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GENDER AND CHILDREN



Almaz KALET,
Kyrgyzstan

photos by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

tested on myself NINE MONTHS OF THE FATHER

This is neither an article nor a research - it's simply a story about how we had been waiting for a child - about nine months of waiting for a long awaited child. Usually, in such cases, it is accepted to write about the mother, but I decided to write about myself. More so, that I have something to tell about.

We learned, that we were awaiting a child. Somewhere new life was burgeoning. Everything changed completely in our lives. Recalling how at different gender conferences women complained about men not paying any attention to the future child, I decided to prepare myself thoroughly beforehand.

The first thing, that comes to mind - I have to start educating myself. One has to read clever books not to repeat other father's mistakes. The books have astounded me: there was no father (a man) in the books. He was not mentioned as a specie! Generally speaking, these are the books about future parents, about pregnancy. Have they all been written by man-haters? You can not find a father/man in any of those books. The titles speak for themselves: "Mother and Child". Full stop. Just like in cheap futuristic fiction, where the role of a man is only in conceiving. He is not capable of anything else, is he?

Only in one book did I find, that father must (everywhere the word - "must") ensure comfort and rest. The same was written on the poster hung out in the hall of the maternity home, where me and



Dilla came to consult a doctor. Alongside the word "mother", you always find the words: loving, caressing, gentle and father is necessary only to punish, curse or create comfort.

There is a Web Portal in the Russian Internet: www.mama.ru which contains everything about newborn and about mothers. Nothing about fathers. There is another Web Site: www.papa.ru It has to only do with building materials. Well, it has been mentioned, that father must create comfort. Go, create - get out of children's room!

Men, themselves, are getting used to this role. When Dilla was in the maternity home, her roommates were sure, that I was either a lover or a brother. Only, not a husband! When I asked why, she answered, that not many women in the maternity home are visited by their husbands. That is, it is not acceptable. I also paid attention, that there were only a couple of men at the most in front of the maternity house. There were mostly mothers or mothers-in-law with bags and parcels in their hands. One of Dilla's roommates used to cry, whenever she saw me visit her. The husband of that woman, having learned, that they were awaiting a daughter, stopped visiting her totally.

One more thing. Women are considering these nine months as a period of shopping spree, as if we can not buy anything later on.

Besides the books, me and Dilla read different magazines too. The most famous of them is called "My Child". It says nothing about fathers either. He is mentioned only in the rubrics about conception and the risks (!) for health.

When on the basis of the knowledge gleaned by me I ventured to put a word about bringing up a child edgewise, this was accepted as a male folly. The expressions of faces of all the women held the question: "Have you ever born a child? We know better what to do!" But, when this age long experience malfunctioned, panic rose. And here is where the father, that is me, came in.

Some words about the maternity hospital. That's a separate topic. It seems, that it is the only place (save some men gynecologists we have) where the access to men is denied. Here women have their edge. It is symbolical, that all the maternity hospitals I've seen purposefully accommodate bearing women on the second floor. The windows can not be opened. One can communicate only by jests and eyes. It's funny to see men hanging around confusedly, not understanding who to call and how to call. The nurses totally control the situation here. They behold a man like Martian here. What the hell is he doing here?!

When my daughter was born, I was asked whether I wanted to see her. I nodded in confirmation. Immediately six women lined up in front of the window with a tightly wrapped baby. My feelings were very different. Everything was mixed up at this moment. Everybody watched me questioningly. I mumbled something about the health of the baby. A second later, I

noticed, that there was a little hole for contributions shrewdly made in the lower part of the window grating. So, I shoved in all the money I had on me.

It's interesting, why they never say "man father", but they always say "woman mother"?

The next day after my daughter was born, I went to the market to buy necessary things and I noticed, that all the clothes for newborn babies were of only two colors - pink and sky-blue.

There is no third choice. The saleswoman, learning that I had a daughter insisted that I buy pink clothes, although I did not like them. I opted for the sky-blue uniform. She was nonplussed.

Practically all the friends and acquaintances, having learned, that I had a daughter, spoke with the undertones of sympathy:

"Come, come, first a girl then a boy". She had not yet been two days old and they had already destined her to the fate, akin to the fate of a kitchen combine or a washing machine. I became angry. After that, they stopped saying such foolish things. Now, my dear ladies are at the grandparents' (parents of my wife) place. In accordance with the local traditions, she will be there for forty days. My role, as a father, is brought down to the minimum: I have to supply products to them. Here, numerous aunts, who know everything, come into play. Although, at times, I'm really surprised at some of their knowledge.

While awaiting a daughter, I understood, that father's/man's role was brought down to the minimum. Often it's only technical and that's it. When one has to love, feed, play with the baby - then it's only for the women.

When Dilla was being discharged, me and my friend were the only men among those present. Four mothers had been discharged before us. Not a single man had been waiting to meet them and I think not because, that they did not love their wives or children, but because of the fact, that public opinion ordered them out of the nursery.



You are not letting us into politics, so we won't let you into the children's room. Isn't it time to remove demarcation barriers and open the borders?

photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

Volodimir KHANAS,
Ukraine

the advanced knowledge of fatherhood

A FATHER CAN DO ANYTHING HE WANTS

short of becoming a mother

(this was a line in one of the children's songs from the Soviet times)

It became imprinted on my mind from the very childhood. My father took me to the village stadium as I was sitting on his shoulders. My mom was walking along with us. The neighbors were gossiping behind our backs: "Can't Vasili do anything else? He's playing with the kid as if he had no wife." Patriarchal Ukrainian village distributed the roles precisely. A man had to do something more serious, than bringing up of children

Not so much time has passed after that and nobody is surprised anymore seeing a man with a baby on the hands or walking out a little tot in a pram. Albeit, by and large, it has not become a mass phenomenon in the Ukraine.

