

strengthen a character's personality. The identity that Marie (re-) discovers is the result of a multiplicity of identities that find fertile ground after all her different, and often heart-wrenching, life experiences.

Marie symbolizes Senegal and Africa as a whole, in her aspirations and wishes, her errors and mistakes. The return of the young woman to her culture and her acceptance of her family, her re-integration into her community represent a possible, desirable, and happy outcome of her quest. It further symbolizes the end of exile for every colonized person. However, it must be said that the return to the source does not always have a happy ending. Samba Diallo, returns home in an ultimate quest to de-alienate himself. He dies, ending his personal dilemma, but not having found a solution to the collective dilemma of the alienation in former colonies. This outcome of the deep dilemma that exile and alienation constitute is rarely acceptable, because it points to an unfruitful identity negotiation; every individual identity being a sum of many influences and horizons. Marie Ndiaga finds life and happiness with a most respectable and respected man: "*J'étais revenue chez moi, j'étais revenue me ré-adapter, j'étais revenue me désaliéner. J'étais revenue me purifier*" (109) [I had come back home, I had come back to readapt, I had come to de-alienate. I had come back to purify myself]. In the same way that alienation is separation from one's historicity, and exile the result of this separation, Marie successfully negotiated the passage from *other* to *self*, by re-appropriating her history back home. The young woman had recovered control and regained communion with *her* environment.

SEDUCTION AND POWER:

THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES IN *RIWAN*
OU *LE CHEMIN DE SABLE* BY KEN BUGUL,
COMMENT CUISINER SON MARI À L'AFRICAINNE
BY CALIXTHE BEYALA, AND *LE PAUVRE*
CHRIST DE BOMBA BY MONGO BETI*

JACQUELINE COUTI

For Vaurvenargues, "*La coutume fait tout, même en amour*" [Customs determine everything, even in love affairs]. Similarly, a focus on love as an attraction based on sexual desire leads to the discovery of individual subjectivity and the values of the society to which that individual belongs. An analysis of seduction in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*, *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africainne* and *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* brings forth what Pierre Hartmann calls "*l'ensemble des attitudes culturellement déterminées*" (13) [the set of culturally determined attitudes]. Seduction functions as a mechanism representing a microphysics of power that can operate in multiple ways (Foucault 34). This study, however, reveals a different reality in love "African-style" or sexual exchange "*à l'africainne*."¹

Examining seduction in these novels uncovers the power struggle between the seducer and his "victim," the seduced one or object of seduction, and the ensuing reversal of this power. In this light, the object of desire is considered here as both a gendered body and a "modern soul" that inhabits and imprisons that body (Foucault 38). However, these African novels also illustrate the difficulty of applying Western concepts of identity formation to other cultures, and the focus on seduction brings out the ambivalent and contradictory relationship between modernity and sexuality in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*, *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* and *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*. A rupture between the two sexes that colonization either created or amplified, and a need for domination over the other sex, become evident in the tension between modern and traditional sexual identity (Smith 100).

The three novels under study here demonstrate the polysemic nature of seduction. The notion of polysemy reveals an important shift in signification. As explains Catherine Cummings: "Adding to the reader's confusion is the fact that seduction shifts ontological registers. Here depending upon the tale and the teller, "to seduce" may denote to allure, captivate or fascinate but also to molest or to rape" (1). However, this analysis of the seductive force emphasizes the distinction between a "natural" or passive seduction and a more active one. The latter type of seduction interests us here. This seductive force allows for reciprocity between the seducer and the seduced, as well as a system of strategies on the part of the seducer, and these strategies reflect the culture. One should bear in mind that the culture in question, even if influenced at times by the West and by colonization, is African, specifically Senegalese and Cameroonian. As Elisha Renne remarks, interpretations of the relationship between sexuality, knowledge, and power in sub-Saharan Africa differ from those presented by Foucault in *History of Sexuality* (Renne xi).

The seduction carried out by the narrator of *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable* exemplifies this idea. A mature woman who has returned to her country after living in Europe, the narrator seems to be less overtly sexual than the other women of the "arrière-cour" (the backyard of the women's quarters), who adorn themselves, walk and move provocatively in what are sometimes desperate efforts to attract their husband, the Serigne—the religious leader of the community.³ The narrator implicitly depicts herself as more civilized and distinguished. Her attempts to seduce are notable

because she chooses the Serigne as her love object. Seduction, according to Pierre Hartmann, implies the notion of choice:

Pour qu'il y ait séduction au sens plein du terme, il faut qu'existe d'abord une relative liberté du choix amoureux et que la séduction puisse elle-même se différencier des formes primaires de la prédation et de la fascination (19).

