

**UNDERSTANDING “NEW SPROUTS OF LIFE” IN  
GIRLS’ EDUCATION: COMPARATIVE AND  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOVIET  
EDUCATION DURING THE 1930S**

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## **Executive Summary**

One way to understand the structural conditions impeding the education of girls and the potential for transformative practices and policies is by examining similar processes in other historical situations. While most of the discussion of the Afghan situation has sought comparisons either with other Muslim societies which have accommodated new opportunities for girls within reformed religious practices or with the poorest regions of Sub-Saharan Africa where systemic poverty combines with cultural practices to exclude girls from basic education, this working paper argues that a broader set of comparisons could bring new insights into the underlying structural as well as immediate policy and practical measures that both exclude and include girls. In particular, this paper suggests that the Soviet Union provides a case study of how a public commitment to educating girls as part of a broader policy of women's equality in fact depended on local practices, involved negotiations and contestations, and ultimately compromised promises of equity for advances in access. This working paper is thus an effort to situate a case study in a broader comparative and transnational framework that can lead to some suggestions about possible interpretations of and responses to the specific conditions of girls' education in the contemporary world.

## **Introduction**

On November 21, 2001, two months after the terrorist attacks on September 11 and just weeks after the United States invasion of Afghanistan that overthrew the Taliban regime, First Lady Laura Bush delivered the Saturday radio address that had been a platform for presidential speeches for more than two decades. During that speech, Laura Bush declared that “the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists,” which included the specific statement that “Only the terrorists and the Taliban forbid education to women.”

After describing the global condemnation of the Taliban’s oppression of women and the determination of the United States coalition to eliminate this regime, First Lady Bush affirmed that Afghan women were “no longer imprisoned in their homes,” as they could now listen to music and “teach their daughters without fear of punishment.” Returning to the primary theme connecting the September 11 attacks to this new commitment to emancipating Afghan women, First Lady Bush concluded: “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”<sup>1</sup>

As First Lady Bush’s comments illustrated, connecting the September 11 attacks to the plight of Afghan women introduced a new justification for the United States led military intervention. The education of Afghan girls quickly emerged as a potent symbol of the potential for dramatic change in human rights, gender roles, and educational opportunity in the months following the Taliban’s overthrow. In the spring of 2002, Laura Bush followed up her speech from the previous fall with this statement: “When we educate children, we give them the ability

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<sup>1</sup> “Radio Address by Laura Bush to the Nation,” November 17, 2001.  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html>, accessed March 22, 2002.

to imagine a future of opportunity, equality, and justice. Education is the single most important long-term investment we can make in the future of any nation.”<sup>2</sup>

At this same time, President George Bush declared that under “the new government of a liberated Afghanistan, educating all children is a national priority.” Echoing the perceptions and prescriptions of gender-equity development discourse, the president then declared:

Education is the pathway to progress, especially for women. Educated women tend to be healthier than those who are not well-educated. And the same is true for their families. Babies born to educated women are more likely to be immunized, better nourished, and survive their first year of life. Educated women encourage their children to be educated, as well. And nations whose women are educated are more competitive, more prosperous, and more advanced than nations where the education of women is forbidden or ignored.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in the intervening years, a resurgence of terrorist acts against teachers and female pupils, increasing restrictions on female mobility, and faltering efforts to enroll and retain girls have called into question the commitment made by American leaders.<sup>4</sup> A 2006 report by Human Rights Watch concluded that the majority of school age girls remained outside of formal education, many rural children still have no access to education at all, and the gains made initially after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 have leveled off and would likely decline in the coming years: “The continuing denial of education to most Afghan children is a human rights

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<sup>2</sup> “Remarks by Mrs. Bush to Back-to-School Project for Afghan Girls,” March 20, 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020320-26.html>, accessed March 2002.

<sup>3</sup> “Radio address by the President to the Nation,” March 16, 2002. Available online, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020316.html>, accessed December 3, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> David Rohde, “Attacks on Schools for Girls Hint at Lingering Split in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times* October 31, 2002, 1; Luke Harding, “Afghan Fundamentalists Raid Girls’ Schools,” *Guardian* November 1, 2002, 15; Zaman Coursen-Neff and John Sifton, “Falling Back to Taliban Ways with Women,” *International Herald Tribune* January 21, 2003, 8; Bay Fang, “School’s Out. Afghan Girls are Losing the Ground They Recently Gained,” *Ms. Magazine* (Fall 2006) online: [www.msomagazine.com](http://www.msomagazine.com), accessed July 27, 2007; Barry Bearak, “As War Enters Classroom, Fear Grips Afghans,” *New York Times* July 10, 2007, 1; “Schoolgirls under Fire,” *New York Times* July 12, 2007, 22.

crisis that should be of serious concern to those who strive to end Afghanistan's savage cycle of violence and war."<sup>5</sup> As the recent reports on violence aimed at schoolgirls and female teachers clearly indicate, the process of achieving gender equity through education remains a long-term project in Afghanistan.

The focus on Afghan girls' education has concentrated global attention on the gendering of educational access, opportunity, and achievement by recognizing that girls were explicitly and systematically denied schooling.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, by attributing this oppression to a single regime, by associating this repression with a particular form of Islamist politics, and by linking these actions to terrorists, this rhetorical strategy, with the associated policy implications, have

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<sup>5</sup> Zama Coursen-Naft and Sam Zarifi, "Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch*, 18, No. 6 (July 2006), 7.

<sup>6</sup> This case study draws primarily on the following reports on education in Afghanistan over the last twenty plus years: Craig Whitney, "In Soviet Asia, Afghan Thrust Finds Acceptance," *The New York Times* April 11, 1980, A2; Niloufar Pourzand, "The Problematic of Female Education, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Afghanistan (1920-1999)," *Social Analysis*, 43, No. 1 (March 1999), 78-81; "Afghanistan's Taliban Closes Schools for Girls," *Associated Press Report*, June 17, 1998; Kate Clark, "Afghanistan's Bleak Education Record," *BBC News* April 27, 2000 [online.news.bbc.co.uk](http://online.news.bbc.co.uk), accessed March 22, 2002; Karen Mazurkewich, "Bringing Hope—and Homework—to the Girls," *Time*, 156, No. 1 (May 29, 2000); U. S. Department of State, "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women," November 17, 2001, [online www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov), accessed November 21, 2001; Hafizullah Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan* (Westport, 2002), 72-79; Bellamy, ed., *State of the World's Children*, 73-75; Peter Baker, "Teaching Boys—and Girls—Another Notion of Jihad," *Washington Post* October 2, 2001; Judy Mann, "Helping Women is Essential to Rebuilding Afghanistan," *Washington Post* November 23, 2001; Richard Lacayo, "About Face: An Inside Look at How Women Fared Under Taliban Oppression and What the Future Holds for Them Now," *Time* December 3, 2001, 36; Pamela Constable, "Afghan Pupils Thrilled to Go Back to School," *Washington Post* March 4, 2002, 16; Susan Dominus, "Shabana is Late for School," *New York Times Magazine* September 29, 2002; Oxfam International, *Free, Quality Education for Every Afghan Child* Briefing Paper No. 93, (November 2006) available [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org), accessed December 1, 2006; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, 2000), 105-114; Hayat Alvi, "Reconstruction in post-Taliban Afghanistan: Women and Education," *Resources for Feminist Research* Vol. 30, No. 3/4 (2003), 13 pp.; "In Afghanistan, Out of Conflict and Into School," *World Bank*, November 11, 2004, available online: [web.worldbank.org](http://web.worldbank.org), accessed December 6, 2006; Pamela Hunte, "Looking Beyond the School Walls: Household Decision-Making and School Enrolment in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit Briefing Paper* (March 2006), available online: [www.aeru.org.af](http://www.aeru.org.af), accessed August 23, 2006.

also diverted attention from underlying factors limiting girls' education such as poverty, domestic violence, and structural impediments.

