

Recreating the motifs of Iranian nomadic kilim in the contemporary children book's illustrations

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Received: July 24, 2015
Accepted: September 31, 2015

ABSTRACT

Previously, nomadic carpets (Kilim) were known as a simple product of tribes, but in the recent decades good visual adaptations of them have appeared in the art of children book illustrations. The motifs and design of these products, for the sake of beauty, geometrical shape and simplicity of design, have a good capacity in presenting pictures to the children. The art of book illustration using appropriate colors and designs of traditional Iranian kilim could play an important role in the reflection of Iranian national culture and art. In this study, the emphasis is on the used patterns and colors of Kilim especially Qashqai products in the works of children book illustration.

The importance of study: this research focuses on indigenous art, culture and identity of contemporary book illustrations in Iran.

Hypothesis: Persian kilim design and motifs are considered as the elements giving identity to the works illustrated in the form of mats, various woven products, and even as decoration and fantasy elements. Sometimes, the illustrator uses motifs of kilims as the active and vivid ingredients which serve the story goals. In these illustrations, kilim designs seem animated as if they are able to move, act, and react.

Statistical population and target: the population includes about 69 illustration works of recent decades, and Qashqai kilim designs have been used in them. In this study, 10 samples were selected from the studied population and their analysis is provided.

Method: descriptive and analytical method was adopted and data collecting was done using library documents and resources.

KEYWORDS: kilim motifs, Qashqai kilims, book illustration, traditional arts, identity

INTRODUCTION

The word Kilim simply refers to a rug with smooth texture and weave. Previously, it was thought that Kilim is a kind of short-napped carpet from category of Oriental carpets which are very cheap and insignificant for the presentation of art works and even carpet business.

Since Kilim weaving needs less skills than carpet weaving, it has a more ancient history and background. So we can say that Kilim has much more authentic and older motifs, particularly since up to a few decades ago, Kilim had no place in business and tourist markets, so the nomadic weavers had not tried to change them on the basis of buyers' taste, and their personal desires and inner wishes created the designs.

Carpet weaving is one of the traditional arts of Iran. This woven handicraft is directly related with life in nature and is inseparable of it. Qashqai carpet belongs to the Qashqai tribe, one of the largest tribes in the province of Fars. "Qashqai carpet is one of the most famous Iranian carpets known for its design strength and energy which cannot be found anywhere else...some similarities sometimes throws the viewer to remember other Kilims" [1].

Full and final resolution of the motifs from each other is not possible because these designs reveal the elements that affect the lives of indigenous people. Some of the designs that were designed to convey a special meaning in the past can be found only in the form of a symbol or forgotten concept because of mental knitting and weaving in rural areas; with others in the transition from one generation to another, forgotten, changed, or modified. Change and evolution while maintaining the foundation of this art, was necessary for its dynamism. Due to the variety of areas which produce Kilim in Iran and the influence of different areas on products on each other, distinction among designs based on area is hardly possible. Most of the designs reviewed belong to Qashqai Kilim or which has a similar design to the motifs of Kilim. And the creative mind of illustrator is also involved in its formation.

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Among the traditional arts of Iran, Qashqai carpet received the "Seal of Excellence" of UNESCO. For premium traditional arts and handicrafts of different countries, such products receive the UNESCO Seal since 2001 officially, and by the offices set around the world UNESCO tried to make an incentive for the artists to improve the quality of their products. Iran also joined the program in 2007 and from Fars province of Iran, Qashqai carpet received the UNESCO Seal [2].

In recent decades, the Iranian illustrators' interest to visual aspects of Kilim due to its capability for abstract design and decoration is visible. These artifacts are simple, elegant, and stylish art work important for the consumer and in terms of visual adaptation of colors, simple designs, and traditional elements are important to enrich children's book illustrations.

Kilim alone is an independent element with its own aesthetic dimension, but in the book illustrations, it can be seen in the background images employed as a complementary visual element to create beauty, coordination, and harmony among the components of the image in terms of color and composition. Iranian carpet motifs passed from generation to generation of art and culture and continuously relate Iran's traditional arts to the endless national treasures of art and culture. Design and motifs of Kilim, especially nomadic products are much older and therefore more genuine than carpets.

"Weavers have used mainly similar and even identical graphic motifs and designs during centuries... most of motifs and arrays in the Qashqai Kilim belong to a sustainable and very ancient cultural heritage, more ancient than those of history of carpet weaving "[3].

