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Sport and Nationalism in the Republic of Turkey

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After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923) as a huge multi-ethnic and multi-religious conglomerate spread across three continents, its successor, the modern Republic of Turkey, was confined in its current borders to mainly Asia Minor. Through the lens of physical culture, this article looks at the impact of the all-encompassing project of nation building as enacted by Atatürk. It traces the efforts for modernity and reform that already started in the nineteenth century but were later turned into a means to purge the newborn nation of Ottoman ‘backwardness’. Catching up with the West, including the introduction of new athletic disciplines, became imperative. In view of some selected physical activities, the article discusses how the ‘Sick Man of Europe’, as the empire was called because its Balkan possessions were dwindling, was designed to turn into a proud and powerful, yet disciplined Turkish entity. Nevertheless, traditional sports in particular have somewhat retained and appropriated religion within a now officially secular society, providing an important cultural reservoir that could bridge some of the country’s existing frictions.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; Turkey; gymnastics; soccer; Zeybek dance; wrestling

Introduction

The conference and special issue title ‘Sport and Nationalism in Asia’ is applied here to the case of Turkey in reverse order: it shall first be asked whether and to what degree Turkey is an Asian country. Against the historical background of Turkish nation building, the article then addresses the problem of who constitutes the nation. Hence, sport as a prism comes in third, but has to be perceived from different angles. It makes no sense for such purposes to focus on one athletic discipline or theatre of performing the nation alone, as will be explained below.

The Asian character of Turkey initially seems to be evident by simply taking a look at the map, since this country of some 75 million people covers the geographical entity Asia Minor or Anatolia, including the political capital of Ankara in its very middle. Only 3% of the landmass of the modern Republic of Turkey is on the Balkan Peninsula, which is part of the European continent; but this territory includes a large segment of the important city Istanbul, which extends on both sides of the Bosphorus. The roots of the Turkish language can be traced back to Central Asia. This is due to the fact that Central Asian tribes migrated westwards and some of them successfully intruded on Asia Minor beginning in the eleventh century. However, during the more than 600 years of the Ottoman Empire, which extended in its heyday deep into Europe, the politically and culturally decisive part of the Empire lay in the Balkans, especially in what is now Bulgaria and Greece, so that the

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claim that Turkey has an in part European character is well founded. Quataert even stresses: 'Until the 1878 Treaty of Berlin stripped away all but fragments of its Balkan holdings, the Ottoman Empire was a European power and was seen as such by its contemporaries, being deeply involved in European military and political affairs.'¹ Furthermore, the architect of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal (d. 1938), who came from what is now the Greek town of Thessaloniki (Salonica), initiated a program of hyper-Westernisation in line with ideas and manpower taken from Western European countries such as Austria, France, Germany and Sweden. For him, 'Turkey's essential Europeanness remained unchanged; it simply had to be expressed in cultural rather than geographical terms.'² However, the multiple reference points between which people in modern Turkey may oscillate are even broader than that. The thesis suggested here is that Turkey's ongoing, excessive, state-driven nationalism has not successfully or has only superficially absorbed the still existing variety and mixture of people(s). Hence, there are tremendous inner conflicts and an overall indecisiveness standing in the way of a convincing and really inclusive national sports policy. The Ottoman Empire, the predecessor of the modern Republic of Turkey, emerged from those Central Asian tribes that had conquered the Anatolian Plateau and later Southeast Europe and lasted from 1299 to 1923. At the height of their power, the Ottomans twice threatened to capture Vienna and were in 1683 finally repelled and also discouraged from further intrusion into Europe. Not least because of their outstanding military forces based on mounted archers, they had created an impressive empire that covered even significant regions of a third continent, namely Africa, including what are now such countries as Egypt, Libya and Algeria. Their domain also reached down the Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula with the two holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina. The ruling elite was Muslim, and the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul also acting as the Caliph, the highest representative of the Muslim community in general. Although a large portion of the people under Ottoman rule were Muslims and many of those were Arabs, the Ottoman heritage typically consists of multiple ethnicities and a broad range of coexisting cultures; other religious denominations were not forced to convert to Islam, but were integrated into this mosaic. However, after a period of stagnation, the Ottoman Empire entered the aforementioned phase of decline, and a frightening shrinking process began in which it lost the majority of its huge territory. Rising nationalist movements in the Balkans that were fuelled by pertinent European ideas endangered the Empire since the nineteenth century. In the middle of that century, the Ottoman Empire was already labelled the 'Sick Man of Europe'. That is to say, the ideology of Turkism – understood as 'the double movement through which Turkishness as the determinative identity of the citizens of the empire, and later, the republic, was racialised and its origins essentialised' – is a latecomer in this tableau; although theories of Turkism had already been proposed since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Balkan Wars in 1912–1913 can be regarded as their real trigger; and racial consciousness became identified as the main force behind the success of various enemies of the Empire.³ When the ideology of Turkism was developed, it was not only influenced by European theories of racism but in a way even superseded their imaginative format. This construct, known as the 'Turkish history thesis', was developed in the 1930s in order to marginalise the huge Ottoman heritage and degrade its importance to just a 'footnote' in glorious Turkic history. The Turkish-American historian Şükrü Haniöglü depicts the inner, functional logic of its grotesque assumptions:⁴