[For there to be seduction in the fullest sense of the word, there must first be a relative freedom of choice, and the seduction must differ from its primal forms, those of predation and fascination].

In contrast to the women of the "arrière-cour," the narrator presents herself as a woman with experience and freedom: "J'étais déjà une grande personne depuis des années et personne n'exerçait sur moi aucune réelle autorité" (156) [I had been an adult for years already and no one exerted any sort of real authority over me]. Consciously or not, the narrator, like the others, chooses to seduce the Serigne. When she goes to his home to meet him, she sets herself apart from the others by reading a book and so he notices her. She becomes the object of the Serigne's desire by using all of her skills, her mind, her speech, and her body language, to captivate him. She kneels in front of him in a sign of submission, and then shares her thoughts with him at his request. In contrast, the other women of the region are brought to him and have no choice but to try to seduce him, in order to please him.

An important aspect of the narrator's situation is the necessity of attracting the other's attention, in order to bring him or her into the game. Without the other's consent, in this case the Serigne's, seduction fails. The notion of reciprocity appears crucial in the love game in question. The narrator comes across as a witty seductress. She is a "bouche lyrique," one who charms with her intellect and rhetoric.⁴ The Western education that sets her apart from the other women becomes an asset that fascinates the Serigne. Seduction cannot take place without both parties' implicit agreement to recognize each other's existence.

We also come across this notion of reciprocity in the other two novels. In *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, the idea of exchange manifests itself in the relationship between Denis and Catherine. The one who watches is

also watched. Denis, who observes Catherine, notices that she examines him as well. Denis explains that Catherine "me regardait souvent du coin de l'œil" (75) [often watched me out of the corner of her eye]. He has unknowingly joined in the seduction game. The enchantress attracts him. In *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine*, Aïssatou also notices M. Bolo-bolo and decides to do everything possible in order to seduce him. The young woman demonstrates the important role that stoicism can play in seduction. Her patience and self-control are exemplary, for the object of her desire seems rather reticent at first. Nevertheless, her persistence pays off. She desires an object that appears to be unattainable, but her attention flatters his ego and the reader witnesses the conquering spirit of Aïssatou.

Even by way of secondary characters such as Rama in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable* or Catherine in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, the reader can observe that for some African women the mechanisms of seduction are set in place and operate by combining sensuality and sexuality. The erotic dance proves to be a powerful weapon in the seduction arsenal of certain characters, such as Bouso Niang in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable*. Rama wears her little *paganes* or skirts, especially the white one with small stars. These *paganes* add to her sensuality and her natural beauty. Unfortunately, for Rama, the love *paganes*, short and embroidered with gold thread, of the Serigne's newest and very young wife are more effective than hers. However, as the narrator emphasizes, "*Rama ne désarmait pas et continuait à être désirable*" (144) [Rama did not give up and continued to be desirable]. Her sensuality "*ébranlait même les femmes*" (147) [even aroused the women]. Yet her tricks do not succeed; for the Serigne has forgotten her.

In *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine*, Aïssatou, wrapped in her alluring little rainbow skirts, represents a risky enterprise that can cause alienation and lead to a loss of self.

(...) jusqu'où aller et quand s'arrêter? Adopter les stratagèmes de séduction à l'africaine: suis-je capable de consacrer trois jours à me confectionner des tresses si fines qu'on les croirait tissées par une machine? de porter des perles aux hanches, qui cliquettent à chacun de mes pas, afin d'exciter la libido des hommes et les faire ahâner comme des chiens? (...) de créer une dépendance artificielle qui exalterait leur sentiment

de puissance et leur donnerait l'impression de me protéger? (Beyala 54).

[...] how far can one go, and when does one stop? Adopt the strategies of seduction, African-style: am I capable of devoting three days to the making of braids so fine that one would think them woven by a machine? Wear pearls on my hips that click with each foot step, so as to excite the libido of men and make them howl like dogs (...). Create an artificial dependency that exalts their feeling of power and gives them the impression of protecting me?].

The narrator, like the other women in my study, seems willing to accept the challenge. They all dress up and put on perfume to attract the gaze and entice the man. The woman transforms herself to respond to certain expectations, in order to dominate the other, to make him howl like a dog, mad with desire. Flatter the male ego, give him a false sense of power, so as to better subjugate him, this power that Aïssatou exercises represents an unstoppable and pitiless force—the warrior notion should not escape the reader's attention. These strategies must lead to the capture of a very particular Troy: the man. Rather than claim the woman as trophy, Aïssatou turns the tables and claims M. Bossolou as her male trophy.

