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### **Mad-Body Gifts**

A Postcolonial Myth of Motherhood in Calixthe Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*.

Erschienen in: MATATU. Journal for African Culture and Society 29-30 (2005), 31-46.

Calixthe Beyala's Novels and Essays are known for their provocative and sometimes aggressive style, in which they present social criticism and feminist subjects, accusing contemporary African societies of machismo. Her writing have often been criticized for presenting a one-sided and particularly negative image of postcolonial Africa as being one of poverty, violence, and prostitution. Nevertheless, in research literature it has been welcomed as a writing of emancipation which gives voice to the female condition by "destroying the emptiness of silence."<sup>1</sup> [31] Although this approach certainly applies to Beyala's writing, in this essay the focus of attention will be on a further, hitherto rather neglected aspect. Her writing, in particular her novel *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, will be read as a postcolonial sketch of mythic motherhood responding not only to patriarchal mechanisms in African societies but also to colonial discourse. It does this by refusing to draw a picture of Africa as an area of projection of European dreams and by refusing to determine African positions only in relation to Western ones. Instead, the novel opens up an inner-African context via apparently 'realistic' descriptions; it includes a European character and European concepts. To collapse opposing positions of 'Africa' and Europe or of the former colonizer-colonized, the novel privileges gender categories – as will be shown later – and explores concepts of African culture, here the Beti culture, to which Beyala belongs.<sup>2</sup> It does not apply these concepts naively, but adapts them to contemporary society and transforms them to make them productive in a postcolonial situation. One particular aspect of transformation is the involvement of European concepts and characters, which means that the utopian sketch of the novel cannot be called simply 'African' or 'European' any more. A figuration of this intertwining process is the final character of the novel *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, as it is formed by the two main characters, Tanga, a sixteen-year-old African girl, and Anna-Claude, a French Jewish woman who has fled from Europe. The voice of this final character is Tanga's, though it has Anna-Claude's (physical) body. In this way, 'Tanga', who could not tell her story because of a lack of 'body' – her body has been [32] mutilated by the male-dominated society – is given a body for her voice to tell her story. If one takes this intertwining seriously, the final character is not Tanga any longer, but a hybrid figure

made up of both of them. Since the productive moment to erase and undo this marginalization is precisely based on this hybrid configuration, the problem of speaking as a marginalized, in this case female, subject is situated in a *postcolonial* context.

### **Silence, absence, and emptiness, or the incapacity of speech**

The novel starts with the two women meeting in a prison cell in a fictive African country: Tanga, imprisoned for collaborating with counterfeiter, is dying and refuses to tell Anna-Claude her story, though the latter insists on hearing it. Anna-Claude, who has come to this fictive African country following her naive dream of finding a world without discrimination,<sup>3</sup> soon has to learn that ‘Africa’ is not that place of originality and innocence which it often becomes in European thought if it is not regarded negatively as primitive, wild and so on. On the contrary, Anna-Claude is arrested as an “*élément subversif et incontrôlable*”<sup>4</sup> after having demonstrated in protest at the disappearance of her students. The two women seem to be in the same position. Nevertheless, there are several hints at the dissimilarities between them, especially their different skin-colour and the consequences of this. In this way the former colonial situation with its neocolonial effects is called to mind.<sup>5</sup> But the relationship of the two women is more complex than this, since the two women can literally touch each other; it is this touch that enables them to pass on Tanga’s [33] story. The source of this creative relationship is a motherly love which can be developed further into a ‘ethics of the Other’.

The passages set in prison form only one part of the novel. They are interrupted by Tanga’s story, told in the first person. Although it is Tanga’s story, it is not Tanga who tells it. On the contrary, Tanga cannot even remember her name – “*Ma mémoire s’est fermée sur lui*”<sup>6</sup> – let alone her story. This amnesia and the attendant loss of identity seem to be the result of a state of silence, absence and emptiness. *Silence, absence* and *emptiness* – these three terms run through the novel as leitmotifs<sup>7</sup> and conjure up images of Tanga’s incapacity to tell her own story. She is surrounded by ‘walls of silence (12), her existence is one between life and emptiness (64), words are absent (137), and so on. The function of these images is much more than that of illustration: they determine the relation of Tanga to her story and her body. The central image here is the genital mutilation she undergoes, presented as an act in which a hole is literally cut into her body:

Je n’ai pas pleuré. Je n’ai rien dit. J’héritais du sang entre mes jambes. D’un trou entre les cuisses. Seule me restait la loi de l’oubli. Le temps passait, je m’habituais à cette partie de moi qui s’était absentée.<sup>8</sup>

