

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## Henri Duparc (1941-2006)

### LIFE

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.

### ACHIEVEMENT

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. In 1998, Duparc received a Lifetime Achievement-All Africa Film Award in Pretoria, South Africa.



Duparc, on the set of *The Sixth Finger*, 1990.

### FILMOGRAPHY

*Abusuan/Family*, 1972  
*L'Herbe sauvage/Wild Grass*, 1978  
*Bal poussière/Dancing in the Dust*, 1988  
*Le Sixième doigt/The Sixth Finger*, 1990  
*Rue Princesse*, 1994  
*Une Color Coffee/Color Coffee*, 1997  
*Je m'appelle Fargass/My Name is Fargass*, 2000  
*Caramel* 2004.

## THEMES

**Beauty** Duparc's films celebrate feminine beauty. Whether a woman conforms to Western standards of slim and trim, or to Ivorian standards of *awoulaba* (a word from the Agni ethnic group that means comely and plump with a generous backside), she remains beautiful and desirable.

*Abusuan* 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 body 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.

**Gender** Women in all their economic and social diversity remain under the seductive sway of men, who control women's movements. And for men's attention, women use their most ingenious tricks. This is Duparc's discourse on a society constructed on gender disparity.

*Wild Grass* *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 supposed mistress. 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, as François refuses to marry her. She threatens to kill him. 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.

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

Demigod goes to see Siriki, Binta's father, to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. When asked why he wants a sixth wife, Demigod explains that a wealthy man like himself needs to show off with as many women as he can afford. This is the same explanation Demigod gives his first wife when he refuses to

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

**Feminism** Duparc's films are laudatory of the female gender. They offer us images of strong, fighting women acting as protectors of men. Duparc praises women's invaluable contribution to their society. From this perspective, Duparc's films are feminist.

*Wild Grass* 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.

*Rue Princesse* *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.

*Caramel* Fred is a single entrepreneur whose declining business keeps him worried. However, Fred can count on his maid, Fatou, to keep his house clean and cook him good dishes to maintain his body's health and a healthy environment. This is Duparc's nod to the women who work as maids to keep men's lives clean but whose contribution to society is too often seen as minor, if not negligible. When Fred is in

need of feminine warmth, he turns to Tatiana, his girlfriend, the one he calls his problem-solver, for moments of intimate pleasure. Tatiana deserves the nickname Fred gives her, for it is thanks to her that he is able to avoid promiscuity in this Ivorian capital under attack by infectious diseases. Maria sees herself as her brother's protector. She wants a woman with established morals for him, who is attentive, a good cook and has a strong sense of the extended family. Lea, Patricia and Caramel are independent, enterprising women who need a man's presence only as a companion, not as a master. From this perspective, the film is also a celebration of African women in all their socio-economic diversity.

**Politics** Duparc's cinema is generally of a comic nature. But that does not prevent it from being socially engaged. Duparc often takes a critical look at his country's politics, its failures and successes. If Duparc believes that cinema should make people dream, for him, this dream also means guiding those in power towards the perception and realization of the people's aspirations. Duparc puts his finger on the failure of modernization and decentralization in *Abusuan*

*Abusuan* 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. It is undeniable that 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". Nonetheless, 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.

**Rural exodus** The development that took place in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1970s could be called " façade development." The profits generated by raw materials were disproportionately used to make the Ivorian capital shine, neglecting the rural zones. 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.

*Abusuan* 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.

**Agriculture and environment** 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," encouraging the youth to commit to farming. Duparc's *Abusuan* communicates that message. In *Wild Grass*, however,

Duparc puts his finger on the high cost the Ivorian environment has to pay for Côte d'Ivoire agricultural leadership

*Abusuan* 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. 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. 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.

*Wild Grass* Côte d'Ivoire based its development on agriculture and became West Africa's agricultural power. 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.

**Colonialism/Independence/neocolonialism** Duparc's films deal with the issues of Africa's colonization, its independence, and its neo-colonization. The filmmaker takes the opportunity to assess Africa's development and its new relations with the old colonial powers. Duparc's treatment of these issues is always marked by hope, criticism, contrapuntal viewpoints and, above all, humor.

*Abusuan* 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

*The Sixth Finger* The film shows how the colonial context exacerbates race division. In the colonies, skin color determines social rank. Whites are at the top of the social ladder. Then come the mixed races, and finally, at the very bottom of the ladder, come the blacks. Those at the top of the ladder enjoy the

many privileges that come with white skin color: they are exempt from taxes. They live in white neighborhoods. They frequent white bars and restaurants or have a reserved table, where they can enjoy iced drinks to soothe the tropical heat and eat in the company of the white commander. Whatever their political affiliations—be they communists, like Simon, or Gaullists, like the commander, or Jesuits, like the priest—the whites are all whites and are therefore placed in the same privileged position. For the others, a better life entails struggling to reach white heaven, to pass for white. *The Sixth Finger* is also a window into African independence. The film is set in 1956 Africa. Historically, all over the continent, people are feverish with anticipation for independence, and the continent is shaken by acts of insurrection. In French-speaking Africa, apart from the fierce resistance of the Maghrib, nothing significant is really happening. While the struggle for independence rages on elsewhere, in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, the black man waits for independence to be handed to him on a silver platter.

