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**Contestations and Dichotomies Concerning Women’s Bodies and Sports in Contemporary Turkey:**

**From Aysun Özbek to Neslihan Darnel**

**Sertaç Sehlikoglu**

**Abstract:**

By centralising “the case of Aysun Özbek”, a media debate over an alleged transformation of a female volleyball player in Turkey, this chapter discusses the contested bodies of Turkish sportswomen. Aysun Özbek is a female volleyball player and former coach of the Vakıfbank Güneş Sigorta, one of the most successful female volleyball teams in Turkey. The reason she attracted media attention; however, was not because of any her sports successes, but the rumour that she quit her profession and started observing a religious lifestyle, including wearing the Islamic headscarf. I start the chapter with analysing the media jargon and discourse of a particular piece of news footage that was broadcasted on a well-known Turkish TV channel at the time of the debate. I analyse the symbolic and discursive meanings of the highlights in the footage and to link them to the contestation between sports, women’s public visibility, public sexuality, secularity and religion in the context of Turkey. During my case analysis, I draw attention to those discursive traditions about women’s public visibility, physical exercise, secularity and piety that are common to both ‘the case of Aysun Özbek’ and of Neslihan Darnel, the Iron Lady and flag bearer of 2014 London Olympics. Juxtaposing and comparing the above mentioned cases and their entailed discourses is a fruitful exercise to understand the ways in which women's sporting bodies are constructed and contested in the context of 21’s century Turkey. This research suggests that national, religious and secularist discourses on women’s bodies and public sexuality were vividly contested in the context of sports.

**Keywords:** Turkey, Women’s Sports, Volleyball, Feminism.

## **Introduction:**

By centralising “the case of Aysun Özbek”, a media debate over an alleged transformation of a female volleyball player in Turkey, this chapter discusses the contested bodies of Turkish sportswomen. Aysun Özbek is a female volleyball player and former coach of the Vakıfbank Güneş Sigorta, one of the most successful female volleyball teams in Turkey. The reason she attracted media attention; however, was not because of any her sports successes, but the rumour that she quit her profession and started observing a religious lifestyle, including wearing the Islamic headscarf. The chapter starts with analysing the media jargon and discourse of a particular piece of news footage<sup>1</sup> that was broadcasted on a popular Turkish TV channel at the time of the debate. I open up each one of the symbolic and discursive meanings of the highlights in the footage and try to link them to the contestation between sports, women’s public visibility, public sexuality, secularity and religion in the context of Turkey. During my case analysis, I will be drawing attention to those discursive traditions about women’s public visibility, physical exercise, secularity and piety that are common to both ‘the case of Aysun Özbek’ and my previous fieldwork done in 2008. Juxtaposing and comparing the above mentioned cases and their entailed discourses is a fruitful exercise which will inform us regarding the nationalist, traditionalist and religious discourses surrounding women’s volleyball in contemporary Turkey.

## **Women’s Sporting Bodies and Nationalism in Turkey**

The process of nation-formation in the Middle East can be said to involve production of certain discourses as much as institution building at its core. Sports participation was overloaded with patriotic meanings in the context of republican Turkey. Being a sportsman was defined as a Turkish characteristic. According to this new Turkish nationalism, participating in sports activities was an important duty for anyone who loved his/her nation. Inevitably, sportswomen were perceived by the state elite not as sexual bodies or women intervening in a male zone, rather, as heroic figures who were devoted to their nation. The Turkish Republic has focused on modernization, civilization and secularism as cornerstones of its political project, expressed in part through discourses and definitions attached to women’s liberated, visible, and fit bodies (Baydar, 2002, Atalay, 2007b). Therefore, when it comes to male bodies, it is possible to claim

that transformation through sports was largely concerned with creating strong bodies fit for different kinds of ‘service’ to the country. However, in the case of women, their healthy, fit and urban-looking bodies were discursively portrayed as the physical representation and manifestation of the new country which had cut its ties from the Ottomans and “turned its face to the West”. The sportswomen of the early Republican period were also the mothers of a fit and “pure” next generation of the nation with their bolstered reproductive capability and mothering skills. Reproducing a pure nation, according to eugenics discourse which as I have suggested has influences some of Kemal Atatürk’s thinking, is “an honor and privilege, if not a duty” (Kevles 1995: 184) for any woman who has the capacity to give birth. In short, the Republican state turned women’s bodies into both the arena and the subject of Turkish identity formation.

