

Kato Kato (2006)

Idrissa Ouédraogo (1954-2018)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Idrissa Ouédraogo was a Burkinabé filmmaker whose work critically examined the interplay between tradition and modernity within his country's evolving social landscape. Born on January 21, 1954, in Banfora, Burkina Faso, and raised in Ouahigouya, a northern town, he was the son of farmers. His rural upbringing profoundly shaped his artistic sensibilities, influencing his portrayal of social hierarchy, communal life, and cultural transformation in Burkinabé society. Ouédraogo pursued film studies in Ouagadougou, Kyiv, and Paris, culminating in his graduation from the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in 1985. His cinematic work offers nuanced explorations of identity, tradition, and societal change, frequently challenging established norms. His filmography includes *Yam Daabo* (*The Choice*, 1987), *Yaaba* (*Grandmother*, 1989), *Tilai* (*The Law*, 1990), *Karim and Sala* (1991), *Samba Traoré* (1993), *Le Cri du cœur* (*The Heart's Cry*, 1994), *Kini and Adams* (1997), *La Colère des dieux* (*Anger of the Gods*, 2003), and *Kato Kato* (2006).

Film *Kato Kato* is a 90-minute drama, originally titled *Un Malheur n'arrive jamais seul* ("Misfortune Never Comes Alone"). The word "kato" is used to convey surprise, disappointment, or sympathy, the equivalent of the American expression "Oh my God!" *Kato Kato* explores themes of justice, personal responsibility, pride, selflessness, and the transformative nature of a quest.

Background The film is a co-production between Les Films de la Plaine (France) and NDK Production (Burkina Faso), filmed on location in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. Bakary Sangaré, who plays Ali, brings extensive acting experience to the role, notably starring in Idrissa Ouedraogo's acclaimed *Samba Traoré* (1992). Léoni Kombelemsigri, cast as Azeta, also has a solid background in film, having appeared in several productions prior to this one. The dialogue of the film is in French.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Ali (Bakary Sangaré)	A schoolteacher struggling to make ends meet
Azeta (Léoni Kombelemsigri)	Ali's wife, who wants to work outside the home
Bintou (Edwige Tapsoba)	A street child whom Ali and Azeta adopt
The principal (Adama Ouedraogo)	Ali's hierarchical superior and the murderer of Bintou's mother

SYNOPSIS

Ali is a Burkinabé schoolteacher who, like many civil servants in his country, is burdened by debt and struggles to make ends meet. Yet his unwavering devotion to his family and deep sense of responsibility compel him to always find a way to meet his financial obligations, even if it means sacrificing his own peace and happiness. When his daughter falls ill shortly after he borrows money to allow his wife, Azeta, to attend her grandfather's funeral with dignity, Ali is forced to sell his most prized possession, his moped, to pay for her medication. But just as he receives the money from the sale, a delinquent girl named Bintou steals it and flees. Ali tracks her down days later, hoping to negotiate its return. But when Azeta cries "Thief!", Bintou is chased by an enraged crowd. In her desperate escape, she is struck by a car and falls into a coma after being taken to the hospital. With her parents nowhere to be found, Ali and Azeta, racked with guilt over the accident, take her in temporarily. They soon discover that Bintou's mother is the abused wife of the school principal where Ali teaches, a volatile and violent man with whom Ali has clashed repeatedly. When the principal fatally stabs Bintou's mother as she attempts to leave him, Bintou is left orphaned and utterly alone. Moved by compassion, Ali and Azeta adopt Bintou, offering her the family and education she had never known.

SCENES

Money is tight Azeta informs her husband, Ali, that she must attend her grandfather's funeral, an obligation that requires money Ali does not have. She reminds him that if he had permitted her to work, she would have been financially independent and would not need to rely on him for everything. She then asks whether his refusal to let her work stems from a fear that another man might take an interest in her. Ali dismisses his wife's suggestion with a laugh. He tells her that his reluctance has nothing to do with jealousy. He explains that his own mother exhausted herself working tirelessly to raise him after his father's death, and he does not want Azeta to endure the same hardship. Azeta responds that times have changed, and that she needs to work, not only to help him, but also for her own satisfaction.



Ali obtains an overdraft Ali reassures his wife that he will find the necessary funds. He visits his banker, who informs him that his accounts are overdrawn. Ali explains that it is crucial for his wife to maintain her dignity in front of her mother and brothers, who are already waiting for her in the village. He pleads with the banker to help him. The banker agrees to grant Ali an overdraft of 40,000 francs (approximately 80 US dollars).



