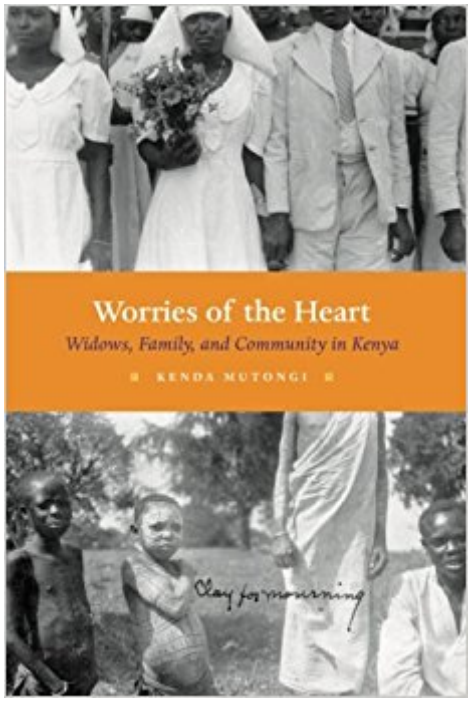
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Worries Of The Heart: Widows, Family, And Community In Kenya



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Synopsis

Growing up in the Maragoli community in Kenya, Kenda Mutongi encountered a perplexing contradiction. While the young teachers at her village school railed against colonialism, many of her elders, including her widowed mother, praised their former British masters. In this moving book, Mutongi explores how both the challenges and contradictions of colonial rule and the frustrations and failures of independence shaped the lives of Maragoli widows and their complex relations with each other, their families, and the larger community.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, rates of widowhood have been remarkably high in Kenya. Yet despite their numbers, widows and their families exist at the margins of society, and their lives act as a barometer for the harsh realities of rural Kenya. Mutongi here argues that widows survive by publicly airing their social, economic, and political problems, their Ã¢â ¬Å“worries of the heart.Ã¢â ¬Â• Initially aimed at the men in their community, and then their colonial rulers, this strategy changed after independence as widows increasingly invoked the language of citizenship to demand their rights from the new leaders of KenyaÃ¢â ¬â •leaders whose failure to meet the needs of ordinary citizens has led to deep disenchantment and altered KenyansÃ¢â ¬â„¢ view of their colonial past. An innovative blend of ethnography and historical research, Worries of the Heart is a poignant narrative rich with insights into postcolonial Africa.

Book Information

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" I am not sure how to categorize Kenda Mutongi' s magisterial book. Mutongi has gotten under the

skin of her material-- and what we read is a living document: surely essential for every reading household in Kenya, for schools, and for every department of African studies. It is at once a literary and academic achievement." -- Binyavanga Wainaina, winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing" Simply praising Kenda Mutongi' s history of western Kenya for its textured and complex treatment of important topics including colonialism, gender, marriage, land, and education would be to underrate its value. Mutongi' s book demands a wider reading outside of the field of African history for its accessible presentation of rich empirical detail combined with an engaging prose style. "Worries of the Heart" also compellingly navigates between insider and outsider perspectives on Kenyan history, offering subtle and generative methodological insights into questions of authority over and within representations of the African past." -- Timothy Burke, Swarthmore College" This captivating book evokes the human experience of living under colonialism in rural East Africa better than any other study I can think of. Widows and their families are Mutongi' s focus, but this is less a history of widows than it is a history of the twentieth century in the Maragoli district of western Kenya through widows' eyes. As we observe impoverished widows engaging in public performances of their " worries of heart" to compel the men in their communities, colonial officials, and finally bureaucrats and politicians in independent Kenya to pay attention and meet their obligations we must admire their tenacity. Yet Mutongi does not romanticize their actions, and the stories of marginalized women and families she recounts are often heartbreaking. In short, "Worries of the Heart" is the kind of book that will be read with profit not only by scholars but by students, who are bound to admire its narrative style, its immediacy, and its evocation of crucial issues in colonial and postcolonial rural experience." -- Charles Ambler, University of Texas at El Paso" I am not sure how to categorize Kenda Mutongi ' s magisterial book. Mutongi has gotten under the skin of her material -- and what we read is a living document: surely essential for every reading household in Kenya, for schools, and for every department of African studies. It is at once a literary and academic achievement. " -- Binyavanga Wainaina, winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing " Simply praising Kenda Mutongi ' s history of western Kenya for its textured and complex treatment of important topics including colonialism, gender, marriage, land, and education would be to underrate its value. Mutongi ' s book demands a wider reading outside of the field of African history for its accessible presentation of rich empirical detail combined with an engaging prose style. Worries of the Heart also compellingly navigates between insider and outsider perspectives on Kenyan history, offering subtle and generative methodological insights into questions of authority over and within representations of the African past. " -- Timothy Burke, Swarthmore College " This captivating book evokes the human experience of living under colonialism in rural East Africa better than any other

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life."-Derek R. Peterson, African History -- Derek R, Peterson "African History""Mutongi''s historical ethnography . . . has a clear, brilliant personal ring to it. . . . Mutongi''s enlightening narrative derives mainly from her disconcerting experiences there in the 1990s, listening to her mother''s generation speak positively of the colonial era but not so of the present.""Mutongi''s writing is refreshingly, clear, and free of unnecessary jargon. The book itself is a delight to read. . . . This is a well-written, thoroughly researched, and quite convincing book. It would be an excellent text for undergraduates and graduate African history surveys, or classes on women or gender." -- Brett L. Shadle "Journal of African Historical Studies""A rare find--a text that employs rigorous ethnographic methods and sophisticated theoretical analysis while remaining as enjoyable and engaging as a book written for the general public. . . . Mutongi''s ability to show the interaction of race, gender, and class in Kenya''s colonial and postcolonial periods make this text a viable option for courses in race and ethnicity, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and African studies. Her innovative use of historical ethnography makes the text an excellent choice for methods classes in sociology and anthropology. The accessible style makes the book an attractive choice for undergraduate classes, while her theoretical analysis and the depth of her historical inquiry make it a valuable addition to any graduate curriculum." -- Zine Magubane "American Journal of Sociology"

Kenda Mutongi is associate professor of history at Williams College.

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