

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE SIXTH FINGER / Le Sixième doigt (1990)

Henri Duparc (1941-2006)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Writer-producer Henri Duparc is a Guinean-Ivorian filmmaker. He was born on December 23, 1941 in Forécariah, Guinea, and died on April 18, 2006 in Paris. Duparc's training in filmmaking first took place in 1962, at the Cinematographic Institute of Belgrade (former Yugoslavia), then at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques de Paris (IDHEC), between 1964 and 1966. In 1967, Duparc worked as a producer for the Ivorian government's Société Ivoirienne de Cinéma (SIC), and when the company went defunct, Duparc created his own production company Focale 13 (later known as les Films Henri Duparc), in 1983. Duparc's work can be characterized as "cinéma naïf" in the sense that it captures and caricatures the flaws of his fellow countrymen. His first source of inspiration is Côte d'Ivoire, whose traditions and everyday life he showcases and at the same time parodies with humor. Duparc has produced a number of shorts, some documentaries, a television series, *Aya* (1986), and eight features: *Abusuan/Family* (1972), *L'Herbe sauvage/Wild Grass* (1978), *Bal poussière/Dancing in the Dust* (1988), *Le Sixième doigt/The Sixth Finger* (1990), *Une couleur café/Color Coffee* (1997), *Je m'appelle Fargass/My Name is Fargass* (2000) and *Caramel* (2005).

Film *The Sixth Finger* takes a humorous look at the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. Where filmmakers like Sembène Ousmane would have treated the colonial situation with frustration, Duparc's tone is both light-hearted and comedic. Duparc's colonizer is not necessarily cruel. He is a jaded civil servant, twiddling his thumbs and waiting for the Africans to kick him out of their territories. Duparc's colonized is not a frustrated man. He is a blissful person, blithely indulging in daily routine, waiting for his independence to be handed to him. While not indifferent to their respective situations, Duparc's colonizer and colonized are a far cry from those described by Frantz Fanon. They are not obsessed with their own situation. They are not obsessed with confrontation. They avoid open conflict. In the meantime, they each live their lives spiced up with sex, racism, exoticism and superstition.

Background *The Sixth Finger* is set in 1956, in colonial Africa. The film was shot in the historic coastal town of Grand Bassam, in Côte d'Ivoire. The language of the film is French. The cast is composed of Ivorian and French professional actors, some of whom were very famous. Jean Carmet, for instance, who played the commander was a popular comedic actor known for his role in *Les Misérables* (1982). *The Sixth Finger* won the Special Jury Prize at the 1990 Namur French-Speaking Film Festival.

CHARACTERS

KWAO African soldier, veteran of the Second World War and husband of Ya for the last ten years
YA The second wife of Kwao, who has been hoping to have a child for the last ten years
THE COMMANDER The French commander of a French African colony.

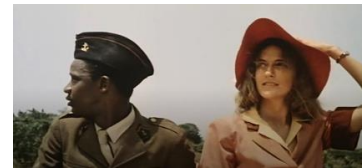
SYNOPSIS

Kwao is an African soldier who fought for France in the Second World War. At the end of the war, Kwao asks his French girlfriend, Gertrude, for her hand in marriage. Convinced that Kwao is a Francophile and an African prince, Gertrude's father agrees to the marriage, although a little anxious about what life will be like for his beloved daughter in Africa. Kwao returns to Africa with his white bride, who imagines herself as the princess of a great African kingdom. However, when Gertrude realizes that instead of a great, rich, sumptuous kingdom, Kwao's home is a poor village as her new home, Gertrude flees in tears and seeks the protection of the French embassy, which summons Kwao and dissolves his union with Gertrude. With Gertrude gone, Kwao marries an African woman, Ya. For ten years, the couple are childless, and all