Korotinmin is sick The following day, Ali accompanies his wife and daughter to the bus station and wishes them a safe journey to the village. Before they part, he reminds Azeta to give their little girl her dose of *nivaquine* syrup, a medication used to prevent malaria. A few days later, while Ali is in the middle of teaching his class, he notices Azeta stepping out of a taxi, her face etched with worry, cradling her child, Korotinmin, in her arms. Tears stream down her cheeks as she rushes towards him, gasping that their daughter is dying, and that her fever is climbing higher by the hour. Ali calms her, assuring her that everything will be alright. He abandons his lesson, helps Azeta onto his moped, and speeds off towards the Hospital. The doctor diagnoses little Korotinmin with typhoid fever. After a careful examination, he writes a prescription for the medications needed to begin treatment. Ali, visibly anxious, asks the doctor how much the prescription will cost. The doctor replies that the medicines will amount to roughly thirty-five thousand francs, plus an additional five thousand for the consultation. Ali falls silent. He glances at Azeta, who holds their daughter tightly, her eyes still glistening with tears.



Ali sells his moped Once they leave the hospital, Azeta, visibly anxious, asks Ali where they will find the money for the medication. Ali responds that he will find a way. He tells her that he is going to visit the bank. At the bank, Ali's request for an extended overdraft is denied. The banker tells him that he has already been generous, that Ali's account is in a disastrous state, and that he can no longer do anything to help. Ali goes to see a moneylender, but the proposed repayment rate of 50% is far too high. Refusing the offer, he decides to sell his moped to a mechanic. The mechanic buys it from him, but at a price well below its market value.



Ali is robbed Three young delinquents, a girl and two boys, watch the exchange of money between the mechanic and Ali. Just as Ali is about to pocket the cash from the sale, the girl, Bintou, snatches it from his hands and takes off running. Ali chases after her, but he fails to catch her. Ali goes to the police to file a complaint. The police chief, a former high school friend, recognizes him and instructs his officers to handle Ali's case with care. One of the officers tells Ali that he is in good hands, since he comes recommended by their chief. Ali takes offense and firmly replies that he expects the officer to do his job without regard to the personal connections of those who file complaints. He adds that he is not seeking special treatment, only fair treatment.



"You are irresponsible!" Ali returns home to explain to Azeta that he sold his motorcycle in order to buy medicine for the child, but that the money was stolen. Azeta becomes angry and calls him irresponsible. Ali, upset in turn, tells his wife that he has had no luck since morning and forbids her from speaking to him in that tone. Azeta apologizes. Azeta asks Ali what he intends to do now. Ali replies that he does not know yet, that he is still thinking. She tells him that she has already thought about what needs to be done. She places little Korotinmin in Ali's arms and walks out. Azeta goes to borrow money from her father, promising to repay him by the end of the month. When she returns, Ali reproaches her for borrowing from her father, who is retired and lives on his pension. Azeta responds that her father was actually proud to be able to help them, and that she promised they would pay him back soon.



The principal confronts Ali The principal watches for Ali's arrival. As soon as he sees him, he stops him and demands an explanation for his absence. Ali explains that his daughter had a medical emergency, and he had no choice but to leave. The principal, however, reminds him that abandoning his post is unacceptable under any circumstance. He warns Ali that if it happens again, the consequences will be severe.



Ali is teaching Ali's young daughter is now slowly recovering. He returns to his teaching duties. In class, he invites his students to reflect on a pressing question: Why is society in decline? The students respond, pointing to issues such as theft, unemployment, and selfishness. Ali takes time to unpack each of these concepts. He guides the students through their meanings and implications.



Ali spots Bintou Ali, his wife, and their daughter are returning from a visit to the doctor when Ali suddenly stops in his tracks. He has just spotted Bintou. He immediately recognizes her as the girl who stole the money he desperately needed for his daughter's medication. Pointing her out, he says to Azeta, "That's the one who stole my money." Bintou recognizes him, too, and quickly warns her friends. Ali tries to reason with the children, asking them to return at least part of the stolen money. But they mock him and take off running. Azeta shouts, "Thief!" Ali tries to stop her, saying "Don't do that. People will lynch them." But it is too late. The crowd is already chasing after the children.