The status of Kilim in Iranian traditional art

The definition of Iranian traditional arts: "traditional Iranian art is the original art collection of the indigenous people of Iran that has deep roots and basis in their customs, traditions, habits and beliefs, and overall the culture of this country. It has always been a supplier of the daily needs and is closely interconnected with the spiritual culture of society." [4].

The inner feature of traditional arts, is its mysterious and allegorical nature; and the exterior feature is that it reveals cultural identity. Iranians have long been the creator of art and trying to reflect their culture through art.

In the digital or the IT age that national identities are automatically and arbitrarily are weakening and all countries are obligatorily stepping toward globalization policies of great powers, preserving the identity is very important [5]. Cultural identity is defined: "in a dictionary definition, culture is what we learn, we teach, we can transfer (...) cultural identity is also a part of the social features distinguishing communities from each other " [6].

The traditional art of kilim weaving of Qashqai reflects the cultural (as well as material and spiritual) heritage of the Iranian people and originated from the system of intellectual, ideological, social and spiritual and material patterns of tribal life. In recent decades, traditional art motifs and designs of Qashqai kilim could play a valuable role in the development of book design and illustration in Iran.

the most important features of kilim

- i. Persian kilim is a traditional woven textile with geometric designs and bright colors inspired by nature which is usually ended to yarn strands at both ends. It is used for a variety of applications, such as mat, woven bag, and so on.
- ii. In the motifs and designs of kilim, cultural roots and symbols of identity exist that may be created under different conditions. These mysteries remained over centuries and has found their own language. The most important characteristics of these products, is its genuineness.
- iii. Similar to other traditional art crafts, subjective and mental designing and coloring made motifs of kilim to be very broad and includes compositions from the simplest to the most complex geometric patterns.
- iv. Behavioral characteristics, beliefs, and art of pastoral life can be regarded as the roots of designs and visual signs in kilims.

Hence, research into motifs and designs of kilims as one of the nomadic products of Iran as well as with regard to the new practical use of them in illustrations is of specific importance.

Types of kilims: Persian carpets generally can be divided into three categories

1. Simple or two-sided kilims: the two sides of textile are usable. Most of simple, two-sided, or coarse kilims have geometric designs and are woven mainly by memory-without using a map.
2. Soumak or one-sided kilim: in which weft strands on the underside of the rug may be left uncut several inches long and only one side of the kilim can be used.
3. non-Soumak but irreversible kilim: which might use a variety of techniques including carpet weaving based on the intended illustration and side of these products.

In the visual adaptations from kilim motifs in book illustrations only some cases, which use collaging photos the type of textile can be identified.

Hypothesis

In this study, the presence of kilim in children's book illustration in Iran is investigated in terms of design, motifs, and coloring of kilim used in these illustrations. 69 illustrations were analyzed using experts' ideas and the following results were obtained.

- A. Directly used in illustrations: in this case, the illustrator has illustrated kilim based on its own place and use, i.e. as rug and woven textiles. This is done in two ways, one the illustrator draws the picture of kilim with its designs, coloring, etc. in a creative way. In the second way, a real image of kilim is used without changes to get closer to reality, however if this image does not fit with other visual elements it would weaken the work of art.
- B. Indirectly used in illustrations: when the artist uses kilim in another position (other than rug and woven textiles) in the composition of his work; this is done in two ways. First, the illustrator used the design peculiar of kilim as a decoration and fantasy element in the work; which means the design and motifs are integrated with the subject or context so that the function of fantasy and imagination in the image find a double effect. For example, the creation of images inspired by the motifs and symbols of kilims on clothes, or mountain and hill in the background of work. Second, the illustrator employs kilim as an active and live element in the service of advancing the story goals; that is the designs of kilim manifest in the form of characters, nature, etc. as if these elements are part of life, have life and are able to move, act, and react. Such animated designs are observed in the works illustration of "Mehrnoosh Masoomian".

The role and use of kilim in illustration

It causes the audience to understand and learn more about the Iranian carpet designs. Iranian illustrators use these motifs with other visual elements in the composition of forms and colors to create space and context. The goal of illustrator in using in the Iranian carpet designs and colors is to express something that has a special fictional story where carpet designs is needed to create the atmosphere. For example, the story occurs in the living space of Qashqai tribe.

