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# WOMEN'S LIVES

— AROUND THE WORLD —



Susan M. Shaw, General Editor, and Nancy Staton Barbour,  
Patti Duncan, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Jane Nichols, Editors



# WOMEN'S LIVES AROUND THE WORLD

A Global Encyclopedia

VOLUME 1  
AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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Susan M. Shaw, General Editor  
Nancy Staton Barbour, Patti Duncan,  
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Editors

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# Preface

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*Women's Lives around the World: A Global Encyclopedia* provides an overview of the important issues facing women in 150 different countries or territories. Each essay follows the same outline, allowing easy comparison across nations. The encyclopedia examines education, employment, children and teens, health, family, sexuality, politics, religion, and issues specific to each country, such as land rights, trafficking, climate change, and social media. Significantly, this encyclopedia also pays attention to the intersections of social difference in women's lives, noting how women's experiences of gender are shaped by race, ethnicity, language, sexual identity, social class, religion, and ability.

The encyclopedia also uses a decidedly feminist lens to examine all of these issues. Drawing from transnational, multicultural, postcolonial, and queer feminisms, these volumes seek to understand women's lives from perspectives of privilege, power, and systems of oppression.

The volumes are arranged regionally: Africa and the Middle East, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. As feminists, the editors grappled with definitions of *nation* and *region* and often made judgment calls based on feminist perspectives. For example, we have included Tibet and Palestine as separate entries in solidarity with their freedom struggles.

To supplement the essays on each nation, we include sidebars that explore individual ideas, movements, or

events; "Women's Voices" sidebars that provide a glimpse into the life of an individual woman or a group of women; and primary source documents that range from UN statements on women to excerpts from various national constitutions about women's rights. We also offer helpful charts and graphs and bibliographic entries for those who would like to explore issues in greater depth.

Such a project always requires incredible collaboration, and many authors contributed to the depth and breadth of this volume, drawing from their expertise and own commitments to social justice and women around the world. In a show of solidarity, these authors agreed to forego a stipend for their work, and the contributors' budget was donated to the National Women's Studies Association to fund a book award for feminist disability studies in honor of Dr. Alison Piepmeier, a feminist disability studies scholar and professor of women and gender studies at the College of Charleston, who died in 2016.

The bulk of the work for this encyclopedia came from the four dedicated volume editors who recruited writers, provided feedback, edited essays, and ensured a quality project to benefit students seeking to learn more about women. I cannot thank these editors enough—Nancy Barbour, Patti Duncan, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Jane Nichols, my colleagues at Oregon State University. I also thank the staff at ABC-CLIO who invited us to undertake this project, provided us with guidance and support, and



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extended our deadlines when needed—Kaitlin Ciarmiello, Lori Hobkirk, Anne Thompson, Barbara Patterson, and Cathleen Casey.

This encyclopedia is a testament to the enduring spirit of women, across all their differences, in their struggle for survival, civil and human rights, and a better future for all

humanity. Each essay and sidebar is an attempt to make women's lives more visible and to encourage social change toward inclusion, equity, and justice.

Susan M. Shaw  
General Editor



# G

## Ghana

### Overview of Country

The Republic of Ghana, West Africa, is a fairly recent creation. However, the name *Ghana* is ancient; it was first borne by a rich African empire in the Sahelian region of West Africa around 500 to 1200 CE (Boahen 1966, 3). The colonial territory of Gold Coast adopted the name Ghana when it obtained political independence from Great Britain on March 6, 1957, in remembrance and nostalgia for the empire's greatness. Ghana's triumph over colonialism made it a symbol of anticolonialism and Pan-Africanism for the so-called Third World people under foreign domination. General expectations for Ghana's successful development were high.

The First Republic started on July 1, 1960, under the leadership of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP). A military and police coup d'état that allegedly had the involvement and sponsorship of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), because of the Ghana government's leanings towards socialist and communist paths during the Cold War era, overthrew the First Republic in 1966 (Mahoney 1983). Ghana's political history became checkered with military regimes, of various durations, and democratically elected and constitutionally sanctioned republics. In 1992, the Fourth Republic, which is still in force, was born after the military junta of the

Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) led by Ft. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, who ruled for about 11 years.

In its short and turbulent postcolonial existence, Ghana has experimented with socialist and neoliberal capitalist politics and political economic paradigms in its pursuit for sustainable development, poverty reduction, and the improvement of life in general. Like other young nations, Ghana has experienced such growing pains as unemployment and faced challenges in its moves to establish good governance and access basic needs, comprehensive health care, adequate education, transport, communication, and industrial infrastructure. The new millennium is unfolding, and Ghana's efforts to positively improve the living standards of Ghanaians, a multiethnic people, and to achieve sustainable development in confluence with the agenda and ideals of the global Millennium Development Goals are alive and unfolding too.

Topographically, Ghana is mainly low-lying and variegated into zones: savannah, derived savannah, tropical lowland or tropical rain forest, and coastal shrub and grassland. Administratively, Ghana is divided into ten regions: Upper East, Upper West, Northern, Brong-Ahafo, Volta, Asante, Eastern, Greater Accra, Central, and Western. The city of Accra is its administrative and political capital. Agriculture, mining, and retail trade have been the key economic activities in the country. Agriculture employs about half of the population. The industrial infrastructure is not big, and so the country largely produces raw materials and exports



them to the global market, especially to the so-called industrialized countries. The biggest items of export are cocoa, timber, and gold. There are some white-collar jobs, but most people, especially women, act in the informal sector of the economy and are self-employed in farming, small-scale processing, and retailing (Amu 2006).

Indigenous Ghanaians are from different ethnic groups and regions that have amalgamated to form Ghana. Demographically, the major ethnic groups are the Akan (47.5%), Mole Dagbane (16.6%), Ewe (13.9%), Ga-Dangme (7.4%), and Guan (3.7%). Alongside these are other ancillary cultural and linguistic groups (GSS 2013). The youth section of the population is rapidly expanding. Ghana's population increased from 6,726,815 in 1960 to 24,658,823 in 2010, an increase of over threefold within 50 years. The average growth rate between years of the national census has been 2.5 percent since 1960 (GSS 2013). In 2010, the female population was 12,633,978. The sex ratio in 2000 was about 97 males per 100 females. In 2010, it was about 95 males to 100 females. The high exodus of males to the global diaspora in search of better jobs is a factor for this decrease. By 2012, the estimated population of Ghana was 25,000 000, with 51 percent being females and 49 being males, giving the country an overall population density of 78 persons per square kilometer (Ghana Embassy 2014).

