

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

Abusuan/Family (1972)

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 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 Henri Duparc's first feature film, *Abusuan*, is a kind of echo chamber for his country's government. In it, Duparc promotes the Ivorian government's urbanization efforts, its fight against rural exodus and juvenile delinquency, and its appeal to young people to devote themselves to farming. However, Duparc also tackles other themes, such as superstition, tradition and modernism, beauty, collectivism and individualism, the suffocation of young professionals, and so on. At the 1973 Ouagadougou Pan-African Film Festival, *Abusuan* was awarded a prize by OCAM (the Common African and Malagasy Organization), and received a Special Mention from OCICI (International Catholic Cinema Office).

Background *Abusuan* was shot on location in Côte d'Ivoire. The cast of the film was entirely composed of local actors, some of whom had substantial acting experience. The languages spoken in the film are French and some Agni, one of the languages of the larger Akan ethnic group.

CHARACTERS

<i>Aka</i>	A young architect, who returns to his native Côte d'Ivoire after 15 years in France
<i>Catherine</i>	Aka's young Ivorian wife, who resents her husband's relative's invasion of her privacy
<i>Kouame</i>	Aka's cousin, who brings Aka his two sons so that he can raise them successful

SYNOPSIS

After fifteen years of study in France, Pierre Aka returns to his native Côte d'Ivoire with a degree in architecture. He is appointed General Director of Architecture, in charge of building social housing to replace the slums in the suburbs of the Ivorian capital, Abidjan. Aka is convinced that the modern housing he builds will not only bring happiness to the Ivorian housewife, but will also free the Ivorian from the constraints of the traditional family. Aka, who, with his wife Catherine and their children, forms the prototype of the modern family, bitterly realizes that the traditional family, with all its demands, will always hunt him down, wherever he is. In fact, Aka and Catherine's house is soon taken over by his extended family: first comes his cousin Kouame, who entrusts him with his two school dropout boys, who no longer want to live in the village, and whom Kouame asks Aka to make as successful as him. Then comes Aka's sister, Lea, who considers that her own children are biologically closer to Aka than Kouame's children, i.e., they are Aka's "real nieces and nephews." So, Lea brings her daughter and son for Aka to look after. For fear of offending his family back in the village and being ill-judged, Aka accepts all these people into his home,

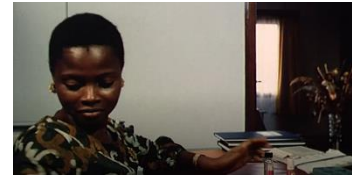
much to the chagrin of Catherine, his wife, who threatens to leave Aka unless she regains the peace and privacy of her own home. Aka convinces Catherine to give him a few weeks to find a solution to their dilemma. Fortunately for Aka, he will not have to make the difficult decision of sending his uneducated nephews back to the village, as he is finding it difficult to find them work in town. When they are caught by the police in the company of a gang of car thieves, and Aka, through his connections, manages to get them out of prison, Aka's nephews decide to return to the village on their own, telling their uncle that life in the city is not for them and that they are people of the land, who want to get back to farming. However, with the nephews gone, Catherine feels guilty that she and her husband have done little to help these young people improve their living conditions.

SCENES

Building for the modern family Pierre Aka is an architect in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. He is tasked with building modern, affordable houses to replace the slums of Koumassi, a working-class suburb of Abidjan. Aka is convinced that his new floorplans will seduce the Ivorian homemaker. He also thinks that his new homes will break down the weighty traditional family and promote a more modern, nuclear family.



Lax work ethic Aka's secretary works assiduously when he is in the office. As soon as Aka leaves the office to visit his worksites, she pulls out her grooming kit and start doing her nails, neglecting the work at hand.



Homecoming Aka and his wife, Catherine, visit his relatives in the village. This is his first visit since he went to France to study, 15 years ago. Aka's relatives are happy to see him, especially his sister, Lea, who comes running from the kitchen and hugs him tightly, getting his beige suit dirty. Aka's wife, Catherine, is not pleased, and she whispers to Aka that his sister is getting his suit dirty. The gaze of Lea's husband goes back and forth between Catherine and Lea. Then, he remarks to Lea that Catherine is a pretty woman, but that she is rather skinny. Lea replies that this is the way women are nowadays in the city, and that they refuse to eat to stay skinny. Aka's visit is blessed. Aka and Catherine are brought some water from a barrel outside used to collect rain water. Catherine reluctantly brings the water to her lips and takes a sip. Then, she passes the recipient of water to her husband, who drinks and passes it, too, to the next person next to him. The family elder blesses Aka's visit with a libation of gin. Some palm wine is also served to Aka to give him a taste of home. Aka's father tells him about how the family has changed in 15 years, during his absence. Aka is informed about the people that have passed. He also learns about the new births. Aka is introduced to his extended family.



