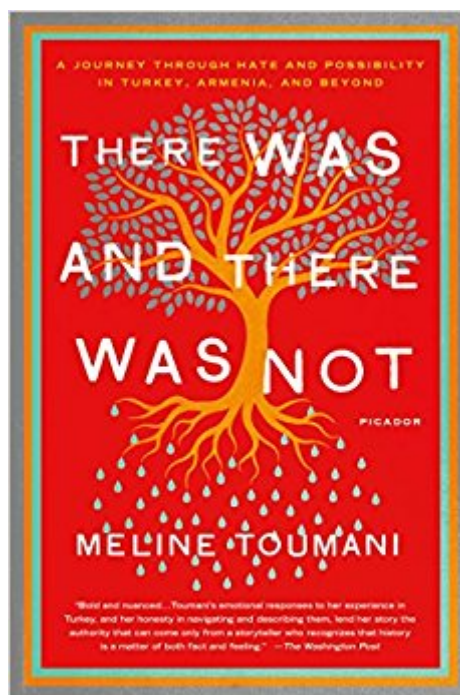




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There Was And There Was Not: A Journey Through Hate And Possibility In Turkey, Armenia, And Beyond



Synopsis

A NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD FINALIST 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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Customer Reviews

“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 Darkesses: 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 of *Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*

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.

As a Turk, I recommend every *Turkiyeli* read this book. Whether you believe a genocide happened, or did not, or simply don’t care, you will get a glimpse into the psyche of the Armenian Diaspora. The author sounds sincere. She is someone who is genuinely interested in this journey without trying to sensationalize what she is doing (moving to Turkey, and trying to understand Turks even though she comes from an Armenian community in the USA where children are taught that violence against Turks is acceptable at summer camp). The take-home message/ interpretation of this well told story for me is that 1915 Survivors (and Istanbul *Ermenileri* for that matter) may have a broken heart, but the Armenian diaspora has a broken spirit. Very sad to read about. This book left me with the impression that even if there is recognition from Turkey, the diaspora’s soul will not heal for generations after that (IF such a recognition were ever to happen).

This book by Meline Toumani is a great book to read as we approach the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. Though I am not Armenian, I was gripped by this dark episode years ago when I learned about it and I have read many books on the Armenian Genocide since then. Meline, the author, is an Armenian who was born in Iran and lived most of her life in the United States. In this book, Meline writes with candor, insight and humor about her personal experience living in Turkey and interacting with Turks and Armenians in that part of the world as she tries to come to terms with her own feelings concerning this polarizing issue. I learned a lot about the dynamics between western and eastern Armenians, diaspora Armenians and those of Constantinople, and between Armenians and Turks. Though she witnessed first hand the continuing denial by Turkey to

acknowledge the Genocide for what it was and a policy of erasing the history of Armenians from Anatolia, she nevertheless, learned to appreciate some things about Turkish culture. This book raises important questions about how one can be an individual when so much of their identity is tied up with being on one side of a very polarized divide. I strongly recommend this book.

This was a compelling memoir that I could not put down. Toumani is an Armeni-American who journeys to Turkey to try to understand and humanize a people whose relationship with Armenia is, to say the least, problematic. What she finds there (and within herself) is contradictory, complex and complicated. This is a book that neither white- washes the complexity of humans or nations nor does it simplify. To try to understand is not to exonerate. Her prose is lucid and her narrative riveting.

Before I read this book, I knew essentially nothing about Turkey or Armenia. Now I feel like I know quite a bit more. The book also gives a lot of insight into why people of Armenian descent who live in other nations put so much effort into campaigning for recognition of a genocide that happened about a century ago. Note that this book isn't really a history book, but instead is more like a memoir by a journalist. However, the book is very well written, and doesn't often digress into the kind of reflective personal psychoanalysis that these sorts of books sometimes drift into.

Toumani shows the courage to review the issue of the Armenian genocide on her own, refusing to blindly accept the unyielding and outdated hatred that is the stock in trade of the Armenian diaspora. On several visits to Turkey and Armenia, she explores modern-day Turkish attitudes, Armenian memories, as well as the historical facts. She reaches no easy conclusions, and certainly doesn't get any acknowledgment of genocide from any Turkish official, yet she is to be commended for seeking to learn about the issues and blow the cobwebs off some long-held biases on both sides.

Absolutely loved it! I was born in the mid 40s of Genocide survivors; raised as a Tdashnak, active in the Armenian Youth Federation; and then radically liberalized in the 1960s after leaving home. And like Meline, i too had hoped there would be a "solution" to the Genocide question; it would make the relationship between Armenia and turkey so much easier if there were..., and the Armenian Republic would definitely financially prosper if the boarder were open. But in the end, without acknowledgement by the turks, BOTH sides will continue to instill hatred in their children... and there will never be trust among these two peoples, who share so very much in common.

A lucid and heartbreaking memoir that conveys the hopelessness of finding answers to a 100 year-old dilemma while promising new perspectives on an impossible subject. Toumani does not shy from revealing the facts about the complexity and divergences among the Armenian diaspora community from around the world. She puts on clear display the multiplicity of viewpoints on the Armenian Genocide existing among Turkish people living in modern Turkey today. A definite read for those who want to learn about the varied facets to a brave journalist who asks the hard questions, grabs her suitcase and travels to Turkey to find out for herself. With seismic analysis and unflinching honesty, Toumani delivers what most people are not unwise to run from: the truth.

An excellent account of one woman's exploration of her complicated heritage and the preconceptions that follow us from childhood into making our own adult conclusions. Her story is told with evocative detail from early summer camp experiences through her travel to understand modern Turkey and Armenia. The author never steers the reader to lay blame on who is right or wrong in this century old controversy but, through her own day-to-day experiences, paints a nuanced picture of the contemporary divide over use of the term genocide and how personal history informs how we make decisions on ongoing political and social issues.

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