Since 2000, life expectancy was 54 years for males and 60 years for females. By 2010, it was around 60 for males and 63 for females. There have been signs of declining fertility, but health, maternal mortality, malnutrition of children, infant (under 5 years) morbidity, and the persistent spread of HIV/AIDS are among the issues facing the country, especially the poor in rural, suburban, and urban areas (GSS 2013).

The country enjoys rich cultural diversity in terms of various languages spoken, indigenous political and kingship institutions and patterns of domestic organization, marriage rites, and forms of descent reckoning, namely, matrilineal, patrilineal, and dual. The experience of colonialism, which united the ethnic groups to overthrow it, is a history shared by all. Moreover, there are the common experiences of national crises manifesting shades of political upheavals and socioeconomic shocks and predicaments in the postcolonial moment. English is the official language for administrative transactions and educational instruction.

Ghana is a multireligious country, and the constitution tolerates freedom of religion and conscience. People associate with Christianity, Islam, or indigenous African

spirituality (traditionalists), which is based on the notion of communion with an unseen Supreme Creator who works with a team of nature and ancestral spirits. Other sects include Hinduism, Buddhism, Rastafari, and Mormonism. The breakdown of religious affiliation by percentage is Christians 71.2, Muslims 17.6, traditionalists 5.2, other 0.8, and people ascribing to no religion 5.2 (GSS 2013).

## Overview of Women's Lives

The end of colonialism demanded a reconfiguration of Ghana's social, political, and economic terrains. The postcolonial society and governments needed to build structures to enhance and protect the fundamental human rights and well-being of all, without regard to sex or gender; to treat all fairly; and to allow and support people to fully develop their potential as members of society for society's benefit. Some people believe that women should only play the roles of nurturers, homemakers, wives and mothers, and secondary actors in agriculture and trade. Whether this is due to the colonial hangover of male chauvinism embedded within the colonial political economy, schooling system, politics, and male-privileging Eurocentric cultural notions of gender or for other cultural and religious reasons, it has had tremendous impact on women's access to society. Others believe that women should have the free and fair space to engage in all national activities to enhance their status as humans and citizens, just as men can. By playing second fiddle to men during the colonial era and, subsequently, in the postcolonial era, women have had less access and participation in Ghana's economy, education, and political systems.

Positive transformations have gradually occurred to the status of women since 1957, inching them steadily to the point of gender equity. Women's rights are being recognized within the indigenous communities and national milieu. Ghana's Constitution since the First Republic has been woman friendly, defended women's rights, and advocated for their educational empowerment and protection from social exclusion and all forms of violence, decimations and abuse of women, and forced prostitution and trafficking of young women. Since the establishment of the National Council of Ghana Women (NCGW) during the First Republic, other national organizations to promote women's affairs and empowerment have been established through the years by some governments. The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), formerly the Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU), affiliated with the



Ghana Police; the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs are some of these institutions. Clearly, Ghana has been nurturing an expanding space to give women recognition and inspire them to mobilize to champion their case and cause, rise to leadership positions in society, own their beings as free and equal citizens, and be free from discrimination and physical, emotional, and mental violation of the law and other people.

## Education

Education of the Ghanaian girl in the traditional setting is markedly different from that of the boy. A little girl may be the delight of her father, but it is her mother who spends the most time with her, preparing her for the responsibilities of womanhood. The mother and older females in the family teach her good feminine manners and traditional female occupations, such as caring for the young, mending clothes, and general household chores. She learns virtues such as readiness to serve and avoidance of quarrels and contentions and to respect and feel empathy toward all, even the enslaved or domestic servant. A girl's education is home-centered and family- and community-oriented, and she remains in training until she attains the age of maturity, which is attested through marriage.

The first European-administered castle schools, and later colonial schools set up in the Gold Coast, introduced formal school education to indigenous girls. By 1836, a girls' school was operating in the Cape Coast Castle in the Gold Coast. Western school education for girls did more than merely prepare them for their traditional roles in the home; education also offered an opportunity to acquire some skills to surmount certain challenges and the needs of her society. Nevertheless, negative social and cultural perceptions about the formal education of girls prevented many girls from accessing this education. For example, many parents saw the long hours spent away from home as a disruption of informal home-based education. Subsequently, few girls were able to enroll in both mission and government schools. This trend did not change much after independence.

An increase in the enrollment and retention of girls in school is still a work in progress. The 1984 national census recorded a percentage ratio of 55 to 45 in male-female enrollment at the elementary school level, a significant drop in secondary school enrollment, and an alarmingly low enrollment of teen girls (17%) at the university

level. Ghana's Ministry of Education (MOE) 2013 report recorded increased rates in gender parity at all levels of girls' education, except in junior high school. The rates suggest an improvement in attitudes, especially those of parents, toward the school education of females.

## Family Responsibility

The life of a Ghanaian girl or teen is attended by many responsibilities, most of which she undertakes for her family. She is expected to perform her family duties, which include but are not limited house chores, assisting in the care of younger children and the elderly and invalid, and partaking in religious activities of the family, with a diligent, respectful, and positive work attitude. Girls as young as four years old may run light errands for the provision of food for the household, and this would not be considered strange or as child labor. Rather, this is training in responsibilities and toward maturity and service to society. As a girl grows into a teenager, her responsibilities alter, and greater demands appropriate to her age are made. Responsibilities such as meal provision, decision making in family matters, housekeeping and laundry, settling of disputes between younger (often female) siblings, supervising school assignments, and babysitting fall to her.