There existed schools for the newlyweds and schools of

the young parents in the Soviet Union. I had sat through one boring lecture on the preparation for married life sometime. Something like: "A conscientious "Komsomolets" should involve their wives into social life" I'd never visited the classes any more. When time came for me to be a father, the "Komsomol" was disintegrating and nobody was interested in the future families of builders of the Communism.

Time is not at a standstill. In the society, which is transforming quickly, the principles of relationship are changing too. Although the situation with fatherhood remains catastrophic. Fathers are not considering themselves responsible either for the education or for the material well being

of their offspring. The experience in working with the Men's Adaptation Center and relationship with the analogical men's structures in other countries has highlighted a whole pile of problems and revealed a lot of positive elements in the dialogue of fathers and children. Having familiarized ourselves with the "Daddy-school" in Swedish town of Ornsholdswick, I and my colleagues came to the conclusion, that such a project may become a reality even in the Ukraine. What is this school doing? Some part of its work may be likened with the women's consultation. Although, the Ukrainian schools teach human anatomy and provide the basic information on pregnancy and child delivery, this knowledge is really not enough. The medical aspect itself is a prerogative of the specialists. In the Ukrainian "Tato-schools" (Tato - Daddy), the main attention is paid to imparting the experience of fatherhood, widening of father's scope of knowledge, especially during the first months of the child's life. In different variations these schools exist in Ternopol, Vinnitsa and Kirovograd. The experience of the citizens of Kirovograd is, probably, the most interesting.

The creative union "Technologies for the Optimal Development of a Personality" has developed a whole complex of gender education for men, wherein the Swedish and the Ukrainian experience was blended. The future fathers receive a possibility to acquire everyday knowledge about psychological problems connected with the birth of a baby, learn how to bring him/her up, receive practical advices about elementary everyday and legal issues. As for

a young father, everything is for the first time! One of the attendees of a "Daddy-school" tried to persuade me, after a year of his child's birth, which he attended: "Everything is more difficult and easier than I thought at the same time. I understand I can never really become a mother. But I will by all means become a good father."



...I will be a good father, by all means. If not a father, then a very good grandfather

photo by Diana Petriashvili, Georgia



photo by Diana Petriashvili, Georgia

Polina MILORADOVICH,
Georgia

gentle age

MAIKO, TAMRO, ZURA AND KETINO -

as a mirror of the Georgian reality

little citizens of our country survive
in very harsh conditions

mini-research of some models of children's existence

Maiko

She is as agile and fussy as an imp. Had the imps existed, they would have had the same kind of eyes - squinting and cold. Too sober. I got acquainted with Maiko last year, when I was writing about the kids trading in the underground. She lives with an old, old granny. She is a grandmother of her mother, so she is a great grandmother for her. The daughter of the grandmother, the grandmother of Maiko died some years ago from some illness. Soon Maiko's mother went to Greece to earn some money and has not returned yet. She has never had a father. Maiko says, that her granny is a hundred years old. She

is as blind as a bat, but miraculously she manages to knit socks. These goods are sold by the neighbor. She also brings the yarn for knitting and takes care of the old lady. For this she retains half of the earned money from selling the socks. This is, as one can guess, a seasonal income, as there are no buyers in summer. Maiko considers her business - selling the newspapers - more prestigious, than her granny's. She grunts contemptuously: sell her socks? Hell no. Newspapers are different. They are printed goods. The article "Children of the Underground", which I published in the national supplement of the "Komsomolskaia Pravda", despite all my discretion, made a lot of noise in

the girls' business. Just like I feared, these girls turned out to be the scapegoats. Instead of sorting out things with the extorters, the management simply kicked the little vendors out of the underground. For some time they've been trading above-ground, but later they went down to the subway again. My publication just raised their "taxes"... Let's not speak about the sad things. Let's concentrate on the best part of Maiko's life. Namely: almost every day she goes to "Dakhmareba (help)". In the evenings she's busy with newspapers in the underground and in the morning you can go to Grishashvili street. There is a very nice house there, where they will receive you, feed you, teach you something and let you watch TV. "A house for temporary shelter", so it is called. Maiko is one of the 50 children who come here. Around 30 live here permanently. In total, in accordance with the NGO-s, there are no less than 30 000 homeless children in Georgia. Maiko is not counted among them, as she has a room and blind grand-granny.

Tamro

Tamro is 11 years old. She was born in the outskirts of Pitsunda and does not remember her home at all. Ill luck has befallen her many times. First - her birth place; where is it now, that place? How does that house look like? Who beholds the world from those windows? She's had bad luck with the parents too: they are very ill, confused, apathetic. Even by the refugee standards, she's had bad luck with the accommodation. The garage, made of concrete iron, freezes in winter and in summer it's getting furnace hot. It also pulled apart during the earthquake. I scrutinize Tamro, she is very beautiful, slender, refined - and I can not conclude, whether she had been lucky in that or not? This flower is too conspicuous and too gentle, let God help her.

