception of culture refers to an intellectually sophisticated plane where culture comes to signify the “best that has been taught and said” in a given society’s reservoir of intellectual activities. Once detached from daily life and elevated to a dignified state of intellectual achievements, culture acts as a source of identity implying a true essence where a society has achieved its best and most important work.

To summarize, as the work of these cultural critics illustrate, modern notions of timeless, pure, autonomous identities that originate from a mythical past unify the nation under the umbrella of a true cultural essence. The search for this unity has been grounded on several factors such as ethnicity, language or religion, which have soon proved

insufficient foundations with reference to the point that nations indeed consist of a diversity of races, ethnicities, social classes and genders. As postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha puts it, “nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the minds’ eye,” and a unified definition of the nation emerges as a strong idea “whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force” (1990, p.1). Pointing to the impossibility of the idea of a culturally homogeneous and unified nation, Bhabha calls for the recognition of the “particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of nation” (1990, p.2). Following the idea that nations are unified under a dominant and hegemonic culture through violent conflicts, Bhabha points to the necessity of a shift in the focus from unity and homogeneity to diversity and heterogeneity, mobilizing notions such as transculturation, displacement and hybridity. Through such notions, national culture can be handled as a “discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity” (Hall, 1992, p.297). Since the 1990s, fixed notions of cultural identity have been replaced by a plurality of identities supplying a variety of possibilities for identification. Consequently, another form of cultural identification became possible: a form of identity that does not depend on an unchanging essence hidden in the mists of time. As Hall (1994) states:

We can not speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity,’ without acknowledging its other side. (...) Cultural identity in this second sense is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (...) Far from being grounded in the mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. (p.394)

This shift in the notion of cultural identity was further reinforced by the dynamics of globalization, by which national borders became more permeable as a result of the increasing mobility of people, knowledge, goods and cultures. This fluidity resulted in a sense of inter connectedness between cultures which was further invigorated by the advances in electronic media that made it easier and faster to convey information from long distances and thus created the feeling of a unified global society (McGrew, 1992).

Therefore, globalization made it possible to dislocate the notion of a unified cultural identity bounded within a national territory. Paradoxically, although this deterritorialization might indicate the fall of nationally defined cultures, nations continued to preserve their eminence. According to Anthony McGrew, the reason for this paradox lies in the dialectical characteristic of the process of globalization. Binaries of ‘universalization / particularization’, ‘homogeneization / differentiation’, ‘integration / fragmentation’, ‘centralization / decentralization’ and ‘juxtaposition / syncretization’ are all inherent in the idea of globalization:

By compressing time and space, globalization forces the juxtaposition of different civilizations, ways of life, and social practices. Thus both reinforces social and cultural prejudices and boundaries whilst simultaneously creating shared cultural and social spaces in which there is an evolving ‘hybridization’ of ideas, values, knowledge and institutions. (1992, p.75)

Time-space compression basically refers to the processes that reduce the prominence of distance through accelerating the time required to get over long distances by means of electronic media, advancements in travel and economic activities. As McGrew (1992) quotes, the term was first proposed by David Harvey to refer to the changes in experiences of time and space in the globalization process. Acknowledging that time-

space compression was primarily fostered by the dynamics of modernity, Harvey lays stress on the way that the process of globalization has intensified this compression. Creating an illusion of a shrank globe, compression of time and space detached cultural identity from limited national boundaries, and posed a concern for homogenization, which is believed to eradicate differences among cultures. This concern resulted in a situation, to which Jean-François Bayart (1996), refers as “re-invention of difference.” This phenomenon, gave rise to culturalist discourses of identity that assume culture as a closed and stable corpus.

In line with the attempts to reinvent difference, contemporary design discourse is widely built upon the assumption that links the practice of industrial design to cultural identity, resulting in the emergence of national design styles such as German, Japanese, Italian or Dutch design. As trade and manufacture started to transcend national borders and an international market emerged, products have been standardized lacking a distinctive character. Consequently companies resorted to the expression of national culture in design as a means of product innovation and differentiation in the global arena, where not only cultural identities but also products are considered to be homogenizing. Thus, the reconstitution of national identity through design became dependent on the historically inscribed imageries of largely stereotyped cultures.

The first accounts of national design have been implicated in the catalogue text of the Boilerhouse Project exhibition that took place in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1985 (Walker, 1989). In the catalogue, products from Britain, France, America, the

Soviet Union, Italy, Sweden and Germany were compared in terms of their differences based on national characteristics. The latter were explained through the hegemonic culture of a particular group within the country in question. For instance, design from West Germany was depicted in terms of a “thoroughly bourgeois country with thoroughly middle-class ideals – hard work, industry, hygiene and seriousness of intent,” which builds the core of West German style marked by “the extremes to which functional aesthetic is taken” (Walker, 1989, p123).

Once the field is divided into national categories, particular styles become representative of the culture that they are considered to belong. For example, Japanese design is associated with “compactness” and “simplicity,” which are characteristics considered to be inherent in Japanese culture and informed its traditional design understanding distinguishing it from other cultures (du Gay et al., 1997).

Similar to the evaluation in the Boilerhouse exhibition, a contemporary review by François Burkhardt attributes German Design such values as “rationalism” and “functionalism” which are presented as key values of the Enlightenment, which has influenced not only German design but also whole German culture (Burkhardt, 1989).

In the same way, in *‘Ilk’ in Milano*, Turkish design is depicted to be informed by a unified national culture. However the organizer and the participants of the exhibition refrain from using the term Turkish design. They prefer the byword Turkish touch in design as a result of their concern for rising nationalist implications. However, they all



reiterate that whether the style is named as Turkish design or Turkish touch in design, it should be appraised as a marketing strategy as other nationally named design styles. Nevertheless, however the style is referred to, it still puts Turkish culture as a constructive element at its center. The major concerns of the exhibition are: How Turkish-ness comes to act as a marketing identity and how it is utilized in the inventory of form-ing identity.

### **3.1. Marketing Identity**

The idea of Turkish design in *'İlk' in Milano* was justified as a marketing strategy. Gökyay (2007) underlines that Turkish designers have already created their own market in the country and are now ready to find new international clients. To accomplish this, the exhibition aimed at gathering the works of all accomplished designers to show the highly developed level of industrial design practice in Turkey. Only in this way the international stakeholders of the design field would be made aware of the sophisticated state of design practice in Turkey. Thus, for Gökyay this exhibition should not be considered as the elevation of individual designers in the global arena, but as an event which will help to indicate that Turkey sufficiently industrialized whereby designers were endowed with the possibilities to produce high quality work. In this context, the level of the achievements procured in the practical field of industrial design emerges as the manifestation of the development that Turkey has attained in the industrialization process. Any successful design, therefore, will not only be associated with the talent of its designer but also with the country which has supplied him/her sufficient resources to realize his/her talents.

Consequently, the design level of products comes to represent the country's industrial and economical advancements and modernity.

A good example of a similar attitude comes from the automotive industry. As Tim Edensor (2002) points out, cars are significant examples of symbolic objects marketed along their national attributes. Although each stage of car production, from manufacture of different parts to assembly, is now organized in different countries, the car industry is still associated with a nation's presumed characteristics, economic wealth and industrial development. Edensor gives the example of British car industry in which various brands like the Rolls-Royce and the Aston Martin have long stood for Britain's economic prestige rather than relating to any individual entrepreneurship or brand identity. These cars were also associated with aspects of so-called British-ness such as luxury, elegance and nobility, which distinguish them from German or American cars.

So, for products to be competitive and distinctive in the highly saturated markets, it is imperative to mobilize all the resources that will supply them with special characteristics. At this point, industrial design comes to play a prominent role in endowing products with their particular marketing identities. Throughout the history of industrial design, product variations within the market have been achieved regarding distinctions between age, gender and social class.<sup>7</sup> In time, design became an indispensable aspect of marketing

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the late nineteenth century the emphasis on sexual differentiation in design was at its peak since in that period men and women came to be strictly separated in political, commercial and social life. Miscellaneous design objects such as clothes, brushes and watches devoted to man and women drew on the existing imageries of social distinctions between the sexes (Forty, 1986). On the other hand, product differentiation regarding different age groups

strategies whereby products have been inculcated with added value that helps product differentiation in the market regarding the presumed tastes and choices of socially and culturally differentiated target groups.

As architectural historian Adrian Forty (1986) contends, this was the result of industrial design's dependence on capitalist economy whose success and continuity derives from the multiplication of objects in the market so as to generate perpetual need for new ones. Therefore, within the dynamics of capitalist production and consumer culture, objects acquire additional value beyond their functional attributes through the cultural qualifications imposed upon them such as femininity, youthfulness or any national peculiarity like British-ness or Turkish-ness. Once these cultural attributes are solidified, they grant the products with an exchange value in addition to their use value.<sup>8</sup>

According to cultural critic Jean Baudrillard (1988), consumption does not stand for satisfaction of needs. Rather than merely satisfying a preexisting need, objects create the needs. Baudrillard explicates the phenomenon of consumption through four different kinds of value systems. In addition to “the functional logic of use value”, and “the economic logic of exchange value” as defined by Karl Marx, Baudrillard proposes two

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came into the open in the modern period since in that period human life was no more perceived as a continuum but it was divided into different phases such as childhood, adulthood and old age. Product differentiation for different age groups was accomplished regarding distinct activities that were seen to fit for each stage (Heskett, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Use value and exchange value are terms employed by Marx in the *Capital* to explicate capitalist consumption mechanisms. Use value relates to needs. In its simplest description objects acquire use value as they meet needs. So, use value is defined in terms of objects' instrumental purpose, utility and usefulness. In determining the use value Marx does not distinguish between fundamental needs such as nourishment and secondary needs which are not as vital. Exchange value on the other hand is referred to as objects' economical value, their price in the market. Exchange value is central to the commoditization of goods within capitalist system (Marx, 1967).

more values which are “the differential logic of sign value” and the “logic of symbolic exchange.” Sign value is grounded on the basis of difference and it is the value assigned to the object by its user to symbolize social values such as taste, class and distinction. Symbolic exchange on the other hand is grounded on the notion of ambivalence. Gifts constitute an example for symbolic exchange which depends on the transgression of the economic. According to Baudrillard, it is the sign-value which plays a central role within consumerism. Through the interplay of signs, as seen in the process of advertising, the use value of products centering on functional aspects are transformed into sign values. In this process the objects acquire their commodity status in the capitalist market. Once function is detached from the object, the product gains its commodity status through its sign value. In other words the exchangeability of the product becomes dependent upon the role of the object as a social and cultural signifier.

In *The System of Objects* Baudrillard (1996) gives a clear example of the commoditization of objects. He refers to folkloric, exotic or antique objects as “marginal objects” placing them in “the non-functional system.” In the case of antiques, for example, the objects acquire a mythological characteristic as they represent the past.