Showering outdoors Aka and Catherine spend their first night in a hut prepared for them. In the morning, Catherine's sister-in-law, Lea, prepares a bucket of hot water for Catherine for her to shower. Catherine enjoys her shower in an outdoor shower stall.



Matrilineal system Catherine tells Aka that she is glad the matrilineal system in Cote d'Ivoire has been abolished. Aka asks her why. She tells him that with all the nephews she saw the day before, she would have many heirs fighting for his inheritance and leaving his children penniless.

A charm for Aka Aka's father takes him aside and hands him a charm for his protection. Aka looks at the charm, puzzled. His father tells him to take it, and keep it on himself. He tells Aka that the charm will give him long life. Aka reluctantly takes the charm.



A sheep for Aka Kouame wants the oracle to help his children be as successful as Aka. The oracle gives him a charm to attach around a sheep's neck, then to offer the sheep to Aka. The oracle insists that Aka must eat the sheep for the charm to work. As they are about to leave, Aka and Catherine receive plenty of gifts from the villagers in food and poultry. Kouame, too, is there with his gift for Aka, the sheep. Kouame is disappointed that Aka has no room in his car for the sheep. However, Aka promises to send his driver for it another day. Kouame decides to take his sheep to Aka instead of waiting for him to send someone for it. His two boys and he embark on an eventful trip towards Marcory, the suburb of Abidjan where Aka lives.



Kouame visits Aka Kouame and his two sons arrive at Aka's place at night. Aka and his wife are entertaining some friends. Kouame invites himself into Aka's compound and starts explaining his difficult trip to the guests. Aka is embarrassed and asks the watchman to take his impromptu guest to the garage. Kouame wants his kids to stay with Aka. His guests gone, Aka confronts his cousin, Kouame, asking him why he came at night and unannounced. He asks him if there is any urgency at the village. Kouame explains that he came to bring him the sheep. Kouame and his sons settle in the houseboy's room. Kouame tells his sons that they will stay with Aka, and that he will make them as successful as himself.



Kouame gets lost The next day, Kouame and his sons go window shopping in Abidjan. They take a taxi, whose driver is as hostile as most of the people they meet in the city. After getting lost a few times, the taxi driver dumps them somewhere in the residential district of Marcory and leaves.



The sheep must be eaten Kouame tells Catherine that the sheep he brought them has been disturbing the neighborhood with his bleating and that they must slaughter it and eat it. She thinks it is a good idea and orders her houseboy to slaughter the sheep. Kouame tells Aka that he brought him his two sons to stay with him in Abidjan so that he can find them good situations. Aka replies that with the boys' little education, it will not be easy. Aka tells his wife that his cousin, Kouame, left them his two sons to take care of. Catherine is not pleased, but Aka tells her that he could not refuse or people in the village would see him as unkind.



Lea comes to Aka's unannounced Lea's husband informs his wife that Kouame travelled to Abidjan and left his two sons for Aka to care for. Lea is not happy that those who contributed nothing to Aka's success are now trying to take advantage of it. She complains that Aka is more concerned with distant relatives' children than those of his own sister. Aka and his wife return from a TV interview and find Aka's sister, Lea, waiting for them in their living room with her sick daughter. Aka is pleased to see his sister, but Catherine is not happy to see her living room cluttered with luggage and visitors sitting with their feet on her new living room furniture. Lea tells her brother that she has no financial support to take care of his "true nephews and true nieces." She tells Aka that she needs his help for her daughter, Adjoua, who is sick, and on whom none of the traditional medicine seem to have any effect. Aka reassures her that he will see what can be done tomorrow. In the morning, Aka tells his sister that he has decided to keep her two children, Adjoua, who is ill, and the boy. He tells her that he will find a doctor for Adjoua. Aka gives Lea some money. She thanks him dearly and returns to the village, leaving her two children with her brother.



