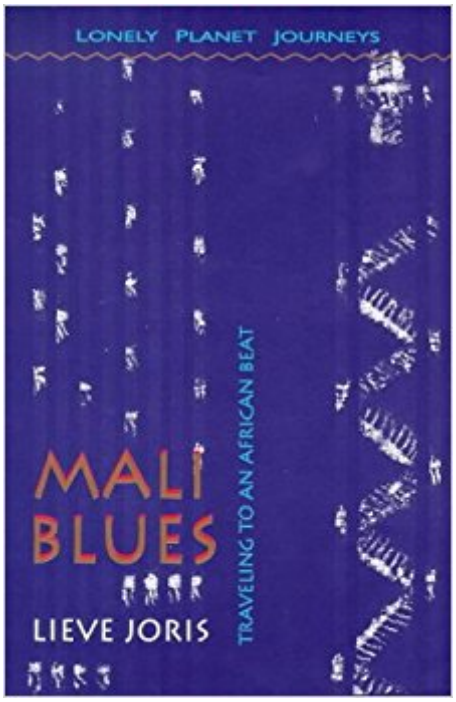
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Mali Blues: Traveling To An African Beat



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Synopsis

"Mali Blues" takes acclaimed writer Lieve Joris to West Africa. Traveling in Senegal, Mauritania and Mali, Joris finds countries troubled by drought, rebel uprisings and ethnic conflict. But the Africans she meets are survivors, fascinating individuals charting new ways of living between tradition and modernity. The story of Malinese blues singer Kar Kar (Boubacar Traore)- celebrated in Europe, caught up in a family tragedy at home - epitomises the struggles facing so many people in these lands. With her remarkable gift for drawing stories out of people, Joris paints a hauntingly intimate portrait of the singer and his society, brilliantly capturing the rhythms of a world that refuses to give in.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In Mali Blues, Belgian-born writer Lieve Joris travels to the West African countries of Senegal, Mauritania, and Mali--a region that to many Westerners seems obscure, even destitute and impoverished. Joris captures the strong will of West Africans, their enduring traditions and heritage, their thumping music, and their unmatched ability to carry on despite hardship and political turmoil. Joris's narrative is immediately captivating and personable; hers is an honest and inquisitive voice. At the journey's beginning in bustling Dakar, Senegal, on the Atlantic coast, Joris wonders, "How long would it take for New York to stop being a reference point for me?" As she absorbs the African cultural landscape, Joris exposes the tensions between a modern world and a traditional one, examining the many political battles among and within these countries. Like a skilled spelunker,

Joris maneuvers into the caverns of the region, illuminating narrow conduits, previously unseen passages, and great rooms as she goes. She meets well-connected urbanites and those who live in remote rural lands, ultimately revealing a West Africa that balances, often precariously, between two worlds. But it is when Joris meets the Malinese blues singer Boubacar TraorÃƒÂ© that her storytelling talents become fully orchestrated and most powerfully applied. TraorÃƒÂ©'s successful yet tragic story serves as a stunning testament to the spirit and struggles of the people of West Africa, a story that Joris conveys so well throughout these pages. --Byron Ricks

The book splits evenly into two halves. The first half recounts Joris's travels in Senegal and Mauritania (the book's high point), and introduces us to Mali. The second half, also dealing with Mali, is an account of her friendship with the singer Boubacar Traore, and her efforts to delve into his personal life. Traore comes across as an abrasive and tempermental character; it's very odd that he should be the focus of the book. Joris's writing style at the beginning of the book relies on indirect quotations instead of actual dialogue, which makes it quite dry; later in the book the writing quality improves markedly where dialogue is concerned. This is more the memoirs of Traore than a travel narrative. It's a sad oversight (but emblematic of the book's flaws) that her only visit to Mali's Dogon region is one day-trip, recounted in a few pages that highlight Traore's role as her guide rather than the Dogon people.

This book is very personal, exposing intimate details of the life of a famous musician in Mali. I was embarrassed on his behalf, and wondered if he knows what this author did to him. Apart from that, given its shortcomings, such as personal bias and structural weakness, it was interesting to read. I'm not sure, however, if someone who had never been to West Africa, and in particular Mali, Senegal and Mauritania, would understand it fully.

Having extensively travelled through and lived in Africa, I totally enjoyed this book which seeks and captures the perspective of the Africans encountered. This is a welcome break from other authors looking down upon local people. Highly recommended to those planning to go to the region and genuinly want to know/feel more and those who love the region and people.

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