

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

WILD GRASS / L'Herbe sauvage (1978)

Henri Duparc (1941-2006)

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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, 2006 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 worked as a producer for the Ivorian government's Société Ivoirienne de Cinéma (SIC), and when the company went defunct, Duparc created his own production company Focale 13 (later known as les Films Henri Duparc), in 1983. Duparc's work can be characterized as "cinéma naïf" in the sense that it captures and caricatures the flaws of his fellow countrymen. 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 has 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) and *Caramel* (2005).

Film *Wild Grass* starts with a disclaimer: "any resemblance to names of persons or situations that exist or have existed is involuntary and purely coincidental." This is because the situations represented and satirized in the film are so prevalent in the Ivorian upper class that many people might find themselves targeted by Duparc's criticism. Among other things, *Wild Grass* criticizes the intoxication of power, the phenomenon of mistresses also called *deuxièmes bureaux* ('second offices', an allusion to husbands who pretend to be working on important files in the office on weekends while they are in fact at their mistress' home), and the difficulty of balancing modern life with tradition. Produced by Focale 13, Henri Duparc's production company, *Wild Grass* won the Best Actress Award at the 1978 Carthage Festival (Tunisia).

Background *Wild Grass* was shot in Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire. The language spoken in the film is French, with some instances of local languages. The actors are Ivorian. Some of them were already known to Ivorian television at the time of shooting. Clémentine Tikida, for example, who plays Bintou, was a news presenter on Ivorian television. Léonard Groghuet, who plays Bintou's colleague, was known for his awareness-raising sketches on social issues on Ivorian television. The film's music is by the late Manu Dibango.

SYNOPSIS

François Kakou is a young Ivorian executive. He takes over the management of the Ivorian oil palm company in the late 70s, replacing a French expatriate. His wife is a doctor and a professor at Abidjan University's Faculty of Medicine. François and his wife are part of the new Ivorian elite. Together with their teenage daughter, Elena, they form the perfect picture of a modern, well-off family. François spends long hours at the office, travels a lot, and spends less time with his family, who complain about his absences. His daughter is sad to go to bed every night without seeing him. His wife begins to suspect him of dating one of his female colleagues, and she frequently subjects him to her interrogations. François, who at first tries to reassure his wife that her suspicions are unfounded, becomes increasingly annoyed with Bintou's questions when he actually starts dating his secretary, Miss Kouadio. Soon, François makes no secret of his relationship with Miss Kouadio and even leaves the family home to live with her. Miss Kouadio insists that François divorce, marry her and give her a child. François refuses and their relationship breaks down. Meanwhile, Bintou, François' wife, who had been rejecting the advances of one of her colleagues, finally

gives in and accepts a date with him to a nightclub. François sees his wife at the club with her colleague. He leaves the bar in a jealous rage, and Bintou goes after him, asking him to return home. As François and Bintou make their way to Bintou's car, Miss Kouadio emerges, a gun in her hand, threatening the couple. Bintou calmly persuades Miss Kouadio to lower her weapon, which she takes from her hands. Bintou advises Miss Kouadio to go home, for the streets are not safe. Bintou and François return home, leaving Miss Kouadio sobbing in the street.

CHARACTERS

BINTOU A doctor and professor at the Abidjan University medical school
FRANÇOIS A young executive and the husband of Bintou, who cheats on his wife with his secretary
MISS KOUADIO François' secretary and mistress, who insists that he divorce and marry her

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

BINTOU

Bintou is an intelligent woman, trained in modern medical techniques, which she also teaches at the university. Bintou remains, however, a superstitious woman who turns to charlatanism when her marriage is going through difficult times. She is also a woman of blind jealousy, which leads her to physical violence.

Intelligent Bintou is one of Côte d'Ivoire's new post-independence professionals. She is a distinguished doctor and professor of medicine. Her intellectual faculties are undeniable and her skills proven. She diagnoses her patients correctly and prescribes effective treatments. She spearheads an elite group of women ready to fill the gap left by European expatriates.