Although it was part of the national project, women who were involved in western sports were only those who could afford the membership fees of the sport clubs. After 1920s, a very limited number of women from elite families became involved in western sports both as professionals and as amateurs. Managers of national sport clubs were encouraged to have female members by Atatürk himself. There are anecdotes about managers who sought to find female members through their male members to satisfy Atatürk’s request (Atalay, 2007a). Eventually, the women who were first involved in sports in Turkey were elite women, who could afford the membership fees of the clubs and usually happened to be female relatives of the men who were either on the managerial board of the clubs, or were regular members.

Women, who were professionally involved in sports came from wealthy, educated and prestigious families and most of them had other professions as well. One of the leading sportswomen in Turkey was Sabiha Rıfat, who became the first female volleyball player in 1929. She was one of the very few female members of a national (and men’s) sport club, *Fenerbahçe*. Rıfat was an educated woman from an elite family and was part of the construction team for Anıtkabir, Atatürk’s mausoleum, as Turkey’s first female engineer. This particular history started an imaginative germination process in the minds of the public, locating women’s involvement in sport as an upper class act.

Navaro-Yashin (2002) focuses on daily political discussions and disagreements about the content of “Turkishness” that took place in the mid-1990s and speaks of two types of Turkish

women that appeared in republican discourses: one of them short-haired, the other black-veiled. Navaro-Yashin uses these images to illustrate the discussions around what was deemed to be the most appropriate public appearance of a “Turkish” woman; and thereby questions the content of “Turkishness”. Thus, what I call the Early-Republican split not only shaped women’s aspirations related to education and fitness, but also placed them under contestation, in the subsequent years. Clearly, the bifurcation of the views related to the content of what it takes to be the ideal Turkish woman in this period evolved and got complicated over time. Yet, body and gender roles have remained at the center of this contestation.

### **The New Turkish Women: Olympic Games and Exposure to Western Gaze**

A special issue of the popular Turkish daily newspaper *Hürriyet*, published on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Republic in 1998, focused on sports and women in the early Republican period in an article entitled “From the Wooden Cage<sup>2</sup> to the Track” (*Kafesten Pistlere*)<sup>3</sup>. The transformation of women’s rural-looking, veiled, “unhealthy” and therefore uncivilized bodies into civilized, disciplined and liberated bodies was perceived not only as an indicator of the westernization and modernization of the country, but also as a way to create and define the new ideal Turkish woman (Alemdaroğlu, 2005, Kandiyoti, 1989 , Göle, 1996).

Women’s participation in professional sports was regarded as an opportunity to prove and showcase the physical transformation of Turkey. The Turkish reform was therefore embodied and represented in the bodies of Turkish elite sportswomen. International games provided an opportunity to showcase the archetype of the modern Turkish woman, where the transformation of Turkey was presented to the ideal global (Western) audience. The presentation of Turkish female bodies to Western audiences was consequential for the Republican project to confirm its success in the eyes of the idealised other. The following quote is from a resource on Turkish women’s involvement in the Olympic Games and has been cited by several researchers:

“The Turkish Republic, which proceeds on the pathway of modernization with giant steps, should have shown the world that the Turkish woman now is no longer under the black veil (*çarşaf*) or behind the wooden curtain<sup>4</sup> (*kafes*)<sup>5</sup>” (Arıpınar et al., 2000:7).

Women’s participation in sports was perceived as a way to represent and demonstrate to the

global (especially Western) gaze that the Turkish nation was succeeding in modernizing itself (Yarar, 2005, Talimciler, 2006, Atalay, 2007b). In her article on the emotive aspects of Turkey's EU negotiations, Ahıska suggests the term *Occidentalism* "to conceptualize how the West figures in the temporal/spatial imagining of modern Turkish national identity" (Ahıska 2003:353). She argues that, "in theorizing the construction and representation of Turkish modernity, we can neither unproblematically herald the Western model nor dismiss the fantasy of "the West" that informs the hegemonic national imaginary" (Ahıska 2003:353). In her account, the Republican reforms of Turkey are not aimed at simply addressing contemporary political and social problems in Turkey, but are also concerned with presenting Turkey to Europe. In other words, the reforms are "part of a performance geared for the gaze of the West" (Ahıska 2003: 355). Similarly, elite sportswomen of the Early Republican era were presented for a "Western" gaze, reflecting the ways in which Turkey has developed a hegemonic, yet inferior relationship with "the West".

