

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Dancing in the Dust / Bal Poussière (1988)

Henri Duparc (1941-2006)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Writer-Producer Henri Duparc is a Guinean-Ivorian filmmaker. He was born on December 23, 1941 in Forécariah, Guinea, and died on April 18, 1986, in Paris. Duparc's training in filmmaking first took place in 1962, at the Cinematographic Institute of Belgrade (former Yugoslavia), then at the *Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques de Paris* (IDHEC), between 1964 and 1966. In 1967, Duparc works as a producer for the Ivorian government's *Société Ivoirienne de Cinéma* (SIC), and when the company goes defunct, Duparc creates his own production company Focale 13 (later known as les Films Henri Duparc), in 1983. Duparc's work can be characterized as "cinéma naïf". His first source of inspiration is Côte d'Ivoire, whose traditions and everyday life he showcases and at the same time parodies with humor. Duparc produced a number of shorts, some documentaries, a television series, *Aya* (1986), and eight features, *Abusuan/Family* (1972), *L'Herbe sauvage/Wild Grass* (1978), *Bal poussière/Dancing in the Dust* (1988), *Le Sixième doigt/The Sixth Finger* (1990), *Une couleur café/Color Coffee* (1997), *Je m'appelle Fargass/My Name is Fargass* (2000), *Caramel* (2005).

Film *Dancing in the Dust*, Henri Duparc's third feature, is the filmmaker's criticism of polygamy and the treatment of women in male-dominated, Muslim societies. Although polygamy is illegal in Côte d'Ivoire, it is still very much practiced in Muslim communities there. Duparc casts his protagonists in Muslim families in the village of Adiaké, where the original population is ethnically Agni and Christian. There is no particular reason other than convenience for Duparc to have chosen this location. The film also touches on other themes, such as tradition, change, education, betrayal, etc.

Background *Dancing in the Dust* was shot on location, in the small Ivorian village of Adiaké. The language spoken in the film is French. The title of the movie is inspired by a popular dance on a dusty square that used to take place in Duparc's native village when he was a child. *Dancing in the Dust* is a production of Focale 13, Henri Duparc's own production company. The cast is composed of local Ivorian actors, most of whom were already well-known for their roles in theater and film. Thérèse Taba, for instance, who plays the third wife, is known for her roles in *Abusuan* (1972), *Petanqui* (1983), and *Secret of the Lost Legend* (1985), to cite only these few. *Dancing in the Dust* won Best Director Award at the 1988 Fort de France Film Festival, in Martinique. At the 1989 Chamrousse Humor Film Festival, in France, the film won both the Grand Prix and the Critics' Award. *Dancing in the Dust* also won the Critics' Award at the 1989 Namur Francophone Film Festival, in Belgium.

CHARACTERS

<i>Demigod</i>	A rich pineapple grower with five wives, who decides to marry a sixth wife
<i>Binta</i>	Demigod's sixth wife, who runs away with her boyfriend after sowing discord
<i>Binta's Parents</i>	Binta's father (Mel Pacome) and Binta's Mother (Angèle Niangoran): Binta's parents

SYNOPSIS

Binta is a young Ivorian girl. Her father, a farmer, cannot afford to pay for her education. So Binta's father sends her to his brother, who lives in a poor neighborhood of Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire, to further her education. However, in Abidjan, Binta is treated like a maid in her uncle's house and does not go to school. The young girl rebels, refuses to do the housework, and spends most of her time in the bars where her boyfriend's band plays. Binta's exasperated uncle sends her back to her father in the village. There,

Demigod, an important pineapple grower and the richest man in the village, falls in love with Binta and decides to take her as his sixth wife. Demigod manages to win the consent of Binta's parents, who, despite Binta's reluctance to accept Demigod's proposal, marry her off to the polygamist anyway. Once in Demigod's home, Binta decides to do as she pleases. Binta becomes the talk of the village gossip with the daring clothes she wears. She only offers herself to Demigod when she wants to, and very rarely. She sows division among Demigod's other wives by creating two antagonistic groups: the dress wearers (*robeuses*) and the waistcloth wearers (*pagneuses*), who engage in a series of unhealthy competitions and acts of sabotage to win Demigod's favor. Finally, Binta cheats on Demigod with her musician boyfriend, who is touring in the village, and she runs off with him to town. The day after Binta leaves, Demigod replaces her with the daughter of one of his employees, whom he had been eyeing for some time.