According to the Turkish history thesis, the cradle of human civilization was Central Asia, the Turkish homeland. From here the Turks had migrated to all Old World continents, establishing major states, such as the Sumerian and Hittite empires, and helping "backward" human groups such as the Chinese and Indians to produce impressive civilizations. Similarly,

the Turks could take substantial credit for the achievements of Greco-Roman civilization, which was the product of Turkic peoples who had migrated to Crete and Italy. Although not all of the peoples of China, India, or the Mediterranean basin were racially Turkic, they owed their civilization to Turkish immigration, which had been prompted by environmental changes.

As absurd as this may seem, the Turkish history thesis, according to Alemdaroglu, 'promoted the idea that Turks and Europeans had a common heritage'.⁵ The reason behind such claims is that the Young Turks movement that seized power in the last years of the waning empire and the military hero Mustafa Kemal, later named Atatürk, 'father of the Turks', deemed it necessary, once the Republic of Turkey was installed in 1923, to completely eclipse everything connected to the long-ailing Ottoman Empire and to the religion of Islam. Religion was perceived as backward and weakening, hence as unreformable and an impediment to any progress in modern society. Secularism became the state ideology and anything related to Islam, including Islamised versions of martial arts, was sidelined or translated into national Turkic categories. Nevertheless, the beginning of the republic in 1923 witnessed a tremendous population exchange between Turkey and Greece based on religious denomination, with 500,000 Greek Muslims being transferred to Turkey and 1.5 million Anatolian Greeks to Greece. Attempts at ethnic homogenisation are related to two major problems that accompany the birth of Turkism as state racism, namely the Armenian genocide in 1915, including the ongoing official denial of its occurrence by the state of Turkey, and the lingering Kurdish question; although Kurds were officially co-opted into the modern Republic of Turkey they have been presented as 'mountain Turks', later as 'Eastern Turks'; their culture was systematically repressed, although there have been some reforms recently. These two huge conflicts will not simply fade. And, despite the overall secular framework, Islam is powerfully back in state politics, especially through the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP, since 2001) under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which in recent decades has had various predecessor parties, each banned awhile after founding. That is to say, Turkey is a country torn by cultural and ethnic conflicts as well as between the two main different poles of secularism and Islam(ism) – a situation that impairs a common sense of successful community and nationhood. The failed bid for the Olympic Games of 2020 that occurred after the Gezi Park riots, which had also spread to other parts of the country, did not come as a surprise. Given the demands and implications of Turkey's authoritarian modernism, it is extremely difficult to fuse diverging elements into a consistent national identity. Open critical discussions about such a national identity and its underlying problems or challenges are an extremely delicate topic. As a consequence, although theoretically there is an endless reservoir of different heritage offerings including all sorts of athletic traditions from which one could creatively pick and choose, such initiatives are often resisted by defenders of the guidelines of Kemalism or the national status quo of Turkey. In the following text, such lingering tensions shall be discussed more closely in connection with sport by highlighting four aspects: (i) the overemphasis on modern sports, notably soccer, (ii) the problem of state-decreed feminism, (iii) the famous case of the designing of Zeybek as the national dance and (iv) traditional wrestling with its rich historical heritage.

