



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

Meline Toumani

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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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