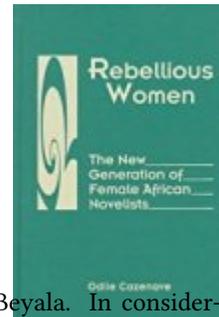


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Odile Cazenave. *Rebellious Women: The New Generation of Female African Novelists*. Boulder, Colo. and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000. ix + 259 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89410-884-6.

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This work was originally published in French as *Femmes rebelles: naissance d'un nouveau roman africain au féminin* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); Cazenave herself translated this version, which has been published in the United States and the United Kingdom. Perhaps the French title more aptly describes the book, for the texts discussed within range from 1981-1994, including some well-known pieces, rather than a group of new, young, unknown writers. However, in conjunction with writers such as Mariama Ba and Ken Bugul, Cazenave does discuss a number of writers who are less recognizable to US readers due to the fact that their works have not been translated from French into English.

French-language African novels of the 1980s and 1990s focus on post-colonial issues of power and identity, and Cazenave believes that women writers and their concerns have not been fully considered (1). Women writers have responded to the marginalization of women and women's writings by "systematically favor[ing] certain kinds of female characters that are typically marginalized" (10). Cazenave structures her work with this in mind.

In addition to an introduction and conclusion, the eight chapters of this work are arranged thematically into three sections. The first section, "Women in the Margins," includes chapters which examine three recurring characters in women's fiction: the foreign woman, the prostitute, and the mentally ill woman. In analyzing the foreign spouse character, Cazenave focuses on Ba's *Un Chant Ecarlate* (*Scarlet Song*), Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* and Angele Rawiri's *Fureurs et cris de femmes*.

Along with a fine analysis of existing scholarship on the prostitution issue, Cazenave examines Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab*, Rawiri's *G'amarankano, au carrefour*

and numerous novels of Calixthe Beyala. In considering madness and mental illness, Cazenave turns again to Ba and Warner-Vieyra and also studies Aminata Sow Fall's *L'appel des arenas* and Gad Ami's *Etrange heritage*. Cazenave's recurrent theme is that "through the use of outside-the-norms female protagonists, these authors rebel against the dominant language and ideology" (81). Cazenave thoughtfully points out, though, that the use of these particular facets is not intended to provide a catalog of descriptions or to limit the types of women characters, but rather to show that women are "not one but many" (81).

The second section tackles an exploration of taboos. Cazenave uses the term taboo in "its specific sense of any type of prohibition about words or actions that applies to African women" as a group (87). Cazenave notes that for earlier women writers the act of writing itself was a taboo, but that current writers are more able to clearly explore women and women's issues (88). The first area of taboo Cazenave considers in this section is parent-child relations, ranging from mother-son and mother-daughter bonds to examining the rejection of motherhood and absent father figures. The body and sexuality comprise the second taboo investigated here. Cazenave argues that the female body became more important as the attention to women's writings grew, noting that the description and function of the body has significantly changed in women's writings (127). Issues of sexual desire and shifting sexual ethics are also explored. Throughout these chapters, Cazenave again analyzes Ba, Sow Fall, Beyala, Rawiri, and Bugul, with the addition of Philomene Bassek's *La tache de sang*, Veronique Tadjó's *A vol d'oiseau* and *Le royaume aveugle*, and Tanella Boni's *Une vie de crabe*.

The third section examines the movement toward a new political novel. These chapters cover archetypes of feminist and feminine writing and the political role of writing. Cazenave notes that male writers of the 1980s almost exclusively wrote of corrupt African society, but that the women writers have taken a more positive approach in their social critiques (215-216). While women writers certainly do tackle issues of corruption, violence, oppression and suffering, they search for “possible alternatives to and a way out of a desperately static and pes-

simistic mode of thinking” (215).

This work is certainly a valuable addition to the scholarship available on Ba, Beyala and Bugul, but also sheds light on a number of intriguing Francophone authors who have been largely neglected in English-language settings. Cazenave’s work is theoretically solid yet will be accessible to a wide range of readers who are interested in learning more about these women and their writing, their motivations and their impact.

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