



The Lion and the Nightingale: A Journey Through Modern Turkey

By Kaya Genç

London: I.B. Tauris, 2019. 448 pp., Paper. £14.22 (Paperback).
ISBN: 9781788316996.

Reviewed by Semanur Pekkendir Darbaz
Deputy Researcher at TRT World Research Centre

The opinions expressed in this review represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the TRT World Research Centre.

In light of the failed coup attempt, terror attacks, the changing constitutional system and the ongoing Syrian conflict, 2016-2017 constituted a period of deep struggle for Turkey. This has not been overlooked by authors, analysts and experts. In 2019 alone, IB Tauris published a dozen book on the contemporary Turkish politics and society.

Kaya Genç's book, *The Lion and the Nightingale: A Journey Through Modern Turkey*, is also concerned with contemporary Turkey. The book can be seen as a diary of 2017 covering post-July 15 Turkey from the perspective of different interviewees. The book presents a chronological order of events that happened in the year, beginning with the Reina nightclub attack on New Year's Eve and continuing with the launch of the Astana process, the constitutional referendum, the ongoing conflict with YPG, the earthquake in Bodrum and other incidents that left their mark on 2017.

The book is a result of comprehensive field work, interviews, observations and historical records. The author does not only cover Turkey in 2017, but also presents a crash course on Turkish history in an attempt to contextualise various aspects of the country's social and political dynamics. For example, when the author tells Şener Özmen's story, a Kurdish artist, he also gives us a retrospective on the struggles of Kurds since the early days of the republic and the ongoing Kurdish issue in Turkey. Many other issues of significance in Turkey's history are covered through the stories of interviewees, such as the history of May Day celebrations, the failed Kurdish opening in 2013, the development of feminist foundations in Turkey, the country's growing interest in contemporary art and so on.

In contrast to the conventions - and arguably outdated - 'secular' versus 'Islamist' categorisations of Turkish society, Genç divides his subjects as "lions" and "nightingales." The lion stands for "strength, the military, the power" while the nightingales represent artists, authors, filmmakers. Yet, despite its unconventional approach, this division fails at providing a diverse collection of insights. Almost all of the interviewees, especially the "nightingales" have the same ideological and political profile: opposed to the current government and uneasy about Turkey's future. The book is dominated by "secularist Turks", despite the fact that Genç claims currently "Turkey's new elites come from both secular and conservative families". Despite acknowl-

edging this, Genç seems to not bother including all the parties of "new elites."

The categorisation is not always consistent throughout the book as there is only one lion who is represented, Ravza Kavakçı an MP from the ruling Justice and Development Party. Although the nightingales are the dominant voice in the book, it also includes the voices of ordinary people from different backgrounds such as Yılmaz Cingöz, a barber shop owner, Necmettin Aykan, bookshop owner and a retired educator and Binevş, a Kurdish woman. Despite the fact that they defy the author's categorisation, their stories represent a larger scale of Turkey, rather than a selection of "nightingales" as the majority of the people in Turkey are ordinary people who won't be categorised as lion or nightingale. However, the untidy selection of interviews leaves the reader unpersuaded about the logic and diversity of the interviewees. Instead of coherency, it gives the impression that Genç conducted interviews with people he happened to know, and mostly with his "fellow nightingales".

Another weakness of the book is the dominant voice of the author that pervades the stories. Although the author aims to investigate "the frustrations of the nation, what they think about the country and imagine and recreate their experiences" through the interviews, the author's personal opinions and his experiences dominates the narrative. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate if the author published this book as a memoir, as Genç's own life story would also be an interesting read in and of itself. He continues to write and comment on many issues ranging from art and literature to Turkish politics. He is often the "Turkey analyst" for the Western media, often giving interviews and speeches about current Turkish agenda in different countries. Acknowledging this fact, his insights on the country that he is living in are valuable, however when it comes to reflecting the insights of the interviewees, the book remains rather weak.

The book still offers a bunch of information for those who want insight from the white-collar part of the country. Especially from the ones who belong to "nightingale" category: "secularist," "well-educated Turks," who are opposed to the current government. However, read strictly for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Turkey, readers will come away disappointed.