Armenian Refugee Women: The Picture Brides, 1920–1930

ISABEL KAPRIELIAN-CHURCHILL

“WHEN THE GREAT DOME of Heaven cracked and shattered over our lives, and we were abandoned by the sun and blown like scattered seed across the Arabian desert, none returned but me, and my Azizya, my precious home, was made to crumble and fall and forever disappear from my life.” With these poetic words, David Kherdian introduces his mother as a young Armenian girl in Turkey before 1915. In The Road from Home, Kherdian recounts the events which scarred his mother’s life forever—deportation by the Turkish authorities, hunger, thirst, exposure, disease, abandonment, homelessness, death of loved ones and finally flight from the burning city of Smyrna (Izmir) in 1922. He concludes his moving story with his mother’s voyage to the United States in 1924, at the age of sixteen, as a mail-order bride, to marry a man who had migrated to America as a guest worker before the war.

This article is about young Armenian refugee women, who, like Kherdian’s mother, Veron, came to North America during the 1920s as picture brides. With the destruction of the social and cultural bulwarks which had sustained the Armenian nation, survivors found themselves in unstable and chaotic circumstances. They met the challenge sometimes by calling up pre-Genocide practices and traditions and sometimes by creating totally innovative responses. This essay studies the process of long distance arranged marriages between refugee survivors and the pre-war male settlers in North America. It sheds light on the dramatic shifts in roles the women underwent from homeless wanderers and forlorn orphans to poorly prepared, resigned and dependent brides, and examines these changes within the framework of refugee adaptation and rehabilitation.

All who survived the Genocide of the Armenian people by the Turkish government (1915–23) experienced the tragedy of a nation on the brink of extinction. They endured the Young Turk government’s determination to annihilate the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire: the murder of Armenian soldiers, leaders and the male population; the deportation of women, children and the elderly to the deserts of Syria,
and the inevitable toll on their lives; incarceration in slave labor and extermination camps; and the captivity of women and children by Moslems—Turks, Kurds and Arabs.3

Not only did the survivors lose all that was dear to them—possessions, family, homeland—but the hierarchies of family and community and the infrastructure of culture and social traditions were also irreparably ruined. The magnitude of loss was heightened by their tragic experiences, so poignantly portrayed in autobiographical accounts and taped interviews of men and women who had lived their childhood and adolescence during these troubled times: the ferocious attack on defenseless, sleeping villagers; the boy, frozen in terror at the sight of Turks burying his friend alive; the mother, benumbed, staring at the dismembered body of her young son; the child trembling as a Kurd plunged a knife in and out of his mother's body.4 Traumatized and dehumanized, some of the victims miraculously survived.5

Together, they formed a separate nation, a disparate band of humanity, predominantly women and children—who belonged nowhere.6 Poor and unwanted, homeless and stateless, they had nowhere to go. Prohibited from returning to their homes in Turkey, some remained confined to refugee camps or orphanages for many years; some managed to set down new roots in the country of first asylum, usually in the Middle East or the Caucasus; others migrated to Soviet Armenia to build up that struggling nation; and still others resettled in a third country—any country which would give them refuge.7

Even before the Genocide, persecution, poverty and conscription in the Ottoman Empire had compelled thousands of Armenians to flee either permanently or temporarily.8 This diaspora, dispersed throughout the world, grew and expanded, as desperate survivors pleaded with family, friends and compatriots to save them from the destitution and despair of refugee camps. Survivors went wherever they could find a safe haven and moved whenever the immigration doors were opened.9

Coupled with the drive to find refuge was the need to locate and if possible, reunite with family members, separated during the atrocities. Survivors underlined their singleminded and convoluted efforts to locate their kin. Such was the yearning for normalcy and intimacy that people often created and rearranged new family structures to make up for lost relatives: a woman might "adopt" an orphan child to replace her lost children; a boy might "adopt" a little orphan girl to replace the sister who was killed; a young woman might marry a stranger in a distant country "to refound the race in another land . . . far from our sufferings
and our scars and our torment, in a world in which our sons and daughters may be free of our wounds.”

Like other forms of social behavior during and immediately following the Genocide, marriage patterns were in a state of flux. Practices like arranged marriages, including long distance arranged marriages, which had largely been a response to male migration, were rooted in tradition. When Yeghishé Mooradian came to Canada in 1907, for instance, he found his paradise and decided to stay and bring out his parents and brothers. He also wanted a wife, so his parents arranged to bring a young woman with them as his betrothed. At the same time, his cousin Virginia, a strikingly beautiful young woman, was spirited out of the old country to protect her from the clutches of the local Moslem lord. She left secretly with her future mother-in-law to marry an older and successful villager who had settled in Egypt. Such practices took on new relevance under drastic new conditions as they became entangled in the pragmatic need for a dispersed people to reestablish family life.

Peoples’ motives were as varied and numerous as the actors and actresses themselves: A man might not search for his pre-Genocide wife preferring instead a young survivor; a refugee girl might be fed up with a life “in transit” and crave a sense of belonging and stability; another might marry a man in North America just to get out of the orphanage or to get to America, regardless of the social and emotional cost; another might marry in the hope of bringing her surviving family members to the new world “to save them”; and still another might want to shape her own destiny, so that she would not always be the victim of outside circumstances. However diverse their motives, marriage was their immediate goal.

Bachelors and widowers in the North American diaspora and survivors from the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Caucasus sought each other out. A man might prefer a girl who was, first and foremost, healthy, but her looks, her youth and her docility were also important priorities. Then he might consider her family background and genocide experiences, particularly abduction and rape. Girls, on the other hand, seemed to prefer men who were well-off, had a good job and could provide for them. Naturally, it was crucial that each was single. Because of the disruption in Armenian society, the Armenian church insisted on an oath from both partners that they were not married or that their spouse was dead. Such was the extent of the upheaval that even this precaution did not prevent cases of bigamy.

Armenian and non-Armenian newspapers and tracing agencies and a
far-flung informal network of family, friends and compatriots served to reunite families and to bring together eligible men and women. Through the auspices of intermediaries men and women in places as distant as Brantford, Ontario and Beirut, Lebanon, were linked up. In the pre-Genocide society, certain individuals had engaged in matchmaking, but in the post-Genocide period, everyone became a potential matchmaker: a woman chose a mate for her son and brought the girl to Canada with her; another woman picked a girlfriend from her orphanage for her brother in the United States; a man selected a bride for his nephew in Argentina. Another man travelled to Marseilles where he found his prospective wife, the cousin of a friend, in a shipload of refugees who had landed the previous day. They married and returned to Canada on the return voyage of the same ship that had brought him to France.