Jealous Bintou is also a jealous woman. She questions François about the women who work with him and is particularly keen to know who is the woman who answers his phone calls. When François goes on a business trip, she asks him about the female colleagues who will accompany him. Her constant questioning has finally irritated François, who begins a romantic relationship with Miss Kouadio, his secretary. When Bintou sees François and Miss Kouadio coming out of a hotel, she attacks Miss Kouadio. Later, Bintou has a man assault Miss Kouadio in the street.

Superstitious Bintou is a superstitious woman. Despite her training in the modern sciences, she remains attached to ancestral beliefs in mystical practices. One would not expect a doctor to turn to a witch doctor to solve her problems. But this is what happens with Bintou when she feels her husband is slipping away from her. She goes to an oracle to help her win him back.

FRANÇOIS

François is an ambiguous character. A hard-working young executive, he listens to his employees and is very sensitive to their needs. However, his orderly professional life hides a troubled family life. He is authoritarian with his wife and defensive when she needs reassurance about their relationship.

Ambitious François is an ambitious, hard-working young executive. As soon as he takes over from Mr. Derose, he sets out his major projects, including the expansion of Côte d'Ivoire's oil palm park by an additional 60,000 hectares. He travels the countryside by car and helicopter to raise farmers' awareness of the need to increase production. He works long hours in his office with his collaborators to ensure that the program he has set up is being followed.

Authoritarian François' new position gives him a certain intoxication with power. François cheats on his wife, Bintou, with his secretary. Bintou suspects him of cheating and questions him about his frequent travels, late returns and absences from family dinners. François gets angry because he believes that she has no right to ask him questions about his activities.

Empathetic François is a boss who is sympathetic and empathetic towards his employees. He cares about their well-being. When he keeps his employees in the office at odd hours, he invites them to eat out together. When one of his employees has an accident at the plant, François cancels his anniversary dinner to go and see what happened. When the employee dies, François and his colleague, Karine, go to the funeral to express their sympathy to the family.

MISS KOUADIO

Miss Kouadio is a determined and extremely jealous woman. She wants François. She maneuvers to get him. Then she convinces him to spend more time with her than with his wife, Bintou. Suspecting that François' chauffeur is more loyal to Bintou than to herself, she convinces François to fire him. However, her increasingly insistent demands lead François to break his relation with her and fire her.

Determined Miss Kouadio confesses to François that she fell in love with him the day she saw him for the first time. She tells him that she has always wanted to be in his arms, and that she is happy to be there now. Indeed, Miss Kouadio has worked at it with patience and persistence, being attentive and docile towards François. Once in François' arms, she insists that he divorce Bintou and marry her. This last demand is more than François can accept, and their relationship falls apart.

Jealous Miss Kouadio is so consumed with jealousy at seeing François feel any degree of love for his wife that she has nightmares. When she wakes up, she tells François that she dreamt Bintou was executing them with a gun. But this is only projection, for in fact, it is Miss Kouadio who, in her rage over losing François, comes to him with a pistol in her hand, determined to do him harm.

THEMES

Nationalization In 1978, eighteen years after his country's independence, François Kakou is promoted to director of the Ivory Coast Palm Oil Company, replacing Frenchman Mr. Derosé. François took over the reins of this government-owned company in the context of a program dear to President Félix Houphouët Boigny, known as "Ivoirisation des cadres", that is, the replacement of expatriate executives by young Ivorian executives. This program was all the more important for the father of the Ivorian nation, as he had a ministry dedicated to it in the constitution of his 1978 government, the Ministry of Labor and Nationalization of Executives. François Kakou's vigor, competence and passion are the showcase of this Nationalization program. François is proof that young Ivorians can take over from skilled foreign elites and steer their country's economy. François has great ambitions for Côte d'Ivoire. As soon as he takes office, he proposes to transform 60,000 hectares of pristine forest into palm oil plantations. With his staff, he multiplies consultations with farmers in rural areas. He works until late at the office. He visits plantations and processing plants. He supports the families of his employees. He can be seen, for instance, rushing to the site of a factory accident and commiserating with the grieving family of an employee crushed to death by a machine in the factory. Like her husband, François, Bintou is a success story. She is a doctor and professor of medicine at the University of Abidjan, where she lectures to students. Bintou is a competent doctor who shows compassion for her patients. She, too, works long hours, beyond what is expected of her. Bintou and François are young Ivorian elites who strive for progress. Bintou and François symbolize the successful bet of a Côte d'Ivoire that knows how to rely on its young, endogenous skilled elites to advance on the world stage.

