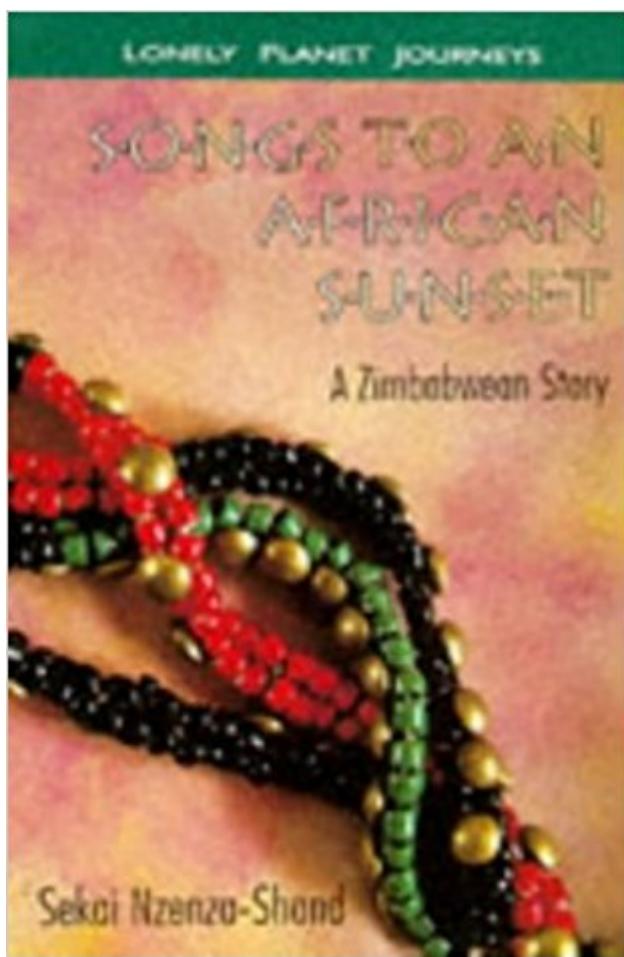


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Songs To An African Sunset: A Zimbabwean Story



Synopsis

An unforgettable picture of contemporary Zimbabwe from the perspective of an African woman returning to her country after years of living in the west.

Book Information

Series: Lonely Planet Travel Literature

Paperback: 248 pages

Publisher: Lonely Planet Publications; 1st THUS edition (April 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0864424728

ISBN-13: 978-0864424723

Product Dimensions: 7.9 x 5.2 x 0.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,130,930 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in Books > Travel > Africa > Zimbabwe #1645 in Books > Travel > Africa > General #8177 in Books > Travel > Travel Writing

Customer Reviews

They say love is blind, but Sekai Nzenza-Shand's devotion to her homeland of Zimbabwe is perceptive and penetrating. After spending years in Australia, she returns to her family's village and finds a world where polygamy and witchcraft still rule daily life, where drought and AIDS drain the land and people, and where old traditions live long. She records the daily buckets of water and bundles of firewood, grinding groundnuts into peanut-butter paste, and her mother's bopoto, where a woman makes "a lot of angry noise" in order to have a grievance heard. Writing with insight and affection about old ways and new challenges, Nzenza-Shand weaves a beautiful portrait of her country, people, and village.

I took someone's advice in reading this book. I liked it a lot; it was helpful in understanding the AIDS health issues in southern Africa, as well as cultural, and political situations. My teenaged daughter wrote an excellent school report and radio dramatization based partly on reading this book. I heartily recommend the book to anyone trying to understand more about the country of Zimbabwe and its struggles today.

I experienced many different emotions while reading this book. Oftentimes, I found humor where it wasn't expected--the author's 1000 brick punishment for the man who had stolen her bedspread, the feminist caricatures, as well as, the antics at the baby shower (who'da thunk it?). Similarly, I was also discouraged where it wasn't expected--the medical student who wanted to marry the author's, likely HIV+, sister-in-law (discouraged because if he didn't understand/care about the risk he was taking, how could any of his other relatives?). Furthermore, I was also unpleasantly surprised at the author's depiction of rampant infidelity in the book. Finally, I particularly enjoyed the stories about the author's mother. She appears to be a particularly savvy and strong woman. Specifically, I found the story of her first beer quite remarkable. Overall, I've assumed this book to be, like "I, Rigoberta Menchu," auto-biographical in nature and non-fiction that's *based on* the truth of a people. Unfortunately, I don't know if that's a good assumption.

The complex journey back to Sekai's roots in this autobiography, begins with her taking a trip back to Zimbabwe to visit her family. The book revolves mainly around the events that happen to her and around her in Zimbabwe. I think that the theme of the book is really re-discovering your roots, and finding your true heritage. I found this book to be very easy to relate to, as I am familiar with the land of Zimbabwe and some of the phrases and words used in the book. Many of these elements are the foundation of Sekai's complex story, which captures your attention instantly. My only criticism about the book is that sometimes the author goes so deeply into a subject, that she gets slightly off track. I personally was drawn into the book by the author's use of catchy sentences and complex ideas that made me want to keep reading. In conclusion, I'd recommend this book to anyone who enjoys a good story with a cultural and ethnic flare to it.

Nzenza returns to Zimbabwe after many years abroad in Australia. She brings with her a husband and child. As they learn the ropes of Zimbabwe and meet her extended family in the village, Nzenza is dealing with family members that are either dying or have died, most from AIDS. It is a touching book, composed of separate tales, but connected stories. She speaks very clearly of her appreciation of the village and her love for the people there. At the same time she speaks from the knowledge that she can not return to live there, having spent too much time in Western cities with conveniences that the village lacks. I enjoyed the portraits of the village she paints and could easily see the picture she laid out. The stories of AIDS and its debilitating effect on Zimbabwean life was saddening. I can only hope future portraits can touch on a Zimbabwe that has conquered this disease.

Nzenza is one of our women who went to the West, but realized she belongs in the soil of her people, the beautiful country of Africa. She recounts how much misery the West has brought to Africa, but is able to rediscover true African life, family traditions, witchcraft, etc. She has come back to her truly natural life and the place where she belongs to, the earth that nurtured us for all generations, our true mother. Brothers and Sisters, you can't miss reading her experience if you don't feel like this. Read and feel. And I became very emotional when reading that book. Speak to our African heart, sister Sekai.

I found this book to be very very interesting! It's a great insight into how the Zimbabwean people manage to combine their traditional ways in the modern world - and the ensuing problems that arise. This is one woman's story who returns to her birth country after living in western society. Her insights into the differences (and similarities) between Africa and the West are enlightening. A fantastic read which combines reality and history!

This book gave me a front row seat in an African village. I could smell the food and hear the sounds of her homeland. I enjoyed the book and would highly recommend it to everyone. I think that those who have visited that region will especially appreciate this book. The stories will immediately immerse you into Zimbabwean way of life.

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