The accident As she flees, Bintou is struck by a car. The driver jumps out, visibly panicked, blaming herself for having killed the girl. Moments later, Ali arrives and collapses against the vehicle in tears, convinced that the young thief is dead. He leans over Bintou's unconscious body and says, "She is still breathing." Azeta, clearly shaken, cries out for someone to call an ambulance. Bintou is taken to the hospital. The doctors inform Ali that Bintou has suffered a severe cranial trauma. They tell him she will survive, but she will retain neuropsychological aftereffects that may lead to behavioral disturbances. The doctor reassures Ali that he has managed to obtain a certificate of indigence for Bintou, allowing her to receive medical care while efforts continue to locate her parents.



Bintou's friends A radio bulletin announces the hospitalization of a young girl injured in an accident, whose parents are being sought. Bintou's two friends immediately recognize her in the report. They reflect on how strange it is that, after all the time they've spent with her, they still know nothing about her origins, just as they realize how little they truly know about each other. The two boys share their stories. One says he comes from the south of the country and fled home after his polygamous father took three additional wives and tormented his mother until she ended her life. The other says he is from the north, a region where rain is rare and hunger is common. He explains that he came to the capital, Ouagadougou, because he wants to live, and he swears that one



day, he will be rich.

Ali's moral obligation Ali visits his friend, the chief of police. Bintou's parents still have not come forward. Ali explains that someone needs to stay by her side until they do. The chief urges him to let the proper social services handle it. But Ali refuses. He says that he cannot leave Bintou alone, and that he and his wife bear responsibility for what happened. Ali says that he needs to be able to look himself in the mirror without shame. Azeta, too, feels deeply guilty about Bintou's accident. She confides in Ali, saying that if she had not screamed "Thief!" like a madwoman, Bintou wouldn't be in this situation. Ali tries to comfort her. He tells her that, if she agrees, Bintou can come live with them once she is released from the hospital, at least until her parents come forward. Azeta agrees.



Domestic abuse The police are called to the principal's home by concerned neighbors. He is accused of abusing his disabled wife, who is confined to a wheelchair. The principal denies the allegations, and his wife insists that she is not being mistreated. Still, the police chief seems to believe she is afraid to speak the truth and presses her with more questions. The principal grows agitated. He declares that he is a teacher, a man of good reputation, and demands that the police leave his home.



Bintou is discharged Bintou is discharged from the hospital, but she has lost both her speech and her memory. Ali and Azeta take her in. Bintou quickly becomes hostile towards Azeta. Azeta confides in Ali, saying she believes Bintou resents her and blames her for the accident. Ali reassures her that Bintou holds nothing against her personally, but is acting under the influence of her neuropsychiatric condition. Azeta loses patience. She accuses Ali of taking Bintou's side. Azeta packs her things and goes to her father's home.



Ali is suspended Ali requests a few days of leave from his principal so he can care for Bintou and search for her parents. He promises to make up for the lost hours with remedial classes. The principal refuses. Ali decides to go anyway. The principal threatens to file a report with the Ministry of Education. Ali challenges him to do so, reminding him of his years of impeccable service. The principal goes to see the chief of staff at the Ministry of Education. He tells him that Ali is a subversive element and a leftist who spends his time insulting the government, especially the minister and his associates, during his classes. The chief of staff assures the principal that he will personally take care of Ali's case. Shortly afterward, Ali is suspended for six months without pay.



Bintou's case unravels Ali tells the police inspector that he feels overwhelmed. He tells the police chief that his wife has left him, and he is unsure how to care for Bintou on his own while keeping his job. He asks the inspector to look after Bintou temporarily, so he can search for her parents. As Ali leaves the station, the two boys from Bintou's gang are rounded up by the police and brought in. Neither Ali nor the boys see each other. Later, Ali goes to his father-in-law and asks him to intervene so Azeta will return home. The father-in-law promises to do so. The two boys from Bintou's gang are assigned to clean the courtyard of the police station. As they work, they spot Bintou and call out to her. Their reaction draws the attention of the officers, who ask if they know her. The boys are brought before the police chief and Ali for questioning. Under pressure, they reveal that Bintou has had previous run-ins with the law. The officers dig into the records and uncover a list of individuals who had filed theft complaints against her in the past. One of the officers recognizes Bintou. He recalls that she had once been accused of theft by her employers, but had adamantly insisted on her innocence, urging their son to speak the truth. Ali manages to obtain the address of Bintou's former employers. When he confronts them, the son finally confesses that he had stolen his parents' money to buy gifts for his demanding girlfriend, and Bintou had been wrongly blamed. Still Bintou's ex-employers cannot help locate Bintou's parents.