The demand to which antiques respond is the demand for definitive or fully realized being. The tense of the mythological object is the perfect: it is that which occurs in the present as having occurred in a former time, hence which is founded upon itself, that which is ‘authentic’. (...) The functional object is efficient; the mythological object is fully realized. The fully realized event that the mythological object signifies is birth. (...) The antique object thus presents itself as a myth of origins. (Baudrillard, 1996, pp.79-80)

The temporal representation that the antiques fulfill as a sign of authenticity grants these objects the sign value within the market. When the dynamics of the global market is

considered, the demand for the nationally marketed design objects is similar to the demand for antiques. National design styles commoditize the myth of national origin wherein the archaic dimension of the national essence comes to act as a sign value. In this respect what was once sacred for the nations is set free in the global market to attract capital.

Postcolonial critic Arjun Appadurai (1986) refers to the process of commoditization through re-contextualization of particular objects in a value system as “commoditization through diversion.” As Appadurai suggests, things can be granted commodity status only in certain situations. In other words, things cannot be defined as commodities during their whole life cycle but they are filled with and emptied of commodity status at different times. In this respect, diversion emerges as a subtle mode of commoditization through which objects are extracted from their original contexts and replaced within temporally, socially and culturally irrelevant ones. As such, fashion, art and Western collections of authentic objects are significant examples of diversion:

In the high-tech look inspired by the Bauhaus, the functionality of the factories, warehouses, and workplaces is diverted to household aesthetics. The uniforms of various occupations are turned into the vocabulary of costume. In the logic of found art, the everyday commodity is framed and aestheticized. (...) It is the aesthetics of decontextualization (itself driven by the quest for novelty) that is at the heart of the display in highbrow Western homes, of the tools and artifacts of the “other:” the Turkmen saddle bag, Masai spear, Dinka basket. ... In all these examples, diversions of things combine the aesthetic impulse, the entrepreneurial link and the touch of the morally shocking. (Appadurai, 1986, p.28)

Likewise, it is this process of commoditization through diversion that made it possible to construct marketing identities for nations. The Italian-ness, Japanese-ness or Turkish-ness

of products are placed on the shelves of supermarkets, display windows of shopping malls and in the pavilions of the international design fairs ready to meet the consumers' demand for authenticity.

Thereby, as Robert Foster (1999) argues, the notion of national identity has been detached from the state and reterritorialized in the market by means of a shift from political ritual to commercial ritual. This means that narratives of nationality are now written via consumption practices whereby the choice for nationally promoted products comes to mark the feeling of national belonging and allegiance.<sup>9</sup> Reification of nationality as consumer brands sets the nationality open to interruptions in the market, raising the questions: "What if nobody buys? Or what if national consumer goods (...) become the property of foreign corporations? Or what if mainly non-nationals buy and so demand nationality in the forms that *they* prefer" (Foster, 1999, p.270)? Hence, the purchase of national brands creates an "alienated nationality" for the local consumer while for the foreign consumer it forms an "ironic nationality." What makes mass consumption that powerful as a form of imagining the nation is that it helps to render both co-nationals equal in terms of their social, cultural and economical statutes, and eradicates differences between nations:

for just as each bottle of Coke or package of biscuits replicates every other one, so too are individuals within the nation latently alike and equal. Similarly, just as Coke and Pepsi are equivalent but different brands of colas, collective

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<sup>9</sup> As Foster indicates "commercial technologies of nation making" can be traced back to the nineteenth century when national mail-order catalogues emerged as a mode of shopping. Another precedent that he points is the international fairs such as the Expo series the history of which also goes back to the nineteenth century and in which nations are marketed as brand-names.

individuals or nations are equivalent polities that differ only in their constituent elements. (Foster, 1999, p.272)

In short, in the markets in which the goods are marketed along with their national attributes, a new vocabulary to acknowledge or differentiate various national identities becomes possible through the practice of mass consumption. National identities enter in the shopping centers as brand names wherein they are represented in equal conditions within the formal unity of shopping mall decorations, but promoted through distinguishing national characteristics. Likewise, international exhibitions become the means to express this equivalence, while pointing to the formal differences between national identities (Foster, 1999). This is precisely the intention which can be observed in *'İlk' in Milano*. By representing the *Turkish touch in design* to the universal design field, the exhibition intends to underline that Turkey, like all the other countries -but especially the European countries- has constructed a worthwhile design culture as a result of the recent developments she has witnessed in the process of modernization. Design coming from Turkey is equal to the European models in terms of the quality of materials and production as well as the applied technology. Turkish design is distinctive due to its cultural heritage which is influential especially in the construction of its conceptual grounds, and this will be the basis of its contribution to the international design field. In this context the notion of Turkish culture forms the constituent element of this contribution based on an assertion of difference.

### 3.2. Form-ing Identity

In representing the products that are supposed to be nurtured by the richness of the Anatolian cultural heritage, *'İlk' in Milano* enables critical questioning of identity categories. The notion of Turkish design identity constructed through the discourse of *'İlk' in Milano* has the notion of a unified Turkish culture at its center. Through the exhibition's discourse, the latter is accentuated to be the rich reservoir of values to which Turkish design style owes its uniqueness and originality.

Such an understanding of Turkish culture, which is considered to inform the designers' approaches almost in an unconscious manner, implies the idea of an 'informing spirit' peculiar to the national culture. This concept of culture was defined by Raymond Williams as "a noun of *configuration* or *generalization* of the 'spirit' which informed the 'whole way of life' of a distinct people" (1981, p.10). According to Williams, this 'informing spirit' that might derive from various origins such as religious, ideal or natural, is considered to influence all sorts of social practices, particularly those of high culture such as art. The definition of culture on the basis of 'informing spirit' consequently gave rise to the acknowledgement of the plurality of cultures.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As James Clifford points out, alliance of the notions of culture and art took place in the early nineteenth century and they came to act as "strategies for gathering, marking off, protecting the best and most interesting creations of 'Man'" (1988, p.234). As he further underlines, the ideas of wholeness, continuity and essence have been essential in the construction of Western notions of culture and art. This inclusive use of the term indicating a unified category has underlied colonial agendas of culture that anticipate a hierarchy between high and low cultures or the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized.



The postcolonial notion of culture shifted the focus to cultural difference undermining the concept of a homogeneous, unified culture. As Bhabha puts it:

(...) cultural difference is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. (...) cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. (1994, p.34)

Thus, Bhabha contends that culture is not a holistic substance but is constructed through an ambivalent process of enunciation wherein the past is recontextualized in the present, and tradition is translated into modernity as a sign of an archaic origin. When conceptualized as such, the notion of a pure, unified culture is replaced by the idea of hybridity and heterogeneity of cultures. This transformation unsettles the conceptions of unified, traditional national cultures by placing an emphasis on the idea that culture is appropriated so as to give the illusion of homogeneity and wholeness to a heterogeneous and hybrid practice. Or as socio-cultural anthropologist James Clifford puts it, culture starts to be handled as a form of collecting within an art-culture system in which "diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement" (1988, p.231). This means that, through cultural collection what is worth excavating from the past is determined and revived in the present in order to imply the continuity of what is archaic, authentic and traditional. Through such a collection, cultural artifacts are recontextualized in the ethnographic museums, tourist markets or discursive frameworks.

Despite the critical work conducted, the notion of culture as the ‘informing spirit’ of a collective identity surpasses the notions of decentering and displacement brought by globalization. As Jonathan Friedman (2006) argues, this substantialist conception of culture is an operative aspect of globalization. “The objectification of culture is one of its instrumental aspects, the reduction of the practice of difference, of meaning, to a product, a text, a substance which liquefied can thence flow across all conceivable borders” (Friedman, 2006, p.404).

When considered within the context of the global market, companies have utilized such a reductionist concept to commoditize culture. So, this notion of culture has highly been influential in the construction of national design styles. It has also been central to the construction of the Turkish design discourse in *‘İlk’ in Milano*. However, as it is often reiterated, the way that the designers express Turkish culture through their work is never direct and intentional. Cultural expression is accomplished almost in an unconscious and intuitive way by designers:

The work of these designers exhibits a modernism based on geometric rationalism that merges informally with local qualities that have roots in the lifestyle of Istanbul, and to a lesser extent, Anatolian Turkey, Ottoman history and indirectly nomad culture. This relation is by no means direct. What I am speaking of is a cultural approach to design that still retains immediate and present, qualities of handicraft and domesticity that is a de facto approach to working with design objects in Turkey. Furthermore due to the way objects are manufactured, by a mix of factories and artisans, the way they are used, by a society with one foot in the Modern world and the other in pre-industrial agrarianism and all the shades in between, we see that the way design is produced in Turkey no matter how much organized by western ways of rationalism will always retain a palpable degree of sensational and symbolic abstraction that makes it unique. (Karakuş, 2007, p.26)

As evident in the statement above, the ‘informing spirit’ of Turkish culture is considered to be cultivated in the unique geography of the country, which has been subject to influences of various civilizations in different periods. So, it is considered to be the setting itself that gives the products designed in Turkey their characteristics, rather than any conscious attempt to create a common national design style. However, depiction of Turkish culture through the discourse of *‘İlk’ in Milano* reveals the fact that Turkish culture is a construct rather than a unified essence, since its portrayal is selective, whereby the influence of some cultures is overemphasized while others have been totally excluded. Turkey’s self-representation in *‘İlk’ in Milano* was based on two different roots that are presumed to underlie the national identity of the products: Geographical and ideological.

### **3.2.1. Geographical Emphasis**

In the context of *‘İlk in Milano’* Karakuş (2007) places a strong emphasis on the geographical context in which the designers produce their work. Through his analysis geographical emphases are utilized so as to explicate the distinctiveness of Turkish design within the global arena. He states that:

Designers working in the Turkish context today combine ideas with a degree of direct relevance that shows how a new world can be created out of the practice of the old transformed through the cipher or rationalism. It is an important statement in a period where Europe and West have seen the rise of superficiality and endless re-presentations of a media reality that threatens to degrade people’s connection to their real physical surroundings. The case for a new and present world intrinsically linked to our physical, social and mental reality is the case made by design coming out of Turkey and Istanbul today. It is an approach produced out of the immediate and always changing culture that flows through the unique geography where Turkey is found. It is the joining together of influences that are union of very old ways of living that still have relevance to our daily lives and new methods and technologies that work in parallel to these old ways. (Karakuş, 2007, p.26)

Design's relation to cultural identity is mostly explained through geographical references in the discourse of *'İlk' in Milano*. In the exhibition, the designers are divided into two groups regarding their place of work. The first group is named 'Turkish designers' and the second 'global Turks'. The former group consists of designers educated and working in Turkey who share a common approach influenced by cultural and historical awareness. These designers utilize exotic forms to reflect the local color while their materials, production techniques and aesthetics relate to a modern or Western context. However, this group is again divided regarding the level of abstraction applied in appropriating the local elements. The first group within 'Turkish designers' interpret cultural elements and concepts through such a subtle abstraction that the references to the local in their works remain indirect. The second group uses traditional forms in a direct manner that includes no reinterpretation except for contextualizing these forms in different materials and functions. On the other hand, 'global Turks' are composed of Turkish designers who were trained and/or work abroad, particularly in Europe and the United States. This group claims to offer an alternative perspective to the former with their direct references to Western rationalism informed by a personal vision rather than a collective cultural one.<sup>11</sup>

The division among designers based on their geographical background is rooted in the idea that being in Turkey, which is a relatively conservative country cautious against

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<sup>11</sup> Rationalization, as a precept of the modern design movement of the twentieth century, is used in the context of *'İlk' in Milano* in an inclusive manner that it comes to stand for all the underlying notions of modern design such as, rejection of ornamentation, emphasis on functionalism and purified and simple geometric abstraction.

outside influences, imposes particular conventions upon designers (Karakuş, 2007). The conservative nature of Turkey is considered to be more determinant on the style of ‘Turkish designers’ than the ‘global Turks’. In short, the physical existence of the designers inside or outside Turkey’s bounded territories is adopted to refer to the stylistic differences among two groups. Consequently, geography emerges as the territory in which national culture is embedded and cultivated. It is this cultural background and shared history that gathers all these designers under a collective style that is unique to Turkey. Hence, Turkish style derives from the great heritage and expansive geography of Anatolia, implying an eclectic and yet anachronistic culture containing influences from different periods and regions.