*A Color Coffee* What happens when the inhabitants of a foreign country occupy another country and claim rights and privileges over the natives? In *Color Coffee*, Duparc turns the tables of colonization and gives France the bitter taste of its own pill. The town of Montreuil, ironically referred to by the filmmaker as Montreuil-sur-Bamako (Bamako, the capital of Mali), an allusion to the large number of Malian immigrants living there, is forbidden territory for French natives. In the film, two imposing black men, posted at the entrance to the district, ask French citizens who wish to gain access to the area to show them an entry visa. France is being overrun by Africans, who make their own laws, live their own cultures and enjoy their own traditions, and even transpose their own homelands there, much to the chagrin of the native French. Duparc's mirror image of France in Africa shows what Africans experience in Africa when the wave of French settlers, disdainful of the local population, build little French community pockets that are tacitly forbidden to blacks. Every African country has its French quarter, its French schools, its French chapels. Why should the mirror-image be shocking? Duparc seems to be asking us (with his trademark good humor and satire).

**Superstition** Ivorian society is a society of superstition. The lives of the country's various communities are governed by ancestral beliefs that are struggling to accommodate the principles of the revealed religions (Christianity and Islam). This resistance is all the more ferocious as these religions, though different, are equally irrational. In these conditions, why abandon the irrational that one knows best, and which has always animated and organized the life of communities, for a foreign irrational?

*Abusuan* 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.

*The Sixth Finger* For Kwao's wife Ya, it makes sense to turn to the village oracle when hoping for a child, or to combine the oracle's incantations and remedies with the doctor's treatments. This puts all the chances on the petitioner's side. But Ya goes further: she cleans the village maternity wards. She collects the placentas of new mothers and buries them in the hope that the traditional gods will reward her efforts with motherhood. Ya's prayers are answered, and she becomes pregnant, to her great joy and that of her husband, Kwao. When the child arrives, he has six fingers on each hand, and village superstition christens it the devil's messenger, who must be disposed of lest the wrath of the gods descend upon the village. Rather than celebrate the arrival of this little being in the community, the villagers decide that he must be killed. At this point, paternal and maternal instincts take over from ancestral beliefs. Kwao vows to defend his son with his life. He grabs his gun, and with the help of his two most loyal companions,

threatens to kill anyone who comes looking for his son. Kwao and Ya flee the village to give their son a chance to live, and to give themselves a chance of a happy life.

*Caramel* The film *Caramel* is based on an African legend, that of Mamie Wata (Mamie Water), the enchanting or bewitching woman. The figure of Mamie Wata is present in African literature and art as a water deity, and her physiognomy is often depicted in popular art as a white or black mermaid. This mythical character from the coastal regions of Africa can prove wicked and grant the sinister wishes of those who, by making offerings to her, solicit her to harm their enemies. Mamie Wata can also turn out to be a seductive and jealous woman who, taking on human appearances, lures men into her arms and carries them off into her world. Sometimes, too, Mamie Wata is a revenant who comes to sleep for the last time with the man she once loved in the world of the living, and whom she had to leave abruptly without having had a chance to say goodbye to. And if this man, not knowing that his lover is from the realm of the dead, insists that she stay with him, then she takes him with her to the world of the dead. This is the case of Fred, who, unaware that *Caramel* had died the previous day, tells her that his only wish is never to leave her again. *Caramel* grants Fred's wish and takes him with her. Duparc revives an old African myth in *Caramel*. This, too, is part of the filmmaker's desire to be an archivist, a curator of African culture and tradition

**Change** Duparc's films bear witness to the changes taking place in Côte d'Ivoire, both in terms of social mores and in terms of legislation. In *Abusuan*, Duparc shows how legal changes guarantee women's rights in family succession. In *Dancing in the Dust*, the filmmaker parodies the loss of respectability of patriarchy in the polygamous system, thus inviting society to turn its back on this form of marriage. But the filmmaker's optimism is far from blissful. He is aware of the pitfalls that threaten change, as well as the new problems that change creates.

*Abusuan* The film alludes to a 1964 Ivorian law that had implications for the condition of women and children in case of the father's death. Before 1964, the people of Côte d'Ivoire were subject to the French colonial civil code governing Africans, which placed them under the matrilineal traditional jurisdiction. The matrilineal system considers that 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, who is considered the man's legitimate heir for being undeniably the blood of his blood. 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. 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.

