

Recontextualizing the *Shield* of Gülsün Karamustafa: The Politics of Writing Feminist Art Histories in Turkey

In a recent interview, the visual artist Gülsün Karamustafa (b.1946, Ankara) revealed that the wedding dress displayed in the center of the *Shield* (1986) belonged to herself.¹ Bearing the shape of a shield, the work displays a wedding dress in the middle of ruffled tulle in different colors. Pulled to one side, metallic silver drapes in the upper part further emphasize the dress in the absence of a head. As the *Shield* is placed on the wall, the ends of the tulle that surround the wedding dress are tied up and left hanging down just above the ground, serving both to underline the form of the *Shield* as well as foreground the shift in meaning that has occurred for the dress. A couple of decorative artificial petals and leaves also hang all the way down the piece. The dress itself features a red bridal sash wrapped around the waist with a small plastic bouquet of flowers attached to it.

The three-dimensional fabric collage appears to be very much aligned with Karamustafa's group of textile panels from the 1980s, which have been shown several times in a variety of exhibitions. Yet, the *Shield* was only displayed in 1986, at a couple of exhibitions in Istanbul and Ankara until it was recreated again in 2016 for Karamustafa's retrospective exhibition "Chronographia" at the Hamburger Bahnhof–Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin, Germany. It was not shown in Karamustafa's first retrospective exhibition, which opened only a few years ago in 2013 at SALT Gallery in Istanbul. More strikingly, the only other work that was reproduced for "Chronographia," *The View of Her Studio from 1985* (1985), had been once before revived in 2006 for the "Anos 80: Uma Topologia" exhibition at Museu de Serralves in Porto, Portugal. The fact that this exhibition, which mapped the practices of the 1980s and 1990s, displayed

Karamustafa's *The View of Her Studio from 1985* together with artists including Mona Hatoum (b.1952) and Barbara Kruger (b.1945) was very significant for Karamustafa as she was able to see her work in the transnational, contemporary context for the first time.² While these exhibitions allowed us to encounter Karamustafa's complete oeuvre, the artworks they unveiled have raised many questions as to their significance and meaning in the wider context of her work. The interviews, commentaries and notes that followed the exhibitions have also brought up new information for debate enabling us to recontextualize not only the *Shield*, the only other work that was considered worthy to be reproduced for "Chronographia," but also her earlier works in general. Thus, in what follows, I want to explore the *Shield* and by extension, to read Karamustafa's wider oeuvre against the grain by unfolding its particular dimensions that have so far gone unnoticed in the literature. In order to do that, first I want to discuss the ways in which the contemporary art histories of Turkey have positioned Karamustafa as a 'woman artist' and how her work has been interpreted through the decades. This exploration will consequently allow me to reflect on the practice of writing art histories in Turkey, leading me to offer a variety of meanings for the *Shield*, all the while unlocking parts of Karamustafa's personal history from the late 1960s to the 1980s that have in fact prevailed in her art making.

Particularly since the 2000s, Karamustafa's work has been the subject of attention across the international art world and often endorsed for its versatility and critical outlook. Guggenheim MAP Global Art Initiative described her on its website as "[o]ne of Turkey's most outspoken and celebrated artists," who "examine[s] the complexities of gender, globalization, and migration." In 2007 "[p]robably no other body of work by a Turkish artist," René Block wrote, "reflects the political and cultural realities of the 1980s with an intensity and sweep comparable to that of Gülsün Karamustafa."³ In 2015, Karamustafa was awarded a Prince Claus Award for

her “immense contribution to contemporary Turkish art and its development; and for confronting socio-political tensions and nurturing understanding and tolerance,” as listed on the Prince Claus Fund’s website. And recently, Udo Kittelmann subscribed to a similar rhetoric in the catalogue of “Chronographia,” in which Karamustafa is described as “one of the leading artists of the second half of the 20th century in Turkey ... not only a critical observer of migratory and globalisation processes, but also a chronicler of Turkish history as a phenomenon between enforced Westernisation and occidentalist fervour.”⁴

Around the same time, the art world in Turkey has recognized the importance of Karamustafa’s practice. In art historical narratives, the artist has been canonized and championed as one of the leaders of conceptual art in Turkey.⁵ Her “role as a woman artist” has been acknowledged in the emergence of contemporary art: she has many a time been coined as one of the “mothers” of contemporary art in Turkey.⁶ Rural-to-urban migration, and later immigration, which Karamustafa has time and again engaged with in her work, has prevailed in art histories. And whilst several of the artist’s pieces were appraised as a “sociological laboratory,”⁷ as she had enquired “the iconography and the everyday objects of the exploding suburbia,”⁸ Karamustafa’s exploration of suburbia and migration has not always been deemed worthy of art historical consideration or critical attention.

In the 1970s, when Karamustafa started her professional career, critics generally disapproved of her paintings, which is in fact her primary medium, and categorized them under the genre of “folk” and “arabesque” due to their subject matters and naive style.⁹ Nor in the following decade did her new textile works and installations, which pursued the same investigative outlook in a similar unpretentious fashion, receive good reviews. They were often condemned as abstract “kitsch” visions.¹⁰ One art critic’s comments particularly stand out as she characterized

Karamustafa's work at the 6th edition of "A Cross-Section of the Avant-Garde Turkish Art" exhibition. The critic, Şükran Moral, who later became a feminist performance artist, described the works, including the *Shield*, as ambiguous, stressing that their message was not clear. She was not sure whether Karamustafa wanted to critique or just to display these "kitsch objects" in the "panorama" she created, which in her words, included "everything from plastic flowers to rugs, a wedding dress and [second] class posters."¹¹ In this period, as Karamustafa has recently revealed, she was feeling very much isolated as she thought her work did not fit in with that of others.¹² Soon after she had created the *Shield* in 1986, she stopped doing paintings and textile works and started working only on site-specific works and ready-made objects.¹³

