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# Gender and Sexuality

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Let us imagine a few social types in Imperial Russia—a married Russian peasant woman, a gay soldier, and a Muslim urban Uzbek woman—and how their lives might have been transformed by the Russian Revolution. If in 1912 the young peasant wife Masha had to endure a loveless marriage with a philandering husband because divorce was virtually unattainable, in the new Soviet Union of the 1920s she could leave her marriage by request. If Masha became pregnant in Imperial Russia, she had to become a mother unless she procured an illegal abortion, whereas in the 1920s she could choose to keep or terminate a pregnancy. Meanwhile, if in prerevolutionary times, the soldier Pyotr had reason to fear a potential blackmailer, or arrest and imprisonment, as he strolled on Nevskii Prospekt in St. Petersburg in search of a same-sex liaison, in the 1920s Pyotr could cruise gay men in Leningrad without fear of criminal sodomy charges because of its decriminalization in the new Soviet Russia. If in Imperial Russia Mirza had been compelled to wear some kind of veil in public, a tradition among urban and wealthier women in some parts of Central Asia, in the second half of the 1920s the Communist Party launched a campaign to end this practice, which she may or may not have supported. Moreover, if Mirza had been unable to procure higher education before the Revolution because of traditional gender norms, in the 1920s she could pursue it as the new Communist regime developed educational opportunities for women as well as men throughout the new Soviet Union.

At first glance, these social types, and the transformations they experienced, might suggest a narrative of oppression in Imperial Russia and liberation in the Soviet Union. This narrative of progress, however, does not do justice to the

complexity of the Soviet approach to gender and sexuality in the first decade after the Revolution. Nor does it contextualize how certain "Soviet" ideas and policies were not *sui generis* but rather linked to prerevolutionary trends and changes. Thus, for example, some of the Jadidists (Muslim reformers) in Central Asia, who called for increased education of girls and women in Imperial Russia, became Communists who advanced this cause after the 1917 Revolution.

When it comes to changes in Soviet policies and discourses about gender and sexuality, the transition from the postrevolutionary years of the 1920s to the Stalin era is often framed by scholars in a similar way as the transition from Imperial Russia to the Soviet Union, but with the terms reversed: the changes under Stalin's rule are viewed as a turn to a more coercive and conservative order. If in 1936 the peasant Masha wanted to pursue divorce or an abortion, she faced new Soviet family laws restricting divorce and banning most abortions. Meanwhile, under Stalin's rule in 1934, the soldier Pyotr could no longer pursue same-sex relations without risk of punishment because of a new anti-sodomy law. And if Mirza's daughter was in school in Central Asia in the late 1930s, she might have been forced to learn Russian when the Communist leadership decreed it a compulsory second language in all non-Russian middle schools.

Scholarship that has argued that the Soviet approach to gender and sexuality was relatively more radical/progressive and emancipatory in the 1920s, and more reactionary/traditional and instrumental during the Stalin era, has yielded important insights into the history and politics of the "woman" question, the Soviet family, Bolshevik feminism, women and wage labor, gender and empire, sexual minorities, and other related topics. Nonetheless, as many scholars have noted, this analytic framework has obscured some of the complexities and contradictions, as well as continuities, in early Soviet and Stalinist discourses and policies.

This chapter explores gender and sexuality during Stalin's rule. It considers femininities and masculinities, gender identities and relations, sexual norms and practices, and sexual politics and identities. The Stalinist gender and sexual order was not unchanging, uniform, consistent, or entirely new; it was inextricably linked to Soviet discourses and policies about national minorities, religion, class, and broader historical events as well as gender and sexual norms and identities in Imperial Russia and early Soviet rule. It consisted of emancipatory and "radical" as well as repressive and conservative policies. At its core, the Stalinist gender and sexual order was designed to be in service to the Party-state, and was oriented toward mobilizing the populace to promote modernization, grow Soviet power, and advance a new industrial "Soviet" socialism.[1]

When the Bolsheviks established a new Communist government in 1917, they sought to create not only a new political and economic reality but also

a new society in which the Russian people as well as national minorities in the newly constituted USSR would be radically transformed. To do this, the leadership introduced new laws, institutions, policies and practices. It also promoted the New Soviet Man and Soviet BecWoman, archetypes whom the populace was supposed to emulate. When Stalin established control in the late 1920s and launched his "Revolution from Above," he continued to pursue the early Bolshevik goal of widespread transformation, though he modified some polices, introduced new as well as more restrictive measures, and expanded the use of repression to achieve change.

Soviet propaganda, literature, and Party-state discourses characterized the New Soviet Man in the Stalin era, as in the 1920s, as a soldier defending the motherland from the threat of counterrevolution or war, an industrial worker laboring on the industrial "front," and a stalwart member of the Communist Party dedicated to the construction of a bright new future. In addition to these archetypes, the New Soviet Man in the Stalin era could also be a collective farm worker rather than a traditional *muzhik*, struggling to achieve a modern new agricultural order; a labor hero who outperformed others; and a master of technology and nature, such as a Soviet aviator, whose accomplishments signaled the educational, scientific, and industrial advances of socialism. In keeping with Stalinist nationality policy, the New Soviet Man was not necessarily Russian, but if he was from one of the Soviet Union's many national minorities, he was sometimes portrayed as having overcome cultural backwardness and benefiting from the tutelage of fellow Russians who were promoted in the 1930s as the "first among equals," as ostensibly the most revolutionary and "Soviet" ethnicity in the country. The New Soviet Man was supposed to be secular and reject what Communist leaders considered to be religious and unenlightened ways. Under Stalin, he was also represented as a model of culturedness (*kul'turnost'*), a man who displayed cultured behavior and taste. In general, the New Soviet Man demonstrated manly courage and strength, allegedly made possible by Stalin's leadership and by male camaraderie, a fraternal band of brothers under Father Stalin's direction. The New Soviet Man was supposed to be heterosexual, get married, and have children as well, but relegate his family to secondary priority as he performed a hegemonic robust masculinity on behalf of the Party-state.

In the Stalin years, as in the 1920s, the ideal New Soviet Woman was a working mother who produced children for the new socialist order; engaged in agricultural, industrial, or other wage labor; and took on public duties to help realize the new society. The New Soviet Woman was also modern and secular, hence not constrained by traditional peasant, ethnic, or religious practices. She did not wear *lapti* (bast sandals) or seek medical advice from *znakharki* (traditional wise women), nor did she wear a veil or remain secluded in the home. In contrast to the 1920s, the Stalinist government promoted

several additional versions of the New Soviet Woman: the unemployed wife activist, who engaged in social mothering and civic housekeeping for the nation; the female collective farm worker who helped to create a new agricultural system; the female citizen-soldier who participated in direct combat to defend the Motherland; and the female luminary, whose achievements were celebrated publicly. In the late Stalin era, the party-state promoted yet another version of the New Soviet Woman: the *unmarried* working mother, whose virtue was officially defined by her reproductive and productive contributions to the state rather than some "bourgeois" notion of sexual morality and marital status.

