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Wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch Women
The Multiple Meanings and Aesthetics of Muslim Dress

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Wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch Women:
The Multiple Meanings and Aesthetics of Muslim Dress

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................................................. v
NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING ........................................................................................................ viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

1. My Location in the Field ..................................................................................................................... 1
2. Sartorial Minorities in the Netherlands and Turkey ................................................................. 3
3. Beyond Veiling and Unveiling: From the “New Veiling” to Complete Wardrobes ................. 8
   The First Rupture: The “New Veiling” and Political Islam ............................................................ 9
   The Second Rupture: The Turn to Consumption and Fashionable Styles .................................. 12
4. Tesettür Wardrobes in the Netherlands ......................................................................................... 15
5. Doing Fieldwork: Wardrobes and Interviews ............................................................................. 18
6. Overview of the Chapters ............................................................................................................... 22

CHAPTER TWO: THE ÇARŞAF .............................................................................................................. 25

1. The Çarşaf in Ottoman and Republican Times ............................................................................ 26
   Break with the Empire: the Shift from Imperial Ferace to Çarşaf ............................................ 26
   Çarşaf as a National Fashion ........................................................................................................... 28
   Tango Çarşaf in the Years of Occupation .................................................................................... 29
   Campaigns against the Çarşaf ....................................................................................................... 32
2. Torbah Çarşaf ................................................................................................................................... 35
   The İsmailağa Community ............................................................................................................. 35
Çarşaf as a Community Garment........................................................................37

3. The Çarşaf in the Netherlands..................................................................39

A Common Story: Quranic Boarding Schools .............................................41

Adopting the Çarşaf in Boarding Schools .................................................44

Outside the Fishbowl (“Fanus”): Çarşaf and its Multiple Publics .................47

Walking Against the Wind..........................................................................50

Being a Çarsafı Hoca in the Netherlands ..................................................55

Love, Care and Çarşaf ...............................................................................59

CHAPTER THREE: OVERCOATS ..................................................................67

1. Tracing the Genealogy of the Turkish Pardösü ......................................67

The Guest Worker’s Overcoat: Becoming Modern ......................................68

The Overcoat Turns “Islamic” and “Fashionable” ........................................74

Denim (Kot) Pardösü ..................................................................................80

The Generational Shift in Producing Overcoats .........................................83

2. Contemporary Overcoat Trends ............................................................84

Kaps ...........................................................................................................84

Loose-fitting, Long Overcoats: A New Cosmopolitan Aesthetics ...............90

CHAPTER FOUR: SKIRTS AND TROUSERS ..............................................95

1. The Appearance of the Modern Skirt .....................................................97

Skirts in Ottoman Fashions and the New Figure of the Muslim Woman ........97

Wearing “Dutch Skirts” in the Netherlands ...............................................99

From Büzgülü Long Skirts to Ready-Made Maxi Skirts ...............................104

Are Skirts More “Islamic”? ........................................................................................................... 108

Skirts in the Presentation of Piety ............................................................................................... 113

3. Styling the Personal .................................................................................................................. 116

A Passion for Tailoring .................................................................................................................. 116

Denim Skirts .................................................................................................................................. 118

Young Professionals in Skirts and Trousers .............................................................................. 123

Medeni Türk Kızı: Wearing Long Skirts in Family Settings ...................................................... 125

Running the Risk of Transgression: Slitted, Fishtail, and Three-quarter Skirts .................... 129

CHAPTER FIVE: WEARING MAKEUP ......................................................................................... 135

1. Care of the Self and the Management of Beauty ................................................................. 136

2. Invisible Makeup ..................................................................................................................... 139

3. Different Effects of Makeup .................................................................................................. 143

4. Makeup and the Intimate Self ............................................................................................... 146

CHAPTER SIX: FESTIVE OCCASIONS AND FESTIVE TESETTÜR ......................................... 150

1. Düğünlükler: Festive Clothing ............................................................................................... 152

2. To Veil or Not to Veil: A Bride’s Dilemma .......................................................................... 155

3. Tesettür Coiffure ..................................................................................................................... 162

CHAPTER SEVEN: HEADSCARVES ............................................................................................. 171

1. Narratives of the Modern Headscarf .................................................................................... 175

From Yaşmak to Atatürk Eşarbi ............................................................................................... 175

The Emergence of the “Consciously Islamic” Headscarf ......................................................... 181

Conversion Stories ..................................................................................................................... 183

Being a Sartorial Minority in the Netherlands: “Who do They Think I Am?” ....................... 191
2. Silk Scarves and Cotton Shawls

The Materiality of Silk Scarves, Care Tags and Care of the Self

“A Passion for Silk is Contagious”

Silken Boundaries

Shawls (Şallar): Cotton, Plain and Cosmopolitan

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

1. Continuities and Ambiguities

2. Looking into Wardrobes: Multiple Longings and Belongings

3. Transnational & Cosmopolitan Aesthetics in the Turkish-Dutch Tesettür Scene

LIST OF FIGURES

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ABSTRACT

Wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch Women:

The Multiple Meanings and Aesthetics of Muslim Dress

This thesis addresses the diverse and changing sartorial practices of Turkish-Dutch Muslim women by exploring the effects that particular garments and combinations have depending on the ways and contexts in which they are worn. Going beyond the divisions of veiling and non-veiling and the exclusive categories of “habitual” and “conscious” headscarf practice, this research enables a better understanding of the complexity of what it means to be a visible Muslim woman in the Netherlands today. It rearticulates Muslim sartorial practices as inherently related to the dilemmas of everyday clothing, and emphasizes that women make choices informed by a wide range of factors, including piety, generation, aesthetics, gender, economic status and social context. Finally, it argues that women’s sartorial practices have transformative effects on both themselves and on their relations with others.

In general, this thesis goes against the grain of arguments that deny the continuities and historical associations between certain items and styles in Muslim sartorial practices and endeavor to explain the novelty of the “modern Islamic headscarf” as a product of wardrobe modernization. Such an approach presupposes a sharp rupture with the past, and analyzes current sartorial practices as if they are essentially different from those of the past. Rather than relying on firm categories of “old” and “new” headscarf practices, this thesis emphasizes the shifting and ambiguous character of Muslim dress. This emphasis entails a revision of some of the main assumptions of the discourse of “wardrobe modernization,” which has also shaped scholarly attention: the anticipated disappearance of religious clothing in modern, secular public spaces and the incongruity between fashion and religious clothing, or, alternatively, the newness of combining fashionable styles and religious dress.

This dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out primarily in the Netherlands between 2007 and 2011 among women of the Turkish immigrant community, along with brief periods of research in Turkey. It draws on a combination of in-depth
interviews, participant observation and wardrobe research; the compilation of a large number of topical life stories (focusing on dress); and a visual archive of garments from wardrobes and street scenes. I also analyze media sources, including news stories and advertisements, social networking websites and online stores from both Turkey and the Netherlands. Moreover, I make use of secondary literature on related subjects, letters of travelers from Ottoman era, literary fiction, historical photographs, and dictionaries to trace the genealogies of the garments mentioned in the interviews.

Each chapter analyzes a different item of clothing in order to explore changing sartorial preferences and what these preferences mean for different categories of women at different historical moments and locations. Even if the headscarf is a central item in pious women’s clothing, all of the other items in their wardrobes are equally important to how women produce different modalities of femininity and modesty. Above all, each chapter emphasizes that the motivations and inspirations that shape sartorial choices in tesettür clothing can never be reduced to a particular interpretation of religious clothing, contrary to the claims of the so-called “new veiling.” Among the specific garments and sartorial practices that the chapters discuss are the çarşaf (a long, loose, two-pieced outdoor garment), the pardöşü (overcoat), combinations with trousers and skirts, festive outfits, styles of makeup, and the headscarf.

A critical analysis of “wardrobe modernization” and changing sartorial practices highlights the associations and continuities, as well as differences, between the former and current sartorial practices of Muslim women. By focusing on specific wardrobes and topical life stories centering on changing sartorial practices, the thesis also provides a wider, alternative approach to studying the controversial practice of wearing the headscarf. By tracing genealogies of garments and collecting ethnographic accounts of everyday clothing, I illustrate that transformations of sartorial practices and discourses about Muslim dress are far more complex than the narrative of the “modern Islamic headscarf” has suggested. Contemporary Muslim dress is not simply a matter of decline or a sharp break with the past, as the thesis of “wardrobe modernization” predicts. Rather, the sartorial practices of Turkish-Dutch women unite and express multiple histories, geographies, and modes of belonging.

Studying Muslim appearances in a context of immigration, where Muslims are considered sartorial minority, demands comprehending the multiple meanings and interpretations of Muslim dress at different historical moments and locations. The research that constitutes this thesis takes up this challenge. It shows that the increasing mobility of both
Turkish-Dutch women and the items of clothing in their wardrobes not only results in a mix of styles and trends, it also facilitates the recognition of different aesthetics and understandings of *tesettür* clothing. Emergent discourses about the ethics and aesthetics of *tesettür* span the transnational space between Turkey and the Netherlands, as both women and garment circulate between these two national spaces. In this transnational field, sartorial biographies of women and their wardrobes offer a critical perspective on the narrative of “wardrobe modernization”, in which recognizably Muslim appearance has constituted the sartorial Other. In contrast to this narrative, this thesis shows that producing a recognizably Muslim appearance is as complex and multi-faceted as the production of any individual appearance.
Garderobes van Turks-Nederlandse Vrouwen:
De Meervoudige Betekenissen en Esthetiek van Moslimkleding

Dit proefschrift behandelt de diverse en veranderende kleedpraktijken van Turks-Nederlandse moslimvrouwen. Het richt zich op hoe de effecten van bepaalde kledingstukken en combinaties afhangen van de manier waarop en de context waarin ze gedragen worden. Door onderscheidingen als tussen sluieren en niet-sluiieren en tussen het "gewoongetrouw" en "bewust" dragen van de hoofddoek achter zich te laten, maakt dit onderzoek een beter begrip mogelijk van de complexiteit van wat het betekent om vandaag de dag een zichtbare moslimvrouw in Nederland te zijn. Het laat zien hoezeer moslimkleedpraktijken verbonden zijn met de dilemma's van dagelijkse kledingkeuzes benadrukt dat vrouwen keuzes maken op basis van een breed scala van factoren, waaronder vroomheid, generatie, esthetiek, gender, economische status en sociale context. Tot slot wordt beargumenteerd dat kleedpraktijken van vrouwen transformerende effecten hebben op zowel henzelf als op hun relatie met anderen.

Op een algemeen niveau gaat dit proefschrift in tegen de argumenten die de continuïteiten en historische associaties tussen bepaalde kledingstukken en stijlen in moslim kleedpraktijken over het hoofd zien en die proberen de noviteit van de "moderne Islamitische hoofddoek" als gevolg van de modernisatie van kleding te verklaren. Een dergelijke benadering veronderstelt een scherpe breuk met het verleden en analyseert kledingpraktijken alsof deze wezenlijk verschillen van die in het verleden. In plaats van te steunen op vastliggende categorieën als "oude" en "nieuwe" hoofddoeken, benadrukt dit proefschrift het verschuivende en dubbelzinnige karakter van moslimkleding. Dit houdt een herziening in van sommige van de belangrijkste veronderstellingen van het discours over de "modernisering van de garderobe", dat ook de aandacht van onderzoekers heeft gevormd: de verwachte verdwijning van religieuze kleding in moderne, seculiere openbare ruimtes en de tegenstrijdigheid van mode en religieuze kleding, of, in plaats daarvan, het nieuwe van het combineren van modieuze stijlen en religieuze kleding.
Deze dissertatie is gebaseerd op etnografisch veldwerk voornamelijk uitgevoerd in Nederland in de periode 2007-2011 onder Turkse migrantenvrouwen, aangevuld met korte perioden van onderzoek in Turkije. Het steunt op een combinatie van diepe-interviews, participerende observatie en garderobe-onderzoek, de compilatie van een groot aantal thematische levensverhalen (gericht op kleding), en een visueel archief van kledingstukken uit kledingkasten en straatcènes. Ook worden mediabronnen geanalyseerd, inclusief nieuwsberichten en advertenties, sociale netwerksites en webwinkels in zowel Nederland als Turkije. Om de genealogie van de in de interviews genoemde kledingstukken te traceren, is daarnaast gebruik gemaakt van secundaire literatuur over verwante onderwerpen, brieven van reizigers uit de Ottomaanse tijd, literaire fictie, historische foto's en woordenboeken.

Om veranderende kleedvoorkeuren te onderzoeken en te zien wat deze voorkeuren betekenen voor verschillende categorieën vrouwen op verschillende historische momenten en locaties analyseert elk hoofdstuk een specifiek soort kledingstuk. Ook al is de hoofddoek een centraal element in de kleding van vrome vrouwen, toch blijken andere onderdelen uit hun garderobes net zo belangrijk te zijn om verschillende schakeringen van vrouwelijkheid en bescheidenheid vorm te geven. Elk hoofdstuk benadrukt, in tegenstelling tot wat de theorie van "het nieuwe sluieren" claimt, dat de motivaties en inspiraties die kleedkeuzes in tesettür kleding bepalen nooit gereduceerd kunnen worden tot een bepaalde interpretatie van religieus kleden. Tot de specifieke kledingstukken en kleedpraktijken die in de hoofdstukken behandeld worden behoren de çarşaf (een lange, loshangend, tweedelig kledingstuk voor buiten), de pardösü (overjas), combinaties met broeken en rokken, feestkleding, make-up stijlen en de hoofddoek.

Een kritische analyse van de "modernisering van de garderobe" en veranderende kleedpraktijken laat de verbanden en continuïteiten, maar ook de verschillen tussen vroegere en huidige kleedpraktijken van moslimvrouwen zien. Door te concentreren op specifieke kledingcollecties en levensverhalen gericht op veranderende kledingpraktijken, biedt dit proefschrift ook een bredere, alternatieve benadering om de controversiële praktijk van het dragen van de hoofddoek te bestuderen. Door de genealogieën van kledingstukken te traceren en door etnografische beschrijvingen van alledaagse kleding te verzamelen, laat ik zien dat de transformatie van kleedpraktijken en het discours over moslimkleding veel complexer zijn dan wat het vertoog van de "moderne islamitische hoofddoek" suggereert. Hedendaagse islamitische kleding is niet slechts een kwestie van de teloorgang van of een scherpe breuk met het verleden, zoals de theese van de "modernisatie van de garderobe" voorspelt. Veel meer
zijn de kleedpraktijken van Turks-Nederlandse vrouwen een uitdrukking van meervoudige geschiedenissen, geografieën en gevoelens van thuishoren.

Onderzoek naar het uiterlijk van moslims in een context van migratie, waarbij moslims qua kleding als een minderheid beschouwd worden, vereist inzicht in de veelvoudige betekenissen en interpretaties van islamitische kleding zoals die op uiteenlopende historische momenten en locaties vorm krijgen. Het onderzoek waarop dit proefschrift gebaseerd is, neemt deze uitdaging aan. Het laat zien dat de toenemende mobiliteit van Turks-Nederlandse vrouwen en hun kledingstukken niet alleen voor een mix van stijlen en trends heeft gezorgd, maar ook voor de erkenning van een andere esthetiek en een nieuw begrip van *tesettür* kleding. Opkomende vertogen over de ethiek en esthetiek van *tesettür* overbruggen de transnationale ruimte tussen Turkije en Nederland, omdat zowel de vrouwen en de kledingstukken tussen deze twee nationale ruimtes circuleren. In dit transnationale veld bieden de biografieën van vrouwen en hun garderobes een kritisch perspectief op het verhaal over "garderobe-modernisatie", waarin een herkenbaar islamitische verschijning de geklede Ander is geworden. In tegenstelling tot dit verhaal, laat deze dissertatie zien dat het vorm geven aan een herkenbaar moslim uiterlijke verschijning net zo complex en veelzijdig is als dat van elke andere individuele uiterlijke verschijning.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. My Location in the Field

In 2007, I moved to the Netherlands to join the international research program, “The Emergence of Islamic Fashion in Europe,” at ISIM.1 At the time, Turkey was still a country where “headscarf debates” were a hotly contested issue in the political sphere (as they had been for decades); the often sensational media coverage of these debates constituted Turkey’s longest-running prime time TV soap opera. These debates did not focus on any kind of headscarf, but rather on a particular style of headscarf that was pinned and tied in a specific way. For some, this type of headscarf was a political symbol and a threat to secularism and a secular lifestyle; for others, this type of headscarf was the primary example of a “modern Islamic headscarf.” For many young women who adopted this style, it also marked a generational change. These young women were often described as “consciously” choosing to wear such a headscarf, in contrast to older women who wore “habitual,” “rural,” and “traditional” headscarves.

These narratives about the “modern Islamic headscarf” were produced in a highly polarized atmosphere in Turkey. This polarization forced a large number of people from different segments of society to take sides, even if the headscarf was not a part of their everyday concerns. As a young unveiled woman and a newcomer from Istanbul, I also experienced the effects of these contestations on women from Turkey, Türkiyeli kadınlar, in the Netherlands. It did not take long for me to realize that Turkish-Dutch women were familiar with the hostile, politicized environment in Turkey for women wearing this type of headscarf. Bearing in mind the fact that Turkey is their country of origin, as well as a Muslim majority country, many Turkish-Dutch women consider such discriminatory treatment more painful in Turkey than in the Netherlands. Even if Dutch-raised post-migrants did not

1 I started research as a junior assistant in the NORFACE project “Islam as a Social Force in Europe: Islamic Fashion and the Politics of Presence” at ISIM (the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World), and then continued as a PhD student in the NWO project, “Islamic Inspirations: Islamic Cultural Practices and Performances: The Emergence of New Youth Cultures in Europe,” after ISIM’s closure.

2 I use the word “Türkiyeli” and “Turkish-Dutch” to describe migrants and their offspring who had come from Turkey to the Netherlands, regardless of ethnicity.
experience the exact dilemmas and discrimination that their older sisters and mothers had faced, they were familiar with the experiences of their peers and relatives in Turkey. In the Netherlands itself, they witnessed how the “guest worker’s headscarf” had gradually turned into an “Islamic headscarf.”

It was not easy to find new ways of talking about what it means to look Muslim in the Netherlands. From the very first moment of my entry into the field, I was subject to a kind of examination: some of my interlocutors vigilantly sought presuppositions and echoes of the hostile Turkish atmosphere in my questions, while others doubted my knowledge and ability to ask proper questions about tesettür. Some of my friends and relatives worried that my interlocutors might influence me to such an extent that I would become a tesettürlü woman myself. When they asked me if I would consider covering in the future, some Turkish-Dutch women were also curious to know whether my mother wore a headscarf. A similar logic shaped all of these questions and concerns: the rigid distinction between covered and uncovered women. Gradually, as my interlocutors and I got to know each other better and talked extensively about garments, fashions, styles, and different understandings of tesettür, these questions receded to the background.

Focusing only on the “modern Islamic headscarf” limits what one can say about the individual appearances of tesettürlü women, the social expectations and contextual demands they negotiate, and the effects of the gaze of others on them. Sometimes, even avoiding the word başörtüsü (headscarf) and using alternatives such as eşarp (scarf) and şal (shawl), as well as “tesettür” as a more inclusive term for religiously inspired clothing, was a relief for my interlocutors and helped to further our conversations. Focusing on the everydayness of clothing (de Certeau 1984; Colebrook 2002) and on different garments and changing understandings of tesettür helped both me and my interlocutors to better understand the complexity of what it means to look Muslim and feminine in the Netherlands today. Furthermore, by tracing and discussing their dress stories, we together discovered the ambivalences, contestations and negotiations that define Turkish-Dutch women’s lives in relation to questions of clothing and dress. These accounts illustrate women’s dynamic relations with their garments and their bodies, and show how clothing relates to different aspects of the self. Women’s sartorial stories take us beyond the dualistic constraints of the categories of “covered” and “uncovered,” and draw attention to women’s socio-spatial

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3 I employ tesettür as an umbrella term to refer an array of different styles of covered, recognizably Muslim female clothing.
mobility in a transnational field. Before zoning in on the turn from headscarves to dress and clothing in general, I first briefly discuss the shifting context in which women narrated their stories of wearing *tesettür*.

2. Sartorial Minorities in the Netherlands and Turkey

Women who wear *tesettür* are considered a sartorial minority both in Turkey and in the Netherlands. The political contexts of these two countries differ sharply. Turkey is a Muslim majority country moving away from assertive system of secularism in the direction of a post-secular society (Göle 2012) and seeking a more liberal interpretation of secularism (Kuru 2006; Walton 2013). In the Netherlands, the political climate has become increasingly anti-Muslim in the post-9/11 era. If debates and policies about Islam have moved in opposite directions in the Netherlands and Turkey in the last decade, how do we understand the effects of their secularization projects of the previous decades?

While the Netherlands underwent a rapid process of deconfessionalization in the 1960s (Moors 2009b), at approximately the same time (in 1960), Republican Turkey witnessed its first military coup, which dissolved the parliament and closed the Democrat Party (DP). The Democrat Party first achieved the support of an electoral majority in Turkey due partially to its relatively liberal attitude toward Islam (Tapper 1991; Aktaş 2005; Belge 2011). In the years following the coup, guest workers from rural Anatolia began to arrive in the Netherlands, as well as in a variety of other western European countries. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, only a small number of women came to the Netherlands as “guest workers” themselves; the first generation of women by and large left their homes in Anatolia to join their husbands.

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4 From 1923 until 1946, the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi; CHP*) was the sole political party in Turkey; the years from 1946 to 1950 constituted a multi-party period, during which many political parties were established. The Democrat Party won elections in 1950, and ended the period of single party governance of the early Republican era.

5 For example, the DP pushed through legislation allowing the call for prayer (*ezan*) to be in Arabic again. The call to prayer had been voiced in Turkish since the secularizing reforms of the early Republic.

6 In 1964 Dutch authorities established the so-called “recruitment agreement” with Turkey (Abadan-Unat 2002).
Migration both within Turkey and to destinations abroad affected the sartorial styles of women during this period in significant ways. With increasing internal migration from the Anatolian periphery to urban centers in Turkey, the headscarf had come to be associated with poverty and rurality (Lindisfarne-Tapper 1997; Öncü 1999; Secor 2002). Religion, village life and covered dress were among the favorite subjects for cartoonists of the time, who published their work in the mainstream Turkish press. Şalvar (baggy trousers), the black çarşaf, ethnic headscarves (yazma, yaşmak, yemeni, etc.) and the cummerbund did not fit the project of “wardrobe modernization” in Turkey; these garments were perceived as producing the overlapping identities of the religious and the rural (Norton 1997).

Migration entailed a transformation of sartorial preferences for almost all women, albeit to different extents. Moving from rural areas to the cities in Turkey required women to adopt and adapt to new sartorial practices. When migrant women came to the Netherlands, they were well aware of their heightened visibility, less so because of their religious identity than because of their rural peasant backgrounds. They were not only guest workers; they were also a sartorial minority. The first modern garments, including overcoats, ready-made blouses, skirt-and-trouser combinations, and small headscarves, entered the lives of migrant women during the early years of migration. Adopting the aesthetics of a modern wardrobe, and incorporating the new gestures and postures which these garments required, played a significant role in women’s formation as modern subjects.

Certain sartorial preferences were seen as indicating women’s success or failure in integrating to Dutch society. Women who succeeded in adopting a modern urban dress code attained more privileged professional positions than women who still wore their “ethnic” or “rural” clothing. At that time, wearing covering garments and a headscarf was still strongly related to immigrants’ rural and ethnic backgrounds, rather than to a religious identity, for the majority of the Dutch public. With the increasing presence of migrant women due to family reunification (Abadan-Unat 2002), sartorial differences became more visible and new styles from Turkey spread in the Netherlands.

Often, home-tailored rural garments like baggy trousers, or the combination of long skirts or dresses with trousers, were considered a sign of backwardness. A very well known saying in Dutch from the period expresses the distinct image of the migrant woman from Turkey: “zoals een Turkse die een jurk over haar broek draagt” (“like a Turkish woman wearing a dress over her trousers”). In other words, the appearance of the Turkish immigrant woman was not so much marked by her headscarf but by her ethnic and rural style of dress. In
INTRODUCTION

The early years of migration, women were not considered to be recognizably “Muslim”; Turkish-Dutch women were only “discovered” as Muslim migrants in recent decades (Sunier 1997, 2002; Moors 2009a). The formation of these new categories of “Muslim” and “Islamist” was a long process, strongly related to political developments beyond the borders of Europe.

International politics began to play a role in the changing categorization of Muslims, both in Turkey and in Europe, with the emergence of the Islamic revival movement in the late 1970s. The Iranian Revolution (1979) also had a strong impact in neighboring countries. This was an era of severe oppression of religious organizations in Turkey. With the 1980 military coup, a constitutional ban was issued on the most prominent Islamist party of the time in Turkey, the National Salvation Party. The Party was charged with aiming to undermine the secular principles of the Turkish Republic and attempting to establish an Islamic order. Ironically, the leaders of the coup opened new Quranic Schools, made religious courses compulsory, added new branch offices to existing İmam Hatip Schools (Özdalga 1999; Özgür 2012; Çağlar 2012), and employed new Muslim preachers (imams and hatips). In this increasingly polarized political climate, the distinction between traditional religiosity and politically threatening Islam materialized in women’s “consciously Islamic” headscarves.

As in other Western European countries at the time, a variety of Turkish Islamic organizations, including the Süleymanlı Community, the Gülen Movement, Milli Görüş (National View) and Diyanet, spearheaded a variety of initiatives in the Netherlands during this period. In the early years of migration, the activities of these Muslim groups were not specifically related to the position of Turkish immigrants in the Dutch society, but their policies based on the idea of temporariness (that is, temporary presence in the Netherlands) gradually changed during in the 1980s. Rather than providing services to “guest workers,” these organizations became advocates for new Turkish-Dutch “citizens” who aspired to enhanced integration in Dutch society (Landman 1992; Sunier 1997). These organizations and

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7 The Milli Selamet Partisi was founded in 1971; it was the successor to the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi), which had been dissolved by Turkey’s Constitutional Court following the March 1971 military coup.

8 İmam Hatip Schools were originally established as religious vocational state schools. For quite some time, they have been an important alternative for the children of pious families who prefer to pursue a religious education rather than follow the official curriculum of secular Turkish state education.

9 The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, a state bureaucracy responsible for monitoring and coordinating Islamic practice in Turkey. For more information, see http://www.diyanet.gov.tr/turkish/dy/default.aspx, retrieved on 12.09.2012.
communities achieved a new role as actors bridging the migrants as citizens and wider Dutch society (Sunier 2010).

In the late 1990s, Turkey experienced another military intervention, a “soft” coup achieved through a military briefing aimed at the government, on February 28th 1997. (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu and Çınar 2003). This coup was a turning point in Turkey for the politics of the headscarf. In the following years, the strict implementation of the headscarf ban affected many families, either directly or indirectly. In this increasingly politicized climate, the distinction between traditional religiosity and politically threatening Islam materialized in women’s “Islamic” headscarves (Sandıkçı and Ger 2005: 62). Women wearing one particular style of headscarf were “discovered” as “Islamists” in Turkey. The political and social costs of wearing a headscarf changed radically in both Turkey and the Netherlands.

Many migrant families in the Netherlands witnessed the impact of the 28 February process, as close or distant female relatives suffered from the ban. As a consequence of this ban, Turkey became less attractive for tesettürlü women from the Turkish diaspora, while Europe began to receive female students who could not pursue their education in Turkey because of the ban. At the same time, however, İmam Hatip Schools and Quranic Boarding schools were seen as the only alternatives for migrant families in the Netherlands who wanted their daughters to pursue some sort of education in Turkey in order to maintain their ties with the home country. The movement of women from Turkey to the Netherlands continued, but not only for educational purposes; marriage also played an increasing role in the 1990s. Young men born in the Netherlands continued to marry women from their own circles in Turkey.

In Europe, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Islam replaced communism as a major global threat to Western powers. This politicization of Islam only accelerated following 9/11 and the commencement of the global war on terror. Since the early 1990s, migrants from Muslim countries, Muslim identity, and Islam in general have all been defined as problematic in the Netherlands. Dutch politics gradually moved toward a more rigid definition of

10 The first ban on the headscarf in Turkey dates back to 1982; this ban focused on headscarves in universities. By 1984, the Council of Higher Education (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu; YÖK) had declared türban to be the unique, “modern” form of headwear allowed at universities. While only a small number of students adopted the türban style or used the term, ironically “türban” as an invented category has dominated headscarf controversy for decades (Aktaş 2006).

11 In contrast to Turkish secularism, which has attempted to ban religious signs from government buildings, Dutch secularism allows students and teachers to wear the headscarf in public schools and universities. However, Muslim women’s appearance in public has become the topic of much debate in the last decade.
secularism that increasingly understood integration to imply some form of assimilation (Moors 2009b; Bekaroğlu 2010; Bracke 2011). The effects of 9/11 and, more locally, the assassination of Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh in 2004 heightened the visibility of Muslims in the Netherlands. These events produced increasing feelings of hostility towards Muslim migrants. In public discourse, discussion about Muslims and “Islamists” provoked questions about Muslim migrants and new Muslim citizens’ belonging to the nation and their loyalty to the state (Moors 2009b: 395). Not only in the Netherlands, but also across Western Europe generally, political discourse increasingly targeted Muslim’s sexualities, bodily attitudes and clothing as indicative of their unwillingness to join wider society and as a threat to European identity (Dwyer 1999; Van der Veer 2006; Scott 2007; Moors 2009b; Fadil 2009; Bowen 2011; Bracke 2011).

Over the course of the last decade, perceptions of the headscarf have gone in opposite directions in the Netherlands and Turkey. Whereas the migrant headscarf first transformed into the “ethnic headscarf” and then gradually evolved towards the “Islamist/Islamic headscarf” in the Netherlands, in Turkey, by contrast, headscarves have become more acceptable and the significance of the headscarf as a marker of religious difference has become relatively vague. Although this shift has been an extremely prolonged process, under the conservative democratic AKP (the Justice and Development Party) government in Turkey, implementation of the headscarf ban has become less strict. Turkey is leaving behind the endless debates over the headscarf in the media and lifting the headscarf ban at universities, although women who wear a headscarf still cannot work at government offices and locations, with the exception of lawyers. In the Dutch case, although the focus has mainly been on prohibiting the face veil (Moors 2009b), the headscarf has also become a target of political criticism. The most notorious example of this was Dutch right-wing politician Geert Wilders’s

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12 Theo Van Gogh produced the film Submission, written by the well-known public figure and anti-Islam ideologue Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Ali is a Somali-born refugee who was raised as a Muslim; after receiving political asylum in the Netherlands, she declared that she was no longer a believer. She was a member of the Dutch parliament between 2003 and 2006. The film caricatures Muslim women with exclusively exotic, Orientalist imagery and misinterprets Islamic teachings; it assumes that Muslim women are nothing more than victims of their religion. See Moors 2005.

13 The AKP came to power in 2002, but only introduced legislation to lift the headscarf ban to in 2008. It was approved by a majority of MPs in parliament, but the constitutional court overruled the decision. Furthermore, this legislation resulted in a case for the closure of AKP on grounds that it had violated the principle of secularism; eventually the party was financially penalized but not closed.

14 In January 2013, the Council of State (Danıştay) ruled to suspend the application of an article from the code of practice of the Turkish Bar Association that bans lawyers from wearing headscarves while practicing their profession.
provocative proposal to impose a “headrag” tax (Kopvoddentaks) in 2009 (Ünal and Moors 2012), while recent years have also witnessed more restrictive policies on headscarves in some Christian schools. In the Netherlands, many women now feel a stronger need to explain their choice of wearing covered dress; they are increasingly confronted with the prejudices of others and feel pressured to defend their sartorial preferences.

Two recent publications highlight these two different trends. Turkey is now home to its first glossy Muslim fashion and lifestyle magazine, Âlâ, a periodical that also targets women interested in fashion in general. Âlâ has often been described both by scholars and pundits as “the Vogue of the veiled.” Importantly, however, Âlâ brings together the sartorial preferences and imagery of both covered and uncovered women, and thus blurs the boundaries between different styles of covered and uncovered dress. In the context of this magazine, the headscarf has become a matter of lifestyle; it is rarely discussed with reference to religious texts and interpretations. More generally, tesettür has achieved legitimation on the basis of a secular language by referring to the notion of tolerance toward different lifestyles in public space (Şişman 2011: 165). The Dutch Hoofdboek Project,\(^{15}\) in contrast, has appeared as the first effort in the Netherlands to normalize the headscarf as an “individual, conscious choice,” and aims “to replace prejudices with the facts” in a context that has become increasingly antagonistic toward Muslims.

3. Beyond Veiling and Unveiling: From the “New Veiling” to Complete Wardrobes

The typical tendency in academic studies of and discourse about the “modern Islamic headscarf” has been to treat the headscarf in isolation. This tendency proved immensely problematic for my thesis research. Such a strong emphasis on the emergence of one particular type of headscarf (the “modern Islamic headscarf”) distracts attention from the fact that dress is an everyday practice, and actors’ preferences of what to wear—including the headscarf—change according to social contexts. The dominant academic discourse on the headscarf restricts the meanings and significations of what it means to look Muslim to ideological contestations, and fails to take into account the material and aesthetic qualities of

\(^{15}\) For more information on the Hoofdboek Project, see http://www.cupofculture.nl/project/hoofdboek
religiously inspired clothing. It produces narratives about the “modern Islamic headscarf” that remain removed from the everyday complexities of living a Muslim life.

In general, the academic literature on headscarves and veils hypothesizes and pivots on two major historical ruptures. The first rupture links the “modern Islamic headscarf” to the emergence of Islamic movements in the 1980s and women’s active participation in these religious-political movements. The second rupture presents covering as an instance of the articulation of faith with consumer culture and conceptualizes Muslim women as consumers. In both cases, the aim is to explore the transformation of formerly non- or less-agentive subjects into highly agentive subjects in a secular world, with the modern headscarf as a significant marker of this transformation. This body of literature has concomitantly defined other ways of being Muslim as non-agentive. This fits with a wider trend of feminist scholarship that often defines Muslim women’s agency solely in terms of resistance and emancipation (Acar 1994; Arat 1994, 2005; Göle 1996, 2003; White 2002; Saktanber 2002a; Çınar 2005) and criticizes depictions of Muslim women as submissive, obedient subjects who lead monotonous lives (Mahmood 2005).

The First Rupture: The “New Veiling” and Political Islam

The secularist idea that recognizably Muslim dress would simply fade away clearly does not match the contemporary social world, either in Turkey or in the Netherlands. However, such an assumption makes it easier to discuss veiling practices in the 1970s and 1980s as a mode of “new veiling” that constituted a rupture with earlier, habitual wearing of covered dress. To some extent, the Islamic movements of the 1980s also promoted the idea of the “new veiling” by celebrating wearing a “modern Islamic headscarf” as a “conscious” act. Religion thus became a matter of individual choice rather than an “inherited or living tradition.” The attire of the period, which was worn with the modern headscarf, was not only long and loose, but also uniform, austere, and sober, as a reflection of an anti-consumerist and anti-fashion stance. This was not only the case in Turkey (Göle 1996, Saktanber 1994), but also in other Muslim countries, such as Egypt (El-Guindi 1981; MacLeod 1991). It was also the manifestation of a generational shift and the emergence of an early cosmopolitan style of Muslim dress, which was similar in appearance on a global level, to some extent erasing geographically and ethnically marked variations of Muslim dress (Moors and Tarlo 2007).
The existing literature on the “Turkish headscarf” (interchangeably used with the term “veil” in this literature) is partly a product of this rupture. For activists in new Islamic movements, the “new veiling” was considered to be both a critique of “westernization” and of “habitual” Islam, while for secularists it was a manifestation of political Islam. One of the consequences of this rupture in the continuity of lived Islam was the conceptual turn from the “Muslim” headscarf to the “Islamist” headscarf. The modern headscarf became defined in terms of a shift from a “habitual” religious practice to “conscious” practice. Both feminist scholarship and the Islamic movements of the period articulated this sort of hierarchical ordering between headscarves. They attributed an assertive agency to women whose lives were considered to be far richer and more complex than the earlier narratives of Turkish modernity and the secular nation-state project had suggested (Kandiyoti 1995; Özbay 2000). The “Islamic headscarf” of this period was considered to have an unsettling effect in the public sphere because it was seen as subverting and contesting the privileged status of secularism in Turkey (Çınar 2005: 58). Such an understanding of agency based on the idea of a subject acting on/against social forces framed studies of the headscarf. This theoretical frame reduced the sartorial preferences of Muslim women to a binary of resistance versus submission (Abu Lughod 1990). The resistance argument was based on the interpretation of wearing *tesettür* as a means to achieving extra-religious ends (Göle 1996). Veiling was discussed as an emancipatory act, “a basis for identity transformation at the level of individual consciousness and a means to free women from monotonous life (Ibid.: 130).” Romanticizing the “conscious headscarf” as a marker of new identities, as opposed to the “habitual headscarf,” played a significant role in the formation of narratives about the modern headscarf.

To some extent, the growing scholarly interest in defining Muslim women as assertive, modern subjects confirmed a break with the past. As a result, it did not pay much attention to historical continuities or to differences in styles of dress and the motivations of women who wore covering attire. Phrases such as “Islamist women” and “turbaned feminists” indicated this break with the past and punctuated the newness of the phenomenon. Aspirations

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16 The “Turkish headscarf” suffered from political circumstances for decades. The political climate consistently had profound influence on the ways in which scholarly studies approached Muslim dress and pious subjects. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, forced veiling in Iran framed the veil as a symbol to talk about “Islamic movements and revival” and “reactionary-ism” in the 1980s. For Turkey, a neighbor of Iran and a young secularizing state with an adopted version of French *laïcité* as its system of secularism, the case of Iran and the so-called “new veiling” have long been a dangerous specter threatening the aspiration to modernity. The headscarf as a symbol of “backwardness,” “submission,” “poverty,” and “political Islam” has been a matter of collective fear for long time, and still arouses these same feelings for some segments of society.
and motivations to be visible as Muslims were highlighted through a conceptual shift from “Muslim” to “Islamist.” Göle’s work on veiling (1996, 2003), for instance, challenged existing representations of the headscarf as “oppressive” and “submissive” by engaging with the Muslim headscarf as a visible, voluntary and controversial adoption of a stigmatized symbol (Göle 2003: 815). Göle defines the “Islamic headscarf” as something “deliberately appropriated, not passively carried and handed down from generation to generation” (Göle 2002: 181). In her analysis, the transformation from “Muslim” to “Islamist” was “the work of a collective countercultural movement” (Göle 2003: 815), through which the headscarf also changed from a stigma into a symbol of distinction and prestige for women.

Studies have mainly focused on actors who considered themselves “conscious” headscarf wearers. Merve Kavakçı’s recent book, *Politics of Turkish Headscarf* (2010), is one of the latest contributions to the narrative of the modern headscarf. Her research focuses on women who explicitly consider their headscarves to be “consciously Islamic” and who simultaneously were considered a “threat” by the Turkish state (Ibid.: 23). This exclusion produces hierarchies among individuals, with some women considered to have a higher level of consciousness than others. The notion of consciousness here refers to achieving a proper knowledge of *tesettür* and choosing to wear a particular style of headscarf (the headscarf of an urban, modern, educated woman), even if some segments of society dislike this and consider it a “threat.” This sort of analysis not only produces a hierarchy between women who wear headscarves more “consciously” and those who wear it more “habitually,” it also encourages a reading of the headscarf that is detached from its functions and meanings in everyday life. Above all, it ignores the ambiguities of everyday dress practices and historical continuities.

Moreover, research and literature that focuses exclusively on the “conscious” headscarf also overlooks the transformative potential of religiously inspired clothing. The attribution of “consciousness” implies that a subject already has adequate knowledge and takes responsibility for her acts. However, as the narratives of the women in this study demonstrate, wearing modest, pious clothing is part of a continuous process of self-disciplining. It is not something already achieved, but something one must always strive for. In fact, these narratives are far closer to those that Saba Mahmood presents in her seminal work, *Politics of Piety* (2005), in which she shows that wearing a headscarf is first and

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17 Merve Kavakçı was a very significant figure during the 1990s and early 2000s in Turkey. She was one of two covered women elected to the Turkish Grand National Assembly as a parliamentarian in 1999; eventually she was removed from parliament on the day of her swearing-in ceremony due to her refusal to remove her headscarf. Later, she was stripped of her citizenship and faced several court charges (Özyürek 2000; Göle 2002).
foremost a religiously motivated practice for women in the Cairene mosque movement. Examining such religious motivations allows us to see possible continuities in Muslim dress. Mahmood’s work is an early attempt to discuss agency not in terms of resistance, but rather in relation to the different potentialities that covering embodies and entails. Mahmood argues that covering may work as a technique of the self, as an embodied practice that serves not only as a marker of pious identity, but also as “the ineluctable means by which one trains oneself to be pious” (Ibid.: 158, emphasis in original). However, this transformative capacity of wearing recognizably Muslim dress is not only limited to the formation of an inner self; as this study argues, it also affects others. By taking seriously the motivations and potentials that define covering and the transformations of one’s self and relations with others that covering entails, we are able to consider the agency of objects—in this case, different aesthetics and styles of Muslim dress—in people’s lives (Tarlo 2007a).

The Second Rupture: The Turn to Consumption and Fashionable Styles

The second shift and rupture, dating back to the late 1990s, refers to the appearance of “Islamic chic” (White 1999; Balasescu 2003) and the effort to theorize this “faithful chic” (Sandıkçı and Ger 2001). When the first veiled models appeared on a catwalk in 1992, Turkey became a leading country in the “Islamic fashion” scene; thereafter, Turkey was often referred to in explaining new modes of Muslim life in an increasingly commodified world (Navaro-Yashin 2002a; Kılıçbay and Binark 2002; Sandıkçı and Ger 2007; Secor & Gökarıksel 2008). Increasing attention was paid to fashionable tesettür styles and to the women who wore them, in the attempt to capture what it means to be a Muslim woman in relation to images, discourses and knowledge constructed in the marketplace (Gökarıksel and McLarney 2010, Lewis 2010).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the appearance of urban, fashionable and recognizably Muslim dress in Turkey predated the 1992 fashion show, which was organized by the clothing company Tekbir. The writer Şule Yüksel Şenler, with her new style of head covering, the Şulebaşı (Şule-head), had already become a fashion icon for young urban women in Turkey in the 1960s (Altınay 2013). The literature on Islamic fashion generally identifies a shift from the Islamic political movements of the 1980s to Muslim consumer identities and communities in the 1990s. It focuses on 1990s tesettür fashions, depicting them
as if they were the first instances a modern, urban Muslim style of clothing in Turkey. This second shift in the literature was inspired by consumer studies and urban studies, and more recently by fashion and dress studies, which have made new, multiple readings of the headscarf possible. Contributions from scholars in various fields articulated multiple, new forms of living Islam, from fashion to music, from architecture to food. In doing so, this new literature began to convey the more complex, ambiguous character of pious subjectivities (Jouili 2009; Saktanber 2002b; Sandıkçı & Ger 2010; Schielke and Debevec 2012).

A focus on fashion and changing sartorial preferences, including the material and aesthetic qualities of clothing and dress, also stimulated scholars to pay attention to the different aesthetic and material dimensions of headscarves and women’s choices of particular headscarves (Sandıkçı and Ger 2005). By offering multiple readings of “the headscarf,” these studies challenged the existing narratives of the modern headscarf, which had only considered this item of dress as a significant marker of religion in the political realm. Instead of a focus on whether women adopted covered dress (or not), attention turned to matters of style, taste and status. Studies of “Islamic fashion” have directed attention to women’s management of visibility. The question of how a religiously inspired outfit can also be expensive, fashionable and attractive was one of the first challenges taken up by this literature.

The emergence of “Islamic fashion” as a concept and its increasing popularity not only unsettled established truths of fashion theory, which locate fashion exclusively in the West (Moors 2009a; Moors and Tarlo 2013). It also opened new horizons in the literature, which started to pay equal attention to other items of Muslim women’s dress in order to explore tensions between religion and fashion. The assumption that religiously inspired dress is necessarily sober and modest, and therefore that such dress would remain outside the domains of fashion and consumption, turned out to be naïve. Women creatively combined mainstream fashions with their headscarves. Recent decades have witnessed striking articulations of mainstream fashions with shifting interpretations of religious modesty.

Even the most uniform and sober form of outdoor tesettür, the çarşaf—which was seen as an anti-fashion statement for a long time—has gone through various changes and adaptations. Different kinds of textiles are used for çarşaf, and their colors vary from tones of plum to navy blue. Çarşaf today have laser-cut ornaments and edges, and women wear a variety of accessories with them. This proliferation of new styles also includes “retro” trends that function as reminders of a more distant past, when similar garments carried different
meanings and functions within the historically and socially situated conditions of their production.

The dress stories of my research reveal that Turkish-Dutch women’s tesettür clothing is not only the product of religious motivations and norms. The women whom I interviewed consider covering as a form of worship, but they also calibrate how they cover in relation to how they want to present themselves to others (Moors 2009a). Muslim women have different understandings of what modest tesettür is, and some tesettür fashions share and express understandings of femininity similar to those of mainstream fashions. Fashioning a Muslim appearance does not necessarily imply a subversion of modern notions of sexuality or, for that matter, a rejection of “inherited traditional Islam.” Tesettür clothing brings together religious concerns and contemporary ideas of beauty. This fact is exemplified by the changing definition of modesty in tesettür, away from “hiding one’s beauty” toward a notion of “managing one’s beauty.”

However, although the shift to “Islamic fashion” has broadened the academic approach female Muslim clothing from an exclusive focus on the politics of covering to the aesthetics of wearing tesettür, it also engenders its own problems. Within this new frame, the Muslim subject is no longer confined to the antagonistic categories of “conscious agent” and “victim of tradition”; rather, the subject has now become trapped in the binary of “fashion conscious” and “victim of fashion” (Karabıyık Barbarosoğlu 2006: 162). In other words, women’s interest and participation in new mainstream fashions may be seen either as a marker of a new status or as a decay of the ideal of tesettür. The focus has shifted in the literature from the adoption of a particular headscarf to “veiling fashions” and women as consumers of particular styles (Gökariksel and Secor 2008, 2010) without paying enough attention to the everyday dilemmas of clothing.

Recent critiques have called on scholars to attend to the effects of previous studies in the construction of academic knowledge on the modern headscarf, especially in relation to the persistent question of whether the headscarf is “oppressive” or “emancipatory” (Sirma 2010; Fadil and Bracke 2012). Moreover, the proliferation of a variety of styles has directed attention to individual styles and taste; slowly but surely, this has also entailed a move beyond headscarves to the rest of Muslim dress (Moors and Tarlo 2013) The focus of this research has shifted from the headscarf as an exclusive marker of religiously-inspired Muslim appearance to Muslim everyday sartorial practice, and thus to tesettür wardrobes. My own research is clearly within this broad trend. At an earlier point, certain scholars discussed the veil as a
dress practice (e.g. El-Guindi 1999) and as a spatial practice (e.g. Secor 2002). However, focus on the “fashionable headscarf” has also excluded certain categories of women who adopted other styles. Above all, this literature excluded certain styles, and the actors involved: women who continue to wear the “ Atatürk scarf” (a small scarf tied under the chin without a pin) or çarşaf, for instance. Women who wear less fashionable or less “conscious” headscarves were ignored by these studies. In contrast, this thesis attempts to broaden the scope of academic studies of *tesettür* by including wardrobe research (Woodward 2007) and women’s own stories of how they put together their everyday outfits (Tarlo 2007b, 2010; Moors 2007, 2009a).

4. *Tesettür* Wardrobes in the Netherlands

In the context of this thesis, the notion of the “wardrobe” is not only a methodological tool, but also a conceptual principle that enables a new reading of Turkish-Dutch women’s appearance within and beyond the headscarf. I approach wardrobes both as an archive of past selves and memories (Guy and Banim 2000; Bye and McKinney 2007; Woodward 2007) and as a collage of social imaginaries. A wardrobe contains items not only from everyday sartorial practice, but also items women no longer wear. It is a personal repertoire that stores items that are constitutive of women’s selfhood as well as their public representations (Cwerner 2001; Hansen 2004). Furthermore, garments in wardrobes function like a surface that mediates among the self, the body and others. By exploring accounts of different items of clothing and tracing the changing meanings of similar garments at different times and within different social contexts, my research shows how dress is used to produce a particular kind of body and set of gestures, as well as a particular kind of pious self in relation to others.

My encounter with Woodward’s book *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007) inspired me to look into the garments and items stored in women’s wardrobes and to collect stories related to various garments, including headscarves. Woodward’s focus on the “wardrobe moment” of British women provides a solid ethnographic account of the daily dilemma of assembling an outfit as “a practice of identity construction” (Tarlo 1996). Her argument that clothing “forms a literal and metaphorical extension of the self” (Woodward 2007: 5) demands a detailed analysis of what women wear in relation to how their clothing makes them “feel” and how it makes them “look.”
Especially in minority contexts such as that of Muslims in the Netherlands, wearing covered dress makes Muslim women more visible, in contrast to the common argument that covered dress makes women less visible or invisible (Tarlo 2010). In general, wearing clothing has often been understood as hiding the body, but sartorial practice is also necessarily about showing the body in a different way. Although clothing conceals, it may also emphasize what it conceals (Harvey 2011). In a similar vein, the notion of Muslim dress is more helpful to investigate what it means to look Muslim today than the exclusive focus on the headscarf, often on one particular style of headscarf, which is studied in isolation. Being recognizably Muslim in the Netherlands means managing both “beauty” and “heightened visibility” in a minority context.

Wardrobes contain a richer collection of garments and accessories than what one sees worn by young Turkish-Dutch women in public spaces. Wardrobes store personal histories. They cross the boundaries between the inside and the outside, between different spatial orders and occasions. They simultaneously include the fashionable and the no longer fashionable. They not only reflect one’s public presence, but also a person’s appearance indoors and in social circles that are more intimate or gender-segregated (women-only). Wardrobes tell us about both public and private bodies. As Rabia Yalçın, a prominent tesettür designer from Turkey, puts it, acquiring a desired wardrobe can consume a lot of time and money for tesettür wearers: “The wardrobe of a tesettür wearer has two doors: one of them opens to the inside and the other is to the outside world.”

Particularly in the diasporic context, a wardrobe contains various items of clothing and unites different regimes of morality, ethics and aesthetics. Items in these wardrobes have the potential to communicate with wider, multiple audiences. In other words, wardrobes contain items that have the potential to be perceived differently in different contexts. Like other artifacts and cultural objects, clothing communicates complex, ambiguous, controversial and context-related messages in culturally constructed fields (Appadurai 1988). Similar items might be interpreted differently in diasporic contexts. For instance, a long skirt is seen as a marker of religiosity in the Dutch context in general, even though it connotes a certain understanding of Turkish femininity for migrant families themselves.

Clothing becomes significant in different social contexts. Dress and its intimate relation to the body allow us to understand how bodies are shaped by different notions of

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18 From an interview titled “When outdoors, indoor garments are off-sides” (Evdeki kıyafet dışarda ofsayt) with the Turkish journalist Ayşe Arman in the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet, 15 July 2009.
femininity and piety. In this vein, I approach dress as a “situated bodily practice” (Entwistle 2001: 45). Entwistle’s work brings the notion of embodiment to the fore in the analysis of mainstream clothing, which had been principally focused on fashion and clothing as matters of wastefulness, distinction and communication (Veblen [1899] 1994; Simmel 1957; Barthes 1985). According to Entwistle, dress is simultaneously a discursive and a practical phenomenon that bridges personal and social experiences. As Entwistle argues, the dressed body is actively produced through routine and everyday practices: “When getting dressed one orients oneself/body to the situation, acting in particular ways upon the surface of the body which are likely to fit within the established norms of that situation” (Entwistle 2001: 45). I approach the sartorial practices of Turkish-Dutch women as broadly embedded in and produced through a dynamic set of relations in different social contexts.

The body is a significant concept in this analysis of tesettür appearance because my work treats clothing and headscarves as mediating among the body, the self, and different publics. The body is both sentient and sensible, it sees and can be seen, it touches and it can be touched (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Crossley 1996). The body feels garments and informs us whether they are tight or loose enough for us to move comfortably; the body experiences telling textures and temperatures, even before our eyes confirm that a garment might suit us well through a reflection in the mirror. Furthermore, dressing affects how the body feels, and the body learns how to display particular gestures to different publics (Mauss 1979).

In this context, I also focus on the materiality of objects; the different feelings that garments produce on their wearers are significant aspects of the interviews about wardrobes that I conducted with various women. In order to discuss different aspects of the self and its relations to others, I collected sartorial biographies of women that illustrate how women adopt particular styles of dress. By studying of wardrobes, I pursue an in-depth analysis of the diverse sartorial preferences Turkish-Dutch women and their effects on different individuals and publics. This requires us to move beyond the limited binaries of being covered and uncovered, and exclusionist categories of the public and private body. As a collection of items of clothing, the wardrobe can be seen as “an externalization of selfhood” (Woodward 2005) that allows us to see the relational self.

This research explores different items of clothing that women put together and wear in specific social contexts to manage their heightened visibility. Women feel differently in different combinations of garments, and the effects that these combinations have on others are also different. For instance, the combination of a long maxi skirt in a grayish-brown color and
leather high heels, worn with a beige silk blouse and a matching silk headscarf in an abstract pattern, produces a different effect than white sneakers worn with white skinny jeans, a blue tunic and a cotton shawl in pastel blue. Each detail and item has the potential to become communicative and, therefore, to highlight different aspects of the self. Moreover, different notions of what “goes together” reveal the aesthetic perceptions of the self (Woodward 2005). Furthermore, by tracing the genealogies of particular garments separately, we can perceive their parallel, long-term transformations and relationships to the project of “wardrobe modernization.” The wardrobe collections of tesettürlü women embody and articulate intersecting stories of gender, piety, and the formation of new taste communities and politics in a transnational field, one that is increasingly expanding and multilayered for the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands.

5. Doing Fieldwork: Wardrobes and Interviews

I chose to focus on wardrobes and dress in order to achieve a wider, alternative approach to the controversial practice of wearing a headscarf. For my interlocutors, wardrobes and garments were more interesting to talk about than headscarves alone. Huge wardrobes from floor to ceiling, often covered by mirrors, were frequently the most prominent piece of furniture in young Turkish-Dutch women’s bedrooms. Moreover, some homes had extra dressing rooms, with wall-to-wall wardrobes, as a new interior trend. Wardrobes are located in the most intimate places in the house (bedrooms or dressing rooms); to open a wardrobe’s doors required a certain intimacy and shared interest between myself and the women with whom I conducted research.

As a newcomer in the Netherlands, I had very few contacts during the initial stages of my study. Moreover, it took some time to introduce myself as researcher who wanted to study wardrobe collections because wardrobes are not often easily accessible for researchers. I attended religious gatherings (sohbet) and religious classes offered by different Turkish religious communities in various Dutch cities from 2007 to the end of 2010. These classes included those organized by Milli Görüş, Diyanet, the Gülen Movement and the Süleymanlı Community. I also attended a wide variety of events such as festivals, charity bazaars (kermes), fashion shows, Ramadan dinners (iftar), seminars and conferences, and several classes on calligraphy and Islam (tefsir, fikih, siyer, akaid, hadith, and Islamic history)
organized by these communities. These were the major occasions on which I was able to meet women and introduce my research, as well as arrange in-depth wardrobe interviews. Additionally, I regularly visited marketplaces and stores in migrant neighborhoods and took street photos to track changing trends and fashions in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene.