Modern Sports and Soccer

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the landscape of familiar physical activities and notably of traditional games and old-style wrestling was increasingly challenged by new

ones, such as 'football (soccer), tennis, cycling, swimming, flying, gymnastics, croquet, and boxing', whereby this wave first hit port and trade cities like Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Izmir because of their large communities of foreigners.⁶ Already since the first half of the 1860s, modern schools geared towards Western models also offered new types of physical instruction.⁷ Unfortunately, this history of sports in the framework of state education and in the private sector has not been sufficiently researched. However, two features shall be stressed here, namely the assumed military instrumentality that receded after the wars, on the one hand, and the ongoing (over)emphasis on soccer on the other. After its beginnings, clandestine for certain political reasons, the first Ottoman sports club was officially founded in 1910 in Istanbul under the name of 'Beşiktaş Osmanlı Jimnastik Kulübü', Ottoman Gymnastic Club Beşiktaş. Although athletic disciplines such as (modern) wrestling, boxing, weightlifting and gymnastics were likewise promoted, soccer soon turned into its main attraction. Certain sports perceived as modern and military, such as gymnastics, swimming, rowing and shooting, were officially and semi-officially propagated mainly in the early decades of the twentieth century in order to overcome weaknesses and to strengthen the power of the Ottoman nation by spreading the Boy Scout movement and setting up of paramilitary youth organisations.⁸ Since the adoption of modern-style sporting disciplines and the construction of 'the healthy young body' were yet another important means to performatively join Western civilisation, Mustafa Kemal forcefully pushed this development.⁹ Stipulating such activities for various age groups was also of concern for the young Turkish Republic, so that 'the parliament passed the Body Discipline Law in 1938 to "regulate games, gymnastics and sports that improve the physical and moral capabilities of the citizens in accordance with the national and reformist principles"'.¹⁰ The art historian Burcu Dogramaci has pointed out in more than one publication the various forms of cultural transfer, including architecture, art and sports, especially from Germany and Austria to Turkey. She traces in particular fascist echoes in gymnastic performances in mass stadia and in sports counselling for Turkish civil servants.¹¹ Ataturk imported followers of 'Turnvater Jahn' and propagated physical education, especially for women, but although the subject was integrated into the curriculum, many schools lack a proper gym and its implementation is deficient.¹² The Ottoman Empire was already included in the International Olympic Committee in 1911 (only one year after Egypt in 1910, which led the pack as the first member state from the Islamic world), and a rapid development of sports has to be attested to the Ataturk period and to the ensuing years from 1938 to 1948, when sports were turned into a means of education administered by the state; but such efforts waned afterwards and did not maintain a rank-and-file character. Of course, the Turkish Ministry of Youth and Health, which was set up in 1969, has launched several initiatives, but the imagined prominent position in the arena of global sports has not materialised, apart from a few exceptions.

In the beginning, the introduction of soccer met considerable resistance from religious circles,¹³ but this athletic activity and notably tennis had and still have the air of being progressive and modern.¹⁴ Although soccer is not the only sport that was first introduced by European communities, practiced in their private clubs and schools and then taken over and integrated into the official educational system, soccer is by far the most pervasive one. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Turkish nationalists, too, came to perceive soccer as vital for the construction of national identity and forcefully promoted it.¹⁵ Gymnastics was likewise introduced around the turn of the century, but never met any comparable success.¹⁶ Soccer skyrocketed after an initial phase of resistance to become the most important athletic activity in Turkey, but even more so as a spectator sport. Stokes stresses that soccer and in the forefront the Istanbul clubs Galatasaray, Beşiktaş and