From the Georgian state Tamro has: a corner in this garage and a benefit - GEL12. This is all. This is all, that is left in place of the white house on the Black Sea coast. She can not really get the free of charge secondary education: during the last years she's had nothing to wear for school and no money to buy the school books. When, thanks to one NGO, she managed to go to school, she was uncomfortable there and she decided, that she would never catch up.

Some women from the non-governmental sector offered her mother to secure a place for Tamro in the boarding house, just like the one, which is frequented by Maiko. But the mother has not agreed, as she is afraid, that the kids there will spoil Tamro. Better to have her nearby - in cold, hunger, but under control. This is what her mother says.

Zura

This is a totally different story. The son of well-off parents. His father has to still go a long way to become an oligarch, but he, according to the estimate of his son, "has a lot of money". It looks like the truth. His father has some thriving construction companies, including some in neighboring countries. In Tbilisi, he builds mansions for the rich. I know seven years old Zura from his mother, whom I had known even before she got married. I do not see Zura often, but we like each other and when possible, get into conversation with great mutual interest. It's true, that he prefers computer games. They are not interesting for me from the practical point of view, but they are very interesting from the angle of seeing Zura's burning eyes and his tightly clenched little fists. I notice these jests almost professionally, because I see my son doing them daily. Sometimes when he (my son) is asleep, he attempts to punch me with his fist while I'm adjusting his blanket. The bellicose CD ROM charge lasts well into the night. Recently the psychologists have been persistently warning,



According to some data, there are more than 30 000 homeless children in Georgia.

photo by Diana Petriashvili, Georgia

that it will last the whole life (God forbid) if one plays too much.

It seems, that Zura represents a very well off example. Here is an example of a happy childhood. Because, it is well provided for, it is, in our understanding, the way out of all problems. Here are the parameters of Zura's existence. He does not attend school, as the parents are afraid, he will be kidnapped for ransom. He is taught by two teachers, who visit him at home. They do not often take Zura out for a walk either, for the same reason. The beautiful house, where the family lives, has a yard. It is clean, well taken care of and depressingly boring. Because it is empty. Beautiful iron gates are always locked. They also have a summer house. It's a happier place there, but, still, you can not do a lot of things there either. Last year Zura and his mother went to Florida and had time of their lives in Disneyland. Zura liked very scary machines there, but he remembers heat and noise better. Generally, even the Disneyland is not enough for childish happiness. So, what is childish happiness? Zura is a smart boy, and I asked him directly.

He answered:

- You must be strong. You must have good weapons. If someone attacks you, you must kill him. Zura's mother works too. She has her tourist firm, which consumes all her time. Zura is educated by a governess, who knows good English. She is not very much respected by Zura, who, not quite understandably, calls her by the nickname Pipa, probably, because of her eyes. It looks like, that his closest friend is his computer with all the shooting things in it.



Sometimes you are not really happy.

photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

Ketino

Generally speaking, Zura is not a good example in terms of happy childhood. Albeit, there are such children in the country too, who can be shown to the world public during the celebration. There has to be something, something lively and perky - singing and dancing! There actually are things like that: the children's parliament, young naturalists, musical groups Ketino, e.g. is everything to make an illustration of happy childhood. She is a painter and a writer and I'm not flattering her. Her paintings and graphic works have been exhibited in Paris, Brussels and somewhere else and her fairy tales have been published in a separate thick volume, thanks to one rich compatriot. Ketino, a whiz kid, had also been receiving the presidential stipend, the payment of which had chronically been delayed and later stopped.. The talent of the girl, of which her relatives are very proud of, is a heavy burden on the family budget. Ketino's mother has secretly told me, that she often finds herself on the horns of a dilemma, to buy her girl a packet of milk or some paints. Her father understood long ago, that only the talent was not enough. One has to have a lot of money for the purpose of fully unrolling it. Ketino, herself, is afraid, that one day a war may start and her father may get killed. When they speak about Abkhazia on TV, she becomes pale and goes to her room.

So what?

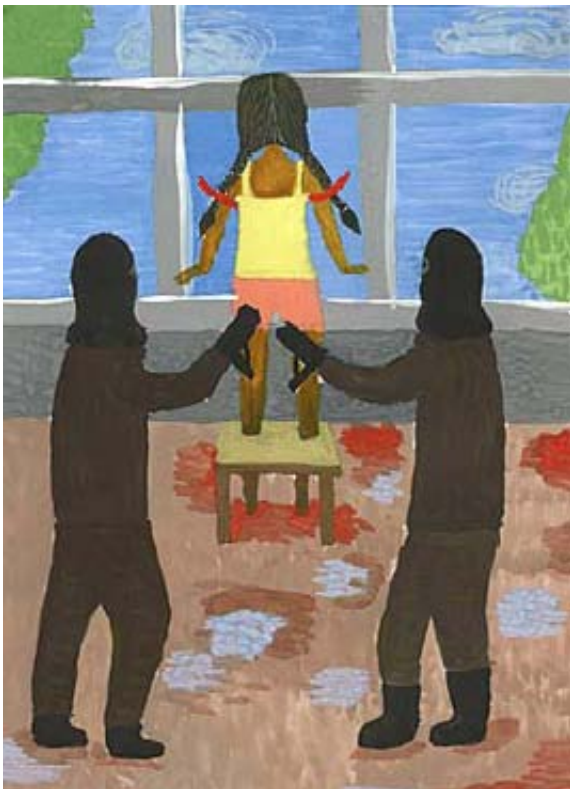
There is no and there can be no single happy age in a, to a great extent, unhappy country Our country is sick

with unhappiness, this is so. The ingredients of this illness are: A) widespread poverty, B) absence of perspective C) cynicism of the authorities and politicians D) prevalent crime and permanent danger of armed confrontations Can this not reflect on the most sensitive, the most impressionable part of the population? On the other hand, does there generally exist the so called happy, cloudless childhood? Despite different cliches, it's always very dramatic, always very non-unclouded, even in the most propitious circumstances. Novices in this life, they require patronage, help and protection. This is why the Children's Protection Day is celebrated in June. As we've seen, there are things to protect the children from. Albeit, unfortunately, often there is nobody there to protect them.