Wardrobes are not only significant because they contain rich collections of garments; they also constitute a means by which to step into life stories. Inspired by Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981), I gathered topical life stories that focus on various aspects of women’s sartorial practices. I used the preliminary results of my first conversations to guide my next steps and generate new questions about tesettür clothing beyond the headscarf. Hence, my interview questions were flexible and changed through time. These life stories gave me the insight necessary to ask proper questions about the changing sartorial preferences of women, which are often firmly related to both life events and the various social contexts that they dress for. All of the narratives in this dissertation were presented by women who told me that they wear headscarf and prefer more covered styles in order to please God. Most of them see their sartorial practices as an everyday aspect of ibadet (worship). However, Turkish-Dutch women are also well aware of the modern construction of Turkish headscarf, which eventually became a “stigmatic symbol” used to distinguish Muslim women as a sartorial minority, both in Turkey and increasingly in the Netherlands. Because of this shared awareness of the hegemonic influence of a particular type of headscarf, the women and I also shared a common interest in talking about the rest of a Muslim woman’s appearance—a concern that is less present in the literature. Both existing representations of the modern headscarf and the negative effects of the “headscarf debate” created significant challenges for my fieldwork; on the other hand, facing these challenges provided critical insight into the discursive and cultural bases of my own assumptions and observations (Marcus and Clifford 1985).

Headscarves are only one means to understanding Muslim women’s subjectivities and belongings; furthermore, in its modern form, the headscarf is a highly contested phenomenon. Within a highly politicized and ideological context, the headscarf became the sole object of explanation; these explanations were produced primarily by comparing covered Muslim

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19 I held interviews in Turkish with native Kurdish speakers as well.

20 This may not necessarily be the case for all women who wear tesettür. The fact that I became acquainted with many of my interlocutors at religious events, as mentioned above, may partially account for their consistent emphasis on the relationship between tesettür and ibadet.
women with their uncovered peers. From the very beginning of my fieldwork, I had to deal with the limitations and effects of focusing on one particular type of headscarf. These limitations inspired me to look into women’s wardrobes and to collect dress stories in order to understand Muslim dress with and beyond the headscarf. Only such an analysis can reveal the shifting positions and multiple belongings that women construct and achieve through their wardrobes. In order to gain insight what it means to look Muslim, it is more productive to focus on the dressed body and individual collections of garments than on a single, ideal type of garment.

The main primary sources for this study are interviews, wardrobe collections, field notes, videos and photographs taken during fieldwork, which I conducted between 2007 and 2011. I also made use of media sources such as news stories and advertisements, as well as Facebook pages and online stores from both Turkey and the Netherlands. Finally, I drew on secondary literature on related subjects, letters of travelers from the Ottoman era, works of literary fiction, historical photographs, and dictionaries to trace the genealogies of the garments mentioned in the interviews.

During my stay in the Netherlands, I often visited Turkey and spent time there. My close connection with Turkey gave me the opportunity to conduct multi-sited fieldwork (Marcus 1995). The Amsterdam and Istanbul Airports, check-in rows and waiting lounges were interesting sites in which I was able to expand my network and to discuss and compare tesettür practices in Turkey and the Netherlands. I also tried to follow the connections of my interlocutors in Turkey. During summer vacations, I visited my interlocutors, attended religious meetings and shopping activities with them in Turkey and talked about what it means to look Muslim in the two different national contexts.

My fieldwork was based on a combination of interviews, wardrobe research, visual archiving of garments from wardrobes and street scenes, and participant observation. I conducted in-depth interviews with fifty-six women. I tried to include women from different backgrounds, especially of different generations, even if many of my interlocutors were part of the same network of religious communities. In particular, I tried to include women with different styles of tesettür. From more covered to less covered, from more fashionable to less fashionable, my main goal was to include as many different styles and preferences of tesettür as possible. All participants appear under pseudonyms, most of which they have chosen for themselves.
I primarily conducted interviews in my interlocutors’ homes, where I was always welcomed with great hospitality and served delicious food. I always appreciated these moments, which often offered me relief from the homesickness I experienced in the Netherlands. For practical reasons, houses and apartments were more convenient contexts in which to conduct interviews, because my informants and I could easily look at the dresses and items in the wardrobes together. Furthermore, conducting interviews in women’s home also allowed us to look at photograph albums, which women often use to describe their changing styles and to compare their sartorial preferences with other female relatives and friends. Women who were more interested in clothing and fashion acted as contacts by introducing me to their close friends with different understandings of tesettür and style.21

In some interviews, I had difficulty accessing wardrobes. Particularly with young women who still live with their parents and siblings, it was sometimes difficult to visit them at home. Furthermore, some women were interested in speaking about their sartorial practices but still reluctant to allow a stranger to enter their wardrobes. In such cases, I gave women a list of items and garments (including their favorite combinations, garments that they no longer wear but still keep, their favorite headscarves, etc.) and asked them to photograph these items; sometimes, they also brought along a few photographs to show how their style had changed through time. These interviews mostly took place in my own apartment. Sometimes, it was easier for my interlocutors to discuss the feel of a dress and the characteristics of combinations in more detail by looking at photographs rather than looking at the garments themselves. Photographs sometimes provided better clues about why a particular outfit was worn in a particular context. Exploring the everyday clothing of Turkish-Dutch women and tracing the genealogies of garments at different locations and historical moments in Turkey and the Netherlands provides a rich contextual analysis of how similar garments may have different meanings in different temporal and spatial contexts.

21 This means that I worked with a form of theoretical sampling rather than representative sampling. Theoretical sampling consists of choosing new cases based on the analysis of earlier encounters, guided by emergent theoretical notions (Glaser and Strauss 1967).
6. Overview of the Chapters

Each chapter focuses on a different item of clothing, traces the genealogy of this particular garment, and explores its use in combinations with other items in contemporary tesettür clothing. The chapters cover a longer historical period than the era of “New Veiling” and are all chronologically arranged. Following the current introductory chapter on the key methodological and theoretical issues and concerns of my research, the second chapter focuses on the çarşaf, the most austere and uniform style of outdoor garment in the tesettür scene. This chapter makes a historical detour to trace the genealogy of the çarşaf in Turkey, proceeding from the late Ottoman era when the çarşaf was introduced to the turn to çarşaf fashions, the attempts in Turkey to ban it, and the more recent connection between the çarşaf and a particular religious community in Turkey (the İsmailağa cemaatî). This second chapter presents the stories of five women who adopted the çarşaf as their outdoor tesettür. The number of interviews is limited due to the small number of çarşaf wearers in the Netherlands in general. By bringing intimate accounts of the çarşaf as everyday clothing and the genealogy of çarşaf together, this chapter reveals a series ambiguities and shifts in çarşaf practice. It disputes the most commonly held depiction of the çarşaf as a timeless, pure form of tesettür. I discuss how various categories of others (family, men, friends, religious communities, and the Dutch public at large) react to women wearing çarşaf. Furthermore, I explore the ways in which women themselves deal with these reactions by expressing their love for the çarşaf and developing particular, individual styles as they mobilize different aspects of the self.

The third chapter analyzes changing styles and fashions of wearing the pardöü (overcoat) and explores what wearing an overcoat means to different categories of women at different historical moments and in particular locations. It focuses on how intersections between people and objects in both Turkey and the Netherlands have enabled particular styles and stories of dress. In particular, this chapter is concerned with transformations in the urban-rural divide and how moving in and out of overcoats and their particular styles expresses the different ways women live Islam in the Netherlands. Beyond the dualistic categories of veiled and unveiled, this chapter offers accounts of the continuous renegotiations over piety and femininity that occur on the basis of women’s social-spatial mobility in a transnational field.
The fourth chapter depicts different combinations of tops (tunics, blouses, cardigans, jumpers, vests, etc.) with a particular focus on skirts and trousers. Unlike outdoor tesettür garments and headscarves, skirts and trousers are not unique to tesettür wardrobes. From the first generation’s baggy trousers to the Dutch skirts and trousers of the 1970s and up to present, this chapter investigates and compares different sartorial choices of women related to skirts and trousers. It pays attention to how women pick different styles and materials that hide and reveal certain parts of the body and aspects of the self in different ways. These accounts about skirts and trousers not only illustrate practices of covering; they also focus on gender differences that other garments do not reveal to the same extent.

The fifth and sixth chapters are each shorter essays that focus on two more specific themes, dügünlikler (festive dresses) and makeup. The fifth chapter explores the sartorial self as an actor in festive contexts. Festive settings are powerful, exceptional occasions that require women to dress differently than they do in their everyday lives. The specific attention to and care for one’s clothing in these contexts depends on an individual’s relationship to the host family. These celebrations are rich sites where one can notice transgressions and ambiguities in tesettür clothing and observe how tesettür is also a matter of context. This chapter explores the dilemma of what to wear as a relationship between festivity and religious modesty. It compares present and earlier festive celebrations and women’s sartorial practices in these settings. Furthermore, it illustrates how the ritual moment creates a state of exception and functions as a form of tesettür in itself; weddings coordinate an abstract tesettür that produces modesty and purifies “attractiveness” from its negative connotations.

The following chapter is about makeup and the use of beauty accessories as extra, final touches in tesettür clothing. Although makeup produces feelings of apprehension because of its close association with attractiveness, a certain amount of makeup has become necessary for producing a “natural healthy look” in everyday tesettür. This chapter shows how women apply different amounts of makeup to accommodate and contest diverse understandings of femininity, religiosity and notions of care for the self. By describing how both the quality and quantity of makeup change occasionally, it shows how contemporary interpretations of modesty have evolved towards the “management of beauty” rather than its concealment.

The manuscript began with a comment on the centrality of scholarly representations of the “modern headscarf.” The seventh chapter attempts to offer a new reading of the headscarf; it approaches the headscarf as a part of everyday clothing and explores the agency of
headscarves by looking at their materiality (fabrics, patterns, colors, ornaments, pins and other ways of tying, etc.). The headscarf was the trickiest item in this research from the very first moment of fieldwork through the final phases of writing. For this reason, it is not only the last chapter in the thesis, but was also the last section that I wrote. Before zoning in on contemporary headscarf collections, this chapter traces the changing styles and names of head coverings that migrant women from Turkey still remember well. The following section turns to the materiality of headscarves by focusing on the various effects particular kinds of headscarves produce both for the Turkish-Dutch women who wear them and for a wider public. This capstone chapter ends with a thick description of the headscarf; it shows how women choose different materials, patterns and formats to highlight certain aspects of the pious self in relation to the wider context in which they live. Finally, I offer a set of concluding remarks in a brief, summary chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: THE ÇARŞAF

In the Dutch-Turkish tesettür scene, women consistently depict the çarşaf as the most radical covering style. The çarşaf is a strongly marked form of Muslim garb; it produces the most heightened visibility. Today’s çarşaf is a two-piece outfit consisting of a long, loose skirt and a short cloak covering the upper part of the body.\(^{22}\) The whole outfit loosely covers the body from head to toe. The çarşaf is usually black, or occasionally another dark, subdued color, though lighter çarşafs may be worn in summer. Although the number of women who adopt the çarşaf as their outdoor tesettür is very small in the Netherlands and in Turkey, there is a proliferation of çarşaf models on the tesettür market. In the last few years, highly stylish and expensive çarşafs have emerged in various colors. A number of different styles of çarşaf\(^{23}\) can be found in the wardrobes of my interlocutors: torbalı (baggy), sosyete (classy), which includes a cape, Sultan başı (the Sultana’s head), those patterned with polka dots, and other subtle variations.

In this chapter, I present the stories of five women who have adopted çarşaf as their outdoor tesettür. Their personal reflections on çarşaf as a sartorial practice contest the most common depiction of the çarşaf as a timeless, pure and radical form of tesettür. This idealization of çarşaf as the most dedicated form of tesettür also stands in contrast to the shifting meanings and styles of çarşaf, both in political discourses and in everyday life since the mid-19\(^{th}\) Century. The next section, then, begins with a historical detour by tracing the genealogy of the çarşaf in Turkey. It begins in Ottoman times, when the çarşaf was first introduced, before discussing the turn to çarşaf fashions and attempts to ban the çarşaf.

To elaborate on contemporary çarşaf stories, I will portray one particular religious community, the İsmailağa cemaati from Istanbul, and discuss their reflections on çarşaf as a religious obligation. Background information on the İsmailağa community is key to this

\(^{22}\) In some of the literature on Muslim women’s dress, a third piece is included in çarşaf style. This item is called peçe, a face-veil that is typically black in color. In the contemporary Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene, the peçe is very rare. Throughout my fieldwork between 2007 and 2011, I attended many religious community gatherings, but I only saw such a face-veil once. Furthermore, I only encountered a black peçe in one wardrobe that I examined; it had been brought back from the hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah that Muslims are obligated to make once during their lifetimes if able) as a souvenir.

\(^{23}\) Çarşaf is originally an Arabic word that means “sheet” (bed sheet) in both Arabic and Turkish.
discussion because all of the çarşaf stories in this section involve women who are or have been linked to this community. The association between the İsmailağa community and the torbalı çarşaf is particularly strong; as one of my interlocutors notes, “çarşaf belongs to the school of that cemaat.” More generally, women who wear çarşaf in the Netherlands are well aware of the strong association between the çarşaf and this community, even if they are not necessarily active members of it. In the last section of the chapter, I will discuss how my interlocutors first began to wear çarşaf, how various categories of others (family, men, members of religious communities and the public at large) react to women who wear the çarşaf, and the ways in which women themselves deal with these reactions and perceptions by expressing their love for çarşaf, and developing particular, individualized styles.

1. The Çarşaf in Ottoman and Republican Times

Break with the Empire: the Shift from Imperial Ferace to Çarşaf

Tracing the shifting styles and meanings of çarşaf is a massive endeavor. The force of Turkey’s modernization project and the hegemonic nation-state ideologies of this period often frame the earlier literature (Taşçıoğlu 1958; Koçu 1969; Sevin 1973; Tuğlacı 1984). Only a few studies have described changing patterns in clothing, from the beginning of the Ottoman westernization reforms during the Tanzimat Era to the Republican period. These studies have generally linked sartorial changes to a linear process of modernization. Rather than tracing commonalities and continuities, historiography in general has given more significance to ruptures. From such a linear perspective, the çarşaf is destined to disappear. This story line predicts the complete abandonment of the çarşaf, first in the cities and then in rural areas, while ignoring the stories of the women who have continued to wear this form of tesettür. Moreover, this genre suggests that contemporary çarşaf stories have no place or meaning, other than as mere instances of “radical Islamism.” Thus, this body of literature denies the ambiguities and contradictions of çarşaf wearing that have characterized the practice historically.

Before the headscarf controversy in Turkey, the çarşaf played a central role in framing debates over development, modernity and the transformation of society from the early
Regulations concerning the çarşaf were mostly related to changing dynamics of power and politics. For instance, the sultan would occasionally ban wearing the çarşaf for security reasons, only to lift the ban again when çarşaf producers complained that they would go bankrupt because poor women could not afford the more expensive imperial outdoor garments known as ferace. However, these regulations were, at most, partially implemented by state institutions, and a large number of women did not abide by them.

In general, women’s clothing was not very different from that of men in the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman women wore şalvar (baggy trousers) and gömlek (long-sleeved shirts) with layered coats (entari, kaftan) and cepken (short jackets) (Micklewright 2000). Often, the difference between genders was marked by ornaments and colors. The common form of Ottoman women’s outdoor clothing was a combination of the ferace (a full-length coat) and yaşmak (scarf), mostly in black, purple or red colors (Üçel-Aybet 2003; Koçu 1969). With the rising mass fashion industry in the 19th Century, and the partial adoption of a western dress code, gender-specific items of clothing began to reshape the Ottoman dress scene. The earliest photographs that show Ottoman women in European dress date back to the 1870s and 1880s (Jirousek 2000).

Historically, fashion was an elite phenomenon that gradually spread to other segments of the population. Affluent women in Istanbul were highly influential in setting new sartorial trends and introducing new fashions into mainstream Ottoman clothing (Vaka [1923] 2003; Sakaoğlu 1987; İsin 1999). Unfortunately, we know very little about the sartorial preferences of provincial and pious Muslim women during the Ottoman era. The literature on Ottoman dress mostly includes and relies on the accounts and letters of European travelers and diplomats and the paintings of European artists (Ellison [1915] 2009; Akman 2011). These Europeans focused mostly on Istanbul, and the preferences of elite Istanbul women were described as leading imperial trends, which were later adopted by women in Anatolian towns (Koçu 1969).

24 Abdulhamid II (1842-1918) banned the ferace for ordinary women in 1889; only women of the palace were allowed to continue to wear it. As a result, the presence of çarşaf and peçe significantly increased on the streets of Istanbul. The anonymity of çarşaf was seen as a threat. With the use of the peçe, covering the face when wearing a çarşaf produced a sort of anonymity for the çarşaf wearer; in other words, it provided a kind of invisibility. There were an increasing number of speculations about spies and enemies of the Sultan who could carry out their plans under the disguise of çarşaf. Thereafter, women were only allowed to wear çarşaf on deserted streets or when they went to social house gatherings (Akkent and Franger 1987).
Both *ferace* and *çarşaf* were subject to various attempts at regulation. The Ottoman sultans not only produced regulations about their shape and color, but also regulated how, where and when one could wear them. Beginning in the era of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807), women started to wear colorful *feraces* different from the conventional *feraces* of the Empire, a trend that displayed the successful adoption of new Western consumption patterns (Jirousek 2000; Mahir 2005). Women’s clothing had a larger impact on society as the concurrently changing economic, social, and political character of the Empire led to the emergence of new dress codes. Increasing competition among women in order to achieve a novel presence in Ottoman public spaces was not only a sign of changing consumption patterns and Western influences in fashion; perhaps more importantly, it was also a sign of new social and economic inequalities within Ottoman society.

*Çarşaf* as a National Fashion

In the early 1850s, the black *çarşaf* made its first appearance in Istanbul. It was a distinct, gendered outdoor garment for women. Originating in Syria, this early form of *çarşaf* was a one-piece garment that covered the wearer from head to toe. The wife of the governor of Syria, Suphi Paşa, first introduced the one-piece *çarşaf* style to Muslim women in Istanbul (Aktaş 2005). *Çarşaf* fashions in Istanbul were the manifestation of a cultural-civilizational break within the empire. The *çarşaf* was promoted as a modern, national outfit for women (Toprak 1998; Çakır 2011); this advocacy changed the long tradition of wearing *ferace*. Since then, the *çarşaf* has represented different understandings of the aesthetics, piety and modesty of Muslim women.

With the emergence of art-nouveau style dresses, especially in Istanbul, the *çarşaf* was reintroduced in 1892 as a fashionable garment. This represented a shift from Imperial to Art Nouveau styles in fashion (Toprak 1998). *Feraces* with low-cut-sleeves (*düşük omuz modası*) had nicely matched with Imperial fashions for a very long time, but they lost their popularity with the appearance of puffy-sleeved (leg o’mutton sleeves) dresses of the Art Nouveau style (Sevin 1973). The loose, long, black *çarşaf* covered the body’s entire figure, at least according to a particular understanding of *tesettür,* moreover, the *çarşaf* hid the new sartorial preferences of women, their primarily western garments, which were the manifestations of
newly emerging inequalities and differences within society. Gradually, the çarşaf itself took on a form similar to that of these dresses.

Changing fashions in women’s clothing were seen as a sign of progress. In a number of women’s journals, several critical essays raised the issue of the çarşaf as a part of the larger debate over modernization and westernization throughout the last century of the Ottoman Empire. Conservative segments of society expressed strong reactions against the increasing numbers of fashionable, çarşaflı women, and promoted former styles of ferace and yaşmak against the new çarşaf fashions. The Istanbul police began to interfere with women in çarşaf. In addition to their pistols, Istanbul police officers started to carry scissors; when they saw women in çarşaf, they cut their skirts and cloaks. However, as Toprak describes, fashion prevailed over state repression, and the ferace and yaşmak disappeared from the Ottoman public scene within two years. (Toprak 1998; Sevin 1973) Regardless of the prohibitions of Abdulhamid II (reigned 1876 to 1909), the majority of women continued to adopt fashionable çarşaf designs. The typical outdoor outfit at that time was a cloak with a black veil, and the fashionable çarşaf increasingly replaced feraces in large areas.

Tango Çarşaf in the Years of Occupation

During the early years of the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1922), the one-piece çarşaf turned into a two-piece garment, which was similar in appearance to today’s çarşaf. It had a wide-cut cloak or cape covering the upper part of the body to the waist, and a full-length loose skirt. The loose-fitting çarşaf (a combination of a wide cloak and skirt) disappeared. Slim-fitting overcoats or western suits (jacket and skirt combinations), called tayyör (derived from the French word tailleur) became the fashionable style of outdoor garments for elite women in Ottoman cities. These new styles were also labeled as çarşaf. New çarşaf models had tight, short skirts; fashionable designs even had slits, because women could not move easily in them otherwise. The new style of the period was called the “Tango Çarşaf” (Taşcióğlu 1958: 52-54). Çarşaf fashion also included new accessories, such as parasols in matching colors, which were used to hide women’s faces beneath transparent veils (Şeni 199: 32).

The fashions of Russian and European women influenced Ottoman women’s clothing during the years of the occupation (1918-1923). These women introduced western fashions and promoted western styles, thereby transforming the sartorial practices of women in
Ottoman public spaces. Elite women adopted these fashions widely; Paris and London fashions become visibly influential in Ottoman women’s dress styles. In the following years, the çarşaf became increasingly adapted to a western style of outdoor clothing. Its shape became tighter and shorter, and it began to be worn with accessories, including Russian furs, brought by Romanov women who escaped the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and fled to Istanbul (Toprak 1998). These Russian women also introduced a new type of headgear made of tulle fabric, which they used instead of hats. “Russian head” (Rus başı) styles were worn by Ottoman women in combination with a variety of outdoor garments (Mahir 2005). Fashionable adaptations of outdoor teşettür to western trends sparked new, even more controversial debates over westernizing reforms. These debates raised questions about morality, religion and nationalism, along with changing understandings of teşettür, and western ideas of femininity and beauty.

Figure 1 Çarşaf models in the magazine İnci, no. 2 (1 March 1919) published in 1998, Tombak.
A women’s magazine published in March 1919 included an illustration of fashionable çarşaf models with tight, three-quarter skirts and fur trimmings that looked like western outfits. As we see in the photograph below, these figures bear no resemblance to what is worn as çarşaf today. The figure on the left side wears something that looks like a fashionable winter overcoat. This çarşaf was decorated with furs around the neck and the edge of the sleeves. Big glassy buttons and a belt right below the chest gave the 20th-century Ottoman çarşaf the shape of an overcoat, while the small details and ornaments became new status markers for Ottoman women.

As we can see in this example, differences between the Ottoman çarşaf and western fashions disappeared before the term “çarşaf” was given up. The çarşaf became the favored style of outdoor dress for the next generation of women who moved into modern, urban public space. Later, such styles would be called manto (overcoat) or tayyör rather than çarşaf. It is important to note here that these fashionable çarşaf models of the early 20th Century bear a resemblance to contemporary Turkish tesettür fashions. However, these fashions are no longer called çarşaf; rather, they are known as kap (see the chapter on the overcoat for more on these fashions).

The desire for fashion amongst women was highly criticized in many periodicals and journals of the period.25 Authors in these periodicals wrote negatively about the strangeness of the new çarşaf, criticizing it as something that was mostly attractive to a certain category of morally decadent, uncultivated women. Achieving acceptance for this new aesthetics in women’s clothing required both persistence and quite a lot of time. Criticism of the transformation of women’s clothing as an indication of moral decay took the practices and meanings of covered clothing of the past for granted as ideal and correct forms. This argument mirrors in reverse the ideological construction of a linear, homogenizing concept of progress, through which modernizers imagine the future.

Women’s clothing achieved a state-controlled institutional form with the establishment of sewing schools. Sewing schools (Biçki Dikiş Kursları) became increasingly popular beginning in the 1910’s. In these schools, women not only learned western fashions, they were also exposed to the modern notion of the nuclear family. Furthermore, they were taught new domestic tasks and household management in these contexts (Aktaş 2005). These

25 See Mahir 2005 for a detailed analysis of women’s periodicals and journals during the occupation years and an account of reactions on the part of elite Ottoman intellectuals to changing styles of clothing, especially the çarşaf.
institutes continued to play a significant role in the lives of Republican women. They functioned as alternative educational institutions for young women who could not continue formal state education.

Campaigns against the Çarşaf

The pace of transformations in women’s clothing, not only in terms of aesthetics but also in the processes of production and consumption, increased during the early years of the Turkish Republic. There was no place for the çarşaf in the project of “wardrobe modernization.” Ironically, given the relative novelty of the style itself, a break with the çarşaf also implied a desired departure from the Ottoman roots of the young secularizing nation. Sewing schools promoted a new dress code, and they quickly responded to the increasing demand for western styles of clothing. The professional tailoring skills that women learned in these schools produced a visible difference between the new fashions and former home-tailored clothes.

In the early years of the Republic, a large number of provincial women were able to fashion new styles of dress in modern public spaces, especially due to the contributions of women who had graduated from sewing schools in smaller Anatolian towns. The Turkish Women’s Association also played a significant role in shaping public opinion and reactions to the çarşaf. Their concerns were similar to those of some Ottoman feminists; they promoted “national fashion” and campaigned for the ultimate abolition of the çarşaf. In their accounts, the çarşaf, with its full-length, loose covering form, became a symbol of backwardness and ignorance. While the fashionable model of çarşaf turned into a combination of jacket and skirt, and became the new dress code for the women of the Republic, the old-fashioned çarşaf was seen as an undesirable remnant of the Ottoman past, which denoted the poverty and provinciality of the women who still wore it. Elite and educated women of the Republic were strongly opposed to the presence of the old-fashioned çarşaf.

In March 1956, three female MPs proposed a legal prohibition on the çarşaf in Turkish Parliament. Although this proposal did not pass, the Turkish Women’s Association continued to sponsor several campaigns against the çarşaf. (Aktaş 2005: 279-280). Like other indicators of the modern secular nation-building project, the new public visibility of women was seen as part of the state’s civilizing mission. The ostensible aim of this civilizing project was to educate those women who only continued to wear çarşaf because they could not afford an
overcoat, and the campaigns of the Turkish Women’s Association tried to find ways to produce inexpensive overcoats for a large number of women.

The elite circles of the Republic actively took part in the formation of public opinion against the public presence of the çarşaf. Although the ready-made textile sector was still under-developed, students of the Girls’ Institutes (Kız Enstitüleri) propagated the new dress code (Cindoğlu and Toktaş 2002; Akşit 2005). Students at these institutes produced elegant yet inexpensive overcoat models, and wearing an overcoat as an outdoor garment became highly popular and trendy among many women; the following chapter on overcoats will explore this trend through ethnographic accounts. In order to provide overcoats to a larger number of women, students from the Girls’ Institutes consulted and contracted with local textile producers and storeowners to manufacture and sell overcoats at reasonable prices. They also organized campaigns to educate women to adopt more fashionable and westernized forms of outdoor garments.

After the military coup in 1960,26 the Mustafa Kemal Foundation, a prominent civil society organization founded during the Republican period, organized several campaigns against the çarşaf. Educated, urban women (who were considered more modern) were mobilized and participated in these campaigns, in which they donated their overcoats to poor, provincial women who could not afford to buy such garments themselves. Although these campaigns may appear to be part of a homogenization project, aimed at creating a new, equal appearance for the citizens of the nation-state, they deepened the gap between urban and rural areas. The çarşaf gradually came to be categorized as traditional rural attire, although it was not yet “radically Islamic.”

Although no legal prohibition against the çarşaf was enacted at this time, there was a common perception that wearing the çarşaf was illegal. One needed to be very strong to wear the çarşaf and to appear in public spaces where the çarşaf was seen as a threat. According to the secular worldview, the çarşaf was a threat to the secular Turkish state. This paranoia legitimized the social exclusion of çarşaf wearers. Since this time, çarşaf wearers have stood out in Turkey. The possibility that the anonymity of the çarşaf might be used for criminal purposes produced feelings of anxiety and disgust about this particular style of dress

26 The first military intervention in the Republican era, the coup of 1960, dissolved the Parliament and outlawed the Democrat Party (DP). The DP first won elections in 1950, thereby ending the one party period of the early Republic. The DP received much of its support due to its liberal attitude toward Islam. For instance, the DP pushed through legislation allowing the call to prayer (ezan) to be voiced in Arabic again; the language of the call to prayer had been switched to Turkish from Arabic as part of the reforms of the early Republic.
throughout the Republican years. The word çarşaf itself is commonly used as a metaphor in everyday discussions about corruption, burglary, kidnapping, fraud, prostitution, and so forth. Çarşaf wearers were well aware of the fact that they may be seen as potential criminals. The police were able to approach them on the streets without a good reason and ask for their identity papers, as if their mere appearance was a crime. The double fear of çarşaf as both as a threat to the secular republic and as a means of criminality marked the presence of çarşaf wearers in public space, and excluded them in a different way than other forms of tesettür.

In the 1970s, çarşaf wearers were stigmatized as supporters of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution in the Turkish secular imaginary. Such stigmatization ignored and erased the fact that the çarşaf had once been a national garment, a modern outfit, produced in various colors and embellished with furs and other ornamentation. Turkish politics targeted the çarşaf as a threat to the secular state. The çarşaf was more dangerous than other types of headscarf because it was seen as a symbol of ―radical‖ Islamism. This depiction rejected and suppressed the long history of the çarşaf and women’s experiences of it.

When evaluating the çarşaf today, this long history, which began in the 1850s, must be taken into account. The çarşaf has been adapted to different fashions and understandings of tesettür, and women continue to endow it with different, shifting meanings. While the one-piece çarşaf of the 1850s is now associated with an “Arab” style, in the 1890s the same çarşaf was refashioned within the context of emergent, western sartorial aesthetics. Later, in the 1910s, this çarşaf was complimented and ornamented with Russian fur fashions. The black, loose çarşaf was seen as something to be completely discarded during the early years of the Republic. The campaigns to abolish the wearing of çarşaf as a part of the project of “wardrobe modernization” reveal the strong antipathy to the çarşaf that existed in the 1930s and 1940s. Due to the success of this public antagonism, by the 1950s and 1960s the çarşaf had come to signify rural poverty and the traditional Ottoman past from which the modern Turkish nation-state sought to distance itself. From the 1980s onwards, the çarşaf was seen as the most austere outfit and the manifestation of “fundamentalist Islamism.” At this same time, one particular religious community rose to prominence with its large number of çarşaf wears.
2. Torbalı Çarşaf

The İsmailağa Community

The İsmailağa community is based at the İsmailağa Mosque in Istanbul, in the neighborhood of Çarşamba, located in the district of Fatih. The İsmailağa Mosque was originally built in the 18th century. According to 19th Century Ottoman census records, Fatih as a neighborhood was characterized by the strong presence of non-Muslim minorities (Shaw 1979). The Istanbul earthquake in 1894 seriously damaged the İsmailağa Mosque, and for a long time thereafter it was only used as a marketplace. The mosque was renovated in 1952 under the leadership of Sheikh Ali Haydar Efendi, who appointed Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu as the imam of the mosque in 1954. Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu is still the spiritual leader of İsmailağa community (a sub-branch of the influential Naqşbandi Sufi order, or tarikat); among his disciples, he is also known as Mahmut Efendi Hazretleri. His disciples can be recognized by their distinctive clothing, especially in and around the district of Fatih: men usually wear long cloaks and grow large beards, while women disciples wear the black çarşaf. This particular style of çarşaf is known as the baggy (torbalı), çarşaf or the İsmailağa style. The streets of Çarşamba are full of çarşaf producers, and Fatih has a unique atmosphere among all of the neighborhoods of Istanbul, with its large number of çarşaf wearers. In the 1980s and especially during the process following the “soft coup” of 28 February 1997, Fatih and the community were considered to be a “threat” and, therefore, became the focus of heated political debates.

Today, both practicing and non-practicing Muslims in Istanbul portray Fatih as different from other neighborhoods (Navaro-Yashin 2002b; Walton 2010); as one tesettürli woman said, “Fatih is like a little Iran.” Çarşaf wearers have heightened visibility in public space in general, but Fatih is perhaps the only location where wearing çarşaf is actually less conspicuous. In contrast to the strong impression of Fatih as a very conservative neighborhood, the crowd of Fatih is in fact more diverse than that of any other neighborhood.

Belge describes Fatih as historically a densely-populated non-Muslim neighborhood of Istanbul (2000: 145).
in Istanbul, particularly due to the presence of çarşaf wearers. On a sunny day, one can see women wearing very exposed garments, including mini-skirts and strapless shirts, and women tourists wearing face-veils (mostly from the Arab Gulf countries) walking alongside çarşaf wearers and shopping on the main street surrounded by classy stores of well-known brands. Tesettür producers and non-tesettür companies alike compete to occupy the most crowded corners of Fatih’s streets. Besides new stores, small, old-fashioned stores continue to sell various items, from clothing to books, which are of particular interest to members of the community. Most çarşaf producers are located along the narrow streets of Çarşamba. For the Turkish-Dutch women whom I interviewed for this research, Fatih is above all a shopping destination, and online stores of sellers from Faith and the nearby area of Unkapani are promising addresses at which to find different styles of çarşafs, ranging from old-fashioned, black, baggy çarşafs to fashionable çarşaf styles in different colors.

Figure 2 Çarşaf stores in Fatih and Meryem’s torbalı çarşaf in the Netherlands.
Çarşaf as a Community Garment

Tracing the history of the çarşaf illustrates that the transformation of tesettür is an ongoing, continuous process. Yet, in contrast to the predictions of Turkey's modernization project, this process is not linear. Women constantly adapt seemingly similar styles to different understandings of tesettür and trends in shifting and multiple ways. The remainder of this chapter focuses on contemporary çarşaf stories, which reveal the ambiguities and contradictions of wearing çarşaf in the Netherlands. The following section briefly describes one particular community of Turkish-Dutch çarşaf wearers, and relates the interpretations and reflections of community members about outdoor tesettür and çarşaf on their official community websites. This is particularly significant because all of the narrators of çarşaf stories in the following section adopted the çarşaf style during their education at Quranic boarding schools affiliated with the İsmailağa community, and most of them put çarşaf on for the first time in a ritualistic manner at these schools. The mottoes of the community are “Çarşaf is farz (an obligation)” and “çarşaf is the honor of religion.” In the teachings of the community, the çarşaf is promoted as the most “authentic,” “timeless” and “pure” form of outdoor tesettür. Even women who are no longer part of this community, and actively participate in the activities of other communities as hocas (religious teachers), still enjoy the presence and appearance of the çarşaf, despite its stigmatization and marked visibility in both the Netherlands and Turkey.

The İsmailağa community shares a particular interpretation of what tesettür means based on specific passages of the Qur’an. In their understanding, çarşaf is the only style of dress that fits the term “jilbab” in the Surah Nur of the Qur’an. They strictly exclude other forms of equally covering tesettür styles, for instance, the pardösü combined with a large scarf. Moreover, performing proper outdoor tesettür is not only about wearing a loosely-covering çarşaf, but also about using other accessories in a proper way. Women from the

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28 “And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.” Sahih International retrieved from http://quran.com/24/31 on 17.04.2012.
community are careful to carry handbags rather than shoulder bags, which risk highlighting
the contours of the upper part of the body. Meticulously formed çarşafş highlight the level of
devotion of some community members.

In Mahmut Efendi’s sermons, the çarşaf and the beard are not only a particular style of
appearance but also concepts that emphasize a pious understanding of the world and a
person’s relationship to God. On the website of the İsmailağa community, the çarşaf is a
significant topic; it appears regularly in the statements of Mahmut Efendi and is discussed on
the forums. His depiction of çarşaf not only points to a higher level of devotion, it also
articulates a critical stance toward modern lifestyles and fashions. In his words:

Those who cannot recognize the difference between mümin (the believer) and
infidel do not know the difference between overcoat and çarşaf.\(^{29}\)

He describes çarşaf as “the badge of religion” (“çarşaf dinin nişanıdır”). According to
his interpretation, wearing çarşaf is a direct means of showing a female believer’s lack of care
for and interest in the material world. While wearing çarşaf is promoted for women on the
community's website, it also is a topic of debate. The well-known saying of Mahmut Efendi
above sparked a heated debate among the followers of the site. The claim that “çarşaf is the
honor of religion” engendered a strong disagreement between two men (posted on 06 October
2008) in a forum. One of them describes the çarşaf as the ideal form of tesettür by referring to
the sayings of Mahmut Efendi. Through this idealized, celebratory depiction of çarşaf, he
emphasizes the çarşaf wearer’s modesty and her detachment from and indifference to the
material world, based on her disciplined self. According to his view, the çarşaf wearer is in
this world but not of it, as a well-known Sufi saying states.

In the discussion, the first participant relates an historical account in which he refers to
the experiences of women from previous generations: “If we could ask our grandmothers a
hundred years ago, they would have said, ‘When we go out we preferred to look older even
though we were very young’.” His account refers to a certain notion of modesty in which
women devalue their most precious quality, their youth. His portrayal of çarşaf is a romantic
one that situates the çarşaf in a narrative as a sign of modesty and morality; this romantic idea
of the çarşaf is distilled from its long and compound history.

on 12.04.2012.
The other contributor to the forum opposes the idea that çarşaf is the only correct form of tesettür. Although all of the women in his family wear çarşaf, he also accepts other forms of well-covering tesettür as correct forms of outdoor dress. In his eyes, judging different forms of tesettür is itself contrary to a pious understanding of modesty. In his eyes, only God knows whether a particular tesettür is correct or not. He writes the following to support his stance in the discussion of Mahmut Efendi’s claim that “çarşaf is the honor of religion”:

Have I said anything against the çarşaf? How I could speak against it? Thanks be to God (hamdolsun) all of the women in my family wear çarşaf. You can’t understand my objection, because of your own prejudices. Shall we call a sister who wears a pardösü, which covers her entire body with a big headscarf that covers her shoulders, wrong? This is basically what the ‘jilbab’ is. To say that çarşaf is the badge of religion is to say that there is no way other than çarşaf. Who can dare to say this? All of the millions of women who don’t wear çarşaf are in error? How can someone claim this? Well, those who wear çarşaf today, they wear it because of the words of their Efendi, in order to show their membership in his cemaat. They even interfered with the form of çarşaf in our cemaat. ‘Don’t wear a two-piece çarşaf, it should be one piece, do not wear peçeli çarşaf, tie it under your chin with a pin,’ etc… They made these sorts of arguments.30

In contrast to the contentions of the male contributors to this forum, however, çarşaf cannot simply be seen as a mediator or signifier of religious modesty or a disciplined will. Even if wearing çarşaf indicates affiliation with a certain community, the increasing diversity of çarşaf fashions blurs this association.

3. The Çarşaf in the Netherlands

Çarşaflı women were the most difficult group to reach during my research. This was not only because of their very small number, but also because they tend to be highly respected women, sometimes even preachers, in their circles. As a result, they have busy lives full of religious teaching and services. Without Hanne’s help, it would not have been possible to collect the personal stories of these women that I narrate in this chapter. Hanne was the first çarşaflı woman with whom I had a close encounter in my life. Hanne and I live very near to each other in Turkey, yet I do not know whether we would have met and become such good friends in Turkey itself. I still notice how our presence together (walking arm in arm) attracts a lot of

surprised attention on the part of people on the street in both Turkey and the Netherlands. We were able to establish a good relationship on the basis of our shared longing for home. We also shared a similar sense of humor, and the process of remembering and mutually sharing stories of our lives back home in Turkey helped us to establish an even stronger rapport. As I got to know her better, I came to recognize my own assumptions about the çarşaf. Our intimate conversations always helped me to confront my own prejudices.

Figure 3 Çarşaf wearers in the Netherlands.
A Common Story: Quranic Boarding Schools

The çarşaf wearers I discuss in this study share similar stories about first adopting çarşaf at one of the Quranic boarding schools of İsmailağa community. Even if these women no longer follow the teachings of the İsmailağa community and do not share their austere interpretation of çarşaf as the only acceptable form of outdoor tesettür, they nonetheless continue to wear çarşaf. Some of them were born in the Netherlands, while others immigrated later in life; all of them, however, have been students in the İsmailağa Quranic schools. While some of them wear more fashionable, alternative styles of çarşaf, others have continued to wear the community style for different reasons.

Among my interlocutors, only one young woman, who called herself Meryem in our interviews, wears what she calls the İsmailağa çarşafı. She adopted this çarşaf style in one of the Quranic boarding schools where she studied for two years. Even if there are several equally covering styles of outdoor attire, Meryem emphasized that there is a clear distinction between other forms of tesettür and çarşaf for community members. According to the community, there is only one form of outdoor dress for Muslim women, and that is the çarşaf. As Meryem says: “they do not even say tesettür is farz (obligatory), they say çarşaf is farz.”

As mentioned earlier, memories of time spent at one of the boarding schools occupy a significant place in the çarşaf stories. The Quranic boarding schools of the İsmailağa community have created an alternative for families that shun public education because of its cost or its secularity. Because they are boarding schools, these institutions form a viable alternative for families both in Turkey and in the Netherlands. Migrant families send their daughters to these schools, which are often located near relatives who can pay close attention to their children. In these schools, students memorize parts of the Quran and learn the basic principles of Islam. Simultaneously, they help to run the school and graduate as certificated hocas. Some of the volunteers have continued to stay at the schools and have taken on administrative roles in addition to religious teaching.

Poverty is one of the principal reasons that families send their daughters to Quranic boarding schools. These schools are not entirely free, but they cost less than a secular public education. In addition, they free families from some of their responsibilities, thereby allowing parents to work hard to make a living and provide a better future for their children. Moreover,
these schools also provide an alternative education for children from families that are critical or suspicious of modern secular education. Quranic schools constitute an alternative social circle and public space in which young women feel empowered by using and developing different skills, even if they are regarded as an “Other,” a marker of alterity, in modern secular public spaces. They give young girls the ability to create their own networks, through which they become visible and respected on the basis of their çarşaf.

Selcen comes from a poor family. She wanted to continue her education at an İmam Hatip School, where she could get a degree that would allow her to further her education as a theology student at a university in Turkey. However, her father wanted her to pursue a religious education in a Quranic boarding school with her sisters. He was a much-respected imam in the İsmailağa community. Selcen admires her father as a trustworthy, wise imam. She seeks her father’s approval in the same manner as his followers, who seek his advice on worldly and personal matters. Her father promised her that she would receive his full support in her future academic aspirations. She remembers the conversation that she had with her father in the following way:

(He said) ‘My daughter listen, I will indeed search and send you to a place where you will be able to learn Arabic and Turkish very well. I am behind you; this is a Muslim country, in the future when the headscarf issue is solved, I will support you pursuing a diploma.’ And then my journey to Istanbul began; I was ten years old. And my education started in a boarding school.

Leaving home to go Istanbul, where she studied in a Quranic School, was not easy for Selcen because she was very young at the time. Her time at the boarding school began in a working class, suburban district of Istanbul. The boarding school was very demanding. Together with her friends at the school, Selcen worked hard to become a wise, learned woman; she describes her time in the “medrese life” nostalgically by referring to the Arabic word “medrese” (school; in this context, an Islamic school):

In the beginning, it was very difficult because I knew that I would be studying there for ten years. Well, you make an agreement before you start. The curriculum lasts for a maximum of ten years, and then it depends on your will,
you may continue if you want. [But you might also work there, right?] I began
to take on some responsibility after six years, for instance, I began an
internship. I took classes in _tefsir_ (Quranic commentary), _fikih_ (Islamic legal
reasoning), and _hadas_ (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) from
well-known thinkers in Turkey, I had my education in the core.

Selcen sought answers to all of the possible questions that people might ask her in the
future. A wise _hoca_ has to be informed about as many subjects as possible, in order to be able
to advise other women at any time, at least in religious matters. _Hocas_ are well aware that
they act as role models for young women in many different ways. Women consult with them
and ask for their advice on almost anything. A young pregnant woman can approach a _hoca_
and ask for a name for her baby, a student may ask for support to adjust her relationship with
her parents, or a young woman might ask for help when she first falls in love with a man of
whom her parents would disapprove.

Hanne also comes from a large, poor family. As she describes below, her family was
not especially pious. Hanne was a student in a Quranic boarding school, although not for as
long a period as Selcen. As we spoke about her first days in the boarding school, Hanne
remembered how she felt when she put a headscarf on for the first time, a few years ago, in
order to go to a mosque; she changed her route to the mosque to hide from acquaintances
because she was embarrassed. Nevertheless, she was passionate to find God. Her first days in
the school were challenging, not only because she had left home but also because she was
encountering a new set of practices and a different way of life.

I was distant from the headscarf, I didn’t wear one, but then we went to this _ceamaat_. For the first time in my life, I saw a meal served on a table on the
floor; in our home, we do not eat on the floor, we do not eat from the same
plate, we do not sit on the floor. We sat on a _sedir_ (a kind of traditional sofa). I
saw those loose dresses, I felt so strange there. I was sitting on the floor and
wearing a loose dress, it looked spooky. I remember the first time I ate on the
floor, some of the girls made fun of me. I was only able to eat salad because
salad is the only dish that we eat from the same plate in my home…my family
does not know the proper way to eat, nor did I. We are Muslim, but this was
the first time that I encountered a truly Islamic way of life and people who
follow it.

Hanne considers life in a Quranic school as an alternative, possibly more adventurous
environment in which to learn Islam, even if, as a city girl, she did not fit in immediately to
life at the Quranic School. She later continued her religious education in her neighborhood
and became an active member in the youth organization of the leading political party in
Turkey during that period, the Welfare Party ( _Refah Partisi_ ). Following the “soft coup” of 28
February 1997, both the Quranic School that Hanne attended and the Welfare Party as a whole were closed down. This was a turning point in her life: from then onward, as an active young Muslim woman, she began to feel imprisoned at home.

Adopting the Çarşaf in Boarding Schools

Adopting the çarşaf is often akin to an initiation ceremony in Quranic boarding schools. Nihal, a young female tesettür producer in Turkey, discussed this ritualistic aspect of adopting çarşaf as we walked around Fatih in the summer of 2011. Students at the Quranic boarding school in her neighborhood come to her and ask her to sew their first çarşaf. When students come to pick out their first çarşaf, they do not put them on when they leave her atelier. They ask for bags and put their çarşafs in them, after which they patiently wait for the day of the ceremony through which they will become a çarşaflı hoca. The decision to put on the çarşaf also requires a long process of negotiation with friends, relatives and family members.

In contrast to Selcen and Hanne, Şevval and Meryem grew up in the Netherlands. Şevval is thirty-four years old and Meryem is twenty-two years old; they are both Turkish-Dutch çarşaf wearers. Şevval’s family came to the Netherlands when she was a small child. Meryem was born in a small Dutch city. Both of them were educated in the Netherlands. Like other çarşaf wearers who participated in this study, at one point they attended boarding schools affiliated with the İsmailağa community in Turkey. Since then, they have continued their service as hocas in Milli Görüş mosques in the Netherlands. Their affiliation with the İsmailağa community is rather vague; they occasionally listen to audio sohbets (theological conversations) and follow discussions available on the Internet. However, they no longer receive direct instruction from the sheikh or teach for the community.

Şevval’s journey in pursuit of her questions about Islam began when she was sixteen. At this time, she realized that it was not possible to obtain satisfying answers to her questions from her parents and relatives around her. In her view, her parents live religion as a “tradition”. In other words, her parents lacked a systematic understanding of Islam, which can

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32 The 28 February process was an unarmed military intervention in Turkey that resulted in the dismantling of the Welfare Party coalition government. It mostly targeted women wearing recognizably Muslim dress. During this period, the headscarf ban was strictly implemented at universities. Some universities established “persuasion rooms” at their gates where women were pressured to remove their headscarves.
only be achieved and cultivated through Islamic knowledge. In the early 1990s, she returned
to Turkey. Her relatives helped her find a boarding school, where she studied for four years in
order to acquire a proper, thorough mode of Islamic knowledge. When she left the
Netherlands, she had many questions about the headscarf and religiously inspired clothing.

I never put on an overcoat when I was at school (in the Netherlands). I wore
whatever I wanted to wear. I did not wear my headscarf properly, I took it on
and off. I was not conscious before I went to Turkey. When I asked about the
headscarf, I always got the same answer: ‘You must cover, otherwise it is a
sin.’ I was never satisfied with this answer. When I came back to Turkey, I
heard about the cemaat. In the beginning, I could not decide whether I should
go to a regular school or to one of the schools of an Islamic foundation. [A
boarding school?] Yes, like boarding school where you get an Islamic
education, a spiritually nourishing place. [Is this community often associated
with çarşaf?] Yes, the İsmailağa community. I enjoyed being there spiritually.
That’s why I decided to stay for four years. There, they always discussed
tesettür, but I never thought that they were sufficiently conscious about it.
However, I liked the çarşaf.

For some young women like Şevval, the atmosphere of the boarding schools seemed
more spiritually nourishing than other schools, such as the İmam Hatip schools. To some
extent, girls in these boarding schools not only learn Islam and become teachers; they also
experience and share a certain interpretation of religious life with others. In this interpretation,
çarşaf is the only proper mode of outdoor tesettür.

In general, the çarşaf was strongly promoted in the Quranic schools of the İsmailağa
community, and the initial occasion on which a young woman put on çarşaf was often festive.
Nermin was also a student at a Quranic boarding school in Istanbul. She wore çarşaf for six
years. It was not an easy decision for her to take her çarşaf off; she experienced a difficult
period emotionally and felt guilty for a long time, in spite of the fact that her mother
applauded her at the door of their house when she went outside for the first time without the
çarşaf. Her present style is a combination of a long, loose overcoat and a loosely covering
headscarf. This outfit is within the limits of Nermin’s understanding of outdoor tesettür, even
if its form is different.

Nermin moved to the Netherlands and began to work as a hoca after she married. She
does not come from a practicing family, and she only began to attend mosque meetings in her
neighborhood at the age of seventeen. Her friends were an important source of inspiration in
her desire to lead a pious life. After a year of mosque attendance in the neighborhood with her
friends, her teacher suggested that she would continue her studies in a Quranic boarding
school. After receiving her hoca degree in three years, she started to work as a teacher at a
different location. In fact, Nermin gradually distanced herself from the community a long time before she moved to the Netherlands.

Nermin uses the metaphor of the fanus (fishbowl) to portray her life and feelings both inside and outside of the Quranic boarding school; for her, being inside the boarding school is like being in a fanus. Although she felt secure and protected there, the school was disconnected from outside world, from the streets of Istanbul. After her graduation, she continued to work as a hoca in Quranic schools of the same community. Throughout the following six years, she spent all of her time teaching and giving sohbets, and she hardly ever saw her parents. Nermin is still glad that she was able to live this sort of life within the community, as she desired at that time. However, she eventually took off her çarşaf after leaving the community. Schools produce a safer environment for çarşaf wearers. They are isolated in a way, and exist at a certain distance from the majority culture, which has completely different ideas about the çarşaf. Outside the community and its boarding schools, Nermin found it very difficult to continue to wear the çarşaf in Turkey.

Adopting the çarşaf is a declaration of one’s strength to bear the burden of heightened visibility and an expression of the promise to cultivate a strong self. However, this promise is difficult to keep. Nermin recalls that the first time that she put on çarşaf with her peers in school was a deeply affecting moment:

We were in the school, it was emotional moment, we put our çarşafs on ceremonially. With your friends, it was such a beautiful moment. There was no problem in the school; there you live in a fanus. Even if you do not want to perform salat (mandatory prayer), you may have to do so, because everybody does, do you understand? Even if you do not want to study, you study because you are in a school with four hundred students, and you live there. Life is easy there; the life you want to live is easy. If you want to live Islam, doing so is easier there. However, once you are outside the fanus, everything changes; life on the street is very different.

In Quranic boarding schools, girls put on their çarşafs for the first time with ceremony. Students bring tailor-made çarşafs to the school in bags and keep them hidden until the time for the ceremony arrives. Putting on çarşaf is a festive moment, a celebration of certain level of commitment and spiritual achievement. Young women who put on the çarşaf not only stand out in a negative sense, they also become more visible as respected and admiredhocas in their own circles. Putting on the çarşaf is like a vow to be strong both inside and outside the community, for the rest of their lives.
Outside the Fishbowl ("Fanus"): Çarşaf and its Multiple Publics

Putting on a çarşaf is never easy; it often creates confrontations with others, initially and perhaps most seriously with close relatives. “Are you ready?”; “Can you do it?”; “Think twice before you decide!”; and, “Don’t put it on if you’ll take it off later” are some of the typical reservations expressed by friends and relatives that I repeatedly heard in the narratives of çarşaf wearers. Often, young women confront all of these prejudices and comments from the very moment that they mention their desire to put on çarşaf to their parents. The effect of çarşaf is different on strangers than it is on close friends and relatives. I have heard upsetting stories of verbal and physical harassment in both Turkey and the Netherlands. Latecomers who have confronted such harassment in Turkey are often more tolerant of prejudices they encounter in the Netherlands.

One must have a strong personality to be able to wear çarşaf. It is very difficult to bear the heightened visibility and to negotiate different effects that çarşaf has on various people, as well as on the wearer herself. Çarşaf means different things to people from different environments. Its effects are not always negative, since sometimes the çarşaf produces feelings of respect and admiration, yet these sentiments, too, can become a burden for women. There are higher expectations of a çarşaf wearer. They have to act properly because other women in their circles respect them as teachers and committed, pious Muslims. Deciding to adopt çarşaf is also a promise to preserve and cultivate a strong personality.

Selcen comes from a large family; she has five sisters and three brothers. She studied in a Quranic boarding school with her three sisters. Women in Selcen’s family have different styles of tesettür; like Selcen, her mother and younger sister wear çarşaf, while two other younger sisters prefer an overcoat, and the youngest sister does not have a particular outdoor tesettür but does wear a headscarf. Selcen could have adopted another, less conspicuous style, as her father advised her to do. Like other women in this study, she put her çarşaf on during her years at boarding school. At that time, she was thirteen years old. Although Selcen comes from a very pious family, and her father is devoted, respected imam, she still had to convince him that she was strong enough to wear a çarşaf. He wondered whether she was ready to live the life of çarşaf wearer, whether she would be able to discipline her nefs (desirous soul). Nevertheless, she chose the most difficult form of tesettür.

Although my father is a hoca, when I told him that I wanted to wear çarşaf, he said ‘I’m nervous about this because you are young. In the future, you may not
like the çarşaf and this will be shameful. You might cause people to think about çarşaf differently, you might have an effect on their lives, and they will think that you can just take it on and off as you please. I want you to wear it in the future, when you are mature enough, when you will be sure about your decision.’ I disagreed, I said ‘No, if you will not buy a çarşaf for me, I will go and buy one for myself.’ At that time, my father bought me a very nice overcoat and a scarf that I liked. Just to make me feel good. He did not buy something cheap or ordinary. I threw them aside, and I bought a çarşaf at half the price of the overcoat and scarf.