In fact, the dire situation of girls' education in Afghanistan had been the object of global attention long before the September 11 attacks brought this issue to the direct concern of American policy-makers and public opinion. More generally, those involved in development projects, including major aid agencies, non-governmental organizations, women's rights groups, and others had consistently situated the denial of education to Afghan girls as more systematic patterns of gender discrimination.

One way to understand the structural conditions impeding the education of girls and the potential for transformative practices and policies is by examining similar processes in other historical situations. While most of the discussion of the Afghan situation has sought comparisons either with other Muslim societies which have accommodated new opportunities for girls within reformed religious practices or with the poorest regions of Sub-Saharan Africa where systemic poverty combines with cultural practices to exclude girls from basic education, this working paper argues that a broader set of comparisons could bring new insights into the underlying structural as well as immediate policy and practical measures that both exclude and include girls. In particular, this paper suggests that the Soviet Union provides a case study of how a public commitment to educating girls as part of a broader policy of women's equality in fact depended on local practices, involved negotiations and contestations, and ultimately compromised promises of equity for advances in access. This working paper is thus an effort to situate a case study in a broader comparative and transnational framework that can lead to some

suggestions about possible interpretations of and responses to the specific conditions of girls' education in the contemporary world.

Girls' education has been widely recognized as a key to economic, social, and political transformations. In the words of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls and the empowerment of women."<sup>7</sup> Limited schooling for girls contributes to a series of other problems, including domestic violence, rapid population growth, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, all of which further cycles of poverty and dependency.

By contrast, improving girls' education in terms of overall enrollment, length of study, and learning outcomes contributes to processes that empower women, strengthen communities, improve public health, and break this same cycle of subordination.<sup>8</sup> As argued by Annan, educating girls causes "a deep social revolution that will give more power to women, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society."<sup>9</sup> This rhetoric has been echoed by non-governmental development organizations, as well as by the United States

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<sup>7</sup> Kofi Annan, "Speech to International Women's Health Coalition," January 16, 2004. Available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sgsm9118.doc.htm>. Accessed March 28, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Bellamy, ed., *The State of the World's Children 2004. Girls, Education, and Development* (New York: UNICEF, 2003); The EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, *Education for All. Is the World on Track?* (Paris, 2002); Gene B. Sperling, "The Case for Universal Basic Education for the World's Poorest Boys and Girls," *Phi Delta Kappan* November 2005), 213-216; Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling, *What Works in Girls' Education. Evidence and Policies from the Developing World* (Washington, D.C. 2004); Martha C. Nussbaum, "Women's Education: A Global Challenge," *Signs* 29, No. 2 (2003) 325-355; "Girls' Education: A World Bank Priority," Overview statement from the World Bank, October 2007, available online [web.worldbank.org](http://web.worldbank.org), accessed December 2, 2007; Jackie Kirk, "Learning for Peace and Equality? Gender and Education in Contexts of Crisis, Post-Crisis, and State Fragility," paper available from [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org) website, accessed December 3, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Annan, "Speech to International Women's Health Coalition." Reflecting the increased attention to education and women since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the United States Department of State recently declared that "educating women is not an option; it is a necessity." United States Department of State, *Working for Women Worldwide. The U.S. Commitment* (Washington, D.C., 2005), 5.



government, where the intersection of gender and education has been recognized as essential to combating factors breeding extremism and terrorism.

### **Girls' Education in the Soviet Union in the 1930s: A Comparative Perspective**

The title of this paper comes from a report submitted in 1936 by Soviet school inspector Konstantin L'vov, who described girls entering schools for the first time across the Caucasus and Central Asia as “new sprouts of life (*novye rostki zhizn*).”<sup>10</sup> This description is suggestive of how the process of educating girls depends on consistent and persistent cultivation, but ultimately can result in substantive change. A similar set of perception reappears in recent reports on girls' schooling in other contexts. These “new sprouts of life” are comparable to the “pockets of success” in contemporary efforts to educate girls, as summarized by this statement: “Success is taking examples like these and multiplying them a thousand-fold.”<sup>11</sup> The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative makes a similar case for “scaling up” the best practices for enrolling and educating girls. Rather than a simple mathematical progress, scaling up “requires rigorous learning about the conditions that facilitated success, strategies for dealing with the multiple constraints that emerge in the course of programme or policy implementation, and the

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<sup>10</sup> K. I. L'vov, “Okhvat sholami devochek razlichnykh natsional'nostei v Tajikistane, Kazakhstane, Kirgizstane, i v Checheno-Ingushskoi avtonomnoi oblasti.” (August 1936). This dissertation is preserved in the Scientific Archive of the Russian Academy of Education, and will be cited by archive location: Nauchnyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Obrazovaniia (abbreviated NA RAO) f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 296-297.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Dervarics, “Tiny Successes in Bid to Close Male-Female Gap in Schooling Worldwide,” *Population Reference Bureau*, March 2004.

management of economic and social uncertainties that may disrupt the everyday schooling participation of girls.”<sup>12</sup>

As these descriptions, images, and metaphors suggest, the significance of girls’ education lies not in the sudden breakthroughs (of the kind proclaimed by Soviet planners when they launched the universal education campaign in 1930 or, in a different context, by American policy-makers during the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001) but rather in incremental, persistent, and substantial investments in the structures, practices, and attitudes that result in long-term changes. By focusing on one historical situation where such changes did occur, although not to the extent policy-makers proclaimed and certainly not without significant political compromises and social complications, this working paper suggests directions for future action that might sustain these “new sprouts of life” in other contexts.

Drawing on the research completed for a case-study of the Soviet 1930s,<sup>13</sup> this working paper explores historical analogies as a way to understand related processes in the contemporary world.<sup>14</sup> This research is thus built around a series of intersecting questions that call attention to the relations between policies and practices, structures and agency, and causes and effects. Why was increasing the enrollment of girls defined as a policy objective? To what extent did the schooling of girls become a site for struggles between hierarchies of power and local communities? How did girls’ experiences shape the meanings of education, and what do these

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, “*Scaling Up*” *Good Practices in Girls’ Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), 9.

<sup>13</sup> This manuscript, “Not One Girl Outside the School! Educating ‘Non-Russian’ Girls in the Soviet Union in the 1930s,” is currently under review for publication.

<sup>14</sup> This approach follows assertions that “what historians do best is to make connections with the past in order to illuminate the problems of the present and the potential of the future.” Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994), 9.

meanings reveal about agency in times of transformation? Exploring archival and published materials, drawing on recent historiographical scholarship, and connected to contemporary policy debates, this research reveals that understanding the girls' school experiences in a specific historical context can suggest ways to think creatively and critically about girls' education in a contemporary global context.

The education of Soviet girls stands at a historical point of convergence between the emancipatory promises of socialist ideology, the political power of Stalinist mobilization, and the complex structures of dictatorship. Following new approaches to understanding "everyday life" in the Stalinist 1930s, this research examines "non-Russian" girls, who were triply marginalized by age, gender, and ethnicity, to explore questions of agency, power, and structure.<sup>15</sup> While

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<sup>15</sup> While "non-Russian" schools included a great diversity of nationalities, this article focuses on regions, such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far North, where the education of girls emerged as a significant political issue. The terms "non-Russian school" (*nerusskaia shkola*) and "nationality education" (*prosveshchenie natsional'nosti*), as used in Soviet discourse, both reflected and asserted an essential division in society. The formal distinction involved language of instruction: "Russian" schools taught in Russian, "non-Russian" schools taught in more than seventy different "native" languages. "Non-Russian" schools were primarily located in the Soviet Socialist Republics of Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turmenistan, and Kirghizia, as well as in many autonomous national regions contained within the above republics and also within the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic. But Russian schools could also be found in all these regions, just as "non-Russian" schools could be found outside of autonomous republics and regions. See discussion in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, 2003), 160-164, 405-409; Peter Blitstein, "Nation-Building or Russification? Obligatory Russian Instruction in the Soviet Non-Russian School, 1938-1953," in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations. Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 253-274; Peter A. Blitstein, "Stalin's Nations: Soviet Nationality Policy between Planning and Primordialism, 1936-1953," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999); E. Thomas Ewing, "Ethnicity at School: "Non-Russian" Education in the Soviet Union in the 1930s," *History of Education*, 35, No. 4-5 (July September 2006), 499-519. The legacies of Jadidism and the Il'minskii system in the Tsarist Empire also need to be considered in evaluating Soviet claims to bring transformation through education. Robert Geraci, "The Il'minskii System and the Controversy over Non-Russian Teachers and Priests in the Middle Volga," in Catherine Evtukhov, Boris Gasparov, Alexander Ospovat, and Mark von Hagen, eds., *Kazan, Moscow, St. Petersburg. Multiple Faces of the Russian Empire* (Moscow, 1997); Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire. The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917* (Montreal, 2001); Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998).

