

Philosophy of Identity in Fashion Phenomenon: Codes, Structures and Integrity

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The article analyses fashion as a reflex of philosophy of identity in everyday life. Contemporary fashion is not imaginable without postulation of national and/or regional identity. Worldly recognisable French, Italian and other regional fashions show a variety of models that have recognisability. Internationally recognisable as fashion that represents particular national identity it still can be seen as not the only possible its identity version. Contemporary variety in identity models in fashion design are reflecting identity models in general. Identity is understood as changeable and liquid that can reflect aspects of identity depending on participants of interaction. Fashion, differently, is a form of mass communication that does not change the message depending on the receiver.

Keywords: fashion design, identity, national identity, creativity, fashion brand, communication

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world and global fashion industry suppose the idea about global unification and disappearance of national features in the global fashion industry. However, national design industries try to create national design brands. The movement raises questions whether a national fashion brand is emerging as a natural one and has roots in national identity, whether it is constructed as a design brand and has lost its ties to national identities. Intensive future orientation is associated with economic and social success, which, on its own, positions the past as less important and not interesting. However, researches show that creativity in a culturally diversified world allows shaping of identity and realisation of identity needs (Bieńkowska 2021: 519).

While there is an abundance of identity choices, in the article we will concentrate on national identity. Moreover, this article will leave topics of colour (unless there are colours of national flags or combined with elements of national costumes), texture, patterns, silhouettes and volumes for other publications. The philosophy of Lithuanian identity in the Lithuanian fashion design due to its broad variety is left for other publications as well. This article concentrates on international fashion as communication of national identity. National identity, seemingly losing its importance, reappears as recognisable features of national design. The research will concentrate on features of national fashion design and will seek for their correspondence with national identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – IDENTITY AND ITS RELATION TO FASHION

The topic of identity is important in contemporary life and contemporary science (Ranta, Ichijo 2022; Akinci 2020; Kuehnhanss et al. 2021; Al-Tamimi et al. 2023; Spielmann et al. 2020; Branson 2022; Nedzinskaitė-Mitkė, Stasiulis 2022, 2023; Saavedra Llamas, Grijalba de la Calle 2020; Labanauskas 2020). However, majority of them use the identity notion as taken for granted without analysis or explanations. On the one hand, it shows that notion became a word of everyday use, what is an additional proof of its importance, on the other hand, it leaves the analysed aspects of identity not mentioned, the relation between the analysed elements unclear, and, last, but not least, functioning of the identity phenomenon obscure. Generalising what is typically mentioned is that 'national identity is perceived very widely and its individual aspects are evaluated in various ways in different branches of science' (Stepanovienė, Dobržinskienė 2017: 181). For the analysis of fashion in the construction of national identity models the structure and functioning of identity is important, so we use the literature that defines the identity notion, even if it is older.

Notion and Functioning of Identity

'Phenomenal identity is a relation between experiences' (Bruckner 2022: 271). One of the most cited authors analysing identity, A. Giddens, defined identity as 'the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography' (Giddens 1991: 244). The essential aspect, identity roots, are in the one, who is identifying, rather than assigned from outside. Identity is a characteristic of people as social beings understanding of who they are and who are others (Kraniauskienė 2004: 40). Although most frequently used in the context of national and ethnic contexts, identity may be seen with a territory, city, religion, professional or leisure group. In contemporary discussions being of a representative of one group, while identifying with another, is not unusual any more. While ageing with Giddens' conception Manuel Castells distinguishes identity from roles and role-sets (Castells 2009: 6). Roles are defined (Castells 2009: 7), while identities are chosen. Identity is optional – 'the question "who am I?" can arise only when there are certain alternatives, choices – what could I be' (Legauskas 2000: 63). Identity, or rather, its choice, expresses person's priorities and capabilities. On the other hand, identity is a process with 'sense of fragmentation and importantly' (Arnold 2013: 1099).

In addition to choosing identity as entity, one can choose manifestation(s) of that entity – e.g. one can see his/her country through the entire history, victorious history, present, economic or scientific development, arts, political or geopolitical views. Growing diversity in social environment increases diversity in the construction or manifestation of identity, that, in its turn, decreases the necessity of congruence between having the same identity.