## The Family

If there had been some talk about the "withering away of the family" among Bolshevik radicals during the Revolution and early Soviet years—which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had earlier suggested would happen under communism—the new Communist government quickly clarified that this did not mean the eradication of the family altogether, but the eradication of the "bourgeois" model of family, in which women were exploited and treated as the property of men. In 1918, the government promoted the legitimacy of marriage and the family in the Soviet context by adopting a new Family Code that made marriage a civil rather than a religious matter, simplified divorce so that it was affordable and equally attainable by the male or female spouse, and granted the same legal rights to children produced in registered and unregistered unions. In 1926, it further undermined religious marriage and the bourgeois family by affirming the legitimacy of de facto marriages, and granting cohabitating couples the same rights and duties as those in "official" marriages. More generally, the Communist regime sought to eliminate not only bourgeois but also other patriarchal models of marriage and the family, including those of the "backwards" peasantry and national minorities. Targeting traditional cultural customs and religious practices, Soviet leaders established a minimum marriage age to end child marriages, banned bride price as well as polygyny, and promoted equal inheritance laws. In promoting these changes, the new Soviet regime claimed to "liberate" women and girls from traditional patriarchal marital and familial practices so that they could participate in the building of socialism. The ideal new Soviet family, comprised of a free and equal union between a man and woman who procreated, would advance the Party-state's goals. The reality of Soviet families was much more complex, however, and many women remained in difficult and abusive marriages because of social norms and the lack of economic opportunities to strike out on their own.

Under Stalin, a new Family Code of 1936 made divorce more difficult and expensive, strengthened men's responsibility for child support, and banned most abortions. Many scholars have interpreted these changes as proof of a Stalinist retreat from revolutionary values and a move toward a more conservative family model. Interestingly, many members of the Soviet populace—particularly women—expressed approval for the new restrictions on divorce. Divorce rates had skyrocketed in the 1920s and in the first half of the 1930s, usually at the behest of men, and women often suffered significant financial problems when their marriages ended. Although the new divorce procedures sought to strengthen family stability, after a temporary decline from 1936 to 1938, the percentage of divorces continued to increase.

If the changes in divorce law entailed a departure from the regime's earlier revolutionary ideas about free and equal unions by making it harder for people to leave unhappy marriages, some aspects of the Family Code did not. The code's focus on fathers' and husbands' financial duties amplified earlier Soviet family policies to combat male irresponsibility and was approved of by many women who wanted more stringent measures to ensure men's payment of child support. Another "radical" aspect of family policy remained unchanged: de facto marriages and divorces continued to be recognized, with attendant legal and financial duties for children born of such unions. Stalinist family policy was intended to bolster family stability and paternal responsibility so that women would have more children. It did not promote a return to a traditional prerevolutionary patriarchal model of the family, in which men had legal dominance and authority, and the family was a private entity separate from the state. Nor did the new family policy encourage women to return to the home and abandon wage labor. Stalinist family policy aimed to mobilize a modern and civic family that would advance Soviet objectives.

The 1936 abortion ban was a retreat from the regime's policy of allowing women to control their own bodies and lives. For Masha, discussed earlier, having an unwanted pregnancy or seeking an illegal abortion might have ended her studies, career advancement, or even her life. The Stalinist volte-face in abortion policy, however, was not a radical change in the Soviet leadership's perception of the procedure, which it had neither condoned nor considered a woman's right when legalizing it in 1920. Instead, the political elite had viewed it as a public health necessity—a necessary "evil" given the high rates of illegal abortions, their harmful effects on women's health, and the poverty that led many women to seek one. The excuse for recriminalizing abortion was also couched partly in health terms; the alleged deleterious effects of the procedure combined with the alleged improvement in people's material conditions made child rearing easier and abortion unnecessary. In actuality, recriminalization stemmed from official concern about the falling Soviet birth rate, particularly among Slavic populations. This is evident from

a simultaneous secret government decision to limit access to contraception, even if this was already largely unavailable because of inadequate funding and supplies. Although the regime hoped to bolster procreation by banning most abortions, an initial surge in the Soviet birth rate was followed by a decrease in the late 1930s. Moreover, despite the procedure's new illegality, there was only a slight and temporary decrease in abortions after 1936. In the absence of contraception, illegal abortion served as a de facto method of birth control. As women turned to "back-alley" abortions, which posed greater risks than legal abortions, there was a sizable increase in abortion-related health complications, including death.

For many non-Slavic women, such as Kazakh and other Central Asian women, the abortion ban had little to no effect on their reproductive practices because the termination of unwanted pregnancies was culturally taboo, and abortion rates were quite low. The abortion ban was accompanied by pronatalist measures, however, that did affect the daily lives of at least some Central Asian and other women who had large families. More specifically, the new Stalinist policy of awarding birth bonuses in the form of annual state allowances for mothers with seven or more children provided social prestige and important monetary assistance (albeit limited). Trumpeting the government's role in easing the burdens of motherhood to legitimize Communist rule, the Stalinist regime pointed in particular to how the plight of female national minorities had improved; birth bonuses, in conjunction with other new pronatalist measures, such as increased funding for the expansion of maternity homes, children's nurseries, and kindergartens, underscored the Soviet break from the "backward" past. Purportedly, rural and urban as well as Slavic and non-Slavic mothers were the happy beneficiaries of the Soviet commitment to improving the lives of mothers and children.

Soviet pronatalism was not new under Stalin; since the early days of the Revolution, Communist leaders, including even radical Bolshevik feminists such as Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1952), had praised motherhood as woman's natural and civic obligation, and adopted various measures to protect and encourage it.[2] Stalinist birth bonuses for mothers of large families, however, were novel. During the Second World War, the government sought to further incentivize motherhood by reducing the number of children necessary to receive birth bonuses. It established a tax on bachelors, childless adults, and couples with fewer than three children, underscoring to men *and* women the patriotic duty to procreate. Communist authorities also introduced new maternity awards to further glorify motherhood. Such pronatalist policies were not uniquely Soviet. In the interwar era, many European governments viewed reproduction as a state matter and adopted similar measures to increase populations, while also restricting access to birth control and abortion.

In the ideal Stalinist family, gender roles were fixed. Women assumed primary responsibility for the household and child rearing, even when working full time. Meanwhile, Soviet leaders expected men to marry, procreate, and provide financial assistance to their families, but not to engage actively in domestic chores and children's upbringing, expectations mirrored in daily life. By affording women equal legal rights and greater economic autonomy as well as establishing a "state-mother-child-triad," early Soviet policies undermined the institution of fatherhood, diminished men's family authority, and fostered gender asymmetry in parenting. During the Stalin era, in actuality, some fathers were actively involved in family affairs, and many men retained a dominant family position. Still, Stalinist policies in the 1930s reinforced fathers' discursive and legal marginality by removing them from their families via forced collectivization and dekulakization, the drive for rapid industrialization, and the purges. The Second World War ruptured men's connection to their families even more, as many fathers marched off to war from which most never returned.

## Work

In the early Soviet years, Communist leaders promoted a social contract with women that encouraged them to pursue full-time employment and motherhood, supported by maternity leave, state-sponsored childcare, and other resources and benefits, but it was only in the Stalin era that the Party-state ideal of the Soviet working mother became a significant reality. The mass influx of women into the wage economy began in 1929. As families struggled in the face of declining real wages and living conditions, many households that had previously functioned with one wage-earner needed two to make ends meet, and more women turned to paid labor. This organic process was harnessed by the Stalinist regime. Faced with the ambitious goals of the First Five-Year Plan and enormous male labor shortages, it launched a campaign to recruit women, and between 1929 and 1941, over 10 million women joined the industrial labor force and service sector. Although female employment varied by region and nationality, by 1939, women made up 39 percent of the paid workforce. A 1942 labor conscription decree and wartime propaganda contributed to a significant wartime increase of women workers. By 1950, women constituted half of the workers in the national economy (excluding agriculture).

