Our Cultural Heritage “Laces” Silk Point Laces as a Way of Communication and Tavşanlı Women Knitting Political Symbols on Their Laces

Dr. Hasan Güneş, Nadide Güneş, Mustafa Güneş
1Yüzüncü Yıl University, Van, Turkey.
2Rekabet Kurumu İOO, Van, Turkey.
3Dumlupınar University, Kutahya, Turkey.

Abstract: The purpose of present research is to identify Kütahya city Tavşanlı district’s point laces on which the important politicians’ names of the past are symbolized; to follow the traces of the appearance dates of these symbolic point laces; to grasp the kind of story and composition they narrate. It is such a misfortune that Anatolian laces with unprecedented beauty and originality are on the verge of extinction because of technological as well as economical causes. On that account it is quite important to document lace motifs still alive in Kütahya city Tavşanlı district, worn during weddings, used as social class etiquette, some valued as bracelets and some as political symbols. Upon this documentation transfer of this tradition to younger generations shall be the other vital element to accentuate. Present study thus aims to conduct an analysis on Tavşanlı region silk point laces occupying major place in Turkish handicrafts, to introduce the readers laces acting as political symbols, to transform our society from consumerism to productivity through relevant trainings and to accentuate the cultural significance of silk point laces.

Key words: Communication via Handicrafts, Politicians symbolized on Silk Point Laces.

INTRODUCTION

Every single society has handicrafts reflecting the community’s individual cultural identity. Likewise Turkish handicrafts, by virtue of reflecting our unique culture, take dominating place amongst global arts. Indeed handicrafts are, just as all folk arts, the most vital and meaningful documents of a nation’s cultural identity continuing for ages, transmitted through generations and kept alive through traditions. One of the handicrafts reflecting this cultural identity is lacing. In Turkish culture handicrafts signify much more than embroidering alone since through lace handiworks when two people cannot communicate face to face one can render messages to the addressee with her lace work, can communicate thus instruct the addressee. In that way two people can reflect their feelings and thoughts on the laces and share them with the outside world. The colors favored in motifs, the stories narrated in these motifs exemplify the fact that Turkish nation enjoys such elevated taste. That explains why lacing gained increasing importance amongst handicrafts and became an inseparable part of Turkish culture and folklore. Onuk argues that as regards folk arts no other nation possesses as many resources as Anatolia. The most salient factor for this variety is the fact Anatolia has been the cradle of many civilizations throughout ages. Since Turkish nation is also endowed with a rooted past it is only natural that these handicrafts are also rich and deeply rooted.

In Turkey silk lacing is mostly performed to contribute to family budget, to put into dowry chest, to keep busy in one’s free time and during visits to neighbors. However since it is a toilsome work demanding high quality and costly material and harder to knit when compared to other types of lace, silk laces are sold more expensively than other lace types. On accounts of such reasons the general interest towards silk point laces has diminished significantly. However as opposed to general oblivion towards point laces because of economical reasons, in Tavşanlı district within the borders of Kütahya, laces with a variety of motifs and stories still strive hard to resist against the sweeping effects of time.

What is Lace?:
Handicrafts are the cultural identity of any nation. Handicrafts bridge a nation’s tradition and customs to the younger generations.

Generally speaking point laces are attached to the hemline thus become a part of our clothing. These laces have, in the course of time, gained new shapes according to our beliefs, customs, habits and lifestyles.

It is possible to encounter the same laces under different names in different regions; however there are also unique motifs exemplifying one specific region. Knitted with several tools such as needle, pin, bobbin case needle or knotted two or three dimensionally, laces can be classified with respect to tools employed and places of usage.
Definitions of laces vary extensively just as the types of laces. Eşberk defines laces as “ruffle knitting made of colorful silk or cotton thread embroidered mostly on the sides of one color or chintz kerchief and in some regions on the fronts, collars and calves on men’s shirts.” According to Ortaç laces are “thin knits attached together through knotting via hand or simple knitting tools such as needle, pin, bobbin case needle that weave fine-spin and various types of threads.” Özbel on the other hand describes laces as “an art of which technique is knitting for the purposes of ornamentation and embroidering.” Onuk reports that “a handicraft of which technique is knitting for the purposes of ornamentation and embroidering and also a way of communication as they convey a message.” Öğür and Ortaç in their definition claim that “Oya (Turkish lace) with no etymological equivalence in other languages represents an art unique to Turkish people and Turkish women in particular.

