
Princesa de Africa

Report by: Nelly Hermitant

Sonia Sampayo was born in Madrid in 1973. She studied ballet from an early age. Later on, she looked for expression in other dance forms, first contemporary dance and then later Oriental and African dance. She has a degree in biology but works mainly as a dancer and a teacher with various dance companies. She has published two books on the techniques of dancing.

Princesa de Africa is an autobiographical book, written in the first person. It is Sonia Sampayo's story, a story of love, tolerance, generosity and understanding.

After the completion of the documentary 'Princesa de Africa' by Juan Laguna about her experience, Sonia Sampayo decided to write a book about her story before anyone else did.

Her story is indeed a rather unusual one. Following her discovery of Senegalese music she joined a group on a trip to Senegal, to learn about Senegalese dance. There she fell in love with everything, not just the music and the dance, but also with the country, its people, and their way of living. On her return to Madrid she could not erase the memories of that wonderful experience and continued mixing as often as possible with Senegalese musicians and attending Senegalese gatherings where everyone danced to the wonderful rhythm of the drums. Then she fell in love with a musician, whom she married, but here is where her personal experience becomes rather unusual and unexpected. Braving her family's worries, and initial disapproval, and facing the prejudices of Western middle classes, she went ahead to marry the man she felt was her true soul mate, Pap Ndiaye, who had already two wives and children in his native country.

When she travelled to Senegal after her wedding to meet her newly wed husband's family, she was facing a rather peculiar situation, as she was going to meet her husband's two other wives and their children.

It was a difficult and painful experience for her, she was rather lost, did not know how to behave, felt lonely and sad, doubting very much if she had made the right choice.

Sonia was thrown into an emotionally complex relationship with Kiné and Fama, (Pap's other wives) triggering an underlying current of jealousy on both sides.

Sonia's narration conveys a genuine feeling, her book is a personal reflection on the acceptance of what is different, unknown and shows that love can transcend difficult situations. Despite the fact that she experiences jealousy and longing for her husband while he is with his other wives, she has grown into loving them and their children, accepting them the way they have accepted her.

This book shows an interesting journey and teaches a lesson in tolerance and humanity.

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