### **The Smash of the Year!**

The video footage was broadcasted in the evening news of the nation-wide TV channel Star TV, presented by the famous anchor Uğur Dündar. The news was about Aysun Özbek who had decided to quit her professional sports life. According to the news, the reason behind her decision was that she was now observing the Islamic headscarf. Throughout the day Star News advertised, with video footage, that it would host Özbek in the channel for evening news. The footage was a composition of scenes from different games with Özbek in it, accompanied by a background thriller soundtrack, the narrator spoke over it with an appetite for scandal and gossip evident in his voice. The highlighted sentences were in the following order: "The smash of the year!" "The Sultan of the Net Adopted the Islamic Veil!" "Once the pride of the secularist Turkey, she is under *kara çarşaf*<sup>6</sup> (the black/dark full veiling)!" (This part of the narrative was accompanied by the scenes of Egyptian volleyball players most of whom were wearing headscarf with the question.) "Are we becoming like this?" "The so-called national volleyball player who will shock Turkey is on Star News Only".

### **The Headscarf as a non-National Element**

In the evening news, Özbek's story began with the current political debates regarding the headscarf: "Amidst the discussions on whether the veil should enter the university campuses or not, it landed in the middle of the sports circles/communities". The news had several highlights some of which were contradictory. According to the news, Özbek was from Arab origin whose female family members were observing *kara çarşaf*. She was wearing the headscarf for a very short period before she began her professional sports life. The presenter also mentioned that Özbek - according to the claims - met a woman who wore *kara çarşaf* in Istanbul - Çengelköy and began to attend religious gatherings a short while ago and started wearing headscarf time to time supposedly because of their influence; then, as of that day, she had decided to adopt the Islamic headscarf. Although these two claims are somewhat contradictory, there is a common theme between the lines: that the Islamic headscarf is not a national form of dress, and that its adoption needs to be triggered by an outside factor; either by a mysterious woman and her larger circle, or by some kind of genetic throwback traced to one's Arabic origin. The news also mentions that after her decision to adopt the Islamic headscarf, her family life went into crisis, her relationship with her husband was damaged and she moved out from their marital home. In other words, this sudden change, according to the news, had damaged her private life as well. Further analysis of this news footage and related events at that time open up multiple themes that are entangled in between women's public visibility, sports, public sexuality, secularity and religion in Turkey. I will now sketch the various themes that run in the narrative concerning Özbek.

### **Women's Sexuality and Sports in Turkey**

The first theme is the centrality of the sexualities of women involved in sports when they are watched – or gazed - by male audiences. Unlike other sports such as tennis or swimming where women wear revealing outfits, volleyball tournaments take place in public courts. However, tennis, for instance, is played in expensive sports clubs that are only accessible to elite class. In order to prevent any harassment, women who wear swimsuits also prefer private or women-only beaches or pools. Since the practices and the tournaments mostly take place in courts that are open to public, female volleyball players have long be harassed by male spectators, till mid 80s. In year 2001, Firdevs Hoşer from the Library of Women's Work (*Kadın*

*Eserleri Kütüphanesi*) and the sports historian Cem Atabeyoğlu published a valuable document on women's sports in Turkey. There, Hoşer criticizes the way in which female volleyball players were perceived as “*baldırı çıplak* (naked legs)” by male spectators and harassed accordingly. She shares the following anecdote which illustrates public attitudes towards women's sports as sexual acts:

“1978 Women's National Volleyball Championship was taking place in Adapazarı Indoor Sports Facility. The room had capacity for 3000 audiences, where no empty seat was left. All of the audiences were men, throwing U-shaped threads with rubbers to the court. Some of the players' legs were bleeding”

This anecdote above reveals the violent forms of sexual harassment through the exposure of women's bodies during physical activity. It also reveals how surprising a female volleyball player's decision to adopt the Islamic veil can be for the public.

### **Bodies That Do Not Matter**

The second theme is the dominance and centrality of ideological discourses in women's image in Turkey. On the one hand, the secularist state and media institutions in Turkey dictate modernization from top down for women through a dress code. In this code, the veil is seen as the ultimate symbol of backwardness and fundamentalism. On the other hand, the Islamist circles and media glorify the veil as a symbol of the noble struggle for modesty and piety. As such, Aysun Özbek's case was a perfect litmus test to illustrate and observe the ideological contestations surrounding the female body.