What remains is “un amas de chair déversé [...], une boursoufflure de chair qui ne se nommera pas.”<sup>9</sup> The monopoly of speech is in the hands of a male-dominated society (24), for which her body has been mutilated, as her mother’s comment indicates: “Elle est devenue femme [...] elle gardera tous les hommes.”<sup>10</sup>

In the present essay the genital mutilation shall be read as a metaphor for the constitution of female bodies in a male-dominated society. A look at cultural [34] practices in South Cameroon, where the novel is set and where female excision is usually not practised, confirms this reading.<sup>11</sup> Thus the choice of this image should not be read as a reference to a supposed cultural ‘reality’, but, rather, as a rhetorical strategy. The repetition of this cutting-up of the body in a scene where a male character, as representative of the patriarchal order, performs the ‘mutilation’ himself places this metaphor in a contemporary context in which cultural practices seem to have been transformed in order to reinforce social (here, gender) order:

Il dit qu’il va me sculpter à ses désirs et que, désormais, j’exigerai de l’homme les mouvements qu’il m’aura appris. Je me tais. Il se lève, sort de sa poche un rasoir et s’attaque à ma toison, le peu que j’ai. Je ne bouge pas. J’abandonne ma vasque de chair à ses doigts et le laisse modeler d’autres images de moi. Il s’arrête, contemple son œuvre, m’adresse des compliments d’une voix lourde avant de s’effondre de nouveau sur moi [...].<sup>12</sup>

### **‘Filling bodies’: The poetics of gift**

If her ‘emptiness’ prevents Tanga from telling her story, the solution is a filling of this bodily emptiness. Instead of transmitting her story through speech, Tanga invites Anna-Claude to ‘enter’ her: “Alors, entre en moi. Mon secret s’illuminera.”<sup>13</sup> This renders impossible any cognitive or purely intellectual [35] process of understanding. At the same time, it should not be reduced to a metaphor of empathy, even if several passages in the novel seem to suggest this. The text structure and the repetitive demands of ‘giving’ accompanying the invitation to ‘enter’ prompt a poetological reading. Tanga does not tell Anna-Claude her story – she *gives* it to her in response to her request: “Donne-moi ton histoire [...]. Donne-moi ton histoire”;<sup>14</sup> Nor does Anna – Claude merely listen to Tanga; she *gives* herself – at first only her hand, later her whole body. The verb ‘to give’, ‘donner’ in French, constantly recurs in the prison passages in order to introduce the narrative passages of the voice telling Tanga’s story – for example, at the beginning of the novel: “Alors, entre en moi. [...] Donne-moi la main [...]. Donne ta main, et mon histoire naîtra dans tes veines. [...]. Et l’histoire de Tanga s’est déversée en elle jusqu’à devenir sa propre histoire.”<sup>15</sup> This bodily gift fills the ‘emptiness’ and in this way transcends the absence of speech. In rhetoric, the filling of a linguistic gap is called catachresis: a term or

a linguistic image has to be invented to articulate what could not have been said without this invention.<sup>16</sup> The ‘filling’ in *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, however, is not only a figurative but also a bodily one. Thus if one wants to read it as a rhetorical strategy ‘answering’ the brutal mutilation, the catachresis should be understood as something more than a linguistic invention or a linguistic image used to sound the depths of this bodily ‘filling’. This is possible if the catachresis is read in the context of materializing processes in language, hence also as means of materialization.<sup>17</sup> The notions of the materializing effects of language and the interdependency of the constitution of body and language, as these should be understood here, have been outlined by Judith Butler in her monograph *Bodies that Matter* [36]:

Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e. reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different.<sup>18</sup>

In Butler’s conception, the constitution of materiality and therefore also the constitution of body is a result of discursive practices and processes depending on regulatory power.<sup>19</sup> Since the body-gift of the two women creates speech in a marginalized position, it constitutes a ‘speaking body’ against, and not within, these processes of regulatory power. It can therefore be read as a violation of discursive practices, if we understand catachresis as a violation of linguistic rules and cultural imagery.<sup>20</sup> The two women violate male order and male economies in which the female body serves male (self-)constitution and male speech. Proceeding from this analysis, it is not surprising that most of the female characters in *Tu t’appelleras Tanga* are prostitutes who sell their bodies to male customers. With regard to the text structure, however, the body-gift of the two women breaks through the ‘walls of silence’ built by the prison, transgressing its passages to give space to a voice telling Tanga’s story in the narrative passages.