A girl must excel in the training given to her by her elders and honor her family's name by comporting herself in moral matters, such as not engaging in premarital sex and not getting pregnant out of wedlock. Even though teen pregnancy is frowned upon in the traditional society, statistics by the Ghana Coalition of NGOs on Health (GCNH) indicate a rate of approximately 750,000 teen pregnancies in Ghana annually (Annicchiarico 2013). Ghana continues to grapple with increasing rates of pregnancy among its teens in contemporary times.

For most groups, the onset of menarche marks a transition from childhood to womanhood, which confers on the "new woman" new responsibilities. In addition to the traditional chores, school-aged girls accompany their parents, especially fathers, to social functions, a thing that would have been unheard of in the past. A new trend in family responsibility is the provision of tech support for less cyber- and tech-savvy parents and family members in a technologically advanced world where the Internet and digital protocols rule.

Although the humanistic principles of Christianity, Islam, and Western school and indigenous education instruct the ideal of dealing tenderly with females because



they are delicate and should not be forced into brute labor, it is not uncommon for a female child or a teenager newly initiated into womanhood to experience the opposite. She may become the victim of forced marriage or a servant or slave to the wealthy, or she may be sold into the sex industry to offset family debts. These criminal arrangements, grossly offensive to human dignity, may be explained by the offending parent or guardian as a fulfillment of the girl's responsibility to her family.

### **Child Marriage**

Ghana has legislation against child marriages. Any marriage that occurs when a girl is below the age range of 16–18 years is considered child marriage by Ghanaian law. Despite this, the practice persists because of some strong sociocultural norms. The prevalence rate of child marriage is high. It is highest in the Upper East Region (50%) and lowest in the Greater Accra Region (11%) (UNFP 2010).

## **Health**

### **Access to Health Care**

Ghana only spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health care in 2014 (WHO 2015). Life expectancy is only 60.95 years, and women live a couple more years than men do. Thirty-eight percent of the population is under the age of 15 (WHO 2015). Improved drinking water is available to more than 80 percent of the population, but less than 20 percent has access to sanitation facilities (WHO 2015). Diseases such as cholera, yellow fever, and meningitis are common (GHS 2014). Equity gaps continue to persist, especially in rural and remote areas. The national health programs work to improve health outcomes, but only when they are available. Ghana Health Services (GHS) found that inadequate programs in certain areas contributed to declining immunization rates in 2014. In districts that received ample attention, rates are greater than the 80 percent target, but only 71 percent of districts are achieving this standard, leading to a 23.6 percent reduction in immunization coverage between 2013 and 2014 (GHS 2014).

### **Maternal Health**

More than 24 percent of women in Ghana use some form of contraception, and the fertility rate in 2013 was 3.9 (WHO 2015). For a woman between the ages of 15 and

49, there is a 17 percent probability that she will be ill or die from maternal causes. The maternal mortality rate is 143.8 per 100,000 in 2014. The GHS has worked diligently in recent years to address maternity care. More than 76 percent of women attend four or more antenatal appointments, and 56.7 percent are attended by a skilled birth assistant for delivery (WHO 2015). There are increasing numbers of midwives serving Ghanaian women, and this positively affects the increased family-planning rates and antenatal care rates and the steady decline of maternal and infant mortality rates. There is one midwife for every 1,374 people (GHS 2014). The mortality rate for children under 5 years old has also declined from 1990 to 2013 (WHO 2015). The GHS is addressing the high pregnancy rates of teens; 39 percent of pregnant women are 10–24 years old. All were offered comprehensive abortion services (GHS 2014).

Abortion has been legal in Ghana since 1985, “provided it is carried out by registered medical practitioners in registered facilities and where a pregnancy is the result of rape, incest, its continuation would result in injury to a woman’s physical or mental health, or the [fetus] has a substantial risk of a serious abnormality” (Aniteye and Mayhew 2013). Even though it is legal, unsafe abortion rates are high and contribute 22–30 percent of maternal deaths, “making unsafe abortion the highest contributor to maternal mortality in Ghana” (Aniteye and Mayhew 2013). Abortion is a target area for the health services because of its impact on maternal mortality rates where legislation has had little impact on the reduction of these rates.

### **Diseases and Disorders**

Ghana has had great success with immunization programs and has been polio free since 2008. Maternal and neonatal tetanus rates in 2011 were zero, mortality due to measles was zero by 2003, and the successful treatment of tuberculosis is at 86.5 percent.

Cardiovascular disease contributes to 15 percent of women’s deaths; asthma, hypertension, diabetes, and sickle cell anemia are other noncommunicable diseases that women are most likely to be treated for (GHS 2014). Hepatitis, yellow fever, and meningitis have all affected significant numbers of the population in recent years, and a cholera outbreak affected 29,000 people last year (GHS 2014).

Five tropical diseases are monitored through the health program. With WHO, UNICEF, and JICA, GHS launched a major campaign to eradicate Guinea worm, including



education, contests, and safe water interventions. Malaria is considered a pandemic in Ghana, and control activities are the focus of GHS; 68 per 100,000 people in 2012 died from the disease (WHO 2015). Treatment for malaria and the distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) have been the focus, and nearly 4 million nets were distributed through pregnancy centers, schools, and town centers (GHS 2014).

HIV rates are 1.37 percent, but women are disproportionately represented: 57 percent of HIV cases are women (Ghana News Agency 2015). Treating pregnant women early with antiretroviral (ARV) therapy is proving effective in preventing transmission from mother to child; 2 percent of the 717,638 pregnant women who received HIV testing and counseling tested positive for HIV. More than 5.5 million male and female condoms were distributed in 2014 (GHS 2014).

## Employment

### Occupations and Employment Status

Participating in the labor market is an issue of survival for some women. For others, it gives satisfaction to an altruistic desire to contribute to the well-being of others. The economically active female population generally works as skilled agricultural, service, and sales workers. Traditional occupations for women include farming, fish mongering, housekeeping, teaching, nursing, hairdressing, dress-making, trading, engineering, lecturing, and working as a bank teller, lawyer, or medical doctor. Less mainstream occupations include being a writer, a poet, an architect, an artist, a musician, or a dancer. The population census of 2010 indicated that 11.4 percent of female workers were employees in both the public and private sectors, 69.4 percent were self-employed entrepreneurs, 8.7 percent were unpaid family workers, 1.3 percent were casual workers, 2.9 percent were apprentices, and 0.7 percent were domestic workers (GSS 2013).

