

# MELINE TOUMANI AND THE TURKIC-ARMENIAN CONFLICT

(MELINE TOUMANI VE TÜRKİ-ERMENİ UYUŞMAZLIĞI)

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**Abstract:** *This essay analyzes the book authored by Armenian American journalist Meline Toumani. Being a very personal story based on her experiences in the United States, Turkey, and Armenia, based on a significant number of interviews rather than on any research in any archives, or even a real work in libraries, having no footnote, the book is not, at any level, a scholarly one. Written, as a whole, with a sincerity that is not often the most obvious quality of mainstream Armenian-heritage authors in the U.S. after 1965, Toumani's work will remain as an important source for the culture of hate within the Armenian diaspora of North America, as well as on the place taken by the "genocide" claims in the definition of the contemporary Armenian identity. Yet, the author eventually failed in her attempt to completely give up the prejudices and indoctrination she received, particularly in the summer camps of the Armenian Youth Federation. Relying heavily, during her time in Turkey, on ignorant or misinformed individuals who identify themselves as "liberals" and who promote tendentious views, and having not acquired the minimal knowledge on Turkish history and society, still less on the Turkic-Armenian conflict, Toumani remains in the middle of the fork, leaving an unachieved, albeit interesting, work.*

**Keywords:** *Armenia, Armenian diaspora, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Caucasus, ethnic identity, Iran, racism, Turkey.*

**Öz:** *Bu makale Ermeni Amerikalı gazeteci Meline Toumani'nin yazdığı kitabı incelemektedir. Herhangi bir akademik niteliği olmayan bu kitap; Toumani'nin ABD, Türkiye ve Ermenistan'daki tecrübelerine dayalı olan, herhangi bir arşivde herhangi bir araştırmaya, hatta kütüphanelerde gerçek bir çalışmaya bile dayalı olmaktan ziyade kayda değer sayıda mülakata dayalı olan ve dipnotları olmayan çok kişisel bir hikâyesini içermektedir. Genelinde, 1965'ten sonra ABD'deki ana akım Ermeni asıllı yazarların çalışmalarının en belirgin niteliği olmayan bir samimiyetle yazılmış olan Toumani'nin bu eseri, Kuzey Amerika'daki Ermeni*

*diasporasının barındırdığı nefret kültürünü ve “soykırımın” çağdaş Ermeni kimliğinde işgal ettiği yeri anlamak açısından önemli bir kaynak olarak kalacaktır. Ancak yazar, nihai olarak (özellikle Ermeni Gençlik Federasyonunun yaz kamplarında) kendisine aşılana önyargıları ve maruz kaldığı beyin yıkamasını bir kenara bırakmakta başarısız olmuştur. Türkiye’de geçirdiği zaman sırasında, kendilerini “liberal” olarak tanımlayan bilgisiz veya yanlış bilgilendirilmiş ve taraflı görüşleri destekleyen bireylere yoğun bir şekilde itimat eden ve Türk tarihi ve toplumu hakkında asgari nitelikte bilgiyi edinmemiş olan Toumani (ki Türki-Ermeni uyumsuzluğu konusunda daha da az bilgi edinmiştir), bir yol ayrımında kalmış ve ortaya ilginç olmakla beraber tamamlanmamış bir eser koymuştur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Ermenistan, Ermeni diasporası, Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu, Kafkasya, etnik kimlik, İran, ırkçılık, Türkiye*

## Introduction

Meline Toumani's book *There Was and There Was Not*<sup>1</sup> on "hate and possibility" between Turkics and Armenians can be summarized in three words; an interesting failure. Unlike the majority of the books published by Armenian and Armenian-heritage authors in 2014-2015, this one does not pretend to be a historical one. It is a very personal account of the conflict between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and their diasporas on one side; and Armenia and the organizations of the Armenian diaspora on the other side. In addition to the personal story of the author, an Iranian Armenian who arrived in the US as a very young child, the book is also based on her trips to Turkey and Armenia. Yet, *There Was and There Was Not* claims (p. 267) to be the result of a "science project", but there are no footnotes and the bibliography contains only eighteen references, including two from Taner Akçam, one from Donald Bloxham, one from Fuat Dündar, and one from Raymond Kévorkian in spite of the criticism they have been subjected to, even before the publication of Meline Toumani's book.<sup>2</sup>

Such a flaw, regardless, does not diminish the value of the testimony as a printed source. Toumani's book should certainly to be used with precautions, but is nevertheless relevant. The first part, made of six chapters, is about the personal experiences of Toumani in America, as the daughter of educated and

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1 Meline Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not - A Journey through Hate and Possibility in Turkey, Armenia and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

2 **On Taner Akçam, see, among others:** Ferudun Ata, "An Evaluation of the Approach of the Researches Who Advocate Armenian Genocide to the Trials Relocation", in Mustafa Aydın (ed.), *The New Approaches to Turkish-Armenian Relations* (İstanbul: İstanbul University Publications, 2008), p. 561 ; "Yusuf Halaçoğlu Cevap Veriyor", *Taraf*, 23.06.2008; Hilmar Kaiser, "A Deportation that *Did Not Occur*", *The Armenian Weekly*, 26.04.2008, p. 17-18; Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge [Massachusetts]-London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 278, n. 75; Erman Şahin, "Review Essay: A Scrutiny of Akçam's Version of History and the Armenian Genocide", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, XXVIII-2, August 2008, p. 303-319; Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle East* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 369-370, n. 76. And more recently: Maxime Gauin, "Review Essay: 'Proving' a 'Crime against Humanity'?", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, XXXV-1, March 2015, p. 141-157, [http://www.ataa.org/reference/Gauin\\_Akcam\\_JMMA\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ataa.org/reference/Gauin_Akcam_JMMA_2015.pdf); Ragnar Naess, *A Genocidal Age and its Aftermath* (London: Gomidas Institute/Taderon Press, 2015), p. 52-54, 346-365; Kent Schull, "Book Review", *The Journal of Modern History*, LXXVI-4, December 2014, p. 975-976.

**On Donald Bloxham:** Yücel Güçlü, "Mislabeling Genocide?", *The Middle East Quarterly*, XIII-2, Spring 2006, p. 67-68; Jeremy Salt, "Forging the past: OUP and the 'Armenian question'", *Eurasia Critic*, January 2010, [http://www.tc-america.org/scholar/forging\\_the\\_past\\_OUP\\_and\\_the\\_Armenian%20question.html](http://www.tc-america.org/scholar/forging_the_past_OUP_and_the_Armenian%20question.html)

**On Fuat Dündar:** Ahmet Efiloğlu, "Fuat Dündar'ın, Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kaybolan 'Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi'", *Belleten*, LXXIV/270, August 2010, p. 531-570. Abbreviated version in English: "Fuat Dündar and the Deportation of the Greeks," *Middle East Critique*, XXIII-1, 2014, p. 89-106.

**On Raymond Kévorkian:** Hilmar Kaiser, "Regional resistance to central government policies: Ahmed Djemal Pasha, the governors of Aleppo, and Armenian deportees in the spring and summer of 1915", *Journal of Genocide Research*, XII-3/4, 2010, p. 173-218.

rather wealthy immigrants from Iran, and her relation to Turkey - a country that remained actually unknown, and perceived only through the accusations of “genocide” and the racial hatred such accusations generated. The second (three chapters) and third (five chapters) parts are about the time the author spent in Turkey, primarily in İstanbul and Van. The fourth part (three chapters) describes the shorter period when Toumani was in Armenia. The fifth and final part (four chapters) is made of thematic comments on Turkey and some concluding remarks. These concluding remarks, however, offer no real conclusion in the usual sense of the word.

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### Describing an identity based on hate

The most interesting aspect of Meline Toumani’s book is, far beyond the strictly personal story of the author, her first-hand description of the culture of hatred developed by the main institutions of the Armenian diaspora in the United States, and its impacts on a part of the Armenians who have no close ties with these institutions. The Toumani family is not, according to the author, particularly linked to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), but she attended events of the ARF, such as the summer camps of its youth organization (Armenian Youth Federation) simply because it was the strongest Armenian group of the neighborhood. This reviewer could not find anything challenging this claim. On the contrary, the critical accounts of Toumani’s book, from the ARF, do not present her as a renegade Dashnak.<sup>3</sup> Yet, this first-hand account is particularly valuable, as, except police records in the archives, such accounts are usually written by members of the party and so have the limits of strictly partisan testimonies.