recognizing the significant constraints imposed by the communist state, by parental authority, and by difficult living conditions, this study argues that greater attention to girls' perceptions, intentions, and actions can further understanding of Stalinism in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup>

This research draws upon, but also contributes to, new research on the intersections of gender and nationality in scholarship on Stalinism in the 1930s. For an earlier generation of scholars, women's liberation and national integration testify to the failed possibilities of Stalinism, as the emancipatory and egalitarian promises of the revolution yielded to ideological determination, pragmatic manipulation, and political repression.<sup>17</sup>

Recent research and approaches have transformed interpretations of Stalinism. Historians informed by gender analysis explore options available to women, the complex meanings of femininity, and the significance of everyday practices.<sup>18</sup> New scholarship on nationality

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<sup>16</sup> For "everyday life" in the Stalinist 1930s, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Everyday Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995); David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, 2003); Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life. A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven, 2000); Larry Holmes, *Stalin's School. Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh, 1999); E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism. Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York, 2002); Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, eds., *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia. Taking the Revolution Inside* (Bloomington, 2006); Lynne Viola, ed., *Contending with Stalinism. Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca, 2002); Jeffrey J. Rossman, *Worker Resistance under Stalin. Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Cambridge, 2005); Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire. Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> For Soviet women's history as an unrealized promise of emancipation, see Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia* (Princeton, 1978). A more explicitly developmental perspective is provided in Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society. Equality, Development and Social Change* (Berkeley, 1978). The classic account of how Soviet policies betrayed national self-determination is Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge, 1964).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade. Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, 1997); Choi Chatterjee, "Soviet Heroines and the Language of Modernity, 1930-1939," in *Women in the Stalin Era*, ed. Melanie Ilić (London, 2001), 49-68; Wendy Z. Goldman,

examines uneven processes of change, categories such as empire, state, and nation, and the construction of complex identities.<sup>19</sup> Rather than a fragmented history, this emerging interpretation of Stalinism is more integrated and compelling precisely because it recognizes the variety and complexity of lived experiences in a dictatorship.<sup>20</sup> By focusing on girls in school,

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*Women, the State, and Revolution. Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993); idem, *Women at the Gates. Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, 2002); Rebecca Balmas Neary, "Mothering Socialist Society: The Wife-Activists' Movement and the Soviet Culture of Daily Life, 1934-41," *Russian Review* 58 (July 1999), 396-412; David L. Hoffmann, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History*, 34, No. 1 (2000), 35-54; Thomas G. Schrand, "Soviet 'Civic-Minded' Women in the 1930s: Gender, Class, and Industrialization in a Socialist Society," *Journal of Women's History*, 11, No. 3 (1999), 126-150; E. Thomas Ewing, "Personal Acts with Public Meanings: Suicide by Soviet Women Teachers in the Stalin Era," *Gender & History*, 14, No. 1 (April 2002), 117-137; Amy E. Randall, "Revolutionary Bolshevik Work: Stakhanovism in Retail Trade," *Russian Review*, 59, No. 3 (July 2000), 425-441; idem, "Legitimizing Soviet Trade: Gender and the Feminization of the Retail Workforce in the Soviet 1930s," *Journal of Social History*, 27, No. 4 (2004), 965-990.

<sup>19</sup> The more influential studies include Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past. Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993); Yuri Slezkine, "The U.S.S.R. as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review*, 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 414-452; idem, "From Savages to Citizens: The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928-1938," *Slavic Review*, 51, No. 1 (Spring 1992), 52-76; Francine Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," *Russian Review*, 59 (April 2000), 201-226; and the contributions in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations. Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> These trajectories have converged in remarkably productive ways in scholarship on Stalinist Central Asia. More than three decades ago, Gregory Massell identified Muslim women as a "surrogate proletariat" that communist leaders expected would transform "backward" regions. Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat. Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton, 1974). Building upon, but also revising significantly, this paradigm, new scholars of Central Asian history examine the extreme power and significant limits of Stalinism, while also restoring agency to women engaged in complex processes of self-assertion, creative adaptation, and simple survival. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, 139-141, 280, 299-300. Questions of gender and power in Central Asia are central to Douglas Northrop's study of the "veiled empire," which focuses on how "women's emancipation ultimately came in many ways to exemplify the entire Bolshevik revolution." Exploring the "profound yet contradictory meanings of Soviet power," Northrop argues that the colonial encounter between Communist authorities and Central Asian subjects was "an ongoing interplay between these two interwoven and mutually shaping sides," with the result that Soviet policy "ultimately was produced by

this project draws on this new scholarship to further understanding of Stalinism through an examination of specific interactions and structures that transcend geographical and ethnic boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

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an ongoing process of debate and negotiation, both within the party and in response to outside events.” Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 7-9, 12-13, 25, 282-283, 311. Marianne Kamp focuses on “the personal and political significance” of actions, such as ceremonial rituals of unveiling or recruitment as state activists, for the women who actively participated in Soviet transformations. Drawing heavily on first-hand accounts by Uzbek women allows Kamp to focus on the “expression of agency within the constraints of time, history, politics, and genre.” Marianne Kamp, “Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2002), 264-278; idem, “Three Lives of Saodat: Communist, Uzbek, Survivor,” *Oral History Review*, 28, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 2001), 2-58. Shoshana Keller examines the campaign against Islam as a case-study of how Soviet rule failed to create a stable order, even as Communist officials constructed a “monolithic” image that had no space for “nuance, complexity, and the plain messiness of life.” Anti-religious campaigns, efforts to liberate women, and violent resistance left women in a “vicious bind,” vulnerable to retaliation either by Central Asian men or Soviet authorities. Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca. The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, 2001), xvii, 64, 102-103, 116, 139, 206, 235, 244. Adrienne Lynn Edgar situates the formation of Turkmenistan in the context of Soviet efforts to transform a “tribal” population into a cohesive nation, in part through symbolic and practical changes in women’s lives. In a recent article, Edgar compares Soviet strategies to “emancipate” women with similar patterns in other “Middle Eastern” countries. Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation. The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, 2004), 221-260; idem, “Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet “Emancipation” of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective,” *Slavic Review*, 65, No. 2 (Summer 2006), 252-272.

