

Adultery and Complex Family Relationships in *Aya De Yopougon* by Marguerite Abouet Et Clement Oubrierie

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Abstract— Adultery is depicted as a widespread but not always hidden part of adult life. While extramarital affairs are often joked about or normalized in the African community, they have really emotional and social consequences. In Aya de Yopougon, Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrierie craft a richly layered narrative that captures the everyday realities of life in 1970s Côte d'Ivoire through the lens of humour, satire, and social realism. Central to the story are the intertwined themes of adultery and complex family relationships, issues that serve not only as personal crises for the characters but also as reflections of a society negotiating the tensions between tradition and change. Through a unique blend of visual storytelling and colloquial dialogue, the authors explore how gender roles, generational expectations, and the pressures of reputation shape domestic life in Yopougon. Literary techniques such as irony, caricature, and polyphonic narration allow Abouet and Oubrierie to humanize their characters while critiquing social norms surrounding fidelity, legitimacy, and family honour. Set against the backdrop of a post-colonial African society experiencing both economic development and moral upheaval, Aya de Yopougon uses the personal to illuminate the political, turning intimate betrayals and family secrets into a broader commentary on cultural transformation.

Keywords: Extramarital affairs; social realism; single-parent family; blended family; African society.

INTRODUCTION

Merriam Webster defines adultery as voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person's current spouse or partner. According to Brzeski Patrick, in legal use, there is a difference between adultery and fornication, while adultery is used when at least one of the individuals involved is married, fornication describes two people who are not married to each other or anyone else engaging in consensual sexual relationship. Our focus therefore centres on adultery and how it affects family relationships in *Aya de Yopougon* by Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie.

Many critics in the academia such as Ajah (et al.), Vrancken and Brown, Silveira and Gomes, Lancaster, as well as Ball, have worked on identity, postcolonial linguistics, translation strategies and global positioning in *Aya de Yopougon*. Furthermore, media critics such as Pianezza, Eckert, Mury and Ribeton have also done some work concerning visual style, social critic and adaptation analysis as it relates to our text. However, nothing much has been done concerning the representation of adultery and how it affects family relationships in the book.

Set in the dynamic vicinity of Yopougon in 1970s Côte d'Ivoire, *Aya de Yopougon* suggests an intense depiction of urban African life through the lens of day-to-day experiences, social expectations, and interpersonal conflicts. Amongst the many themes explored in this graphic novel series, adultery and complex family dynamics stand out as central to both the plot and the social commentary. Abouet and Oubrerie delve into how extramarital affairs, hidden parentage, and fractured domestic relationships reveal the contradictions and tensions within traditional Ivorian values and the pressures of modernity. The question is; how do the themes of adultery and complex family relationships shape individual characters and also reflect a broader societal concern? These themes do not only shape individual characters but also reflect broader societal concerns such as gender roles, generational divides, and the struggle for personal autonomy. This article, with the use of social realism theory, examines how *Aya de Yopougon* uses humour, and realism to explore the implications of adultery, social commentary and family complexity, offering a nuanced portrait of a community in transition.

ADULTERY: COMMON BUT CONSEQUENTIAL

Adultery in *Aya de Yopougon* is represented as a prevalent but not always hidden part of adult life. While these extramarital affairs are frequently joked about or normalized in the African community, they have really emotional and social consequences on the individuals and families affected. We are going to examine some examples of adultery as represented in the text and how it affects the family dynamics.

Examples of adultery in the text:

1.1.1. Ignace (Aya's father) has an affair with his secretary, Jeanne and also fathers two children for her. This hidden relationship dramatically affects his marriage and the reputation of his family. Ignace believes he can hide Jeanne and his two children forever while lying to her that his wife has no child for him. Below is the discussion between Aya and Jeanne when the later arrives at Ignace's family house to drop off the two children she has with him:

Aya : Vous ne pouvez pas laisser vos enfants chez nous.

Jeanne : Et pourquoi pas Aya ? C'est aussi chez leur père, non ?

Aya : Vous n'êtes qu'une briseuse de foyer.