On the contrary, here, the obsession for identity is clearly exposed (p. 13) with the example of the recurrent use of “odar” (“different”, “other”); “*Armenian friends are different from odar friends.*” Yet, this identity is defined negatively;

3 For example: “BOOK REVIEW: Toumani’s ‘There Was and There Was Not’ Not Recommended”, *Asbarez*, 01.06.2015, <http://asbarez.com/136433/book-review-toumanis-there-was-and-there-was-not-not-recommended/>

“*Hai Tad* is translated as the Armenian Cause (technically the Armenian ‘Case’). We treated it not as two words that somebody had decided to put together, but like a basic truth, as fundamental as gravity or the sunrise” (p. 15), but “we chatted only in English at camp” and the “Armenian cause” is defined solely in terms of territorial and political claims against Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (p. 16). The obsession for the “genocide,” the fear of “assimilation” is also well described by Toumani (p. 14-15, 228, 280) and the logical conclusion of these obsessions is terrorism, explicitly praised and justified, in 1989, when she was in that AYF camp. The suicide attack of Lisbon, in July 1983 takes a particular place in the glorification of terrorism (p. 17-19) and it shows the sense of “sacrifice” advocated by a speaker from the ARF (p. 16).

However, the limits of Toumani’s book are quickly attained; it is a testimony, but by no means a real work of research, even in the bibliography. Indeed, she does not mention the praise for terrorism beyond the limits of the ARF: for example the massive support enjoyed, in the Armenian community of the US, by Gourgen Yanikian, who assassinated in 1973 the Turkish general consul in Los Angeles and his deputy;<sup>4</sup> in France but also in most of the diaspora, by the ASALA terrorists who had attacked the Turkish consulate of Paris, killed a guard, wounded the general consul and took hostages;<sup>5</sup> and more generally, the stance of Armenian diaspora’s newspapers and political groups toward terrorism.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, if Ms. Toumani rightfully writes that Karekin Nejdeh (also transliterated as “Nzhdeh”), who established the AYF in 1933, was still a reference in 1989 (he still is in 2017, actually), she fails to mention his openly racist, Fascist and Nazi ideology and his move to Germany to be a part of the Nazi war effort.<sup>7</sup>

4 Michael Bobelian, *Children of Armenia* (New York-London-Toronto-Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p. 141-163. Also see: Christopher Gunn, “Commemoration for the 40th years of the first victims of ASALA”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue #27, 2013, p. 267-273 ; Gaïdz Minassian, *Guerre et terrorisme arméniens* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002), p. 35.

5 Minassian, *Guerre et terrorisme arméniens*, p. 65-66 ; Jean-Pierre Richardot, *Arméniens, quoi qu’il en coûte* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 209-222. Also see: “Abdallah, connais pas”, *Le Monde*, 17.10.1986.

6 Christopher Gunn, “Eyes Wide Shut: Armenian-American Newspapers and Armenian Terrorism (1973-1985)”, in Tolga Başak and Mevlüt Yüksel (ed.), *I. Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri ve Büyük Sempozyumu/First International Symposium on Turkish-Armenian Relations and Great Powers* (Erzurum: Atatürk University, 2014), p. 139-149 ; Heath Lowry, “Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Armenian Terrorism: ‘Threads of Continuity’”, *International Terrorism and the Drug Connection* (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1984), p. 71-83.

7 John Roy Carlson (Arthur Derounian), “The Armenian Displaced Persons”, *Armenian Affairs Magazine*, I-1, Winter 1949-1950 ; Mehmet Perinçek, “Garegin Njdeh, Ermeni Milliyetçi Hareketi ve Büyük Güçler”, in Tolga Başak and Mevlüt Yüksel (ed.), *II. Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri ve Büyük Sempozyomu/Second International Symposium on Turkish-Armenian Relations and Great Powers*, Volume I (Erzurum: Atatürk University, 2016), p. 35-53 ; Mehmet Perinçek, “Nazi-Dashnak Collaboration during World War II”, in Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) (ed.), *Turkish-Russian Academics. A Historical Study on the Caucasus* (Ankara: Terazi, 2016), p. 199-231.

That having been said, the very personal dimension of the book makes it more interesting to know the depth of racism possessed by Armenian Americans without political affiliation. Speaking about her aunt, Ms. Toumani observes, on p. 222; “*I knew I felt uncomfortable with what I was doing—all the Armenians in my life did, to varying degrees.*” Worse, Toumani writes p. 224; “*Nothing I said could humanize Ertan [the editor of Aras Publishing and Agos newspaper] or his parent for her.*” Yet, according Ms. Toumani, she “*was a generous, gracious person under normal circumstances, and not one to shy away from complex subjects. But when it came to Turkey, nothing I said could move her.*” And Meline Toumani’s aunt is not an isolated case, as “*a terrible but familiar Armenian expression*” says: “*Even if a Turk is made of gold, don’t put him in your pocket*” (sic). Empirical evidence has to be used with precaution, yet the fact that Ms. Toumani could not find a single person of Armenian heritage around her who approved her demarche, and that she calls “*familiar*” the quoted racist expression proves that racism exists beyond the limits of the traditional nationalist parties of the diaspora (ARF, Hunchak, Ramkavar). How representative are these non-affiliated, albeit racist members of the Armenians diaspora is another question. It is important to know Meline Toumani’s book puts forth that they exist and not in insignificant numbers.

Even more remarkably, Ms. Toumani offers -whether she realizes it or not- a rebuttal to those who attribute anti-Turkish racism to “*trauma of 1915*” only. Indeed, “*many Armenians, no matter where they came from, had a tendency to conflate Iranians with Turks, Azeris, Arabs, and all other Muslims, considering them one large and undesirable group*” (p. 40), but there is nothing similar against Russians, in spite of the responsibilities of the Tzarist Russian state in the tragedy of Ottoman Armenians during the First World War.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, her parents testified: “*There was no problem [in Iran]. We were very comfortable with our Muslim neighbors.*” It is true that even the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was “*comfortable*” with the Shahs of Iran as well as with Ruhollah Khomeini (except during the first five years of the Iranian Revolution).<sup>9</sup> But precisely, it shows that if the tragedy of 1915 is used as a pretext for anti-Turkish racism, the mutual killings and plunder between Armenians and Assyrians on one side, and Iranian Muslims (Azeris, Kurds, Persians) on the other side<sup>10</sup> are not.

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8 Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins...*, p. 141-171 ; Yusuf Sarıınay, “Rusya’nın Türkiye Siyasetinde Ermeni Kartı (1878-1918)”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 1-2, 2008, p. 69-105; Stéphane Yerasimos, “Caucase, la grande mêlée (1914-1921)”, *Hérodote*, n° 54-55, 4e trimestre 1989, p. 155-159.

9 Gaïdz Minassian, *Guerre et terrorisme...*, p. 23, 80, 251-252.

10 Nicolas Gasfield, “Au front de Perse pendant la Grande guerre — Souvenirs d’un officier français”, *Revue d’histoire de la Guerre mondiale*, II-4, 1924, p. 127-145 ; Émile Zavie, *D’Archangel au Golfe Persique, aventures de cinquante Français* (Paris: La Cité des livres, 1927), p. 173, 203-204, 269-284, 298 and passim.



