

**Umut Özkırmılı
(ed.):
“The Making
of a Protest
Movement
in Turkey:
#occupygezi”**

Erdem Evren

Book Reviewed

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“Taksim has never felt safer in my entire life,” she said with a big smile on her face. “Did you see the rainbow flag on top of the barricade in Beşiktaş yesterday?” he asked curiously. “The mobilization of the common gives the common a new intensity,” Hardt and Negri have written (213). “[Its intensification], finally, brings about an anthropological transformation such that out of the struggles come a new humanity.” “It’s like falling in love”, one protestor is on record as saying.

The May to June 2013 uprising in Turkey started as a protest against the loss and commodification of an urban commons in Istanbul, but quickly evolved into the single most important spectacle of anti-authoritarianism in the history of the country. The event itself—that is, the initial street clashes with the police along İstiklal Street on May 31, 2013—really came out of a void. There were hardly any signs or precedents; what was once a foreboding only retrospectively became a harbinger. Among the thousands of people who encamped and reclaimed first Gezi Park and then the entirety of Taksim Square in the first two weeks of June, however, there were many groups which had already carved miniscule anti-systemic spaces out of the now overtly conservative and neo-liberal political landscape of the country.

Until May 31, socialists, LGBTQs, feminists, football fans, Marxist-Leninist militants, anarchists, environmentalists, anti-capitalist Muslims and many others were all islands in themselves. The tiny green space at the heart of the city electrified in an unprecedented manner their various desires for and attachments to alternative and radical worlds. But more importantly, what it also did was to facilitate a sense of coming-togetherness, instigating commensurability to a certain degree in demands, languages, intensities and sensibilities.

The Making of a Protest Movement in Turkey, the latest of half a dozen edited volumes and special issues on the Gezi uprising that have so far appeared in English, takes this partial convergence in concerns and grievances as its starting point to contextualize and make sense of those eighteen days that have changed the country. The volume brings together eight articles written from a variety of perspectives including sociology of Islam, politics of race and law, poststructuralism, queer studies and political ecology to shed light on the social and political developments and processes that preceded and followed the uprising in May to June 2013.

More than a few contributions explicitly seek to challenge or reveal the limits of well-seated political and academic con-

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ventions of thinking about and through Turkey. I will mention three of them here: Aslı İğsız's extensive documentation of the effects of deployment of law in order to simultaneously facilitate rampant privatization and expansive criminalization seeks to situate the AKP's rise within a broader context of authoritarianism's marriage with neoliberalism. Contending that 'democratic authoritarianism' has always been the regime's character since the 1940s, Cihan Tuğal by contrast recounts some of the AKP's policies and reactions before and during the uprising as a deviation from this formula. He discerns a novel 'fascistic path' and asks if instead 'Gülenism' could be the new skin for old ceremony. Even if the recent political developments in Turkey fail to support his speculation that the Gülenization of the regime is the domestic and international capital's Plan B, his analysis of the past and future of the 'Erdoğan wing of the regime' remains valuable. Emrah Yıldız's thoughtful piece reflects upon the convergences between

the Kurdish political movement and LGBTQ groups and individuals during and after the Gezi uprising to take issue with two things: Joseph Massad's extremely problematic contention that the growing recognition of homosexuality in the global South categorically serves the interest of imperialism, and Jasbir Puar's notion of "homonationalism," which concerns the toleration and protection of LGBTQ bodies in the global North as "the latest litmus test of a genuine commitment" (115) to liberal democracy.

One notable weakness of the book is the absence of conceptual or thematic coherence. Neither the foreword by Judith Butler nor the introduction by the editor Umut Özkırmılı offers much help in pointing to a common theme or problem and this causes partial confusion since the volume brings together articles as diverse as Zeynep Gambetti's Deleuzian reading of body politics during the uprising and Michael Ferguson's notes on the slavery in

the Ottoman Empire and the recent distinction between 'Black Turkey, White Turk' to which Tayyip Erdoğan extensively resorts. Only in the afterword, Spyros A. Sofos observes with insight that "the idea of regaining some sort of subjectivity and agency that had been systematically undermined and frustrated" (137) is perceived by most contributors to lie behind the Gezi protest. However, what potential these subjectivities and agencies hold to deepen the cracks that are already opened at the heart of the neoliberal-conservative model is one among many other questions that goes unanswered.

Despite its limitations, *The Making of A Protest Movement in Turkey* is an important edited volume that brings together stimulating pieces written by prominent scholars working on Turkey. One should approach it as an early but valuable contribution to a critical academic and political conversation that we will continue to have for years to come.

Works Cited

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