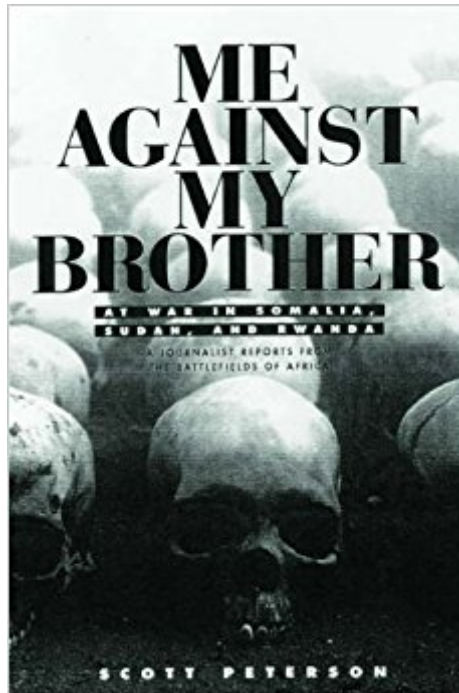




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Me Against My Brother: At War In Somalia, Sudan And Rwanda



Synopsis

As a foreign correspondent, Scott Peterson witnessed firsthand Somalia's descent into war and its battle against US troops, the spiritual degeneration of Sudan's Holy War, and one of the most horrific events of the last half century: the genocide in Rwanda. In *Me Against My Brother*, he brings these events together for the first time to record a collapse that has had an impact far beyond African borders. In Somalia, Peterson tells of harrowing experiences of clan conflict, guns and starvation. He met with warlords, observed death intimately and nearly lost his own life to a Somali mob. From ground level, he documents how the US-UN relief mission devolved into all out war - one that for America has proven to be the most formative post-Cold War debacle. In Sudan, he journeys where few correspondents have ever been, on both sides of that religious front line, to find that outside "relief" has only prolonged war. In Rwanda, his first-person experience of the genocide and well-documented analysis provide rare insight into this human tragedy. Filled with the dust, sweat and powerful detail of real-life, *Me Against My Brother* graphically illustrates how preventive action and a better understanding of Africa - especially by the US - could have averted much suffering. Also includes a 16-page color insert.

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Customer Reviews

Unfortunately, the question of whether humanity as a whole learned a valuable moral lesson from the Holocaust was dramatically answered in the negative during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Not only did history repeat itself, but so did world indifference to the misfortune of a million victims. In *Me against my brother* (New York: Routledge, 2000), journalist Scott Peterson vividly describes, based on personal observations and extensive research, the ethnic tension and the genocide in Rwanda. In the chapter "Genocide Denied" he also covers world reactions, including, unforgivably, France's defense of the Hutu aggressors and the isolationist policies of the United States. He argues that these were important international factors that made the mass killings possible. Above all, the author persuades us that, unlike other ethnic tensions in Africa and the Middle East, the Rwandan genocide could have been averted by effective U.N. involvement: "In Rwanda Hutu extremists were often just young men with machetes or ill-disciplined soldiers" he states. (292) As the title of the book suggests, neighbors, former friends and even family members killed many of the victims in Rwanda using rudimentary weapons: most often machetes that had been previously employed for everyday household purposes and agriculture. Why then did the U.S. refuse to intervene? Peterson points out that a few months after giving the inaugural lecture at the United States Holocaust Museum in April 1993 and expressing his commitment to fight the evil of genocide throughout the world "But as we are its [evil] witness, so we must remain its adversary in the world in which we live" President Clinton, having just pulled humiliated American troops from Somalia, urged the United Nations not to intervene in the ethnic conflict in Rwanda (289). Peterson elaborates: "Genocide must be organized to be effective, and in Rwanda that took time and left many traces. But Washington feared another Somalia, and so the first instinct was denial that genocide was even occurring that would have legally required action to stop it. The second instinct was to disengage entirely, as the US sought to slash UN troop numbers. The third move at least from the part of American policy-makers was to bully any other nation from acting" (290). In hindsight, Bill Clinton would later declare that not interfering in the Rwandan genocide was the biggest regret of his presidency. Between April and September 1994, the Hutu majority in Rwanda ruthlessly massacred almost 1 million men, women and children of the Tutsi minority. Tensions