The body-gift, read as a rhetorical figure with materializing effects, has a constitutive force within Beyala’s novel,<sup>21</sup> but it is not an easy gift. Referring to the etymology of the term ‘gift’, Derrida has pointed out its ambiguity, since a gift always also implies elements of harm and poisoning.<sup>22</sup> Following Derrida, a gift is actually a ‘figure of the impossible’. In order to be a ‘true’ gift, it must not be recognized as such, because each moment of recognition or answering reaction implies a moment of return that ‘gives’ something back and leads to a return to the economic. Hence a gift cannot even be named a gift. To illustrate this ‘prohibition of return’, Derrida speaks of the “death of the giving instance.” The harm caused by the gift demands, from this point of view, the disappearance of the giver and unaware acceptance by the recipient, who is not in a position to choose whether to accept or refuse the gift. In other [37] words, the

act of giving takes place irrespective of the subjects involved, and does something to them that is beyond their control.

In *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* the death of the giver becomes clear when Tanga demands from Anna-Claude that the white person in her has to die before she can give her body to Tanga (14), and Tanga, who 'gives' her story into the body of Anna-Claude, must give up her body, which is what happens when she dies (177). The gift thus implies a gift of oneself, a self-giving in a double sense, a gift of oneself which is the equivalent of death, and the gift of oneself for a new, hybrid character who can no longer be separated but who does not fuse completely into a new homogeneous self, either.<sup>23</sup> The double origin of the final character remains discernible. It is announced in the title of the novel and repeated at the beginning when Tanga calls Anna-Claude by her own name: "Tu auras dix-sept saisons, tu seras noire, tu t'appelleras Tanga."<sup>24</sup> There is no 'I' speaking to another subject, but the addressee is at the same time the person speaking. This paradoxical form of address needs no 'I' which asserts itself by speaking to or about another subject.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the position of the Other, of the person addressed, is doubled, so that the position of speaking exists only in the act of addressing the Other.<sup>26</sup> This 'address of the Other' subverts the idea (or illusion) of autonomous self-representation.<sup>27</sup> [38]

### **The (re)invention of mythical motherhood**

Although the act of giving cannot be motivated, the 'trigger' of the gift can be named. After approximately one third of the novel, there is a love scene between Tanga and Anna-Claude which proves to be a key passage in this context. Although it is a kind of love scene between two women it is not lesbian love, but a force initiated by a „maternal link“<sup>28</sup> between them that makes them touch each other and that will raise their narrative voice:

Leurs corps s'enlacent. Anna-Claude pleure. Tanga [...] lui dit qu'elles froteront leur désespoir et que d'elles jaillira le plus maternel des amours. Elle lui dit de sécher ses larmes, afin que, de la plaie du malheur, tombe la croûte. Elle la berce, elle la cajole, elle lui dit qu'il est temps de continuer son histoire avant que le temps n'inaugure la cérémonie de sa mort.<sup>29</sup>

If one extends the idea of maternal love, one can say that the hybrid voice is 'born' by them. Consequently, a birth metaphor is used several times in the text to convey the effects of the bodies touching and giving each other, as in the following: "Donne ta main, et mon histoire *naîtra* dans tes veines."<sup>30</sup> In spite of the maternal link, it is not possible to ascribe to either of the women the function of mother or daughter. Tanga is at the same time mother, 'giving' her story, whose inheritance Anna-Claude wants to pass on – "c'est elle [l'histoire] que tu dois me léguer"<sup>31</sup> – and daughter, being born in Anna-Claude's body (14). [39] Anna-Claude positions

herself as both mother and daughter, saying that she is Tanga's 'deliverance': the French term 'délivrance' (13) makes it possible to combine the notion of liberation and motherhood, because it also means 'delivery'. In addition to this, and with reference to the figure of Christ, 'délivrance' can also be read in the religious sense of redemption, so that Anna-Claude takes the position of a daughter giving herself to Tanga, even if she does not do so as the daughter of Tanga.<sup>32</sup>

Motherhood, birth metaphor, and redemption can be merged with the idea of resurrection, to which the text also alludes: the love scene, for example, ends before the hybrid voice is reborn from the women's touching with the words: "Et de nouveau, les mots se sont succédé du corps de la mort naissante à son corps à elle, *ressuscitant l'enfance évanouie*."<sup>33</sup> The story, which is told in the first person, is not a mere repetition but is rebirth in a transformed way, here, of Tanga and Anna-Claude in the wider context of female productive power. This combination reintroduces a female dimension in male-dominated concepts of creativity, as is the case in Christian belief.