The woman does not always need to resort to a warrior or seducer's arsenal. The first time that Denis sees Catherine, he is struck by her beauty and when she touches him, her gentleness moves him. She is so sweet and "*si belle qu'on a peine à croire qu'elle travaille comme les autres femmes*" (198) [so beautiful that it is hard to believe she works like the other women]. She rouses the adolescent's dormant sensuality and takes advantage of his new feelings to impose herself on him with sensations and games unknown to him.

These novels present several unstoppable ways to seduce. Some resemble European techniques of seduction and others differ. The polysemy of seduction reveals itself in its entire splendor. However, the most effective long-term seduction methods may come as a surprise. When one speaks of seduction, sensuality—and therefore sexuality—come to mind. The significance of pleasure should not be overlooked as seductive power operates on the body in a variety of ways.

While important, sexuality as an effective vehicle for seduction in African culture is not predominant in *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable* nor in *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine*. Indeed, it is bound to fail because man is unfaithful. As *Riwan ou Le chemin de sable* demonstrates, another woman, younger or, worse yet, older, more delectable and more interesting, will always come along and catch a man's eye. The frustration of the women of the *arrière-cour* exemplifies this situation:

(...) ces femmes, souvent oubliées par le corps de leur époux
 (...) exécutaient des danses qui imitaient l'acte sexuel et à qui
 mieux mieux, des mouvements lents et denses qui faisaient
 traîner le plaisir aux mouvements saccadés qui menaient à la
 jouissance rapide et foudroyante (Bugul 89).

[These women, often forgotten by their husband's body (...) did competing dances that imitated the sexual act, from slow and dense movements that prolonged the pleasure to syncretized movements that led to a quick and stunning orgasm].

In the dark where no one sees them, masturbation becomes their consolation. Bouso Niang is the only one to express her sensuality openly, by day. Rather than being shameful, masturbatory pleasure becomes an expression of her freedom.

Furthermore, sex in itself can be dangerous if it develops into an uncontrollable urge. Rama will learn that lesson at the cost of her life.

Comment une petite fille passait-elle si rapidement de l'autre
 côté où le sexe avec son lot d'enjeux socioculturels, son lot de
 plaisir, d'attentes, de désirs, de soupirs, de frustrations, faisait
 la loi et entassait petit à petit un fagot de sentiments de plus
 en plus denses! (85).

[How did a young girl cross over so quickly to the other side, where sex, with its share of socio-cultural stakes, its share of pleasure, expectations, desires, sighs, and frustrations, dictated the law and little by little built up increasingly intense feelings!]

Rama symbolises "la sensualité réputée des femmes de Mbos" (90) [the famed sensuality of the women of Mbos]. Her seductions succeed solely because of her sensuality and sexuality. When the Serigne loses interest in her, he forgets her existence. The young girl's identity depends on her sexual magnetism and her capacity to distract men. She does not know how to be anything else but an object of pleasure and companionship. Significantly, she does not cook. She spends her day getting ready for a possible night of love or to take care of the Serigne if he feels unwell. In these ways, she shows her affection. Rama shapes her being on her sensuality, since that is what interests the Serigne. She has remade her identity for him, "envoûtée par sa douceur qui avait aiguisé, artisé sa sensualité" (129) [enchanted by his gentleness that had heightened, sharpened her sensuality]. Her life holds meaning only because she attracts this powerful and sensual man. Her self belongs to the other, to him. Only in the presence of her husband's sexuality does she know who she is. La "jouissance," the orgasm, is what she expects from life (132).

Soon she will need a man, any man, to prove to herself that she exists. Seduction for her is not a means but an end that defines and confirms her existence. She is still desirable, attractive, sweet-smelling and richly adorned (144), but she no longer attracts the Serigne, not even entertains him. She no longer has a reason for being. She then gets carried away by her sensuality, loses all control, and destroys the equilibrium of the world of the women's courtyard from which she has fled, thereby undermining the Serigne's power. The uncontrollable seductive force becomes destructive for it feeds on frustration. In Rama's case, seduction reveals the limitations of sex and her example upholds the narrator's position that "qui possédait le sexe possédait le mari" (205) [the one who was having sex with the husband controlled him]. Rama's example supports the notion of reciprocity, which disappears once the Serigne no longer partakes in the game of love.

Indeed, according to Aïssarou's mother in *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine*, "la seule richesse d'un homme, (...) ce sont les petits plaisirs de la vie: manger, boire et faire l'amour" (Beyala 74) [man's only treasure (...) is life's little pleasures: eat, drink and make love]. Food appears at the forefront, which seems logical, since from the first minutes of life onward, nourishment is imperative if one wants to survive. The ultimate seduction nourishes the man and persuades him that the woman in question represents his only source of sustenance. If one seduces to get a man,

one also seduces to keep him and the best way seems to be to become his caretaker. He can nourish himself intellectually, as the Serigne does with the narrator of *Ruwan ou Le chemin de sable*. She becomes "celle avec qui il discutait, avec qui il mangeait, à qui il demandait son avis" (176) [the one with whom he conversed, with whom he ate, from whom he asked advice]. She even counsels him in the resolution of difficult situations, such as healing rites. This intellectual nourishment deeply unites them. Although he takes other women, the narrator always keeps her place and her husband never forgets her existence.