Concluding the analysis of identity notions and processes, Algimantas Valantiejus stated the following:

‘Today’s search for human identity is helped to express a relatively unstable and critical attitude that seeks to realize the changing relationship with traditional or newly born authority. When it comes to modern identity, the principle of choice should be taken into account: today’s man, feeling a much wider scale of possibilities, inevitably approaches various values and moral norms. From the point of view of the possibility of choice, a person increasingly feels the limits of his identity, critically reviewing both the lacks and excesses of identity’ (Valantiejus 1999: 14).

How do we classify people? How do we determine their identity? Identities are defined by the similarities between group members and their differences from others. In this way, identity includes ‘two possible comparative relations between people or things – similarity and difference’ (Kraniauskienė 2004: 40). The difference is more pronounced in the individual and the similarity in the collective identity (Kraniauskienė 2004: 41).

Components of Identity

Both a person and a group of people can consider themselves different from others, for example, even when they are aware of their similarity to them. Identity is perceived through (1) what a person *attributes to himself* and (2) what a person *separates from himself*. Sequence of self-attributed and non-attributed features creates identity, although other identities may have partially same features. In short, identity is realised by comparing and naming differences. It embraces an individual change and persistence while changing, which, in turn, enables an infinite variety of identities and expands the number of identity groups, augmented by groups of combinations of change.

When we think about time, we can distinguish between *the past, the present and the future*. This kind of time division is characteristic of the classic formula of identity, according to E. Krukauskienė: ‘where we came from, who we are and where we are going’ (Krukauskienė 2007: 37). In addition to past, present and future perspectives, the contemporary understanding of identity also includes opportunities, desires and possibilities. National identity is ‘understood as a complex process of assigning meanings and as symbolic capital to be contested’ (Pilarczyk-Palaitis 2023: 118). National identity includes spirituality and religious identity even in secularised times (e.g. Nikiforova 2020).

Constancy and Change in Identity Processes

Identities may change historically. Social contexts and the life choices of people shape the possibility of individuals to assign themselves to some kind of identity. ‘A new flexibility of self-definition: whereas identity had previously been defined in terms of rigid and predictable social structures and processes, their decline meant that identity and its definition must be based on shifting and non-absolute foundations’ (Bendle 2002: 6). Contemporary understanding about identity sees it as constantly changing and adapting to social contexts – ‘The evolving creation of the self-flexible, mobile and mutable – suggests that negotiating one’s identity is a process of adaptability and imagination’ (Waddell 2020: 179).

Importance of Fashion for Identity

Public opinion and fashion are important factors in the formation of an individual’s and group’s identity, but there are no single theories describing the today’s functioning mechanisms. Most

authors understand fashion as business (e.g. Bukantaitė, Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė 2021) or self-expression (e.g. Stankevičiūtė 2021). Historically we may see social movements and social change reflections in fashion – the attributes of life, adopted from groups occupying a low social position (for example, jeans and leather jackets) became fashion objects. Today social media are the main spreader of public opinion and fashion, presenting the most easily understandable and convenient world view. Fashion does not only shape the worldview. It supports societal norms, demonstrates and confirms social hierarchy. International political situation may be reflected through national elements in fashion – this is especially visible in Ukraine's national elements in international and regional fashion analysis (e.g. Denysiuk 2022; Bezuhla 2022). Fashion industry has models that integrate ethnographic elements into fashion designs and, contrary, create modernised versions of national costumes.

The Notion of Fashion

Similarly to identity, the notion of fashion is an everyday word, taken for granted both in the contemporary everyday life and contemporary science. Fashion is usually associated with new but rapidly spreading patterns of behaviour. Fashion is a type of collective behaviour spread over a large geographical area. Only temporary and spreading, but not universal, behaviour is called fashion. Contrary to fairly stable social norms, fashion is constantly changing. 'Fashion has rather and always to do, because of its very nature, with surfaces, appearances, transience, and mere play of forms' (Matteucci, Marino 2017: 2).

