

disciplines and their associations. All in all, this multidisciplinary collection is well suited to inspire not only those interested in a critical history of travel and exploration but also those concerned with West African history in general.

University of Duisburg-Essen

SABINE VOSSKAMP

SOCIAL HISTORY AND EVERYDAY LITERACY

doi:10.1017/S0021853708003460

Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy And Making the Self. Edited by KARIN BARBER. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. Pp. xii + 452. \$75 (ISBN 978-0-253-34729-9); \$29, paperback (ISBN 978-0-253-21843-8).

KEY WORDS: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, literacy, local history, method, social.

This very rich collection of essays presents a challenge to both literary and ethnographic studies of Africa in the colonial and early postcolonial era. The 'hidden' texts examined here are not works of great appeal to either readers of the Indiana University Press or current audiences in Africa. Instead they consist of journalism, letters and diaries produced, for the most part, by non-elites and either never published at all or circulated briefly and ephemerally. The approach to the documents is ethnographic, in the sense that great attention is paid to the context in which they were produced and (along with imported literature) consumed; but the common cultural thread here is literacy as a critical vehicle for self and group advancement even among Africans of quite low socioeconomic status.

The contributions are restricted to Anglophone Africa with special emphasis on South Africa and Ghana (10 of the 15 chapters), but also Nigeria and Kenya. Several studies deal only with reading rather than writing, but all base their analysis on social as opposed to individual consciousness. The subtitle phrase 'making the self' might suggest an opposite approach but, in her introduction, Karin Barber makes clear that in writing of this kind (as perhaps opposed to some more canonical African novels and autobiographies) there is no replication of the classic modern European move to 'interiority' and the assertion of an autonomous individuality. Instead, in her own chapter on a very ingenious author (more successful as an educator, businessman and eventual Yoruba *oba*) in the hinterland Nigerian town of Osogbo, the lack of dialogue with an intellectual peer community renders the resulting books not only unmarketable but also textually sterile. By contrast, Stephanie Newell, Bhekizizwe Peterson and Isabel Hofmeyr demonstrate how reading communities developed in Ghana and South Africa although the stress here is more on social promotion and skills deployed in political life than on literary production. Only Graham Furniss, dealing with Hausa literature in the twentieth century, connects these associations (even here also linked to emerging political parties) with the creation of significant *belles lettres*.

The most dramatic 'hidden histories' discovered by scholars here are 'tin trunk' diaries, journals or memoirs found after their authors had died. Stephan Miescher, Audrey Gadzekpo, Ruth Watson, and Liz Gunner all examine such texts in, respectively, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. And each teaches us a great deal about the importance of literacy for the authors. However, with the partial exception of religious visions, none of the writers probe their own psyches, concentrating instead (usually with little effort at literary composition) on external events and the advancement of their economic and social careers.

In Gadzekpo's piece on Mercy Ffoulkes-Crabbe of Cape Coast, Ghana, an autobiographical author who did edit her unpublished manuscript and was also a public writer, the genre in question might more properly belong to obituaries than to memoirs. T. C. McCaskie focused his chapter upon the evolution of this mode of writing in colonial Asante. His is the one contribution which most fully lives up to the book's promise of examining not only the textual content of the obituaries in question but also the full range of their presentation, circulation (or repression) and even practices of reception (combining private with public reading and elaborate oral commentaries extending well beyond the often very restrained information that gets printed).

A number of the essays focus upon letters, sometimes preserved in 'tin trunks' but often culled from various state and private archives. Here writing is very directly connected to practical objects: for Catherine Burns's herbalist, Louisa Mvemve, the legitimation of professional and civil status before South African state authorities; for Vukile Khumalo's Zulu-language 'epistolary network' around the Natal mission station of Ekukahanyeni, a variety of social but particularly political needs; for Keith Breckenridge's workers, the management of their often very precarious lives in a South Africa of extensive labor migration; for Lynn Thomas's Kenya schoolgirls, the pursuit of claims upon men who had made them pregnant outside of marriage. Politics and cultural uplift are the more obvious issue in Bodil Folke Frederiksen's study of a 1945–52 Kikuyu newspaper, much of whose content also consisted of letters.

The central question for the research which holds together this entire volume is whether its focus on literature and literacy moves us beyond the usual use of 'tin trunk' materials for reconstructing social history, i.e. how much does the contextual tail end up wagging the textual dog? Perhaps such a question is inappropriate, since the whole notion of an even semi-autonomous text is linked to a European cultural paradigm which projects like this (along with postmodernist literary theory, happily not much present here) seek to transcend. But, except for McCaskie and Furniss (as well as, in a negative sense, Barber), there is little attempt by the authors to connect modern literacy with precolonial oral or written-Islamic forms of literary expression. Writing and literacy thus appear as Western skills, appropriated by Africans for instrumental rather than expressive purposes. Nonetheless, writings of this kind inevitably reveal something more of the 'selves' who produce them than other forms of evidence and so the book does live up to its promise.

University of Chicago

RALPH A. AUSTEN

THE SLOW SUPPRESSION OF THE SLAVE TRADE IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

doi:10.1017/S0021853708003472

The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885–1950. By A. E. AFIGBO. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006. Pp. xv + 208. \$75/£45 (ISBN 1-58046-242-1).

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, colonial policy, slavery abolition, slave trade abolition.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing corpus of studies of the suppression of slavery during the colonial period. It differs from others in its specific focus on the issue of slave-trading, rather than the institution of slavery. It is based