The cultural framework drawn through the discourse of *‘İlk’ in Milano* places a strong emphasis on the accumulations derived from the various civilizations that had lived on Turkey’s geography including the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires as well as various Anatolian Civilizations. Among these, the exhibition mostly focuses on the influence of Ottoman culture. While other resident cultures within Turkey’s geography are not specifically named, but congregated under the title of Anatolian civilizations, the inspirational role of Ottoman heritage is most of the time openly asserted. The emphasis on Ottoman heritage is mostly apparent in the selection of the products which include reinterpretations of the elements and concepts that are considered to be of Ottoman origin, such as water-pipe, fez, traditional Turkish bath and decorative elements extracted from Ottoman architecture. Implying continuity with an imagined imperial

past, the Ottoman heritage is adopted to take advantage of Ottoman cultural achievements in the construction of Turkish identity.

The impression of Islamic culture on the construction of Turkish design style can also be traced through the objects exhibited in *'İlk' in Milano*. Reinterpretations of forms like minarets and domes of the mosques, abstractions of symbols like the crescent and textual references with an Islamic emphasis through product names or product reviews are most frequently resorted strategies of Turkish design style.

The geographical location of Turkey at the crossroads of two continents is another influential factor in the inventory of Turkish culture. With regards to the position that Turkey occupies between Europe and Asia, Turkish culture is defined as to be exposed to the influence of both Eastern and Western cultures. Moreover, as a result of its split by the Bosphorus, Istanbul is considered to be the city where this tension between two cultures is most clearly manifest. Referring to the late 1990s, the time when the application of a local design approach started to gain popularity among Turkish designers, Karakuş depicts the lifestyle of Istanbul as follows:

A guest to Istanbul in this period was exposed to a high flying western oriented society with its resulting living spaces organized along lean, modernist lines. But at the same time this lifestyle was taking place within the context of the very old yet resilient streams of culture that had been resident in this geography for thousands of years. Designers very sensitive to being modern yet also responsible to their geography intuitively found design solutions that combined these multiple contexts in a natural balanced way. This balanced design was a catalyst enabling this new Turkish society to live a lifestyle which allowed individuals to feel comfortable in the many different contexts Turkey's geography occupied, be they Western, Eastern, modern or traditional etc. (2007, p.22)

The centrality of Istanbul and its lifestyle to Turkish design practice does not only derive from its strategic location between two cultures but also from the fact that it is the heart of all the economic and industrial activities of Turkey, including industrial design. That is to say, since most of the designers in Turkey work in Istanbul and are nurtured by its hybrid and in-between culture, their work and approach exhibit a commonality, which can form the basis to define Turkish design style in general. Moreover, even the designers who conspicuously reject the notion of national culture as an inspirational source acknowledge the special status of Istanbul as a factor that affects design practice, like Mehmet Ermiyagil, who states that:

I never thought Turkish culture had impact on my approach to design. But I always believe Istanbul is an extreme catalyser in developing ideas for its inhabitants. I feel that it is really difficult to describe what is quintessentially Turkish today, but Istanbul always provoke inquisitiveness for others with its well placed location at the region which takes advantages of global dynamics, that it what I believe which triggers the excitement. (Turkish Touch to Design, 2007, p.143)

Crafts and traditional arts are other resources utilized in definitions of Turkish design. John Heskett underlines that, “in the history of industrial design the twin themes of continuity and change constantly recur in different guises, and at times pronounced tensions have been created by their conflicting demands” (1980, p.7). According to him, this paradoxical state of industrial design actually derives from the emergence and development patterns of the field as a specialized practice. Industrial design emerged as a separate discipline as a result of division of labor in the production phase in tandem with the developments in industrialization. Heskett explains that although industrial design has originated from the craft tradition; “its emergence has not been simply a linear evolution from handwork to mechanical production, but, rather, a constant

diversification” (Heskett, 1980, p.7). As crafts and design were separated the former came to act as “residual phenomena, anachronisms and survivals from the past” (Walker, 1989, p.39) in the industrialized societies. However, in spite of advancements in mass production crafts have played an important role in the construction of the modern design movements which were lead by the Arts and Crafts movement. As John Walker highlights, crafts tradition still persists today many times as a sign of luxury, exclusiveness and nostalgia especially appreciated by upper income groups. Besides, crafts today still occupy an important place in both design and manufacture processes especially during the production of models or prototypes (Walker, 1989). In this context, creation of objects by means of processing new and modern materials with old and traditional craft techniques or mass-produced products that pretend to be craft objects are two popular approaches that can be observed in *‘İlk’ in Milano*. For example, Ali Bakova is a designer who devotedly works to revive the traditional crafts within the contemporary context. He states regarding his products exhibited in *‘İlk’ in Milano* that:

We are living in a fluid thought period; from culture to culture, discipline to discipline, role to mission, ability to expert... we cannot avoid the flow of anything. The meanings that we find inside the design products disappear in this fluid absence. This exhibition takes its reference from the craftsmen who are designers of the old times and the products of them in which they had reflected their souls and it is a wish to remember their names once again with the products that are prepared in the effort of “Homage to Turkish craftsman. (Turkish Touch to Design, 2007, p.137)

In short, it is possible to claim that the associations established with the traditional craft culture in Turkey are utilized to express the hybrid character of Turkish-ness which has one foot in the conservative past and the other on the progressive future. As Karakuş (2007) argues, the long tradition of craftsmanship and the forms that resulted from these



archaic production techniques continues to be an influential element in Turkish design too, because of Turkish society's presumed devotion to antecedent traditions. Hence, designers, and especially the ones in the furniture sector, are still considered to bear the influence of artisanal material and production techniques on their design decisions. To Karakuş, the impact of crafts on design is apparently observable in the "heavy, bulky geometries seemingly planted where the object has landed almost like a result of a natural occurrence (2007, p.23) especially in the work of 'Turkish designers'.

One last inspiration that informs Turkish style comes from the folkloric and daily practices of Turkish social life. In this respect, traditional Turkish handicrafts such as lacework and kilims or ritualistic practices such as drinking tea or Turkish coffee supply a wide reservoir of objects and motifs to be appropriated. As an apparent approach among the designers participating in *'İlk' in Milano*, these folkloric elements that are presumed to mark an authentic Anatolian culture are adapted to contemporary social, cultural and technological conditions. As social anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985) argues rituals, being symbolic entities, have a prominence in the construction of the socio-cultural borderlines of a community and thence manipulation of these symbols helps to intensify such borders and their expression. Thus all these folkloric and ritualistic objects, by transforming rituals into contemporary practices regarding the changes in technology, lifestyles and aesthetic understanding, place an emphasis on Turkish-ness by claiming to be symbolic representations of Turkish culture.

In short, Turkish design style as constructed through the textual and visual discourse of *'İlk' in Milano* is built upon the appropriation of historical, Islamic, artisanal and folkloric elements by the contemporary context, which could be named as modernizing the traditional. This can be considered as an oxymoron since modernity implies development and progress as opposed to the connotations of tradition with the past. However the oppositions are not limited to progress and tradition, but also point to the binary of East / West, the former representative of tradition and backwardness and the latter standing for modernity and progress. While Turkish design is then associated with the presumed progressive features of modern Occidental cultures, it is also marked by a motive to build a traditionally defined cultural identity associated with Oriental cultures. Such an approach inextricably raises questions of identity and cultural self-representation with an ideological emphasis.

### **3.2.2. Ideological Emphasis**

In a special issue of the international design magazine *Abitare* that is devoted to Istanbul, the city is presented with a special focus on its historical and cultural context. In this respect, the issue included examples from both historic and contemporary architecture of Istanbul such as the Hagia Sophia or the new shopping center Kanyon, examples from the design scene including an introductory text about *'İlk' in Milano*, and depiction of the city's cultural and daily practices. The introduction to the Istanbul file starts with a quote from Gündüz Vassaf on Istanbul:

Once, when Gods and humans mingled together, I was called Byzantium, named after Byzas, grandson of Zeus. Then came Constantine, who named the city after himself. Now the Turks insist on calling me by their own version of my Greek name *stin poli*, while the Greeks claim the name of their Latin

conqueror as one of their own. What is in a name? “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet”. But, no! I have had at least thirty names, from the New Rome to Islambol. Even the Swedes had a name for me. Now they say, I am between the East and the West. An identity crisis! Whose? Mine or theirs? Enough of this nonsense. Take the labels off and (just) look at me. (Vassaf, 2007, p.93)

Vassaf poetically points to the constructions of Turkish-ness as in-between the East and the West. Even though Istanbul and Turkey in general have gone through remarkable historical transformations, such a stereotypical conception still remains central in the construction of Turkish-ness through various discourses. Besides, such a introductory quote in an international magazine inextricably opens up questions in the cultural and ideological emphases in the construction of Turkish-ness through various mediators such as literature, architecture or design.

The cliché that posits Turkish culture as ‘a bridge between two cultures’ is substantially influential in depictions of Turkish-ness. Turkey is indeed geographically placed between two continents, connecting Europe and Asia through the Bosphorus Bridge. However, at the metaphorical level, the phrase implies the uniqueness of Turkish nature as in-between two distinct cultural essences, the East and the West. The metaphor contradictorily derives from both a double negation and a double affirmation. While Turkey is depicted as belonging to neither of the two cultures, it is also considered to be culturally influenced by both. So, it is the ebb and flow between the East and the West that Turkish-ness owes its genuine hybridity.

Similarly, the discussions regarding the construction of a unique Turkish design style have at their center the idea that Turkish design should have a specific identity avoiding both generic internationalism and simplistic vernacularism. Rationalist and functionalist principles of the international style are contested since they are believed to end in a situation in which all products resemble each other with no reference to a particular cultural identity. On the other hand, application of a local design approach through appropriation of the vernacular Turkish forms is considered to carry the risk of Orientalization (Karakuş, 2007). As a result of this tension between the international and local approaches, the modernist west and the traditional east, the role of Turkish design is designated as to achieve a balance between the two (Karakuş, 2007). In this respect, re-interpretation of stereotypical Turkish images in a modern context is the most popular approach adopted by designers. Furthermore, both international and vernacular design approaches evident in definitions of Turkish design are informed by an essentialist understanding of unified, homogeneous and authentic cultures.

