

Some Reflections on a Turkish--oops, Kurdish--Parliamentarian

Her Name is Aysel Tugluk

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Something strange happened in Turkey last May. A Kurdish woman sang the praises of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. She called him a “miracle”. She said he was “deathless”. She went on to say he was an “unrivalled” example of how to make--yes, make--a nation. She added other tidbits that could only be said of God. I was rattled to see this near deification of a mortal at the dawn of the 21st century. Nothing like it had ever crossed my path. It was akin to being blinded by something extraordinarily bright--but it wasn't light, it was prose, black on white. I was definitely at my wits' end ready to throw in the towel so to speak. Life, I murmured to myself, couldn't be so bleak. Literature, thank god, came to my aid. I remembered a passage from Ralph Ellison's beautiful book, *Invisible Man*. The grandfather of the protagonist, probably a newly freed slave, tells his son how to deal with the white folks. Give them a lot of “yeses” and “grins”, adding, “agree'em to death and destruction.”

And that is precisely what our Kurdish sister, Aysel Tugluk, did in Turkey and in Turkish--and in broad daylight! The Turks fell for it and sucked it all up and called her the “model” Kurd under the sun. *Radikal*, a Turkish newspaper, upstaged every other daily and printed, word for word, her statement. Turkey's talking heads then ran with the story the way their American counterparts are fixated with the exploits of Paris Hilton. A columnist for the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, Taha Akyol, usually a dour face when it comes to the words that have the root Kurd in it, went ballistic from joy, praising our very flesh and bones, for the first time in his life. A lover of good prose, I almost fainted when I saw so many superlative adjectives placed next to Aysel's name. I had a vision of her reading about herself in the Turkish media and pinching herself to be sure that what she was seeing was real! It was! I saw it in America! Aysel, you are our own miracle superior to Ataturk!

Forgive me, reader, for I want to address the rest of my reactions to Aysel directly.

Aysel, by way of giving you a bird view of my expose I want to expand on your memorable “yeses” and “grins” to the Turks and then, if I don't run out of time or space, say a few things about the Turkish columnist who has guaranteed you an immortal place in the anthologies of our times. Yes, Aysel, you owe that man, Mr. Akyol, your fame, which, if my reading of history is any guide, will live for as long as there are Turkish-speaking people in this world. By way of comparison, what Dante did with Beatrice, Virgil with Aeneas, Homer with Achilles, Mr. Akyol, your very own muse, was able to do the same, nay better, with you. I don't plan to have any kids soon, but if I change my mind, will I have your permission to name my daughter after YOU?!

But first, although in poor taste, I feel obliged to say a few things about myself. I am a pretty well-read person. An advocate of long duration for the rights of the Kurds for self-determination, I also have met my share of interesting people. Although I don't talk about it much, I can pass as a well-traveled individual as well. But never in this blessed life of mine had I come across such a flash of brilliance as I did when I read your revelation that Iraqi Kurdistan is part and parcel of the Turkish fatherland. Your idol, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and his sidekick, Ismet Pasha, tried very hard to convince Lord Curzon, the representative of Great Britain at Lausanne, Switzerland, the site of the dismemberment of greater Kurdistan, not to make southern Kurdistan part of Arab Iraq. Both failed. You, being the "true" daughter of Ataturk, want to reverse that. This kind of eye-opener visits us once in a 1,000 years. I am just very grateful to the almighty for making me part of your journey on this earth. Thank YOU!

There are a lot of other precious lines in your defense of the Turkish state. I ask the reader to check the article online, which you cleverly titled, "The Trauma of Sevr [Treaty] and the Empathy of the Kurds", which I am surprised the Turkish bigots have not translated to the English language so far. I don't know what others make of the immortal headline, but I thought it was brilliant and I would write the word brilliant in neon lights. You don't read English, but if you did, I would have said, "feel free to Google my writings and you will not come across the word "brilliant" at all," which should give you an indication of how highly I thought of your musings. Oops, I am sorry, I have used it once before, but take heart; it was not wasted on the "imperialists" or their spokespersons, who, according to you, have vowed to separate the Kurds from the Turks, a cruel act, no different than separating Juliet from Romeo, but your darling, your father, your reason d'etre and your god, Ataturk. Yes, Aysel, you and I meet at least in one place: we both "love" Ataturk to death. Between the two of us, I think he was brilliant in a diabolical sense, you think he was god's gift to the Kurds. I am beginning to think you are right and I was wrong. At long last, I stand corrected! Again, thank YOU!

I have saved the best for the last. You are really allergic to America and Americans, aren't you?! You are definitely a good reader of our times, and especially in Turkey. Walking around with a halter on your neck, living in a country with 91 percent anti-American feelings according to a recent PEW survey, you have nothing to lose but your noose by screaming the loudest epithets at Americans--and I love it when you do them all in Turkish. I have thought long and hard about this position of yours. Forgive me for my impertinence, but I want to give you some ideas about how to better endear yourself to the Turks. Do you remember the time when Eric Edelman, now the Deputy Secretary of Defense, was the Ambassador of the United States in Turkey? In Ulus, a neighborhood in Ankara, the anti-American feelings were at their all time peak. Shopkeepers proudly displayed signs saying, "Americans Can Not Enter!" I suggest you enlarge one of those homemade signs--I don't want you to waste your money by ordering a new one--and post it from the walls of Amed, the largest Kurdish city in Turkish Kurdistan, just below the sign that says, "Happy is he who Calls himself a Turk". You will kill two birds with one stone: Turks will think Kurds hate Americans and Americans will think the Turks hate them. If you succeed, the wall behind my computer monitor will get a picture of YOU!

Finally, I also want say a few words about your muse, Mr. Akyol. Remember how he urged you to attack your colleague Leyla Zana. I have never met you, I can't wait to shake your hand, and I will do it with both hands if ever our paths cross, but I think you really hit the jackpot when you seduced a bigot as rancorous as Mr. Akyol to beg you to ask Leyla to a duel. I don't know what you are thinking of the suggestion, but I want to tell you about a book, *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright, on how to feign a fight in case you are forced to try it. Be smart, don't think you know everything and accept help even if it comes in a language other than Turkish. I want to bet on YOU.

Black Boy is a work of fiction that chronicles the life of Richard Wright, a black author. Born in Mississippi in 1908, he tries to relocate to Chicago as a young adult to escape the shadow of Jim Crow, or his laws, a monstrous system no different than our own Ataturk and his decrees. In between, he gets a job in Memphis, Tennessee. His white boss, Olin, plays with his mind and tells him of Harrison, another black man, who has intentions of killing him. Richard sees through the machinations of his boss. He meets Harrison secretly and tells him of the provocation that is in the works. And yet both are trapped into a boxing match notwithstanding their covert pact. In the course of the fight, they can't simulate fake punches and hurt each other badly. In the light of this literary precedent, I am really worried about you two. Knowing that life often imitates art, I am, to be honest with you, rather edgy. I want to ask you point blank, you will NOT fight Leyla, will you? If you do, I won't know what to do, other than quote you Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Turkey's most famous poet, who in another context once noted, doing so would qualify one to become, "dostunun yuz karasi, dusmaninin maskarasi, which translates to something like, "the shame of your friends and the laughing stock of your enemies." Lest you don't understand, racism is stronger than cancer, tsunamis, earthquakes and even lightning and I wish you well as you fight this evil force without the need for a duel with your sister, Leyla Zana. Can I count on YOU?

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