SCENES

I will do as I please Binta is sent by her parents to her uncle, who lives in a populous suburb of Abidjan, to study. Binta spends most of her time working as a maid for her uncle and his wife. Binta rebels and tells Mamou, her uncle's wife, that she refuses to be the maid of the house, and that from now on she will do as she pleases. Binta goes dancing in a bar. She seems to know the bar's regulars, and especially the musicians in the band playing there that evening. One of the musicians partners her into a languorous dance. Mamou reports Binta's behavior to Binta's uncle. Binta's uncle is shocked to learn that Binta has not been home for three days, the entire time that he has been away. The uncle decides to send Binta back to her parents in the village.



Demigod is impressed by Binta Binta is sent back to her parents in the village. Demigod is the richest man in the village, and he likes to say that after God, he is the boss. Demigod, whose car has broken down on the road to the village, tries to hang on to the truck without brakes that is taking Binta to the village. He recognizes her as Siriki's little girl he used to see around in the village, and he is so distracted by her that he falls off the truck. Demigod promises himself that he will marry Binta. In the village, rumors are spreading. The story goes that Binta, old Siriki's daughter, has returned from Abidjan, where she was supposed to be studying. The story goes that Binta never actually went to school in Abidjan because her father was penniless and could not afford her tuition, and that she instead spent her days and nights running the streets and seducing men.



I will marry a sixth wife Demigod returns home at last, exhausted by the long walk to the village. The youngest of his five wives, his favorite, sets the table and keeps him company while he eats. Demigod complains that his wife's sauce is a little too spicy and that he does not like it. She reminds him, with a complicit wink, that only yesterday he was complaining that her sauce lacked spice. Demigod tells his wife to tell her co-wives that he will be talking to them all after his nap. Demigod emerges from his siesta. He takes a seat in front of his wives. He takes out a cigarette, puts it to his lips and lights it. His wives jostle to be the first to bring him an ashtray. Demigod tells his wives how proud he is of them. He tells them that if they are proud of him, too, it is because he is a successful man. He tells them that a man of his caliber must have more than five wives. So, he announces to them, he has decided to marry a sixth wife. Demigod's wives cry out in indignation. Demigod's wives ask him the real reason for this decision and why he believes that five wives are not enough to satisfy him. He replies that the week consists of seven days. Each wife will have one day to herself, and on the seventh day, he can rest. Demigod insists that with six wives, it will be a marriage of equity, as there will no longer be a favorite wife. His third wife reminds him that each time he marries another wife, he betrays them. To reward his wives for their understanding, he promises them each five pieces of clothing tomorrow.



Demigod visits Binta's parents

Binta is not happy to be back in her village. She has been pouting since she arrived, to the chagrin of her mother. Demigod visits Binta's father, Siriki. After some customary pandering to the father, he tells him that he saw his daughter, Binta, and that she made a good impression on him. Demigod tells Siriki that he wants to make him one of the village notables by marrying his daughter, Binta. Old Siriki asks Demigod what other proof of his power he is looking for after being the husband of five women and the owner of an immense pineapple plantation. Demigod replies that no one can be happier than a man who is loved by several women. Demigod tells Siriki that he will accept any term he fixes for his daughter's dowry and urges him to give him his answer tomorrow. Before leaving Siriki, Demigod slips some cash into his pocket. Siriki tells his wife that his difficulties are on the way to being resolved. He tells his wife about the conversation he has just had with Demigod. Binta's mother is overjoyed that Demigod wants to marry her daughter. Demigod goes to the village shopkeeper. He places an order for groceries to be delivered to Binta's parents. At Siriki's, Binta tries to persuade her father that marrying Demigod is not the right thing for her and that he should let her finish her studies instead. Her father replies that she knows how to read and write, and that this is already enough for a woman. Binta castigates her parents for having no dignity or self-respect. She accuses them of wanting to sell her to Demigod for a few bottles of juice and a few cans of food.



