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A COMPANION TO GLOBAL GENDER HISTORY

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY
Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

WILEY Blackwell

A Companion to Global Gender History

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Introduction

Teresa A. Meade and
Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

When a book project, no matter how long or short in the making, comes to an end, authors confront a final step of choosing an image for the cover, a task that is often pleasant, but also challenging. For this new edition, we wanted the cover to illustrate the long temporal sweep of gender history and the diversity of topics contained in the book, as well as highlight their global reach. The image we selected has just the geographic and chronological breadth we sought. In it a woman in the rural Ghanaian village of Mowire fills buckets of water that she and her daughter, who sits nearby, will carry a long distance. According to Nancy Borowick, who took the photograph, women like this along with "children as young as three or four head to the nearest well multiple times during the day to pump water for their homes for bathing, cooking and drinking." This scene, repeated in poor countries throughout the world where water is scarce, expensive, and time-consuming to obtain, conveys the reality that collecting, pumping, hauling, and standing in line for water is gendered work. Historically, women drawing or carrying water appear on early Chinese scrolls, ancient Etruscan jars, and classical Greek vases. Stories from the Bible feature women at wells, while traditional Indian songs and dances portray women getting water from the Ganges. Just enter "women carrying water" in a computer search engine and you can spend hours in front of a screen looking at "Indian Women Carrying Water," "Bedouin Women Carrying Water," "Maasai Tribal Women Carrying Water," and so on. You could even buy enough tote bags and pillow covers with reproductions of classical and contemporary art portraying women toiling with water to fill an entire house.

According to the United Nations, women and girls worldwide spend 200 million hours a day collecting water, time that takes away from caring for their families, attending school, taking care of themselves, or doing anything else. For many women, this can mean as much as five hours daily traveling over rugged terrain transporting water, sometimes in dangerous conditions. Women balance huge jugs on their heads

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while pregnant and carrying children, or lead youngsters who are themselves loaded down with bottles and cans. Women and children also suffer the direst effects of contaminated water since toxins are absorbed by pregnant women, pass into breast milk and on to infants and young children. This is true throughout the world, from isolated villages in Ethiopia to metropolitan cities such as Flint, Michigan. But women are also fighting for clean water: women protested contaminated city water in Flint, and as Jocelyn Olcott explains in her chapter in this volume, Aymara women led the fight against the Bolivian government's privatization of the water system and sale of water rights to the US-based Bechtel Corporation in 1997. Mexican women organized campaigns to bring clean water to cities and villages, a basic human need which the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic – in which handwashing is the most important precaution – made even more evident. On the cover of this book an African woman's muscles strain as she fills multiple buckets at a communal well, a task representative of gendered labor for all time. But she also suggests an area in which women are working toward a different future, as they do in many chapters in this book.

We could have chosen any number of images that point to the past, present, and future of gender because, perhaps even more than when the first edition appeared a decade ago, gender is everywhere on the international stage. As chapters by Patricia Acerbi, Barbara Winslow, Charles Sowerwine, Patricia Grimshaw, and others in this book point out, feminism has grown in strength in many quarters of the world. It is challenging male authority on the playing field, in the courts, in entertainment and the media, and in the upper echelons of power, as women seek gender equality. The largest protest demonstration in the history of the world, the Women's March of 2017, brought millions into the streets, while the spread of #MeToo has empowered women in many fields. On the other hand, as many of our authors note, growing nativist and nationalist movements across the globe have also unveiled the enduring strength of misogyny, especially as it intersects with racism. The wage gap persists, and only a small percentage of women reach top leadership positions in government and business. Even the impact of the 2020 worldwide pandemic has been shaped by gender: incidents of domestic violence against women and children rose precipitously in households where multiple family members were confined for weeks to prevent the spread of contagion; workers in hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities most at risk of exposure to the virus were – and are – disproportionately female; women also predominate in the low-wage service jobs that are impossible to do from home or while maintaining the "social distancing" that the COVID-19 pandemic requires. Female national leaders, including New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern, Germany's Angela Merkel, Finland's Sanna Marin, and Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen, also did better than their male counterparts at fighting the virus, with much lower death rates and better infection control. The countries with the highest death rates were all led by authoritarian men more concerned with projecting their masculinity than protecting public health.

The prominence of gender in historical scholarship matches its visibility on the world political stage. More than thirty years ago Joan Wallach Scott argued in the pages of the *American Historical Review* that history was enacted on the "field of gender." Scott defined gender as "a social category imposed on a sexed body," and stated, in a line that has since been quoted by scholars in many fields, that "gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power."[1] Scott later explained that she had

originally wanted to pose the salience of gender to historical analysis as a question, but the editors of the *American Historical Review* would not allow questions in article titles.[2] In the decades since her article appeared, that salience has become clear. Gender – understood as a culturally constructed, historically changing, and often unstable, system of differences – has become a standard category of historical analysis for many younger historians, and a fair share of older ones as well. The women's history on which gender analysis was initially based has continued to flourish and expand.

