

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## Rue Princesse (1994)

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, 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** In his trademark style of humor and derision, Henri Duparc draws his audience's attention to serious social issues. *Rue Princesse* deals with social inequality and its consequences, such as poverty, prostitution and vulnerability to the pathology of AIDS, which at the time of filming, in the 1990s, was a global scourge and a killer of African youth. *Rue Princesse* also celebrates the determination and resilience of women who, in the difficult economic context of structural adjustment imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on African countries at that time, find the means to beat the dice that are loaded against them. *Rue Princesse* was awarded the Grand Prix at the 1996 Bari International Film Festival, in Italy.

**Background** *Rue Princesse* is an 88-minute Ivorian comedic drama. The film was produced by Focale 13, Henri Duparc's production company, with support from the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*. Some of the actors in the film are Ivorian theater professionals. Others have established international reputations. For example, Félicité Wouassi (Josey) is a French-Cameroonian actress known for her radio productions for RFI (Radio France Inter). Gérard Essomba, who plays Emile, is a Cameroonian actor, director and producer well known on the French stage. The language of the film is French. The film's original soundtrack is by Issouf Kanté.

### CHARACTERS

**Josey** A prostitute, who falls in love with Jean and who follows her dream of becoming a singer  
**Jean** The son of a rich businessman, who would rather become a musician  
**Emile** A rich Ivorian businessman, who wants his son, Jean, to take over his business

### SYNOPSIS

Jean is the son of a wealthy Ivory Coast timber industrialist, Emile. Jean's father has a promising future in mind for his son, who is to succeed him at the head of his company and marry the beautiful Aki, a girl from a wealthy local family. However, Jean's only dream is to become a musician. Besides, Aki's bourgeois attitude is not to his liking. On the other hand, Rokia, his mother's friend, leaves him in awe. Rokia and her husband, Fodé, want a child and, because Fodé is infertile, they intend to carry out an in vitro fertilization

operation using sperm from an anonymous donor. However, Rokia, who has a crush on Jean, wants to kill two birds with one stone: have the child with Jean. She tells her husband, who finds the idea diabolical, but accepts it. Rokia's attempts to seduce Jean fail, and one evening as they pass through Abidjan's red district called "rue princesse", Rokia gets angry and orders Jean to get out of her car. She leaves him standing in front of a prostitute to whom she hands a banknote and asks to initiate this novice in sex. Then she starts her car and drives off. At rue princesse, Jean meets Josey, an impetuous prostitute with a perennial smile. Jean falls in love with Josey and makes friends with all the sex workers on rue princesse. Jean learns from Josey that rue princesse is a hangout for Abidjan's high society, including Jean's father. Although careful not to question Josey's profession, Jean encourages her to develop the singing talent he sees in her, by joining the musical group of his theater company. Gradually, Josey moves away from her profession on rue princesse and devotes herself to her new passion as an artist. When Jean's father realizes that his son is in love with a prostitute he used to visit, and that Jean even intends to marry her, the father explodes into a rage, threatens Josey and goes so far as to have her arrested by the police. But this is without counting on the determination and solidarity of the girls on rue princesse, who arrive at the police station demanding that their friend be released immediately, threatening to go on strike and reveal the names of all their influential clients on television. The police chief, who does not want a scandal, frees Josey. Jean and Josey get married in a blaze of cheers and applause. Their union is sealed by the town's mayor, himself a regular client in rue princesse.

## SCENES

**An exemplary father** Jean plays the *kora* (a string instrument) in a theater troupe rehearsing in a playhouse in Abidjan's red district called rue princesse. Jean's father, Emile, comes out of a brothel just as Jean's car passes, and he hides from his son. After the brothel, Emile joins his wife and children at the dinner table. Emile arrives at the sawmill and sees Jean busy playing his *kora*. The father snatches the instrument from his son and throws it into the sawmill furnace. Then he tells Jean that he does not want a musician in his family. Jean retorts that he will no longer live at the family home.