Family François and Bintou are the poster boy and the poster girl for the successful program of ivoirization of executives. However, the long hours they devote to their professional careers have a negative impact on their family life. This can be seen at the beginning of the film, when François and Bintou, attending the handover ceremony from Monsieur Derosé to François, leave their teenage daughter at home alone, where she keeps herself busy with baking. By the time her parents get home, their daughter is off to bed, and they only have time to kiss her good night. Long hours at work cause François to miss precious family moments. He misses the intimate meals his wife prepares for him, and he misses his daughter's birthday. Bintou begins to wrongly suspect him of having an affair with his European colleague. Instead, his long hours together and business trips bring him closer to his new secretary, Miss Kouadio. François starts having an affair with Miss Kouadio and neglects his wife, Bintou. A male colleague of Bintou's, who notices

that she is more often at her office than at home, understands that her married life is not going well and starts propositioning her. Bintou, dismissive of him at first, accepts his offer of a date when François no longer hides his relationship with Miss Kouadio and starts sleeping out more frequently. However, François and Miss Kouadio's relationship deteriorates when he hesitates to divorce Bintou and marry her, and tells her that he cannot give her the child she wants. François spots Bintou in a nightclub with her colleague. He leaves in a jealous rage. Bintou pursues him, and on his way home, they are accosted by Miss Kouadio pointing a gun at François. Bintou bravely walks up to Miss Kouadio, calmly takes the gun from her and asks her to go home. Bintou saves her family from sinking with this act of bravery. Duparc seems to be telling us that the modern family will navigate the reefs that can only be avoided by the extraordinary commitment of women. The woman will remain the anchor, saving the family from perishing in the winds of modernism.

Continuity/rupture Will the nationalization of executives ensure continuity or will it be a break with the past? From the point of view of economic development, as Bintou and François clearly demonstrate, Côte d'Ivoire will continue its ascent towards progress. This is not to say that this ascent will be without difficulties. Whatever their skills, women will not necessarily find an environment conducive to their professional development. A doctor by trade, Bintou is continually harassed by one of her colleagues, who makes sexual advances to her through disparaging remarks, which Bintou dismisses without too much fuss. Likewise, as soon as she is hired by François' company, Miss Kouadio is the target of sexual advances from the human resources manager, who tells her in no uncertain terms that the only way for her to move up in the company is to sleep with him. Unlike Bintou, who takes her colleague's advances in stride, Miss Kouadio rebuffs her stalker and reports him to François. And if François reprimands the human resources manager, it is rather because he, too, has his eyes on Miss Kouadio. He pursues her and makes her his mistress. This intoxication with power, which leads the administrative superior to believe that his high position in the organization entitles him to female trophies, is something François inherited from his predecessor, Monsieur Derose. On each of his trips, Monsieur Derose would stay in hotels, where the company chauffeur would deliver girls for his pleasure. François refuses to engage in this ritual when a girl, unwittingly brought into his hotel room by his chauffeur, is waiting for him. However, is it really a break with the system introduced by his predecessor when François combines sexual pleasure with work by being accompanied on all his trips by Miss Kouadio? Côte d'Ivoire's new executives have learned from their expatriate predecessors how to keep development on course. But they have also learned from them the flaws of the system, which they repeat to perfection.