Instead of integrating women from the outset as equals alongside men in all sectors of the economy, Soviet authorities pursued a policy of labor inclusion through segregation. They encouraged new women workers to pursue jobs in traditionally "female" sectors of the economy. In addition, the

regime regendered the economy and labor force by reassigning positions that had previously been designated as male as primarily or exclusively female. Soviet policies opened up employment opportunities for women, affording them new skills and training as well as greater entry into rapidly expanding sectors of heavy industry, such as mining and metallurgy. Nonetheless, because of hostility against women workers, central directives to promote female skilled labor were often undermined at the local level. As Zueva, a railroad worker during the 1930s, explained: "Men see the woman worker as an enemy, a wrecker of production, not a comrade."[3] When women filled jobs formerly held by men, they mostly worked as unskilled and semiskilled laborers, and rarely held managerial and other leadership positions. Ultimately, the regime's policies reinforced a gendered division of labor, which meant that "women's work"—even in previously "male" sectors—tended to be less prestigious and lower-paying than "men's work." Meanwhile, labor laws to protect working women's reproductive capacity, such as exempting nursing mothers from night shifts and providing them with breastfeeding breaks, were often not enforced. The gap between Party-state policies about women workers and actual workplace practices persisted in the postwar period. Nonetheless, despite discrimination, harassment, and limitations on professional advancement, Soviet women took pride in their work. As Tania, a construction engineer, noted, "Work was my life. At first I worked in order to live, later it was more, it went deeper inside and as a result it turns out that I cannot imagine myself without work."[4]

Just as wage labor was gendered, so too was unpaid labor in the home. In the early Soviet years, Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin denounced the drudgery of housework, Party-state leaders called for the increased socialization of housework and childcare, and propaganda heralded women's liberation from "kitchen slavery." Innovations such as maternity leave, communal childcare, public kitchens, and laundries were intended to allow women to enter and remain in the paid workforce with fewer biological or domestic constraints. During the New Economic Policy (NEP) era of the 1920s, however, state expenditures for such resources dropped significantly, and many factories and other workplaces allowed existing services and facilities to atrophy. It was only during the Stalinist drive for rapid industrialization and modernization that a substantial network of nurseries, kindergartens, public canteens, and laundries began to develop. From 1928 to 1936 the number of children in childcare centers increased tenfold. The number of communal dining halls also multiplied significantly, serving approximately 25.5 million citizens by 1933. Given the overall number of women entering wage labor, and an overall population of approximately 165 million in the mid-1930s, even such significant increases in resources were entirely insufficient to meet demand. Meanwhile, in the new socialist society, an assumption of "natural" sexual differences

between men and women remained. As domestic work and childrearing continued to be associated with women, working mothers struggled to fulfill their dual roles as mother/homemaker and laborer.

In its initial years, Stalin's policy of forced agricultural collectivization devastated peasant men and women alike, and millions lost their lives in the resulting famine of 1932 and 1933. Collectivization was intended to be an efficient and modern agricultural system for fueling rapid industrialization and extending Soviet power into rural communities. In Central Asian regions with nomadic national minorities, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, and Turkmenistan, it was also an instrument to compel people to settle down and become "Soviet." Dekulakization, the forced removal of "*kulaks*" (wealthy peasants) supposedly opposed to collectivization, led to the summary execution of tens of thousands and the exile and deportation of millions from their villages.[5] Stalinist propaganda, nonetheless, touted the importance and successes of collective farming. Frequently, it featured a young woman as the public face of the new agricultural landscape, who represented the transformation of the "backwards" *baba* into a *kolkhoznitsa* (female collective farmer), capable of mastering new ideas, processes, and technologies. Visual culture frequently depicted this new *kolkhoznitsa* as a tractor driver, underscoring women's new opportunities and the benefits of agricultural mechanization. To some extent the discursive centrality of the image of the *kolkhoznitsa* reflected reality; as millions of men departed the countryside because of dekulakization or the search for industrial jobs, women played an increasingly important role in agriculture. But even so, men occupied the vast majority of leadership posts because of discrimination and a gendered division of rural labor, despite repeated instructions from the central government to promote women. Moreover, many men ignored or undermined the few women in higher positions, sometimes violently.

The official celebration of the *kolkhoznitsa* stood in stark contrast to the reality of hundreds if not thousands of *bab'i bunty* (women's riots) against collectivization in its early years.[6] Frequently at the forefront of peasant resistance, women in Slavic and Central Asian regions blocked efforts at grain requisitioning and dekulakization, repossessed "socialized" seed and livestock, and verbally and physically abused Soviet officials and activists promoting the new agricultural policies. Interestingly, peasant men often stood back from the angry women, and joined in protests only when they could justify their actions as masculine rather than anti-Soviet—for example, that they were safeguarding female relatives. Because Party-state authorities did not usually utilize force against these unruly peasant women, and rarely punished them compared to their male counterparts, women's riots allowed for the relatively safe expression of peasant resistance to Soviet policies. Communist and rural leaders tended to characterize women's opposition as a product of irrational

female behavior and *kulak* manipulation as a way to diminish its significance. The rebellious women, however, often articulated specific goals and rational socioeconomic interests as they obstructed Soviet collectivization.

If the *kolkhoznitsa* served as the public face of collectivization, the male industrial labor hero served as the public face of Stalin's drive for rapid industrialization.[7] Although the male worker had been central to Soviet imagery in the 1920s, the Stalinist regime promoted the labor hero as another version of the New Soviet Man in the 1930s. Whether a "shock worker" engaged in socialist competition, or a "Stakhanovite," this was a brawny heroic worker who went above and beyond to achieve greater productivity. The term Stakhanovite came from Alexei Stakhanov, a Donbas miner who allegedly hewed 102 tons of coals instead of the 6.5 norm in one shift in 1935. Industrial leaders applauded and rewarded Stakhanov for his "individual" feat, even though he had auxiliary assistance, and encouraged others to emulate his purported strength, will power, and novel work techniques to surpass production quotas. As Stakhanovism spread beyond heavy industry to other sectors, various markers of success demarcated Stakhanovites from ordinary workers. Many female salesclerks, for example, achieved Stakhanovite status by promoting cultured trade and excellent customer service. The message behind the labor hero movement was that, despite limitations, such as inhospitable work and living conditions, an ordinary individual worker—male or female—could become an exemplary one, even a Soviet celebrity. Indeed, part of the appeal of becoming a Stakhanovite was that it conferred a variety of rewards, including some that marked recipients as members of an emergent new Soviet elite.

Tens of thousands of wife-activists provided free labor during the Stalinist drive for industrialization and modernization. The wife-activist (*obshchestvennitsa*) movement first emerged among elite housewives of industrial managers and engineers in the mid-1930s, and then encompassed wives of more rank-and-file workers, including those in the countryside. While some scholars have argued that this movement cast unemployed wives as the helpmates of husbands, reaffirming traditional gender roles, the movement also afforded wives more complex social roles as they moved beyond their husbands to assist society as a whole by promoting education, mannered behavior, and cultured taste among workers and their families, improving work and living conditions, and engaging in voluntary labor at workplaces. By encouraging wife activists to use their allegedly feminine traits, maternal nature, and domestic experience to contribute to the Soviet project, the Stalinist regime valorized them and the domestic, in sharp contrast to the Party-state's denigration of homemakers as ignorant and counterrevolutionary and the domestic sphere as feminine and unproductive in the 1920s. The wife-activist became another version of the New Soviet Woman, a new model of Soviet womanhood.