In those days, only a few critics opposed what has gradually become an art historical trope. For example, Ahmet Köksal was one of the first to attempt to acknowledge, if only partially, the political concerns that Karamustafa has alluded to in her work.¹⁴ In the 1980s, Semra Germaner proposed an interdisciplinary context by connecting the artist's work with the novels of Latife Tekin (b.1957), a prominent woman author of the time, who was also engaging with "the topic of arabesque."¹⁵ In the decade after, Deniz Şengel provided readers with a view of Karamustafa's textile panels and paintings that linked them to Byzantine artistic traditions and by extension, with a mystical and ritualistic dimension.¹⁶

Particularly notable is that it was not until the early 2000s that art histories discovered the gender dimension of the artist's work. Barbara Heinrich pointed out that Karamustafa's paintings portrayed the ways in which the women have been defined by the allocation of prescribed roles: as mothers, brides and daughter. She further asserted that Karamustafa's work evoked the question of nationalism in Turkey through an elaborate investigation of gender in the fabric of society.¹⁷ Ahu Antmen underlined that while Karamustafa's early paintings depicted the lives of

migrant women whose identity was structured by “traditionally restrictive gender codes,” her textile pieces were premised on the chasm between arts and crafts as “gendered categories.”¹⁸ Moreover, Antmen stressed that her work explored “the formulation of gender constructs from the Ottoman era to today”¹⁹ as the artist drew on her analyses of orientalist paintings in her later installations. Articulated against the perpetuated gender roles in society, not only Karamustafa but also several other women artists in Turkey have critically engaged with the politics of gender in their art.²⁰ I argue that this engagement has not only been reflected in the narratives but has also been discursively accounted for in the development of art in Turkey. For example, Beral Madra has observed that in the 1970s, women artists produced works that were somewhat “apologetic and descriptive”²¹ in that they seemed to downplay their sexuality and be less inquisitive in their investigations into the body, but between the 1980s and 2000s they gradually became more daring and subjective, producing works that were explicitly critical of the gendered social structures.

The fact that narratives have developed a strong orientation in discussing the role that gender has played in artworks, not only in Karamustafa’s art but in a number of works by women artists, I suggest has somewhat neutralized the engagement of these practices with other positions of criticality, such as the political.²² While this led the gender debate to become shorthand for women’s art in histories of contemporary Turkish art,²³ if not for ‘feminist art,’²⁴ all the while excluding the art historical inquiry into diverse approaches that could speak to sexual difference or lived experience. That Susan Platt has suggested that many Turkish women artists, including Karamustafa, “only rarely . . . paint[ed] private stories or psychic traumas”²⁵ is significant in this sense as it appears to be aligned with this particular practice of writing art histories.

In this respect, it is not surprising to note that narratives have often alluded to the art of the 1980s as an “apolitical conceptual practice.”²⁶ Indeed, portrayals of Karamustafa constitute such a case due to the rather politically deprived representations of her work resulting in unilateral views that do not take on her political engagement, *actual encounters* or *lived experiences*.²⁷ Rather, they pivot only on the aspects of her work that problematize migration and by extension, gender. Certainly, the discursive dissociation of art and the political in Turkey may be understood in the context of the military coup of 1980, which created, what Erden Kosova called, a “period of paralysis ... a social vacuum ... [that] suspended all political activities by brutal force.”²⁸ The atmosphere of fear and pressure was created after 1971 by the issue of the Turkish military memorandum has somewhat been carried through the 1980s until today. Indeed, many contemporary artists still feel compelled to conceal their former political engagements.²⁹ However, Karamustafa has not been one of these artists.

As T.J. Clark has pointed out, “encounters” between the social and the political take on a crucial importance in art historical research as they explain the ways in which an experience or an event becomes an image, a form, and a work of art.³⁰ Positioning the background as the foreground, Clark suggests discovering the “network of real, complex relations” and “concrete transactions [that] are hidden behind the mechanical image of ‘reflection.’”³¹ Following Clark’s logic, I want to ask in what ways Karamustafa’s *actual encounters* take on further significance in her work. More specifically, through an elaborate reading of the *Shield*, in what ways the intertwined positions of criticality, such as the political and the feminine,³² speak to each other, while making a new visual epistemology possible for Karamustafa’s work.

Shielding the Wedding Dress

One of the initial readings of the *Shield* might be mapped on the wedding dress itself. In 1970 Karamustafa wore the dress to marry her husband, Sadık Karamustafa (b.1946) – a leading graphic designer in Turkey today – who was back then a fellow student from the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts. Surrounding the *Shield* with such a personal and intimate event in her life not only draws attention to Karamustafa’s lived experiences and the significance of bringing it into her work but also to the probable connotations that the wedding dress invokes, with regards to the ways in which the politics of this particular dress play out in social consciousness.

Karamustafa describes the period in which she wore the dress as a time they faced parental pressure to “wear a wedding dress and have a ceremony.”³³ They were, as she reveals, “young people who were set out to change the world and see better days. ... As much as wearing the wedding dress was a token of the institution of marriage, so was this particular dress,” for she saw it as “a symbol that *shielded them* against [pressures].”³⁴ When Sadık’s parents insisted, the young couple felt obliged to have a wedding ceremony. “It would have broken their hearts, if we did not have it,” Karamustafa comments.³⁵ Yet, she also confirms that wedding ceremonies in her family have usually been moderate events in which the newlyweds attend in chic but simple cocktail attire. The white wedding dress is nowadays recognized in most parts of the world as a prerequisite of weddings.³⁶ After having become popular in Britain and France in the nineteenth-century, it was soon fashioned around the world, including the Ottoman court as early as 1898.³⁷ Over the years, the white wedding dress has become a symbol of innocence and virginity in the Euro-American tradition, which possibly added to the popularity of this product of the ‘modern world’ in other cultures and geographies, such as Turkey. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a total secularism was imposed upon both the state and the society and the

institute of marriage has since been reorganized. As Nancy Lindisfarne observes, the new Turkish government was not involved in actually resetting traditions, but has since indirectly promoted ‘Western-style’ weddings.³⁸

