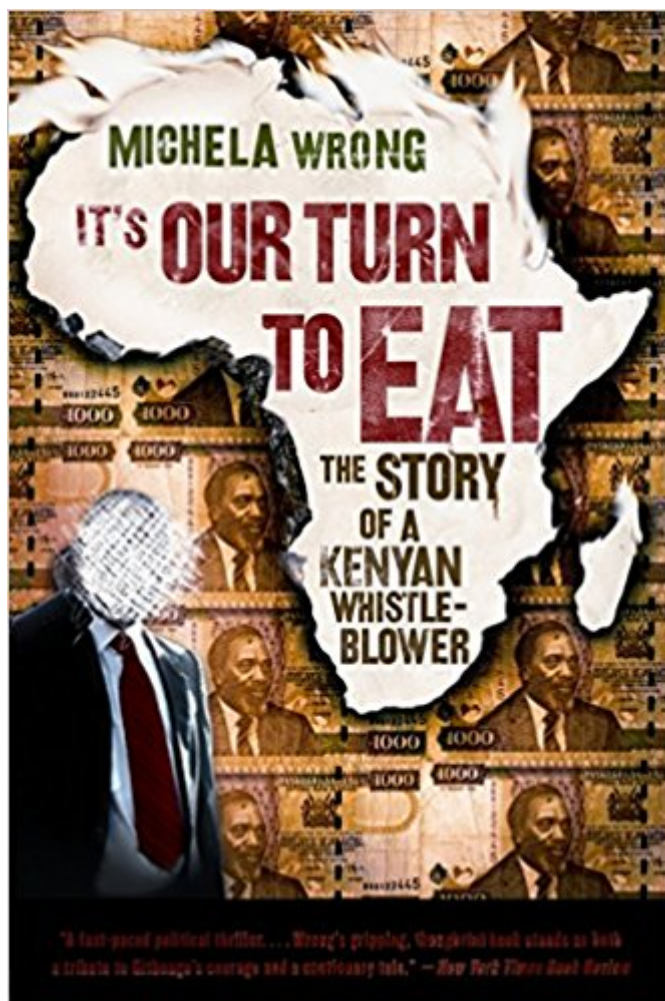


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It's Our Turn To Eat: The Story Of A Kenyan Whistle-Blower



Synopsis

"A fast-paced political thriller.... Wrong's gripping, thoughtful book stands as both a tribute to Githongo's courage and a cautionary tale." *—New York Times Book Review* "On one level, *It's Our Turn to Eat* reads like a John Le Carré novel.... On a deeper and much richer level, the book is an analysis of how and why Kenya descended into political violence." *—Washington Post* Called "urgent and important" by Harper's magazine, *It's Our Turn to Eat* is a nonfiction political thriller of modern Kenya—an eye-opening account of tribal rivalries, pervasive graft, and the rising anger of a prospect-less youth that exemplifies an African dilemma.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kenya's dysfunctional state is the subject of this gripping profile of an anti-corruption crusader. Journalist Wrong (In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz) tells the story of John Githongo, a journalist and activist (and Wrong's personal friend) who joined newly elected Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki's administration in 2003 as anti-corruption czar. Githongo's reformist hopes were betrayed when his investigation of a contracting scandal earned him the enmity of colleagues, death threats and smear campaigns. He fled to Britain in 2005, taking along secret recordings of conversations in which powerful officials implicated themselves in the scam. Githongo, a charming idealist with an intransigence bordering on egomania, is a magnetic protagonist for Wrong's exposé of the machinery of corruption. She dissects the deeper problem of Kenya's patronage system, which exploits the state as a source of loot and makes allowances for the tribal parties in power. The

resulting graft and discrimination – which Wrong argues fueled the communal slaughter surrounding Kenya's 2007 election – reinforces Kenyans' view of existence as a merciless contest, in which only ethnic preference offers hope of survival. Githongo's saga highlights this pan-African problem and addresses possibilities for change. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 2003, when Mwai Kibaki was elected to replace Kenyan president Moi, the peaceful transition was hailed locally and internationally as the end of rampant corruption and tribal favoritism. John Githongo, a former journalist and longtime critic of government corruption, was named to head an anti-corruption commission. But Githongo was alternately hopeful and skeptical about the new government. Soon scandals and rumors of scandals emerged of officials eating at the government trough. Githongo, a member of the leading Kikuyu tribe, began to surreptitiously tape conversations with government figures to document corruption and became the target of threats. Journalist Wrong provided temporary shelter when, two years after joining Kibaki's administration, Githongo fled Kenya, taking with him incriminating evidence of graft. Wrong offers a compelling analysis of Kenya's history of tribalism and corruption, dating back to British colonialism, and the dramatic story of one man's bravery and the ultimate price he paid. Written with the pace of a thriller and a depth of analysis of a nation and a man, this is a compelling look at a nation struggling to overcome its past. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I had the privilege of living and working in Nairobi between late 2004 and the end of 2005. It was only a few months after my arrival that John Githonga suddenly left Kenya and went into exile because of death threats from those government officials whose grotesque corruption he was about to expose. Until I read "It's Our Turn to Eat" one year ago, I had limited understanding of how deeply ingrained and tribal-oriented the corruption has been. It provided the clearest and most honest explanation I have ever encountered of how profound the role of tribalism has been in Kenya, both before and since the country's independence from British rule. I only wish that I'd had the benefit of reading it before I began my attempt to help bring reform to the Kenyan law enforcement system so that I might have better understood why such efforts were naive and destined to be thwarted by those benefitting most from the status quo. During my time in Kenya, there were frequently reports in the then newly-free press of what were astoundingly brazen and arrogant acts of corruption by one

