

My Next Door Neighbor

When she heard that her brother was the blessed father of a fourth male heir, she uttered shouts of rejoicing, "More boys, more young men for our family!" she said. I wanted to ask her why she preferred boys. Because they can fight? Our country has been ruined by war. Because they can work? Women are now working more than men. She and her sister sit all day long sewing or knitting wool for the family. Otherwise, they clean, cook, give private lessons or perform some other lucrative job. Their work did not require any costly training. They went to school until reaching the secondary classes. Their education allows them to teach reading and dictation to little children. This is probably the main trait that differentiates them from their mothers and grandmothers. In their conversations, they handle the same old topics of birth, betrothal, marriage, money, disease, and death. Now they have added political events, but their knowledge of politics consists in repeating what they hear from other people or from the radio. They believe what people around them affirm, and identify with the party to which their family belongs. Should their family change sides, they would do the same. Besides the limited education they received, there is one more difference between them

and their mothers and grandmothers. They have more opportunity to earn money through teaching, or some similar job. This gives them the pleasure of saving, just as their mothers and ancestresses enjoyed hoarding pieces of jewelry. Are they happier? Better dressed? Do they spend part of their money on cultural activities like reading books, taking trips, going to the movies or to the theater, engaging in sport and recreation, visiting exhibits or museums, doing anything that would allow them to grow, to break the routine of their occupations? Nothing of the sort attracts them, even if they could afford any of the above activities. Not having personal ambitions, they adopt the interests and ambitions of the group to which they belong. Their pleasure is that of the group and also their worry.

The coming generation of females will probably lead the same traditional life as that of my next-door neighbor and her sister. They will go to the same schools, repeat the same old prayers, hear commonplace radio talks, perform the same traditional jobs. And I sit pondering, trying to see how change could find its way to such an environment.

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