European feminists such as Julia Kristeva have regarded the figure of the mother as one of multitude which underpins – as a 'catastrophe of identity'<sup>34</sup> the dichotomy of the 'I' and the 'Other', since it is a figure of neither complete fusion nor complete separation. Unlike the concept of a male-connoted (Christian) creator of the wor(l)d, the creative potential of this figure (conceptualized as "un être de plis,"<sup>35</sup> a 'being of folds') is grounded in her body. Beyala, who, in her essay *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales*,<sup>36</sup> directly attacks the exclusion of motherhood from the Christian concept of creation, manages to (re)introduce it through her conception of 'délivrance' as a combination of birth, redemption and liberation. Her concept can be called a 'postcolonial resurrection' of a myth of motherhood, not only because it feminizes a colonial institution which has, along with the implementation of European schools, cut off the colonized women from the 'traditionally' institutionalized [40] possibilities of speech.<sup>37</sup> It can also be called 'postcolonial' because it involves the character Anna-Claude, who is crucial to the productivity of this maternal concept.

### **Cultural concepts of (female) creative powers**

Questions concerning the role of the gifts of the two characters have so far not been considered. There has been no 'explanation' for why Anna-Claude gives her body, whereas Tanga gives her story. Of course, it is a strategic choice to tell Tanga's story as the story of a marginalized African woman. And of course, corresponding to the idea of the gift, the giving up of one's story must not be placed higher up the scale than the relinquishing of one's body, because this

would mean arguing, within the economic system of a body-and-mind-binarism, that the mind is valued more highly than the body. As has been said, Tanga's lack of speech is due to her 'emptiness' – to the hole cut in her body. Her reaction to this mutilation is not just passive complaint but also the resolve to 'refill' the hole (32). At first she rediscovers, in a sort of vision, the parts cut from her:

Ensuite, je pivoterai sur moi-même, je prendrai le spectacle de mes dépouilles passées, je glisserai vers elles, je soulèverai leur pagne, je froterai leur clitoris, j'incendierai le plaisir, j'effacerai de ma vie le vol de l'oiseau noir, je lancerai mes jambes vers la frontière, alors seulement, j'accéderai aux zones confisquées du bonheur.<sup>38</sup>

From a perspective of cultural anthropology, Éloïse Brière has pointed out in her reading of Beyala's novel that female genitals are linked in the Beti culture to female creative potential. As a central institution in which this link has been ritualized she names the *mevungu*, a female ritual in which massage of the clitoris is connected with the invocation of female creative power.<sup>39</sup> Although this institution has been destroyed by colonization, writers such as [41] Beyala, says Brière, attempt to revitalize such concepts by focusing on the body:<sup>40</sup> in this way, Beyala's characters attempt to 'refill' their emptiness and to resurrect their creative power.

Another image that illustrates Tanga's attempt to 'refill' her hole and which at the same time establishes a further link to the imaginary archives of African cultures is the snake that Tanga wants to insert into herself: "J'enfouis une vipère dans mon sexe. Il distillera le poison. Il envenimera quiconque s'y perdra. Je brandis pour l'humanité la virginité retrouvée. Je chante."<sup>41</sup> This image refers back to concepts of 'witchcraft' according to which sorcerers, thanks to supernatural powers, introduce a snake into the body of an adversary, which is normally done to harm the other person.<sup>42</sup> Since Tanga is several times called a 'witch' (11, 12, 58), the idea that she also has supernatural powers is confirmed. The fact that she is able to pour her story into Anna-Claude's body confirms this reading. According to cultural imagery in many African cultures, a 'person' consists of two bodies, one visible and the other invisible yet having corporeal needs. This invisible body should thus not be analogized as having a mental existence in the European sense.<sup>43</sup> People thought of as being able to employ supernatural powers are not fixed with their invisible body to a visible body, but are regarded as able to change bodies, which means that they are able to occupy the visible body of another person. Tanga's leaving of her visible body to be reborn in Anna-Claude's recalls this, albeit the result of this body switch is not harm but the resurrection of female creative power.

Returning to the question of why Anna-Claude gives her (visible) body whereas Tanga gives her story (or her invisible body) – the cultural references [42] just pointed out make it possible to ‘explain’ this distribution of gifts. In contrast to Tanga’s (visible) body, Anna-Claude’s is not mutilated. She has been discriminated against (63, 139–40), but from the cultural perspective of the novel she has not lost her creative power, whereas Tanga, despite her body’s being empty, is able to employ ‘cultural techniques’ of ‘body changing’. Only in the combination of their powers and their bodily potential can the new myth of motherhood, hence of ‘full’ bodies, be ‘reborn’.