An observation of employment trends shows that women are more likely to dominate informal economic activities in agriculture, industry, and services than men. Many operate in the private informal sector, while men dominate the formal sector. The majority of women in the formal sector operate in the lower and nonmanagerial ranks, which makes their voice inaudible in decision making that concerns their employment. Few are in the higher echelons of influence and power within the public and formal sectors.

## Pay

As at May 1, 2014, the minimum wage in Ghana stood at USD\$1.36 per hour (6.0 Ghana cedis). However, the degree of educational qualification and experience of a woman, the type of work she performs, and the size and magnitude of profit of the firm she works for usually determine her remuneration. As citizens of Ghana, women workers, according to the Labour Act 651, are entitled to fair wages, timely payment, holidays, and leaves. The labor laws and Ghana's Constitution of 1992 guarantee equal pay for work of equal value, irrespective of gender. This principle applies to the single spine salary structure, which is the current public-sector salary structure, and ensures that without discrimination women in public-sector work receive the remuneration due them. Nevertheless, a gender pay gap exists in most work in the informal sector, implying a significant wage discrimination against women and gender gap in returns of the earnings (Verner 1999; Addai 2011). Thus, women employees in informal work in the private sector tend to receive a lower wage than men (Verner 1999).

## Maternal Leave

Women employees are entitled to maternal leaves, usually spanning weeks, in the event of pregnancy. Ghana labor laws do not put a limit on the number of times a woman may apply for a maternal leave. The leave must be granted to employees who produce a medical certificate by a qualified medical practitioner or midwife indicating their due dates. It is criminal for an employer to withhold salary and other benefits or to terminate the employment contract of an employee pregnant woman on maternal leave on grounds of her absence from work.

## Family Life

### Marriage and Household Roles

Despite a surge in the rates of divorce, domestic violence, and marital distress (Anim 2012), the traditional view of an unmarried woman as incomplete, unfulfilled, and irresponsible operates as a powerful force that compels a majority of Ghanaian women onto the marriage path. In 2012 alone, 7,066 women registered marriages with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly; 468 ended in divorce (GhHeadlines 2014). Heterosexual marriages within the frames of customary, Islamic, and ordinance marriage are three forms of matrimony that are legally open to a Ghanaian woman. Her marriage may begin by an arranged



betrotal, known to the Akan as *asewa*, or a marriage by common consent, where she chooses her marriage partner. She may also marry as a means of offsetting family debts. Typically, arranged marriages are more common in the rural areas of the country, whereas marriages by consent are more common in the urban centers, due to the individualism the urban spaces afford people.

Most married Ghanaian women take full responsibility as wives and homemakers for their households. A study by Forster and Offei-Ansah (2012) revealed that they fulfill marital obligations, assist with family decisions, do chores, supervise domestic work, lead religious activities, and provide money for maintaining the home. Achieving the latter requires the woman to take a job outside the home, to attend an academic institution for training for the job market, or to accept a higher-paying job offer, which may take her to a new locality and could be in another country. Many engage paid domestic workers to perform their family chores, and some depend on the extended family, where mothers, aunts, or female cousins may step into the role of the absent homemaker and administer the household in her stead.

## Politics

Ghanaian women have come a long way in contributing tremendously to Ghanaian politics—both the indigenous ethnic politics and national politics of Ghana. Although the division of labor has traditionally been demarcated by gender, some roles and responsibilities overlap at times. There are no gendered roles in national politics. Within indigenous politics, women by custom have complementary political roles and statuses to the men. While men tend to head lineages and communities, women play both formal and informal roles as important decision makers and political actors. There is a kind of duality of power in the political systems of most ethnic groups. This duality shows the indigenous notion of a cosmological complementarity of male and female essence. Thus, the custom of most groups permits women to be clan leaders, female chiefs, and warriors and to constitute military companies in the defense of their communities.

Among the Akan, Ewe and Ga, for example, this complementary duality of power manifests at the apex of the political institutions and state organization, where female chiefs are members of the general assembly of state chiefs and council of elders and participate in legislative and judicial processes such as the declaration and unmaking

of war and the distribution of land. They can hold their separate courts and lead impeachment of the male chief, which could lead to his removal from office. Their views and approval must be sought by the council of elders and the community in the selection of eligible male chiefs. Known as *Ohemaa*, *Mamagah*, and *Mannye* among the Akan, Ewe and Ga, respectively, the woman chief depicts the existence of female power and recognition of women as political beings. Women are permitted to organize and send deputations with petitions to the male and female chiefs. They can embark on demonstrations against the making or unmaking of certain policies in the community. Under the female leader, their symbol of political power, women can even demand the removal of a public officer.

This traditional political position of women is not clear today because of the dominance of and focus on national politics that evolved from Western colonial political notions. The advent of colonial rule, which introduced Western formal schooling and the introduction of Abrahamic religions of Christianity and Islam, greatly altered the indigenous political status of women. These were all male-centered, which privileged males and pushed women to the fringes of society and politics. Few women had access to Western school education, and so few had new opportunities for autonomy within the modern cash economy and urbanization. The colonial cash economy removed certain indigenous customary structures, such as independent access to resources and economic enterprises and the symbiosis of the sexes based on an efficient division of labor, that provided significant autonomy to women. Instead, the colonial regime imposed new forms of subordination through differential access to resources and economic autonomy in the modern economy.

While emphasizing the schooling of the African male, the colonial order superimposed the European 18th- and 19th-century aristocratic male chauvinistic notion of appropriate gender roles and relations in politics. Women were therefore relegated to the background of politics. The colonial regime instituted a tradition of male hegemony in the frame of the modern politics of the colonial territory and later independent state of Ghana. This weakened, but could not kill, the indigenous right of women to act in politics. This transformation and bias set the tone for the existence of certain gender inequalities within Ghana's national politics in the postcolonial context.

