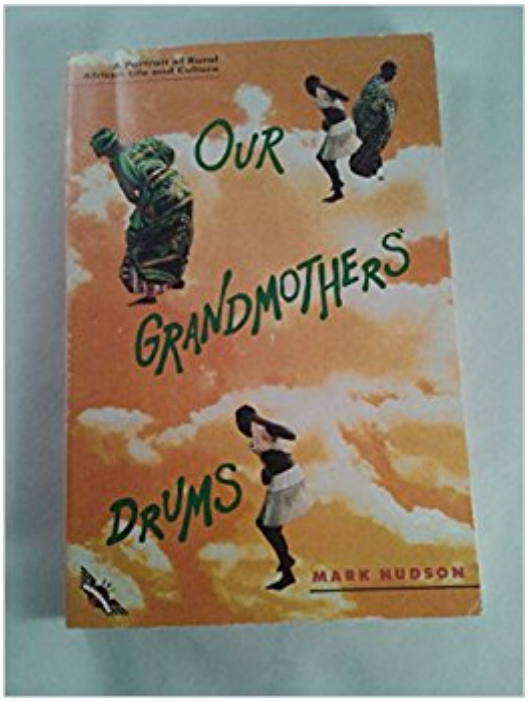
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Our Grandmothers' Drums: A Portrait Of Rural African Life & Culture



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Synopsis

In 1985 Hudson visited the village of Dulaba in the Gambia to help in some field studies there. He was so intrigued by what he saw that he decided to return. The book tells of the lives of the women, devout Muslims, who are circumcised in an all-female ritual, but who sing ribald songs. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Hudson, a young Englishman, spent 14 months in a village in Gambia. He originally intended only to observe the community, but as time passed, he became an active participant in the rituals of a people who inhabit termite-infested huts, live near dangerous bush and are entirely reliant on an annual rainy season for survival. PW called this a "perceptive first book." Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Hudson, a young Briton in his 20s, came to the village of Dulaba in The Gambia on an anthropological research mission, never clearly explained, but focusing on "the unchanging scheme of Mandinka women’s lives." His work explores the landscape and inner workings of one village. It is a voyage of discovery and of self-discovery, despite the apparent sameness and slowness that characterizes village life. Hudson follows the women to the rice fields, working alongside them, trying to understand an impenetrable way of life. Despite his endless probing, and ubiquitous tape recorder, he remains apart, though he does cross a boundary by becoming intimately involved with a village woman. Hudson offers a little history, a little sociology, and a succession of vignettes. The

many names becomes confusing at times, but his reconstructed conversations make the book personal, easily read, novel-like. This is anthropology with a human face. Recommended for African and women's studies collections and for large public libraries.- Janet L. Stanley, Smithsonian Inst. Libs., Washington, D.C.Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I bought this book cautiously, not knowing what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised.Our Grandmothers' DrumsThis book is somewhat dated, but is still highly relevant and I think you'll find value in reading if you are interested in rural life in The Gambia.I have a close family member serving in The Gambia. I worry about him and wanted to know more of what his life may be going through.This book eases my concerns and fears somewhat. I recommend you read this if you are planning an extended stay in The Gambia or if someone you care for will be travelling and living there. My Grandmothers Drums will help you realize the struggles and joys available in the complicated nation.Sincerely,Will In IL

This was a difficult book to read in that I had no real frame of reference for this history which is precisely why I was reading it. I found that even though the country and culture were foreign to me as I continued to immerse myself in the story a sense of the depth and complexity of the rich history and peoples came to life. I will read it again before I leave for Peace Corps service in The Gambia and I understand why it could be considered required reading for anyone prior to travel in this country.

I know someone headed to the Gambia with the US government. This book was suggested as a means to understand the area better. It is an old book, but it arrived in great condition.

I bought this for my daughter as a suggested reading for her trip to Africa. It came in excellent condition.

Thank you for being so prompt in sending out the book. It was in exactly the condition that it was stated it would be in.