Siriki's reply is affirmative

Demigod sends a *griotte* (a female go-between) to Binta's parents, whose mission is to sing Siriki's praises and give money to Binta's mother on his behalf. Binta looks on in disgust as her parents bow down to Demigod's gifts. Meanwhile, Demigod, blindfolded to avoid showing favoritism, rewards his wives with textiles, which he draws randomly from the shopkeeper's wheelbarrow. Afterwards, seated on his veranda, Demigod enjoys the praise of the *griotte*, who brings him old Siriki's affirmative reply about his request to marry Binta.

Binta accepts Demigod's proposal

However, the *griotte* tells Demigod that Binta has not yet accepted his proposal of marriage, and that she wants to meet him first. The *griotte* tells Demigod that Binta says she chooses her man, not the other way around. Demigod is shocked that a woman would say she chooses her husband. Demigod wonders if Binta will also want to measure his genitals. Demigod visits Binta. He tries awkwardly to be poetic. All his attempts to be romantic have no effect on Binta, who dismisses them as the nonsense of a man who wants to sleep with a woman. Binta tells Demigod to let her finish school first and then they can talk about marriage. Demigod tells her he prefers her to be a virgin rather than educated. Binta tells Demigod that she is no longer a virgin. He thinks she is making up a story to discourage him from pursuing her. He tells her that if she marries him, she can have all she wants. She asks him if he would let her go to Abidjan from time to time. He tells her that he has no problems with that. She tells him that, with this condition, her answer is yes.



The wedding

Demigod and Binta's wedding brings the whole village together. Binta's parents are overjoyed. The *griots* make a fortune singing Demigod's praises. Demigod's five other wives are also present, applauding in spite of themselves.



Binta's unorthodox ways

Demigod's six wives take a trip to the beach. Binta decides to go topless for a swim. Her co-wives criticize her shamelessness. She replies that she has beautiful breasts and sees no reason to conceal them. Demigod's fifth wife decides to follow Binta's example and expose her breasts, too.



"Robeuses" and "pagneuses"

Binta teaches two of her co-wives to walk in high heels. She suggests they ask Demigod to take them shopping in town. She suggests that the three of them form the "robeuses" camp (those who wear a dress) and that the other three wives be christened the "pagneuses" (those who wear a waistcloth).



Sauce sabotage Binta sabotages the cooking of one of her co-wives, a "pagneuse", by emptying a whole jar of salt into her sauce. The "pagneuses" decide that the "robeuses" have declared war on them and prepare to retaliate. One of the "pagneuses" puts some powdered soap in the sauce that Binta has prepared for Demigod. Demigod says that he is fed up with this war between the "pagneuses" and the "robeuses", and that he expects to be served properly in his house.

Demigod has his eyes on another woman The wives of Demigod have been shopping in town and admiring what they've bought for themselves. The "robeuses" have picked up some beautiful dresses, and the "pagneuses" have bought some beautiful waistcloths. Meanwhile, Demigod, who is visiting his pineapple plantation, is beginning to take notice of the fifteen-year-old daughter of one of his employees.



Stimulant for Demigod One of the "pagneuses" has decided that, after her night with Demigod, he must have no energy left to devote to Binta. To this end, she prepares an aphrodisiac for her husband made from crushed kola nuts and ginger, which she makes him eat. Demigod doesn't sleep a wink and, under the effect of the stimulant prepared for him by his fifth wife, makes love all night long. The next day, Demigod is so worn out he can hardly stand on his feet. Binta reminds him that today is her day, and that he had better get ready to satisfy her. The "pagneuses" watch with satisfaction how the fifth wife has worked on their husband. Demigod is completely exhausted. Demigod has neither energy nor attention to devote to Binta. All he wants to do is sleep. Binta discovers the mixture that Demigod's fifth wife made him eat. Binta goes to the market to buy the whole stock of ginger and kola.