*Dancing in the Dust* Polygamy in Côte d'Ivoire is not an institutional problem, as it is in many African countries. Theoretically, polygamy is illegal. However, this form of matrimonial union is easily practiced under the cloak of the Muslim religion. The fact that Duparc cast his protagonists (Demigod, Binta, Binta's parents) in a Muslim community is a direct criticism of that community for its practice of polygamy. Duparc introduces Binta, a non-conformist young woman, into the Muslim community, and like the worm in the fruit, she nibbles away at the edifices of Muslim patriarchy, which are the honor of the father, the sealing off of female desire, and the serenity of the father's harem. Taking issue with her father's decision to accept Demigod's marriage proposal, Binta sends the *griotte* (a female go-between) to tell Demigod that she is the one who chooses her man, not the other way around. She asks to meet Demigod to discuss the conditions under which she will be his wife. Demigod interprets this as his eventual emasculation by Binta. With Binta, everything changes. Subjected to an exhausting sexual schedule caused by the competition created by Binta between the dress wearers (*robeuses*) and the waistcloth wearers (*pagneuses*), Demigod confesses his powerlessness to conform to the rotation he himself has established for his wives; deceived and abandoned by Binta, Demigod bitterly realizes that his wealth cannot always subject women to his will. Of course, Demigod replaces Binta as soon as she leaves. But

this is a wavering Demigod, trying to reassure himself, but who knows that things will never be the same again. Demigod, or the cultural and religious institutions he represents, has been forever demystified.

**Tradition vs. Modernity** Duparc's films feature the contrast between tradition and modernity. *Abusuan*, for instance, begins and ends with the image of a traditional woman, Aka's sister, Lea, returning from the fields. Here, the filmmaker emphasizes women's important, yet underrated, contribution to subsistence economy, and even more so to the national economy, given the importance of agriculture in Ivorian development. In *Wild Grass*, Duparc shows the dilemma of an Africa trying to position itself in the modern world, but with one foot firmly planted in tradition.

*Abusuan* When Lea comes to visit Aka in Abidjan with her children, she does not 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.

*Wild Grass* 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.

**Tradition** Duparc's films present various practices in Côte d'Ivoire, and in Africa in general, that are so sedimented in customs and beliefs as to constitute traditional elements. From the pharmacopoeia of the libido, to the life of immigrants in French hostels, to mythical fertility recipes, Duparc has no shortage of humor in his treatment of serious issues.

*Dancing in the Dust* There is consequently a big market in Côte d'Ivoire for traditional libido stimulators, such as pepper, ginger, and cola nuts. In fact, hot pepper is scientifically proven to be a libido enhancer. It contains capsaicin, which releases endorphins and improves blood flow for erection. Ivorian women, by empirical experience, have been spicing their husbands' stews with strongly hot peppers to make them perform lastingly in bed. Demigod's fifth wife puts so much pepper in his stews that he can barely eat. Another stimulant that is readily used in Côte d'Ivoire to enhance erotic arousal both in men and women is ginger, which, besides its anti-inflammatory and anti-hypertensive function, is particularly known to boost testosterone. Ginger is widely consumed in Côte d'Ivoire in the form of powder to spice food and most commonly in the form of juice. In the film, a suggestive conversation between a man and



his ginger juice-vendor girlfriend hints at the sexual benefits of the beverage. When, with the arrival of young Binta in the Demigod household, competition between the co-wives to win their husbands' affection becomes intense, Demigod's fifth wife prepares a mixture of ginger and cola (one of the main ingredients in coca cola), which she makes him consume before going to bed. This recipe keeps Demigod so aroused that in the morning he can barely stand on his own two feet. Known for boosting stamina and increasing libido, cola nut is a natural aphrodisiac, which along with pepper and ginger, constitutes the main natural aphrodisiacs used by Ivorian men and women in this society where sex and sexual performance are open subjects.

*The Sixth Finger* The efforts of Ya, Kwao's second wife, to have a child illustrate the traditional notion of womanhood. A woman is only truly valuable when she is a mother. Otherwise, she is considered a failure. For the ten years that Ya has been married to Kwao, the couple has been childless, and all suspicions have turned to her. The community concludes that the couple's childlessness is due to Ya's infertility. As a result, Ya is subjected to all kinds of gossip and discrimination from her community. She is called a witch, and a young man in the village goes so far as to steal the meat in her stews and replace it with stones. In her quest for a child, Ya consults the village oracle, who makes her drink concoctions. She also consults the town doctor to see if her ovaries are still fertile. While waiting for the remedies to work, Ya sets herself the task of burying the placenta of new mothers, hoping that the gods will reward her dedication with a child. Her husband Kwao's friends say the whole thing is a waste of time, and that Kwao would do better to take another, younger wife who will give him children. Kwao's friends suggest young Adjoua, who arrives in all her finery to convince Kwao that she is the woman for him. However, Kwao, though not always faithful to Ya and a womanizer, is convinced that Ya, whom he loves, will give him the child of his dreams. In the end, Kwao is right. Ya gives him a son.