## Politics and the Public Sphere

Women's involvement in paid labor as well as in politics and social and community initiatives demonstrates how the public sphere was regendered under Stalin. Soviet visual culture reflected this change. In the 1920s, women had been marginalized in political iconography of the new socialist order and rarely depicted unless the target audience was female. Moreover, when represented, women were usually cast in supporting roles to men, as happy recipients of the new regime's revolutionary policies, or as unenlightened, or petty bourgeois, and, therefore, potentially counterrevolutionary. Under Stalin's rule, there was a significant expansion of, and far more, positive female images. In a wide variety of print and artistic representations as well as social and political events, women were characterized as active citizens and positive symbols of the new Soviet order. This was no small matter. During the 1920s, for example, over 300 Soviet postage stamps—official items of the new state—had featured people, but they have been without exception men; in contrast, after 1929 under Stalin, women began to appear, signaling their inclusion in the body politic. Stalinist narratives of women as exemplary figures underscored their modern transformation as well as the successes of the Revolution and the new Stalinist order; women had gone from being poor and benighted peasants and workers to successful laborers, and even unemployed housewives had become contributors to the Soviet project. Depictions of newly visible women notables, along with images of women as scientists, masters of technology, and physically fit and strong athletes, coexisted with more conventional displays of mothers, underscoring women's ability to be working mothers, including heroic ones. In narratives about female luminaries from national minorities, becoming a public heroine also involved breaking with traditional and "backward" religious and ethnic practices.

Despite women's public recognition under Stalin as invaluable participants in the construction of a new order, and Communist ideology that posited women's active involvement in politics as integral to their overall emancipation and the building of socialism, the political elite did not treat women as political equals. In the 1920s, women's political marginalization had been explained in part as a result of women's alleged ignorance and lack of economic independence, both of which supposedly hindered their ability to act as autonomous political agents. Wage labor was supposed to allow women to become more economically and thus politically independent from men, and education was supposed to transform women into politically aware and active citizens. But despite women's increased education and mass entry into paid labor in the 1930s, they remained largely outside of high politics under Stalin's rule (and indeed beyond). Few women occupied top positions in the

All-Union Council of Ministers (before 1946 called the *Sovnarkom*), the All-Union Supreme Soviet, and the Communist Party Central Committee, and not a single woman served on the Politburo, the highest policy-making body of the CP between 1919 and Stalin's death. Women constituted between 12 and 21 percent of total Communist Party members in Stalin's time, although they fared a bit better numerically in the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*), constituting 34 percent of its members in the mid-1930s. Female involvement in both the CP and the *Komsomol* was constrained by anti-women prejudice as well as most women's daily double burden of having to labor in the home and workplace.

Women's leadership in lower-level party and government bodies was also limited, though it did increase during the Stalin era. Female leaders largely served in political sectors directly related to women's everyday responsibilities as mothers, wives, and caretakers, such as education and public health. Interestingly, some female national minorities might have been better represented in government and party institutions than their Slavic counterparts, for as the regime sought to extend Soviet power in predominantly Muslim regions, it established quotas mandating one-third of posts for women in such bodies.

In 1930, one of the main vehicles for women's political activism and advocacy, the women's section of the Communist Party (*Zhenotdel*), was abolished. In the 1920s, the *Zhenotdel* organized literacy campaigns, consciousness-raising activities among women, and a delegate system that offered women political training and experience. It also sought to emancipate female national minorities from "oppressive" religious and indigenous customs. Although acting on behalf of the party, the *Zhenotdel* offered women some political autonomy, and frequently advocated on behalf of "women's" issues. In 1930, Communist leaders framed the liquidation of the women's section positively—ostensibly because the woman's question had been "solved" and women had gained equality. In actuality, women lacked political parity or equality, and the *Zhenotdel*'s dissolution eliminated a major vehicle for advancing women's voices and concerns.

The regime's failure to treat women as political equals to men is underscored in its structures of repression. To be sure, millions of women and men suffered immensely during Stalin's purges in the mid-to-late 1930s, but women constituted only about 6–9 percent of the prison-camp population of the *Gulag*. The secret police targeted the wives and family members of political prisoners, however, and established a special camp for them in Karaganda. Female criminals and prostitutes also ended up in camps when police forces targeted them as "socially harmful elements" during the mass operations stage of the purges in 1937 and 1938. Even though Stalin and the Soviet leadership did not deem women politically threatening enough to incarcerate them en masse, the Great Terror inflicted deep violence on the psyches and

lives of women who remained outside the camps, particularly those directly connected to male "enemies of the people." Guilty by association, these women often lost their jobs and friends, and struggled to survive in conditions of economic deprivation and social isolation.

## Soviet Power, Islam, and Gender

Despite some changes in Soviet nationalities policy during the Stalin era, the regime continued to link the Sovietization of national minorities to the eradication of traditional religious and ethnic practices viewed as anti-Soviet and oppressive to women. As a result, Communist authorities promoted women's "emancipation" in the predominantly Muslim regions of Soviet Azerbaijan and Central Asia, believing that this would win over local women, undermine indigenous power and patriarchal family structures, and lead to widespread social transformation. The Communist liberation narrative about freeing Muslim women from male oppression contained problematic Eurocentric and colonial assumptions, however.

Under Stalin, Party and local activists abandoned the *Hujum*, the very public assault on religious and indigenous customs in Central Asia of 1926 and 1927, which had included mass unveiling campaigns in Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan, which had resulted in a violent backlash against women who unveiled. Still, in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, unveiling and ending female seclusion remained priorities. In regions where veiling was not common among indigenous women, Soviet officials focused instead on promoting women's education and medical care as well as enforcing recent laws against bride-wealth, polygamy, and underage marriage. In the first seven months of 1929, for example, Soviet courts tried over a thousand Turkmeni men for engaging in these illegal marital practices. The police and judiciary also went after local men who harmed women for unveiling or engaging in public life. In addition to using criminal prosecutions to advance change, the Stalinist government linked Communist Party loyalty to compliance with new Soviet laws and initiatives, and punished or expelled men for gender transgressions in the mass *proverka* (verification campaign) of members that began in 1929. In the purges of the 1930s, Party men who failed to unveil their wives or abandon other traditional gender and family customs were often deemed "enemies of the people." Despite Soviet print and visual culture in the 1930s that trumpeted the successful modernization of female national minorities (such as newsreels featuring Russian *and* Kazakh women doctors treating Kazakh male patients), significant opposition to gender reforms led many national minorities to ignore or subvert new Soviet laws and prescriptions.

Some Muslims, including Jadidists who advocated Islamic modernization before the 1917 Revolution, and local women activists who supported changes in gender norms and, in some cases, had initiated personal reforms in their own lives in advance of Communist initiatives, supported the regime's liberation policies for women. Other Muslims saw the campaign against Islamic and ethnic practices as an imperialist assault on their way of life and an attempt to impose Russian and foreign ways. From this perspective, the practice of religious and indigenous customs became an act of political and cultural resistance. Ironically, by politicizing everyday familial, marital, and gender customs, the Soviet regime advanced Muslim women's political agency, a Communist goal, which they didn't always exercise in support of Soviet power. Whereas some Muslim women chose to eschew old practices and adopt new "Soviet" behavior, others did not, either because of male pressure and domination or in defense of their own religious and ethnic identities. Women's actions, however, were not necessarily political or anti-colonial. Stalinist policies of collectivization and modernization, as well as the Second World War, wrought not only massive economic but also social changes, which undermined traditional gender norms. As girls began to attend Soviet schools, and women began to work as full-time collective farm laborers or urban wage earners, female seclusion lessened. Because Soviet schools did not allow students to wear veils, and veils were impractical in many workplaces, veiling also became less common. Nonetheless, even as Muslim women became better educated, adopted new jobs and public roles, discarded their veils, exercised personal freedoms such as divorce that Communist power had introduced, and gained access to basic Soviet healthcare, many acted as guardians of religious faith, indigenous customs, and ethnic identity in their private lives, both during the Stalin era and in later years.