**Aki: A girl from a good family** Jean plays the *kora* at a fashion show where his mother, Fanta, is presenting her collection of dresses. Fanta is there with her friend, Rokia. Jean's fiancée, Aki, is one of the models in the fashion show. Fanta tells Rokia that Jean's father would like him to marry Aki, a girl from a good family. After the event, Fanta asks Rokia to drop Jean off at home, which Rokia readily accepts. Emile, his friend Fodé, Rokia, Fodé's wife, Jean and Aki, picnic on the beach. Rokia lectures Aki on the necessity for her to not settle too quickly with Jean. Rokia tells Aki to enjoy her youth, to take time to explore several options, meet and make love to several men discreetly, before choosing who she really wants to marry. Rokia confesses to Emile that she would like to sleep with his son, Jean. Emile laughs it off as a crazy idea. Aki finds Jean does not project manliness, and she sets her sights on Fodé, telling him that her relationship with Jean is just a family arrangement, and that she is waiting for someone better to woo her. Fodé immediately seizes the occasion and asks her to meet him during lunchtime tomorrow in his office.



**Rokia loves Jean** They were never able to have because of his infertility. She tells him that his idea of an anonymous sperm donor is repugnant to her, as she will never know from whom the foreign sperm she will be inseminated will come. Instead, she suggests that Jean give her a child naturally. Fodé finds the idea diabolical, but he likes it. Instead of dropping Jean off at home, Rokia takes him for a ride into town. On the way, Rokia reveals her love to Jean. He tells her that she is his mother's friend, and that he will never be able to see her naked. Rokia gets exasperated, parks her car on rue princesse, the street of popular bars and prostitutes, and asks Jean to get out of the car. Rokia hands a prostitute a banknote and tells her, pointing to Jean, that she's bringing him a client to deflower. Then she gets into her car and drives off with a screech of tires, leaving Jean standing in front of the prostitute.



**Rokia sees a witchdoctor** Rokia approaches a witchdoctor to find a mystical solution for her to have a child with Jean. Rokia tells him she would like to have a child by a man named Jean. All the clues the charlatan says he has about Jean's size and complexion are false. Despite the charlatan's lies, Rokia agrees to do whatever he suggests. The charlatan asks Rokia to take a purifying bath in his bathroom and then lie down naked on his sacred mat. While Rokia does this, the man masturbates while watching a pornographic film. Rokia takes her bath and lies down on the mat. He hypnotizes Rokia, puts her to sleep and rapes her.



**Jean meets Josey** The prostitute, who already has a client lined up, calls on her colleague, Josey, to take over Jean's sex education. Josey convinces the reluctant Jean to follow her to her studio. Josey finds Jean tall and handsome. She asks him what he does for a living. He replies that he is a musician. She asks him if he has any money on him and wants to give him back the money that she received from Rokia. He refuses. Josey offers Jean some donuts. They eat and chat. Jean wants to know how Josey's customers treat her. She tells him that she can defend herself, and she also has her whistle in case she needs help from her friends. Josey and Jean seem to like each other and promise to meet again. Jean visits Josey at rue princesse. She decides to close up shop for the day to spend some time with him. She shows him her entire condom collection and jokes that she gets them from every country in the world, in every color and size. She offers him a few and advises him never to make love without them, but he rejects them on the grounds that he is not yet ready for sex.



**Josey deposits her savings** Josey arrives at Fodé's office, at the bank that he manages, just as Aki is coming out of it. Josey wants to deposit her life savings. She wants more than the usual 5% interest return for her money. Fodé tells her this will not be possible. However, she starts undressing on Fodé's desk and manages to get him to promise a higher rate.



**Josey and Jean** Josey wants to accompany Jean to his first theater rehearsal. He is delighted. Josey dresses up for the occasion. Josey's friends tease her that she is getting more and more beautiful for Jean and working less and less. Josey asks one of her colleagues to look after her customers in her absence. And Josey insists that she make them wear condoms. Josey sees Jean on stage for the first time. She is impressed by his performance. At the end of the rehearsal, she tells him how handsome he looks on stage. She tells him that hearing him play makes her shiver with pleasure. Josey tells Jean that when her father died, she had to go and live with her uncle. He pimped her out to his friends. So, she left her uncle's house and decided to set up her own business and be 'CEO of her own body'.