Selcen’s father respects and values çarşaf as a pure, perfect form of outdoor tesettür. Yet he wonders whether Selcen will become a role model and represent çarşaf properly. Parents often disagree with their daughter’s decision to wear çarşaf, not necessarily because they disagree that çarşaf is the perfect form of outdoor tesettür, but simply because of its negative effects on others. The marked presence of çarşaf is difficult to live with, not only for its wearers but also for those relatives who do not wish to associate themselves with the garment.

As Selcen repeatedly emphasized throughout the narration of her life story, she savors adversity, and she gets the strength to overcome troubles from her spiritual life. She tries to bring the spiritual and the material worlds together in her life story in a coherent narrative. She attributes great significance to her dreams. They are influential in her everyday life. She decided to pursue a career as a hoca in a boarding school, after which she started her own Quranic school with her sisters. Later, she made a crucial decision concerning her marriage after she had certain dreams. A dream was responsible for bringing her to the Netherlands a year ago. She always consults her father about her dreams. She attributes spiritual significance to her decisions, whether they relate to her everyday life or to future plans. Her dreams function as guides to lead a pious, God-pleasing life.

A çarşaf wearer’s strength and patience are regularly questioned in different encounters. These challenges are a matter of discussion between daughters and parents, and they are an especially important issue to be agreed on during the process of marriage arrangements. After thirteen years, when Selcen wanted to discuss her çarşaf with her fiancé, she encountered reservations quite similar to those that her father had earlier expressed. Her fiancé asked whether she possessed the strength to keep her nefis in control and, therefore, not to change. As he said, “Your çarşaf is an honor for me, but don’t take it off when you come and see the life in the Netherlands!”

Women deal with a wide range of effects that the çarşaf produces on different publics, as the effects of çarşaf and its meaning change from intimate familial contexts to encounters
with strangers on the street. Parents try to persuade their daughters to adopt a less visible style of outdoor *tesettür*, while friends rework their relationships and degrees of intimacy with these young women. Hanne’s account illuminates how a çarşaf wearer experiences a transformation of her appearance that gradually affects her relationships with male friends in particular. Her story also emphasizes how the çarşaf affected and determined the way that men approach her. The image of çarşaf as an “austere” and “radical” style plays a powerful role in transforming the çarşaf wearers’ physical closeness to the opposite sex.

When I first covered, my relatives found it very ugly. My mother did not say much, but my father considered my style extreme. In a friendly manner, he tried to explain to me that I do not need to cover in this way. He said that this is not what Islam wants me to do… Furthermore, my male friends began to distance themselves from me, it was a very funny experience, but tough, too. When I first put the headscarf on, they still came near me and asked ‘How are you Hanne? Is everything all right?’ When my headscarf got longer, they only saluted me. When I began to wear ‘peçe meçe’ (a face-veil), they passed by without even looking at me (she laughs). I did not say a word, my outfit changed, radically changed, okay, but the person inside it did not. I am the same person. As long as I set my boundaries with men, I do not have a problem.

In a sense, the çarşaf limits Hanne’s relationship with her friends gradually and sets certain boundaries, even if she does not think that she needs these boundaries. She describes the change as a radical one that reshaped her environment and relationships, sometimes beyond her own intentions. Her friends no longer treat her as their friend Hanne but as a çarşaf wearer; in doing so, they substitute the ideal and pure image of the garment for the individual’s character. Outside the fanus, çarşaf wearers experience the effects of çarşaf differently. Their individual characteristics and relationships become less visible, even with people they know well. They are often marked solely as çarşaf wearers.

After more than a decade after taking her çarşaf off, Nermin still vividly remembers a shocking encounter with a stranger in Turkey during the 1990s. This encounter marked her experience outside the “fanus”:

Where you go, everybody looks at you. It was not easy for me. I’ll never forget, once we were walking to the bus stop in Aksaray (an old, relatively modest neighborhood of Istanbul) with my cousin, when a man approached us, grabbed my cousin’s çarşaf and pulled it off. He was yelling: ‘How dare you wear this in these times? Who do you think you are?’ We were shocked. We had experienced verbal attacks and abuse many times, but this was first time that someone physically touched us. It was scary; I don’t know, maybe he was drunk. Anyways, when I left the fanus, I had some difficult times. It was also okay when I had been a hoça for six years, then I was back at my home. There
was always pressure (not only from outside but also from her relatives), and then I started to think about this, to wonder about the negative effects of experiencing such reactions from others. Would this change in time? These sorts of questions occupied me. As I told you, life inside the school and outside it are very different. You feel good at home but when you go outside it’s a challenge. I had very difficult times, and then I decided to buy a black overcoat and scarf.

Wearing çarşaf produces very mixed and contradictory feelings for the wearer: sometimes it is the source of self-confidence and pride, and sometimes it causes disappointment and embarrassment. It can trigger both admiration and harassment from others. Hanne also describes the different feelings that the çarşaf produces outside the fanus:

When I first put it on, I covered my face, as well as my hands with gloves. It covered me up to my eyebrows. I could hardly see below my eyes, it was difficult to walk; I bumped into walls that were shorter than me. It took a while to get used to. I was walking on the streets of city center, when I came across a mirror—I saw myself and said ‘Aaaa! (Surprise!)’ I used to walk down the middle of the most popular street of the city…as the edge of my headscarf fluttered, it felt as if I was waving the flag of the jihad.

There is no other tesettür garment that produces such strong and contradictory effects. Wearing this particular outdoor garment, to which many people react so negatively, can also empower its wearer. To some extent, it marks her visibility more than any other garment. Being marked in such a way stimulates a different sensorial, bodily and emotional state. The çarşaf mediates and transforms the relationship between the wearer and others; this effect is so strong that women often describe it metaphorically. Sometimes, the effect is depicted as the feeling a fish might have outside of its fishbowl, while at other time this effect is compared to the sensation of walking against the wind. The difficulties of standing out not only produce emotional effects; they also change the feeling and experience of the body itself.

Walking Against the Wind

My interlocutors often employed “rüzgar” (wind) as a metaphor to describe the difficulties that they experience as çarşaf wearers. As a metaphor, wind expresses the strong mediating quality of the çarşaf between the self and others. It also indicates the sensorial effect that wearing çarşaf causes. As the eldest of her sisters, Selcen is proud that she has been strong enough to continue to wear çarşaf and has thus become a source of inspiration for her younger sister. This sister also adopted çarşaf; Selcen describes her as a strong person: “The
wind does not shake her.” Selcen emphasizes that wearing çarşaf requires passion and strength, which are both necessary to walk against the wind:

Wearing çarşaf is like trying to walk against a strong wind or in a heavy storm. When you walk in çarşaf, you feel as if it limits your movements. You feel pressures and the judgments of others all the times. It protects you, you feel sheltered under it, as long as you have enough strength to love it. You walk against the wind.

Figure 4 Walking against the wind.

The strong wind is a potent metaphor through which to reflect on the effects of the çarşaf on it wearer and the reactions of others to it. Women’s accounts reveal that çarşaf also illuminates how certain garments produce a sensual effect on their wearers. Hanne also refers to the metaphor of wind in order to describe her feelings when she first adopted çarşaf and went outside. She was somewhat upset when she told me this story because she no longer experiences this emotion. In other words, wearing çarşaf has gradually become an everyday routine for her. The various difficulties that she has faced as a çarşaf wearer have changed in their effects on her; moreover, she has found ways to deal with them. Hanne never thinks of taking her çarşaf off, even if there are other styles that she feels might be more pleasing now if she had adopted them before the çarşaf.
Haha! You should have seen my style, my shoulders were straight, I was strong and fast like the wind, oh my God, it was so different from the way it is now. It was not only about wearing çarşaf, it was more...well! It is no longer like that. Now it is a part of me, I cannot think of myself without it. There is no possibility for me other than the çarşaf.

Meryem is relatively more active and familiar with Dutch social settings than some of the other women I interviewed; she was born and received her education in the Netherlands. However, she does not work, and spends most of her time watching her two small children and organizing her household. Because of her children, she has to be active and social outside of her home. In contrast, other than her time spent with the community, Hanne lives a secluded life at home as a single woman. Her teaching schedule is very strict, and she has to travel from one city to another a few times a week to teach in other community mosques. She has a small old car, which was a gift from the community. Although she had a tough time obtaining a Dutch driving license, she now enjoys the comfort of travelling in her car. She loves her car because it allows her to minimize her encounters with others outside her community. In a sense, while her çarşaf makes her more visible, her car makes her less visible. Unlike Hanne, Meryem has a different impression and experience of the Dutch environment. Meryem enjoys riding her bike through the city, while Hanne avoids using public transportation and feels more comfortable in her private car. While Hanne prefers familiar stores for her shopping and grocery, Meryem tries out different stores, and she takes her kids to the public library or parks on her bike. As she would say, she feels “at home” in the Netherlands.

Hanne experiences the marked visibility of çarşaf more than Meryem. A Dutch language course is one of very few places where she meets people from outside the community. She knows that life outside the community would be very difficult for her:

If I were to spend time in (mainstream social) life, I would receive strong reactions to my outfit. I live an isolated life in the Netherlands; I do not have kids, so I don’t have a social life of that kind. I do not have a professional life either. My work is in and for our community, and I live an honored and privileged life in my community.

As we see above in Hanne’s account, she acknowledges the difficulties involved in wearing the çarşaf, but she does not give it up; however, these difficulties have caused her style to change. After moving to the Netherlands, Hanne gradually adopted a different style of çarşaf. She continues to change the degree of coverage of her cloak around her face as she travels back and forth between the Netherlands and Turkey. She also values her car, which
protects her from the prejudices and reactions of others—metaphorically speaking from the wind.

In Turkey, I cover my face up to the nose. It goes there (up to the nose) automatically (without me noticing). Here people do not mind; they do not look at you. Moreover, here (in the Netherlands) I am often in my car when I am outside. This is also comforting. I feel at home in my car, but in Turkey, on the buses and so forth, you are in social life...

For these reasons, Hanne keeps her face covered up to her nose. Hiding her face a bit more makes her feel more comfortable. There is a wider social network that might judge her negatively in Turkey, and her style attracts attention differently in Turkey than in the Netherlands, often in a more hostile manner. Hanne copes with the effects of çarşaf in Turkey by covering her face more thoroughly and making herself less recognizable. The more visible she becomes in social life and in mainstream circles (other than her network and community), the more difficult it becomes for her to manage the negative effects of the çarşaf. On the other hand, in the Netherlands Hanne feels more comfortable because her encounters with others are limited. Similarly, life is easier for any young, educated Turkish-Dutch woman in çarşaf as long as she remains in within non-professional life and networks. Unfortunately, this does not leave çarşaf wearers many career options, other than being a hoca. Willingly or not, wearing çarşaf limits certain encounters. At the same time, however, it constitutes new, more intimate circles for women, within which they live very busy lives.

Hanne portrays her life as distanced and isolated from mainstream social life. Her role as a çarşaflı hoca empowers her and grants her social status and recognition in a particular social circle, within which other women greatly respect her words and deeds. She thinks that it would be more challenging for her nefs to wear çarşaf if she led a different life. For her students, çarşaf creates limits on those who wear it in a way that enables them to actualize their desired selves. However, çarşaf also poses greater challenges than other forms of outdoor tesettür:

I was never hassled, I never felt embarrassed because of my çarşaf. Yet, I never insisted on çarşaf in my classes or in my sohbet groups to women attendees. Well, I look like a çarşaf wearer, that is how it looks from the outside. When I teach about tesettür, I do not even advise my students; they begin to think about wearing çarşaf because they are influenced by other sources, circles, and people. But this is not necessarily a good way to begin. The most important thing is that you stay within the limits of Islam, you live in a society, and you have a social life here. This will limit you. My social life is within Islam (in religious circles), and I am in my shell, so this is not an obstacle for me. Would I take my çarşaf off if it became an obstacle? No! Nobody should take it off, but çarşaf should not be a starting point either.
[There were people who took it off, right?] That’s true, they did. That is Islam; and this is tesettür…nafs, my dear, that is the nefs!

Hanne also has difficulty being outside the fanus. For her, the Turkish-Dutch religious communities constitute the fishbowl. In the Netherlands, it is relatively easier to deal with obstacles, because çarşaf wearers have a relatively limited social environment. Receiving a diploma in Turkey gives them credibility; they often achieve privileged positions as teachers.

While women struggle to walk against the wind, they also try to create a space for their individuality. This helps women manage the effects of çarşaf and enables them to give çarşaf a new status in the Dutch setting. Women wear different styles of çarşaf, and they customize çarşaf according to their personal tastes and needs, as well as different social contexts.

Figure 5 Different çarşaf styles, colors and patterns.

Contemporary çarşaf wearers try to articulate certain individual statements within the limits of the confined, fixed messages that the çarşaf seems to communicate to others.
Fashioning çarşaf in a creative, unique manner is one way for a woman to express her personal stance and to manage the effects of the çarşaf; the section below, “Love, Care and Çarşaf,” will explore this matter more in detail later. First, however, I offer a few more specific accounts of being a çarsaflı hoca in the Netherlands.

Being a Çarsaflı Hoca in the Netherlands

After receiving a diploma from a boarding school, women become eligible to work as teachers in the different Turkish religious communities. Most religious communities value them as well-trained, pious instructors. They are small in number, so their positions as teachers are quite prestigious. Because of their small numbers in the Netherlands, the çarşaf entails more responsibility and instills a relatively higher status to its wearers than it does in Turkey. At the same time, however, the number of Turkish-Dutch communities that explicitly desire not to be associated with çarşaf is increasing, as Islam becomes a more threatening and controversial subject in Dutch politics. Therefore, coping with the negative image of the çarşaf has become more challenging for çarşaf wearers in the Netherlands.

An increasing number of çarsaflı hocas have adopted other styles of tesettür (usually a combination of a long, loose-fitting overcoat with a headscarf) in the last decade. The reason for this change is not only the Dutch political climate, which is becoming increasingly hostile towards Muslims, but also the demanding expectations of women’s own networks, because people’s perception of the çarşaf as a sign of a higher level of commitment and spirituality is very difficult to cope with. It burdens the wearers with a great responsibility, as well as increasing their visibility in close circles. Generally, these women would hesitate to identify themselves with such responsibility, because they are aware of the weakness and difficulties that they have negotiated; they are therefore reluctant to take on the authority, knowledge and responsibilities that are expected of a çarsaflı hoca.

The association of the çarşaf with perfection, purity and devotion puts pressure on teachers because they are role models for their students. More specifically, it limits their ability to express their subjectivity as individuals. To some extent, the conspicuous image of the çarsaflı teacher erases both the individual strengths and weaknesses of the person in the eyes of others. In the accounts of young Turkish-Dutch women, the students of these hocas, the çarşaf was not considered to be a proper outfit; rather, it was seen as an obstacle to their...
desired futures. Although most of them take for granted the notion that the çarşaf is the most devout and pure form of covering, they still cannot imagine themselves wearing it. The ability to wear the çarşaf indicates a higher commitment to living a pious life. Ideally, the çarşaf is a means to and symbol for the triumph of the inner self over worldly desires. With the decreasing number of çarşaf wearers, this ideal image has become even stronger. In the eyes of practicing young Muslim women, it is a garment that only teachers are fit to wear. Moreover, most of the Turkish-Dutch religious communities do not like to associate themselves with the çarşaf, even if they deeply respect çarşaf wearers. In their opinion, the çarşaf does not fit into Dutch public space, and they consider it to be a negative representation of Turkish-Dutch women.

As teachers, çarşaf wearers hesitate to promote çarşaf as an ideal form of outdoor tesettür. They give great value to modest, covering styles of tesettür and discuss the significance of outdoor tesettür with their students. Rather than promoting çarşaf as an ideal form of outdoor tesettür, they also explain the burden of the çarşaf. For instance, Hanne confessed that she would adopt an equally covering but different style of tesettür if she were to make her choice now. However, she would never consider giving the çarşaf up, as she feels that her çarşaf is a promise given both to God and to those people who questioned her strength when she first put on her çarşaf. Like other teachers whom I interviewed, she openly tells her students about the difficulties of çarşaf and mentions the possibility of wearing other, equally covering styles.

As a fashionable çarşaflı hoca, Şevval told me that she has become frustrated with idealization of the çarşaf as a pure and perfect marker of religious commitment within the tesettür scene. Beyond her visual appearance, a çarşaf wearer’s words and actions are also taken for granted as pious and spiritually fulfilling. After nearly twenty years wearing a çarşaf, Şevval explains how she feels limited in her çarşaf because of the expectations of others:

I am fed up with the meanings that people attribute to the çarşaf. They expect many things from you because you wear çarşaf. They want you to behave in a certain way, to be the person they imagine. [What do they want from you?] I told you, they think I lead the life of a nun, and they expect me to always be serious and spiritual. When I join a social gathering, they only want me to preach. That's ridiculous. Everywhere I go, they immediately assume that I will talk about something religious. You cannot do that for twenty-four hours. I can talk about food and drink, too, and I can talk about furniture, clothing and fashion. I get so bored.
Figure 6 Şevval’s wardrobe: the inside of her wardrobe, including her favorite dress combined with a matching silk scarf for indoor use, her çarşaf patterned with polka-dots, and her dark red shoes and handbag, which match well with her dark blue çarşaf.

In a similar way, Hanne also complains about the image of the çarşaflı hoca, particularly in the Netherlands. In her early years in the Turkish-Dutch community, she had a difficult time, as some women from the community found her manners improper. They expected her to be a calm, serious person under her çarşaf. However, she kept surprising her students with her worldview and behavior. Her students like to spend time with her because she is a fun person. They feel very close to Hanne and discuss their problems with her, even if they know that she will not always agree with them. Hanne does not hesitate to talk about her weaknesses and mistakes in front of her students. From her perspective, she came to the Netherlands not because she already knows so much, but rather to learn together with her friends and students. Even if other members of her community criticize her, she continues to challenge the existing image of the teacher:

They say: ‘Aaa hocam!! Do you dance?’ Yes, I can dance, if you want me to… What is wrong with that? They think that I was teleported from somewhere in space. That is what they think when they see a practicing Muslim. They think that they cannot be like such a person. When I first came here, my students had a very strong image of what the hocas should be like: a hoca does not talk or
laugh, does not dance or have fun. Like a robot, she comes and sits with her head down and prays, with her rosary in her hands. This is the image of a hoca in their minds. They see that I play volleyball, I play football...when we go to the playground, I am the one who is ready for the most dangerous games. Everybody says ‘Aaa did you see the hoca?’ I was treated like an alien. I felt free to break that taboo. If it is not shameful for you to do these things, then it is not shameful for me, either. People think that they can do certain things, but the hoca cannot. That is absurd. There is not an extra part in Quran for me saying that some things are forbidden for hocas, but not forbidden for you!

The choice of çarşaf creates challenges and raises prejudices. In contrast to the privileged status as a committed person and ideal model that one achieves by wearing çarşaf, the çarşaf, due to its strong association with the İsmailağa community, can also be a hindrance in the process of being accepted by other religious communities. Şevval is still sympathetic to the İsmailağa community, even if she does not attend its meetings or regularly follow its teachings. Şevval’s account illustrates the difficulty of finding a place as a çarşaf wearer within the religious communities in the Netherlands:

Yes, I am attached to a specific community, but I am also on my own. I am an individual; I am open to everybody. I go to the Diyanet mosque, but I am open to all communities, and yet they do not want to embrace us because we are çarşaflı. There is always a prejudice. I can be everywhere, as long as I feel comfortable, but it takes long time for them to embrace us.

Şevval volunteered as a teacher for different Turkish religious communities in the Netherlands, including Milli Görüş and Diyanet. However, she has found these communities challenging and limited for a çarşaflı hoca. The Dutch government does not recognize her teaching certificate, which she received from a boarding school in Turkey. She seeks alternatives to continue her professional life as a teacher in the Netherlands. At the time of our interview, she was planning to apply to an Islamic Theology department in order to get a degree from a Dutch university. Only then will she be able to get what she calls a “real job” in the Netherlands.

Like other hocas in the Netherlands, Şevval is especially interested in obtaining a Dutch degree, because only such a degree will allow her to expand her opportunities and achieve a better status in a larger, more transnational network. With this degree, coping with the reactions of members of the Turkish religious communities to her çarşaf would be easier. Over the last few years, attending Arabic and religious classes at higher educational institutions has become very important for the hocas. While educated Dutch women continue their education in Dutch at universities, late-comers like Hanne try to improve their knowledge and skills at higher educational institutions. Beyond the general challenges of
being a çarşaf wearer, Şevval’s knowledge and status has also been challenged by the new generation of hocas with Islamic theology degrees.

Choosing the most strict, devout form of tesettür and dedicating most of their time to volunteer within religious circles no longer guarantee a çarşaflı woman’s acceptance by the Turkish-Dutch community or in a wider public. Newly established hierarchies in this transnational field also require women to seek certification from secular Dutch institutions for their accreditation and status as teachers. Only with such certification are they able to expand their networks and, thereby, possibly carve out a new place for the çarşaf in the Turkish-Dutch religious community.

Love, Care and Çarşaf

Love is one of the most common themes in çarşaf stories. As I discussed throughout the previous sections, wearing çarşaf in modern, secular public space conspicuously marks the wearer and affects her sense of self and her relationships with others. These women not only have a strongly marked presence in public space, but also within their intimate networks. Wearing çarşaf requires the cultivation of a disciplined self so that women can keep their promise to be strong enough to wear çarşaf and “walk against the wind,” even outside their communities. This strength is crucial to living outside the metaphorical fanus. However, wearing çarşaf is not only about the chaste work of discipline; it is also about cultivating affection, intimacy and love for the garment itself. Merely “liking” (beğenmek) the çarşaf is insufficient; women need to invest love and care in their çarşaf in order to withstand the negative effects of wearing it and to cope with its privileged status. This, above all, distinguishes the çarşaf from other forms of outdoor tesettür.

The heightened visibility of the çarşaf affects not only the wearer, but her friends, family and relatives as well. In most contexts, the çarşaf is an object of disgust and threat; it therefore affects emotional relationships with others in the çarşaf wearer’s life. As I will explore below in more detail, wearing çarşaf becomes a very important issue in marriage arrangements. Friends, relatives and future husbands also need to have enough strength to embrace the presence of the çarşaf wearer. In order to be able to continue wearing çarşaf, women seek love and respect from others in their close environment. Women try to make their çarşaf more personal and intimate; by doing so, they transform an object of disdain and
distaste into a lovable object for others. The respect and support of loved ones and a çarşaf wearer’s intimate bond with the çarşaf itself are both crucial to dealing with the effects of the çarşaf’s visibility.

Figure 7 Accessories often combined with çarşaf from the women’s wardrobes: a poncho to wear over the çarşaf during winter, indoor scarves, jewelry, a pair of leather shoes, and bags.

Investing care and love in one’s çarşaf is also a way to highlight individual differences between oneself and other çarşaf wearers. Being meticulous and affectionate toward one’s çarşaf is very important, as Selcen’s account below illustrates. She pays great attention to her çarşaf, and she sincerely cares for her appearance because she is a çarşaf wearer. Because Selcen is sensitive to all of the negative effects that attend the marked visibility and cliché of the çarşaf, fashioning a personal style is particularly important to her:

People think of çarşaf as polluted, muddy and ugly in color. True, the black color fades quickly (from the sun); I don’t like this. I do not like perfume but I always wash my çarşaf with a nice-smelling detergent and softener so that it’s clean and sweet-smelling when I put it on. I have heard clichés about the
çarşaf since I was girl. People think about çarşaf negatively, they see it differently. They do everything they can to throw dirt at the çarşaf. When I wear my çarşaf, people in the town recognize that it is me. I match my shoes with my bag, I wear a ring in the same tone of color, and so on...my eyes are sensitive to the sun, so I wear sunglasses. When I walk outside like this, people say ‘Aaa...such a caring (gentle) çarşaflı woman!’

Clichés about the çarşaf, which Selcen mentions in the quote above, are not only expressions of disgust; some of these feelings also involve hatred. In contrast to the interpretation of çarşaf as a “simple” and “pure” form of outdoor tesettür, the majority perceives çarşaf as “extreme” and “polluting” because its presence undermines the idealized notion of modern, secular public space. By contrast, in women’s accounts the çarşaf is an object of love. Women relate to their çarşafs through an investment of love and care; the value of this love returns to the wearer, while the çarşaf achieves an individualized style.

The çarşaf produces such a strongly marked visibility that the wearer sometimes feels less visible as individual. In the midst of all of the negative and affirmative effects that çarşaf wearers deal with, the individual wearer herself may disappear. By converting and adjusting their çarşafs to best suit their personal understandings of comfort and taste, çarşaf wearers mark their personal distinction. By individualizing their çarşafs according to their personal style, women feel more comfortable and visible as a person, instead of being identified merely as a hoca or a member of particular religious community.

Love and care are the commonly repeated themes in contemporary accounts of the çarşaf. By talking about the çarşaf in terms of love, women find a new ground on which to establish an intimate and personal bond with their çarşafs. In this respect, the accounts of çarşaf wearers are quite different from the accounts of other tesettürlü women in this research; çarşaf wearers portrayed their tesettür as something that can only be worn with love.

My love for çarşaf started when I was only four years old, when I used to go to a mosque on the weekends. There were imams teaching in the mosques before, but there were no female hocas then. The imam at the mosque had daughters, who came here as ‘tourists’ in the beginning. When I first saw them, I adored them. They were çarşaflı. That is how my love for çarşaf started. That is how I fell in love with the çarşaf.

Advancement in one’s spiritual life nourishes one’s love and care for the çarşaf. Reciprocally, this love endows çarşaf wearers with the patience and strength necessary to manage the negative effects of çarşaf. Selcen’s love of çarşaf derives from her passion and strength in overcoming difficulties. She sees her çarşaf as an important aspect of her personality, and she receives compliments from people around her:
I always loved my çarşaf, I never stumbled. I never said ‘Aaa I wish I did not wear it, aaa I need to look beautiful to this or that person, my çarşaf is an obstacle.’ I didn’t hesitate about it for a moment. As I advanced in my spiritual life, I heard compliments from the people around me: ‘How happy you are, it is very nice that you do not allow your nefs to control you in such times.’

Through their words and deeds, women try to transform the negative effects of çarşaf on others. While tesettür wearers in general often repeat that they see their tesettür as a form of worship that they practice to please God, çarşaf wearers invest more love and care in their particular style of tesettür than the wearers of other styles do. Other pious women admire the strength of these women, even if they do not consider çarşaf comfortable or suitable to their own understanding of tesettür.

Although the çarşaf has been adapted to current fashion trends, the image of çarşaf as “traditional,” “ideal,” and “radical” distances wearers from the here-and-now, as if they do not belong in the present time. Friendships between çarşaf wearers and women who wear less covering or even non-tesettür styles surprise many people, as such relationships undermine the linear understanding of modernity, which predicts the complete disappearance of the çarşaf and religious dress in general. Selcen describes how much she enjoys being together with a friend who dresses very differently than she does. This friend is uncovered and often wears very attractive, fashionable outfits, but she nevertheless likes Selcen’s strongly-marked company:

You know what I like the most? I have a friend; she married and went to Sweden. I tell her often that I really like to walk with her arm in arm and I want to do this more often. People see that a woman in çarşaf and a fully uncovered (tamamıyla açık) woman can be together, they can be arm in arm. They can be genuine friends like any other two people.

Between parties of an arranged marriage, çarşaf often becomes an especially important matter to agree upon. Expecting respect and affection from others becomes particularly crucial when a possible marriage is on the table. Marriages bring two different families with different backgrounds together; these families do not necessarily share the same feelings and thoughts about the çarşaf. The attitudes of family-in-laws towards çarşaf may become a hindrance for the couple. Some families prefer not to have a çarşaf wearer as a daughter-in-law. Sometimes the young couple, and particularly the groom, has to deal with the groom’s family’s unwillingness and reservations. On the other hand, husbands may also prefer not to associate themselves with such a marked presence.

Even many practicing young Muslim men think that life with a çarşaf wearer would be difficult. During initial conversations about marriage, a young man might try to determine
whether his future wife will change her style of *tesettür*. As a thirty-six-year old single woman, Hanne wants to marry and start her own family in the Netherlands. However, it has been very difficult to find somebody who will accept her *çarşaf*. It would be easy if she was willing to marry with someone from the İsmailağa community, but she does not share their worldview. She finds it difficult to get along with members of the community; as she would say, “In their eyes, I am someone who has lost the way (of religion), in my eyes they are puritan (*bağnaz*).” Several attempts at arranged marriage failed at the very first encounter because of Hanne’s *çarşaf*. Even though candidates knew that she wore the *çarşaf*, they thought they could convince her to change her style. They tried to make sure that she would at least be willing to wear less austere and covered outfits.

![Figure 8 Hanne’s wardrobe: her indoor dresses and scarves.](image)

In addition to her strong personality, many potential grooms find Hanne’s *çarşaf* very difficult to embrace. Finding the right candidate for marriage can be very difficult unless one limits oneself to certain communities with a particular, common understanding of *tesettür*. Wearing *çarşaf* has become a hindrance for other kinds of love in Hanne’s life:

Men are not comfortable with my outfit, especially Muslim men (that is to say, men from religious circles). For fanatics, my outfit is a guarantee. They take it
for granted. [What do you mean by fanatic?] Tarikat ehli, (pious men from Sufi orders), those who want to live precisely according to Islam. For them I am the only fish in the sea. I am attractive only because I wear proper tesettür. More intellectual men, those who have studied theology, those who know the tricks of tesettür, they ask: ‘Why don’t you cover differently? Why don’t you cover like other women?’...hearing this was usually difficult for my nefs. I immediately asked them, ‘Can you walk with me arm in arm? Am I someone that you can be proud of? Am I someone you can walk with?’

As we see in the case of çarşaf, fashioning one’s appearance in a conspicuous way is an important subject in marriage arrangements. The husband of a çarşaf wearer also needs to be prepared to face difficulties; others often perceive his masculinity as more “macho,” “oppressive,” and “authoritative.” These assumptions are part and parcel to the general perception of the çarşaf wearer as more oppressed and more submissive than the wearers of less covering, more colorful styles of tesettür.

Wearing çarşaf is not always hindrance to other forms of love and romantic relationships. The expectations that women have of their future husbands also play an important role. Meryem’s marriage and the role of çarşaf in her story are very different from Hanne’s experiences, which often ended with disappointment. Meryem’s husband is a young Turkish-Dutch man who was already searching for a çarşaflı bride when they first met. Meryem and Yusuf studied in the same college in the Netherlands. Their common friends introduced them, because they expected that Meryem and Yusuf would like each other’s modest appearance. They fell in love at first sight.

Meryem’s romantic story highlights different ideas about and principles of attraction between two pious young people. In this story, her husband attracts her attention with his beard, which he had grown according to the Sunnah (authoritative example) of the Prophet Muhammad, and his trousers, which were folded above his ankles (also according to the Sunnah). Meryem interpreted his beard as a sign of his detachment from worldly notions of beauty, and, therefore, as a reflection of his attachment to the other world. In their relationship, her çarşaf is an object of respect and admiration. Her husband reminds her very often that he felt in love with her when he saw her in her black çarşaf. They both see their respective appearances as a reflection of their inner selves.

I would not marry a man who does not follow the Quran and the Sunnah. I could not marry a standard man. When I first saw my husband, he had a shaved head, he wears baggy trousers and a robe; As I said before, he is handsome, too. Alhamdulillah (God be praised)! We saw each other when we passed each other in school. We liked each other at first sight. His beard attracted my attention. Then I noticed that his trousers were up to his ankles…
Meryem and her husband Yusuf know that they must support each other’s sartorial preferences, because they both wear garments that endow them with a strongly marked visibility in the Dutch setting.

Women will not necessarily break their promise to God and themselves simply because of their partner’s lack of respect and love for the çarşaf. To put it differently, a woman will not give up her çarşaf simply because it might affect her other love relationships. Both members of a couple must have enough strength to deal with the difficulties of such a heightened visibility. “Will you be able to love me with my çarşaf?” remains a crucial question at different stages of life. Although she is an ex-çarşaf wearer, Nermin wants to keep open the possibility that she might wear the çarşaf again in the future. Before accepting her marriage proposal, she explained to her future husband that she wore çarşaf for a long time and asked him to promise not to criticize her if she should decide to wear çarşaf again. She wanted to make sure that her husband would embrace her in çarşaf, too.

Women individualize çarşaf in terms of style, and they invest love and intimacy in their relationship with the çarşaf in order to create a personal bond with it. Even if investing love and care in the çarşaf is a form of idealization, it happens at a more individual level than other forms of idealization. Women are critical of the idealization of çarşaf as demonstrating higher level of religious commitment and as constituting a source of authority. They criticize some çarşaf wearers who let the çarşaf cover their weaknesses and personal traits. Şevval bluntly states that she does not want her çarşaf to conceal her individual qualities or her weaknesses:

The çarşaf should not repress your personality when you wear it, do you understand? Your çarşaf should not get ahead of you (önüne geçmemeli). Women not only adopt the çarşaf, they also take on a certain personality. I don’t know why, but they put pressure on people to acknowledge and respect them. People should love or respect me not because I am a çarşaf wearer, but because I am who I am.

Women distance themselves from the dominant, uniform image of çarşaf through their personal style and aesthetics. The more that their presence is marked, the more women become aware of the judgments of others, both negative and affirmative. In response, they try to mark their difference by investing love and care in the çarşaf:

In the contemporary tesettür scene, an increasing variety of colors (purple, green, navy, etc.) and subtle patterns have become available for çarşaf wearers. New technologies of tailoring such as the “laser cut” (lazer kesim) have affected çarşaf style by introducing plain
yet ornamented edges around the sleeves. For evening parties, çarşaf is produced from shiny fabrics and decorated with Swarovski stones. Fashionable styles of çarşaf have continued to develop, even as the çarşaf has become an increasingly marginal form of outdoor clothing in the Turkish tesettür scene. New, fashionable styles of çarşaf quickly enter the wardrobes of çarşaf wearers in the Netherlands. While it still cannot fully compete with other fashionable tesettür styles, the çarşaf is no longer a matter of uniformity.

As the metaphors of fanus (the fishbowl) and rüzgar (wind) illustrate, the effects of the çarşaf are different than those of other, equally covering outdoor tesettür styles in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. By investing in them with love and care, women turn their çarşaf into lovable objects for others as well. Friends, families, and future husbands should also contribute to this investment, as they also experience the effects of the conspicuous presence of a çarşaf wearer in their lives. The çarşaf strongly marks the wearer and often produces negative and contradictory effects on both the wearer and on others. In order to bear and deal with these difficulties, it is insufficient merely to “like” the çarşaf; women must invest love and labor in their çarşaf and individualize them in order to nourish the strength and patience necessary to living as a çarşaf wearer. The accounts of the women who participated in my research illustrate that love and care become important means that empower women to deal with both the negative effects and privileged status of the çarşaf.
CHAPTER THREE: OVERCOATS

1. Tracing the Genealogy of the Turkish *Pardősii*

The çarşaf was not the only new style that replaced the ferace in the late 19th Century Ottoman Empire. Although the çarşaf became highly adapted to European fashions, the yeldirme (women’s cloak) was the first explicit example of a European-style overcoat in the Ottoman Empire. The appearance of these European overcoats in Ottoman public space dates back to the early 1910s. For elite Ottoman women, the çarşaf had become old-fashioned by 1918 (Sevin 1973). Unlike the ferace, which was worn by men and women in a similar way, the yeldirme was first the gendered style of garment in a modern sense. With an overturned collar, set-in sleeves,33 buttons on the front and a light texture, the yeldirme became a popular style of summer outdoor garment (Taşçıoğlu 1958: 29).

The following anecdote about the graduation ceremony of a sewing school from the early 1910s illustrates the velocity of the transformation and state-sponsored wardrobe modernization that Ottoman women experienced. One of the first sewing schools, Biçki Yurdu (Sewing House), was opened in the 1910s, led by a female tailor, Behire Hakkı, who had received training in Paris. The aim of the sewing school was to instruct girls from poor families in modern tailoring skills and methods. At the first graduation ceremony, young women presented their skills to elite intellectuals and bureaucrats. They selected an overcoat to display their skills, even though this was not yet commonly worn attire at the time. They promoted the style that was to become a marker of status in the new Republic.

In the 1950s, when Taşçıoğlu wrote about this event in her book, *The Social Status of Women and Clothing in Turkish Ottoman Community*, European-style overcoats were already very popular as a new urban style of overcoat. Wearing an overcoat rather than ethnically marked garments or a çarşaf was an indicator of becoming a modern, urban citizen of the Republic. During the Republican years, the image of a woman with an overcoat and a small headscarf tied under the chin signified a break with the Ottoman past. In the 1950s, campaigns

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33 A sleeve joined to the body of a garment by a seam, starting at the edge of the shoulder and continuing around the armpit.
against çarşaf and the promotion of overcoats heightened the new visibility of women as status markers in Turkey. The overcoat produced a unique, modern, and somewhat uniform appearance for women in the Republic. For the first generation of migrant women discussed in this research, the overcoat was the first modern outdoor attire, which many women had begun wearing soon before or just after they moved to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s.

This chapter will explore overcoat fashions from the early years of migration up to the present-day Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. It offers an analysis of changing styles of wearing overcoats and overcoat fashions. Furthermore, it explores and illustrates what wearing such overcoats means to different categories of women at different historical moments and in particular locations. In order to achieve this analysis, I focus on how the mobility of people and objects within and between Turkey and the Netherlands has enabled particular styles and stories of dress. I trace the migration stories and changing sartorial practices of women from early years of migration to today. In particular, I am concerned with transformations in the urban-rural divide; therefore, I discuss at length how moving in and out of overcoats and their particular styles intersects with the ways in which women live Islam in the Netherlands.

The Guest Worker’s Overcoat: Becoming Modern

Three-quarter overcoats were the most commonly worn outdoor attire in the accounts of migrant women who had come to the Netherlands. The first generation of migrant women described this particular style of overcoat as the first modern and urban (şehirli) item of outdoor clothing they had ever worn. These three-quarter overcoats were relatively close-fitting, intended to be worn in winter, and produced by the mainstream textile industry. Women mainly referred to this style of overcoat as manto or pardösü (originally both French terms, manteau and par-dessus) and used these terms interchangeably in their accounts.34

34 Overcoat producers have promoted the label of pardösü for covered and religiously inspired styles of overcoats since the 1980s. Tesettür companies continue to release fashionable, long overcoat collections with the label of pardösü.
The manto style overcoat was tighter and shorter than the outdoor garments Anatolian women previously wore. It fashioned a distinctively modern visibility, concealing local and ethnically specific markers of provincial dress. While obscuring older ways of differentiating among women, the manto also produced new forms of difference among women. Wearing such an overcoat required a transformation of bodily gestures and movements. A closely fitting, three-quarter overcoat requires the body to move in a slower, more elegant way. These overcoats produced certain effects in their wearers as well as in their viewers, constituting different understandings of femininity and modesty with a stronger division between the home and outside experience. This distinction was particularly marked among women in the cities, who, of course, no longer labored in the fields.

35 Simultaneously, ethnic and local types of apparel were displayed as the traditional garments of Anatolian villagers in national museums.
Women described their new posture in overcoats as well-mannered and more ladylike (hanım hanımcık). This style of dress would not allow women to sit cross-legged on the ground, but rather encouraged them to sit on chairs as a sign of having mastered a more civilized, modern way of life. Other urban accessories completed and complimented the elegant style and feminine posture performed by the body in a manto: a small, modern headscarf, a handbag, and a pair of shoes instead of slippers. Not all women welcomed these changes in posture and garments. In some accounts, learning these new forms of feminine visibility was portrayed as an embarrassing experience, which took some time to get used to.

As previously discussed, in the wake of the campaigns against the çarşaf in the 1950s and later, overcoats became a popular item through which to fashion a modern, secular appearance. The rural-urban divide constitutes the main line of demarcation in women’s narratives. Wearing manto was also a tacit requirement that came with the displacement of migration. It concealed the markers of poverty, a rural background and local-ethnic aesthetics, and transformed migrant women’s bodies in a manner that made them acceptable in modern, urban public space. The first generation of migrant women often simply referred to two categories of garments, those worn on a daily basis at home and those for wearing outside and on special occasions. Most women only had a few outfits in their suitcases when they set out for the Netherlands. Stories of their engagement with the overcoat and its shifting styles are shaped by the specific backgrounds of the women concerned and their patterns of mobility. Some women emigrated directly from small Anatolian villages; others had already experienced work and life in one of the big cities in Turkey. This rural and urban divide was a major factor in shaping their experiences in the Netherlands.

The styles of outerwear they had worn in their villages of origin varied, depending on understandings of body covering, modesty, and piety, as well as the climate of their home region. Mükerrem and Pelda—both in their late sixties now—joined their husbands in the Netherlands in the late 1970s, together with their children. In their sartorial biographies, changes in clothing style were not only strongly linked to the migration process, but also intersected with different regional styles, aesthetics, and notions of comfort in body covering.

The black çarşaf was commonly worn as outdoor dress in the village where Pelda spent her early life, near the city of Elazığ in Eastern Anatolia. Pelda came out of her çarşaf on her way to the Netherlands. At the airport in Istanbul, she took it off and put it in a plastic bag. The next stop on her way to Amsterdam was Frankfurt. When she arrived at the passport control desk in Frankfurt, she was wearing an entari (a long, loose-fitting dress) combined
with a loose white cotton scarf and new leather shoes. She emphasized that she did not have a proper purse because she had never needed one before. She had a small hidden pocket inside her clothes, attached with a cord and safety pin. Her passport was in her husband’s pocket. In Frankfurt, one of her relatives bought her a red leather handbag. She kept that bag for almost four decades. It was this outdoor accessory that completed her new elegant posture and look.

Pelda bought her first overcoat from a market in the Netherlands. It was a green, close-fitting three-quarter length overcoat. It was the first and last overcoat she bought in the Netherlands. It felt too tight and short for outdoor clothing, especially since she was accustomed to wearing a çarşaf. She felt embarrassed wearing it. For a long time, she continued to wear a çarşaf when visiting her village in Turkey on summer vacations. Several years passed before she felt able to wear her outdoor overcoat in the village. The overcoat worn over skirts or trousers and accompanied by shoes and a handbag gradually transformed the image of the provincial migrant woman into that of an urban subject. Although worn with headscarves, such styles were not yet labeled as “Islamic.” To the women who adopted them, they were perceived principally as modern garments.

The ways in which women combined former sartorial practices with new fashions were ambiguous, and depended on the social context. Sometimes, the guest worker’s overcoat was combined with baggy trousers, or with skirt-trouser combinations, which women had worn before emigrating. Women frequently told me that without their overcoats, they lost their self-confidence and felt uncomfortable, as they were not used to displaying their bodies in public. On the other hand, for some time, they would also feel uncomfortable when they returned to their native villages wearing their new styles. In this context, they also used overcoats to hide the changes in their clothing and taste.

Mükërrem, who is sixty-eight years old, bought her first overcoat after she came to the Netherlands in the late 1970s, and still wears pardösü. She followed her husband to the Netherlands, who had come to the Netherlands “as a tourist.” Married when she was fifteen years old, Mükërrem still perseveres in her unhappy marriage; she spends most of her time in the Netherlands, unlike her husband, who spends most of the year in Turkey. When she moved to the Netherlands, şalvar (baggy trousers) was the most commonly worn garment in her village close to the city of Yozgat, in Central Anatolia. Such a şalvar is often worn with blouses and a vest, which conceal the contours of the upper part of the body. But Mükërrem

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36 The word turist was commonly used by my interlocutors to denote people from Turkey who lived in the Netherlands without a required residential permit.
did not come to the Netherlands in her şalvar. Although she still wears şalvar when she does housework, on the day she arrived in the Netherlands, she was wearing a long, loose skirt (a maxi skirt with an elasticated waist) over loose cotton trousers to cover her legs.

Şalvar and cotton (pazen) trousers were commonly worn in Turkey’s rural areas. These were replaced by the popular flared trousers of the period, often worn in combination with a long dress or short skirt. Wearing more modern combinations allowed Mükerrem to adjust more easily to urban life in both Turkey and the Netherlands. Although her village clothes were replaced by urban garments, Mükerrem still tried to maintain her earlier understanding of modesty, and wore her new garments so that they would cover her body properly. She often wore a skirt or a long dress over her new Dutch trousers, beneath her new overcoat. Her overcoat also hid the fact that she was inexperienced with urban fashions. As she put it:

I never wore modern clothes in my village. I never had an overcoat in Turkey, then I came here…then, here I never took my pardösü off.

For Mükerrem, the overcoat is still formal attire. In familiar and intimate contexts, she does not need a pardösü. For instance, although she still does not put on her pardösü in the village, she wears it when she leaves the village and visits the city. There, Mükerrem prefers to put on a long, loose, dark, and plain-colored overcoat that flawlessly hides her figure. She completes her tesettür style with a scarf in a plain color that loosely covers her chest and shoulders.

Not all migrant women started to wear overcoats after coming to the Netherlands. Among the first generation of migrant women, there were women who had first left their villages for the big city (büyük şehir) to seek a better life in Turkey. Therefore, it is important to note that adopting the overcoat during that period was not unique to stories of emigration to Europe. Overcoats played a similar role in the modern urban public spaces of Turkey. They fashioned an urban (şehirli) look for women from small Anatolian villages.

The overcoat has a longer history in Kadriye’s wardrobe than it does in those of other older women whom I interviewed for my research. When she first came to the Netherlands, Kadriye already owned modern urban outfits. As she emphasized, she never really dressed like the other women in her village because she had gone to school and married a young man from a pious family in the city. As one of the few girls attending school, she used to wear a hat as part of her school uniform. She recalls feeling that her hat she helped her empathize with the girls who wore headscarves in the village. As a little girl, she had tried to hide her hair under her hat as if she were wearing a headscarf.
When she came to the Netherlands in 1978, Kadriye had already been wearing an overcoat for several years. Her father-in-law had bought her first overcoat for her in 1961 as a present. She married at the age of seventeen and then left her village in the region of Nevşehir for Ankara, Turkey’s capital. There, she cultivated positive feelings towards the overcoat. Her description of her arrival in the Netherlands illustrates her feelings of comfort and confidence as a modern şehirli woman in tesettür.

I did not come to the Netherlands in village dress. My eldest son bought a very nice skirt from Karamürsel Mağazası (a popular department store of the period in Turkey) on Mother’s Day. I bought a green blouse from a boutique, which matched with the skirt. I had an overcoat and a matching scarf, too. I did not come from the village. I came from Ankara. My outfit was proper.

Relatives and friends also contributed to the formation of these new styles. Those who were more experienced in urban settings and had knowledge about shopping places and urban fashions helped newcomers or those who had previously lived in a village. Garments and styles started travelling between Turkey and the Netherlands. Sevda vividly remembers how her clothing changed as a small child. Her uncle played important role, both in her migration story and in helping her to fashion a new appearance. Her family followed her uncle, who first left the village for the Netherlands. He married a Dutch woman and settled in the Netherlands in the early 1970s. Sevda started to wear modern fashions in their village, in the province of Erzurum in Eastern Anatolia, before moving to the Netherlands. Her Dutch aunt always brought nice clothes for Sevda, while her mother, a pardösü wearer, adopted an elegant, urban style with the help of her relatives in the Netherlands.

My aunt is Dutch; she brought us clothing from the Netherlands. When my mother came here, she wore high heels. If you look at elderly women from Erzurum, they wore atki or ihram, that is, very thick, large shawls (covering the upper part of the body from the head down), when they first came here, and their tülbents (plain white cotton scarves) covered their faces up to their noses. We had neighbors who wore clothes like that...

Modern overcoats either replaced or covered the great variety of provincially-geographically marked attire of Anatolian women in the Netherlands. In the early years of migration, adopting an overcoat created social and spatial mobility for women. Not only geographical mobility, but marriage, too, could lead to a comparable change of style. Marriage not only increased the mobility of women in the villages but also signified a transition to adulthood as a woman with a new sense of femininity. Overcoats were portrayed as a precious and expensive item in their dowry.
As the narratives of women suggest, the adoption of the overcoat in the 1970s both signaled and enabled social and spatial mobility for the first generation of migrant women arriving from Turkey. While not many of them found employment, most did eventually have interactions with Dutch public institutions and encountered members of the Dutch public. However, adopting the overcoat was not restricted to women who migrated to Europe. Overcoats also fashioned an urban look for women who left Anatolian villages for the Turkish cities, playing an important role in the formation of new forms of visibility for women in Turkish public space.

The Overcoat Turns “Islamic” and “Fashionable”

In the 1980s and 1990s, full-length, loose-fitting overcoats combined with large, loose-covering headscarves in plain colors became more and more visible in Turkey and in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. The cultural politics of emerging civic religious organizations and movements in the 1980s played a significant role in promoting a particular style of outdoor clothing, and knowledge about it, among young, educated urban women. Students at Quran courses and İmam Hatip schools of the period began to distinguish between habitual forms of covered dress and consciously learned forms of body covering that they considered explicitly Islamic. Education played a significant role in transforming women into pious Muslims. Young girls began to learn about proper, conscious (bilinçli) forms of tesettür based on religious texts.

The robadan overcoat was one early expression of urban Islam (şehirli İslam) in women’s clothing. It was different from the existing long overcoats of the period, as it had a seam placed just below the shoulder level, thereby creating a loose shape that conceals the figure from head to toe. Wearing a robadan overcoat and fashioning an understated look was considered a stance against attractive femininity and sexuality (Şişman & Karabıyık-Barbarosoğlu 2000). The robadan overcoat produced the figure of the urban educated Muslim woman as completely covered. This style of overcoat, combined with dark-colored, plain scarves and worn on a daily basis, produced a kind of uniform style (Sandıkçı and Ger 2010).

In Turkey, such new, long, loose forms of pardösü distanced their wearers not only from more provincial styles but also from earlier urban styles of outdoor garments. For instance, the black çarşaf, an equally covering outdoor garment, came at that time to be seen
either as a statement radical Islamic politics or as outdated rural attire. The narratives of women about this period focus on “the heightened visibility” (Tarlo 2010) of wearing *tesettür* in public spaces and underline the importance of commitment and strength nourished by faith and religious education. Besides shifting understandings of body covering from habit to a consciously learned practice, these modest and pious styles differentiated devout women from those who followed the many fashionable styles of outer garments developing at that period. In circles of committed Muslims, *robadan* overcoats replaced the closer fitting, three-quarter overcoats of the 1970s. Wearing a uniform style was seen as a sign of modesty and piety, even as fashionable styles of *tesettür* proliferated, in part due to the developing textile industry, which benefited from the liberal economic policies in the 1980s. The former style of overcoat, which had been the first modern outdoor attire of migrant women, gradually became perceived as rural and identified with poverty.

The 1980s witnessed frequent family reunions for Turkish guest workers in the Netherlands. This was not a one-way process. Girls were also sent back to Turkey to pursue alternative education in Quranic boarding schools or *İmam Hatip* Schools.\(^{37}\) Returning to Turkey enabled young Turkish-Dutch girls to better master the Turkish language, to maintain their ties with the homeland, and to receive an Islamic education in addition to a secular Dutch one. They also learned about new Islamic fashions that were emerging in Turkey. On their return to the Netherlands, they introduced new styles of outdoor *tesettür* clothing. They also played an active role in religious organizations and in propagating modern, correct *tesettür* fashions, spreading their knowledge about Islamic clothing in the Netherlands. As educated, pious women from *İmam Hatip* and Quranic schools, young *tesettür-lü* women linked their own sartorial preferences to religious texts and teachings. They disseminated knowledge about *tesettür* and introduced idealized styles within Turkish religious circles. These young women also brought new *tesettür* fashions from Turkey to the Netherlands.

Ela Nur, for example, first came to the Netherlands in 1980 when she was seven years old. Her father was an imam, employed by the Turkish state in the late 1970s. Ela Nur followed him, studied theology in the Netherlands, and now teaches Islam at a college there. In 1987, she left the Netherlands to study at an *İmam Hatip* School for three years. She returned with a change in her style of dress. She had started wearing a headscarf and *pardösü*, but her first *pardösü* was chic and elegant in comparison to the *robadan* style. It expressed

\(^{37}\) Chapter Two, which focuses on the *çarsaf*, discusses the experiences of my interlocutors in Quranic boarding schools and *İmam Hatip* Schools in more detail.
both her Islamic education and her understanding of tesettür fashion, as well as her personal style. İmam Hatip graduates not only propagated new styles of tesettür and knowledge about them, they also embodied new aesthetic preferences and tastes linked to different understandings of femininity and bodily posture.

I wore a pardösü…but it was a cool one, I never wore something wide like the robadan pardösü. I returned to the Netherlands with an overcoat on. I had an İmam Hatip background; (I thought that) people should see what a girl educated in İmam Hatip School dressed like…that is why I wore it. The overcoat gave a different feel to the way you walked and the way you sat, but you could learn to carry it off.

Dressing plays a constitutive role among people in a diaspora, as it transforms not only their sense of self but also their relationship with others (Moors 2009a; Tarlo 2007). Styling does more than signify degrees of religious practice and modernity, it is also lived as an expression of personality and one’s inner self. Young women try to find ways of expressing their individual identity through dress. At the same time, personal styling and the individual search for religious meaning in dress become a source of inspiration and motivation for others.

Ela Nur and her older sister were aware of their responsibility as role models, both as daughters of a well-known imam and as educated tesettürlü women originally from Turkey. They introduced a new aesthetics of tesettür to the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. Ela Nur’s narration powerfully articulates the role of femininity in the formation of the modern pious female subject:

As the daughters of an imam, we had to be careful all the time. What might others say about our father if we were to misbehave? My sister had a beautiful outfit. Everything matched perfectly. Her style was very different from what people were used to here. She wore a sugar pink overcoat, a matching scarf and pinkish shoes. From head to toe, everything matched. Girls admired her style, and so they covered, too. They adopted tesettür not because they admired her understanding of Islam but because of her style.

Stylish combinations of long, loose overcoats with large scarves (90 x 90 cm) covering the shoulders and the chest had appeared in Turkey’s major cities in the late 1980s, and diversified into an expanding market in the 1990s (Sandıkçı and Ger 2010; 2007; White 1999; Gökarıksel & Secor 2010). During these years, the wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch tesettür wearers also began to include expressive and stylish overcoats. Women began to create alternative outdoor tesettür styles in order to escape being perceived as “uniform” and “fundamentalist.” They looked for ways to articulate individual taste with the religious norms and aesthetics of tesettür. In this context, robadan overcoats came to be labeled as rural and a
sign of poverty, while they were also perceived as markers of radicalization and political Islam. As more fashionable, stylish overcoats appeared on the market, robadan coats disappeared from the urban tesettür scene.

Figure 10 Women in more form-fitting overcoats and headscarves shopping at a community event.

In her discussion of the centrality of a changing habitus of consumption in the formation of identities and the marking of internal cultural differences in Turkey during the 1990s, Navaro-Yashin (2002b) mentions the increasing popularity of stoned-silk overcoats in the mid-1990s.38 Stoned-silk overcoats were not made from locally produced cloth, but were promoted as a “foreign product” of better quality than local products. Stoned-silk was the most expensive style of pardösi of that period. In big cities, stoned-silk overcoats replaced pale-colored, cheaper overcoats made of cotton or polyester. Particular colors were popular

38 Navaro-Yashin did her fieldwork in Istanbul in 1994.
among covered university students: light pink and lavender, diverse tones of purple, pastel blue and green, dark yellow and grey (Ibid.: 225).