## The Military and the Great Patriotic War

As toward 1939 the Stalinist regime readied for possible war with the capitalist West, particularly Nazi Germany, it promoted another version of the New Soviet Woman, the female soldier, who both disrupted and reaffirmed existing gendered landscapes. Although some women had fought during the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Civil War (1918–21), gender roles in the early Soviet years marked men as the "defenders" of the country and women as the "victims" of war and aggression in need of men's protection. Stalinist authorities, however, encouraged female teenagers and young women to enroll in an expanding network of paramilitary classes, and by the mid-1930s, their participation was reportedly around 50 percent in many regions. The *Komsomol*, and, to a lesser extent, the Society for the Promotion

of Defense, Aviation, and Chemical Industries (*Osoaviakhim*), likewise promoted girls' and women's military training. In the last few years before the Nazi invasion, the Soviet press and popular culture also began to feature the accomplishments of female snipers, parachutists, and sharpshooters, suggesting that womanhood and military service were not incompatible. The regime's celebration of three female aviators who set a new world flying record in 1938 underscored women's technical and potential military prowess.

As approximately 800,000–1,000,000 women joined the Red Army and partisan forces during the Second World War, women soldiers became increasingly recognized as a distinct group in society. If, at first, female volunteers signed up only as individuals, in early 1942, the Stalinist regime shifted course and began to mobilize women officially because of the need for new military recruits, given the decimation of fighting forces in 1941. Soviet women served in many military capacities, in contrast to female service in the armed forces elsewhere, in which women were cast as "noncombatants." In the Soviet context, the previously male space of combat was regendered as a mixed space as hundreds of thousands of women served at the front. Significantly, many women did not feel the need to erase their "female" differences to become soldiers and asserted their womanliness instead of cultivating a masculine soldierly self.

The gender transformation of the frontlines challenged the soldierly identity of male troops. As a result, most male soldiers and commanders initially viewed the identity of soldier and woman as antithetical, and reacted to women soldiers in combat units with incomprehension and hostility. As the war wore on, the experience of fighting alongside women, and sometimes being commanded by them, appears to have changed some men's minds about women's capacity to be military comrades. Many men, nonetheless, sought to reaffirm their differences from women, and did so by asserting a military masculinity that sexualized female forces, and contributed to women's sexual harassment and assault. Focusing on female soldiers' sexual rather than military roles allowed men to disassociate combat from women and construct them as sex partners rather than military comrades. Communist leaders, meanwhile, celebrated men's hyperviolent masculinity and focused on their outstanding individual feats of killing and courageous support for their male comrades. Despite women's presence at the front, official discourse and male soldiers touted the importance of this camaraderie to military successes, linking frontline brotherhood to soldierly masculinity.

The Soviet press did not report the many difficulties female soldiers faced, from sexual abuse to the lack of women's-size boots or of supplies for menstruating women. Yet it also did not treat these women as an oddity. Instead, the press extolled women soldiers' exploits as daughters fighting on behalf of the Motherland. Many narratives also emphasized female soldiers'

femininity, which may have reflected individual woman's self-presentation but additionally served to reassure readers that a distinct binary gender order was still intact. Significantly, reportage focused on exemplary women combatants but not on female troops as a whole or the state's mobilization of women into the armed forces, which effectively obscured the scale and nature of women's involvement. As the silencing of this broader military context suggests, the Stalinist regime did not intend for the female soldier to be a permanent identity.

Although many women were recognized during the war as heroes and lauded for their military valor, in the immediate postwar and late-Stalin years the central press and official war narratives largely marginalized female combatants' contributions, focusing instead on women's war efforts as workers and mothers. Soviet authorities rejected the female soldier as a permanent model of womanhood by accelerating women's demobilization at the end of the war and encouraging female troops to pursue nonmilitary careers. The great Moscow Victory Parade reasserted the masculinity of combat by *not* featuring women veterans. This suppression of female soldiers' sacrifices was deeply painful for them; as one explained,

> Men were victors, heroes, wooers, the war was theirs, but we were looked at with quite different eyes ...
>
> I'll tell you, they robbed us of the victory.[8]

In some postwar regional narratives, however, women veterans received greater attention. In recently occupied Latvia, for example, they were honored as symbols of the "liberation" of the new Soviet republic from past oppressors, bourgeois, and Germans.

After the war, silence also surrounded the brutal sexual violence male Soviet troops inflicted on perhaps 2 million German, Austrian, and other women as they liberated Nazi-occupied regions and claimed victory over Germany. Even if not official policy, soldiers perpetrated mass rape to express their Soviet *and* masculine dominance over women, and the Third Reich and Axis enemies more generally. By acting in groups, they reinforced their collective brotherhood and transformed rape into a social act of male soldierly bonding, while pressuring reluctant comrades to participate. Although this sexual violence might have reinforced many soldiers' sense of virility, damaged from the war, it might also have undermined their masculine identity by transgressing gender norms that positioned men as male protectors of women and children. How did men's sexual violence inform their postwar masculine selves and their reintegration into civilian life? How did it affect their relationships with women?

As the Stalinist regime applauded returning male soldiers, it encouraged them to return to the workforce and "renew their military glory every day in their work."[9] This transition proved difficult for many men who suffered

emotional and physical damages from the war, especially the 2.75 million physically disabled veterans who often lacked medical support, including prosthetic devices, for their impairments. For many veterans, moreover, the workplace was hardly a vehicle for heroic glory or even self-realization. Alienated from work, politics, and their families, many veterans met in taverns, bathhouses, and other homosocial venues where they reasserted their frontline brotherhood. Meanwhile, many younger Soviet men who did not serve during the Great Patriotic War and could not claim a military masculinity sought to emulate soldiers, while others began to distinguish themselves by developing an alternative and nonmilitary model of manhood rooted in jazz, Western-style fashions, and dancing. Although these stylish young men (*stiliagi*) faced significant public disapproval, they were not repressed because many were sons of the Stalinist elite and their "rebellion" was not explicitly political. Joined by other young men and women from different social strata in the late-Stalin and post-Stalin years, they contributed to a new Soviet youth culture.

Enormous wartime losses, particularly of male lives, resulted in a terrible population imbalance in the male-to-female ratio. Men constituted approximately four-fifths of war deaths. Cognizant of this demographic crisis, and a decline in the birth rate, the Stalinist government adopted a new Family Law in 1944 to spur reproduction. By making divorce much more difficult and redefining legal marriage to encompass only registered unions, the law was supposed to promote family stability, and therefore greater procreation. The law was hardly conservative, however. By stripping unregistered marriages and any children of such unions of any legal standing, including paternal child support, promising financial and other forms of government assistance to newly defined "unwed" mothers and "out-of-wedlock" children, and relieving men of responsibility for offspring of sexual liasions, the law unintentionally encouraged men to pursue extramarital affairs and impregnate unmarried and widowed women. Finally, by offering increased financial assistance and new awards to mothers of large families, and lowering the number of children required to receive such aid, the law was supposed to incentivize motherhood.

The new law legitimized "single" motherhood, as did Soviet propaganda, which heralded unmarried mothers' successes in raising happy and healthy children. This does not mean, however, that unmarried mothers and their children faced no social opprobrium. Meanwhile, the state's monetary aid proved inadequate, and many "single"-mother families received less help than they would have from child support payments. Moreover, religious and cultural opposition to the new policy, for example, in the new Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, as well as bureaucratic incompetence, meant that some "single" mothers never received state aid.

The war and the 1944 Family Law changed the structure of Soviet families. The huge number of widows, the greater difficulty in heterosexual pair bonding given the unbalanced sex ratio, and the legitimization of unmarried motherhood meant that "fatherless" families became an increasing reality. By uncoupling marriage from reproduction, and adopting new pronatalist policies, the Party-state made motherhood even more of an imperative for normative womanhood. Meanwhile, Soviet public discourse, including literature, directed women to be healers of men's physically and psychologically damaged bodies. This had the effect of gendering wartime trauma male, erasing the very real trauma that female soldiers and women on the home front had experienced.