Few woman and men engaged in actual courtship. When Kherdian’s mother was fifteen, her aunt asked her whether she wanted to get married. She did not know what to reply. “It wasn’t my place to approve, or disapprove. Traditionally, these matters were decided by the parents or guardian, but of course, these were not ordinary times. I found myself blushing, not knowing what to say, or even understanding what it was I was feeling.... I was speechless, but somehow I was secretly pleased. I knew Auntie was modern, but I had no idea she would actually leave such a decision to me. It would have been unheard of at home—that I knew.” The aunt continued: “I don’t want you to be unhappy.” “You have seen too much already.... You’re fifteen now. I think the time to marry has come.” But the young girl was confused: “I didn’t even know what questions I should be asking.... I was terrified! I had no idea what to expect—what to look out for, what to look forward to.” The young man was in the United States but his mother, who, like her, was a refugee in Greece, had observed her and entered into negotiations with her aunt. “Nothing was said at first, and by the time I had gone out, made Turkish coffee and returned it [the engagement] was already settled. Of course, I couldn’t speak, nor did anyone speak to me. It was all very official and proper, and I wasn’t included in the negotiations.”

Another informant, in a tone just as resigned as Veron Kherdian’s, recounted her experience:

A person came from Canada to our village. A friend in Canada had asked him to find him a suitable girl. He said he would pay all the necessary costs of bringing the girl to Canada. The visitor thought I was suitable. He
showed me a man’s picture. We didn’t write, just a picture. I came here. We saw each other here. I arrived here on December 1 and was married on December 21.15

Sometimes, after being linked up by a matchmaker, a man and woman exchanged photos and corresponded. If they liked each other, the man proposed. The following excerpts from “courtship” letters give a sense of the delicacy of some of these relationships; the first is a letter from Canada to a young survivor in Aleppo, Syria and the second is her reply. The man, a laborer in a factory, had written to his sister-in-law’s aunt in Aleppo to select a suitable mate for him, “an old-fashioned girl with traditional values.”

To the young woman he wrote:

Although this is my first letter to you, it will not be considered out of order. Naturally we do not know each other personally, but through my friends and the picture you sent, we know each other a little. Based on that fact I dare to write this letter to you. Of course the matter is clear, that is why I write unabashedly. I believe you have received my photo and you have also given your consent to be my life’s companion—faithful and obedient. Is that right? I have received your photo consenting to be my fiancée. I love you and I am keeping your photo in my right pocket. We are joining our fate and destiny to each other, and as our pure hearts are joined together, we must know each other well. I am sure I will find in you all the qualities that I have hoped for. I know that you are an unattached person; as for me, I was married in my homeland but during the devastating world war, my family was all killed. Naturally, my friends have talked to you about me, and told you all the details.

She replied:

You have expressed your intentions, and now I would like to write about my wishes. Like you, I too do not value riches but I do value love. So far, I have not been through much suffering and I hope I will not be in the future but if I do experience difficult times, I will consider it my fate and I am ready to accept whatever is God’s will. I ask for love only. You understand that I value love a great deal. . . . I must also tell you that I am not so experienced in these matters. I have written this much so that you would not worry. My family urged me to write this letter. Do not fret, I am not like other girls, I will keep my promise [to marry you]. . . . By the time I read your letter [to his sister-in-law’s aunt requesting the name of a
suitable girl for him to marry] my father and mother had already given you their consent, so I accept their decision and I hope with God’s will we will not regret the decision and our wishes will be fulfilled. . . . Forgive my poor writing. I wrote it in the dark, secretly. You too must write secretly. It is shameful. You know, in the past I used to jeer at others saying that they got engaged by writing letters to each other. Dear, if I have written anything improper please forgive me, because I am not experienced in such matters.  

These touching letters were written by literate people. A poorly educated or illiterate person, on the other hand, might seek out the services of an articulate acquaintance to write his/her letters or would refer to an Armenian Letter-Writer guide book. In such cases, the contents and style would not be a true reflection of the individual.

Both women and men ran other risks in such long-distance encounters. The vulnerability of young women was particularly highlighted by the general absence of family protection and the guideposts and controls of the pre-Genocide period. At the same time, both men and women were known to cheat about their ages and their wealth and/or to send outdated or touched-up photos. Usually someone could be found in the extensive network to vouch for the intended spouse or to pass along pertinent information.

Once they had agreed to marry, the prospective groom was obliged to obtain permission from government officials for his fiancée’s entry into the country. Because of bureaucratic bias against refugees, as potential public charges, and because Canadian authorities classified Armenians as Asiatics, it was not a simple matter to arrange entry. As Asiatics, Armenian refugees were obliged to have a bonafide passport, to come by continuous journey from their country of birth or citizenship, to show $250 landing money, or to be the wife or child under eighteen of a Canadian resident. Governed by such restrictions, only about 1,300 Armenians—all refugees—were admitted to Canada from 1920 to 1930. Among them were 658 women and 310 children, ratios which reflect the survival categories in the old country where it was estimated that 80 percent of the survivors were women and children. Since the information in the Annual Reports of the Canadian Immigration and Colonization Department varies from year to year, it is difficult to determine how many of the women came to join their husbands. In the 1930–1931 Report of the Deputy Minister, none of the women were shown to be going to their husbands, 6 were going to relatives, 6 to employers and 5
to others, perhaps fiancés, it seems likely that women going to employers were entering as domestic servants. Indeed, of the 658 women, 306 were admitted as houseworkers. Records which are available for about 50 of this group—those who were sponsored by the Armenian Relief Association of Canada and later the United Church of Canada—show that almost all the women fulfilled their contracts of up to two years before marrying.²⁰ There are no available records for the remainder, except for an interviewee who indicated that she worked for a few months as a maid and then married. It may also be true that some of the girls entering as domestics were betrothed before immigrating. This situation may partly explain the apparent inconsistency and arbitrariness in government decisions regarding fiancées.

In any case, if the prospective groom was unsuccessful in securing official permission, he might try a number of other strategies. Considering that Armenians did not practice marriage by proxy, a man might gather up all his savings and borrow from friends to make the long distance voyage to the Middle East, marry in the country of first asylum and return to Canada with his wife. Once France opened her doors to Armenian refugees, another might meet his betrothed in Marseilles, Lyons, or Paris, important Armenian refugee settlements, and using the services of representatives of the independent Armenian Republic and the Armenian Apostolic church might arrange for the necessary passport and a hasty wedding abroad.