<sup>21</sup> Education figures in all these studies, although with more limited materials and narrower interpretations than in this case study of “non-Russian” girls’ schooling. Massell includes efforts to increase women’s educational opportunities as one of the “tasks of female mobilization” that supported the instrumental objective of “revolutionizing Moslem societies.” Massell also refers to “widespread withdrawal of Moslem children, especially girls, from Soviet schools” as an example of the “massive backlash” in the late 1920s. Finally, Massell argues that the lack of official support for girls’ schooling “aggravated what was already a volatile situation, wherein Moslem parents were inclined to withdraw their children (especially girls) from school, or to forbid their attendance in the first place.” Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, 139-141, 280, 299-300. Edgar recognizes that Soviet authorities believed that educating girls would indoctrinate the young generation with new ideas about women’s emancipation, and she contrasts this ambition with the slow pace of school enrollment, attributed to parents’ reluctance to “expose their daughters to Soviet values.” See also the recruitment of Turkmen women for higher education as an example of “the uniquely ambitious and the uniquely problematic nature of Soviet nationality policy.” Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 70-71, 227, 231-232. Kamp begins one of her studies with Benedict Anderson’s important insights into the place of colonial education systems in shaping identities, and she also refers to girls’ schooling as part of the broader transformation of Central Asia. Kamp, “Pilgrimage,” 263-264, 270, 272-273. For a fascinating first-hand account of how one Uzbek woman associated her own education with a process of liberation, see Kamp, “Three Lives,” 26-31, 45-48. Keller also identifies education as a place for conflict between Soviet authorities, who promoted secular schooling to undermine Islam, and the indigenous population, who responded to girls’ enrollment with “violent opposition” and “fierce”

This research on the Stalinist 1930s has certain methodological challenges, some of which are common to historical analysis and others of which are unique to the Soviet context. Unlike contemporary policy analysis of girls' schooling around the world, this historical research cannot interview participants in the field, cannot observe classroom practices, and cannot select the matrices of schooling that are most revealing of processes of change. Instead, this research must accept the first-hand accounts produced by Soviet educational discourse, interpret a limited number of descriptions of classrooms by pupils, teachers, and inspectors, and evaluate the limited and possibly compromised statistical data released by the Soviet government.

In each case, the specific conditions of Stalinism exacerbated the disciplinary characteristics of historical analysis because of the official monopoly on public discourse. While archival and published sources often include vivid anecdotes, these stories are usually told from an "official" point of view, and the lack of corroborating evidence makes it difficult to verify or contextualize these accounts. Sources thus must be read carefully, "against the grain" of their ideological pre-determination.<sup>22</sup> By focusing on specific actions and actors within a common context, this approach restores an element of agency to the history of Soviet nationalities in the Stalinist era.<sup>23</sup>

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resistance. Keller, *To Moscow*, 39-40, 74, 89, 95-96, 124, 209-210, 234. Northrop discusses Soviet presumptions that teachers would be allies of the unveiling campaign, although he provides contrary examples of a male teacher who beat his wife after she unveiled, a female teacher who closed her school and revealed, and a petition submitted by twenty unveiled women teachers. Northrop also includes examples of attacks on schools, pupils, and teachers as evidence of anti-Soviet resistance. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 109, 111, 114-115, 182, 195-196, 322, 329, 332.

<sup>22</sup> Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 86-87. For the challenge of restoring agency and voice to a subordinated minority in American educational history, see Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught. African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Massell's view of Central Asian women solely as "conduits" of Soviet power, new scholarship explores their complex roles as historical agents. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, 134-135,

Comparative scholarship on gender and education provides further insights into this historical case-study. Many imperialist projects included educational strategies intended to “elevate” colonized peoples.<sup>24</sup> Illustrating the centrality of gender relations in colonial structures, imperial authorities often perceived the education of girls as a promising way to undermine traditional customs and established elites. In her study of colonial power in Rhodesia, for example, Carol Summers examines how European authorities associated the schooling of girls with objectives ranging from economic development to family stability to more compliant domestic service; anticipating the analysis in this case-study, she concludes that the “rhetoric of social engineering was more prominent than the results.”<sup>25</sup>

In the United States, missionary schools which removed Native American girls as a strategy to transform indigenous culture often failed to provide the formal education for a “white” world while simultaneously depriving individuals of the informal instruction, particularly that offered by mothers, essential for the “native” world.<sup>26</sup> This comparative

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145-148, 172-180, 260-266, 283-284, 327-329; Kamp, “Pilgrimage,” 264-278; “Three Lives of Saodat,” 2-58; Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 88-97, 106-128, 182-196, 228-229; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 98-101, 164-165, 187-196, 210-242.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, schools never fulfilled the mission presumed by imperial authorities, as indicated by the ways that colonial schools became incubators for nationalist independence movements and training grounds for post-colonial statesmen. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 1983), 120-122.

<sup>25</sup> Carol Summers, “‘If you can educate the Native woman...’: Debates Over the Schooling and Education of Girls and Women in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1934,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 36, No. 4 (Winter 1996), 449-471. British schools in India combined the Victorian ideology of separate spheres with colonial assumptions about women’s cultural degeneracy. David Savage, “Missionaries and the Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India,” *Gender & History*, 9, No. 2 (August 1997), 201-221.

<sup>26</sup> Carol Devens, “‘If We Get the Girls, We Get the Race’: Missionary Education of Native American Girls,” *Journal of World History*, 3, No. 2 (1992), 219-237. Moravian schools for Native American children also brought a hegemonic ideological agenda into conflict with the traditional upbringing of



approach calls attention to the instrumental approaches adopted by state powers, the meanings of female identity within indigenous communities, and the ways girls were positioned and positioned themselves in the broader relationship between colonizer and colonized.<sup>27</sup>

This working paper also draws on gender analysis of schooling that questions the teleological assumption that increases in girls' enrollment necessarily lead to women's equality.<sup>28</sup> Recognizing how this research has contributed to policy-making in a global context, this article argues that similar lessons can be derived from historical analysis of comparable processes.<sup>29</sup> Feminist scholarship also underscores the importance of recognizing girls' agency in shaping and defining patterns of change.

While acknowledging the durable power of political structures, cultural norms, social institutions, and family relations, historians are also asking how girls perceived these constraints, responded to specific situations, and pursued distinct strategies.<sup>30</sup> Decisions about enrollment and attendance were often beyond the control of individual girls, whose actions and intentions were

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indigenous communities. Amy C. Schutt, "'What Will Become of Our Young People?' Goals for Indian Children in Moravian Missions," *History of Education Quarterly*, 38, No. 3 (1998), 268-286.

<sup>27</sup> For a thoughtful comparison of British and French colonial policies, modernizing states such as Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, and Stalinist patterns in the Soviet Union, see Edgar, "Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation."

<sup>28</sup> In the early 1990s, scholars and activists described how schools were reinforcing, perpetuating, and validating gender differences, and thus "shortchanging" girls, to the detriment of their social identity, intellectual development, and professional achievement. American Association of University Women, *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (Washington, 1992); Myra Sadker and David Sadker, *Failing at Fairness. How Our Schools Shortchange Girls* (New York, 1994); Peggy Orenstein, *SchoolGirls. Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (New York, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> See the UNESCO appeal for "gender-oriented initiatives" and "gender-fair measures" in *Education for All*, 78-79. See also the call for "gender equality in education" in UNESCO, *Scaling up*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> See Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Soland, and Christina Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills. Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Bloomington, 2005).

thus constrained by more powerful actors and structural conditions.<sup>31</sup> But girls also participated in these decisions, and more importantly, their experiences shaped the significance of Stalinist education.<sup>32</sup> Asking how Soviet girls “made” their own history in the context of repressive dictatorship calls attention to the meanings of historical change.<sup>33</sup>

The numerical transformation of Soviet schools was quite striking: between 1914 and 1939, Russian and then Soviet enrollment in elementary and secondary schools expanded from less than eight million to more than thirty million pupils.<sup>34</sup> The schooling of female and national pupils were two key elements of the universal education campaign that began in 1930, which was intended to increase the supply of trained workers and professionals, prepare underrepresented groups for political service, and eliminate “backwardness” across social levels.<sup>35</sup> Whereas in the 1920s girls made up less than 40% of Soviet enrollment, by the end of

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<sup>31</sup> For careful analysis of decisions about girls’ enrollment and attendance, see Hunte, “Looking Beyond the School Walls.”

<sup>32</sup> For an approach that “features girls as subjects rather than objects, as agents rather than as symbols,” see Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls. The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven, 2002), 3. For thoughtful consideration of how Native American girls experienced and perceived their education in white schools, see Devens, “Missionary Education,” 227-237.

<sup>33</sup> This approach thus draws productively on the principle that girls, like the universal “men” in Karl Marx’s formulation, “make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, first published 1852 (New York, 1963), 15.

<sup>34</sup> The Soviet campaign for mass schooling is discussed in terms of government policies, community responses, and especially the role of schoolteachers (but not the significance of nationality) in Ewing, *Teachers of Stalinism*, 53-82.