Corresponding to the narrative logic of the novel, the myth of full bodies seems to have been common in ‘earlier’ times, before the patriarchal organization of society and before colonization. The narrative voice telling Tanga’s story time and again evokes memories (or dreams) of a mythical space and time:

Je suis ailleurs. Je me promène dans le pays où les arbres parlent, se rendent visite et accueillent leur bien-aimé au seuil du crépuscule pour reconduire les gestes d’amour. Les rues sont pleines de nénuphars qui, d’un geste, couchent leurs mains sur ma joue renversée et me racontent les secrets des astres ma mère. [...] Alors, j’ai donné la tête aux souvenirs.<sup>44</sup>

By moving the idea of ‘full’ bodies to another space and time, their essentialization is avoided. It is a utopian concept which has nothing to do with ‘biological’ motherhood. Rather, Tanga cuts the ties that bind her to her ‘natural’ mother:

Je destructure ma mère! C’est un acte de naissance. Folie que de croire à l’indestructibilité du lien de sang! Bêtise de penser que l’acte d’exister dans le clan implique une garantie d’appellation contrôlée! [...] Nous ne brisons rien puisque rien n’existe, puisqu’il nous appartient d’inventer le circuit sans fin.<sup>45</sup> [43]

### **Madness as transgressive force**

The postcolonial resurrection of this myth of motherhood is not established in the ‘real’ world. The two women are in a prison cell, and the final character with a white body and speaking as the black Tanga is declared mad: “Elle est complètement maboule.”<sup>46</sup> The hybrid character is marginalized again, thus does not receive adequate ‘representation’.

In Western discourse and therefore also in Western literature, madness has been one of the conceptualizing *topoi* of ‘Africa’. According to Bernard Mouralis, the affinity of anthropology and psychiatry in the Western discourse about Africa has excluded the latter from the concept of reason. Mouralis sums up his analysis by saying that the *topoi* of madness envisages the Western “incapacity to think the Other.”<sup>47</sup> For Mouralis, this incapacity goes back to a way of



thinking in differential relations which can be found again in the dichotomy of the 'I' and the 'Other', already mentioned in this essay. When African responses to this exclusion reject the position of the mad assigned to them, they reluctantly take up the logic of Western discourse, and, without intending to do so, situate themselves in opposition to the Western view.

To escape these mechanisms, Vumbi Yoka Mudimbe has pleaded for a "coup de folie"<sup>48</sup> in writing: i.e. an act of madness which invents a logic of its own, a logic that does not attempt to position itself in relation to Western attitudes. Fifteen years later, Beyala's postcolonial resurrection of cultural concepts advocates an alternative way, challenging Western concepts: it does not avoid Western influences but transforms them and combines them with concepts of her African culture so that a hybrid text arises. Her starting point is a strategic act of privileging gender categories, which is again brought about by a 'coup de folie'. It has been said that the two characters find their power to give themselves (up) in relationship of maternal love, but from the very beginning this love is accompanied by madness that enables the characters to take the necessary transgressive steps. Thus it is said of Anna-Claude:

Folle, elle l'était vraiment. De cette folie qui questionnait sans jamais répondre, de celle qui créait le temps et l'arrêtait, de celle qui se réclamait de tous les lieux du monde où l'homme abolira les frontières. Les frontières demeuraient, la folie demeurait.<sup>49</sup> [44]

And Tanga also is several times called mad.<sup>50</sup> The connection between madness, love and gift brings us back to Derrida, who describes the gift as a figure of madness that "eats away at language itself" and in this way ruins everything in language that would make it possible to reason about the 'nature' of the gift.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, for Derrida the gift also has creative potential, since it is a kind of 'motor' of signification; as a figure of the impossible, however, it needs to remain atopic in the strict sense of the argument.<sup>52</sup> In Beyala's novel, though, the atopic gift 'receives' a utopian dimension, as it receives a body and a voice through the strategic selection and combination of cultural concepts which are irrational, whether from a Western point of view or from an African one. The text is in some ways 'mad', but the quest for 'full' bodies and the venture of risking hybridity is founded in precisely this madness. [45]

## **Anmerkungen**

<sup>1</sup> This formulation is the subtitle of Irène Assiba D'Almeida's monograph on *Francophone African Women Writers* (Gainesville: UP of Florida 1994), which D'Almeida has taken from an expression in Beyala's novel *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, namely "Tuer le vide du silence" (Paris: J'ai lu, 1988): 13. (Unless otherwise indicated, further page references are in the main text.) In this way, D'Almeida's choice underlines the programmatic character of Beyala's writing. For further feministically orientated readings of Beyala see also Odile Cazenave, *Femmes rebelles: Naissance d'un nouveau roman africain au féminin* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), Rangira Béatrice Gallimore, *L'œuvre romanesque de Calixthe Beyala: Le renouveau de l'écriture féminine en Afrique francophone sub-saharienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), and Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, "Calixthe Beyala's

'femme-fillette'. Womanhood and the Politics of (M)Othering," in *The Politics of (M)Othering. Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature*, ed. Obiomo Nnaemeka (London: Routledge, 1997): 101–13.