What has also happened in the last thirty years is that historical gender analysis and women's history have increasingly become international enterprises, in terms of both the focus of scholarship and the scholars involved. While the footnotes in Scott's article – and most other theoretical discussions of gender from the 1980s – were numerous and wide-ranging, almost all of them referred to studies of the United States or Europe. Since then, new research has begun to challenge understandings of gender derived primarily from the Western experience, and examine the role of women and of gender in global processes. Because of this, we decided to slightly retitle this second edition, adding Global and making it *A Companion to Global Gender History*.

For this second edition, every chapter has been updated since the first edition, along with the inclusion of seven new authors and seven completely new chapters reflecting topics that have becoming increasingly important in the last decade, including material culture, science, and global imperialism. Written by authors from across the English-speaking world, the book includes a diversity of viewpoints and reflects questions that have been explored in different cultural and historiographic traditions, thus providing an overview of gender history worldwide. We have attempted to decenter the West, locating Western Europe and North America as simply one of many social formations within a gendered world history that expands from many hubs. As both scholars and teachers, the contributors understand the importance of making difficult concepts understandable, providing evidence for complex assertions regarding gender identity, and grappling with evolving notions of gender construction. We have sought to preserve the features readers praised in the first edition, including balanced coverage of the field of women's and gender history. In this way the book contributes to the history of women, studying their interactions with men in a gendered world, and also explores the role of gender in shaping human interaction over thousands of years. Each chapter includes suggestions for further reading that give readers the necessary tools to pursue a subject further.

When thinking about how to organize such an enormous project, we decided that it would be useful for readers to have both thematic chapters that provide conceptual overviews of the ways in which gender has intersected with other historical topics and categories of analysis, and more traditional chronological–geographic chapters that explore gender in one area of the world during a specific period (though these are of necessity very broad). We could not cover every part of the world in every time period in a single volume, but we provide enough chapters in each period to allow comparisons between different regions of the world, and enough chapters about one area to allow the tracing of change over time within it. We gave the authors a relatively free hand to explore their particular topic in the way they saw fit, celebrating differences as useful examples through which to assess the ways in which insights in one area can challenge received wisdom and standard generalizations in another.

One of the key points emerging from this collection is that no generalization about gender has applied to all times or all places. Indeed, even Scott's definition of gender as "a social category imposed on a sexed body," while acceptable thirty years ago when scholars were asserting the difference between "cultural" gender and "biological" sex, is today highly contested. As the chapter by Deirdre Keenan examines in more depth, intersex and trans individuals have challenged the notion that gender is based on the body. They highlight the nebulous boundaries and permeable nature of the categories "women" and "men," and challenge us to think carefully when using these words. Historical and anthropological research from around the world has similarly provided evidence of societies in which gender was not based on body parts or chromosomes, but on something else. Sometimes this was a person's relationship to reproduction, so that adults were gendered male and female, while children and old people were regarded as different genders, and one's gender thus changed over the span of a lifetime. In some societies gender may have been determined by one's role in production or religious rituals, with individuals who were morphologically (that is, physically) male or female regarded as the other gender, or as members of a third or even fourth or fifth gender. Marcia-Anne Dobres suggests that there is evidence for third genders as early as the Mesolithic period (10,000 BCE), Kumkum Roy discusses destabilization of binary gender categories in the Jain tradition, and Rosemary Joyce explores gender fluidity in the early Americas, as does Barbara Andaya in early modern Southeast Asia. Robert Nye notes the continuing power of the two-gender system, however, and analyzes the ways notions of gender intertwined with those of sexuality.

Another key point of this collection is that gender must always be considered in connection with other categories of difference and social hierarchies, such as class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and so on. Often these social hierarchies reinforced one another in systems of oppression that were multiplicative rather than additive, conceptually defined as "intersectionality." Many of the chapters in this book examine such interlocking hierarchies. As Susan Kingsley Kent observes in her review of gender and the law, legislation governing the right to vote, own property or retain an inheritance, laws determining the ownership of slaves, statutes preventing foreigners from gaining citizenship, and so forth, have always rested on the intersection of gendered assumptions of race and class. Nupur Chaudhuri and Utsa Ray discuss the intertwining of gender and racial understandings in colonial India, where colonial authorities viewed Englishmen as vigorous and "manly" while Bengali men were dependent, soft, and "feminine." Several chapters, including those by Barbara Winslow and Patricia Acerbi, examine movements that challenged these interlocking hierarchies, particularly those that connected feminism with the struggle for national liberation and anticolonialism, thereby challenging both imperialist and gender hierarchies. Those struggles continue, as witnessed by the March for Black Trans Lives in Brooklyn in June 2020, which brought more than 10,000 people together, one of many demonstrations for racial justice around the world that summer, sparked by police violence and systemic inequalities.