<sup>35</sup> Although Soviet law mandated coeducation, in fact the proportion of girls increased slowly after 1917. For Soviet coeducation, see “Iz programmy RKP(b). Priniata na VIII s’ezda RKP(b),” (March 18-23, 1919) *Narodnoe obrazovanie v SSSR. Obshcheobrazovatel’naia shkola. Sbornik dokumentov 1917-1973 gg.* (Moscow, 1973), 18-19; “Desiat’ let sovместnogo obucheniia,” *Uchitel’skaia gazeta* June 22, 1928, 4; A. Gorchakov and M. Komarov, “Sovместnoe obuchenie,” *Shkola i zhizn’* [Nizhnii Novgorod] No. 10 (1927), 43-47; NA RAO f. 9, op. 1, d. 50, l. 564; Larry Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*.

the 1930s, girls made up 48% of school pupils, and total enrollment increased to fifteen million.<sup>36</sup> Similarly dramatic expansions occurred in “non-Russian” regions, including predominantly Islamic republics, where enrollment exceeded five million pupils by 1939.<sup>37</sup>

Situated at the intersection of gender and nationality, “non-Russian” schoolgirls acquired both practical and symbolic significance that contrasted sharply with their previously marginal positions. Before 1914, girls made up just 12% of pupils in national minority schools.<sup>38</sup> While Soviet officials denounced traditions that forced Eastern women to “live in darkness,”<sup>39</sup> these disparities persisted after the revolution. On the eve of the Stalinist “great break,” the proportion

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*Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931* (Indianapolis, 1991), 99, 134; Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 138-141; John Dunstan, “Coeducation and Revolution: Responses to Mixed Schooling in Early Twentieth Century Russia,” *History of Education*, 26, No. 4 (1997), 375-393; E. Thomas Ewing, “Gender Equity as Revolutionary Strategy: Coeducation in Russian and Soviet Schools,” in idem, ed., *Revolution and Pedagogy. Interdisciplinary and Transnational Perspectives on Educational Foundations* (New York, 2005), 39-60.

<sup>36</sup> *Zhenshchina v SSSR*, 20, 107-108; *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo v SSSR* (Moscow, 1940), 246; Norton T. Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy* (Baltimore, 1966), 106.

<sup>37</sup> Elementary and secondary enrollment in the republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kirgizistan, Bashkiria, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Osetia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Tatarstan accounted for approximately 17% of Soviet pupils. *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo v SSSR*, 246-248.

<sup>38</sup> In the Tsarist era, ethnic and religious minorities were educated in “Russian-native schools” (*russko-tuzemnye shkoly*) and “other people’s” schools (“*inorodcheskie shkoly*). For girls’ education in this earlier era, See Dowler, *Classroom and Empire*, 94-97.

<sup>39</sup> NA RAO f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, l. 33; Rein, “Natsraiony,” 3; Kozhukhov, “Mobilizovat’ sily,” 3; “U nas i u nikh,” 5; GARF f. 5462, op. 12, d. 203, l. 9; *Zhenshchina v SSSR*, 20; Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, 98; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 11-12, 60-63. Of course, these figures exclude girls educated in religious schools, which continued to exist under increasing pressure from Communist authorities. For “underground Arab” schools in Caucasus villages, see L. Lebedev, “Adat budet pobezhden,” *Za kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie* December 15, 1930, 3. See also Marianne Kamp, *New Uzbek Woman* (Seattle, forthcoming 2006).

of girls enrolled in Soviet schools was approximately 30% in Azerbaijan, Kirgizistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, 26% in Uzbekistan, and less than 10% in Tajikistan.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1930s, however, the “greatest advances” in girls’ enrollment were in national minority regions. In Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan, girls’ enrollment more than quintupled, from less than 100,000 in 1927 to more than 500,000 in 1935, while the proportion of girls increased from 27% to 41%. Within the Russian Republic, “steady increases” occurred in regions with significant Muslim populations: from 23,000 to 71,000 girls in the Chuvash republic, from less than 10,000 to 55,000 girls in Dagestan, and from 68,000 to over 203,000 girls in the Bashkir republic.<sup>41</sup> In the Chechen region, officials claimed that the number of female pupils increased from less than 1,000 to more than 50,000 during the same period.<sup>42</sup> Both

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<sup>40</sup> In addition to this regional distribution, there were also differences within regions based on location and ethnicity. Girls’ enrollment tended to be lower in villages than in cities. In Uzbekistan, for example, girls made up less than 15% of total enrollment and only 5% of rural enrollment in 1926. NA RAO f. 9, op. 1, d. 50, l. 14. Girls from “local minorities” also enrolled at lower rates than so-called “European” girls. In Kazakhstan, the percent of girls among Russian pupils increased to 35% in 1927, yet the percent of girls among Kazakh pupils was just 12%. GARF f. 5462, op. 10, d. 138, l. 4; “Doklad Narkomprosa KA.S.S.R. v komissiiu po uluchsheniiu truda i byta zhenshchin pri KazTsIK o meropriatiiakh po razvitiuu zhenskogo obrazovaniia,” No. 134, in *Kul’turnoe stroitel’stvo v Kazakhstane (1918-1932 gg.). Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 1 (Alma-Ata, 1965), 196-198. In Uzbekistan, Russian girls made up 51% of pupils in cities and 46% in villages, while Uzbek girls made up just 24% in cities and 11% in villages. Kozhukhov, “Mobilizovat’ sily,” 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Zhenshchina v SSSR*, 20, 107-108.

<sup>42</sup> In Uzbekistan, Russian girls made up 51% of pupils in cities and 46% in villages, while Uzbek girls made up just 24% in cities and 11% in villages. GARF f. 2306, op. 70, d. 2452, l. 63; d. 2527, l. 50; d. 2667, l. 2; NA RAO f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, l. 156; K. I. L’vov, “Rovesnitsy Oktiabria,” *Prosveshchenie natsional’nostei* No. 5 (1933), 45; “O sostoianii narodnogo obrazovaniia v Ingushskoi A.O.,” *Kul’turnoe stroitel’stvo v Checheno-Ingushetii (1920-iun’ 1941 g.) Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Grozny, 1979) No. 79, 233; “Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia vyvela gorianky iz temnota i ugneteniiia,” (May 1930) in *Velikii Oktiabr’ i raskreposhchenie zhenshchin Severnogo Kavkaza i Zakavkaz’ia 1917-1936 gg.* (Moscow, 1979) No. 174, 308; GARF f. 296, op. 1, d. 467, l. 37.

Western and Soviet scholars have recognized this educational expansion as marking a significant change in communist women's status.<sup>43</sup>

This transformation in the schooling of “non-Russian” girls occurred in the context of the Stalinist “revolution from above.” The collectivization of agriculture was particularly violent in national minority regions, as the expropriation of livestock and forced resettlement of nomadic tribes disrupted economic production and population distribution. Dekulakization also brought deadly results, as family, tribal, and religious authorities were punished as “anti-Soviet” elements. A mass campaign against Islam included repression of mullahs, destruction of mosques, and vitriolic propaganda.

Most visibly, the aggressive effort to eliminate women's veiling provoked violent opposition, including the murder of thousands of activist women. Millions died in national minority regions as a result of government campaigns, popular resistance, devastating famines, forced migrations, and other turmoil.<sup>44</sup> While these processes were specific to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the challenges of building education and in particular recruiting and retaining girls in times of economic change, political turmoil, and ideological strife are familiar patterns to proponents of girls' schooling in other contexts.

One of the striking features of the Stalinist “revolution from above” was the language of militant transformation. This language was echoed in calls for the “struggle (*bor'ba*) for the schooling of the girl” which was in turn described as “a powerful weapon on the front for the

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<sup>43</sup> Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 139-140; V. Bil'shai, *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR* (Moscow, 1956), 126.