*A Color Coffee* When talking about tradition, it is important to be careful not to paint an entire nation or a vast region with a single brush stroke. In this respect, the African continent is made up of 54 nations, and no single tradition can claim to be unanimously accepted in Africa. However, when Africans find themselves in the West, homesickness causes the selective cultural practices of different origins, the way they mourn, celebrate funerals, baptisms or weddings, to spread very quickly so as to become sedimented as the "tradition" of the immigrants, themselves and, by this very fact, homogenized. The weekly gatherings that bring Docteur and his fellow African immigrants together around African food and anecdotes are the places where these new traditions are rehearsed and sedimented. It would have been desirable for these new traditions to be nourished by the habits of the host country. As it happens, the communitarianism of these immigrants alienates them from the practices of their host countries, and, as we see in *Color Coffee*, this communitarianism all too often celebrates the most abject practices, such as promiscuity, the devaluing of women, trickery, swindling and illegality, practices that stick to the bodies of immigrants as being their tradition, whereas in their respective countries of origin many of these practices are decried as anti-cultural or anti-traditional.

**Family** In his treatment of the theme of family, Duparc shows how family demands in his country weigh on young professionals and prevent them from making headways. For young professionals to thrive, they have to free themselves of the very anchor of their success, the traditional family; a daunting proposition. Duparc also shows the strength of women in keeping the family stable amidst the many pitfalls of modernism.

*Abusuan* 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.

*Wild Grass* 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. 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. 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. 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.

**Arts and Culture** Côte d'Ivoire's prosperity seems to have been achieved by neglecting African arts and culture. As a man of culture, it is obvious that Duparc loves culture and would like to see it given a greater place in society. As a result, Duparc's films are always a platform for the promotion of arts and culture. *Rue Princesse* celebrates the importance of music and theater. *Caramel* celebrates African cinema, painting and sculpture.

*Rue Princesse* 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.

*Caramel* Duparc seems to advocate a return to African values through the consumption of African art. Fred is passionate about cinema, but more specifically African cinema, the absence of which he laments in Ivorian theaters. He notes Africans' disproportionate interest in Hindi love movies and American Rambo-style action films. He believes he has found a way to encourage Ivorian cinema-goers to watch African films. He plans to devote two full days to one African film in his theater. And he has selected five films for that. For Fred, people come to the cinema to dream, not to be depressed. This is why he displays a large-lettered sticker on his car, expressing his conviction that "CINEMA IS DREAM". From this perspective, Duparc departs somewhat from the directives of FEPACI, which asserted at its first convention in Algiers that African cinema must refuse to be a dream factory, as is the case in the West, and instead be a cinema committed to working alongside African states in their efforts to fight imperialism. In addition to being an advocate of African cinema, Fred, who is certainly the filmmaker's mouthpiece, is a big consumer of African paintings and sculptures, which he proudly displays in his home—an encouragement from the filmmaker to his compatriots to be consumers of art.

**Sexuality** One recurring theme in Duparc's cinema is 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. In Duparc's films sex is celebrated, parodied, and caricatured.

*Wild Grass* 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. Deroose 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 often serviced him shows, sex for her is a professional occupation and she 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.

*Rue Princesse* 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.

*A Color Coffee* When the aims of marriage are more to consolidate the union of two families or to ensure the continuity of a lineage than to unite two people with compatible feelings, sex fulfils a purely pragmatic and utilitarian function, and is not passionate or erotic. In this arrangement, sex is based less on one's love for the other and more on the need to guarantee one's lineage through procreation. Under these conditions, the sexual act falls mechanically within the logic of fulfilling a contract. By having sex, Kada and Docteur perform their familial and social contract, that of working to ensure the continuity of the bloodline. The sexual act is not based on sentimental attachment, but on moral obligation. It is with Maria, his French girlfriend, that Docteur seems to truly experience sexual pleasure devoid of familial pressure, although Maria also hopes that her relationship with Docteur will lead to marriage. And it is with her progressive Arab boyfriend, Peter, that Kada makes passionate love, with the sole aim of the fulfillment of pleasure—even if their relationship is expected to eventually fall in the practical and dutiful register of marriage. So, marriage does not necessarily imply love, even if sex is part of it, and sex does not necessarily imply pleasure. These are dissociable concepts in human relationships, the film seems to imply.