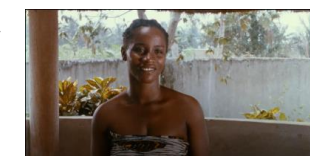


Demigod wants an end to the chaos He demands an end to the chaos in his home. He decides to implement some changes. From now on, no woman will come to his room. He is the one who will go to their rooms when it is their turn. And no one will feed him any aphrodisiacs. Demigod tells his wives that he is not a horse and needs a break from time to time, like any normal person.

Demigod will not give his daughter to a polygamist Demigod's first wife tells him that she thinks Fofana, a man from the village, is interested in their daughter. Demigod replies that Fofana already has two wives and does not need a third one. Demigod's wife reminds him that he himself has six wives. He retorts that, unlike Fofana, he is rich. Demigod tells his wife that he wants something better for their daughter. He tells her that Fofana is poor and that poverty has never been a source of happiness. She retorts that neither has polygamy. Demigod's wife tells him that if she were educated and had a job, she would leave him when he decided to marry a second wife. Demigod looks at his wife, dumfounded.



Binta's elopes and is replaced with a new wife The village gathers for a popular dance. Binta's boyfriend is among the musicians hired for the event, and Binta is happy to see him. Demigod catches Binta in the arms of her musician boyfriend. Binta runs away with her boyfriend rather than return to Demigod. Demigod replaces Binta with the fifteen-year-old daughter of his foreman.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

DEMIGOD Demigod is a polygamist. Unlike most polygamists, who rule their households with inflexible hands, Demigod is more of a naive, pleasant joker. He is lax about the rules of the household, and his wives sometimes take advantage of this to play him for a fool. For the filmmaker, Demigod is the symbol of a polygamy that is losing ground.

Egotistical Demigod explains to Binta's father why he wants a sixth wife: "There is nothing so pleasing to a man as to be loved by a multitude of women." For Demigod, polygamy is a way to satisfy his vanity, to feel important and loved. So he decides to leave no room for any doubt about being loved. Demigod fills every day of the week with the feeling of fulfillment—every day, that is, but one, because even in love, there

has to be a day of rest. He treats himself with six wives, who will love him for six days, and reserves the seventh day of the week to recover from the excess of love that comes from his wives. After all, does not the Scripture tell us that God himself took the seventh day to rest and enjoy his work?

Buffon Demigod is a goofy character whom viewers may even find themselves liking, despite his egotistical inclinations. His buffoonery is apparent from the moment he is introduced to the viewer. His car breaks down, he latches on to a truck with no brakes and finds himself thrown into the thicket as the driver approaches a bend. His wives stuff his sauce with hot pepper, making him sweat and painfully huff and puff. They dose him with aphrodisiacs and keep him stimulated all night, to the point where in the morning he can barely stand on his own two feet. His image is more that of a comic polygamist than the abusive authoritarian one to which literature has accustomed us.

Naïve Demigod is naive to believe that whatever is good for him is necessarily good for his wives. He tells them that a sixth wife will lighten their load and eliminate favoritism. He fails to understand that favoritism is at the very heart of any marriage, and that when two people come to live together, it is with the aim of being each other's exclusive favorite. On the other hand, Demigod believes that gifts of clothes and jewelry will make his wives forget his disloyalties, until his first wife tells him she would have left him if she had an education, and Binta, his sixth wife, runs off with her boyfriend, whom she has never stopped loving.

BINTA Binta is a mischievous, defiant girl. Unable to dissuade her parents from marrying her off to Demigod, she plays along and agrees to be the polygamist's sixth wife. However, her marriage to Demigod does not prevent her from living her life as she pleases, offering her love to whomever she pleases, whenever she pleases. After sowing discord in Demigod's family and subverting his authority, she leaves him for her city boyfriend.

Wild Binta is a wild girl. She lives on the fringe of family expectations. Her uncle expects her to be a well-behaved girl, who accepts the diktats of the house, notably that of serving as a maid. Instead, she refuses to do the housework and frequents the bars. In the village, rumor has it that she is a promiscuous girl. She confesses to a shocked Demigod that she is no longer a virgin. She imposes her rules on him in bed. She strips naked on the beach. She dares to cheat on Demigod and to run away with her boyfriend.

