Δ 2 WRITING:

Reinterpreting Anatolian Kilim Motifs through "*Our Everyday*": *Pluralism, Sustainability, and Local Cultural Values*

Traditional Anatolian kilims have always been more than functional objects; they carry stories, values, and cultural symbols that have been passed down through generations. In this project, my aim was to reinterpret these motifs and create a symbol set that reflects the contemporary identity of Anatolia. I wanted these symbols to resonate with today's society while preserving the historical and cultural weight they carry. However, this project isn't just about redesigning symbols—it's about creating a bridge between the past and present of Anatolia, keeping these cultural motifs alive and meaningful.

When I came across Nan O'Sullivan's Our Everyday chapter, my understanding of cultural preservation in design began to shift. O'Sullivan's work at Victoria University goes beyond celebrating Maori culture alone; it emphasizes that design education should honor and integrate the many cultures that make up society. She notes, "The work we do in the design school has to acknowledge and honor the diverse cultures that make up the student body and the communities that they serve" (O'Sullivan, 2023, p. 60). Her approach highlighted for me the importance of respecting cultural roots in design, which led me to examine whether my own process honored the full complexity of Anatolian motifs.

The Conflict Between Singular and Pluralistic Design Approaches

One of the main tensions I began to see in my own project was between singular and pluralistic approaches to representing cultural heritage. O'Sullivan advocates for a pluralistic perspective, which values showing culture through layered, diverse narratives instead of reducing it to a single representation. This challenged my tendency to simplify for clarity, which may make these motifs more accessible but risks losing some of their richness and depth. "Sustaining cultural heritage," O'Sullivan writes, "is about much more than physical preservation; it's about retaining meaning in the modern world" (O'Sullivan, 2023, p. 67). Her words made me question whether one "clean" symbol set could capture the full essence of Anatolian motifs or if I was inadvertently stripping them of their deeper meanings.

This approach reminded me of the well-known debate between Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn on design philosophy. Crouwel advocated for objective, straightforward design, while van Toorn argued that cultural design should embrace subjective, complex narratives. My design mindset tends to align more with Crouwel's clear and rational simplicity, but van Toorn's ideas made me realize that a minimalist approach might not fully capture the complexity of Anatolian motifs. Van Toorn's subjective style, which allows for interpretation and variation, could perhaps better preserve the multi-layered nature of these cultural symbols (Crouwel & van Toorn, 1998, p. 45).

The Role of Sustainability in Cultural Heritage

O'Sullivan also brings a unique view of sustainability that goes beyond the environmental lens and focuses on cultural sustainability. She argues that preserving cultural heritage requires more than just maintaining physical form—it means keeping that heritage relevant and meaningful. "Sustaining cultural heritage is about much more than just physical preservation," she writes (O'Sullivan, 2023, p. 72). I began to see that my project's goal wasn't merely to create decorative elements. These motifs carry the values and connections of generations, and preserving them in a meaningful way means making sure they remain relevant today, not just aesthetically pleasing.

In exploring Anatolian kilim motifs, I realized that modern Anatolia, as well as my design perspective, is influenced by Western aesthetics and symbols. While these global influences can enrich a design, there's a risk that Western symbols could overshadow the unique characteristics of Anatolian motifs. O'Sullivan points out that local values can adapt without losing their authenticity, and this influenced my approach. I realized I need to balance these influences carefully, ensuring each motif retains its original meaning even as it is adapted for modern audiences.

Rather than breaking from tradition, I want my project to allow the wisdom of the past to flow naturally into the future. The symbol set I developed reflects today's Anatolia but is rooted in traditional values. As O'Sullivan notes, "Cultural heritage is sustainable when it holds meaning and relevance across generations" (O'Sullivan, 2023). By reimagining Anatolian motifs in this way, I hope they won't just survive but thrive, bridging past and present in a way that resonates with contemporary society.

Integrating Local Cultural Values in Design Education

O'Sullivan's work also made me think about the role of cultural heritage in design education and its potential in Turkey. Her approach suggests that design education should deepen students' connections to their own heritage, not just teach technical skills. I began to wonder how Turkey's design programs could benefit from integrating Anatolian symbols and weaving techniques. Including traditional motifs in Turkish design curricula could connect students more closely to their heritage, equipping them with both a sense of respect for tradition and the ability to innovate. By fostering an understanding of local culture, Turkish students could develop a design language that is both contemporary and grounded in cultural identity (O'Sullivan, 2023, p. 60).

Through this process, I see how embedding local values within design education could help future Turkish designers create meaningful work without detaching from their roots. This connection to heritage could inspire them to view design as a practice that respects cultural layers while evolving in response to modern needs.

Passing On Cultural Heritage to Future Generations

Finally, O'Sullivan stresses that cultural heritage must adapt to stay relevant in the modern world. "If heritage is only understood by a small group of experts, it doesn't really have value for everyone" (O'Sullivan, 2023, p. 72). This point encouraged me to see heritage not just as something to preserve, but as a living concept that should resonate today.

For my project, this means preserving the cultural meaning of Anatolian motifs as they are reinterpreted for a new era. The goal is for these motifs to exist not only as decoration but as "living heritage" that bridges past and future. In keeping their core meanings intact while reimagining them, I hope they will continue to inspire modern audiences without losing the essence that makes them culturally significant.

References

O'Sullivan, N. (2023) *Our Everyday: The Intangible yet Tangible Tensions between Commonality, Contrast, and Co-operation within Design Education.* In: Schranz, C. (ed.) Commons in Design. Amsterdam: Valiz.

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