*Caramel* The theme of sexuality, so present in Duparc's films, is again featured in *Caramel*. The treatment of open sexuality, which in countries such as Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Niger and Mauritania would have been controversial, is tackled in a lackadaisical way in the Ivorian context. Here again, women seem to be more sexually assertive than men. The sexual recipes proposed by Lea and Patricia frighten Fred. Fred confesses to Patricia that he is not ready for her sexual ardor, and that sex once in a while is more than enough for him, and that for this he has Tatiana, his problem-solver. Fred may not be all that sexually inclined, but not all men feel that way. Antoine, for example, makes the rounds of funeral wakes in search of grieving souls (women) to console. Sacrilegious, one might say, but in Côte d'Ivoire, it is at weddings, christenings and, above all, funeral wakes that love encounters take place. It is as if death awakens buried sexual impulses. Incidentally, it is while making love with Caramel, the dead woman who has returned, that Fred experiences his greatest sexual fulfillment, a fulfillment that leads him to his own death.

**Jealousy** Jealousy, Duparc seems to be telling us, is a bad advisor. It clouds the common sense of the person affected, leading to irrational actions. Duparc shows how apparently thoughtful, methodically trained people fall into mysticism and violence when they become jealous.

*Wild Grass* 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.

**Love:** Duparc emphasizes the importance of love in a relationship. Love, Duparc seems to imply, can conquer even the most apparently insurmountable obstacle. Duparc's films seem to divorce love, deep affection for each other, from sex, which he places in the register of pure lust.

*The Sixth Finger* Kwao is not a blameless man. He cheats on his second wife, Ya, by sleeping with Sékou's wife. Sékou is no saint either. He sleeps with the commander's wife. However, Kwao displays an admirable affection for his wife. He supports her, consoles her, and reassures her that one day they will have a boy when the lack of children in their marriage depresses her. To his friends, who suggest he take another wife to replace Ya, Kwao says he loves his wife and is loyal to her. But what kind of loyalty does Kwao, this adulterous man, have? Love for him seems to be divorced from sex. It is the affection, the deep feeling, that he has for his wife, and which is separable from sexual impulses that are more bodily than emotional. As long as his feelings are centered on Ya, whatever the wanderings of his body, Kwao considers that he remains faithful and loyal to his wife. This, incidentally, seems to be the case with Sékou's wife. She is deeply attached to her husband and is delighted that he has recovered from his alcoholism. However, as she confesses to Ya, Sékou no longer makes love to her, and she always finds someone in the village to satisfy her in this respect when she feels like it. Sékou's wife considers herself loyal to her husband, even though she cheats on him. The same is true of the commander's wife. She cheats on her husband with Sékou, but she would not leave him for Sékou; Sékou is only an instrument for her to satisfy her desires. Her "loyalty" remains with the commander.

*Rue Princesse* Aki and Jean 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.

**Marriage** A recurring theme in Duparc's films is that of arranged marriage. Such a view of marriage does not take into consideration the fact that love plays an important role in marriage. Duparc shows that love, whose reason defies logic, often derails marriages that have not given it full attention.

*Rue Princesse* Aki and Jean's families have decided that the two young people should get married. This decision has been made without the input of the two people who are principally concerned, and who will be spending their lives together. Aki's and Jean's marriage is, from the point of view of their respective parents, a transaction that is designed to protect the financial interests of both families. The parents consider that they are from the same social class, the high class, and that having raised their children according to the standards of that social class, marrying them together will guarantee the perennity of their familial status and prevent the squandering of their families' assets. The two young people, Aki and Jean, see things otherwise. It is their hearts that they want to follow, and their hearts do not beat at the rhythm of familial interests. Therefore, they thwart the marriage project set up for them by their parents.

*A Color Coffee* In *A Color Coffee*, Kada's marriage to Docteur falls into this category. Without consulting their children, who are strangers to each other, Kada's and Docteur's fathers arrange the marriage. Kada's protests to her father do not move him. The marriage is sealed, and Doctor, on the occasion of a vacation trip to Côte d'Ivoire, meets Kada for the first time, marries her, and establishes documents allowing her to follow him to France. For Kada's father, who tells his daughter that marriage frees women from the slavery of society, his daughter emancipates herself from a greater, societal, slavery to place herself under the slavery of a single man, her husband, further sealing the friendship with Docteur's father. For Docteur's father, this marriage ensures the continuity of his lineage, given that Docteur is his only son, who until now has had no children of his own. It goes without saying, then, that in this arrangement, community and family interests, rather than individual and selfish considerations, take precedence. In such a context, anyone who marries by putting their personal interests above those of the community or extended family will be alienating themselves from these institutions and the support they provide.

*Caramel* In Africa, marriage is a rite of passage for women, a status of respectability. While men like Fred and his colleague Antoine flutter from woman to woman and are in no hurry to marry, women like Tatiana, Lea and Patricia feel the passage of time and the pressure of society to find themselves a husband who will validate them. Tatiana is a single mother and a civil servant. She is financially independent, and, as she tells Maria, Fred comes to her when he needs a good hot meal and human warmth. And she has been waiting for years for Fred to propose marriage. Lea is also an independent woman. But her single life weighs heavily on her, and she jumps at the chance to seduce Maria's brother into a possible marriage. She makes a fool of herself trying to please Fred, and in the end, is repulsed by him. Patricia owns a successful restaurant-bar in Abidjan. She is in her mid-twenties and still not married. She will do anything for a husband, and when Maria invites her to seduce her brother, Patricia goes all out. However, like Lea, she takes the wrong approach and loses Fred's respect. Before she met Fred, Caramel had been living with a violent alcoholic who beat her. However, her relatives advised her to put up with her fiancé's cruelty rather than leave him, as being single and approaching her thirties would be a tragedy. Despite pressure from her relatives, Caramel decides to leave, thus ignoring the social wisdom that a woman must marry at all costs or remain a failed woman.