The character Aïssatou symbolizes best the symbiosis between food and sex, which are both elements that heighten the senses.⁵ In her case, nourishment feeds the body but also the spirit.

Entre sauce ngombo, macabo et ignames, nous aboutissons à tous les excès sensoriels, à tous les égarements. Bien sûr, j'ai pris quelques grammes: (...) Mais, au lit, je renue avec plus d'agilité qu'autrefois. Mon poids semble se reporter sur l'âme de mon amant et l'empêche de se déplacer hors du cercle de mes jambes (Beyala 114).

[With ngombo sauce, macabo, and yams, we reach the pinnacle of sensual excess and wild behavior. Of course, I put on a few grams: (...) But in bed, I move with greater agility than before. My weight seems to settle on my lover's soul and keeps him from leaving the circles of my legs].

This notion of heaviness and weight implies that food reinforces seduction by anchoring it in a physical, tangible form. The narrator describes Aïssatou's figure, now chubby or plump, as appetizing, resembling a little soufflé with her "puffy" breasts and cheeks (114). Food, however, often becomes more important than sexuality. The narrator explains about M. Bolobolo:

Sans m'embrasser, il lève le nez et hume l'air. "Ça sent bon! Qu'est-ce que tu nous as préparé?" Déjà, il semble fou. Le voilà qui se précipite dans ma cuisine, rempli de bonheur. "J'adore le saka-saka!" (119).

[Without kissing me, he lifts his nose to sniff the air. "It smells good! What have you prepared us?" He already seems crazed. Full of joy, he rushes to the kitchen. "I love saka-saka!"].

For M. Bolobolo, culinary pleasure seems to surpass sexual pleasure. The reader better understands why he stays with his wife although he cheats on her. Their bond appears indissoluble, because of the food that she prepares for him. Therefore, his wife's culinary skills ensure the success of their marriage. Aïssatou magnifies the effect of sexuality and sensuality by feeding him those good meals that prove to be powerful aphrodisiacs.⁶

At times, however, Aïssatou questions the objective and merit of seduction: "Un homme, fût-il en diamant, méritait-il qu'on se casse un ongle?" (54) [Even were a man made of diamond, would he be worth a broken fingernail?]. Ironically, this question is only rhetorical. The purpose of seduction is not to acquire a man, but rather what he represents: a social status. Seduction entails power. In this light, the importance of studying socio-cultural advantages, such as marriage obtained through seduction, becomes evident. Seduction's ultimate goal encompasses more than simple physical gratification or companionship.

After having traveled so far from one's home and country, having left behind one's self and African identity, how does one find that person again? After becoming lost in the pursuit of a chimerical dream, how can one define one's self? How does one reintegrate this culture and society that one so happily fled? How do you recompose the scattered pieces of the mosaic of the self? The narrator of *Ruwan ou Le chemin de sable* begins her story with these underlying questions. As she states, "j'étais là [dans mon village] parce que je ne savais plus où aller" (Bugul 149) [I stayed there (in my village) for I no longer knew where to go]. Her comments suggest that belonging to a social order is necessary to give meaning to one's life. The paradoxical solution that she (a would-be feminist) finds to appease her inner anguish surprises the reader. She decides to become the last of a string of co-wives, and in this way, gain a status, a husband, and companions. She again becomes an African woman and reinvents her femininity.⁷

For this character, seduction has a purpose other than obtaining pleasure. Yet her social insertion can only be achieved once she has decolonized her mind and undertaken a seductive endeavor African-style.⁸ However, as we have noted, it is through her Western education

that she seduces the Serigne. Thus emerges the paradox of this woman who reclaims her African identity by criticizing and rejecting what the West has brought her, and yet reintegrates her society because of what she learned in the West.

Becoming the twenty-eighth wife of the Serigne may seem to be a pathetic accomplishment for a woman who has traveled widely and seen so much. And yet the reader must remember the powerful position of the Serigne, the community's religious leader. Furthermore, the disillusion and despair expressed by the narrator at the start of the novel is inescapable: she has lost faith in life and no longer cares about her future. After her first meeting with the Serigne, as they are leaving the women's courtyard, she realizes: "*j'ais l'impression de sentir l'air frais que je respirais comme pour la première fois*" (29) [I had the impression of feeling the fresh air that I was breathing, as if for the first time]. In this women's courtyard, the reader becomes aware of the protagonist's solitude and her need to belong to a society of women. Indeed, the narrator arrives from a different "courtyard," another space, one where she always stands alone (37). She wants to free herself from a modern subjectivity that separates her from her community. She aspires to be part of a group. She has at last found a purpose to her life.