Bintou's mother is murdered One day, Bintou sees a news report on television. She suddenly screams, "Mother!" Ali and Azeta rush in, stunned to discover that Bintou has regained her voice. She points to the screen, showing the image of a woman stabbed and lying in a pool of blood, and her husband being arrested by the police. The woman is Bintou's mother, and the murderer is the principal, Ali's superior. He killed his wife, Bintou's mother, after she decided to leave him, fed up with his violent behavior. Having regained her voice, Bintou finally tells her story. The principal is her stepfather, a deeply violent man who married her mother after her biological father died in a car accident that left her mother physically disabled. When Bintou rejected his sexual advances and reported him to her mother, he threw her out of the house. Her mother, with nowhere else to go and dependent on him due to her disability, remained with the principal.



"Now Papa has become Maman" Azeta returns home. Her relationship with Bintou improves significantly, and the two begin spending more and more time together. Meanwhile, Ali tells Azeta that he has been suspended for six months without pay. Azeta puts her secretarial diploma to good use and finds a job. Ali now stays home to care for their young daughter. He tells her, with a smile, "Now Papa has become Maman."

Ali and Azeta adopt Bintou Ali and his wife Azeta officially adopt Bintou. She now lives with them and is embraced as a true member of the family. Bintou returns to school, where she studies diligently and consistently earns good grades. In the warmth and safety of her new home, Bintou begins to smile again, rediscovering joy, confidence, and a sense of belonging.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ALI Ali is a principled and compassionate man whose unwavering sense of justice guides his actions, even when it places him at personal risk. Beneath his resilience lies a deeply human vulnerability: He wrestles with frustration and doubt, yet remains devoted to those he loves.

Principled Ali consistently upholds fairness and integrity. He refuses preferential treatment from the police, insisting on being treated like any other citizen. This shows a strong moral compass and a commitment to justice, even when it might disadvantage him.

Responsible (under pressure) Despite setbacks, Ali tries to provide for his family, selling his motorcycle to buy medicine, seeking help from the bank, and ultimately staying home to care for his daughter. His actions reflect a deep sense of duty, even when circumstances overwhelm him.

Impulsive Ali is not immune to frustration or anger. He snaps when Azeta calls him irresponsible, but he also reflects and seeks resolution. His emotional responses are human and layered, revealing vulnerability beneath his sense of responsibility.

Compassionate Ali's decision to adopt Bintou, defend her, and care for her despite her troubled past and neuropsychiatric condition shows profound empathy. He does not abandon her, even when her behavior is difficult, and he works to uncover the truth about her life.

THE PRINCIPAL The principal is a rigid and domineering figure who cloaks his cruelty in a veneer of respectability, wielding authority both at school and at home with oppressive control. Beneath his polished exterior lies a deceptive and violent man.

Domineering The school principal is a domineering figure who relishes asserting his authority over Ali, often reminding him of his subordinate status with condescending remarks and rigid control. At home, his behavior turns cruel. He treats his disabled wife not as a partner but as a burden, expecting her to serve him in silence despite her physical limitations.

Rigid There is little flexibility in the principal's management style. He expects punctuality, consistency, and discipline, and struggles to accommodate personal crises or emotional nuance. His rigidity contrasts sharply with Ali's more compassionate and complex reality.

Deceptive The principal presents himself as a man of honor, respected by students, and who seeks the trust police. Yet beneath this carefully constructed façade lies a deceptive and violent nature: he is an abusive husband and a murderer, skilled at masking cruelty with a false sense of duty.

BINTOU Bintou is a guarded yet profoundly vulnerable girl, shaped by layers of betrayal and systemic neglect that have left her yearning for safety and recognition. Beneath her hardened exterior lies an aching need to be understood.

Yearning Beneath her tough exterior of a street girl, Bintou longs for connection, safety, and understanding. Her bond with Ali, her reactions to Azeta, and her moments of reflection reveal a deep desire to be seen and understood.

Vulnerable Bintou is a deeply vulnerable girl, scarred by the trauma of a predatory stepfather who expelled her from their home after she resisted his sexual advances. Betrayed again by former employers who falsely accused her of theft and neglected by a system that dismissed her suffering due to her impoverished background, she carries the weight of injustice in silence, until her voice finally returns.

AZETA Azeta is a proud and fiercely protective woman, whose sense of dignity is inseparable from her devotion to family. She navigates hardship with grace and defiance, determined to uphold both her household's stability and her own self-respect.

Protective Azeta is fiercely committed to her family's well-being. To preserve its fragile equilibrium, she borrows money from her father or seeks work outside the home, defying her husband's resistance. Her determination reflects both sacrifice and a rebellion against the constraints imposed on her.

