



## **Nationalism and African Communal Identity in Marguerite Abouté's and Clément Oubrerie's *Aya de Yopougon***

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### Abstract

Nationalism has become a contested construct because scholars doubt its ideological authenticity and global migratory consciousness, which promotes transcultural / transnational identity, and problematizes its *raison d'être*. Though Abouté and Oubrerie's graphic novel could be read as a portrayal of the emerging urban center and its postmodern identities, this study rather investigates how *Aya de Yopougon* galvanizes juvenile nationalistic consciousness through age-long African communal identity. Using the postcolonial theory, the paper argues that the epistemology of nationalism, as a forerunner of nationhood, has been inherently encapsulated in African communal identity as manifested in the lives of middle-class dwellers of Yopougon, a suburb of Abidjan. It further deconstructs the symbolic Eurocentric paradigms of nationalism because nationalistic consciousness is located in the African definition of "family" and "community" revealed in the setting of Yopougon which contrasts with other spaces that bear the emblem of nationhood in the novel. Yopougon is not Anderson's "imagined community"; its inhabitants reflect African communal identity that is located in gender complementarities and civic interdependence. The paper concludes that communalism could be an African brand of modern nationalism, used to develop the nationalistic and communalistic consciousness of the Ivorian youths who are faced with crude realities of a postcolonial society.

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## Introduction

The European colonization of Africa was premised on what Patrick Brantlinger calls “the myth of the dark continent” (1985: 168). In the eyes of the West, Africa was a “dark continent” because “Africans, African culture, religions and artifacts were classified according to the grid of Western thought and imagination in which alterity was a negative category of the same” (Pawliková-Vilhanová, 1998: 164). The Eurocentric conceptualization of the *other* world, reinforced by theories on evolution, race and progress, provided a ‘providential’ framework on which the “Scramble for Africa” stood, thereby justifying the “myth of the dark continent” and the civilizing missions of empires. African literary writers have immensely contributed to galvanizing the understanding of the African man and his society, thereby refuting age-long anti-African Eurocentric ideologies; their works could be described as products of nationalistic responsibility as they set out to reinterpret the African consciousness.

African literature provides a platform for discussing and interpreting African existence and essence, underlining why it is difficult to divorce the early African writing from the nationalistic perspective of its writers. It therefore explains why the Negritude school was interested in the cultural consciousness of all Blacks whose roots were traced to the black continent. Léopold Sédar Senghor’s ideological cries of “retours aux sources” from his Parisian *Quartier Latin* explain the nationalism of negritude literature that inspired African writers such as Birago Diop, David Diop, Olympe Bhély-Quenun and many others. In his early work on African literature titled *La Littérature nègre*, Jacques Chèvrier classifies African novels into “romans de la contestation, historique, de formation, de l’angoisse et du désenchantement” (1974: 127). This novelistic classification unveils the nationalistic perspective inherent in African writing which, in its ethnographic nature, demonstrates that nationalism could not have been a

Western construct since its socio-cultural manifestation describes African consciousness as portrayed in early African literary works. This work is premised on the fact that the ontology of nationalism as Eurocentric concept prelates its materialization; it intends to argue that African communalism is the African brand of European nationalism which has been part of the African consciousness. It posits that Marguerite Abouté's and Clement Oubrerie's overt allusion to African communalism in their graphic novel entitled *Aya de Yopougon* results from the failure of the European brand of nationalism in post-independence Ivorian society.

### **The Western concept of nationalism and African nationalism**

Nationalism has become a contested construct because scholars doubt its ideological authenticity; current happenings all over the world question its ontology, while global migratory consciousness, which has promoted transcultural and transnational identity, problematizes its *raison d'être*. The term nationalism has been given multiple definitions as scholars attempt to interpret its concept. This paper does not intend to contribute to controversial and polemical debates on the epistemology and typology of nationalism; however, it aligns its ideas with the Primordialists or Perennialists in arguing that “nations and nationalism are old phenomena and so they are natural and universal,” as against the ideology of Modernists who believe that nations and nationalism are “the product of modern state, bureaucracy, secularism and capitalism” (Anbarani, 2013: 64). Ademola Adeleke (2012: 70)'s definition of nationalism as the desire to create a nation-state which would take its place among the community of nations appears modernist or capitalist, tending towards economic nationalism, and it is conceived primarily in emancipator terms (Miller, 2006: 204).