Analysis of reproduced kilim designs in book illustrations

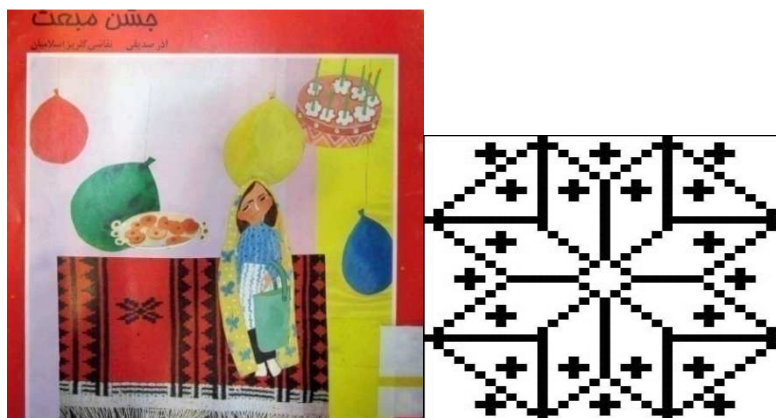
Sixty-nine images were analyzed in terms of using kilim designs, here ten works are presented and their analysis is provided.

1. "The story of that day" is illustrated by "Hadi Ebrahim Zadeh". In the cover design, kilim is depicted in place (rug or other hand-woven textiles), with a Muharramat design (a zebra pattern that a motif is repeated in each row) from the Qashqai carpet. Kilim is painted in the background as a coordinating and balancing component. The color and design are not that of the Qashqai kilim, but the artist's personal taste and creation is involved (figures 2-1).



Figures 1-2

2. Mab'ath Ceremony is a book illustrated by "Golriz Islamian". On the cover, a part of the kilim photo is collaged directly without changing color and form. The carpet design is Qashqai's "golden scissors or Ghezel scissors". Kilim is clear observable for the color and the surface area (Figures 4 -3).



Figures 3. Ghezel Gheichi (scissors)

Figure 4. an illustration of Mab'ath book

3. "Where is Rahim Aqa's house?" is a book illustrated by "Mr. Parviz Kalantari. In this image we see a woven rug over a woman's shoulder and the kilim bag is used directly in its place (Qashqai saddlebags). Saddlebag is illustrated with a unique Qashqai design i.e. Sormeh-dan, but it is made simpler and the coloring is also close to the Qashqai carpet (figures 6-5).

Figure 5



Figure 6. simplified Sormeh-dan

Parviz Kalantari is among those artists who used indigenous elements and symbols of Iranian culture abundantly in his works. "He has borrowed geometric motifs and designs and images he use are reminiscent of nomadic rugs and Gabbeh of Iranian tribes. This artist blends childish realism with decorative Iranian designs "[7].

4. "Happiness" is a book illustrated by "Negin Ehtesabian" where rugs are used directly in the form of photographs. The inspired layout used here is "Moharamat" pattern (Figure 7). But in character's dress belt the kilim design is used indirectly (non-mat and non-carpet products). Kilim with "left ring design" is collaged in the position of the belt and in the form of photo (figures 8-9).



Figure 7

Figure 8.the belt is a collage of Kilim's photo



Figure 9. Left-ring motif

5. "Our land Iran" is a book illustrated by 'Ali Khodaie'. He used kilim indirectly as a symbol of life is nomadic tribes. Symbol is a part of the kilim margin in its actual colors. The margin design of Qashqai kilim includes simple four-color entries (figures 10-11).
- 6.



Figure 10

Figure 11.simple four-colored entries motif

7. In the book "The buds on the carpet" illustrated by "Mitra Abdullahi", kilim is indirectly used in the flowery plain (Fig. 12). Designs are born of the artist's creative mind, animated in some points, and of the creative mind, and have become the flowers and trees. Qashqai kilim motifs used are "Eit Ol" means a dog's hand (figure 13), "Ghezel Gheichi" (scissors) that refers to the eight-pointed star which is a symbol of the sun (figure 4), Sormeh-dan Qashqai motif that can be seen with slight changes (Figure 6). These motifs' beautiful design and color fill the background of the image.



Figure 12

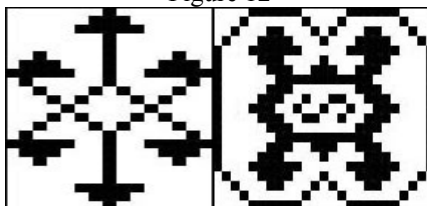


Figure 13. Eit Ol (dog's hand) motif

8. In "came the voice of music" illustrated by "Janet Mikhaili", kilim is used directly as a rug, it has a simplified design, but it has not true colors (figure 14). In this Qashqai kilim, the motif of Khorasani kilim is observed (Figure 15).