It is time to put an end to it Aka, Catherine, and their friends are enjoying a night out. Aka's friend tells Aka and Catherine that he is afraid their house is being besieged by the whole village lately. Catherine agrees, and adds that all these people coming from the village also incur some financial burdens. Aka replies that it is time he put an end to the pressuring demands of his extended



family. Catherine threatens to leave Aka. Catherine tells her husband that the situation of his relatives coming to live with them is untenable and that she will leave him if he does not stop it. Aka replies that he understands her, but that he does not want to be misjudged in the village for a rushed and misguided decision. Aka begs Catherine to be patient for one more week.

Aka's nephews are in a gang While Aka is making phone calls to his contacts to find jobs for his nephews, one of them is roaming the city and socializing with a gang of delinquents. He gets into a fight and is hurt. His nephews now have their own gang. They decide to take the bus to the beach of Vridi to gaze at beautiful girls in bikinis. They get lost. They see the gang that beat a friend a few days ago, and they decide to take their revenge. However, the leader of the rival gang convinces them that they should go to the beach of Bassam look at beautiful girls. The two gangs reconcile. The boys get into a stolen car and head full speed to the seaside resort of Bassam. They meet and swim with some girls. On their way back to Abidjan, the boys are flagged by the police. They do not stop. The police chase after them. After a short car pursuit, the boys pull over.



Aka's nephews are in jail Catherine is worried about Aka's nephews, whom she has not seen for hours. She asks Aka if he was able to place the boys somewhere. He replies that he has found nothing for them yet because they have no experience and very limited education. Nevertheless, he was able to enroll one, the one who has completed elementary school, in a mechanic training center. Catherine calls her husband over as he is getting ready for work. She has just seen the pictures of Aka's nephews in the paper, arrested for being in a stolen car. Aka's friend, who is visiting, calls the police chief, his friend, to announce that he is coming for the boys that were arrested. The police chief tells Aka and his friend, Kodjo, that the boys were just caught in the company of a known gang of car stealers, and that they apparently knew nothing about the activities of that gang. The boys are released and go home.



Adjoua and her brothers want to go back to the village Aka's niece, Adjoua, has been found a good doctor by Catherine. Adjoua tells Catherine that she feels much better. She tells her that she misses the village and that that she cannot wait to return to the village as soon as she has completely recovered. Adjoua has now fully recovers and has been released from the hospital. She scolds her brother and cousins for their delinquent behaviors and for sullyng their family's honor. She tells them that she is returning to the village and that they should also think of doing the same. One of the boys tells his uncle, Aka, that his brother, his cousin and he have decided that the city is not the place for them. He says that they are farmers and want to return to farming. Adjoua and the boys leave for the village. Catherine is little sad. She tells her husband that she does not believe they did anything to help their nephews or to improve their lives. Aka reminds her that she did not want to have them in her home. He tells her that he does not understand her anymore. Catherine replies that she did not want the whole village in her house, but still, Aka and she did nothing to help these boys



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

AKA Aka is an optimistic, humble and respectful character. He sees a bright future for his country, free from the poverty and burdens that make life difficult for the Ivorian housewife. The fifteen years he spent far from his culture have not alienated him from it. On the contrary, he is humble and respectful of his tradition and his parents.

Optimistic Aka graduates in architecture from France and is commissioned by the Ivorian government to supervise the construction of low-cost housing to eradicate his country's precarious slums. Aka sets to work with optimism. He is convinced that in ten years' time, there will not be a single slum in his country.

He is also convinced that his new homes will free the Ivorian housewife from hard toil and strengthen the nuclear family. Aka's optimism is put to the test by the realities on the ground.

Humble Aka is so deferential to his extended family and his culture that his wife, Catherine, gets frustrated. When he visits his extended family in the village, Aka spontaneously hugs his sister without worrying whether his new suit might get dirty. He happily drinks from the communal bowl without worrying about the health risks involved. Moreover, he is so concerned about the judgment his village might pass on him that he readily accepts the solicitations of his extended family.

Respectful Aka is loath to upset his village relatives. He is not superstitious and does not believe that the charm given to him by his father is of any use. However, he accepts it so as not to offend the old man. Aka is also respectful of his wife's feelings and always asks her opinion on the decisions he makes. His attitude towards his collaborators is also marked by professionalism and consideration.