Defiant Binta defies her aunt and uncle, refusing to continue playing the role of housemaid. She opposes her parents' desire to see her marry Demigod. She accuses them of being opportunistic and undignified. When she realizes that no matter what she says, her marriage to Demigod is sealed, Binta decides to impose her own rules upon him. She tells him that he must make his request whenever he wants her, and that it will be up to her to accept or refuse his request. And when Demigod does ask, she often turns him down.

BINTA'S PARENTS Binta's parents are the prototype of immoral, predatory parents. Unconcerned about their daughter's welfare, they sell her to Demigod to solve their own financial difficulties. Their immorality is made all the more flagrant by the fact that the person pointing the finger at them is their own daughter. Binta lectures them on their lack of dignity and their selfishness, but to no avail.

Selfish Binta's parents decide to marry her off to Demigod. They tell their daughter that this decision is for her own good. In fact, it is not. Demigod began bribing the parents the day he announced his intention to marry Binta. They received provisions and money from him, all of which affected their decision. Moreover, Binta's father confessed to his wife that with Demigod as their son-in-law, their financial difficulties would disappear. It is clear that it was out of selfishness and not for Binta's sake that her parents agreed to give her in marriage to Demigod.

Authoritarian Binta's parents are authoritarian. They decide to marry her off to Demigod against her will and before even asking her opinion. She objects to their decision, but Binta's father insists that it is up to him, and that she has no say in the matter. Binta has no choice but to submit to her parents' authority and become Demigod's sixth wife.

Shameless Binta tells her parents that they should be ashamed of the way they deliver her to Demigod because it amounts to selling her. And she is right. Binta's parents lack dignity and self-respect to want to solve their financial difficulties by forcing their daughter into marriage. Binta's parents accept this situation, which would shame many parents, as perfectly normal. But they are in no way embarrassed by it.

THEMES

Confinement/movement Demigod's wives live within the confines of his large estate in the village, and are only allowed out under his supervision. He drops them off at social functions and brings them back himself. Their only companions are their co-wives, and they are their own censors, watching over one another and moralizing to one another about which behaviors to ban in the household. All this changes when Binta is introduced into the family as Demigod's sixth wife. As a condition of becoming his wife, Binta asks Demigod to allow her to go out from time to time to Abidjan. Binta has her lover and friends there and would like to see them from time to time. But Demigod does not know that. Demigod, eager to have Binta in his harem, accepts Binta's condition. Once in Demigod's family, Binta begins to shock her co-wives and teach them new habits. Binta, who sees the traditional waistcloth as a confining garment for women, forms, with her two most daring co-wives, the "robeuses" club, that is, the club of the wives who wear dresses, unlike the other, more conservative wives, who prefer their waistcloths. Thus, the "robeuses" learn to walk in high heels and wear make-up, breaking out of the straitjacket in which Demigod has confined them until now. Binta pushes her audacity to the extreme. At the beach, Binta bathes topless, thus ignoring the gaze and judgments of the community, which have thus far kept women morally "straight". Finally, at the village ball, Binta reunites with her city boyfriend, with whom she decides to elope when Demigod catches them in an amorous embrace, thus freeing herself from Demigod's stifling authority.

Objectification Demigod goes to see Siriki, Binta's father, to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. When asked why he wants a sixth wife, Demigod explains that a wealthy man like himself needs to show off as many women as he can afford. This is the same explanation Demigod gives his first wife when he refuses to allow his daughter to be the third wife of a man who covets her. Demigod explains to his wife that he is rich and entitled to polygamy, while the man who covets his daughter is poor and should be content with just one wife. For Demigod, then, a man's wealth justifies the number of wives he can have, and retroactively, the number of wives a man has reflects his social status. Demigod tells Binta's father to fix a suitable dowry for his daughter, and soon the deal is struck, much to Binta's displeasure, who lashes out at her parents. Binta blames her parents for selling her to Demigod like cattle. She asks them where their dignity has gone and tells them that poverty should not be a justification for them to lose their honor. However, Binta decides to take revenge for this transaction that makes her an object of exchange. She decides to humiliate the seller (her father) and the buyer (Demigod) by making them the laughing stock of the community. Binta takes her revenge on her objectification by introducing mischief, jealousy and unhealthy competition between wives, and depravity into Demigod's household, and she emancipates herself from Demigod and her parents at the end of the film.