suspicions of infertility naturally turn to Ya, who makes repeated visits to the village healer and the town doctor to have a child. Ya and her husband endure the malice and gossip of the villagers, who even go so far as to say that they are possessed by the devil. However, Kwao, who boasts of being literate, having known Europe, having fought in the war and having slept with white women, rises above all these resentments with humor and pride. While literate Africans are jostling for privileges reserved to whites, such as eating and drinking with the nonchalant and bored white commander at his restaurant-bar, Kwao, with his veteran's title, ex-sergeant's uniform and ex-serviceman's pension, is convinced that he is already close to the white man, and lets the wickedness of his fellow Africans run off him like rainwater. Ya's perseverance pays off, and she becomes pregnant. When Kwao and his wife's long-awaited child is born, it has six fingers on each hand, and the village elders decree that the infant is an emissary of the devil, who must be killed to avoid calamities to the village. Kwao draws his gun to protect his son. However, the village's determination to carry out the sentence against the newborn is such that Kwao and Ya choose exile in order to see their child grow up.

SCENES

How Gertrude Left Kwao Kwao tells his friend, Amon, how his French wife, Gertrude, left him ten years ago. Gertrude's father was happy to give his daughter in marriage to Kwao, a World War II veteran who had pretended to be an African prince. Kwao promises to be Gertrude's husband, father and mother, that is, to look after her like her parents would. Kwao returns to Africa with Gertrude. After hours in a truck on a country road and long hours walking through the bush, Kwao and Gertrude arrive at a high plateau. Pointing to a small hamlet in the distance below, Kwao says to Gertrude: "Princess, behold your kingdom." The young woman is stunned by what she sees. Gertrude runs off, wailing that what she sees is a village, not a kingdom.



SEXUALITY

You are pretty soft Simon, a French colonist, has a new African woman in his bed every night. Tonight, he shows off his muscles to Awa, his new conquest. Awa notes that, despite his muscles, Simon's penis is very soft. Awa offers to purge him with chili pepper, but Simon asks her to take him in her mouth instead.

Kwao sleeps with Sékou's wife While his wife is at the market, Kwao flirts with the wife of his neighbor, Sékou, a man who is not very fond of him. Sékou's wife seems to like the attention Kwao is giving her. Kwao sleeps with Sékou's wife. He tells one of his friends that he sleeps with Sékou's wife to get revenge for Sékou's hatred of him.



I seek pleasure elsewhere Sékou's wife tells Ya that her husband has stopped drinking thanks to the commander's wife, who gives him good advice. She also complains that her husband has not made love to her for the past six months and that she is obliged to see a villager from time to time to satisfy her. She swears to Ya that this villager is not Kwao.

The latest fashion from Paris A Lebanese shopkeeper sells second-hand pyjamas at the village market, passing them off as the latest fashion from Paris. The villagers storm his stall. The shopkeeper sexually harasses one of his customers who has come to try on his pyjamas in the back of his truck. She defends herself by violently grabbing his testicles.



Simon and Abdallah have gonorrhoea. Ya goes to the town doctor for a check-up. Simon also goes to see the doctor, but for a venereal disease infection. In the waiting room, Simon meets Abdallah, who has also come to the hospital for the same reason - a gonococcal infection. Both men conclude that they have been infected by the same woman, Awa.



An evening at the commander's The commander organizes a reception at his home. The European women fantasize about the black guests. The commander, on the other hand, has other worries. He has just learned that a villager shot his guards and asks Simon to make sure it never happens again. The commander is furious that the villagers are refusing to pay taxes, instead contributing to a new local political party. He accuses de Gaulle of being behind the gradual loss of the colonies.



Many mixed-race children The commander suspects Kwao of being the shooter and says he deserves to be in prison. Simon retorts that Kwao only fired to scare off the guards, who wanted to rape a girl. Simon adds that the guards really wanted to collect the tax by having sex, and that getting paid in sex seems to be a classic method in this part of the world. He notes that one village in the region, which is rarely visited by whites, has many little mixed-race children. The commander's wife asks Simon if this is an accusation against the priest. Simon defends himself.



Sékou masturbates the commander's wife Sékou tells the commander's wife that the reason Ya cannot have children is because she rides a bicycle. The commander's wife tells him that she rides horses a lot, and that has not stopped her from having children. She shows Sékou her C-section scar and asks him to touch it. Sékou hesitates. She takes his hand and places it on her lower abdomen. The commander's wife leads Sékou's hand lower and lower between her thighs, moaning with pleasure.