If, on the other hand, he managed to get permission from government authorities, he would normally pay for his fiancée’s passage to Canada and send her money for clothes and maintenance en route. Once the arrangements were made, the young woman would embark on a journey which would seal her fate forever. The trip itself could be fraught with danger. All along the way, swindlers were lying in wait for unwary travellers. In one such case, a dishonest travel agent asked a young refugee “to wet the paper.” His demand for money under the table was totally misunderstood by the inexperienced woman, so she failed to arrange for her passage to the United States. Bribes and long waits could double the cost of the trip, and fraudulent accommodation could make travel insufferable. “From Aleppo to Marseilles,” recalled an informant, “the boat was like a stable. Hay here. Garbage there. Dirty. That’s where my sister got sick.”²¹ The voyage to freedom, moreover, could take a person far afield, as in the case of a woman, who, with her son, travelled across Asia to Japan, then to Oregon and New York before joining her husband in Hamilton.²²
Aside from the vagaries of the journey, most picture brides were filled with a mixture of relief and anxiety for what lay ahead, as the following account reveals:

After the Genocide, my aunt and I went to Marseilles [France]. My mother and father had been killed. We had no relatives. We had no one. I was 18 or 20 years old. I worked in a biscuit factory and my aunt found a job somewhere else. There was a big hotel in Marseilles; we were all refugees there. Hotel de Lyons. The owner was not Armenian but there were Armenian agents who helped the refugees. Another refugee woman was coming to Canada to join her husband in... She lived in the same hotel and she saw me. She told me she was going to take me to America and asked for my picture. Then my husband-to-be saw my picture and sent me money and said he was arranging my passage. Well, this is my luck. I decided to come. When you are alone and when you have no choice and there is someone who will look after you, what can you do? And he was Armenian. You say, “this is my luck and you throw yourself in.” There were several of his country people who knew him and they told me he was a fine man and came from a good family. I came from Le Havre on an English ship. First class. One thing I was afraid of—that there might be cheating. It happened that the man would send a picture of himself taken years ago. I left myself in the hands of God. When I came, I saw the house; it was old but clean. The store was clean and all the fruit was set out in a neat and clean fashion. I saw him and his family and I said, “Thank God.” 23

Not every couple was as fortunate. Deception about age, background and wealth was a recurring problem as indicated by another respondent. Her fiancé had written that he was twenty-seven years old, a barber who owned a big house. When she arrived in Quebec as a sixteen year old, he quickly married her on the ship, trying to calm her misgivings by arguing that Ottawa would deport her, that he would lose the $1,000 bond he had put up for her and that if she did not like him, she was free to leave him after the marriage. He brought her to Hamilton where she learned the truth. He was actually thirty-five years old, worked as an unskilled laborer in a local factory and owned a house in partnership with another man. In retelling the story, she bristled with indignation: “My husband tricked me. I was crying so much. Just crying. He should have married my sister; she was closer to him in age. But the go-between said she wasn’t pretty enough.” “Still,” she added, “I bore him four children and lived with him until his death forty years later. He
looked after me well and I cared for him in his old age.”24 In another case, an interviewee recalled that because her intended mate considered her far too young, he introduced her to a young man at a friend’s home. Her husband-to-be came dressed in dirty work clothes because he refused to deceive her by wearing “fancy clothes” at their first meeting: “He wanted me to see what he would look like for the rest of his life.”25 “When my wife arrived in Halifax, I met her at the boat,” recounted another interviewee. “She was pretty and petite. She looked much younger than nineteen. At that time I was thirty-nine years old. I said to myself, ‘How can I marry this child?’ To her I said, ‘Some day I’m going to be an old man, walking about with a cane and you are going to be in your prime. Do you really want to marry me?’ She quietly said, ‘Yes.’”26

While each individual had the final choice of whether to marry or not, for many women, it was a choiceless choice. If she refused to marry, what could she do in a strange country? Where could she go? Who would look after her? How could she bear the shame? Besides, the girl felt a strong sense of obligation since a promise had been made and money had been spent. If an older relative had survived, especially a male, then the agreement would normally have been sealed between her fiancé and the relative, so it became a question of honor. How could she break her family’s word, particularly if the man had assisted her family and/or supported her en route while she waited for her travel papers? What would be her lot if she returned to the Middle East or to France? Earning a living as a refugee was difficult. It was not easy, moreover, to find a suitable young man among the refugees, especially one who could support a family. First of all, men were scarce in the refugee communities in the countries of first asylum since so many had been killed or imprisoned by the Turks or had taken up arms in self-defense. At the same time, the orphanages, especially of the Near East Relief, began winding down their operations after 1923 and the children were sent out on their own. Girls were despatched to a number of countries including England and Egypt as domestic workers and boys were sent abroad as farm workers. Not only were sex ratios imbalanced in different communities, but eligible women and men were dispersed to all parts of the world.

Thus in the predominantly male communities in Canada, women were rarely rejected or if they were, the man could easily find another suitor who would repay his costs.27 To give a sense of the male-dominated pre-war migration, research has shown that before World War I, 750 Arme-
nians migrated to the city of Brantford, the most important Armenian settlement in Canada at the time. Approximately 100 were women and children and 650 were men. Probably as many as 600 were men without women—bachelors and married men who had left their families in the old land.28 Unable to return home after the war, their attitude toward permanent settlement in North America changed, and they then began the search for family reconstruction. Under such conditions, they rarely turned down a woman. To be sure, they were so anxious to find a mate, they often took the precaution of keeping their fiancées sequestered in a room until after the wedding—two or three weeks following their arrival—for fear they might spurn them for another man.29

The old-time settlers were all the more worried because in age, education, socioeconomic background and geographical origin, many of the women were different from them. The men were largely agriculturalists from the region of Keghi, in the heart of historic Armenia. By the 1920s they had spent their youth in the iron factories of southern Ontario. By contrast, the newcomers were from all parts of the Ottoman Empire and from every socioeconomic and educational background. By the 1920s, they were in their late teens, in their twenties, or early thirties—considerably younger than the middle-aged men they married. Immigration Department statistics indicate that the majority of women were between the ages of ten and twenty-nine. In 1925-1926, for instance, nine women were admitted between the ages of ten and seventeen; twenty-eight between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine; thirteen between the ages of thirty and forty-nine and seven over fifty.30

The differences in age and background reflect the social chaos caused by the Genocide. While in pre-Genocide society it was customary to find a ten year age gap between bride and groom, in Canada after the war age difference were more likely to be eighteen or twenty years. Some couples, moreover, were so dissimilar in their socioeconomic backgrounds that they would have moved in totally different social circles in the old country. An agriculturalist sojourner, for example, who had worked as a gardener in a home in Erzeroum heard that a member of his former employer’s family had survived; he brought her to Canada and married her. In another case, a semi-literate moulder married a well-educated woman whose father had been a wealthy merchant in Tiflis. Another man was looked upon as a saint for marrying a young woman who had been raped and was sickly. The fate of these young refugee women had many facets. In the newsletters of Armenian orphans in
France, repeated articles describe the “commercialization” of Armenian girls and young women dispatched as female houseworkers. “They are beguiled by unconscionable administrators who pack them off to different countries, alone and inexperienced. . . . Who knows their story?” asked the editor. “How they marry, how they die, how they are buried.”