Economy: Agriculture and the environment 60,000 hectares of rainforest: this is what François Kakou intends to remove as soon as he takes charge of the oil palm company in order to make way for palm plantations. And this is without counting the tens of thousands of hectares of forest that disappeared in previous years to be replaced by oil palm plantations. The figure is staggering and frightening at the same time, considering what we know today about the ecological disasters caused by this large-scale deforestation. Studies estimate that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, 3% of Côte d'Ivoire's forests disappeared each year to make way for palm oil. Côte d'Ivoire, which, as can be seen from François' enthusiasm, is banking on oil palm to accompany coffee, cocoa and rubber as the flagship agricultural products of its economic growth, is heading for ecological disaster. If the danger was not perceptible at the time of this film, it is now. Today, oil palm is in the cross-hairs as one of the main causes of the loss of vegetation cover in Africa and Asia, and consequently, one of the main causes of global warming. This new ecological reality has caused European industrialists to back down, becoming sensitive to what is now known as "imported deforestation". Clearly, in *Wild Grass*, Duparc, in the role assigned to African filmmakers by the FEPACI, is promoting the Ivorian government's agricultural development program. One wonders what Duparc's position would be on this large-scale deforestation today, at a time when world cinema is increasingly focusing on raising mass awareness about climate change.

Modernism and tradition *Wild Grass* is also the dilemma of an Africa trying to position itself in the modern world, but with one foot firmly planted in tradition. François is the CEO of a large state-owned company. His wife, Bintou, is a doctor and professor at the University of Abidjan's medical school. The couple have one daughter and live in a large villa in one of the capital's most sought-after districts. François' and Bintou's professional and economic success places them firmly in the modern world. However, this is only superficial, as in reality they still carry many of the habits inherent to patriarchal African society. François' frequent absences make his wife anxious, and she pesters him with questions about the nature

of his relationships with his female colleagues, his late arrivals and his repeated travels. Where a calm, reassuring explanation would restore Bintou's confidence, François, instead, loses his temper, feeling that he owes his wife no more explanation than he is willing to give. François' attitude stems from his belief that his status as a man gives him unquestionable prerogatives. And it is this same conviction that leads François' company human resources manager and Bintou's doctor colleague to make sexual advances to Miss Kouadio and Bintou, respectively, in the workplace. Faced with François' defensive behavior, Bintou is convinced that her husband is cheating on her; and she is right, because François is dating his secretary, and over time, makes no secret of it. To "get" her husband back, Bintou, a respectable medical professor, turns to a witch doctor, who prescribes her mystical sacrifices. So, despite the fact that their well-shaped heads, in the likeness of Western intellectuals, float in the clouds of modernism, Ivorian executives all too often have their feet firmly planted in obscurantism.

Extramarital Relationships The 1970s and 1980s saw the development of a tradition in Côte d'Ivoire known as the "grotos" phenomenon. A *grotto* was a well-to-do man who maintained one or more mistresses (called in the Ivorian jargon "second offices"), often much younger than himself. The term *grotto*, derived from the word *gros* (fat), referred to the fact that the man was obese, suggesting that he was well-fed, therefore financially well-off, and able to support a mistress. François lacks the stoutness of the typical *grotto*, but he has the money, and consequently buys himself a mistress, in the person of Miss Kouadio. Miss Kouadio is young, attractive and sexually uninhibited, unlike Bintou, who comes home from work exhausted and unwilling to accommodate her husband's exceptionally boiling sexual desire. With Miss Kouadio, François finds satisfaction for his sexual desires, while at the same time enjoying showing her off as proof of his social success. The life of the *grotto* is not without its setbacks, however. Mistresses can be so demanding that they destroy the *grotto's* home. Such is the case with Miss Kouadio, who insists that François divorce his wife Bintou and give her a child. François, who intended to have a few moments of pleasure with Miss Kouadio while preserving his family life, finds himself caught up in a whirlwind of lies, jealousy, threats and violence. Things do not turn out as he would have wished. Here, Duparc satirizes the *grotto* tradition, dwelling on the destructive potential of men's power intoxication, which leads them to seek female conquests outside marriage.