**Rue princesse** Josey reveals some of the secrets of rue princesse to Jean. Rue princesse is a hub where all classes of Ivorian society rub shoulders. A young market trader by day who turns into a hustler by night. The town's mayor, sitting at a table with a respectable-looking woman who is, in fact, a prostitute.

**Weekend at the beach** The weekend is the busiest time of the week on rue princesse. However, Josey accepts Jean's invitation to spend some time at the beach. She closes her door, to the surprise of her colleagues. Josey has singing talents. Josey sings and dances to the sound of Jean's *kora*. But she feels a little sad and tells him that she fears this beautiful moment, like all beautiful moments, may not last long enough. Jean is impressed by Josey's voice. He advises her to take singing lessons at the conservatory. That evening, Josey invites Jean into her bed. The two young people spend the night in each other's arms.



**Jean will invite Josey** Josey passes her audition and is accepted into Jean's theater group. She declares her love for him. Jean introduces Josey to his mother, who greets Josey with disdain. Josey tells Jean that her mother is "well calibrated" (beautiful), a language and casualness that shock Jean's mother. Jean's parents are organizing a reception. His mother asks Jean to be there, as it will be an opportunity to meet important people who will open doors for him. Jean asks if he can invite Josey. His mother tells him that Josey is not the kind of girl to associate with their world. Jean's mother wants to know where Aki is. Jean tells her that Aki is not the girl for him. Jean invites all of Josey's friends to the reception at his parents'. Jean's friends from rue princesse are a rowdy crowd. They are noticed by all the guests for their lack of decorum.

**Emile expels Josey from his home** Emile, who often goes to rue princesse, recognizes Josey dancing with her son. He gets up and removes her from the dance floor. He tells her he no longer wants to see her with his son, and he threatens her with imprisonment if she persists. Josey rallies her friends, and they all leave the reception. From her table, Rokia exults. Jean goes after the girls from rue princesse.

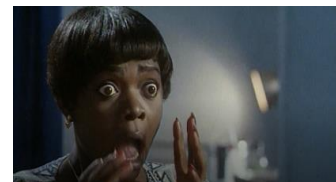


**Emile attacks Josey** Fanta goes to look for her son, Jean, on rue princesse. She does not find him there. But she learns from the prostitutes that her husband, Emile, is one of their regular customers. She tells Emile that she knows all about his visits to the rue princesse. Emile is convinced it is Josey who has spoken to his wife. He comes to threaten her. Josey takes out her whistle and alerts her friends, who rush to her aid. Emile leaves, promising to return with the police. Alone with Josey, Jean asks her how his father knows her. She tells him she had no idea Emile was his father. She tells him that Emile was one of her clients. She asks Jean that they stop seeing each other because Emile is a powerful and dangerous man who could get her into a lot of trouble.



**Jean sleeps with Rokia** Rokia follows Jean and the girls. She sees Jean coming out of Josey's studio. She approaches him at the kiosk where he has just stopped for coffee and tells him she wants to make peace with him. She slips a pinch of a powder given to her by her charlatan into Jean's coffee. Afterwards, they drive to a bar and return to Rokia's house, completely drunk. Jean spends the night in Rokia's bed.

**Rokia is pregnant by her charlatan** Rokia's doctor tells her that she is at least one month pregnant. Rokia's joy turns to horror when she realizes that there is no way Jean, with whom she slept only a few days ago, could be the one who made her pregnant. She then realizes that the charlatan took advantage of her while she was under hypnosis. She vows to kill him.