For some women, however, their long overcoats functioned to hide their preference for new fashions when they visited relatives in Turkish villages over the summer, as these would have emphasized emerging differences and inequalities between those remaining in Turkey and those in the Netherlands. Sevda is forty-five years old and lives in Den Haag. When she was in her early twenties, she had one pardösi, which she only wore when she went back to her village of origin.

In the early years of my marriage, I wore a pardösi. I put it on when we went to visit my husband’s relatives in Turkey. They live in a small village. My appearance would not have been not proper; my dresses were showy and were made of thin material. My husband’s family wanted me to wear a pardösi. We bought a loose, lilac-colored stoned-silk overcoat from his acquaintances. After we returned here (to the Netherlands), I told my husband ‘You may ask anything of me but don’t ask me to wear this,’ and he said ‘I wouldn’t force you to. Dress as you wish.’

Overcoats, then, both obscure local styles in modern public space and allow their wearers to conceal their personal taste if they so desire. Elderly women also feel comfortable wearing long, loose overcoats, not only because such overcoats hide their aging bodies but also because they hide their preferences for old or new fashions that people might judge them for. Pelda gave up her çarşaf almost thirty years ago on her way to the Netherlands, and since then she has only worn overcoats. In addition to feeling good about wearing a loose fitting overcoat as a pious Muslim woman, she also employs her overcoat to camouflage her personal style and tastes. She likes to wear colorful clothing. Bright red, purple and green are her favorite colors. She also loves kadife entari (long velvet dresses), which used to be the dress-of-choice for wealthy women in her village. After thirty-five years, Pelda no longer feels embarrassed; on the contrary, she feels comfortable and good in her overcoat. She describes the feeling of the overcoat as free and more ladylike. During the first years following her emigration, her pardösi primarily concealed her poverty and old clothing, but now her overcoat covers her personal choices: the colorful, chic dresses of village women, which, as she says with pleasure, hide the young woman inside her:

I like bright colors, I like my dresses to be shiny. (What do your friends think?) When I go to a wedding party, I put on yazma (a white cotton scarf) with my overcoat. Women look at me and see me as an eighty-year-old woman, and then, when I take off my pardösi, they say, ‘You look like a fifteen-year-old!’
The example above indicates that the boundaries between “conscious” and “habitual” ways of wearing an overcoat are often vague, contingent and sometimes contradictory. Overcoats reveal and hide not only bodies, but also often the social life, tastes and personal preferences of the wearer, which vary according to social contexts and audiences.

Younger women frequently portray the choice of pardısü as a well-thought-out decision, rather than as a habitual form of body covering. This emphasis on conscious practice reveals and relates to women’s long search for sufficient, accurate knowledge about Islamic dress. The story below offers another account of wearing the overcoat in the 1990s. Fatma Nur started to cover late in life. She does not come from a pious family. In the mid-1980s, she was the first immigrant girl at her university. For a long time, she was an active member in the Dutch Turkish Women’s Union, an organization for labor rights. She spent a lot of time in Amsterdam with the leading leftist activist and intellectuals of the period from Turkey. Only later did she learn about Islam and decide to live an Islamic life.

In the 1990s, when she decided to practice tesettür, she was thirty years old. She desired a proper tesettür appearance according to her knowledge of Islamic clothing. Her decision was a conscious one, which came about after several years of Islamic education from different religious circles.

Gradually and discreetly, I changed my wardrobe; I bought a new blouse, a skirt and an overcoat. For months, I searched for the right overcoat. It took such long time...I bought new brown boots that match my overcoat. I prepared everything for the change. It was Eid (bayram). I left home, my heart was beating fast...I did not want anyone to see me in the neighborhood...

Women often postpone wearing an overcoat, as it can be a more difficult decision than adopting the headscarf. The overcoat produces a different set of effects on both the wearer and the public. This is not only a matter of preparing oneself physically and spiritually, but also a process of fashioning a personal style that feels positive and right in order to bear the negative reactions to tesettür in modern public spaces. “Can I be the woman I desire to be with this particular outfit?” was a constant question for the women who decided to adopt the overcoat in those years, and this question is still central and urgent for young Turkish-Dutch tesettür wearers today.
The denim overcoat was one of the first alternative styles that combined different aesthetics and knowledge of tesettür clothing with mainstream trends and fashions. Compared to other styles of outdoor tesettür worn by Turkish migrant women in the Netherlands, the denim pardösü was unique in the way it integrated the global fabric of denim with the aesthetics and concerns of tesettür. Importantly, according to both secular and religious understandings of fashionable dress, being modern requires engagement with the mainstream clothing industry. Denim had long been absent in general from the Turkish-Muslim milieu because wearing denim suggested a particular lifestyle and animosity toward religion connected to leftist movements in the 1970s (Karabıyık Barbarosoğlu 2006). Denim fabric worked to convert the old-fashioned, austere and fundamentalist image of the Muslim woman in her full-length overcoat into a moderate, urban, trendy and modern figure. This particular design of overcoat brought diverse ideas of femininity, beauty, fashion, modernity, and modesty together. Kot pardösü (the denim overcoat) and other denim clothes, especially long denim skirts, came to occupy a unique place in the wardrobes of some contemporary tesettür wearers.

The long, loose-fitting denim overcoat was one new trend that also became very popular among Turkish-Dutch tesettürlü women. As previously discussed, wearing pardösü signified a religiously-informed, conscious, personal preference. This new style gained an urban and relatively upper class status while also creating codes of distinction among tesettür wearers (Secor 2002; White 2002). In the late 90s, fashionable tesettür overcoats became markers of both piety and of a new status. While the principle of body covering remained the same, the new overcoats were distinguished on the basis of a variety of accessories and a change of fabric in the 1990s.

In their respective works on denim, Miller (2007) and Woodward (2011) discuss the ubiquitous character of denim fabric as a global phenomenon. The ubiquity of denim and the fact that it is worn globally produce commonalities among people of very different backgrounds. Denim jeans, in particular, are the single most common form of everyday attire around the world. The growing Turkish tesettür market embraced the ease and comfort of this global fabric and combined it with pious understandings of femininity and piety. The ubiquitous nature of denim fabric allows tesettürlü women to solve the dilemma of everyday
clothing. Denim grants a certain stylistic to a garment, and it is easily matched with other items. Women especially prefer denim overcoats made of thinner fabric in the summer because they hide the figure of the body and also being light and refreshing. Both overcoats and denim garments in general are styled and patterned with motifs and embroidery that fit Turkish tesettür taste.

![Figure 11](image1.jpg) A fashionable denim overcoat from Asu’s wardrobe.

![Figure 12](image2.jpg) A denim overcoat.

Denim overcoats attract women from very different age groups and economic backgrounds, and they are also visible in the Dutch scene. Over the last several decades, they became distinctive enough to achieve a prominent place in the Dutch tesettür scene. Two Dutch artists created an archive project titled Exactitudes by systematically documenting people on the streets who followed similar fashions over the last sixteen years. Exactitudes is a global project consisting of a series of photographs from many different locations; the series called “Brigades,” from Rotterdam (2010), features women in denim overcoats.
Denim overcoats are produced at different lengths and degrees of tightness for women with different understandings of tesettür and practices of body covering. They are practical for everyday clothing; moreover, they soften the formal, austere posture of the long overcoat wearer. Wearing long, loose overcoats (often in dark colors), once labeled as fundamentalist (irticaci), becomes a somewhat less conspicuous style due to the ubiquity and anonymity of denim fabric.

Although wearing denim was severely criticized in certain religious circles, and some tesettür producers and sellers avoided the fabric, denim overcoats retained their popularity
until recently, as they were one of the few alternatives to the uniform overcoats of the 1980s. With the proliferation of more fashionable styles of overcoats, however, long, loose-fitting denim overcoats lost their popularity and became old-fashioned. Nevertheless, denim overcoats are still mainly produced by tesettür companies rather than mainstream Turkish denim manufacturers. The presence of unusual denim garments, in particular long overcoats and skirts, distinguishes clothing stores owned by Turkish-Dutch entrepreneurs in the Netherlands (see Chapter Four for a discussion of denim skirts).

The Generational Shift in Producing Overcoats

It was not only the materiality and styles of overcoats that changed over time, thus displaying a generational shift. Just as young Turkish-Dutch women no longer want to wear their mothers’ overcoats, but seek to display their personal aesthetics by fashioning a modern form of tesettür, young executives of tesettür companies do not simply want to continue their tesettür businesses as their fathers had done (most tesettür companies are still run by male family members). The pencil-drawn overcoat figures featured in the advertisements of early 1980s (Sandıkçı and Ger 2007), have been replaced by glittering catwalks at the yearly-organized Istanbul International Islamic Clothing Fairs, which began in the 2000s. Young company owners considered this the right moment to appear in public spaces with attractive shop windows and fancy billboards. These overcoat producers (pardösücüler) left the dusty, grey commercial buildings (ış hanları) and side streets of Istanbul to open luxurious stores with fancy names on main shopping streets and in malls. The names of companies have changed as well, shifting from family names to attractive monikers for the global Islamic clothing market, such as Sheray and Setrems.

Similar shifts are visible in the Netherlands. For a long time, Turkish-Dutch women preferred to buy their overcoats in Turkey, where they could find the latest trends. The first Turkish stores in the Netherlands where women could find overcoats were çeyiz mağazaları (dowry stores).39 These stores were quite old-fashioned; few, if any, young women patronized them, and they gradually disappeared. New tesettür stores with fashionable collections of brand name garments have appeared in migrant neighborhoods in the Netherlands over the

39 A kind of store that sells a wide range of items, from wedding gowns to teapots, from copies of the Quran to prayer carpets.
last few years. Young women not only have access to the Turkish tesettür market via the Internet, they also shop at stores in migrant neighborhoods that import textiles from Turkey while also resembling mainstream clothing stores. They organize shopping trips to Istanbul, and regularly make purchases from the increasingly available Internet stores based in both Europe and Turkey. Moreover, these young women have begun to maintain separate sections in their wardrobes for large collections of pardösüs and new three-quarter tesettür overcoats called kap. Pardösü wardrobes are costly to own: a brand-name overcoat costs at least one hundred euros, sometimes even more. A fashionable Turkish-Dutch overcoat wearer often has around twenty to thirty overcoats, which she seasonally upgrades with new styles.

Mainstream clothing stores such as Zara, Mango and H&M sell overcoats that are similar to the overcoats of the Turkish tesettür market, particularly the tight-fitting and three-quarter length models. These stores are very popular among young Turkish-Dutch women. Not surprisingly, the Turkish tesettür market responded to the demands and interests of tesettür wearers by beginning to follow mainstream fashions closely. Well-known headscarf producers such as Armine expanded their product range and introduced overcoats and other items of clothing. The boundaries between tesettür and non-tesettür collections and stores have blurred, as they have both adjusted to mainstream fashions and store concepts.

2. Contemporary Overcoat Trends

Kaps

Over the course of the last decade, the contemporary tesettür scene has witnessed two distinct trends, both of which could be considered “retro.” On one hand, there has been a gradual transition from increasingly fashionable, full-length styles of tesettür to three-quarter length, tighter overcoats (now called Kap). On the other hand, a contrasting development has been the return to full-length, loose outer garments, somewhat similar to those of the 1980s, but displaying a more cosmopolitan Islamic style, described by both the Arabic term jilbab and the Ottoman term ferace.

The three-quarter-length, close-fitting kap style is reminiscent of a winter coat from the 1960s or 1970s in its form and shape. However, these new kaps are made from a much wider variety of fabric, which varies according to both the seasons and distinct occasions.
Kaps have largely adapted to mainstream fashion trends; moreover, they are mainly produced by well-known tesettür companies and marketed with other tesettür items and accessories such as headscarves, purses, skirts, and tunics. Like the robadan overcoat, the name of this new style originated from its tailoring. The waist of the overcoat is tightly fitted with additional stitches along the front of the chest and back. These extra stitches highlight the slimness of the waist.

Kaps are worn together with fashionable, trendy accessories. Footwear ranges from high-heeled shoes and knee-high leather boots to Converse All-Star sneakers and sandals. Original as well as imitation bags, showy watches, and big sunglasses from well known luxury brands, which are worn together with fashionably patterned silk scarves from seasonal collections, and stylishly tied around the neck with a swinging short edge at the back, complete the look of the fashionable Kap wearer. Young Turkish-Dutch women in the Netherlands call this new trend the “Istanbul style.” It is urban, modern, classy and hip. Young tesettürlü Turkish-Dutch women claim that the introduction of Kaps to tesettür clothing led to two different trends. Some young women who previously wore full-length overcoats shifted to this less covered style, while others who had previously found it difficult to wear a pardösü now felt able to do so.

Dicle is a shop assistant in a Turkish clothing store who first came to the Netherlands in 2004. She grew up in a very small village in Central Anatolia and later moved to a small Turkish town. She is twenty-six years old and also an İmam Hatip graduate. Her taste and preferences in clothing changed as she moved and made new friends in the Netherlands. Her story epitomizes the more general success story of the young women who have arrived from Turkey in recent years. Dicle received her Dutch degree and applied for a job as a social worker, while simultaneously working in a clothing store. Her style continues to change, and she has become a trendsetter and source of inspiration for tesettürlü girls and customers in her neighborhood. Kaps are new items in Dicle’s wardrobe. Through the kap she has gradually adopted the practice of outdoor tesettür. Although she thinks that wearing an outer garment is an important element of tesettür, she had not previously been able to find a suitable style of overcoat to wear. Now, however, the new style of kap highlights the dynamic figure of the body and can easily be adapted to mainstream fashion trends. Most young women who wear it now associate former tesettür overcoats with elderly women. Asked if she ever wore a pardösü, Dicle replied:
No, I never wore pardosü. I sell them here and I have tried them on a few times. They are not appropriate for my age...I want to wear proper tesettür. I do not want to pretend to be tesettürlü; I actually want to be so. Tesettür is not only about putting on a headscarf. I want to pay more attention to my appearance than that. I bought this recently from Istanbul (she points out an Armine kap hanging behind us)...it is from Armine. (This kap had an asymmetrical cut at the front, with a thin leather belt.) I wear it even on hot days...I feel naked if I go out without it. I do not feel comfortable. Besides, I like the style.

Figure 14 Dicle’s kap in an Armine catalogue, courtesy of Armine.

In the contemporary tesettür scene in the Netherlands, there are different styles of outer garments and various ways of fashioning these styles. Some fashionable kaps can hardly be considered covering outer garments, as they display the wearer’s figure quite clearly. Some are very eye-catching, especially when worn with accessories and ornaments. Wearing such new styles of overcoat relates to a different understanding of tesettür. These new garments and the concept of tesettür that corresponds to them can sometimes lead to contestations
among young women, their parents and hocas. The question of which style of outer garment to choose has also become more pressing with the proliferation of new styles and friendly competition in women’s networks.

*Kaps* enable young women to practice outdoor *tesettür* and display their personal understanding of *tesettür*. They are an alternative for those who do not like older styles of overcoats but are willing to wear an outer *tesettür* garment in public spaces. For others however, fashionable *kaps* are not proper to a modest understanding of *tesettür* because they are attractive and expensive.

Zeynep is a twenty-five-year-old, college-educated woman from Amsterdam. She decided to put on the headscarf five years ago. Her *tesettür* decision was not unexpected, but it was still difficult for her parents to accept. Her story reflects how wearing *kap* mediates questions of style and piety in new ways. The *kap* allows her to practice outdoor *tesettür*; furthermore, it rescues her *tesettür* from her parents’ criticism, as they had not wanted her to wear a full-length *pardösü*. Zeynep does not think that her current style reflects her understanding of *tesettür* entirely. She has tried to find a middle way in order to diminish the tension caused by her decision to cover. She sees her current style as transitory, with the *kap* enabling her to practice outdoor *tesettür*. With a rather loose *kap* and a shawl covering her shoulders and chest, Zeynep has fashioned a style that her parents do not find too radically religious or old-fashioned. As Dicle emphasized above, the *kap* style is modern and does not evoke the same meanings as the older *tesettür* *pardösü*. Zeynep explains:

> When I first covered, I wanted to wear a long *pardösü* so much. But my mother did not let me. ‘Well, you can cover but you cannot wear the *pardösü*’ she told me…for her that style is *sofu* (puritan, fanatical). But what I wear now is not my ideal style. I envision a particular look with a *pardösü* and a big shawl. This will be my real statement in the future *inşallah*…it does not have to be all black. I can make it individual through the colors I choose.

Zeynep does not consider the color black to be an option because it produces such a strong visibility and would hide her personality (for a more detailed discussion of this issue, see the previous chapter). There is a particular contradiction involving the color black in *tesettür* clothing. Black is the color of modesty and elegance, but wearing only black in *tesettür* clothing is strongly associated with “fundamentalism” in the Turkish *tesettür* scene. In the Dutch context, wearing all black *tesettür* is also considered as a sign of “radicalism.” In both contexts, wearing only black *tesettür* has become less and less common.
In the practice of outdoor attire, women adopt a wide variety of particular signs of piety and thereby shape and contest the category of “conscious tesettür” in general. Like ex-çarşaf wearers who have given up their çarşafı, there are ex-pardöşi wearers who no longer consider pardöşi necessary to their tesettür practice, or, more simply, do not find it comfortable. Even if new, fashionable, long overcoats enable some women to deal with the dilemma of heightened visibility, and therefore practice outdoor tesettür, for others, these same overcoats are no longer an option. Serap is a twenty-two-year-old educated woman from Amsterdam. She wore pardöşi for a year in the past, particularly when she attended the meetings of a religious community; however, she does not feel good in an overcoat anymore. The overcoat has become solely a winter outfit for her. The change in her style also related to her changing environment and social life:

The overcoat was commonly worn in my milieu at the time. My friends from that community, all of them wore pardöşi. [Do they still?] Yes they still do, and they do not consider three-quarter-length overcoats as pardöşi. For them, only the long overcoat is a real pardöşi. I was only able to wear it for a year…I was young at that time, perhaps sixteen or seventeen. It makes you
look older than you are. *Pardösi* is beautiful, but I still don’t prefer it. Let me put it this way: I do not find it practical. I am a student. I have a busy life. I am always in rush and moving around. *Pardösi* is long—it tangles your legs.

For some religious communities, wearing a long overcoat is a significant element of proper *tesettür*. In the Turkish-Dutch *tesettür* scene, women from the Süleymanlı community stand out, with their long overcoats and scarves tied under their chins with a knot. Nonetheless, ideas about the necessity of wearing outdoor *tesettür* and its style differ greatly among women. Young Turkish-Dutch *tesettürlü* women strive to fashion distinct styles of outdoor attire, even when they would rather wear long overcoats. Personal preferences are not always in line with mainstream fashion trends. As Göle (2002) points out, for some individuals, the search for authenticity can entail a critical distance from the assimilative strategies and potentially homogenizing practices of modernity. Different understandings of *tesettür* are often marked by the peculiarities of personal style. Knowledge about combining certain colors and kinds of fabric, as well as a thorough understanding of the aesthetic principles of different publics, inform choices of outdoor *tesettür*, and help to construct an ideal of *tesettür* for pious young women. Contemporary styles reflect not only new ideas of femininity and piety, but also taste, social status and distinction in the manner famously discussed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984). In this sense, sartorial practices become a “performance of difference” (Göle 2002: 185), and necessarily involve the search for an individual, innovative image in a larger field of sensorial interaction. On the basis of an innovative look and a multiplicity of aesthetic ideals, women are able to manage the heightened visibility that wearing certain types of garments produces (Tarlo 2010: 11).
Loose-fitting, Long Overcoats: A New Cosmopolitan Aesthetics

Old-fashioned, loose-fitting, full-length overcoats in dark colors are disappearing rapidly. Nonetheless, a few young women have purposely adopted this elderly, unfashionable look. They wear this style with plain color large scarves, or, in some cases, with a çarşaf cape. In doing so, they make a personal statement about their constant attention to working on their inner selves and thereby achieving higher levels of devotion. While some young women wait for the right moment to adopt what they think of as an ideal tesettür style in order to make a personal statement, others choose old-fashioned styles associated with elderly women. Even if these young women own wardrobes full of fashionable dresses and accessories, they purposely adopt an elderly look or more covered styles of outdoor garments as their tesettür appearance. In the collections of contemporary Turkish tesettür producers, these old-fashioned overcoats can hardly be found, at least not in high quality fabric. Hence, women often need to have them tailor-made. Both the producers of this style and its young wearers label call it the “grandma’s overcoat.”

Nermin, whom I first introduced in the chapter on çarsaf, wore a çarşaf for six years before becoming an overcoat wearer. She teaches the Quran and several different courses on Islam and organizes religious meetings (sohbet) among women. She interprets her practice of outdoor tesettür in direct reference to the Quran. Sura Al Ahzab, verse 59, instructs women to wear covering outer garments:

O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves (part) of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.⁴₀

Nermin’s outdoor tesettür has been black and very simple since she first put on a çarşaf in the 1990s. Her present style consists of a black, loose-fitting, long overcoat and a large black scarf that also covers her shoulders and chest. Her conversation with the shop assistant in a tesettür store illustrates how difficult it has been for her since choosing this style.

You go into a store, you describe what you want and they say it is babaanne (grandma) style. Eventually, you have to say ‘Yes!’ They frankly say ‘We don’t sell babaanne fashion.’ They call it a grandma’s overcoat when you ask for a loose fitting overcoat.

There is no doubt that many older women still prefer this particular style of overcoat. Both the form and the color conceal their aging bodies, as well as the layers of other garments that they often wear underneath. Garments that women find comfortable are not always aesthetically pleasing. Aging requires a change of sartorial preferences. Elderly women are often more concerned with covering the figure of their bodies properly, and they are careful not to wear colors and ornaments that are very attractive. Most importantly, they do not wish to give the impression to others that they want to look younger.

For younger women, on the other hand, wearing a grandma’s overcoat usually denotes a different understanding of tesettür. As its name indicates, this garment demonstrates a woman’s willingness to distance herself from mainstream ideals of beauty. By choosing this elderly style, she cultivates a particular understanding of modesty. Thus, the choice of the “grandma’s overcoat” on the part of a young woman designates a devoted and modest self, especially in the current era, with its emphasis on youth fashion.

Sartorial preferences also change for elderly women. Their preferences have become more complicated and influenced by the others in the contemporary tesettür scene. As children become educated young professionals, their parents’ social milieu also changes. Older Turkish-Dutch Muslims have also gradually altered their sartorial preferences. As I discussed in the previous section, Kadriye has worn what she considers proper urban outfits since her very first days in the Netherlands. For a long time, she was responsible for clothing her entire family. They still remember their early years spent in poverty in the Netherlands. Kadriye used to sew for her sons until they started to study in high school, and no longer liked the clothes she made. She is very proud of her sons, all of whom became well-educated Muslims, and who have not compromised their religion in spite of their success as businessmen in the Netherlands. Nowadays, they go shopping together, and they like to buy new clothes for their mother. One of them bought Kadriye her first fashionable pardösü in Turkey. It is a well-covering garment, but in a color that is new to the elderly style:

My son bought a proper pardösü for me…it’s) beautiful! It is a soft, pink, creamy color—such a sweet color. He said ‘Mom you always wear black, brown, let’s buy this one for you.’ I agreed. I put it on, and I liked it very much.

While some young women adopt the “grandma’s overcoat” as a personal tesettür style, other young Turkish-Dutch women try to combine a religious understanding of bodily
covering with cosmopolitan aesthetics. In the final section, I will illustrate how women bring together diverse elements of outer-garment fashions from various localities in a transnational field and how they combine them innovatively, both according to their understanding of Islam and in relation to different publics in the Netherlands. New cosmopolitan styles and an aesthetics of displacement are means for Muslim women to construct a new mode of visibility in the Dutch public sphere.

Rüzgar is a twenty-two-year-old university student who works as a tour guide at the natural history museum. She was born in the Netherlands. She is one of the few young women who have adopted loose, long outer-garments in the “grandma style.” Not only does she make a sharp distinction between indoor and outdoor clothing, she also changes her preferences according to those present in her context. Rüzgar takes off her pardösi indoors when there are only women present. She chooses the simplest overcoat and the plainest headscarf possible. She thinks of ornaments (pockets, buttons, patterns, etc.) as additional elements that attract the wrong type of attention.

Figure 16 A “grandma’s overcoat” from Rüzgar’s wardrobe.

Figure 17 Rüzgar’s combination for work: ferace and jacket.
A young Turkish-Dutch tesettür wearer who adopts Egyptian-, Gulf-, or Moroccan-inspired styles distances her individual style from mainstream tesettür fashion trends common among the Turkish community. This style communicates well with the wider, diverse public in Dutch public spaces. Yusra is another young woman who synthesizes different aesthetics and diverse styles in order to facilitate communicating with a wider public. Her understanding of bodily covering and outdoor tesettür is similar to those of Nermin and Rüzgar. She was born in the Netherlands and is the only woman in her family to wear tesettür, which she adopted eight years ago when she was fourteen. Yusra changed her career and future plans when she chose to live a more pious life. A few years ago, she decided to quit her job at a bank and began to study Islam and Spiritual Guidance at university, while also working actively for a Turkish religious community. Yusra decided to add an outer garment to her tesettür during a trip to Egypt; she returned to the Netherlands in what she calls a jilbab. This Arabic word is used to refer to a woman’s outer garment in the Quran. Her outer garment is a long, black, loose overcoat made from thin silky fabric. It is light, airy and comfortable to wear both outside and indoors. This particular style, which is relatively new in the tesettür scene both in the Netherlands and in Turkey, has become increasingly popular among young women. In Turkey’s tesettür market, this new style of outer garment is called a ferace.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the ferace was the most common form of attire for Ottoman women. It disappeared with the emergence of new çarşaf fashions in the late 19th Century and the popularity of European style of overcoats. The name still recalls Ottoman women’s outdoor clothing, even if the designs are different. The label ferace fits well with the promotion of an Ottoman revival in Turkey and beyond (Walton 2010). New outdoor feraces are generally black in color and have ornaments around the sleeves. They are made from a thin, shiny fabric called “Medina silk.” They are cheaper than long, fashionable pardösi (the price of a fashionable overcoat is around one hundred euros whereas that of a ferace is about thirty-fifty euros).

One of the most popular Turkish tesettür fashion magazines, Âlâ, promoted ferace in a recent issue as an ideal style for urban, conservative women. In the Netherlands, feraces have become an alternative for tesettürlü women like Yusra, who neither like the fashionable, close-fitting long pardösi nor the old-fashioned, loose, long pardösi that has become known as the “grandma overcoat.” Speaking of her ferace, Yusra comments:
I feel free in this, I feel so comfortable. I do not care about my body. I feel free to mix with men...you can find these in Moroccan stores. This is from Egypt. In Turkish stores, you only find close-fitting overcoats that just fit on your body—you might as well wear a short jacket and skirt. Loose overcoats in the Netherlands are mostly for elderly women...

Now three years since we first met, Yusra continues to wear the ferace. She has different ones from Syria, Jerusalem and Istanbul. Although feraces are made from very thin fabric, she wears them during the winter with layers underneath. In general, they are more comfortable in indoor contexts with a mixed crowd such as workplaces and universities. On the whole, the number of ferace wearers is increasing in both Turkey and in the Netherlands. Furthermore, new styles of ferace have already become tight and fashionably ornamented, as well as expensive. To some extent, feraces solve the dilemma of the distinction between indoor and outdoor tesettür, blurring the boundaries between the two and highlighting changes in the practices of both.

This chapter aimed to address the complex set of dynamics that play a significant role in the changing meanings, styles, and practices of the overcoat among Turkish-Dutch tesettürli women. Initially, the guest worker’s overcoat, as a status symbol, indicated its wearer’s spatial and social mobility, from small villages to urban areas and finally to Europe. The urban outdoor garments of provincial women concealed the markers of rural poverty and ethnic backgrounds as they entered modern public spaces. Later, in the 1980s, wearing an overcoat was transformed into a religiously inspired and informed practice. The accounts of the women that I have presented vividly illustrate how fashionable styles of loose, long overcoats worn in the 1990s transformed into the “grandma style,” even before the promoters of the style became grandmothers themselves. In the 1990s, more fashionable styles emerged, which, within a decade, had become bifurcated into tighter and shorter kaps, on the one hand, and new cosmopolitan overcoats, on the other. These longer cosmopolitan overcoats are often known by the Quranic term jilbab or the Ottoman term ferace.

The mobility of both garments and individuals has transformed the practice of wearing overcoats in tesettür clothing. The proliferation and dissemination of styles enables actors to develop their unique appearances through diverse aesthetics addressed to different publics. Connections between actors and styles across countries constitute new tesettür preferences, aesthetics and personal styles in a cosmopolitan transnational field.
CHAPTER FOUR: SKIRTS AND TROUSERS

Women’s sartorial preferences in tesettür clothing are not limited to outdoor garments—the choice of which garments to wear indoors or in combinations under fully covering outdoor garments is equally important. Most women wear skirts and trousers in combination with various top garments (jackets, blouses, tunics or dresses). Skirts and trousers are not only part of the wardrobes of tesettürlü women—women with diverse sartorial styles also wear skirts and trousers. In the world of tesettür clothing, skirts and trousers are different from other garments that are specifically worn as outdoor garments, such as the overcoat or the çarşaf. Therefore, they mediate different ideas about aesthetics, fashions and understandings of tesettür. As commonly worn garments, they circulate in a wider fashion scene; therefore they highlight commonalities and differences between tesettürlü and non-tesettürlü women. Moreover, women’s accounts of their skirts and trousers not only illustrate practices of covering but also ideas about gender difference, which other garments do not necessarily reveal to the same extent.

In the first section of this chapter, I give a brief historical account of skirts as modern garments and of the changing figure of the female body in Ottoman fashion during both the 19th Century and at the beginning of the Republican Era (1923). This sartorial history is especially important because the first generation of migrant women in the Netherlands were already confronted with a modern, secular dress code, what I have referred to earlier as “wardrobe modernization” in Turkey. Their sartorial practices were influenced by the urban-rural divide, which structured Turkey’s modernization project more generally. Skirts replaced more gender-neutral garments such as the şalvar and the entari (a kind of long robe) that were worn by both Ottoman men and women. Long, loose black skirts (with an elasticated band around the waist), became common as the lower piece of a çarsaf ensemble, and were therefore the earliest form of skirt in Ottoman women’s outdoor clothing. They usually functioned as overskirts covering women’s indoor clothing. At around this time, the garments characteristic of Istanbul fashion became influential all over the empire. They produced a feminine appearance in the modern sense, as they were visibly different from more gender-neutral garments and the image of personhood these garments created.
This chapter analyzes women’s accounts of their skirts and trousers in relation to changing perceptions of the female body and piety. It portrays the significance of wearing skirts and trousers in order to illustrate different, changing modalities of femininity as found in women’s migration stories from 1970s up to today. It depicts the multiple meanings of wearing a skirt as markers of a new status and urbanity. Basic sewing skills were no longer sufficient to make outfits representative of women’s new social status and sense of femininity in new locations. Some women who adopted and adapted new sartorial practices have been more successful in the Netherlands, while others failed in fashioning a new appearance, and were described as typical Turkish migrant women.

The section of the chapter on the shift from the “büzgülü etek” (a loose, long skirt with an elastic waistband) to the “kumaş etek” (a long, close-fitting skirt with a zipper) describes how most of women became unable to sew for themselves because they no longer possessed the skills necessary to do so. Like other modern garments, new skirts required new sewing skills. In the early years of migration, wearing ready-made (hazır giyim) garments signified the transformations in women’s lifestyles, as migrant women previously wore home-tailored garments for the most part. The discussion of “Dutch” skirts and trousers illustrates how ready-made garments became status markers, and how women developed different notions of femininity to fashion their visibility in the context of migration.

The following sections, “New Veiling: Trousers vs. Skirts?” and “Skirts and Piety,” portray the multiple, complex views women hold about the religious dimensions of wearing skirts or trousers. Women refer to various hadiths, interpretations of Islamic texts, and sermons of hocas in order to explain the formation of sartorial styles. They fashion styles differently. Some women do not consider wearing trousers suitable to their understanding of tesettür, while others consider trousers (combined with long tops) to be a modest, protecting form of tesettür. This part of the chapter elaborates how women see skirts as a means of disciplining their bodies and as a pious style that indicates a higher level of devotion and respect in religious contexts, especially mosques and religious meetings. Wearing a long, loose skirt highlights a modest understanding of tesettür in religious gatherings.

The last section of the chapter explores recent trends in skirt and trouser fashions. By focusing on creativity and styling, it portrays the ways in which women transform the aesthetics of Turkish long skirts to undermine the dominant image of the immigrant woman in a long skirt and tesettür. Women often shift their preferences from skirts to trousers in order to cope with the difficulties of tesettür clothing. These accounts illuminate how wearing
particular styles of skirts, as a mode of bodily discipline, fashions a particular posture and a set of movements that in turn display, for instance, values related to the family, such as respect for the elderly. In contrast, trousers and tunic-and-jacket combinations produce a more formal, professional look for young, working women. With a focus on changing styles, the final section of the chapter explains how young women negotiate and integrate different notions of femininity and understandings of tesettür clothing in both Turkey and the Netherlands. They employ diverse, sometimes contradictory notions of femininity, taste and style in fashioning new types of visibility as young Muslim women.

1. The Appearance of the Modern Skirt

Skirts in Ottoman Fashions and the New Figure of the Muslim Woman

The history of skirts is similar to that of other western and new national garments in the 19th Century Ottoman dress scene. Elites first introduced outdoor skirts that were similar to the European long skirt-and-jacket combinations, which were worn beginning in the period of Sultan Abdülhamit II. Adopting western notions of beauty and the body were popular; the slim look, in particular, became fashionable (Sevin 1973: 140). The shape and movement of the body gained significance with the new presence of women in modern public spaces. Fashion trends emerging in Paris and London were very influential in the formation of modern Ottoman dress. Magazines and tailoring guides played a major role in shaping bodily ideals and clothing styles. A slim figure and suitable sartorial preferences were seen as means to becoming modern.

Together with the corset, skirts played a major role in shaping the appearance of the new Muslim woman. The transformation of the çarşaf from a one-piece outer garment to a two-piece cloak-and-skirt combination not only raised the number of women wearing skirts, it also diversified skirt models themselves. During the transition period, women continued to wear two layers of skirts. The first layer was called the “iç etek” (inner skirt); it was often made of wool or silk fabrics. The second layer was part of the çarşaf, a form of outdoor tesettür. Both layers were ornamented fashionably. İç etek was often worn as a part of both indoor and outdoor dress. The effect of the iç etek when walking was particularly striking:
different layers of fabric overlapped and blended to create an elegant look (Taşcioğlu 1958: 28). Elite Ottoman women adopted proper styles of skirt as well as the *entari* for their new bodies and figures.

On the whole, these new fashions created a thin, tall ideal of feminine beauty. Wide belts worn around women’s waists, which were already restrained by corsets, helped to construct this ideal. By 1909, both *çarşaf* skirts and inner skirts had become very tight, so that women could no longer combine both together. During the years of the occupation (1918-1923), the combination of a long-sleeved blouse and a long circle skirt with a wide belt around the waist, which highlighted the wearer’s slim figure, was quite prominent in the Ottoman fashion scene (Taşcioğlu 1958). In this period, the highest possible compliment that a woman could receive emphasized the foreignness of these garments, as is evident in phrases such as “You look like an ecnebi (foreign) woman,” and “She is so beautiful that she looks like an ecnebi woman” (75).

Indoor clothing, too, went through a significant set of changes at this time. The most common indoor clothing, a combination of *şalvar* (wide baggy pants) and *gömlek* (a blouse with long sleeves) was replaced by a combination of *entari* (a long dress) and *hırka* (vest). Şeni (1991) describes the role of *entari* as a sort of Trojan Horse, a practice that revolutionized Turkish women’s clothing. She analyzes a dialogue between two female characters (one dressed in a European manner the other dressed in an Eastern fashion) in a book written by Fatma Aliye, the prominent female Ottoman activist and novelist. In her work *Contemporary Muslims (Nisvan-ı İslam*, first published in 1892), Aliye contends that the *entari* is only pleasing to the eye if the person wearing it is girdled by a corset.41 The *entari* stimulated the adaptation of the corset to Ottoman sartorial practices. Consequently, it radically changed the figure of the urban Muslim woman (Ibid.: 29). The corset not only introduced western fashions, it also enforced and created a certain shape and posture of the female body.

Until the 1920s, the corset was a crucial item in the wardrobes of both European and elite Ottoman women. In the following years, the length of skirts grew shorter, extending only to the knee, and women’s legs became more visible. Women began to prefer straight-cut dresses, which disguised their breasts and hips. Hairstyles also got shorter; a style called “*a la garçon*” (boy-like) became popular. Adopting a less feminine appearance helped women to

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41 See *Nisvan-ı Islam* by Fatma Aliye Hanım (2012: 120-121).
take on active roles in public spaces. Educated, elite women became the trendsetters for the Republican fashions (75 Yılda Değişen İnsan ve Cumhuriyet Modaları 1998). However, the concealed female figure, combined with short hair, gradually disappeared during the years of the financial crises (1929 and later), and by the 1930s the most common hairstyle was longer again. The most remarkable invention of 1940s was the nylon stocking. Women who could not afford to buy silk stockings and therefore could not adopt particular styles of skirt enjoyed this cheaper substitute (Ibid.: 57). With the advent of the nylon industry, skirts and nylon stockings had become available to a larger number of women in Turkey by the 1960s. Nylon democratized women’s access to western fashions, and ready-made skirts became especially popular at this time.

When women began to migrate to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s, they had already experienced or witnessed some of these sartorial changes. The move from the provinces to the cities in Turkey or directly to the Netherlands was often followed by, and entailed, a major shift in clothing. Çarşaf was replaced by manto and şalvar or pajamas, and büzgülü skirts were replaced by readymade trousers and skirts. These shifts took some time and produced alternative styles, which women created by combining new and old items of clothing alike. Creative combinations, such as skirts worn over trousers, revealed clearly how women were able to accommodate different practices of bodily comfort and fashion in the early years of migration.

Wearing “Dutch Skirts” in the Netherlands

As I mentioned earlier, both Dutch and Turkish people still remember the saying “Zo al een Turk die een jurk over haar broek draagt.” Migrant women gradually adopted new styles of Dutch ready-made garments in the 1970s, including short skirts, often at knee length. A new status and appearance meant different things for different segments of Turkish society in the Netherlands. Adopting skirts, especially what women called “Dutch skirts,” was challenging for most Anatolian women due to former practices and understandings of body covering. The ways in which women fashioned their appearance in more modern, urban garments varied.

42 I use the term “pajamas” to refer to a cotton pant-like garment, often decorated with a flower pattern, that has an elasticated waist and elastic cuffs at the bottom of the legs.
Most of them still do not feel comfortable when talking about the length and tightness of the skirts and trousers of the period.

Nylon stockings were one of the most significant markers of this change. The difference between pajamas and stockings was a matter of particular importance for the first generation. Nylon stockings worn with slim-fitting skirts and blouses signaled the process of becoming modern, emancipation from a rural background, and adaptation to a new life. Women coped with new types of sartorial discomfort: even a pair of very thick stockings (kalın çorap), were not as comfortable or practical to wear underneath one’s skirt as cotton pajamas. Therefore, in most of cases, pajamas worn under büzüllü skirts were replaced by trousers worn with short skirts or dresses.

The combination of thick knee-length stockings and knee-length pajamas (paçalı don) worn underneath skirts also became very popular, especially as the first generation grew older. This combination allowed women to complete a modern appearance with fashionable leather shoes while also enjoying the comfort of cotton pajamas underneath. This combination was not only protective and comfortable, it was also more practical than full-length stockings.
when performing ablutions for prayer (abdest). Although it is more common among elderly women, a few young tesettür wearers who only wear long skirts also prefer a similar combination (knee-length stockings and pajamas) due to its ease in the practice of ablution.

After thirty years, Mükerrem finally began to feel comfortable when wearing thick stockings. When she first came to the Netherlands, she wore pajamas under her büzgülü skirt. For her, these were already more modern garments than the baggy trousers that she used to wear in the village. Her mother, who stayed behind in the village, did not wear readymade skirts like those her daughter began to wear in the Netherlands. She still wears a pair of cotton pajamas in combination with a büzgülü skirt or dress. Unlike many other migrant women who stayed at home all the time, Mükerrem spent much of her time in the hospital, as her daughter needed medical care. Being outside with others was the main reason to make changes in her style of clothing. She no longer felt comfortable in her pajamas and skirt.

Mükerrem’s depiction of her first Dutch skirt-and-trouser combination illustrates her feelings about changing sartorial styles. Her new style was not only about wearing more modern, urban clothes, but also about adopting a different practice of body covering. Wearing trousers with a short top such as a blouse or jumper was not an option for the first generation, which preferred more covered styles of clothing in the villages. It was already very difficult for Mükerrem to trade in her loose cotton pajamas for a pair of trousers worn under a tighter, shorter skirt. Mükerrem bought her first Dutch skirt-and-trouser combination from a market with her husband. She wore them until she met another Turkish migrant woman who sewed a long dress for her.

Wearing such a dress was a transitory style for her, as it covered the body better than a skirt and blouse combination. Fashioning a new appearance with skirts was also a significant step. This introduced a different style of covering and posture that made Mükerrem feel good in her new environment. In her story, this change of style was necessary because her earlier appearance had caused problems and misunderstandings during encounters in her new location.

I came here in pajamas, aaah, at that time, who would dare to wear trousers in Turkey? (She became silent, indicating that nobody in her village would dare to do so, at least no one she knew.) I happened to be in the hospital, tending to my daughter. I wore pajamas when I went to the hospital at first. One of the nurses asked my husband ‘Why does your wife wear clothing like this?’ and another cleaning lady asked him ‘Why do you make your wife wear those clothes?’ Then we went to the market. We bought two pairs of trousers; I would not have worn them even if I knew I was going die. Then I got a long
dress tailored. [Who sewed it?] We had a relative in Rotterdam; she made it. I had to wear it when we were in the hospital. [Did you always wear pajamas underneath a long dress or skirt?] Of course, of course, what else could I have worn? In summer, they always said to me, ‘You wear a skirt, why don’t you wear stockings, too?’

When elderly women today reflect on and describe the new sartorial styles they adopted, they discuss each preference as a marker of shifting understandings of femininity and modesty in their new location. Some women combined long, tailored dresses with pajamas, trousers or stockings, while others tried to adopt the short Dutch skirts of the period, and combined them with trousers or nylon stockings. They tried to fashion a new, modern appearance that would erase the marks of poverty and a rural background. The more they succeeded in performing a modern, urban presence, the more successful they were as immigrants in general.

The importance of the rural-urban divide is quite evident when comparing the life stories of Mükerrem and Sibel. They both came to the Netherlands in the 1970s, but they wore different styles and came from very different backgrounds: Mükerrem wore a büzgülü maxi skirt and pajamas, and later adopted a skirt-and-trouser combination, while Sibel wore close-fitting skirts, nylon stockings or trousers. Their narratives about trousers and skirts reflect different notions and shifting practices of modesty. They had different lives in Turkey. Sibel used to go to the cinema twice a week with her friends; she frequently hosted social gatherings in her house. She always wore fashionable, modern clothes. Therefore, she did not have much difficulty adapting her style of dress in the Netherlands; she already had an urban style. In her opinion, this was the reason why Dutch people did not think she was from Turkey. Sibel only worked in part-time jobs in the Netherlands. She thinks that she was always treated differently from other migrant Turkish women because she wore more modern outfits.

On the other hand, Mükerrem never wore modern clothes before moving to the Netherlands. Her new life did not disappoint her in the way that it did Sibel as a woman. Mükerrem was exposed to other women’s lives; she bought new garments, which were more modern and feminine. When she remembers her early days in the Netherlands, she laughs at her own amazement and naivety. There were so many things that were completely new for her in the Netherlands. For instance, she told me how she was amazed when she first saw her neighbor with a vacuum cleaner. She kept watching her for a while; she had no clue what this machine that made so much noise was. She waited until evening to ask her husband about the
strange machine, and then she asked her husband to buy one. She started to vacuum her carpets, which she used to clean by shaking or washing them in front of her apartment.

Trousers, which Mükerrem found embarrassing to wear, enabled Sibel to find a cleaner, more comfortable job in the Netherlands. Changing styles allowed women to feel less stigmatized and more equal in their relationships with the others.

It happened all the time. It was 1977; I was working at a flower farm. There were five or six other women from Turkey. I was the only one who wore trousers and a blouse. My boss asked my help in communicating with Spanish and Italian workers. I said that I couldn’t help, I didn’t know their language. Then, my boss asked ‘Where are you from?’ I said I was Turkish. He said that Turks wear long skirts and cover their heads…Turks work in the fields with animal muck. They covered their mouths with their yazmas (rural cotton scarves) and worked there all day. Because I told them that I was Turk, they sent me there to work, but I wouldn’t go. The boss got angry when I told him that I was Turk. ‘How is that possible? You wear trousers, you are modern!’ he exclaimed. I talked to the director, and he called my boss and told him that I had come to complain. I told him that I knew why he did this to me: I didn’t help tourists (Spanish and Italian women) and I was a Turk.

Nevin’s story also provides another sharp example of the change in sartorial practices in the context of migration. It frequently took some time for women to be able to refashion the comfort of previous habits of clothing in combination with new aesthetic values. Nevin left her children behind with her parents in Turkey and joined her husband in the Netherlands in 1978. She only brought two skirts and two blouses in her suitcase. She remembers very well that when her two skirts were worn out, she had to buy her first Dutch skirt. At that time, it was almost impossible to find even a knee-length skirt in the Netherlands.

It was very difficult to find a skirt or dress that would extend to the knee. We had to wear the short skirts of the Dutch women. We could only wear them with trousers. When the skirts got longer, we threw the trousers away. At that time, we dressed this way, but now I never wear trousers under my skirt. [Why?] These skirts are long enough. Even my kids (she means her son-in-laws) haven’t seen me in trousers yet—I’m that sort of person. Trousers show your figure, for instance I do not take off this vest when men are present, it hides your breasts and hips. Look, now I am sitting alone, but even so I have my tülben (a thin fine cotton scarf), I tie it at the back (a style that leaves her neck and chest uncovered). Otherwise, I feel naked; it feels like I am entirely naked.

As Nevin’s account of her feelings of nakedness and discomfort shows, covering the body does not merely depend upon the presence of others; it is also embodied and habitual. One maintains a certain awareness of the body even in intimate spaces, regardless of the presence of others. This awareness is formed by a certain understanding of femininity and a
specific notion of modesty. It has less to do with a religious understanding of the private and the public (this divide is more socially-oriented, informed by the presence of others). Furthermore, even in the context of mahrem, women may not feel comfortable putting on garments other than long skirts. As we see in Nevin’s case, she does not like her sons-in-law to see her in the trousers that she sometimes wears at home. She is concerned about covering her body as an elderly woman, even in front of her family.

The wearers of “Dutch skirts” in the 1970s are elderly women today. Nowadays, they can find more suitable skirts for their practice of body covering and tesettür understandings. The first generation is still the largest group among tesettürlü women who prefer not to wear trousers. Their concerns in choosing which style of skirts to wear have changed, and their age plays a major role in their selections. As grandmothers or mothers-in-law, most of them do not consider trousers suitable for their age. An increasing variety of skirts in different models offer elderly women ways to display both their aesthetic preferences and their new status as elderly woman whose attractiveness is no longer an issue. Even though Nevin chooses subtle, dark colors, as she finds these more suitable to her age, her wardrobe also includes skirts of different colors and different materials, which match nicely with her blouses and headscarves.

From Büüzgüülü Long Skirts to Ready-Made Maxi Skirts

Tailoring a büüzgüülü skirt only requires very basic sewing skills. The name büüzgüülü comes from the skirt’s shape, which results from an elasticated band that gathers the fabric around the waist. This pattern is very similar to that of the şalvar, which women are easily able to sew themselves. Büüzgüülü skirts were loose and long; women often wore pajamas underneath them, as they had not yet adopted nylon stockings. Although this hybrid style hid the figure, it also fashioned a more feminine posture and appearance than the former şalvar. Furthermore, women who at first did not want to give up the comfort of baggy trousers gradually accepted new ideas of femininity and the more feminine, slim shape of the female body that büüzgüülü skirts encouraged. Büüzgüülü skirts can still be found in the wardrobes of elderly women today, as a less modern, less expensive and more practical style of skirt. They have also become an object of nostalgia, as migrant women long for the home country and the past.

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43Mahrem indicates those men for whom women do not need to cover (e.g. fathers, brothers, uncles, husbands).
Pelda’s description of fabrics and her explanation of why sewing is no longer relevant for migrant women together express women’s changing relationship with garments. As one of the few elderly women among my interlocutors, Pelda remembers sewing her own büzgülü skirts and entari. This was before her migration to the Netherlands. She had to sew her own garments because of her family’s poverty at the time; this was the only way to dress herself and her children. Her garments were often made from two types of cotton fabric called basma and pazen. Her preference for basma or pazen shifted according to the seasons, as the former is made of thinner fabrics whereas the latter is made of cotton flannel and designed for winter clothing. Different kinds of material were principally important to provide comfort to the body, rather than to create and impart an aesthetic posture.

Figure 19 Sewing kumaş skirts (below) requires sophisticated tailoring skills.

The materiality of clothing has always been significant to Turkish-Dutch women interlocutors, not only in the context of migration, but also in their prior lives in the village. The difference between rich and poor women was sharp, yet only evident on the basis the kind of fabrics used in their garments; the rich could afford to wear garments made of velvet, especially red velvet. As Pelda says, “only the rich could wear a red velvet dress,” while the poor only wore garments made of basma or pazen fabric, usually patterned with flowers and made of cotton. Büzgülü skirts evoke the poverty that Pelda experienced as a young woman.
In the past, we used to sew our own clothes. At that time, it was easy to sew. Now, there are circle skirts, tight skirts, pieced skirts; it is very difficult...I was very poor in the past. Now every month you have something new to wear; in the past, we had one or two outfits a year, no more than that.

Self-tailored büzgülü skirts gradually became indoor garments, just as şalvar and pajamas did at an earlier moment. Pelda nowadays prefers tailor-made skirts, especially because she has put on some extra weight. She has had a tailor in Istanbul for long time; he can tailor garments for her without seeing her in person. Pelda can now afford to buy or tailor her garments, and is able to wear more expressive clothing. Her wardrobe is very colorful. Furthermore, like other elderly women, she feels freer in choosing what to wear, as long as the garment covers her figure properly. In addition to the fabric, decorations and designs matter quite a lot for her. Each detail reveals a different aesthetics and an idea of femininity.

Figure 20 Pelda’s şalvar and a scene from her wardrobe: her favorite red velvet skirt and colorful blouse.

In one interview, a young tesettürlü woman described a key distinction among elderly women and their clothing preferences, based on the differentiation between ready-made or stylishly-tailored “kumaş etek” and self-tailored “büzgülü basma etek.” These two types of skirts articulate a strict distinction between elderly women who enjoy clothing, and therefore catch up with new trends, and those who cannot keep up with the times, and therefore live in
the sartorial past. The difference between women who are able to wear kumaş etek (ready-made skirts, made of jersey or wool) and those who still wear büzgülü basma skirts (made of cotton fabric) has become more and more visible in recent years.

Figure 21 Shopping for skirts in a market in The Hague.

Büzgülü skirts are still popular among elderly Turkish women in the Netherlands, even if these women rarely wear them outside the home or in social gatherings. This type of skirt has become inappropriate, even embarrassing, as it indicates that its wearer has still not adjusted to modern urban clothing. Wearing a büzgülü skirt was described as “resisting change” or “living in the past, living in the village.” This same style would not be interpreted this way in Anatolia today because it still maintains a certain functionality in village life (although this is not the case in Turkey’s large cities). In the Netherlands, however, this style does not adequately reflect urban ideas of femininity and understandings of the body in urban life. The büzgülü skirt today functions as a prayer skirt (namaz eteği); younger women only wear them on top of everyday clothes, for instance over their trousers, when they pray. The büzgülü skirt is loose and easy to put on over other layers of garments because of its elastic
waist. It hides more modern, urban styles of clothing during prayer, and therefore fashions a modest presence in the presence of God. In other words, the significance of religiosity in clothing changes according to the intimacy and intensity of religious experience throughout the day.


Are Skirts More “Islamic”?

By the 1980s, there were enough alternative styles of tesettür to suit different understandings of body covering and fashion concerns among Turkish-Dutch women. However, as an item of clothing for “conscious” Muslim women, skirts also gained new meanings. They became a new marker of ideal tesettür, at least for particular segments of the Turkish-Dutch community. Some pious women refused to include trousers in their wardrobes—in doing so, they often referred to a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad curses a man dressed like a woman and a woman dressed like a man. The “new veiling” gave skirts a new meaning and turned them into markers of religiosity. This fact is even more remarkable because gender-neutral garments, such as long dresses and şalvar, were worn by Muslim men and women in Anatolia for such a long time. They had not been considered as a matter of religiosity.

The controversy over skirts corresponded to the shift from the “habitual” to the “conscious” headscarf. In practice, however, the choice between trousers and skirts does not fit easily into these exclusive categories, as the following account reveals. Zehra is one of the few young women who rarely wear trousers. In general, she does not consider trousers suitable for outdoor tesettür practice. Unlike young women her age who wear fashionable outdoor tesettür garments, Zehra wears long, loose-fitting overcoats. On the other hand, she generally prefers to wear trousers at home. She enjoys the comfort of trousers, yet she would never wear them in front of others in public. At the time of our interview, she only had two pairs of black trousers, which she sometimes combines with long dresses. However, these trousers always remain under her long overcoat if she is outside. When she puts on trousers, she pays great attention to ensure that her long pardösü conceals them. She enjoys the comfortable feel of trousers, but they do not fit her conception of proper tesettür. Her sartorial
preferences reflect her commitment to following the interpretation of the hadith mentioned above. Indeed, this hadith remains significant when women discuss trousers and skirts. For Zehra, her mother’s tesettür is more devout because she never puts on trousers:

My mother pays greater attention to her tesettür. She never wears trousers. This is rare. [What does she think about trousers, did you talk about it?] Of course we did, there is a hadith behind it. Our Prophet told women that they should not dress like men. Well, there are certain skirts…if you wear trousers you look more well-mannered (edepli) than you would look wearing these skirts. My mother does not wear trousers, nor does she wear those types of skirts.

Nonetheless, it is quite difficult to draw strict boundaries between men’s and women’s clothing in contemporary fashions, especially in relation to the religious differences between skirts and trousers. Moreover, the proliferation of new fashions and styles makes it difficult to comprehend one’s preference for trousers or skirts merely in religious terms. On the one hand, some skirts risk highlighting the figure of body in a sexy way, which is not proper to tesettür, while on the other hand, modest combinations of long tunics or dresses with trousers display a rather devout understanding of tesettür. Moreover, this controversy also raises the question of why şalvar (baggy trousers) has not been challenged. Even if baggy trousers vary in terms of material and color, both men and women used to wear baggy trousers, as well as long robes. At least in terms of form, these garments were almost exactly the same.