Toumani's book offers -even if it is not, at least not explicitly, her aim- a part of the explanation for the scope of anti-Turkish racism when she describes the "witnesses" used by Armenian Americans in the 2000s, to perpetuate the memory of the "genocide". That part is probably the most remarkable part of the book. One of the "witnesses" "*was born in 1912, in İzmir*" (p. 23). So, this person was three years old in 1915, and this very young child grew up in a province where 99% of the Armenian population remained at home during the First World War.<sup>11</sup> This kind of fact is, of course, not explained by "the PR consultant" (p. 23) or "the executive director [of the nursing home] Aghavni Ellian" (p. 22). Yet, it is possible that this "witness" was actually referring to the capture of İzmir by the Kemalist forces in 1922. Meline Toumani relays (p. 24) the words of the "witness"; "*The Turks she says to me, pulls my hair; where's your father?*". However, considering the fact that a part of the Armenians of the city took part to the war crimes of the Greek army as early as the day of the Hellenic landing (15 May 1919), the crimes of Armenian volunteers of the Greek army in Western Anatolia until 1922 and, even more, the key role of the Armenian revolutionary committee of İzmir in the fire that partially destroyed the city from September 13 to 16,<sup>12</sup> it is not big surprise if Turkish soldiers were looking for some Armenian they considered dangerous. It is true that the "witness" continues in describing a kind of summary execution, and that such executions of Armenians suspected to be arsonists took place during the fire of İzmir, but the incoherence of the narrative, partially recognized by Toumani herself, the obvious senility of the "witness" (she claimed that she was 51 years old) and her explicit racism (she calls the Turks "the dogs") seriously damages its credibility (p. 24-26).

Meline Toumani also mentions Hingeni Evrensel, who "was one hundred years old" by time she saw Evrensel in 2008, as Evrensel was "born in March 1908 in Ordu". Evrensel began with these words; "*I don't know a single thing, I was just a baby.*" (p. 31). Ms. Toumani makes no secret of the senility of this "witness" and explains that the mental faculties of her daughter, also present,

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11 Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *The Story of 1915. What happened to the Ottoman Armenians?* (Ankara: TTK, 2008), p. 56 ; Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), p. 204 ; Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities. The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York-London: New York University Press, 1983), p. 80. Also see: Lewis Heck, Report from Berne, Switzerland, dated 7 February 1918, p. 23, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park (Maryland), RG 59, M 353, reel 7 (867.00/813) ; S.R. Marine, Turquie, 16 décembre 1920, Service historique de la défense, Vincennes (SHD), 7 N 3211 ; Letter of Charlton Whittall, dated 10 February 1921, The National Archives, Kew Gardens (London), FO 371/6499/2265.

12 Maxime Gauin, "Victims of their Nationalists: Armenians and Greeks in Western Anatolia, 1905-1922", in *Ermeni Meselesi ve 1915 Olayları* (İstanbul: İstanbul Aydın University Publications, 2015), p. 139-158, [https://www.academia.edu/22746646/Victims\\_of\\_their\\_Nationalists\\_Armenians\\_and\\_Greeks\\_in\\_Western\\_Anatolia\\_1905-1922](https://www.academia.edu/22746646/Victims_of_their_Nationalists_Armenians_and_Greeks_in_Western_Anatolia_1905-1922)

was hardly in a better situation (p. 32). The description finishes with a “witness” born in 1914, who, of course, did not remember anything about the relocation of Ottoman Armenians. Except perhaps one uncle, this “witness” did not say that she has lost any member of her family during the relocation. She herself remained in Turkey until the end of 1970s and claimed that her mother worked for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (p. 35-36).

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objections regarding the Armenians’ genocide claims. Ms. Toumani’s description of the kind of “oral history” practiced by the main Armenian organizations of the United States is particularly valuable, as an insider who cannot be suspected of rejecting the genocide charge. Yet, the “oral history” with academic pretensions is, at least in some cases, not fundamentally better than the mainstream ones described by Ms. Toumani. Indeed, the main example in the US is the work of Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, who have described their methodology as follows:

*At the time of the massacre, the interviewees ranged in age from five to fifteen years old. For many interviewees, telling their story was an emotional experience. Interviews were frequently punctuated by tears and sighs. Still, more than one interviewee who began the session reluctantly, looking sickly and tired, ended the several hours in a spirited, energetic, if not crusading frame of mind.<sup>13</sup>*

Correspondingly, Meline Toumani observes that “*the dissatisfaction of the Armenian community with Ararat,*” the unsophisticated, fiercely anti-Turkish movie of Atom Egoyan, “*was short-lived. [...] The Archbishop His Eminency Oshagan Choloyan admitted that it was the first film he’d seen in seventeen years*” (p. 66). In other words, “*We would support this film whether we liked it or not*” (p. 63), because “*the Armenian diaspora’s obsession with genocide had become its raison d’être, that it had become inextricable from a general hatred toward Turks [...]*” (p. 68).

13 Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, “Armenian Survivors: A Typological Analysis of Victim Response”, *Oral History Review*, X-1, 1982, p. 49. Also see: Justin McCarthy, “Book review”, *American Historical Review*, XCIX-2, April 1994, p. 605-606.



However, all these interesting remarks and observations by Toumani are too scattered, and are not included in a wide-ranging, rigorous analysis based on robust references. A key example of weakness is when she touches upon the internal fights in the Armenian diaspora in less than three pages (p. 49-51). She rightfully mentions the assassination of archbishop Leon Tourian by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak) “during a Christmas Eve service,” but she fails to put it in the context of rivalry for the control of the Armenian diaspora: Murder of an ARF leader in Beirut in mid-1920s, assassinations of anti-Dashnaks leaders by Dashnaks in Lebanon (1929, 1933) and Greece (1926), bloody clashes between Communist Armenians and Dashnaks in Lyon (1926), Paris and Grenoble (1933), assault by ARF members against Tourian himself before his assassination, etc.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Toumani is right in writing (p. 50) that “*after the murder [of Tourian], Armenian churches began to affiliate as Dashnak or non-Dashnak,*” but the issue was not only about “affiliation.” Indeed, supporters of Tourian murdered at least one Dashnak official in Providence, Rhode Island, tried to kill two historical leaders of the ARF and incited their fellow Armenians to boycott members or supporters of the Dashnak party. The ARF itself made the situation only worse, as “many Dashnaks,” “*voluntarily contributed huge sums of money not only to meet the expenses of the trial but to care for the families of the two men*” sentenced to death for the assassination of Tourian (their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment) and as the ARF and its supporters “*came to define them as heroes.*”<sup>15</sup>

As a result, Meline Toumani stresses (p. 51) an essential point in writing, about the internal divisions of the Armenian diaspora, especially in the US; “*The most important thing was to belong to something, and it only worked when you had something or someone to fight against [...].*” And barely implicitly, she connects the divisions to the anti-Turkish racism and the identity issue in the diaspora; “*the problem of not feeling entirely at ease in either the American world or the Armenian one,*” the “irrational, hostile fragmentation” of identity (p. 48) and its consequence: “[...] *there was only one thing that everybody agreed on: the Turks hated us and we hated the Turks. This trumped*

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14 Rapport du commissaire spécial de Lyon, 3 mai 1926 ; Note sur le comité de secours pour l'Arménie, HOG, 5 mars 1932 ; Rapport du commissariat spécial de Lyon, 14 février 1933; Rapport de la préfecture de police de Paris, 6 mars 1933 ; Rapport du procureur de Grenoble, 4 décembre 1933, Archives nationales, Pierrefitte, F7 13436 ; Astrig Atamian, “Les Arméniens communistes en France, une histoire oubliée”, *Ammis*, n° 7, 2007 ; Kapriel Serope Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, Boston: Baikar Press, 1934, p. 61-65, 70.

15 Sarkis Atamian, *The Armenian Community* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), p. 367-370 (quotation p. 369-370). Also see: Benjamin Alexander, “Contested Memories, Divided Diaspora: Armenian Americans, the Thousand-Day Republic, and the Polarized Response to an Archbishop’s Murder”, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, XXVII-1, Fall 2007, p. 32-59.

*everything.*” Her personal example is interesting in this regard; *“It wouldn’t have occurred to me to call myself anything but Armenian”* (p. 41) but *“little by little I refused to speak Armenian to everyone.”* Regardless, her demonstration would have been stronger with even a minimal research on Armenian nationalism and internal conflicts.