Patriarchy (defeated) *Dancing in the Dust* is a caricature of all the symbols of patriarchy. Demigod, the symbol of patriarchy, is introduced to us in an unsavory situation that shows his lack of control over his life. His car breaks down on the way home. He clings to a truck with no brakes in which Binta is traveling. He spots the girl, is seduced by her beauty, loses his grip and falls to the side of the road. In this cinematic gesture, Duparc seems to foretell first a relationship between Demigod and Binta, then the subsequent breakdown of that relationship, but above all Demigod's loss of control. And the viewer need not wait long to see this. Demigod complies with the first condition Binta imposes on him without a second thought: to be free to move around, to be able to travel to Abidjan from time to time. Then Demigod's new wife begins to damage his honor by revealing that, contrary to his expectations, she is not a virgin, by bathing topless at the beach, by wearing suggestive clothes that get the village talking, and by cheating on Demigod with her lover from the city. Furthermore, Binta exhausts Demigod's sexual energy by creating an unhealthy competition among his wives, who each outdo each other, sometimes with aphrodisiac potions, to draw out of Demigod his ultimate determination to dominate, his last strength, to the point where Demigod recognizes that he will not survive this frantic sexual rhythm. Here, patriarchy seems to give up, to recognize its powerlessness, to admit its failure inflicted by the one over whom it thought it had total domination.

Polygamy Although legal in many African countries, especially those with a Muslim majority, polygamy and early marriage (under the age of 18) have been prohibited by the Ivorian civil code since 1960. However, to the best of Ivorian memory, no offender has ever been brought to justice, and polygamy is practiced openly, especially, but not exclusively, in Muslim communities. Based on a misinterpretation of the Qur'an, African Muslims allowed themselves up to four wives by their religious faith. Duparc poignantly satirizes this practice by going beyond the mythical number four to provide his main character with five wives. And even this excess is not enough for Demigod. Now he is looking for a sixth wife in the person of young Binta. And when she is introduced to Demigod's family, Binta becomes the bad weed in Demigod's garden. She undermines his authority by her excessive autonomy. She drains his strength by being sexually overdemanding and asking him to perform to her expectations. She destabilizes his household by creating discord among the wives, and she humiliates him by cheating on him and leaving him for her boyfriend. However, as soon as she leaves, Binta is replaced by the daughter of Demigod's foreman, which is the filmmaker's way of telling us that polygamy has a thick skin, and that it will take more than a few setbacks to dislodge it. Indeed, an effort by the Ivorian National Assembly to legalize polygamy failed in 2022. But the champions of polygamy are not yet defeated.

Education Demigod's first wife tells him that if she were educated, she would leave him. Indeed, the lack of education of Demigod's first wife, and of all his wives, closes the door to social mobility for them, puts them in a situation of financial dependence, and makes them vulnerable to the conquering ambitions of men whose terms of marriage they find themselves compelled to accept. Binta is aware of this situation, and when her parents tell her that she is being given in marriage to Demigod, she begs them to wait until she finishes her studies to choose the man of her life. When her parents remain adamant on the matter, Binta tries to appeal to Demigod's good sense. But Demigod refuses to wait, even accusing her of thinking too much and insisting that women have no use for education and that a woman's value lies in her virginity. With that, Binta replies to Demigod that she would rather be educated and not a virgin than a virgin and not educated, because with education at least, she can stand on her own two feet. She tells Demigod that she is no longer a virgin, but he is too much in love with her to go back on his decision to marry her. Once in Demigod's house, Binta takes it upon herself to educate her co-wives about the freedoms they are deprived of. Binta's education of her co-wives is a challenge to Demigod's authority, a challenge to his ego as a man. Having accomplished her mission of subverting Demigod's authority and humiliating him, Binta runs off to the city with her lover. Demigod soon recovers and replaces her with another woman, as the village is still full of uneducated women at the mercy of men eager to appear important through polygamy.