CATHERINE Catherine, who is a stranger to Aka's ethnic group, is a distant, ungrateful woman. She does not appreciate her husband's family or culture. Despite the family's good will toward her, Catherine is unkind to them. She does, however, feel some self-blame at the end of the film, when she realizes that she could have been more tolerant towards Aka's relatives.

Distant Unlike her husband, Catherine is a woman who prefers to keep her distance from Aka's extended family. Neither their culture nor their presence seems to please her, and she lets those around her know it. She hesitates to drink water from the shared bowl; she refuses to drink the palm wine offered to them on arrival in the village. She tells Aka that she is relieved to see the abolition of matriarchy, as she perceives his numerous nephews, who would normally have been his heirs in the matriarchal system, as predators. She does not welcome Aka's relatives when they come to Abidjan unannounced.

Ingrate Catherine is an ungrateful woman. The reception she gives her sister-in-law, Lea, is the exact opposite of the treatment she received from Lea in the village. Whereas Lea took care of her in the village, cooking for her, putting water in her bathroom for her and giving her gifts at the end of her stay, Catherine treats Lea like an outcast in Abidjan and threatens Aka to leave him if he doesn't send his relatives back to the village.

Remorseful Catherine is well aware that she has not always been kind to Aka's relatives. Although she gets on better with Aka's niece, Adjoua, and finds her a good doctor, she is very harsh with Lea and the nephews. She feels remorse for her indifference when the nephews decide to return to the village. She then confesses to Aka that they could have done more to help the boys improve their living conditions.

KOUAME What Kouame wants, he obtains by twisting the arm of providence. He is convinced that his cousin, Aka, is one of the most influential and recognized men in the country, and he has decided that his children must be like Aka. He uses every means at his disposal, ordinary and mystical, to make Aka accept his children.

Pushy Kouame would like his boys to be successful men like Aka. Kouame's oracle advises him to make Aka eat a lamb that he has mystically prepared. Kouame sends the lamb to Aka in Abidjan and insists that it be slaughtered, prepared and eaten. Without warning Aka beforehand, Kouame leaves his boys with him to look after. Kouame is a character who forces people's hands to get what he wants.

Naïve Kouame is a naive character. He imagines that all it takes for his children to become like Aka is to rub shoulders with and live with Aka. He does not realize that his boys' lack of schooling at their age is already a handicap, and that they will never be able to rise to Aka's level. He is convinced that the oracle's mystical remedies will work for him to that end. What is more, once in Abidjan, Kouame finds it bizarre that the cab drivers do not know his cousin, Aka, whom he considers one of the most important men in the country.

THEMES

Beauty The word *awoulaba* is an Agni word, one of the local languages and the ethnic group of Pierre Aka. It means 'beautiful woman', but a beautiful woman according to African standards, not European ones. So, every year, Ivorians organize two parallel contests for the most beautiful Ivorian woman. The first, called Miss Côte d'Ivoire, chooses the most beautiful woman according to Western criteria: she must be slender, with angular features. The second contest, called Miss Awoulaba, chooses the most beautiful woman according to African criteria: she must be comely and plump and have a generous backside.

In *Abusuan*, Duparc celebrates both standards of femininity. Lea's husband's gaze runs from his wife to Catherine, then from Catherine to his wife. Then, Lea's husband announces to his wife that Catherine is pretty, but a little thin. His wife tells him that this is the fashion of the women in the city, and that they starve themselves to stay skinny. The man shakes his head with an unconvinced smirk. On the other hand, admiring Catherine from afar, Kouame and a group of men fantasize that, with a woman as beautiful as Catherine, Aka must never be bored in bed. Thus, in the same village, Catherine and Lea, two women of different builds and physical constitutions, are admired for their beauty. Here, Duparc tells us that beauty is relative, and depends on the person judging and the criteria applied to the judgment.