A woman might reason that it was better for her to marry an Armenian—albeit older and a stranger—in a far off land who could look after her than to be exploited and enslaved as young, docile labor in foreign places.

Differences in age, background and temperament and initial unfamiliarity with each other cast a joyless aura on the early years of marriage. “What was love?” shrugged an interviewee. “There was no love in those days. No. The man needed the woman and the woman needed the man. That’s why they married. It was your fate, that’s all. Just your destiny whether you married a good man or a bad one.” Another ruefully remembered, “What did we know? Laid down, got up, had children.”

Indeed, neither women nor men found it easy in the first years of marriage to live with a total stranger, chosen by chance, as in a “lottery.”

The women hoped for good providers and faithful husbands, men who did not drink or gamble. As for themselves, they wanted a place to call home where they could build their own “nest.” They aimed to be efficient homemakers, chaste wives and good mothers. It was a question of honor to act in such a way as to bring credit on their husband’s name. The women knew their role and their place: “He is my husband. I am his wife. I must be obedient. Cook, wash, sew and rear the children. He must work outside and bring money home. That’s the tradition.” Nodding her head in agreement, an informant remembered her mother’s advice to be good to her husband because he was the breadwinner.

Especially in the first years of marriage, when women were almost totally dependent on the men, old country models of the husband’s authority were barely questioned, whatever the demands: to remove his shoes and wash his feet at night; to leave the room when men were present; to keep her arms covered; to refrain from wearing makeup or having hair permanents. She was respectful, deferential and formal to the point where she addressed him either as Mr.—or simply as Man or Husband. Although rare, family violence did occur. Such abuse was often occasioned by the beginnings of wifely rebellion against an old country order that was increasingly out of pace with Canadian society. In the following excerpt, an informant describes her early experiences:
I used to do my washing by hand, in the washtub—the galvanized washtubs and scrub boards. No machines. The men had long underwear. I couldn’t even wring it. I used to go up and down like this to squeeze the water out to hang it to dry. Then bring it in to iron. We didn’t have those electric irons. We had those coal irons. We used to burn some coal in them. At night I used to sew, crochet, knit. Needlework. If we had the paper, we sat down and read the Armenian paper. Letters, I used to write a lot of letters to my sister and my cousins.

I knew I couldn’t afford a lot of children. I like children but it was so hard to look after them, to dress them and send them to school. But there was nothing we could do. Even if we went to the doctor, he wouldn’t give us anything. Just had to be careful. I had them one after the other. That used to worry me. What I’m going to be if I have one every year. I used to nurse them a long time—18 months. So I wouldn’t get my period. Then I had an operation.

I wanted my husband to help me around the house. I didn’t know what it was—the family life. He should have told me. He knew more than I did, but he never told me anything. He should have been more tender with me. I was so young. He used to leave the house early in the morning, come home late at night. He used to stay in the store late to earn a few more pennies.

He used to treat me like a slave. Anything he said I had to do. We were never to use the word, No. We didn’t even call them by their first names. We were far too formal for that. Because he wasn’t home, I had to look after everything. We had two Quebec stoves. I used to bring up the coal from the basement and take out the ashes. That was the man’s job. It was too heavy for me. He didn’t do anything around the house. At first he used to do the shopping. Didn’t want me to go out alone. I was too young and inexperienced. He’d bring the food home and I’d cook it. I didn’t know what to cook. He used to say, do this, do that. I didn’t know how to cook. After awhile I started doing the shopping myself and from here and there, I learned how to cook.

He didn’t want me going out much. There was a wedding, but he said I was too young to go. Here I was married. I wasn’t too young. But to go to a wedding I was too young! Maybe he didn’t want me to meet someone else or to learn too much. We all got married so quickly after we came. And quickly had children. So we’d be stuck with the kids. Stay in the house. Sometimes when a girl came, the men wouldn’t let anyone else see her. Kept her in the room until they were married. But it didn’t happen that women ran off with other men. We were old country women. The
first visitor I had, was 6-7 months after I was married. Two women came to see me. Even now, she remarks about how young I was in that big house, all alone. Then my sister-in-law came and we became like sisters. Even ate out of the same dish. . . . She was young too. Our men used to say they had a kindergarten in the house.35

When the interviewee was asked how she had felt at the time, since her comments were made fifty years after the fact, she quickly replied that she had been satisfied with her lot. Her life had been no different from that of other Armenian women. Like them she had worked hard and so had her husband. “At least,” she chuckled, “we were on our own and I didn’t have to cope with a meddlesome and domineering mother-in-law, like all the young brides in the old country.”36

The strength of the marriages often depended on how adroitly, diplomatically and kindly the husband educated, nurtured and assisted his young wife to manage on her own. In this respect, the fact that most of the men had been in Canada for some years, had learned something of the language, the patterns of work, the culture and the way of life somewhat facilitated the adjustment of the women.