As Said (1985) has explicated, Orientalism refers to a tradition of thought developed in the West, particularly in Europe, through the imperialist acquisition of the East in order to solidify and justify its domination. According to Said, Orientalism is premised upon the presupposed distinction between the East and the West and its principal products appear in various modes of representation including literature and the arts. These representations supply the vocabulary of Orientalism with stable, stereotypical, characteristics determined for the East, to domesticate their differences from the West. In this respect, the idea of tradition, backwardness and inferiority comes to be associated

with the essence of Eastern cultures, which is situated as alien to and “other” of the West.

With its emphasis on the distinction between the traditional East (Turkey) and the modern West (Europe), the understanding of Turkish culture as represented in *‘Ilk’ in Milano* remains in the Western discursive constructions of the East, wherein largely stereotypical imageries of Turkey have been sustained by the dominant discourses in the country. Even though Turkey has never witnessed such a colonial acquisition as in the countries examined in Said’s Orientalism like Egypt or India, the same Orientalizing imagery works for Turkey too. As art critic Hasan Bülent Kahraman (2002) argues, this is another form of Orientalism, which is specific to the communities that have experienced the modernization process in the context of Westernization.<sup>12</sup> This position, as Kahraman (2002) argues, points to the internalization of Orientalism through the Kemalist modernization process: it depends on the justification of the presumed backwardness of Turkish culture mostly because of its Islamic background. What is distinctive of the modernization process of Turkey is that it depends on a manifest Orientalism and Occidentalism at the same time, embracing the stereotypical imageries of both the East and the West. The process is thus marked by a contradictory attitude

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<sup>12</sup> To Kahraman, starting from the administrative reforms of the Tanzimat period that later gave birth to the movement of Young Turks and finally Kemalism, Turkey has always been in a paradoxical relationship with the West. This contradiction derives particularly from the Kemalist modernization process of Turkey, which aimed at constituting the country as a westernized society. Paradoxically, this process was built on the rejection of the West as part of the anti-imperialist project of nationalism. The positivist, evolutionary and technologist ideas of modernism were adopted in the modernization process of Turkey taking these notions as identical with the idea of Western civilization. Through such a reductionist attitude, modernity, West, Europe and civilization have started to be used as synonyms.

entailing externalization of both the East and the West, while western values of technology, progress and rationality are still adopted at social and cultural levels in order to break free from the Orientalist imageries about Turkey.

In the case of *'İlk' in Milano*, an exhibition devoted to the amendment of Turkey's negative image especially within Europe accompanied by a marketing motive, a similar kind of Orientalization takes place. By replacing the mythicized representations of the East within a context that is representative of the mythicized West, Turkish design discourse of *'İlk' in Milano*, is in conformity with the approaches that aim to synthesize Eastern and Western attributes. In other words, the Turkish cultural identity that is represented in the exhibition strictly reinforces the essentialist constructions of East and West. Consequently, this basic concept of Turkish design, drawing up the existing imageries of the West or Europe about Turkey, bears the risk of Orientalization that is rooted in the nineteenth century.

This re-contextualization of so-called Turkish images and elements points to the contradictory aspect of Turkish-ness manifest in the exhibition's discourse, which according to Brian Wallis, is a common paradox in all national exhibitions. As he (1994) argues, national exhibitions addressing an international audience are attempts of "repackaging the imagery" (p.267) of nations in order to improve their images in the international arena, whereby "individual nations are compelled to dramatize conventionalized versions of their national images, asserting past glories and amplifying stereotypical differences" (p.271). Wallis draws attention to a "self-Orientalizing"

attitude marked by the objects selected for such exhibitions and argues that this situation, whereby the stereotypical objects standing for national identity most of the time remain in the realm of Orientalist constructions of the country's image.<sup>13</sup>

Sıla Durhan (2006) also points to the self-Orientalizing mode that is manifest in international exhibitions. In the visual analysis that she conducted she focuses on the Turkish pavilions in the Expo fairs, starting from the first exhibition that Turkish Republic had entered in 1930 in Budapest to the last one participated in Hanover in 2000. As Durhan argues, in all these exhibitions, except for the one in Budapest, Turkey was represented through stereotypical imageries that are reminders of the tourist promotions of the country focusing on the representation of the richness of Turkish historical heritage. Only in the Budapest exhibition, an emphasis on a modernist representation was adopted as a result of the stimulation to express the modernization and nationalization process of the newly established republic. In all the other exhibitions representation of Turkey was held so as to meet the Orientalist expectations of the audience.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> According to Wallis, the exhibition entitled *The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent*, which was organized as a part of the cultural festival *Turkey: The Continuing Magnificence* in 1987-88 in Washington, D.C., Chicago and New York is an epitome of such a repackaging. When the exhibition was realized, Turkey was suffering from the negative images of herself that were mostly caused by the recent military coup, occupation of Cyprus, reactions against the Kurdish nationalist movement and the reemergence of the problems regarding Armenian genocide. Therefore, the exhibition aimed at demolishing Americans' probable negative images about Turkey through a rehabilitated image, "drawn from an epoch of the Turkish past venerated in the West: the renaissance of the arts during the reign of the Ottoman emperor Suleyman I" (Wallis, 1994, p.271).

<sup>14</sup> As Durhan informs, In the nineteenth century, in Turkey pavilions the focus was on the representations of Ottoman accumulations. However, with the twentieth century a contradictory mode of representation started to take place. Although the pavilions of the century were marked

*'İlk' in Milano* is significant as a result of its concern in reestablishing a respectable Turkish identity and promoting its level of westernization. One of the participant designers, Aziz Sariyer (2007) states that the exhibition will favor the country underlining that “ An exhibition of Turkish designers, which will be realized before Greece, a country which joined the European Union before Turkey, within the most important design week of the world, is a prosperous distinction of Turkish state.” In a similar fashion, Ali Bakova draws attention to the role of the exhibition in the revision of Turkey’s image:

A process called “Becoming Western” has been lived and still in progress. It is the same western culture, which has been valorizing design products of the past and present economically, ethically and esthetically and preserve these products cultural legacy of humanity. Our fear as designers, who are challenged by problems of identification as an Eastern and (non)belonging to the Western in this world we live, has created an unsolved problem caused by an instinctual inhibition of not being able to produce what we have designed. I am hoping that our image of “the Eastern at the door” might shift its focus; at least the outcome of the exhibition should be as such. (Bakova, 2007)  
(Translation by the author)

Aiming at portraying a rehabilitated image of Turkey for the evaluation of a Western audience, the exhibition includes cultural artifacts that are transformed into contemporary design products by the use of cutting-edge technologies. However, it is apparent that such an attempt limits the scope of identity to stereotypes, entailing

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by abuse of the Ottoman historical and cultural elements, Ottoman was largely defined as the Other of the Turkish Republic. Such an attitude is observable in the use of sultanate rowboats in the 1998 Lisbon exhibition or a simulation of mosque domes with lighting units in 1970 Osaka exhibition. In 1939 New York exhibition juxtaposition of the stereotypical historical elements with anti-Orientalist imageries such as the collages entitled *Toward Democracy* or *Man and Art* reveals the contradictory attitude of Turkey’s representations built on the tension between the modern and traditional. To accomplish a modernist representation in the Budapest exhibition, rather than utilizing historical or regional references, the pavilion was built with the signs of modernization and hence salvation from the Oriental imageries represented through such objects as Atatürk bust and photos of new Turkey.



selection of objects to match existing imageries about presumably unified cultures. Following postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak's (1990) argument, it can be proposed that this representative status undertaken by the exhibition results in a situation in which Turkish image comes to be constructed with reference to hegemonic conceptions of the West. As Spivak suggests, "the question of 'speaking as' involves a distancing from oneself" (p.60) whatever generalization self might signify and represent. Thus, 'speaking as' Turkish to a hegemonic Western audience ends in an essentialist rhetoric about a homogeneous Turkish cultural identity wherein the attempt to reestablish Turkish-ness leads to speaking of "ourselves" with the voice of the West.

To summarize, the construction of Turkish design on the basis of Turkish culture through the discourse of *'İlk' in Milano* is a strategic process of commercializing national identity. As a result of the driving forces of the global market and the historical background behind the formation of the Turkish nation, definitions of Turkish-ness is built upon such antagonisms as modern and traditional. The next chapter focuses on the visual strategies utilized by designers to represent this antagonism.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION

Industrial design is an influential representative practice as well as involving a prominent commercial dimension. The industrially designed product is arguably embodied by the conceptual framework behind it. In this respect, both historical and contemporary myths come to act as efficient resources to be appropriated and communicated through the visual vocabulary of design. As Forty puts it, “Unlike the more or less ephemeral media, design has the capacity to cast myths into an enduring, solid and tangible form, so that they seem to be reality itself” (1986, p.9). As Forty argues, while promotional media like the audio-visual advertisements inculcate myths, designed elements embody those myths through such elements as color and form. For example, as the contemporary myth of the fun and cheerful office work is inculcated through advertisements, the myth becomes reified through the office furniture with vivid colors and amusing, vigorous forms. Consequently, the myth of fun office work as pleasure activity comes to be perceived as natural.

The Barthesian use of the term ‘myth’ can also be utilized to elucidate the concept of national design styles through which presumed national identities are naturalized. As

literary theoretician and semiotician Roland Barthes (1972) clarifies, myth is “a type of speech,” wherein meanings are assigned to things through historical practices rather than emerging naturally. Myth relies on language to construct its own system of signification, which is manipulated historically.<sup>15</sup>

Barthes explicates the way myths work through the example of Basque chalets wherein they come to represent a reductive notion of national identity within a specific context. In this respect, Basque chalets which could not be made accountable to form a vernacular style when confronted in the Basque country in Spain, suddenly become representatives of “basquity” in Paris. This is because all specific architectural elements of Basque chalets like the asymmetrical roof, red tiles and dark brown half-timbering are appropriated with an intention to impose the meaning basquity upon the chalet. The chalet becomes impoverished as the history behind its presence is stolen from it to be restored within the mythical system with a new history (Barthes, 1972).

The mythical system proves an effective tool to understand the construction of national design styles. This nationalized representation requires reduction of the national culture into its basic, essential characteristics. Hall (1997) refers to this process as ‘stereotyping’ in which essential and basic cultural characteristics of a specific group are appropriated so as to naturalize the notion of cultural identity. As Hall contends, stereotypes are

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<sup>15</sup> According to Barthes, when the sign of the language system that is composed of the signifier and the signified enters into the mythical speech, it comes to act as the signifier of a second-order system. At this level, when the signifier of the myth becomes open to signification again by the signified of the myth, the historical knowledge regarding the object of the myth enters the scene distorting the meaning of the signified. Therefore, mythical signification is not arbitrary as the linguistic sign, but it is always constructed through analogy and motivation (Barthes, 1972).