government minister or another. When their crimes were exposed, each responded in a manner that said, in essence, "so what?" or, if the acts were exposed by the U.S. or U.K., accused the messenger of acting as a hypocritical colonial power with racist attitudes towards "the Kenyan people. We in the United States certainly have corruption among our government officials, particularly in Congress. But one difference between our corrupt and those in Kenya is the arrogance and sense of entitlement among Kenyan officials that results in their not caring at all about the public reaction to such acts. It was obvious that the way to move from poverty to untold riches in Kenya was to be elected to Parliament or, even better, get appointed by the president to a ministerial post. Ms. Wrong's book puts it all into historical context and provided the kind of insider knowledge that only someone of John Githonga's stature, integrity and lifelong experience could truly piece together. This is an extraordinary book and I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to really understand why Kenya is so poor today, despite its natural riches, hundreds of millions in foreign aid and citizens who are incredibly proud, hard-working, educated, enterprising and hospitable. Time will tell whether its newly-enacted Constitution will make meaningful changes in the extent to which elected officials can continue to plunder the country's riches and leave the masses so incredibly poor.

Firstly this is a beautifully written book. Although it is factual it reads like an adventure novel. The thread through the book is the attempt by John Githongo to expose the rampant corruption within the political elite in Kenya. Just as interesting are the detailed descriptions of the Kikuyu hierarchy (the Mount Kenya mafia) and how they manipulate the situation to completely discredit John, the whistleblower, one of their own, who was expected to do the 'right thing'. I was brought up in Kenya and the descriptions of the tribal rivalry and continuing conflict ring true. I have just returned to Kenya on holiday after an absence of thirty years and this book brings it all back to life. Also of some interest is the complicity of the major donors in turning a blind eye, indeed almost encouraging, the on-going corruption in the country. Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in Africa

I came to this book after listening to an interview with John Githongo on NPR's "Planet Money" podcast in which he casually mentioned (amid chuckles) that part of his remit as Kenyan corruption watchdog was to investigate so-called "Nigerian" scams and found out that the majority of their victims were Latin Americans. I thought: I have to read this book! And I was not disappointed. It is not riveting "All the President's Men" stuff, with moonlit meetings in Nairobi parking garages. Rather,

it is the relatively simple story of Githongo, who thought he could make a difference by becoming a new government's anti-corruption czar. When he actually tries to do his job, he realizes that the rot he is trying to cut out begins at the very top, among the Cabinet. And then the point comes when the price demanded by the ringleaders is not simply silence but a simple choice between outright complicity and unpleasant consequences. With the twist that Githongo went completely off the reservation by taping his senior colleagues discussing every tawdry detail of their procurement scams. In general, one cannot find major faults in Wrong's narrative, but one aspect of the book raises some doubts: her focus on the international aid donors as silent accomplices of African plutocrats. Of course, their failure to denounce scandals and practices like Anglo-Leasing is outrageous. I was reminded of the book when reading that the incoming Conservative government in Great Britain had ring-fenced only two budgets from spending cuts: the health service and foreign aid --meaning that the obdurate bureaucrats who continue to shovel millions into the pockets of scoundrels will continue to do so undisturbed for at least five more years. However, Wrong does not discuss how much leverage these organizations actually have, since, according to her own figures, aid only accounts for 5% of modern Kenya's state budget (p. 184). I imagine she would respond that: 1) even small leverage should be deployed to secure better governance; and 2) the "ideal reader" for this part of the book is the taxpayers of Western nations who believe their funds are being used to feed hungry children. Both points are well taken. Nonetheless, the overall tone of pessimism about the "aid community" is slightly off the mark. From my point of view, even though Githongo ultimately failed to dislodge the Cabinet ministers who participated in the scam permanently, my takeaway was not despair: his gesture and the firestorm it provoked will in the long run probably be more decisive than anything Western diplomats and aid agencies can do by cajoling or threatening. His story is a small (albeit failed) baby step toward better governance in Africa, but at least a step of some kind.

There are three main strands in this short and gripping book. One is the extent to which high-level corruption is embedded in the (formally) democratic structures of Kenya. The second reveals the willingness of donor countries and multilaterals to go on doing business as usual after corruption is revealed and a few eye-brows have been raised The engrossing chapters describing both aspects confirm the conviction of many development economists that fighting corruption is a battle lost even before the fight : there is a conspiracy of silence among the leaders, and donors and multilaterals are good at barking but hardly ever bite. The third strand is the exemplary story of a man of values, John Githongo, put at the helm of an anti-corruption authority by country leaders who

expected Githongo to expose graft in the previous government -but keep clear of the misdeeds of the incumbents.

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