The customary political rights of women did not die in the unwritten constitutions of indigenous politics, so women partook in the African struggle for



political autonomy from colonialism. For example, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, one female chief of the Asante people, inspired her people to fight the British in 1900. In 1917 to 1918, women were active in cocoa resistance to frustrate the British colonial economic enterprises in the country. After independence, women have been “increasingly active in [nonfarm] economies” and in national politics (Newman et al. 2000, 2; Nketia 2005). No legislation in the postcolonial era has prevented women from taking part in politics. Yet, while some governments encouraged women to access their political rights and participate, others paid lip service to the idea or did not actively motivate women. All the constitutional governments protected the right to participate in politics. The military juntas did not make decrees that enforced gender inequality in respect to political participation. However, these rights in practical circumstances have not counted for much for some regimes.

According to Nketia (2005), the treatment of women in politics before 1992 depended on the degree of elitism in a government. The military juntas of the National Liberation Council (NLC), National Redemption Council (NRC), and Supreme Military Council (SMC) were very elitist and did not make women a significantly integral part of their “male soldier” government. They did not tolerate political opposition, and one could be part of politics if he or she was directly or indirectly part of the government. Thus, women were largely excluded from politics. The governments of the Second and Third Republics were democratic but filled with similar elitism—intellectual elitism in the former and old political elitism in the latter. Thus, few women were able to be part of the parliament. With the exception of Nkrumah’s CPP and Rawlings’ PNDC regimes, no government before the Fourth Republic made strong efforts to place women in the mainstream of national political activity. The two leaders deemed their governments as revolutions that should engage all people without regard to gender or educational standing.

Many women occupied major positions as policy makers and advisers and contributed greatly to the country’s political and governmental affairs. Although women have had the franchise since 1955, and some have served in political offices as ministers and ambassadors, Ghana has not yet had a female president. However, two notable women have aimed for the presidency: Akua Donkor, who is unlettered but the founder of the Ghana Freedom Party, and Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, a university graduate and former first lady, have made attempts to become president.

Since their days as cadres in the liberation movement, women have not departed from national politics. Socialist in orientation, Nkrumah and the CPP successfully pushed for an affirmative type of legislature to purposefully make 10 women members of the new Republican parliament. The NCGW was created as a mass movement to encourage women’s participation and guarantee that right in national politics. Women parliamentarians numbered 18 in 1965. The military junta that overthrew the CPP and the Second Republic, and the military junta that overthrew it, were not proactive in given women access, representation, or participation in government and politics. About five women entered parliament in the Third Republic. The PNDC overthrew the Third Republic on December 31, 1981, and women’s participation in politics vigorously resurged.

The first lady, Mrs. Rawlings, assumed a strong position in national politics. Her clarion call was female empowerment. Her husband, Jerry John “J. J.” Rawlings and his PNDC made several women, including Joyce Aryee, Ama Ata Aidoo, Aanaa Enin, Esi Sutherland Addy, Mary Grant, and Vida Yeboah, leading members in the government. Mrs. Rawlings led a mass movement for women called the 31st December Women’s Movement, which was formed in 1982 (Daily Graphic 1982). Like the NCGW, the movement aimed “to mobilize women’s initiative to awaken them politically . . . to promote and protect the interest of women in the new society and to get women themselves looking after their own interests” (Shillington 1992, cited in Nketia 2005, 76). Rawlings supported it and opined that national problems could be stopped if an end would be brought to the habit of making women responsible for only bringing up children in the home (76). Embodying the aspiration of women to be part of the nation-building efforts, it organised workshops, owned economic enterprises, embarked on educational campaigns on the political rights of women, and engaged its women in national dialogues and expressed women’s views in national issues. Many women worked as cadres of the PNDC regime and sustained the revolution until the Fourth Republic was born.

Because the movement woke many women into the limelight of national politics, their visibility in partisan and national politics has become stronger since 1992. The Fourth Republic Constitution clearly dictated that the state shall take measures to “achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in the recruitment and appointment to public offices.” Furthermore, “a person shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status.”



Additionally, “citizens have the right and freedom to form or join political parties and to participate in political activities subject to such qualifications and laws as are necessary in a free and democratic society and are consistent with this Constitution” (Republic of Ghana 1992, 36, 16, 24). This provides a fair field of play for all who are capable and interested to participate in politics and to freely exercise their political rights.

Since 1992, many women have been appointed as district chief executives, regional ministers, council of state members, and members of parliament (MPs). Ghana had its first female speaker of parliament, the Rt. Hon. Justice Joyce Bamford-Addo, whose tenure was from January 7, 2009, to January 6, 2013. Women have contested to represent constituencies in parliament and to lead political parties. Samia Nkrumah, Kwame Nkrumah’s daughter, became an MP in 2009 and the chairperson of the CPP. Since 1992, women’s involvement in ministerial offices have been significantly connected to education, policy making, culture, tourism, health care, and gender issues.

### Religious and Cultural Roles

The famous Kenyan professor John Mbiti described Africans as “notoriously religious” because religion permeates all aspects of their lives (Mbiti 1969, 1). Most Ghanaians are inclined to religion and believe in the supernatural. A plethora of religious groups exist in Ghana; however, the triple heritage of Christianity, Islam, and the indigenous African path of spirituality are dominant. Islam in Ghana and West Africa emerged primarily through trade contact with Islamic North Africa around the 7th century. Portuguese explorers and missionaries reached the Gold Coast in the 15th century and built a fort there in the 1480s. They and, later, other European missionaries introduced Christianity there. Islam and Christianity met indigenous paths of spirituality. The latter has continued to survive, and many Christians and Muslims partake in rites and ceremonies of the indigenous paths because they are organically connected to family culture and history. Certain Christian and Islamic sects even invoke elements of practices and beliefs of the indigenous paths as reinterpretations of Islam and Christianity in idioms of African spirituality.

Most women in Ghana are religious because of religion’s nature as a giver of hope for a better tomorrow and its promise of supernatural intervention in situations of hopelessness, poverty, and discrimination, which many women feel. Women culturally deem themselves as

responsible for the protection of society. Religion is one platform they use to seek divine guidance for Ghana. In recent times, women religious groups, such as the non-denominational nationwide Aglow Women’s Christian Fellowship, and Muslim women have organized national prayer services for divine protection for Ghana. Women do not only follow religion. Many lead as ritual specialists—priestesses—within indigenous spirituality, and several work in the clergy as ordained ministers.