The struggle to make ends meet and the preoccupation to carve out a new life, usually ruled out marital separation, desertion and divorce. More significantly, for people who had lost their loved ones, the family was sacrosanct; desertion of spouse and children was unthinkable. As an informant who had spent his childhood and adolescence in orphanages so aptly put it, “I had never known the tenderness of mother or father; when I had my own family, I treasured my wife and children more than my own life.”37 During inevitable periods of tension, misunderstanding and conflict, relatives, friends and community and religious leaders intervened to try to keep the family together.38 For a small number, to be sure, the mismatch was so unbearable—a pretty and spirited young woman married to a tyrannical and jealous man—that separation might occur. While passion and love, adultery and infidelity are threaded through their stories, most men and women simply regarded their marriage as part of their fate, accepted it and tried to make the best of it as they would normally have done with arranged marriages in the pre-Genocide period in the homeland. Fortunate ones could look back and say with conviction: “those who fall in love before marriage, waste their love. We married, and our love came after; and we remained happy.”39

Strange marriage patterns were not the only issue to challenge these refugee women. In the old land, before the Genocide, traditional struc-
tures like family, clan, village and church supported people on a day to day basis. People assisted each other during life crises—the birth of a child, choice of a mate, marriage preparations and adjustment, the death of a family member, financial difficulties, marital conflicts, generational tensions and other family problems like troublesome in-laws. A reciprocal mutual assistance allowed people the pleasure of enjoying with one another the goodness of life and the backing necessary to combat the evils and cope with the sorrows. In the process of the Genocide, these age-old support structures were destroyed; and men, women and children had been left to their own devices and resources, defenseless against sinister forces and unprotected by ancient custom and practice. For many young survivors, the knowledge of pre-Genocide patterns of behavior, customs, and relationships were erased by the vividness of life in the convoys of deportees, in refugee camps and orphanages. For them, the warmth and happiness of family life was a slim memory over-shadowed by pain;


Age and point in life course at the time of the Genocide played an important role in their health and well-being: a woman might become sterile because of an unsanitary miscarriage during the deportations; an older woman might lose her children and be past the child-bearing stage in her life; a teenage girl might be unable to menstruate because of trauma. Many young women found that their lives had been disrupted by the Genocide at a critical stage of development. For them, the normal development of childhood and adolescence had been shattered. The physical and emotional changes of adolescence had not been allowed to run their natural and normal course, with the help and support of family and community. Instead of dealing with issues of blossoming female sexuality, they had struggled to find a morsel of bread, a drop of water, a place of rest. “You shrank before you grew,” whispered the grandmother of Kherdian’s heroine, Veron, upon seeing her again after a separation of four years. Young Veron, just fifteen, wanted more than anything “to be a young girl,” again and to go to school. But she had grown up
quickly and she knew that “my time for being a young girl had passed.”

Embarking on the next stage of life’s adventure, young women like Veron, had come to North America, alone, without family and without money. Pitched into a strange land, they were obliged to make a leap from refugee child to Canadian wife and mother. They had to build everything up from nothing, even their sense of self-worth. No contact was easy for them, either in their private life, within the Armenian community or in the Canadian environment. Everything was new and had to be learned; everything had to be constructed from the beginning.

In coping with the transition to womanhood and to marriage, the women often relied on Armenian guide books and newspapers which gave instructions on how men and women should behave. Women, instructed one such book, be clean and neat, and dress modestly, never ostentatiously—in such a way as not to embarrass your husband. Do not spend any money without his knowledge. Behave in a well-bred manner, always with patience and good cheer. Be forgiving even if you are right and never bear a grudge. Tend to his needs first, then your own and always spare him the problems of the house. Make the home comfortable and prepare his favorite meals. If you want your husband to stay home, take care of your kitchen. Carry out his wishes, respect his authority and discuss important matters with him. Train your children to be obedient to his will also. Strangers should never see any conflict or disagreement between husband and wife. Never talk about his shortcomings or mistakes to others. To complain to others only opens the door to unfaithfulness. Keep no secrets from him, do not open his letters or look into his pockets or his papers. Believe that you are happy and you will be happy. Make him proud of you and of your home.

Instructions to the husband were just as revealing. Do not forget, instructed a set of guidelines, that your wife is your better half. Never abuse your position of authority, nor remain indifferent, strict or coarse with your wife. Do not wound her by word or deed. Do not enslave her to such a degree that she shudders in your presence. Do not bring the cares of your work into your home. Keep your appearance clean and neat. Keep your wife happy by indulging in her little fancies. Remember your wedding anniversary and your wife’s birthday. Understand her wishes before she reveals them and carry them out. Trust her with your financial affairs, discuss your business affairs with her—your successes and failures. Give her the required money on time; recognize how belittling it is for her to ask for money for a pair of gloves. If she works, let
her use some of her earnings for her own needs. Do not ridicule your wife’s inclinations, nor criticize her work in the presence of others; train your children to respect their mother. As you do for strange women, bend down and pick up an item dropped by your wife, stand to acknowledge her, show her the best place, help her on with her coat, request her permission to smoke. By becoming her slave, rule over her.

Events of the Genocide weakened such attitudes and perceptions especially among mature women, because those who had overcome the ordeals of starvation, disease and poverty could not easily be dominated. Among them too were sojourner brides—women who had been left in the village by their sojourning husbands. Under such circumstances women had been obligated to assume the responsibility of caring for their children and defending their property against corrupt tax collectors and/or marauding bandits. These women had learned to be strong and independent before the Genocide and if they survived the disaster, they became even stronger. But for young women, on the threshold of womanhood, it was a different matter. They had lost their childhood and adolescence and now in North America, they were without the support and guidance of family and relatives and, particularly in the early years, were constrained by ignorance and inexperience and often confounded by poverty and prejudice as well.

Because of the deaths and abductions, miscarriages, abortions, unsanitary birth conditions and the breakdown of the menstrual cycle, the Armenian population plunged during and immediately after the deportations. Partly to resurrect the Armenian family and nation and partly to take the place of lost family, each couple considered child bearing and child rearing a vital priority. Most couples had a child within a year or two after marriage. Significantly, interviewees revealed the powerfully therapeutic role of children. Men and women who had lost their dear ones—and every single Armenian had experienced such loss—found solace in their children. Almost all the women interviewed made a remark similar to the following: “When I had children, I gave them all my love. I was happier”; “I used to tell my children, ‘you’re all I have on earth’”; “Every day was death in the old country after the Genocide. But life changed after I found my two sisters in America and had children.” By creating their own families, the survivors gradually managed to take hold of their grief and sense of abandonment and to relive their own lost childhood and adolescence in their children.

Other strategies of creating normal family life also helped to bring
equilibrium to the communities. As mentioned above, survivors had often rearranged new family structures to make up for lost relatives. Now, in North America, desperately seeking stability, they realigned themselves in such a way that remarriages, adoptions, half and step sisters and brothers were not unusual phenomena. Another distinguishing feature of some families was the wide age gap—sometimes as many as twenty years—between siblings or half siblings born in the old country before the Genocide and those born in the new world during the 1920s. Informants indicated that the young brides were naive about birth control and contraception, pregnancy, abortion and childbirth: “no one told us about those things in the orphanage.” An orphan from the Bird’s Nest orphanage in Lebanon recalled that when she started her period, she thought she was dying. Explaining that it was normal, one of her girlfriends gave her a piece of cloth but no pins. She flushed as she remembered her embarrassment when she was skipping and the soiled pad fell on the ground for all to see. Another, blushingly recalled a conversation with her husband:

I didn’t know about pregnancy. About five months after I was married, I said to my husband that something was happening in my stomach. What could it be?