**Polygamy** Although legal in many African countries, especially those with a Muslim majority, polygamy and early marriage (under the age of 18) have been prohibited by the Ivorian civil code since 1960. However, to the best of Ivorian memory, no offender has ever been brought to justice, and

polygamy is practiced openly, especially, but not exclusively, in Muslim communities. Based on a misinterpretation of the Qur'an, African Muslims allowed themselves up to four wives by their religious faith.

*Dancing in the Dust* Duparc poignantly satirizes this practice by going beyond the mythical number four to provide his main character with five wives. And even this excess is not enough for Demigod. Now he is looking for a sixth wife in the person of young Binta. And when she is introduced to Demigod's family, Binta becomes the bad weed in Demigod's garden. She undermines his authority by her excessive autonomy. She drains his strength by being sexually overdemanding and asking him to perform to her expectations. She destabilizes his household by creating discord among the wives, and she humiliates him by cheating on him and leaving him for her boyfriend. However, as soon as she leaves, Binta is replaced by the daughter of Demigod's foreman, which is the filmmaker's way of telling us that polygamy has a thick skin, and that it will take more than a few setbacks to dislodge it. Indeed, an effort by the Ivorian National Assembly to legalize polygamy failed in 2022. But the champions of polygamy are not yet defeated.

*A Color Coffee* Duparc paints a caricature of polygamy to show not only how degrading the practice is for women, but also how ill-suited it is to life as a couple. Docteur, already married to Awa, decides to take Kada as his second wife. However, he has neither the space, nor the resources, nor the astuteness to manage his new situation. Docteur lives in a cramped one-bedroom apartment. He barely earns a minimum wage working as a hospital floor-cleaner in a French hospital, and only manages to make ends meet thanks to the financial support of his French lover, Maria. It is to Maria that Docteur turns when he needs a mattress or a television. Docteur is financially insolvent, and his decision to marry a second wife was based on his sexual urges and on the desire for children, not necessarily on reason. Moreover, while Docteur thinks he is fooling the French administration by passing off Kada as his daughter, he lacks the intellectual acuity to manage the situation he creates. He loses control and becomes the plaything of his second wife. Indeed, Kada, whom he takes for a naive and harmless young African girl, is in fact a very cunning young woman, who plays him for a fool. At school, Kada makes friends with Fatim, an Arab girl, who introduces her to her cousin Peter, the local butcher. Kada cheats on Docteur with Peter, and eventually runs away with him. Kada first emancipates herself from the authority of patriarchy (her father) who has imposed Docteur as her husband, and then frees herself from the degrading situation of polygamy by finding in Peter the husband of her choice.

**Patriarchy** Patriarchy is not always victorious in Duparc's films. In fact, it too often emerges defeated in its power struggle with women. Duparc turns patriarchy into a despot who has difficulty controlling the system he has put in place, and who made a fool and manipulated by the women he tries to control.

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

*A Color Coffee* Kada's father tells her that he has decided to marry her off to Docteur, his friend's son. He tells her that marriage is liberating for women, because by making themselves the slaves of men through marriage, women free themselves from the greater injustice of being enslaved by the whole of

society. Kada's objections, when she tells her father she does not even know what Docteur looks like, are to no avail. Docteur arrives in the village and returns to France with his new wife. In France, Docteur instructs Kada, as he had already done with Awa, his first wife, that he is the master of the house, and that she must make herself available to him whenever he wants her. However, Kada, who began her education at a French high school, retorts that she learned at school that a woman has rights, and that a man cannot take her sexually without her consent, otherwise he will be subjected to the rigors of the law. Docteur replies that he is the master of his palace (his apartment), and that France stops at his doorstep. Moreover, Kada realizes that the weekly gatherings of Africans serve only to reinforce the idea of the superiority of men over women. They are occasions for men to prove to their peers that they are absolute masters of their households. Eventually, Kada steers clear of the influence of the omnipotent African patriarchy represented by Docteur. She decides to settle down with her progressive Arab lover, Peter.

**Power/authority** Duparc's films deal with the question of power in both interpersonal and interstate relations. Power, Duparc seems to be telling us, is not necessarily held by the one believed to be the strongest. Duparc proposes a more complicated understanding of power relationships, a decentering of the balance of power.