During the war and in the postwar period, Stalinist propaganda and visual culture asserted Soviet men's roles as fathers and protectors of their families. Homecoming narratives continued this trend, emphasizing demobilized soldiers' happy reunions with their families, and some postwar popular magazines and paintings depicted returning fathers' bonds with their children. These representations marked a shift from Soviet men's earlier marginalization as fathers, and suggested a new familial masculinity for men to embrace. At the same time, however, the 1944 Family Law—and the realities of the war—undermined fathers' familial roles. Moreover, postwar visual culture and media trumpeted Stalin's role as not only the paternal leader of the great Soviet family but also the surrogate father in individual families.

## Sexual Politics

The sexual politics of the Stalinist regime—like its gender politics—were oriented toward transforming and regulating sexual norms, practices, and identities to promote a new Soviet order and Party-state objectives. Soviet discourses and policies regarding gender, the family, ethnic and national minorities, religion, and class, as well as the regime's economic and political agendas, informed Stalinist sexual politics.

During the early Soviet and Stalin years, Communist authorities promoted heterosexuality as the natural and "normal" sexuality for Soviet citizens. Although they promulgated this construction of heterosexuality in new family laws, court cases, visual culture, and printed media, as already discussed, they also rejected various forms of heterosexual relations and practices, such as underage marriages, which were associated with women's oppression and "backward" religious and national customs. Under Stalin, female prostitution, which had been decriminalized in 1922, came under increased attack. If during the early Soviet years public health and medical officials sought to rehabilitate female prostitutes and integrate them into society, in the early 1930s Communist authorities adopted more punitive tactics and

increasingly sent them to corrective labor colonies in the *Gulag* system. This change was a result of new police efforts to regulate urban areas and cleanse them of "social anomalies," given the massive social dislocation caused by Stalin's economic policies. In addition, in the context of the drive for rapid industrialization and women's mass entry into paid labor, the alleged causes of women's prostitution—unemployment and dismal material conditions—were purportedly resolved. According to Communist authorities, women were no longer compelled to sell their bodies, and, thus, if they did, deserved to be punished.

The previously discussed Stalinist Family Law of 1936 affirmed the regime's sexual conservatism, including its rejection of the more liberated heterosexuality of the postrevolutionary years and 1920s, which was marked by an increase in premarital and nonmarital sexual relations as well as divorces. Indeed, as the new policy explained, making divorce more difficult was intended to combat "light-minded attitudes toward the family and family obligations."[10] Nonetheless, although the new law indicated a shift, most Communist leaders had in fact long promoted sexual conservatism. In the early 1920s, they rejected Kollontai's radical sexual ideas and viewed sexual liberation as distracting to the socialist cause. The *Komsomol* sought to channel young people's sexual energy into the collective building of socialism. Many Soviet officials, social commentators, and medical professionals decried sexual libertinism, linking "excessive" sexual activity to moral degradation and poor health. Sanitary enlightenment propaganda of the 1920s talked about non-procreative and casual sex only in negative terms, associating it with venereal disease, men's infidelity to their wives, and the sexually deviant prostitute.

The regime's sexual conservatism, nonetheless, intensified under Stalin's rule. Public discussions about sexuality disappeared in the 1930s. By 1932, the nascent field of Soviet sexology was dead, and plans to host the Fifth Congress of the World League of Sexual Reform in the Soviet Union were abandoned. Studies of sexual behavior, venereal diseases, or related publications were either destroyed or removed to special divisions in the libraries that were closed to the general public. As Soviet authorities terminated the public health sexual enlightenment efforts of the 1920s, citizens were schooled, instead, via "moral education" and the punishment of "deviant" behavior. Freudian ideas about sexuality and psychoanalysis were discredited as perverse. In 1934, the government (re-) criminalized sodomy (meaning male homosexuality), and in 1935, it passed an anti-pornography law.

The Stalinist regime's criminalization of male homosexuality in 1933 and 1934 marked a significant policy change. In 1917, Bolshevik leaders repealed tsarist criminal statutes, including the criminalization of male sodomy, and the new Russian Criminal Code of 1922 reaffirmed this change. So, too,

did the penal codes in Soviet Ukraine and Belorussia. The legalization of consensual male same-sex relations, partly a product of the new regime's decision to secularize criminal law, did not indicate widespread acceptance. Instead of viewing homosexuality as a crime, Communist leaders, Soviet officials, and experts adopted a biomedical perspective and characterized it as an abnormality, illness, and psychological "perversion." Significantly, homosexuality was decriminalized in the more "modern" and "European" parts of the Soviet Union, but not in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Soviet Central Asian republics. In these, more "primitive," regions with a majority of non-Slavic peoples, Communist authorities viewed homosexuality differently, claiming that it was particularly common and "an endemic form of depravity" that warranted punishment.[11] In Central Asia, they also outlawed the "keeping of *bachi*," that is, the practice of hiring cross-dressed feminine dancing boys as entertainers and prostitutes for men, which they associated with the persistence of local "primitive" and capitalist customs. Communist authorities also rejected a biomedical approach to same-sex relations among Russian Orthodox clergy, or between clergy and laymen (particularly boys), claiming, instead, that homosexuality and pederasty were the result of the perverted conditions of a monastic and religious life. The regime's approach to male same-sex relations in the early Soviet years, therefore, was multifaceted and inconsistent. Even in regions where homosexuality was legalized, Soviet censorship limited public discussion about same-sex sexuality or its artistic and literary representation, while homophobia led many gay men in the 1920s to get married to advance their careers, as Communist and medical authorities deemed marriage a cure for same-sex desire.

A new domestic and international context in the late 1920s and early 1930s contributed to the (re-) criminalization of male sodomy. During the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32), Communist Party leaders directed the Commissariat of Health and related professionals to adopt new medical priorities and strategies to boost industrial and agricultural workers' productivity. This coincided with the imposition of new orthodoxies in a variety of scientific and cultural fields and delegitimization of "bourgeois" and non-Party specialists (professionals associated with the Old Regime) as part of the so-called Cultural Revolution. Together, these changes contributed to attacks against "biologizing" doctors and scientists who supported a biomedical understanding of homosexuality, psychiatrists who promoted a biosocial and therapeutic approach to same-sex desire, and sexologists who sought to better understand human sexuality. In this environment, research about and "treatment" of Soviet homosexuals—male and female—appears to have ceased. Meanwhile, as the police stepped up efforts to control urban areas and remove social problems, gay men were targeted in visible male homosexual subcultures. After raids against gay and bisexual men in Russian and Ukrainian urban communities in 1933, Genrikh

Iagoda (1891–1938), the deputy chief of the secret police, contacted Stalin with a new draft anti-sodomy law, arguing that "pederasts" threatened state security by engaging in espionage and debauching "healthy young people." In these new domestic circumstances, Soviet leaders rejected the earlier medical and psychiatric approach to homosexuality in favor of a new penal approach involving compulsory labor treatment.

The politicization of male homosexuality in the context of the growing Nazi threat also played a role in recriminalization. Speaking in 1934 on behalf of the anti-sodomy law, the world-famous writer Maxim Gorky (Gor'kii; 1868–1936) justified it as a blow against the forces of fascism by asserting that homosexuality was a product of fascist degeneracy and foreign perversion. Arguing that homosexuality had no place in the Soviet Union, he proclaimed "Destroy the homosexuals—Fascism will disappear."[12] Other Communist leaders also envisioned homosexuals as political enemies involved in anti-Soviet activities. Official discourse that associated homosexuality with the corruption of male youth and bourgeois depravity further delegitimized it. Purportedly "normal," politically loyal, non-fascist, and non-bourgeois Soviet people did not engage in same-sex relations.