As we see there are the people and the things to protect them from. It's a pity, that quite often, there is nobody there to protect them.

photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia



Maria OSIPOVA,
Belarus/Russia

the echo of the tragedy

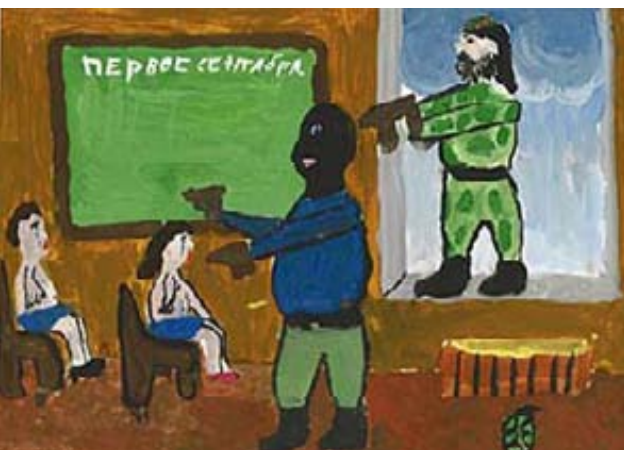
THE CHILDREN ARE PAINTING BESLAN

CAN THEY TEACH the special forces to prevent terrorist acts

a полиумков - and the politicians - to remember the casualties not only on the anniversary?

Till the majority had been looking for the guilty, turning the tragedy into political bargaining, Iulia Voronova, the head of the social fund "Children - Our Hope" and her colleagues asked Russian children to draw Beslan, in order to find out, what we, the grown ups, have done and what are the consequences.

If prior to Beslan, children had been afraid of drugs, conflicts in the family, street crime, after the events of 1September 2004, terrorism became their main fear. These pictures are hard to comment on



even after two years have passed since the tragedy. How was it for the organizers of the competition to be receiving sacks of such pictures every day from all over Russia?

Only the citizens of Beslan will never really forget the tragedy. Such is our memory and you can not do anything about it. Let those, who do not agree with this, forgive me. Who remembers the explosions in the Moscow underground? Who remembers the date of taking the hostages in Budionovsk or the date of "Nord-Ost"?

Naturally, Beslan is different. There were children there. Many innocent kids who died. The president of the country, whose citizens these kids had been, did not arrive at the anniversary to pay tribute to their memory. Now there are a lot of kids in Beslan, who will draw armed men and death for a long time.

I know, that the organizers of the competition "Beslan through the kids eyes" intended to publish an album with the children's works in it and to present it to the president, ministers, politicians, governors - to all those, who are responsible for security in Russia. I do not know, whether they managed to fulfill their intention. If yes, then there is a chance, that some of the responsible officials will see in these pictures not only the fear and pain, but also the children's hope, that we will one day learn how to protect them, combining efforts to jointly fight terrorism.



Nina ERKAEVA,
Kazakhstan

history

CRUEL TIME - HAPPY CHILDHOOD

happy time - cruel childhood

I paid attention to her immediately.

Something in her appearance caught my eye: radiant face, nobleness, some glitter in the eyes. You could give her around seventy.

In a hat and with flowers in her hands, she had been looking for a seat in the bus - which was taking people to the cemetery - the memorial of the politically repressed. I was thinking: "Is it possible, that after all she has gone through {Had she been in the camp for the political prisoners?}, she could remain so cheerful and kind?"

- Please, sit here, - I offered.

- I wanted to sit here, near the window, to see the road

- Yes, please.

- I'll sit here, I can't see well.

This is how my conversation with Nadezhda Andreevna Kovaliova started. She will turn 80 in August. She told me her story. In the morning of June 1937, they arrested her uncle as well as her brother and father. Till 1992 nobody knew anything about him.

- Why did you decide to look for him - didn't he have wife or children?

- His wife left us immediately, taking with her half a year old son, away from the danger. There have not been any news from them yet.

Nadezhda remembers her uncle well, despite the fact, that she was only 10 then, because he was very strict. He told her parents, that they had humored her very much: "What will she become in future?!" She grew up a very nice person. It was she, who in 1992 went to the committee of national security, to enquire about his fate. She found out: he was executed in the October of 1937 as an enemy of the people in accordance with the article 58 and its five paragraphs: subversions at the factory, the railroad, water utility etc. In 1998 he was rehabilitated, but nobody was informed about this. All of this was found out by her, the non-obedient nephew. Being in such conversation, we covered the whole road unnoticeably. We talked about the past and the present. Her words: "I pity the young people today. They have hard life" moved me. These words, after she has told me about the hungry childhood and self-made toys! How scary it was, when her brothers and sisters were dying. The memories of how they had been walking through the village and towards the cemetery and the fact that, that day, they didn't have to go to school are still fresh in

her memory today.