In our conversations, women consistently articulated the difference between wearing a skirt and a pair of trousers in relation to the presence of others and the occasion (in terms of time and place). Women choose to put on different forms of skirts when they go to religious meetings. These skirts are often loose-fitting and long. In these mosque gatherings, some participants consider performing a more modest appearance as pious act; however, they also like to be visible and seen as attractive at other times. The choice of this particular style of skirt also demonstrates an individual’s commitment to the above-mentioned hadith. This style should be modern and fashionable, while simultaneously fitting within certain limits of modesty and piety. It should also correspond to the community’s general taste, which is shaped by both the spirituality of the meeting and the backgrounds of the participants. A different posture and mode of femininity are thus displayed in a modest way, which is only possible when wearing skirt.
Long, covering outdoor modes of *tesettür* (çarşaf and pardösu) allow women to blur and thereby overcome the distinction between wearing trousers and skirts. Underneath the çarşaf or pardösu, women wear whatever garment they find comfortable and aesthetically pleasing, and can hide or reveal their sartorial preferences as they like. Wearing çarşaf or a long overcoat gives women the advantage of shifting among styles occasionally. They can enjoy the comfort of trousers under their outer garments when there is a mixed crowd. When they prefer a more chic feminine style, they can remove their outer garments and display their skirts. However, there are many contrasting opinions about and practices of wearing skirts and trousers. For instance, while some çarşaf wearers are strongly against wearing trousers, others adapt trousers to their understanding of *tesettür* in terms of comfort and protection. It is important to note that even though the çarşaf (whether a combination of overcoat and cloak or
skirt and cloak) mostly hides what women wear indoors, the question of whether one wears trousers or a skirt still matters. Hanne, for instance, is a çarşaf wearer who enjoys the comfort of trousers underneath her çarşaf. She often wears long dresses (ferace) and trousers. In her understanding of tesettür, trousers are significant because they are more practical and comfortable than long, loose skirts.

Figure 23 Trousers under long overcoats and tunics or blouses (with different preferences of length).

In Hanne’s account, wearing trousers under a long dress is a sign of modesty that underlines a devout understanding of tesettür. A pair of trousers fashions a modest appearance; furthermore, they allow her to move freely due to their protective quality. They widen the range of different bodily movements and allow women to display different notions of femininity. This, in turn, relates to an active lifestyle that is modern and urban, even as it is also reminiscent of the comfort of baggy trousers and pajamas, two rural garments that do not fit well in modern, secular public spaces.
Niyet (intention) plays a major role in women’s narratives of tesettür, especially in relation to women’s sartorial preferences and interpretations of religious texts and sayings about clothing. As a hoca, Hanne is hesitant to label anything haram (forbidden) in absolute terms, including trousers:

In Islam, it is difficult to categorize something as forbidden directly. Why should trousers be haram in Islam? What would be the guilt of a pair of trousers? I don’t think it is right to call trousers haram for women. First of all, when they are under my dress, they are not trousers but pajamas. If you seek an answer in Islamic sources, you see that our Prophet tells women that they should wear a layer that protects them against falling and the wind.

Different individuals interpret wearing trousers in different ways. Hanne refers to another hadith to strengthen her argument that trousers are practical and protective. The reason and intention behind wearing a garment is crucial. If the aim of a garment is protection, this garment does not become haram simply because it is called “pantolon” (trousers). In this hadith, the Prophet Muhammad prays for a woman from his caravan. When she unfortunately falls from a camel, the Prophet immediately turns his back. The woman responds by saying “rahat ol” (do not worry) and tells him that she is covered because she is wearing a layer under her outer garments.44

Hanne is critical of the fact that some teachers show no tolerance for trousers. For some hocas, wearing trousers under a dress or an overcoat is a sin, but wearing full-length pajamas (which could be as tight as modern trousers) is not. To them, pajamas express provincial, local tastes and women’s relationship with the past: they show an individual’s attitude of disinterestedness in the present and, thus, their disregard for life in this world. Trousers are urban and modern attire, and for these hocas modern trousers do not produce adequate modes of modesty and femininity. Hanne, however, expresses a contrasting view of trousers:

Trousers are part of my tesettür [What about stockings?] I do not wear stockings, because when you step on elevated things the wind might blow and disturb your garments. Your legs might show. Conservatives (bumaz) say that when you put on flower-patterned underwear ‘don’ (the name of a type of underwear that covers the legs just below the knee), this is an aspect of worship. Well, I ask them, when I wear black trousers for the same purpose, when the function is the same, is that a sin?

As a hoca herself, Hanne argues that religious teachers are responsible for explaining the boundaries of Islamic clothing, but at the same time they must take care to be reasonable.

44 This hadith is recorded in Munavi, Fayz-al Kadir, 1: 109-110.
about what they say to their students. In religious classes, one can find girls and women who favor various different styles, including some who are not tesettürlü yet at all. It is important for Hanne that her lessons suit the current times, as well as being within the boundaries of Islamic teachings and practices. From her perspective, the notion of *haram* must be understood in a balanced way in order to make sense in the everyday lives of Turkish-Dutch tesettür wearers.

If you say that a pair of trousers is *haram*, you need to explain this. You have to say why this is so. For instance, nobody understands what you are saying because in this society (Dutch society), a woman does not wear men’s clothing (trousers in particular) in order to look like a man. It is normal for women to wear trousers. The hadith in question referred to a man who tries to look like a woman in order to display his sexual inclinations (*meyil*).45

According to Hanne’s understanding of clothing, why you wear a garment is as important as what you wear. There is a strong mutual relation between what we wear and how we feel about ourselves. Hanne refers to the hadith at the level of inclinations and intentions because she thinks that the act of wearing trousers does not inherently constitute a gender transformation or manifest such a transformation to others in our times.

**Skirts in the Presentation of Piety**

The majority of women prefer to wear a skirt when they participate in religious meetings. Mosque meetings and religious gatherings at homes are unique because they bring acquaintances from diverse backgrounds together. On these occasions, family members, relatives, friends, neighbors and other members of the migrant community come together. They constitute a more homogenous audience with a more refined taste and critical understanding of tesettür clothing than that of passersby on the Dutch streets. Furthermore, these occasions produce a spiritual atmosphere in which women become more aware of their words and deeds. They contemplate their own understandings of piety and reflect on how they practice and attempt to nourish this piety every day. In doing so, they bring the representational aspect of clothing to the fore.

45 “The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) cursed the man who dressed like a woman and the woman who dressed like a man.” This hadith is recorded in the authoritative collection of Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 32, Kitab El-Libas, Number 4087, narrated by the Companion of the Prophet, Abu Hurayrah.
Women draw a distinction between the functional and representational aspects of wearing trousers and skirts. They occasionally change their preferences with regard to wearing skirts or trousers. Sevde is a young woman who wears both skirts and trousers. However, for her, there are places and occasions in which the difference between wearing a skirt and trousers becomes more of an issue. Like many other women, Sevde considers skirts more elegant and feminine than trousers, but there are still some contexts in which the comfort of trousers is more important to her. On the other hand, religious meetings are contexts in which she considers wearing a skirt appropriate. Sevde is an active member in the Gülen movement, but she also follows the programs of other Turkish religious communities in the Netherlands. As an active community member, she thinks that her style and appearance also plays an important representational role in the movement. Through her clothing and appearance, she tries to present her values and way of life as a practicing Muslim woman.

I always wear skirts to religious meetings; I would never go to such a context wearing trousers. I think that this context has a tensil keyfiyeti (representative quality). [How?] When I say tensil keyfiyeti I mean that if there is a religious meeting, if the Quran will be read, if the words of God will be recited, you should pay a greater attention to what you say and do. For instance, you should not wear close fitting trousers…I never criticize anyone by asking ‘Why did you wear this?’ but I never wear such garments myself. I believe that there is such a strong spirituality in this context that angels fill the room. [How about the combination of tunic and trousers?] No, I do not wear that either.

The sense of spirituality attached to these contexts plays an essential role in clothing preferences. In these meetings, women share and nourish spirituality as a common experience, but they also learn and share certain community tastes and understandings of tesettür.

In his writings and sermons, the contemporary Turkish theologian Fethullah Gülen often employs the notion of keyfiyet and its representational role in Muslims’ life. Keyfiyet literally means “quality” or “nature”. In his writings, Gülen discusses notion of keyfiyet along with the idea of kemmiyet, which literally means “quantity.” He describes keyfiyet as “the manifestation of Muslim values in a person’s attitude, behavior, saying and thinking, in other words, it is the internalization of the Muslim way of life, its embodiment, to achieve deeper knowledge of the self.”\(^{46}\) With the notion of keyfiyet, Sevde refers to the representational aspect of her Muslim identity and her visible presence.

Clothing is a significant means for fashioning a proper feminine posture, which becomes even more important when women attend religious meetings. Even though there are no men present in these contexts, Sevde pays greater attention to her words and deeds, and her clothing preferences are particularly crucial, as they are visually communicative. Especially when she is with the members of the community, she is not only an individual, but also a representative of a certain understanding of a Muslim way of life. In her long, stylish skirt, she can perform a proper femininity, which she feels represents her Muslim identity as a member of the community.

Furthermore, sartorial preferences demonstrate an individual’s respect for and commitment to the gathering. This is different from displaying respect for the elderly or family members, which I mentioned previously. This display of respect reveals one’s affiliation with and concern for the understanding of femininity in *tesettür* and according to community values. As a member of a particular community, Sevde wants to show that she acknowledges and affirms a certain understanding of *tesettür* when she attends a religious gathering. Showing respect requires not only fashioning a particular style of *tesettür*, it also demands the display of a certain body language. This display is not always harmonious with one’s personality. It often requires hard work and internal struggle.

For Sevde, the image of the “ağır abla” represents the ideal woman in her community. * Ağır* literally means heavy in Turkish, but in this context it denotes a wise and mature person in the community. The image of ağır abla embodies and represents the model Muslim woman for Sevde. Besides being a practicing Muslim, the ağır abla is a hardworking, mature, patient, mothering, calm, and worthy individual. As an ideal persona, she is a moral figure whom other women refer to when they talk about being a good Muslim. The ağır abla is more aware of her body movements and their effects on the others. Her body movements indicate a certain awareness and reflect a disciplined will. A slowness and rhythm in the motion of her body also signifies a modest understanding of femininity. In sum, the ağır abla is an ideal that women refer to when they criticize their own choices, words and deeds:

*I am a rather relaxed (rahat) person. Here we are at home, but when you go outside and interact with strangers, you represent others (i.e. Muslims in general). I was never a calm (ağır), serious person. I admire ağır abla(s) yet I could never be one. For instance, when I wear trousers, I sometimes sit with my legs apart at the bus stop, or I sit with my legs crossed, but you cannot do this if you are wearing a long overcoat. You cannot sit with your legs apart.*

As Sevde explains, her sartorial preferences allow her to create a more modest, pious posture. When she mentions sitting with her legs apart, Sevde refers to a less feminine, less
modest posture, which she does not think embodies Muslim values. Each posture causes one’s body to feel differently and produces different effects on others. Even if Sevde could never become an ağır abla herself, she strives to better represent her way of life as a Muslim by wearing skirts for special occasions such as religious gatherings.

In other contexts, comfort and practicality are more important than a pious understanding of femininity. One such context is travel; Sevde does not wear skirts when she is travelling. She is the mother of small twins and a seven-year-old boy. When she is travelling, she does not care much about whether her appearance fits with a devout understanding of femininity. Her priority is to be able to act efficiently with her three children. Therefore, in these contexts she only wears trousers with long tops and cardigans. Wearing a skirt would disable certain movements of the body. Sevde does not want to look like a mother who cares more about her appearance than the comfort of her children. Performing proper motherhood and dressing according to the needs and expectations of the particular moment are more important to her. Not fulfilling her role as a mother would be more stigmatizing than not performing a particular understanding of tesettür.

3. Styling the Personal

A Passion for Tailoring

Even if new trends and urban lifestyles have promoted wearing trousers together with long tops (tunics, blouses, cardigans, dresses, etc.) in tesettür clothing since 1990, skirts maintain a unique place in the wardrobes of tesettür wearers. As I mentioned above, there are certain occasions during which women prefer to wear a skirt because it explicitly merges a particular aesthetic and a notion of pious modesty. Not doing so in such contexts could be seen as inappropriate or disrespectful. Some young women do consider kumaş maxi skirts old-fashioned—because such skirts are produced in standard models, they are not taken to reflect personal tastes and understandings of femininity. As a solution, sewing one’s own skirt has become more popular among young women. Sewing helps women create their own styles, which synthesize different notions of aesthetics and interpretations of tesettür. This section
explores how women fashion personal styles with long skirts, and thereby articulate their understanding of tesettür and sense of femininity in various settings as young professionals.

In their accounts, young women often made statements such as “I do not like the Turkish style or classic skirts.” Young women try both to adopt the aesthetics of Turkish tesettür clothing and to personalize their tesettür. Creative, personalized adaptations succeed in distinguishing their long skirts from the “classic” Turkish skirt and outdated notions of femininity and religiosity.47 Young women do not like to wear old-fashioned, undecorated, long, straight-cut skirts in dark colors; on the other hand, they also do not consider the contemporary models of long skirts prevalent in the Dutch market compatible with their personal preferences and understandings of piety. The story of two fashionable Turkish-Dutch women, Azize and Latife, who are also young entrepreneurs in the Dutch tesettür market,48 illustrates the general desire to fashion a personal aesthetics in tesettür clothing.

We sewed seventy skirts, we used to make three or four skirts in one week...we did not know how to sew, but we had a passion for clothing...a tenacity. We always imagined colorful skirts and thought about combining them with other fashions. We always came up with something unique and different. Then, you must ask yourself how to make it. You sit at your sewing machine; you have to make them yourself. Or you have to give your design to a tailor to make it for you; we did that too. We love clothing, and we love colors. We could not find what we wanted in the market...we thought it would be better if we made it ourselves.

The growing interest in sewing is not a result of poverty or necessity, in contrast to what we hear in the accounts of first generation women. Rather, sewing is a means to fashion a unique, personal taste within the norms of tesettür. Sewing allows women to fashion their own style while also enabling them to bring together disparate fashions with a particular understanding of tesettür. An increasing number of young women have become interested in sewing, and they participate in tailoring courses in order to learn how to produce their own clothing. With the ability to sew for themselves, young women are able to determine the length and looseness of their garments as they wish; simultaneously, they incorporate

47 A skirt is not “Turkish” or “classic” simply because the label reads “made in Turkey”—skirts in chain stores such as Zara, H&M and Mango also bear this label—but because a set of unique ornaments and a distinctive shape give skirts a Turkish character. The main difficulty with long skirts in mainstream fashions is that they are not always available. Tesettür companies in Turkey produce long skirts in a wide range of designs and materials. This is why most of the long skirts in the wardrobes of my interlocutors are often originally from Turkey.

48 These young women are tesettür coiffeurs; they make and sell fashionable head-coverings that match young women’s party dresses. For more detail about tesettür coiffeurs, see Chapter Six on festive dress.
aesthetics from different styles and trends that are not always available in ready-made covered styles of clothing.

Denim Skirts

Denim was absent in the tesettür scene up until the 1990s, as I mentioned in the overcoat chapter. Although tesettür producers introduced denim to the tesettür clothing market “from head to toe” (e.g. denim-patterned headscarves, blouses, bags, boots, etc.), from that time forward, not all young women preferred the styles and quality of these companies. In the absence of desired styles of long denim skirts—especially if wearing jeans is compatible with one’s tesettür understanding—converting jeans to long skirts is an option. This creative refashioning also illustrates the desire to distance one’s personal style from the old-fashioned, classic kumaş skirts.

Denim skirts quickly replaced the “classic” plain-colored maxi skirts, which had previously been used to produce “safe” combinations. Like any other garment made of denim, long denim skirts create a certain sense of comfort and a safe feeling, both because of their easy adaptability in various combinations and because the fabric itself induces a feeling of anonymity by highlighting a shared taste with a large number of people, as I discussed in the denim overcoat section.

Long, close-fitting denim skirts have become one of the most commonly worn styles in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. Denim skirts are often embellished with big pockets or shiny zippers, or occasionally with rivets or beads. Unlike mainstream mini or knee-length denim skirts, these skirts are long. Both the growing tesettür market in Turkey and the mainstream clothing industry offer various models with colors and designs that change from one season to another. As we see in the following accounts, women still like to fashion their own apparel.
Asira is young, fashionable woman from Amsterdam. She prefers Replay jeans, which she converts into skirts, because this is a well-known, expensive jean brand; it is familiar to her colleagues and friends, and different from that of any other long denim “Turkish” skirt. Brand names also play a significant role in rescuing the long skirt from its former connotations of old-fashioned rurality.

I searched for a long denim skirt for quite a while…I wanted to wear denim skirts but there weren’t any (she means long denim skirts). Then, I bought a pair of denim trousers. I went to the tailor and had the trousers tailored as a skirt. I bought some fabric [Can you show me?], and the tailor undid the trouser legs. I told her to put this fabric in between the legs. [You bought the black fabric?] Yes, I bought it from the marketplace for three euros. (She touches the fabric.) You can recognize from the texture that it is from a pair of jeans. This is Replay (a very popular brand in the Netherlands). I bought a pair of Replay jeans and had this skirt made from them.
Jeans that would not fit within an individual’s understanding of tesettür are transformed into attire that is compatible with tesettür. Making a skirt from a pair of jeans also adds a different feel to the garment. Such a skirt has a thicker texture and conceals one’s figure more effectively. Furthermore, this sort of skirt has the unique cut of fashionable jeans and a visible brand label. Other young women converted fashionable jeans into denim tesettür skirts, too. Tailoring a long skirt from a pair of jeans entails the transformation of a garment that displays the shape of the body into a garment that conceals the body. The long denim skirt brings together different elements that some tesettürlü women desire. It is a mix of high quality, comfort, a certain taste and a particular understanding of body covering.

It is difficult to link this phenomenon to a particular understanding of tesettür, because women who follow diverse practices of tesettür fancy denim skirts converted from jeans.
Ceylin is a twenty-five-year-old university student. At the time of our interview, she was very confused about her *tesettür*. She no longer sees wearing a headscarf as central to her understanding of modesty and piety. Her story is at the margins of *tesettür*, as she situates herself in between *tesettür* and non- *tesettür* practices. She first put on a headscarf when she was seventeen. Although she still follows a certain style of *tesettür*, she is highly critical about her initial adoption of *tesettür* because it was not the result of a conscious decision.

On several occasions throughout our conversation, Ceylin repeated that she would come out of *tesettür*, if only she could be sure that she would not have any regrets after doing so. A year later, I received an email from her updating me about the many things that had changed in her life. She is now married and no longer wears a headscarf. She wears both skirts and trousers, yet her favorite is the denim skirt:

I wanted to buy a long denim skirt but I couldn’t find one. You might find one, but it has a deep slit...then I said to myself, ‘It doesn’t matter how much it costs, when I find a denim skirt I will buy it.’ However, I still couldn’t find one, so I said, ‘Let’s make a skirt from a pair of jeans.’ I had not seen this before, but I had heard about it. I talked to a tailor and asked whether she could make a skirt in this way. She said she had never heard of such thing...she said ‘I have never done this, but let’s give it a try.’ And she did very well.

Denim skirts may become an alternative for women later in life, especially for those who would like to fashion a style that differs from that of classic *kumaş* skirts. Wearing denim skirts highlights individual differences among middle-aged women. As I briefly mentioned when relating her migration story in the chapter on *pardösü*, Fatma Nur is a forty-three-year-old *tesettür*li woman; during her time at university, she was the only young migrant woman there. Currently, she runs social care and aid projects for elderly members of the Dutch-Turkish community. She also has a very active life in the *Diyanet* mosque as a volunteer. Her story is distinctive because she adopted *tesettür* at a very late age. For long time, she was an active member in the Holland Turkish Women’s Union, an organization dedicated to labor rights. She spent a lot of time with the leading leftist artists and politicians of the period from Turkey in Amsterdam. She typically wore jeans, a turtleneck jumper (with short sleeves in the summer) and a brown leather jacket in photographs from the time.

Fatma Nur often prefers to wear long skirts. On summer days, she prefers loose cotton trousers, as she does not find stockings comfortable. But denim skirts are her favorite. To some extent, she likes standardized clothing, and feels protected by the limits that such garments set for her. From just a glance at her wardrobe, it is possible to see that functionality and simplicity are important for her. Functionality shapes her understanding of modesty to a
large extent. It also endows her style with a plain appearance. Fatma Nur cares about the quality of the fabrics she wears in terms of both comfort and health. She does not hesitate to invest in quality materials. Denim skirts fashion a more gender-neutral look than other long skirts. She enjoys a more casual urban style. Her sartorial preferences are different from those of her friends the same age.

I have friends who wear flashy garments, with many ornaments. I tell them that they look nice, but I cannot wear such things. Such shiny garments, they look good on some people. If I wear the same garment, however, it feels as if everybody is looking at me. If something makes me feel this way, I cannot wear it. I feel strange...you know the kind of fabric. There is more nylon stuff in Turkey; I never wear nylon. Jersey fabric, I would never wear that either.

At work, Fatma Nur pays greater attention to her clothing, especially because she thinks that her outfit and posture also represent her employer. Her account reveals that she revises and adjusts her understanding of modesty and sartorial practice according to this particular context.

If I am going to work, and I know that I have meetings all day long, then I pay attention to what I wear, because I represent my employer. My appearance is important, it should be pleasing to the eye. [How so?] For instance, last Thursday I went to work. I put on a denim skirt and a black jacket. I wore a short-sleeved blue shirt, and a black-and-blue colored scarf...I dislike things that attract too much attention.

For Fatma Nur, denim skirts and jacket combinations feel appropriate in the workplace. Fatma Nur’s wardrobe expresses a particular understanding of modesty. She buys clothes that are easy to wash and do not need ironing. The most important thing for her is to be able to easily combine any particular garment with the rest of her clothing. Time is very precious for Fatma Nur, and she considers spending time on her clothing wasteful. Denim skirts fit with her active lifestyle. They look smart and energetic on her as a professional.

Although Fatma Nur thinks that women her age in general should adopt more decorated, feminine fashions, she continues to wear simple, somewhat gender-neutral garments. For her, denim skirts solve the everyday dilemma of clothing. They are easy to put on, and combine well with different accessories for different occasions. They fashion a “safe mode” for their wearers. The principles of comfort and simplicity that denim skirts display constitute a different sense of femininity and modesty. Fatma Nur dislikes skirts made of Jersey (a kind of fabric that is typically stretchy and thin), which displays the body’s figure. Long denim skirts are alternatives to the “classic” Turkish style. They produce a more
professional look, and allow middle-aged women to fashion a personal style different from the typical image of the migrant woman.

Young Professionals in Skirts and Trousers

Young women attribute different meanings to particular styles of skirt, each of which highlights different notions of femininity and modesty. The life cycle has a significant effect on how these meanings evolve. Professional life requires young women to fashion skirts and trousers in more formal and sophisticated ways. Trousers and skirts signify different things in the workplace than they do in religious meetings, for example. Moreover, a woman in tesettür who wears skirts or trousers communicates different messages to Dutch viewers than she does to members of the Turkish religious communities. This section will focus on the place of skirts and trousers in changing personal styles when young women become professionals.

Ebrar is a young woman who sought to change her wardrobe and sartorial sensibility after beginning her professional life. She works as an account manager in a Dutch firm, where she prepares yearly income and tax reports for companies and entrepreneurs. After a few negative experiences with her customers, she began to suspect that her clothing choices caused her to be less trusted and treated in an inferior manner to her male colleagues. Ebrar decided to pay more attention to her outfits at work. In her opinion, both her gender and her tesettür make her customers think that she is not sufficiently skilled and professional. She believes that her tesettür makes it more difficult to deal with the already gendered perceptions of her customers.

Ebrar distances herself from the stereotype of a Turkish woman with a long, old-fashioned skirt, which evokes the image of an elderly migrant woman walking through the bazaar with heavy grocery bags; she seeks a style that strengthens her position as a professional. Her favorite combination is that of knee-length dresses with modern trousers. Such a combination looks more fashionable, as it shows the body’s shape more closely than tunics. Completing this outfit with a jacket on top, she creates a professional, formal look.

I am gradually changing my style from skirts to trousers. Trousers keep you warm. They are more comfortable. In fact, I could wear trousers with skirts, but I feel less formal in a skirt...when I put on trousers and a jacket, my outfit is more formal. When Turkish costumers come, if you have a skirt on, they see you as housewife. [Do Dutch costumers think the same thing?] I don’t think so,
because our Turks look and think differently. Their wives wear skirts and are always at home. This is the Turkish prejudice about women in skirts. For the Dutch, wearing a skirt is more about religiosity. They think you live for your religion. Our women often go shopping in marketplaces, they carry grocery bags, and they often wear long skirts. I think that is why the skirt has this image.

Stylish skirts with more cosmopolitan aesthetics have also become popular in the wardrobes of professional tesettürlü women. The “Istanbul style” (İstanbul tarzi) increasingly dominates the tesettür scene both within Turkey and in the Turkish diaspora, women still recognize crucial differences among garments both in terms of quality and aesthetics. In the Netherlands, they find skirts sold in Turkish stores old-fashioned and in bad taste. Such skirts generally lack the desired cosmopolitan or “Istanbul” aesthetic, and they are low in quality for their relatively high prices. On the other hand, skirts sold in mainstream clothing stores are often very tight and made of thinner fabrics, and therefore display the figure of the body.49

Evrem is a twenty-one-year-old tesettürlü woman from Amsterdam. She works as an optician. Her style has changed visibly since she started her profession as an optician. She had a difficult time finding a proper job. In fact, one of her attempts to procure a position ended with a court case at the discrimination bureau in Amsterdam. Her prospective employer told her directly that her appearance was not suitable because of her headscarf. She eventually won the case. The everyday dilemma of clothing has become more challenging and complicated for tesettürlü women in professional life. Evrem faced similar prejudices and distrust from her customers. Young professional tesettürlü women face a more difficult task because they have to deal with the negative effects of their tesettür. In order to cope with these negative effects, they need to fashion a personal style within the boundaries of certain understandings of modesty and piety.

Even if young tesettürlü professionals are not interested in fashioning such a style, others, especially employers, often ask them to do so. If they do not, they may lose their jobs. They need to pay more attention to their clothing in order to highlight their professional skills. By displaying a certain understanding of beauty and fashion, young tesettürlü women highlight commonalities with their customers. At their workplaces, style and aesthetics become more important than gendered perceptions of wearing trousers and skirts.

49 Although the gap between what is called the Anatolian market and the more urban regions of Turkey is increasingly disappearing, the same company might produce the same garment with different qualities of textile for rural and urban regions, and designers know that certain models sell well in Anatolia, but not in the big cities. For instance, while flower-pattern satin headscarves sell better in rural regions, more geometrical, abstract patterned silk scarves are primarily produced for urban areas.
sophisticated style can erase the effect of tesettür as a clothing preference that otherwise devalues one’s professional knowledge and skills. Evrem’s change in style is different from the change that Ebrar made. Rather than wearing trousers, she continues to wear skirts, but in a highly fashionable manner. She favors the more cosmopolitan “İstanbul tarzi.” She has adopted new trends and items from the Istanbul fashion scene with the help of cousins who live in Turkey. Evrem employs the “İstanbul style” to protect her clothing from the prejudices of others.

They didn’t let me wear Converse All-Stars and so forth. I wore them in the beginning. I was very casual; I wore jeans and a colorful headscarf. Then the costumers began to ask, ‘Do you work here?’ They were surprised to see someone in a headscarf. ‘Ah! Are you going to conduct my vision test? Can you do such a thing?’ They did not trust me. Whenever I put on skirts, boots, or a jacket and blouse with a chic headscarf, watch or jewelry, then there was sense of trust. I walk around in high-heeled shoes; when I dress up, I feel good. It seems that they want me to dress chic.

Evrem’s choice went the opposite way, from jeans to skirts, as jeans are often not considered proper professional clothing. Fashioning a proper appearance relies not only the choice between skirts or trousers, but also on the kinds of skirts or trousers one chooses. The skirts that Evrem finds suitable for her style are not the long, loose skirts characteristic of migrant women. They are short enough to display her boots, and she wears them combined with short, tight-fitting jackets. Like Evrem, many young professionals (covered or not) feel the need to change their style in the context of the workplace. Sometimes, they are directly asked to make changes to their appearance in order to look presentable. Through certain accessories, women are able to add a personal touch to their outfits and thus feel empowered. Fashioning an individual style challenges the image of the tesettürlü woman as less professional but more religious.

Medeni Türk Kızı: Wearing Long Skirts in Family Settings

The decision to wear a skirt rather than trousers cannot be explained exclusively on the basis of religious references and interpretations. Motivations and inspirations for this sartorial choice are also associated with certain family values, which in turn highlight particular meanings of womanhood and the role of women as family members. For some tesettürlü women, wearing a skirt is a strict, unchanging, habitual practice, but more importantly it is
also a marker of a certain understanding of femininity. These women only wore trousers when they were small children. Because skirts fashion a more feminine appearance than trousers, they continue to be more attractive to teenage girls. To wear skirts with a proper posture requires a high level of awareness of the body’s movements. In general, kumaş skirts are no longer attractive for most young tesettürlü women, because they consider these skirts too old-fashioned or “classic” for their taste. Nevertheless, they all remember well the period during their childhood when they patiently waited their turn to wear kumaş skirts of their own.

Habibe is a Turkish-Dutch woman who only wears skirts. In her professional life, she has received a lot of attention as a successful, young, recognizably Muslim woman in the Netherlands.

I do not wear trousers; I wear skirts. [You don’t have any trousers?] No, I don’t have any trousers, I do not think they suit me, and I’m not used to wearing them. I am short—I don’t think they look good on me. I was raised in trousers, I wore them until I was eight or nine, then I stopped, or rather I was asked to stop… I always wore a skirt from then on. Now skirts are trendy, there are very beautiful suits.

For Habibe, wearing a skirt communicates a certain message about her values and her way of life as a woman. Through this particular style, she affirms her role as a woman in the eyes of her family and relatives. For instance, the way she sits with her long skirts when in the presence of elderly people or her parents shows that she acknowledges them in a respectful manner.

Habibe describes her style as classic; she considers this to be a safe style. She does not need to bother catching up on recent trends or taking the risk of creating fashionable outfit combinations. In her opinion, this safe style saves her both time and money. As she would emphasize, she has skirts and jackets in her wardrobe that she can wear for ten years without any modification. She prefers skirts in plain colors, loose and long. For her, skirts guide their wearers by forming a particular bodily posture, which is appropriate in certain contexts.

For instance, let me put it this way, when I wear a skirt I have to sit properly; I sit like this (she shows how she makes sure that her skirt covers her legs properly). You place your legs on top of one another. You do this when elderly people are around, or in an official context. You can sit comfortably (laid-back) too, but when you cross your legs, you must place this layer under your leg. You squeeze the skirt, so it does not show anything…

Through these explicit practices, Habibe preserves notions of femininity and modesty that are accepted in her close network, particularly in her family. She feels embarrassed when she even thinks of herself in trousers. Her feelings about a possible shift from skirts to
trousers recall her mother Pelda’s feelings of discomfort and embarrassment when she first came out of çarşaf and adopted a close fitting overcoat, a story which I discussed in the overcoat chapter. As Habibe emphasizes, wearing skirts properly is a long-term discipline through which the body learns how to sit and move in skirts. Older female relatives often tell younger women to “put on your skirt” when guests are coming for a visit. Another frequently heard imperative is “sit properly!” (düzgün otur!), which aims to correct the body movements of young skirt wearers.

Habibe’s style has remained almost exactly the same for many years. This is her style; it simultaneously represents her idea of womanhood both professionally and as a member of her family. By combining two different understandings of femininity, she produces a unique style with her skirts. On one hand, she is an ambitious professional, even “aggressive” in her work, as she says. On the other hand, as a single woman and oldest daughter, her style affirms her respect for the values of her family. In a way, Habibe transforms the classic style of her wardrobe into a new personal style.

The motivations and inspirations involved in fashioning one’s style depend quite a lot on context. For instance, some young women would not feel very comfortable in trousers in the presence of their elderly parents, although they find trousers suitable for the workplace or university. Serap explains how wearing a skirt produces different meanings for the Dutch and Turkish communities. She thinks that from the Dutch perspective wearing a long skirt is more about piety; it is about Islamic orthodoxy rather than gender difference. Serap considers herself a tesettürlü Muslim woman, but not an orthodox one. She strictly avoids wearing skirts when she socializes with Dutch people. She thinks that the stereotypical image of the Turkish girl in long skirts is excessively rigid. Even if the skirt is orange—the symbolic color of the Dutch Royal family and the Netherlands more generally—it remains stigmatizing. It still produces feelings of otherness for her.

It doesn’t matter how good your Dutch is, how good your education is, when you wear a skirt, they think you are excessively orthodox. Even if you have a skirt that is orange in color, even if you say that you are Dutch, it does not matter—in the end a skirt is a skirt. They look at your skirt, not its color or its combination with other garments. If I am going to a place where there will be Dutch people, I wear a dress with skinny jeans underneath or a chic pair of trousers. Well…I try to dress up in this way.
At the same time, as mentioned before, kumaş skirts might be the safest, most appropriate attire to wear to family gatherings or the meetings of religious communities. Serap refers the word “medeni” (civilized/urbane), which highlights the young, urban, chic aspects of her style. The definitive outfit of the “medeni Türk kızı” (urbane Turkish girl) is basically a combination of a blouse and a normal black or perhaps dark blue skirt; it has become prominently present in various Turkish religious communities.

I cannot wear these trousers everywhere. People (from the Turkish community) view them differently. Well, you cannot call them trousers but you can’t call them a skirt either. (On the day of interview she was wearing a skirt-trouser combination.) There is always something to say, there is always an excuse. I would never put this on when I go to visit my family. For instance, if I were to visit my mother’s friends with my mom while wearing such an outfit, I am sure that I would provoke negative reactions. They would say, ‘Is it a skirt or what?’ ‘It’s too tight,’ and so on. But when I bought this outfit, I paid attention
to all that. For the events and gatherings that are organized by the Turkish community, I prefer to dress like a medeni Turkish girl.

Wearing a skirt at home or at one’s workplace also produces different feelings and modalities of femininity for Evrem.

If I wear a skirt at home, when guests arrive, I have such a different feeling… I feel mature. It feels lady-like (hanım hanımcık). If I put on a skirt and wear high-heeled shoes or boots outside, I feel myself present, confident. You walk in this manner: ‘tıkır tıkır’ (with a sharp rhythm and sound). The skirt should not be too long, well, about this long (she points out a length that is a hand span higher than her ankles). You wear high-heeled shoes or boots, a bit modern. Then I feel strong as a woman. On days when I want to feel like a strong woman I wear an outfit like this.

Even if the headscarf is an unchanging item in young tesettürlü women’s clothing, all of the other items in their wardrobes are equally important to the ways in which women conceal and reveal different modalities of femininity and modesty. As we see in the quote above, it is possible to add different effects to a skirt with other accessories, and thereby to rescue it from its former meanings. By manipulating the appearance and effect of her skirt by adjusting its length and using other accessories, Evrem feels empowered as a woman. On the other hand, the style of skirt that she wears in domestic contexts helps her feel more like an adult. She achieves a more mature, feminine appearance at home, in the presence of family, friends, neighbors, and relatives.

Running the Risk of Transgression: Slitted, Fishtail, and Three-quarter Skirts

Slits complicate the potential meanings of skirts. It is not always easy to move properly and fashion a modest posture in skirts with slits. Indeed, slits may challenge the idea of modest tesettür clothing entirely. Skirts with slits are considered sexy, not only in mainstream fashion, but also in tesettür fashion. However, long, close-fitting skirts require slits so that their wearers can walk. Furthermore, there are different kinds of slits: open (açık yırtmaç) and closed (kapalı yırtmaç). As the names indicate, the first type of slit displays more of the leg more than the second.

Wearing a particular style of slitted skirt relates to both questions of modesty and piety and to the process of becoming an adult woman. In the accounts of young women, fashioning a suitable outfit with a skirt and disciplining the body in order to move properly in this style highlight the successful closure and completion of a liminal period, the passing from childhood to womanhood.
Long fish-tail and three-quarter-length skirts, which are produced by mainstream clothing companies, allow women to fashion a different style of *tesettür*, thereby introducing a new aesthetic to the Turkish-Dutch *tesettür* scene. They distance their preferences and tastes from what is typically sold in old-fashioned Turkish stores. New and fashionable three-quarter skirts, often combined with trendy knee-length boots, are found in the new generation of Turkish clothing stores, such as the successful Turkish chain Manzaram. While these new stores offer more fashionable skirts, self-styled skirts, in particular, guarantee a more distinctive appearance.

Figure 27 The image at the top right is the popular Mango skirt, seen at a community event; at the bottom right we see a green fishtail skirt from Zehra’s wardrobe; the image on the left shows a picture of a skirt that was recently on Facebook and got many “likes” from other young women.

The problem with skirts from mainstream fashion lines is that they are often very tight and made of thin fabric that displays the contours of the body. Even if they are long skirts, similar in length to maxi *kumas* skirts, they produce a sexy appearance. For instance, a
leopard print fishtail skirt from the mainstream chain store Mango was especially trendy at the time of my fieldwork. It was an expensive garment; often, a few good friends shared one skirt among themselves to wear on special occasions. Women have different ideas about wearing such appealing skirts. These ideas are related to various concerns and anxieties over when, where, and in the presence of whom to wear such sexy garments. Some women would wear this type of skirt as part of their everyday clothing, while others only wear it on special occasions, when only other women are present. Others still find such skirts completely incompatible with their understanding of tesettür, so they do not wear them at all, even at women-only gatherings.

Fatma’s wardrobe is unique, since it combines garments that express a strong Turkish taste with cosmopolitan garments right next to one another. She likes wearing trousers with tunics, but she also has a large collection of skirts in her wardrobe. She wears both fashionable long Turkish skirts and mainstream skirts. Fatma does not like old fashioned, classic skirts; she prefers decorations and details on her skirts. In her view, these small details, which could well be invisible to some people, express her taste and personality. Even the denim skirt in her wardrobe, which is as plain as possible and therefore appropriate for the safest combinations, is decorated with embroidery and lace.

Below, Fatma describes her favorite skirt in detail. Clearly, she enjoys uniqueness and creativity in her style.

It has lacework, embroidery, it is a bit creative, there are pockets on the sides, they are bit lower (than ordinary pockets). I do not actually use the pockets. It is long but it has a slit. The front is triangular, it looks cool with boots...

Figure 28 Detail from Fatma’s skirt.
Super Star and Didi are Fatma’s favorite stores; they often offer fashionable skirts that appeal to her taste. Buying garments from Turkish stores makes it difficult to fashion a unique personal style, because these stores play a major role in propagating certain styles and trends among young women. Women know that if they wear the most fashionable skirt sold in Manzaram that season, they will probably encounter several other women in exactly the same skirt or in the same model in slightly different colors. Therefore, they often avoid wearing garments from Turkish stores, especially when attending Turkish wedding parties or events of the Turkish community.

The significance of long skirts in non-
tesettür fashions is, of course, different. Like many other garments in mainstream fashion, long skirts need to be attractive and, therefore, to highlight the shape of the body. The full-length leopard print skirt from Mango that I mentioned above, which is made of shiny, thin fabric, exemplifies this. Fatma describes feeling of the garment and its effect on others in the following way:

You can’t wear skirts like mine when you are thirty-five, after you’ve had a kid and your body’s shape has changed. From time to time, I think about this. This skirt is very tight on the top and it gets looser to the bottom. This is why many people prefer it. It’s very tight on top around the hips, and you often wear something that’s not so long on top, usually a short jacket. When somebody says something, then I think maybe I should cover it up. [Has anybody said anything?] With these skirts, it happens all the time. Because my hips are low, it does not matter whether I wear high-heeled shoes or not, my hips always move when I walk (kıvırırım). In my old neighborhood, the kids used to ask ‘Are you a model? Why do you walk like that (kıvırağak)? After seeing you, we mimic the way you walk.’ I said that this is simply the way I walk, this is the shape of my body and hips (kalçamın yapısı böyle).

The style of skirt that Fatma describes in this quotation is called a “balık etek” (fishtail skirt) by young tesettür wearers. For some tesettür wearers, this design is only appropriate in women-only meetings, especially wedding parties or henna parties. While Fatma wears fishtail skirts in many different contexts, from the workplace to wedding parties, another young woman named Yusra has gradually become uncomfortable wearing fishtail skirts, even when she attends women-only meetings. She always maintains her outdoor tesettür when she is in the presence of men; if she is at home, she wears a very long dress that conceals her body like an outdoor garment. Her sartorial preferences in terms of length and looseness are directly informed by the notion of mahrem-namahrem.50 In Yusra’s practice of tesettür,

50 See footnote 3 above. “Namahrem” refers to those men in whose presence women must cover.
women-only gatherings are significant because they allow her to dress up and highlight different aspects of her femininity. Even so, however, Yusra feels shy when explaining the effects that her fishtail skirt has on other women. For this reason, she does not like this particular skirt anymore.

I don’t like fishtail skirts anymore. [You don’t like them?] Not anymore, they are extremely eye-catching (dikkat çekici), which is not nice. Even if you wear them among women…my hips are big (bayağı var) they become more visible, and that’s not good. All eyes are on you, don’t make me explain it explicitly (açık konuşturma) [They look at your butt?] (We laugh.) Yes, they are not embarrassed to look, they say things about my figure; the fishtail skirt wraps around your body. I bought a black one from Mango recently, it is very long and black. I wore high-heeled shoes with it when I went to a henna party. [Women-only?] Yes women-only.

Tesettürli women’s ideas and opinions about tight-fitting balık skirts and three-quarter-length skirts vary. In most accounts, women encounter many criticisms, but in spite of these criticisms they continue to wear such relatively short, tight skirts. Wearing fishtail and three quarter-length skirts with leggings or tight jeans is often taken as a sign of reluctance and discontent with the practice of tesettür. It denotes a mode of femininity that is difficult to reconcile with mainstream understandings of modesty and piety in both secular and religious imaginaries. Even in the exclusive presence of other women, fashioning an attractive appearance as a tesettürli woman risks being seen as being hypocritical in relation to one’s own beliefs and commitment. Such an attractive mode of tesettür is even more difficult for hocas, both because there are relatively few of them and because, as pious figures and role models, they must negotiate the high expectations of others.

People only see me as a hoca. I like three-quarter skirts (with nylon stockings), but you cannot attend (women-only religious meetings) dressed like this. Well, I could wear this outfit in Turkey, [Not here?] because here people think that we (tesettürli women) are covered even in bed. [Even those in your immediate circle?] I am talking about the Turks in the Netherlands…in Turkey that is no longer the case (aşılmış). When you take off your çarşaf you can wear a t-shirt or a jogging suit. However, here people find it odd (yadırganır), they think that you are a hypocrite, that you compromise your Islam, as if you do not truly live Islam. But in Turkey people are used to this, covered women are more comfortable there.

By focusing both on particular styles of skirts and women’s preferences for trousers and skirts, this chapter has discussed the multiple modalities of femininity and shifting understandings of tesettür in the Netherlands, as they have developed from the early days of migration. Above all, my discussion in this chapter emphasizes that the motivations and inspirations that shape sartorial choices in tesettür clothing can never be reduced to a
particular interpretation of religious clothing, contrary to the claims of the so-called “new veiling.” The choice to wear a skirt or trousers has always been shaped by different understandings of femininity and religiosity as they exist in different contexts. This choice of wearing skirts or trousers exposes and highlights a set of dynamics in the formation of tesettür practice, including kinship, age/generation, occupation, piety, and the effects of different social settings. Furthermore, through their creative, personal styling of tesettür outfits, women succeed in preserving their individual tastes and understandings of tesettür.
CHAPTER FIVE: WEARING MAKEUP

Cosmetics and beauty accessories occupy a prominent place in women’s bedrooms and wardrobes. They play an important role in producing an individual, fashionable look. A well-groomed, healthy face plays an important role in fashioning the image of a modern, urban tesettürli woman in the Netherlands. However, not all women consider putting on makeup compatible with a modest conception of tesettür. Wearing makeup is a challenging practice, as it is often promoted to make a person more attractive. There is a thin, ambiguous line between a healthy natural look and an attractive look. The tension between proper care of the self and making oneself attractive is another daily dilemma in the practice of tesettür, because looking healthy may also be considered beautiful and attractive.

When discussing a modest appearance, the criteria for choosing between wearing and avoiding makeup (as well as when, where, and which style of makeup to wear) reveal diverse, contrasting practices of tesettür. Wearing a certain style and amount of makeup has increasingly become an inevitable aspect of tesettür. Women emphasize the notion of a “healthy, well-groomed look” as the marker of proper care of self rather than a “beautiful” or “attractive” appearance. In their narratives, care of the self becomes a new way of talking about particular aesthetic questions related to tesettür. While some pious women see makeup as necessary, others interpret makeup as an alteration of one’s God-given appearance. Therefore, they strictly avoid wearing make-up. However, in most cases, the statement “I don’t wear makeup” was followed by comments such as “Well, perhaps a little bit of mascara, foundation, and lip gloss”; “Sometimes when I am bored at home, I wear makeup”; “I carry makeup in my bag but I do not wear it”; and so on. Even if women do not use makeup on a daily basis, there are special occasions when they like to wear it; they feel that merely dressing up is not enough to complete a desired appearance. For instance, in the workplace or at school, women feel they need to use a certain amount of makeup to produce a healthy appearance and mien.

The issues surrounding makeup are complex, not only because of different interpretations of women’s adornment according to religious understandings of modesty, but also because women refer to different concepts of beauty and femininity in fashioning everyday clothing. Additionally, tesettür fashion catalogues and magazines closely follow
mainstream fashion trends; models often wear a certain amount of makeup, which is necessary for fashion photography. By focusing on distinct styles and amounts of makeup—both commonly worn “invisible makeup” (minimal makeup) and occasionally worn visible or heavy (ağır) makeup—and their different effects, this chapter shows how women apply different amounts of makeup to accommodate and contest particular understandings of femininity and ideas of beauty in different contexts. It illustrates how the contemporary interpretations of modesty in tesettür clothing have evolved towards the “management of beauty” rather than its concealment.

A well-groomed face as the marker of proper care of self and the ways in which such a face is perceived in specific contexts produce different concerns about makeup. The presence of specific people (mahrem and namahrem), spatial boundaries (indoor and outdoor), and different social events (from weddings to funerals) require different ethical and aesthetic judgments in relation to both the quality and quantity of one’s makeup. There are certain occasions when the same style and amount of makeup produce opposite effects, as these occasions require different presentations of femininity and religious modesty. Generational differences and religious beliefs play an important role in shifting interpretations of modesty and notions of the care for the self. Women’s narratives about wearing makeup highlight different aspects of this transformation and illustrate the different effects that makeup has on different publics. Knowing the correct amount and style of makeup to apply at the right moment is an important means of beauty management.

1. Care of the Self and the Management of Beauty

Women frequently draw on notions of care of the self and the management of beauty to talk about the particular aesthetics of a well-groomed appearance. Care of the self is a mode of behavior, instilled in the lives of subjects over time, as Foucault has famously argued. In his words, care of the self consists of “practices and formulas that people (have) reflected on, developed, perfected and taught (1984: 45).” The notion of care of the self is very common in the accounts of young women in this research, and wearing makeup is often referred to as a strong marker of a well-cared-for self. I approach women’s efforts and practices aimed at producing a carefully groomed presence as indicators of care of the self. Wearing makeup requires devoting extra time and labor to one’s appearance. Makeup adds an extra touch to
one’s appearance. Through a process of trial and error, women develop a mode of makeup appropriate to *tesettür*. They combine different ideas of beauty and modesty when they choose to wear a particular kind of makeup.

There is no single formula for the proper style and right amount of makeup that always fits with modest *tesettür* clothing. The quantity and quality of makeup applied differ from person to person and occasion to occasion. They also change over time. The reflections of elderly women about makeup demonstrate that understandings of femininity and notions of care for the self have changed dramatically in recent decades. In their accounts, lacking the time and money necessary to producing a well-groomed image is considered a marker of modesty. For them, makeup is a novelty that is difficult to see as a marker of care of the self. This is why elderly women often criticize young women’s desire to appear well-groomed—they consider new beautification practices incompatible with their notions of modesty and religious convictions. For instance, when I asked Mükerrem, one of the elderly women I interviewed for my research, about makeup, her response focused on her granddaughter. Mükerrem told me that she herself only had used hand cream from time to time when her hands got very dry after long hours of working in the fields. She did not even like to put henna on her hands. The only bodily adornment she mentioned was her long, braided hair, which she has never had cut. Thick, long, braided hair was sufficient to mark her as a healthy person, she said. Because of her hair, she was considered beautiful when she was young.

Mükerrem compared herself with her granddaughter in terms of changing understandings of beauty. She was displeased because her granddaughter wears very heavy makeup.

I have a granddaughter in Germany, it does not matter if she is covered or not, she wears heavy makeup. I do not know what she is thinking; she says that she wears makeup to look more beautiful. I call it ‘whitewash’ (*badana*).…I never plucked a single hair (pointing to her face), I never put anything in my hair. [Did you cut your hair?] No, I didn’t, I had five very long braids, and my relatives would help me make them.

The methods of revealing and managing one’s beauty as markers of the care of the self have changed visibly, as Mükerrem’s comparative account indicates. Her granddaughter considers makeup a necessary means of self-beautification, compatible with her understanding of *tesettür*, even if she is often criticized by others.

Untouched beauty has been replaced with a new aesthetics of “naturalness” that can only be produced via cosmetics. To explain this change only on the basis of an individual level of devotion and piety is impossible. Mükerrem never put on makeup; over the course of
her life, she was not constantly influenced by her religious convictions in a singular way. As she got older, she became a more devout Muslim. During the first years following her migration, however, her attire changed completely. As discussed in several other chapters, after moving to the Netherlands Mükerrem replaced her baggy trousers with an overcoat and a small headscarf, and later with a skirt-and-trousers combination. However, she strictly avoided wearing makeup as a young woman. The reason for this avoidance was not piety, but rather a particular understanding of beauty and femininity.

Mükerrem is now sixty-eight years old. The number of social occasions that require her to dress up and look beautiful has gradually decreased. Within her close circle in the Netherlands, there are specific expectations about the mode of femininity that an elderly, pious woman should embody. Notions of modesty and ideas of beauty are formed not only by the convictions of individuals and generational differences; they are also dependent on social contexts and localities. Furthermore, they change over time. Wearing makeup has become crucial to presenting a modern, urban mode of femininity. It has become a requirement of the proper dress code in certain social contexts. As a result, at present the absence of makeup may be seen as a stronger religious statement on the part of a practicing young Muslim woman.

Producing a healthy facial appearance via cosmetics has become necessary to constructing proper tesettür. Nevertheless, there are young women who share similar ideas and judgments to those expressed by Mükerrem. They relinquish wearing makeup as a marker of self-care, even though it is expected in the present-day tesettür scene. They consider the absence of makeup as a part of their individual tesettür. Some pious women deem makeup inappropriate because they consider it to be an act of interference with God’s creation. In addition to avoiding makeup, leaving one’s eyebrows untouched is also perceived as a sign of a higher level of devotion. Untouched eyebrows are very significant due to a particular hadith that curses women who change the shape of their eyebrows. However, it is very difficult to disregard one’s eyebrows when every year new fashion models appear with differently shaped eyebrows. Leaving one’s eyebrows untouched becomes a sign of appreciation for the “natural beauty” that God has bestowed upon an individual.

51 “Allah has cursed those women who practice tattooing and those who get themselves tattooed, and those who remove their facial hair, and those who create a space between their teeth artificially to look beautiful, and such women as change the features created by Allah. Why then should I not curse those whom the Prophet has cursed? And that is in Allah's Book. i.e. His Saying: ‘And what the Apostle gives you take it and what he forbids you abstain (from it).’” This hadith is recorded in the authoritative collections of Sahih Bukhari, Book 72, Number 815, narrated by the Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Abdullah.
Hülya is a university student who shares a house with three other female students. Like many other young women her age, putting on makeup was an everyday practice for her for quite some time. Hülya became a more pious individual as she learned more about Islam. She began to appreciate what she calls her “innocent look” as a result of this transformation. Her account illustrates clearly that ideas of beauty and its relation to makeup may also change in the process of cultivating a pious self. She sees her natural appearance as a meticulous creation of God. Therefore, she wants to keep it as is. Wearing no makeup and leaving one’s eyebrows untouched have become strong markers of piety for her. This careful neglect represents a different understanding of the care of the self.

I do not wear makeup anymore, but there were times when I did. When I was in high school, I wore mascara and eye shadow; I was enthusiastic about that sort of thing. Even after I learned that it is a sin, I continued to wear makeup for a while. Then, the same thing happened with plucking my eyebrows. I lost my enthusiasm. I never wore heavy makeup anyway. Everybody was doing it, so I did too. Because if you didn’t, you weren’t normal. Later, I learned that it was very sinful. [Plucking your eyebrows?] Aaah, yes, it is sinful because eyebrows are very important. God created us meticulously….every single person, each detail, God created us uniquely. When you give your eyebrows a different shape, you change the look that God has given you. God created everyone with an innocent look.

While the “innocent look” has become quite prominent in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene, the argument for a “God-given” (untouched) appearance may not be sufficient to negotiate the beauty ideals of different environments, for example, in one’s professional life. Wearing the correct amount of makeup shows that one understands the norms and aesthetics suitable in a particular social context. Women modulate their presentation of femininity and modesty by wearing a certain amount and kind of makeup; in doing so, they are able to reveal or conceal certain aspects of the self. Generational differences, religious convictions, and changing ideals of beauty engender different styles and interpretations of wearing makeup in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. The following section will explore the common practice of “invisible makeup” as a crucial part of everyday tesettür appearance.

2. Invisible Makeup

Minimal, “invisible” makeup is commonly used by tesettür women in order to produce a healthy, natural look. A cosmetically-produced natural look has increasingly become the preferred form of makeup. In general, invisible makeup is considered necessary to creating a
healthy facial appearance; it is also easily adaptable to tesettür. Invisible makeup usually consists of a small amount of foundation used to smooth the skin’s texture and color, blush on the cheeks, mascara that pulls away the eyelashes from the rim of the eye, kohl eye-pencil, and sometimes smooth eye shadow, which create the illusion of larger, more open eyes. Lip-gloss or balm completes invisible makeup and produces the image of a well-groomed individual.

Figure 29 An advertisement from Álã Magazine, December 2012, promoting a “naturally beautiful” (doğal olarak güzel) look next to cosmetics selected by the editor and a fashion model wearing “invisible makeup” from the 2012-13 Fall-Winter fashion catalogue of a well-known tesettür company, Tuğba, in Turkey), courtesy of Tuğba and Álã Magazine.

Wearing invisible makeup indicates that a young woman knows how to manage her beauty skillfully, rather than completely revealing or hiding it. Managing one’s beauty is required not only for modest clothing but also for professional life. The question “Did you put on makeup?” is a kind of compliment for someone who puts on invisible makeup. The change
is minimal, so it does not spoil the ideal meaning of tesettür. A young woman named Boncuk describes “invisible makeup” as an ideal style of makeup:

    When you think of the ideal of tesettür, makeup should not attract attention. Aaah...young girls with tweezed, thin eyebrows, mascara on their eyelashes, and eyes framed with thin lines...I do not find this appropriate. You can use a little makeup, of course; when someone sees it, they should say ‘What beautiful eyes and eyebrows you have.’ It should look natural.