Proud Azeta moves through the world with pride, acutely aware of how appearances shape perception. She refuses to attend her grandfather's funeral empty-handed, not out of obligation, but to shield herself from the judgment she knows would follow.

SOCIETY

Gender roles Traditional gender roles, once rigidly defined by domesticity for women and breadwinning for men, are steadily dissolving in the face of evolving social realities in Africa. Economic pressures, shifting cultural values, and growing awareness of gender equity have reshaped expectations in households and workplaces alike. Today, caregiving and career-building are no longer confined to one gender; they are shared responsibilities, negotiated with empathy and pragmatism. Yet this transition is not always seamless. Deeply ingrained beliefs and personal histories often resist change, creating tension between past ideals and present needs. This tension is poignantly embodied in Ali's story: a man who, shaped by the memory of his mother's sacrifice, initially forbids his wife from working. But when he loses his income and Azeta steps into the provider role, Ali is compelled to reimagine his place in the family.

Illustrative moment: Ali refuses to let his wife work outside the home. He is haunted by memories of his own mother, who toiled endlessly to raise him alone after his father's death, only to pass away at the age of forty. For Ali, caring for his family is a sacred duty, and he insists that his wife should not use her diploma in executive secretarial studies. Azeta, however, believes times have changed. She sees her husband's stance as outdated, arguing that today's society calls for women to work not only for personal fulfillment but also to support their families. Ali's views on gender roles begin to shift when he is suspended from his job for six months without pay, and Azeta announces she has found employment. Now, Ali stays home with their daughter. Cradling her in his lap, he says, "Now, Papa will become Maman." This is his acknowledgment and acceptance of the fading boundaries between traditional male and female roles.



Poverty In Burkina Faso, the middle class, once seen as a stabilizing force in society, is increasingly slipping into poverty under the weight of economic stagnation, inflation, and institutional neglect. Civil servants, especially teachers, struggle to maintain dignity as their salaries fail to meet rising costs of living. Access to credit tightens, basic needs become luxuries, and the promise of upward mobility fades. The erosion of financial security not only affects households but undermines professional commitment and morale. Teachers, expected to shape future generations, find themselves unable to support their own families. This collapse of the middle class reveals a deeper crisis: when those entrusted with public service are forced into survival mode, the social fabric begins to fray. Ali's story exemplifies this descent: he is a devoted educator whose life mirrors the desperation of the very delinquents he's meant to guide.

Illustrative moment: Ali is a man cornered, driven to the brink of poverty by his social and economic condition. In any dignified state, Ali, who is a schoolteacher, should be able to establish himself within the middle class. Yet this is far from reality. Each day presents Ali with insurmountable obstacles that threaten his salary before he even receives it. His debts have mounted to the point where his banker refuses him any further credit. Loan sharks, seeing him approach, warn him not to come near. In desperation, Ali sells his moped, only to have the proceeds stolen by delinquents. So consumed is he by his financial troubles that he can barely devote time to the students entrusted to him. He leaves class midway to respond to the distress of his wife and daughter. When he requests a two-week leave, his superior denies it and files a negative report against him. Ali's life, reduced to a daily scramble for money through makeshift means, increasingly mirrors that of the young delinquents roaming the streets of Ouagadougou. Through him, Ouédraogo raises the urgent question of the impoverishment of Burkina Faso's civil servants. More specifically, in Ali's case and for others in the teaching profession the question becomes the following: how can we expect those charged with educating our children to do their job well when they themselves are unable to meet their most basic needs?

JUSTICE

Justice/injustice In many societies, justice is not a common right but a selective privilege, one which is reserved for those with influence, wealth, or personal connections. The system often bends to accommodate the powerful, while ordinary citizens are left navigating indifference, delay, or outright neglect. Legal institutions, meant to uphold fairness, instead mirror social hierarchies, reinforcing exclusion and deepening mistrust. This disparity breeds frustration and forces marginalized communities to seek alternative, often precarious, forms of justice. Such dynamics are illustrated in Ali's experience: when robbed, his case is only taken seriously because the police chief happens to be an old acquaintance. Ali, aware of this imbalance, insists on being treated not as a favored friend but as a citizen deserving equal protection. Yet the broader reality remains: Those without connections are often left to fend for themselves, sometimes with tragic consequences.