Jeanne : Aya, faut pas me fatiguer. C'est facile de parler, là, mais tu sais ce que c'est de vivre cachée ?

Aya : Personne ne vous a envoyée de faire comme métier maitresse de mon père

Jeanne : C'est ton père qui m'a cherchée pendant des mois. Il me disait que sa femme était stérile, qu'il n'avait pas d'enfants. Il voulait la quitter mais elle était tellement malade qu'il devait faire ça en douceur. Lorsque j'ai su qu'il me blaguait, il était trop tard (T3 pp.10-11)

Aya in the above discussion asks Jeanne not to leave her children with her family while Jeanne wonders if her children are also not part of the family Aya is talking about. Aya goes ahead to accuse Jeanne of being a home breaker and Jeanne tells her that it is easy for her to talk because she has no idea what it means to be the other woman. Aya then informs her that nobody sent her to do the job of a mistress to a married man. In her own defence, Jeanne tells Aya that her father lied to get her to be with him. According to Jeanne, Ignace told her that his wife was barren and also sick. He added that he couldn't leave her suddenly because of her sickness but that he would eventually leave her. Jeanne also says that before she found out that Ignace was lying to her, it was already late. This depicts a true picture of some married African men who go about lying to naïve women that they are not happy at home with their wives just to have them as their mistresses. Some of these men in reality also have children with their mistresses just like Aya's father.

This singular act of adultery almost ruined Ignace's nearly perfect family. His nineteen-year-old daughter, Aya, who loves, adores and respects him so much begins to see him in another light. She starts advising her mother not to accept this new development. She says:

Maman, tant que les femmes accepteront cette situation, les hommes ne changeront jamais, ça c'est sûr. Il a préféré un petit modèle maman, cette Jeanne ne t'arrive pas à la cheville ! Montre-lui plutôt que toi aussi tu peux

plaire aux hommes. Il s'est moqué de toi maman. Si cette Jeanne n'était pas si préoccupée par son confort, tu n'aurais jamais rien su de leur histoire. Si j'étais toi, je ferais comme Dona Isadora dans *Femmes de Sable*. (T3 p.28)

Aya, as cited above, tells her mother that as long as women accept men and their cheating behaviour, these men will never change. She states that her father prefers a young beautiful lady but assures her mother that the lady is not prettier than her. She then asks her mother to show her father that she can also be attractive to men because he is mocking her. She concludes by informing her that if she were in her shoes, she would act like Dona Isadora in *Femmes de Sable*. In the telenovela *Femmes de Sable*, Dona Isadora is a character who is portrayed as a free-spirited, barefoot dancer who revolutionized ballet by embracing improvisation and free movement. The character embodies the spirit of modern dance pioneers who broke away from traditional ballet. One can conclude that Aya is advising her mother to break away from the norm that African men can have extra marital affairs and their wives will condone it. The act of women accepting adultery by men can be seen when Aya tells her friends Bintou and Adjoua what her father did and how they react to it:

Bintou : Tu fais toute cette histoire parce que ton vieux a un deuxième bureau ?

Adjoua : Ouf, je suis rassurée, je croyais que c'était grave.

Aya : Mais les filles ! c'est plus que grave.

Bintou : Mais Aya, c'est le lot quotidien des vieilles d'ici

Adjoua : Oui tu sais qu'on vit dans ça depuis longtemps.

Aya : Et alors, c'est normal non ?

Bintou : Ce qui n'est pas normal c'est ton état. (T3 p.32)

Aya informs her friends about her father's infidelity and the fact that he has two children with the lady. Her friends do not see anything bad about it while stating that it is what the men of Yopougon are known for. Aya asks if it was normal and they tell her that what is not normal is her reaction to the news. Aya's friends, just like most African women, see their husband's extra marital affairs as normal. Some may even go to the extent of encouraging the man to marry the other woman instead of having another home elsewhere with her. Imagine Bintou and Adjoua telling Aya that what is abnormal is her reaction upon finding out that her father has a second home.

