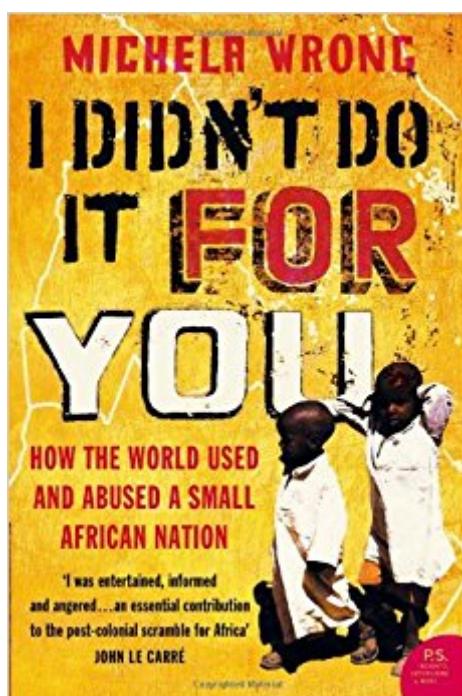


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I Didn't Do It For You: How The World Used And Abused A Small African Nation



Synopsis

One small East African country embodies the battered history of the continent: patronised by colonialists, riven by civil war, confused by Cold War manoeuvring, proud, colorful, with Africa's best espresso and worst rail service. Michela Wrong brilliantly reveals the contradictions and comedy, past and present, of Eritrea. Just as the beat of a butterfly's wings is said to cause hurricanes on the other side of the world, so the affairs of tiny Eritrea reverberate onto the agenda of superpower strategists. This new book on Africa is from the author of the critically acclaimed *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*. Eritrea is a little-known country scarred by decades of conflict and occupation. It has weathered the world's longest-running guerrilla war, and the dogged determination that secured victory against Ethiopia, its giant neighbour, is woven into the national psyche. Fascist Italy wanted Eritrea as the springboard for a new, racially-pure Roman empire, Britain sold off its industry for scrap, the US needed headquarters for its state-of-the-art spy station and the Soviet Union used it as a pawn in a proxy war. Michela Wrong reveals the breathtaking abuses this tiny nation has suffered and, with the sharp eye for detail that was the hallmark of her account of Mobutu's Congo, she tells the story of colonialism itself. Along the way, we meet a formidable Emperor, a guerrilla fighter who taught himself French cuisine in the bush, and a chemist who arranged the heist of his own laboratory. An arresting blend of travelogue and history, 'I Didn't Do It For You' pierces the dark heart of our colonial history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Much like Wrong's *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz* (2001), covering the reign of Zaire's brutal dictator

Mobutu Sese Seko, this book taps at the world's conscience, asking who is to blame for the suffering and neglect of postcolonial African states; it takes Eritrea as case study—victim. A veteran Africa correspondent for the Financial Times, Wrong writes in a pointedly digressive style full of narrative side roads that accommodate a daunting level of geographical and historical detail. Historical highlights include a colorful profile of the late 19th-century writer and Italian parliamentarian Ferdinando Marini that draws on his extensive memoirs about his tenure as the first civil governor of the region as an Italian colony. The early 1960s conflict, occupation and independence of this small neighbor to Ethiopia also make for a terrible, gripping story, including border disputes and bloody war with Ethiopia. A complicated history so punctuated with violence is not exactly easy to read about, but the author's extraordinary grasp of the postcolonial psyche and tormented national identity of this country makes it fascinating. Agent, Joy Harris.(June 14)

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Wrong, an Africa correspondent for the Financial Times, is no stranger to African politics. In the *Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz* (2001) covered Zaire's brutal history; this book attempts to put Eritrea in the public conscience. While chronicling each stage of the nation's history, Wrong creates lively profiles and successfully dissects geopolitical rivalries. Highly readable, the most compelling parts address the colonial and postwar eras, when the U.N. failed to act against Ethiopian repression. Other pages, including her discussion of the presence of U.S. military personnel, received mixed reviews. Some critics even wondered if Wrong's "True Believer" optimism didn't create a simplistic morality play. But all told, *I Didn't Do It For You* is an important book, one that will help put Eritrea back on the world map.Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