Failed modernization Upon its creation, in 1969, the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers included in its objectives the valorization of African cultures and the appreciation of local governments' programs. In his first film, Henri Duparc fulfills this responsibility by showing the development efforts made by the Ivorian government twelve years after independence. From this perspective, the proclamations of Pierre Aka, the main character in *Abusuan*, sound like state propaganda. As Director General of Architecture in charge of building social housing in the commune of Koumassi, a populous suburb of Abidjan, Pierre Aka declares that, thanks to the government's efforts, in ten years' time there will be no slums left in his country. And Aka proudly announces that the floorplans of the social housing he is building will transform the traditional extended family, bringing it closer to the ideal of the nuclear family, and will meet with the approval of the Ivorian housewife, for whom they will make housework easier. Unfortunately, this modern urbanization program so dear to the first Ivorian president, and for which Pierre Aka is the spokesman, is drowned out by uncontrolled immigration, the consequence of numerous regional wars and a ten-year civil war that turned the suburbs of the Ivorian capital into vast slums.

Failed decentralization Twelve years after its independence from France, Côte d'Ivoire had made remarkable progress in terms of infrastructural development, to the extent that some observers at the time did not hesitate to compare what they called "the Ivorian miracle" to the "Japanese miracle". In fact, the history and geography examination for the Ivorian baccalaureate of 1981 challenged Ivorian students to compare the Ivorian miracle to the Japanese miracle. Indeed, this supposed Ivorian miracle had only occurred in cities, and more specifically in the capital, Abidjan, built in the image of European megacities. As soon as one leaves the city, the Ivorian countryside looks desolate. This is evident during Aka's journey from the city to the village. Aka's car quickly goes from the main asphalt roads to the bumpy paths of the countryside. And the beautiful villas and apartments of the capital's gleaming districts quickly give way to the mud huts of the countryside, where water is collected in large barrels placed under the roofs in times of rain. Development has not reached the Ivorian countryside. Aka acknowledges this, bitterly confessing to his friend and guest, Kodjo, that the village has not changed at all since he left for France. Indeed, for anyone familiar with Côte d'Ivoire, not only has the Ivorian countryside seen no substantial change in terms of development due to the lack of decentralization, but the country's major cities have also declined and become overpopulated and crime-ridden because of the movement of both national and international populations towards the urban centers.

Rural exodus The development that took place in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1970s could be called "façade development." To the detriment of the country's revenue-generating regions - the coffee, cocoa, cotton, gas and oil-producing regions that have made Côte d'Ivoire a great agricultural nation - the profits generated by raw materials were disproportionately used to make the Ivorian capital shine. Abidjan saw the development of major highways, impressive skyscrapers, luxurious hotels, affluent residential districts, attractive movie theaters and trendy nightclubs to entertain its fine population of civil servants relatively better treated than their counterparts in the West African region. This showcase of prosperity in the Ivorian capital and the

relative neglect of the countryside led to successive waves of fortune-hunters flooding into Abidjan from the rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire and from countries in the region, such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, etc.

Aka's nephews symbolize this migratory population from the countryside to the city. Charmed by the gaudiness of the city, which is represented by their uncle, Aka, with his shiny white car and his big house, the nephews no longer want to stay in the village. They imagine that once they get to town, they will be as successful as their uncle. The reality is quite different. In fact, in the 1970s, this massive rural exodus, mainly undertaken by young people, had harmful consequences for Côte d'Ivoire. The country saw a rise in crime, caused by the delinquency of unskilled and idle youth—Aka's nephews are a prime illustration of this—and a drain on the agricultural workforce that had turned Côte d'Ivoire into West Africa's greatest agricultural power. To remedy the situation, the country embarked on a carrot-and-stick policy: incentivizing young people to return to farming, and tracking down and punishing criminals. *Abusuan* sends a message to Ivorian youth who have dropped out of school, saying that they have a valuable contribution to make to the country's development by returning to farming, and that, on the other hand, any delinquent behavior on their part will be severely punished.