Change Polygamy in Côte d'Ivoire is not an institutional problem, as it is in many African countries. Theoretically, polygamy is illegal. However, this form of matrimonial union is easily practiced under the cloak of the Muslim religion. The fact that Duparc cast his protagonists (Demigod, Binta, Binta's parents) in a Muslim community is a direct criticism of that community for its practice of polygamy. Duparc introduces Binta, a non-conformist young woman, into the Muslim community, and like the worm in the fruit, she nibbles away at the edifices of Muslim patriarchy, which are the honor of the father, the sealing off of female desire, and the serenity of the father's harem. Taking issue with her father's decision to accept Demigod's marriage proposal, Binta sends the *griotte* (a female go-between) to tell Demigod that she is the one who chooses her man, not the other way around. She asks to meet Demigod to discuss the conditions under which she will be his wife. Demigod interprets this as his eventual emasculation by Binta. This emasculation is foreshadowed by Duparc even before Demigod meets Binta when the engine of his jeep gives out on him in the middle of the bush. And when he clings to a passing truck, it is one without brakes from which he falls, distracted by the sight of Binta, the woman he later marries, and who puts his respectability to the test and destabilizes his harem. With Binta, everything changes. Subjected to an exhausting sexual schedule caused by the competition created by Binta between the dress wearers (*robeuses*) and the waistcloth wearers (*pagneuses*), Demigod confesses his powerlessness to conform to the rotation he himself has established for his wives; deceived and abandoned by Binta, Demigod bitterly realizes that his wealth cannot always subject women to his will. Of course, Demigod replaces Binta as soon as she leaves. But this is a wavering Demigod, trying to reassure himself, but who knows that things will never be the same again. Demigod, or the cultural and religious institutions he represents, has been forever demystified.

Tradition (cola nuts, pepper, ginger and sex) Most men look for ways to enhance their sexual performance, and most men do it discreetly. The Ivorians, however, are very open on the topic of sexual desire enhancement. They freely talk about it to their friends and spouses, and not only men seek sexual

performance enhancers, but women, too, seek it for themselves and for their partners. There is consequently a big market in Côte d'Ivoire for traditional libido stimulators, such as pepper, ginger, and cola nuts. In fact, hot pepper is scientifically proven to be a libido enhancer. It contains capsaicin, which releases endorphins and improves blood flow for erection. Ivorian women, by empirical experience, have been spicing their husbands' stews with strongly hot peppers to make them perform lastingly in bed. Demigod's fifth wife puts so much pepper in his stews that he can barely eat. And when he complains, she reminds him with a wink that last night's stew was missing some pepper, meaning he did not perform well. Another stimulant that is readily used in Côte d'Ivoire to enhance erotic arousal both in men and women is ginger, which, besides its anti-inflammatory and anti-hypertensive function, is particularly known to boost testosterone. Ginger is widely consumed in Côte d'Ivoire in the form of powder to spice food and most commonly in the form of juice. In the film, a suggestive conversation between a man and his ginger juice-vendor girlfriend hints at the sexual benefits of the beverage. When, with the arrival of young Binta in the Demigod household, competition between the co-wives to win their husbands' affection becomes intense, Demigod's fifth wife prepares a mixture of ginger and cola (one of the main ingredients in coca cola), which she makes him consume before going to bed. This recipe keeps Demigod so aroused that in the morning he can barely stand on his own two feet. Known for boosting stamina and increasing libido, cola nut is a natural aphrodisiac, which along with pepper and ginger, constitutes the main natural aphrodisiacs used by Ivorian men and women in this society where sex and sexual performance are open subjects.