### Meline Toumani in Turkey and Armenia

In spite of the inaccuracies and deficiencies described in the previous part of this essay, it cannot be contested that the author was courageous, and that more than one of her remarks are quite relevant. She understood, and courageously wrote, on p. 69, that *“our obsession with 1915 was destroying us”*. However, when she reached the conclusion that what was needed was *“to understand the Turk”* (p. 70), she made very bad choices at the very beginning by looking at individuals with dubious reputations such as Taner Akçam and Fatma Müge Gökçek. It is true that Ms. Toumani is not a historian but a journalist, yet this is hardly an excuse. She calls Taner Akçam a *“historian”* (p. 67). In fact, Mr. Akçam (like Fatma Müge Gökçek) never got a single degree in history; he graduated in sociology. His doctoral dissertation was written in very bad German (even the title had several errors) and co-supervised by Vahakn N. Dadrian, after Mr. Dadrian was fired by the State University of New York for sexual harassment<sup>16</sup> —in other words, Mr. Akçam’s doctorate degree was obtained in irregular conditions. Moreover, Meline Toumani met Taner Akçam in 2004, when he was working at Minnesota University, claiming the title of *“visiting professor”* without any right to do so. It is true that Toumani confesses, p. 6; *“[...] even if I wanted to believe that the thing in question did not fit the definition of genocide, it would be impossible for me to find my way into that belief”*. Regardless, that prejudice, sincerely expressed, cannot justify that she failed to process the minimal checking about Taner Akçam, as she did with some *“false assumptions”* she had developed in the past (see p. 53-59 for instance). The poor English spoken by Taner Akçam (raising doubts about how he could be a *“visiting professor”* at an American university) should have been sufficient to be cautious about his academic credentials.

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16 *“Geneso Fires Professor for Sexual Harrassment”*, *Times Union*, 25.04.1991, p. B10, <http://albarchive.merlinone.net/mweb/wmsql.wm.request?oneimage&imageid=5599449> . On Mr. Dadrian’s publications, see, among others: Edward J. Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians. A Study in Counter-Insurgency* (New York-London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 117; Hilmar Kaiser, *“Germany and the Armenian Genocide: A Review Essay”*, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, VIII, 1995, p. 127-142 ; Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres...*, p. 43-128 ; and *“Study the Armenian Genocide with Confidence, Ara Sarafian Suggests”*, *The Armenian Reporter*, 16.12.2008, <http://www.gomidias.org/press/show/14>

Correspondingly, the heavy reliance of Meline Toumani on Fatma Müge Gökçek and her faith in the “Workshop for Armenian Turkish Scholarship” (p. 73-77, 176-177, 282 and passim), which had little to do with any serious “scholarship,”<sup>17</sup> could lead only to deep misunderstandings. A typical example is the very inaccurate way the Viennese Armenian-Turkish platform is described (p. 171). Instead of checking anything, Ms. Toumani took her information from Ms. Gökçek only. As a result, the very basic fact that the platform published a compilation of documents is omitted.<sup>18</sup> For sure, a scholarly publication, under the responsibility of Turkish “official” historians and of a former member of the ARF who kept personal ties in the party (Garabek Krikor Moumdjian) seems anathema to Fatma Müge Gökçek —and Meline Toumani, failing to understand, writes accordingly.

The fact that Meline Toumani met Yusuf Halaçoğlu, when he was still chairman of the Turkish Historical Society (Tr. *Türk Tarih Kurumu*) is somewhat better (p. 173-185). That such a meeting took place at all is by itself important. However, Ms. Toumani’s mental blockade is more than obvious in her account of the conversation, and is exemplified by these words: “*I began to realize how truly confusing it would be to talk to him without a total grasp of both the history and the historiography of the Armenian issue*” (p. 175) and: “*in a match like this, I was bound to be the loser. Certainty is always more powerful than doubt*” (p. 185), as if Ms. Toumani ever expressed any doubt on the genocide claims. Moreover, the meeting with Prof. Halaçoğlu remained unique: She made no attempt to speak with Seçil Karal Akgün, Sina Akşin, Türkkaya Ataöv, Kemal Çiçek, Yusuf Sarıнай or Ömer Turan —and similarly did not attempt to speak with Michael Gunter, Bernard Lewis, Guenter Lewy, Heath Lowry or Justin McCarthy in the United States.

However, Prof. Halaçoğlu has to be praised, as he remains the only person who made Ms. Toumani sensitive to the fate of the Turkish (and more generally Muslim) victims of Armenian nationalists, in mentioning “*the ovens [where] Armenians had burned the Muslims.*” This time, Ms. Toumani “*nodded. This may have been true. That was terrible. I was intent on showing empathy for such a possibility*” (p. 177). Yet, these sentences represent less than two lines in a 287-page book. And it is particularly strange, as the author praises Donald Bloxham (p. 284) for having “added depth to [her] understanding.”

17 Ahmet Kemal Gençtürk, “Book Review”, *Insight Turkey*, XVII-3, Summer 2015, p. 231-233, <http://www.insightturkey.com/a-question-of-genocide-armenians-and-turks-at-the-end-of-the-ottoman-empire/book-reviews/6497>; Jeremy Salt, “History as Theology”, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, XVII-1/2, Fall 2011, p. 159.

18 İnanç Atılğan and Garabet Moumdjian (ed.), *Archival Documents of the Viennese Armenian-Turkish Platform* (Klagenfurt-Vienna-Ljubljana-Sarajevo: Wieser Verlag, 2009).

Mr. Bloxham's book on the Armenian issue is definitely flawed, but at least it mentions the massacres of Muslim civilians perpetrated in 1916 by the Armenian units of the Russian army, and provides a rather interesting, albeit short, description of the ethnic cleansing policy conducted by the independent Republic of Armenia, against the Muslims, mostly Azeris (1918-1920).<sup>19</sup> Even if these two cases do not constitute the comprehensive list of the crimes committed by Armenian nationalists from 1914 to 1922 (in particular, Donald Bloxham omits the massacres of 1914-15 and underestimates the ones of the Armenian Legion, from 1918 to 1920), they are enough to reach the conclusion that virtual silence on the Muslim victims is no solution for an Armenian who wants to "understand" the Turks (or, even more, the Azerbaijanis).

*Toumani looks more like a victim of circumstances than like a fundamentally dishonest person. She was subjected to the guidance of the professionals of anti-Turkish activism*

Toumani's failure to understand such a basic reality oddly echoes one of her confession (p. 133): "*Whatever the day's lesson [of Turkish in İstanbul], my mind could find a connection to the genocide.*" That having been said, Toumani looks more like a victim of circumstances than like a fundamentally dishonest person. She was subjected to the guidance of the professionals of anti-Turkish

activism: she was brought in an environment where she was "insulated from mainstream Turks" most of the time (p. 130), and, furthermore, had long and frequent discussions with Hrant Dink and other members of *Agos* newspaper staff. As Dink's assassination led to the triumph of a completely fictional version of his life and his unquestioned portrayal as a man of peace and dialogue, it is necessary to remind the reader that Dink totally denied -without any argument- the very existence of the massacres of Turks perpetrated by Armenian nationalists before 1918 (a denial that makes Mr. Bloxham look like a friend of Turkey by comparison) and dismissed the ones of 1918 as simple acts of "revenge" —a kind of half-excuse.<sup>20</sup>

It is also necessary to stress that Dink gave space in *Agos* for the monologues of Taner Akçam, including in July-August 2006, namely after Ferudun Ata had demonstrated, during the contradictory symposium of İstanbul University (April 2006) that the core of Akçam's reasoning (the trials of 1919-1920) is plainly wrong. Dr. Ata did so in front of Hilmar Kaiser and Ara Sarafian, who both support the "Armenian genocide" charge but do not have a high opinion of Taner Akçam. This author also tried to find even a single article by Dink

19 Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) (first edition, 2005), p. 100, 103-105.

20 Statement in the documentary movie *Sari Gelin* (2005).

condemning the terrorism of the ASALA and the JCAG/ARA, or at least acts such as the double bombing in İstanbul by the JCAG, on May 29, 1977, and the Orly attack on July 15, 1983, but it was in vain.

Another legend is the “opposition” of Dink to censorship regarding the events of 1915. Actually, his newspaper, *Agos*, published on 3 November 2006, an article ferociously supporting the Masse bill, a proposal eventually rejected by the French Senate in May 2011, which was designed to ban the “denial of the Armenian genocide”. The author of that article, Vilma Kouyoumdjian (Kuyumcıyan) later moved to France, first as the correspondent of *Agos*, later as a contributor of *Les Nouvelles d’Arménie magazine* (directed by former ASALA spokesman Jean-Marc “Ara” Toranian), the collectif VAN (established at the initiative of Mr. Toranian) and the Dashnak radio AYP FM, where she continued to support censorship, particularly the Boyer bill (annulled by the Constitutional Council of France in February 2012). It bears noting that Ms. Toumani refuses “to entrust historiography to a government body” in the context of diaspora’s claims (p. 239), but is silent on the liberticidal views expressed in Hrant Dink’s newspaper.