Fenerbahçe dominate media discourse and public consciousness because soccer is ‘widely considered to be progressive, European and sophisticated’, while the athletes are cherished as celebrities.¹⁷ However, despite Turkey’s inclusion in the UEFA (Union of European Football Association) since 1962, the Turkish media present the successes of its soccer players and especially of the Galatasaray club in European tournaments in highly belligerent nationalistic terms. Although Kösebalan relativises his account a bit towards the end of his article, he even speaks of ‘reincarnations of historical Turkish-European confrontations’ and deplores that ‘the secular establishment’s discourse that Turkey is a member of “the civilised Western world” does not correspond to its framing of the West as the other at a subconscious level’.¹⁸ The sport section of Turkish newspapers usually does not deserve this name, but should rather be called the soccer section. Soccer also dominates TV and reaches out to the Turkish diaspora in Germany and elsewhere. Another downside of this eclipsing fascination for soccer is the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity that is related to it. Soccer unfolds its socialising function nearly exclusively for the male part of society. Thus, in spite of its modern appeal, it basically reproduces male hegemony. An ethnographic study of an Istanbul-based female soccer fan club deplores the prevalent patriarchal social order and the less-than-modern inclusion of women: ‘Ladies of Besiktas were founded with a vision to dissolve the dichotomies the hyper-feminine concubine who comes to the matches with a male companion, keeps asking about the off-side rule and the masculinized comrade who knows what is going on on the field’¹⁹ – hopes that have not yet sufficiently materialised. Looking at the sports landscape of the 1980s, the ethnographer Navaro-Yashin already showed that ‘no other practice but soccer (*futbol*) proved to be more promising for the production of a popularised notion of the state’ and that in Turkey ‘the activity of watching soccer was historically turned into an important component of boys’ socialisation into manhood’, hence it turned into a ‘major pastime for a large majority of men, enjoying soccer as a spectator, if not as a player, is an important marker of gender’.²⁰ Although soccer, even today, is paramount in Turkish society and many equate it with sports as such, the visual consumption and debating of soccer by far outweigh the activity level on the ground and especially among older males.

State Feminism

A second category of impediments to a pervasive and successful sport development pertains to another feature of the Atatürk legacy, namely state feminism. The liberation of women was regarded as an integral part of the modernisation program. Following Western modernity could be proven not only by the recognition of women’s rights already in 1926 with the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code, which was inspired by the Swiss one, and in the 1930s by the right to elect and to be elected; increasing female presence in public space visualised and performed the efficacy of reform generally and the curbing of Islamic influences. One of Atatürk’s adopted daughters, Sabiha Gökçen, became a fighter pilot in the 1930s. Photographs of her in uniform have acquired iconic status: she is the epitome of the civilised body of the Republic, representing an active, progressive, responsible and courageous citizen. However, ‘the Kemalist regime had a double discourse on women’, so that Alemdaroglu and many others criticise:²¹

While the state encouraged increasing involvement by a group of elite women in public life, it gave a different message to a large number of “other” women: they were expected to contribute to the process of modernisation not by becoming elite women professionals but being housewives.

Modern Turkish women were supposed to take off the veil and leave behind Islamic patterns of seclusion and bodily shame. Whether their conditions at home really changed was of no real concern to the reformers, who came to focus on a small urban elite of women that served their purposes of showing off modernity; the majority of rural women and those of the lower classes did not partake in these advancements, and behind closed doors many allegedly now emancipated women were exposed to the same old problems.²² Reforms in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic not only focused on the military, administration, economics and law but also encompassed the whole spectrum of cultural activities that had to be rejuvenated in order to express, enact and spur on the idea of progress and Westernisation. Atatürk personally endorsed, for instance, the establishment of a 'state conservatoire' (1936 in Ankara) as a professional school for theatre, opera and ballet. A complete state school for ballet was set up in the middle of the twentieth century.²³ Pious Muslim circles frowned and still frown severely upon such activities, especially ballet. The same applies to the introduction of youth and other festivals in which males and females happily intermingled and were supposed to show up in modern, tight-fitting sportswear and to perform gymnastics and the like all together in newly built stadia throughout the country and especially in Ankara – events that were transmitted by newspapers and journals, effectively combined with the rise of sports photography.²⁴ Despite official insistence on this type of cultural showcase modernisation, women were expected to submit to the needs of nation building in a manner that rather represses their femininity in public space. It has to be recalled that Turkish state feminism is not about sexual liberalisation, for instance, but is a specific type of top-down, prescriptive emancipation that is not really concerned with what women themselves wanted or even with learning what they regard(ed) as necessary. Women were expected to serve the national cause and not 'selfish' individual projects. The participation rate in physical activities is low in Turkey in general, but even lower for girls and women. Apart from impressive festivals, the high-flying goals are usually not achieved in the realm of sport. That is to say, 'women are under-represented at all levels [of sport], including coaching, refereeing, management and media, in Turkey'.²⁵ Furthermore, many women cannot reconcile their religious identity and its demand to wear a headscarf with competitive sports activities, while those women who do compete mainly choose rather masculine athletic disciplines, i.e. sports that downplay or counteract femininity, such as volleyball, taekwondo, basketball, karate, swimming, kickboxing, handball or judo, a feature that became evident in the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Games, that displayed an increased participation of Turkish women who were successful predominantly in weightlifting.²⁶ As a result, many girls and women are left behind and lost for athletic purposes, while the range of suitable athletic disciplines for females remains unnecessarily limited. However, it has to be kept in mind that the surveillance of Islamic displays in public space affects not only women but also male athletes.²⁷