Postwar Soldiers Amon tells Kwao that he would have been better with a woman from his country instead of coming back with a French woman. Kwao replies that he is a literate man, and that he has seen Europe, and that it would have been ill-advised for him to marry a black woman. Kwao stops at the military camp to salute the French flag. Then he goes to the Treasury to collect his veteran's pension. The African employees at the Treasury are hostile to Kwao. Sainte Rose, a mixed-race employee, thinks that France is wasting its money on useless people. Kwao reminds them that he fought in the war in France and slept with white women, and that he is an important man.



Drunken Soldiers Kwao's friends run to warn him that drunken colonial soldiers are brutalizing young Adjoua and her mother. Kwao shoots in their direction, driving them off. The commander arrests people he suspects of drunkenness in the street and jails them for days to sober them up. One of Kwao's friends is arrested. He protests that he is just passing by and not bothering anyone. The commander ignores his explanations and orders that he be locked up for three days.



The Commander's speech The commander gives an impassioned speech to the villagers seated in front of a sign that reads: "France works for you". The commander's speech is about justice and equality, and the need for everyone to have bread. The commander uses metaphors that the people find hard to follow. Kwao misinterprets the commander's speech to the notables. He tells them that the commander is hungry because he is poorly paid by France, and is asking to be fed. The village chief tells the commander that he has understood his message. The next day, the villagers bring food to the commander, who is not sure what to do with it.



Europeans' view of Africans

Sainte Rose and the commander complain about the heat. Sainte Rose remarks that with the African heat, it would have been fairer if the invention of the refrigerator had been an African feat. The commander replies that Africans cannot even invent a match, and that as soon as they get a bit of education, they prefer to go into politics. The parish priest announces that he has a lot to do in his parish with his faithful, and that he has never seen such a pagan race. The commander adds that Africans are not only pagan, but also lazy



Ya wants a child

Ya, Kwao's African wife, has come to see the village healer because after ten years of marriage, she still has no children. The healer gives her a concoction to drink. A woman from the village comes running to fetch Ya, as there is a birth in progress and Ya must retrieve the placenta and bury it in the hope that it will bring her good luck and give her a child. The healer makes Ya wash herself with some of her own concoctions. She assures her that within two months she will be pregnant, unless her husband is not strong enough to have sex with her. Ya tells the healer that she has no worries about her husband's sexual energy. Ya tells her husband, Kwao, that she caught old Konaté's son stealing meat from her sauce and putting stones in it. Kwao replies that they are treated like this because they have no children, and that people say they are inhabited by the devil. Kwao tells Ya that he would be happy if she gave him a boy. Kwao wonders if he is not the cause of their infertility.



A new wife for Kwao

Kwao's friends suggest that he take young Adjoua as a wife to replace Ya. They think that Adjoua is young and fertile, and that she will give him beautiful children. Kwao replies that Adjoua is indeed beautiful, but that he has no intention of leaving his wife, Ya.



Ya is pregnant

Ya comes home with good news for Kwao. The doctor has told her that she can have children. He gave her some tablets to help stimulate her ovaries, which she proudly shows off to her husband. Ya tells her husband, who is busy replacing tiles on the roof of the house, that she is pregnant. Kwao is ecstatic. He celebrates the good news by jumping. He loses his balance, slips and lands in a tub of water.



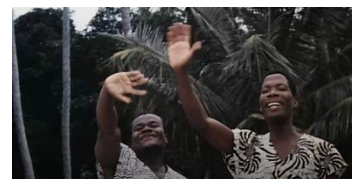
Ya gives birth

Ya, Kwao's wife, has just given birth. Kwao wears his soldier's uniform to go and see his son. Kwao finds his wife crying. She tells him that their son has six fingers on each hand. Kwao replies that there's nothing to cry about if their child is blessed with two fingers more than the other children. Ya tells Kwao that the village has decided to kill the child. Kwao goes into a blind rage and shouts that no one will touch the son he has waited ten years for. Kwao swears that tradition or not, his child will live. Amoi, Kwao's best friend, keeps guard in front of Ya's bedroom.