Regardless, Meline Toumani offers an interesting, first-hand testimony on the “openness” of the *Agos* daily, on p. 93: “*One of his [Dink’s] younger colleagues came in, a woman my age. [...] ‘Without any contact, the diaspora maintains the image of the Turk as a murderer. They assume that Turks all know about 1915 and deny it; but of the ninety years, it has been eighty years of silence [until mid-1990s].’*” So, this woman, who never set foot in an archive, is kind enough to refrain from calling Turks “murderers” because they know nothing -unlike her- as a result of “eighty years of silence.” That statement is contradicted at the same page, by the one of Baskın Oran, who affirms that silence ended during the 1970s: “*For Turkey the ASALA murders were like being woken up at three a.m. with a hand grenade.*” Both these interpretations are far from the truth —as is usual with *Agos* contributors. In addition to the fact that the three quarters of the first assassinations of Turkish diplomats, drivers, etc., by Armenian terrorists (1973-1979) were not perpetrated by the ASALA (even if Gourgen Yanikian, the ASALA’s main reference, is included) but by the JCAG,<sup>21</sup> before the first of these attacks, the Armenian issue had been discussed in Turkey, including by mainstream

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21 Mehmet Baydar and Bahadır Demir were assassinated by Yanikian in 1973; Oktar Cirit by the ASALA in 1976; Daniş Tunalgil, İsmail Erez and his driver (1975), Taha Carim (1977), Necla Kunalp, Beşir Balcıoğlu and their driver (1978), Ahmet Benler and Yılmaz Çolpan (1979) by the JCAG. And as previously said, it was the JCAG, not the ASALA, which perpetrated the first murderous bombing in İstanbul (1977).

historians, journalists, and politicians such as Kazım Karabekir, Esat Uras, Cemal Kutay, Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, Enver Ziya Karal and Sadi Koçaş.<sup>22</sup> In 1965 only, several hundreds of articles on the Armenian question had been published in Turkish newspapers.

As Toumani has been in such a company —which she preferred over *Jamanak*, the Armenian newspaper of Turkey with the more objective views, and the more informed figures of the Turkish far left and “liberalism” such as Halil Berktaş and Haluk Şahin, it is not a surprise that she practices double standards about Turkey and Armenia. This is not that she hides anti-Turkish racism entirely. In particular, she quotes violent, hateful statements she heard in Yerevan, including calls for murder, with mutilations (p. 213-217), something she never heard in Turkey. However, she does not mention at all the glorification of terrorism in Armenia, for example the welcoming of Mardiros Jamgotchian (murderer of the secretary of the Turkish consulate in Geneva in 1981) and Varoujan Garbidjian (the main perpetrator of the Orly bombing), or the elevation of Monte Melkonian (number one of ASALA from 1980 to 1983, leader of the dissident faction, ASALA-RM, from 1983 to 1985) to “national hero.”<sup>23</sup>

Correspondingly, on p. 193, she writes; “*The war [between Armenia and Azerbaijan] also set off in the early 1990s a de facto population exchange: hundreds of thousands of Armenians left Azerbaijan, and an even larger number of Azeris had to flee Armenia and Karabakh, each group leaving behind generations of history.*” Such a sentence is certainly better than the average narrative heard from Armenian diaspora’s activists, but it is still inaccurate. Indeed, geographically, Azeris were not only expelled from “Armenia and Karabakh”, but also from seven districts of Western Azerbaijan, invaded in 1992-1994, and where there were almost no Armenians before. Chronologically, the expulsions of Azeris began in 1987, not “in the early 1990s”. Furthermore, although there can be no excuse for the short waves of violence against Armenians in Azerbaijan (1988, 1990) that provoked emigration, it was an unorganized and reactionary violence that was triggered

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22 Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (Ankara: Yeni Matbaa, 1950) ; Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, Ankara: TTK, Volume II-3, 1951, p. 18-100, III-3, 1957, p. 35-59 ; Cemal Kutay, *Karabekir Ermenistan'ı Nasıl Yok Etti?* (İstanbul: Ercan Matbaa, 1956) ; Kazım Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz* (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1960) (first edition, 1951) ; Sadi Koçaş, *Tarih Boyunca Ermeniler ve Selçuklular'dan Beri Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri* (Ankara: Altınok Matbaası, 1967) ; Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Ermeni Meselesi* (Ankara: Dışişleri Akademisi, 1971). Also see: Yervant Çark, *Türk Devleti Hizmetinde Ermeniler, 1453-1953* (Ankara: Yeni Matbaa, 1953).

23 Maxime Gauin, “Remembering the Orly Attack”, *Review of International Law and Politics*, VII-27, p. 113-139.



by the more systemic violence perpetrated by Armenian nationalists.<sup>24</sup> Actually, there are no Azeris anymore in Armenia, but the United Nations estimated the Armenian population of Azerbaijan to be around 30,000 in 2003,<sup>25</sup> nine years after the signature of the cease-fire (1994). Furthermore, there is nothing among the violence perpetrated against Armenian civilians in Azerbaijan (1988-1990) similar to the massacre that took place at Khodjaly, where at least 613 Azeri civilians were methodically exterminated by Armenian forces in February 1992.<sup>26</sup>

Beside these inaccuracies, it is striking that Meline Toumani devotes only a short paragraph to the conflict, does not mention Khodjaly even by name, and completely fails (p. 260) to understand the impact of the conflict on Turkey,<sup>27</sup> exacerbated by the presence of an Azeri minority in that country, as well as by the territorial claims emanating from Armenia and the main organizations of the diaspora toward eastern parts of Turkey (Eastern Anatolia).<sup>28</sup>

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Ms. Toumani also commits inaccuracies when she compares ideology. She criticizes, to some extent, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (and briefly refers to its territorial claims against Turkey), but immediately after that, she calls the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) of Turkey “the Dashnaks’ hardline corollary.” If a comparison is to be made, an analysis of both parties will reveal that ARF is much more hardline than MHP. MHP explicitly refused, even

24 Antoine Constant, *L’Azerbaïdjan* (Paris: Karthala, 2002), p. 329-334 ; Ariel Kyrou and Maxime Mardoukhaïev, “Le Haut-Karabagh, vu du côté Azerbaïdjan”, *Hérodote*, n° 54-55, 4e trimestre 1989, p. 265-267 ; Stéphane Yerasimos, “Transcaucasie: le retour de la Russie”, *Hérodote*, n° 81, avril-juin 1996, p. 186-193.

25 UNHCR, *International Protection Considerations Regarding Azerbaijani Asylum-Seekers and Refugees*, Geneva, 2003, p. 4.

26 Holly Cartner, “Response to Armenian Government Letter on the town of Khojaly, Nagorno-Karabakh”, *Hrw.org*, 23.03.1997, <https://www.hrw.org/news/1997/03/23/response-armenian-government-letter-town-khojaly-nagorno-karabakh> ; Thomas Goltz, “The Successes of the Spin Doctors: Western Media Reporting on the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, XXXII-2, June 2012, p. 189.

27 Svante E. Cornell, “Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: A Delicate Balance”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, XXXIX-1, January 1998, p. 51-72.

28 For example: “‘Western Armenia’ return depends on youth, Sarkisian says”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 26.07.2011, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=8216western-armenia-8217-return-depends-on-youth-sarkisian-says-2011-07-26>

during its radical years (1969-1980) to endorse any racist theory, and focuses on Turkish nationalism (without claiming the superiority of Turks) and loyalty to the state. Furthermore, one of the main persons who established the MHP with Alparslan Türkeş is an ethnic Armenian, Levon Panos Dabağyan. On the contrary, the ARF is an openly racist party, which collaborated with Fascist Italy, Aryanist Iran of Reza Shah, and Nazi Germany, not merely by opportunism (common ambitions against Turkey and the USSR), but above all for ideological reasons.<sup>29</sup> MHP does not claim a single square kilometer of Armenia. On the contrary, territorial claims against Turkey (and Georgia) are the core of the ARF's ambitions today.