Betrayal Demigod betrayed his wives' trust. Each time he married a woman, he made her believe she was his last. And each time, Demigod betrayed her by marrying another. So from being a monogamist, Demigod became a polygamist with six wives. Demigod's first wife shows him how he not only betrayed his wives but also his own convictions and demonstrated his selfishness. Indeed, Demigod denies his daughter's suitor the same polygamous privileges that he offers himself. Demigod maintains that his daughter should not marry a man who already has two wives. His wife reminds him that he himself boasts six wives, and asks why what is good for the goose should not be good for the gander. Demigod replies that he is rich, and that the poor should not be entitled to the privilege of polygamy. So Demigod, who once linked pleasure to the male condition, now restricts pleasure to his socio-economic class. Binta deconstructs this conception. A woman has as much a right to pleasure as any other man, and she alone has the right to decide from whom and when she wants to take that pleasure. Demigod considers it a betrayal on the part of his brand-new wife that she refuses him sex when he needs it and imposes her own conditions on him. However, Binta takes the betrayal a step further. She asks Demigod to take all six of them shopping, but this is just a subterfuge on her part to meet her boyfriend. That day, unfortunately for Binta, and fortunately for Demigod, Binta's musician boyfriend left without telling her where he was going, and she returns home, unhappy, with Demigod. At the village ball a few days later, Binta runs into her boyfriend, whose band has been invited to play. Demigod catches Binta in her boyfriend's arms, and early the next morning, Binta leaves with her boyfriend. To repair his wounded pride, Demigod immediately replaces her with his foreman's daughter, whom he has been eyeing for some time.

Power/authority *Dancing in the Dust* shows that the sources of power are as diverse as money, family position and youth. Demigod is a rich man, the richest man in the village of Adiaké, and for this reason he is convinced that, after God, he is the master of the place. His wealth gives him a certain power over men and women. He tells one of his wives that, as a financially well-off man, it is his prerogative to have as many wives as he wishes, and he does not deprive himself. He has five wives but wants a sixth, the newcomer to the village. He practically buys Binta off her parents by showering them with gifts and money. He reigns supreme in his household and calms his wives' discontent by buying them waistcloths. His money, Demigod thinks, can buy him anything he wants and enable him to impose his will on others. Unlike Demigod, Binta's parents are not wealthy and cannot buy people's respect and submission. However, as parents, they have authority over their daughter, conferred on them by the family and by the patriarchal society. Binta's father uses this patriarchal power to bend his daughter to his will and force her into a marriage that will get him out of his financial difficulties. Binta is not totally helpless, however. On the contrary, it seems that her youth gives her a power far greater than that of Demigod himself. She knows this and uses her youth to manipulate Demigod, who is totally under her control. She plays him for a fool, makes him beg for a bit of love, introduces new habits into his home. It seems here that the power of the weakest, Binta, is in fact the strongest power.

Deception/cunning *Dancing in the Dust* is a game of deceptions, Demigod's deception of his wives, Binta's deception by her parents, and Demigod's deception by Binta. Demigod wants a sixth wife for his own sexual pleasure. However, he presents his desire to his five wives as a decision he makes to make life easier for them, rather than to make it more pleasurable for himself. And paradoxically, for a decision he supposedly makes for their benefit, he rewards them with clothes, which proves his bad faith. To convince Binta's father to give him his daughter in marriage, Demigod offers to make him one of the most important men in the village, thus buying the loyalty of his future father-in-law. And old Siriki, who only decided to marry Binta to Demigod with the hidden intention of solving his own financial difficulties, presents his intention to his daughter as a good idea to ensure her a better future. Binta is not fooled and castigates her parents, calling them shameless. However, Binta has not yet said her last word. She intends to win her revenge on Demigod and his parents. And to do so, she pits her co-wives against each other in a merciless war for Demigod's attention, in the process weakening Demigod physically to the point that he, exhausted, denies himself to Binta, who wants nothing less.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What symbolism do you see in Demigod's car breaking down on the road at the beginning of the story?
2. Is this film a feminist project? Explain your answer.
3. How effective or ineffective is Binta as an advocate for women's causes? Explain your answer.
4. What does Demigod's wives fighting among themselves for his attention say about women's effort towards equality with men?
5. Countering his daughter's argument that she wants to be able to choose her husband, Binta's father tells her that "all men are the same. The only thing that makes them different is money." What do you think of this assertion?