Consequently, after Aya's advice to her mother, Fanta, she, that is the mother, decides not to allow her husband make a mockery of her. She leaves her matrimonial home to go stay with her sister, Aicha, in another town. Aicha is also among the women who believe that one should not leave their matrimonial home when the husband

cheats. She advises Fanta to go back home because she believes Fanta is making way for the other woman to enter (T3 p.59). At this point, Fanta stands her grounds and says that the other woman is already in since she has two children for her husband. Ignace needs to stay alone and take care of their two younger kids while she (Fanta) rests and thinks about what she will do. Maybe, while taking care of the two little ones, he may not have time to go chase after other women.

Mr Sissoko: He is one of the main characters in the text, Moussa's father and Simone's husband. He is one of the richest men in Yopougon and owns a brewery which produces a popular beer, consumed by almost all in the town known as "La Solibra". According to the narrator, the first ever televised advert in Côte d'Ivoire was that of the beer, Solibra, "En 1978, la Côte d'Ivoire, mon beau pays a connu sa première campagne publicitaire télévisée" (T1 p.1). He seems to be one of the men who values his small nuclear family, made up of his wife, son and himself. One may even think that he has been faithful to his wife when he says: "En fin...je n'ai que lui malheureusement. Vous vous rendez compte ? Un seul enfant, moi, un africain." (T1 p.33). He tells Ignace when he visits him with his wife and daughter if he had noticed that he (Sissoko), an African, has only one child. Later on, the book reveals that Mr Sissoko had an affair with Philomène, his parent's former house keeper while he was just nineteen years (T6, p.89) and that she has a son for him by the name Grégoire.

Grégoire's entrance into the Sissoko family happens when Mr Sissoko visits his son Moussa who is in prison and shares the same cell with Grégoire. Mr Sissoko helps Grégoire to get out of prison and immediately offers him a top position in his company. One would say that Mr Sissoko already knew Grégoire as his son even before he meets him in prison, this is confirmed when Moussa affirms: "Bon, la maman de Grégoire connaît mon vieux depuis petit et il était tellement content de la voir à la MACA qu'il a fait libérer Grégoire. Mon vieux même l'a su tout de suite quand il l'a vu à la MACA" (T7 p.49). MACA (Maison Central d'Arrêt d'Abidjan) is the central Prison in Abidjan and that was where Mr. Sissoko met Grégoire and he decides to give him a high position in his company. This act of Mr. Sissoko baffles many people especially Aya, who inquires: "Attends, donc c'est en prison que ton père l'a embauché, comme ça? Et il lui offre un poste important comme ça ! Et toi tu trouves ça normal, que toi son propre fils, tu ne sois rien ici ?" (T7 p.49). Aya questions the fact that Mr Sissoko gave a man he just met in a prison, an ex-convict, an important post in his company while his own son has no post in the same company. This singular act of Mr Sissoko will definitely change the dynamics in his family. The love between Sissoko and Philomène is rekindled and he starts dating her all over again. He gives her and her son more attention as we can

see how he made Gregoire his company's human resource manager, buys him and his mother a big house and is always with them. Philomène tells her son : "Coûte que coûte, vaille que vaille, tu seras le futur PGD de la Solibra" (T7 p.84). She makes the above declaration to Grégoire telling him that little by little, he will become the future Chief Executive Officer of la Solibra because she realises that Sissoko is still in love with her.

Hyacinthe (Adjoua's father): He is one of the men in the text who cheat on their wives. He not only cheats but stoops low to cheat with his own daughter's friend who is also his best friend, Koffi's daughter. When Koffi catches him with his daughter, he asks: "Hyacinthe, qu'est-ce que tu fais sur ma fille Toi, mon Meilleur ami?" (T1, p.25). While Mr Koffi wonders what his best friend is doing with his own daughter, Hyacinthe is not perturbed because Koffi is also with someone else's daughter. He answers: "Comme toi, d'ailleurs avec cette jeune fille qui est aussi la fille de quelqu'un" (T1, p.25). The women whose husbands and fathers cheat seem not to be bothered as in the case of Adjoua, whose father cheated on her mother with her best friend, Bintou. She says: "Je m'en fiche qu'elle sorte avec mon vieux. Ma vieille ne dit rien, alors pourquoi je vais me mêler de leurs histoires ?" (T1, p.27). Adjoua declares that if her mother says nothing about his father cheating, who is she to meddle in their business.