The European concept of nationalism is equally and perpetually linked to the dynamics of political struggles, explaining the “symbolic nationalism of Kwame Nkrumah” (Fuller, 2008: 520) who was obsessed with replacing Eurocentric monuments after independence with his personal identities. The use of national symbolisms defined the independent African states as a means of asserting hegemony and identities of their territories and sovereignties. It therefore justifies Anderson's *Imagined Communities* because the national flag, anthem and currency are images that construct/ed the

psychic space of new African states. This political transformation leads to what Ruth Marshall-Fratani calls “the redefinition of the content of citizenship and the conditions of sovereignty or the construction of autochthony as a political category” (11-12). The European Modernist concept of nationalism aligns with political struggles and sovereignty, thereby creating the twin idioms of colonialism and nationalism, domination and independence, and struggle and freedom. As already said, the view of this paper adopts the Primordialist perspective of traditional nationalism which informs Khapoya’s definition of African nationalism as “a selective feeling of kinship or affinity shared by people of African descent. It is a feeling based on shared cultural norms, traditional institutions, racial heritage, and a common historical experience” (2012: 150). We intend to show that beyond power struggles, nationalism is not different from African communalism. Using postcolonial theory to interpret Marguerite Abouté’s and Clement Oubrerie’s graphic novel *Aya de Yopougon*, the paper argues that the epistemology of nationalism as a forerunner and byproduct of nationhood has been inherently encapsulated in African communal identity as manifested in the lives of middle-class dwellers of *Aya*’s Abidjan’s Yop City.

As we shall see later in the work, *Aya de Yopougon* goes further to deconstruct the symbolic Eurocentric paradigms of nationalism because nationalistic consciousness is located in the African definition of “family” and “community” revealed in the socioeconomic setting of Yopougon, which is contrasted with other spaces that bear the emblem of nationhood in the novel. Khapoya (2012: 153) describes African societies as collective societies in which the needs and rights of the communities as a whole precede those of the individual. In essence, Yopougon is not Anderson’s “imagined community”; its inhabitants reflect African communal identity that is revealed in gender complementarities and civic interdependence. From *Aya de Yopougon* 1, 2 & 3 that form the corpus of this work, the narrator introduces graphically the characters, not as individualized entities, but as integral part of family entities where father, mother and children play complementary roles in the evolution of the plot. In *Aya* 2, one can say that African communal identity as a paradigmatic network of interpersonal relationships is unveiled. This explains why Adjoua’s teenage pregnancy and the birth of her baby, Bobby are seen as a collective burden than as a

personal problem of her immediate family. Aya and her friends are Bobby's godmothers who belong to a coterie of daily nurses, enabling Adjoua to engage in her petty trading. From the above observation, it is possible to affirm that *Aya de Yopougon* contests Africanized Eurocentric nationalism and celebrates the triumph of African communalism which has been inherent in the social fabrics of African traditional societies.

The Postcolonial theory engages in post/colonial discourse; it identifies, defines and interrogates grand narratives such as nationalism whose epistemology is socially constructed, thus inherently problematic. It is against this background that *Aya de Yopougon* is read as a counter-narrative that deconstructs and contests the Eurocentric notion of nationalism in a very subtle way.

### **Contesting Nationalism through African communalism in *Aya de Yopougon* 1-3**

The narrative of *Aya de Yopougon* demonstrates the omnipresence of Ivorian postcoloniality and independence by the use of symbolisms and materialization of crisscrossing high-rise buildings, illustrated by Clement Oubriere. Marguerite Aboutet presents *Aya de Yopougon* as a graphic novel that fictionalizes her childhood experience in the Abidjan suburb of Yopougon. It narrates in six volumes the life of Aya, as the title suggests, and a coterie of friends with their respective heterosexual family structure whose desires and obsessions constitute the leitmotiv of the novel that engages partly in the discourse of Ivoirian Miracle and Post/modernity. *Aya* cannot be seen only as a *Bildungsroman*, though Aboutet's *Akassi* discusses the early part of this *Bildung*, but also as a novel that portrays the postmodernity and spatiality of an emerging urban centre. In her thesis titled "I Will Be VIP...", Jordana Chris Matlon offers the geospace of Yopougon as one of the *communes* of Abidjan and admits its realistic representation in Aboutet's *Aya* in this way:

Yopougon represents the nucleus of Abidjanais culture...Yopougon is somewhat built up, with a scattering of multi-story office towers and intersecting paved roads, but it is largely characterized by unsigned, unnumbered neighborhoods of shanties or *bidonvilles*. This commune is memorialized in Ivoirian Marguerite Aboutet's *Aya de Yopougon*, comic book

which keeps domestic and expatriate Ivoirians smiling with accounts of life in the metropolis (2012: 38)

Clement Oubrerie's graphic illustration of all corners of Yopougon elaborates Matlon's textual representation of this commune in her autoethnographic studies of peripheral Abidjanais men in her work. Yopougon is an urbanizing peripheral area of Abidjan popularly and pejoratively renamed "Yop City", probably after America's New York City found in American films by its *bovaresque* inhabitants; the latter are undergoing a postmodern influence of Western popular culture, thereby appropriating a postmodern identity and language, so to speak. Yopougon's ethos or what D. H. Lawrence calls the "spirit of place" – a notion he adapts from the ancient concept of *genius loci*, a guardian spirit that watches over a particular locale (Tally, 2013: 81) –, can be seen in the middle-class dwellers' subjective sensibilities: they now enjoy the embryonic fragrance of Harvey's and Jameson's postmodern "space-time compression" which "typifies human experience in the postmodern condition" (Tally, 2013: 39) in the Ivoirian society of the 1970s.