Once again, it has to be emphasized that Meline Toumani is more a victim of circumstances than anything else. As she explains, *"I also planned to spend time with ultranationalists, military wives, government officials, anyone who would be willing to sit down with me—the greater challenge, the better."* (p. 101). Had Meline Toumani spent more time with the Turkish "ultranationalists," she would have been accurate on MHP and many other subjects. One of her few meetings with a "mainstream Turk" left her "a bit mixed up", as his words on Armenian extremism "weren't so far off from [her] own" (p. 80). Correspondingly, she also states, p. 138: *"learning the language was one pure love in Turkey. Its obvious function was to help me to connect with people—to say to every new Turk I met that I was trying to understand them; that I came in peace."* She "even [came] to feel a certain fondness" for the Turkish national anthem (p. 262) and bordered on integration to Turkish society at one moment of her time in İstanbul (p. 119). All of these prove that the influence of Armenian nationalism repackaged with the Dink label largely explains the partial failure of her project to understand the Turk.

In short, Ms. Toumani did not take profit of her experiences to deepen her knowledge in reading. The result is a too anecdotal and personal book, marred by inaccuracies and inconsistencies, even if some anecdotes are indeed relevant, such as the meeting with a French woman, exasperated by Armenian activism in her country and living in the former house of Enver Paşa (p. 132-133), a good example of many mainstream Westerners. *"And although I probably knew less about Turkey at that point than the average backpacker, I*

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29 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 388 ; Jordi Tejel Gorgas, *Le Mouvement kurde de Turquie en exil: continuités et discontinuités du nationalisme kurde sous le mandat français en Syrie et au Liban (1925-1946)* (Berne : Peter Lang, 2007), p. 153-154, 226-228, 253 ; Georges Mamoulia, "L'histoire du groupe Caucase (1934-1939)", *Cahiers du monde russe*, 2007/1, p. 55-57 ; Beatrice Penati, "'C'est l'Italie qui est prédestinée par l'Histoire': la Rome fasciste et les nationalistes caucasiens en exil (1928-1939)", *Oriente Moderno*, LXXXVIII-1, 2008, p. 66-69 ; Mehmet Perinçek, *Ermeni Milliyetçiliğinin Serüveni* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2015), p. 295-338.

*had a strong urge to seem like I belonged,*” Toumani explains, p. 77. It is the opinion of this author that entrusting people like Taner Akçam and Hrant Dink for developing her knowledge on Turkey is what led to Toumani’s failure in truly understanding this country.

### **The root of the problem: Ignorance**

Correcting all the factual errors committed by Meline Toumani in *There Was and There Was Not* would probably mean writing a 100-page text. The long list of persons, including “scholars” Ms. Toumani thanks (p. 281-284), speaks volumes on their level of knowledge. As a comprehensive analysis would be too long, I have chosen to expose key examples from three topics: the Armenians in Ottoman society; the “genocide” claims themselves; and the history Republic of Turkey.

Meline Toumani repeats classic themes of anti-Turkish, anti-Ottoman literatures, in particular that the Armenians “*were denied the right to bear arms until late in the nineteenth century*” and “*were charged dramatically higher taxes than Muslims.*” (p. 157). Actually, the Ottoman Empire had Christian soldiers and officers from 14<sup>th</sup> to (at least) 16<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>30</sup> and when the Ottoman Ministry of War proposed, for the first time, to enlist the Armenians in the military, in 1869-1870, the Armenian Patriarchate refused. The refusal was reiterated in 1876, and this is not until the Young Turk revolution (1908) that the Ottomanist idea of universal military duty was (for six years only) accepted by the Armenian religious leadership.<sup>31</sup> Regarding the taxes, beside the exemptions for those (Muslims and non-Muslims) who worked for the imperial palace, there is no evidence that non-Muslims (Armenians or any others) actually paid “dramatically higher taxes than Muslims,” because if there actually was (until 1855) a specific tax for non-Muslim males who were not in a state of misery, there was also another one, paid by Muslims only, a representing 88% of the tax on non-Muslims.<sup>32</sup>

Another classical theme is “*the interest of the Ottoman authorities to manipulate the numbers in order to control minority representation in local or*

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30 Dimitri Kitsikis, *L'Empire ottoman* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1991), p. 54-55 ; Metin Kunt, “Transformation of Zimmi in Askeri”, in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, Volume I (New York-London: Holmes & Meier, 1982), p. 55-67.

31 Odile Moreau, *L'Empire ottoman à l'âge des réformes. Les hommes et les idées du « Nouvel Ordre » militaire (1826-1914)* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2007), p. 41-50, 70-71.

32 André Clot, *Soliman le Magnifique* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), p. 256 ; Gilles Veinstein, “L’empire dans sa grandeur (XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle)”, in Robert Mantran (ed.), *Histoire de l'Empire ottoman* (Paris : Fayard, 1989), p. 21.

*national councils*” (p. 175). If the accuracy of the Ottoman censuses is the subject of various interpretation, there is no evidence for deliberate manipulations by the state, which was concerned by accuracy rather by anything else.<sup>33</sup>

Oddly enough for an author who criticizes the perception of Armenians as victims only, she also writes (p. 156) that they “*were officially deprived of equal rights for much of Ottoman history.*” In addition to the fact that the “official” interdiction was often theoretical, for Armenians as well as for other non-Muslims (particularly Jews in 16<sup>th</sup> century and Greeks by 17<sup>th</sup> century), the legal equality in the Ottoman Empire was secured between 1839 and 1856. By comparison, equality in law was accorded to the Jews by the United Kingdom in 1858, Switzerland in 1874, Russia in 1917, Romania in 1919, and Iran in 1925; to the Protestants by Spain in 1876. Taking the date of legal equality in the Ottoman Empire out of the international context is misleading. Correspondingly, Meline Toumani also mentions only with some regrets the existence of the Armenian elite, p. 156: “*although a wealthy Armenian merchant class inspired envy and suspicion in popular accounts, the majority of the Ottoman Armenians were peasants.*” In fact, the majority of the *total Ottoman population* were peasants, and the Armenian bourgeoisie, who helped her poorer coreligionists, was not only made of merchants and an Armenian middle class emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely thanks to the Ottoman reforms.<sup>34</sup> As observed Marc Ferro, there is a general tendency, in the Armenian historiography, to reduce to almost nothing the history of Ottoman Armenian elite as well as of the Armenian terrorism that emerged during the 1890s.<sup>35</sup>

Ms. Toumani, in summarizing the theses of the Workshop for Armenian Turkish Scholarship, indeed obliterates that terrorism (and the rest of the Armenian nationalist activities), calling “pogroms” the events of 1890s and 1909 (p. 176). In fact, the violence of the Dashnaks and Hunchaks during the 1890s, their openly expressed desire to provoke murderous reprisals on their

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33 Stanford Jay Shaw, “The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831-1914”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, IX-3, August 1978, p. 325-338 ; Meir Zamir, “Population Statistics of the Ottoman Empire in 1914 and 1919”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, XVII-1, January 1981, p. 85-106.

34 Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire. 1839-1863* (İstanbul, 1988) ; Hagop Barsoumian, “The Dual Role of the Armenian Amira class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian Millet (1750-1850)”, in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (ed.), *Christians and Jews...*, p. 171-184; François Georgeon, “Le dernier sursaut (1878-1908)”, in Robert Mantran (ed.), *Histoire de l'Empire...*; Robert Mantran, *Histoire d'Istanbul* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 300-301.

35 Marc Ferro, *Les Tabous de l'histoire* (Paris: Nil éditions, 2002), p. 34-35.

own population by killing Muslims, particularly Kurds, is obvious not only in Ottoman sources, but also in Western ones,<sup>36</sup> which have been analyzed for decades, including by non-Turkish historians.<sup>37</sup> The provocation strategy by Hunchak leader Gueukderelian and Archbishop Mushegh Seropian in Adana in 1908-1909 is also well established, and this time, the repression of criminal elements from the Muslim community was clearly stronger than during the 1890s.<sup>38</sup>

Another aspect of the terrorism carried out by Armenian nationalists is the assassination of Armenians loyal to the Ottoman state, and more generally of all those who opposed the Armenian nationalists favoring revolution. Yet, describing the Akdamar (Akhtamar) monastery in Van (p. 141), Toumani fails to mention the murder of the abbot and of his secretary by the ARF, in 1904,<sup>39</sup> most probably because she never heard about the acts of intra-Armenian terrorism.