The Islamic media in Turkey published numerous news pieces about Özbek; calling for respect for her choice of veiling. *Zaman*, one of the leading Islamic conservative newspapers, published transcription of a very short phone interview with Özbek without including any of her recent or old photographs. It is important to note that there had never been any other form of support or praise for Özbek in the Islamic media when she was a successful volleyball player; the interest and support came only after she began wearing a headscarf. This support was about defending the right of wearing the headscarf; rather than the personal choices and the rights of sportswomen. The Islamic media<sup>7</sup> had never published such an extensive news pieces about

women in volleyball until Özbek decided to wear a scarf. The secularist media, on the other hand, had glorified Özbek's volleyball career and focused on her sports life as 'national pride'; they now ridiculed or pitied her decision to veil. Özbek's case illustrates the dichotomies and ideologically circumscribed responses when it comes to women's freedom and liberation. It was Özbek's body and public sexuality that was under contestation. Both sides neglected several other aspects of her life in order to highlight this one particular aspect. This case shows how difficult it is, not only to embrace every aspect of a famous person's life at the popular level, but also to speak outside the established discursive jargons without decoding them.

### **Being the Focus of Attention, but Still Being Invisible and Unheard**

The third theme is the silence and absence of Aysun Özbek in the middle of all this heated debate. During the news footage, we, as the listeners, do not get to see Özbek in her new attire in any of the news. The only veiled photograph of Özbek disseminated in the mentioned news footage as well as in other newspapers is a photo-shopped photograph, with a headscarf transposed over Özbek's head.

Özbek refused to appear on TV, or on newspapers during that period. Her invisibility is very ironic especially when her transformation carries several symbolic meanings related to her public visibility. Her transition from a publicly visible figure- a successful volleyball player who embodies national pride- to a private person - a retired ex-professional who has decided to become a mother -attracted huge public attention; yet her avid audience do not get to see her. Moreover, her refusal to talk in any of the news and politely requesting respect for her personal choice draws our attention further to understanding the silence of a subject who is being discussed, criticized, applauded, rejected and accepted for different reasons by different groups. Considering the ideologically and historically loaded concepts surrounding women's sports, public visibility, modernity, national pride, piety, and sexuality; her denial to speak is to revert those multifaceted instruments of power surrounding and acting upon her. The whole fuss that revolved around her decision and transformation seemed to make Özbek herself, her voice and even her silence invisible, while the furore created the illusion that the public knew a lot about her. This element of silence and absence deserves further analysis in itself. Thus, a closer ethnographic look at the relationship between self and culture in the lives of pious women needs



to take the multiplicity of their subject positionings into consideration, and this consideration can also be framed as an attempt to “rediscover women’s voices” (Smith-Rosenberg 1985: 11).

### **The Iron Cage of the Secularist – Islamist Dichotomy**

The fourth theme I need to analyse in this case is the necessity of women’s agency in addressing and overcoming the challenge of double patriarchy and ideology. The societal expectation for Özbek is an “either - or” solution, that does not leave room for a physically active woman who can be both the national pride and a pious woman observing Islamic headscarf outside the volleyball courts. This dichotomous perception resurfaced when, a year later, Özbek decided to return to the volleyball courts. Her return was heralded with the news line: “Threw the Veil and Ran to the Nets”<sup>8</sup>. During her one year break, she had a baby which may have been the conventional reason for her break from her professional life.

The crucial point in this case is, we do not read or hear her about her pregnancy and motherhood in any part of these debates, except between the lines. Despite the societal importance given to motherhood in Turkey, this aspect of Özbek life does not seem to fit into the dichotomous and ideologically loaded perceptions concerning sportswomen. The more ideologically loaded and heated the discussions and the public debates are, the more is the necessity for an ethnographic fieldwork to understand the situation. Thus, I would like to argue that ethnographic fieldwork will provide a deeper understanding and a more multidimensional picture of women highlighting the voices, feelings, and desires related to sports, body and public sexuality.

The nationalist, Islamist and secularist propaganda has evolved from and through highly sexualized and gendered principles, in the context of the sports. I will be encountering each one of the meanings attached to sports, fitness and physical exercise in the field. All these public debates and the fuss, as in the example of Özbek, are mere reflections of the ways in which women’s public sexuality in sports is imagined versus veiling. The ideological camps’ (nationalist, Islamist and secularist) expectations from women’s public sexuality in relation to sports are manifestations of the dominance of the two seemingly opposing sets of patriarchal values in Turkish society. One expects the woman to stay at home and the other to participate in

sports and games. Pious women's involvement in professional and amateur sports is against these dichotomies, which is why it may be difficult for those who are not familiar with the debate or the context, anyone who has considered observing her religion while keep doing sports, to comprehend it.

