

start a new life and adopt new ways in the New World, guarded against revealing their past lest it set them apart from the society of the host country. This is especially true of Armenian communities in Europe and North America where discrimination, prejudice, and social rejection of newcomers were prevalent.²⁰ For still others, the burden of the daily struggle for survival in a new and unfamiliar world weighed so heavily that it kept them from talking about their traumatic past. Talking about it could be an opportunity for significant therapeutic effect, an opportunity they rejected.

Within the family atmosphere of many survivors, talking about the traumatic past, the Catastrophe, was thus taboo. It could only be mentioned in hushed tones within the tight circle of family friends—mostly survivors themselves—or in brief references, often in Turkish, a language unintelligible to their children. Janine Altounian confesses her lack of interest in tales of the past that were told in her home, especially when family friends, all sharing the same gloomy past, came to visit. These stories were told mostly in Turkish, a language she was supposed not to understand. She knew nothing about her parents' past but she knew that she "was living in a heavy atmosphere, very serious and overly crowded, where you sensed the proximity of this huge disaster which 'they' had certainly escaped but which touched me and kept me apart from the world I encountered 'outside,' at school."²¹

²⁰ David Kherdian writes that his parents were "victim[s] of America who/escaped the Turkish Genocide." "A Family of Four," in *On the Death of My Father, and Other Poems* (Fresno: Giligia Press, 1970), n.p.

²¹ Altounian, "Parcours d'un écrit de survivant," p. 115.