*Aya de Jopougon 1* opens with a humanly "empty" space [panel], artistically displaying photographed portraits of Aya's family and a set of TV, advertising a locally produced beer, *Solibra*, that empowers a comedian Dago on bike to surprisingly overtake a bus driver since "mobility in urban spaces merges the technological and the physical" (Daan, 2012: 211). Marguerite Aboutet's narrative revolves majorly around three families who are spotted in Aya's father's sitting room watching TV with their children as illustrated by Oubrerie and presented by Aya the narrator: Adjoua with her parents, Hyacinte and Korotoumou, Bintou and her father, Koffi, and Aya and her family members among whom are Fofana, Akissi, Fanta her mother and father (Aboutet 2-3). The second page displays a series of panels, revealing a telephonic conversation between Adjoua and Bintou as they fix a rendezvous with a "*génito*" whose wealth they intend to lavish in Yopougon's numerous bars.

From visual and textual representations in *Aya*, it is evident that Yopougon, like other city suburbs, is a product of Ivorian postcoloniality and nationalistic-elitist configuration since it is intended to decongest the capital city of Abidjan, the pride of the Ivorian bourgeoisie and aristocrats,

which can be defined as a postcolonial city. The reason is due to economic nationalism because Abidjan must be made comfortable for foreigners or multinational and transnational companies which have become powerful organizations trying “to control the global economy while nation states feel compelled to offer a competitive environment to attract investment” (Hungwe, 2010: 44). Yopougon, as illustrated by Clement Oubrerie, shows well paved lanes and streets, lock-up stores for barbers and other small scale enterprises, blocks of storey buildings that reveal the emergence of a market economy of “excluded” communities of an independent state. It is “excluded” because independent states are driven by discourses of development and new nationalism; it leads to, in Morten Bøås’ words, “the polarization and fragmentation rather than producing the images of unity needed to maintain and facilitate a national consciousness” (20). The opening panels of *Aya de Yopougon 1* engage in colonial discourse as the text and its images highlight the Ivorian modernism and its “société publicitaire” since 1978, that falls within the Miracle era of the state. In general, this shows that “democracy in Africa has been reduced to the emergence of a market economy.” (Chachage and Chachage 174)

Marguerite Aboutet justifies the deconstructive and autoethnographic enterprise of her graphic novel; it is expressed in her words that provide the *raison d’être* of her narrative: “pour contredire une histoire erronées sur l’Afrique”, a statement located in the preface of *Aya de Yopougon 1*. The introduction of Monsieur Sissoko upsets the economic equation of the narrative that portrays a middle-class society; he is the director of Solibra. His house, compared to “la maison du President Boigny” (*Aya 1* 31) and his beer, metaphorize the emergence of the dominant class of African aristocrats, a symbol of modernism, arrivisme and economic nationalism. M. Sissoko’s villa is fantastically gargantuan and creates a panoramic geospace of its own, surrounded by nothing but climatic worldview since Clement Oubrerie frames the *maison* in a giant panel of page 30. The castle is however devoid of the communalism and conviviality of Yopougon homes, typical of African society. Despite his opulence, M. Sissoko has only a son who habitually occupies Yopougon city-space, where he gratifies his unending pleasures.

Yop City is a melting pot of all cultures and lives, garnished by nightclubs and public places that attract people from all works of life such

as Moussa, the heir of Sissoko. Unlike his parents, his friends are inhabitants of Yopougon and he is eventually accused of impregnating the young girl, Adjoua. The news traumatizes Monsieur and Madame Sissoko, but the worst is that “ce sont des paysans qui habitent Yopougon” (*Aya* 172). The parents are forced into a relationship with peasants; it starts during the wedding between Moussa and Adjoua, which is conducted in Yopougon. Sissoko’s rejection of Bobby, Adjoua’s newborn baby, and Hyacinte’s search for the evidence of paternity are insightful in the narrative, creating a link between the city and village. And incidentally, the birth of Bobby goes a long way to demonstrate the recreation of African communalism in Yop City as we shall see in the next section of the work.