Koffi (Bintou's father): While he seems to be angered when he sees his daughter with a man old enough to be her father, he is also going out with a young girl of her daughter's age (T1 p.25). He also almost marries a girl who is his daughter's age mate if not that his wife refused and rebelled against the marriage which almost broke their once peaceful home (T3 p.73). Alphonsine who always plays the obedient and traditional wife decides to announce to the world that she is the breadwinner of the family. This brings mockery to Koffi from his friends and extended family members, Hyacinthe concludes: "Depuis quelque temps, Koffi a perdu sa culotte dans sa maison. C'est sa femme qui l'a trouvée et qui la porte maintenant" ((T3, p.119). He tells the others that Koffi's wife is the one who wears the trousers now in the marriage. This means that the wife makes the decisions in the family.

Amastène and Monique (Aya's biology teacher and his wife): This couple are both cheating on each other. First is Amastène who goes about sleeping with "all" his female students. He forces some, while some agree because they want to get a good grade in his course. There are also few, like Aya, who reject him and obviously face the consequences of rejecting him. Bintou confirms this when she says:

Oui le pervers qui te sert de modèle oblige les étudiantes à coucher avec lui pour avoir de bonnes notes et si elles refusent, il les bat. La vérité sur ton modèle, ton parrain, Aya a refusé ses avances et depuis il la harcèle, la martyrise en lui mettant de mauvaises notes. Et il a même failli la violer. (T6, p.82).

Bintou makes the above statement while trying to explain to the young lawyer, Didier, who is Aya's love interest and also a mentee of Amastène, that Aya is a victim of Amastène. Didier invites Aya to a get-together in his family house where Amastène is also invited. On seeing Aya, he lashes out at her and lies that she is a loose girl who thinks she can get good grades because she is beautiful, he opines: "Cette idiote compte sur son physique pour réussir" (T6, p.64). He says this while explaining to Didier and his parents that he sees Aya every day at the University and that he offers her free extra classes but she rejects them always. Likewise, Monique, Amastène's wife has her own share of being an adulterous partner. She meets Mamadou and decides to date him and also sponsor his lifestyle. Aya confirms this: "Hé Bintou, la dame a un amant, et quel amant ! C'est Mamadou" (T5, p.26). Aya finds out that Amastène's wife has a lover while she follows her because she wants to tell her about her husband's infidelities and how he harasses his female students.

ADULTERY AS A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PHENOMENON

The portrayal of adultery reflects both the double standards for men and women and the social pressure to maintain appearances. Women are often judged harshly, while men escape with minor consequences or even pride in their exploits. Adultery in *Aya de Yopougon* is not treated as a mere act of personal betrayal but as a reflection of broader societal attitudes. In Yopougon, extramarital affairs are common among men and are often tolerated, if not tacitly accepted, by the community. For instance, Aya's father, Ignace, maintains a long-term affair with his secretary, Jeanne, which leads to the birth of two children outside his marriage (T2). Fanta, his wife, endures emotional betrayal long before the secret comes to light. His hypocrisy and the secrecy surrounding the affair highlight the societal double standards that allow men greater sexual freedom while punishing women for the same behaviour. Example is the case of Bintou, who just for acting as a home wrecker in a movie, is bullied in real life (T7).

Hyacinthe (Adjoua's father) and Koffi (Bintou's father) also indulge in adulterous affairs with younger women, reflecting a generational pattern of male privilege. Thus, adultery in the narrative functions less as a personal failing and more as a societal norm enabling patriarchal entitlement.