Ghana has a spectrum of ethnic cultures with ideas that define the cultural role that women of each group must play. However, some shared ideas have coalesced into a general, broad Ghanaian cultural notion about the roles that are expected of women. Fundamentally, marriage is expected of all women of good health and sound mind and character. The customs of many groups demand females to go through nubility rites before marrying. Generally, the demeanor of a marriageable woman is expected to be morally pleasing and modest to endear her to suitors. Most women cherish the idea of marriage because it brings respect to them and their family, and it affords them the venerated status of mother. A woman can become a mother outside marriage, but the preferred motherhood is the one obtained through marriage. Spinsterhood, lesbianism, and barrenness are frowned upon. Motherhood and fertility are cherished because they sustain society.

Consequently, women’s major cultural role in all the ethnic groups is procreation, the valuable biological reproduction of society. All the groups believe that the survival of the family or lineage depends on the existence of a female member. For the matrilineal societies, no matter how many men there were, if the female sex became extinct, the family would last only the span of these men (Aidoo 1985, 18). Women, as custom dictates, are central figures in both their extended and nuclear family. As sister and aunt to their brother and his family and as wife and mother in her nuclear family, she is an authority in family decisions. Being the sister or mother of grown children, especially males, she is consulted in all decisions made by her brothers or sons. As a wife, she is mandated to contribute to the making of the family as a breadwinner or family purse controller. This, however, depends on the husband’s awareness of the customary authorization given to the women.

Polygyny is accepted by all the ethnic groups for cultural reasons, such as the creation of more people for labor for family economic enterprises. However, polyandry is not practiced. Customarily, a woman is expected to be accommodating to polygyny. A wife must take a pacification fee



from the husband before he can take another wife. Except in the few cases where a wife, by custom, maintains a duolocal residential pattern by living in the family home and the husband's, she dwells with her husband. Customarily, a wife is expected to birth a lot of children. Ten is a commendable number. This practice has minimized because of economic hardships in contemporary times. A wife is supposed to be obedient to her husband, faithful, hardworking, helpful, not quarrelsome, and not lazy. Wives, and women in general, are expected to work hard and contribute to the economy of family and community. Many cultivate the land, some being at the forefront of planting, harvesting, and processing Ghana's cocoa, and maintain households. A traditional woman dreads being referred to as lazy and idle. A woman who has children must be motherly, which requires her to provide nourishment and shelter for her children and, when necessary, those of others and for strangers, because she is essentially a mother of all.

## Issues

Despite the different socioeconomic and political adversities that bedevil the country, Ghanaian women in different spheres of operation and locales have emerged as the vital backbone of the contemporary family and society. Tagged with the primary identification of wife and mother, women continue to maintain a complicated and tedious work schedule in the home and outside of it. Rural women maintain children and households and hew firewood. Their field tasks include farming, storing food, and tending livestock. Pivotal to both subsistence and cash crop farming, they feed their families with their produce and sell some or give them to middle marketers for forwarding to the urban markets in Ghana and overseas. Ghana's agricultural labor mainly depends on women. The coastal women do not fish; nonetheless, they support the male fishers by receiving, processing, and preserving fish by smoking, drying, or salting. They feed their families with the fish and care for their families with the proceeds from the sale of fish.

The urban women are often more educated in the Western formal school ways than their rural counterparts. Thus, many work outside the home as professionals and civil servants and operate in managerial and administrative spheres of companies. Due to the numerous factors of rural urban migration, some rural women possess little or no school training and gravitate to urban spaces. Determined to survive in the big towns and cities, they end up in rough and exploitation-prone jobs as *kayayo* (porters),

street hawkers and peddlers, and *ashawo* or *too-too* (commercial sex workers). Despite prevailing challenges confronting them because of certain entrenched socio-cultural notions, women have been seeking solutions on their own behalf. Some urban women articulate general women's concerns on issues such as forced marriages, wife battering, human trafficking of females into sex slavery and prostitution, female circumcision, hunger and malnutrition, rape, inadequate maternal care, unemployment, and general poverty. Thus, activists such as Esther Ocloo, a famous food processor; Annie Jiagge, a former Ghanaian Supreme Court judge; Nana Oye Lithur, minister of state; Grace Omaboe, an ace actress; and Mrs. Rawlings campaigned for women to live well in an environment and spirit of social equality and justice. For example, Ocloo and 14 other women created a financial institution to assist women entrepreneurs through the establishment of a branch of the U.S.-based Women's World Banking. Women's rights activism secured an amendment to the rape law in Ghana's criminal code, which conferred a minimum of three years in jail on rapists.

Parliament also prescribed female circumcision, or clitoridectomy. Although some Ghanaian communities that have been influenced by certain religious orientations and foreign cultural idioms circumcise women as a mark of femininity, most Ghanaian ethnic societies deem the practice unwholesome and hazardous. A mature adult female can voluntarily undergo circumcision, but it is a punishable offense under Ghana's law to subject infant, adolescent, and pubescent girls to it. Women's rights advocacy also inspired the passing of Article 22 of the Fourth Republic Constitution, which entitles a spouse, of either gender, a reasonable proportion of an estate in the presence or absence of a will. It also permits both spouses, upon divorcing, to have equal share of property acquired during the marriage.

The ideal beautiful woman in Ghanaian culture is a combination of strength, dignity, intelligence, and good looks and the central role she plays in the survival of her family. Her physique should consist of a blend of unblemished skin, preferably dark and shiny; woolly supple hair, long or short, braided or plaited; unblemished teeth; and strong legs and back, which are deemed necessary for carrying children. A furtive glance, pleasant smile, low voice, and the ability to cook and dance signify beauty. Her bosom, calves, cheeks, and buttocks must be well rounded. However, Western concepts of beauty and grooming styles have influenced many Ghanaian women to the extent that some desire aspects of the Caucasian woman's phenotype,



such as light complexion and straight hair. It has become a common fashion for many Ghanaian women to buy and use imported dangerous chemicals to bleach their skin, euphemistically calling it “skin toning”; straighten their kinky hair; or wear imported expensive hair pieces and weave-on wigs, popularly called “Brazilian hair.” Many also prefer wearing Western-style clothes, which they deem fashionable and markers of cultural enlightenment. Still, some women maintain the indigenous standards of beauty and prefer indigenous dress styles and adornments.