Dancing the Nation

During the Ottoman Empire, all sorts of life cycle rituals and festive occasions had been accompanied by dances. They also accompanied graduation ceremonies of the widespread guilds and of schools of higher religious learning.²⁸ In his cultural study of Turkish dance, Metin And has described the character of dances as a broad, lively tradition and has pointed out their huge variety and fragmentation, since 'each region, even each village, has its own dance' and, as a consequence, 'there is no single national Turkish dance' that 'is widespread over the entire country, although attempts have been made to popularise

certain dances'.²⁹ Several other authors have likewise dealt with the attempts to create the national dance called Zeybek in Republican times and its explicit endorsement by Atatürk.³⁰ Again And already highlighted: 'When we speak of Turkish dances, we must bear in mind that there is no single national Turkish dance that is known over the entire country; thus, Atatürk attempted to popularise a single dance: the Zeybek.'³¹ The latter idea goes back to the famous mass educator later responsible for physical education, Selim Sırrı Tarcan, who, during his stay in Sweden, became acquainted with Swedish folk dance performances in the urban environment of Stockholm, which inspired him to design a modern Turkish equivalent.³² Bits and pieces were chosen, mainly from village dances of the Aegean region, for the newly established canon. Selim Sırrı had the opportunity to have his creation performed in the presence of Atatürk in Izmir in 1925, thereby greatly pleasing the leader of the Turkish nation. Projects of this type are related to the interest in folk culture that was triggered by rising nationalist sentiments in Europe in the nineteenth century. Therefore, Degirmenci speaks of a 'hand-to-hand relationship between the folk and nationalism' because the construction of an authentic and shared origin via folk culture lends legitimacy to the national idea of a territory thereby declared homogenous.³³ Öztürkmen³⁴ has rendered the best analysis why this particular dance, the Zeybek, was designed and its elements selected by social engineers to be the national dance of Turkey: it perfectly fits the trajectory of modernisation because it underlines the artistic refinement of the rural, thus evoking potential for development; shows males and females together; conveys a sense of structure and order; is easily learned; can be staged anywhere; and makes Turkey visible to Europeans. Zeybek was spread via various channels, especially from 1932 to 1950 through the newly set up people's houses (the so-called *halk evi*), student dormitories that were organised in accordance with the students' region of origin, annual festivals or competitions, school performances, folklore clubs and commercialised offerings. According to Öztürkmen, Zeybek enhanced the Republican project and served a civilising mission in various ways: it was arranged on the basis of geographic-administrative units rather than ethnically; it provided visual and somatic offers of identity; since the 1970s, the dancers were often migrants in the cities who had no longer been raised with these local traditions; furthermore, it advocates the cooperative co-presence of the sexes; it propagates an aesthetic of uniformity; it constructs a national repertoire, music broadly appealing to Turks anyway and being less elitist than literature; its fixed moves do not allow for improvisation and thus foster an aesthetic of undisputable group movement; Zeybek further blurs places of origin in favour of a synthesising unified style and demonstrates variety within unity with some limited space for self-presentation. Nevertheless, one cannot discard Zeybek as a mere artificial product; it has proven to be successful and popular for many decades now. While for critical observers these performances smack of authoritarian, top-down orchestration, this field of cultural physicality is one of the most vividly received by the Turkish populace.