Gender *Wild Grass* features various faces of Ivorian women. The film introduces us to Bintou, an intellectual woman with sought-after skills. Bintou is a doctor and a professor at the university medical school. She lives an affluent family life. Then there is Marie, Bintou's friend. A woman entrepreneur, she works as a self-employed textile dyer. Then there is Miss Kouadio, François' secretary. All these women are consumed by a pernicious disease: the feeling of not being loved the way they want to be, and of not holding the reins of their lives in their own hands. Marie comes to see Bintou, convinced that her husband, who comes home exhausted every night and no longer makes love to her, has a mistress. She asks Bintou to find her a remedy to kill her husband's libido, so that he will no longer be sexually attracted to his mistress. If her husband no longer wants her, she thinks, she might as well kill all sexual desire in him so that no one else can enjoy it. Bintou gives Marie some powdered bromide, which she advises her to mix in very small quantities with her husband's whiskey. Then Bintou goes to see Marie to help her find a solution to the infidelity of her husband, François. Marie recommends Bintou to a witch doctor, whose mystical methods are intended to bring Bintou her husband back. Miss Kouadio, François' secretary and mistress, also feels insecure. Although François has left his family home and is spending more and more time with Miss Kouadio, she demands marriage and a child as proof of his love, which François refuses to give her. Their romance ends in disaster, and in revenge for François' returning to his wife, Miss Kouadio points a threatening handgun at François, which Bintou snatches from her in an act of courage. Apart from the hotel prostitute, who could care less with whom she sleeps, as long as she gets paid, all the other women are under the emotional control of a man, a control that often leads them to irrational and desperate acts.

Feminism It might be hard to detect a feminist bent in the women of *Wild Grass*, given the picture of jealous, predatory, manipulative women that Duparc paints of them. The Miss Kouadio who steals Bintou's husband, drives him from the family home and chases him with a pistol in her hand when he leaves her, is far from being a paragon of virtue. Likewise, the Marie who looks for remedies to kill her unfaithful husband's libido, and the Bintou who attacks her husband's mistress and pays thugs to beat her in the street, are far from being positive representations of women. Beyond these human imperfections, it is possible to see feminist impulses in these characters. Bintou is an aspiration for the new Ivorian woman. She is an intellectual with sought-after skills, who combines empathy with her profession. She is also, as we see in

the hospital, where she admonishes the indelicate parents of her patients, a woman who knows how to assert herself when the need arises. At the same time, she balances her professional life with her family life, remaining a caring mother and wife, struggling to save her marriage. In this respect, Bintou conforms perfectly to the womanist ideal, the kind of African feminism that so many African and African-American authors seek to promote. Although not as educated as Bintou, Miss Kouadio is also a driven woman who knows what she wants and fights to achieve it. Thanks to her determination and aptitude, she obtains a position as executive secretary to François Kakou. She does not yield when the director of human resources harasses her. She rebuffs him. At the end of the film, Bintou saves her marriage and, in a moment of empathy towards Miss Kouadio, asks her to go home, as the streets are dangerous at night; an empathy that suggests a certain solidarity between women in a male-dominated world.

Sexuality *Wild Grass* deals with one of the recurring themes in Henri Duparc's films: sexuality. This subject, considered taboo in many African countries, is remarkably openly discussed in Côte d'Ivoire. Men and women talk about sex, look for ways to satisfy or inhibit it, without any hesitation. While Bintou returns home every evening, tired and not in the mood for making love, which frustrates her husband, Bintou's friend, Marie, complains that her husband refuses to have sex with her. She sees her husband's disinterest in sex with her as an indication that he is cheating on her. Marie therefore looks for a remedy to inhibit her husband's libido and prevent him from cheating on her. François has an overactive sexual appetite, and Bintou, his wife, thinks that this is due to his promotion, which is certainly going to his head. Bintou tells François that she was prepared to turn a blind eye to his escapades, dismissing them as passing whims, until she noticed that François was slipping out of her grasp. If François is starting to escape his wife, it is because his secretary, Miss Kouadio, is as sexually active as he is. Miss Kouadio, as François likes to joke, is an "insatiable" woman who does not cut any corners, and always wants more sex. With her, François finds his sexual urges satisfied, and he gradually moves away from his family home to live with her. However, François, and certainly Marie's husband, considers that if his conjugal life lacks sex, he can seek it elsewhere, without committing himself totally to that elsewhere. François likes having sex with Miss Kouadio, but he is not disposed to leave his wife for her. So, François turns down the offer of marriage from Miss Kouadio, only to return to his wife when Miss Kouadio becomes increasingly demanding. Mr. Derosé has never known François' marital problems. For him, the formula is very simple: pay some prostitutes to satisfy his libido. And as the prostitute who was often serviced him shows, sex for her is a professional occupation that knows how to compartmentalize emotion and reason. She has no attachment to anything other than the money she receives from it. She wants to be neither a wife, and therefore vulnerable to deception, like Bintou and Marie, nor an abandoned mistress, like Miss Kouadio. Likewise, her clients, unlike François, are certain that their sexual escapades will not cost them any emotional discomfort.