### **The New Turkish Pride: The Iron Lady**

Six years after Özbek case took place, in 2014, we witness a new form of objectivation regarding female sporting bodies. The London Olympics was a significant moment in the history of the Olympics as female athletes from all of the participating countries were present at the event. For the Turkish national team in fact, women not only outnumbered men in participation (66 women out of 114 participants), but also in the amount of medals (three out of five Turkish medals were won by women)<sup>9</sup>. While the world was thrilled about opening up the path **both** to civilization and to liberation for Muslim women through sports during the London 2012 Olympics, Turkey had yet another agenda for the same events. The Western media's exclusion of Turkish (non-veiled) female Olympians from their lists of "Muslim" sportswomen was not necessarily perturbing for Turkey. Turkish Olympics committee members and the Minister of Youth and Sports, Suat Kılıç were, however, concerned about the new Turkish female image, which was presented by the flag-bearer Neslihan Danel during the opening ceremony. On 20<sup>th</sup> of July, Kılıç himself announced Danel as the Turkish flag-bearer for London 2012. She was selected from four candidates. The other three were basketball player Nevriye Yılmaz, taekwondo player Bahri Tanrikulu and wrestler Rıza Kaya. The jury was willing to select a female athlete as the flag-bearer for Turkey and Yılmaz was in fact a strong candidate but she was recently married<sup>10</sup> and unlike Danel, she did not have children yet. We learn from Kılıç's following words, that childbearing was considered as a criterion for the Turkish flag-bearer of Turkey:

*"Other Olympians are also very important for us. However, Neslihan is selected to be the face of Turkey. She is a sportswoman and a mother. Her selection brings forward the significance of family."*<sup>11</sup>

Western media introduced this tall, beautiful volleyball player as "the Iron Lady", as suggested by the media outlet distributed by the Turkish Olympics committee. According to the outlet,

Darnel was “*a shining example of a woman and mother for all the young athletes that will follow her during the event*”<sup>12</sup>. Following in the footsteps of their secularist republican predecessors, the new Turkish state still continues to invest in women’s sports as a tool to create an ideal woman. Today, elite sportswomen are not only upholders of national pride, or the symbolic mothers of the young nation, but also actual mothers and family bearers. In a way, in contemporary Turkey the tension on the bodies of sportswomen is not eased, but perhaps further enhanced.

Kılıç’s interpretation of Darnel was in line with the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s pro-natalist propaganda, launched over the last few years. Following the lead of the Turkish Prime Minister, it became routine for MPs, ministers or heads of local authorities who are invited to act as wedding witnesses to tell the young couple (in public) to have at least three children (Sehlikoglu 2013b). This once took place at the London Olympics reception during my fieldwork, in the presence of the press, when Kılıç told Nevriye Yılmaz within earshot of everyone present including members of the media, “*I want a child from you.*” Quite amusingly, the sentence has the same double meaning in Turkish as in English. It is unclear whether he wants to father the baby or is just encouraging her to become a mother. I was dining with Nevriye and six other basketball players and Nevriye was sitting right across me. I immediately turned to Nevriye to see how she would respond but neither she, nor other players presented any surprise to such public intervention into her private life or to the sexual innuendo (and how private is the body of a national athlete anyway?). She responded, “*inşallah*” (God willing).

## **Conclusion**

This case study aims to understand the ways in which women’s bodies are circumscribed by several discursive traditions (Asad, 1996). Quoting from Mahmood (2005): “Tradition may be conceived as a particular modality of Foucault’s discursive formation in which reflect upon the past is a constitutive condition for the understanding and reformulation of the present and the future” (115). She then, draws our attention to interpersonal and pedagogical aspects of the discursive tradition, which also enables its practitioners to interact with each other with certain codes and concepts as reference points. Therefore, while accepting Turkish secularism as a constructed discursive tradition, I also question the possible ways of talking against this tradition in order to pursue anthropological work. In other words, although I agree with Mahmood (2005)

that “the past is the very ground through which the subjectivity and self-understanding of a tradition’s adherents are constituted” (Mahmood 2005: 115); I also urge the importance of understanding whether and how the practitioners play with and play around the limits established by the discursive traditions. Thus, this chapter holds a critical position against patriarchal ideologies inscribed over women’s bodies, within the framework of sports, physical exercise and public visibility. By patriarchal ideologies, I mean what Saba Mahmood calls “nationalist, religious, medical, or aesthetic” characteristics that “work by objectifying women’s bodies and subjecting them to patriarchal systems of representation, thereby negating and distorting women’s own experience of their corporeality and subjectivity” (2005: 158). I hold that the secularist project of Turkey is no less patriarchal than Islamist ideology and accordingly I aim to frame the historically loaded meanings of women’s physical exercise from a post-structuralist feminist perspective.