Correspondingly, the national security reasons for the forced relocation of 1915<sup>40</sup> are barely touched in one sentence of the book, on p. 176, and when Ms. Toumani mentions the city of Zeytun, which became Süleymaniye (p. 88, 200), she never says that this town was one of the main centers of Armenian nationalism, from 1860s to 1921. Revolts erupted in 1862, 1878, 1895-96, and

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36 Among many others: Gaston Aubyneau, *La Journée du 26 août 1896 à la Banque impériale ottomane, Constantinople* (Villeurbanne: Imprimerie Chaix, 1912) ; R. des Coursons, *La Rébellion arménienne, son origine, son but* (Paris: Librairie du Service central de presse, 1895), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5801336w> ; Caleb Gates, *Not to Me Only* (Princeton-London: Princeton University Press/Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 108-109, 134-135 ; George H. Hepworth, *Through Armenia on Horseback* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1898), p. 55, 60-63, 341-342, <https://archive.org/details/througharmeniaon00hepw> ; Sidney Whitman, *Turkish Memories* (New York-London: Charles Scribner's Sons/William Heinemann, 1914), p. 10-35, 93-100, 118-123, <https://archive.org/details/turkishmemories00whituoft>.

37 Kâmurân Gürün, *The Armenian File* (London-Nicosia-Istanbul: K. Rüstem & Bro./Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), p. 118-162 ; William Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism. 1890-1902* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 155-163 and 321-324 ; Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres...*, p. 11-29 ; Justin McCarthy, Cemalettin Taşkıran and Ömer Turan, *Sasun. The History of an 1890s Armenian Rebellion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014) ; Fikretin Yavuz, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Ermeni Terörü: 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını* (Ankara: TTK, 2015).

38 Rapport du vice-consul de France à Mersin et Adana, 23 octobre 1908, Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve, P 16742 ; E. Bernier, "La Turquie et la paix — La question arménienne", *L'Europe nouvelle*, 29.11.1919, p. 2176 ; Kemal Çiçek (ed.), *1909 Adana Olayları Makaleler/The Adana Incidents Of 1909 Revisited* (Ankara: TTK, 2011) ; Salâhi Sonyel, "The Turco-Armenian 'Adana Incidents' in the Light of Secret British Documents (July 1908-December 1909)", *Belleleten*, LI/201, December 1987, p. 1292-1338, [http://www.ttk.org.tr/templates/resimler/File/fulltext/Belleleten\\_Makale/bel201-1291\\_1338.pdf](http://www.ttk.org.tr/templates/resimler/File/fulltext/Belleleten_Makale/bel201-1291_1338.pdf)

39 Kapriel Serope Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted...*, p. 68-69.

40 Edward J. Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians...*, p. 79-222 ; Kâmurân Gürün, *The Armenian File...*, p. 186-210.

1915, in addition to troubles in 1913, 1914, and 1921.<sup>41</sup> The revolt of 1915 was particularly concerning, as it was coordinated with other insurgents of Anatolia and the Armenian nationalist organizations abroad, to facilitate an Anglo-French landing in Mersin and/or İskenderun. On this issue, following his usual habit, Taner Akçam quoted out of context a few parts of one Ottoman document to minimize the importance of the rebellion and neglected the relevant French archives.<sup>42</sup>

The ignorance of Ms. Toumani is even deeper when it concerns the “genocide” narrative itself. In particular, she mentions, “*the large group of intellectuals killed on April 24, 1915*” (p. 35) and once again, she alleges that “*the group of two hundred Armenian intellectuals [was] rounded upon April 24, 1915,*” (p. 277) that musician Gomidas, one of them, “*had watched his peers being executed,*” “*had survived the genocide but had lost his mind.*” Almost everything in this description is false. Out of the 235 Armenians arrested at the end of April in İstanbul (mostly, but not only, on 24), not a single one was killed during that month. 38 had been arrested by error and were released during the following weeks —including Gomidas. Calling the 197 others “intellectuals” is misleading, considering the number of weapons seized in their homes: 19 Mauser guns, 74 Martini rifles, 111 Winchester guns, 3,591 pistols, etc. (as well as 45,221 pistol bullets). 19 were sentenced to death and executed, and only one died in jail, in 1918.<sup>43</sup> Concerning Gomidas in particular, he became insane in 1916,<sup>44</sup> about one year after his arrest, and, according to another Armenian who was him at that time, “*He was always sane. There never were any massacres in Changri [Çankırı] while we were there for several months.*”<sup>45</sup>

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41 Report of vice-consul Fontana (Aleppo) to the British chargé d'affaires, October 21, 1913, The National Archives, Kew Gardens (London), FO 371/1773/52128 ; Aghassi (Garabet Toursarkisian), *Zeitoun, depuis les origines jusqu'à l'insurrection de 1895* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1897) ; Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Facts on the Relocation of Armenians* (Ankara: TTK, 2002), p. 47-48, 58-59 ; Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1963), p. 67-78 ; Jeremy Salt, “The Narrative Gap in Ottoman Armenian History”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, XXXIX-1, January 2003, p. 32.

42 Maxime Gauin, “Strategic Threats And Hesitations: The Operations And Projects Of Landing In Cilicia And The Ottoman Armenians (1914-1917)”, in *19.-20. Yüzyıllarda Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu* (İstanbul: Türk Ocakları/İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2015), p. 982-1004, [https://www.academia.edu/24209649/Strategic\\_threats\\_and\\_hesitations\\_The\\_Operations\\_And\\_Projects\\_of\\_Landing\\_In\\_Cilicia\\_And\\_The\\_Ottoman\\_Armenians\\_1914-1917](https://www.academia.edu/24209649/Strategic_threats_and_hesitations_The_Operations_And_Projects_of_Landing_In_Cilicia_And_The_Ottoman_Armenians_1914-1917)

43 Yusuf Sarımay, “What Happened on April 24, 1915? The Circular of April 24, 1915, and the Arrest of Armenian Committee Members in İstanbul”, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, XIV-1 & 2, Fall 2008, p. 75-101.

44 Halide Edip, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib* (New York-London: The Century C°, 1926), p. 374.

45 Matthew A. Callender, “The Shock of Komitas”, *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 17.10.1959. I express my thanks to Yeşen Dursun for having sent me the PDF of that letter to the editor.



Not surprisingly, what Toumani writes about the relocations is as far from the truth than her claims about the arrests of 1915. Especially, she reproduces (p. 175) two conspiracy theories, developed by Vahakn N. Dadrian and repeated by his student Taner Akçam. Confronted by Prof. Halaçoğlu to “evidence and records,” she indeed comments as follows;

*The government orders for the deportation and extermination of Armenians were known to have followed two tracts: the Interior Ministry issued official, written instructions to deport the Armenians of a given province, citing such reasons as protecting them from unrest; at the same time, unofficial commands—sometimes written but often only verbal—were delivered through party [Committee Union and Progress] secretaries and other trusted messengers, indicating that the goal of the deportation was extermination.*

Nowhere in her book, does Meline Toumani wonder how Minister of Interior Talat could have had the strange idea to send dozens of ciphered telegrams, a minority of which were discovered after the armistice,<sup>46</sup> and the others discovered only between 1970s and 2000s.<sup>47</sup>

In other words, why was it so important for Minister of Interior Talat to mislead future historians?<sup>48</sup> As Ms. Toumani learned Turkish and was educated in the U.S., she possesses the linguistic competences to check herself that the “evidence” for the “dual track system” is made of manipulation of authentic sources, in addition to a reference to Ambassador Morgenthau’s Memoirs that is contradicted by Morgenthau’s own diary.<sup>49</sup>