## Conclusion

Women of Ghana, in different locales and classes, have suffered some inequities based on their gender. Androcentric biases have restricted their full participation in national development processes. However, they have not relented in their struggle to acquire first-class citizenship for themselves and future women. Separately or in coalitions with men, women have been seeking ways to respond and change situations of gender inequity. As we reflect on the history of Ghanaian women’s struggle and significant contributions to society, we have to remember that the need to find effective ways to secure women’s right is as imperative as ever. The solution to gender inequity will not come easy; yet, opposition and risk should not deter women. The human drive to resist oppression, the passion for individual achievements and organization building, and the commitment to protect Ghanaian familial viability must continue in the psyche and actions of Ghanaian females.

DE-VALERA N. Y. M. BOTCHWAY AND  
AWO ABENA AMOA SARPONG

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## Iran

### Overview of Country

Iran is located in Western Asia, where it borders the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea. It shares borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan in the north; Turkey and Iraq in the west; and Pakistan and Afghanistan in the east. Iran is 1,648,195 square kilometers, or slightly smaller than Alaska (CIA 2017). The country has very diverse terrain that includes rugged mountainous regions, deserts, and coastal plains. As of July 2016, the population of Iran was 82,801,633, with a median age of 28.8 years (CIA 2017). The capital of Iran is Tehran, which is located in the north-central part of the country.

Iran was known as Persia until 1935, and it boasts a rich history with the Persian Empire for thousands of years. It became an Islamic republic in 1979 after the ruling monarchy of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919–1980) was overthrown by a revolution led by the majority of the Iranian population. The country has been in political turmoil for much of its history and has had a tumultuous relationship with many Western countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom. Iran became known as the Islamic Republic of Iran after the majority of the country voted to establish an Islamic republic led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989). Its constitution is based on Islam; however, some would say that the government

is highly influenced by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (1939–).

Iranians are from a variety of ethnic groups, including Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Balochs, Arabs, Turkmen, and Turkic tribes. The majority of Iranians are Shia Muslims, who comprise about 90–95 percent of the population (CIA 2017). About 5–10 percent of Iranians are Sunni Muslims, while the remaining minority are either Zoroastrian, Jewish, or Christian. Iran currently has an unemployment rate of about 10.5 percent (Rajabova 2017).

In 2015, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) ranked Iran 114th out of 155 nations based on the Gender Inequality Index (GII, 0.515).

### Girls and Teens

According to the Iranian national census, there are about 11.5 million girls between the ages of 10 and 24 in Iran (Golchin 2012). Being a teenage girl in Iran is very similar to growing up as a teenager in any country with access to constant Internet, media, and international culture. For the modern youth growing up in Iran, teenage life often revolves around self-expression.

In more affluent parts of Tehran, such as North Tehran, Western trends are noticeable and often give off the vibe of New York or London hipsters (Krever 2016). Iranian teens go out with friends and enjoy themselves. Due to government bans on drinking, clubbing, and bars, activities for



# About the Editors and Contributors

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## Editors

**Susan M. Shaw** is professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Oregon State University. She specializes in feminist studies in Christianity and is the author of *Reflective Faith: A Theological Toolbox for Women* and *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home, and Society*. She is coauthor of the introductory women and gender studies textbooks *Women's Voices*, *Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings* and *Women Worldwide: Transnational Perspectives on Women*. She is also coauthor of *Girls Rock! 50 Years of Women Making Music*. She blogs for *Huffington Post* and teaches courses in feminist theologies, feminist teaching and learning, and feminism and the Bible. She has led study-abroad experiences in the United Kingdom, Guatemala, Spain, and Costa Rica.

**Nancy Staton Barbour**, MAIS, is an instructor of women, gender, and sexuality studies and is a PhD student in adult and higher education at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. Her research explores issues of social justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity in colleges and universities, as well as the roles and experiences of faculty leaders of study abroad.

**Patti Duncan** is associate professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Oregon State University, and she is the editor of *Feminist Formations*. She earned her PhD in women's studies at Emory University. Duncan is the author of *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*, the codirector and producer of the documentary film *Finding Face* (2009), and the coeditor of *Mothering in East Asian Communities: Politics and Practices*. Her work has been published in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*; *The Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (JMI)*; and *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*, as well as many anthologies.

**Kryn Freehling-Burton** is a senior instructor in women, gender, and sexuality studies at Oregon State University, where she coordinates the online WGSS program and advises students



for the online major. She is the coeditor of *Performing Motherhood* and the author of *In the Image of God*, a play about women that has had more than 30 performances throughout California. Freehling-Burton coproduces a regular play-reading series about women scientists in collaboration with the Oregon State Library Special Collections. Her first cowritten documentary is about Gerty Cori and the women scientists at Oregon State; it will premiere in her gender and science class this year. Freehling-Burton and her partner have three grown children and one high schooler.

**Jane Nichols**, MLIS, is an associate professor and the head of the Teaching and Engagement Department at Oregon State University Libraries & Press. She has more than 10 years of experience supporting faculty and student research and information needs, particularly those in the liberal arts and women, gender, and sexuality studies. Her teaching, scholarship, and service have given her a unique perspective on the information needs of women, gender, and sexuality studies scholars. Nichols's scholarship explores the use of technology to enhance student learning, engagement, and academic success. Her work has appeared in *Journal of Library Innovation* and *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, among other publications. She serves on the board of CALYX Press, which publishes *CALYX: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women*. She is co-project director of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities Open Book Program to resurface, through digitization, CALYX's at-risk literature. She previously served on the editorial board of *Collection Management* and was elected chair of the Association of College and Research Libraries Women and Gender Studies Section, where she led a 400-member professional group to advance women and gender studies librarianship.