![Figure 30 Eye makeup and materials.](image)

Minimal eye makeup, specifically eye-pencil and mascara, is more compatible with female Muslim piety due to a hadith in which the Prophet recommends putting on “kohl” (sürme) at night for the health of one’s eyes. The use of kohl to clear one’s vision and to strengthen the eyelashes, as the hadith indicates, was common among Muslim men and women at the time of the Prophet. This hadith provides a religious basis and justification for eye makeup, even though makeup materials are now mixed with many different chemicals.

Makeup may enhance the image of a tesettürli woman in both positive and negative ways. Women are often confronted with the judgments of others. There is a general assumption that makeup and tesettür do not go together because wearing makeup makes a person attractive. In this context, invisible makeup does not connote sexual attraction. It is a safe alternative, which helps a woman appear healthy and modest at the same time. The notion of “not wearing makeup” as a means to look more pleasant suits the aesthetics of both

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52 “The Prophet Muhammad said: ‘Among the best types of collyrium is antimony (tihmid) for it clears the vision and makes the hair sprout.’” This hadith is recorded in the authoritative collection of Sunan Abu-Dawud, Book 32, Kitab El-Libaas, Number 4050, narrated by the Companion of the Prophet, Abdullah Ibn Abbas.
WEARING MAKEUP

religious modesty and professional life. Another young woman, Serpil, comments on her invisible makeup as a part of her professional look:

    Well, they always say that they wear makeup to look well-groomed, but makeup turns you into a sex object, too. You wear makeup to have more attractive eyes, or you wear lipstick to have more pronounced lips. It is a matter of preference. I also use makeup. However, I only wear makeup to look healthy at work. My face is pale; I need to color it just a little bit. This may not be an excuse, I realize. My everyday makeup is not sexy; my friends often ask me whether I put on makeup or not. It is ‘invisible makeup.’ It is not noticeable...

    A tired, pale face should be covered with some makeup at one’s workplace. Cheeks colored with blush, powder or cream create a healthy, energetic facial appearance. Looking energetic and vibrant is a part of professional look, as well as a constituent aspect of mainstream beauty ideals. Such an appearance gives the impression of being hardworking, and therefore becomes necessary and desirable regardless of one’s ideas about modesty and tesettür. After a long period of wearing makeup, women feel quite at ease with their “natural look” and the makeup they use to create it. They become estranged from their natural appearance. When they look at themselves in the mirror without makeup, they do not see a healthy, energetic face.

    On the basis of their appreciation for their God-given beauty, women develop and adopt different styles of makeup. For instance, they prefer to use eye-pencil instead of eyeliner because eye-pencil produces a less seductive look for the eyes. Şüheda has tried to decrease the amount of makeup she uses as she aims to practice a more modest, covered form of tesettür. Using eye-pencil instead of eyeliner changes the effect of her makeup, as she describes below:

    I like makeup and other cosmetics. I often use eye-pencil. It was very difficult to stop wearing eyeliner. You get used to it. If you do not wear it, you feel different and you look sick. Well, in fact it does not matter much. [Do you feel that way now?] No...but I still put on eye-pencil, even if it is not to look beautiful. Otherwise, you look as if you just got out of bed. When I go out, I put on mascara and eye-pencil—they make you look good.

    One’s God-given appearance may not be fully suitable in one’s professional life. As a young woman and tesettür wearer, Emine feels responsible for how she looks at work. She tries to make her tesettür presentable. Makeup is crucial in fashioning this effect.

    You have to pay attention to every detail of your appearance. Your scarf and your makeup are both important...I wear makeup because my face is very pale. I put on blush or powder, especially at work. We go to other companies for meetings; we meet with the police, with families. I need to be good-looking and chic.
In some contexts, it is impossible to imagine *tesettür* without makeup. The amount of makeup one wears not only changes according to different concepts of *tesettür*, but also depends on social context. Ebrar wears makeup to hide her exhaustion. She finds minimal makeup appropriate for both *tesettür* and Dutch professional life.

I rarely wear makeup. Usually, I only do so for women-only gatherings (such as) henna and wedding parties. I do not like to wear makeup outside. Sometimes I wear eye makeup when I go to work. My eyes look bad because of exhaustion and lack of sleep. Dutch people do not approve of too much makeup in the workplace, either.

Women rely on invisible makeup not only to achieve a modest appearance but also to look professional. In both cases, invisible makeup indicates that a woman is not overly interested in her appearance; too much investment in how one looks consumes both time and energy. As an aspect of self-care, makeup and its changing aesthetics are not formed in isolation. Rather, makeup is embedded in social practice and appears as an intensification of social relations (Foucault 1984: 53).

In certain respects, religious notions of self-care are similar to the modern notion of care of the self, even if the techniques and practices of self-care in each context are distinct. Care of the self is very important in the formation of modern, professional subjects, but it should also remain within certain limits. In addition to the contradictions and anxieties that heavy makeup creates in *tesettür* clothing, it also produces a less professional look. The practice of makeup in professional life shares similarities with makeup in relation to the limits of religious modesty. Invisible makeup may work well in contexts where women interact mainly with the non-Turkish Dutch communities, as wearing lots of makeup is often considered “cheap” in the Netherlands. In the following section, I will illustrate how identical amounts and styles of makeup create different effects in different social contexts.

3. Different Effects of Makeup

The idealization of *tesettür* as a marker of religious identity plays a significant role in how makeup is practiced and perceived by others. As I previously discussed, makeup is a medium through which women display their attention to self-care, and different styles of makeup reveal both a particular aesthetics and a particular understanding of *tesettür*. Events and occasions play a crucial role in how makeup is practiced and interpreted by others. For a *tesettür* wearer, it is very important to know when to wear which type of makeup. The same
amount and style of makeup can produce opposite effects in different social contexts. On certain occasions, it is not makeup itself, but the very display of extra care of the self that is unwelcome and inappropriate.

Funerals are one occasion at which any style or amount of makeup is open to criticism. Publicly displaying self-care in a context of mourning would be disrespectful. In this instance, the purpose of the gathering, rather than its location, plays a significant role; funerals transform the effects of makeup as well as the sense of place. For instance, a certain style and amount of makeup may be acceptable when one attends religious classes in a mosque, but this same makeup would be very uncomfortable when attending a Mevlid ritual\(^ {53} \) in the mosque after a funeral. Even for women who wear makeup on a daily basis, the undesired effects of makeup on such occasions can be difficult to bear.

Another example of a special occasion on which makeup is inappropriate is Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. Whereas a pale face at work may be undesirable, such an appearance takes on very different meanings during Ramadan. A pale face becomes a marker of bodily discipline and the deprived, fasting body. Most women who enjoy wearing makeup on a daily basis avoid it during the month of Ramadan. Glossed or colored lips, in particular, are considered reprehensible at this time of the year. Even women who are not fasting tend to prefer to wear less makeup or no makeup at all during Ramadan. Makeup ruins the image of the fasting body. Wearing makeup is also considered disrespectful to those who are fasting in order to discipline their bodily desires and strengthen their spirituality.

The question of whether or not applying lipstick breaks one’s fast is also a matter of debate and divergence. Although many women and religious authorities agree that wearing makeup is in general reprehensible (mekruh) but not forbidden (haram), wearing lipstick and makeup is almost inevitably seen as a sign of not fasting during Ramadan. Ramadan is the month of worship; in addition to fasting, women also tend to pay closer attention to their ibadet. Even if they do not generally pray five times a day, they try to do so during Ramadan. They attend religious meetings and daily recitations of the Quran (mukabele). The reasons for categorizing makeup and other cosmetics such as perfume as reprehensible are not only related to questions of attractiveness. The use of cosmetics contradicts the ideal of a pure, clean body required for worship. For this reason in particular many women stop wearing makeup during Ramadan.

\(^ {53} \) The Mevlid is a ritual recitation of the Quran following the funeral and burial of a deceased Muslim.
The heightened visibility of *tesettür* clothing also increases the wearer’s anxiety over the potential unintended effects of their words and actions. Inappropriate makeup negatively affects other Muslim women who adopt more modest forms of clothing. Bihter receives a lot of criticism because of her makeup. She adopted *tesettür* when she gave birth to her first child. As we discussed the changes in her life, she emphasized that it was her own choice to become a practicing Muslim; indeed, her husband is not at all pious. She left her career as an account manager and began to study Islamic theology at university. Bihter is a very fashionable woman. She owns one of the largest wardrobe collections that I encountered during my research, and she likes to wear makeup on a daily basis; because of this, she is often criticized by others.

They say things but I do not mind…it’s nobody’s business. If this is a sin, it is mine. We (Muslim women) are responsible for our actions and deeds. However, if you do something wrong, the others talk about it and you become a bad example. Well, there are girls who see me as a role model, I told them that I am not a *hoca*, they should not take me as a proper example. For instance, my mother’s uncovered friend said to me ‘You put on a headscarf but you wear more makeup than I do.’ Did I say anything about her makeup? No!

The idealization of *tesettür* as a marker of religious identity transforms the effects of makeup beyond the intentions of *tesettür* women. In the specific contexts that we have considered in this section, a heightened degree of spiritual significance transforms ideas of beauty and care, and consequently changes the effects of makeup. Wearing makeup without full knowledge of the aesthetic and ethical norms of those present at an event can also easily produce undesired effects. Many women think wearing a lot of makeup is tolerable only at women-only gatherings or wedding parties. In other contexts, the same degree of heavy makeup is criticized as having overly sexual connotations.

Women-only occasions are relatively flexible in terms of dress and makeup because they are considered intimate contexts. However, even in such women-only contexts, wearing a lot of makeup can produce conflicts between women who have different understandings of femininity and *tesettür*. Generational differences become a significant factor in shaping narratives about wearing visible makeup (*ağır makyaj*). Dicle describes her first experience with heavy, visible makeup and how it created a conflict with her mother:

I went to the coiffeur with my friends, and they put lots of powder on my face. My face looked very tanned. My eyes had layers of makeup and mascara—it was really cool. My mother saw me at the wedding party; she looked at me and said ‘What kind of makeup are you wearing? Go and wipe your lipstick a little bit, wipe the powder off of your face.’ I told her to leave me alone but I knew that I was wearing heavy makeup.
Dicle does not consider her makeup suitable to modest clothing because she thinks it transforms her into a very attractive woman; nevertheless, she continues to wear this type of makeup for women-only gatherings. Being attractive and revealing does not have overtly sexual connotations in such contexts, in contrast to mixed-gender contexts. However, the judgments of elderly women are often very different from those of younger women. According to the general opinion of older women, such a presentation of femininity is inappropriate, not only because of religious concerns, but also because it does not fit with their particular understanding of modesty.

4. Makeup and the Intimate Self

As discussed earlier, invisible and heavy makeup create different effects in different contexts. However, makeup in general is heavily loaded with negative sexual connotations. By declaring that she does not wear makeup at all, a woman clearly distances herself from the heightened visibility and negative connotations of makeup. Women who choose to wear absolutely no makeup tend to abide by specific interpretations of the Islamic textual tradition.
These texts emphasize that adornment and the display of a woman’s beauty are exclusively intended for intimate spaces in the company of one’s mahrem.\textsuperscript{54} This means that makeup may play a different role in intimate spaces, especially in the lives of married women, as marriage creates a context in which a sexually attractive self can be performed.\textsuperscript{55} Even if women oppose the practice of makeup in public, they may find it acceptable or even enjoyable in intimate spaces. For some of the non-makeup wearers, makeup may be a matter of entertainment because it produces a different sense of femininity and the intimate self. Others may wear makeup to please their husbands. However, pleasing one’s husband is not always a determining factor, especially if the woman in question finds displaying an attractive self at odds with her construction of a modest and pious self.

Some of my interlocutors only put on makeup for specific, intimate occasions. Frequently, they showed me photographs taken on these occasions, when they were together with very close female friends or when they were alone. Hanne is very strict about not wearing makeup outdoors. She told me her thoughts about makeup, not so much as a hoca or as a çarşaf wearer but as a single woman in her late thirties. She referred to the past as a reference point to highlight her consistency and strength in practicing a modest appearance, even as she also considered wearing makeup as an option in the future:

My eyes (she has green eyes) are the most beautiful part of my face, of course, when I wear mascara, I look different. Since my eyebrows and eyelashes are light, when I put mascara on they look very different. Others ask me ‘Is that you Hanne?’ When I am bored, I put on makeup. I did so recently, and then I took a picture. I can show it to you…it looks funny because I do not know how to do it properly...Well, in the future, if my husband would like it, and if it would make him happy, I might be able wear makeup.

Hanne considers wearing makeup fun. She sees it as a means for performing different modalities of femininity. Although most women enjoy this unique feeling and its effect on others, Hanne’s account illustrates that makeup may be a very personal experience and practice of the intimate self, not for public display.

\textsuperscript{54} In the Quran, Surah Nur (24), Ayet 31 explains the category of mahrem in the following way: “And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision, and guard their private parts and do not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chest and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women, that which their right hands posses or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not well aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And return to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.”

\textsuperscript{55} Abu Lughod’s (1990) ethnography of Bedouin women richly portrays emerging forms of differentiation among women based on their involvement in companionate marriages, in which women’s attractiveness and individuality gain more importance.
Marriage partners may have different ideas about makeup and the presentation of sexual and gender roles. Before marriage, a couple must make sure that they share a certain understanding of femininity. There should be an indirect agreement about femininity and ideals of sexual attractiveness. Selcen is a çarşaf wearer who thinks that soft, black eye makeup suits her çarşaf. Her makeup is very subtle; she only uses an eye-pencil. She chooses her eye-pencil color to match the colors of her indoor headscarf. Sometimes, she wears big, black sunglasses that conceal her minimal eye makeup when she is outdoors.

Selcen told me happily that her husband cherishes her natural beauty. The two of them agree on a certain notion of sexual attractiveness and femininity. This agreement is very important for her. Early in their relationship, she wanted to make sure that her husband would accept her minimal eye makeup, especially after the suggestion he made on their wedding day.

On our wedding day, the party was women-only. On that day, my husband asked me to put on visible eye makeup. I said whether this would only be for the day of the wedding or not, and he said that it would be. Then I asked him to find a suitable photographer, because if the photographer had been male, I would not have worn makeup. He said that he would arrange an appropriate photography shoot, because he knew a couple who were both photographers. The woman had her own studio. We went there...

Even if Islamic sources permit and even encourage women’s adornment as a way of pleasing their husbands, makeup preferences differ significantly among women. Couples may seek a tacit agreement on a modest, pious mode of femininity, and makeup becomes an important signifier because it has a direct relation to sexual attractiveness.

There is not a single formula for “appropriate” makeup in tesettür clothing. Practices and interpretations of wearing makeup change according to different social contexts and relations. Spatial boundaries (intimate-public), the presence of people (mahrem-namahrem), generational differences, interpretations of Islamic sources, religious convictions, and different notions of the self all play important roles in shaping how women feel about wearing makeup. Many young women conceive of makeup as an extra touch in fashioning one’s appearance and as an indicator of proper care of self. For them, wearing a certain amount of makeup—“invisible makeup”—is necessary to fashioning a healthy look, which simultaneously fits with tesettür and professional life. Because makeup can easily be associated with negative connotations of sexuality or care of the self, women must be exceptionally attentive to the quality and quantity of the makeup they wear. To manage their tesettür appearance in multiple settings, women must negotiate and articulate different
modalities of femininity. They use different styles and amounts of makeup as a means of managing their beauty.
CHAPTER SIX: FESTIVE OCCASIONS AND FESTIVE TESETTÜR

Weddings, engagements and henna parties\(^{56}\) are common and important festive events in women’s lives. They bring a large number of people from various circles together. The mixed yet relatively intimate crowd at such occasions makes women more apprehensive about what to wear. The crowd is not only mixed in terms of gender. In addition to relatives, parents, and friends, colleagues of the couple and unrelated guests also attend engagement and wedding parties. Such events produce anxieties over how to combine festive aesthetics and modest clothing. These celebrations are rich sites where one can observe norms, limits, and transgressions in tesettür clothing. This chapter explores the dilemmas of tesettür in relation to festive celebrations and religious modesty. It compares and contrasts current and former types of celebrations and women’s changing sartorial practices.

“Düğünlük” (bridal and party) garments have a unique place in women’s wardrobes. The colors, texture, ornamentation, and quality of düğünlük garments are all distinctive. Terms like parıltılı (glittering), simli (silvery), and janjanlı (iridescent; chatoyant) are used to indicate their showy, shiny, and highly decorated texture.

These precious moments for families and young couples are meant to be remembered for a lifetime. Wedding gowns remain in most wardrobes for a long time as souvenirs of a fond memory. Renting wedding gowns or party dresses for these events has become less popular because festive events have become key sites of and for fashion. Festive garments may be the most expensive items of clothing that women wear in their lifetimes. They are typically not suitable as everyday clothing. The question “Are you going to a wedding?” could be a very negative remark when directed toward everyday clothing. Such a remark emphasizes the inappropriateness of certain garments to everyday life and criticizes the desire to attract attention. In their distinction from everyday clothing, festive garments such as wedding gowns (gelinlik), engagement party dresses (nişanlık), and henna party dresses

\(^{56}\) Traditionally, the henna night (kına gecesi) is a women-only party for a bride. It takes place before the actual wedding party. The bride wears a highly decorated dress called a bindallı, and her face is covered by a sequined, red veil. The bride’s close friends, relatives, and neighbors, as well as the close female relatives of her future husband, gather to eat, dance, sing and put henna on their hands.
(kaftan and bindalli) articulate the specific aesthetics and ethics of tesettür clothing at festive occasions.

Young Turkish-Dutch couples invest a lot of money and time in wedding parties. Increasingly, young couples prefer to have their weddings in the Netherlands because they want their friends and colleagues to share in their celebration. Young women often organize shopping trips (düğün alışveriş) to major cities in Turkey with future husbands and close relatives. Some couples have two parties, one in Turkey and one in the Netherlands, especially if they still have large families in their Turkish hometowns. When one member of the couple comes from abroad, they often wait for summer vacation in order to have a wedding party in Turkey.
In the Netherlands, these parties are sometimes held at cultural centers, party halls and restaurants, while others are held in mosques. New, religiously-inspired alternative parties often incorporate a novel set of celebratory activities, including religious *sohbets* (theological lessons) that emphasize the importance of starting a new family, performances by whirling dervishes, and Sufi music. They also promote new dress codes and fashions that are both thoroughly covering and expensive. Different kinds of wedding parties have brought about major changes in women’s choices of clothing. For both the couple and the guests, such social gatherings refine and redefine religious notions of modesty and *tesettür* clothing. Different preferences of what to wear and what kind of wedding party to organize communicate different levels of piety and religious modesty.

In this chapter, I explain the relationship between *tesettür* and festive occasions by focusing on brides’ choices of veiling and non-veiling. By examining the types of attendance, locations, and concepts that define these parties, I explore festive sartorial practices and the changing of aesthetics and understandings of festive *tesettür*. Based on the stories of three women, the last section describes the newly emerging business of “*tesettür coiffure*” as one solution to the dilemmas of veiling and non-veiling, as well as a method for combining certain understanding of *tesettür* with festive fashions.

1. *Düğünlükler*: Festive Clothing

Attendance at festive events is mixed (in terms of gender), and the context often more intimate and familiar than of public space in general. Festive occasions construct the concept and practice of *tesettür* differently. The comments and criticisms of acquaintances in these contexts have a stronger, more lingering effect than the judgments that women encounter in everyday life. Clothing is of cardinal concern to all of the participants in these celebratory events: the bride and host families and their close relatives, as well as the guests. The specific attention that guests pay to their outfits depends on their proximity to the host families. Closer relatives and friends must focus more carefully on their clothing because they are more central to the festive setting. The understanding of modest, proper *tesettür* is more flexible at the center (for bride, close relatives, etc.) than it is on the periphery (for other guests) of the festive scene.
Wedding and engagement parties constitute some of the few contexts in which women are less concerned with the negative effects of attracting attention; therefore, notions of tesettür become more flexible on these occasions. This is especially true for the bride, as she has to be visible, ideally in the most beautiful way possible. She is present at the party to be seen and for the guests to celebrate her. Styles and modes of tesettür change as one moves outward from the bride at the center to the relatives and the invited guests at the periphery of the stage; this outward transformation expresses different understandings of modesty and highlights the transgression of everyday tesettür norms on this particular occasion.

At such gatherings, women of different ages, from different localities and with different educational and economic backgrounds, all try to make their appearance different from that of the everyday. Dressing for celebrations increases the dilemmas that women face in fashioning a proper tesettür appearance. Even the smallest details of tesettür change on such day. For instance, a shiny pin with a colored stone or the image of a flower replaces a simpler, everyday pin on one’s scarf. Even reserved, older women want to look different. An elderly woman might mark the difference of the day by substituting her everyday cotton scarf with the silk scarf that her daughter bought for her on mother’s day. Nergis tells us that weddings are a rich, rare context in which to observe changing patterns of clothing among reserved, older women.

When you go to weddings, you realize how they (elderly women) change their style. They wear more modern headscarves...hand-made ornaments (oya) on cotton headscarves are no longer important, but it matters more if the headscarf is silk or not.

Festive occasions, including religious feasts, are also special moments because women frequently use them to make their decision to wear tesettür for the first time public. These occasions are powerful sites of display. Many women prefer to put on tesettür at a festive event when they are able to introduce a major change of style to a larger number of people at once. This may be easier and smoother than introducing changes in their wardrobe one by one. Displaying their choice to as many people as possible and encountering many reactions at once—compliments, mockery, negative judgments and approval—allow women to pass through this initial phase quickly. Festivities thus function as rites of passage.

The migration context is also central to the changes and adjustments of festive aesthetics in relation to understandings of tesettür clothing. Dicle explains how her düğünlik

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57 Interlocutors often used the term “modern” to describe the difference or shift from everyday tesettür to festive tesettür.
dresses changed after moving to the Netherlands. She has a large wardrobe of special attire for festive events. Her account also indicates the way in which tesettür shifts in quality and degree from the center to the periphery of festive stage. The closer an individual is to the key participants in a wedding, the more visible she becomes in the festive setting. As a part of the festive scene, individuals close to the center of the stage represent the host family.

We used to simply wear our bayramlık (new garments bought to wear at religious feasts) outfits at wedding parties, but then we came here...now I have different dresses for wedding and engagement parties. This also changes according to how close I am to a particular relative or friend. If it is a very close friend or relative, I like to put on a special party dress (abiye), but if it is distant friend or acquaintance, I wear more normal attire.

Figure 33 Abiye dresses from Bihter’s wardrobe.

Tesettür clothing and conceptions on such occasions have gone through significant changes and adaptations over the last few decades. It is important to recall that festive dresses
have come to constitute a special mode of celebratory *tesettür*; they are not only different from everyday clothing, but also from former festive garments, as, garments are changing, and new party concepts have emerged that have transformed the spaces and activities that constitute celebrations.

2. To Veil or Not to Veil: A Bride’s Dilemma

In the past, going to a hairdresser and having one’s hair prepared on one’s wedding day was a very common practice, intended to make the bride appear as the central figure of the festive atmosphere. The wedding photos of my interlocutors from the 1990s clearly show that this was very common; furthermore, the practice of non-veiling on one’s wedding day transformed the bride’s appearance from the everyday to the festive. In addition to elegant hairdos, low-cut wedding gowns with short sleeves were also very common in this era. The majority of wedding photos I saw did not match with the present-day festive *tesettür* conceptions of my interlocutors. Fashions in party dresses have changed, principally because wedding ceremonies now take place in different locations (party halls, restaurants, hotels, etc.) and with more mixed crowds than previously. Nevertheless, the festive atmosphere of a wedding party continues to be a site of exception in relation to *tesettür* clothing.

As Feride and I were looking at photo albums in her living room, we came across her wedding photos from 1999. She was twenty years old when she was married. In the photographs, she appeared non-veiled, not only at women-only gatherings such as her henna party but also in the midst of mixed-gender crowds. As a bride on the stage, she could embody a non-*tesettür* appearance sharply different from her everyday *tesettür*. Even if the bride wore a very attractive wedding gown, the meanings attached to the ritual of wedding and the blessedness of establishing a family preserved her sexuality from the possible negative connotations of unveiling.

In a certain sense, the ritual moment of a wedding functions as *tesettür* itself; this is an abstract *tesettür* that produces a distinct mode of modesty by naturalizing and purifying female attractiveness, and thereby counteracting its negative connotations. In this ritual moment, uncovering does not mean the same thing that it does in everyday life. Non-veiling at a wedding is more acceptable and does not spoil the meaning of *tesettür* in the way that it does on any other day. However, due to the increasing number of fashionable *tesettür*
wedding gowns, uncovering has become less of an option for today’s pious Turkish-Dutch brides. This is in part because the wedding gown has lost its aura and in part because the new fashion scene promotes elegant, covering wedding gowns. As we see in the conversation below, Feride now regrets that she took of her headscarf as a bride.

Feride: Aah, how did you find that old photo? That’s me on our wedding day.
Arzu: You didn’t wear a headscarf?
Feride: In those days, well…you know there was no türban (an ornamented, stylish ‘modern’ head covering) then.
Arzu: How did you feel about it?
Feride: If my wedding were to occur now, I would never take my headscarf off. In those years, it was normal. You know the funny thing was that we had our wedding in the mosque…men sat on the right side and women sat on the left side. There was a large distance in between them. I was mostly on the women’s side, but men could see me, too.

Organizing a wedding celebration in a mosque rather than in a secular wedding salon not only reveals a particular understanding of religious modesty, it also produces a sense of intimacy and familiarity. Many guests will know the mosque well from their daily lives, and may also know one another through mosque-based networks.58 Organizing a wedding in a mosque produces an “at home” feeling—the mosque is more intimate than other public settings. This feeling of being at home derives from the various functions of the mosque in community life and from the presence of guests who are familiar with both the setting and one another. The mosque fuses the domains of the intimate (indoor) and the public (outdoor).

The moment of the wedding ritual is quite significant to how women feel about their non-tesettür presence. Even if Feride chose a mosque as the venue for her wedding party, and arranged segregated seating for the men and women guests, she preferred to wear a wedding gown without a headscarf. On that particular day of her life, as a bride, she did not mind being seen by men without her tesettür. It is very difficult to explain Feride’s choice solely in terms of her changing concept of tesettür or level of religiosity. Being the bride created an invisible tesettür for her, at least to some extent.

When Hatice thinks back to the 1980s and 1990s, she cannot remember ever seeing a bride in tesettür in her village (located in Central Anatolia), while in everyday life all village women were covered. Hatice asserts that not veiling on the day of her wedding was not problematic at all.

58 In the Netherlands, mosques affiliated with Turkish religious communities are not solely places of worship; they also function as social centers where the community organizes different activities.
At that time in our village, a bride would never wear a headscarf. The bride would adorn herself, she would wear makeup, perhaps some blush and so on. She would go to the hairdresser to get her hair done. But only on that day.

In the contemporary tesettür scene, one cannot say that covered gowns are less fashionable or beautiful than less-covering mainstream wedding gowns. Although there are stylish tesettür wedding gowns today, it is still possible to see a few young tesettürlü women who prefer to wear wedding gowns without a headscarf. For instance, on her wedding day Nil preferred to wear an uncovered wedding gown. She is a twenty-seven-year old university graduate who is married to a young man from Turkey. They were only able to hold their wedding party in Turkey, because it took several years for him to get his residency permit to move to the Netherlands. Instead of wearing a highly fashionable tesettür wedding gown, Nil purchased a somewhat typical wedding gown from a store in Turkey. She explained to me why she wanted to wear a non-tesettür gown on her wedding day—this was something that she had wished for since she was very young.

Covering was my own decision; I was nineteen at the time. Nevertheless, I always wanted to be an uncovered bride on my wedding day. My family always respected my decision and my husband said it was not a problem for him.

Nil not only uncovered for that particular, special day; she also uploaded her wedding photo with her husband as a profile picture on Facebook. In this way, her non-tesettür presence has extended beyond the particular time, location and audience of her wedding. On Facebook, she received many compliments for her photograph with her husband. Because they are contexts of exception, wearing fancy, attractive festive attire is tolerable on wedding days. From the positive comments that Nil received, one can conclude that her unveiling on her wedding day was not an issue for her relatives and Facebook friends. The comfort of her wedding gown lingers in the photos, even as her non-tesettür presence remains an exception in Nil’s life.

Beyond the question of whether to veil, festive events such as weddings allow women to rework the boundaries of indoor and outdoor tesettür. As an ex-çarşaf wearer, Nermin analyzes weddings in general as performances on stage that refine and redefine the boundaries of indoor and outdoor tesettür. On her own wedding day, she tried to find a middle way between her understanding of femininity and tesettür and the expectations other had of her as a bride. As I explained in the chapter on the çarşaf, Nermin maintains a very strict boundary between indoor and outdoor tesettür. In her everyday life, she wears a black, loose, full-length overcoat and a wide black headscarf. It was a great challenge for her to put on a white gown
in the presence of a mixed crowd. When she came to the Netherlands, she was already married, but her husband’s family wanted to hold a wedding party for her and her husband in their new location. She had slightly different ideas about religious weddings than her parents-in-law. Additionally, as a newcomer, she did not know most of the guests at the party.

They wanted a wedding party here. They organized a dinner. My parents-in-law wanted me to wear a wedding gown…instead of a wedding gown, I had a white dress tailored, and put on a plain white headscarf…we were leaving home and I wore an overcoat on top of my dress. They asked ‘What are you doing?’ We were going to the location where we had arranged the dinner. I wasn’t able to go out without my overcoat. The people here found it strange. Soon, however, everybody got used to it. They realized that there are indoor and outdoor forms of tesettür.

Nermin did not reject her parents-in-law’s suggestion entirely; rather, she tried to reconcile their understanding of a wedding party and its dress code with her own understanding of outdoor tesettür. She wore an overcoat over her wedding gown. It took some time for her in-laws to understand and respect her practice of outdoor tesettür.

Şevval has a more confined understanding of indoor and outdoor tesettür, which is exclusively shaped by the presence of males and non-relatives (namahrem):

I do not go to places (parties and celebrations) where men and women mix. If a very close friend is getting married and I have to go, I briefly congratulate the couple and give them a present, just out of politeness, and then I leave…if I have to stay for a while in such a mixed crowd for some reason, I sit with my çarşaf on.

The comforting, pleasant feeling of festive dress is not only a concern for the bride. It matters for guests also; however, tesettür understandings are more flexible at the center (for the bride, close relatives, etc.) than at the periphery (for other guests).

The nature of festive events also shapes the tesettür understandings appropriate to them. In invitation letters, the hosts often explain what kind of party they have planned by describing its location (party hall or mosque), noting whether it will be mixed-gender or not, stating whether it will be a religious event, and so forth. Some women simply avoid wedding parties where there will be dancing and music because of their understanding of piety. Some young women prefer women-only parties, as they enjoy dressing up as they like and dancing. Sometimes, women may be disturbed by the unexpected, brief appearance of the groom or male relatives of the bride. In these women-only gatherings, an announcement prohibiting photography is often made. Furthermore, many women wear revealing party dresses at these gender-segregated parties, and therefore must be warned in advance of the groom’s arrival so that they can first put on a covering garment such as a ferace or an overcoat with a scarf.
Alternately, as we learn from Ebrar’s story below, misunderstandings about the characteristics of a gathering may spoil the event entirely and give women a hard time:

Last time, we went to my friend’s wedding party. We heard that men and women would sit separately. My friend assured us that this would be the case. I put on a three-quarter-length skirt with thick stockings because I thought it was a ladies-only party. [What did you wear on top?] I wore a jacket. Some friends came by car to pick us up. We arrived at the party, and then I realized what they meant by ‘separated’: men and women were just sitting separately in the same room. I asked, ‘Is that what you meant?’ I had to walk up to the couple and congratulate them. I was so worried, I couldn’t walk freely…I did not feel comfortable, I felt as if everybody was looking at me. [What did you do?] I didn’t walk around; I went to their table and congratulated them briefly…you think about your dress ahead of time, I wanted my mine to be loose and free, I just wanted to enjoy the time with my friends. Then, one of my friends asked me ‘Did you change your style?’

Ebrar found her friend’s question distressing and offensive because a change of style in this context was seen as a movement away from a more covered tesettür to a fashionable, festive tesettür. This was especially problematic because Ebrar was not a very close relative or friend of the host couple and their families.

The desire to beautify tesettür appearance on festive occasions requires a lot of work and money, particularly for the central figure of the event, the bride. The process of selecting clothing takes a long time and demands a lot of labor. The decision of what to wear on one’s wedding day can take months, and inspirations are many:

I searched on the Internet a bit. I could not find a proper model, and my choice of color was also very difficult to find, because I don’t want my dress to be white. The color does not match with my skin. I want my wedding gown to be a bit darker than off-white, like grayish white. I want it to be somewhat close-fitting; I do not want a puffy wedding gown. I should look like a mermaid. If it has a wide-cut neck, I will wear an extra body covering. My sleeves will be fully covered with gems; I do not want my skin to be seen. My head will be covered, so I want a long bridal veil (duvak). It could be one like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s (the Prime Minister of Turkey) daughter wore…when the time comes, I will see…I will have my henna party; I want to wear a bindallı⁵⁹ in the Ottoman style…

Non-veiling is still a possible alternative at weddings, but it mostly occurs at women-only parties. Clothing is less problematic at henna parties because they are generally women-only events. Red is the distinctive, thematic color of henna parties, and an increasing number of brides prefer to wear traditionally inspired models of henna party dresses. Red kaftans or

⁵⁹ Bindallı it is the old name of a fabric that is made of velvet or silk and patterned with figures of leaves and branches. Bindallı was often used to make dresses (entari) or shirts (mintan) for both men and women.
bindalli have become very popular as a part of ethnic and neo-Ottoman trends in clothing. The bride’s face is always covered with a red, transparent scarf as she sits and waits for her women friends and relatives to put henna on her hands.

Figure 34 Kaftans and wedding gowns on display at the First Istanbul Tesettür Fashion Fair.

Figure 35 A red, see-through scarf from Sevde’s wardrobe.

A new type of women-only wedding party is also becoming popular among young professional couples. Couples invest a lot of money in these relatively upper class parties. They take place in expensive hotel salons, and female personnel serve the guests. Gender segregation is more rigid at these parties than it is at community gatherings and mosques in Turkish neighborhoods; consequently women are able to wear more revealing, fashionable
dresses in these contexts. Serap describes one fancy, expensive party that took place in an upscale hotel in Amsterdam, with a particular focus on the bride’s outfits, in following way:

It was a very popular hotel. Because of that, all the guests were dressed up...extremely dressed up! It was a women-only party. The servers were women too. I wore a tight black top with my gold color jewelry. [What shoes did you wear?] I had black shoes but my dress was shiny. [What did the bride wear?] She had three different dresses; she first entered the room wearing a strapless wedding gown. She is *tesettür* but she wanted to uncover her hair because it was a women-only occasion. Later, she put on a green party dress; it was very unique. Aah...when they applied the henna, she wore a *kaftan*.

A few weeks after our interview, I got exciting news from Serap. She had met someone. He was a friend of her very close friend, and they met at a dinner arranged to introduce them to each other. Within a year, she celebrated her own wedding, with three different dresses, including a henna party. She opted to wear a pink party dress with *tesettür* and a *kaftan* in red and gold colors for her henna party; at the wedding itself, she wore a white *tesettür* wedding gown with a red ribbon around her waist. Serap’s family eventually had to organize a mixed wedding party, because her relatives and parents’ friends would not have considered gender segregation appropriate on such a festive day. In our interview, Serap sounded as though she might have preferred women-only party, but she also knew that such a party would not be proper due to the long tradition of mixed weddings in her village.

Serap did not want to risk her day; she wanted to enjoy it as much as possible. Even if she held a women-only party, she decided that she would not uncover her hair. She wanted to record every minute of her wedding party to share with as many people as possible. In this sense, her experience with a non-*tesettür* appearance as a bride was very different from Nil’s. Serap is more precise in producing different *tesettür* appearances for different publics, and unveiling is not an option.

Arzu: What would you wear?
Serap: I would never uncover my hair, because I want to be able to have a lot of fun with my friends on such a special day and to take as many pictures with my friends as possible. It’s not because I don’t trust them. However, I take precautions...I don’t uncover my hair. As a bride, I do not find dancing proper on your wedding day.

Fashioning a festive *tesettür* has become more complex and challenging. Not only the bride, but other women as well are more concerned and nervous about their appearance. Furthermore, fashioning an appearance that is recognizably distinct from everyday *tesettür* is difficult. It requires a different notion of aesthetics and includes items that women do not use in their everyday clothing. Women contest and adjust everyday *tesettür* in different ways on
these occasions. They may feel freer to dress up and wear garments they cannot wear as everyday clothing, as the gaze of others is relatively tolerant and less judgmental. The simultaneously joyful and ritual character of festive events determines the limits of Islamic clothing. Women feel pressure to accommodate a modest tesettür understanding with fashionable, feminine styles. They convert non-tesettür party dresses into outfits suited to their desired tesettür appearance. Above all, the lack of proper tesettür party dresses has brought about a new field in which young women have begun to seek alternative modes of covering.

3. Tesettür Coiffure

Tesettür, türban and baş (the latter word literally means head) are interchangeable terms used to describe the fancy models of headwear that have become very popular in the last ten years. Most devout Turkish-Dutch women do not find everyday headscarves appropriate to party dresses. Party scarves are more embellished and made from shiny fabrics. Moreover, many women prefer specific forms of festive head covering, which look more similar to a hat or a turban. This demand for fashionable, original, matching headwear sparked a new business: tesettür kuaförlüğü (tesettür hairdressing). Young women who might have preferred to be non-veiled in the past can now go to tesettür coiffeurs to have fashionable headwear and combinations of headscarves prepared for their wedding days.

Figure 36 Festive head coverings at display at the Istanbul Tesettür Fashion Fair, October 2009.
In recent years, many Turkish-Dutch hairdressers have added the slogan “We make party türbans for your special days” to their advertisements and flyers, and welcome tesettürlü costumers to dress up for parties and celebrations. Creative, skilled young women prepare türbans and make fashionable headwear for their friends and relatives; some of these women have turned this hobby into a successful business in the Netherlands. These young entrepreneurs often introduce their styles and meet with future costumers at celebrations. Initially, the styles of tesettür kuaförlüğü were quite similar and basic, but they have gradually adapted and transformed into highly fashionable designs ornamented with various accessories, which are often brought from Istanbul. Wedding türbans are often made of large satin scarves, shaped by stitches and pins and adorned with crowns, flowers, lace, ribbons, tulle and
beads. In recent years, it has also become possible to find ready-made türbans for party dresses.

Drawing on the accounts of Azize and Latife, two good friends who eventually became successful business partners, and Remziye, one of their costumers, this section illustrates some of the difficulties in fashioning festive dresses with proper headwear and examines the emergence of teşettür coiffure as a solution to the dilemma of veiling or non-veiling on celebratory days. Azize and Latife are well-known teşettür coiffeurs from Amsterdam in their late twenties. They received their university degrees in Islamic theology and pedagogy. As they emphasized earlier in their narratives about skirts, Azize and Latife have become increasingly passionate about sewing their own dresses. They both work for the Amsterdam municipality, since they could not find teaching jobs at schools. Azize and Latife both prefer fashionable teşettür clothing. On weekends and during their spare time, they make fashionable head coverings for parties and celebration. Gradually, they became teşettür coiffeurs, beginning by creating fashionable covers for their own festive dresses. Initially, they practiced on two mannequin heads that they bought at a flea market. Within a short period of time, they had acquired a large number of customers in Amsterdam.

Their story clearly illustrates how this new business has emerged out of the individual desire to fashion festive teşettür. When Azize and Latife each got married in the early 2000s, it was extremely difficult to find somebody who was capable of making party türbans. Azize was lucky, because she married somewhat later. Latife fashioned Azize’s teşettür on her wedding day. She made a very chic türban for Azize. Latife’s account emphasizes the importance of achieving one’s desired appearance on such a special day and the demand for unique head coverings that match new festive dresses:

I was in such hurry on my wedding day, I did not notice who was there, who made my ‘baş,’ we did not prepare anything in advance…nothing. That’s why I do not like my wedding türban, I am not happy with it…it still bothers me. One month after our wedding party, I put on my wedding gown again to have these photographs taken with my husband. I tried to create something for myself at home, I don’t know how it looked from the back but it looked good from the front.

The “gelin başı” (bride’s head) costs eighty euros, and usually takes around two hours to prepare. Simpler types of headwear that are sold with party dresses cost around thirty-five euros and are less time consuming. There is a friendly sense of competition between teşettür

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60 The phrase “gelin başı” (bride’s head) was commonly used by my interlocutors, and is also used in relation to non-teşettür wedding gowns.
and türban coiffeurs, and they have become significant actors in fashioning special types of headwear for festive party dresses. Tesettür coiffeurs describe their work as a solution for women who do not want to take off their scarves, but also prefer not to wear a plain satin headscarf with their fashionable wedding dresses. Some people criticize tesettür kuaförlüğü, however, because it makes tesettür more attractive and showy. To some extent, tesettür coiffeurs change the form and meaning of tesettür during the ritual moment. For Azize and Latife, their work is not only a matter of beautifying the bride but also a source of inspiration for non-tesettürlü women in such festive contexts. They are not entirely sure whether what they do is sinful or a good deed. In the eyes of some people, they serve Islam because they promote tesettür in such a way that might attract other women to the practice, while for others they ruin the modest meaning of tesettür:

Well, if women did not have this option, what would they do? Perhaps they would uncover their hair...perhaps in the eyes of God, this is more sinful than what we do. People like the beautiful head covers we make. They admire being covered. It could be encouraging for other women, too.

Not only do tesettür coiffeurs adorn festive dresses with stylish head coverings and accessories, they also help women to cover their bodies in various ways. The limits of covering change from person to person, but on a special occasion like a wedding, practices of covering are even more diverse, ambiguous and unpredictable. Head coverings complete a tesettür appearance. Festive tesettür is not only about covering one’s hair but also about covering the body properly. This can become problematic and difficult if a bride chooses a wedding dress with a low-cut neck or short sleeves, which is not designed according to tesettür. Fashioning tesettür party dresses from mainstream garments always requires additions; sometimes, a bolero jacket or a shawl is used to wrap the bride’s arms properly, while at other times a turtleneck stretch shirt is used. Additional items of clothing and the duplication of styles in a large number of party dresses have resulted in a kind of standardization, which, in turn, women usually dislike.

Azize and Latife pay great attention so that each model they make is unique and different from their previous designs. Their designs represent a specific understanding of tesettür and festive aesthetics. Their unique, creative, fashionable designs have helped them become more popular than other tesettür coiffeurs, who often produce nearly identical styles. Offering a wide range of alternatives to one’s costumers is important for Azize and Latife, because they often make more than a few head coverings for the same festive event. They have to satisfy different costumers from the same family with different styles and conceptions
of tesettür. For instance, one of their customers, Fatma, requested a different style; she does not like tesettür party dresses. A combination of a stylish jacket with a skirt and fashionable accessories expresses her taste better than tesettür party dresses. She does not like typical tesettür party dresses, as she explains:

At wedding parties, they look at your dress…dresses are always very similar at wedding parties here, because women wear these dresses with their headscarves. If the henna party is women-only, some women come without a headscarf. But I realized that if they have to wear headscarf, they wear shiny satin dresses and those small jackets that reach up to here (bolero jackets that cover the arms and breasts). I dislike those jackets—they make your shoulders look bad, especially if you are fat, they make you look odd. On top of that, all of the guests get their headscarves done. They all look the same.

Women do not want to wear similar dresses in the same colors, especially on important days. This is the biggest challenge for tesettür coiffeurs. Women debate what to wear frequently and enthusiastically: ideas and styles are exchanged among friends, and tesettür stylists take a significant part in the process. Tesettür coiffeurs act as promoters, not only in terms of aesthetics and style but also by constructing the meanings and norms of tesettür in relation to the festive scene.

Although the motto “veiling is beautiful” has become ubiquitous in advertisements, the media, and religious texts, it is still very difficult to fashion a proper, beautiful festive dress in accordance with tesettür. Women’s preferences in dresses vary widely. Costumer profiles and the styles that Azize and Latife describe reveal a strong relationship between the tastes and backgrounds of the customers. In Azize and Latife’s depiction of styles and costumers, economic and social background seems to play a more significant role than an individuals’ level of modesty or piety. Furthermore, education level is even more influential than economic status in fashioning proper, stylish clothing.

For instance, the more educated costumers prefer plain, less adorned wedding costumes: they dislike garments that scream ‘Here I am!’ They come with their friends, who also wear fashionable dresses, while the less educated girls come with their mothers-in-law and are less likely to state clearly what they want. On the other hand, the combination of wealth with a lower level of education often results in a flamboyant but cheap looking dress...

In order to calibrate the tastes and preferences of their customers in designing head coverings, Azize and Latife must establish empathy with their customers. To begin, they examine the outfits of the bride and her friends. By doing so, they are more likely to produce a result that will satisfy everybody. Sometimes, however, when they have to tell a customer
that what she desires is in bad taste. At other times, they try to hint that a desired garment is not a proper form of covering according to their understanding of tesettür.

Beauty in this context encompasses more than visual and aesthetic concerns. A beautiful tesettür presence is a matter of seeking respect, approval and recognition from different segments of society on a particular festive occasion. Azize and Latife describe the increasing demand for their work on the part of “people in general, but also (by) covered (kapalı) women, even if these women don’t typically imagine that they can be beautiful.” Their customers are quite apprehensive and often feel under pressure. There is pressure not only to achieve a desired appearance but also in relation to what other people might think of their dress preferences.

They all say ‘Aah this is my henna party, there will be many people, everybody will see me, I want to look beautiful…’ Each customer comes to us, they sit and first they say ‘Let’s not exaggerate, let’s make something simple (sade) but beautiful.’ They sit in our chair, and then they give up ‘sadelik’ (simplicity), they start saying ‘Well, maybe we can add this, maybe you can do that.’

Tesettür coiffeurs have created an alternative to the simple choice between everyday tesettür and non-veiling on wedding days and at women-only parties. Their labor is crucial for young women who want to look fashionable in a covered, stunning outfit without the risk of being judged as inappropriate. At the same time, the presence of festive headwear has negatively transformed the meaning and effect of non-veiling on one’s wedding day. Non-covering on one’s wedding day in the presence of a mixed crowd has come to be seen as a sign of improper tesettür, or at least of not being aware of its meaning. New preferences set new limits to displaying modesty. This is why most tüban stalkers pay great attention to producing proper head covers that clearly reflect a certain notion of tesettür. Because they follow the limits of modest tesettür, coiffeurs also see their work as a pious act.

Remziye’s story illustrates how women grapple with the dilemma of simultaneously looking beautiful and practicing proper tesettür on festive days. I met Remziye at Azize’s house in the winter of 2007, on the day of her henna party. Azize invited me to the party so that I could see and record them making a tüban. Remziye was nineteen years old at the time of her wedding, the daughter of a Turkish mother and a convert Dutch father. Unlike her brother, who highlights his Dutch identity, she defines herself as a Turkish woman, speaks fluent Turkish and has strong ties with the Turkish community. When I entered the room, Remziye was sitting in front of a mirror wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Remziye could have uncovered her hair for her henna party, because it was going to be a woman-only event.
Nevertheless, she preferred to wear a *tesettür* party dress. She described the kind of head covering she wanted while Azize and Latife put on her makeup. Remziye selected a *türban* that would leave her neck uncovered, with a high top over her head, adorned by many accessories. She wanted something embellished and showy that would suit her puffy, purplish satin dress. She wanted her beauty to surprise her friends, who had told her that she should uncover at her henna party, and show off her beautiful blond hair like a Barbie. Her friends thought that this would make her more beautiful. Remziye was nervous because of her friends’ comments; she intended to show them that it is possible to be beautiful and covered at the same time.

Figure 38 A selection of photos from the preparation of Remziye’s *türban*.

Azize and Latife designed Remziye’s outfit and headwear in advance, and bought the necessary materials to make the *türban* a few days before Remziye came to their place. They always discuss outfits with their customers, and they often come up with a set of a few accessories from which the costumer can choose. Accessories must match both the color and texture of the dress. It is essential for the head covering and the dress to be in a harmony. It should seem like the head covering is an extension of the outfit. After Azize and Latife
completed Remziye’s makeup, they started to prepare the first, base level of covering. They tied Remziye’s hair at the top and wrapped it with a cotton scarf before putting a white cotton bonnet on top. On top of the base layer, they gave form to the headscarf with pins and stitches. They prefer cotton material for the base because it helps to hold the satin scarf in place. For some models, they use a plastic film on the front side, so the satin scarf maintains its shape for a long time.

After preparing the cotton base layer, Azize and Latife started to work with the headscarf, which is often somewhat larger than an ordinary scarf. For Remziye, they used a satin scarf perfectly matched to the color of her dress. They formed the scarf by shirring and stitching from the edges at the back of the neck. They made layers by folding the scarf and using decorative ribbons in darker tones at the edges of the headscarf. Many pins were used in this process, but they were invisible, so we could only see that the layers were nicely arranged in order to preserve the türban’s form. Finally, Azize and Latife used hairspray to complete the türban.

Figure 39 Remziye’s henna party dress.
Remziye was pleased with the result, even though it was not what she had described to them in the beginning. Latife and Azize did not want to make a türban with her neck uncovered. Because Remziye wanted to have a teşettür party dress even for her women-only henna party, Azize and Latife insisted that she should wear a more covering, proper teşettür. Otherwise, they thought, it would be more appropriate for her to uncover her hair completely. They were not only worried about how Remziye would represent a certain conception of teşettür; they also wanted to maintain their business reputation as teşettür stylists who make proper türbans. Azize and Latife relate their work to a certain understanding and aesthetics of teşettür. By incorporating knowledge of teşettür into their work, they also endow their labor with religious meaning.

Wearing chic, elegant teşettür in a proper manner produces a festive atmosphere. The guests and hosts are also part of the festive scene; they too pay attention to their outfits and strive to distinguish themselves from their everyday appearance. As moments of exception, celebrations display different, more flexible practices of teşettür. These events shape and form a new aesthetics of festive teşettür (düğünlükler) while also producing new measures of proper teşettür. The preference for veiling or non-veiling has different connotations at today’s festive occasions. In celebratory settings, women merge different understandings of teşettür with diverse aesthetics and fashions. They are often less concerned with the negative connotations of attractiveness because these events function as an abstract teşettür, particularly for those who are at the center of the festive stage. At the same time, new styles of teşettür head coverings and covered party dresses have become popular in the Turkish-Dutch teşettür scene.
CHAPTER SEVEN: HEADSCARVES

Is it cultural? Is it political? Is it fashion? Is it worship? Is it an object of peer or male pressure? Is it a matter of choice? Is it modern? Is it backward? Is it rural? Is it silk or cotton? Is it urban? Islamic? Is it attractive or ugly? Is it the basis for a court case about human rights or an emblem of discrimination? Is it a threat? Is it modest? Radical? Reactionary (irticacı)? Is it conscious or habitual? Is it an accessory? Is it oppressive or liberating? Is it Turkish or Moroccan? Tied with a knot or pin? This is only a partial list of the questions asked and terms used when one enters into a discussion about the modern headscarf. Even this short list clearly shows that the headscarf is one of the most contested items of women’s clothing in modern, secular times.
Headscarves hold a special place in the wardrobes of the women with whom I conducted research. Many of them had very rich collections of scarves in terms of color, pattern, and styles. These women differ not only in their aesthetics, tastes, and understandings of piety and modesty, but also in the ways in which they keep the headscarves in their bedrooms. Boxes, drawers and hangers are full of headscarves of different kinds. These headscarves varied from the 90 x 90 centimeter wide square scarves of the 1990s to dark, plain-colored Moroccan chiffon shawls, from cotton flower-patterned yemeni(s)\textsuperscript{61} to silk scarves with leopard prints, and from twill silk scarves patterned with the map of Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar to shiny satin scarves.

\textsuperscript{61} The yemeni is a, soft square scarf made of fine cotton. See figures 48 & 49 on page 205.
During my research interviews, the question “How many headscarves do you own?” often resulted in a long pause. Women were sometimes embarrassed when they realized how many headscarves they might possess. Some of my interlocutors simply did not want to mention the number, and preferred to change the subject. It is very difficult to give a headscarf away, as the wearer feels that at any time this particular scarf could be the one needed to match with a particular outfit. Headscarves are precious yet challenging items in women’s wardrobes: they do not always match with the desired combination of garments, and any outfit without a headscarf is incomplete. Women also enjoy giving and receiving headscarves as gifts. In a sense, friends, relatives and colleagues help to shape these large collections with their selection of headscarves. These large collections of headscarves bring together the aesthetics of different geographies and communities, personal tastes, both past and the future, mainstream fashions, tesettür fashions and changing understandings of modesty and piety. Moreover, these collections mirror continuities and similarities, as well as shifts and variations, in headscarf practice. In doing so, they challenge the problematic division in the narratives of the “modern headscarf” between the “habitual” and the “conscious” or the “cultural” and the “Islamic,” which are interchangeably used in the literature.

At particular historical moments and political conjunctures, the scarves and styles of Muslim women’s head coverings have had different names as well as meanings. The genealogy of the Turkish headscarf in the Netherlands begins with the presence of geographically-marked, provincial headscarves and the first modern headscarf, the “Atatürk Eşarbi,” during the early years of migration. This genealogy follows a trajectory similar to that of the changing styles and trends of the headscarf in Turkey. The literature mainly describes two major shifts in the history of the Turkish headscarf: the first phase, involving the transformation of the traditional practice of wearing a headscarf into a “political act” in the mid-1980s, and the second phase, involving the emergence of fashionable headscarves in the 1990s and the proliferation of fashionable styles (Navaro-Yashin 2002a; Sandıkçı and Ger 2001, 2007). The “consciously Islamic” headscarf of the 1980s and the fashionable styles of headscarf that emerged in the 1990s largely replaced former styles, which were described as either “cultural” or “habitual” headscarves in the Dutch-Turkish tesettür scene.

Scholarly literature on the Turkish headscarf, with its constant emphasis on the headscarf as a “consciously Islamic” choice, has overlooked the aesthetics and materiality of the headscarf as an object and artifact (Sandıkçı and Ger 2005). This literature has also
dismissed the agency of headscarves and clothing more generally in people’s lives (Tarlo 2007; Moors 2009a), as well as their transformative capacity for the pious self (Mahmood 2005). Most problematically, general scholarly debate has defined the adoption of the headscarf either as subordination or resistance to secular western power. This narrative eliminates the historicity of headscarf practices. It denies the continuity of styles and the ambiguity of meanings by constructing dichotomies and hierarchies between styles, from “rural” to “urban,” “cultural” to “Islamic,” and “habitual” to “conscious.”

Narratives of the modern Turkish headscarf in the Netherlands capture constant changes in the materiality, style, and agency of the headscarf, and illustrate continuities and commonalities in women’s adoption and styling of their headscarves. Contemporary headscarf collections offer challenges to the predictions of two modern narratives about the headscarf: the secular modernization narrative, which predicts the ultimate fading away of the headscarf not only as a marker of religious identity but also as a marker of ethnic and rural identities and poverty, and the “Islamic modernization” narrative, which predicts the disappearance or replacement of “habitual” or “cultural” headscarves by a consciously worn “Islamic” headscarf. With the disappearance of ethnically or culturally marked headscarves, both narratives suggest a certain degree of homogenization in the practice of modern headscarf. In contrast, the accounts of the women whom I interviewed for this research reveal significant continuities between styles and meanings, rather than the sharp ruptures that the two modern headscarf narratives suggest.