Illustrative moment: Ali is robbed of the money he earned from selling his moped by a group of petty delinquents. When he goes to the police station to report the theft and request that the culprits be found, he is recognized by the police chief, an old high school classmate. The officer then instructs his subordinates to treat Ali well and to do everything possible to help him recover his money. One of the police officers tells Ali that he is lucky to be recommended by their chief and assures him they will take good care of his case. Ali responds that his relationship with the chief should be irrelevant. He insists that he is a citizen seeking justice and should be treated with respect like any other, and that the officer, as a public servant, should carry out his duties with integrity, without needing his superior's intervention. Ali complains about only influential people seem to benefit from the services of justice, while ordinary folks are left behind. In fact, to reclaim justice, the common people often form vigilante groups, driven by frustration and a survival instinct that leads to swift and unforgiving justice. That is why, when Ali recognizes his thieves, he tries to negotiate with them rather than alert the crowd. However, Azeta shouts "thief!" and rouses the crowd, which then chases after Bintou, resulting in her running into a car.

Juvenile delinquency Juvenile delinquency often stems not from inherent malice, but from deep wounds inflicted by abuse, neglect, and systemic failure. Children who grow up in fractured homes, where violence replaces care and silence masks suffering, are often left to navigate the world without guidance or protection. When families collapse and institutions fail to intervene, the streets become their only refuge, offering fragile bonds in a life of crime. These young lives are shaped not by choice, but by desperation.

Through three characters in his film, Ouédraogo tells the story of juvenile delinquency as the consequence of familial neglect, abuse and violence, and the irresponsibility of government leaders who have failed in the process of decentralizing resources. Their stories expose how personal trauma and structural injustice converge, pushing vulnerable youth towards crime, not out of cruelty, but as a cry for dignity and belonging.

Illustrative moment: One boy from Bintou's gang recounts how his father took a second wife and reduced his mother to a servant in her own home. Isolated and humiliated, she took her own life, leaving him defenseless against a violent father and eventually homeless. Bintou shares how her stepfather's sexual assaults shattered her childhood, while her disabled mother, trapped and powerless, could barely shield her. Another boy, from the arid north, speaks of a land abandoned by infrastructure and rain alike. Families flee to cities in search of hope, only to find overcrowded slums and broken promises. With no support, no guidance, and no future, these children are driven to the margins, where survival often means crime. Their stories are not excuses, but warnings.



POLITICS

Power: abuse Abuse of power undermines the very foundations of trust and responsibility. When authority is used not to protect but to dominate, it fosters fear, silence, and systemic harm. In institutions and homes alike, unchecked power often hides behind status, enabling manipulation, coercion, and violence. Victims are silenced not only by intimidation but by the social structures that shield their abusers. The consequences are profound, extending beyond individual suffering to corrode the integrity of entire communities. Ouédraogo shows how a school principal exploits his position to falsify reports against his subordinate and to conceal his violence and domestic abuse, ultimately leading to the murder of his disabled wife. Her daughter, Bintou, expelled and silenced, only regains her voice when the truth is publicly exposed, revealing the stark contrast between authoritarian cruelty embodied by an abuser and the strength of empathy embodied in a compassionate man.

Illustrative moment: As Bintou tries to flee the crowd rushing towards her after Azeta cries out "Thief!", she is struck by a car. She falls into a coma, and when she finally regains consciousness days later, she is left aphasic and suffering from memory loss. Her speech and memory return suddenly, triggered by a traumatic shock: while watching a news report on television, she sees her mother, murdered, stabbed by her abusive husband. Bintou then reveals that the man responsible is her stepfather, who had expelled her from the family home after she rejected his sexual advances. Ali is surprised to see that the man is also the principal of the elementary school where he works, the same man who abused his authority to file a false report to the Ministry of Education, leading to Ali's six-month suspension without pay. This principal, who should have embodied integrity and moral leadership, was in fact the violent husband of Bintou's disabled mother. After years of abuse, Bintou's mother quietly packed her belongings and attempted to leave him. That decision cost her life. Neighbors had repeatedly called the police to report domestic violence, but Bintou's mother, terrified of her husband, always denied the abuse, until the fatal day. The principal used his position to dominate both his subordinates and his family. In stark contrast stands Ali, who uses his role to offer compassion and support to those, like Bintou, who need it most.

ETHICS

Responsibility/education Responsibility and education are the twin pillars of a just and functioning society. When nurtured together, they shape individuals who understand their duties and act with empathy and integrity towards others. Education, the transmission of knowledge, is mostly about the cultivation of character, the insistence that each person matters and must be accountable for their actions. However, this ideal falters when families and institutions fail to uphold their roles. Children deprived of guidance often drift towards survivalism, forging bonds in the streets that mimic family but lack stability. In contrast, those who embrace responsibility, teachers, parents, mentors, become architects of hope. This contrast comes into focus in Ali's story. Ali is devoted teacher and father whose sacrifices are undone by neglected youth, yet who still chooses compassion over resentment when he takes in Bintou, one of the very children who wronged him.