**Josey is kidnapped** Mariam goes to warn Jean that her father has attacked Josey. Josey's father returns to rue princesse with a police officer, but he arrives too late. Jean has just driven off in his car with Josey aboard. Emile sets off in pursuit of Jean and Josey, suspecting that they are seeking refuge at Jean's grandmother's house. Jean and Josey run out of gas in the middle of nowhere. Jean takes a jerrycan to go get some gas at the next town and leaves Josey alone. Emile arrives at the scene of the breakdown and, aided by the policeman, kidnaps Josey. Jean arrives at the police station accompanied by Josey's friends, ready to do battle with Emile. The girls threaten to go on strike and go on TV to reveal the names of their clients unless Josey is freed. The police chief says he does not want any scandal and releases Josey. Emile protests. The police chief orders him to shut up.



**The wedding** Jean goes to his grandmother to ask for her blessing to marry Josey. Jean and Josey get married in a blaze of cheers and jubilation. All of Josie's friends are present at the wedding. The marriage is sealed by the town's mayor, a regular at rue princesse.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**JOSEY** Josey is a persevering, empathetic and caring character. As a sex-worker, she works hard to survive the unforgiving economic conjuncture of the 1990s and to even save some money. She understands Jean's social condition the very day she meets him and befriends him. She encourages Jean to pursue his artistic dreams when his family shuns him for wanting to be a musician.

*Persevering* Life has not been easy for Josey. Left in the care of her uncle when her father died, he preferred to pimp her out to his friends rather than provide her with an education. Having decided to take her life into her own hands, Josey finds herself in Abidjan's red district called rue princesse, where sexual diseases and poverty coexist. But Josey does not let life's adversities get the better of her. Keeping a cool head and her eyes fixed on a better future, she works hard to save 15 million CFA francs (just over \$30,000), which she deposits in the bank. She finds the love of her life in Jean, and perseveres in her passion for singing until she is accepted into Jean's theater group and leaves her life as a prostitute behind.

*Empathetic* The first day she meets Jean, the estranged son of a rich businessman, after he was dropped off at rue princesse by Rokia, Josey immediately realizes that he is a penniless innocent. She asks him if he has any money to return home, insisting on returning the money she received from Rokia, but Jean refuses to take it. She shows Jean her condom collection, gives him a few, and advises him to always use them, but Jean tells her he's not ready for sex yet. Then she asks Jean if he is hungry, and she shares her donuts with him.

*Caring* Josey is as caring of Jean as he is of her. While Jean's father and mother lament his pursuit of a musical career, Josey is the first to encourage him in this direction. She tells him that he has a beautiful touch on the *kora* (string instrument), and that seeing him play on stage gives her the shivers. With Josey, Jean regains the confidence that his father's reticence and hostility had caused him to lose.

**JEAN** Jean is a rebellious, determined and supportive character. He defies his father's demand that he marry Aki, a young woman from a rich Ivorian family, and he refuses to follow in his father's footsteps. He trains hard to be accepted into a theater group as a musician. When he understands that Josey, his girlfriend, has some musical talents, he encourages her to pursue her dreams of being a singer, which she does.

*Rebellious* Jean is the opposite of what his father would like him to be. His father plans to turn him into a business manager. Jean prefers to be an artist-musician, and leaves home to follow his dream. His father insists on marrying him off to Aki, a daughter from one of the country's most influential families. Jean rejects Aki and falls in love with Josey, a prostitute from the red district of rue princesse. Jean's father goes to great lengths to prevent his son's relationship with the young prostitute and has her arrested by the police. With the help of the prostitutes of rue princesse, Jean frees Josey and makes her his wife against his family's wishes.

*Determined* Jean has a clear idea of what he wants to do in life. He wants to be a musician. Despite his father's attempts to change his mind, Jean remains firm on his decision and fulfills his dream by becoming a member of a theater ensemble. Similarly, when Jean falls in love with Josey and decides to have a serious relationship with her, he disregards Josey's profession as a prostitute as well as his parents' reservations. Jean defies his father's authority and protects Josey from the latter's abusive ways. Jean, the musician, marries Josey, encouraging her to also follow her passion for singing.