The number of male victims of the new anti-sodomy law is difficult to determine, given the lack of access to relevant archives and the bureaucratic complexity of surveillance and prosecution. Existing evidence, however, suggests mass arrests occurring in several major Soviet cities in 1934 and thousands of prosecutions (if not more) during the Stalin era. In this context, Pyotr, the gay soldier mentioned earlier in this chapter, would have become a target. Still, despite repression, male urban homosexual subcultures continued to exist, as men rejected the heteronormative sexual order by meeting for love and sex. Meanwhile, male same-sex relations that were more "private" appear to have garnered less police attention, and some gay and bisexual men, including well-known figures, lived their lives without persecution, especially if they married women and kept their same-sex desires from the public. For gay men living more openly, punishment was a real possibility during the purges of the 1930s, including not only imprisonment but also execution. The poet Nikolai Kliuev (1884–1937), for example, who wrote about homosexual love and refused to compose "normal verses," met this fate. While undoubtedly the all-Union anti-sodomy law and official homophobia adversely affected the lives of men-loving-men during the Stalin era, details of the lived experience of such men are not well known, particularly in rural areas and regions with national and religious minorities.

Significantly, female homosexuality was not criminalized under Stalin or any other Soviet leader. Unlike their male counterparts, women-loving-women were not characterized as a potential political threat since women generally lacked political power. Authorities didn't view female same-sex sexuality as

a social threat either; women's lesser economic power to establish urban subcultures as well as their more private forms of social organization meant their same-sex relations were not as publicly visible as that of queer men. Soviet discourses that promoted motherhood as essential to womanhood and as women's civic duty also compelled many queer women to enter into heterosexual marriages so they could become mothers, which masked their identities and desires. Meanwhile, medical professionals argued that "genuine" female homosexuals were uncommon, and associated female homosexuality with "masculine" women who demonstrated gender nonconformity in their dress, behavior, and adoption of "male" jobs. Interestingly, although most experts condemned these women for their sexual transgressions, some viewed their gender transgressions more equivocally, for they associated these women's masculinity with political consciousness, skills, and public competency. Doctors and psychiatrists argued that "feminine" and gender-conforming women who pursued same-sex relations did so because of bad heterosexual relations, or because of temporary corruption by the "mannish" female homosexual. Although female same-sex relations were not criminalized, it appears that at least some lesbians faced punishment in the early Soviet and Stalin eras for their sexually transgressive behavior, charged with crimes such as engaging in "depraved acts" with a minor, "crimes of nature," and "hooliganism."[13]

Despite the Stalinist regime's condemnation and criminalization of male homosexuality, policies regarding it were not consistent. In the *Gulag*, the forced-labor penal camp system initiated under Stalin's rule was apparently pervasive, and largely ignored (or tolerated) by camp officials who viewed it as a product of incarceration and a homosocial environment. They also viewed it as a product of carceral power relations, in which prisoners established a hierarchy, enacting sexual violence against other inmates and reducing "passive" homosexuals to the lowest status. Authorities permitted this system of sexual dominance, which they could and did manipulate, particularly since it often involved "criminal" inmates (supposedly friendly to the Soviet regime) abusing "political" inmates (those deemed hostile to Communist rule). Many camp officials also indulged queer relations because of the perception that they helped to preserve order and enhance labor output. If some men engaged in homosexual sex to experience pleasure and enact violence against others, others pursued consenting queer relationships for intimacy and love. Some men also engaged in sexual barter to receive benefits, such as additional food.

Female same-sex sexuality in the camps also appears to have been largely ignored or tolerated by officials. Like male same-sex sexuality, many interpreted it as acquired and temporary homosexuality due to incarceration; ostensibly when released, the majority of women would abandon same-sex relations in favor of heterosexual ones. Although female prisoners of all social

classes engaged in same-sex relations—for the sake of pleasure, love, or in exchange for improved living and work conditions—women of the intelligentsia often sought to conceal their lesbian affairs in an effort to maintain their class distinction. According to them, it was "criminal" inmates who engaged in such relations, allegedly seducing innocent prisoners and shamelessly parading their desires. Educated women also constructed "criminal" queer women as different, even disgusting, because many violated gender norms. In the lesbian subculture of the camps, some women assumed a "masculine" and assertive role (the *kobly*, butches), while others assumed a "feminine" and "passive" role (the *kovyrialki*, femmes). Although such "butch-femme" couples existed in the 1920s and earlier, and were not merely a product of the *Gulag*, some scholars allege that camp life helped to mainstream this relationship model and subculture, eclipsing most other models and an earlier "salon" lesbian subculture. This argument is moot: It underscores the need for more research to better understand the nuances and complexity of female queer relations under Stalin's rule and in subsequent years.

Whereas Communist Party meetings and procurators' reports from camps appear to have evinced no concern about homosexual relations, the same cannot be said of heterosexual sex. Communist authorities and camp administrators frequently discussed it as a problem and sought to limit sexual contact between male and female prisoners by officially banning cohabitation, punishing inmates for heterosexual relations, and imposing sex-segregation in the camps. This might have been because of the potential economic problems resulting from heterosexual sex: any pregnancies and births hindered women's labor productivity and required the allocation of scarce camp resources to support pregnant and nursing mothers as well as babies and children. In the broader context of the regime's pronatalism, however, this procreation was still useful to the state, and many camps established maternity wards and nurseries. Despite the efforts to curb heterosexual sex, it flourished in the camps. Although some female prisoners sought heterosexual intimacy, many others experienced sexual violence at the hands of male inmates and camp personnel. Some heterosexual female prisoners, like their queer counterparts, also used sexual barter to better their camp situations.

Under Stalin, Communist leaders adopted a relatively "radical" position on interethnic and interracial sexual relations. Unlike many governments around the world, which banned "miscegenation" and interracial unions, the Stalinist regime endorsed racial mixing and mixed marriages. Although in the early Soviet years some scholars and eugenicists objected to these unions because of their belief in a worldwide racial hierarchy and the idea that the mixing of the "races" would lead to physical and moral degeneracy, Stalinist authorities officially repressed these views in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Soviet laws already embraced the equality of all people, regardless of race

or ethnicity. Moreover, according to Communist ideology, differences among people were a result of historical, cultural, and material differences rather than biological differences. As Nazi rule was established in 1933, the Stalinist regime explicitly rejected Nazi and eugenicist racist ideas. Rather than seeing mixed marriages as a negative, the Communist Party characterized mixed marriages as a positive means for bringing the Soviet Union's diverse groups together and generating a unified people. Mixed marriages also legitimized communism by exemplifying the Soviet commitment to racial equality and the "friendship of peoples," in contrast to the explicit racism of capitalist and fascist regimes.

## Wartime and Postwar Sexualities

The mass upheaval of the Second World War contributed to the development of a new Soviet sexual landscape. As men and then women entered the armed forces, and families fell under German occupation, or were evacuated away from the front, many relationships collapsed. Wartime conditions led many husbands, wives, and non-married lovers to seek sexual and emotional intimacy outside of their existing unions. In the process, sexual norms and practices in Soviet society shifted, and extramarital as well as casual relationships became more common.

