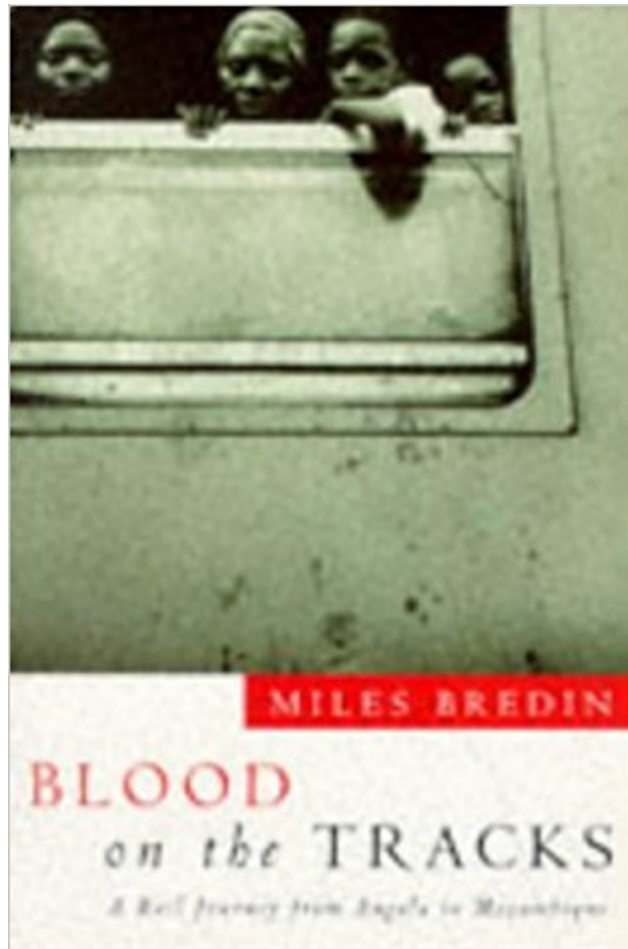




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Blood On The Tracks: A Rail Journey From Angola To Mozambique



Synopsis

Taking in three civil wars, five countries, and a couple of rain forests, this is a guide to the history of Africa. Tracing the route of the colonial railway which spans the African continent through Angola, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe to Beira.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

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Customer Reviews

The premise behind Miles Bredin's trip, to travel across Southern Africa by rail, was a great idea, but he never even came close to fulfilling the subtitle of the book "A Rail Journey from Angola to Mozambique". Travelling as a journalist, he doesn't seem to spend a lot of time filing reports as much as he does looking for a good place for a drink, or begging for free plane trips from aid agencies. He mentions that he had trouble receiving compensation from the paper he was supposed to be reporting for... maybe that's indicative of his reporting efforts. He actually doesn't board a train until page 130, and it's in Zambia, the only country that managed to avoid any sort of civil war through the present. Granted, nobody could travel in Angola during the civil war, and the resurgence after the 1992 elections, and he does make it from Zambia, through Zimbabwe and Mozambique, but anyone could do that when the countries are peaceful. All Bredin does in this book is remark on the poverty of the people, how corrupt the governments are, and how aid agencies are almost useless, and offers no solutions himself. But there are a million better written books about Africa, and he adds little to the subject of Africa's poverty, and why it's so bad, and who is ultimately to blame, except to suggest.... America! He says very little of British and French colonialism and neo-colonialism as a cause, but put lots of blame on the USA. And it's particularly

ironic that Bredin uses the rail system as a basis of his observations of the problems of Africa; the rail system built by the British and French colonialists (and that includes tracks in Angola, Mozambique, and Zaire, nominally under control of Portugal and Belgium) were meant first and foremost to extract resources from the colonies and send them to the colonial powers as efficiently as possible. He never mentions this fact at all. The worst thing for me about this book was the usual British journalist bias about what is in reality the relatively minor role of the US in the problems he writes of in this book. The recent cold war struggle between the USA and USSR is blamed for all of Africa's problems, but they didn't begin to use African countries as pawns until independence, and the specific problems of Angola and Mozambique started well before 1975. European Colonialism is hardly mentioned as the MAJOR cause of Africa's present problems. The USA deserves criticism for a lack of involvement in African affairs, but are hardly a primary cause of the continent's problems. European Colonialism is the number one cause for certain. The last chapter of the book contains these crazy statements (all in one paragraph!): "The Americans have become an international menace..." and "The former Soviet Union was even worse." and worst of all, he writes "Britain, France and Belgium are scarcely blameless but this is not the point. It is easy to prove that the west has harmed and continues to harm Africa but Africa has also damaged itself." So there you go, Africa is a disaster because the USA, USSR and the Africans themselves are really to blame! Don't waste your time with this book.

After having spent nearly three years in Angola with an international organization, I have my own views on Angola, the Government and the laboured peace process and left Angola more than a little cynical. Mr. Bredin and Ms. Logan's book covers not only Angola, but (the former) Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It was with great pleasure that I read the book which also accounts the tumultuous events in Angola of 1992, all related with a healthy dose of humour. It brought back a lot of good memories for me and I feel it really captured the essence of the country and the people, not only of Angola, but the other countries through which the Benguela Railroad passes. Armed with this book, I visited some of the major towns along the railway including Benguela and Huambo during my time there, a fascinating experience made all the better by "Blood on the Tracks". An excellent book and a great introduction to the realities of life in Southern Africa.

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