You’re pregnant. The child is inspierited. [hokevorvatz]

What does that mean?

It means the baby is alive. It’s breathing.

Then it’s going to die because it can’t breathe. It’s going to drown.

No it won’t die. If you breathe, so will the baby.45

Another turned to an older woman for guidance and advice:

She told me I was pregnant. I was so innocent. I was only 17. She explained to me how I was going to have that baby. She looked after me like a mother. She took the child. When the baby was born, she rubbed it with salt according to our old country custom. I knew nothing. When the baby cried, so did I. I didn’t know how to bathe the baby. But I was young and I learned.46

As the women became acquainted with each other, they began to share their knowledge and experiences. They replaced relatives lost in
the Genocide and helped reestablish social behavioral guideposts. Those from different origins and socioeconomic backgrounds lived next door to one another and became bound by their common sorrow, their mutual need, their ethnic identity, and their humanity. They passed along information about homemaking, birth control and child rearing. They rallied in times of distress; helped in household chores and the care of children; exchanged children’s clothing; interpreted with doctors and school teachers; worked, learned and played together. They shared their hardships and their triumphs and wept and rejoiced together. In the long run their interdependence created a true sisterhood.47

This relationship was all the more crucial because life in the new world could be difficult for them. Like many voluntary immigrants, the women arrived with no material possessions. Like other immigrants, they encountered problems with a new language, strange customs and an unfamiliar way of life. Being immigrant women from a conservative and technologically backward society that had been torn asunder, they were now attempting to adjust to a society which was itself changing rapidly through industrialization, urbanization and immigration.

Most of the women did not know English or Canadian customs and habits; and they were ignorant about Canadian foods and cooking methods and unfamiliar with North American machines and technology. Their accounts of their early endeavors reveal their first faltering attempts to learn English and to understand Canadian ways and values. There was embarrassment at requesting two o’clock meat instead of two pounds, confusion about how to flush the toilet, anxiety at burning a shirt when using an iron for the first time, stern disapproval of a friend for wearing too much lipstick and rouge, the wonders of “dating” and the “proper” behavior of North American men and women as seen in the movies, and disappointment because of prejudice and harassment from “Christian” neighbors. The concept of “freedom” itself — national, group and individual — required serious thought and interpretation.

All immigrants must cope with disruption in their lives. Even newcomers who are motivated and well-prepared and who encounter the most receptive circumstances, experience a measure of distress initially. For these young women, the struggles of the first years of adjusting to Canadian life were compounded by other factors. They were refugees — unwillingly uprooted from their homes and torn from their loved ones. They were poor and stateless foreigners who had been allowed to enter Canada as an act of mercy, a symbol of compassion for the “starving
Armenians." For them, adaptation to marriage, the transition to womanhood and adjustment to Canadian society were intricately entangled in recovery from trauma. The usual stresses of integration were intensified because they had been wrenched from their homeland under harrowing circumstances and because their expulsion had been followed by years of deprivation. As the initial excitement of being in a peaceful land wore off and as the fear of deportation vanished, other issues began to churn in their hearts and minds.

When Kherdian’s mother reached safety, she “felt even lonelier and sadder. . . . For the first time, I began thinking about my parents and my sister and brothers.” For the young survivors, the heaviest burden was the loss of loved ones. Especially among those who had been unable to bury their dead, who had inadvertently been separated from a sister or brother or who had witnessed violence against a family member, mourning, sometimes repressed, lingered on for years. Many agonized at not knowing where family members were or if they were alive. Their grief also engendered a “survival guilt” which especially tormented those who had been unable to protect their kin. Time and again, during interviews, they cried out “Why me? Why was I saved?”

For some of the informants, the interview itself was cathartic, drawing out memories that had lain dormant for decades, unrevealed even to their own children. Once the initial step was taken, the stories and the tears poured out. One recalled, with shame, how she had stolen jars from a church to buy food; another remembered being beaten by the Turk who had taken her in as a servant; another shuddered at the memory of the first attack on the unarmed villagers after they had camped in the field of Khoulla Khan (1915); an informant wept as she described the siege of the city of Marash and the panic-stricken forced flight of the refugees through mountain gorges during a raging blizzard (1921); another agonized over the conflagration of Smyrna (1922) when the Armenians and Greeks were hemmed in by the fire and the Turkish army on one side and the sea on the other. Interviewees also told about courage and strength, devotion and heroism: young Eto Arakelian, who by her quick-wittedness, saved the lives of approximately forty of her villagers; the steadfastness of Protestant missionaries who, in the face of death remained with their people; the resistance of places like Musa Dagh and the city of Urfa; the bravery of Armenian volunteer regiments in the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Painful as it was, they talked about rape and abduction, albeit with
Under conditions of war or flight, rape was viewed with a measure of resignation as the will of God, the lesser by comparison with the risk of death. A woman might be forced to submit or she might not resist for fear of being murdered; she might “sacrifice herself” in order to save other members of her family; or she might be offered in exchange for the liberty of the group. Whatever the circumstances of the rape, rape victims were plagued by severe repercussions, especially a sense of sinfulness and debasement. Although they were accepted in the Armenian community, they suffered their own silent purgatory. Kherdian recalls that women taken by the Arabs, for example, were tattooed either below the lip or on the cheek or forehead: “Whenever we [in the orphanage] saw a new girl with little blue marks on her face, we knew she had been freed from the Arabs. We wouldn’t say anything, of course, because these girls felt deeply ashamed, and were very unhappy.” Another recounted how she had been abducted and forced to marry a young Kurd; she remained imprisoned until her prayers were answered and she found an opportunity to escape. Two years later, she married an Armenian who never asked about her past until fifty years after their wedding — on his deathbed.