between the two ethnic groups rose during the early 1990s over control of the country. The Hutu government of Rwanda, backed by Belgium and France, had more or less ruled the country since their revolution against the Tutsi elite in 1959. However, the Tutsi minority in exile, led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) under the leadership of Paul Kagame, was attempting to reaffirm power in Rwanda. The Hutu extremists, who called for a "final solution" to the "Tutsi problem", gained political momentum during the 1990s. The Hutu Power movement galvanized the support of part of the army and of powerful politicians. The assassination of Juvenal Habyarimana (1937-1994), the third president of the Republic of Rwanda, on April 6, 1994, only stocked the Hutu extremists' hatred and their suspicion that the Tutsis were out to destroy them. They blamed the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front for the crime, using the assassination of the president as a pretext for mass murder. Transmitting their message mostly via radio stations, they urged vendetta against Tutsis as well as against moderate Hutus. The result was atrocities that are almost beyond description. Nonetheless, Peterson attempts to give readers an impression of the sheer volume and violent nature of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. "In the next weeks, the death toll began to merge into a statistical mass. In this village one Tutsi survived from a population of 400; in that town some 2,800 were slaughtered; dozens of parish churches were turned into abattoirs. To fully appreciate the nature of Rwanda's mass killing, however, requires extracting the terrific agony particular to each death. That is now an impossible task. But an extermination rate of 45,000 each day means little, unless you explore and taste the charnel house yourself" (263). The Hutu Power movement reinforced one simple, hateful message: in the power struggle with the Tutsis, it's us versus them. Either we kill them or they'll kill us. We've seen over and over again throughout history how this "us versus them" mentality can lead to the dehumanization of members of another ethnic or religious group. This makes genocide not only possible, but also--in a dramatic inversion of ethical standards of right and wrong--a moral duty. Scott Peterson's well-documented book, *Me against my brother*, shows the danger of this dualist mentality and, perhaps even more so, the danger of lack of intervention by the rest of the world when genocide occurs. Genocide, he points out, is not just a "humanitarian crisis"--as the international news conveyed the Rwandan disaster--any more than mass rape in Bosnia was a "gynecological crisis". Genocide is a massive crime against humanity that reveals the moral breakdown of our civilizations in general:

particularly when the world refuses to intervene and help the victims. As the UNAMIR commander in Kigali, General Romeo Dallaire, notes with great regret about the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda: “The biggest crime of all is that we weren’t able to keep it from happening” (290). Claudia Moscovici, Literature Salon

Scott Peterson’s *Me Against My Brother* is about the horrors of African war. Peterson has covered it as a journalist for years, and is no fan of it. In fact, he is unrelentingly negative. For instance, in his largest section, on the UN intervention in Somalia, Western governmental powers (including the UN) can do no right. When they ignore Somali famine, Peterson reviles them. When they intervene after the worst of the famine is over, again Peterson reviles them. When they fail to make a strong show of force and disarm the warlords, Peterson reviles them. When they do make a strong show of force by attempting to disarm powerful warlord Mohamed Aidid – which leads to immediate street violence that leaves 25 Pakistani UN soldiers dead – again Peterson reviles them. When they appease Aidid, Peterson reviles them; when they fight him, Peterson reviles them. Peterson says the UN did not understand the Somali culture of violence and made themselves look foolish and weak, but when the UN struck back with an helicopter assault against key Aidid personnel, Peterson is horrified that the UN might do such a violent thing. It’s not that I disagreed with most of what Peterson writes. He points out errors and foibles with a practiced eye and a passionate pen, and his efforts have convinced me that there may have been no way to effectively intervene in Somalia – that, indeed, every move the UN made or could have made was a terrible error. But he seems to have no point; he just lashes out in all directions, as if there’s a simple answer he is not telling us and it is everybody’s fault for not getting it. Peterson makes up for his emotionalism in his later chapters on Sudan, not by being less impassioned or less negative but by better acknowledging the complexities of that situation. While agonizing over the horrors of the Sudanese civil war and attacking various political and charitable organizations for their parts in it, he finally loses his self-righteousness and voices honest, complicated questions about how and whether outside intervention should have taken place. He does not have the answers, but I do not count that against him since no one else does, either. At least he is trying to draw lessons from these situations, rather than merely drubbing everyone in sight. His closing chapters on Rwanda are his best yet, perhaps because the moral equation is even simpler, the evil even greater, than in Somalia and Sudan. Despite the fact that I read the second paperback edition of this book, there were a number of typos and editorial screw-ups, including a couple of misspellings and a substantial number of mixed-up soundalikes

(the most embarrassing being that the author twice, when he describes people chewing, says they are "emasculating" things rather than "masticating" them). But other than these errors, Peterson's vivid and powerful writing works. While *Me Against My Brother* is not a comprehensive policy discussion (even where it tries to be), the book perhaps fulfills a greater function. Peterson's authorial power and passionate heart make it impossible for the reader not to care about the subject matter, and want to find out more about it. The generation that solves the problems Peterson decries can only do so if it knows about, and cares about, those problems. Peterson is doing his part to bring that generation into being, and he deserves our thanks for it.

A very brief review of Scott Peterson's macabre book would simply say "Chilling, gruesome, and violent". This book is a must read for anybody curious about the UN or US missions to Africa and the seemingly endless violence that occurs there on massive scales. As I write this, Rwanda is struggling to hold an election after the 1994 Genocide and Liberia seems to be on the brink of spiraling down into a conflict marked by massacres. Mr. Peterson's book makes you wonder how humanity could sink to the level that it has over and over again, but make no mistake, the conflicts in this book devoured women and children as quickly as male combatants. Even the definition of a combatant is blurry in a world where 10 year olds are trained as shock troops. Famine is used as a weapon as the countryside is deliberately ransacked by warlords. Disease and starvation soon join the fray. The scale of the violence becomes unreal. In Rwanda approximately 800,000 people were exterminated in few months. Mostly with machetes and clubs, not machineguns or gas chambers. It is hard to comprehend the personal face to face orgy of destruction that lead time and time again to children being grouped together and beaten to death. This book raises questions about the usefulness of food aid to refugees as it is hijacked by combatants and refugees are forced to move around to allow "combat units" access to the food that the world ships in. It would seem that the meddling of the world isn't helping the larger geo-political situation in these countries and indeed that the only real solution will have to be an African solution as the citizens in these war torn countries decide that peace is worth more than war.

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