<sup>44</sup> For the Stalinist “revolution from above” in national regions, see Kamp, “Pilgrimage,” 264; idem, “Three Lives,” 2-58; Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 197-260; Keller, *To Moscow*, 141-255; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 13-14, 24-31, 164-208, 314-343.

struggle for women's emancipation."<sup>45</sup> In practice, however, strategies to expand girls' schooling undercut this confrontational discourse with more conciliatory approaches. Many Communist and educational organizations launched "mass campaigns" with the goal of "changing public opinion."<sup>46</sup> Under the headline, "Not One Girl Outside the School," the educational newspaper blamed the 15% enrollment of girls in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kirgizistan on "religious survivals" and "class enemies."

Despite this accusatory language, the recommended approach involved practical measures and "explanatory work" designed to increase acceptance of a new generation of equal, liberated, and educated women.<sup>47</sup> In 1934, the Communist Party Central Asian Bureau secretary declared that the education of girls was a "deficiency" and thus "one of our most important tasks," yet he also stated that only in the "most stagnant" regions was it "necessary to tear the girl from the home, so that she goes to school." Instead of this confrontational approach, he called for more measured steps that would advance the enrollment of girls.<sup>48</sup> In 1937, Gaigisiz Atabaev, the leader of the Turkmen government (and a former teacher), compared the failure of

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<sup>45</sup> Kozhukhov, "Mobilizovat' sily," 3; Rein, "Natsraiony," 3; NA RAO f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 20-21, 26, 96-97.

<sup>46</sup> L'vov, "Rovesnitsy Oktiabria," 44; "Udarnyi mesiachnik podgotovki k uchebnomu godu," *Bakinskii rabochii* August 20, 1931, 1; M. Mamedov, "Plan po vseobuchu vpolnen na 100.7 prots.," *Bakinskii rabochii* August 31, 1931, 1; P. S. Miloslavskii, "Natsional'nuiu shkolu Severnogo Kavkaza—na uroven' peredovykh shkol stran," *Severo-Kavkazskii uchitel'* No. 10 (October 1935), 8.

<sup>47</sup> L. Shnaider, "Ni odnoi devochki za bortom shkoly," *Za kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie* March 8, 1932, 3.

<sup>48</sup> This transcript is located in the former Central Communist Party Archive, now the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii (abbreviated RGASPI) f. 62, op. 2, d. 3366, l. 145.

coercion with the promise of persuasion: “One can’t just have a punitive policy; the fundamental thing is to induce Turkmen women to study.”<sup>49</sup>

Only rarely was even the threat of coercion invoked, as in this hypothetical statement from a district educational department: “If they would kick all the kulaks out of the village, then the girls would begin to go to school.”<sup>50</sup> A Russian who had been an activist in Central Asia conceded the moderation of Soviet tactics in his lament that “the children, boys and girls, should have been driven to school by the police.”<sup>51</sup> In 1936, L’vov reported with dismay that not a single show trial had been organized of those resisting girls’ enrollment, and no parents had been punished for keeping their daughters out of school.<sup>52</sup> Although the rhetoric of “struggle” and totalizing goals of “complete enrollment” were consistent with campaigns such as collectivization and unveiling, the recommended strategies for girls’ education tended to be pragmatic and persuasive, rather than confrontational and coercive.

Militant rhetoric could thus coexist with nuanced understandings of how to educate girls. Soviet officials recognized, for example, that total enrollment and gender ratios provided only partial evidence of equality. The proportion of school-aged girls enrolled, the number actually in attendance, and their distribution by grade level were also evidence of incomplete progress.

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<sup>49</sup> Cited in Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 257.

<sup>50</sup> NA RAO f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 268-269.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 291-292.

<sup>52</sup> L’vov complained that in the one case where a fine was imposed, even this minor sanction was overturned after an appeal. NA RAO f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 268-269, 286. For husbands threatened with fines, criminal prosecution, and other sanctions if their wives did not attend literacy programs, see Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 231. In addition to the more pragmatic approach discussed here, limited use of administrative measures also demonstrated the weakness of the educational apparatus, especially in rural regions. For the Stalinist educational administration, see Larry Holmes, “Ascent into Darkness: Escalating Negativity in the Administration of Schools in the Kirov Region, 1931-1941,” *History of Education*, 35, No. 4-5 (July September 2006), 521-540.

Despite calls for 100% enrollment of school-age girls, the actual percentage in school was also much lower, and in some places remarkably small. A 1931 report claimed that not a single girl attended school in many Uzbek villages.<sup>53</sup> In 1932, Turkestan Communist officials estimated that rural schools enrolled a mere 1% of school age girls, compared to just under 6% of boys; in the cities, by contrast, schools enrolled more than 52% of school age children.<sup>54</sup> By acknowledging that only a fraction of eligible girls were in school, Soviet officials recognized the need to close this “breach” and “forgotten sector” on the education “front.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Limits of Social Engineering**

While often adhering to a conventional Stalinist narrative of the heroic girl overcoming traditional constraints to enter the new socialist world,<sup>56</sup> the stories told about Soviet girls enrolling in schools also present important counterpoints.<sup>57</sup> In many cases, for example, fathers, brothers, or other male relatives actively supported their daughter’s education, which complicates the presumed conflict between patriarchal authority and the Soviet school. In addition, the obstacles to the schooling of girls were described not only as traditional customs or

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<sup>53</sup> Cited in Keller, *To Moscow*, 209.

<sup>54</sup> RGASPI f. 62, op. 2, d. 2963, l. 19. Girls made up just 11% of pupils in Uzbek village schools, less than one-half the ratio in city schools. Kozhukhov, “Mobilizovat’ sily,” 3.

<sup>55</sup> GARF f. 296, op. 1, d. 467, l. 37; NA RAO f. 9, op. 1, d. 50, l. 15; f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, l. 99; Kozhukhov, “Mobilizovat’ sily,” 3.

<sup>56</sup> For Stalinist “heroic” narratives, see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 71-75; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 6, 78, 136; E. Thomas Ewing, “A Stalinist Celebrity Teacher: Gender and Professional Identities in the Soviet Union in the 1930s,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 16, No. 4 (Winter 2005), 92-118.

<sup>57</sup> See examples of these narratives in Ewing, “Not One Girl.”



religious prejudices, but also difficult living conditions, and particularly the burdens of housework and childcare borne disproportionately by girls.

Most importantly, even Soviet reports valued the individual effort of girls as they challenged established customs and sought opportunities for education, even as these same reports conceded that social conditions, political turmoil, and structural factors were impeding schooling. Educating girls, even in the hyperbolic discourses of the Stalinist 1930s, thus appears less as a transformative endeavor or site for resistance than a process by which identities were re-negotiated through structures and practices.<sup>58</sup> Exploring these issues, tensions, and transformations in the Soviet context, and more broadly in comparative terms, can thus offer lessons useful for those engaged in contemporary efforts to provide and enhance education for all.

The education of “non-Russian” girls was thus a complex process shaped by multiple, and to some extent contradictory, interests and objectives. While enrollment patterns illustrate both the ambitions and limits of social engineering, educational practices illustrate the importance of human agency. Although the regime could decree, and to a certain extent enforce, compulsory enrollment, reports on household obligations, pupils’ attitudes, and classroom interactions all suggest that factors other than Soviet ideology shaped educations.

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<sup>58</sup> Recognizing Stalinism as both an integrated system and a set of localized, conditional, and strategic processes, this interpretation of Stalinism emphasizes the ambition and also the limits of the state’s transformative efforts, the persistence and reconstitution of individual and collective forms of identity, and the ways that dictatorship as well as resistance were expressed in practices, language, and experience. As defined by Northrop, this approach focuses on “complex processes of negotiation—not dictation—that shaped the social and cultural realm of family life.” Soviet power appears as “provisional, unstable, always under debate, and continually changing,” with the state as “one actor among many—a powerful one, to be sure, but not always dominant in the struggles to shape the political, cultural, social, and economic worlds in which its citizens lived.” Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 14.