In this respect, since most of the traditional marriage rituals were strongly associated with Ottoman customs, which were considered too rustic, conservative or oriental in the modern imagination, they were often abandoned in the weddings of new Turkey.³⁹ As the well-educated upper classes of society quickly associated themselves with modernization, they soon adopted the white wedding dress and modern ceremonies. Nilüfer Göle stresses the dynamic notions of the society in that the upper-middle classes in particular acquired “Western, secular life-styles” while excluding the “Islamic life-world” that distinguished them as “Republican elites” from the “parochial” ones who were attached to more traditional, local and religious manners and customs.⁴⁰ Yet, not only in weddings but also in daily life, some of the customary traditions have often maintained, which at times renders visible the negotiation between two major cultural tensions in Turkey.

The fact that Karamustafa’s family were from the two most developed cities in the country, Istanbul and Ankara, and have often been coined as “Republican, elite civil servants” in narratives,⁴¹ whereas Sadık’s family were from Ordu, a small town on the coast of the Black Sea in Turkey, allows me to consider the possibility that the wedding dress in the *Shield* materializes a dialogue between two different cultures. The traditional red bridal sash tied around the waist of the wedding dress should be taken into consideration to explain this dialogue as, similar to other customary bridal accessories in various cultures such as the garter, it symbolically acknowledges the virginity and the chastity of the bride. However, as the chastity is already confirmed by the white wedding dress, the red bridal sash displayed on Karamustafa’s bridal gown only serves to

highlight it. In this respect, the dress entails an understanding of modernity into which a traditional symbolism of patriarchy has been integrated. Yet, I suggest that this emphasis does not entirely present a tension between different cultural values or between modernity and tradition. Instead, it shows one more time the perseverance of patriarchal values through cultures, territories and ages, and their ability to be translated into new sets of social and cultural practices. Certainly this representation links the *Shield* to the discussion of the gender role defined for women by the Republican reforms, which equipped them with equal civil rights. However, since then women have also been expected to conform to the standards of the social strata by being secular and educated but domesticated and sexually chaste at the same time.⁴²

Reading the *Shield* through Karamustafa's wedding dress subscribes to the questions that the master narratives predominantly raise in relation to in her work. For such questions inquire the notion of gender across a set of practices and institutions structured within society, although they focus far less on how they have materialized in the artist's life. Indeed, I want to reflect on the "bond between the personal and the historical, fiction and fact," as Marsha Meskimmon stresses, that "delineate the complex exchanges between individuals and the society which they make and which, in turn, makes them"⁴³ in order to explore the political and the feminine in the *Shield*.

Exploring the Social

Karamustafa's first *encounter* with the political, to borrow the words of Chantal Mouffe, as the ontology that "concerns the very way in which society is instituted,"⁴⁴ occurred far back in her past, and was grounded in the relationship with her maternal uncle Mihri Belli (1915-2011). Belli was a powerful intellectual figure in the family, a prominent member of the Communist Party of Turkey since the early 1940s, who was incarcerated for seven years during the mass communist

arrests in 1951. Witnessing her mother and grandmother traumatically experiencing his imprisonment made an indelible impact on Karamustafa.⁴⁵ After his release, Belli and his wife Sevim (b.1925), who is a medical doctor and an important political figure in the Marxist movement in Turkey, were involved in the foundation of the (Marxist) Workers Party of Turkey in 1961, which was characterized by an anti-Western and anti-capitalist political view, and which gradually identified itself with anti-Americanism by the end of the 1960s.⁴⁶ And although the Bellis had never directly affected Karamustafa's political views, it is quite clear that being raised in a politically engaged family environment developed in her a socialist consciousness that was later reorganized by her milieu at the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts.⁴⁷

This milieu, which mostly consisted of her artist friends from the Academy, many of whom are renowned artists in Turkey today, included Karamustafa's lifelong friend the painter Figen Aydıntaşbaşı; the group of painters that later came to be called the "1968 Generation," i.e. Alaettin Aksoy (b.1942), Gürkan "Komet" Coskun (b.1941), Mehmet Güteryüz (b.1938) and Utku Varlık (b.1942); the painter Nevhiz Tanyeli (b.1945), known as Nevhiz, and her husband the poet Feridun Aksın (1933-2005), as well as the novelist Sevim Burak (1931-1983) and her husband the painter Ömer Uluç (1931-2010). It was Nevhiz who had introduced Karamustafa to the circle that usually got together at her abode.⁴⁸ As a young painting student just moved to Istanbul, Karamustafa instantly embraced this new atmosphere in which art, politics, philosophy, poetry and life were included among topics of conversation.⁴⁹ Yet, almost confirming Clark's art historical thinking, Karamustafa's encounter with this 'artistic community' was not her a priori "point of reference as a social being."⁵⁰