'essentialized', 'naturalized' and 'fixed' versions of types, which are "simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized" (Dyer quoted by Hall, 1997, p.257). Stereotypes take on these characteristics and "exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to the eternity" (Hall, 1997, p.258). In the case of national design styles, stereotypical depictions of national cultures or stereotypical archetypes are appropriated so that they can be frozen in time and hence made open to interpretation at the mythical level. Once the products are deprived of all their economical, social and historical backgrounds through the national myth, the Italian-ness, Japanese-ness or German-ness of products enter into circulation in the global market. In *İlk' in Milano*, it is the myth of Turkish-ness that various designers reify through various representative strategies. What is common to all those different interpretive strategies is the emphasis on modernity. As Karakuş (2007) insistently asserts, "modernism is the goal" in the works of each designer working in the Turkish context, independent of any individual design approach. As he further emphasizes:

In the different frameworks these designers occupy, we see in the practice of design in Turkey today an unresolved relationship between the universal cultures of rational modernism as exemplified by design education or mass production on the one hand and autochthonous culture, elements of local condition that are historical, traditional or environmental on the other. (Karakuş, 2007, p.26)

What is common in all the strategies of representation peculiar to Turkish design is the interaction of the traditional with the modern and the vernacular with the universal. With its emphasis on typical artifacts as icons of historical heritage, tradition and national culture, such an alliance is primarily premised upon the manifestation of cultural difference. While an imagined past and a mythical heritage supplies the stereotypes to

distinguish between the Turkish and its others, these stereotypes also become the mediators through which difference is experienced and the national myth is sustained. On the other hand, enabling the negotiation between the poles of the modern and the traditional implies advancement of the traditional by new means. In short, in the case of Turkish design, modernist design ideals form the aesthetical framework, while the notions of tradition and history come to form the conceptual framework and offer the formal vocabulary. Through these modernist interpretations designers have adopted various strategies, which have been documented by a number of scholars in the field.

Harun Kaygan's (2006) analysis on the visual and formal vocabulary of Turkish design style is framed by the approaches that are utilized to appropriate stereotypical archetypes that are related to Turkish culture. In this respect he defines two different strategies that are widely used in Turkish design. The first one is 'interpretation' and it is simply defined as 'processing' of these elements. In other words, 'interpretation' relates to the use of cultural elements directly as they are as representatives of nationality. This can either be 'reproduction' of significant local objects such as 'Balıklı Parfüm Şişesi' by Paşabahçe which was ornamented with Seljuk and Ottoman patterns or 're-application' of decorative elements and motifs such as çini, Ebru or Ottoman calligraphy on product surfaces. The second strategy determined by Kaygan is 'modern interpretation', which is identified with the redesign of the presumably authentic Turkish objects through rationalization, simplification or application of novel materials.

Analysis conducted by Değer Demircan (2005) focuses on the craft tradition in Turkey and he traces the transformation of crafts and their influence on design practice in Turkey. His classification includes two main groups that are craft objects and mass-produced objects. The first group includes the subgroups that are: ‘craft objects, with traditional appearance and for traditional function’, ‘craft objects, with traditional appearance and for new functions’ and ‘designed craft objects for new functions’. The second group of mass-produced objects includes designed objects that appropriate the objects that are traditionally produced by craft techniques and is divided into three subgroups with regards to the transformation offered in their forms and functions by mass-production. These are: ‘designed objects with traditional function, traditional appearance and technological adaptations’ (e.g. Teflon coated Turkish coffee pot and stainless steel teapot in usual forms), ‘designed objects with traditional function, novel appearances and technological adaptations’ (e.g. the electrical samovar and electric powered tea-pot), and ‘designed objects with novel appearances inspired from traditional culture and for both traditional and new functions’ (e.g. redesign of water-pipe or Turkish coffee pot with totally modern appearances).

Balcıoğlu’s (1999) analysis derives from a broader conception encompassing both visual and textual strategies that are utilized to appropriate Turkish culture. His classification includes six different strategies that are enumerated as follows:

*Neological approach:* to name an object after a Turkish city, hero, location, etc. (...) Not the making but the title of the object is signifier and endeavour to position a ‘modern and global’ product into a national context by naming it through which it explicitly claims ownership.

*Morphological application:* to pick up a cultural, historical, traditional or even popular ‘shape’ and bestow it upon objects for decorative purposes (...)

*Topographical execution:* to bequeath a three dimensionality therewith a function to a two dimensional 'shape' or a fragment of a pattern derived from historical ethnographical or architectural sources (...)

*Formal interpretations:* to give a new form or to create a new product from a known item by developing, mutating, distorting, altering, modifying or adjusting them is not what we encounter often. (...) Products falling in this category continue to reflect the main form with some degree of respect.

*Allegorical interpretations:* to give a new function to an old object and deviate its known feature (...) The alterations made may employ new, in some cases metaphorical, allegorical and/or ironical depth subordinating the function by meaning embossed. (...)

*Conceptual inspirations:* to originate ideas from cultural norms, beliefs, social behaviours and actions, rather than a concrete object (...) (Balcioglu, 1999, pp.67-68)

Karakuş (2007) constructs one last classification which is also central to the construction of two different groups of designers as 'Turkish designers' and 'global Turks' in *'İlk' in Milano*.<sup>16</sup> Hence Karakuş's reference is directly *'İlk' in Milano* whereas the former ones refer to Turkish design in general. Besides, his classification differs from the former ones as he does not take the objects as the center of his analysis but prefers a classification based on different approaches adopted by designers regarding their geographical location. Hence Karakuş distinguishes between two different approaches based on the cultural context in which designers are educated and produce their work. The two strategies he defines are both in search of contemporaneity, but one informed by cultural aspects and historical awareness and the other by personal vision. The former approach is referred to as 'geometric abstraction' that is utilized by the group 'Turkish designers'. 'Geometric abstraction' is defined as an approach that "exhibits a simplicity that is connected to subtle yet ingrained cultural practices of abstraction infected by rationalist epistemology of the west mixed with the informal, nomadic practices of the

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<sup>16</sup> In the section 3.2.1. Geographical Emphasis, this classification was used to indicate the geographical basis of identity construction. Here, the focus is on the design approaches of these groups.

east” (Karakuş, 2007, p.24). On the other hand, in the work of ‘global Turks’ the influence of “Western rationalism” as a result of their direct exposition to Western culture “waters down” the traces of the ‘geometric abstraction’ that is peculiar to the work of ‘Turkish designers’ (Karakuş, 2007, p.25). So, rather than being local examples, the work of these designers fall in the canon of universal style. Karakuş points to two different approaches with regards to the level of abstraction applied to autochthonous forms, however he does not go into details in exemplifying ‘geometric abstraction’ and hence does not suggest sub-divisions regarding the functional, visual or technological adaptations.

To summarize, classifications conducted in the field all deal with the notion of Turkish identity in design within different frameworks and through different perspectives. While Kaygan’s, Demircan’s and Balcıoğlu’s classifications refer to Turkish design practice in general, Karakuş’s analysis is relatively limited and he focuses on *‘İlk’ in Milano* as the reference point. On the other hand, Kaygan and Balcıoğlu place their classification in a cultural context. Different from Kaygan, who seems to focus on the national context, Balcıoğlu places the notion of globalization and the dynamics of the international market at the center of his analysis. Demircan exhibits an interest on the transformations of techniques and forms peculiar to the tradition of crafts and he rather conducts a formal analysis through which a number of strategies regarding the functional and visual transformations craft products are determined. What is significant in Karakuş’s classification is the approach premised upon the cultural distinction between the West and the East as exemplified through the binary of “rational west” and “informal east”



and marked by internalization of these Orientalist conceptions. In the following section various approaches to the utilization of Turkish culture is adopted as the basis to understand the identity discourse in *'İlk' in Milano*. The classification will encompass functional, technological and aesthetical factors based on the expression of cultural difference through the modernization of the traditional under the following themes: Transformation, Re-contextualization and Implication.

#### **4.1. Transformation**

Transformation refers to the adaptation of objects that are presumed to be peculiar to Turkish cultural traditions to contemporary social and technological conditions and aesthetical conventions. Designers who follow this line borrow an exotic object that reflects the local color and redesign it so as to replace it within the contemporary context in terms of its materials, production techniques, aesthetics and function.

Once these objects are marked as traditional cultural entities, they function as representatives of national identity. Consequently, rituals, the repeated customs that reinforce the sense of identity within a community, supply a wide range of resources to be appropriated through the strategy of transformation.

Şebnem Timur a scholar of industrial design (2001), placing the rituals of drinking tea and smoking water pipe at the center of her analysis, refers to transformed versions of the latter as specific versions of “alternative modernities.” Underlining the role of these social practices in creating a sense of cultural identity, she argues that the

transformations of these practices along with their related objects supply an alternative practice of modernity, which is different than the Western model. In this context, transformation emerges both as a way to revive tradition and as a means to produce “object of divergence, within the convergent and dominant lifestyles dictated by the societal modernization” (Timur, 2001, p.116). For instance the ritual of drinking tea, which is considered to be a tradition of great significance in Turkish culture, has resulted in the establishment of tea as a national drink just after the government has promoted its production in the 1930s (Timur, 2001). In time, it has developed its own rituals of brewing and consuming, providing possibilities to extract and transform archetypal objects that are presumably expressive of Turkish-ness.

In the context of *‘İlk’ in Milano*, the rituals of drinking tea, rakı and Turkish coffee and smoking water pipe along with their associated customs and objects provide the most frequently utilized resources of transformation. In this respect, the traditional tea glass, rakı glass, Turkish coffee pot and water pipe emerge as the types of objects that are chosen for this strategy. Moreover, the long tradition of handicrafts in Turkey provide a fruitful resource to be excavated as exemplified through the transformation of such vernacular objects as kilim or İznik ceramic tiles.

At one level, this approach uncritically adopts the technologist aspects of modern design, which are driven by advances in material and production technologies. What is inherent in this approach is the idea to reflect the character of the age that we are living in and to underline the idea of progress. Therefore, on one hand it places a strong emphasis on the

use of leading-edge technologies and high-tech materials in the production process, while on the other hand it requires simplicity, clarity and unity in the form of the object. Having established these formal conventions as a common characteristic, the strategy of transformation exhibits different levels of application in the way that stereotypes are altered in terms of their style, function and usage.

#### **4.1.1. Formal Transformation**

Transformation at this level takes place only in refinement and simplification of the forms to obtain a novel and modern appearance. It may either refer to transformation of prototypes or surface decorations. The original functions of prototypes that are transformed are preserved. However, it is also common for this level of transformation to offer some additional functional gestures in order to improve product usability.

By stating that “one of the goals in my design is to reinterpret the traditional elements of Turkish culture through contemporary design, the reinterpretation of all colors and delicacies that can be found within this geography” (quoted by Karakuş, 2007, p.95), Faruk Malhan falls in line with this approach. The İstanbul series by the renowned designer, which consists of different types of glasses including the redesign of the traditional tulip shaped tea glass and rakı glass, can be counted among the best examples of this type of transformation. In this series there has been no material or technological change in the objects. For example, compared with the traditional tulip shaped tea glass (Figure 1), its İstanbul series version (Figure 2) seems to have more refined lines. The curvilinear form of the traditional glass is smoothed in order to acquire a purified

simple geometry. Additionally, the re-designed product has a notch at its base different from the traditional one. The notch helps the glass to fit stably on its saucer, which helps to provide the product and its companion with a functional and aesthetical unity.