The first part of this chapter presents a more nuanced picture of continuities and changes in headscarf forms, names, and styles in the Turkish-Dutch context. The second section discusses the reflections and experiences of women in relation to the gaze of others. It describes the public presence of the headscarf with a focus on how women who wear the headscarf experience and perceive what others think about the headscarf. These experiences and perceptions define these women as a sartorial minority. Through everyday stories of the headscarf, the next section shows how young women seek new styles, strength, and inspirations in their headscarf choices. This section also presents “conversion stories” of adopting the headscarf. The last part of the chapter focuses on two particular styles of headscarf that have materialized within the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene in the last few years. It first describes the materiality of styles—fabrics, patterns, care-tags, etc.—and discusses the effects of two distinct styles, Turkish silk headscarves and cotton shawls, in the lives of young Turkish Dutch women. It also portrays how both styles blur the boundaries between Turkish
religious communities, on the one hand, and between different Muslim migrant communities in the Netherlands, on the other.

1. Narratives of the Modern Headscarf

From Yaşmak to Atatürk Eşarbı

The first Turkish language dictionary on dressing and accessories was published in 1969, at the initiative of the state-owned textile and clothing enterprise, Sümerbank. The author, the Turkish historian Reşat Ekrem Koçu (1905-1975) maps various styles and items of headdresses over both time and space. The pedagogical language in the dictionary clearly sets up a boundary between the past, which the various styles of headscarves are taken to have belonged to, and the present time of the author (Fabian 1983). The language of the dictionary anticipates “unveiling” as the ultimate consequence of the modernization project. This dictionary is a rich account and instrument, in the sense that it shows how national and modern accounts of clothing distinguish and exclude certain practices of dress. This is a typical example of the construction of a narrative of secular modernity in Turkey (Navaro-Yashin 2002b; Özyürek 2006; Çınar 2008).

In this dictionary, yaşmak—a category including a variety of large and loosely covering scarves—was depicted as the outdoor style for “women of Islam.” Muslim women often wore headdresses (such as hotoz or fes) indoors, and put yaşmak on over them, partly covering their faces when they went outside. The text below the images of women in different styles of yaşmak (on the left) directs the reader from left to the right in a chronological order by referring to different generations of women. Beginning with the covered yaşmak made of thick tülbend (kind of cotton fabric commonly used for headscarves), the chronology moves

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62 In 1932, the Turkish government secured credit from the Soviet Union for the construction of the Sümerbank plant in Kayseri. The factory opened in September 1935. Designed, financed and equipped with machinery by the Soviet Union, it was a direct replica of similar Soviet cotton plants.

63 In the same dictionary, Koçu quotes from the Kamûs-ı Türkî, the first Turkish source, written by Şemseddin Sami, that describes the common outdoor headwear of Muslim Ottoman women: “Yaşmak; when Muslim women used to wear ferace outside, they covered their faces and heads with a two-pieced white cotton thin scarf, which came from above and below, leaving a gap in front of the eyes (my translation); (İslam kadınılara sokakda ferace giyikleri vakit yüzlerine tutundukları ince beyaz dülbendden örtü ki biri yukarıdan ve biri aşağıdan gelerek gözlerin önünde bir aralık bırakırmak iki parçadan ibaret) (1969: 240).”
forward to what the author calls “the last era of yaşmak,” in which the yaşmak becomes more revealing, openly displaying the nose and forehead of an “elegant lady” in the middle and constituting the less covering, more transparent covering on a younger girl in the left corner.

In the anticipated trajectory of evolution, the less covered, more transparent yaşmak is associated with the image of an elegant woman. The last image belongs to a young, single woman (“küçük hanım” is the term generally used for such women) that imposes a certain aesthetics and implies a temporal gap between styles on the basis of the generational difference between yaşmak wearers. The typical tone, along with the accompanying set of other images, encourages readers to think that the tradition of wearing the veil as an outdoor garment for Muslim women has disappeared; the remnants of this practice are marginalized and associated with a particular provincial background. Thus, according to this logic, the yaşmak is no longer Muslim women’s dress but merely the clothing of village women.

Figure 42 The figure on the left depicts different generations of women in yaşmak (Koçu 1969: 241); the figure on the right shows a woman from İstanbul wearing a hotoz (Ibid.: 132). The second image was first published in the “Elbise-i Osmaniyye” by Osman Hamdi Bey & Marie de Launay in 1873.
The author also describes particular styles of indoor headgear. *Hotoz* (on the right), alternatively known as *tepelik* or *fes*, was perhaps the first example of a readymade type of headdress for indoor use, which was also used as an accessory according to the same dictionary. The author does not anticipate a possible continuation of this practice. He reproduces an image of the *İstanbullu* woman in the following manner:

> Until the recent past, *hotoz* was the most common form of headdress that young girls and women of all ages wore mostly at home. Women covered their *hotoz* with *yaşmak* when they went outside. Those who did not put on *hotoz* brushed their hair and covered their braided hair with a *yemeni* (my translation). 64

In the context of migration, headscarf stories allow us to capture continuities between certain styles. The styles and the terms used in the dictionary are echoed in the accounts of young Turkish-Dutch *tesettürlü* women. Their accounts and memories challenge the hegemonic headscarf narrative of secular modernization. While the tone of the text in the dictionary might lead readers to conclude that the styles described are already extinct, in fact, they still provide a rich source of inspiration for an increasing number of Muslim women and *tesettür* designers. These old forms reappear and acquire new meanings in the lives of young Turkish-Dutch women.

*Fes* and *hotoz* are still present in the photo albums or in the photographs that hang on the walls of houses in the Netherlands. My interlocutors described this form as both an indoor and a provincial style. In a nostalgic way, they evoke the village life of elderly women. There are also elderly women who still wear this style, even in the Netherlands. A young, fashionable *tesettürlü* woman, Bihter, describes a kind of *fes* that one of her elderly relatives still wears:

> My father’s auntly lives in Haarlem, she wears a *fes* with her scarf, and it is funny. When you see her, you remember village life. She still wears three layers of dress...

In the same dictionary, Koçu identifies two different kinds of *yemeni* based on tying styles. Unlike the *yaşmak*, which he refers to deliberately as an outdoor scarf of Muslim women, he portrays *yemeni* styles in terms of practicality and comfort. *Salma* and *kundak* were the two common forms of the *yemeni*. In the *kundak* style (which literally means

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swaddle), all of a woman’s hair is wrapped in the scarf, and it is only possible to see some hair at the very front. *Salma*, on the other hand, often leaves the wearer’s hair in braids uncovered at the back. Similar to its contemporary function underneath silk scarves, the *kundak* style functioned to keep hair the under the *hotoz* and other headdresses (Koçu 1969: 160).

![Figure 43 Salma style on the left and kundak style on the right.](image)

The *yemeni* is still used; it is not only worn indoors but also under headscarves without bonnets to give a fashionable shape to silk and satin scarves that need to be fixed with pins. Young Turkish-Dutch women, in particular, also refer to this same style as *kundak*. Although they prefer the comfort of cotton scarves at home, *yemeni* or *yazma* styles can no longer be a part of young women’s clothing in public spaces.⁶⁵ There is also strong pressure on elderly women not to wear these styles outside of the home. Even if they are more comfortable and practical due to their cotton material, most *tesettürlü* women find it embarrassing to put them on.

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⁶⁵ Wedding and henna parties might be the only contexts in which some styles still highlight locality within Turkey. For instance, girls who are originally from Elazığ tie their *yemeni* in their particular local style on these occasions, hence they are known as “the women of Elazığ” (*Elazığlı kadınlar*).
The first generation of migrant women often wore provincial cotton scarves, or, as Nevin describes below, small colorful scarves usually made of polyester. Women’s geographical and social mobility resulted in changes in their styles of wearing the headscarf. Nevin mentions a particular outdoor style from her village on the west part of Black Sea coast. She uses the same term, *yaşmak*—used for the outdoor scarves of “the women of Islam” (*İslamın kadınları*) in the dictionary—to identify the large cotton scarf characteristic of her village. This scarf has a particular print and fabric that belongs to a specific region, even as the styles of tying may change from one village to the next. This is a geographically-marked, “traditional” style.

There are differences...the most common scarf has patterns like stars on it, but we have white scarves with black polka dots on them, they are like long, covering prayer scarves. Women wear those scarves on top of their *tülbents*. They cover their mouths up to their nose. For instance, that is how the women in Tosya (another village) cover when they go outside. Indoors, they wear normal scarves. However, in our village, it is different. We wear long dresses. In our village, women wear a headscarf that is about one and half meters long, we call it *yaşmak*, you put it on from the back, and wrap it around the jowls. It is very long...youngsters wear white ones and elderly women wear black ones, we have two colors.

There were a few basic kinds of *yaşmak* worn based on the locality and age group of women in Nevin’s village. These coverings are very different from contemporary headscarves, which mostly reflect wearers’ personal tastes, and sometimes the aesthetics of communities to which they belong. This type of covering signifies where a woman is from, as well as indirectly specifying her marital status. Furthermore, the function and signification of this type of headdress have changed in these localities because they have become exclusively a style for the elderly, one that is not favored by young women. Ironically, in spite of the fact that it is fully covering, the same style would not be considered suitable as an outdoor style for Muslim women today.

While the headscarf narrative of secular modernization predicted the ultimate fading away of headscarf practice, the “Atatürk headscarf” emerged as a modern alternative to ethnically and geographically marked headscarves. This was a more ambivalent headscarf, as its presence in modern public space was not a problem for the modernization project. For example, Nevin came to the Netherlands wearing a small *Atatürk eşarbi*, not the *yaşmak* she used to wear in her village. This type of scarf was more suitable with an overcoat. As we can recall from the chapter on the overcoat, Nevin first changed her style after she moved to
Istanbul. At that point, she adopted a less covering, colorful headscarf, which was part of her first modern outfit, as she described.

Figure 44 Women wearing “Atatürk eşarbi” in Almelo 1978, by Bertien van Manen in her book, Vrouwen te gast (1979), courtesy of Bertien van Manen.

For a long period, the Atatürk headscarf was the only available alternative for those who did not want to unveil, but also did not want to look poor and rural. This style was the first modern headscarf, in other words, the first headscarf that did not have any ethnic signification or trace of a provincial background. A young woman named Bither describes her mother’s scarf in the early years of migration as an Atatürk eşarbi.

They call this the ‘Atatürk eşarbi,’ my mother wore that style. She had a lock of hair uncovered above her forehead; it was a very small scarf. They call that knot the Atatürk knot. [Like the Süleymani do?] No, my mom had a scarf just like that which you see in old Turkish movies… She wore it all the time when she went out. She had very small scarves.

While the Atatürk headscarf was more ambivalently perceived in the Turkish context, it was treated exclusively as a migrant headscarf by the Dutch public. To some extent, at least,
it was still strongly associated with poverty and a migrant background in the Netherlands. A large number of women, such as Bither’s mother, put on the Atatürk eşarbi on their way to the Netherlands as an alternative to provincial scarves, on the one hand, and unveiling, on the other. In Turkey and the Netherlands alike, ethnic styles continued to produce a hierarchy between women from less provincial areas and others who were from remote villages. Those who quickly adopted a more urban style of dress were able to distance themselves from the disadvantaged position of the poor.

The Emergence of the “Consciously Islamic” Headscarf

The emergence of new, “consciously Islamic” veiling fashions, which became possible in the 1980s, not only transformed the material and aesthetic aspects of headscarves, in terms of size and coverage, but also changed the meanings of former styles (both ethnically-marked scarves and more ambivalently perceived small scarves). While both provincial scarves and the Atatürk eşarbi gradually became less visible in public spaces, the remnants of those styles were considered as “corrupted/degraded” according to the headscarf narrative of Islamic modernization. Ethnically marked scarves were not “Islamic” because they were cultural; the Atatürk headscarf was not “Islamic” because it did not properly cover all of a woman’s hair.

As I discussed in the chapters on the overcoat and the çarşaf, children of migrant families often followed an alternative educational path in Turkey, in addition to Dutch education, in order to realize plans to return to Turkey. Increasing mobility and emerging networks between Turkey and the Netherlands concurrently promoted new styles. However, the February 28th, 1997 military intervention was a turning point in Turkey for the politics of and about the headscarf. In the following years, the strictly enforced headscarf ban affected many families, either directly or indirectly. Most Turkish migrant families in the Netherlands witnessed the impact of the 28 February process, since female relatives living in Turkey frequently suffered from the ban. Merve Kavakçı was a very significant figure during that period. She was one of two tesettürlü women elected to the Turkish Grand National
Assembly as a parliamentarian in 1999; she was forcibly removed from the Parliament on the day of the swearing-in ceremony due to her refusal to remove her headscarf. Later, she was stripped of her citizenship and faced several court charges because she had worn a headscarf inside Parliament. In her recent book, *Headscarf Politics in Turkey*, Kavakçı (2011) discusses the “pin factor,” the use of pins and bonnets in fashioning headscarves in the 1990s, as a major difference between “habitual” and “consciously-Islamic” headscarf practices. It was the use of pins that divided women into two categories, “threats” and “non-threats,” in the perception of the Turkish state; this dichotomy was in fact a modern, secular, elitist invention.

For some, the use of pins defines a headscarf as a “conscious” practice, while for others pins turn a headscarf into a “threat”. As Gökariğsel and Secor (2011) argue, pins were simultaneously functional and moral items that prevented headscarves from slipping and thus revealing the wearer’s hair (Ibid.: 853). Pins allowed women to fix and arrange colorful, slippery headscarves with bonnets in a fashionable manner; they produced a generational gap between styles. Elderly women who did not find the use of pins and bonnets practical and saw them as mere fashion faced young women who declared that pins as well as bonnets were not fashion items, but a matter of religiosity.

New hierarchies among styles excluded the headscarf practices of elderly and peripheral women by privileging women who adopted the “conscious” style as actors who have gained knowledge of proper *tesettür*. Kavakçı describes the difference between the two styles and the women who wear them.

A woman who consciously adopts the headscarf as a reflection of her commitment to Islam would probably not compromise her *tesettür*, therefore she would take the measures to keep her headscarf covering the entirety of her hair and ensuring that it stays put. If there is no usage of pin, then the headscarf tied under the chin with a nod (*sic*) is very likely to slide back, revealing some hair in the front. This would more likely be the covering of a woman of the periphery who is less conscious about her *tesettür* thus merely wearing it for cultural/traditional or social reasons rather than out of religious obligations (2011: 26-27).

By focusing solely on the category of women who were seen as “threatening” (Ibid.: 23) and not women of the periphery and their styles, Kavakçı reproduces a hierarchy between headscarf styles and reinstates the rural-urban divide in the practice of wearing a headscarf; this hierarchy is quite similar to that produced by the narrative of Turkish modernity itself (Argın 2005; Zeybek 2011). Adopting the headscarf has come to be defined as a choice rather than as an embodied, habitual, sartorial practice. This redefinition reveals new distinctions
among women; while it produces and emphasizes commonalities among some women, it excludes other women who are not in the position to choose. Women who are capable of choosing to wear the headscarf become equals, distinct from those who cannot choose, but rather have to wear the headscarf. Based on being able to choose wearing a headscarf or not to do so, the protagonists of these two different stances share a common evaluative ground. They jointly contribute to the construction of hierarchies between styles and meanings of the headscarf.

Conversion Stories

The modern, consciously worn headscarf distinguishes itself with a certain achievement of knowledge and the aesthetics and sensibilities constructed through this knowledge. The following section focuses on how this breach in the formation of the contemporary headscarf is internalized and narrated by women as a sort of “conversion story.” Transforming the headscarf experience from a “habitual practice” into “a self-chosen practice” is a commonly shared narrative among Turkish-Dutch women. This break makes headscarf practice “modern” and therefore “conscious,” and vice versa. The headscarf gains a sort of legitimacy through the knowledge required to practice it “consciously”. Young women who adopted the “consciously Islamic” headscarf were rigidly represented as political agents in an “Islamic milieu” that also included other daily practices that were interpreted as aspects of a “resistance society” (Deeb & Harb 2007). Without this knowledge, the headscarf would only be a sign of women’s “submission” or a “cultural/traditional” practice; on the basis of knowledge about how and why to wear a headscarf, this same practice becomes an act of “resistance.”

The emergence of a new style in the early 1990s revealed some of the difficulties in fashioning the headscarf as a “conscious” practice. Each particular headscarf must be selected deliberately in order to differ from other styles formerly worn. Women sought something different from the Atatürk eşarbi in terms of size, and new in a sense that reflected urban taste more than a plain white scarf. They tried to distance their headscarf practice from the negative connotations of poverty and a rural background; furthermore, they upheld a break in the practice that is marked by achieving explicit knowledge about why one wears a headscarf.
In the early 1990s, when Nermin decided to put on a headscarf, she could not find a headscarf at home that would achieve her desired presence on the streets of Istanbul:

When I decided to adopt tesettür, I did not know what to put on. My mother’s headscarf style was something in between wearing and not wearing the headscarf. She would not hesitate to pull her scarf down to her shoulders when she wanted. I could not find a scarf that would cover my shoulders, because they were all very small. I found one large, white scarf, a prayer scarf (namaz örtüsü). I looked like an old woman, a grandmother. Everybody looked at me. I was so embarrassed with that white ‘hajji’ scarf.67

In the end, Nermin bought a large, plain scarf in a dark color, which was considered to be a “conscious” (bilingli) headscarf (and by some commentators, a “threat”) at that time. In the 1990s, persuasion rooms (ikna odaları)68 for tesettürlü women were introduced at universities. During this period, many women saw migration to Europe as an opportunity to continue their career or lead better lives. They introduced a new style in the Netherlands, along with the knowledge required to adopt the headscarf “consciously.” In this “conscious” style, pins are used to fix the slippery scarves at several locations—under the chin, on the sides and on the top of the head—so that the scarf maintains its form. This gives the wearer a neat, clean look. Women choose different fastening accessories for different occasions and outfits, including simple straight pins (preferably the thinnest ones, so scarves will be less damaged), as well as brooches and clips decorated with shiny and colorful stones.

According to the theory of “conscious” headscarf practice, women must rediscover their headscarves on the basis of a more sophisticated knowledge and an explicit aesthetics. Only by doing so will become more comfortable wearing a headscarf in the public spaces. To achieve this “consciousness,” women attend religious sohbets (theological conversations) and mosque meetings; they seek knowledge about modest dress in hadith collections and the Quran. On the basis of this knowledge, which their parents had not been able to teach to them when they first adopted the headscarf as children, young women articulate the headscarf as an “autonomously chosen” practice.

A woman who adopts the headscarf at a later point in life probably does not come from a religious family. Most parents of such women do not discuss the meaning of the headscarf at all with them; furthermore, they often resist their daughter’s decision. In the

67 This is a type of broadly covering white cotton scarf.

68 Experts, including psychologists and faculty members, tried to persuade young women to remove their headscarves in order to enter university.
accounts of women from such families, the headscarf is idealized as even more effective and transformative. Statements such as “I was reborn,” “My life has changed,” and so forth indicate the new beginning that these women experience. Sometimes donning the headscarf marks the closure of a successful transformation; on the other hand, because the headscarf is the most stigmatized item in *tesettür* clothing, deciding to wear it sometimes initiates the transformation toward a desired pious self.

Elif is a fifty-year-old woman from Istanbul. She married and moved to the Netherlands in 1998. She was twenty when she decided to adopt the headscarf. She does not come from a pious family, and she had a very different life and clothing style previously. It took around seven years for her to put her desire to wear the headscarf into practice. She describes the moment of her decision after long period of reflection and hesitation. Her soul was ready to adopt the headscarf, but her body was not. Below, we read her internal dialogue on a warm summer day. She was walking on a street when she passed by a shop window and noticed herself:

August 25th, 1988, on a very warm day. I was in weird mood, I said: ‘You want to live a different life, you want an utterly different life, but you cannot do this (adopt the headscarf). Why don’t you cover yet, is your soul that weak? What do people around you think? Why is that so important for you?’ I am still the only one covered in my family…I was walking on my way; I did not yet have the courage. I was thinking…if I am going to do this, I cannot cover and then uncover. The doubts were only in my head; my body was ready (the way she dressed changed, became more modest and covered, ready for adopting the headscarf). I stood in front of a huge shop window, and looked at my reflection…people might think I am crazy, I thought…I said ‘You have waited so long…are you listening to şeytan (the devil)’…no, don’t do so, not now’…God was watching me in that way (referring to her reflection on the shop window) and waiting for my commitment. I decided. I was alone, my family was in our summer house. Then, I called a few close friends and asked them to accompany me shopping (for a headscarf). One of them said jokingly, ‘Weren’t you already covered?’…that was funny…they said, ‘No need for shopping, we’ll give one to you, we have enough.’ I covered and went out; it felt as if I had always been covered. My family was shocked; my friends asked ‘How can this be?’ If you are confident in what you are doing, they accept you and they respect your decision…

It is less common to hear stories of the first headscarf experience as an individual choice from girls and women who adopted the headscarf at an early age. These stories often begin with sentences like “I admired my mother, she was so beautiful in her headscarf” and “My father bought my elder sister a beautiful headscarf, so I wanted one”; the desire to put on a headscarf at eight, ten, or twelve years old is usually related to the desire to grow up. It is
not a life-changing experience in a religious sense, but it still has the potential to become one in the future.

I was very young, I was eight years old, but I studied at an Islamic school. Everybody wore a headscarf; it was very popular in our school. It was like a trend among my friends. I was not aware (of its meaning) really but I put it on. One day, a friend of mine came to school with a headscarf, the next day you saw another friend with a headscarf. We all started at that period. I never uncovered again. Later, it became something that reflects your identity...it was not a big deal at that time, nobody said ‘Aaaa! Zeynep has put on a headscarf’...I was just like other girls around me...

While the meaning of tesettür and the proper practice of the headscarf is also taught in Islamic schools and neighborhood mosques, young women still often try to find ways to achieve a more sophisticated knowledge of tesettür at later stages of life as young, educated professionals. Wearing a headscarf is a confrontational practice, and women want to ensure that they possess accurate ways of explaining why they wear the headscarf to others. This rigorous search for knowledge about tesettür is a modern and secular phenomenon.

In her account, Asira argues that the proper manner of covering one’s hair with the help of a bonnet and pins is only something that becomes possible on the basis of a comprehensive knowledge of Islam. To adopt the headscarf as a child is not regrettable, because it is not a “choice”; nevertheless, this practice also needs to be chosen actively and reflected on as an educated adult.

I was twelve or thirteen. I never regretted it. [Do you remember the first time you wore the headscarf?] Well, I did not cover all of my hair at first. I was small and enthusiastic; at home when I was alone, I took one and tried it on. I think Süleymanlı women tie their scarf like that; I left a lock of hair uncovered at the front. Later, around the age of fifteen or sixteen, I learned a lot from sohbets. Then I covered my hair completely.

In contrast to earlier generations, parents who have recently acquired knowledge of the “modern Islamic headscarf” try to encourage their daughters to adopt the headscarf as a “consciously Islamic” practice from the very beginning. Parents are well aware that their daughters need support and knowledge to adopt and continue their headscarf practice. Goncagül is the mother of a twelve-year-old who recently adopted the headscarf. When Goncagül decided to put on the headscarf, she was older than her daughter is now. After a long period of hesitation, Goncagül found enough courage to practice the headscarf. She recalls her experience, which occurred during a short chat with an elderly woman after prayer in a neighbor’s house, vividly:
She said ‘I am so proud of you.’ It was only the two of us left in the room for prayer. After praying she said, ‘Well done my daughter, you are the only one. You built the walls of your house but you did not build a roof for the house.’ I wondered what she meant…then she explained this to me in the following way: ‘You built four walls of your house, but if it rains, there will be water, and it will damage the base, you pray and believe in God, that is very good but to continue this, you should protect your faith, if you do not hold on to your headscarf you may give up.’

Goncagül came home afterward and told her boyfriend that she had made her decision, and her boyfriend bought her first headscarf for her as a gift. Her account demonstrates how coincidences and conversations with others shape the process of decision-making. Her first scarf was an expensive silk one, and she covered all of her hair as an indication of “conscious” practice. After almost twenty years, she wants her daughter to make the decision to cover with a more sophisticated, deeper Islamic knowledge than she had when she was young. She narrates her daughter’s experience as follows:

She has a few friends who recently covered...my fear is that she will have to defend her headscarf, and she should be sure about it. She should adopt it consciously. If I had told her, ‘You will put on the headscarf” and I did not explain why...this wouldn’t be good. I did not say very much to her, I only told her ‘You are doing this for God, if you uncover after two days...first you accept the fact and then do it.’ She read books during the summer with her aunt in Turkey; her aunt told her why she should cover. We came back to the Netherlands; she covered and is glad now. I also talked to her hoca, they said ‘You should be happy that God gave her this privilege, and that she is a smart child. But it is your duty to support her, if you give her a hand…’ She attends mosque meetings, there are evening sohbets on Fridays for young girls, and she goes there. Hopefully, she will educate herself spiritually.

As a mother and a tesettürülü woman, Goncagül knows that her daughter will need strength and patience to cope with the disadvantages of wearing a headscarf. To cultivate this strength, she should only wear the headscarf for God, not for anybody else. Otherwise, she will not be able to internalize and continue her practice. Spiritual strength and a sophisticated knowledge of tesettür practice are necessary in order to be successful. In contemporary understandings of tesettür, this knowledge is not only necessary to wear the headscarf in a proper way, but also to be able to continue the practice as a key aspect of everyday clothing.

As teenagers, many young women begin to ask questions that neither their parents nor hocas at the mosque can answer convincingly. These questions are not about one’s faith or God but about the significance of the headscarf, which young Turkish-Dutch tesettürülü women always have to explain accurately in order to defend their choice to others. Even if
they do not implement this knowledge, women seek more sophisticated and better-articulated explanations of why they have chosen to adopt the headscarf. Some girls start wearing it at very young ages. The judgments and perceptions of the public about the headscarf, both in the Netherlands and in Turkey, often coincide: the headscarf is considered to contaminate secular, modern public space.

All of the accounts from my research interviews reveal that there are often ruptures in narratives of headscarf practice. There are moments of learning and discovery of the different potential meanings of the headscarf. The headscarf is the main item of clothing that women must frequently defend; they feel pressured to provide convincing reasons for wearing it. Beyond learning the explicit meaning of the headscarf, women adapt their headscarves to their sartorial practices in order to achieve a pleasant, comfortable feeling. Knowing which headscarf to wear on a given occasion becomes very important, as different styles communicate differently with different publics.

For Habibe, the headscarf is a constantly changing practice, both in form and meaning. It is a Divine command and a reminder of the other-worldly life. She first put on the headscarf because her mother told her that her father wanted her to cover her head. After more than thirty years, Habibe is still not convinced that this was her father’s desire. In her opinion, it was her mother’s wish. It was merely a “so-called headscarf,” a headscarf in name only, as she put it. It was “cultural”; her parents did not explain why the headscarf is religiously significant—they did not know. Habibe sees her headscarf differently. Her account highlights how old forms continue to acquire new meanings in contemporary tesettür practices:

When I covered my head, I had a different motivation. The facts and reasons for covering changed in time. I do not think that is a bad thing, it shows that you think and change. If you had asked me why I covered my head before I would have said: ‘I covered because of my religion.’ If you further asked me ‘Why specifically?’ my answer would have been ‘As a woman I should not be attractive to men.’ Now, I consider covering as an aspect of ibadet (worship). Within the last ten years, I attained a different understanding of tesettür. If you now wonder whom I am covering for, I would say for myself and for the next world…my manner of covering has changed, too. For instance sometimes I have a headache. I take off my shawl and tie it kundak style (the style depicted in E. Koçu’s dictionary, 1969) in my office. If a customer or my friend Jan comes, I do not change my scarf. It is ibadet. I put on my scarf for God, not for others. So I feel comfortable, I do not mind if my ear is visible, or if they see a lock of my hair. However, it mattered a lot to me in the past.
Even if there is a consensus that women should dress modestly and thereby not attract the male gaze, what is “not sexually attractive” is contested and negotiated. As a fashionable young tesettürlü woman argued on her twitter site, “modesty is not about hiding one’s beauty but about managing one’s beauty” (see Chapter Five on makeup for more on this point). The contemporary headscarf does not produce an effect of unattractiveness any longer; it can be very attractive and fashionable. It does not hide beauty. The function of the headscarf in drawing a boundary between men and women, in terms of attraction, does not produce consistent practices. Sandıkçı and Ger (2005) argue that the lack of consensus about the definition of proper tesettür provides women with the freedom to display their own tastes and interpretations. Fashioning a faithful, beautiful appearance entails “creative and resourceful negotiation of subjective meanings, social influences and the fashion dynamics” (Ibid.: 66).

Styles change over time, and the meaning of the headscarf undergoes constant transformation, for individuals as well as religious communities, yet wearing a headscarf remains a significant aspect of clothing. To be able to follow at least one of God’s commands is a relief for many women, regardless of constant changes. By interpreting headscarf practice
as only a matter of worship and solely for God, women are able to acquire strength to deal with the difficulties and disadvantages of the headscarf.

Even if a headscarf is adopted solely as a command of God or an aspect of worship, its significance and form change over one’s lifetime, as we read above in Habibe’s narration of the changes in her own perspective. Habibe became a more pious individual and a practicing Muslim, but she is more flexible in the ways in which she covers her head. In contrast to the predictions of the paradigmatic narrative of the “modern Islamic headscarf,” the boundaries between the “habitual” and the “conscious” headscarf blur as women discover different meanings of headscarf practice and as they encounter disadvantages in the Netherlands. For some women, other norms or God’s command may gain more significance in fashioning pious subjectivities at later stages in their lives.

As we see in the quotes above, conversion stories that narrate the transformation of headscarf practice from “habitual” to “conscious” are crucial because women need strength to overcome the difficulties and disadvantages of their veiled presence in public. Life as a migrant also demands that women be more articulate about their headscarves, as they need to explain their “choice” better to others. As their networks expand beyond the migrant community and women enter professional life, they confront negative reactions to the headscarf more frequently.

In the contemporary Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene, the term tesettür has emerged to denote a spiritual and pious practice of modest clothing, of which the headscarf is only one part. Nermin thinks that wearing a headscarf is not a sufficient indication of proper moral behavior for many practicing Turkish-Dutch women. For instance, pointing out a very attractive young woman in skinny jeans and a headscarf standing in the public library, Nermin said to me: “Today, I do not see tesettür among our youth. I see the headscarf but I cannot see anything else. Look there, she has a headscarf on but she does not have tesettür.” As a hoca and a modest, covered woman, Nermin disapproves of the combination of a headscarf with tight, attractive mainstream garments. According to her, the headscarf is wrongly associated with religiosity. This particular understanding of modest, religious clothing also undermines the “politics of the pin” (i.e. the notion that certain modes of fixing a headscarf determine whether or not it is “conscious”) in the contemporary tesettür scene.

Sevde’s suggestion that “not all başörtülü women are tesettürli, but all tesettürli women are başörtülü” illustrates the notion that tesettür constitutes new boundaries and
distinctions among women who wear headscarves. It shifts the focus from headscarf practice to the complete appearance of the person and her moral conduct. Furthermore, a comprehensive perspective on tesettür admits flexible practices of the headscarf (in terms of form), unlike the “modern Islamic headscarf” of the 1980s, which was mainly defined as taking the necessary measures to cover all of one’s hair. With the help of pins, women fix their headscarves under the chin; this is a modern headscarf, visibly different from former styles of headscarf, which were tied in different ways, for instance with a knot or simply by wrapping. A plain-colored headscarf tied with a pin was perceived as “consciously Islamic” and concomitantly as a “threat” to the secular Turkish state. The pins that initially marked the difference between rural and urban, and the distinction between “cultural/traditional” and “conscious” practice, became a technical necessity for fashionable headscarf practice. Judgments about the “conscious” headscarf became more complicated with the proliferation of styles and the changing materiality of headscarves themselves.

Being a Sartorial Minority in the Netherlands: “Who do They Think I Am?”

Tesettürlü women think quite a lot about how others imagine them and judge their lives. Wearing the headscarf in everyday life is also about constantly asserting that “I am not the person that you think I am”; “I am not dirty, I am not ignorant, I am not oppressed or a terrorist, and I speak fluent Dutch”; and so forth. Even friends and relatives assume that the headscarf represents a major change in women’s lives, so most women who adopt the headscarf as adults have to prove that they are still the same person. Whether a woman adopts the headscarf later in life as a “self-chosen practice” or adopts it as a very young member of pious family, merely because her sisters and mothers see it as inevitable, she encounters similar clichés about the headscarf in the Netherlands.

This section of the chapter portrays women’s accounts of and reactions to the judgments and criticisms of others. It focuses on the shifting reasons and motivations for continuing to practice the headscarf as a significant part of everyday clothing and worship in relation to the gaze of others. As I explained in the previous section, the headscarf becomes more stigmatizing as women who wear it move outside the Turkish migrant community. More specifically, the headscarf experience is less disadvantageous and stigmatizing as long as
women remain within intimate circles, mostly within the networks of Turkish religious communities. Furthermore, some parts of the city are less comfortable for women. In the quotations below, Ebrar portrays an uneasy encounter, when she realized what the image of the başörtüsü (hoofddoek) might be in the mind of little boy.

Women around me often wear the headscarf. But then you go to a neighborhood that you do not know, to a Dutch neighborhood to visit your friends….a Dutch kid is pointing at you and saying to his mother ‘Look mama, a terrorist,’ and the mother only says ‘That’s very rude of you say that.’ She doesn’t say ‘She is not a terrorist, don’t label her that way.’

To build trust and intimacy with people who have fixed, rigid stereotypes about the headscarf is very difficult. In the Dutch context, the headscarf only adds to these challenges and difficulties, as both the Dutch majority and secular Turkish communities generally perceive the headscarf negatively. Moreover, some women also face discouraging reactions from within their own intimate circles, including family members, relatives, and friends. In part, these friends and family members do not want their loved ones to live a more disadvantageous life than their peers who are not covered. At other times, friends and family members do not like to associate themselves with the clichés about the headscarf.

With the partial exception of Islamic schools, schools are the first places where children face the fact that life with the headscarf is difficult outside one’s home. Fatma’s narration of her experience at school exemplifies this:

After going to an Islamic school, I went to a Christian school. [How was it?] We read the Bible in the mornings, then they did their ibadet (worship), and I just sat among them. There were also other migrant kids. At that school, I did not take off my headscarf during the gymnastic classes. The teacher usually had a reaction; she did not want me to wear it. My cousin was also in the same school. She did not wear a headscarf. They always said, ‘She is a Muslim too, she doesn’t wear a headscarf, so why do you?’

The headscarf has no negative meaning to begin with for a small child. These negative connotations only emerge when girls have to explain how and why they are different from other Muslims who do not wear a headscarf. In such conversations, the headscarf seems to be the major issue that makes them different from other Muslims.

Emine is twenty-two years old; she decided to begin wearing a headscarf a year ago. Like many other girls who adopted the headscarf at an older age, she encountered a lot of criticism for doing so. Criticism came not only from friends, but also from relatives and her family. For a long time, her mother told her that she was ugly with the headscarf. It was a
very difficult decision for her to adopt the headscarf because her family was completely against it. Like many other young women who covered later in life whom I interviewed for this research, Emine wore the headscarf on purpose for the first time in a context where many people would notice it, namely, at a wedding party. Women prefer not to answer the question “Why have you adopted the headscarf?” repeatedly. In the accounts of women who covered more recently, it is common for friends, colleagues and relatives to assume that they are going through a set of changes. Acquaintances often anticipate a fundamental change in the newly-covered woman’s life.

People said to me ‘You were more beautiful when you were uncovered. Won’t you miss your life?’ They think you will have a different life because you are covered.

The headscarf is especially problematic in short encounters during which a woman does not have the opportunity to show that she is not the extremist individual the other party might imagine. In general, women who wear the headscarf require more time and energy to introduce themselves after challenging the clichés of others. Job interviews are some of the clearest instances of such situations. In these contexts, there is a sense that what others think about the headscarf matters most. Furthermore, there is usually not enough time for the tesettürlü professional to contradict the prejudices they encounter.

Girls increasingly face disadvantages related to the headscarf as they grow up. For instance, one young professional woman, a graduate of an Islamic school, eventually had to take a manager of a company to court for discrimination. The company did not employ her because she wore the headscarf. Unlike others who often make excuses to mask why they do not find women with headscarves appropriate for their businesses, this prospective employer frankly told my interlocutor that she could not get a job because of her appearance. Looking presentable is very important for certain jobs, and becomes a complex issue when the headscarf is involved. Women who wear headscarves are often not seen as sufficiently presentable for jobs that require face-to-face communication with costumers.

Many young women wonder whether their lack of success in finding employment has to do with their professional skills and degrees, or, alternately, with their headscarves. During my fieldwork, I met many young, well-educated professional women who eventually reconsidered their career plans and changed their fields of study. Bihter’s story exemplifies this. After a long period of desperately looking for a job while wearing a headscarf, Bihter decided to take off her headscarf. Although at the time of our interview she was wearing a
headscarf—she had quit her job and thus adopted it again—Bihter still considered taking off her scarf as an option for getting a job:

I got the job after the second meeting. I uncovered my head and went to the second interview. Because they had already asked me at the first round whether I would uncover if hired, I had lost my self-confidence. I have a degree; I go to a good school. Later, I plan to continue at university, and I want to work. They did not hire me. I want a good career. I said ‘I will work,’ and I took off my scarf. I got the job. It’s that simple: if you take your scarf off, they hire you.

Wearing fashionable garments allows women to cope with the loss of self-confidence. In some cases, women decide not to wear the headscarf in their workplace at all. Frequently, one job interview questions is “Would you uncover your head if we hire you?” or “Would you wear a more fashionable headscarf?” if the applicant is wearing a headscarf in a plain color, such as black. As I mentioned previously, black is a potentially controversial color, because the black headscarf is often associated with “fundamentalism” and “radical Islam.” Most women answer these questions for themselves before going to job interviews. Some women may take off their headscarves at their workplace. Others may decide to give up the practice of the headscarf completely. Still others change their career plans, so that they can get job with less difficulty as a tesettürli women.

Xhanım is a thirty-five year-old professional. She is divorced and single. She entered into an unhappy arranged marriage with a man from her village when she was very young. Divorce was a major, transformative event in her life. After her divorce, she decided to study more, but from the very beginning she was not very satisfied with what the Dutch education system offered, especially as the child of an immigrant family. She was well-trained in ironing and sewing, which now causes her to laugh when she remembers the fact. She made herself into a person quite different from what either her family or Dutch society assumed that she should be. Her desires and plans are legitimate in the eyes of her parents, and she gained enough self-confidence to become the woman that she desired to be. Xhanım completed her university degree and is now the chair of a foundation working on multicultural projects in the Netherlands. However, she still often encounters prejudice against her headscarf. For instance, even a naïve compliment such as “You are very open-minded,” which she received after making a set of comments at a conference, can be a sensitive issue, as it reveals that the person making the comment does not anticipate her to be “open-minded.” Xhanım’s encounters with others reveal that wearing a headscarf can also hide one’s professional skills and qualities:
I do not want to exaggerate, but if I were to uncover now, nobody would ask why. Of course, there would be people who would criticize me for doing so. I do not care about that anymore. If I make this decision, it is my decision. I would only do it for myself. At a certain moment in my life, I got confused about what I wanted. I thought perhaps I wanted to uncover…because we live in Dutch society, and they do not see your qualities because of your headscarf. Willingly or unwillingly, they put you in a category. They exclude you; I often experience this. [How?] I had an appointment in a school. [When it was?] Last month…well I often have such experiences. I had an appointment, and as soon as I entered the building, the guy at the entrance asked ‘Are you looking for the cleaning ladies? They are over there.’ I replied, ‘How did you conclude that I am looking for the cleaning ladies…because I am wearing a headscarf?’ He was shocked because I spoke to him in proper Dutch. In his mind, a woman in a headscarf cannot speak Dutch. Then, he apologized, and tried to atone for his mistake…

The headscarf not only hides a person’s qualities, as Xhanım describes above, it can have even worse effects in some encounters, as women may experience it as a sign of disability in communication. They face judgments patiently, and they consider being patient a pious act. They patiently let people treat them disdainfully. Alternately, some people assume they know exactly who a woman wearing a headscarf is, because they know all the clichés about the headscarf.

Turkish-Dutch women who wear headscarves are not only outsiders as immigrants, but also as visible Muslims. These clichés often have stronger effects in a context in which the Dutch secular arrangement is moving from a “multicultural society” towards what Bracke calls “secular nostalgia,” which involves “the announcement of the end of toleration in the name of protecting secularism (and) serves to disguise the transformation of this secularism in ways that particularly exclude Islam” (2011: 44). Therefore, religious communities have become the only alternative spaces in which some women are capable of feeling comfortable. Nonetheless, young women continue to wear headscarves. The headscarf makes a difference in their personal lives, as it becomes part of their identity and comforts them, even if it also causes so much trouble in the outside world. As they often assert, the headscarf also has positive effects, which in turn encourage them to continue their practice.

69 The Dutch rightwing politician Geert Wilder’s suggestion of “kopvoddentax” (literally, a “headrag tax”) in September 2009 to the Dutch Parliament was a clear instance of this. There are increasing numbers of young professionals who could afford to pay the tax (1000 euro per a year) to obtain the permit to continue to wear the headscarf if Wilder’s proposal of headscarf tax to stop the supposed “Islamisation of the Netherlands” is someday actualized. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10271153 retrieved on 17.03.2012.
After practicing the headscarf for almost twenty-five years as a teacher at an Islamic college, Elanur cannot imagine herself without her headscarf. The headscarf is like any other item in her wardrobe until the moment that she faces one of the various clichés that cause people to treat her differently. They treat her as if they know her because of their assumptions about the headscarf. Such mundane encounters also produce a certain mode of awareness about wearing a headscarf.

From time to time, when I face difficulties, I think about my headscarf, and then I say that is my *cihad* (the term *cihad* is used to denote gaining control over one’s desires and will). Sometimes, people treat me differently, for instance, when I am in the market with my mother, the grocer tries to communicate with me by moving his hands all around as if I cannot speak Dutch. Then I say that this is my *ibadet* (worship).

Categorizing the headscarf experience as *ibadet* gives women the strength and patience that they need to cope with discriminatory experiences. Headscarf practice constitutes the jihad of the inner self through which a woman becomes a more patient person. She learns how to control her anger and deal with her disappointments. The negative effects of the headscarf in Dutch public space transform the spiritual meaning and positive feelings associated with the headscarf; women try to convert these effects into something spiritually rewarding.

In some encounters, *tesettürlü* women feel that some people treat them more respectfully, while others might even choose not to communicate with them. The headscarf affects their proximity with others, regardless of the intentions of the wearer. It can simultaneously draw both demeaning and comforting boundaries, and it differs from one encounter to the next:

It protects me. I was walking on the street in The Hague, and I was on my way to the station. I saw a drunken man barely walking and standing on his feet. He was asking for a cigarette. I approached him; he was asking everybody for a cigarette—men, women, teenagers, old people who passed him. I passed by him, and he did not ask me. I think my *tesettür* kept me away from trouble. Of course, God knows its profundity, and I discovered it too… I have experienced this many times, it keeps me away from trouble.

Wearing highly fashionable clothing and attending certain events where *tesettürlü* women are not expected to appear is another way that *tesettürlü* women enjoy challenging clichés that are commonly held among Dutch people. As members of a Muslim immigrant community, they feel more pressure about their presence and activities. They try to combine the modern headscarf properly with certain moral behaviors as “good Muslims.” Women see
their efforts to combine their headscarves with mainstream fashions and become successful representatives of a larger Muslim community in the Netherlands as pious acts.

Even if there are difficulties to wearing the headscarf in a practical sense (matching headscarves to mainstream fashions or the weather, for example), women prefer not to view headscarf practice as a difficulty; moreover they seek spiritual satisfaction by bearing the stigma of the headscarf. In other words, they make the headscarf visible to society at large and challenge the clichés of others.

If you are wearing a headscarf, you should behave properly, as befits both the Muslim and the Turkish identity. You represent something, not only yourself. Sometimes, in some places, I am the only woman with headscarf. The joy of being there is different. I am proud because I am the only one. I remember a particular day well...I took my children to a very famous ice-skating show. I paid a lot of money, just to have fun with my kids. When I entered the salon, all eyes turned to me; I was the only woman with a headscarf and kids with dark hair. I enjoyed it very much. I represent myself, and all women who wear the headscarf. I like this a lot.

Women try to deal with stigma by marking the presence of the headscarf on occasions when people do not anticipate seeing them. As Goncagül describes above, events such as ice-skating shows are less likely to be attended by migrant families. Even if a woman adopts the headscarf for merely pious reasons, to be able to wear it with a sense of comfort in Dutch public spaces requires work. This work is not only about the pious self. Women have to articulate a certain set of aesthetics and be creative and sympathetic to others’ criticisms in order to make the headscarf a positive item of clothing. The question of which headscarf one chooses to wear becomes very significant, and the answers vary greatly based on location, context, and company. In the following section, I will focus on two particular styles that have become increasingly popular in the Turkish Dutch tesettür scene.
2. Silk Scarves and Cotton Shawls

The Materiality of Silk Scarves, Care Tags and Care of the Self

Different producers and manufacturers offer large collections of silk scarves that differ in terms of texture, thickness and patterns. It is not only the fact that the silk headscarf is precious or trendy that marks one’s status in professional and transnational fields. Women also describe the feeling of silk scarves as a matter of comfort. The texture of silk produces a delicate, soft feel; women no longer feel comfortable with formerly fashionable satin polyester scarves. An average silk scarf costs between six to ten times more than a good quality satin scarf. Wearing a silk scarf turns out to be an “addiction” (bağımlılık), as many young women would say.

Silk scarves also vary in terms of texture, thread count, and patterns. There are two kinds of silk scarf fabrics. Both are made of pure, 100% silk, but differ completely in look and feel. These two types are the twill and şura scarves, respectively. The twill scarf is especially popular in youth collections. Twills are the thickest silk scarves. They drape well and keep their form for a long time because their texture is composed of a pattern of diagonal/parallel ribbing (like the texture of denim), unlike şura silk, which has a shiny, smooth texture and matches well with fancier clothing. Weather and the seasons also play a role in the preference for şura or twill scarves. With their thinner texture, şura scarves are airy and suitable for the summer, whereas twill scarves, with their thick texture, are a safer option for rainy days.

Producers also choose between these two different kinds of silk in their designs. Some patterns and colors look better on shiny surfaces, while others look more fashionable on thick twill material. Twill silk scarves with creative figures in various colors represent certain lifestyles. The figures on twill youth collections include, for instance, the Madrid Metro map, the Eiffel Tower, the map of Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar, and the Maiden Tower in Istanbul, as well as objects such as pianos, flutes, cars, and bicycles. Twill scarves are considered trendy and more urbane than şura silk scarves, which are often patterned with flowers or Ottoman seals.
Figures of animals and people are the only images that producers meticulously avoid using. This avoidance is based on the following hadith: “Angels do not enter a house in which there is an image.” However, leopard prints from mainstream fashion have become a source of inspiration for headscarf producers in Turkey. Ottoman heritage inspires designers, as certain colors and patterns reminiscent of the Ottoman arts and famous architectural monuments from the Ottoman period decorate a new generation of silk scarves. The distinctive seals of Ottoman sultans (tuğra) have also become trendy, although there were debates about their appropriateness because such prints include some of the names of God. Thus, patterns sometimes produce tensions between religious sentiments and fashion, but not necessarily for all tesettürlü women.

Headscarf producers and designers from the Turkish tesettür market also map the tastes of potential customers along socio-economic and geographical lines. The patterns, colors and textures of headscarves reproduce boundaries between the provincial and the urban. While silk scarves have replaced formerly popular satin scarves, and thus become a

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70 This hadith is recorded in the authoritative collection of Sahih Muslim, Book 24, Number 5252, narrated by the Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Abu Talhah.
mainstream trend in urban settings, in some provincial regions satin scarves still sell better because they are cheaper. A sale manager from a well-known headscarf producer in the city of Eskişehir, who also prefers silk headscarves, explained how her company sees the headscarf market during our informal conversation at the Islamic Clothing Fair in Istanbul, in 2009:

We use different materials for the western cities of Turkey and the other Anatolian cities. Young women from big cities prefer twill scarves, whereas women from Anatolian cities (she specifically referred to central and eastern Anatolia) prefer satin. Satin is cheaper; it has a very shiny texture. Young professional women prefer geometrical figures on their scarves while others prefer floral-patterned headscarves.

Tying silk scarves is not the only matter that requires practice and skill—women also need to learn how to care for their silk scarves. The passion for headscarves that are difficult to tie and difficult to take care of reintroduces the matter of care for the self. Using silk scarves properly requires certain knowledge. As one website that educates women about silk headscarves states, “The beauty of organic silk is the miracle of a caterpillar and the leaves of the mulberry tree, hence your scarf is very delicate and precious.” With its organic texture, “silk is the best at protecting the moisture of the skin,” as one of the producers mentions on their website. This statement echoes the notion that “you are worth treating yourself to preciousness,” found in the same advertisement.

“Care tag” instructions inform women how to use their silk scarves so that they last for a long time. Silk, as a soft, fragile material, produces a different sensation for its wearer—it gives the headscarf a fine texture and feel. Producers describe silk scarves as “fragile,” “precious,” and “delicate;” it is perhaps these characteristics that make silk headscarves feminine in a different way. This is a “delicate,” “precious,” and in some ways more “fragile” understanding of femininity.\footnote{Silk is also considered to be a particularly feminine fabric because wearing silk is religiously prohibited (haram) for men according to several hadiths. For instance, one hadith reads: “Wearing of silk and gold has been made unlawful for males and lawful for the females of my Ummah.” This hadith is recorded in the authoritative collection of Hadith Al-Tirmidhi, Number 1152, narrated by the Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Abu Musa al-Ash’ari.}

It invites the wearer to make fashionable and matching combinations, but also to take good care of her headscarf. From cleaning to drying, from storage in wardrobes to tying them properly with pins, silk scarves require extra attention on the part of the wearer.
Both on care tags and in the forums of websites about tesettür, these headscarves are treated as precious and delicate; therefore, women must take good care of them. Women pay great attention to maintaining the odor of the brand-new silk scarf and its smooth appearance, as if just came out of the factory. They are taken to deserve greater care, just as women themselves observe greater care for the self.

As I noted earlier, Kavakçı (2010) discussed “the pin factor” as a “threat” to the secular state in the Turkish context and as a sign of “conscious” headscarf practice. These pins take on a new role in silk scarf fashions. Pins are the enemies of silk scarves because they destroy the beautiful and expensive texture of the scarves. On every occasion on which they wear silk headscarves, women must solve the puzzle of how to attach pins in different places so that the needles will not leave deep marks in the delicate texture of the scarf. Only by taking such care will expensive silk scarves continue look brand-new for a long time.

A fashionable silk scarf must always look new on the wearer. Even if the scarf is from an old collection, it should look well-preserved and new. Cleaning silk scarves is time-consuming, or otherwise costs a lot of money if one wishes to take the entire collection to a dry cleaner. For instance, Serap considers the process of washing her silk scarf collection one of the most intricate and time-consuming domestic tasks. It lasts for hours, and she does not like anybody else to wash her silk scarves.

To wash my silk scarves, I need a full day. I start to wash them in the morning. It should be a summer day, so they dry quickly. While the first round dries, I wash the second round. (Laughing) Then I put them in the laundry basket, and I iron them. I do not know how many hours it takes, three or four. And I hang them on my scarf hangers. They have layers, so each takes around ten headscarves. [So how many do you have?] Probably around seventy…I have to wash them once a year at least.

Wearing silk scarves requires investing a significant amount of time and money on appearance, as a matter of the care for the self. As I discussed in the chapter on makeup, care for the self is very important in making and managing tesettürlü presence in public spaces. It becomes a central issue as women expand their networks and begin professional life. Changing styles of tying, or selections of material and patterns, are strongly related to social life, just as they were in the past. However, they now relate to different aspects of social life. As we can recall from previous sections, changing headscarf preferences once indicated a woman’s marital status or geographical location. In the contemporary Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene, on the other hand, silk scarves point to and display women’s expanding networks in the
professional world and multiple belongings in the migrant context. Displaying meticulous care for the self is crucial, as it transforms a person’s relationship with others as well.

“A Passion for Silk is Contagious”

Silk scarves have gradually become very popular among women of all ages. Young women spend a lot of money on silk scarves to catch up with the colors and patterns of the seasons, while older women try to adapt silk scarves to their wardrobes. Thus, the silk scarf is the new modern scarf of present times, just as the “Atatürk headscarf” was in the 1970s and the “Islamic” urban scarves were in the 1980s and 1990s. Provincial and traditional headscarves that are modest, but not “Islamic” in the manner that the popular discourses of the 1990s described, are no longer visible in Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene. They have become solely an elderly or indoor style. They are in bad taste, as they are not considered modern. Today’s modern, urban headscarf in the Netherlands is the silk scarf. The phrase “yeni ipekçiler” (new “silk-ists” or “silk wearers”) denotes women who have recently become fond of wearing silk headscarves, and thereby captures the rising popularity of the trend. Passion for wearing silk scarves is described by one young fashionable woman as a “contagious disease.” Moreover, it is the new style, which is also recognizably Turkish in the Netherlands.

Figure 47 Women shopping for silk scarves at Multifestijn (a large yearly festival organized by the Süleymanlı community in the Netherlands).
Wearing a fashionable silk scarf is a status symbol; young women compete with each other to wear the most fashionable, matching scarves that express the trends of the seasons in the Netherlands. Women who travel to Turkey often (especially to Istanbul) and those who have close relationships with relatives in Turkey bring and spread new styles of tying and the most fashionable silks. Both in the Netherlands and in Turkey, silk scarves replace cheaper-quality colorful scarves. This new form is called the “Istanbul style” in the Netherlands. Silk scarves not only indicate the upward mobility of young women in the Netherlands (from children of working class migrants to young Turkish-Dutch professionals), they also demonstrate their increasing capacity to participate in transnational networks and maintain ties with urban locations in Turkey other than their parents’ villages. The various tesettür scenes in Turkey have been influential in the emergence of this new trend. Larger numbers of women have become passionate consumers of silk scarves and dedicated followers of online stores and producers from Turkey; they also share new trends and preferences via fashion-oriented pages on social networking sites. Silk scarves have helped to establish stronger relations between young Turkish-Dutch women and Turkey. The collections of headscarves in their wardrobes articulate the multiple belongings of women in this transnational field.