This normalization of male infidelity is further emphasized through the character of Grégoire and Amastène who juggle multiple relationships while keeping up appearances as some respectable businessman and lecturer respectively. These

portrayals serve as a critique of patriarchal privilege and the performative morality of the adult male characters. Extramarital affairs emerge as normalized behaviour, especially among men, revealing glaring double standards and behaviours that can bring about complexity in their families.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Family isn't portrayed as a fixed structure, but as a fluid, evolving network influenced by personal choices and societal norms. As the story progresses, the family dynamics change from nuclear to complex. In Tome 1 and 2, Aya's family is just herself, her parents and two siblings and their maid (T1, p2). However, in Tome 3, Aya's family becomes complex with the introduction of Jeanne, his father's mistress and her two children (T3, p10). Same goes to Adjoua and her family who in Tome 1 is a nuclear family until Adjoua gets pregnant outside wedlock and becomes a single mother and Bobby her son is added to their family dynamics (T2, p30). In the same way, Mr Sissoko had a nuclear family until he finds out that he has a son with Philomène whom he had an affair with when he was young. His family automatically becomes complex with a son, Grégoire, whom his wife and son are unaware of (T7, p85).

Complex family relationships

A complex family could also be seen as an extended or multi-generational family. This type of family has many adults, children and other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews living together and sharing household responsibilities. These families are common in our African society with the most frequent types such as, blended families with step-siblings, single-parent families and families with non-biological parents or grandparents raising children. The term "complex" is used to differentiate these family structures from the nuclear family which consists of father, mother and their children. *Aya de Yopougon* features a variety of complex family setups which we are going to examine below:

Single-parent family: There are a number of single-parent families depicted in *Aya de Yopougon* as presented below:

- i) **Adjoua:** She gets pregnant outside wedlock, tries to pin it on Moussa, who marries her thinking the pregnancy is his own: "Adjoua: Moussa, je dois t'annoncer une grave nouvelle. Je suis enceinte" (T1, p.60). Adjoua in the preceding quote tells Moussa that she is pregnant for him. Later on, after she gives birth, it was discovered that her son belongs to Mamadou and her marriage to Moussa ended. Mamadou accepts being Bobby's father but is

more an absent father than a real father to Bobby, Adjoua's son: "Aya: Il faut que Mamadou assume son rôle de père. Adjoua : Je ne vais pas le forcer, Aya. Il dit qu'il a juste fait deux fois " (T2, p.34). Aya tells Adjoua that Mamadou has to assume his responsibilities as Bobby's father while Adjoua tells her that she cannot force him to do so. Adjoua, in the novel, represents single mothers who try so hard to raise their children alone. She lives with her parents in their family house and raises her son with the help of her family.

ii) Philomène: She gets pregnant at a young age for the young son of her employers. She is sent packing with her pregnancy while her baby daddy is unaware of her situation. She gives birth and becomes a single mother to her son Grégoire.

iii) Jeanne: Aya's father's mistress who gives birth to two children for her married lover. She lives alone with these two children for many years before allowing people know that Ignace is their father. Even after that, she still has to take care of them alone because Ignace does not want them to come and live with him in his family house.

Non-biological parents: Extended family involvement in child-rearing is a factor portrayed in our text. There are many cases about children with non-biological parents. Some instances would be the cases of Felicité who lives with Aya's family and Hervé who stays with Bintou's family. These two live with parents who are not their biological parents and siblings who are not of the same parents as them. All these reflect the flexible and often pragmatic approach to family life in Yopougon.

CONSEQUENCES OF ADULTERY AND COMPLEX FAMILIES

In most, if not all complex families, there are usually no family bond. Oftentimes, bonds are created by only those from the same mother. Family bonds are frequently strained by secrecy and betrayal provoked by adultery. Here are some examples of consequences of adultery and complex family as presented in our text:

Broken families: Aya's family is torn when her father's affair is exposed. Ignace's concealed children with Jeanne highlights the collapse of traditional family units and the struggles of Fanta, his wife. When Fanta finds out that her husband cheated on her and has two children from the affair, she feels betrayed and decides to abandon her matrimonial home, thereby abandoning her children. The effects of adultery become

emotional inheritances for Aya and her siblings who have to suffer the absence of their mother. This is a social reality in most broken homes where the children suffer the absence of either of their parents.