Figure 1 Traditional tulip shaped tea glass  
(Source: <http://www.turkishculture.org/pages.php?ParentID=11&ID=53>)



Figure 2 İstanbul Series tea glass by Faruk Malhan  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/farukmalhan.php>)

Kaygan (2007) refers to the curved outline of the traditional tea glass as the 'oriental curve' and considers it as an important element in what he calls Turkish design iconography. According to his analysis, the level of refinement and simplification in the curves come to act as a sign of both designed-ness and modernity. Hence, the İstanbul Series version's difference from the traditional tea glass lies in its extended and simplified curve, which still supplies the associations with the traditional one. Kaygan further contends that, what is significant in the 'oriental curve' in terms of an iconological analysis is that, when compared with the geometrical purity of the modern design models, curvaceous lines evoke Orientalist connotations through the binaries of modern and traditional, rational and irrational and masculine and feminine. While the 'oriental curve' is associated with the irrational, feminine and traditional east and its ornamented and curvaceous styles, the level of transformation that the curve has undergone elevates it to the canon of rational, masculine, modern western styles. These rather reductive generalizations have a central role in conceptualizing the visual framework of formal transformation.

Oneman, is the name of a redesigned Turkish coffee pot (Figure 3) by Aykut Erol, and it is a product that can also be placed within the line of formal transformations made on behalf of modernization.



Figure 3 Oneman by Aykut Erol  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/aykuterol.php>)

The product is designed in three different sizes in the form of a truncated cone. Different from the traditional coffee pot, none of the three different sizes have an individual handle assembled on the body, but there is one single demountable, red, conical handle common to all three products, which is attached to the chosen version while at use. Even though this functional design gesture does not provide any ease of use or storage, it can still be considered as a sign of designed-ness in order to distinguish the product from its rivals. With its supplemental handle, purified and geometric form and glossy material finish, Oneman implies a break from the traditional pot, which has an organic form with a handle, integrated to the body.

The sofa entitled Sekü (Figure 4), which is a modern interpretation of the traditional Turkish furniture sedir (divan) by Faruk Malhan, is another example.



Figure 4 Sekü by Faruk Malhan  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/farukmalhan.php>)

In this case, it is not as inevitable to establish the link between the traditional product and its transformation as it is in the other products within this group, unless the designer makes a statement to supply the link. Hence, it constitutes an example wherein the aesthetical transformation is accompanied by textual strategies. In Sekü, as elucidated by Karakuş (2007) the associations with sedir are established through the low base and broad depth of the sofa. In addition, the use of soft cushions placed on a hard body makes references to the conventional form and usage of sedir. The archetypal product has been redesigned with contemporary materials in a simple, minimalist form to combine Turkish and Western attributes.

An example for the formal transformation of surface decorations is the redesign of ceramic tiles named İznik (Figure 5) by Defne Koz. Koz, states that “my idea of design is influenced by my training in Ettore Sotsass’ studio, by the combination of my Turkish and Italian culture and by my curiosity for very different product types. My interest spans from humanizing new technologies like digital audio systems to rediscovering the

tradition of hand made ceramics” (quoted by Karakuş, 2007, p.75). So, since the designer has been exposed to both Italian and Turkish cultures during her education and practice, it becomes even more natural and inevitable for the designer to internalize both Eastern and Western attributes through her design.

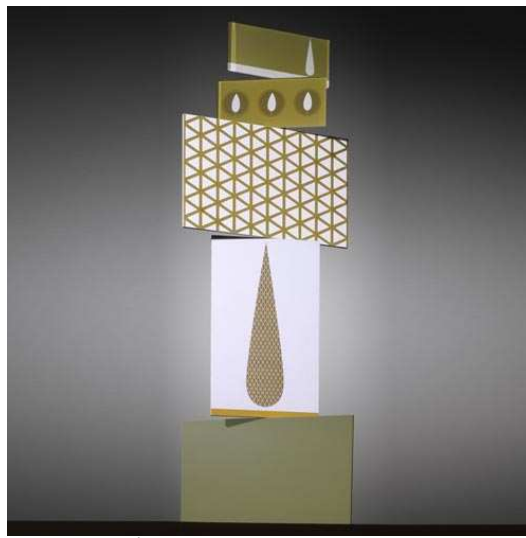


Figure 5 İznik ceramic tiles by Defne Koz  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/defnekoz.php>)

In İznik tiles, Koz extracts the surface decorations used on the traditional ceramic tiles in order to acquire more rationalized geometric patterns. In this context, some characteristic traditional motifs have been reduced to their basic geometries to supply the refinement. In addition, the reinterpreted abstract patterns on the monochrome tiles are remarkably different than the combined color schemes of their traditional counterparts. Thereby, Koz blends contradictory attributes in the product by transforming a highly decorated and almost arabesque object into a non-figurative, abstract and modern one.



#### **4.1.2. Technological Transformation**

Technological transformation refers to the utilization of technological applications both in the production phase of products and in the products' function. Similar to formal transformation, in this case the original functional purpose is preserved. However, the functional innovations realized through the use of certain technological applications shift the traditional usage of the appropriated product. Use of electric power in the operation of a traditional product provides a popular example for this kind of transformation. To be sure, technological transformation does not exclude formal transformation.

Kunter Şekercioğlu, whose work falls into this category states that “Turkish design exists where the liberal/logical west merges with the conservative/emotional east, feeding on the dualities of Turkey’s geography” (Karakuş, 2007, p.111). It is noteworthy to underline that the designer himself internalizes the presumed Eastern qualifications uncritically as in the way that he accepts and adopts Western associations. In this respect Şekercioğlu, like all the others mentioned within this group, takes Eastern and Western attributes as inert, natural facts rather than accepting them as constructs of a hegemonic Western discourse. Consequently, he reinforces and sustains the Orientalist discourse, rather than disrupting it. Hence, at least at the discursive level, contrary to the harmony that is aimed to be achieved by means of the strategy of transformation, the distinction between the qualifications of Eastern and Western becomes fairly intensified.

Cezve (Figure 6), an alternative redesign of the Turkish coffee pot by Şekercioğlu, is a product launched for the domestic market. The product is re-designed to preserve the

essence of the traditional product in terms of both its appearance and provision of the means for the conventional cooking style “as a housewife has learned to cook it from her mother, continuing to boil the coffee after she had distributed the froth to the cups” (Şekercioğlu, 2005, p.155). However, the stove as the conventional heat source is replaced with electric power in order to adapt the product to the advances in technology and change of lifestyles. The glossy finishes of the material and the lean organic lines of the body on the other hand refer to a formal transformation of the traditional coffee pot by means of purifying and modernizing its appearance. So the product can be considered as a hybrid object that recontextualizes the traditional in a contemporary fashion.



Figure 6 Cezwe by Kunter Şekercioğlu  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/kuntersekercioglu.php>)

On the other hand, naming the product as Cezwe, marks an affinity with the Turkish word for coffee pot ‘cezve’, but the Turkish letter ‘v’ in the word is replaced with ‘w’,

which reflects the intention to harmonize Eastern and Western attributes that is inherent in all the objects in this category, - this time at the discursive level.

Nar (Figure 7) is meant to be ‘a local product for the global market’ (Demircan, 2005). In this respect, the traditional water pipe, which is a craft product, has been redesigned to meet industrial mass production requirements. Hence, this product is an example in which the production of the traditional object is technologically altered. In terms of the product’s appearance, although there have been some refinements and simplifications in the form, the traditional structure of the product consisting of different parts made of different materials and its curvaceous lines has been preserved.



Figure 7 Nar by Kunter Şekercioğlu  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/kuntersekercioğlu.php>)

Şekercioğlu avoided making a plugged version of the water pipe, since it meant to disturb the whole ritual of smoking, which requires the use of coal to fire the tobacco and whose history goes back to hundreds of years. Instead, he just aimed at reviving the traditional in a modernized, contemporary context through some adaptations in its appearance and production technology (Demircan, 2005).

#### **4.1.3. Functional Transformation**

Functional transformation is framed by appropriation of stereotypical objects in order to bestow them with totally new and diverse function. The model that undergoes functional transformation may originally be either a three-dimensional object or a two-dimensional decorative pattern or motif. Functional transformation of the latter generally requires the decorative element to be extruded into a solid form. In this type of transformation new materials also replace the original ones of the model. Like technological transformation, functional transformation of the stereotypes also requires a formal affinity with the stylistic precepts of modern design.

It is possible to trace such an approach in the bench entitled Grandbazaar (Figure 8) by

Erdem Akan, who explains his design philosophy as follows:

My design philosophy is based on tension between all opposites: such as fabricated vs. hand-made; natural vs. artificial and new vs. old, but especially between eastern culture and western culture. For me design should balance or amplify this tension. Playing with clichés and provocation are the methods I like. I believe in necessity of Turkish Design ecole and therefore currently conduct research and design contemporary products with Turkish and Islamic culture flavor. (quoted by Karakuş, 2007, p.91)



Figure 8 Grandbazaar by Erdem Akan  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/erdemakan.php>)

The bench, as an imitation of vernacular Turkish carpets bears highly Orientalist connotations. Because of the way that the carpet is lifted up from the floor with a slightly applied curvature it also resembles a flying carpet, the popular item of Eastern stories.<sup>17</sup>

Common to all these objects of transformation is the stimulation to express cultural identity through two contradictory emphases: One on modernity and the other on tradition. The engagement with the concept of tradition ends in the reiterated use of stereotypical objects as markers of national identity. On the other hand, tradition comes to the scene as the opposite of the idea of progress aligned with the antagonism of the

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<sup>17</sup> *One Thousand and One Nights*, the collection of folk stories from different historical and geographical Eastern civilizations such as Arabia, India, Persia, Egypt and Mesopotamia, is a distinctive example for the Eastern stories utilizing such stereotypical elements in storytelling. Among those stories *Sinbad the Sailor* can be marked as the most popular one.

Orient and the Occident. However, transformation as a strategy aiming at the renewal of tradition, actually exhibits a paradoxical attitude towards both Oriental and Occidental attributes. The strategy is built upon the integration of both attributes, while it also requires the rejection of a precise state of belonging to the Orient or the Occident. It rather points to a condition, where involvement with tradition exhibits the intention to preserve and reflect the national essence 'as it is', while involvement with the concept of modernity reflects the will to represent a national identity 'as it is expected to be'.

#### **4.2. Re-contextualization**

This is the strategy that utilizes local objects or motifs in a direct manner and involves recontextualizing these forms in different materials and usage. Different from the strategy of transformation, imitation requires reproduction of local elements without any refinement, abstraction, simplification or technological adaptation. However, this strategy is also driven by the same intention as transformation, that is, expression of Turkish-ness through references to Turkish culture by means of metonymical representation. A variety of local objects and motifs that are chosen for this strategy stand for Turkish-ness reducing the various practices of Turkish culture that is multiform and heterogeneous into a product. In other words, re-contextualization does not only offer technological innovations and rationalization of forms but it also ends in the reification of largely mythicized cultures. As the historical heritage and traditional culture is objectified through the strategy of re-contextualization, the products come to act as the markers of cultural difference, similar with the strategy of transformation.