- Why do you pity them? They are not eating grass, they play with good toys.

- They can't find their place in life, so they beat about, they are desperate. We had been brought up differently. Although the religion was persecuted, the children were still baptized and we feared the God and loved life. You can not live without belief.

- So you think it's better, when they make a man do something against his wish?

- Naturally, because he's doing the work necessary for the people and thus he respects himself and people also respect him for this. Now you can procrastinate the whole life and nobody will even remember you.

Leaving the cemetery, she said:

- I visited uncle Pasha, I'm sure, he had been buried here.

She thought, that when she would grow, she would get married, have children and clad them in chintz. But all of this turned out to be nothing else but building castles in the air. She finished school in 1943. All of the young men, her acquaintances had been taken to the war. Only few of them returned. All the same, she says, that she's had a lot of good things in her life.



All the same, she says, that there have been a lot of good things in that life.

photo by Nina Yerkaeva, Kazakhstan

world

"Lord, when my mother is crying, I'm angry with you!.."

children's letters to the God

Israel

God, why are you delaying so with the Messiah. We have waited for too long. (David, 11 years)

In the heaven, my Lord, you are, naturally, the God, but on the Earth, sorry, it's my mother, who is the God.

(Sopha - 9)

I believe in you, God, and the rest depends on You.

(Shlomo - 10)

Dear God, they've been killing so many of us, the Jews, but we still love you - is this because we are so stupid or so smart? (Dan - 10)

God, give my regards to all the children, who are there, with you. (Adin - 11)

God, one must fear you, but how can one love you, when one fears you? (Shai - 9)

God, do not let the terrorists to the Heaven, they are killing children (Itshak - 11)

Can You avert death from Israel? Isn't it your country? (Anat - 10)

Why is there always some weeping in prayers? (Oren - 11)



photo by Diana Petriashvili, Georgia

Georgia

God, when my mother is crying, I'm getting so cross with you. (Vladimir - 12)

God, when all Georgians die, there will be no more Georgia. Don't let this happen! (Shota - 8)

If its only the soul, which is important for you in the human being, why did you create the body too? (George - 10)

Are you with the government or with us? (Kostia - 8)

Dear God, when father was leaving us, he ordered me to take care of mother, be gentle to her, help her and support her in everything. But, had he done all of this by himself, he wouldn't have had to leave us, isn't that so? (Jacob - 12)

God, I'm freeing you from taking care of me. Live on your own. (Grigol - 8)

God, why are you giving beauty to the vicious girls? It's very dangerous! (Igor - 10)

God, do you have the God? (Maia - 9)

When there is a war on the Earth - are you on a holiday? (Ada - 8)

Where have you seen a Georgian begging for something.

You ask us, we will not grudge the good God anything (Vazha - 10)

What is more important, loving you or loving Nana? (Revaz - 9)

Russia

Will my mother return? I want to see her once more, to pat her. (Sasha - 10)

Jesus, we are all perishing here, defend us. (Galia - 7)

How is my father, who now is with you? Can you, please, return him to me (Aleksei - 7)

God, do you look like an icon? (Iura - 8)

God, do you like, what's happening on the Earth, or you feel bad about it? (Andrei - 7)

God, were you scared of death? (Vova - 10)

Why didn't you save my dog? Maybe you liked him and this is why you took him to you? (Vika - 10)

Is everything in the Bible true, or have you fantasized a little? But, tell me the truth. (Tania - 10)

Latvia

God, what language do you speak? (Leon - 8)

God, give me power, health, money and then I will be your replica on the earth (Evalds - 9)

Dear God, you ushered me into this life, but you have not prepared it for me. (Otto - 9)

Happy people - this is heaven, unhappy - hell (Indul - 9)

My father came to you, I want to speak to him through the grass, tell him. His name is Olger. He's been a sailor. Whenever he used to return from the sea, he loved the soil and the grass very much. (Renata - 13)

God, do you have memories? (Ūris - 12)

God, after yesterday I'm ashamed of myself very much. (Alvis - 11)

Sweden

Dear God, is it fashionable to be a Swede? (Henrikh -11)

Dear God, thank you, that you are helping our ice hockey players to win (Sif - 10)

Help my parents please - give me everything, that they want me to have. (Gibbi- 11)

God if I pray for the unhappy, you will make me happy sooner, right? (Eva - 11)

Dear God, is pleasure a big sin? (Sigfrid - 10)

You look always so somber on the portraits, sad; is this because you created us badly? (Donna - 12)

What's the number of your cell phone? (Yuhan - 7)

God give us money, for us to be able to go to America, but give us money for the return trip too (Alan - 11)

God, what is your profession? (Harry - 7)

God, you created my brother Max, so poorly. (Bjore - 10)

Send severe frost to Stockholm - we would not have to go to school (Martin - 12)

Why is that so, that some people believe in you and they suffer and others do not and they have everything all right. (Nicaol - 12)

You want me, dear God, to be honest, then listen to me: I love neither daddy nor mom. I love to bathe (Kurt -12)

USA

Dear God, I'm going to wear a costume of a devil at the fancy dress ball. Will you be angry? (Maria - 10)

Dear God, I'm doing my best (Frank - 7)

God, I have the photos of all the famous people, but you. (Norman - 9)

Dear Mr. God! Do you think about the people, who do not believe in you? I'm not asking this for myself. (Your friend Neill - 9)

God, did you specially do it so, that giraffe looks like it does, or it happened by chance? (Norda - 7)

Dear God, I read your book and I liked it very much.