Mr Sissoko's family becomes inhabitable for him when he decides to rekindle a love affair and start a relationship with his long-lost childhood lover, Philomène. His wife and child are relegated to the corner while he buys a house for his mistress and her son (T7, p.101). He also gives an important position in his company to Grégoire, the son he shares with his mistress while his own legitimate son has no say in the company. Simone, Mr Sissoko's wife is not happy that their son, Moussa does not have a place in his father's company. She encourages her husband to give their son a chance but during their argument, he leaves his wife telling her that he is going where they still consider him a man. Mr Sissoko says: "je vais où on me considère encore comme un homme" (T7, p.85). This shows that the family bond is already broken, the man no longer considers his wife and son as people he can trust and be happy with.

Shame and disgrace: Adjoua decides to hide the real identity of her child's father, creating a ripple effect in her family and community. She chooses a rich man's child as her son's father because she wants to be married before the birth of her son. Adjoua's pregnancy epitomizes calculated deception. She lies that *Moussa* is the father of Bobby, a ploy aimed at social security through "un mariage... sous le signe de la tromperie" (T1, p.60). The public show of their forced union, driven by class fear and moral hypocrisy, reveals how family honour can overshadow individual truth. In the bid to cover his family honour, Mr Sissoko accepts the marriage between his son and Adjoua, likewise Hyacinthe, Adjoua's father who practically forces Moussa to marry Adjoua.

GENDER, YOUTH, AND THE CHALLENGE TO TRADITION

While adult characters frequently embody traditional and hypocritical values, the younger generation, represented by Aya, symbolises a challenge to these norms. Aya is ambitious, rational, and morally grounded. She condemns her father's infidelity, she says: "...tant que les femmes accepteront cette situation, les hommes ne changeront jamais" (T3, p.21). She makes it clear that as long as women accept men's infidelity, they (men) will never change. She encourages her mother not to accept her father's adultery: "si j'étais toi, je ferais comme Dona Isadora dans *Femmes de Sable*" (T3, p.22), she tells her that if she were in her shoes, she would behave like Dona Isadora in *Femmes de Sable*. Dona Isadora in the novel made a great change to something already seen as a norm. Here Aya is telling her mother to be the first to go against a cheating husband publicly. Aya is also against her friends' pursuit of rich men for personal gain, suggesting a generational shift in values (T2). Aya's resistance to both romantic entanglements and

societal expectations of women underscore the novel's feminist undertones which of course is a reality. Her character serves as a thwart to the adults around her, many of whom are entangled in lies and contradictions. Through Aya, the authors highlight the potential for personal integrity and change within a society riddled with outdated gender roles and moral compromise.

SIGNIFICANCE AND THEMATIC DEPTH

Moral ambiguity

The comic book uses humour and realism to depict moral ambiguity. These could be seen in the headings below:

Relationships and loyalty: Ignace pretends to be the loyal husband to his wife Fanta while he is having an affair with his secretary. To Aya, his father is the best man ever until she finds out that he has been cheating on her mother. Mr Sissoko, on the other hand, sneaks out to buy a mansion for his lover and the son they have together while his wife and son are unaware. Furthermore, Adjoua gets pregnant for Mamadou and pins it on Moussa who marries her thinking the baby is his. While Koffi gets angry seeing his friend Hyacinthe with his daughter, he is also playing with a girl his daughter's age. Finally, Aya who often finds herself torn between her loyalty to her friends and her desire for personal ambition.

Economic struggles: The characters frequently face ethical dilemmas related to survival. For instance, some resort to questionable means to secure financial stability, blurring the lines between right and wrong in their pursuit of a better life. Mamadou for example who starts dating an older married woman so that she can sponsor his lifestyle (T5, p.26). Another instance is Bintou who decides to go out with her best friend, Adjoua's father just for money and good lifestyle. Adjoua who chooses Moussa as her baby daddy because he is more financially stable than the actual baby daddy.

Parenting and Independence: Aya's parents have conflicting views on how she should lead her life. Her mother wants her to conform to traditional expectations and her father wants her to get married as soon as possible while Aya seeks independence and education (T1, p.22). Adjoua likes going out to party at night while her father detests it. He monitors the children's movement at night by making sure to count their legs while they sleep. Adjoua thinks he is too wicked for this (T1, p.20). This conflict creates a moral ambiguity about the roles of parents versus the aspirations of children.