Some women suffered physically and emotionally for many years because of their past experiences. There were those who had been stricken with malaria, cholera or Mediterranean (Armenian) fever; more commonly, the lack of clean water had affected their eyes. Other afflictions were less visible: anxiety, sadness, the inability to enjoy life, feelings of worthlessness and helplessness and depression. Even if a connection were made between symptoms and causes of illness, many other factors combined to make mental health a complicated issue: the language barrier; Armenian distrust and fear of hospitals; their ignorance about mental health disorders and treatment; their tradition of looking after their own people; and their general reaction to mental illness as a sign of weakness, an inability “to stand on one’s own two feet.” By today’s standards, admittedly, the state of mental health care in Canada was rudimentary. In those days, the medical profession did not understand, and perhaps did not try to understand post-trauma stress, especially among a small group of working-class foreigners. While the vast majority of these young brides did not suffer from mental health problems, some did and their ailments remained undetected or professionally untreated for long periods of time. The few severe cases were incarcerated for a lifetime in institutions for the insane.
Each survivor grieved in a different way. Some resolutely suppressed the memory while others never stopped talking about it. Some were filled with the desire for revenge while others were burdened with guilt. Some questioned their faith: “What did our people do to deserve such treatment?” “How could God do this to us?” “Are we so cursed?” Or they would cry out, “God has given us this tragedy, why does He not give us the solace to bear it?” Some resigned themselves to destiny: “Such is the will of God. Such is the fate of the Armenian people.” One woman might adopt a servile attitude to authority and teach her children not to make waves. Another might never lose a sense of anger and would pass on to her children a commitment to change the course of political realities.

Grief was not only personal but collective. All Armenians, both refugees and old timers yearned for a lost homeland and a culture in disarray. Armenians had a history of being a minority, and they were ready and willing to transfer to Canada their expertise in balancing the old with the new. Yet, something far more profound and intense haunted them. They were afraid of losing themselves as a people. For some, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic became the center of national revival. Others could see Soviet power only in the light of occupation of the land and the suppression of the language and culture. Regardless of where they lived in the diaspora, they believed that they, as remnants of a persecuted people, were the crucible, the well-spring of national renaissance. To them fell the enormous responsibility to sustain the patriotic spirit, to nurture Armenian culture and to pass on to their children the legacy of ages before it disappeared altogether.

The Genocide had other domino effects, particularly with respect to broken families. “For years,” recounted an interviewee, “he tried to find his wife and children through newspaper tracing services and word of mouth. No luck. Then he remarried and he was getting along fine with his new wife when all of sudden who should appear on the scene but his first wife and son? So he left his second wife and took his first one but they never got along, always fighting.” In another case, a woman’s first husband suddenly showed up. “She hadn’t heard from him in years. Thought he was dead. He wasn’t dead but he was almost blind. So she left her second husband to look after the first.” Such occurrences highlight not only the strong sense of duty but also the ensuing heartache.

Although marriage and family were the underpinnings in rebuilding Armenian community life, a number of men remained unmarried. Some
could not find a “suitable” wife; some were considered too old or too short or otherwise “ineligible.” Others like Onik Kazazian chose not to marry because they felt a strong responsibility to care for their surviving family members:

Coming here [Argentina] with five people in one room, no furniture . . . I had no thought of marriage and my own family. . . . I worked hard; one day I looked in the mirror and my hair was getting gray.59

Men like Onik, who remained bachelors, usually boarded with relatives or friends and became everyone’s “uncle.” While such an arrangement provided them with some warmth and human contact, most lived out their lives alone and lonely—still another manifestation of the fragmentation of Armenian family life.

The refugee brides had learned survival skills in a world of violence and upheaval and they were anxious to start a new life in a peaceful land. They had come from a society where the only predictable thing was life’s unpredictability. Even before the Genocide, Armenians had lived in an environment of insecurity and instability, for who could predict what violence or exploitation would strike on the next day? In Canada, the Armenian refugees felt safe and secure regardless of their past experiences and their initial confusion and disorientation. An interviewee, who knew nothing about Canada before her arrival, recalled her joy: “When I put my foot on Canadian soil, when I saw that pure white snow, I fell in love. I loved Canada then and I still love this country.”60 Even if there were no mainstream care-givers to lend solace to a community in collective mourning, Canada represented sanctuary. From then on, no matter what difficulties they encountered, the feelings of loyalty and gratitude to Canada permeated their lives. Seldom did they refer to Canada without adding a term of affection like, “this haven,” or “this blessed land.”

In their new-found paradise, they immediately set about trying to learn English and to familiarize themselves with Canadian ways. They studied Armenian-English guidebooks and dictionaries and took English language classes. They pledged allegiance to the Union Jack and sang God Save the King. Without a working knowledge of English, lacking a degree of sophistication needed to function effectively in a large industrial urban environment, ignorant of the city beyond the few blocks of the Armenian neighborhood, and limited, to an extent, by the cultural constraints of the Armenian community, the women looked inward to
their families and community for the framework of continuity and stability, and for support to cope with the trauma of Genocide, to deal with the adjustments of marriage, and to withstand the pressures of functioning in a new environment.

They found great comfort in the Armenian community. Those who had come before the war had already established the framework of a pioneer society and had begun to adjust to Canadian life. The Genocide transformed these largely temporary workers into permanent settlers. The men cushioned the shock for the refugees and eased them into the unfamiliar conditions of the urban working class in Canada. The oldtimers embraced the refugees, assisted them, wept with them, married them, taught them their old country traditions, values and customs and shared with them their “Canadian expertise.”

At the same time, the strong links among the women reverberated in the community and in a way reflected the relationship among the men in the pre-Genocide communities. Friends, god-parents, distant relatives, village people and political confreres were treated as intimate relatives. The bonding of fictive kin solidified the community and acted as an anchor for the next generation: “I have no real aunt or uncle,” recalled an informant. “But as a child I didn’t know that because every Armenian woman was my aunt and every Armenian man was my uncle.”

Their spirit of survival, their resilience and their determination to conquer adversity helped the young refugee brides live with their tragedy and make a place for themselves and their families in a land “far from the sins and sorrows” of their troubled homeland.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Professors Donna Gabaccia and Stacy Churchill and Dr. Lisa Gilad for reading this article and making important comments.
3. For studies of the Genocide of Armenians by the Young Turk government,


5. The experience of Armenian refugees reflects in most essential respects the processes which have been documented in later survivor groups. For models depicting the refugee experience, see Stephen Keller, *Uprooting and Social Change: the Role of Refugees in Development* (Delhi, 1975) and Barry N. Stein, “The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study,” *International Migration Review*, 15, 1 (1979).

6. It is estimated that 80–85 percent of the survivors were women and children.


11. Interview with A. Norigian.

12. Interview with M. Stepianian: “My sister married him to come to Canada. To be saved. She didn’t want to marry him. He was eighteen years older than her. But the go-between convinced her that after she got to Canada, after a few years, she could bring out the rest of us.” By the same token, a man might prefer an orphan girl with no surviving relatives so that he would not have to assume the responsibility of bringing more people to North America.