There are no historical evidences relating to the earliest date, birth and purpose of lacing. However Akpınarlı reports that lacing has borne out of the needs of hair covering and ornamentation desires of people. He argues that people’s taste of ornamentation progressed parallel to the elevation in their aesthetical taste and creativity skills.

History of Lacing:
This handicraft stands out as significant historical samples having carried to present day the lifestyle traces and skills of Turkish people emigrated from Central Asia to Anatolia. Indeed the research findings and excavation materials obtained in Central Asia have manifested that the art of knitting originally belongs to Turks. This is a valid assumption since “the earliest samples of knitting were found amidst the discoveries in Pazırık 2. cairn belonging to Huns that lived in Central Asia during BC 7th and 8th centuries.”

Art of knitting and knitting works reached to the West on trade ships having sailed from the East. In fact colorful socks of Islamic world were the earliest samples that carried Italy and Spain to the first rank in knitting works during 12-16th centuries. Onuk reports that in 12th century point laces reached from Anatolia to Greece from whence it traveled to Europe through Italy. Onuk puts forth in his researches that lace is a type of decoration. The word which also corresponds to embroidering was used in 11th century amongst Turks as „the house is decorated” and „the woman is decorated”(wife is decorated). Mameluke Turks in Egypt pronounced the word “oya” as „oyu”. Kuman Turks described embroidering process on cloth and stone as „ovyulamak” thus “oya” term developed into „oyum” amongst Kirghiz Turks.

Point lacing and handicraft works went through its golden age during 18th century. Nonetheless Western populism and Western idolization that climbed after the Reform Era unfortunately pulled down the appreciation towards point laces. Onuk reports that today, silk point laces are most widely common in cities Rize, Konya, Bursa, Kastamonu, İzmir vicinity, Balikesir Gönen, Kütahya, Muğla, Bafra, Ordu vicinity and Bolu.

Silk Point Laces as a way of Communication:
Point laces occupy major position in traditional Turkish clothing and culture. Used as head embroidery point laces not only reflect hand skills of our women but also act as significant means of communication by virtue of the motifs and secret messages they contain.

It would be safe to claim that art of knitting dates as far as the history of humankind. Parallel to the development of humanity, knitting followed the same kind of progress and experienced some alterations in motifs. People used this particular art form in almost any place. Knitting was used as clothing at times and at other times as house utensil or decoration. Particular topic of this research is “Lace which is an art of knitting refers to thin knits attached together through knotting via hand or simple knitting tools such as needle, pin, bobbin case needle that weave fine-spin and various types of threads such as silk, cotton, metal thread and mostly used for the purposes of ornamentation and embroidering” In the words of Onuk “Lace of which technique is knitting is a form of ruffle born out of the union between flower and art of knitting, used for embroidering and decoration and also used as a way of communication by virtue of the messages they convey.”

Lacing was passed from Ottomans to modern age through master-apprentice relationship. Though lacing subject is now available in formal-informal education curriculum technological advancements, machinery production, changes in dowry tradition have gone through “both negative and positive changes due to cultural, social, aesthetic and economical grounds. Regardless of all negative changes, silk point lacing strives hard to survive but manages to stand upright only regionally.

As the nonverbal way of communication of Turkish women, laces enjoy a variety of types. In addition to being used for clothing and embroidering, each lace also contains a unique story and message. For instance a bride wearing a kerchief embroidered with pepper motifs actually is trying to say that “We are at loggerheads (we have no peace but pepper like relation giving pain).” Women with complaints narrate their sorrow onto the laces that they knit on the sides of kerchief. In that way the bride tries to tell that she has problems with her husband or mother-in-law. Red colored lace tells that she is pregnant while brown tombstone lace symbolizes ill-fortune. Putting daisy motif kerchief on girl’s head by the suitor party during the ceremony of asking a girl’s hand in marriage indicates that suitor party (the boy and his parents) appreciates girl’s beauty. Laces with grape motifs symbolize sweet relations and they are mostly presented as gifts to mothers-in-law.
Wealth of a family is weighted with their dowry and even the richness of their laces. Similar to Tavşanlı there are other regions in which certain laces are sine qua non and must be present in the dowry chest no matter what. Having a variety of types, laces are easy to see in weddings and neighbor visits. Such laces, since they reflect the characteristics of Turkish culture, can be accepted as major building blocks of any civilization.