As a part of this differentiation process, the associations with the local in *'Ilk' in Milano* are established through geographical, historical and Islamic connotations and through references to daily or vernacular practices. The series of products considered within this group consist of objects that are reminders particularly of the Ottoman period such as the fez; some decorative elements extracted from Ottoman architecture; objects and symbols related with Islamic culture such as the skullcap specific to the pilgrimages; objects that are reminders of folkloric Anatolian culture such as the lacework and Turkish carpet and objects of daily practices such as the tulip-shaped tea glass and Turkish delight.

These objects are assumed to be representative of a true and timeless cultural essence as they are assumed to survive from the mists of the Anatolian history. They are assumed to form a genuine reservoir of the cultural heritage accumulated from the civilizations resident in Anatolia. Similar with the strategy of transformation this strategy also ends in local access into the global market as it commodifies cultural identity. Central to this process of commodification is the transformation of cultural value into an added value. In other words, to generate commercial value out of cultural value, a sense of designedness is added to the existing value of the objects in question. In this respect, a harmony between the local and international styles is aimed to be achieved by the reproduction of the archetypes by means of following the aesthetical precepts of the generic modern style, which maintains an emphasis on simplicity, functionalism, rationalization and progress.

Both Turkish Delight Ottoman and Hamamlamp are good examples of Turkish style in design that are dedicated to recontextualize archaic resources. These works belong to Pinocchio Design, which consists of Meltem Eti Proto, Luca Proto and Jülide Arslan. The designers all agree upon the necessity of constructing a Turkish design identity through contemporary reinterpretations of traditional elements and they further claim that “the forms symbolizing Turkish culture should be converted into design icons” (quoted by Karakuş, 2007, p.119).

The Turkish Delight ottoman (Figure 9) is a complete reproduction of Turkish delight as a piece of furniture gesturing towards stereotypical depictions of Turkish-ness. Great attention has been paid to keep the form as it is. Even the smallest details of the desert like the coconut flakes poured over or the nuts inserted into it are represented as a texture on the material.



Figure 9 Turkish Delight ottoman by Pinocchio Design  
(Source:<http://www.arkitera.com/eventfile.php?action=displayEventFile&ID=101&year=2007&aID=2129&o=2098>)



Hamamlamp (Figure 10) is a reproduction of the Turkish bath dome with a new-age material, corian. The product does not only imitate the form of its model, but it also follows its function. Hamamlamp is designed to diffuse light in all directions in the form of floor lighting, rather than overhead lighting. Another irrelevance regarding the original context of the model is the way that the product replaces natural light with artificial and relocates the unit in domestic space.



Figure 10 Hamamlamp by Pinocchio Design  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/pinocchiodesign.php>)

What is common to all these examples is the reproduction of the clichés of Turkish-ness as well the reproduction of artifacts. The recourse to mimicry of archaic elements reinforces the discourses of Turkish culture that is defined in terms of a traditional and conservative essence. Furthermore, the engagement of designers with relocation of these traditional elements in a modern context inevitably evokes a series of dichotomies such

as tradition and modernity, history and contemporaneity, local and global and finally Turkish and Western. Consequently, the strategy of imitation also reproduces the discourse based on the synthesis of Eastern and Western attributes. When considered from this perspective, re-contextualization emerges as a strong strategy to be utilized for the products that are offered to the global market because of the very fact that they stand in the category of Orientalist discourses about Turkey.

It is possible to keep the traces of such an attitude in Hadji (Figure 11) Turkish delight bowl, which is premised upon fairly intensive Islamic references.



Figure 11 Hadji by Erdem Akan  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/erdemakan.php>)

Hadji is an exact reproduction of the skullcaps of the pilgrims. However, the plastic product is not used to cover the head but used as a Turkish delight container. Use of an iconic element to serve another stereotypical representative of Turkish culture is a

gesture that fosters the products cultural significance. On the other hand, the graphic representation of the object photographed along with a minaret also serves to reinforce the Islamic references of the object. Location of both the minaret and the bowl diagonally directed upwards through sky and the light illuminating the bowl give an air of spirituality to the picture. Such a representation is inextricably related to the reductive conventions related to the binaries of the spiritual east and rational west.

A direct correspondence of the reproduced model and its name as in the examples of Turkish Delight ottoman, Hamamlamp and Hadji Turkish delight bowl reinforces the cultural connotations of the objects. Fes.ti.val felt rug (Figure 12) by Ali Bakova is also an example that utilizes such a textual strategy.

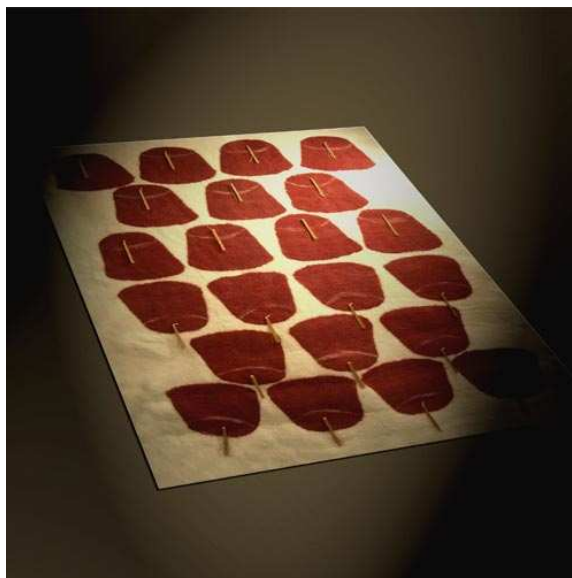


Figure 12 fes.ti.val by Ali Bakova  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/alibakova.php>)

Different from the other examples, here the fez does not undergo an exact reproduction, but it is compressed into a two dimensional form to be used as a pattern. However, references to the model are still so direct that the product can be counted among the examples of this strategy. In addition, cultural connotations of the product are not limited to the repetitive use of the iconic Ottoman fez. The material of the rug, felt also provides an effective cultural representation since it is widely accepted as a material belonging to Turkish craft tradition.

Another example that utilizes a similar strategy is the Compass rose collection by Ela Cindoruk. The collection consists of a series of jewelry including a ring, a brooch and a necklace (Figure 13) that consists of layers of paper tied together with silk straps, imitating lacework.



Figure 13 CR Xa necklace by Ela Cindoruk  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/elacindoruk.php>)

Cindoruk explains the inspiration behind her work as follows:

I have always been amazed by the potentials of various materials such as simple wire. I choose to utilize their richness to achieve contrastingly simple solutions as I am a believer in “Less is more.” This group of work is a result of my interest in ornamentation in personal and public space. I take it a step further and suggest a new usage of ornament by reconceptualising them on the body. In this way these objects relate to us to ubiquitous elements of a familiar past (found in Turkey). The creativity that goes into faking and imitating the past and how I can apply it as body ornamentation is a central theme in my work. (quoted by Karakuş, 2007, p.87)

Here, Cindoruk intends to invoke cultural connotations through a clever appropriation of folkloric decorative elements. The way that she openly uses the term ‘faking’ reveals that she intentionally utilizes these forms as a differentiative strategy. Hence her discourse is marked by a critical self-consciousness different than the others. Similar to Bakova, Cindoruk mimics crafts as well as the use of iconic forms as the model of the imitation. The way that the silk straps are used to tie the pieces of paper emerges as the strongest gesture that provides the product with the air of a craft product.

In short, imitation requires internalization of the Otherness offered by the privileged Western audience. This Otherness is exposed most of the time through mimicry of local elements without any interpretation or abstraction. In this respect, the products of re-contextualization can be claimed to end in the re-creation of stereotypes regarding Turkish tradition and culture.

At this stage, another kind of re-contextualization can be identified which at one level may parallel self-orientalizing approaches. However, here the stereotypes that the west imposes are utilized as a gesture of subversion. Even though such a strategy is not

common in the context of *'İlk' in Milano*, as well as the preceding examples of Turkish style in design, it is possible to point to at least one exception, that is Eastmeetswest (Figure 14) by Erdem Akan. Eastmeetswest is another example of the reiterated recourse to the tulip-shaped tea glass as a source of inspiration. In this case, the tea glass is preserved in its traditional form but suspended in a rectangular glass frame.



Figure 14 Eastmeetswest by Erdem Akan  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/erdemakan.php>)

Akan defines the motive behind his work as follows:

Maybe no form is as ‘Turkish’ as the tulip shaped tea glass. This glass, which is the main actor of Turkish tea rituals, is known to be of here, no matter from where and how it has come. It is one of us to such an extent that we forget its quality and it often seems natural and normal to us, until ‘the foreigner’ once again reminds us of how beautiful and special this glass is. Despite our mostly western outlook, thank God, our feelings and thought are still Eastern. How could this unusual state in between be better expressed than a hybrid form with a straight exterior and a tulip shaped interior. (quoted by Kaygan, 2006, p.66)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Translated from Turkish by Kaygan.

By this statement Akan indeed strictly enforces the distinctions between East and West in an essentialist manner associating the emotional east with a curvilinear form while defining the west with rectilinear forms that may relate to the rational west. However, the formal vocabulary of the tea glass calls for a different interpretation as well. By placing the representation of eastern culture, i.e. the traditional tea glass, within a context that is representative of west, namely by framing the East with West, Akan may be said to express the fact that Eastern-ness is a Western construct rather than an a-priori identity category.

Eastmeetswest also points to the borders that are drawn for representations of the East by the West. The representation of an Eastern form suspended within a Western frame displays the restrictions of Western representations of the East, while revealing the necessity that both need each other to be defined as an identity category.

At this point, Eastmeetswest breaks away from the strategy of re-contextualization. It has a subversive edge which involves an awareness of constructions of the East by the West, rather than taking East as an inert natural fact. In that sense, Akan intervenes the discourses regarding the construction of the Other.

In Eastmeetswest Akan reveals the construction of Otherness in order to de-privilege Western constructions of the East. He conflates two voices in the product, framing the so-called East within the West. Through adopting a cleverly defined metaphor, the designer simply depicts how the East is constructed regarding cultural difference and

thus becomes digestible. Thus, Eastmeetswest does not entirely belong to the self-privileging economy of West. It stands as a distinct example in the context of both '*İlk*' in *Milano* and the strategy of imitation struggling with familiar binary oppositions, disrupting and deconstructing all identity categories, labels of Self and Other, East and West.

### **4.3. Implication**

Unlike the other two strategies of transformation and re-contextualization, here the associations with the cultural values are not supplied through the appropriation or reproduction of archetypes. Therefore, the products of implication do not evoke cultural connotations at first sight. They rather seem to be following the stylistic and conceptual conventions of the generic modern design style. In this respect, the strategy of implication requires the use of discursive strategies more than visual ones to impose and anchor cultural meaning to products. The product's name, promotional texts about the product, reviews or interviews conducted with the designer regarding the product may be counted among the examples that provide effective strategies. Once any of these textual strategies is adopted, the product is liberated from the first impressions it invokes and deviates from its intended context.

As an apparent approach, an analogy with the product's form and a presumably authentic Turkish object, motif or concept is established. However, the references that supply the relation of the product with the traditional archetype are most of the time occasional in the context of '*İlk*' in *Milano*. The associations established with the so-



called Turkish culture range from recourses to nomadic or Islamic culture to a focus on rural practices.