Others chapters look at situations in which social hierarchies counteracted one another or created contradictions. Many of the essays in this collection discuss high-status women who ruled over or alongside men despite cultural norms that decreed female inferiority and subservience. Bella Vivante points to the ruling queens from

pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt and Kate Kelsey Staples those of medieval Europe. Amy Kallander highlights the important political, social, and philanthropic roles of women in the Ottoman and Mughal ruling courts, and Christine Worobec examines the empresses of eighteenth-century Russia and Eastern Europe.

Several of the chapters provide evidence of more fluid gender roles – whether positive or negative – while others point to ways in which many types of historical developments served to rigidify existing notions of masculinity and femininity. This included the social stratification that accompanied the rise of centralized states in Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica, as Bella Vivante and Rosemary Joyce point out. It continued with the spread of text-based religions and philosophical systems, such as Christianity and Confucianism, which tended to relegate women to an inferior status, as Barbara Andaya and Vivian-Lee Nyitray note.

Colonization was a potent force in creating more rigid gender roles. Allyson Poska and Susan Amussen discuss ways in which European empires imposed patriarchal norms on those they encountered in the Atlantic World, and also trace how women resisted European domination by asserting their traditional gendered power and authority. Sean Redding's chapter demonstrates how Europeans colonizing Africa sided with the most retrograde aspects of the colonized, and imposed male domination in ways it had not previously existed, a process Utsa Ray finds in other imperial settings as well. Colonization also created new myths, particularly related to masculinity. The frontier narrative, from crossing the Great Plains of North America to forging into the jungles of Africa to subduing the Indian subcontinent, has been a mainstay of triumphalist historical narratives and the core of the western literary canon. Linda Kealey, Charles Sowerwine, and Patricia Grimshaw challenge American, Canadian, and Australian frontier mythology, and point to links between this and later racism and exclusivity.

As they provide evidence for both fluidity and rigidity in gender structures, the essays also provide evidence on both sides of the debate about women's agency and oppression. Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Raevin Jimenez, and Kumkum Roy document ways in which the family and kin group served as an institution protecting and supporting male privilege and patrilineal descent, but also as a location of real female power. Judith Tucker explores the ways in which the doctrines and institutions of Islam were both restrictive and liberating for women, while Meghan Roberts notes that early modern women worked actively in science and medicine, creating networks that enabled them to do so, despite enormous constraints and marginalization. Anne Walthall traces how Chinese women created a rich literary culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite Confucian ideas about women's inferiority, and other authors also highlight women's writing, music, and dance. Several authors discuss new scholarship on the actions of enslaved people in creating new cultural and social forms despite the humiliation, violence, disease, and dehumanization brought by enslavement.

Women's history began in some ways as a branch of social history, and many of the chapters include extensive discussions of issues that matter to social historians: the family, work and leisure experiences, marriage patterns, and class differences. Laura Frader provides an overview of the historical influence of gender on labor and looks particularly at the ways that women's and men's work has been valued differently over time, a fact that the examinations of labor in the chronological-geographic essays

reinforce. Marcia Wright discusses how kinship systems in Africa adapted to dramatic social and economic change, revealing women's important role as entrepreneurs. Julie Hardwick finds similar adaptation in early modern Western Europe, as does Amy Kallander in the early modern Middle East, although both authors remind us that the impact of economic development, and of other social and political changes, was very different for elite urban dwellers than for rural people. According to Deborah Simonton, complex and conflicting gender ideologies in the modern era intersected with industrialism and urban development in Europe, and Linda Kealey emphasizes the same processes in Canada.

The scholarship of the last forty years has made clear, however, that the centrality of gender is not limited to social issues, and many of the chapters examine themes that have traditionally been the province of political, diplomatic, and even military historians. Though some mainstream national history – the accounts that legitimate nations and their governments – remains cut off from the interpretative richness gender analysis provides, the process of building and ruling societies has always been carried out according to gendered principles. Judith Tucker examines the relationship between nationalist struggles and women's movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Middle East; Anne Walthall and Barbara Molony do the same in East and Southeast Asia. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera analyzes the roles women assumed in the rebellions and wars of independence in Latin America, and Sean Redding those in Africa. Barbara Molony and Karen Petrone suggest ways that the study of war – long viewed as a primarily masculine realm, though rarely studied as such – benefits from closer analysis of gender. According to Molony, the sex slavery that was part of World War II in Asia came into the headlines in 1991 when Korean and Chinese women forced into prostitution to serve the Japanese imperial army during World War II as so-called "comfort women" came forward to demand reparations. Comfort women's memoirs deepen our understanding of conflict worldwide, as have the accounts of Holocaust survivors, refugees, and other war victims. Because sex slavery, rape as a tool of combat, and similar practices are not, nor have ever been, unique to Japan, the history of war can be better understood when it incorporates these deeply troubling issues. Engendering war, as these chapters do, brings to mind the writer Viet Thanh Nguyen's terse dismissal of the heroism of masculine combat: "Not all soldiers are rapists, but every army rapes."[3]