## Contributors

**Abritty Abdullah** is currently completing her MA in women, gender, and sexuality studies at Oregon State University. Previously, she earned a liberal arts degree focused on creative writing. Originally from Bangladesh, she connects her scholarly and creative work to gender issues in Bangladesh and in South Asia more generally. Her thesis explores cultural representations of *hijra* (transgender/intersex) communities in three Bangladeshi films. In the future, she intends to broaden her research to consider gender within other South Asian countries.

**Camille S. Alexander** earned a master's degree in literature with concentrations in composition and rhetoric, Caribbean literature and feminism, and gender studies. She is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Kent under the supervision of postcolonial theorist Dr. Abdulrazak Gurnah.

**Liudmila Morales Alfonso** has a master's degree in social sciences, with a mention in gender and development, from FLACSO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales) in Ecuador. She is a current doctoral candidate in social sciences from the University of Salamanca, Spain. She has been a journalist, editor, and academic and is focused on the role of power and discourses, with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive rights, civil society, media, gender, and the state.

**Alexander Allison** graduated from Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne with a BA in history with honors. During his undergraduate career, Allison studied at the Pontifical



academic writing at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. Currently, she teaches English at the Christ Church Foundation School in Barbados.

**Lauren Nicole Benke** is a PhD candidate in literary studies at the University of Denver. She holds a MPhil in Irish writing from Trinity College, Dublin, and specializes in Irish drama, British and Irish modernisms, and performance studies. Her dissertation is titled “Gestural Articulations of Woolf and Joyce: Toward a Performative Critical Methodology.”

**Francesca Bettio** is professor of economics at the University of Siena, Italy. She is the author or coauthor of more than seventy publications, including books, articles, and research monographs. As an expert on female employment and gender issues, she has a long record of collaborating with the European Commission.

**Lacey Bonar** is a PhD candidate in the History Department at West Virginia University. She has taught introductory-level women’s and gender studies courses for West Virginia University’s Center for Women’s and Gender Studies since 2014.

**De-Valera N. Y. M. Botchway**, PhD, is an associate professor of history (Africa and Africa Diaspora) at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. His interdisciplinary research and teaching span the history of world civilizations, black religious and cultural nationalism, sports in Ghana, African indigenous knowledge systems, and African studies. He was a research fellow at the Centre of African Studies, University of Cambridge, England. He was an AHP fellow in 2103–2014 and has published two books and some articles.

**Nabil Boudraa** is an associate professor of French and Francophone studies at Oregon State University. He has received several grants and awards, including a Fulbright Scholar and three NEH Summer Institute Grants. In the summer of 2017, Boudraa will codirect an NEH program on women’s voices in the Maghreb since independence in the 1960s. His publications include *Algeria on Screen: The Films of Merzak Allouache*, *Francophone Cultures through Film*, *Hommage à Kateb Yacine*, and *North African Mosaic: A Cultural Re-appraisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities*. Nabil is also the coeditor of two special issues of *Journal of North African Studies* devoted to cinema, literature, and the arts in the Maghreb.

**Thomas J. Brinkerhoff** is a Benjamin Franklin Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania and a candidate for a PhD in history. He specializes in social, gender, and cultural history of modern Latin America, specifically Argentina.

**Lauren Brown** holds a bachelor of arts in religion from Berry College and a master of divinity from the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University.

**Claudia Bruno**, journalist and writer, is on the editorial board of *inGenere* Web magazine. She is among the founders of, and collaborates with, the Italian branch of the International Association of Women Philosophers (IAPh-Italia).

**Alicia Bublitz** is currently executive director of CALYX Press, an independent feminist publishing house, and is an activist, cultural critic, women’s studies scholar, Vagina Warrior, and lifelong Girl Scout.



**Andrea Robertsdotter** is currently an assistant professor and campus librarian in the Department of Public Library Services at Western Kentucky University, Glasgow. She holds a master's degree in library and information science from Drexel University and a master of arts in American and British literature from Indiana State University. Her research interests are slave narratives, African American poetry, and literature.

**Audrey Robinson-Nkongola** is an assistant professor and campus librarian at Western Kentucky, Glasgow. She earned a master of arts from Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana, and a master of library information science from Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Karissa Sabine** is a master's student and graduate teaching assistant in women, gender, and sexuality studies at Oregon State University. Her research revolves around the ways girlhood is represented in the films of Hayao Miyazaki.

**Brian Santana** is currently a professor in the Department of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University. He holds a PhD in American studies from George Washington University and a master of arts in English from North Carolina State University. His research interests include 19th-century American literature, film studies, and cultural theory.

**LinDa Saphan** earned a PhD in sociology in Paris in 2007. Saphan is an associate producer and head researcher for the documentary film *Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia Lost Rock and Roll*, directed by John Pirozzi, which was released in 2014. She is currently an assistant professor of sociology at the College of Mount Saint Vincent.

**Awo Abena Amoa Sarpong**, PhD, is a lecturer of art education at the University of Cape Coast, in Ghana. She teaches courses that draw on her research on culturally responsive education. She coauthored a chapter, "Fancy Dress Masquerade in Cape Coast as a Haven for Negotiating Eccentricity during Childhood," in *Misfit Children: An Enquiry into Childhood Belongings*. She is also curator of the Gramophone Records Museum and Research Centre in Ghana.

**R. Kyle Saunders** is a first-year doctoral student of sociology at West Virginia University. His current research is in social psychology and involves bias, blame, and helping behaviors. His dissertation strives for an expansion of the concept of morality and status characteristics theory, specifically exploring sexual orientation as a status characteristic.

**Dawn Schiller** is a survivor and leader in the antitrafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault movements. She is a national speaker, consultant, and author. She graduated summa cum laude in 2012 with a BS in liberal studies, and in 2017 she earned an MA in women, gender, and sexuality. She teaches courses on activism and difference, power, and discrimination and is a contributing writer for Crixeo.com. She is a member of Phi Kappa Phi honors society and sits on multiple organizations dedicated to ending violence against vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls.

**Debra L. Schultz**, PhD, is an assistant professor of history at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York. She is the author of *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement*.