Illustrative moment: Ali is a devoted schoolteacher. He teaches his students the cardinal virtues essential for living in a just and cohesive society. He carries out his duties with selflessness, committed to the children entrusted to him. That is his responsibility. At home, he embraces his role as a father with equal dedication, going so far as to incur debt and sell his most prized possession, his moped, to buy the medicine that will save his daughter from typhoid. Yet his efforts are undermined by children whose parents have failed in their own responsibility to educate and guide them. Petty delinquents snatch the money from the sale of his moped, endangering his daughter's life. Among them is Bintou, a girl cast out by her stepfather, an elementary school principal, ironically meant to embody responsibility and moral leadership, after she dared to report his sexual advances to her mother. Like Bintou, her two accomplices are children of neglectful parents. Abandoned and left to fend for themselves, they survive on petty theft and form fragile, illicit alliances in the streets, trying to recreate the family structure they never had at home. Ali exemplifies true responsibility when, despite his own financial hardship, he takes Bintou under his wing, a stranger, a girl who wronged him, and offers her a stable home and an education.



Pride and duty Pride and duty are twin forces that shape our moral compass. One is rooted in self-respect, the other in responsibility to others. True pride is not boastful; it is the conviction that one has acted with integrity, even when no one is watching. Duty, meanwhile, demands sacrifice and persistence, often in the face of uncertainty or personal cost. When these values align, they create a powerful sense of purpose: the will to do what is right not for reward, but because it affirms who we are. This is the path Ali chooses. Faced with the aftermath of Bintou's accident and the failure to locate her parents, he refuses to leave her fate to bureaucracy. When the inspector urges him to step back, Ali ascertains the necessity for him to fulfill a moral duty and live with the satisfaction of being right.

Illustrative moment: Bintou was hit by a car while fleeing the crowd of vigilantes that Azeta had inadvertently unleashed. Now lying in a coma at the hospital, her condition weighs heavily on both Ali and Azeta, who are consumed by guilt over what happened. As they await news of Bintou's family, the two take turns keeping vigil at her bedside, unwilling to leave her alone. When the police inspector informs Ali that efforts to locate Bintou's parents have yielded nothing, Ali offers to take her into his home once she is discharged, at least until her family is found. The inspector cautions him against it, warning that such a decision carries immense responsibility, especially since Bintou's parents may never be located. He urges Ali to let the appropriate social services take over. Ali responds simply, "I want to be able to look at myself in the mirror without feeling shame." In that declaration lies not only the weight of guilt, but the pride of a man who refuses to turn away from what he sees as his moral duty.



Selflessness Selflessness is the strength that places the needs of others above personal comfort, ambition, or gain. It is rooted in empathy, humility, and a deep sense of moral responsibility. In a world often driven by individualism, selflessness stands out as a rebellion, an insistence that care and compassion matter more than convenience. It reveals itself not in grand gestures, but in everyday choices: the willingness to listen, to sacrifice, to stand beside someone in their moment of need. True selflessness asks for no recognition; its reward lies in the dignity it preserves and the bonds it strengthens. It is in moments of hardship that selflessness shines most clearly, revealing character through action. Ali is a selfless man whose altruistic character unfolds through a series of solid sacrifices that place others' needs above his own.

Illustrative moment: When he takes in Bintou, a child abandoned by the system and who even robbed him of money he desperately needed for his daughter's medication, Ali does so not out of duty, but from a deep moral instinct, despite his own financial and emotional strain. Ali's decision to leave work mid-lesson to support his struggling family, fully aware of the professional consequences, speaks of a man who values care over convention. Even more telling is his willingness to endure humiliation and debt, selling his moped and facing rejection from banks and loan sharks, all to shield his loved ones from collapse. These acts are affirmations of empathy and resilience. Ali's choices reveal a character shaped by humility and conviction, someone who believes that no one should be left behind, even when the cost is his own comfort, pride, or stability.

Selfishness Selfishness is a destructive force that distorts relationships, undermines integrity, and weakens the fabric of community. It goes beyond simple self-interest, revealing itself in a willful disregard for others, a drive to satisfy personal ambition or desire, no matter the cost. When selfishness is paired with authority, its impact multiplies: decisions made for personal gain can ripple outward, harming those who depend on fairness and care. In families, institutions, and public life, the selfish individual often cloaks their actions in validation, masking harm beneath ambition, entitlement, or convenience. The result is broken trust, stolen opportunities, and the silencing of those who act with sincerity. More than a mere flaw, selfishness is a moral failure that, when unchecked, can devastate both private lives and public systems. This dynamic is illustrated in *Kato Kato*, where the school principal's self-serving choices destroy a good man's career and fracture the lives of those closest to him.