Back to farming The founding father of the Ivorian nation, President Félix Houphouët Boigny, always prided himself on being a farmer. A great agricultural speculator, he made a huge fortune in cocoa and coffee, and was always telling his people that "the earth never fails the farmer." Indeed, Aka's car fills up with victuals on his return from the village. In truth, the village is the country's granary. Having prioritized agriculture over industry—the industrial sector being more that of agricultural product processing than of heavy industry—it was essential for Côte d'Ivoire that the agricultural workforce remained vigorous and reliable. The rural exodus threatened the vigor and reliability of this agricultural workforce and hence the prosperity of Côte d'Ivoire. So, from the 1970s onwards, the country embarked on a "back to farming" campaign, encouraging young people either to stay in the countryside or to return to farming thanks to funds earmarked for supporting young farmers. Initiatives to this end proliferated. For instance, businessman and mayor of the rural town of Divo, the late François Konian, created a successful musical group, Woya, which young people could only join if they committed themselves to coming to his rural commune to work for years as farmers. Young people flocked to Konian's door. In *Abusuan*, Aka's niece Adjoua convinces her brothers to return to the village to work the land. The next day, the two young men, who have been in trouble with the police, come to tell their uncle that they no longer want to live in Abidjan, and that they are people of the land, who only wish to return to work the land. With this scene, Duparc is helping to raise young people's awareness of the need to return to farming, once again fulfilling the mission entrusted to African filmmakers by the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI).

Lax habits/absenteeism Two of the evils undermining African societies in the wake of independence are a lax work ethic and absenteeism. During colonization, Africans were forced to work for the metropole, seeing their efforts enrich the colonists and the colonists' country more than themselves. As a result, Africans worked less out of love and conviction than out of coercion. This feeling of detachment, this lack of commitment, has taken root in many Africans, who even after independence find it difficult to invest themselves honestly in their work, continuing to believe that they are working for exploiters and not for themselves, and that under these conditions, one must make the least effort and only work when the boss is watching. Aka's secretary, who seems to have all the assets of an intelligent and capable young woman, but who only works when her boss is in the office, is the image of this laxity. This lax attitude is one of Africa's demons, against which the Ivorian government launched major awareness campaigns in the wake of independence. Here again, Henri Duparc's cinema shows his patriotic fiber by contributing to his government's efforts to raise awareness against laxity and dereliction of duty. In so doing, Duparc fulfills one of the essential missions entrusted to African filmmakers by FEPACI: to be the voice of African governments in their struggle for development.

Collectivism and individualism When Aka and his wife, Catherine, arrive in the village, they are twice invited to drink from the communal bowl, the first time it was water and the second time palm wine. Then, Aka's father brings in all his nephews, born during the fifteen years of his absence, and presents them to him. These gestures illustrate the collectivist community to which Aka belongs, even though his wife refuses to accept it. Indeed, Catherine reluctantly brings the bowl of water to her lips. The idea that the water served

to her in this bowl comes from a barrel exposed to the whims of the elements and within the reach of the whole family is repugnant to Catherine, who hesitates to drink it. But she does, under the reproachful gaze of the villagers. Later, Catherine welcomes the fact that matriarchy, the hereditary system of the extended family, has been abolished in favor of patriarchy, the system of the nuclear family.

In *Abusuan*, Catherine is the advocate of individualism. Her husband, Aka, on the other hand, tries to strike a balance between tradition (collectivism) and modernism (individualism). Aka accepts his cousin Kouame's children into his home for fear of offending his family back in the village. This is because Aka is perceived by his extended family as a collective investment. The burden of his studies in France, as his sister Lea puts it, was sustained by the sacrifices of his extended family. He cannot, now that he has succeeded, make himself the herald of individualism, although the repeated expectations of his family back in the village inconvenience him considerably. Fortunately for Aka, he does not have to make a drastic choice between his convictions and the expectations of his village relatives because his nephews decide to return to the village on their own. And Catherine, who did not want to see her household invaded by her husband's extended family, is self-critical and revises her position: she concludes that she and her husband could have done better to help his nephews improve their living conditions. Here, collectivism and individualism seek a middle ground.

Superstition The Agni of Côte d'Ivoire, the ethnic group to which Aka belongs, are predominantly Christian. However, their Christian faith has not totally alienated them from their ancestral animist practices. On Sundays, after church, the community likes to dance to the sound of the brass band. It is precisely on this day, and after having danced a few steps to the sound of the brass band, that Kouame chooses to visit the village oracle to ask for his mystical intervention so that Aka can agree to take his two boys with him. This is no cinematic coincidence. It is a well-thought-out scene by the filmmaker, who intends to highlight the religious syncretism that characterizes the spirituality of the Ivorians. Whether Christian or Muslim, the Ivorian, like most Africans who have inherited revealed religions, still has one foot—usually the strongest foot—in his or her ancestral animist beliefs. Aka's father, although a Christian, gives his son a charm which he advises him to always wear to protect himself from evil people. He asserts that the reason he has been able to live as long as he has until he has is thanks to this charm. And Kouame is convinced that it is the work of the village oracle that has led Aka to keep his two children. So he rewards the oracle with a bottle of gin. Ivorians, and Africans in general, are convinced that God's hand needs to be forced a little in order for good things to happen for them: success at an exam, a job offer, a sporting victory. And for them, happiness comes from the direct intervention of animism.