Meline Toumani continues to repeat the lesson learned from Taner Akçam in alleging that the “extermination” had “*to be effected by a brutal Special Operation that operated the massacres.*” As she can read English and Turkish, she could have checked herself that the claims against the Special Operations

***Nowhere in her book, does Meline Toumani wonder how Minister of Interior Talat could have had the strange idea to send dozens of ciphered telegrams, a minority of which were discovered after the armistice, and the others discovered only between 1970s and 2000s. In other words, why was it so important for Minister of Interior Talat to mislead future historians?***

46 Salâhi Sonyel (ed.), *The Displacement of Armenians. Documents* (Ankara: TTK, 1978).

47 Hikmet Özdemir and Yusuf Sarıncay (ed.), *Turkish-Armenian Conflict Documents* (Ankara: TBMM, 2007).

48 I am not the first to make this purely logical remark: Jeremy Salt, “The Narrative Gap...”, p. 22.

49 Maxime Gauin “‘Proving’ a ‘Crime...’”, p. 152-153.

are entirely based on distortions of sources, and have completely neglected the Ottoman military archives, including the published and translated ones.<sup>50</sup>

An even more deplorable example of ignorance is where the authors affirms (p. 178-179) that the Armenians from the Çukurova plain “*had the comparatively better fate of only walking for weeks to disease ridden refugee camps in the Syrian desert.*” Actually, these Armenians were relocated by train, a part was sent to city of Aleppo and another part to the vilayet (En. province) of Damascus, instead of “the Syrian desert,” and the action of Cemal Paşa (number three of the CUP regime) toward them is proved by Ottoman, German, American, and even Armenian sources—all of which Meline Toumani completely ignores.<sup>51</sup> That error raises the question whether she actually read all the books of her (rather short) bibliography. Indeed, she cites (p. 286) a book of Kurdish nationalist writer Fuat Dündar. In spite of his strong biases, Mr. Dündar admitted the positive action of Cemal, including in the book cited by Ms. Toumani.<sup>52</sup>

If there is a question about the reading (or not) of Fuat Dündar by Meline Toumani, it is out of question that she did not read Raphael Lemkin. Indeed, she alleges that “*Lemkin cited the massacres of Armenians as an example [of genocide] in creating his definition*” of the word (p. 178). Beside the fact that Lemkin’s definition of “genocide” was quite different from the one adopted by the United Nations (it could include any mass violation of human rights), there is not a single occurrence of the word “Armenian” in his book (*Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Washington, 1944) where Lemkin coined the word “genocide”. Lemkin called the Armenian forced relocation of 1915-16 “genocide” in a few cases, and only after the publication of his book.

Meline Toumani’s remarks on sensitive aspects of modern Turkey’s politics and history are hardly better than the ones on the Ottoman time. Under the influence of Fatma Müge Gökçek (explicitly) and of the staff of *Agos* (likely), she repeats the old claim about a “second-class” status for the Armenians (p. 74), then goes further, alleging (without source) that in mid-2000s like during the Kemalist years, “*Armenians, Greeks and Jews [...] were still living under separate-but-equal rights that were not equal at all*” (p. 89) and in a typically

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50 Edward J. Erickson, “Armenian Massacres, New Records Undercut Old Blame”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, XIII-3, Summer 2006, p. 67-75, <http://www.meforum.org/article/991> ; Maxime Gauin, “‘Proving’ a ‘Crime...’”, p. 146-147; Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres...*, p. 82-88.

51 Yücel Güçlü, *The Holocaust and the Armenian Case in Comparative Perspective*, p. 68-79 ; Hilmar Kaiser, “Regional Resistance...”; Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres...*, p. 191-198, 218-220, 251-252.

52 Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878-1918)* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), p. 114.

Agos-styled manner, she insists (p. 238) that “*Their [Armenian’s] second-class status in Turkish society was a direct consequence of that society refusing to make an honest account of what they had endured.*”

In fact, Agop Martayan Dilaçar was the first president of the Turkish Language Society (Türk Dil Kurumu), where he worked until his death, in 1979. After having served as general manager of the Ottoman Bank (1914-1927), Berç Keresteciyan was an independent member of the Turkish parliament, representing Afyon (Western Anatolia) from 1935 to 1946.<sup>53</sup> André Vahram (1950-1954), Zakar Tarver (1954-1957), and Mıgırdıç Şellefyan (1957-1960), members of the ruling Demokrat Partisi (DP), served as deputies of İstanbul. Hermine Agavni Kalustyan was appointed as a member of the transitional parliament (1960-1961) by the military regime, and Berç Turan was a CHP senator of İstanbul from 1961 to 1964, testifying that Armenians “enjoy equal rights” in Turkey.<sup>54</sup> Among the Jews, Samuel Abravaya Marmaralı served as an independent deputy of Niğde from 1935 to 1943, A. Galante as a CHP deputy of the same city from 1943 to 1946, Salamon Adato (1946-1954), Işak Altabev (1957-1960) and Cefi Kahmi (1995-1999) as DP deputies of İstanbul. Cefi Kahmi’s father had been one of the most successful businessmen of Turkey, close to several political leaders, including Alparslan Türkeş, the first president of the MHP.<sup>55</sup> Sami Kohen is a pillar of the daily *Milliyet* and Gila Benmayor is one of the best-known columnists of *Hürriyet*, one of Turkey’s most popular newspapers. Several Greeks also served as members of the Turkish National Assembly, such as Nikola Taptaş or Nikola Fakaçelli. Ariana Ferentinou is a columnist for *Hürriyet Daily News* and teaches at Bilgi University.

Moreover, “separate-but-equal” is a former jurisprudence of the U.S. Supreme Court that allowed segregation from 1896 to 1954.<sup>56</sup> There has never been in Turkey anything comparable to the American laws separating white and black people in schools, trains, and buses and banning interracial marriages.

The influence of Dink is even clearer when she repeats a famous allegation of his: that Sabiha Gökçen, an adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was

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53 Semi Ertan, *An Armenian at the Turkish parliament in the early republican period: Berç Türker-Keresteciyan, 1870-1949*, master thesis, Sabancı University, İstanbul, 2005.

54 Statement to *Hürriyet*, 09.04.1965, translated in *Realities from Turkish Armenians* (İstanbul, 1980), p. 9.

55 Jak Kahmi, *What I’ve Seen What I’ve Experienced* (İstanbul: Bahçeşehir University Publications, 2013).

56 André Tunc, “L’abolition par la Cour suprême des États-Unis de la ségrégation raciale dans l’enseignement public”, *Revue internationale de droit comparé*, VI-4, 1954, p. 816-824, [http://www.persee.fr/doc/ridc\\_0035-3337\\_1954\\_num\\_6\\_4\\_9099](http://www.persee.fr/doc/ridc_0035-3337_1954_num_6_4_9099)

of Armenian heritage. Dink's goal in making such an allegation presented without any evidence, and against all the available sources,<sup>57</sup> was most probably an attempt to describe Turkish society as an intolerant one, where Armenian roots have to be hidden. It is unfortunate that, against her desire to understand the Turk, she repeated one of the most unsophisticated lies spread against Atatürk in the last 15 years.

*There Was and there Was Not is a quite unachieved book. The quality is extremely variable from a chapter -not to say a page- to another. Good intentions are fundamental, but not enough. Meline Toumani courageously challenged the culture of hatred and sincerely tried to understand Turkey, but in most of the cases, she did not meet the right persons.*

### Conclusion

*There Was and there Was Not* is a quite unachieved book. The quality is extremely variable from a chapter -not to say a page- to another. Good intentions are fundamental, but not enough. Meline Toumani courageously challenged the culture of hatred and sincerely tried to understand Turkey, but in most of the cases, she did not meet the right persons. The book raises many good questions, but does not provide always the right answers, far from that. Regardless, she finishes by a last, essential moment of lucidity, on p. 280; “*And if we move on from genocide recognition, with or without Turkey's olive branch, what holds*

*us together then? If there is no better answer to this question, maybe the answer is simply, nothing. [...] We become individuals.*” This reviewer wishes to see the “individual” Toumani emancipating herself for good —regardless of whether she believes in “the genocide” or not, improving her knowledge and writing a better, second volume in the future.

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<sup>57</sup> “İşte soyağacı”, *Hürriyet*, 23.02.2004.

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