Particularly notable is that Karamustafa's years at the Academy, between 1963 and 1969, fell during the years when events were escalating up to "May 1968," in which Karamustafa and her

friends were actively involved – together they occupied the Academy building on 22 June 1968 in protest against the administration, living there for a month. What constituted the political domain of the student protests of 1968 in Turkey was mainly guided by the idea of socialism, with a particular emphasis on the ‘social,’ which was developed in the 1960s by a group of intellectuals and political figures, who were mainly lead by Mihri Belli,⁵¹ whose distinct political perspective was something Karamustafa already familiar with. As much as the authentic and far-reaching Marxist nature of the occupations in May 1968 in Paris influenced the student protests in Turkey, it is worth noting that the Turkish student unrest and social awakening had in fact emerged from the politically tense conditions of Turkey in the 1960s.⁵² Therefore, the Academy students were already aware that they needed a change in their art curricula in order to address current issues in society by integrating Marxist ideology and social-realism in their teaching and learning environment.⁵³ The growing dissent and increasingly active political involvement of both Karamustafa’s circle and the larger body of protesters, including socialists, students, workers and intellectuals, unraveled a story quite different to the one in France. As Karamustafa observes, whereas students and workers secured certain civic rights in France, in Turkey “things did not work out the way they did in Europe.”⁵⁴ Hundreds of dissidents were detained and eventually a military memorandum was issued in 1971, which led to the execution of three revolutionary students.⁵⁵ At this time, as the Turkish daily newspaper *Milliyet* reported on 28 July 1971, Karamustafa and her husband Sadik were suspected of hiding a political fugitive at their place, a fellow architecture student, and as a result she was incarcerated for six months.⁵⁶ The point is that Karamustafa’s circle at the Academy and the events of 1968 and beyond suggest the renewal of her relationship with the political, to borrow the words of Richard Noble, in ways that improved her “critical engagement with the political reality” while enabling her to explore

the “subject positions or identities defined by otherness, marginality, oppression or victimisation,”⁵⁷ which laid the foundations for the *Shield* and the production of many of her works in the years to come.

Immediately after her release in 1972 Karamustafa made the “Prison Paintings,” a series of fifteen paper works that narrated different stories and characters from her time in prison in her simple but assertive style. Later in the 1970s she made two more prison paintings, *Tryptich* (1977) and *Bed of the Lifetime Prisoner* (1978). Of particular importance is the fact that in her first solo exhibition at Taksim Art Gallery in 1978, just a few years after graduating from the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts, Karamustafa displayed her portrait series of infamous Turkish communists (1973), including the poet Nazım Hikmet (1902-1963), novelists Sabahattin Ali (1907-1948) and Sevgi Soysal (1936-1976). Her “May Day” paintings from 1977 and 1978 that commemorate International Workers’ Day are also of particular importance considering many who participated in the celebrations of 1 May 1977, known as the “Taksim Square Massacre,” died or were injured.⁵⁸ Twenty years later, in 1998, she made her installation called *Stage*, which consists of a photograph from 1971 showing herself and Sadık in court waiting to hear the verdict, onto which the words “Ideology, Stage, Regime, Control” are projected. René Block and Fulya Erdemci described this as an “autobiographical work, ... a commentary on the hegemony of the Turkish state [that] juxtaposes her personal history with the recent political history of Turkey, 1971 coup d’etat.”⁵⁹ Apart from the *Bed of the Lifetime Prisoner*, which was displayed in her first solo show, this body of work was shown all together for the first time in 2013 in her retrospective at SALT when Karamustafa felt that the time had finally come to display all of them to give a clear account of those days.⁶⁰

Encounters with Artists

What ties together Karamustafa's *actual* political encounters with the *Shield* is intrinsically the wedding dress, as the artist has disclosed that she passed hers down to her circle of friends.⁶¹

Although most of her friends from this circle left Istanbul to live in Paris after graduation, if not after the 1971 memorandum, Karamustafa's artistic and intellectual upbringing within this milieu lasted throughout her years at the Academy. What makes this intellectual circle more interesting seems to be the nature of their intimate relationship. Indeed, Karamustafa has called the group her 'revolutionary friends' in interviews and, particularly with the women in the circle; she not only shared the same political ideals or artistic interests but also personal objects such as their wedding dresses. During this time, the impact of two women from this milieu on Karamustafa's life and artistic practice becomes apparent: the painter Nevhiz and the author Sevim Burak (1931-1983).⁶²

Karamustafa stresses that Nevhiz, a painter whose work consists of metaphor-intense figurative paintings, stood as a very influential figure in her intellectual and artistic growth in those days.⁶³

This was not only because of the way that her art and life were completely conflated, as Karamustafa notes, but also because of this new network that Nevhiz ushered her into. Nevhiz's close friend Sevim Burak's influence on Karamustafa is of particular importance. In that period the canonical novelist seems to have been influential on many younger women artists, including Nil Yalter,⁶⁴ helping them to chart new paths for their art, all the while herself accessing the psychosexual aspects of her own identity and by extension, her oeuvre. Indeed, this encounter between women, which has clearly engendered "interactions ... of spaces, bodies and images,"⁶⁵ to borrow Marsha Meskimmon's words, suggests what Deborah Cherry calls a visual "intertextuality."⁶⁶ As Jennifer G. Germann has also pointed out, the role of art histories in

revealing “intertwined lives” and “intersubjective productions” whilst drawing on images, identities and life stories suggests an expansion of “our field of vision [by including] other women operating in the same milieu at the same time,” rather than focusing on singular artists as sources of influence.⁶⁷ Similarly, Griselda Pollock proposes that in order to understand the art produced by women in greater depth we need to reinscribe their particularities, differences and own subjective temporal landscapes. Foregrounding the importance of their lived experience, which she calls “spaces of femininity,” Pollock proposes the analysis of the ways in which sexual difference has been configured in the context of artists’ “complex social formations of class, race and sexuality.”⁶⁸ In this respect, I want to consider the intersubjective encounter between Karamustafa and both of these women as a ‘space of femininity’ that extends out from the political position they shared together, which can help us further understand the *Shield*, as well as Karamustafa’s other works.

Nevhiz’s paintings have at times been interpreted in line with the work of her fellow artists of the 1968 Generation, though she has never been canonized in narratives as one of them.⁶⁹ The reason these artists took this name was due to their representation of the rebellious spirit of the 1968 events in their art, which predominantly focused on the notions of mutiny and sexuality combined with satire and self-criticism, while bringing out their own individual style and critical point of view on social events.⁷⁰ Keen observation of social realities has also been central to Nevhiz’s body of work, in which humans and creatures represent dreams and bring forward sexually charged imagery. Thus, it is quite clear that Nevhiz’s cultural landscape charted a new path for Karamustafa’s art in that she has gradually rediscovered not only the problematic gender constructions but also the issues of the class society.