Girls who sat separately, acted deferentially, or compromised their education to fulfill household, familial, or marital obligations were not realizing—or being allowed to realize—the promises of becoming a new generation of emancipated women. Girls who attended school, earned promotions, and sought further opportunities were shaped as much by “local” conditions, including parental support, teacher intervention, and individual determination, as they were inspired by revolutionary ideology. These patterns illustrate how agents acted along the spectrum between the operation of a repressive state and the resistance of oppressed communities.<sup>59</sup> In this context, questions about who went to school, where they sat, what they said, and how they studied all provide insights into the everyday history of Stalinism. The promise to cultivate “new sprouts of life” through the education of girls thus served simultaneously as political strategy and ideological promise, yet the meanings of schooling were contested and negotiated, rather than imposed in an essentialist or instrumental manner.

### **Conclusion: Soviet Girls’ Education and Contemporary Policy Issues**

Four aspects of the Soviet campaign to educate “non-Russian” girls have contemporary significance: first, a politically opportunistic effort that selectively identified the denial of education to girls as a sign of oppression and a justification for intervention; second, patterns of resistance that invested girls’ schooling with symbolic meanings embedded in family, community, and culture; third, a modernization perspective that defined girls’ education as a long-term investment in economic development; and finally, the importance of empowering girls as individual agents. These four aspects demonstrate the continuing relevance of this historical

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<sup>59</sup> For this tension in Stalinism, see Kamp, “Pilgrimage,” 274; idem, “Three Lives,” 2-58; Keller, *To Moscow*, 194; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 13; and the contributions to Viola, ed., *Contending*.

case-study of Soviet girls' experiences. This section thus responds explicitly to the call for "detailed work on gender initiatives," which can provide information about "what works," and thus can fill the "largest gap" in this program for change: "Without technically and empirically based rigorous analysis to inform change and reform, discussions of 'scaling up' will continue to be abstract rather than real."<sup>60</sup>

The Soviet "liberation" of "backward" women of "the East" has long been recognized as a politically opportunistic effort to undermine traditional elites and impose communist power.<sup>61</sup> This case-study thus suggests ways to evaluate other situations where girls have been promised liberation and equality through education. The most striking example is Afghanistan, where two superpowers—the Soviet Union and the United States—justified intervention in part by promising more equality to women and more access to schools.<sup>62</sup>

Certainly this working paper should encourage a skeptical approach to such claims, especially when the promise of girls' education coexists with broader patterns of social and political subordination. Yet this case-study also recognizes that such efforts, while primarily rationalizations for intervention, may indirectly yet substantively change girls' lives. The recruitment of women teachers, the expansion of enrollment, opportunities for professional training, the restructuring of local authority, and the articulation of different values are meaningful changes that may result from politically opportunistic engagement. This historical

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<sup>60</sup> UNESCO, *Scaling up*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> The most influential argument along these lines is Massell *Surrogate Proletariat*. See discussion of this interpretation in Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 221, 244; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 11-12, 314.

<sup>62</sup> Whitney, "In Soviet Asia, Afghan Thrust Finds Acceptance"; Pourzand, "Problematic of Female Education, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Afghanistan"; U. S. Department of State, "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women," November 17, 2001, online [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov), accessed November 21, 2001; Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan*, 72-79.

analysis also indicates, however, that substantive changes depend on prolonged investments “on the ground.” Even in Afghanistan, where outside powers were most opportunistic in their promises, some improvements followed initial interventions—but girls’ education also suffered from the conflicts associated with invasion, occupation, and resistance.<sup>63</sup>

This study also provides new ways to understand opposition to girls’ schooling. In the 1930s, Soviet power, generated widespread, passionate, and determined resistance. Because girls’ education coincided with two destabilizing campaigns—women’s liberation and collectivization—the presence of female pupils in Soviet schools often provoked a negative response. Yet the relative lack of violence and the relative success of girls’ education, at least when compared to campaigns that generated more resistance and attained fewer objectives, suggest that schools served a mediating function that moderated these broader conflicts.

For many girls, dekulakization, religious persecution, and the terror generated long-lasting hostility to all Soviet institutions, including education.<sup>64</sup> Yet schools could also take advantage of more contested and ambivalent aspects of Stalinism. In contrast to unveiling, which (in theory, if not always in practice) required a complete and visible break with tradition, schooling could involve conditional and strategic engagements, as illustrated by the attendance, attrition, and achievement patterns that educators found so discouraging.

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<sup>63</sup> For girls’ education in Afghanistan since 2001, see Bellamy, ed., *State of the World’s Children*, 73-75; Baker, “Teaching Boys—and Girls—Another Notion of Jihad”; Lacayo, “About Face”; Constable, “Afghan Pupils Thrilled to Go Back to School”; Dominus, “Shabana is Late for School”; Rohde, “Attacks on Schools for Girls Hint at Lingering Split in Afghanistan”; Coursen-Neff and Sifton, “Falling Back to Taliban Ways with Women;” Hunte, “Looking Beyond the School Walls”; Coursen-Naft and Zarifi, “Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan.”

<sup>64</sup> For the long-term trajectories of Central Asian women, see Kamp, “Pilgrimage,” 273-274; idem, “Three Lives,” 32-33, 40-44, 51-54; Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 258-260; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 85, 347-357; Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes, *Lost Voices. Central Asian Women Confronting Transition* (London, 2005).

Unlike collectivization, which involved the loss of resources and authority in exchange for distant—and receding—improvements offered preferentially to marginalized groups, schooling promised increased living standards and social status for individuals and families.<sup>65</sup> As education became a more valued form of symbolic capital, even determined opponents of Soviet power may have accepted the advantages of educated daughters and wives. Finally, to the extent that schools replicated existing structures of gender difference—with boys and girls performing distinct roles, increasingly under the supervision of women teachers—this opposition may have been tempered by the ways that schools tolerated, accepted, and even reinforced traditional identities. While Soviet ideology proclaimed emancipation and equality, school practices that accepted gender divisions in classrooms, perpetuated masculine privilege, and maintained uneven housework burdens suggest that education could exert conservative as well as transformative influences.

These interpretations provide insights for understanding opposition to girls' schooling in other contexts. The Taliban policy on girls' education was the most extreme example of such

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<sup>65</sup> This interpretation is consistent with recent research on Soviet power in Central Asia. According to Edgar, communist leaders recognized that education did not pit men against women, did not pose the same kind of direct threat to indigenous customs, and was consistent with the long-term Soviet goal of forming the Turkmen nation. Concluding that “the transformative potential of education was far greater than that of the assault on custom,” Edgar includes girls' schooling with other efforts to promote women's liberation while also maintaining men's support. Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 244-245, 257-258. Although he does not mention girls' schooling in this context, Massell concludes that communist leaders realized that “the tasks of the revolutionary modernizer were not those of all-out collision and war in society but those of infiltration and subversion.” Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, 389. See also Keller's conclusion that facets of “modernity,” including education, were more important than militant campaigns in eroding Islamic traditions. Keller, *To Moscow*, 247-249, 255. This interpretation of the mediating politics of girls' schooling also fits with Northrop's argument about the “soft” approach to cultural change embedded in the Soviet “symbiosis of modernizing state and colonial empire.” Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 28-30, 83-84, 118-126, 247-249, 294-295, 309. Colonial authorities in Rhodesia also came to see girls' education as “a safe, slow alternative to revolution,” which “was designed not to work to promote change and development, but to soften development and promote harmony and order.” Summers, “If You Can Educate,” 463, 471.

opposition, yet as with anti-Soviet resistance in the 1930s, the motivations for this action were multi-faceted.<sup>66</sup> While similarities to Taliban extremism could be seen in the Soviet context in the refusal to allow daughters to attend school or physical attacks on female pupils, this case-study also suggests that even extreme opposition was moderated, undermined, and ultimately displaced by growing recognition of the limited dangers and expanded possibilities associated with girls' education. As the school was seen increasingly as resource for communities and individuals, more Soviet girls attended schools for longer periods of time. Recognizing the complexity of this process allows for more subtle strategies to promote girls' education without provoking determined—and ultimately self-destructive—forms of opposition.<sup>67</sup>

The Soviet case-study also provides insights into the relationship between modernization and girls' education. While public attention is drawn to political conflicts like the Taliban ban, poverty imposes more insidious limits on girls' schooling.<sup>68</sup> Like their Soviet predecessors, contemporary development experts assume a causal connection between female education and economic modernization. The education of girls is expected to raise work-force qualifications, transform family roles, raise living standards, and promote gender equality.<sup>69</sup> Soviet history

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<sup>66</sup> For Taliban restrictions on girls' education, see Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, 105-114; Clark, "Afghanistan's Bleak Education Record"; Mazurkewich, "Bringing Hope—and Homework—to the Girls"; Bearak, "Afghanistan's Girls Fight to Read and Write;" Pourzand, "Problematic of Female Education," 75-81; Hunte, "Looking Beyond School Walls"; Coursen-Naft and Zarifi, "Lessons in Terror."