Illustrative Moments: The principal's selfishness is both destructive and far-reaching, driven by ambition and unchecked sexual desire. To advance his own career, he denounces Ali to the Ministry's chief of staff, resulting in the dismissal of a gifted teacher and depriving students of the guidance they deserve. This professional betrayal reflects a profound moral failure. At home, his cruelty deepens: he beats his disabled wife over a late meal and preys on Bintou, his adolescent stepdaughter, casting her out when she resists his advances. His actions reveal a man who exploits authority for personal gratification, indifferent to the suffering he causes. Through this character, the film lays bare how selfishness, when entwined with institutional power, can devastate lives and destroy the very foundations of justice and care.



Quest A quest is rarely just a journey from one place to another. It is a movement of the soul, a search for refuge and a longing to be seen. Whether driven by hardship, hope, or hunger for meaning, those who embark on a quest often seek more than survival; they seek affirmation, dignity, and a place to belong. This pursuit can take many forms: a child fleeing violence, a teacher striving to uplift others, or a youth rebelling against neglect. Beneath each path lies a common thread, the desire to escape erasure and claim a voice in a world that overlooks them. The quest becomes a mirror of inner need, shaped by trauma but propelled by resilience. It is in this light that the intersecting journeys of Ali, Bintou, and the delinquent boys unfold, each revealing a deeper truth about human yearning and transformation.

Illustrative moment: The paths of Ali, Bintou, and the two delinquent boys intersect because they are all driven by a shared impulse: the quest for well-being. Ali, a devoted father and committed teacher, pursues a dual goal, providing a better life for his family and guiding his students towards hope and dignity. His journey is far from easy, marked by debt, sacrifice, and moral trials that test his resilience and compassion. Bintou, cast out by an abusive stepfather and a powerless mother, embarks on her own quest for safety and identity. Initially drawn into a gang, she begins to rebuild herself after Ali takes her in, helping her reclaim her voice and self-worth. The young delinquents, often seen as threats, are also seeking escape, not out of malice, but as a desperate response to violence and neglect. Their turn to crime is not a choice freely made, but a survival strategy born of broken homes and institutional failure. Through these intertwined journeys, the film reveals a deeper truth: behind every act of rebellion lies a story of pain, a search for refuge, and a longing for recognition.

Appearance vs. Reality In *Kato Kato*, the theme of appearance functions as a lens through which the film interrogates power, morality, and social perception. Characters are often judged not by their actions but by the roles they inhabit (teacher, neighbor, spouse) creating a fragile veneer of respectability that conceals deeper truths. The film suggests that societal structures frequently reward conformity and decorum, even when they mask cruelty or corruption. This tension between public image and private reality becomes a central concern, revealing how institutions can enable harm when appearances are mistaken for virtue. The narrative challenges viewers to look beyond surface impressions and question the ethical foundations of authority. This critique finds its most potent expression in the figure of the school principal, whose outward persona conceals a deeply violent and morally bankrupt interior.

Illustrative moments: The principal lives behind a carefully constructed façade that conceals his darker self: He is an abusive husband and a murderer, who is hardly suspected of deviant behavior because of his

social rank and his profession as an educator. To the police who come to his home upon denunciation by his neighbors of domestic abuse, he poses as a respectable educator who would not harm a fly and gives them no substantial evidence to arrest him even though they strongly suspect him. His rigid control and condescension at work mirror the cruelty he inflicts at home. He is obsessed with maintaining appearances, whether through punctuality, hierarchy, or public respect, but this only serves not as a reflection of integrity but as a shield for his brutality. The contrast between how he is perceived and who he truly is underscores the film's critique of institutional power and the dangers of conflating authority with virtue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Ali's moral compass guide his actions, and what consequences arise from his choices?
2. In what ways does Bintou's experience reflect systemic neglect and the vulnerability of children in precarious environments?
3. What different kinds of masculinity do Ali and the principal represent?
4. How does the film's original title "Un malheur n'arrive jamais seul" (Misfortune never comes alone) echo through the film's narrative?
5. What does the film reveal about the cost of survival in a society with limited support systems?
6. What critique does the film offer of institutional authority, particularly through the school principal and the chief of staff's roles?