Concepts selected in point laces can be classified as abstract and concrete concepts. Concrete concepts are generally decorated as Plant embroidery, Object embroidery, Figure embroidery and Geometric embroidery. In abstract concepts on the other hand Symbolic embroideries are more favored. Lace master has witnessed everything in her habitat, stored in her memory and knitted or she named her original motifs that she created on her own similar to their replicas in real life. In fact the richness of motif collection and composition can also be observed in point laces. Colors used in motifs and harmony between colors set the value of particular motifs since harmony between motif and colors is crucial in lacing work. These laces also act as conveyors of social messages. In addition to such laces unique to Tavşanlı region, there are also some laces that narrate political messages:

1. Silk Point Lace named as “Open Session”:

![Fig. 1: General view of “Open Session” Point Lace.](image1)

![Fig. 2: “General view of “Open Session” Point Lace.](image2)

Resource, Nihal Karagöz:

In 1979 I was making silk point laces. But I had never heard of “Open Session” point lace then. So it must be the product of next years. It was 1980 and 1985 when I first heard of “Open Session” point lace and I also made one upon order.

As narrated by silk point lacing master Nihal Karagöz it was 22.10.1983 that three leaders of the new party held discussion on a TV program “Open Session” prior to general elections. It seems that women of Tavşanlı watched the same program and symbolized the theme on their laces.
2. Silk Point Lace Bamed as “Demirel”:

![Image of Demirel Lace](image)

**Fig. 3:** General view of “Demirel” Lace.

*Resource, Nihal Karagöz:*

“Demirel” silk point lace was made for the first time after 1974 when Demirel and his party won the election. Right-wing administrations are quite popular in Kütahya region. For instance a rightist political leader Menderes was quite an applauded prime minister. The locals regarded Demirel administration as the heir of Menderes so they showed sympathy for Demirel.

Historically speaking, in year 1965 AP (Justice Party) leader Demirel collected 52.8% of all votes and rose as the single authority. In 1969 general elections, AP gathered 48% of all votes and became single authority once again. This incidence also proves that during those times Tavşanlı women followed the political developments rather closely.

3. Silk Point Lace named as “Ecevit”:

![Image of Ecevit Lace](image)

**Fig. 4:** General view of “Ecevit” Lace.

*Resource, Nihal Karagöz:*

Ecevit was a popular figure in our region. My father-in-law and even his father were CHP (Republican People’s Party) supporters. My dad in particular announced his admiration for Ecevit, İnönü and his sympathy with CHP by displaying their pictures on the coffee house he owned in Başköy. Right-wing parties were still popular but Ecevit admiration climbed higher particularly after Cyprus Military Intervention. Thus this particular lace dates back to 1974 and its name is driven from the hero of that age, Bülent Ecevit.

Historically speaking, Turkish Republic organized Peace Operation to Cyprus Island two times during Ecevit rule. The first one was on 20 July 1974 and second one on 16 August 1974. In the aftermath of these operations KKTC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) was founded.
4. Silk Point Lace named as “Kalemli”:

Fig. 5: General view of “Kalemli” Lace.

Resource, Nihal Karagoz:
He became minister during the first governance of Özal. Though he was also commissioned in Demirel governance his popularity climbed in Özal administration. As he was a local of Tavşanlı region and very popular amongst the local people his name was given to the lace. I think it emerged around 1983 but I am not quite sure. Anyway I am positive that its emergence coincides with 1st Özal Government.

Historically speaking Mustafa Kalemli was elected as ANAP Kütahya representative on 6 November 1983 general elections. Tavşanlı women wasted no time and immediately imprinted their fellow townsman’s name on their laces.