<sup>67</sup> See nuanced discussion of overcoming resistance to girls' education in Bellamy, ed., *State of the World's Children*, 23-26; Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women*, 155-156; Hunte, "Looking Beyond the School Walls"; Coursen-Naft and Zarifi, "Lessons in Terror."

<sup>68</sup> For this argument, made after the overthrow of the Taliban, see Gene Sperling, "Educating the World," *The New York Times* November 22, 2001, 39.

<sup>69</sup> *Education for All*, 29-35; Bellamy, ed., *State of the World's Children*, 17-23; Gene Sperling, "Educate Them All," *Washington Post* April 20, 2002, A19.

confirms this correlation between education and development, as women's occupational status, economic productivity, and public roles all changed dramatically, even within the constraints of communist dictatorship.<sup>70</sup>

Yet this case study also questions any simplistic connection between economic modernization and female education by focusing on school practices concealed or distorted by aggregate numbers. How do attendance, attrition, and achievement rates compare for boys and girls? What out-of-school factors, such as housework, childcare, or early marriage, influence schooling? Do classroom climate and pedagogical strategies encourage girls' education? Finally, are gender roles in schools consistent with, or in contradiction to, the values of family, community, and society? As advocates of girls' schooling acknowledge these complications—in part by drawing lessons from historical case-studies—more effective strategies can sustain these processes of development.<sup>71</sup>

Does education empower girls? Recognizing the significance of this question, many non-governmental organizations concentrate on crucial moments that empower girls to determine their own educational futures.<sup>72</sup> When reporting on their projects, these organizations provide numerous examples of girls for whom educational access created transformative opportunities,

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<sup>70</sup> See discussion in Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*; Corcoran-Nantes, *Lost Voices*, 63-77; Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 261-262; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 350-354.

<sup>71</sup> *Education for All*, 78-79; Dervarics, "Tiny Successes"; Hunte, "Looking Beyond," 9-10; UNICEF, *Strategies*, 1-6; Herz and Sperling, *What Works in Girls' Education*.

<sup>72</sup> "Can Schooling Empower Girls?" *Equals. Newsletter for Beyond Access: Gender, Education, and Development* No. 3 (October 2003) available [www.ungei.org/beyondaccess/](http://www.ungei.org/beyondaccess/), accessed November 30, 2006. See also the argument for "education with *empowering* content and processes" in UNESCO, *Scaling up*, 10. For the "multiplier effect of educating girls," see Bellamy, ed., *State of the World's Children*, 44-57. Educational researchers and practitioners asking specifically "what about the girls?" have demonstrated how a gender-sensitive approach can substantially change the experience and outcomes of schooling. Sadker and Sadker, *Failing at Fairness*; Orenstein, *SchoolGirls*.

with the implication—sometimes explicitly stated, while other times suggested implicitly—that the repetition of these individual experiences across a particular society would produce systemic change.<sup>73</sup> While criticized appropriately for imposing Western, individualist, and materialist perspectives,<sup>74</sup> this focus on the life experiences of girls makes the important interpretive statement that human agency can shape larger processes. As illustrated by one final example from the Stalinist 1930s, this recognition of the capacity for action in transformative situations can become a means of achieving and sustaining significant change.

In his report on Soviet schools, L’vov provides an extended description of a thirteen year old pupil named San Batukaeva. At the time of his visit, she was the only girl in her classroom. Her home conditions were difficult, as her mother’s death left her fully responsible for all the housework, yet still she succeeded at school, as described by L’vov:

In her studies she is not behind the boys. She is even with the best pupils. She can work independently in the classroom, on a par with all, and is capable and attentive to her studies... she does not get distracted from school lessons; she answers questions quickly. She does not have a girl’s diffidence which often appears after a short duration of school attendance. She answers questions even faster than most boys, and she reads a book silently during independent lessons.

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<sup>73</sup> See, for example, the narratives of “Real Lives” posted on the website of the United National Girls’ Education Initiative, which explains both impediments to education and policies promoting change in terms of the experiences of individual girls from Malawi, Thailand, Mozambique, and Benin. “Real Lives,” available online <http://www.ungei.org/reallives/index.html>, accessed December 3, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> For the problems of imposing “foreign notions of liberation” on Soviet women of Central Asia, see Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 87, 354. For a critical analysis of recent American discourse on Afghan women, see Emily Rosenberg, “Rescuing Women and Children,” *The Journal of American History*, 89, no. 2 (2002), 456-465; Coursen-Naft and Zarifi, “Lessons in Terror.”



Asked what she wanted from education, Batukaeva responded: “when I am grown up, I want to be smart, I want to study.” Batukaeva was not unique, according to L’vov, but the “tragedy” was that not enough was done to ensure that all girls like her could succeed.<sup>75</sup>

As mentioned at the start of this paper, girls like Batukaeva were described by school inspector L’vov as “new sprouts of life,” thus acknowledging social transformation through the education of girls was both a long-term and a gradual process.<sup>76</sup> In the recent history of Afghanistan, other girls have been portrayed by the international media in similar terms: Fatim and Zargona were two girls who defied the Taliban ban on female education when they secretly attended schools set up by their parents,<sup>77</sup> while Shabana and her sister became symbols of open access to education after the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban.<sup>78</sup>

Yet as reports during this same period have also demonstrated, efforts to restrict girls’ access to education also have their public faces, such as Shukria, a thirteen year old girl shot to death as she walked home from school in the summer of 2007.<sup>79</sup> And finally, reflecting the contested relations at the center of these broader processes, the nine year Afghan girl Raihana offered this response to a foreign reporter as she watched her school burn following a rocket attack in the fall of 2002: “I am afraid...But I will continue.”<sup>80</sup> Simply celebrating the steps taken by individual girls does not by itself demonstrate the achievement of substantial change, yet such

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<sup>75</sup> NA RAO f. 14, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 342-345.

<sup>76</sup> In other contexts, including the next paragraph of this report, L’vov invoked the language of struggle, further confirming the play of multiple perspectives. Ibid, ll. 296-297.

<sup>77</sup> Bearak, “Afghanistan’s Girls Fight,” n.p.; Harding, “Inside Afghanistan’s Secret Schools,” n.p.

<sup>78</sup> Dominus, “Shabana is Late,” 42.

<sup>79</sup> Bearak, “As War Enters Classrooms,” 1.

<sup>80</sup> Rohde, “Attacks on Schools,” 1.

an interpretive statement is a crucial reminder that education is ultimately a personal, incremental, and subjective experience, as well as a structural transformation shaped by policy decisions and political struggles.

The rhetoric of “new sprouts of life” thus retains its power as both an image of on-going transformations and a strategy for sustaining development. Eschewing the militant rhetoric of confrontational campaigns, desperate enemies, and heroic triumphs, this image symbolized the profound transformation underway in global schooling. Girls’ determination to attend and achieve at school redefined a broad social and political transformation into a personal challenge and a collective accomplishment. Repeated countless times over past decades and throughout the world today, girls who attend school continue to shape contemporary global processes.