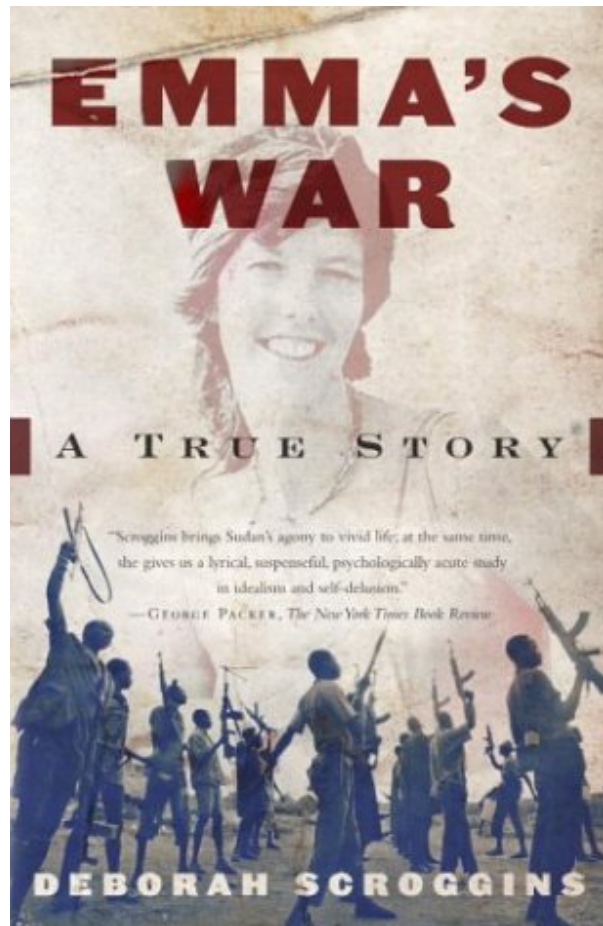
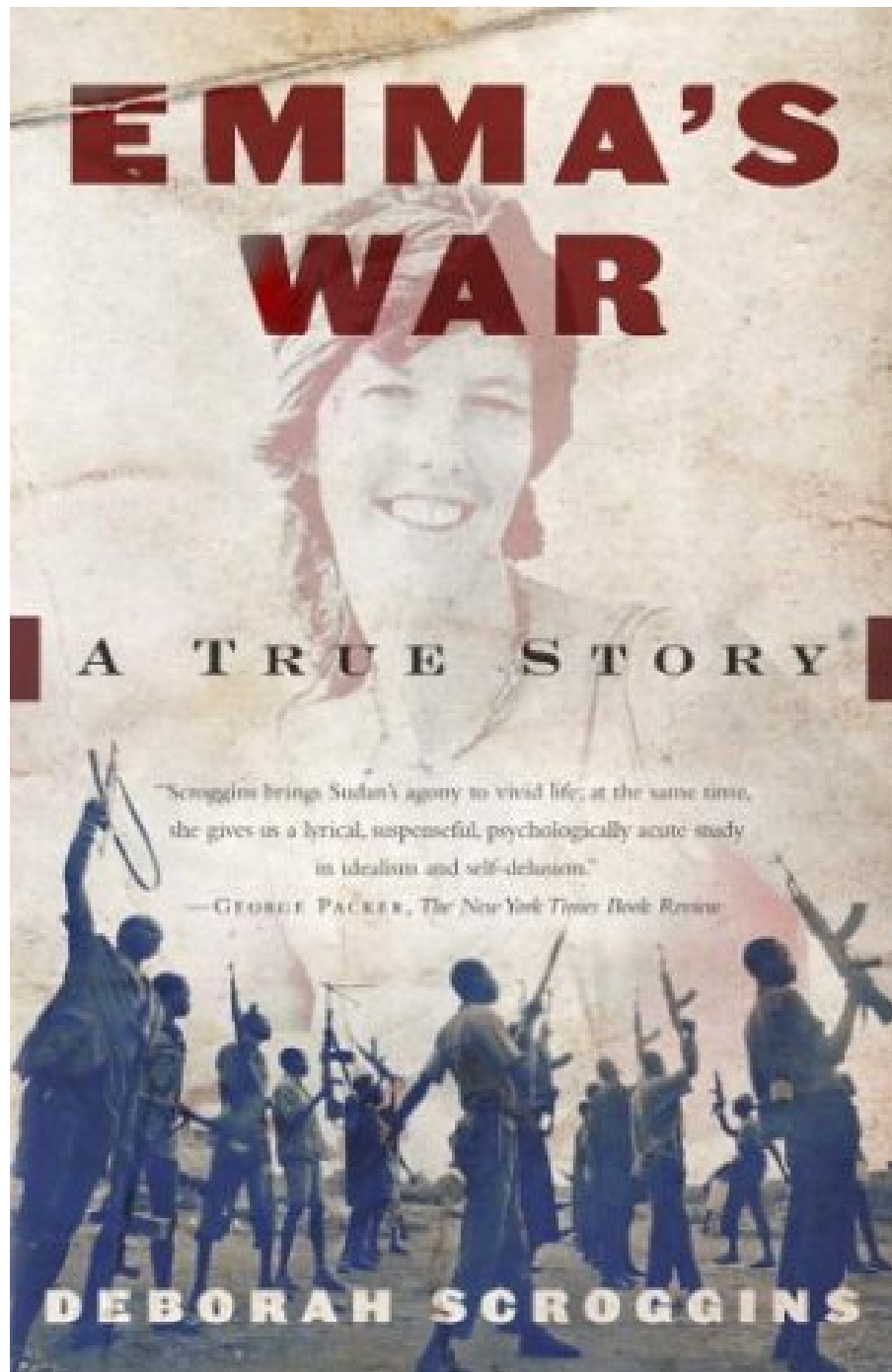