There was a lot of writing and highlighting throughout the book and I was disappointed that the description was misleading.

It’s one of the best hot country books of all, evocative and moody. Rarely a hot country writer created such a dense atmosphere with economical wording. The weather; the landscape; feelings: Hudson describes it to the point, or so he sounds. Anyway he reflects my own impressions of the same area ingeniously, and I learned a lot.We get to know the village ladies very well. They aren’t especially sympathetic or interesting. But the village interaction, organisation of field work, family and celebrations make for fascinating reading. The dialogues and local song lyrics are fun - most basic texts, but very expressive just because of that.Indirectly, we also get to know the author, who seems to be calm and unprejudiced, not interested in sensations and easy jokes. He befriends the local ladies, joins their field work, actually has influence on the community life, asks many questions, sometimes seems very confused in his situation and acts quite unreasonable. He never takes himself very importantly. For Hudson in this book, single rhymes with mingle, and he makes use of local customs to get closer to some ladies. I’d like to know how much he did not write.Sometimes I confused the many villagers Hudson introduces by name. He lives in a Muslim Mandinka village, the main topic in this book. Hudson also devotes one chapter to the circumcision celebration in a Jola village. As a non-native reader, I found Hudson’s English much easier to follow than many other English books.Remarkably, this book fetched the Somerset Maugham Award. While both Hudson and Maugham write about hot Commonwealth countries, there are no other shared characteristics: Maugham features traveling gentlemen in the tropics who drink a stengah for sunset in front of their bungalows, locals remain extras; on the other side, Hudson dives deeply into village life, reaching the border of what’s possible repeatedly, here the whites are the supporting acts. Exactly one time Hudson uses the expression "a trifle", a phrase Maugham almost luxuriates in.I also know Hudson’s Music in My Head, a roman ÃƒÂ clef about Youssou N’Dour in Dakar, which reads much more neurotic than Our Grandmothers’ Drums. The Grandmothers’ first chapter plays on Dakar airport and feels stressful like the whole book of Music in my Head. Later Hudson published only one more book (but many articles). Occasionally Grandmothers’ Drums reminded me of Nigel Barley’s books.

If you ever go to Gambia, this is the book to get, together of course with the ubiquitous Lonely Planet. Hudson, a young adventurer, spent 14 months in a Mandingko village, observing and commenting on the daily life. Amazingly, he was allowed to join one of the women’s societies... so he followed them around, participated in their dances, field work and intrigues and documented this stuff in OGD. Hudson shows that African women are, although destined to a life of hard work, circumcission & mostly unhappy arranged marriages, far from helpless creatures. They are

economically independent, they are free to choose their lovers, they sing and they dance:"It was in the early hours of the morning before the dancing began in earnest, the figures of the women glowing as though golden in the light of the hurricane-lamp, as they came running towards the drummers, spinning around only at the last moment to dance. This was what they liked more than anything elese - the extremity of this total bodily exertion, this fervent, almost ecstatic unleashment of energy, in which every muscle, every last atom of their energy would be used. It was as though the rhythms of the drums..[...]... were touching something actually inside the women themselves, to which their frenetic shaking was an involuntary, though wholly pleasurable response. They called it dia - sweetness.""Hear the sound of these drums!Our own drums!Here the sound of these drums!Our grandmothers' drums!"Hudson shows that African life can be strange beyond our imagining. The pragmatic and relaxed attitudes towards the body and sexual activity; the separatedness of women and men, who get together pretty much just for sex; the ancient initiation formulas and rites, the pragmatic interpretation of the Muslim religion mixed with animism and, above all, the aliveness of these people get through in this book really well. These Mandingko use their bodies for pleasure in a way which makes Westerners look like hollow emaciated specters lost in our greedy little calculating minds. There is much fun in African lives and much sadness - sadness that we have forgotten about. We need to learn from Africans about how to inhabit our bodies and about how to live in the present moment and this book gives us first hand information on these topics. Highly recommended.

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