13. Generally, physical problems were associated with the eyes. Indeed, Armenians later set up many institutions to care for the large number of people who had become blind primarily as a result of the shortage of clean water.

14. Kherdian, *Road from Home,* pp. 213–4, 228. In Armenian circles, engagements were often performed in absentia, but never marriages.

15. Interview with M. Tashjian.

16. These letters are in the author’s private collection. This literal translation by Eugenie Sheharian, Toronto, accurately reflects the style and tone of the originals.

17. See for example, Isabel Kaprielian, “The Armeño-American Letter Writer,” *Polyphony* (Winter, 1981). Letters played an important role both in bringing together eligible men and women and in uniting surviving family members. The widespread use of letter writing was possible because of the pre-war improvements in education and the concurrent spread of literacy among Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The high rate of literacy among the Armenian immigrants to Canada is evident from the statistics of the Department of Immigration and Colonization. (1925–30).

18. While Armenians were not considered Asiatics by U.S. law, they were limited by quota regulations in 1921 and 1924.

19. Men and boys over the age of ten or twelve were murdered or imprisoned by the Turkish authorities; an unspecified number of women and girls survived because they had been taken into captivity for harems, prostitution, slave labor or household maids. *Government of Canada, Sessional Papers,* Reports of the Department of Immigration and Colonization, 1920–1930.

20. The Armenian Relief Association of Canada was an interdenominational, interethnic and public organization created after the war to assist Armenian refugees, first by raising approximately $300,000 to send abroad for refugee rehabilitation, and then in arranging for the admission and initial settlement of 109 Armenian orphan boys and about 50 women as domestic servants. The work of the Association was taken over in 1928 by the newly formed United Church of Canada. For the boys, refer to Jack Abramian, *The Georgetown Boys,* (Winona, 1976). For the women see Isabel Kaprielian, “Refugee Women as Domestics: A Documentary Account,” *Canadian Woman Studies Journal,* 10, 1 (Spring, 1989): 75–79; and “The Saved: Armenian Refugee Women,” *Canadian Woman Studies,* 7, 4 (Winter, 1986): 6–9. For the Armenian Relief Association, see Kaprielian, “Armenian Refugees and their Entry into Canada, 1919–30.”


22. Interview with G. Halagan.


25. Interview with A. Tomasian.
26. Interview with K. Lorisian.
27. The exchange of money helped men recover their expenses and should not be construed as the sale of women.
29. An interviewee, L. Lorisian, recounted how her betrothed introduced her to his friends before their marriage: “They were all short and fat. By comparison my fiancé looked like a prince.” A striking contrast exists between Japanese picture brides and Armenian ones in that the Japanese women were married by proxy in Japan and thus both the man and woman were committed to the marriage. While Armenians had long-distance betrothals, marriages did not take place by proxy.
30. This movement of young refugees is confirmed in *Yergounk, Revue Litteraire Arménienne*, 1929–1930, Bibliothèque Nubar, Paris, France. In Armenian and French. In the September, 1929 issue, the following statistics were given: in 1923–24, 600 orphans immigrated to France; in 1926, 300 and in 1929, 71. Among the girls none was as old as twenty; 180 were nineteen, 162 were eighteen; and 129 were seventeen years of age.
32. Interview with A. Tomasian.
33. Interview with V. Tanielian.
34. Interview with Mrs. A. Simigian.
35. Interview with A. Lorisian.
36. This is a reference to the old country tradition where a bride was obliged to live in her husband’s home and was under the authority of her mother-in-law. Another interviewee summed up the relations between her and her mother-in-law: “If my mother-in-law said that madzoon [yogurt] was black, then I had to agree. I would never contradict her. Madzoon was black. That’s how powerful she was.” Interview with D. Bedrosian, Toronto.
37. Interview with G. Elekian.
38. Of course this applied to all marriages, not just the letter brides.
39. Interview with I. Israelian.
40. Interview with M. Stepanian.
41. As Erik Erikson has stated: “The danger of any period of large-scale uprooting and transmigration is that exterior crises will, in too many individuals and generations, upset the hierarchy of developmental crises and their built-in correctives and that man will lose those roots that must be planted firmly in meaningful life cycles. For man’s true roots are nourished in the sequence of generations and he loses his taproots in disrupted developmental time, not in abandoned localities.” Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York, 1964).
45. Interview with M. Stepanian.
46. Interview with A. Tomasian.
47. In the same vein, see Lisa Gilad, *Ginger and Salt: Yemeni Jewish Women in an Israeli Town* (Boulder, Colo., 1989). To quote from Gilad: “A woman’s best friend is invariably referred to with a kinship term—my dear sister or my beloved cousin. . . . Their friends are more important to them than their ‘real’ kin—friends
choose each other and thus elect to take on obligations. Kin feel forced to help, but friends want to. . . . Friends . . . are relations of choice and this element of choice seems to be very important in that it allows a woman to control her own social life and to express her personal preferences.” p. 84.


50. Indeed, 75 years after the beginning of the Genocide, survivors continued to search for their kin. Horizon weekly, published in Montreal, ran an ad on 12 November 1990, submitted by Hratch Nersessian, in Armenia, seeking his two brothers and his cousins lost during the turmoil of the Genocide.

51. See Housepian, The Smyrna Affair.

52. Eto is a symbol of thousands of unsung heroines, ordinary women, who with honor and dignity rose to the occasion of a national tragedy.

53. Usually informants requested that the tape recorder be turned off. Most could “not remember” who were rape victims in the community and spoke only of “someone I once knew.”

54. In an article, for example, in the Hairenik daily newspaper published in Boston, 5 May 1916, G. H. Karageulian discusses the topic of rape and abduction. To the question, should the Armenian man marry a woman who has been abducted, he replies: “An Armenian man should not reject a woman who has been abducted since she is an innocent victim who cannot be held morally responsible for her condition.”

55. Kherdian, Road from Home, p. 131.

56. Interview with N. Telian.

57. The Turks destroyed about 250 churches and 215 monasteries, hundreds of schools, libraries, valuable ancient manuscripts, hospitals, monuments, and countless homes. See Kévork K. Baghdjian, La Confiscation, par le gouvernement turc, des bien arméniens . . . dits abandonnés (Montréal, 1987).

58. Interview with A. Uvoian.


60. Interview with K. Lalian.

61. Interview with I. Zakarian.