An example for this case is the Moon coffee table (Figure 15) by Aziz Sarıyer, which is introduced by Karakuş as follows:

(...) direct references to abstract patterns derived from Ottomans or Anatolian sources are incorporated so subtly into the design that the direct reference is blurred to the point of abstraction. A case can be made for example that the Moon Table in the shape of a crescent moon, one of the most iconic Turkish symbols, by Aziz Sarıyer, one of the leading geometric abstraction designers, is a conceptual abstraction of the crescent symbol taken to a vague point where symbolic/iconic and geometric abstraction meet. But by and large the lines are fairly firm with an undercurrent of politics most especially the views of the statist, Republican attitude determining the majority values towards the production of form through rationalist ideals that ignore the past. (2007, p.25)



Figure 15 Moon Table by Aziz Sarıyer  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/azizsariyer.php>)

Even though the form of the coffee table resembles a crescent moon; it is nearly impossible to identify the product as a cultural representation appropriating the Islamic

icon crescent. The way that the form resembles a crescent moon seems to be the result of a functional design gesture rather than an intention to evoke cultural associations. Although the product is entitled moon, it does not indicate that the designer aimed at transforming or reproducing the symbolic crescent, since moon is a neutral term free of any Islamic attributions. Only when the product is introduced along with Karakuş's explanatory text, it gains a representative status of Turkish-ness.

Implication thus causes the modern and global to be assessed as traditional and local as opposed to the strategies of transformation and re-contextualization which work *vice versa*. So, the products of this strategy can be considered as significant examples that represent the aim of the exhibition in rather subtle ways: To draw a modern, westernized image for Turkey in the global arena, while being sensitive to preserve the so-called traditional core of Turkish-ness. Karakuş's assertion that the vagueness of the Islamic symbol used in Moon Table is due to the hegemony of positivist and rationalist Republican ideology over Islamic culture clearly exemplifies the case. In this context the Moon Table can be considered as an example that subtly appropriates the Islamic icon so as to eradicate its associations with tradition and backwardness, but still preserves the icon in order to adopt 'our' roots and heritage.

Sema (Figure 16), a coffee table designed by Alper Böler and Ömer Ünal of U&B Studio, constitutes another example for anchoring Islamic meanings in such a subtle manner that supposedly negative connotations of such references in the Republican ideology is alleviated by means of a modern design language.



Figure 16 Sema coffee table of U&B Studio  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/alperbolser.php>)

Sema is the name given to particular Sufi ceremonies. However, in a general sense the term is used to refer to the dance of the whirling dervishes. The coffee table consists of rotating steel bars mounted under a turning top. Yet, this act of rotation does not immediately recall whirling dervishes unless the product is named Sema. At the moment that the product's name is uttered, another form of reading becomes possible imposing an analogy between the product and the whirling dervishes.

Apart from the Islamic references, Turkish nomadic culture and practices also supply an occasional resource for deviation. Here, the duality of the traditional and the modern is still at work. This time it is the traditional associated with the rural that undergoes amelioration through a modern treatment of the urban.

In this respect, Rolling Tent (Figure 17) a piece of the office system Resolve Series (Figure 18) by the remarkable designer Ayşe Birsel can be counted as a distinct example.



Figure 17 Rolling Tent by Ayşe Birsel  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/aysebirsel.php>)



Figure 18 Resolve Series by Ayşe Birsel  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/aysebirsel.php>)

As Karakuş explains:

We could remiss if we did not analyze Birsel's earlier work in the context of her background. While Birsel has seldom made any direct reference to any particular quality of Turkishness in her design work, it is intriguing to note her use, in especially her work for Herman Miller, of light structures in textiles and in the shape of tents that exhibit a particularly abstract shape and nomadic qualities. As evidence we can point to the resolve series for Herman Miller where Birsel's portable meeting room component bares a striking resemblance to the nomad's yurt or tent in both appearance and function. (Karakuş, 2007, p.56)

Clearly, Birsel's design understanding does not fall in the same line with the approaches that intentionally utilize local objects, motifs or concepts. On the contrary her work can be considered within the canon of contemporary modern design style enriched with her unique approach to design. The case is also valid for the Resolve Series in terms of its aesthetics and the way that it does not denote any cultural context without reading the review by Karakuş.<sup>19</sup> The relation supplied with the nomad culture through the text is so occasional and vague that it evokes the supposition that the nomadic connotations derive from an almost intuitive approach unconsciously adopted by the designer herself as a result of her Turkish roots.

Birsel herself also expresses the inspiration behind her work. However as different from Karakuş, she does not mention anything about nomad culture, but rather states that the main concept of the product is hospitality, which is a widely accepted characteristic to define Turkish-ness (Kaygan, 2007).

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<sup>19</sup> The Resolve Series office system was used as part of the decoration in the recent popular science-fiction movie *Minority Report* directed by Steven Spielberg and released in 2002. This case also forms a proper basis for the assertion that this product is an exemplifier of the futuristic and progressive precepts of modernist design.

The discrepancy between the two statements reveals the fact that the relation between the product and its cultural meaning is largely arbitrary. With regards to this point, deviation could be considered as a marketing maneuver in the global market that attempts to promote products by constructing local attributes in explaining their form.

The arbitrariness of the way that the cultural connotations are evoked could reach a level that may end in creation of new archetypes. The new Yeni Rakı bottle (Figure 19) designed by Gamze Güven can be marked as an example of such a case. Yeni Rakı is the oldest and most well known rakı brand in the sector. Till the privatization of the sector in 2004 it was the only brand produced under state monopoly. Following the privatization process, the company decided to redesign its bottle in order to meet the customer needs and remain competitive among the increasing number of brands in the market.



Figure 19 New Yeni Rakı bottle by Gamze Güven  
(Source: <http://www.ilkinmilano.com/gamzeguven.php>)

Rakı, like tea, is accepted to be an authentic Turkish beverage. As Nedim Atilla informs, even the European council of alcoholic beverages names the drink as “Turkish rakı” such as “Scotch whiskey.” However, rakı was first produced at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Ottoman Empire replacing wine consumed in the pubs (Atilla, 2004). The production of rakı continued in the newly established Republic in the 1920s. In time, it has turned to be an indispensable element of Turkish culinary culture. Taken in a special cylindrical glass with ice, rakı is a social drink consumed in accompaniment with appetizers. However, the rakı bottle, different from the typical rakı glass can not be counted as an archetype since it has not been marked as an object with a particular form in the traditional and ritualistic way of consuming the drink.

As the designer of the new bottle, Gamze Güven (2005) states that the old bottle was no different from an ordinary bottle and it had no distinctive characteristics peculiar to the product it contains, in the way that whiskey bottles share a rectangular cross section. So, Güven redesigned the bottle, to provide “our national drink” the characteristic appearance that it “deserves.” She wanted the bottle to have a “strong,” “masculine,” “elegant” and “modern” appearance (Güven, 2005). In order to accomplish her goal, she designed the bottle with wide shoulders and base to emphasize strength, while using concave lines in the slim waisted body to emphasize elegance. In order to provide a modern look and to emphasize the clear color of the beverage, she replaced the old paper label with a serigraphic print applied directly on the bottle. In this way, she believed that she managed to design a bottle which is suitable to Turkish rakı and which soon will become a “cult” object (Güven, 2005). In this case deviation takes place in order to

create a typical, unique object that will be marked as part of the ritual, rather than transforming an already existing traditional form.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

*‘İlk’ in Milano* is widely acknowledged to provide a broad perspective for industrial design practice in Turkey. Supplying a documentary of products designed in Turkey in the last decade by renowned Turkish designers for both domestic and global market, the exhibition portrays the high level of design quality acquired in Turkey, which was assumed to be contrary to the expectations of the international design field. However, the significance of the exhibition goes beyond its role in pointing Turkey’s recent advancements in the practice of industrial design. The notion of Turkish design identity constructed throughout the discourse of *‘İlk’ in Milano* enables critical questioning of identity categories. As an exhibition that attempts to affirm Turkey’s identification as Western in the eyes of the global audience *‘İlk’ in Milano* introduces the “Turkish touch in design” as an alternative contribution to the Western oriented design field, which results in the expression and reinforcement of cultural difference. In other words, the exhibition results in the recontextualization of Turkish national identity in the global market as a brand name wherein Turkish-ness constitutes an added value to the products, while designed-ness as a sign establishes affinity between Western and Turkish design cultures. However, this differentiation process results in the perpetuation of the

essentialist rhetoric on Turkish and Western cultures. As I have argued in the preceding chapters, such a conception results in self-definitions of Other-ness reinforcing the hegemonic Western discourse of the Other. As such, the notion of Turkish style in design suppresses the plurality of identities under hegemonic values of selected versions of Turkish-ness.

At this point, to intervene this discourse and “to turn existing Western monologue into a dialogue” (Akan quoted in *Turkish Touch to Design*, 2007, p.139), Turkish identity must be questioned so as to avoid producing stereotypical representations that undermine the preconceptions, to scrutinize the essentialist rhetoric about homogeneous national communities and to de-privilege totalizing discourses. To resist the hegemonic forces of globalization and self-privileging ideology of the Western audience requires definition of new strategies are required that strive against the stream.

Critical strategies of representation within the global economy of the West could be utilized as a gesture of subversion. Or as John Biln argues, the exact stereotypes that the West imposes upon its other could be used to undermine “self-serving constructions of the other” (Biln, 1997, p.27). As Biln explicates following Spivak’s arguments, such a contravention is based on the awareness that it is impossible to determine an authentic self and other in their total wholeness:

(...) self-constructed “centering” is a double move. While concealing the necessity and inevitability of a submerged “second” or oppositional term (to which a privileged term owes its existence), this “other,” locked as it is in a closed discourse of sameness or self-presence, is itself inescapably never more than an assimilation of a necessarily and radically disjunctive other. Any such centering produces an “other” that is both secondary and under-privileged

(with regards to a privileged “first” term) and appropriative and supersessive (with regards to some radically disjunctive other). This second and parallel moment in centering, this displacement of an “external” other or radical alterity, is insurmountable. Any assertion of equivalence between these two “others” serves only to conceal the rift between them. (Biln, 1997, pp26-27)

As Biln further suggests, “othering” could be diverted to a subversive gesture, a self-serving otherness, through discursive strategies that conceptualize the untold as “what it refuses to say” rather than what it cannot (Biln, p.27, 1997). Transformation of othering into a critical strategy requires in the first place terminating internalization of otherness through opposing any claim to a true essence. What should be brought to light through discourse is the awareness that what is represented as “Turkish” is restricted with the assumptions and expectations of the West. Such a subversive strategy is exemplified in *‘İlk’ in Milano* by Akan’s eastmeetswest in which the East is framed within the West subtly suggesting that the East is a Western construct. Here the expression of Turkishness is based on the intervening into what has heretofore been said.

In short, even though the moment that Turkish style in design is uttered inescapably ends in reaffirmation of difference, it is still possible to interrupt self-orientalizing attitudes through discursive strategies. The critique of Turkish style in design raises other questions to be addressed in subsequent studies: What other criteria can the style be built on other than historically inscribed depictions of Turkishness? Is it possible to resist forces of the global market without relying on traditionally defined national identity categories? And perhaps most importantly, to what extent is it possible to detach formal attributes of a designed object from a culturally inscribed discourse?

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