Becoming the Serigne's wife allows her to rejoin a female collectivity that will teach her much about herself. She will be able to redefine her notion of femininity. Over the course of the novel, she shares her point of view on this question by rejecting the European stereotype of the "modern woman." Paradoxically, marrying such a man allows her to be closer to other women. During her youth the narrator dreamed of emancipation and of the "white mirage," that of assimilation and integration into the white, European world. These dreams deprived her of a traditional marriage, which, in the perspective of a mature and disillusioned woman, now represents the lost paradise—a synthesis of unforgettable moments forever out of reach. For the narrator, becoming the Serigne's wife is a personal choice and not an imposition, in contrast to Rama's marriage. As an expression of personal will, the narrator's seduction of the Serigne undermines her reification, the reduction of a woman into an object. Ironically, her seduction becomes the expression of a modern subjectivity that is aware of its individuality and fragmentation, and therefore wants to be traditional and belong to a community.

The narrator's marriage also symbolizes a total rejection of post-colonial cultural alienation. On the eve of her wedding, she perceives her fragmented identity to be "*comme une poupée brisée, abandonnée dans une poubelle*" (158) [like a broken doll, abandoned in a garbage can]. Acculturated, she was played with and discarded. That explains why she is ashamed of her refusal to belong to her society and to its values, references, and bearings (158). Her life in Europe did not fulfill her expectations. On the contrary, it stripped her of her sense of identity. She explains how marriage with the Serigne provides the perfect solution to all of her problems. She first states, "*Ainsi le Serigne m'avait offert et donné la possibilité de me réconcilier avec moi-même, avec mon milieu, avec mes origines, avec mes sources, avec mon monde*" (173-4) [In this way the Serigne had offered me the possibility of reconciling with myself, with my environment, with my origins, with my roots, with my world]. Later, she adds:

Dans le village où j'avais retrouvé ma place, une place que je n'espérais pas aussi importante, j'étais épanouie à plus d'un titre (...) j'avais retrouvé mon village, mes sens, mon milieu, mon moi-même (187).

[In the village I had found my place, a place that I had not expected to be so important, I was fulfilled in multiple ways (...) I had again found my village, my senses, my circle, myself].

Not only does she reintegrate into a society that had not accepted her upon her return, she also acquires an enviable social status.

In addition to a social reconciliation, this alliance leads to an emotional reconciliation. At last the narrator makes peace with her mother, and so with herself. She is no longer the one that no one wants, the one called Ken Bugul.⁹ And while she no longer holds the privileged place of the Serigne's most recent wife, she remains a favorite: "*L'épouse si proche intellectuellement du Serigne était presque un Serigne*" (174) [the wife so close intellectually to the Serigne was almost a Serigne], and no one can take that away from her. The narrator also acquires power and shows that a woman does more than just groom herself (177).

One may wonder if she does not mock the other spouses. She does present herself as being superior to them. The Serigne does not treat her like the other co-wives for she always keeps her freedom and her free

gratification of marriage comes from the role it provides, that of spouse. Marriage creates a place for the individual in society. The female identity molds itself around the husband. A woman with an unfaithful husband has more merit, due to her tribulations, especially if she stays composed. In the end, M. Bolobolo tires of his amorous adventures and sheepishly returns to his wife's bosom (Beyala 157). Here the concept of self has no value without the other, the husband. One cannot define oneself and fully blossom without the other's recognition or his gaze.

This stoic vision of marriage ensures that the matrimonial union will last. Nevertheless, this type of marriage seems to bring only relative pleasure. M. Bolobolo is free to follow his desires, yet guilt eventually punishes him at his wife's mercy. Nevertheless, she does not gain any glory from his surrender. She presents herself as a detached, even insensitive, observer, as she hides and represses the pain caused by her husband's lack of respect. She continues to give him what he needs: food and sex. This is a far cry from the elevation of love as a spiritual union of two souls, purged of sensuality, a notion for which many have labored, such as the French seventeenth-century "précieuses." The lack of communication in this kind of marriage is blatant. Silence reigns. This reflects well what Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana calls the "*symbolique du non-dit, du processus de voilement*" (7) (symbolism of the unspoken, of the veiling process) that according to her underlies the education of most young sub-Saharan African girls. The woman does not say what she thinks; instead she hides herself and manipulates the other by means of food and sex. The notion of invisibility leads us to a power that functions effectively because it is undetectable and hidden. This type of marriage succeeds because, as the narrator tells us: "*l'harmonie et la paix règnent dans le silence que nous impose une musique lointaine*" (Beyala 156) [harmony and peace prevail in the silence imposed by a distant music]. Food and sex become symbolic of the matrimonial bond, but what about love?