5. Silk Point Lace named as “Kenan Evren”:

Fig. 6: General view of “Kenan Evren” Lace.

Resource, Nihal Karagoz:
“Kenan Evran” point lace emerged in 1980 or 1981 when Evren’s military rule seized power after Military Coup. In those years Evren was largely popular but today he is not so popular amongst public. Though many point laces differed with respect to color match, colors in Evren point lace never ever changed.

6. Silk Point Lace named as “Coalition”: 
Fig. 7: General view of “Coalition” Laces.

Resource, Nihal Karagöz:
Also known as Cherry, this point lace is widely defined in this region as “Coalition”. It was created during the time of Demirel and İnönü coalition that corresponds to 1990 till 1993.

As the pages of history are scrutinized it surfaces that on 20.11.1991 Coalition government was founded. The Prime Minister of this coalition government was Süleyman Demirel and Vice Prime Minister was Erdal İnönü. Following the death of 8th President Turgut Özal, Demirel took over the Presidency seat while İnönü resigned from his political position.

7. Silk Point Lace named as “Assembly Candle”:

Fig. 8: General view of “Assembly Candle” Lace.

Resource, Nihal Karagöz:
It is broken point lace or in other terms small point lace. It is classified as a cheap point lace. In Kalemli, its emergence dates back to the time assembly session seats’ clothing was changed. If I am not mistaken assembly chandeliers were also changed alongside with seat clothing. This is the origin of the name candle. I am not sure about the exact date but it might be the onset of 2000s.

Historically speaking, upon the approval of President of the Assembly Mustafa Kalemli in 1997 a cleaning operation of chandeliers was started and the bill cost 20 billion TL, for the Assembly elevators the bill cost around 9 billion TL. Tavşanlı folk reacted vehemently to this extravagance and they did not forgive the misdeed of their own townsman and never ever supported him again. I believe the reason it is cheap is related to the actual meaning it preserves.

8. Silk Point Lace named as “Assembly Founded”:
**Resource, Nihal Karagöz:**

It is quite an old point lace dating back to the 1960s. My grandmother knitted this model so many times; she even made one for me. My grandmother was born in 1912. After the execution of Adnan Menderes an administrative chaos prevailed and with the establishment of assembly this point lace was called under this name.

In the light of information provided by this point lace, it has been possible to reach some really striking historical facts.

Upon the military coup dated 27 May 1960 it took one month to establish a new government (30.05.1960). Cemal Gürsel, head of National Unity Committee, proclaimed that he was appointed as Prime Minister without being selected by National Unity Committee and he claimed that his government consisted of members with no political party roots. However during this period no vote of confidence was deemed necessary. Gürsel resigned in order to secure the establishment of a new government as necessitated by democracy. Thus 1st Gürsel Government was ended.

Cemal Gürsel was assigned without any elections as head of government in 1961 by the National Unity Committee he had ruled. Gürsel set the new government by non-members of National Unity Committee. Vote of confidence was again not conducted. 2nd Gürsel Government (05.01.1961-20.11.1961) ruled till 1961 general elections.

8th İnönü Government established a coalition government between CHP-AP in (20.11.1961-25.06.1962) but unfortunately this government lasted not so long.

In such a short time as 2 years, 3 governments were established. This must the gap period Nihal Karagöz referred to. “Assembly Founded” point lace emerged during this period.
Fig. 11: General view of “Undersecretary” Lace.

Resource, Nihal Karagöz:
Özal was a popular political figure in our region. In those years undersecretary was a new concept amongst the locals. Even I still do not know the meaning of undersecretary but the term found itself a place in point laces since it sounded nice for people. I guess this point lace emerged in 1980s.

10. Silk Point Lace named as “Pasha Medal”:

Fig. 12: General view of “Pasha Medal” Lace.

Resource, Nihal Karagöz:
Pasha medal dates as far as 1960s. It does look like a medal but I cannot say anything about the origin of its name.