EMMA'S WAR: A TRUE STORY BY DEBORAH SCROGGINS



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Features

- Deborah Scroggins
- History
- Africa

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Raw and Incredible Look at Sudan's Aid Community

By B. Bauer

I'm an NGO worker in a post-conflict society, and was intrigued at reading this account of one woman's experience in the Sudanese aid community, and her subsequent marriage to a warlord. My fears of this being a book too bogged by history/biography were quickly tossed aside...Emma's War is so engaging because it is actually three stories in one: the story of an English woman who married a Sudanese rebel, the contentious history of southern Sudan, and a very delightful first-person narrative about the author herself and her experiences with the first two.

What I like so much about this book is that it never takes sides; Scroggins is somewhat sympathetic towards Emma, but never apologetic over her (sometimes) inhumane actions. This book also really illuminates the situation in Darfur now, and how the conflict of the last 20 years has fueled the current crisis there. I'd call it a must-read for anyone interested in the region, and anyone struggling to understand the conflicts of interest between humanitarian aid and armed conflict.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Powerful story of war, aid, aid workers and the politics of the Sudan

By A. Woodley

With yet another crisis in the Sudan (did it ever go away?) this book is a powerful source of information on

the machievelian politics of the region, but also of the Aid, the aid workers and one in particular, Emma McCune.

In the early 1990's Emma was an aid worker and idealist, working in the Sudan on programmes to provide young people with education (and assisting them in avoiding being drafted into the armies of the fighting factions of the region. Deborah Scoggins who met her once, unravels her life, and ties it in with the actions of the those around her - the warlords, the aid organisations, and the man she married, Northern Nile Warlord Riek.

This is a fascinating and well written book, almost Shakesperian in its tragedy. From tragic childhood to idealist aid worker to blindly in love, to prime manipulator and finally tragic heroine - It seemed her life and made a complete circle.

Scoggins clearly knows the area, its politics and history and is able to draw in immense amounts of background to situations which might otherwise be inexplicable - but she is an easy writer to read, it is eloquently put. I found myself unable to put this down until I was finished, and is easily one of the best reads of the year for me.

I found myself by turns exasperated and annoyed with Emma - she seemed frivolous with everyone but herself and yet, she obviously achieved such a lot before she became enamoured with Reik. Even perhaps afterwards.

I think reading this book will do more than explain the life of one woman, it will provide a background to one of those little understood regions - we are expected to give aid to the suffering masses without understanding why - and whether you actually give aid after you read this book will be interesting!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

The Imperialists' New Cloths

By Omer Belsky

Welcome to Sudan. The ravaged country, its society torn apart by endless war, as if cursed with every possible curse - Ethnic strife, widespread corruption, religious warfare, famine - and that Modern curse, the one that makes powerful foreigners interested: oil.

Deborah Scoggins uses the story of Emma McCune, a young Englishwoman who - obsessed with Sudan, its people, and its men, came to marry a Sudanese warlord, to shed light on the forsaken land, and of the people who populate it - not merely the Sudanese themselves, but also, perhaps especially, the Westerners who come to "save" them.