The presence of Burak in Karamustafa's close circle of friends on the other hand, prompts the questions the novelist was known to tackle in her work, one of which was about her mother. As her family had kept her mother's Rumanian-Jewish identity a secret from everyone, Burak attempted to restore her identity in her work.⁷¹ First keeping and later revealing this secret had an impact on the author's style, resulting in creating characters of different ethnic and religious groups who spoke a "fragmented language" evoking the linguistic world of the Old Testament, while disclosing her guilt and aggression in relation to her mother.⁷²

The way that Burak developed a new linguistic style for herself links to Karamustafa's determination in insisting on her unique manner of painting and the innovative outlook of her textile works between 1970 and 1986. One could also argue that Karamustafa's particular interest in the lives of different identities, often the people seen as 'others' in big cities can be understood in the light of Burak's concern in the lives of the minorities, the 'others' in Turkey. This is particularly discernible in Karamustafa's paintings *The Birth* (1974), *One Birth, Three Girls* (1974) *Precious Bride* (1975), *The Lacemaker* (1976) and *Flat of the Concierge* (1976) that appear to be the fragments from the lives of others and the result of a detailed observation of their households, which often portrays characters involved in precarious domestic labor. More importantly, these works do not simply aim to encase the question of migration, or kitsch, as it is quite clear that they reflect a subtle critique of the class society and bourgeois ideology. Certainly, both Nevhiz and Burak's political personas and socially concerned work not only redefined Karamustafa's latent political subjectivity but also opened up the possibility for feminine imagery. Perhaps both of these women allowed Karamustafa to create for herself a 'space of femininity' in the search for her style and identity, a space which substituted her relationship with her own mother. Alongside Burak's investigation of the maternal and Nevhiz's

feminist visual outlook, there is the fact that Karamustafa passed her wedding dress down within this circle of friends to further consolidate this rather maternal situation – especially considering a wedding dress is often passed down from mother to daughter. Hence, apart from the political position from which the *Shield* speaks, the people and events encircling it explain the work in ways that transcend the issue of gender or the formal qualities of the work, granting access to more complex, intimate and inner encounters.

Resituating the Maternal

Years later, in 1986, Karamustafa once more came across her wedding dress, when she found it at her mother's house. The artist has disclosed that she may have subconsciously felt burdened with the wedding dress (and what it stood for) and so she created the *Shield* with it.⁷³ Of particular importance is that the *encounter* with the dress happened following her mother's death. This is surprising as Karamustafa's mother, Türkan Belli–Ebcioğlu (1923-1985), did not make an evident appearance in her work until 1998 in *My Roses My Reveries*, which was formed of an enlarged black and white photograph of herself from when she was a child, on the train with her mother who, while carrying her baby brother, tries to reach out for her father from the window. The second appearance of her mother occurred in 2012, when the artist created the work called *For My Mother*. This work originated from a decorative object that Karamustafa had found in a flea market, which featured ceramic figurines of a flamboyant woman and a dog, and she had thought her mother would have liked it very much.⁷⁴

What is interesting is that, by contrast, several of Karamustafa's other works place other members of her family in their center, including her father and both grandmothers. The memories of her grandmother on her mother's side formed the premise of her now-renowned installations,

such as *Memory/Recollection* (1991) and the *Heimat ist wo Mann isst* (1994), which were inspired by their wartime accounts of repatriation, deportation or escape.⁷⁵ Her father Hikmet Münir Ebcioğlu (1904-1985) has recurred in a few of her mixed media installations, including *The Notebook* (1993/2013), *Chronographia* (1994) and *The Monument and the Child* (2010), as well as *My Roses My Reveries*.⁷⁶ Such works not only depict Ebcioğlu as a sheltering and guiding father figure but also strikingly identified him as an intellectual in the service of the Turkish nation, as he worked as a journalist and a radio presenter at TRT - the national Turkish Radio and Television. Whereas Karamustafa's father and grandmothers have been the focus of attention, her mother has been absent from interviews and commentaries.⁷⁷

In fact, Karamustafa and her mother Türkan's relationship was somewhat distressing at times. The mother and the daughter had initially been very close: the mother was "an adorable young dreamer" with artistic aspirations, who was only twenty-three when she gave birth. Yet, that Türkan had often rejected the mother and wife role set by the Republican ideal, leading Karamustafa to help with most of the household chores from a young age. Although Türkan had deeply contributed to Karamustafa's early aesthetic formation and greatly supported her daughter's decision to study art, when the family moved to Istanbul where Karamustafa initiated to study painting at the Academy, she was understandably unwilling to leave her vibrant cultural circle in Ankara – her own space of creative femininity. To Karamustafa's recollection, the disagreement cracked their relationship, eventually leading Karamustafa to carve out a new space of femininity at the Academy. The fact that Türkan suffered from dementia in her last ten years caused the tension and confrontations between mother and daughter to increase, leaving the artist with a deep resentment for a long time after her mother's death.⁷⁸ During this period,

between 1975 and 1985, as Karamustafa had become a mother herself, she gradually identified herself within her own mother.

Julia Kristeva argues that for both man and woman the loss of the mother is the first step to become autonomous, “a necessity” in that the children can take the next step in being independent individuals. Kristeva further suggests that the feminine is reborn with the death of the mother, in which both a need and a representation, if not identification, of the self are observed. As Kristeva sets the loss as a condition of *becoming*, she points out that only under “optimal circumstances” can it acquire meaning and be transformed into a “sublime object,” perhaps a work of art.⁷⁹ If we are to take the *Shield* as the embodiment of Karamustafa’s distressed relationship with her mother and their prolonged strain, then her loss suggests a transformation from “the hatred ... confusional love ... the aversion” to identification and creation for the artist. In other words, the temporal and affective overlap between her maternal experience, her loss and the making of the *Shield* reinscribes the agency of the feminine in Karamustafa’s work. The relocation of the self in the work through the use of her own wedding dress serves as a visual representation of the artist’s identification with her mother, and by extension the prescribed but rejected normative roles of mother and daughter. It could further be asserted that it was perhaps Karamustafa’s intense lived experience with her mother that led to the significant shift from paintings and collages to installation and videos in Karamustafa’s work starting from 1986 onwards. Illustrating Kristeva’s argument, with the loss of the mother started “the becoming” of Karamustafa.