Jealousy The women as well as the men in *Wild Grass* are prone to jealousy. François Kakou goes into a jealous rage when he sees his wife, Bintou, in a nightclub with one of her colleagues. However, if Bintou has put François in this state, it is because he brought it on himself. Bintou only agreed to go out with her colleague after her husband had humiliated her with his extramarital relationship with his secretary, Miss Kouadio. Wounded by François' lack of discretion with Miss Kouadio and the negligence to which he had subjected her, Bintou fell into a gradually dangerous jealousy. First, she begged François to be more pleasant. Then she consulted a mystic to help her win François back. When this failed to produce the desired results, and on the contrary, François eluded her more and more, Bintou turned on Miss Kouadio, first physically attacking her, then having her beaten by individuals hired for the task. As for Miss Kouadio, she is no less consumed by jealousy. Tormented by nightmares, Miss Kouadio becomes convinced that Bintou is out to get her, so she buys herself a gun. When she attempts to hold François back and make him her husband fail, and when François decides to return to his wife, Miss Kouadio decides to take revenge by killing Bintou. She accosts Bintou, who has just convinced François to return home, and threatens her with her gun. However, Miss Kouadio lacks the courage to follow through with her threats, and allows herself to be disarmed by Bintou. Jealousy is an imperfection that does not discriminate on the basis of gender or class. François, the all-powerful CEO of the Ivorian Oil Palm Company, his wife Bintou, the intellectual revered by her patients as well as her students, Miss Kouadio, the secretary of François, Marie, the dyer—all of them are prey to jealousy, which has no regard for their social status.

SCENES

A Modern couple Bintou is a professor at the medical school of the University of Abidjan. She gives a lecture in an amphitheater on the topic of clitoridectomy. The next day, Bintou stands proudly beside her husband, François Kakou, who is being promoted to CEO of the *Société Ivoirienne de Palmiers à Huile*, in replacement of Jacques Derose, a European. Their daughter is watching the ceremony on television at home.



Not in the mood The couple gets home late, spend some time with their daughter, and put her to bed. François is in the mood for sex, but his wife tells him that she is exhausted. François is not happy. He reminisces when his wife and he started dating and how much they were attracted to each other.



You have changed François tells his wife that she changed. She wants to know if she changed for the better or the worse. He evades her question. She insists. He still gives her no answer.

Killing a cheater's libido Bintou's friend, Marie, has come to see her at the hospital. Marie tells Bintou that she believes her husband is having an affair. She tells Bintou that her husband is always tired when he gets home after work. She asks Bintou if she has some medicine to kill her husband's libido so that he will stop cheating on her. Bintou gives her some powdered bromide and advises her to put just a pinch of it in her husband's whiskey bottle.



François' ambitions François plans to replace 60,000 hectares of rain forest with plantations of oil palms. François and his collaborators visit palm oil transformation plants, palm plantations and talk to farmers about the future of palm oil and how they can contribute to growing oil palm productions.



Who is that woman? François' daughter complains that she does not get to see her father often, and that he works too much. Bintou and her husband are at a restaurant. Bintou asks François who is the woman that often answers his phone. He tells her that she is one of his colleagues. She notes that they seem to be working often together. He replies that it is not different from the way she works together with her male colleagues.