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

*A Color Coffee* The lecture given by Kada's father to justify his daughter's marriage to Docteur reveals the predominant place given to men in society. Kada's father portrays the husband as a despot to his wife, but an enlightened despot who will free his wife from the slavery of society. However, Duparc seems to imply through subtle imagery that this is just wishful thinking, as man is not as powerful as he likes to believe. On the first day they meet, Kada opens a bottle of Coca-Cola for Docteur using her teeth. And when Docteur marvels at the strength of Kada's jaws, she retorts, like Little Red Riding Hood to the Big Bad Wolf, that all the better to munch on him; then she asks Docteur if he knows anything about Little Red Riding Hood. Naturally, Docteur, unsophisticated as he is, replies that Paris is a big city, and it is impossible to know everyone in it. This scene foreshadows what the viewer will later see as Docteur's being taken care of by women, and his downfall brought about by women. Indeed, Docteur can only make ends meet with money from his French girlfriend, Maria, and his two wives, Kada, who sells African souvenirs, and Awa, who is an illegal sweatshop worker. Eventually, Kada's rebellion and voluntary departure with Peter, her Arab lover, cause Docteur to lose control and reveal his manipulation of immigration laws to the French authorities. Docteur's power collapses and he is deported to his country of origin. The woman is Little Red Riding Hood, showing the man, the Big Bad Wolf, that his power is merely illusory.

*A Color Coffee* Relations between states are also governed by a power struggle. The difficulties encountered by Ivorians--or any other African--in obtaining a French visa are a far cry from the hospitable treatment reserved to French nationals wishing to travel to Côte d'Ivoire. While the doors to Africa are generally wide open to Westerners, almost insurmountable obstacles are placed in the path of Africans seeking European visas. Orthodoxy would have us regard any Westerner visiting Africa as a potential benefactor for Africa, a contributor to Africa's development. Conversely, any African wishing to travel to

the West is considered, until proven otherwise, to be an illegal immigrant, as a destabilizer of Western progress. At the heart of this perception of the movement of people lies a racial logic. Truth is on the side of the West, just as lies are on the side of Africa. Truth, we might even say, is the West, and lies Africa, in this power struggle. This logic stems from the racism of the colonial situation, where the West, by virtue of its military power which enabled it to subjugate Africa, also arrogates to itself an ontological superiority and therefore a civilizing mission. Under these conditions, it is to the benefactor Westerner that the doors of Africa must be opened, and not to the profiteer African that the doors of the West must be opened. Duparc beats the omnipotence of the West to a pulp with a Docteur and other blacks who fool France and French institutions, even if they are eventually caught up in their duplicity.

**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. One particular film of Duparc shows the class difference in Côte d'Ivoire as well as the unequal application of justice in the country.

*Rue Princesse* 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 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.

**Appearance** Life is but a game of *masquage*, Duparc's films seem to be saying. Many of the characters in his films go about their lives wearing masks, pretending to be what they are not. However, Duparc does not always give the upper hand to false pretense. His films always end up with an unmasking of falsehood.

*Rue Princesse* 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.

*A Color Coffee* Docteur is the quintessential deceptive immigrant. The nickname he has chosen already augurs his intention to dodge with the truth. He is a floor-cleaner in a Parisian hospital, but he goes by "Docteur" in his Montreuil neighborhood. And he carries this title all the way back to his African village, declaring to anyone who will listen that he is an important man in France, known to the French authorities and the owner of a big house there. The suit Docteur wears is in itself an artifice of deception, intended to present him as something he is not. The children who make fun of Docteur when he enters the village are attentive observers, who perceive the incongruity of Docteur's attire, its zany, inappropriate aspect. Not only is it unsuited to the African heat, but the umbrella in the shape of a hat makes Docteur look like a clown. This incongruity between what one wants to appear as and what one actually is exposed as pertains not only for Docteur, but for all those who try their hand at the game of deception. Docteur's deception in posing as the father of his second wife is discovered by the French authorities, and he is repatriated to his country. The fraud of Sapeur, the charlatan, is also exposed, and he is deported. Afiba, the unfaithful wife, is exposed when she infects her husband with gonorrhea. Only Kada, who in this sea of deceptions has taken care to keep her true identity, her authentic birth certificate, in her luggage, unbeknownst to Docteur, succeeds in her escape with Peter, her lover. Duparc's message that deception never pays is perfectly clear.

## CHARACTERS

### Open

1. AKA (*Abusuan*) 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.
2. FRANÇOIS (*Wild Grass*) 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.
3. BINTA (*Dancing in the Dust*) Binta is a mischievous, defiant girl. Unable to dissuade her parents from marrying her off to Demigod, she plays along and agrees to be the polygamist's sixth wife. However, her marriage to Demigod does not prevent her from living her life as she pleases, offering her love to whomever she pleases, whenever she pleases. After sowing discord in Demigod's family and subverting his authority, she leaves him for her city boyfriend.
4. JEAN (*Rue Princesse*) 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.
5. KADA (*A Color Coffee*) Kada is an adaptable, resourceful and rebellious young woman. She fitted immediately into French society upon her arrival in France by making friends at school and learning French laws. She found herself an occupation and became financially independent. When her marital situation became unbearable to her, she left her husband and started dating a young Arab man.

