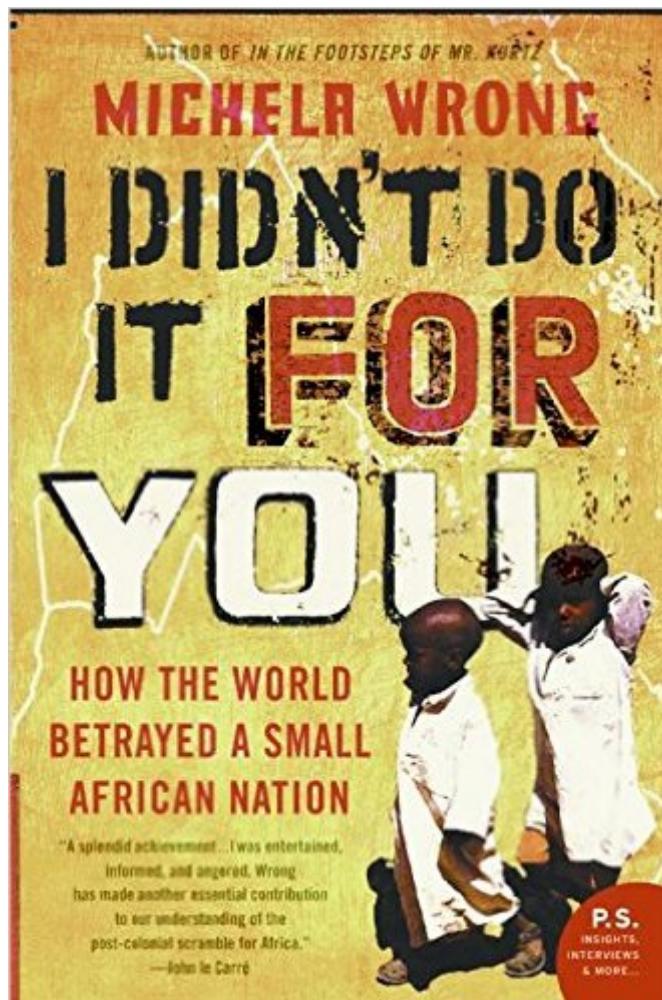


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I Didn't Do It For You: How The World Betrayed A Small African Nation



Synopsis

Scarred by decades of conflict and occupation, the craggy African nation of Eritrea has weathered the world's longest-running guerrilla war. The dogged determination that secured victory against Ethiopia, its giant neighbor, is woven into the national psyche, the product of cynical foreign interventions. Fascist Italy wanted Eritrea as the springboard for a new, racially pure Roman empire; Britain sold off its industry for scrap; the United States needed a base for its state-of-the-art spy station; and the Soviet Union used it as a pawn in a proxy war. In *I Didn't Do It for You*, Michela Wrong reveals the breathtaking abuses this tiny nation has suffered and, with a sharp eye for detail and a taste for the incongruous, tells the story of colonialism itself and how international power politics can play havoc with a country's destiny.

Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial; Reprint edition (June 13, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060780932

ISBN-13: 978-0060780937

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (55 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #506,047 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 inÂ Books > Travel > Africa > Eritrea #299 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Africa #382 inÂ Books > Travel > Africa > General

Customer Reviews

Michela Wrong's style of writing is captivating as she brings History to life. She develops the personalities of the people involved very thoroughly and it is almost like reading a novel. She picks a relevant theme (not obvious until read) for her chapters to coincide with each pertinent stage of recent Eritrean History. Her book is not only a lesson in History, but also pleasure to read. I found myself remembering and reminiscing about things I had long forgotten while I lived at Kagnew Station, Asmara, Eritrea in the early sixties. I was married to an Eritrean lady for thirty-three years before I lost her in a car accident eight years ago. Because of my interest in my spouse's heritage I have read many books and reports about Eritrea over the years. The recent History of Eritrea has confused me in the past, even though I had direct accounts and opinions from my in-laws who lived

through those trying times. I was never sure of the big picture, i.e., why the Russians pulled out and where the U.S. stood on all that was happening. And I was not aware of the brutal fighting between the British and Italians during WWII at the Battle of Keren. I also did not understand the extent to which the British dismantled the factories and Italian capital investment in Eritrea. Michel Wrong has provided me with answers to many questions I have lived with so long. She also summed up the G.I. lifestyle at Kagnew Station very well. There was a lot of "Aminal House" type behavior at Kagnew Station. But I think the guys she interviewed for this subject probably exaggerated a bit on just how wild a place it actually was. While this is obviously a book that has meant much to me and my past life, I found Ms. Wrong to be an excellent author.

After reading Ms. Wrong's book I have mixed feelings about its content. I lived in Asmara for 2 years and 3 months (71-73) near Kagnew Station. I enjoyed reading the stories of the few people she spotlighted. She does know how to spin a yarn, keeping my interest, but also there is something missing. Actually, much is missing. The first thing I will comment on is about the Italians living under Ethiopian occupation in Asmara. I witnessed many abuses by these privileged, spoiled Italians in Eritrea. From the teenage gangs of the sons of the colonialists who hunted down and beat dark skinned Eritreans (much like the brown shirts of Nazi Germany) to the shunning of the mixed blood people (who were called Cafe-latte). I find it hard to believe that any Eritrean would welcome Italians as "belonging to Eritrea". The antics of the "gross guys" is very misplaced. It is nothing more than the story of a few drunks who were totally insignificant in the history of Eritrea. I'm sure the experience of Eritrea was as varied as the people stationed there. My experience was much different. My parents enjoyed the Eritrean people and the beauty of the countryside. We traveled often on weekends to Dekemhare, Keren, Masawa and many places I have forgotten the names of. We visited orphanages, helping to repair windmills, meeting the British families devoted to the easing of suffering in this forgotten part of the world. These were the acts of kindness. Orphanage volunteers, peace corp workers, religious missions....these were ALL staffed by British and Americans....NEVER Italians. Mrs Wrong quotes "Zazz" in a discussion about GI guilt about not serving in Vietnam.

This is in some ways a good and necessary book. It spotlights a nation and a set of problems that most of the world doesn't pay much attention to. But there is a problem. Michela Wrong is too close to the subject and her emotional attachment at times results in the book not being as objective or as good as it might have been. In particular, she seems to have been far too close to Eritrean rebel

groups and their leaders. Eritrea's history isn't about "betrayal". Its about the same problems that most African nations have faced. Rather than face the fact that the problems of Eritrea today are largely self-inflicted wounds, she falls back into blaming colonialism and cold-war politics in really unconvincing ways. In her coverage of Italian colonial rule, she confuses events in Eritrea with those in Ethiopia. She is also willing to judge Italy to a far higher standard than she applies to the pre or post-independence governments of both countries. She is also more than a little unwilling to understand the role that Italy played in creating Eritrea. The lowest point in the book is her coverage of Britain's wartime rule of Eritrea. She advances a theory that the British were racist than the Italians because their rule produced fewer multiracial children. Somehow she sees superior morality in men who promoted widespread prostitution and produced children which they abandoned. It makes no sense to me. Her logic is also full of wrong assumptions about the number of British in the country and the nature of the occupation. She also isn't very good about the details of the war. The war in East Africa and in particular the victory at Keren was not a British victory, but a victory of the British Indian Army.

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