11. Silk Point Lace named as “Semra’s Daisies”: 
Resource, Nihal Karagöz:

Semra Özal established a foundation. A contest was held in there. I think it was the time Fevzi Çoşkun was the mayor. I could not participate since I had not heard about the contest. The winner was Hacer Sakalli. This contest fueled the popularity of point lacing works. Such contests should be promoted. Two sisters-in-law competed, Nuran Sakalli was the older sister-in-law who actually taught the way to perform lacing but the apprentice won the contest. She joked about the final score by saying the student becomes the master.

As this date is analyzed historically it is true that in 1984 Fevzi Çoşkun was elected as mayor and this contest was organized during this period.

Historically speaking it was 1986 that Semra Özal established Foundation for the Empowerment and Promotion of Turkish Women. Key members of the foundation were wives of bureaucrats, industrialists and businessmen. Daisy Foundation that adopted the name of wild flowers organized activities such as collective wedding and circumcision ceremonies. We can thus argue that the emergence of this point lace dates back to 1986-1988.

12. Silk Point Lace named as “Officer’s Pinch”:

Resource, Nihal Karagöz:

While making this point lace it is puckered while knitting five leaves. Its name reflects debauchery of officers who pinch the girls. It is really ancient, probably goes back to the 60s. I know that the verses below also belong to the same period;

Officers show off but no money in their pockets
What really allures naïve girls is the strap on shoulders
Yellow color in the middle of flower in a way symbolizes the star which is an officer rank.
13. Silk Point Lace named as “Labor Contract”:

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 15: General view of “Labor Contract” Lace.

**Resource, Nihal Karagöz:**

During the years this point lace emerged, salaries were quite low and contracts were signed every two years. Since in every household one man was employed in an organization contracts were closely watched at all times. This is the time that point lace was created. Probably in the 1990s when Iraq war took place and Saddam was intervened during 1st Gulf War. During those years all we ever thought about was contracts. Our salaries could barely meet basic nutrition needs of a house so we wept at times. Our salaries equaled to 100 Marks alone. Our budget could finally breathe freely upon the signing of contract. If I am not mistaken our salary which was 300 Turkish Liras climbed to 1700 TL after the contract.

Historically speaking it was 30 November 1990 when mine workers called for a strike. Since during that period contract signing was delayed for too long, the workers rioted and marched from Zonguldak to Ankara. Prime Minister Akbulut stopped the workers in Bolu and prevented their entrance to Ankara and signed a contract with the workers in that city. Mine Labor Union General Secretary Şems Denizer became a hero and started to be called as Lech Walesa. Özal reacted against these salary raises “What the hell is this ” but failed to do anything against the pay increases. But due to his attitude, Özal lost popularity amongst mine workers.

As the language of point laces is analyzed it becomes possible to witness the history of those years once again. Just as it is possible to read certain periods from the works of some writers, the same finding holds true for the laces.

**Conclusion:**

Women of Anatolia embroidered their aspirations on laces, kilims and other forms of handicrafts to silently express their inner thoughts. That is how Anatolian women narrated their sorrows, heartbreaks, joys, hopes, aspirations through the colors and motifs on laces.

Just as is valid in all regions of Anatolia in Tavşanlı region too point laces face the threat of extinction on accounts of several reasons: Decreases and changes in the usage areas of silk point laces, cheapness of factory production, toilsome process of lacing work, deterioration in sight ability and deformation of skeleton structure since more than 100 knots or stitches are knitted every cm², high cost of silk’s raw material, dying with madder the silk extracted from real cocoon silk, twisting the wires on which motifs shall be embroidered, the fact that though it can be completed in 15 days when worked four hours a day it is sold only for 200 TL, advancement in production technologies and cheaper manufacturing via industrial tools.

However it is a must that these national riches be kept alive and passed to future generations. Therefore usage areas of point laces should be widened, point lace knitters who are small in number should be employed in Public Education Centers where point laces can be taught to students and spread, promoted and supported. It should always be remembered that this toilsome handicraft demanding such patience and skill is not merely a form of clothing or ornamentation. Ultimately it is an art form possessing deep meanings within itself and above all else it is an authentic artistic style DESCENDING FROM TURKISH CULTURE AND COMMISSIONED TO CONVEY MESSAGES FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE.
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