Michela Wrong opens this book on the -- to Westerners -- negligible country of Eritrea with a marvelous anecdote. She was sitting in Cairo airport's transit lounge near a middle-aged Pakistani who introduced himself as a salesman who traveled Africa and the Middle East looking for possible markets for his multinational company. Wrong, in turn, told him that she was a journalist writing a book about Eritrea, which is where she was headed. He was confused. "You are writing a book about Algeria?" "No. Eritrea." "Nigeria?" "No, Eritrea." "Al-Jazeera?" "No. Eritrea. Small country on the Red Sea. Used to be part of Ethiopia." The Pakistani closed the conversation: "I'm sorry. But I've simply never heard of the place."The book's title comes from a story, apocryphal one hopes, of a British captain leading his war-weary men into the capital city of Asmara after the battle of Keren,

which, although little-known, was among the toughest and most brutal battles of World War II. He was greeted by an old Eritrean woman, enthusiastically ululating in celebration of her country's liberation from Italian Fascist rule. The captain interrupted her high-pitched shrilling with a savage "I didn't do it for you, n****r." That too is a theme of Wrong's book: Nothing, absolutely nothing, that the world's powers -- from Italy, to Great Britain, to the United States, to Russia, to Israel -- have done in Eritrea since 1880 has been for the Eritreans. Instead, Eritrea has been a venue for colonialism, pillaging, and the exercise of Cold War and Middle East realpolitik, and a pimple on the rump of Ethiopia. Essentially, *I DIDN'T DO IT FOR YOU* is a history of Eritrea, and because Eritrea has been so closely engaged with its neighbor Ethiopia, also a history of Ethiopia. Ethiopia believes that Eritrea should be part of it, which, of course, would give it access to the Red Sea. By and large, Wrong rebuts Ethiopia's arguments. Yet from 1950 to 1990 Ethiopia exercised varying degrees of control over Eritrea, and from 1962 to 1992 Eritrea fought a bitter, heroic, and ultimately successful War of Independence. That War of Independence -- as well as its aftermath, first tantalizingly promising but now sadly depressing (Eritrea now is essentially a one-party country presided over by Isaias Afwerki, a dictator for all intents and purposes) -- is the central episode of the book. The major secondary ones consist of Eritrea being buffeted about by the Italians, then the British, and later the Americans. In yet another instance I learn how my country's post-World War II foreign policy was shameful and misguided. Admirable in many ways, *I DIDN'T DO IT FOR YOU* could have been better. It is too hasty and unnecessarily confusing. Seemingly containing everything that Wrong ever reported or researched in a decade of covering Eritrea, the book is too long for the general reader. Moreover, while briskly written, it is riddled with threadbare clichés. (No book should contain more than one "turning a blind eye")

A fantastic book written from the inside of the Eritrean Civil war. The author outlines what was quite possibly the most unique rebellion in African history. She does a masterful job of portraying the initial years of the EPLF and their ability to mobilize the populace and utilize the safe havens available to support their efforts. The contrast between Mengistu's governance and that of the EPLF in the initial years is stark and telling. The sad part of the book is the decline of inclusive governance and ultimate strong man rule by Afwerki. Although the title speaks of "how the world betrayed a small African nation," it might well have been: "How a revolution betrayed itself. It would be a true seminal work if Ms. Wrong did a follow on book or an updated version covering the period from 2005 to the present. *I Didn't Do It for You: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation* (P.S.)

I grabbed this as the most highly rated book on Eritrea. I fully understand after zipping through the pages. Well written, dry, witty, and insightful as to the human and political relationships that form this nation, it has served as my primer. I will read more on Eritrea, but doubt that it will be as enjoyable. Excellent job. I, too, hope to ride that train one day.

As an Eritrean raised in post independence Eritrea, reading this book really gave me an interesting and critical perspective. It gave a view of how Eritrea is seen from outside. I enjoyed reading it, and I learned a lot I didn't know about my country. There are seemingly unimportant facts and little details that answer questions I've asked myself all my life. Thanks to Wrong I now have a deeper view into my lovely country's past. I would recommend this book as a reading text in schools in Eritrea, and also to anyone who wants to learn about Eritrea in a fun, enjoyable way. Thank you Michela Wrong for contributing such a wonderful book about my people and my country.

This is well written and I'm interested in Eritrea, but it gets very bogged down in the minutiae of the various political machinations at times.

Incredible story of a tiny nation fighting for its life against a giant and winning!

I knew - and cared, frankly - nothing at all about Eritrea when I started this book. It is incredibly well-written and a fascinating account of a story that should be better known. While I am to the right of the author, one has to respect her research, keen insights, and writing skills. I have now purchased her other books.

Even to those who claim they have a good understanding, like me, about Eritrean history, the information the book provides on the Italian and British occupation is something that you hardly find in other books. The suffering of the population under the Italian colonization and the looting during the British administration from 1941 to 1952 is quite revealing.

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