Aïssatou's search for an absolute differs from the European woman's desire to find someone who will love her for her own person. As we have seen with the protagonist of *Réwan ou Le chemin de sable*, this search is bound to fail. Marriage, Beyalá's recipe for happiness, emerges as the solution to all problems for it gives the woman what she seeks: a social position and status.

Catherine's case in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* is more problematic than one might think. The dichotomy of seduction manifests itself

will. She can leave the Serigné's house whenever she pleases and she often sleeps at her own home. The narrator does not really have to suffer from the Serigné's disinterest, as do his other co-wives such as Rama, despite his sexual attraction to other women. The seduction of the "*bouche lyrique*," the lyrical voice, leads to her significant and extremely beneficial social insertion but also reinforces a modern subjectivity that separates itself from others.

This notion of seducing in order to rebuild one's identity comes forth as well in Calixthe Beyalá's *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'Africaine*. The narrator, a female character experiencing an existential crisis, portrays herself as a black woman who has become white, and one whose bearings were disrupted by her exile (11-2). In what may seem paradoxical to a European reader, the search for the self and a return to her roots lead this woman to marriage. By rejecting the French feminist and feminine ideals, Aïssatou also rejects the imposed, colonial ideal of the French woman.¹⁰ She embraces her culture by embracing the life of a man in the most socially accepted way possible: she becomes his wife.

The depiction of an infallible system of seduction allegorically sets in motion the search for the self. In many cultures, it would seem that the path to the heart of a man goes through his stomach. The culinary trope conveys an extraordinary sensuality. All of the senses are bewitched, so much so that the almost orgasmic ecstasy of M. Bolobolo at the tasting of all of these little meals does not surprise the reader.

The search for identity bases itself on the acknowledgment of the validity of the previously rejected maternal philosophy. The mother emerges as the one who knows everything empirically. She has a recipe for every ailment and for every situation. Not surprisingly, she has mastered the art of seduction. Eventually, the narrator will adopt the maternal precepts so completely that she accepts an idea of marriage that has nothing to do with the Western notion of love. She affirms that, "*il arrive toujours un moment dans la vie à une femme où elle doit aimer le mariage plus que l'époux*" (126) [there always comes that moment in a woman's life when she must love marriage more than she loves her husband]. This would-be stoicism may appear to us as cynicism. Here the reader finds what Foucault identifies as "arts erotica" in *History of Sexuality* (70), where it is not pleasure that matters, but self-mastery, and control and power over one's body.

The woman who stimulates the man's senses must control her own in order to dominate him. Her mind must always be stronger. The ultimate

through her character. The seductive force represents both an instrument of patriarchal domination and a means for questioning masculine hegemony (Cummings 5). This duality allows us to see Catherine as the voice of dissent. In Denis' eyes, she appears to be a siren that enchants men. One should also remember that Catherine has been reduced to a sexual object in spite of herself. Raphaël, the catechist in charge of the sixa,¹¹ and the right-hand man of the Reverend Father Superior (the R.P.S.) "*Révérend Père Supérieur*," brings about her reification and her social downfall because the sixa becomes a prostitution ring. From a Western perspective, this woman would be a "hysteric," a victim of seduction in its most vile form, that of sexual abuse. However, we also witness the perversion of this female character. According to Cummings, the seduced woman has two choices: either to hide what has happened to her or to repeat it. In this second case the woman becomes "*perverse*" (11).

Catherine has suffered a trauma of which the narrator Denis cannot be aware, due to his age. She had to play her part in the sexual game and, in an act of resignation, accept the role Raphaël and Zacharie imposed on her (Beti 286). Catherine seems to be reproducing a schema: from seduced woman, object of seduction or prey, she becomes the seducer, the agent of seduction, and Denis becomes her victim. In her study of *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Herzberger-Fofana has obscured this point by only considering Catherine as a victim. According to her, Catherine cannot be a "*Hétaira*," one of "*ces femmes licencieuses [qui] symbolisent une revanche sur l'oppressé, une forme de révolte contre l'envahisseur*" (172) [these licentious women [who] symbolize revenge over the oppressor, a form of revolt against the invader]. Herzberger-Fofana bases this assertion on the women of the sixa, who do not control the sale of their bodies. Catherine stands out from the women of the sixa for she takes her revenge on all of the men who have subjugated her. She who has been dominated in turn begins to dominate. Denis' seduction, morally reprehensible to some because he is a minor, is not depicted as a forced act or rape, but certainly as a transgression. Unconsciously, Denis desires Catherine. From the first time he sees her, her great beauty and charm disturbs him and she senses it.