A difficult patient Bintou speaks to her patients in their local languages to explain their treatments and to reassure them. She cannot understand why the drugs are not working effectively on one of her patients, in particular, and orders that no food other than the hospital food is to be given to the patient. But as soon as Bintou leaves the patient's room, the patient's mother gives him a drink of alcohol brought from the village.



François misses his anniversary dinner François is supposed to dine with his wife on the occasion of their 10th marriage anniversary. However, an accident at the plant requires his presence. His driver finally drops him home late at night before driving his colleague, Karine to her home. Through the window, Bintou sees Karine in the car.

Bintou asks about Karine François apologizes to Bintou for missing their anniversary dinner. He tells her about the accident at the plant, and how he will never get used to seeing a dead body. She asks him about Karine. He reassures her that she is just a colleague.

Showing empathy François and his colleagues go say their condolences to the family of the employee who died in an accident at the plant.



François hires Miss Kouadio François hires a new executive assistant in replacement of Karine, whom he has promoted. The human resources manager harasses the newcomer. He tells her that the quickest way for her to get ahead in the company is to become his mistress.



Business dinner Bintou goes to her husband's office to invite him for dinner at a restaurant. François tells his wife that he will be dining with some American investors. She understands but is disappointed. François's new secretary is part of the dining party. Left alone at home, Bintou is bored.



Bintou spots François and Miss Kouadio Bintou decides to go see a movie. The film has started a while ago, and she does not want to go in the middle, so she drives to the restaurant where her husband is meeting the American investors. She sees him in the company of his new secretary. François does not see Bintou.



François lies During breakfast, Bintou asks François how his evening with the investors went. He tells her that it went well. She asks if they were many people. He replies that there were just three people, the two Americans and him. She says nothing. He tells her that in a few days, he will be going on a business trip.



Bintou suspects Miss Kouadio Bintou visits François at his office. François introduces Bintou to his closest colleagues. Bintou recognizes Miss Kouadio, whom she saw at the restaurant with her husband and the American investors. Later, Bintou anonymously calls François's office asking to speak to Miss Kouadio. She is told that Miss Kouadio is on a business trip with her boss, François.

François is having an affair François is having an affair with his executive assistant, Miss Kouadio. Bintou calls François at his hotel's bar and asks him if he is alone. He says yes. She tells him that he is lying, and that he is there with a woman. He tells her to stop being jealous each time she sees him with or hear that he is with a female colleague. He hangs up. Bintou calls again, and the barmaid tells him that it is his wife calling again. François tells the barmaid, loud enough for Bintou to hear, that he is not there.



A prostitute for François Unbeknownst to him, a woman is delivered to François's hotel room by his company's chauffeur, just as Miss Kouadio leaves him. François learns from the woman that it is a company policy that was established by his predecessor. The company's chauffeur would deliver her to Mr. Derose's room each time he stayed at this hotel.



I am not Derose François tells the woman to get dressed and leave. He tells her that he is not Derose. Just as she is getting dressed, Miss Kouadio returns and knocks on François' door. He opens. Miss Kouadio sees the woman and wants to leave. François restrains Miss Kouadio and tries to explain what is going on.

Bintou sees an oracle Bintou confides in her friend, Marie, that her husband has been lying to her and slowly slipping away from her. Marie advises Bintou to see the local oracle, Yaou, for some charm to recapture her husband.



The quarrel François has returned home from his business trip. His wife sets up a candlelight dinner for them. He is in a somber mood. She apologizes for pestering him at his hotel during his business trip. He tells her that he is getting used to her constant bickering. She replies that he knows as well as she that he has enjoyed the sensual and expert ways of Miss Kouadio. He tells her to control herself. They quarrel. François decides to step outside “for some fresh air.” She sobs.

François returns to Miss Kouadio François goes to his office. He sees Miss Kouadio working there late. He tells her that the work can wait. François takes Miss Kouadio to a hotel. They make love. She tells him that she fell in love with him the first time she saw him, and that it is a dream come true for her to be with him.