Change Before 1964, the people of Côte d'Ivoire were subject to the French colonial civil code governing Africans, which placed them under traditional jurisdiction. Four years and two months after Côte d'Ivoire's independence, President Félix Houphouët Boigny's ruling party, the PDCI, passed a law in the National Assembly abolishing matriarchy and giving the head of the family, the husband, authority over the family. This law only gained a foothold in urban families. In the countryside, and more particularly in the Akan societies of southern Côte d'Ivoire, from which Aka's Agni ethnic group hails, matriarchy continues to hold sway. The matrilineal system considers that the woman's womb is the purest source of lineage. Whereas a man's child might not actually be his, a woman's child is absolutely hers. Therefore, to ensure that a man does not squander his family's inheritance by giving it to a child that might not be his, the man's heir must be his sister's son, the son of the woman with whom he shares the same mother. In the Akan tribe, when the matrilineal system is put to work, it is not uncommon for the widow and her children to be stripped of their inheritance upon the death of the husband, in favor of the nephew, the son of the deceased's sister, considered the man's legitimate heir for being undeniably the blood of his blood. Pierre Aka's wife, Catherine, is right to celebrate this law abolishing matriarchy, which, in modern couples, guarantees the woman that the fruits of her and her husband's labor will not be taken away from her and her children once her husband dies. However, and this is the double-edged sword of the law favoring the patrilineal system in the civil code, patriarchy robs women of the decision-making power they had in traditional society, where queen-mothers and matriarchs exercised formidable authority: it makes men the exclusive masters of the family, who delegate their power to women only as they see fit, but are under no obligation to do so. The paradox of the patrilineal system is that, while it claims to liberate women, it actually establishes and consolidates patriarchy. Catherine is lucky to have a husband like Aka, who is not so imbued with his masculine condition, and who is attentive to her opinions and sensitive to her feelings.

Tradition vs. Modernity *Abusuan* begins and ends with the image of a woman, Aka's sister, Lea, returning from the fields. Here, the filmmaker emphasizes women's traditional contribution to subsistence economy, and even more so to the national economy, given the importance of agriculture in Ivorian development. When Lea comes to visit Aka in Abidjan with her children, she doesn't come empty-handed. She arrives loaded with provisions. Lea is just one of the millions of women who supply local and international markets with the fruits of their labor. And yet, they are not necessarily viewed with empathy by their urban sisters. In fact, they are often greeted with a look of contempt. Thus, when Lea, who has been busy with her housework, runs to hug her brother, Aka, whom she hasn't seen for fifteen years, without taking the precaution of washing her hands first, Catherine complains to her husband that Lea is soiling his suit. And when Lea goes to visit her brother in Abidjan, her sister-in-law, Catherine, whom she has looked after so well in the village, receives her coldly, even unkindly. Catherine is the modern, literate city woman, who looks down on the traditional, illiterate rural woman that Lea is. Duparc's emphasis on traditional femininity at the beginning and end of the film seems to tell us that she is far more valuable to him. It is the woman who supplies the nation's granaries, which literate femininity consumes without restraint. Catherine's modern kitchen, and the receptions she organizes with her husband, are the sites of this unbridled consumption. Duparc's message is clear: let's have deference for the rural and traditional zone because this is the zone whose activities sustain us. It is the message of President Houphouët, the self-proclaimed farmer, that Duparc relays.