Catherine's seduction of Denis illustrates how power is exercised through sexual initiation, and a young and innocent boy's loss of virginity. According to Hartmann, "*la relation initiatique devient un insidieux rapport de sujétion*" (114) [the initiation relationship becomes one of

insidious subjugation]. At the beginning of the novel, no woman could possibly seduce Denis, a pure "angel," consecrated to God. The influence that Catherine has over the young boy leads to his loss of innocence. Not only does Denis lose his virginity but he also loses his illusions and his certainties. Life becomes more complex for him. Beforehand, as he explains, "*tout était si beau*" (153) [everything was wonderful] and he was "*tranquille et heureux*" (153) [calm and happy]. Moreover, Catherine precipitates the fall of the sixa and the loss of the R.P.S.'s "*innocence*" or illusions. The enchantress' role in the implosion of this society is crucial. For Catherine, seduction becomes a weapon of subversion and dissension. This seemingly venal woman manages to pull the pin of the social game by using her charm. According to Hartmann, "*La sensualité se mêle immédiatement de vanité*" (76) [Vanity immediately joins itself to sensuality]. Catherine herself becomes arrogant after having taken the young protégé of the R.P.S.

She presents herself to the R.P.S. as a victim, but we know that she is a victim who has also taken her revenge on men. She eventually denounces Raphaël and is unfaithful to her future husband. Of course, the ultimate revenge is taken on the R.P.S. for he personifies the cause of her misfortunes, since he created the sixa and put Raphaël in charge of it. In so doing, as explains Marguerite, one of the sixa women, it is as if the R.P.S. told Raphaël that these women were his wives and he could make use of them as he desired. (291). While the R.P.S. visited all the villages under his care with Denis and Zacharie, Catherine takes malicious pleasure in sleeping with the latter, her lover, next to the R.P.S.'s hut. For her lover forced her to follow him. Yet that will not satisfy her wounded ego, for she must sexually initiate the one she considers "the son of the R.P.S.," (75) right under the R.P.S.'s nose. She purposely creates a rupture in their religious and filial relationship. After having sex with Denis, she mockingly tells him not to worry about his father, the RPS (151). Denis' allegiance to the religious precepts that his spiritual father instilled in him are not enough for him to resist an activity that he sees as satanic (152).

Denis' failure to resist temptation shatters the Christian values to which he thought he adhered and causes him to feel extreme guilt. Denis becomes unwell from this and he has difficulty carrying out his duty of choirboy (180). However, this feeling of immense shame never withstands his desire for Catherine. Because of Catherine's seductions, the entire community, which the R.P.S. spent so many years building, falls

down like a house of cards. Out of jealousy, Zacharié's wife, Clementine, denounces Catherine to the R.P.S. and this creates a snowball effect.

We are therefore not surprised to see the sadistic punishment administered to Catherine. Each blow she receives on the R.P.S.'s orders is intended to expiate each of her sins. This scene only emphasizes the biased nature of her situation, for both Raphaël and Zacharie escape the lashings. For those who are religious, Catherine's seductive power is diabolical and evil.¹² However, the vice of seduction did not originate in Catherine, but in the *siza*, for she was seduced there, like the other women before her. As Marguerite explains to the R.P.S.: "*toutes les femmes de ta siza couchaient avec quelqu'un (...). Et le cathéchiste Raphaël provoquait, nouait, dénouait ces liaisons à son gré, parce qu'il en tirait profit*" (296) [All of the women of your *siza* were sleeping with someone (...). And the catechist Raphaël provoked, tied, untied these liaisons at his will, because he profited from them]. Not satisfied to have taken advantage of most of the women in the *siza*, the catechist reinvents himself as a procurer and allows himself the luxury of making a profit from their prostitution. Raphaël becomes the vernal symbol of the seducer and manipulator, whereas Catherine symbolizes the polysemic nature of seduction.

Mongo Beti, a male author, uses the theme of seduction to denounce the double social exploitation of the women in the *siza*, an exploitation that leads to their alienation and loss of bearings. The R.P.S. exploits them as menial labor and Raphaël exploits them as prostitutes, in what becomes a double reification. Someone else always controls their bodies. In *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Catherine personifies the perversion engendered by seduction as she reverses the norms imposed on her to seduce Denis, a young boy, while Zacharie seduces her. "The huge jigger" that Denis takes out of the R.P.S.'s right foot, (101) is an allegorical reminder of the prevailing misconduct in the mission. The reader cannot help but make the connection with the outbreak of syphilis in the *siza* that announces itself in women by nauseating odors that signal near certain death. No one bothers to notice it until the stench becomes pervasive.