<sup>2</sup> Although the novel is set in an unnamed fictive country, certain terms such as 'kaba' (188–89), which refers to a typical female garment, or 'Mâ' (50, 79, 147–48), a common abbreviation for mother in Cameroon, make it possible to situate the novel in the cultural context of (South) Cameroon. The name of the protagonist Tanga also makes this contextualization possible because it reoccurs in two canonical novels of Cameroon literature, in Mongo Beti's *Ville cruelle* and in *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio* by Francis Bebey. In some as yet unpublished works of Cameroon researchers, the name Tanga is analysed etymologically as 'femme insultée' in the language of the Beti: i.e. *ewondo*; see, for example, Marcelline Nnomo, *Aspects et enjeux de l'écriture chez les romancières camerounaises francophones* (1969–1999) (Thèse de Doctorat d'Etat Es-Lettres, Université de Yaoundé, année académique 1998/1999), vol. 1: 40. And Beyala calls herself Etonne, which is a regional group of the Beti; see Juliana Makuchi Nfah–Abbenyi, "Calixthe Beyala (1961–)," in *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Pushpa Naidu Parekh & Siga Fatima Jagne (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998): 75.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 141. For a detailed analysis of Anna-Claude's dream, see Sigrid G. Köhler, *Körper mit Gesicht: Eine Gabe der Rhetorik aus postkolonialer Sicht: Lektüren zu literarischen Figuren des/der Anderen am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (unpublished Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophischen Fakultät der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster; Münster 2002): 173–75. This essay is an extract from the Beyala chapter of the cited work, which undertakes a rhetorical reading of the body on the basis of the figure of the gift to sketch 'other' modes of representing the 'Other'.

<sup>4</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 12. "A subversive and uncontrollable element," quoted from Calixthe Beyala, *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, tr. Marjolijn de Jager (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1996): 6. Further references to this translation are in the main text.

<sup>5</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 6. See, for example, the following passages in the novel: "Ton peuple a su tout définir, tout interdire" (108) / "Your people knew how to define everything, prevent everything" (77), or "Les Blancs naissent enveloppés dans un ruban rose. Nous, on naît sur des décombres" (48) / "White people are born in pink ribbons. As for us, we're born on piles of rubble" (32).

<sup>6</sup> "My memory has closed itself to that"; Beyala, *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 6, 21, 36, 44, 46, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 20. "I didn't weep. I didn't say a thing. I fell heir to the blood between my legs. To a hole between my thighs. All that I was left with was the law of oblivion. Time passed, I was becoming accustomed to that part of me that was gone" (12).

<sup>9</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 26. "A mass of flesh poured out [...], a swelling of flesh that will not be named" (16). Nfah Abbenyi comes to a similar conclusion when analysing the names of female characters, which are constructed in binary terms, so that this "discursive act [...]" informs of the hyphenated identities of these women and the hierarchical, dominant society in which they live" and in relation to which they are defined. Nfah Abbenyi, "Calixthe Beyala's 'femme-fillette'. Womanhood and the Politics of (M)Othering," 102.

<sup>10</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 20. "She has become a woman [...], she'll keep any man" (12).

<sup>11</sup> See Jean-Pierre Ombolo, *Essai sur l'histoire, les clans et les regroupements claniques des Eton du Cameroun* (Yaoundé: Université de Yaoundé, 1986): 95. The idea of reading genital mutilation as a metaphor for the process of cultural coding of female bodies should not be seen as an attempt to take this cultural practice lightly. On the contrary, to invert the argument, one could say that novel uses this drastic image to underline the objectification of female bodies in postcolonial societies. In her essay *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales*, Beyala very sharply attacks this cultural practice to counter any criticism that she might be trivializing genital mutilation. See Calixthe Beyala, *Lettre d'une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales* (Paris: Spengler, 1995): 78–94. When the objectified body of the protagonist dies at the end of the novel it becomes obvious that the metaphor of genital mutilation shows how female bodies are produced as object bodies, and that this 'production' is not a reversible act, but one that creates 'realities'.