The case of Aysun Özbek illustrates the dominance and centrality of ideological discourses, expectations, and perceptions surrounding veiling and sports and may give us indices as to the perception of the issue of veiling as an “Islamic stigma symbol” (Göle, 2003) and sports and the challenges its carriers face because of the perceptions. This case shows the discursive difficulties that surround several forms of women’s physical activity and visibility, including sports. Again, in Özbek’s case, her invisibility and absence goes unnoticed due to the fuss. It is this fuss that makes her unuttered remarks, possibly way richer and multiple than the dichotomous debates and the fuss evolving around her. It is therefore necessary to remove ourselves from the debates and get closer to her to hear her voice. What is being relegated to second place in such debates is the voice of Muslim women who are the topic of discussion; Muslim women about and on behalf of whom researchers, journalists, the media, westernized and Islamist men continuously speak, and whom they feel at liberty to commend, advice and order as to their appearance.

The state seeks to build the bodies of its citizens through its myriad institutional and discursive apparatuses. As Das and Poole (2004) have pointed out, “sovereign power exercised by the state is not only about territories, it is also about bodies” (2004: 10). Putting women’s bodies at the center of nationalist debates, in effect, makes them embodied representational

subjects of certain national identities. Thus, it is not surprising for the contemporary Turkish government to continue this tradition and use sportswomen's bodies as tools to present their new(ed) identity.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5fz2w\\_aysun-Özbek-voleybol-uyur-dundar-st\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5fz2w_aysun-Özbek-voleybol-uyur-dundar-st_news)

<sup>2</sup> The *mashrabiyya*, or in the Turkish case *kafes* which can be translated as ‘wooden cage’, was previously used when gender segregation was being practiced. It ensured that women would not be seen by men while women could watch the men in such places as mosques, palaces and certain houses.

<sup>3</sup> <http://dosyalar.hurriyet.com.tr/fix98/75yil/82ekl.htm>

<sup>4</sup> The wooden curtain, or cage, was previously used when gender segregation was practiced. It ensured that women would not be seen by men while women could watch the men in such places as mosques, palaces and certain houses.

<sup>5</sup> “Çağdaşlık yolunda dev adımlarla ilerleyen Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Türk kadınının da artık çarşaf altından ve kafes arkasından çıkmış olduğunu dünyaya göstermeliydi”.

<sup>6</sup> The word *kara çarşaf* also embodies secularist anxieties as it is considered as the most extreme form of Islamic veiling. The word *kara*, which means dark or black, has a more negative connotation than its synonym *siyah*.

<sup>7</sup> Islamic media refers to the media (newspapers, journals, and TV/radio channels) owned and run by the religious groups of Turkey, targeting the religious groups of Turkey. Their shared characteristic is to avoid non-Islamic depictions, and often have programs or pages discussing religious matters – even if the publication is not necessarily religious. *Yeni Şafak* and *Zaman* are two major daily newspapers in that category.

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<sup>8</sup> “Tesettürü attı, filelere koştu”, headline in major newspapers including Milliyet.

<sup>9</sup> One gold in athletics, women’s 1500m event to Aslı Çakır Alptekin and two silvers; one to Gamze Bulut in the same event, and one to Nur Tatar in Women’s 67kg event in taekwondo.

<sup>10</sup> The minister Suat Kılıç was her *nikâh şahidi* (one of the two official marriage ceremony witnesses)

<sup>11</sup> His exact words in Turkish were: “*Olimpiyata katılan diğer sporcularımız da bizim için çok önemli ancak Neslihan Türkiye’nin yüzü oldu. Hem sporcu, hem anne, hem da aile vurgusu ön plana çıktı*”

<sup>12</sup> My personal archive, collected in London throughout the Olympics as a researcher and a blogger. 25th July, 2012.