Kwao leaves the village

Kassi and the village witch doctor come to take possession of Ya's infant. They are met by Amoi's and Kwao's guns. Kassi explains to Kwao that his son must die or he will bring misfortune to the whole village. Kwao decides to go into exile with his wife and son. As he leaves, Kwao tells his friends that, in addition to having six fingers on each hand, his son has three testicles. Kwao, his friends and Ya burst out laughing.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

KWAO 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.

Cheerful Kwao is a cheerful man, who takes life as it comes. The lack of children in his marriage makes Kwao the target of the village's gossip, and he knows it. However, Kwao never lets the spite of his peers, with whom he maintains good relations in the village, get the better of him. Kwao's revenge is most unorthodox. For example, in retaliation for Sékou's wickedness, he sleeps with Sékou's wife. One wonders if Kwao is not looking for ways to derive pleasure from even the most frustrating situations.

Proud Kwao is proud of his service to France during the Second World War. He is also proud to have known Europe and white women. To those of his compatriots, like Sékou for example, who disrespect him, Kwao is quick to point out his status as a veteran and a literate man who has traveled outside Africa. In fact, after the war, Kwao felt that his European experience compelled him to marry a white woman, as a black woman would take him back to a state of primitiveness that he had surpassed. Nevertheless, after Gertrude fled, Kwao married Ya, an African woman.

Ambiguous Kwao is an ambiguous man. He loves his wife, Ya, to whom he has been married for ten years and with whom he hopes to have a child. He refuses to marry the young Adjoua, whom his friends advise him to take as a replacement for Ya. In other words, Kwao is loyal to Ya. And yet, Kwao has no qualms about cheating on her with Sékou's wife. For Kwao, this extra-marital relationship with Sékou's wife should not be seen as disloyalty to his wife. Kwao confides to one of his friends that he sleeps with Sékou's wife solely to take revenge for Sékou's resentment towards him.

YA Ya 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.

Stoic The fact that Ya is childless stigmatizes her in the village as a witch. However, Ya remains true to herself, smiling and approachable towards the other villagers. She carries on unabated with her healer's and doctor's treatments, as well as with her cleaning duties at the nursery, and eventually has a child of her own.

Superstitious Ya has been married to Kwao for ten years, and their marriage is childless. Ya is convinced that the problem lies with her. She consults the town doctors, but also the village healer, to find a solution to her "infertility". However, to give herself a better chance of having a child, Ya puts herself at the service of new mothers, collecting and burying their placentas. She hopes that by cleaning up the village maternity ward, the gods will take pity on her and reward her with a child.

Determined Ya is a determined woman. She wants a child, and she does everything in her power to make it happen. She consults the traditional village healer. She consults the town doctors. She tries to appeal to the gods by cleaning after women who have just given birth and by burying their placenta. Ya ends up bearing a son, but it remains to be established whether this son is the result of the efforts of the traditional and modern healers, or a reward from the gods. Nevertheless, it is the result of Ya's determination.

THE COMMANDER 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.

Prejudiced The commander is a man full of prejudices about Africans. He cannot be called a racist, as his relations with Africans are cordial and agreeable. He does, however, believe that Africans are lazy, that they prefer to consume imported products rather than create their own, and that as soon as they get a bit of education, they get into politics. These are all common criticisms that some Africans, too, make of their fellow Africans.

Naïve The commander is a naïve man. His prejudices about Africans make him completely blind to everything going on around him. To him, Africans are big, lazy, harmless children with no entrepreneurial spirit. The commander's wife cheats on him right under his nose with Sékou, but the commander is far from suspecting Sékou as a man capable of cuckolding him. In fact, he even makes Sékou his wife's bodyguard, giving the latter the opportunity to spend a lot of time with his lover.

Nonchalant The commander believes that the colony is a lost cause. He believes that de Gaulle has saved France, but that he is losing the economy with his lenient administration of the colonies. The commander seems to have come to terms with this loss and is not overly involved in the management of the regions for which he is responsible. He gives occasional speeches on justice and equality. He sometimes goes out and arrests drunkards to keep himself busy. On the whole, however, he prefers things to go smoothly, knowing that independence is forthcoming.