Along with tracing the actual experiences of women and men, many of the chapters examine symbolic and metaphorical uses of gender, as well as other topics that have been central in the new cultural history over the last several decades. Darlene Juschka discusses how gender ideology and gendered identities are given materiality in myth and ritual. Mary Sherriff's analysis of the study of gender in the art world argues that feminist art history has challenged the way many scholars approach and interpret any representation of the human form, as well as the way art historians and critics look at cultural production in general. Meha Priyadarshini scrutinizes the contribution that the material culture studies approach has made to gender history, evaluating the effects of the consumption and production of material goods on gendered identity and societal norms. Focusing on colonial Latin America, Sonya Lipsett-Rivera traces the way in which notions of honor served to gender space, with interiors characterized as feminine and the street as masculine. Jocelyn Olcott, Barbara Molony, and Sean Redding all point to anxieties about the "modern woman"

or the "modern girl" in early twentieth-century Latin America, East Asia, and Africa, including concerns that women who created this identity effaced sexual difference and eroded family relations.

The chapters in this edition range widely in terms of approach as well as chronological and geographic coverage, and also in terms of theoretical perspective, matching the way that historical scholarship as a whole does. Laura Frader and Barbara Winslow draw on Marxist feminist theory in their emphasis on the intersection of gender and class, while Nupur Chaudhuri, Utsa Ray, and Deirdre Keenan develop insights drawn from postcolonial theory to explore the gendered construction of race. Mary Sheriff's chapter poses the implications of queer theory for the field of art history, noting the ways in which new types of sources that have emerged as part of gay and lesbian studies have dramatically altered approaches to images and objects in general. In their explorations of societies that have left no or very few written texts, Marcia-Anne Dobres, Raevin Jimenez, and Rosemary Joyce weave in anthropological theory, while observing that gender bias has skewed the interpretations of the material record. All the authors have what we would term a feminist perspective in their work – indeed, this book and everything else in women's and gender history would not exist without feminism – but, like gender, they all define feminism somewhat differently and vary in the level to which it stands as an explicit theme. Moreover, as the image of the Ghanaian woman on the cover of this book implies, women's advancement in much of the world depends on the political activism of feminism and other women's movements, but also on democratizing the production and distribution of clean water, along with other of the world's essential resources. Gender equality remains illusive so long as millions of women and girls across the globe continue to spend large chunks of their days simply supplying water for drinking, cleaning, and growing crops, as they have been doing since ancient times.

As a field of study, women's history is now almost five decades old, and gender history more than three. Those of us who have been involved with them for a long time sometimes become depressed at how difficult it has been to insert women – to say nothing of gender – into the traditional historical narrative. A number of the chapters in this collection note similar omissions, absences, and invisibility, but the overall impression we hope the essays convey to you – as they did to us – is that from the earliest human cultures until today, the process of defining societies, ruling them, settling them and building them has been carried out by women, men, and people who understood themselves to be another gender entirely, but always according to gendered principles. There is no aspect of human existence – labor and leisure, family and kinship groups, laws, war, diplomacy, foreign affairs, frontier settlement, imperialism, aggression, colonial policy and the resistance to it, education, science, romance and personal interaction, the construction of race and ethnicity – that is untouched by gender.

The scope of this volume is daunting, as is the coverage of each chapter, for every author struggled to keep her or his essay to a manageable word limit and worried about overgeneralizing. Nonetheless, these broad strokes give meaning to the social construction of gender, illuminate its variations according to time and place, and demonstrate its complexity in relation to far-reaching historical epochs. We are indebted to our contributors for the depth and range of their efforts, and the brilliance of their results.

NOTES

1 Joan Scott, "Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91:5 (December 1986): 1056, 1087.

2 "Forum: Revisiting Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," with articles by Joanne Meyerowitz, Heidi Tinsman, Maria Bucur, Dyan Elliott, Gail Hershatter, and Wang Zheng, and a response by Joan Scott, *American Historical Review*, 113/5 (2008): 1344–1430.

3 Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017): 27.

Part I

Thematic Essays on Gender Issues in World History