Internal tensions and the dichotomy in the perception of seduction and its practice cause the implosion of a society or community under colonial and patriarchal domination. Conversely, Ken Bugul and Calixthe Beyala, two female, post-independence authors, depict seductions that are mostly free of negative stigmas. These female writers put forward a seduction where some kind of reciprocity and at least a minimum of respect

for the other are necessary in order to attain one's goal. In their works, there is no vicious coercion as found in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*. This mechanism allows a reinscription and reconciliation with the community that these former expatriate female characters had rejected when seduced or fascinated by the "white mirage."

Through marriage, the protagonists of *Kiwan ou Le chemin de sable* and Aïssaton of *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* shed the status of those left behind and rejoin the collectivity. By finding their place, they gain power subversively and reach a dominating position. Catherine was seduced forcefully and so she did not have a choice. For her, seduction can only be a dividing and destructive force, and her power becomes one of destruction. Colonial domination of the mind emerges as the common theme in these three works that denounce the insidious effect of colonization that spreads even to the intimacy of the African couple. Mongo Beti exposed the problem in 1956, and over fifty years later, Ken Bugul and Calixthe Beyala try to give an answer to the rupture between men and women shown by Beti. These two women writers use seduction to point the way to reconciliation through marriage. Nonetheless, this choice can only be made out of free will, as the example of Rama in *River ou Le chemin de sable* reminds us. We must go back to the sources but with a difference: the woman's choice. Her reification has alienated her and distanced her from men. As Bugul and Beyala demonstrate, there is no harm in submitting to the man one has chosen. By using her free will to choose her supposed submission, the African woman in the love or sexual exchange African-style takes her life in hand, liberates herself from a mass of Western frustrations, and exerts effective power, for it is invisible because it is disguised as obedience.

* Translations from French into English, other than those in previously published texts, were done by Caroline Gates and Jacqueline Courti.

NOTES

1. Though in this study I often use the adjective African; this adjective in my analysis mainly covers sub-Saharan societies. The authors I study are from Senegal and Cameroon. I do not intend to reduce the complexity of the African continent and its societies. Nevertheless, I shall add that Calixthe Beyala uses the expression "*à l'africaine*" in a very general and loose way, which may reduce awareness of the diversity of people from Africa.

2. In his body of works, Foucault analyses the modern subject and its self-awareness, what he calls "modern subjectivity" or "modern soul." Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* that "this book is intended as a correlative history of the modern soul and of a new power to judge" (23). He explains that this "soul" has nothing to do with the one taught by Christian theology. On the contrary, he argues that:

[T]his real, non corporal soul is not a substance; it is an element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relation gives rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power (. . .) A "soul" inhabits [a man] and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy (. . .) the soul is the prison of the body (29-30).

3. Shirin Edwin explains that in Senegal Muslim families are "affiliated to a Muslim brotherhood under the guidance of a marabout, or a Muslim religious leader or a holy man" (78): "Serigne" in Wolof.
4. "*La bouche lyrique*," in the sense of enchantress, is an expression borrowed from Professor Kandjioua Dramé at the University of Virginia.
5. The topos of food as an aphrodisiac seems to be universal and is found in successful movies such as "*Chocolat*" and "Como Agua para Chocolate."
6. Aïssatou tells a male friend that "*La légende dit que le ngombo queuec de beuf ensorcelle les sens des hommes à tel point qu'ils rivalisent avec les taureaux*" (Beyala 83) [Legend has it that ngombo oxtail bewitches the male senses to the point that they rival bulls].
7. The notable trope of the rejection of European culture and its criteria for feminine beauty could be the subject of further study. It is another form of decolonization of the mind.
8. Another theme to be examined is the alienating impact of colonization on the intimacy of the African couple and its implication for relationships between men and women.

9. In Wolof this name means "no one wants me."
10. A return to one's roots is the *sine qua non* that sets the seduction in motion.
11. All the women engaged to get married and who want to get married in the strict Catholic creed must stay in the *sixa*, a building in the mission designed to house them.
12. In latin *seducere* means "to lead aside or astray." In the Christian religion, seduction is often viewed as the weapon of the devil, a seducer who causes the fall of Adam and Eve. The woman is often associated to a negative seducing force that detracts from the good path. It should be noted that in this book, men such as Raphaël and Zacharie whose seducing caused the dissolution of many women do not incur any bodily harm or punishment.