Wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch women: The multiple meanings and aesthetics of Muslim dress
Unal, R.A.

Citation for published version (APA):
Ünal, R. A. (2013). Wardrobes of Turkish-Dutch women: The multiple meanings and aesthetics of Muslim dress
CHAPTER SIX: FESTIVE OCCASIONS AND FESTIVE TESETTÜR

Weddings, engagements and henna parties 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 (kın geceesi) 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 bindallı) 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 modern⁵⁷ 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.](image)

*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 off 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. 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 bindallı 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

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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.
bindallı 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 Kafıns and wedding gowns on display at the First Istanbul Tesettür Fashion Fair.](image)

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 tülbans 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 tülbans 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 tülbans 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 tesettür coiffure as a solution to the dilemma of veiling or non-veiling on celebratory days. Azize and Latife are well-known tesettür 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 tesettür clothing. On weekends and during their spare time, they make fashionable head coverings for parties and celebration. Gradually, they became tesettür 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 tesettür. 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 tesettür 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 tesettür

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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-tesettür 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 türban stylists 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 türban. 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.
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 tesettür party dress even for her women-only henna party, Azize and Latife insisted that she should wear a more covering, proper tesettür. 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 tesettür; they also wanted to maintain their business reputation as tesettür stylists who make proper türbans. Azize and Latife relate their work to a certain understanding and aesthetics of tesettür. By incorporating knowledge of tesettür into their work, they also endow their labor with religious meaning.

Wearing chic, elegant tesettür 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 tesettür. These events shape and form a new aesthetics of festive tesettür (düğünlükler) while also producing new measures of proper tesettür. The preference for veiling or non-veiling has different connotations at today’s festive occasions. In celebratory settings, women merge different understanding of tesettür with diverse aesthetics and fashions. They are often less concerned with the negative connotations of attractiveness because these events function as an abstract tesettür, particularly for those who are at the center of the festive stage. At the same time, new styles of tesettür head coverings and covered party dresses have become popular in the Turkish-Dutch tesettür scene.