The Variety of Wrestling Styles and the Traditional Martial Arts Heritage

Another success story seems to be that of dance, is the development of wrestling. Throughout Turkey, various traditional or meanwhile neo-traditional wrestling styles, such as Aba, Karakucak, Şalvar and oil wrestling (*yağlı güreş*) are intensely practiced as a complement to modern-style wrestling with its inclusion in the Olympic system and its importation as a part of the somatic modernisation process. Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestlers have been the backbone of Olympic performance by Turkish citizens. Some of the freestyle wrestlers may even take part in competitions of more regional wrestling

styles, like oil wrestling, which is quite widespread in the western half of Turkey and in 2010 managed to gain UNESCO heritage status, thus superseding other variants.³⁵ As for wrestling in Turkey, cultural brokers, athletes and spectators refer to different historico-ideological frameworks, namely, first of all, old Turkish and pre-Islamic wrestling with its Central Asian heritage; second, Ottoman war training; and third, wrestling in the framework of the modern Turkish nation state. Invocations of elements from these different categories may coexist, overlap or conflict with one another. Drawing from these different reservoirs and mixing them often decisively blurs the implicit message of how the nation is imagined and performed.

The cultural register of the Central Asian Turkish tribes with their traditional martial arts is to a certain degree an integral part of the modern Turkish cultural memory. Like archery and riding (which were essential for hunting and the impressive expansion westwards), wrestling is known to have been very popular among them and to have been a regular cultic practice, for instance in connection with funeral rites. Old Turkish folktales bear witness to this heritage and, to a certain degree, even include females in this narrative. From the perspective of the Turkish history thesis, the Huns' mounted archers, for instance, can be counted among those who stormed Europe long before the Ottoman Empire came into existence.

While the nomadic Turkic background is fundamentally related to the triad of archery, riding and wrestling, only the latter survived with a significantly broad basis in modern Turkey, but the three interrelated athletic categories were also important for Ottoman warfare and festivities. Since the fifteenth century, the Ottomans institutionalised a systematic program of martial arts training, including archery drills especially on horseback and the use of lances, maces, swords, etc. in combat situations. Proto-modern sport clubs (called *tekke* like the widespread model of the Sufi convent) and the regular staging of various martial games provided training opportunities in preparation for war. Not only infantrymen, but also the mounted archers and even a considerable number of Ottoman sultans themselves wrestled. So-called arrow squares (*ok meydanı*, the most famous being the one built by Mehmet the Conqueror after the conquest of Constantinople, henceforth Istanbul) were set up for thoroughly organised outdoor archery training that comprised target practice as well as range archery.³⁶ Instances of extremely outstanding performance were marked with a column of honour. The bow as a combat weapon became completely obsolete quite late in the Ottoman Empire and only when the special infantry unit of the Janissaries, the bodyguard of the Sultan, was abolished in 1826 and its lodges were closed. The Janissaries had resisted adopting firearms and had relied on their highly demanding archery skills, which took many years to acquire and complete. However, attempts to revive this age-old tradition of archery evinced only limited results. The introduction of mechanised public transportation also greatly reduced the importance of animals, notably horses. Despite the construction of a large Hippodrome in Ankara in the early Republic, the main winner of the traditional athletic triad in modern Turkey is wrestling, especially oil wrestling. Mustafa Kemal is known to have sent a letter and a gift to the famous oil wrestler Kurtdereli Mehmet congratulating him not only on his athletic successes but even more so on his attitude, expressed in his saying that on the wrestling field he always felt backed by the whole Turkish nation and thought of the honour of the nation (*Ben, her güreşte arkamda Türk milletinin bulunduğunu ve millet şerefini düşünürdüm*). In rural areas, oil wrestling is still widespread and popular also among the youth.³⁷ That is not to say that oil wrestling has witnessed a glorious development ever since Atatürk's telegram. By the 1970s, the situation of oil wrestling and even more so its image in wider Turkish society as utterly backward must have been quite deplorable. However, the 1980s witnessed reviving interest in

local/regional culture as a soft power. One can only speculate why oil wrestling or, more precisely, a certain festival in the town of Edirne was privileged over other wrestling styles and athletic events so that the competition in Edirne finally gained the aforementioned UNESCO status as an intangible cultural heritage in 2010. Perhaps, among other factors, this has to do with its location in the uttermost western half of the country, thus representing less potential trouble from regions with a strong Kurdish or other ethnically non-Turkish population. Despite the renowned heritage status of the central festival and the large number of international media people it attracts, this particular event and even more so oil wrestling festivals elsewhere in the country cultivate a decidedly nationalistic narrative³⁸ that does not fully employ or reach out to other communities, as would be easily imaginable against the background of the rich Ottoman heritage; at least pertinent endeavours meanwhile seem to have been curbed.