Indeed, this *network of real, complex relations*, places not only the *Shield* but also the body of work that she produced throughout the 1970s and 1980s in a new light. While the *Shield* stands as a powerful but elusive reminder of the political dissidence of the 1960s and 1970s, it

foregrounds the sites of negotiation in society, as well as evoking the artist's days at the Academy, her *actual* political involvement, and her intellectual milieu through which the political and the feminine conflate. Relocating the work not only within the ideological premises of those decades but also in the larger framework of the state ideologies that cast the social and cultural roles for women, minorities, socialists and intellectuals, serves to further understand the implications that are epitomized in the practice and politics of art historiography. More importantly, the feminine in Karamustafa's art demonstrates the crucial significance of the psychosexual and intersubjective dialogues not only with men but also women, allowing us to assert the feminine in a non-binary context. The fact that Karamustafa's spaces of femininity and her political subjectivity have persistently informed and spoken to each other offers a new vision; a vision that constitutes a mutually transformative domain that does not comply with the master narratives, which are premised either on progress or loss. That the encircling stories, events and practices of social and intellectual networks call the generational map of art histories into question provides us with a temporal connection between now and the late 1960s and, also adds another layer to the *Shield*, leading to the rupture of historical linearity by taking us back and forth in time and making the artist's own temporal landscape accessible.

Acknowledgements

Notes

Unless otherwise stated translations are mine.

¹ Huo Rf, “Gülsün Karamustafa ile Söyleşi,” *Sanat Dünyamız* 153, (2016): 56-58.

² See Levent Çalıkoğlu, “Gülsün Karamustafa,” in *Çağdaş Sanat Konuşmaları 3, 90’lı Yıllarda Türkiye’de Çağdaş Sanat*, ed. Levent Çalıkoğlu (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, 2008), 55.

³ René Block, foreword to *Gülsün Karamustafa: My Roses My Reveries* by Barbara Heinrich (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, 2007), trans. Bronwen Saunders, 5.

⁴ Udo Kittelmann, preface to *Chronographia: Gülsün Karamustafa* (Wien: Vfmk Verlag für moderne Kunst GmbH, 2016), eds. Melanie Roumiguière and Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, trans. Jacqueline Todd, 9.

⁵ _____, _____, 45.

⁶ Beral Madra, “Küresel Sanatın Sıcak Noktası,” in *Türkiye’de Dün-Bugün Dönüşümleri*, ed. Gülsen Bal (Istanbul: Kitap Publications, 2008), 73 (trans. N. Kıvılcım Yavuz); Vasıf Kortun and Erden Kosova, *Ofsayt Ama Gol* (Istanbul: SALT/Garanti Kültür AŞ, 2014), 48; and Beral Madra, “Visual Art as a Field of Complication,” in *User’s Manual: Contemporary Art from Turkey, 1986-2006*, ed. Halil Altındere and Süreyya Evren, trans. Yiğit Adam, (Frankfurt and Istanbul: Revolver and art-ist Publications, 2007), 33.

⁷ Fulya Erdemci, “Breaking the Spell, Re-routing,” in *Modern and Beyond: 1950-2000* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2008), trans. Liz Amado, 275-276.

⁸ Erden Kosova, “Contemporary Art in Turkey,” *User’s Manual*, 49; and Kortun and Kosova, 16 and 95.

⁹ Ahmet Köksal, "Fujita, Köktürk, Karamustafa," *Milliyet Sanat* 278 (1978): 26; Barbara Heinrich, *Gülsün Karamustafa: My Roses My Reveries* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, 2007), 18-23; and Erden Kosova, "Slow Bullet II," *Red Thread* 3, (2009): 1–12.

¹⁰ Kaya Özsezgin, "Yeni Galerilerden Yeni Sergilere," *Milliyet Sanat* 25, (1981): 52; Nilgün Özyayten, "Gülsün Karamustafa'nın Tanıklıkları," *Hürriyet Gösteri* 159, (1994): 40; and Selen Sarioğlu, *Gülsün Karamustafa: Sanatçı Kişiliği ve Yapıtları* (MA thesis, 2007), 19.

¹¹ Şükran Moral, "Öncü Türk Sanatından Bir Kesit," 16. Emphasis added.

¹² "Gülsün Karamustafa in Conversation with Övül O. Durmuşoğlu: Me in Time/Time in Me," in *Chronographia*, trans. Karl Hoffmann, 81.

¹³ Selen Sarioğlu states that Karamustafa did not paint for seven years, in *Gülsün Karamustafa*, 8.

¹⁴ Köksal, 26.

¹⁵ Semra Germaner, "1950'den Günümüze Türk Resmi," *Sanat Çevresi* 102, (1987): 20. Also Kortun draws similar parallels between the creative productions of the time and Karamustafa's oeuvre. See Kortun and Kosova, 95.

¹⁶ Deniz Şengel, *The Fallen Icon: A Rhetorical Approach to Gülsün Karamustafa's Art 1981-1992* (Istanbul: SALT/Garanti Kültür AŞ, 2016), 40-44.

¹⁷ Heinrich, 18-23 and 50-65. Also Esra Yıldız also touches upon these questions in *Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında 1970'lerden 2000'lere Türkiye Çağdaş Sanatında Kadın Sanatçılar* (Istanbul: PhD diss., 2012), 95-102.

