



There Was and There Was Not: A Journey Through Hate and Possibility in Turkey, Armenia, and Beyond

By Meline Toumani

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There Was and There Was Not: A Journey Through Hate and Possibility in Turkey, Armenia, and Beyond By Meline Toumani

A young Armenian-American goes to Turkey in a "love thine enemy" experiment that becomes a transformative reflection on how we use—and abuse—our personal histories

Meline Toumani grew up in a close-knit Armenian community in New Jersey where Turkish restaurants were shunned and products made in Turkey were boycotted. The source of this enmity was the Armenian genocide of 1915 at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government, and Turkey's refusal to acknowledge it. A century onward, Armenian and Turkish lobbies spend hundreds of millions of dollars to convince governments, courts and scholars of their clashing versions of history.

Frustrated by her community's all-consuming campaigns for genocide recognition, Toumani leaves a promising job at *The New York Times* and moves to Istanbul. Instead of demonizing Turks, she sets out to understand them, and in a series of extraordinary encounters over the course of four years, she tries to talk about the Armenian issue, finding her way into conversations that are taboo and sometimes illegal. Along the way, we get a snapshot of Turkish society in the throes of change, and an intimate portrait of a writer coming to terms with the issues that drove her halfway across the world.

In this far-reaching quest, told with eloquence and power, Toumani probes universal questions: how to belong to a community without conforming to it, how to acknowledge a tragedy without exploiting it, and most importantly how to remember a genocide without perpetuating the kind of hatred that gave rise to it in the first place.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A **remarkable** memoir... A moving examination of the complex forces of ethnicity, nationality and history that shape one's sense of self and foster, threaten or fray the fragile tapestry of community.” *?Kirkus Reviews (starred review)*

“In this **courageous and candid** memoir, Meline Toumani reflects on what it really means--and does not mean--to come into the inheritance of a tragic past; on the complex feelings involved in confronting a historical enemy and Other; and on what we owe--and do not owe--to our collective identities, and what to ourselves. **Writing with precise insight and wit, Toumani addresses issues that weave through traumatic histories everywhere**, and that continue to concern us all.” *?Eva Hoffman, author of After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust*

“Meline Toumani has written an unusual book: **courageous, intriguing**, and at moments, despite its subject, **unexpectedly funny**. And her determination to understand and put behind her a century of hatred has echoes for more peoples than just Turks and Armenians.” *?Adam Hochschild, author of To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918*

“I read Meline Toumani's **original and audacious** book with admiration, first for the grainy pleasures of her narrative--the raw energy of true encounters--and perhaps even more for her nerve and seriousness in trying, as an Armenian-American woman, to find a path between the often-self-defeating absolutism of her own Armenian community and the Orwellian evasions of most contemporary Turks when asked to acknowledge the plain act of long-ago genocide in plain language.” *?Michael J. Arlen, author of Passage to Ararat*

“Meline Toumani's **inspiring** book cuts through the fog of politics surrounding the Armenian genocide with honesty, intelligence, and humanity. I was very impressed by the charm, humor, and bravery she displays in her relationships with Turks from all sides of the political spectrum, as well as her willingness to examine the assumptions of her fellow diaspora Armenians.” *?Ruth Franklin, author of A Thousand Darkneses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*

“Meline Toumani's beautifully rendered memoir is a powerful reminder of how family histories can constrain as much as they enhance our understanding of the world. This is a **remarkable, vital, and perhaps above all courageous** investigation into history, culture, and the human heart.” *?Dinaw Mengestu, author of All Our Names*

“This is a **brave book, deeply intelligent and elegantly readable, providing a much needed fresh point of view**. Anyone genuinely interested in the relations between Armenians and Turks, a subject that continues to be clouded by politics, must read it. In a meticulous, clarifying, and highly informed accounting, Toumani gives a personal perspective on the hate-filled relationship that persists between those Armenians who insist that the genocide be recognized and those Turks who adamantly deny the historical truth of the genocide. **I could not put it down.**” *?Eric Bogosian, author of Operation Nemesis*

“This deft combination of political and personal narrative is an attempt to cross one of the modern world's most sensitive divides. **With warmth and feeling, it shows why so many people and nations are imprisoned by the past, and what can happen when they set themselves free.**” *?Stephen Kinzer, author*

About the Author

Meline Toumani has written extensively for *The New York Times* on Turkey and Armenia as well as on music, dance, and film. Her work has also appeared in *n+1*, *The Nation*, *Salon*, and *The Boston Globe*. A journalism fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, Austria, she was also the coordinator of the Russian-American Journalism Institute in Rostov-on-Don, Russia. Born in Iran and ethnically Armenian, she grew up in New Jersey and California and now lives in New York City.

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