THEMES

Myth/ideology/propaganda Every ideology needs its nemesis to maintain itself, a formidable enemy who threatens its existence, and for whom it must remain in a constant state of alert. Without this enemy, an ideology would not survive, as ideologists would have no arguments to recruit new subjects and occupy those already supporting the ideology. Where this enemy is non-existent, ideology must imagine and invent it through propaganda. *The Sixth Finger* takes place a few years before the independence of Côte d'Ivoire. A new local political party is created, looking for members. Kwao is appointed party representative. To motivate members, the party creates the myth of persecution and espionage. Members are led to believe that there are forces working against the party's interests, which must be tracked down and prevented from doing harm. Nearby, in the village, Kwao identifies Kassi, a local man who refuses to join the party, as one of the hostile forces. From this point of view, Kassi's hostility towards Kwao becomes an expression of his hostility towards the party. Outside the village, the party raises the specter of foreign spies, who must be subdued and eliminated. So Kwao and his friends attack two innocent wildlife photographers, one black and one white, clubbing them and holding them prisoner. When a representative of the local political party arrives in the village, there is no doubt that he knows the two men well, and is responsible for having framed them as spies to give Kwao a patriotic purpose. Quietly, the party representative advises the two hunters to remain patient, and that he will return with them. The two hunters serve as successful propaganda for the local party, enabling the party to massage the patriotic fiber of its militants.

Communication/(missed)communication The great paradox of the colonial situation is that it endured through miscommunication or missed communication between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized and the colonizer have coexisted, more or less peacefully, out of misunderstanding. In *The Sixth Finger*, the commander delivers a speech from a balcony to an audience of villagers about equality, social justice and the need for everyone to have bread. The commander's speech in formal French is too opaque for the villagers. Kwao, who wants to explain it to the villagers, translates it badly. Kwao misinterprets the bread metaphor used by the commander as the latter's frustration at not having enough to eat, because he is poorly paid by the colonial administration. The next day, the villagers arrive at the commander's house laden with victuals of all kinds: fruit, vegetables, grains, meat and edible insects. The commander, at first reluctant to accept all these gifts, comes to appreciate them, and one can easily surmise that in the future, he will ask his African constituents to institute donations as a matter of policy. Here, we see how the villagers initiate their own servitude through incomprehension at the very moment when the commander gives them a speech about equality and emancipation. Duparc dramatizes this incomprehension between the colonizer and the colonized through an interplay of imagery. The commander, in his military uniform, addressing the Africans from the height of his balcony, is reminiscent of de Gaulle, in his 1958 address to the Algerians, when he uttered his famous ambiguous phrase, "je vous ai compris" ("I've understood you"). No one could

tell whether de Gaulle was speaking to the Algerian independence fighters or to the Algerian colonists, who refused Algerian independence. The confusion and misunderstanding served both factions of Algerians, who coexisted until the fateful moment of the war of liberation.

Colonialism/Reality and Pretense The colonial context exacerbates race division. In the context of colonization, 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. Sainte Rose, the multiracial man, believes that this paradise must be his by birth. He hates pretentious blacks like Kwao, a veteran of the black regiment of the Second World War, and he thinks that the pension paid to Kwao every month by France is a big waste of money. For Sainte Rose, hating Africans is a way of asserting his difference from them and his membership in the privileged race. In fact, the commander allows him to sit at his table at the bar, confirming his conviction that he is one of the whites. As for Kwao, he reminds those who, like Sainte Rose, dare to disrespect him that he fought in the European war and "fucked white women." That, for him, makes him a man deserving of respect, like the whites. Seated behind his desk as a treasury clerk, Sékou resents Kwao each time the latter shows up to collect his pension paid to him by France for serving in the war. To take revenge on Sékou, Kwao sleeps with Sékou's wife and laughs about it with his friends. Sékou is a resentful man, who dreams of being in Kwao's shoes. However, providence smiles upon Sékou when, in the village savannah, the commander's wife, who has been fantasizing about having sex with blacks, asks Sékou to masturbate her. Sékou complies and becomes the bodyguard and discreet lover of the commander's wife. Then he immediately rises in social rank, sailing merrily towards the whiteness so desired by the colonized.