Have you written anything else? I want to write something like that too. (Mark - 9)

Dear God, last week we visited New York and I saw St. Patrick's church there. You live in a splendid house. Dear God, when I grow up I want to look like you. (Frank - 12)



photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

Germany

How do you think, Dear God, is not the Earth overcrowded? (Erna - 9)

Why do I always attract all the misfortunes? Maybe they like me, how do You think? (Eva - 10)

I won't write anything to you, as I'm telling you everything in the evenings. (Hans - 10)

So, dear God, is a man born because he has to die? (Barbara - 11)

Had Adam and Eve not violated your order, would we have lived in the heaven now? (Estra - 11)

God, if there is a life after death, why does one have to die? (Katharina 10)

Do you exist or not? But, tell me the truth! (Martha- 8)

Do I live in my own time? (Ludvig - 10)

Dear God, do it so, that there are no poor, homeless and illiterate animals on the Earth (Maria - 10)

We have so many immigrants in Germany, that it will end soon (Heinrih - 11)

Dear God, You must appoint the government on the Earth. Then everything will be in a Godly way. (Emma - 11)

Do you have a girlfriend? (Anna - 11}

Poland

I do not want to get married - this leads only to divorce (Leonidia - 8)

Why do people hide from me, that I'm very beautiful? {Barbara - 11}

Dear God, I want to be your grandson - it's dangerous to be your son (Tadeush - 11}

Dear God, do you compose music for the composers? (Helena - 12)

God, I love you and you do for me - nothing (Iaroslav 10)

Is it possible, that Zbizhek is my destiny? This is so terrible, God.(Iza - 9)

God, give my parents, much, much work, or else they have a lot of free time and they pester me a lot {Sigmund - 11}

I do not understand, dear God, am I not worth loving? (Stasia -9)

Why do people pray to you only when they feel bad? (Ianina - 7)

Tell me, maybe I'm your failure, as my father says? (Robert - 7)

Dear God, why have you done so, that a person lives eternally only after death? (Hanna - 11)

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photo by Ulmida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

Our family had a boy. There had been lengthy discussions of the sex of the baby before he was born and each time they tried to define it the expression of my husband's face changed. The family, which had three daughters, was awaiting a son. My husband was joking, that if I bore a girl he would not visit me in the hospital and I should not get offended about it and go straight to my parents. I was lucky, I bore a son and 7 hours later the attitude of my mother in law towards me changed. She came to our house and in full compliance with the strict traditions, put the baby in the cradle, washed him in the sandy water and took pride in the fact, that he reminded her of her son.

Rano BOBOJANOVA,
Tajikistan

I'm shouting silently

I DO NOT WANT TO HAVE A DAUGHTER

I do not want to see,
how she repeats my fate

*many women choose to bear
only boys*

My daughter always asks me: has my father ever taken me in his hands, has he loved me just as much? I'm forced to lie, not to offend the little soul. She's just started to form her world outlook, but she already feels the difference between the attitudes towards her and her brother. She heard somewhere the saying: "Pisarem tachi saram, dukhtarem dumi kharam", which is translated approximately as: "My son is a crown on the head, and my daughter is like a tail of a donkey" I'm always trying to convince my daughter, that she is a crown on the head, but she corrects me: "the saying says totally the opposite". The teachers from the nursery say: Rukhshona is like a little boy, she jumps and climbs everything, she is always in bruises and scratches. My daughter complains: why do they not punish Iusro, Jakhongir, Akmal, Ilkhom, but only me? I'm trying to explain, that she can cut herself and, that the teachers take care of her. There was a time, when she did not play with boys, they persuaded her, that this was "Aib" (shame). The word "Aib" defines a girl's or a woman's place in the society, being a norm of control. I persuaded her, that she could play, she could be friends, and there is nothing bad in it. Now, all the friends of my 6 years old daughter are the boys. What will this lead to,

the time will show, but I'm trying to instill in her the feeling of independence.

The traditional society has a lot of its laws. You are not born yet and your role in life has already been determined. Dozens of women, who try to determine the sex of a baby at the early stages of pregnancy, come to Matrluba Khabbibulova, a doctor. She says: " some time ago a woman visited me. She already had four daughters and she was pregnant with twins, girls again. When she was told the sex of the babies, she felt bad. Some women worry so much, that hearing such "verdict", they leave me immediately and go to have abortions". By our statistics, there are 13.2 abortions per 100 births. Between the ages 20-34, there are 62.8% of abortions registered per 1000 women. It's true, that we do not have the stats for the selective abortions (according to the sex), but the specialists are sure, that the number of such abortions is enormous. Discrimination of women starts in the womb of a mother.

Birth of children is naturally a happiness. It brings complications in life only for the mother. It is only she, who gets up at night, at the same time hearing the complaints of her husband: pacify your baby or go to another room in order, that I can sleep normally. Caring and understanding husband, trying to mitigate his wife's problems is a rarity. The child sees who does what in the family and he has his own perceptions. When my husband sometimes makes dinner, Rukhshona says: this is not a man's business, let

mother make it. We look at each other and say: here is your gender!