6. MARIA (*Caramel*) Maria is a supportive and self-doubting woman. Docteur acknowledges that life in France would have been difficult for him were it not for Maria's support. She helped him find a job and helps him financially. Maria, who has been waiting for Docteur to propose to her, thinks that she faces unfair competition from African women because she is not as curvaceous as they.
7. CARAMEL (*Caramel*) Caramel is a gentle, courageous and enigmatic young woman. She is soft-spoken and always smiling. She has gone through some difficult times in her life but has remained strong and optimistic, forging ahead to better her life. She is, however, an enigmatic woman, who ends up proving Fred's sister's suspicion of her as out of this world.

### Closed

1. CATHERINE (*Abusuan*) 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.
2. KOUAME (*Abusuan*) 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.
3. BINTOU (*Wild Grass*) 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.
4. MISS KOUADIO (*Wild Grass*) 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.
5. DEMIGOD (*Dancing in the Dust*) Demigod is a polygamist. Unlike most polygamists, who rule their households with inflexible hands, Demigod is more of a naive, pleasant joker. He is lax about the rules of the household, and his wives sometimes take advantage of this to play him for a fool. For the filmmaker, Demigod is the symbol of a polygamy that is losing ground.
6. BINTA'S PARENTS (*Dancing in the Dust*) Binta's parents are the prototype of immoral, predatory parents. Unconcerned about their daughter's welfare, they sell her to Demigod to solve their own financial difficulties. Their immorality is made all the more flagrant by the fact that the person pointing the finger at them is their own daughter. Binta lectures them on their lack of dignity and their selfishness, but to no avail.
7. THE COMMANDER (*The Sixth Finger*) The commander is a prejudiced, naive, nonchalant man who patiently waits for his mission in Africa to come to an end, passing the time in his bar. He has formed a certain idea of Africans as lazy, unenterprising people. His belief in these stereotypes blinds him to the reality around him.
8. EMILE (*RuePrincesse*) 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 princess, 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.

9. DOCTEUR (*Color Coffee*) Docteur is a humorous, easy-going and pleasant man, but a backward man all the same. Although relaxed, he sees himself as the master of a house that he insists must remain closed to any French intrusion. He lives in France but refuses to follow a French lifestyle. He orders his wives around and insists that they be available to him anytime he wants to have sex.
10. MARIA (*Color Coffee*) Fred's sister, Maria, is a superstitious, nosy, and selfish character. Maria is afraid that her brother's naivete in matters of dating will lead him straight into the embrace of a witch. She spies on him and sets about to find him a woman. However, Maria wants that woman to adhere to her own principles first.

### Agreeable

1. KWAO (*The Sixth Finger*) Kwao is a cheerful, proud, and ambiguous man. He ignores the malice of the village towards his family and always displays a benevolent attitude. He takes pride in his status as a veteran who has seen Europe, and he feels this puts him above the fray. He adores his second wife, Ya, but cheats on her with the wife of his neighbor, Sékou, to take revenge for the latter's enmity, he says.
2. YA Ya (*The Sixth Finger*) is a stoic, superstitious and determined woman. She remained fearless and resolute in the face of the hostility of the villagers, who called her a witch. By force of determination, Ya finally succeeds in having the child of her dreams, after years of follow-up treatment by her healer and her doctors.
3. JOSEY (*Rue Princesse*) 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.
4. ADRIENNE (*My Name Is Fargass*) Adrienne is the one who really holds the Zouma family together. She is reliable, compassionate and strong. She interceded to get her nephew freed from jail. She runs to the rescue of a battered woman and gives her shelter at her home, defying the victim's violent husband.
5. MAMIE (*My Name Is Fargass*) Mamie is a caring, imposing and respected woman. She is the traditional pillar of the family. Her presence is reassuring. Her advice is well taken by the family as well as the neighbors.
6. FRED (*Caramel*) Fred is an uncharacteristic Ivorian young man in that he is a sober man, in terms of pleasure, focusing all his attention on his main passion. An avid fan of African cinema, he opens his own movie theater to promote African films. This business is a risky enterprise in a country whose population is more interested in foreign, especially American, films. However, Fred remains undaunted, following his dream.

### Disagreeable

FARGASS (*My name is Fargass*) Fargass is lazy, delinquent and hypocrite man. He would rather live as a freeloader and a beggar than find himself an honest job. When his uncle insists that he start fending for himself, Fargass turns to a life of criminality and vagrancy. While he chastises criminals, he is himself a more dangerous outlaw.