

## Preface

On May 28, 2013, a call went out for people to defend the Gezi Park against bulldozers that had appeared overnight to uproot trees as a first step towards replacing the park with a reconstruction of the historic Taksim Military Barracks demolished in 1940. The initial alert came from *Taksim Solidarity*, an umbrella platform that had been organized to spearhead movements against transformation projects that characterize the ruling Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) urban policy. This includes infrastructural projects like the third Bosphorus Bridge and the Istanbul Canal and the privatization of formerly public spaces like the Gezi Park. What began with a small group of people keeping watch over the trees rapidly grew into round-the-clock occupation of the park with the number of people increasing every day. When police used tear-gas and water cannons on the occupants and set up barricades to keep them out, there was a wave of protest that was replicated in sixty-seven cities from Ankara to Izmir, Adana and Hatay.

The makeup and content of the protests varied widely from city to city with different slogans and symbols. The millions of people who joined in the movement were, however, united by a sense of frustration at the government's reactions to a range of issues and style of governance as well as anger at the disproportionate use of force and the failure of mainstream Turkish media to cover it. The protests involved the participation of people from a variety of ideological positions in Turkish politics except for the supporters of the AKP themselves. The majority were middle class and secular, but the participation of working class people, practicing Muslims, environmentalists, and ethnic and religious minorities belied any attempt to characterize this movement as "being organized by extremist elements" and lacking public support. The positions and goals of the people participating in the demonstrations were diverse and sometimes incompatible but the common spirit of resistance was undeniable. The significance of the movement to "take back" the public space, the alignment of dissent and the slogans built around the threatened trees has been extensively debated in the social media, though it remains problematic to predict what kinds of possibilities will emerge out of the movement. It also remains a reality that while entire areas of the Turkey's big cities were brought to a standstill by the protests, whether the electoral picture will change drastically. However, what remains undeniable is that the rhetoric of the Turkish Model, as an ideal for the Middle East

in the post–Arab Spring era, will be reconsidered as Turkey confronts the aftermath of its own “Summer” of dissensions.

In all likelihood, the events signify the end of the decade of coexistence among competing visions for Turkey’s future. This goes beyond the duality of secular versus religious inclinations, although it remains as the major fault line. Also at play is resentment over visible disparities that have accompanied a sweeping increase in overall prosperity. It is still too early to predict what kind of alternatives will emerge and what impact the events will have on the forthcoming local and general elections, the presidential elections, the new constitution process, the proposed presidential system of government, the Kurdish initiative, domestic calculations and the balance of political parties, and the economy in Turkey. However, what is undeniable is that the “Turkish Model” is once again at crossroads, at a juncture from where various alternative futures are possible. Its identification as “secular, democratic, and liberal” is at the heart of debates as it had been proposed as an alternative in the post–Arab Spring Middle East. This is reminiscent of the era when the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted speculations about Turkey’s geo-strategic significance and a model was developed that asserted the significance of the Turkish experiment for the post Soviet world. The argument was simple. Turkey, with the exception of Israel, was the only country in the region that combined parliamentary democracy with a market economy and was able to show significant growth rates. Referring to the country’s Islamic heritage and its ethnic affinity with a large part of the post Soviet states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, it was argued that Turkey was well placed not only to act as a “model” for the countries but also as a bridge between the “East” and the “West”. This was an argument that became prevalent not only within Turkey but also in the international arena and it has been argued that it was aimed primarily at strengthening Turkey’s negotiation with the international community, particularly the European Union (EU). Certain parallels with the current scenario in the Middle East are immediately discernable. A somewhat similar situation of “transition” is being predicted for the Middle East today with the “collapse” of the ruling regimes. There is similarly a crisis in Turkey’s relations with the EU. The attraction for the “Model” here is being projected in terms of a shared Ottoman past, though the Arab world does not look upon this heritage without criticism.

This book argues that the Turkish Model was a myth that transferred the ideal of a secular, democratic, and liberal society as a model for the post Soviet Turkic world and in the process encouraged a “Turkic” rhetoric that emphasized connection between two regions based on common ancestry. It is an attempt at understanding what the Turkish Model or Turkish Development Alternative was and why it was promoted in the Central Asian Republics immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It begins with an understanding of the reality of the Model from a Turkish perspective and then goes on to examine whether the Turkish world as an alternative makes sense both from a historical as well as contemporary perspective. It concludes by looking into the reemergence of the Model in the wake of the events in the Middle East since early 2011. It examines how in the light of a search for options the Turkish Model was once again projected as viable.

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This book is for three generations of exceptional women—Nayantara, Paramita, and Kana.

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