These examples illustrate how *Aya de Yopougon* skillfully navigates moral ambiguity as it relates to family and societal settings, prompting readers to reflect on the characters' choices and their implications.

GENDER ROLES, ECONOMIC PRESSURES, AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

In our text, gender roles, economic pressures, and social expectations play significant roles in shaping the relationships among characters. Here's how each factor influences their dynamics:

Gender Roles: These roles are viewed in two ways namely: Traditional expectations and power dynamics.

Traditional Expectations: Women are normally expected to fulfill roles as caretakers and homemakers, which creates tension for characters such as Aya. In the text, Aya represents those who seek independence and education. This affects her relationships with her friends, Bintou and Adjoua who embrace traditional roles. Fanta and Alphonsine play the traditional role of caretakers and homemakers until their husbands decide to cheat on them. They flip the script on them and expose the real situation of their individual families.

Power Dynamics: Male characters often hold positions of authority, affecting how women navigate their relationships. Women may feel pressured to conform to these dynamics, impacting their choices in partners and friendships. In a society such as ours where men are seen as the prize, women tend to struggle just to be seen or heard. Fanta has to leave her matrimonial home for her husband to realise how much he wants her. Alphonsine also has to speak up and tell the whole world that she is the breadwinner of the house before her husband could decide to slow down with his show of power.

Economic Pressures: This will be discussed as a survival strategy where people are seen doing all sorts of things just to survive economically.

Survival Strategies: Economic instability is part of the problems that force the characters in our text to make difficult choices in their relationships. Some of these women engage with men who can provide financial support, complicating notions of love and loyalty. Bintou does not find Moussa attractive; however, she still wants to be with him in the name of “j’aurai son nom, sa maison/I would have his name, his house” (T1, p.63). Adjoua knows that Moussa is not the father of her baby yet she decides to pin the baby on him and even marry him because he is from a very rich home.

Social Expectations such as community judgement affects choices made by characters as presented in the text and as analysed below.

Community Judgment: Characters face societal scrutiny regarding their choices, particularly in terms of marriage and relationships. This external pressure can lead to conformity, causing some to suppress their true desires. Albert, Adjoua's brother, who is homosexual decides to bring a lady home because he is afraid to let people know his true sexual orientation (T6).

The interplay of gender roles, economic pressures, and social expectations creates a complex web of relationships where characters navigate their desires against societal norms. For instance, Aya's friendships are influenced by her pursuit of education, conflicting with her friends' more traditional ambitions, illustrating how these pressures can both unite and divide. Overall, *Aya de Yopougon* provides a nuanced exploration of how gender roles, economic pressures, and social expectations shape the relationships of its characters, reflecting the broader societal context of Côte d'Ivoire.

CONCLUSION

In *Aya de Yopougon*, Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie use the themes of adultery and complex family relationships to critique societal norms and gender roles in 1970s Côte d'Ivoire, revealing the contradictions between tradition and modernity, and the moral ambiguity embedded in familial and romantic bonds. The graphic novel's strength lies in its ability to deal with serious themes while maintaining a light, engaging tone that invites both empathy and reflection. Through the interwoven themes of adultery and complex family relationship, Abouet and Oubrerie expose the contradictions of a society caught between tradition and modernity, where appearances often mask deeper dysfunctions. Adultery serves not only as a personal betrayal but as a social critique, while family dynamics reveal the often-painful cost of secrets and gender inequality. The portrayal of adultery reflects both the double standards for men and women and the social pressure to maintain appearances. Women are often judged harshly, while men escape with minor consequences or even pride in their exploits. Through these themes, Abouet and Oubrerie expose the contradictions of gender norms, class pressures, and generational change. Aya, as a figure of integrity and progressive values, offers a hopeful alternative to the hypocrisy of her elders. In presenting these realities with both humour and poignancy, the novel becomes not just a coming-of-age story but also a powerful commentary on the moral and emotional landscapes of postcolonial African life.

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