Similarly to elements of identity, objects of fashion have a symbolic meaning – they show value attitudes and orientations, that make their change not random. A change in fashion, externally visible as a change in fashion objects, shows a change in value attitudes.

Fashion offers the same objects and patterns of behaviour to society as a whole, but people understand and manifest fashion differently. The different appreciation of fashion and the display of its objects depend on taste. J. J. Stuhr (2006) shows the similarity between philosophy and fashion. It strengthens the possibility to see fashion as everyday life philosophy.

Functioning of Fashion

Fashion is driven by needs of separation and communion. With the help of fashion, a fashion-creating social group not only shows its vanguard position, but also demonstrates its power (Simmel 1905). Fashion spreads, according to many authors, including Georg Simmel, due to the desire of the lower social positions to resemble the upper ones. According to Simmel, where there is no desire for one group to resemble the other, there is no fashion (Simmel 1905). In society, the desire of the majority of society to be similar is usually not noticed, and fashion is associated only with the conscious desire of a part to stand out. Meanwhile, from Pierre Bourdieu's point of view, on the contrary, neither the desire to be different nor the desire to be similar are conscious (Bourdieu 1989). Since the beginning of 20th century, the acceleration of fashion changes was noticed (Simmel 1905). Today, fashion is spreading faster due to social media.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fashion is an international code system, integrating international, national and regional codes. Some of them are internationally assigned to the particular time or region, some may be seen as local in some regions, as international or as life-style related in other ones. Fashion designers may use a variety of codes to create their distinctive features that may be seen as representations

of region and fashion at the same time. The usually known French or Italian fashion allows one at the same time to recognise the creator and have features of a region of a country.

The aim of the research was to analyse the region-specific content, reflected in fashion brands and visually expressing the country's or region's identity.

Phenomenological method for the research of features of national and regional identities in the fashion phenomenon. As aspects of identity in the phenomenon of fashion the following elements were analysed: design silhouette, form, constructive, design texture through colours and fabrics used, design details, the aspect of sexuality and other emerging and prominent elements. Visual analysis was supplemented with the verbal text analysis, to support the visual communication, where it was conveyed by verbal explanations.

The task of this research is to analyse the features, key elements characteristic of the Italian, French, British, USA and Japanese fashion relation to national or regional identities. Media content analysis was conducted on pages, presenting fashion trends, fashion weeks and fashion portals. The analysed media is a series of the freeze-frames of expressions of the fashion phenomenon. On the other hand, it is a medium between fashion designers and their audiences that reflect everyday philosophy. To support regional tendencies, the analysis of contents, found through Google Search on fashion from particular nations, was conducted simultaneously. In abundance of information Google algorithms allow the selection of the most searched and opened sites. This way Google Search operates in a dialectic way – reflects and impacts media use at the same time. The impact of fashion's seasonality was taken into account – the analysis enclosed the full calendar year.

Italian fashion is broadly known as a brand. It is an example of a national fashion, where at the same time we may see signs of time (or, more precisely – contemporaneity – the most important moment for fashion), designers, country and even regions. It is interesting to notice that Italian fashion demonstrates the highest variety of national identity symbols.

The first element of national identity in fashion is **regional traditions and traditional dresses**. A great example of regional traditions in the Italian fashion is Dolce & Gabbana. The team manages to be trendsetters in fashion design, represent Sicily and be recognisable as a fashion brand. Traditional aspects are represented in the depiction of gender in Italian fashion shows: romantic and sexual femininity (visible in details and fabrics – ruffles, guipure and naked parts of body) and luxury and elegant masculinity.

The second important element is **history**. History in the Italian fashion is visually and textually associated with Gucci's connection to the Renaissance. They relate their creativity with the Renaissance and intellectual maximalism. Baroque as historical identity is strongly associated with the Versace style and models.

Religion as an element of national identity is visible in the Italian fashion – Crosses, Rosaries and religious motives on fabric are still visible in Italian fashion. Luxury as an element of national identity is part of Catholicism. A typical example is Moschino collections created by 'Cheap and Chic' designers. Architecture – both religious and its influenced secular architecture of Catholic country – has influence on fashion design. Both Italian architecture and fashion radiate luxury.