Traditionally, the girls in Tajikistan, from the very early years, are brought up as future wives and mothers, faithful and diligent housewives, fulfillers of a husband's will and boys - as social leaders, the future earners of livelihood and keepers of the family. Thus we have a "gender distortion". These are the words from the national report on execution of CEDAW. The school books, the environment, traditions, education in the family - all of this serve the interests of the boys. After the 9-th grade, the number of girl pupils drops significantly. According to the official data, 90% of boys and only 75% of girls receive secondary education, but in reality this gap is much bigger than that.

In accordance with the Convention "On Child's Rights", ratified in Tajikistan, all people, who are not 18 years old yet, are considered children. At 18, these children already have their children. My acquaintance, Khamida, who is 35 years old, has born the third son. Her husband wanted a daughter, but she consciously did not want to have daughters. She says: "I do not want her to suffer, just like I have suffered".

This is what Khamida says. What is hidden behind these words, is known only to her.

Oxana POBIBICH,
Kazakhstan

focus-groups

how would we like to see them?

I finished to process the materials of the focus groups, concerning the problem of forming the gender identity, which I conducted last week. The ideas of men and women audiences, concerning the issues of bringing up girls and boys, are interesting. What would the mothers like their daughters to be and what would the fathers like them to be?



Photo by Svetlana Beisova, Kazakhstan

IF A BOY WERE BORN IN YOUR FAMILY, HOW WOULD YOU BRING HIM UP?

Men's opinions:

- If a boy is born, father must bring him up from the very childhood. Father must be an example to take for the boy.
- He may not have education, but a man must have his own opinion, to be able to make firm decisions and achieve the goals. He must not achieve his goals trampling over people's lives, but do everything in accordance with rules and honestly.
- Rationality, intellectual skills.
- Parents want to see their children educated, sportsmanly. They want them to be successful in everything
- The main thing is to give him freedom and choice and the possibility to decide on his own what to do, what kind of person to be.

Women's opinions:

- My son is nice, I don't know yet how to raise him, but I want him to be strong, manly and to be able to earn his livelihood.
- I will teach my son, primarily, to respect women.
- To be responsible, to be a man.
- From the very beginning you must teach the boy to be ambitious, diligent and responsible.

WHAT ABOUT IF YOUR FAMILY HAS A DAUGHTER?

Women's opinions:

- She must be a friend, there should be trustful relationship.
- I will bring her up to be a good woman, housewife, to take good care of her husband. She must raise her children well, she must always keep her house clean, her children must study well.
- She must be beautiful, womanly, caring, clever, sensitive, just.
- My boys are going in for ice hokey and my girl for figure skating, because physically they must be brought up differently. A girl must be dancing, her movements must be light and beautiful and the boys must be strong. I would least of all want my daughter to be subservient, caring, to be just sitting at home and waiting for her husband. It would be more pleasant for me if they did everything together. You must also bring boys up so, for them not to be helpless when faced with chores.

Men's opinions:

- My daughter must be self respecting
- A man develops those qualities in his daughter, which he wants to see in a woman
- I will bring her up a coquette
- The same qualities, as for a son, are necessary: honesty, communicativeness, self-sufficiency, education
- She must be able to do chores. Not less important: she must pay attention to herself, figure, make up, hair-do - but she must not be overdoing this.



photo by Diana Petriashvili, Georgia

apropos

BOYS IN GROZNY ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN GIRLS

In accordance with the experts, trading with children in Chechnia is a profitable business. The families without children, whose number has grown in the republic, buy them with pleasure. Some time ago, the employees of FSB (Federal Security services) detained a group of doctors, who traded with the newly born children. In the words of Iuri Rossinski, the representative of Russian FSB in Chechenian republic, the employees of security services also detained the buyers and now they are trying to find out, how the children got in the hands of the traders. It's been established, that there was a woman gynecologist with a long record of work, practicing in Grozny, among them. She was

arrested while trying to sell a baby. She wanted to sell a baby for \$5 000. They found out later, that the arrested had already figured in another analogical criminal case - which had to do with the selling of a little girl for \$3000. Another group, trading with children, comprising 5 doctors - 3 men and 2 women, was arrested in April in Grozny. According to the experts, trade with children in Chechnia is a very profitable business. Over the recent years, the birth rate in the country fell because of the problems with health of the population. This is why some childless families buy children. "Health of the population really is something to worry about. Two wars, which we survived, could not but have some impact on the physical and psychological health of Chechenians." - they told us in the ministry of health.

The source: "gazeta.ru
http://www.gazeta.ru/2006/05/04/oa_198370.shtml

ENVIRONMENT IS STRONGER THAN ME

I grew up in a family, where they'd never emphasized the fact, that I was a girl and that my younger brother was a boy. We were children and we shared everything. My brother played with dolls (with and without me) and later he was remaking his clothes or tried, with the mother's help, to make new ones. We also used to dig together in the orchard, lay the party tables, clean the irrigation ditches - everything together. I climbed the trees together with the boys, shot from the slingshots, rode the motorbike. My parents never reprimanded me.

Now, in my family, I'm repeating my parents model.

But, where do some things come from?

