The Global Biopolitics of the IUD

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INTRODUCTION: This book foregrounds the sociological narrative of the control of female sexuality using IUD as contraceptive device. Theoretically, this story is at the intersection of comparative political perspectives on biopower\(^1\), neocolonial perspectives, feminist perspectives, population studies, and science and technology studies.

BACKGROUND: The purpose of writing this book is to enhance the socio-political and technological understanding of the development and use of IUD in the contraceptive literature. The author claims that this literature has so far paid more attention to oral or hormonal contraceptives and paid less attention to the positive outcomes of IUD. This book aims to bridge that gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW: Before the 1990s, the extant studies reported IUD largely as failed technology. Most of them focused on the mid-1970s case of Dalkon Shield IUD that caused infections, septic abortions, permanent infertility and even death of several women. Feminist scholars often argued that IUD inflicted technological violence on passive, uneducated, and poor women—mainly from the global south. Their womb was punctured by a patented device to keep that device at its place. The surgical insertion usually did not follow the process of seeking informed consent from the women and removing the device was often denied. The studies saw this technology as a tool for carrying out the ambitious population growth control programs at the risk of the health of these women. Therefore, the view was generally critical of the IUD technology and the doctors, pharmaceutical companies, and regulators that made it accessible to the masses. From the 1990s, however, the discourse on women-centered family planning began to get stronger. It viewed that a mix of contraceptive devices, including IUD, helped women exercise their reproductive rights, especially in the wake of antiabortion politics in the United States. The view on safety also started shifting from the device to the context of its use. The author takes this line forward and tries to convince the readers that a more balanced view on IUD is required.

ARGUMENT: The author argues that the researchers were already focused on improving IUD and making it effective and safe. She affirms through her data that it helped securing the reproductive rights of women and countered the antiabortion politics. Finally, she illustrates that IUD technology, though originally intended for the global South, integrated the biopolitics of the global South and North through the invention of Mirena, a hormone-releasing IUD that helped the white-upper-middle-class women of the global North maintain their reproductive capacity and lead a lifestyle free from menstrual cycles.

RESEARCH DESIGN: The research design is qualitative that seeks data from multiple sources such as a) scientific/academic reports and articles; b) archival letters, documents, and memoranda; c) conference proceedings, d) field observations and personal conversations, and e) interview and autobiography of a key resource person for this project. The methodology used was coding all qualitative data and mapping that against a historical analysis of the development of IUD technology.

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\(^1\) A term coined by Michel Foucault meaning, “as modern societies developed, regulating life and bodies became central to their effective functioning” (Takeshita 2011, p.21)