Last, but not least, the feature to be analysed in this article is the connection between seeing Italy as a cradle of European culture and dictating global fashion as visual expression culture. Even if contemporary culture has a huge influence through contemporary music, economy and politics from other countries, the Italian fashion represents the Italian identity as **central from the cultural position**.

Summarising the Italian fashion media of identity we may see luxury and regional variety with elements of Italian history and cultural centrality. It is interesting to notice that there may as well be the influence of history and the late unification of Italy that may lead to the lack of use of state symbols, e.g. flag, visible in identities of other countries in fashion.

French fashion is a brand of national fashion as well: black and French flag colours, elegance, comfort and functionality.

Starting from the main national identity difference from the Italian fashion – we may see one of the *state symbols* – flag – in the French fashion design. Not depending on international fashion tendencies, colours of the French flag reappear in collections (including Lanvin).

Important for the Italian fashion elements of the national costume are rare in the French fashion. Distantiation from traditional attitudes is visible in gender depiction. *Femininity* is at the same time *comfortable and functional*. Femininity is more elegant and has less prominent sexuality than in the Italian fashion. The symbolic relation between femininity and comfort was named by Chanel. Continuation is visible in the contemporary French fashion.

Compared to the Italian identity in fashion, the French fashion shows *modern orientation* – clear and clean silhouettes, functionality, comfort and reappearing flag colours. Gender emancipation (especially through power suits) is visible in Yves Saint Laurent and Givenchy collections.

Summarising the national identity in the French fashion we may see much less variety than in the Italian one. However, it contains important aspects that may be structured in modernity – clothing modernity (clear and clean silhouettes), colour modernity (not colourful), state orientation (reappearance of colours of national flag) and gender emancipation.

British fashion is rarely seen as a recognisable national fashion brand. While it is recognisable through quality of materials and production it is rather associated with luxury and establishment than with fashion tendencies.

However, some tendencies may be seen. Combination of *modernity* with *establishment* may be seen in the lack of representation of traditional dresses, but a high representation of the established high British society associated checked materials and natural colours.

However, contemporary British fashion brands use *British rock music* as inspiration and a sign of identity. Stella McCartney shows the Beatlesque visualisation and Vivien Westwood the punk style. It is interesting to notice that Vivien Westwood collections mix the punk style with the royal symbols and tartan.

Tartan and related checked materials raise questions about the importance of the Scottish identity in the British national identity. Burberry, Roland Mouret and Vivien Westwood position tartan differently. While Vivien Westwood positions tartan together with punk elements for contemporary rebellious images, Burberry and Roland Mouret use tartan associated, but modified checked materials as symbols of establishment.

The fashion associated state symbol – national flag and its colours – is more related to sports fans' outfits than the expression of fashion.

Summarising the British fashion relation to the national identity we may see a combination of the established luxury with the recent Britain-centred pop culture as the tension between aristocracy and rebels.

USA fashion is understood as a national fashion design brand. Recognisable and associated with a country, the USA fashion has strong features of national identity.

The USA fashion national identity is strongly associated with the *state symbols*. The flag and the coat of arms are widely used by designers. Although the symbols are used by most designers, Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren are especially notable for that.

Historical national identity *symbols* visible in fashion are *western* elements (boots, belts, bags, etc.) and *denim*. Western elements are frequent in Ralph Lauren designs. His collections usually contain fringes, conchos, massive buckles and western boots, representing the birth of contemporary America and symbolising courage. Denim is a fabric, in symbolism, use and history representing the American dream. It is a durable fabric with symbolic social mobility from technical to workers clothes, to the symbol of *social emancipation* and to fashion. Used in collections of most American designers, especially visible in Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren's ones. However, an exclusive and unique shift in denim use, made by Calvin Klein – combination with cashmere and posh blazers and coats – is still part of the American fashion.

The third tendency of the American identity in fashion is *minimalism*. Static, minimalist silhouettes and clean lines are forward oriented.

Gender representations in the USA fashion vary from sexy sport styles to the unisex fashion, representing gender emancipation.

Summarising the national USA fashion we may see statements about patriotism, bravery in history and emancipation.

