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Vakko and the Veil: Negotiating History and Agency Through an Iconic Turkish Brand

Abstract:

This paper engages with the tensions and histories embedded in Turkey’s fashion landscape by taking a closer look at perhaps the country’s best-known fashion brand, Vakko. At a time when Turkey is presided over by a conservative Prime Minister and ruling party who are viewed by many of the secular citizens of Istanbul as unrepresentative of their interests, Vakko and its scarf present a compelling opportunity to address how fashion has integrally influenced the development of Turkey’s national self-definition. Both the brand and its revered scarf allow for a way to better understand not only how Turkey sees itself but how that vision is reified and challenged on and through the female body. Through visits to several Vakko stores, sales locations and the company’s headquarters in Istanbul, as well as conducting interviews with several members of the Turkish fashion industry, this work explores the complex relationships between dress, the female body, nationalism, consumerism and religion in Turkey.