

sistent (and perhaps inadvertent) alignment of the African objects with an ancient past. In Picasso's time Africa was perceived as a backward place of darkness and savagery, a foil to Europe's own conceit of modernity. Unfortunately Stepan does little to correct this nineteenth-century view of Africa and its art, and at times the colonial tone in his own prose proves disturbing to twenty-first-century readers. Stepan also refers repeatedly to William Rubin's 1984 *Primitivism* catalog, which claims as self-evident the cultural superiority of European over "primitive" artists. On many points, Stepan's footnotes indicate that he is summarizing what Rubin has already said about Picasso's fascination with African art objects, without introducing new or more nuanced ways of understanding the highly problematic ideas put forth in Rubin's exhibition and catalog.

Inquiry into concepts of "primitivism" is absent in Stepan's book, although this was not his mission in writing the volume. However, of greater concern to this reviewer was the tone of the preface, in which Stepan notes that for the first time, the African art objects owned by Picasso will be explicated in terms of their "ethnographic backgrounds"—as opposed to being evaluated for their artistic, cultural, or historical merit. Also troubling was the casual reference to Africa as the "Black Continent" (7), a phrase that I hoped was a translation error, albeit a tragic one. Perhaps these echoes of colonial assumptions in the author's own prose stemmed from his complete immersion in Picasso's life, work, and era, so that the occasional slippage into colonial dogma was just that, a momentary identification between writer and subject. Seen in this light, the book can be read as the work of a dedicated scholar, one completely responsive to his topic, and one who deftly brings much-needed information to African scholars and Picasso enthusiasts alike on the intriguing and multifaceted relationships between the artist and his African and Oceanic objects.

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**Patrice Nganang. *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle*.** Translated from the French and with an afterword by Amy Baram Reid. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006. (Originally published as *Temps de chien: chronique animale: roman*. Paris: Serpent à plumes, 2001). vii + 232 pp. Glossary. Bibliography. \$49.50. Cloth. \$18.50. Paper.

*Dog Days* is primarily a political allegory built around rumor and "street-side" radio—popular counter-discourse to the dominant governmental information—which satirically conveys the sociopolitical experience of Cameroonians. It is appropriately set in a bar (named The Customer Is King) and in the streets of Yaoundé, for it is in these spaces that rumors are

most often fabricated, circulated, and consumed. These rumors, *kangossa* (or “street-side radio”), create and unmake men and eventually move people to demonstrate and to fight for democracy and the rule of law.

*Dog Days* is an intriguing novel written from the perspective of a dog, Mboudjac; his master, Massa Yo, is owner of The Customer is King. The book is presented in two parts (“First Barks” and “The Turbulent Street”); each part has two chapters, divided into subsections. The novel includes an extensive and helpful glossary and an afterword written by the translator, Amy Baram Reid, presenting the biography of the author and contextualizing and analyzing the novel.

At the onset of “First Barks,” the reader witnesses Mboudjak’s degeneration when its status changes from that of a pampered dog with a golden collar and walked by its owner (an impotent master likewise having lost his stature), to a dog infested with wounds and persecuted by flies. Its critical and distant observations of humans defamiliarize the Cameroonians and their world. Its gaze reveals the harsh realities of the streets of the decadent quarters of Yaoundé; the world of impotent and languishing intellectuals who have lost all hope because of their thwarted aspirations; the world of the more opulent police commissioner and his mistress, Mini Minor, associated with the ruling party; and the world of unattended and fatherless children. The second book, “The Turbulent Streets,” presents the popular urban spaces through Mboudjac’s meanderings with a cigarette vendor, a garbage picker, and a pushcart man. The cacophony of the marketplace, the bar The Customer Is King, and the chaotic streets also reveal the harshness and violence of the day-to-day experience of Cameroonians, the citizens’ fear of the regime (which eats their bodies and turns them into stones), the surreptitious popular protests against the failed leadership of the corrupt Cameroonian government, and ultimate opposition to the regime when young Takou is killed by the police commissioner. *Dog Days* satirizes and provides insight into Cameroonian daily life, although at times one yearns to go deeper into character types such as that of Mini Minor.

*Dog Days* is not only about politics and rumor but also about language in polyglot Cameroon. Reid’s translation adroitly conveys Nganang’s innovative use of Cameroonian speech; however, her skillful integration of Pidgin and the code switchings within verbal exchanges lack the sociolinguistic sophistication of the French version, where the puns and amalgamations of French, English, and the national languages of Cameroon become manifestations of local color.

The afterword provides valuable information for understanding *Dog Days*. Nonetheless, when it compares the style of this novel to that of Michel Tremblay and Patrick Chamoiseau (and also compares Birago Diop’s “Souffle” to Sweet Honey in the Rock’s “Breath”) one wonders if the translator finds the literary value of *Dog Days* in its compatibility with Western aesthetics. Will African literature ever become independent when even its admirers and champions feel the need to speculate about the reading con-

text, declare that “the novel cannot be pigeon holed” and assert that it has a place within the Western canon because its particularity embraces the universal? Does *Dog Days* need to be global to appeal to the world reader?

Above all else, with *Dog Days* Nganang participates in the collective street-side radio that dominates the novel because he, too, invents a fantastic tale, which “seizes history in its creation” (83) and makes the traumatic Cameroonian and African present more intelligible. *Dog Days* is a well-narrated *kangossa* that all readers will enjoy.

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**Karin Barber, ed. *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. ix + 451 pp. Illustrations. Photographs. Notes. References. Index. \$75.00. Cloth. \$29.95. Paper.

Comprising an insightful introduction and fifteen richly textured essays, *Africa's Hidden Histories* is an important contribution to standing research on a range of topics in twentieth-century African studies. Literary scholars, educationists, and social, political, and intellectual historians will draw particular benefit and pleasure from the unhurried, penetrating studies—incorporating an abundance of engrossing illustrations and photographs—that mark the volume's status as a major archival and theoretical project.

The volume's three parts explore specific meanings and transformative capacities attributed to writing, reading, and the circulation and collection of texts by African individuals and groups negotiating an array of volatile ideological and material tensions in colonial Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. As promised in Karin Barber's introduction, each section generates a distinct set of insights into “the complexity and contingency of social orientations and affiliations in colonial Africa” (6).

The seven essays of part I (“Diaries, Letters, and the Constitution of the Self”) disclose a remarkable range of functions performed by seemingly commonplace forms of personal writing. Each of the essays examines individuals' attempts to deploy writing to clarify the nature and extent of myriad external factors shaping their lives. In some cases these factors emanate directly from the authoritarian nature of the colonial state. More often, however, the challenges documented and interrogated are shifting and overdetermined, mediated by a range of traditional and emergent pressures reconfiguring individual and collective understandings of ideal African personhood. Each of the contributors underscores the emotional poignancy of specific expressive moments in letters and diaries—moments constituting invaluable windows on the complex nature of self-fashioning and interpersonal relationships amidst unstable sociopolitical circumstances. At the same time, the contributors effectively depict the unique