Japanese fashion. In the 1980s, the Japanese fashion designers Kenzo, Issey Miyake, Hanae Mori, Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto made their debuts, introducing the Japanese fashion phenomenon in Paris and later around the world. The uniqueness and exclusivity characteristic of the Japanese fashion allowed the latter to consolidate the positions of Japanese designers as national fashion.

'Japaneseness' was visible in the reflection of *ethnic heritage* and references to the Japanese *cultural products and artefacts*. The sources of inspiration for the designers' designs here undoubtedly came from the symbols from Japanese culture, such as Kabuki, Mount Fuji, geisha, and cherry blossoms.

Unlike most other national fashions, the Japanese fashion *tends not to emphasise sexuality* in their clothing design, there is no emphasis on the naked cult fashion, and the latter is hidden behind many folds or other geometric constructions. One can also notice the beginnings of unisex fashion. In the visuals of Japanese fashion brands, 'chaotic' silhouettes are usually found, but they are always based on a system of certain forms. However, in the silhouettes, the emphasis on the vague waistline is not to be forgotten. It is like a distortion of a one-size-fits-all suit with exaggerated details or a shape.

The national identity in the Japanese fashion is visible in the use of *national dress* – kimono – and its elements. The layering, abundance, asymmetry, colours and hieroglyphics that are usual for kimono costumes is often recognisable in Japanese creations and designs.

The delicate art of wabi sabi, where oriental brevity, aesthetics, exclusivity and minimalism intertwine, has an impact on the Japanese fashion as a combination of *oriental minimalism* with elements of the *avant-garde*.

Summarising the Japanese national fashion we may see the importance of history and traditions. While history and traditions in different ways may be seen in other national fashions as well, the disguise of sexuality is exceptional for the Japanese fashion.

CONCLUSIONS

National fashions are closely related to national identities. Particular recognisable features of represented countries are prominent features of identities of countries, associated with centres of fashion. Features of national identity in fashion may vary depending on nation. Some show more state symbols, some ethnic, and some historical ones. Nevertheless, they represent the identity of the nation, whether state, ethnic or traditional aspects. While European fashion shows sexuality, Japanese fashion disguises it. Unisex elements may be related both to sexual and those in disguise. The impact of religion is still visible in the contradiction between maximalism and minimalism. Historical Catholicism is still visible in maximalism, while reformed Christianity and Japanese religions in minimalism. The correspondence between national identities and fashion shows importance and deepness of fashion as a social phenomenon. Even in the contemporary globalised world national fashions do not blur into a melting pot, but rather recreate and remind national and local elements. Fashion as everyday life philosophy reflects contents of the phenomenon of identity.

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SANDRA MOCKUTĖ-CICĖNĖ, VIKTORIJA ŽILINSKAITĖ-VYTĖ

Tapatumo filosofija mados fenomene: kodai, struktūros, integralumas

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama moda kaip tapatumo filosofijos atspindys kasdieniame gyvenime. Šiuolaikinė moda neįsivaizduojama be nacionalinio ir (arba) regioninio tapatumo elementų. Pasulyje atpažįstamos prancūzų, italų ir kitų regionų mados atspindi įvairius tapatumo modelius, kuriems būdingas skirtingas atpažįstamumas. Net tarptautinė moda gali reprezentuoti tautinius ar regioninius tapatumus. Dar įdomiau – ji gali būti laikoma ne vienintele galima konkreataus nacionalinio ar regioninio tapatumo versija. Šiuolaikinė mados dizaino tapatumo modelių įvairovė atspindi tapatumo modelius apskritai. Tapatumas suprantamas kaip kintantis ir takus, galintis atspindėti skirtingus tapatumo aspektus priklausomai nuo sąveikos dalyvių. Mados išskirtinumas tas, kad ji yra masinės komunikacijos forma, kuri nekeičia pranešimo, atsižvelgiant į gavėją, o tai parodo jos skleidžiamos kasdienybės filosofijos universalumą.

Raktažodžiai: mados dizainas, tapatumas, tautinis tapatumas, kūrybiškumas, mados prekių ženklas, komunikacija