Silk scarves produce a new community of aesthetics that blurs the boundaries of location and religious communities in the Netherlands. Neither local styles nor the styles of religious communities can resist the increasing interest that women have in silk scarves. Fashionably combined garments and matching silk scarves with intricate patterns become more significant in constructing women’s desired appearance than local or community styles. Seher and her friend explained the familiarities and modes of knowledge that the Istanbul style silk scarves have obliterated in the Turkish Dutch tesettür scene:

It may sound weird, but because we grew up in the same environment, we could recognize geographical differences before. She is from Sivas, she is from Konya, that person is from Aksaray…now you cannot tell. It’s changed now, they all wear the Istanbul style. For instance, when we saw a girl outside, we could guess that she is from Sivas, or from Konya. [How would you know that?] That is experience…nowadays, a girl from Sivas goes to Istanbul because she has relatives there. Television also affects matters. Girls that have never been to Istanbul, they see changing fashions on TV, or in fashion magazines.

Young women often eagerly told the stories of their first silk scarves. Emphasizing the desire to change one’s style to silk illustrates how the contemporary silk scarf acts as a status
symbol. However, there is a difference of opinion among the elder generation about what silk scarves mean in the lives of young women. Some parents would like to buy the most expensive and beautiful scarves for their daughters who have decided to wear the headscarf, while others still find such expenditure wasteful.

Serap is a long-term headscarf wearer; in her circle she was the only one who wore silk scarves. Her father bought her first silk scarf for her when she first covered. As a teenager, she was rather young to have an expensive silk scarf. Now, as young woman in her mid-twenties, she thinks a person should develop a certain taste before adopting silk scarves. She says, “I have grown up with silk,” as she distances herself from the “yeni ipekçiler,” those who have recently adopted silk scarves. Many of her friends and relatives, including her mother, thought that the amount of money she spent on silk scarves was extremely wasteful. However, Serap no longer needs to convince her mother, because she too has begun to enjoy the feeling of silk:

My mother used to say, ‘Isn’t it a sin? You spent so much money on them. It is okay if you have one or two but you have thirty or more.’ I told her, ‘Mom, you will understand someday.’ In the last three years, I have begun to fight over my silk scarves with my mother. I share them with her. She goes into my wardrobe! She says there is (a headscarf for) mevlid there, there is one for that wedding, henna party, that scarf of yours goes well with my dress, etc.

Still, women’s accounts also illustrate that different generations have different aesthetics and practical concerns about wearing silk scarves. Young women believe that silk scarves feel more comfortable than satin scarves, while elderly women find tying and fixing such slippery material very difficult. However, they patiently try to wear silk scarves because their daughters and younger relatives have shown such strong distaste for old-fashioned cotton headscarves. In the contemporary Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene, a modern tesettür appearance is almost impossible without a silk headscarf, fashionably worn with accessories such as pins and bonnets. Pelda is an elderly woman who finds silk scarves annoying and uncomfortable. She can still wear white cotton scarves in her neighborhood in Den Haag as an elderly migrant woman, but in Istanbul she was highly criticized, and her relatives insisted that she wear a silk scarf. After three difficult days, she chose go back to her white cotton scarf:

I went to Istanbul last year. They wanted to take me out shopping, together with my daughter’s mother-in-law. It is embarrassing that nobody wears yazma (an old fashioned large white cotton scarf) any longer. I put on the headscarf (that they wanted), they said let’s go. Ahh! I was suffocated, I did not feel
good. I said, ‘I am going to put my own scarf on.’ My niece said, ‘Aunty! Please! Wear this headscarf, you can’t wear that one. It is embarrassing to wear it here.’ I went for a walk along the Florya seashore; I only saw one woman wearing a white scarf like mine, just like me she had an overcoat and a white scarf. I thought she must be from our region. All the others had very colorful silk scarves. I did not like them.

As with other modern headscarf trends, the silk scarf also replaces former modes of recognition through which women were able to identify other women. As we see in the narration above, on the basis of a white cotton scarf and a style of tying, Pelda could recognize a woman in the crowd as someone with whom she shares a background.

Figures 48 & 49 Pelda’s cotton scarves and elderly women with yazmas in The Hague.
The idea of coming from the same region and wearing a similar style of headscarf produced a certain sense of belonging in public space. The contemporary *tesettür* style, with its fashionable silk headscarves, replaces former significations of the headscarf, which might be rural, regional, or community-based, as well as the particular interpretation of the “Islamic” headscarf in the 1980s and 1990s as “conscious.” The silk scarf has produced a taste community (Maffesoli 2003). A particular aesthetics and a shared emotional experience act as the foundation of this community, in which a large number of women participate from different ethnic, religious communities and socio-economic backgrounds (Moors 2009).

**Silken Boundaries**

Together, the silk “Turkish” headscarf and Istanbul style have produced new boundaries and new taste communities, which transgress the existing boundaries of different religious communities in the Netherlands as well as the division between public and intimate spaces. While some of the former significations of the headscarf are reproduced in this new trend (such as urban vs. provincial aesthetics), the cultivated taste necessary to wearing a silk scarf replaces the styles of headscarf tying that are specific to particular religious communities. The pleasure of wearing silk scarves blurs the boundaries between public and intimate contexts, as women continue to wear these scarves indoors and at women-only gatherings. Even if a silk scarf tied in a particular way may designate the wearer’s participation in a certain religious group, preferences of pattern, colors and kinds of silk scarf (*twill* or *şura*) produce commonalities between women from different communities. At the same time, if some women within a religious community adopt expensive silk scarves, this may produce subtle differences within this community itself.

As Duygu describes below, silk scarves enhance new boundaries beyond tying styles, which are often associated with specific religious communities:

> In the past, there were different styles of headscarf tying. Now there are silk wearers (*ipekçiler*), now you see women who want to wear Vakko’s scarves,

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Vakko is a well-known, expensive mainstream fashion brand in Turkey.
there are some who favor French styles...there are women who like classic fashions and those who like more informal sporty fashions. [What do you mean by sporty?] Headscarves patterned with maps, letters, musical instruments...there are women who prefer flower patterns, or plain colors.

The growth of the tesettür market in Turkey has also blurred the existing associations between certain communities and brands. Online stores run by fashionable young female entrepreneurs and festivals organized by Turkish religious communities make a wide variety of brands available for women from diverse communities. At first, silk scarves were less affordable and accessible for women in the Netherlands. They could only obtain them if they went to Turkey or received them as presents. Today, however, young Turkish-Dutch women have begun to run online stores, while others bring silk scarves from Turkey and sell them in the house meetings or festive gatherings of Turkish communities.

Milli Görüş is probably the religious group that has resisted the use of expensive silk scarves most adamantly and for the longest time. The new fashionable tesettürs with colorful silk scarves do not fit their idea of modest tesettür, and Milli Görüş also opposes extravagant spending on women’s clothing. Loose-fitting, long overcoats in dark colors and large, and plain headscarves have been distinctive for Milli Görüş members in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene for a long time. These shawls and scarves are tied in a particular way, which differentiates the Milli Görüş style from that of other communities. This style requires the use of an extra pin to attach the edge of scarf on one side, often at the level of the ears, while the other edge of the scarf covers the collar or sometimes the chest. However, this style has become increasingly marginal in the community in the last few years. An increasing number of women have adopted silk scarves, first at women-only gatherings, as such scarves completed their fashionable outfits more harmoniously than plain and dull-colored chiffon or cotton shawls and scarves in subdued colors.

Rather than the adoption of specific measures to cover the entirety of the hair, the use of pins in a particular way differentiates the Milli Görüş style from the women of other communities. Sevde is an active member of the Gülen movement, who is also very careful about appropriately covering her hair with pins and bonnets. For her, the Milli Görüş style is a “political” one. Sevde often wears colorful, patterned silk scarves. She frequently tucks her scarf inside the collar of her jacket or overcoat. She has a very rich wardrobe, and her fashionable overcoats occupy a large place in it. Sevde studied physics at a university in Turkey and graduated in the year that the implementation of the headscarf ban became very strict. She is married to an educated young Turkish-Dutch professional. She is a very hard
working person: in spite of being the mother of a son and three-year-old twins, she has continued to study in order to get a Dutch degree and obtain a proper job. She also pursues weekend courses at an Islamic University.

Sevde’s narration about the headscarf preferences of women within her community requires us to shift focus from the significance of adopting tesettür clothing to the powerful agency and materiality of the headscarf. She describes geometrical and abstract patterns as taste preferences that are more refined and sophisticated than floral patterns. Her categories are very similar to the division between urban and rural markets that the sale manager mentioned previously. Instead of referring to the rural-urban divide, she invokes education and professional status as determining factors in the formation of refined taste in silk scarves.

Not only with the community, but also among the subgroups of that community, there is a kind of group psychology. For instance in our community, we have academic sisters (ablalar). Their way of covering is different than the styles of those sisters who give ‘halk sohbeti’ (talks in religious gatherings in the neighborhoods). [Can you give an example?] For instance, on Friday evenings I attend a group meeting of academics in Rotterdam. The headscarves of those ablas (sisters) are from well-known brands, better in quality, and their patterns are more geometrical. The tying style of their scarves is tighter and smaller. They do not cover their chests and shoulders. Especially because of their work environment, they used to tie their scarves tidily (often in a less covering style)...they often put their scarves under their necks. Or they wear shawls because they are easy to take off [They uncover at their places of work?] Yes there are few abla...as I said, academics wear silk scarves, Pierre Cardin, Armani, etc. Housewives wear satin scarves, we see satin scarves on them that you can buy for three or four euros.

The academic group Sevde describes has a strong interest in following the changing styles and trends in the big cities in Turkey. Some of them work for international Dutch companies and have business partners from Turkey, as well as from different parts of the world. They travel more than those whom Sevde calls “housewives” (ev hanımları), who only go back to their villages in Turkey. In this sense, these women share similar aesthetics and taste in their choice of headscarves with women from other communities. Women with a more professional background share similar aesthetics; they form a community of taste that is distinct from that of community members who have limited access to professional networks and transnational fields.

Well-known headscarf producers have successfully captured the silk scarf market in the Turkish tesettür scene. Every season, they design a different collection in matching colors and patterns, keeping in tune with mainstream fashions. At an earlier point, certain brands
became more popular than others in religious communities, usually because of the company owner’s affiliation with a particular community. To some extent, this community connection continues to be present (to those who are able to recognize it) through trademarks, yet this is often less significant and visible than the style of tying. Former connections between particular brand names and religious communities are gradually disappearing as women often choose their headscarves on the basis of matching and fashioning pleasant look in relation to the rest of their outfit.

Armine brand scarves would immediately suggest an association with the Süleymanlı community for some people, because the owner of the company is a member of the Süleymanlı community, just as the Aker and Ugoza brands connote the Gülen movement for those who know the link. However, silk scarves and women’s desire to fashion the most harmonious outfits blur these community boundaries. To a certain extent, it is true that if one visits a community event or festival organized by the Süleymanlı community in the Netherlands, most of the community members will tie their headscarves so that the Armine label can be seen, and market stalls at such events primarily carry this brand. But because of the growing tesettür market and increasing competition, other brands take part in these events more than ever before. It is always up to the wearer whether she wants to conceal the brand name when tying her scarf.

Individual taste and community aesthetics play a significant role in fashioning a particular appearance. Asu is a young woman from the Süleymanlı community; she prefers Armine scarves, although she does not like to display the brand name when she ties her headscarf. She was born in the Netherlands, and although she has many relatives in Erzincan, when she visits Turkey she spends most of her time in Istanbul. As she says, she does not know Erzincan well. After her primary school education, she spent three years in one of the community’s boarding schools, and afterwards she completed her higher degree. Like other women in the community, her headscarf is square, folded in a triangular manner and tied under the chin with a knot. She often wears a cotton yazma under her silk scarf in order to preserve it for a long time. Asu is slowly getting into the headscarf business by bringing silk scarves from Istanbul and selling them in the Netherlands. She has a deep respect for the

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73 Multifestijn is a widely-known, yearly multicultural festival organized by the Süleymanlı community. For more information on the event, see http://www.multifestijn.nl/
elderly women and teachers of her community who follow a certain tradition of tying. However, she shifts her style of tying depending on place and occasion.

As I discussed previously, the “pin factor” has always been a crucial issue in the politics of the Turkish headscarf. The pin, rather than the scarf itself, was seen as the signifier of a break with the traditional rural headscarf. The use of pins and bonnets made headscarves “consciously Islamic,” as well as fashionable. In this transformation, the Süleymanlı headscarf is a liminal form that it is neither “rural” nor a “threat.” It is a square-shaped headscarf, folded in a triangular manner and tied under the chin with a knot, without the visible usage of a pin. This liminality created a sort of safe zone for the women of the community for a long time. Other than the türban (which leaves the neck uncovered), it was the only headscarf style that was not prohibited in the public spaces of the Turkish military such as hospitals, museums, military guesthouses and so forth. It was similar to the Atatürk eşarbı in a way because it also only had a single knot, yet it was more covering.

Asu told me that she and her friends enjoyed more freedom with this style in Turkey during their short trips in the past. On these trips, women from the community were able to visit military museums, their relatives in military hospitals and other state institutions because they wore headscarves tied with a knot under the chin. These stories date from the 1990s, when there were very strong regulations over the public visibility of the headscarf in Turkey. Such experiences were limited to women’s trips to Turkey, as wearing such styles in the Netherlands would only imply person’s affiliation with a particular community for those in the known. In the wider Dutch public space, their headscarves would only be legible as “Turkish.”

In recent years, religious gatherings have become the only contexts in which women prefer to wear community style scarves. Women no longer prefer such styles as everyday clothing, but they wear them for religious occasions. The styles of the communities are disappearing from public spaces; they are increasingly limited to religious occasions and the style of hocos (religious teachers). In a sense, this is similar to how local and ethnic styles of the past gradually became preferred for indoor clothing.

I often tie my scarf at the back, and there are also times I tie it in the front. It depends where I am going…I act strategically. If I am going to the mosque community, I tie it at the front. Tying at the front is not always comfortable, because I have two small kids. When you only have a knot under your chin, it easily gets loose. It opens. In our community, they say it is better if you tie a
cotton scarf (yazma) underneath, just in case it gets loose. If you wear a yazma beneath, it does not show your hair. I do not feel comfortable with a yazma around my neck, that’s why I wear a bonnet. If I go somewhere outside the community, I tie my scarf at the back. [What if anyone sees?] It’s normal, everybody does this. They do not say anything. I tie my scarf at the front when I go to the mosque, because I do not want to look different there. I tie it like everybody else.

Hocas are ultimately the only remaining representatives of community tastes, as they continue to tie their headscarves in the Süleymanlı style.

Of course, hocas pay more attention to this matter. They tie their scarves according to the style of their community. For instance, in our community, headscarves are tied under the chin with a knot…our ancestors who taught us the path tied their scarves in that way.

In summary, wearing the proper headscarf at the right time and place to display a particular understanding of aesthetics and taste has increasingly become more important than revealing one’s affiliation with a particular religious community.

New taste communities not only blur the boundaries between Turkish religious communities. The desire to construct a fashionable tesettür appearance and to experience the pleasant feeling of silk scarves also goes against the gendered boundaries of indoors and outdoors, as women also like to wear silk scarves during indoor occasions when they are solely in the presence of other women. This fact challenges commonly-shared assumptions about the conditional relationship between headscarf practice and male presence. A çarşaf wearer’s interest in wearing silk scarves clearly demonstrates the fact that limiting our understanding of headscarf practice to public space alone fails to describe the shifting meanings of headscarf practice itself.

Even though they wear the çarşaf outside, some women like to put on silk scarves indoors and at women-only meetings. One might wonder why a çarşaf wearer would want to wear an expensive silk scarf, since she prefers the most plain, covering form of tesettür outside. While shawls are more practical and comfortable to wear under çarşaf cloaks, fashionably-tied square silk headscarves allow women who wear the çarşaf to complete their desired presence as tesettürli women. They enjoy the feel of silky scarves, fashionable patterns and matching colors with their dresses indoors when they are with other women. Assuming that çarşaf wearers would be indifferent to the changing aesthetics and fashions of shawls and headscarves would simply be incorrect. Selcen’s story about a female headscarf merchant clearly shows that such an assumption may have upsetting consequences.
One of our friends in Turkey, she sells headscarves; she attends house gatherings and religious meetings to sell them. She came to our community gathering, and also to the Quran School to sell headscarves. I was looking at the scarves, and guess what she said to me? ‘Why are you looking at these scarves, you wear çarşaf outside; you do not wear these headscarves at home.’ She tried to show me cotton shawls and tülbent. I said, ‘Why do you think that this is how I dress at home?’ She said ‘Oh really, then you wear silk scarves?’ She did not want me to buy her silk scarves; she pointed me toward the cotton scarves. I told her that I do wear silk scarves, and asked, ‘Don’t you want to earn money?’ [Was she a tesettürlü woman?] Yes, but she had full makeup; she had a headscarf but tied very narrowly, so you could see there (pointing to her neck), also, her clothing was not proper to tesettür. She said ‘You cannot afford to buy these.’ It was weird. Well there is a saying in Turkish; you cannot know who has money and who has faith…

The “yeni ipekçiler” have emerged as a new taste community. Their increasing presence has also transformed the meaning of wearing a cheap satin or plain scarf. Some women strictly avoid wearing silk. They are critical of this emerging taste community among practicing Muslim women. Wearing a silk scarf requires practice and skill, not only aesthetically but also practically in order to tie and fix one’s scarf properly. Silk requires delicate use and care, not only because it is expensive, but also because it takes a lot of time. Some tesettürlü women consider such attention to be contrary to their idea of the modest tesettür and lifestyle. Their criticisms do not necessarily entail an austere and simple tesettür or an anti-fashion statement, but might result in a moderate tesettür that also looks beautiful, tidy, and clean.

Elif often wears plain square headscarves that she can easily combine with her everyday clothing. Her collection of headscarves is much larger and more diverse than what she ultimately prefers to wear. One of her scarves, for instance, is a white scarf that has a shiny texture, which she puts on for special occasions such as wedding parties and festive days. The rest of her collection is composed of very simple and inexpensive scarves. Elif’s taste is quite simple, based on practical concerns. She does not like shiny satin or slippery silk scarves. She bought her favorite headscarves two or three years ago from a marketplace in Bakırköy (a neighborhood on the European coast of Istanbul). Many young women in her circle would consider her headscarves representative of an elderly style.

Elif is very active in her circle; she regularly organizes religious meetings and various social activities with the young women in her group. She is always ready to lend a hand to needy people around her, both in the Netherlands and in Turkey. She organizes charity parties. For some women with more thoroughly covered styles, her tesettür may not seem to
be sufficiently covering, yet she pays meticulous attention to ensure the modesty of her appearance. She does not have a particular outdoor *tesettür* style, nor does she wear long overcoats, yet she is careful to wear long tops over her trousers.

Young women wearing fashionable silk scarves follow Elif’s religious meetings with increasing interest. Her style is distinct as a *hoca*, because she is not from a particular religious community. As I mentioned before, *hocas* tend to preserve community styles. Elif has always been extremely careful about her judgments in our conversations, even if she has been critical of the increasing interest in and wastefulness of outwardly appearance. In her testimony, she hesitates to position herself as an authoritative voice. She modestly kept reminding both herself and me that she is not in a position to judge such matters authoritatively. Elif thinks that there are more important things in life than clothing, especially for Muslim women.

A Muslim woman should not spend that much on her headscarf. Why do I wear my headscarf? I wear it for God. It is something you do for God, it does not matter which brand…

Elif is not only surprised by the quantity of garments in contemporary wardrobes, she is also stunned by the cost of garments and their effects on other people, with which she does not feel comfortable. She does not believe that expensive, luxurious items of clothing reflect her sensibility as a practicing Muslim woman. Even in the case of a gift that did not cost her anything, she would prefer not to wear an expensive silk scarf. She does not want to include an expensive item in her appearance. One expensive silk scarf with delicately painted whirling dervish figures from her wardrobe illustrates her ideas about modest clothing. It was a gift from a relative in Istanbul. It is a custom-designed headscarf, produced in a very limited number—as far as Elif can remember, there are only five hundred of this particular scarf. The effect of exclusivity that this scarf aims for makes Elif uncomfortable. This is why she refuses to wear this scarf; instead, she decided to frame it and hang it on the wall. To explain this, she referred to a famous quotation from the poet and theologian Rumi: “I have seen such people, there weren’t even clothes on them; I have seen such clothes, there weren’t even people in them.”
Shawls (Şallar): Cotton, Plain and Cosmopolitan

In the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene, we witness an increasing competition between two distinct styles: plain cotton shawls and colorful silk scarves. Women prefer shawls because they are more practical and comfortable. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, women find that simple shawls are more appropriate in Dutch public space. If we look at the media representations of the Muslim women in the Netherlands, we often see simple and plain cotton shawls rather than Turkish headscarves—fashionable patterned and colorful silk scarves—which also have a strong ethnic connotation. Just as silk scarves transgress the boundaries of the Turkish religious communities and different spatial orders (indoors/outdoors and intimate/public); shawls transgress the boundaries between different migrant communities and generations, and therefore fashion a style that is relatively neutral to local and ethnic aesthetics (similar to the Atatürk and modern Islamic headscarves in previous eras).

Cotton shawls are practical and easy to use, unlike silk scarves, which are extremely difficult to fix and lose their form quickly. This is why “beginners” and elderly women often prefer cotton fabric. However, the reasons that women in the Netherlands prefer wearing shawls in plain colors rather than square colorful scarves is a more complex matter. Plain color cotton shawls are certainly protecting, and they stay in better shape on rainy days. They are practical for the unpredictable Dutch weather. They match with colorful combinations of garments easily because they are plain in color. Cotton shawls are not expensive and they do not have care tags, and women do not have to spend so much to time cleaning and ironing them. However, these are only the practical reasons that make them popular.

Like many other young women, Bihter changes her style occasionally, not only from religious gatherings to shopping excursions, but also from time spent with her Turkish-Dutch friends to her interactions with Dutch classmates and peers. She describes the shawl as a style that everybody likes. More importantly, Dutch people do not even perceive the shawl as an “Islamic” headscarf. By this, she simply means her Dutch colleagues and classmates. She compares the shawl style and the Istanbul style; she deliberately decides which one to wear
depending on the audience and context. As we were looking at her photo album, we had the conversation below:

Bihter: There was a dinner at the university.

Arzu: You wore a shawl there?

Bihter: Sometimes I do yes…

Arzu: You are wearing the İstanbul/çati (çati means roof, the style took that name because of its pointed front) style here, and cool sunglasses.

Bihter: Here we are also going to a dinner with a group of people. They were wearing that style, so I wore it as well. I wanted to be in tune with the group. Imagine that you are going somewhere with a miniskirt on where women wear very long, covering dresses; this is the same sort of thing. Of course, I will not uncover my head if I am going to a dinner with Dutch people. I dress up in a similar style and tie my headscarf in a sporty way. Shawls, for instance, everybody likes them, even if some of them think that they are religious. I have a few Dutch friends; they said that if they were to become Muslim, they would adopt my style. They find it more modern. I do not know what they mean exactly by modern, I think it is simply practical. In the beginning, I wore it just because it was very practical, but now I like it.

Figure 50 The cover of Hoofdboek, with a model wearing plain cotton shawls and another model wearing silk shawl with a high top in front in the “İstanbul style.” Courtesy of Hoofdboek and Âlâ Magazine.
Young Turkish-Dutch women feel more comfortable with shawls when they are in the presence of Dutch colleagues and friends. As I mentioned before, the shawl defies the local aesthetics of particular migrant communities. To put it differently, this particular style of wearing a cotton shawl is detached from the former stigmas of rural migrant women’s headscarves in the Netherlands. In many accounts, it is clear that women enjoy the fact that they are not recognized by their national origin when they wear shawls rather than square, patterned scarves. This style also looks more professional and trendy. A plain color cotton shawl blurs the boundaries of style between the Turkish and Moroccan communities. Especially for the Turkish-Dutch girls, this style constitutes a more cosmopolitan taste than that of the silk Turkish headscarf.

Rabia is a twenty-year-old student. Over the last few years she has made major changes in her headscarf. She started with a typical, square Turkish headscarf, which her mother also wears; for two years she tied her headscarf at the back, which left her neck completely uncovered. After receiving a few negative comments about leaving her neck uncovered as inappropriate *tesettür*, she started to wear shawls. She ties her shawl in a manner that covers her chest and shoulders. Her style is visibly different from Turkish *tesettür* styles. This difference is not based on the patterns and colors of her typical Turkish scarves, but rather on the way that she ties her shawl. She considers her recent style similar to the Moroccan style, yet she makes it slightly different for those who can recognize that nuance:

My style look like the Moroccan style, they like plain scarves, not those very colorful, busy scarves…some of my Moroccan friends do not like the style of Turkish women. Moroccans have two pieces, they have a shawl and they wear something soft like a bonnet under it. They show that layer, the bonnet. Under my shawl, I have a cotton scarf.

Rabia’s style is not very pleasing to the eye according to the taste of older members of the Turkish community; furthermore, regardless of age, some people find her style out of fashion in Turkey. There, it does not produce the same effect that it produces in the Netherlands. Many young Turkish-Dutch women feel that people communicate more easily with them when they wear the shawl style rather than the Turkish style. Shawls are considered to be more native to the Netherlands, while they also, to some extent, transgresses ethnic and national boundaries within the immigrant community.
While young women enjoy wearing shawls and find them less stigmatizing, mothers do not like their daughters to wear this style. “This Dutchness” does not sit well with people in Turkey either. It shows that person is from not from Turkey.

People look at you differently. You do not see this style there. The shop assistant asked me ‘Have you come from outside of Turkey?’ I said ‘Yes,’ and he replied, ‘Do not misunderstand me, but your style, here, only elderly women wear it. Old women and grandmothers wear that style.’ I said I like it that way. It is my style. Others also agreed with him. They said that no young women in Turkey like this style.

Some young Turkish-Dutch women try to blend some fragments of Turkish aesthetics with plain cotton shawl styles to mark their difference in the larger Dutch Muslim community. The style of colorful, square headscarves that is fashionable in the Turkish context does not match with the image of the “modern” headscarf in the Netherlands, at least not for the larger public beyond the Turkish diaspora. Rabia does not wear the bonnet like Moroccan girls wear, and Esra marks her difference by pinning her shawl under her chin. For her, this is what marks her as slightly Turkish rather than Moroccan.

They do not like my shawl, especially my mom. She says that my face looks too small when I wear a shawl; she asks ‘Why don’t you wear a Turkish headscarf?’ Generally, Turkish women dislike this style. They say our great grandmothers (nine, ebe) wore this style. [What is your mother’s style like?] It is a normal Turkish headscarf. She ties under her chin. [Do you tie your scarf under your chin?] Yes, but my style is different, because the shawl is not a square headscarf.

The communicative capacities of particular styles of headscarves are described based on familiarities and commonalities that are shared by a large number of people. By making it known to as many people as possible, women transform headscarf practice into a less stigmatizing experience. Young Turkish-Dutch professionals purposefully choose certain styles, which reveal certain effects of headscarf. Their preferences change according to different occasions and the people that they encounter. Habibe describes the effect of the shawl in her professional life:

When you put on a shawl, you face becomes brighter, childish and innocent. This recalls the visage of Holy Mary (Hazreti Meryem). When you tie your scarf under the chin, it may give you a more serious look. If you leave it loose, and if you smile, you look more open to communication. When you wear a shawl, your identity is not recognizable. It does not indicate your Turkishness. You look more open, and strangers talk with you more comfortably. The Turkish headscarf surrounds your face, it shades your eyes, and eyebrows…your facial features look sharper with the Turkish headscarf.
Turkish-Dutch women who did not grow up in the midst of the “headscarf politics” and debates over the “pin factor” in Turkey prefer to wear a style that is considered to be “grandmotherly” in order to look different from their mothers. Such a style is not less “Islamic” in Turkey, but it is less “Turkish” in the Netherlands. Through this style, women suppress their Turkish identity and engage with a larger public. This is the new alternative for Dutch public space.

The shawl stories of women who travel back and forth between Turkey and the Netherlands reveal the shifting meanings and forms of the shawl style. The headscarf has embodied particular aesthetics and taken different forms in different locations. In general, the headscarf is not a fixed practice in terms of form, and it does not have a fixed meaning. The pins and bonnets that made the headscarf “threatening” for some constituted the “conscious” practice of the headscarf for others. However, the changing styles also indicate a generational difference. Cotton shawls tied in a particular way are not “grandma’s style” anymore. Although the plain, easy shawl style has much in common with the headscarf styles of elderly women in Turkey, for the young generation of Turkish Dutch women, such a shawl is fashionable and has the potential to communicate with a wider public. The same style is less of a “threat” in the Netherlands, but for different reasons than in Turkey, as in the Netherlands it is less recognizably Turkish. Emerging new styles also undermine the hierarchies among styles, such as the dichotomies between “conscious” and “habitual” and urban and rural, that formed the modern Turkish headscarf in the first place.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

I began this thesis with a reflection on my location as an ethnographer in a challenging, sensitive field, where I also had to confront my own prejudices. Focusing on the hotly debated “headscarf issue” would have been a relatively easy solution to this ethnographic dilemma, as most of my interlocutors immediately assumed that this was the focus of my research. For quite a long time, the “headscarf issue” has been considered the most important question for research on Muslim women’s clothing practices to address and answer. Studies in this vein privileged the “modern Islamic headscarf” and the women who wear this style. Other items of dress and the dilemmas of everyday clothing, as well as other coexisting styles, remained in the margins of the literature. Above all, the approach of the literature on the “modern Islamic headscarf” is based on problematic dichotomies between veiling and non-veiling, and “consciously Islamic” and “habitual” headscarves; therefore, this literature has failed to describe what it means to be a visibly Muslim woman today.

Rather than firm categories of “old” and “new” headscarf practice, my research has emphasized the shifting, ambiguous character of Muslim dress among Turkish-Dutch women. In doing so, it has entailed a revision of the two major assumptions of the thesis of “wardrobe modernization,” which have also shaped scholarly analysis: the anticipated disappearance of the religious clothing in secular, modern public spaces and the incongruity between fashion and religious clothing. By tracing the genealogies of garments and collecting ethnographic accounts of everyday clothing, I was able to illustrate that transformations of sartorial practices and discourses about Muslim dress are far more complex than the narrative of the “modern Islamic headscarf” (the “conscious headscarf”) has suggested. Studying Muslim appearances in a context of migration, where Muslims are a sartorial minority, pushed me to grapple with the multiple meanings and interpretations of what looking Muslim means at different historical moments and locations. My ethnography demonstrates that the increasing mobility of Turkish-Dutch women and items of clothing has not only enabled a mix of styles and trends; it has also facilitated recognition of different aesthetics and understandings of tesettür clothing. In this transnational field, the sartorial biographies of women and the collections in their wardrobes offer critical readings of the narrative of “wardrobe
modernization,” in which recognizably Muslim appearance has generally constituted the sartorial Other.

1. Continuities and Ambiguities

The denial of continuities and historical links between certain items and styles in Muslim sartorial practice and the endeavor to explain the novelty of the “modern Islamic headscarf” are partly products of the narrative of wardrobe modernization. This narrative presupposes a sharp rupture with the past, and treats current sartorial practices as if they are essentially different from the past. Fabian’s argument that anthropology historically constructed “relations with its other by means of temporal devices (that) implied affirmation of difference as distance (1983: 16)” has strong echoes in the narratives of the modern headscarf and wardrobe modernization in Turkey. Wearing a headscarf was often associated with a peasant background and poverty, which the project of secular-modern nationalism desired to leave behind. The prediction was that the headscarf, as a marker of the rural, religious, and ethnic identities of the past, could never find a proper place within the project of wardrobe modernization. However, the enduring presence of visibly Muslim women in the secularizing world, and women’s endeavors to combine headscarves with creative, fashionable clothing, both challenged the presupposition of this rigid difference and a break with the past.

Together, a critical analysis of “wardrobe modernization” and attention to various genealogies of different garments reveal associations and continuities, as well as differences, between the former and current sartorial practices of Muslim women. The modernization project employed the ideological notion of “the new” to designate the modern, and the two notions were often used interchangeably. The desire of modernizers to distance themselves (and their appearance) from what was seen as “archaic” produced a temporal gap and affirmed the precedence of one hegemonic understanding of modernity over alternative ways of becoming modern. As Walter Benjamin famously suggested in his critique of modernity, the search for the new is a particular sensation characteristic of the modern age. Benjamin describes “the new” of the modern epoch as “a quality independent of the use value of the commodities (1999: 22).” He critically approaches the notions of newness, repetitiousness and ephemerality as motivating characteristics of modern, everyday experience. Although Benjamin regards everyday experience as alienating because of these characteristics, his
approach gives great value to the different ways in which individuals try to overcome the effects of such experience. By turning my attention away from the “new veiling” to everyday clothing, wardrobes, and genealogies of garments, I was able to gather narratives that were critical of both the “modern” appearance of Muslim women in the Netherlands and the project of “wardrobe modernization” in Turkey.

In fact, narratives of the modern headscarf fit seamlessly into the discourse of wardrobe modernization. As with other garments, the headscarf has rapidly adjusted to new sartorial practices. The discourse of “new veiling” linked the modern headscarf to the emergence of new Islamic movements in the 1980s and 1990s, and women’s active participation in these religious-political movements. In the second phase of “new veiling” covering was interpreted as an instance of the articulation of faith with consumer culture; in this light, Muslim women were reborn as consumers. Both of these discourses began with the aim to explore the turn from formerly non- or less-agentive subjects to highly agentive subjects in a secular world, with the modern headscarf as a significant marker of this transformation and agency. This mode of discourse privileged women who presented themselves as “conscious” or “fashionable” Muslims while excluding other women. It privileged the pious actors of Islamic movements and the consumers of “Islamic fashion,” who shared an activist profile or similar sartorial tastes. While this approach highlighted wearing a headscarf as a new and distinct phenomenon, it also hindered discussions of *tesettür* clothing as an embodied practice and a matter of everyday life.

In this respect, Saba Mahmood’s work is helpful because she emphasizes the transformative capacity of veiling in the cultivation of pious selves. Mahmood’s approach is able to recognize historical continuities and ambiguities while also highlighting the performative and transformative aspects of wearing religiously inspired dress. With her argument in mind, we can clearly see that the “conscious” headscarf, as a significant marker of the “new veiling,” shares the same ideological grammar as the thesis of “wardrobe modernization”; furthermore, “conscious” headscarf practices forecast and imply a closure that results in the successful attainment of proper practice. The women’s accounts that I have presented in this thesis consistently criticize the discourse of the “consciously Islamic headscarf”, which implies that the subject already possesses adequate knowledge and responsibility for her acts. As their narratives illustrate, modest, pious clothing is part of a continual process of self-disciplining. The notion that this process would ever come to an “end” is contrary to the very understanding of the modest self that these women cultivate.
In addition to the transformative capacity of pious clothing, this thesis aimed to understand how the effects of particular outfits and combinations—including headscarves—depend on the ways and contexts in which they are worn. Bringing Muslim sartorial practices back into the dilemma of everyday clothing and emphasizing that women make choices informed by a wide range of factors, including piety, generation, fashion, gender, economic status, location, ethnicity and social context, unsettles hegemonic representations of the modern headscarf. By going beyond the division between veiling and non-veiling and the exclusive categories of “habitual” and “conscious” headscarf practice, I was able to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of what it means to be visibly Muslim today. As the stories that I present in my research show, producing a recognizably Muslim appearance is as complex as the production of any individual appearance (Tarlo 2010).

Collecting genealogies of garments and women’s sartorial biographies helped me to recognize similarities and differences in dress over a longer period of time than the literature typically focuses on. This literature breaks with the past of Muslim dress, and has a tendency to emphasize recently introduced items and trends in Muslim women’s sartorial practices, as if they are entirely new. By contrast, my research indicates that Muslim clothing became fashionable long before the literature on “Islamic fashion” assumes. Both the “new veiling” and, later, “Islamic fashion” assert a problematic temporal difference between religiously inspired clothing and secular dress. Furthermore, both arguments have constructed troubling hierarchies among different styles of Muslim dress. On the basis of a closer examination, it turns out that the relationship between fashion and religiously inspired clothing extends much further back in time. The assumption of an incongruity between fashion and religious clothing has oriented the literature on Muslim dress and its definitive questions since at least the 1990s. Because of this, the literature’s main concern has been to describe the shift from “Islamist women,” who were represented as “radical” political actors dressed in an austere, uniform manner, to the consumers of fashionable Muslim clothing today.

Fashionable, covered Muslim clothing has co-existed with modest, religious clothing for a much longer period than the narrative of the modern headscarf suggests. The example of the çarşaf, which I discuss in detail in the second chapter, provides a rich account of the ambiguities and contingencies that define wearing a particular type of covering garment entails historically. The çarşaf first appeared in 19th Century Ottoman public space; it became popular and fashionable because it could hide both western fashions (for the rich) and ethnically marked clothing (for the poor). With its increasing popularity, the çarşaf replaced the imperial ferace as a “national fashion.” As a new, urban, outdoor garment, the çarşaf was
incorporated into skirt-jacket combinations, which included fashionable head coverings. This occurred even before its name changed.

During the early years of Republic, sartorial transformations continued as modern overcoats began to replace çarşaf in secular public space; ironically, this substitution was again considered to be a break from the past, this time from imperial fashions. Three-quarter, slim-fitting overcoats were the first modern garments for most migrant women who came to the Netherlands in the 1960s. In studying sartorial genealogies, I faced a variety of difficulties inherent in the privileging of certain ideas of modernization. Akin to the representations of the modern headscarf, these historical narratives provide us with accounts and observations of a particular style of çarşaf and the women who wore this style; therefore, we still do not know much about less fashionable, more covering forms of çarşaf and the women who wore them during earlier periods. In the contemporary tesettür scene, the çarşaf has become a specific marker of the İsmailağa Community and a sign of a woman’s commitment to disciplining the self. Nevertheless, in the last few years, çarşaf have again become popular as outdoor attire. These new çarşafs are well decorated, with laser-cut designs and pattern; they are also produced in multiple colors. To interpret the çarşaf as nothing more than a strong marker of religiosity would be an oversimplification; as the genealogy of the çarşaf and the narratives of everyday clothing in this research reveal, wearing a certain style of çarşaf has been always a more complex matter.

In summary, narratives of the “modern headscarf,” which focus first on “conscious” headscarf practice and later on “fashion,” deny a whole range of continuities and similarities that I have endeavored to take seriously in my research. Above all, this broader perspective, which avoids the ideological battles over “consciousness” and “fashion,” strives to recognize and account for the different impulses, aspirations, expectations, modalities of femininity, and notions of piety that form women’s multiple belongings and longings.

2. Looking into Wardrobes: Multiple Longings and Belongings

In my research, I focused specifically on wardrobes in order to develop a new methodological and conceptual framework to study Muslim dress. The items of clothing and collections of artifacts that constitute wardrobes vividly reveal the diverse, multiple belongings and subjectivities of Muslim women; they enable an understanding of the ambiguities, commonalities, and dilemmas of everyday Muslim sartorial practices. Without a doubt, my
research did not include all items of clothing and accessories that contribute to everyday *tesettür*; I have necessarily been selective in my choices of inclusion and exclusion, based primarily on the emphases that my interlocutors put on certain garments in their sartorial biographies. Although I tried as much as possible to include women with different styles and backgrounds in my research, many of my interlocutors are connected to the same Turkish religious communities and networks in the Netherlands.

To study wardrobes, one must necessarily go beyond the dilemma of veiling and non-veiling, and expand one’s analysis beyond fashion’s communicative capacities. Highly fashionable and absolutely unfashionable garments hang next to one another in women’s wardrobes. Wardrobes incorporate artifacts and items from different places and time periods, as well as gifts from close friends and relatives. They are the building blocks for ordinary clothing practices, moments of exception, and complex sartorial performances on special occasions such as festive events, religious gatherings and business meetings.

In this thesis, I have insisted on the links between sartorial practices and particular social contexts. The great diversity of garments that I found in wardrobes encouraged me to explore and convey how the idea of modesty and the practice of *tesettür* work differently at different moments and locations. By examining wardrobe collections, I discovered that there are moments of exception in the sartorial biographies of women. Certain garments represent an individual’s understanding of modesty and aesthetics in the most flexible and ambiguous contexts. These items of clothing are never worn as everyday attire because they are often flamboyant, tight, and attractive; hence, they risk transgressing norms and challenging ideas of modesty in *tesettür* clothing. By exploring festive garments, my thesis argues that festive events are moments of exception that produce different understandings of religious modesty. At weddings, this is especially the case for the bride and others who are at the center of the celebratory setting; for them, the context itself naturalizes and purifies female attractiveness from its negative connotations. The festive atmosphere functions as an abstract *tesettür*. I explored in detail how uncovering (or covering less) does not mean the same thing in these contexts as it does in everyday life: uncovering is more acceptable in festive settings and does less to violate the meaning of *tesettür* in the way that it would on any other day.

Similarly, the meanings of makeup and its absence differ depending on social context. Women employ different styles and amounts of makeup to complete their *tesettür* appearances. Wearing the same amount of makeup may produce opposite effects in different contexts, as understandings of *tesettür* and the expectations of others vary according to the occasion. Women wear “invisible makeup” to produce a natural, healthy look as the marker of
a well-cared-for self. Focusing on different amounts of makeup added another dimension to our understanding of how women accommodate and contest particular understandings of femininity and ideas of beauty in different contexts. For instance, women’s preferences in makeup may change totally during the month of Ramadan, when they are at work, or when they attend a wedding party. Women’s adjustment of makeup according to different requirements in these different contexts explains how contemporary interpretations of modesty in tesettür clothing have evolved towards the “management of beauty” rather than its concealment.

My analysis of skirts and trousers underscored the relationship between femininity and piety. Skirts and trousers highlight a set of gendered sartorial practices in fashioning tesettür to an extent that other garments do not reveal. More gender-neutral garments such as şalvar and entari were replaced by modern clothing such as trousers and skirts. Trousers and skirts were not only modern, secular garments; they were also constructed as modern items central to “conscious” Muslim dress. Women choose between skirts and trousers according to occasion. By putting on long outdoor garments, they may hide or reveal their preferences in order to manage the effects of wearing skirts or trousers. For some women, a particular style of skirt can simultaneously be a strong marker of piety, femininity and “Turkishness.” By drawing on Islamic texts and arguments, other women contend that wearing trousers is a gender-neutral practice. They often choose to wear trousers rather than skirts for practical reasons, or to manage their appearances in different contexts.

In fact, in the case of each particular garment, similar long-term changes have had comparable effects. In other words, the project of wardrobe modernization succeeded in transforming different garments in similar ways. As their sartorial biographies reveal, Turkish-Dutch women not only want to wear their headscarves in different ways than their mothers did, they also want to wear modern attire such as kumaş skirts, trousers and overcoats. The headscarf was not alone in gradually becoming “modern” and “Islamic.” Nearly all of the items of clothing in women’s wardrobes were affected by the discourse of “conscious, urban” Muslim dress. While these changes produced certain general characteristics of tesettür practice, an increasing diversity of interpretations and modes of recognizably Muslim dress are now visible on the streets of the Netherlands.

Although the modern headscarf seems to have adjusted to “wardrobe modernization,” recognizably Muslim dress is still often considered to be monotonous and oppressive, as well as insufficiently modern and fashionable. Representations of the modern headscarf in the
literature show that the aspiration and motivation to wear recognizably Muslim dress tends to be thought of as “new” and “different.” In other words, these sartorial practices were not predicted by the thesis of “wardrobe modernization,” which assumed that religiously inspired dress would fade away in modern public space. This observation points to another important question that demands further exploration: why is this wide range of fashionable Muslim clothing still often perceived by outsiders as uniform, dull, and submissive, and still seen as destined to disappear?

3. Transnational & Cosmopolitan Aesthetics in the Turkish-Dutch Tesettür Scene

The increasing mobility of people and garments (via online stores, social sharing sites, etc.) has played a crucial role in mixing styles and shifting trends in tesettür clothing. The findings of my research illustrate that such mixing is not only a matter of geography or ethnicity, but also a temporal, historical process; the fashions of the past return as “retro” styles. The rapid pace of blending styles and spreading fashions, as well as an increasing interest in exploring the genealogies of garments beyond the narrative of “wardrobe modernization,” deny a single, stark formulation of Muslim women’s dress. Individual innovation and personal styling have gained greater importance in bringing a different set of aesthetics and notions of beauty and religious modesty together harmoniously. Women make different combinations and choose particular styles for different occasions; the diversity of combinations expresses and relates to women’s multiple belongings and positions.

Retro trends are becoming a key part of cosmopolitan styles of Muslim dress. These trends push us to think about associations and similarities between tastes and preferences that belong to different epochs and localities; to some extent, they merge the aesthetics and norms of the past and the present. Continuities in both the forms and names of garments challenge the assumptions of “wardrobe modernization.” One striking retro trend is the increasing presence of the “ferace” in women’s wardrobes, an aspect of sartorial neo-Ottomanism. Although contemporary feraces are not very similar to the Ottoman feraces in terms of color or fabric, they are similar in form. In the Netherlands, these garments are called ferace in Turkish stores and “jilbab” in Moroccan-Dutch stores. Feraces are not the only garment to reemerge through retro trends; the fashionable, three-quarter-length, close-fitting overcoats of
the 1970s, worn with small headscarves, have also returned to the contemporary Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene.

Many transnational actors and objects have become part of and participated in my research: not only post-migrants and their wardrobes, but also the producers and sellers who have become part of the global tesettür market. Social events (festivals, concerts, conferences, trips to Turkey, etc.) organized by religious communities functions as nodal points in the circulation of actors, styles and fashions between Turkey and the Netherlands. Young tesettür women are costumers of global fashion stores such as Zara, Mango and H&M; tesettür producers in Turkey follow mainstream trends, diligently incorporating the fashions of the day, such as leopard prints, polka-dot patterns, and furs. In the Netherlands, clothing stores such as Manzaram not only consider tesettür women as their customers, but target Dutch costumers as well. In their catalogues, Turkish tesettür producers use covered and uncovered fashion models together in the same photo shoots. The increasing mobility of people and the global circulation of garments encourage and result in a mix of styles and tastes, which together produce novel Muslim appearances.

Wardrobes also bring together transnational elements, divergent aesthetic judgments, and a wide variety of garments in unexpected, sometimes contrasting ways. Again, I want to emphasize that the assumption of a strong contrast between sober, pious clothing, on one hand, and mainstream fashion, on the other, fails to comprehend what it means to look Muslim today. Such an assumption ignores how the construction of any individual wardrobe is necessarily informed by a wide variety of factors. These factors relate both to the present moment and the multiple modes of belonging that women experience, as well as to their memories and past relationships.

An investigation of the material aspects and the aesthetics of Muslim dress broadens the field of possible interpretations of what looking “Muslim” means. We can see this vividly in my analysis of the fabrics and shapes of headscarves preferred by women over time. Fashions in headscarves exhibit extraordinary chronological variation, from loosely-covering, white cotton scarves to smaller Atatürk scarves, from colorful satin scarves to more sophisticated silk scarves, and, finally, from çarşafs to cosmopolitan, rectangular shawls made of different fabrics in plain colors. In the Dutch setting, these shawls are ambiguous—they communicate easier with a wider audience. On the other hand, the Turkish headscarf still tends to be perceived as ethnically marked, and, consequently, remains a sign of the wearer’s unwillingness to mix with other Muslims migrant communities and integrate into Dutch society at large. However, wearing the same style of rectangular shawl in Turkey and in the
Netherlands may produce very different effects. While such a shawl is considered more cosmopolitan in the Dutch setting, in the Turkish *tesettür* scene this same shawl is perceived as an aesthetically unsophisticated garment with rural and elderly connotations.

Selecting a matching headscarf with a proper style of tying that fits with the rest of one’s outfit is a key aspect of managing one’s appearance and the impression that it makes. Furthermore, matching is also evidence of the successful merger of piety and fashion. As the narratives of young women illustrate, it is essential to know when, where, and in the presence of whom to wear a particular headscarf. But headscarves are also valued for reasons other than their aesthetic appeal. As small but mobile commodities, they are easily acquired, but they can be difficult to discard, especially when they were received as gifts or bought as souvenirs. Headscarves become collector’s items; as such they materialize the relations between the wearer and those who have contributed to the collection.

For many women, a headscarf collection is much more than a fashion statement or a marker of piety. Moreover, women not only see wearing a headscarf as a pious act; they also manage their entire *tesettür* appearance in accordance with certain understandings of modesty. They may take up multiple subject positions or selves; they selectively hide and reveal different forms of belonging related to categories of gender, generation, status, ethnicity, community, and professional attainment. With the proliferation and mixing of styles and fashions, it has become much more difficult to know what to wear in different contexts. In order to do so, innovation and common sense must work together.

This thesis is an account of a moment of transformation, which seems to be moving into two different directions in the Netherlands and Turkey. In the Netherlands, public debates and shifting policies related to Islam and immigrants have transformed the effects of looking visibly Muslim remarkably over the last decade. First, the migrant headscarf turned into an “ethnic” headscarf, before gradually becoming the “Islamic headscarf” in public discourse. In Turkey, on the other hand, the “rural headscarf” first turned into the “Islamic headscarf,” but in recent years being recognizably Muslim has begun to achieve legitimacy through a secular discourse based on the notion of tolerance towards different “lifestyles.” In Turkey, the headscarf is now considered less of a “threat” to the secular state, even if the consequences of the former headscarf ban in universities and the current employment inequalities experienced by *tesettürlü* women have yet to be fully addressed and reconciled. In the Netherlands, the headscarf has become a symbol of danger and threat in an atmosphere that is increasingly antagonistic toward Muslims. This moment of transformation is not characterized by the problematic divisions between “modern” and “traditional” or “rural” and “urban.” Rather,
Dutch politics itself has turned toward a more rigid construction of secularism that increasingly defines integration as assimilation. However, the stories of Turkish-Dutch women who are witnessing this transformation vividly illustrate an ongoing movement and shift in sartorial practices, which enables actors to articulate different tastes, notions of piety and modesty, and modalities of femininity. Personal innovations and the management of impressions and appearances now play a greater role in the construction of proper combinations of tastes, aesthetics and religious modesty in relation to different temporal and spatial contexts.
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Çarşaf models in the magazine İnci, no. 2 (1 March 1919) published in Tombak, 1998.

Figure 2 Çarşaf stores in Fatih and Meryem’s torbalı çarşaf in the Netherlands.

Figure 3 Çarşaf wearers in the Netherlands.

Figure 4 Walking against the wind.

Figure 5 Different çarşaf styles, colors and patterns.

Figure 6 Şevval’s wardrobe: the inside of her wardrobe, including her favorite dress combined with a matching silk indoor scarf, her çarşaf patterned with polka-dots, and her dark red shoes and handbag, which match well with her dark blue çarşaf.

Figure 7 Accessories often combined with çarşaf from the wardrobes: a poncho to wear over the çarşaf during winter, indoor scarves, jewelry, a pair of leather shoes, and bags.

Figure 8 Hanne’s wardrobe: her indoor dresses and scarves.

Figure 9 Amsterdam, 1976, by Bertien van Manen in her book, Vrouwen te gast (1979), courtesy of Bertien van Manen.

Figure 10 Women in more form-fitting overcoats and headscarves shopping at community event.

Figure 11 A fashionable denim overcoat from Asu’s wardrobe.

Figure 12 A denim overcoat.

Figure 13 By Ari Versluis & Ellie Uyttenbroek in Exactitudes (2011), Courtesy of Ellie Uyttenbroek and Ari Versluis.

Figure 14 Dicle’s kap in an Armine catalogue, courtesy of Armine.

Figure 15 A form-fitting long black overcoat.
Figure 16 A ‘grandma’s overcoat’ from Rüzgar’s wardrobe.

Figure 17 Rüzgar’s combination for work: ferace and jacket.

Figure 18 Photos by Bertien van Manen in her book, Vrouwen te gast (1979), courtesy of Bertien van Manen.

Figure 19 Sewing kumaş skirts (below) requires sophisticated tailoring skills.

Figure 20 Pelda’s şalvar and a scene from her wardrobe: her favorite red velvet skirt and colorful blouse.

Figure 21 Shopping for skirts in The Hague Market.

Figure 22 Fashionable skirts in the Netherlands.

Figure 23 Trousers under long overcoats and tunics or blouses (with different preferences of length).

Figure 24 A collage of denim in the Netherlands: Women wearing denim skirts at Manzaram while shopping (bottom left), and women at a community event.

Figure 25 Denim skirts from Asira’s wardrobe (on the right) and (on the left) the design from Chanel, a combination of a short denim jacket and a skirt made from jean (1991-1992 autumn-winter) displayed as a part of exhibition “Blue Jeans” at Centraal Museum, in Utrecht 2012.

Figure 26 Serap’s urbane Turkish girl’s (Medeni Türk Kızı) combination (blouse, headscarf, and full length skirt).

Figure 27 The image at the top right is the popular Mango skirt, from a community event; at the bottom right we see the green fishtail skirt from Zehra’s wardrobe; the image on the left shows a picture of a skirt that was recently on Facebook and got many “likes” from other young women.

Figure 28 Detail from Fatma’s skirt.

Figure 29 An advertisement from Âlâ Magazine, December 2012, promoting a “naturally beautiful” (dогал olarak густел) look next to cosmetics selected by the editor and a fashion model wearing “invisible makeup” (the image on the left is from the
2012-13 Fall-Winter fashion catalogue of a well-known tesettür company, Tuğba, in Turkey), courtesy of Tuğba and Álâ.

Figure 30 Eye makeup and materials.

Figure 31 A fashion model wearing heavy makeup for Álâ Magazine shoots. (The image on the top is from the December 2012 issue of Álâ Magazine; the image in the right corner is from the December 2012 issue.) Courtesy of Álâ.

Figure 32 Kinds of fabric for festive dresses.

Figure 33 Abiye Dresses from Bihter’s Wardrobe.

Figure 34 Kaftans and wedding gowns at display at the First Istanbul Tesettür Fashion Fair, 2009, October.

Figure 35 A red see-through scarf from Sevde’s wardrobe.

Figure 36 Festive head coverings on display at the Istanbul Tesettür Fashion Fair, 2009, October.

Figure 37 Festive Dresses featured in Álâ Magazine, December 2012, courtesy of Álâ Magazine.

Figure 38 A selection of photos from the making of Remziye’s türban.

Figure 39 Remziye’s henna party dress.

Figures 40 & 41 Patterns, colors, fabrics, and ways of storing headscarves.

Figure 42 The figure on the left depicts different generations of women in yaşmak (1969: 241); the figure on the right shows a woman from İstanbul wearing a hotoz (1969: 132). The second image is first published in the “Elbise-i Osmaniyye” by Osman Hamdi Bey & Marie de Launay in 1873.

Figure 43 Salma style on the left and Kundak style on the right.

Figure 44 Women wearing “Atatürk eşarbi” in Almelo 1978, by Bertien van Manen in her book, Vrouwen te gast (1979), courtesy of Bertien van Manen.

Figure 45 Decorated cotton yemenis from Habibe’s wardrobe.
Figure 46 Headscarves in various patterns and colors, and some examples of the catalogues of Turkish headscarf producers.

Figure 47 Women shopping for silk scarves at Multifestijn (a large yearly festival organized by the Süleymanlı Community in the Netherlands).

Figures 48 & 49 Pelda’s cotton scarves and elderly women with yazmas in The Hague.

Figure 50 The cover of Hoofdboek, with a model wearing plain cotton shawls and another model wearing silk shawl with a high top in front in the “Istanbul style.” Courtesy of Hoofdboek and Álâ Magazine.
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