Conclusion

This article is based on the assumption that the state-run hyper-modernisation with its marginalisation of Ottoman heritage and further the homogenising impetus of Turkism represent major obstacles to a more successful or convincing involvement in and development of sports in Turkey. The last years of the Ottoman Empire were overshadowed by traumatic experiences of decay, loss and destruction – notably during the war period that even preceded World War I. No wonder the rise of Turkism was related to an overall rhetoric of becoming once again as strong and healthy as the early Turks. Atatürk himself emphatically endorsed this doctrine, although he personally led a very unhealthy lifestyle and engaged in sports only moderately. After the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), paramilitary Turkish Power Associations mushroomed throughout Turkey, later reshaped as Youth Associations that advocated ‘national’ as well as modern sports.³⁹ Likewise, the Turkish Boy Scouts movement that had already started in late Ottoman times and activities organised by the Red Crescent contributed to the strengthening of the new Turkish national body. However, a clear-cut national identity as mirrored in a certain athletic profile and a vital sports landscape that fulfils the high Turkish expectations for success in world society did not really emerge, apart from wrestling, to a certain degree. The pushing of selected athletic disciplines perceived as modern and hence as desirable civilising means has become evident. However, this does not imply that the populace has wholeheartedly and actively accepted such offerings. The same applies to the imposing demands of state feminism, which did not leave enough room for religious sensibilities and current ideas of shame. From the viewpoint of societal dispersion, folklore dancing in the form of Zeybek and local/regional wrestling styles are the most successful athletic activities presented here, but despite their public inclusion in international showcase or get-together events, even they lack imagination and a creative outreach to communities other than the national one. This article argues that it is time to put more trust in people’s minds and bodies themselves and to be more supportive of the productive power of individual playfulness.

Notes on Contributor

Birgit Krawietz is Professor of Islamic Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin. She has published on Islamic legal theory, medical ethics and sports in the Islamic world. Her overall research interests are normative Islam and cultural history.

Notes

1. Quataert, *Ottoman Empire*, 2.
2. Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 201.
3. Isyar, "Republican Citizenship," 343–4.
4. Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, 165.
5. Alemdaroglu, "Politics of the Body," 63.
6. Quataert, *Ottoman Empire*, 162.
7. Lüküslü and Dinçşahin, "Shaping Bodies," 195–7.
8. Okay, "Sport and Nation Building;" and Akmeşe, *Modern Turkey*, 163–77.
9. Dogramaci, "Heading into Modernity," 114.
10. Alemdaroglu, "Politics of the Body," 65.
11. Dogramaci, "Heading into Modernity."
12. Çağlar, "Beyond Culturalism," 102–3; cp. Erdem, "Sport in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," 138–9.
13. Okay, "The Introduction, Early Development," 6, 9.
14. Stokes, "Strong as a Turk," 27.
15. Okay, "The Introduction, Early Development," 5, 7.
16. Okay, "Sport and Nation Building," 152; cp. Lüküslü and Dinçşahin, "Shaping Bodies."
17. Stokes, "Strong as a Turk," 26.
18. Kösebalaban, "Turkish Media," 52–4.
19. Erhart, "Ladies of Besiktas," 95.
20. Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, 124–5.
21. Alemdaroglu, "Politics of the Body," 66.
22. White, "State Feminism."
23. And, "Opera and Ballet," 74–5.
24. Dogramaci, "Heading into Modernity."
25. Koca and Hacısoftaoglu, "Struggling for Empowerment," 162.
26. *Ibid.*, 160.
27. Kösebalaban, "Turkish Media," 57–60, 63.
28. And, *History of Turkish Dancing*, 26–7.
29. *Ibid.*, 157.
30. Notably Öztürkmen, "I Dance Folklore"; and Lüküslü and Dinçşahin, "Shaping Bodies."
31. And, "Opera and Ballet," 69.
32. Lüküslü and Dinçşahin, "Shaping Bodies."
33. Degirmenci, "Pursuit of a Nation," 48–49.
34. Öztürkmen, "I Dance Folklore."
35. Krawietz, "Sportification and Heritagization"; and Krawietz, "Prelude to Victory."
36. Özveri, "Turkish Traditional Archery."
37. Hershiser, "Blood, Honor and Money."
38. Krawietz, "Prelude to Victory."
39. Okay, "Sport and Nation Building," 153–5.

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