Scoggins sees continuity between the present day Aid workers, Journalists and other do-gooders and the Western Imperialists of the 19th century. Their implicit model was Charles George Gordon, the Victorian soldier and adventurer who led African soldiers in a "campaign" against slavery, and whose mix - of idealism, thrill seeking, and utter ignorance of the country and the people he came to save - they share (This is also a theme of William Easterly's *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*).

Like their Imperialists forerunners, the white aid-workers become immediate elite, separated and elevated above the population by the color of their skin. Also like the Imperialists, they get powers above and beyond anything they might have had back in the West. 25 years old Emma McCune, for example, became a school coordinator, essentially an education Minister for the area under the Sudanese Rebels' control. Indeed, one of

the most penetrating insights of Scoggins is that a certain nostalgic quality for the days of Imperialism may be a motivating factor for Africa's whites; McCune herself was born in India, where her father had continued his Imperial Era post as manager of a Tea estate up to the mid 1960s. In India, an Englishman was a marked aristocrat, and Mr. McCune could never adapt to the bourgeois England he was forced to return to as the British Indian world came to an end. By going to Sudan, wasn't Emma at least partially recovering something her father had had and had lost?

And yet this is not quite fair, because for better or worse, Emma identified herself with the Sudanese as the Imperialists never had. She worked, apparently diligently, for them and with them. If she was guilty of Orientalism (a term popularized by Edward Said in *Orientalism* - and heavily criticized by other scholars; see *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Policy Papers (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), No. 58.) and *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents*) - her brand of romantic, even erotic attraction to Africa lacked the exploitive elements that made the "White Man's Burden" so repulsing. She may have had a fetish for Sudan - and Sudanese men; she may have had an idealized view of them - but I don't think she patronized them, lorded over them with the mystical power of her white skin (the Locals referred to Westerners as Khawajas - white).

In Sudan, Emma met, fell in love with, and soon married Riek Machar, an already married, British educated, high-rank commander of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) - a rebel force of Sudan's Southern, Christian and Pagan people. As her relationship with Machar deepened, she came to see things from his perspective, putting her in conflict with her UN colleagues and supervisors. One of the best parts of Scoggins' book is her description of the problematics of the morality of hunger. Machar's men had been stealing food that was going to the camp's starving children. He exhibited the starving children in special camps, with "caretakers", who supposedly were watching after them, but in fact were taking their food. But as horrible as it seems, "it was not easy to tell right from wrong". How different were the rebels and the saviors?

"It was not as if the aid workers themselves were going without meals... [the] discrepancy made some people uncomfortable, especially when grain stocks were low and aid workers had to put more than one hundred thousand refugees on half rations. But - face it - food tastes awfully good after a day that begins at five AM and continues until nightfall with all manners of frustrations in between. Who could blame the khawajas if they enjoyed an extra helping of canned fish? Think of what they could be eating if they were at home in Manhattan or Melbourne. True, children were dying. But if the aid-workers didn't keep up their strength, more would die." (pp. 234-235).

Her marriage cost Emma her job, and she became a propagandist and an apologist for Riek Machar, who was busy in a war against the SPLA leader, John Garang. As the war deteriorated to a tribal blood-fest, which benefited only the Islamic government in Khartoum, Emma's life became endangered. "There are some people out there who would gladly put a bullet through my head", she said. Machar gave her two bodyguards. And Emma did not believe any harm would come to her.

That Emma's story would end tragically seems inevitable. Yet, astonishingly, Emma died in a mundane car accident; she was never important enough for anyone to kill. She had been five months pregnant. Her death was tragic but meaningless.

Scoggins' book tells is really a triple narrative: a biography of Emma McCune; a brutal account of the sad history of Sudan and the naïve Westerners who tried to help it; and a sketch of Scoggins's own experience reporting from Sudan. None of the narrative end very effectively - all fizzle out, like Emma, stopping before the tale is over. Scoggins's own reporting is the least satisfying element of it all - chapters upon chapters of

her experiences in Sudan (and even, for some mysterious reason, Somalia), which don't add up to much.

And yet Scroggins's prose is effective, and her insights, particularly of the mentality and problems of the white aid-workers, quite illuminating. If you're interested in Sudan's sad history, in the colorful life of Emma McCune, or especially in the complexities of aid-work in Africa, you are likely to find `Emma's War' a useful and readable account.

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