<sup>12</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 129–30. "He says he's going to mould me as a sculpture into his desires and that from now on I will insist on techniques from other men that he will have taught me. I remain silent. He gets up,

takes a razor out of his pocket and gets started on my pubic hair, what little I have. I do not move. I leave my basin of flesh in his fingers and let him shape other images of me. He stops, contemplates his work, sends compliments in my direction in a low voice before he collapses on top of me again” (93).

<sup>13</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 14. “Well then, enter into me. My secret will be illuminated” (7).

<sup>14</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 13. “Give me your story [...]. Give me your story” (7).

<sup>15</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 14. “Well then, enter into me. [...] Give me your hand [...]. Give me your hand and my story will be born in your veins. [...] And Tanga’s story flowed out into her until it became her own story” (7–8).

<sup>16</sup> For the rhetorical figure of catachresis, see, for example, Uwe Neumann, “Katachrese,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Carl Niemeyer, 1998): 911–15.

<sup>17</sup> This reading has been inspired by an essay by Jane Gallop in which she reads Irigaray’s image of touching lips as catachresis. Analogous to the productive effect of speech following another economy than the patriarchal economy at the expense of the female body in the image chosen by Irigaray, the result of the touching in Beyala’s novel is also speech and thus telling of a female life-history. See Jane Gallop, “Quand nos lèvres s’écrivent: Irigaray’s Body Politic,” *Romanic Review* 74 (1983): 77–83.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge 1993): 69. See also 31–32.

<sup>19</sup> See Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 9–10.

<sup>20</sup> See Neumann, “Katachrese,” 912, 914.

<sup>21</sup> For a reading of Butler’s concept of bodies that matter as rhetorical figures of giving or as prosopopoeia, see Köhler, *Körper mit Gesicht*, 31–66.

<sup>22</sup> For the ambiguous etymology of the term ‘gift’, see Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps, vol. 1: La fausse monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991): 25.

<sup>23</sup> For hybridity as a concept of conflictual identities, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 114–15, 207. Bhabha conceptualizes hybridity as a strategy of writing and representation, so that the idea of a hybrid body itself implies a transposition of the concept.

<sup>24</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 14. “You shall be seventeen seasons old; you shall be black; your name shall be Tanga” (7).

<sup>25</sup> According to Menke’s rhetorical analysis of the (Western) act of self-positioning in speech, the ‘I’ assumes itself (or at least the illusion of itself as an autonomous position) by speaking about others or to others. See Bettine Menke, “De Mans ‘Prosopopöie’ der Lektüre: Die Ent-leerung des Monuments,” in *Ästhetik und Rhetorik: Lektüren zu Paul de Man*, ed. Karl-Heinz Bohrer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993): 34–78.

<sup>26</sup> The name Tanga underlines this double positioning, especially when read against Mongo Beti’s novel *Ville cruelle*, in which Tanga is a town, divided into a European and an African section, called the ‘foreign’ Tanga and the ‘indigenous’ Tanga. See Eza Boto [Mongo Beti], *Ville cruelle* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971): 17–22.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to this, the Western model of representation as a model of speaking for somebody is rejected, when Tanga refuses to let Anna-Claude speak in her name (13). The idea of speaking for somebody only indirectly confers a position of subjectivity on the represented, because the representing position maintains the monopoly of speech. For a postcolonial critique of the Western model of representation see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s reflections on this subject which she presented in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” and which she has answered negatively, negating this possibility of speech. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1993): 66–111. It is not only the historical proximity – Spivak’s essay and Beyala’s novel were published in the same year – that suggests an affinity between these two texts. For an analysis that explores the parallels of these two texts and their concepts of speaking from a marginalized position, see Sigrid G. Köhler, “Kann die Andere Sprechen? Anrufung der Mutter: Afrikanischer Feminismus zwischen Universalisierung und Differenz,” in

*Interkulturelle Geschlechterforschung. Identitäten – Imaginationen – Repräsentationen*, ed. Judith Schlehe (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001): 192–210.

<sup>28</sup> Nfah Abbenyi, “Calixthe Beyala’s ‘femme-fillette’: Womanhood and the Politics of (M)Othering,” 108.

<sup>29</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 65. “Their bodies intertwine. Anna-Claude weeps. Tanga [...] tells her that they will stroke their despair and that the most maternal of all love will gush forth from them. She tells her to dry her tears, so that the scab will fall off the wound of unhappiness. She cradles her, cajoles her, tells her that it’s time to continue her story before time begins to celebrate the ceremony of her death” (45).