¹⁸ Ahu Antmen, "Tracing Social Constructs of Gender in Turkish Art from the 1970s to the 2000s," in *User's Manual 2.0: Contemporary Art in Turkey 1975-2015* (Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2015), eds. Süreyya Evren and Halil Altındere, trans. Erin Gölönü, 106.

¹⁹ Ibid. 106.

²⁰ Indeed even today, discussions on women's gender role occupy a large part of the everyday political discourse and have spread into the wider social consciousness, which then has been countered with constant challenge and dissidence from intellectuals. For a discussion of gender in Karamustafa's work, see Nancy Atakan, "Women Active in Turkish Art Community," accessed 26 October, 2016 (2009), <http://www.nancyatakan.com/works/59/women-active-in-turkish-art-community>; Ahu Antmen, "Why Do the Pioneers of Contemporary Art Have Pink IDs?," in *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey*, ed. Esin Eşkinat, trans. Nazım Dikbaş (Istanbul: Istanbul Modern, 2011), 66-89; Tomur Atagök, "Cumhuriyet'ten Günümüze Kadın Sanatçılar," *Bildiklerim Gördüklerimdir, Gördüklerim Bildiklerimdir* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, 2011), 26-54; and Ahu Antmen, "Cinsiyetli Kültür, Cinsiyetli Sanat: 1970'lerden 1980'lere Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Sanatçılar," *Toplum ve Bilim* 125, 2012, 63-88.

²¹ Beral Madra, *İnci Eviner 'Skinless'* (Venice: Zenobio Institute, 1997), 1.

²² Also Marion von Osten observes this by saying, "a pivotal aspect of her career that has been long neglected." See *Chronographia*, trans. Karl Hoffmann, 68-69. Certainly, detaching art from the political in histories is not something new. As Hilary Robinson pointed out, to a great extent, the 'activist art' practiced by women has recently been written out from the art historical literature. See Hilary Robinson, "Witness it: Activism, Art, and The Feminist Performative Subject," in *Companion to Feminist Art* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, forthcoming 2018), eds. Maria Buszek and Hilary Robinson.

²³ This is also true for different cultural contexts. See, for example, Sally Baden and Anne Marie Goetz, "Who Needs [Sex] When You Can [Gender]? Conflicting Discourses On Gender at

Beijing,” *Feminist Review* 56, (1997): 3-24; and Georgina G. Gluzman, *Trazos*

Invisibles: Mujeres Artistas en Buenos Aires, 1890-1923 (Ciudad: Biblos, 2016), 17-25.

²⁴ A number of narratives openly distinguish between the feminist art and the political art in Turkey. For example, Orhan Koçak, *Modern ve Ötesi: Elli Yılın Sanatına Kenar Notları* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2007), 83-86; and Süreyya Evren, *101 Artworks: Forty Years of Turkish Contemporary Art* (Berlin and Istanbul: Revolver and art-ist Publishing, 2011).

²⁵ Susan N. Platt, “Public Politics and Domestic Rituals: Contemporary Art by Women in Turkey, 1980-2000,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24, no.1 (2003): 21.

²⁶ Kortun and Kosova, 70.

²⁷ For example, see Kortun and Kosova, 66; Barbara Heinrich, 18-23; Çiğdem Sağır, “Gülsün Karamustafa,” in *Seksenlerde Türkiye’de Çağdaş Sanat: Yeni Açılımlar* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2008), ed. İpek Duben and Esra Yıldız, 160-164.

²⁸ Kosova, *Slow Bullet II*; and Kortun and Kosova, 48.

²⁹ Indeed, Nil Yalter is one of these artists, who refrains from talking about her long-ago political engagements. Personal interview with Nil Yalter, 23 March, 2016 and 28 April, 2017, Paris, France.

³⁰ T.J. Clark, “On the Social History of Art,” in *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 13.

³¹ *Ibid.* 12.

³² Throughout the text, I use the terms the ‘feminine’ and ‘femininity’ to refer to the meaning that, instead of “underfeminization” of women’s art, argues for the “critical recuperation of the notion of the ‘feminine.’” Together they take a position that underlines sexual difference in a

positive way, as something that constitutes subjectivity in the artistic production and identity creation while challenging the values and categories constructed by patriarchal discourses, narratives and canons of art history. See Griselda Pollock, “Mother Trouble: The Maternal-Feminine in Phallic and Feminist Theory in Relation to Bracha Ettinger’s Elaboration of Matrixial Ethics/Aesthetics,” *Studies in the Maternal* 1, no.1 (2009): 10-11; and Janet Wolff, “The Feminine in Modern Art: Benjamin, Simmel and the Gender of Modernity,” *Theory Culture Society* 17, 33 (2000): 34-35.

³³ Personal interview with Gülsün Karamustafa, 23rd September 2016, Berlin, Germany.

³⁴ Huo Rf, 56-58. Emphasis added.

³⁵ Interview with Karamustafa.

³⁶ George Monger, *Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2005), 13.

³⁷ M. Çağatay Uluçay, *Harem* (Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1971), 112, Volume 2.

³⁸ Nancy Lindisfarne, *Elhamdulillah Laikiz* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), quoted in Özlem Sandıkçı and B. Ece İlhan, “Dowry: A Cherished Possession or an Old-Fashioned Tradition in a Modernizing Society?” in *Contemporary Consumption Rituals: A Research Anthology*, ed. Cele C. Otnes and Tina M. Lowrey (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2004), 153.

³⁹ Sandıkçı and İlhan, 153.

⁴⁰ Nilüfer Göle, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites,” *Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1 (1997): 52.

⁴¹ Kortun and Kosova, 85; and interview with Karamustafa.

⁴² Gül Özyeğin, “My Father, an Agent of State Feminism and Other Unrelatable Conversations,” in *Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Travelling Theory* (Farnham and Burlington: Routledge, 2011), eds. Kathy Davis and Mary Evans 34-35.