François hurts Bintou François comes home very late. Bintou asks for some explanation. She wants to know if he has another woman in his life. He tells her that he is tired and only wishes to go to bed. She asks him if she is such a horrible woman that he has to flee from the house each time he sees her. He replies that he has to get out because she nags all the time and stifles him. He tells her that he did not marry a wife but rather surrendered his freedom. Bintou leaves the bedroom sobbing.

Bintou drills François' chauffeur Miss Kouadio convinces François to get rid of his chauffeur. She tells him that his reputation is at stake, for his chauffeur might be feeding rumors about his infidelities. François obliges. Bintou summons François' disgruntled chauffeur and solicits some information from him. He tells her about his former boss's affairs.



Bintou assaults Miss Kouadio Bintou keeps watch outside the hotel where François and Miss Kouadio usually meet. She sees them coming out after a few hours, and she hides in François' car. Just as Miss Kouadio is about to open the car door, Bintou pounces on her, beating and scratching her. Miss Kouadio manages to fight her way out of Bintou's grasp, and runs off crying. François runs after Miss Kouadio.



Miss Kouadio's nightmares Miss Kouadio has nightmares of Bintou coming after François and her with a gun and killing them. In Miss Kouadio's nightmare, Bintou parks her car in front of François' office building. Bintou checks to make sure that her gun is in her purse. She walks briskly but calmly into the building, takes the elevator upstairs, and enters the office. She pulls out her gun, points it to Miss Kouadio working at her desk and pulls the trigger. Then, she walks into François' office and shoots him, too. Then, Bintou puts the gun back into her purse and walks calmly back to her car.



Miss Kouadio is roughed up Miss Kouadio is assaulted by an unknown man, who gives her a stern warning as he lets her go after roughing her up. He tells her that next time, she will be raped. As Miss Kouadio runs from the scene, François's former chauffeur comes to shake the man's hand and congratulate him.



Miss Kouadio suspects Bintou Miss Kouadio tells François that she is convinced that Bintou is no stranger to her assaults. François says she has the wrong idea and that Bintou has nothing to do with it. Miss Kouadio informs François that she will buy herself a gun for her protection.

Bintou kicks François out of their home After a couple of days at Miss Kouadio's, François returns home. His daughter is upset because he forgot her birthday the day before. Bintou asks him to collect his things and leave the house. Bintou cuts her wedding band in pieces and sends them to François.



Miss Kouadio pressures François Miss Kouadio tells François that she wants to be his wife and have a child of him. François tells her that it is impossible for him to have a child. She tells him to divorce and marry her or she will leave him.



Bintou goes on a date François fires Miss Kouadio and asks his former assistant, Karine, to return to work with him. Bintou finally agrees to go out with a colleague of hers who has been pursuing her for a long time. François sees them dancing together. He gets angry and leaves the bar. Bintou sees him. She excuses herself to her date and goes after him.



Miss Kouadio points a gun at François Bintou hails François. He comes to her. She hands him her car keys and asks him to drive them home. He smiles and takes the keys. Miss Kouadio appears with a gun in her hand, threatening them. Bintou walks to her. Miss Kouadio warns Bintou to stop. Bintou keeps moving towards Miss Kouadio until she grabs the gun and gently takes it from Miss Kouadio.



François goes home with his wife Bintou tells Miss Kouadio to go home because it is late and not safe. Bintou calls over François, who follows her without saying a word to Miss Kouadio. Miss Kouadio gets into her car and drives away as François and Bintou, too, drive away.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is Bintou's behavior in the film consistent with her social status and intellectual background? Explain your answer.
2. What do you think is the real reason why Miss Kouadio insists that François get rid of his chauffeur?
3. Was it fair of François to fire Miss Kouadio? Explain your answer.
4. Why did Miss Kouadio wait until she was in François' arms to report the harassment, she was suffering at the hands of the human resources manager?
5. What lesson does the filmmaker want the viewer to take away from the last scene in which François returns home with his wife?