*Supportive* Jean's attentive attitude towards Josey puts the young prostitute at ease and leads her to share her life story with Jean. She explains why she became a prostitute, and Jean listens without being judgmental. Later, the young man invites the girl for a weekend at the beach. He hears her sing and is dazzled by her voice. Jean encourages Josey to pursue her passion for singing. With Jean's support, Josey tries out for an audition and is accepted into Jean's theater group.

**EMILE** Emile, who declares that there will be no musician in his family, is an intolerant character. Furthermore, Emile is hypocritical in that he forbids his son to associate with the girls of rue princesse, yet, he is a regular client in that red light district. When Emile learns that, in spite of his injunctions, his son, Jean, continues to see Josey, he beats her up and has her arrested by the police. He is a violent man.

*Intolerant* Emile will not let his son Jean date Josey because he does not want a girl of her reputation and background in his family. Emile has mapped out a future for Jean as a company director married to a girl from a good family, in this case Aki. His lineage depends on it. Emile sees Josey as the bad seed that could not only lead his son down the path of depravity, but also sully his lineage.

*Hypocrite* Emile is a hypocrite. He wants a well-ordered life for his son, Jean. However, he himself leads a hectic life between his family and the prostitutes he sleeps with. He has no problem frequenting the prostitutes on rue princesse, but he objects to his son's involvement with Josey. His own actions contradict his moralist declarations.

*Violent* Emile rejects his son's chosen path as a musician. So he violently snatches his musical instrument, his *kora*, from him and throws it into the furnace of his factory. Emile sees Josey dancing with Jean at a reception at his house. He ruthlessly drags Josey off the dance floor, threatens her and orders her to leave his house. When Emile's wife learns from one of the sex workers that her husband is a regular on rue princesse, Emile assumes that Josey has informed her, and Emile goes to beat Josey in her studio. Emile also forcibly abducts Josey and takes her to a police station to prevent his son, Jean, from continuing to associate with her.

## THEMES

**Poverty** Mariam invites Jean to share a lunch of lukewarm, sweetened water and a piece of stale bread, which she jokingly calls "café sénégalais" (Senegalese coffee), because, says she, Senegal does not grow and therefore does not know coffee. Under normal circumstances, this woman from Côte d'Ivoire would have enjoyed a large bowl of café au lait (coffee with cream) or hot chocolate, accompanied by a slice of baguette spread with butter or jam. But these are not normal times. This is a period of austerity imposed on Ivorians by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In fact, the 1970s and early-1990s were the golden age of Côte d'Ivoire. On the international market, the prices of cocoa and coffee, the country's main exports, hit the roof. As a result, Côte d'Ivoire witnessed an economic boom, with a growth rate only second to Japan's. Because this economic boom depended heavily on foreign capital, namely on international speculators' willingness to pay high prices for coffee and cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire borrowed funds from the World Bank and the IMF to launch new development programs. The money was poorly managed, and the financial institutions imposed upon Côte d'Ivoire a program of structural adjustment to recover their money. The draconian measures imposed by structural adjustment had dramatic effects on the country's economy, which television in Côte d'Ivoire reported daily as *conjuncture économique difficile* ('difficult economic situation'). A new term was born for the Ivorians who were feeling the burden of structural adjustment: simply *la conjuncture* ('the conjuncture'). The term penetrated even the most remote hamlets, and was adopted by intellectuals and the least educated Ivorians alike. 'Conjuncture' was the term by which Ivorians expressed their malaise. And it was the term used by Mariam, the prostitute on rue princesse, who lunched on lukewarm sweetened water and stale bread, to tell Jean of her condition as an Ivorian beaten down by a declining economy.