Figure 14

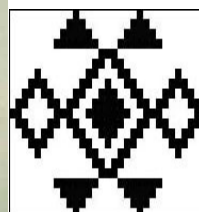


Figure 15. Khorasani motif

9. "water is taking the world" is a poetry child book with illustrations of "Mehrnosh Masoomian" in which kilim is indirectly used. Kilim motifs formed images as river, Tombak (figures 16-17) and animated dolls (figures 18-19). Also, simple Sormeh-dan (Figure 6) and complex Sormeh-dan motifs (Figure 20) can be seen in book illustrations. Designs, color variations of kilim also comply with the other elements in the composition of the page.





Figures 16-17

In other page, kilim motifs are used indirectly in the moving figures.



Figures 18-19

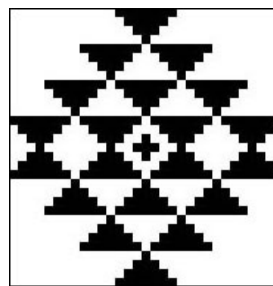


Figure 20. Complex sormehdan motif

10. In the story "Rolling Pumpkin" illustrated by "Nasrin Khosravi" the kilim design is used indirectly as a decorative element and in combination with other elements of the work. The kilim has not the peculiar designs and motifs, but the colors are close to true color of kilim and strands at both sides are observable. Soft lines of visual elements in combination with geometric motifs of kilim has a unique beautiful effect in the general mood of work (Figure 21).



Figure 21

Kilim is placed in the background and has an effective role in the composition. Some parts the form is linear and glass like. In the works of Nasrin Khosravi, many lines and designs can be found which are inspired by those of kilims. These abstract designs are generally used as decoration and margins. Overlap is a feature of children's drawings; to put the image layers on each other "in such a way that as if everything passes X-ray and turns to transparent layers." [8]. This feature is seen frequently in the works of Nasrin Khosravi.

11. In the book "The Girl Who Knew Too Much" with the illustrations of "Gholamali Maktabi" (figure 22), kilim designs are indirectly inspired by angular and geometric motifs of Qashqai rug. Here (Figure 23) a type of Qashqai kilim can be seen with designs similar to Maktabi's work, which can be the source of the illustration [9]. Geometric and angular designs of the work are illustrated as decorative elements to create texture and the two-dimensional atmosphere of image. Limited color image is reminiscent of two-dimensional graphics.



Figure 22



Figure 23

CONCLUSION

The illustration of a book is undeniably effective on the perception of story by the audience. The illustrator also selects his/her work based on audience age group and type of the story. Among the contemporary illustrators that kilim is a permanent element of their work, would be Parviz Kalantari, Siavash Zolfagharian, Ali Maktabi, Nasrin Khosravi, Mehrnoosh Masoomian and Mr. Ali Khodaie.

Selecting kilim for the composition of the works of contemporary illustrators was due to the subjective way of thinking in the images, which has led to variety of designs and motifs of kilim in the illustrations.

"Color completes line and form (shape) in the creation of the image. In addition to the aesthetic features that the color creates in the image, the emergence of feeling and emotion in color exhibition is what an illustrator pays attention to. The presence of color in the image, increases the credibility of children and enables the child to make a closer relationship with visual elements. Color is most closely associated with human emotions and the role of color in art is intuitive and stimulating more than anything else, while line is associated with a more thoughtful quality" [8].

The use of bright and powerful colors of kilim according to the need of image enriches the visual quality and boosts the audience's visual pleasure. The traditional Iranian art is a great area for adaptation of designs and colors of the Qashqai kilims.

Vernacularism in the art makes the traditional arts less likely to be forgotten. Kilims have close similarities to modern abstract art and can become successful today.

Through an analysis of some works of Iranian illustrators who used kilim design in their works, we can identify a similar illustration method among them. There are complementary colors next to each other, flat colors and simple and geometric forms which are suitable for children's books can be considered as the reasons of using kilim in this category of works. Kilim colors and motifs used in the illustrations remind us of most matured colors used for woven carpets. Using indigenous elements in the illustration, is one of the challenges of today's illustrators to show their national identity. This issue which refers to the necessity of the themes of the text, tastes and approaches of illustrators also has a particular global reflection. "Global and native view on the illustration and image are two separate processes that each have their own special place." [8].

Thanks to Ms. Toktam Dehqan who helped by analysis and redrawing the designs and motifs of Qashqai kilim.

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