Independence *The Sixth Finger* is a window into African independence. The film is set in 1956. Historically, we are four years away from African independence, and all over the continent, people are feverish with anticipation. Independence is within their grasp, and they want to seize it. The continent is shaken by acts of insurrection. In French-speaking Africa, Algeria stands out for its determination. As early as 1954, the Algerian National Liberation Army took up arms against the French occupation and wanted to drive France out of Algeria, culturally (by choosing Islam as the state religion), politically (by joining the socialist and communist movement, even if this inclination will later be purged), and linguistically (by choosing Arabic as the national language). In the French colonies south of the Sahara, apart from rare skirmishes with the colonial authorities (such as the villagers' refusal to pay taxes, or Kwao's warning shot that puts the soldiers who were brutalizing the young Adjoua to flight), everything takes place in an indolent, good-natured atmosphere. Kwao, the Gaullist, peacefully discusses politics with his friend Simon, the communist colonist, and exchanges venison and alcohol with him. Simon spends his nights with native female conquests and ends up with gonorrhoea. Amon struggles to sell membership cards for the newly-formed local political party, which most villagers find hard to see the relevance of. The commander spends his days drinking in his bar and dealing with minor villager insubordinations. Sékou sleeps with the commander's wife, and Sainte Rose sleeps with the commander's wife's girlfriend. There is no urgent need for independence. Instead, the focus is on mimicking the colonist. 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. As a result, as Fanon observes, the French black is condemned to say "thank you", because, "the [French-speaking] Negro is unaware of the price of freedom, because he has not fought for it. From time to time, he fights for Liberty and Justice, but it's always about white liberty and white justice, that is, values secreted by the masters."

Tradition/Motherhood 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. She shows him her beautiful breasts, her attractive smile and her sensual walk. However, Kwao, though not always faithful to Ya and a womanizer, refuses to take Adjoua as his wife. He 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. However, this son, born with six fingers on each hand, makes Kwao and Ya the village pariahs when they refuse to allow their child to be killed according to village tradition, which considers this newborn with "abnormal" hands to be an agent of the devil.

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? So, for example, it makes sense to turn to the village oracle when looking 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. This is what Kwao's wife Ya does. 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.

Exoticization/colonial fantasies The white women of the colony, the commander's wife and her girlfriend, Carine, fantasize about the sexual prowess of the Africans. At the commander's bar, the commander's wife introduces Carine to the mixed-race Sainte Rose, and immediately Sainte Rose and Carine engage in a sensual waltz on the dance floor. From this waltz springs an intense sexual relationship that makes them slip away from other people whenever possible to indulge in the passion of sex. The commander's wife is more than just a matchmaker. She also satisfies her own sexual desires with Sékou, the treasury clerk, who also doubles as a park ranger. The white men are not to be left out. Simon, the communist colonist, insinuates that the many mixed-race children in the village are the priest's children. The priest defends himself poorly, and in a Freudian slip admits that he is the father of these children. In fact, every Sunday, one of the priest's African women positions herself in the front row of the congregation with her child, and, staring at the priest, pulls out her breast to nurse her daughter. This is certainly an allusion to the way the priest takes her breasts in his mouth. As for Simon, his many conquests among the village women are rewarded with a venereal infection. The colony is the place where the colonist's uninhibited sexual fantasies are realized.

Love/loyalty Kwao is not a blameless man. He cheats on his second wife, Ya, by sleeping with Sékou's wife. Sekou 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. Duparc's protagonists separate love, loyalty and affection, on the one hand, from sex, on the other.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How important are children in your culture? How does your culture show this?
2. Are there any stigmas associated with childless couples in your culture? Explain your answer.
3. Ya wants a child to make her a "complete" woman. Is this one of the main reasons why women in your culture want a child? Please explain.
4. Are there any beliefs or superstitions in your culture that endanger the lives of vulnerable people? Please explain.
5. In what way can the voluntary exile of Kwao and Ya be seen either as a victory or a failure?