

CNSD uniforms: memories of the school culture of the Belle Époque in the confines of Minas Gerais

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1 INTRODUCTION

Herein, the relation between school uniforms and fashion in Minas Gerais during the Belle Époque period was investigated. This, could be identified through different life school culture memoir pieces from Minas Gerais: i) a narrative by a student from the city of Diamantina (1893-1895), ii) a uniform project for the Escola Normal de Juiz de Fora (1896) and, iii) the photographic artefacts from students doing their graduations at the Colégio Nossa Senhora das Dores (CNSD; Uberaba city) (1908-1912) - a female confessional catholic school from the final period of the Belle Époque in the Triângulo Mineiro.

The study is based on the existing literature which includes textual and iconographic documents with the aim to comprehend real fashion contents and observations of the period, including those regarding school uniforms. These, reached Brazil through the coastal ports, spreading to Minas Gerais, and subsequently to the Triângulo Mineiro. The objective of the study is to understand the fashion concepts of this historical period by means of school life recollections.

As theoretical-methodological procedures, text and photography contents of different sources were crossed and confronted in a dialectic perspective of the fashion concept, its historical context and the resources of the cultural material, allowing the comprehension of the production of the culture and the registering of memories of secular and confessional schools from Minas Gerais, directly related to the incorporation of the French fashion style during the Belle Époque in Brazil.

2 DEVELOPMENT

In the Belle Époque, three paradigmatic, complexes and interconnected concepts shaped the Brazilian social-cultural life: i) the idea of a civilization and its manners were, especially influenced by France, an example of republicanism and good taste; ii) that education was the source of reasoning in a nation project well versed and progressive; and particularly that, iii) female and religious education characterized “good families” which together, formed and disciplined future wives and mothers. In this context, the school environment was not only a branch of the family and Estate, but also an important site of interaction and learning connected to the political and cultural life of the cities.

Importantly, two factors highlight the links between educational formation, fashion culture, social status and gender. The manual labour registered in the confessional curricula made the female training appreciated, establishing a vigorous association between private and public education. At the same time, the fashion sector influenced clothing serving to a variety of interests including user identification, standardization of social groups, anonymity of each individual, and definition of belonging to or being excluded from the society. Inde-

pendently of these aspects, it is clear that clothing was an important factor of social segregation. It is possible to observe that school uniforms follow the same rational, especially considering the elite educational providers such CNSD located at Uberaba.

The investigation of the life school of Minas Gerais with focus on fashion, its perceptions and contents, was based in three sources: i) a narrative by a student from the city of Diamantina (1893-1895) - Helena Morley, alias of Alice Dayrell Caldeira Brant ii) a uniform project for the Escola Normal de Juiz de Fora (1896) and, iii) the photographic artefacts from those finishing their degrees at the CNSD - a female confessional catholic school from Uberaba (1908-1912).

In order to analyze a diary, a uniform project and a collection of photographs, distinct questions and approaches were necessary. Helena Morley's diary registered life school and social events between 1893 and 1895, being published for the first time in 1942. The uniform project for the Escola Normal de Juiz de Fora, amongst other documents, rescued the model that was conceived for the school that was opened in 1896. The photographs of students from CNSD corresponded to and pictured the following classes and periods: those who graduated in 1908, those who studied between 1908 and 1910, and also, a single photograph of a student from 1912. Fashion magazines of the same period were also used as necessary.

Less known than the association between the cultural life of the metropolis and the Belle Époque, the modern effervescence and countryside cities, were also considered as important aspects for this study. Therefore, the time period (filled with changes which considered the tensions and transformations that took place between the XIX and XX centuries) and the location (Diamantina, Juiz de Fora and Uberaba) in which this manuscript focuses, provide with new venues for the fashion culture, allowing new hypothesis and discussions to be made on the existence and permanence of a connection between education, French fashion style and clothing design, based in the school environment.

Particularly in the Triângulo Mineiro, manual labour such as sewing, crochet and embroidery were taught at schools, allowing female international, national and regional cultural exchanges, as well as the nurturing of a fashion culture within the CNSD.

The theoretical-methodological debate used as main reference herein, Georg Simmel, a German sociologist who defined fashion from the XIX to the XX century; moment in which Paris was at the centre of the Occidental trends. The study dealt with cultural exchanges that became clearer as the analyses of the available sources became deeper.

By familiarizing with the fun story told by Helena in her diary, in which she wrote that an aunt with poor sewing skills made her a skirt irregularly cut as a uniform, it is clear that on the contrary of what Helena thought, her aunt was updated to the fashion style of the period, making her a unique skirt design. A comparison between the diary and the journals

and magazines from the investigated period, lead us to question the Morley's narrative and to consider her immersion in the surrounding culture.

Another point to consider, is the uniform project for the Escola Normal de Juiz de Fora which incorporated the sailors as a design theme that was appropriate for the coastal and port regions and widely disseminated in European magazines and journals from that analysed time, such as the fashion French journal "The Station".

The CNSD uniforms, on the other hand, as found in photographs, showed a close connection between them and the Belle Époque fashion, with tailoring of uniforms and lacy lingerie dresses as part of the female clothing since the second half of the XIX century, commonly featured in contemporary international fashion magazines and cutting and sewing manuals. It was detected in the photographs of students from 1912, the pigeon chest style in their blouses. Finally, in group photography, a clothing standard was observed and at the same time, an identity for each individual was noted in regards of their clothing cutting and finishing.

3 CONCLUSION

By analyzing the available registers, the evaluated uniforms, support the manuscript hypothesis, i.e.: the close relationship between fashion, culture and school formation allows the evaluation of distinct concepts related to the production and wearing of clothes, as well as the rising of questions about the transnational cultural dialogues that are inherited from the time cut investigated herein.

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