<sup>30</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 14 (my emphasis). “Give me your hand and my story will be *born* in your veins” (7; my emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 178. “It is what you must bequeath to me” (129).

<sup>32</sup> See also Susan Arndt, “Transcending ‘Race’ and Culture Difference: Women’s Global Solidarity Reconsidered in Calixthe Beyala’s *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*,” in Arndt, *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African-Feminist Literatures* (Trenton NJ & Asmara: Africa World Press, 2001): 173–74.

<sup>33</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 66 (my emphasis). “And once again, the words follow one another from the body of nascent death to her body, *resuscitating* a vanished childhood” (45 ; my emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> See Julia Kristeva, “Stabat mater,” in *Histoires d’amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1999): 296.

<sup>35</sup> Kristeva, “Stabat mater,” 324.

<sup>36</sup> See Beyala, *Lettre d’une Africaine à ses sœurs occidentales*, 35–36.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Carole Boyce Davies, “Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism,” in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1986): 3.

<sup>38</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 33. “Then I’ll pivot around myself. I’ll take the spectacle of my past slough, slide towards it, lift up its pagne, rub its clitoris, set fire to pleasure, erase the flight of the black bird from my life, send my legs flying in the direction of the frontier; only then will I have access to the confiscated regions of happiness” (20).

<sup>39</sup> See Éloïse Brière, *Le roman camerounais et ses discours* (Ivry: Nouvelles du Sud, 1993): 242. For the mevungu, see also Phillippe Laburthe–Tola, *Initiations et sociétés secrètes au Cameroun: Essais sur la religion beti* (Paris: Karthala, 1985): 327–35.

<sup>40</sup> See Brière, *Le roman camerounais et ses discours*, 32, 231.

<sup>41</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 143. “I’m concealing a viper inside my vagina. It will distil the poison. It will envenom anyone who gest lost in there. I’m brandishing my rediscovered virginity for humanity. I’m singing” (103).

<sup>42</sup> Statements which take up the idea of a snake in the body can be found in descriptions of illnesses or in statements about the ‘evu’ (which is a ‘spell’ that introduces a harmful animal into the victim’s body) in the context of (female) witchcraft. See Eric de Rosny, *Heilkunst in Afrika. Mythos, Handwerk und Wissenschaft* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1994): 101–102, or Laburthe–Tola, *Initiations et sociétés secrètes au Cameroun*, 75, 84, 105–109. The idea of reading Beyala’s novel in the context of cultural concepts and beliefs was confirmed in discussions with Christel Lako in Yaoundé, March 2001. I thank her very much for her suggestions and explanations concerning Cameroonian cultures, and the many conversations we had on Beyala’s novels.

<sup>43</sup> See de Rosny, *Heilkunst in Afrika*, 97ff. De Rosny explains in this context that the healing process in a person consists in this conceptualization of the person reuniting a person’s two bodies.

<sup>44</sup> Beyala, *Tu t’appelleras Tanga*, 100. “I am elsewhere. I’m walking around a country where trees talk, visit one another, and as dusk begins to fall they welcome their beloved to renew their gestures of love. The streets are full of waterlilies which, with one gesture, place their hands on my tilted cheek and tell me the secrets of my mother the stars. [...] So, I turned my head towards memories” (70).

<sup>45</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 59. "I'm deconstructing my mother! It's an act of birth. It's madness to believe that the blood bond is indestructible! Foolishness to think that the act of existing within a clan implies guaranteed quality. [...] We're breaking nothing since nothing exists, since it is ours endlessly to invent the circuit" (39).

<sup>46</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 190. "She's completely off her rocker" (137).

<sup>47</sup> See Bernard Mouralis, *L'Europe, l'Afrique et la folie* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1993): 13.

<sup>48</sup> Vumbi Yoka Mudimbe, *L'autre face du royaume: Une introduction à la critique des langages en folie* (Paris: L'âge d'homme, 1973): 153.

<sup>49</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 8. "She really was mad. The kind of madness which asked questions without ever replying, which created time and stopped it, claimed kinship with every place in the world where man abolished frontiers. The frontiers remained, her madness continued" (3).

<sup>50</sup> Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, 57, 79, 105. For the idea of madness as the transgressive power of the characters, see also Odile Cazenave, "Inscription de la folie et de l'irrationnel dans les textes de femmes," *Revue francophone* 7.2 (1992): 107–29.

<sup>51</sup> See Derrida, *Donner le temps*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> See Derrida, *Donner le temps*, 53.