

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan.**

Nordberg, Jenny (Author)

Sep 2014. 368 p. Crown, hardcover, \$25. (9780307952493). Crown, e-book, (9780307952516). 305.309.

Investigative journalist Nordberg presents a stunning book that uncovers the history and reality of the enduring Afghani custom of the *bacha posh*, that is, girls who dress and pass as boys. Far from what readers might expect, this tradition allows families to celebrate the arrival of a “male” child when the absence of one can have a negative impact. Further, dressing and treating a girl as a boy is believed by some to spur an actual future male birth. In other cases, Nordberg finds the reasoning is more prosaic, for a male child may accompany sisters outside the home. The deeper she gets into the reasons behind the custom, the more she pushes for insight from teenagers abruptly required to “convert” to womanhood and mothers unaware of how to deal with daughters who then must struggle to adopt the manners and habits adult females must exhibit in their gender-segregated society. Readers will find themselves captivated by the stories of these women, especially those who fight to be *bacha posh* into adulthood. Nordberg has done some staggering work in this unique, important, and compelling chronicle. Book clubs will be riveted and will talk for hours.

— *Colleen Mondor*