The suffocation of young professionals As soon as he returned from France and took up his first post in Abidjan, Aka is besieged by his extended family, who ask him for all kinds of assistance. His cousin Kouame sends him his two drop-out boys to raise them into men like himself. His sister Lea also brings her sick daughter, Adjoua, so that he can find her a good doctor, and her son so that he can send him to school. Catherine complains to one of her husband's friends that all these people arriving from the village have to be fed and housed, which involves enormous expenses. Here, Duparc criticizes the burden that the expectations of the extended family in Africa place on young professionals, even before they have had a chance to establish themselves. The demands of the extended family are such that they drown young professionals and jeopardize their own future. This is often due to the fact that these young professionals also benefited from the collective support of the family during their studies, and are therefore indebted to the extended family that helped them. This is the case, for instance, with Aka, who, as we learn from Lea, was only able to complete his studies in France thanks to the sacrifices made by his entire family in Côte d'Ivoire. If it is true that family demands on young professionals suffocate them, it is also true that young people will only be able to free themselves once they have learned to stand on their own two feet, which is very difficult in a country that offers few individual opportunities and where the community is constantly needed for advancement.

Idealism/Disappointment Pierre Aka has just returned from France, his architecture diploma in his pocket and his head full of wonderful ideas for his country. In Europe, he has seen slums being transformed into decent neighborhoods, lifting their populations out of precariousness. He believes that this is possible in his homeland; too. Aka even believes that the old habits of the extended family, which weigh down the modern family and prevent it from flourishing, can be done away with. Pierre Aka is in a position to realize his project of urban modernization and independence for the extended family. However, this project is proving difficult. Pierre Aka is himself a product of the extended family, which made sacrifices for his studies in France and his success, and he feels indebted to this family, from which he cannot suddenly cut himself off at the risk of being called ungrateful. Moreover, contrary to his expectations, the exiguity of the modern house, which has only two bedrooms, does not necessarily discourage prolonged visits from the extended family. In fact, his two-bedroom home soon welcomes cousins, sisters and nephews, who have no trouble finding sleeping quarters either in the garage or on the couch in his living room. Pierre Aka finds himself powerless before the expectations of his extended family, and their ambition to live as a nuclear family with his wife and children, free from family constraints and compromises. In fact, it's as if Aka has given up, leaving his idle nephews to roam the streets of the capital and have their day in court with the police. If, at the end of the film, Pierre Aka's nephews, cousin and sister return to the village, it's of their own free will, not because Aka refuses to receive them. Aka seems to have resigned himself to the fact that, at any moment, they could come back to ask for him. He seems to have become accustomed to the way of life he had hoped to escape.

Westernized vs African cultures In *Abusuan*, Henri Duparc brings modern (westernized) and traditional (African) cultures into direct confrontation. A young Ivorian executive educated in France, Pierre Aka, back in his homeland, does not always find tradition easy to live with. For instance, Aka is not happy to see his cousin, Kouame, arrive unannounced at his home, just as he is receiving (westernized) guests. Kouame, in his village garb, pulling his sheep, accompanied by his ragged sons, arriving unannounced, appears like a hair on the soup in the Aka oyster world. Indeed, in the village, visitors do not announce themselves in advance, and Pierre Aka himself visited the village unannounced, surprising his parents and sister. However, Aka prefers this concept of "surprise visit" to be confined to the village and not applied in town. Furthermore, Aka, who benefited from the solidarity of his extended family for his studies in France, would now like to get rid of the family's demands. Aka is a character inhabited by contradictions that he must learn to reconcile. He tries to do this without frustrating the villagers: he agrees to share water with the villagers in the communal bowl. He accepts, albeit reluctantly, the protective talisman given to him by his father, even though he has no faith in its power. While Aka balances between tradition and modernism, his wife Catherine, is categorical. She expresses her disgust at drinking from the communal bowl. She welcomes the disappearance of the traditional matrilineal system. She refuses to see her home taken over by Aka relatives. She is the prototypical modernist who seems unwilling to compromise with tradition. But compromise is inevitable. As if to tell us that we are in a dialectic where village and town, modernism and tradition, are always already intertwined, Catherine, so reluctant to accept tradition, is remorseful and regrets her early inflexibility when Aka's nephews decide to return to the village.

Discussion Questions

1. What importance do you attach in your culture to the extended family as opposed to the nuclear family? What examples support your answers?
2. In your culture, do young people in rural areas face radically different needs from those in urban areas? Please explain.
3. In your country, what problems are likely to hinder the advancement of young professionals in society?
4. Where rural exodus constitutes a national problem, what practical solutions can governments provide to alleviate the problem?
5. Are young people in your culture attracted to farming? Why or why not?