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)$^{61}$ to silk scarves with leopard prints, and from twill silk scarves patterned with the map of Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar to shiny satin scarves.

---

$^{61}$ 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

---

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-piece white cotton thin scarf, which came from above and below, leaving a gap in front of the eyes (my translation); (İslam kadınları sokakda ferace giydikleri vakit yüzlerine tutundukları ince beyaz dâlbendden örtü ki biri yukarıdan ve biri aşağıdan gelerek gözlerin önünde bir aralık bırakarak ikiparçadan ibarettir) (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).  

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 aunty 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

---

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 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.

\(^{65}\) 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 Süleymanlı 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 tesettürlek women elected to the Turkish Grand National

---

66 The first ban on female headwear in Turkey was the 1982 ban on headscarves in Turkish universities. By 1984, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) declared the türban as the modern, exclusive form of head covering allowed in universities. While only a small number of students adopted the türban style or used the term, ironically “türban” as an invented term has dominated the headscarf controversy for decades (Aktaş 2006).
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 Gökärıksel 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 eșarbi 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.

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) 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.
HEADSCARVES

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 hocas, 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 tesettürlü 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 tesettürlü 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 tesettürülü, but all tesettürülü 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 tesettürli 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 tesettürlü 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, *tesettür* 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 *tesettür* women are not expected to appear is another way that *tesettür* 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 tesettürli 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

---

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. 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.

---

71 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.
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 *tesettür* 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 scarves.

---

72 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

---

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 hocas (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 teşettürlü 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 teşettür. 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 teşettürlü women consider such attention to be contrary to their idea of the modest teşettür and lifestyle. Their criticisms do not necessarily entail an austere and simple teşettür or an anti-fashion statement, but might result in a moderate teşettür 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 teşettür 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 Istanbul/çatti (çatti 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 “Istanbul 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 likes 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.