⁴³ Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2003), 39.

⁴⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 8-9.

⁴⁵ Interview with Karamustafa.

⁴⁶ Giritli, “Turkey Since the 1965 Elections,” *Middle East Journal* 23, no.3 (1969): 353-54; and Feryal Saygılıgil, *Kadınlar Hep Vardı: Türkiye Solundan Kadın Portreleri* (Istanbul: Dipnot Publications, 2017), 223-264.

⁴⁷ Interview with Karamustafa.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; and phone interview with Nevhiz Tanyeli, 21 March 2017.

⁴⁹ Interview with Karamustafa.

⁵⁰ T.J. Clark, 11.

⁵¹ Muzaffer Kaya, “Türkiye’de Anti Emperyalist Mücadele (1965-1971),” *Journal of Historical Studies* 4, (2006): 5-6.

⁵² Leslie L. Roos, Noralou P. Roos, and Gary R. Field, “Students and Politics in Turkey,” *Daedalus* 97, no.1 (1968): 191. Also see Ismet Giritli, 353; and Doğan Gürpınar, “Myths and Memories of the 1968 Events in Turkey: 1968 as the Mirror of 2008,” *Turkish Studies* 12, no.3 (2011): 464.

⁵³ Güler Bek Arat, *1970-1980 Yılları Arasında Türkiye’de Kültürel ve Sanatsal Ortam* (Istanbul: SALT/Garanti Kültür AŞ, 2014), 91-93.

⁵⁴ Gülsün Karamustafa, “The View from Istanbul,” *The New Tate Modern*, June, 2016: 19.

⁵⁵ Murat Belge, “Nationalism, Democracy and the Left in Turkey,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, no.1 (2009): 12; and Karamustafa, *Ibid.* 19.

⁵⁶ After being convicted, Karamustafa’s passport was cancelled and she was not issued a new one until 1986. Barbara Heinrich, 15.

⁵⁷ Richard Noble quoted in Chantal Mouffe, “Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space,” *Open!*, accessed June 9, 2017, <http://onlineopen.org/art-and-democracy>.

⁵⁸ Ayşegül Baykan and Tali Hatuka, “Politics and culture in the making of public space: Taksim Square, 1 May 1977, Istanbul,” *Planning Perspectives* 25, no.1 (2010): 49-68

⁵⁹ René Block and Fulya Erdemci, “Pain and Pleasure,” in *Iskorpit: Recent Art from Istanbul* (Berlin: Berliner Kulturveranstaltungs-GmbH, 1998), 10.

⁶⁰ Özlem Altunok, “Sanatçı Portresi: Sınırları Aşmak,” *IstanbulArtNews* 16, (2015): 16

⁶¹ Huo Rf, 56-58.

⁶² By proposing these two women as important influences for Karamustafa’s life and work, I deliberately conflict with the master narratives that assert the painter Altan Gürman (1935–1976), the creative male ‘genius,’ as the greatest influence on her art. See for example, Ahu Antmen, “Why Do the Pioneers of Contemporary Art Have Pink IDs?” 72.

⁶³ Interview with Karamustafa.

⁶⁴ See Yasemin Özcan Kaya and Dilek Winchester, “Men's Year Dog's Year: Interview with Nil Yalter,” in *Unjust Provocation* (Istanbul: Alef, 2009), ed. Ayşegül Sönmez.

⁶⁵ Marsha Meskimmon, 77-78.

⁶⁶ Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-6.

⁶⁷ Jennifer G. Germann, "Queen Seduces Mistress: The Portraiture of Marie Leszczinska and Madame de Pompadour," in *Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), ed. Alexandra M. Kokoli, 140-6.

⁶⁸ Griselda Pollock, "The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories," in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), ed. Griselda Pollock, 9.

⁶⁹ See for example, Semra Germaner, "1968 Kuşacağı Sanatçıları," in *Cumhuriyet'in Yetmişbeş Yılında Kültür ve Sanat Sempozyum Bildirileri* (Istanbul: Sanat Tarihi Publications, 2000), 87-95; and Burcu Pelvanoğlu, *1980 Sonrası Türkiye'de Sanat: Dönüşümler* (Istanbul: PhD diss., 2009), 10. For a discussion of Nevhiz's work, see Levent Çalıkoğlu, "Boşluğa Yuvarlanışın Sevinci," *Milliyet Sanat* 526, (2003): 39; and Mehmet Ergüven, *Nevhiz* (Istanbul: Locus Publications, 2017).

⁷⁰ Semra Germaner, "Modernisation of Turkish Art: 1950-1990," in *Modern and Beyond: 1950-2000* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2008), trans. Nazım Dikbaş, 18.

⁷¹ See Nilüfer Erdem, *Analysis of Two Short Stories of Sevim Burak Through the Perspective of Applied Psychoanalysis: "Portrait of the Artist As Her Mother's Daughter"* (Istanbul: MA thesis, 2010), 161-162.

⁷² Ibid. 20 and 92; and Nilüfer Güngörmüş Erdem, "'Sanatçının Annesinin Kızı Olarak' Portresi," in *Cinsiyetli Olmak, Sosyal Bilimlere Feminist Bakışlar* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publications, 2007), ed. Zeynep Direk, 96-105.

⁷³ Interview with Karamustafa.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Heinrich, 15 and 53-55.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 58-63.

⁷⁷ One exception to this is a recent interview by Altunok, in which Karamustafa mentions her mother, in *IstanbulArtNews*, 16. Hilary Robinson makes a similar discovery about Louise Bourgeois's (1911-2010) mother by analyzing her interviews and comments. See Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 132-145.

⁷⁸ Interview with Karamustafa.

⁷⁹ Julia Kristeva, "Black Sun," in *The Portable Kristeva: European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989/2002), ed. Kelly Oliver, 197-198.