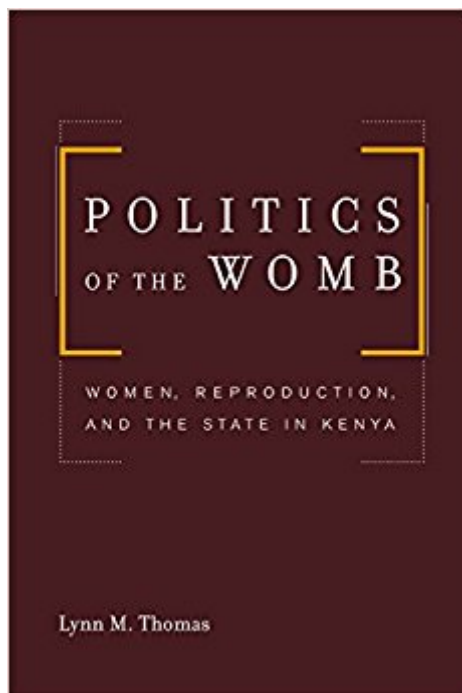




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Politics Of The Womb: Women, Reproduction, And The State In Kenya



Synopsis

In more than a metaphorical sense, the womb has proven to be an important site of political struggle in and about Africa. By examining the political significance and complex ramifications of reproductive controversies in twentieth-century Kenya, this book explores why and how control of female initiation, abortion, childbirth, and premarital pregnancy have been crucial to the exercise of colonial and postcolonial power. This innovative book enriches the study of gender, reproduction, sexuality, and African history by revealing how reproductive controversies challenged long-standing social hierarchies and contributed to the construction of new ones that continue to influence the fraught politics of abortion, birth control, female genital cutting, and HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"In Thomas's skilled hands, and in her unabashed love of story-telling, intimate events in Kenya help us think more clearly and more critically about Africa in the twentieth century. The politics of the womb are at the core of the colonial experience and of colonial politics. . . . Africans struggled amongst themselves over the regulation of reproduction, and these layers of intimate strife, and the policies and protests emanating from London and mission hospitals and African homesteads, give us something we haven't had before--a gendered and transnational colonial history."

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womb are at the core of the colonial experience and of colonial politics…. Africans struggled amongst themselves over the regulation of reproduction, and these layers of intimate strife, and the policies and protests emanating from London and mission hospitals and African homesteads, give us something we haven't had before-- a gendered and transnational colonial history."—Luise White, author of *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*

By understanding what we commonly call "Female Genital Mutilation" instead as a form of "initiation," Thomas attempts to wrest the practice free from a hundred years of Western colonial and post-colonial censure. Instead, she makes a persuasive case for initiation as residing within a complex and changing nexus of concerns about gender, generation, and class. Debates between colonial and anti-colonial interests, in this way, are marginalized and complicated, and Thomas is able to tell a more nuanced story of struggles over women's reproductive rights. While I thought Thomas's approach to the subject matter was suitably novel, I felt her analysis didn't always match the theoretical standards she sets out in her introduction. Despite claiming to draw from Foucault and his conception of bio-power, this connection was not made explicit in her analysis; likewise for her stated concern about the problems of representing Kenyans' "voice." She name checks the right subaltern studies academics, but does not play their ideas explicitly against hers. Nonetheless, this is an important and innovative contribution to African history that can help us better understand the complexities embedded in debates about reproduction in Kenya and Africa

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