**Music and art** Rue princesse is also the hub of *Zouglou*, the musical expression of the Ivorian malaise, which Henri Duparc features in the restaurant-bars where Jean and Josey hang out. Indeed, the difficult economic situation resulting from the structural adjustment of the 1990s was felt by the most vulnerable social strata in Côte d'Ivoire, including the peasant families and the student population. To enable Côte d'Ivoire to pay its creditors from the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as the World Trade Organization, instructed the prime minister of the day, Alassane Ouattara, to take draconian measures: as recommended by the W.T.O., Mr. Ouattara eliminated subsidies to Ivorian planters, while America and the European Union generously subsidized their farmers. Ouattara forced the early retirement of over 10,000 civil servants; those still lucky enough to keep their jobs saw their salaries slashed by 40%; Ouattara reduced access to education by cutting teachers' salaries in half; he

eliminated subsidies for university restaurants, university bus services and university medical coverage, and he imposed first-aid fees on the population. Protests on university campuses came in response to this economic austerity imposed by politicians in complicity with the international financial institutions. The Ivorian government repressed them with violence and bloodshed. *Zouglou* emerged, a music of sharp, protesting verses, danced with jerky, expressionist movements, which even today continues to be the artistic expression that challenges the political powers over their anti-democratic excesses.

**Sexuality** In *Rue princesse*, Duparc takes up one of his favorite themes, that of sexuality, or at least the liberal sexuality of Ivorians. But it is rather a caricature of Ivorian liberalism that Duparc makes in this film, where, much as he has shown in his previous films, everyone seems to sleep with everyone else without any apology whatsoever. Rokia wants to sleep with Jean, her friend's son. However, she makes her husband believe that this is for a noble cause, that of having a child without going through IVF treatment with an anonymous donor. Rokia's husband, Fodé, accepts his wife's proposal with a disconcerting casualness. But this is because Fodé covets Jean's fiancée, with whom he sleeps with the tacit blessing of his wife, Rokia. Rokia eventually gets Jean into her bed, but not before getting him drunk. For, in fact, it is Josey, the prostitute, that Jean loves; Josey, who has also in the past satisfied the sexual desires of Jean's father, Emile. From now on, Emile's escapades are with another prostitute, Double Coca (Mariam), and if his wife, Fanta, keeps quiet about it, this is only because she pretends to know nothing. In fact, the whole town pretends not to know about each other's sexual escapades. All they do is advise each other to religiously use the condoms that the government and international NGOs distribute in profusion. The charlatan who has hypnotized and impregnated Rokia, or the client who infected the prostitute Brigitte with AIDS, have undoubtedly disregarded this advice.

**Class** Côte d'Ivoire is a class society. The gulf between rich and poor, already marked before the 1990s, widened with the economic situation caused by structural adjustment. Duparc shows the difference between social classes through the protagonists' living quarters, as well as through the meals they eat. In *rue princesse*, the neighborhood of all the excesses of Abidjan's biggest urban district, Yopougon (or Yop City as the Ivorians like to call it), people eat lunch, as Mariam, a prostitute, shows us, with "café sénégalais", sweetened lukewarm water, and stale bread. When one dares to treat oneself to a beer, it is *la conjoncture*, as Josey teaches us, the poor man's watered-down beer, that one drinks. What a contrast to the lobster-and-caviar lifestyle of the families of Emile the industrialist and Fodé the banker! At the reception organized by Jean's parents in their large multi-storey villa, to which Jean invites his friends from the *rue princesse*, the abundance and ostentation are delirious to the prostitutes. They say they have never seen so many good dishes in their lives, and they try to stuff themselves as best they can, knowing that tomorrow will be tough. Emile's high social class also gives him great social influence. Emile takes the liberty of requisitioning a law enforcement officer to pursue and kidnap Josey. The law of the richest is the law of the land.