Sometimes I hear my son saying: "I'm not a girl, am I?" Or else, my daughter saying: "So, you are growing your hair like a girl"

I notice in the behavior of my son some, to put it mildly, deviations from my model of education. If I invite him to drink a cup of tea, he calmly sits down at the table and waits for me to serve him. Naturally, after my reaction, he jumps up and helps me to lay the table, but still

We are brought up by the society, and it remains very patriarchal, with oriental tinge, in Kazakhstan yet. My friend, a teacher with 20 years of experience, is horrified by the thought, that a woman can be equal with a man in the family. She is very calmly accepting the fact, that some things are easily forgiven a man just for the fact, that he is a man and, conversely, are not forgiven a woman, because she is a woman. "We live in the South of Kazakhstan, in the Muslim society, and it is so accepted in our society and it can not be otherwise" she says in all earnest-

ness. The majority of the school teachers live in the accepted world of the stereotypes. They simply do not understand what the talk is all about. These people are teaching our children.

They start dividing us into boys and girls from the middle phase of the secondary school. In the nurseries and the primary school children are socially equal. They jointly build, sew, mold, paste, sweep. With the same passion they help mother in the kitchen and father in the garage. Later, the society starts to divide them into strong-brave boys and the clean-obedient girls.

I am moved to the tears as often the environment turns out to be stronger than me.

Svetlana Beisova, Kazakhstan



A couple of years later, the society will tell them, who can do what and who can't.

photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

Natalia DOMAGALSKAYA,
Kyrgyzstan

the zone

THE NURSERY OF SPECIAL REGIME

Behind the barbed wire, behind the heavy metallic gates and under the vigilant supervision of the wardens, in the women's colony, there are five children aged one and a half months to three years old. These are the kids of the mothers-prisoners, who were born in the prison. Just recently, there had been six of them there, but the sixth - a two years old girl was taken by the relatives. With the mother's consent, naturally.

The stork brings these girls from the outer world. I.e. The staff of the jail can not remember a single case, when a mother's pregnancy had been caused by the visits of the husbands to which the women-prisoners are entitled to. The current mothers had been pregnant already before they'd been indicted and during the court proceedings. They openly told the reporter, that they had no problems concerning the free of charge abortions in the confinement, but they decided to keep the baby purely from the child-loving considerations. Well, maybe, that's the case. But, it's also probable, that the majority decided to bear a child in the hope to mitigate the sentence and future benefits in the colony. For giving birth, they are taken to Chui district maternity home, one of the best in the republic. After giving birth, they lie in a two bed ward: on the bunk, opposite - an escort woman. The reps of the colony meet the mother and the child in the car. Though without a bouquet of flowers, they flaunt the whole assortment of dowry for the newly born - diapers, blankets, hats. All medical services for mothers and children are, naturally, complementary, just like a free of charge dentist once a week for everyone, who needs his services. Some life?

Just recently, mothers permanently lived together with their children in a separately standing building on the territory of the colony, which looked like a run down kindergarten surrounded by shrubs. They lived there, before the kids turned three, later they would be sent to the relatives or the boarding house. Such life, naturally, is more comfortable, than the common barracks for a hundred persons. Mothers were freed from all types of work, but caring for a child, they received additional food package - butter, milk, sugar. Although, all of this was simply swapped for cigarettes, tea or something stronger, than tea. As a result, the rooms smelt of cigarette, children were not taken care of and the criminals, who had fun living, were untouchable: feeding the babies! Now, the rules have changed. The children are supervised by two nurses from among the prisoners, round the clock. Both of them with high education (one of them - medical). Both of them have children in their families outside prison, thus they have experience for taking care of them. Both of them are non-smokers and rather alien to the formalities of the criminal world. They address each other by family names. They are doing all the chores: washing of diapers, preparing dinners, walking the children, taking them to WC, "Ladushki-Ladushki", tale telling in the evening, "show us where is the rabbit on the picture" etc.

The real mothers visit their children once a week strictly in accordance with the timetable, twice a day. The rendezvous are confined to one hour and for the feeding mothers, there is a timetable, agreed with the pediatrician. If the weather is fine they take the babies out into the yard to play in the playpen or on the swings. The kids are digging in the sand among the yellow leaves and the mothers, relishing in the sun, are smoking nearby. Sometimes, for the educational purposes they curse, as the kid is climbing something he is not entitled to or at other times they smack them on the but. In an hour, they will deliver their treasure to the nurse: "Here!" and back to their own territory. I have not seen a single child, who, changing hands from the mother to the nurse, would sob or cry.

Only one newly born girl will leave the jail together with her mother: she won't be three yet, when her mother finishes her sentence. Others will have to serve their sentences for a long time: for fraud, for drug trafficking, for purposeful homicide. The sentences vary - eight, ten, eighteen years. So not only "Ladushki", but the school, maybe even the future weddings of some little girls will go through without their mothers attending.

- I found my husband with his lover, - she says ashamedly, - so I know it's not good, but I could not take it, so I beat them both. My husband had some scratches, and this She brought a note to the militia, that she suffered miscarriage on the third week of the pregnancy. That certificate was not from her district, forfeited probably, but the judge did not think a long time - I was sentenced to five years. I want to go home! I have little children there - a son and a daughter. They lie to them saying, that I left for Almaty to work there and that I would not return soon, they do not want to traumatize them. They just don't understand, why can't I even call. I'm afraid, soon they will start to understand. I miss them so much, but one can not even think about an appointment - nobody wants to bring them here and keep them in the room behind the bars!

- What about the husband?

- He visits me every week, just imagine. He swears, that he loves me and that nothing had happened and that I concocted up everything.



photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

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