Wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch women: The multiple meanings and aesthetics of Muslim dress
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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 tesettürülü 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 Mükereem, one of the elderly women I interviewed for my research, about makeup, her response focused on her granddaughter. Mükereem 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.

Mükereem 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 Mükereem’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. Mükereem 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.

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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 tesettürlü 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 Âlâ 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 Âlâ 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.

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 tesettür 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 (ithmid) 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-Libas, Number 4050, narrated by the Companion of the Prophet, Abdullah Ibn Abbas.
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 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.

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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 tesettürlü 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.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.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 hocası 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.

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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.”

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.