**Justice/injustice** Justice in any class-based society is all too often the application of the law of the richest. In 2011, the government of Alassane Ouattara, under the pretext of cleaning up the city of Abidjan, but really for political reasons that were obvious to all Ivorians (*rue princesse* being the center of the working class' social demands and above all the cradle of one of the major opposition parties), destroyed the bars, cafés and restaurants on the mythical *rue princesse*. Similarly, on February 20, 2024, a mass eviction operation scheduled to last until March 17, 2024, demolished thousands of homes in Yopougon, leaving families exposed to the weather and living in precarious conditions. In Côte d'Ivoire, since 2011, all too often the land of those who have been evicted has been reclaimed by those in power to make way for gentrification. This is the law of the richest and the strongest. However, Duparc shows that when the victims of this iniquitous law stand together, they can put justice back on track. This is what Josey's friends do when they defend her against Emile's assault at *rue princesse* and her illegal arrest at the police station. The strongest impose their law only as long as the weakest accept it without reacting. In *Rue Princesse*, Duparc shows that people who organize against their oppressor can be the authors of their own freedom.

**Work/protection** *Rue Princess* calls for women's work to be valued and for sex workers to be respected. Josey states that she is the CEO of her body and manages it as such. Her body is her personal business, and she takes care of it by cultivating and cleaning it (she closes up shop when she needs a rest), by treating herself with personal moments of joy (going to the beach or to a restaurant with Jean), and by

taking care of her body (routine visits to the doctor and the regular use of condoms). Josey's work is relatively profitable, allowing her to take care of herself and save some money. Josey deposits 15 million of her savings in Fodé's bank, and through seduction manages to invest her money at a higher rate than that normally offered to the bank's customers. Josey, through her work, actively participates in her country's economy. Duparc's message is unambiguous. Prostitution is as noble a profession as any other. Prostitutes are agents of development and deserve the respect of their compatriots. Like their fellow citizens, prostitutes need the protection of the state. And toward this end, Duparc emphasizes and encourages the efforts made by the Ivorian government (distribution of condoms, monthly medical check-ups, and medical care) to protect prostitutes from the ravages of AIDS, the pandemic that wreaked havoc in African countries in the 1990s.

**Love** Aki and Jean's families have decided that the two young people should get married. This decision has been made without their input. The transaction is designed to protect the financial interests of both families. As for the two young people, they are not really attracted to each other. Aki finds Fodé, who is certainly older than her father, attractive. For her part, Josey, the prostitute on rue princesse, makes Jean's heart flutter. And for Josey, Jean is ready to defy the authority of his father, who thinks that a prostitute is not the ideal daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, Jean and Josey get married after many ups and downs, and Aki ends up in the arms of Fodé. Love, Duparc tells us, is a force capable of beating all prejudices. For Aki, Fodé's age is irrelevant, as long as she is happy with him. For Jean, too, who would have a future free from need if he chose to follow the path laid out for him by his father, Josey's social condition is of little importance. What matters are his feelings for her. For Josey, Jean rejects family comfort and the succession of his father's factory, and goes rogue.

**Appearance** Many of the characters in Rue Princesse go about their lives wearing masks. Emile, Jean's father, gives the impression of a respectable family man. He comes home every evening at dinnertime to eat with his wife and four children. But not before taking a trip to the red district on rue princesse, where he is a loyal customer of the prostitutes. He preaches good behavior to his son, even though he himself is short on the virtues he preaches. Rokia, who wants to sleep with Jean, convinces her husband that she is doing it for their happiness. She tells him that it is to have the child they have always dreamed of. And Fodé accepts his wife's explanation. But if Fodé is so easily convinced, it is less because he believes his wife's excuse than because it allows him to satisfy his sexual desires with Aki, Jean's presumed fiancée. While Rokia struggles to win Jean's attention, Fodé cavorts with Aki. However, Emile, Rokia and Aki are merely symptoms of a general pattern of deception. Under the cloak of respectability, Ivorian high society is made up of hypocrites. It is by threatening to expose the duplicity of the ruling class that the girls of rue princesse obtain Josey's release from the police chief, who says he doesn't want a scandal.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do Rokia's efforts to have a child say about being a woman in this culture?
2. Is prostitution legal in your country? Explain on what grounds prostitution is allowed or forbidden in your country.
3. Is *Rue Princesse* a feminist project? Why or why not?
4. What is the filmmaker's message in celebrating the union between Jean and Josey?
5. Are there any political messages in this film? Please explain.