This kind of sexual behavior flourished in the Red Army. While some rank-and-file female and male soldiers fell in love with each other and established mutually affectionate unions, other military relationships were more hierarchical and tended to involve male officers with female subordinates. Women in these relationships—frequently called "field campaign wives"—provided sexual and other services to higher-ranking men in exchange for special privileges, such as supplementary rations. While some women actively pursued these relationships, others were essentially commanded to play this role by their superiors. Still other women felt compelled to enter into these relationships because of the constant male sexual harassment they faced. As one female soldier explained,

> It was very hard for us to exist in that zone. For that reason, many of the girls got off with one single guy, in order to protect themselves from advances from the rest of them.... It was very hard.[14]

Women soldiers were also raped by their male compatriots.

Although *both* men and women were sexually active in the Red Army, women were subjected to a sexual double standard. Many male soldiers apparently saw women's sexual activity either as a sign of weakness—a way

to gain benefits or to get pregnant so they would be sent home—or a sign of immorality, whereas they saw their own similar sexual conduct as natural. Soviet society more broadly condemned women's sexual relations in the Red Army, holding them but not men accountable for what many perceived as a wartime breakdown in moral values. This double standard had serious consequences for military women at the end of the war, and effectively silenced the sexual violence that some had experienced. The perception that many female soldiers had been "loose" also stigmatized them and led many women to keep their bravery and military contributions at the front to themselves. "Try telling it," one woman veteran stated, "and who will give you a job then, who will marry you?"[15]

It is likely that the wartime conditions that led to a new morality and more temporary heterosexual relations on the home front also contributed to an increase in same-sex relations. As research about other countries has shown, the Second World War provided many opportunities for male troops to act on same-sex desires, which they may have been unable or unwilling to explore during peacetime. Moreover, despite Soviet women's military participation, the armed forces as a whole remained very male, and most men experienced the war in a homosocial context. Unlike elsewhere, Soviet authorities did not grant male troops regular leave or organize wartime brothels so that men could pursue heterosexual liaisons. As male troops experienced the challenges of war, they frequently took care of each other, performing "feminine" tasks such as tending to wounds and preparing food. Many men formed deep friendships and emotional bonds, and some even spoke of their great love for each other, which in some cases was presumably romantic love. As women soldiers also experienced the hardships of the war, and new opportunities for pursuing same-sex intimacy, undoubtedly some turned to each other for love and support, including sex. It is worth noting that although many of the same-sex relations during the war were consensual, inevitably some were also nonconsensual.

Freer sexual relations during the war were reinforced by the 1944 Family Law, which implicitly encouraged non-conjugal relationships and greater sexual promiscuity for reproductive purposes. This law too reaffirmed a sexual double standard; women were expected to be sexually active to become mothers, but not to pursue sexual activity for the sake of pleasure. Indeed, the Soviet regime regarded female sexuality with great ambivalence, particularly female youth sexuality. Anxiety among Communist and educational authorities in the late 1930s and early war years about "unhealthy relations" between boys and girls, and a perceived increase in youth sexual activity, fueled the Stalinist regime's decision in 1943 to abandon coeducation in urban schools. This policy to monitor and contain youth sexuality remained in place throughout Stalin's reign.

Although Stalin hardly promoted a politics of sexual freedom, there was a kind of sexual revolution after his first decade in power. The Great Patriotic War and the new Family Law of 1944 had a dramatic effect on sexual norms and behaviors. The *Gulag* also appears to have fostered new sexual practices, and its revolving door—a yearly release of perhaps 20 percent of inmates during the Stalin era as well as an amnesty in 1945—meant that Soviet society was flooded with released prisoners, some of whom likely pursued similar sexual conduct at home. Finally, the demographic imbalance at the end of the war contributed to a crisis of heterosexuality in the postwar period, as reproductive-aged women vastly outnumbered their male counterparts. For millions of Soviet women, marriage was simply unattainable, and since motherhood was tied to normative womanhood, millions of widows and single women became unmarried mothers in the late 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, from 1945 to 1955, 8.7 million children were officially born out of wedlock. As "looser" sexual relationships between men and women prevailed in the postwar and late Stalin era, the divorce rate also continued to climb, despite the greater difficulty in procuring one.[16] Sexual norms and practices, of course, varied in different Soviet communities, so overall trends do not do justice to regional and local variations.

If the regime effectively sanctioned new heterosexual norms and behaviors, it did not approve of new expressions of same-sex desires or liaisons. Authorities' condemnation of "pair friendships" among cadets at the Suvorov military academies in the late 1940s, which they deemed "the worst, most unhealthy form of individualism," suggests official anxiety about postwar military same-sex relationships.[17] Concern by *Gulag* doctors and administrators about the spread of homosexual identities and queer sex in Soviet society as millions of prisoners were released after Stalin's death suggests that they might have had similar fears upon the release of at least 600,000 inmates in Stalin's 1945 amnesty. Notwithstanding official homophobia during the Stalin era, however, there doesn't appear to be evidence of an active homophobic campaign and punitive policies against the Gulag queer until after Stalin's death. Moreover, despite criminal prosecutions of men having sex with men in the postwar period, evidence from court cases suggests that many Soviet citizens knew about but did not report them to authorities. This "quiet accomodationism" may have existed as well in the earlier Stalin era, but it is also possible that this limited tolerance was a result of new "popular notions of domestic privacy and accepted official intrusion" after the Second World War.[18]

## Conclusion

When Stalin died in 1953, the Stalinist gender and sexual order was not replaced by a more liberal one, despite destalinization and various liberalizing

reforms under Nikita Khrushchev's leadership. Instead, the new regime increased the persecution and prosecution of male same-sex desire—both in the *Gulag* and in wider society. As lesbians, too, received renewed attention, medical professionals often subjected them to psychiatric "treatment" and hospitalization for their "perversions." Seeking to replace Stalin's overt coercion and repression as a method of control, Khrushchev instead promoted moral renewal as official policy as a way to discipline citizens. The campaign to promote "communist morality," combined with Khrushchev's efforts to reinvigorate socialist democracy (popular participation in the administration of society), resulted in the more overt regulation of gender and sexual norms and practices in the everyday lives of Soviet people, as new and revived mechanisms for peer surveillance were established.

## Notes

Special thanks to Elizabeth Wood and Naomi Andrews for their feedback on this chapter.

1 Because the Communist Party was so much entangled with the Soviet government, many scholars call it a "Party-state."

2 Kollontai was briefly people's commissar (government minister) of social welfare after the 1917 October Revolution, and was a member of the highest Party committee (the Central Committee) from 1917 to 1921.

3 Wendy Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 219.

4 Greta Bucher, *Women, the Bureaucracy and Daily Life in Postwar Moscow, 1945–1953*, Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006, 65.

5 See more on this in the chapter of the peasantry.

6 See, for example, Lynne Viola, "Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization," *The Russian Review* 1, 1986, 23–42.

7 The reader can see this clearly on this book's front-cover.

8 Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, New York: Random House, 2017, 109.

9 Robert Dale, "Being a Real Man: Masculinities during and after the Great Patriotic War," in Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers, eds., *Gender and the Second World War: The Lessons of War*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017, 116–34, 124.

10 Rudolf Schlesinger, ed., *The Family in the U.S.S.R.: Documents and Readings*, London: Routledge, 1949, 278.

11 Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 162.

12 Ibid., 189.

**13** Ibid., 68, 225.

**14** Kerstin Bischl, "Telling Stories: Gender Relationships and Masculinity in the Red Army 1941–45," in Maren Roger and Ruth Leiserowitz, eds., *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, Osnabrück: Fibre, 2012, 117–34, 129.

**15** Alexievich, *Unwomanly Face*, 109.

**16** Mie Nakachi, "N. S. Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law: Politics, Reproduction, and Language," *East European Politics and Societies* 1, 2006, 40–68.

**17** Erica Fraser, *Rearming Masculinity: Martial Brotherhoods and Postwar Recovery in the Soviet Union*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming, 81.

**18** Dan Healey, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, 70.