### **“Retours aux sources”: Yopougon as a network of relationships**

The conflict of Bobby’s paternity is dramatized in *Aya de Yopougon 2*, which depicts Hyacinte’s adventure to his homeland in search of Bobby’s resemblance. As a journalist with CALAMITE MATIN, he should have known that DNA could have provided the only key to the resolution of paternity conflict, but he decides to visit his village with camera, a sort of Senghorian “retours aux sources”. Marguerite Aboutet uses this narrative structure to create a paradigmatic relationship between Yop City and a typical Ivorian village. Though Hyacinte’s camera upsets the rusticity and naturalness of village life, it however appeals to his relatives, whose photographs are captured in groups, giving them the opportunity of romance with city life’s high culture. Without his search for evidence, he would not have deemed it fit to reconnect with his extended family, but he would rather remain in a city that gives him access to high culture promoted by modern state. His attitude justifies Antony Anghie (456)’s assertion that the postcolonial experience of the common high culture of the modern affords the individual citizens the opportunity to disregard, dispense with, or at least reduce in significance, their affiliations with their own communities. The phenomenon is characteristic of the old generation of city dwellers such as “les sages de Yop”: Hycinte, Ignace, and Koffi and Bonaventure Sissoko (except in the participation in the burial ceremony of a relative in the village) whose children experience rootlessness in the city, but however recreate the village communal ambiance in Yop City.

Why Bonaventure Sissoko and Hycinte engage in paternity conflict,



induced by economic gain or pain? The writer presents the young generation of Yop City dwellers whose perspective of life is different from that of their parents. From *Aya de Yopougon* 1, 2 & 3, the narrator introduces graphically the characters, not as individualized entities, but as integral part of family entities where father, mother and children play complementary roles in the evolution of the plot. In essence, nationalism, as a forerunner and byproduct of nationhood, has been inherently encapsulated in African communal identity as manifested in the lives of middle-class dwellers of Abidjanal Yop City. However, nationalistic consciousness is located in Marguerite Abouté's conceptualization of "family" and "community" in her novel. Presenting sketches of different families that make up Yopougon community, the emphasis is on the children, not on parents. She uses Aya to introduce the family of Ignace and Fanta who are her parents. Besides, issues are settled not in law courts but in a palaver with all households that make up the community in attendance.

In *Aya 2*, it can be said that the African communal identity as a paradigmatic network of interpersonal relationships is now unveiled. This explains why Adjoua's teenage pregnancy and the birth of her baby, Bobby, are seen as a collective burden than as a personal problem of her immediate family. Aya and her friends take charge of Bobby as godmothers, enabling Adjoua to engage in her petty trading. In *Aya 2* whose cover page displays Bobby at the back of Aya, some panels show where Aya cleans up Bobby (14) and carries him around with Bintou (28-29) while the real mother sells *claclos chauds* in the market. Adjoua has to carry on with life after her unfortunate marriage with Moussa is annulled; her socioeconomic rehabilitation is only possible with the help of her friends. A dialogue between Adjoua and Féli at the marketplace exposes a lot:

**Féli:** Bobby pleure depuis. Il a faim ô. Aya dit de venir le nourrir.

**Adjoua:** Eh! Dieu! C'est vrai. Je l'ai même oublié ô.

.....

**Adjoua:** Bon Féli, tu peux vendre mes claclos?

**Féli:** D'accord.

(*Aya de Yopougon* 2 31)

The discussion between Adjoua and Féli displays emotional solidarity and support though both do not share parentage. Hungwe (39) affirms that nationalism is recognized for its important psychological dimension of bringing people together. However, that is only when it has to do with emancipatory political nationalism. Unfortunately, with the emergence of economic nationalism, that came with postcolonial elitist consciousness – as seen in M. Sissoko and his likes, who occupy places and positions vacated by the colonial masters –, interpersonal distance, rather than togetherness, is created in African communities that are now socially spatialized into villages, capitals, ghettos, suburbs, Low Cost Areas and Government Reserved Areas (GRA). What Aya, Féli, Binetou and others display towards Adjoua in Yopougon is simply a communal or communitarian identity inherent in African cosmic vision. In essence, as Thomas Kochalumehevattil simply puts it, “the self is defined in terms of the ‘we existence’ through social interactions” (2010: 113), unlike individualism which is prevalent in European societies.

Still in *Aya 2*, as Aya departs for Yamoussoukro, Adjoua feels disturbed over who will mind Bobby. Aya’s reply is insightful: “Adjoua, y a plein de tanties dans le quartier. Tu peux les voir.” (68). “Tanties” are generic names for older women in the neighborhood, not necessarily blood relations; it depicts how the network of interpersonal relationships and interactions is constructed in a typical African society. Child training and upbringing is seen as a collective responsibility. This explains why Féli and Hervé are integrated into Ignace’s and Koffi’s immediate family respectively, though they are relatives. Aya’s communitarian consciousness is not surprising; it is not only towards Adjoua, but also towards Hervé whom she teaches how to read and write (101-102), Binetou, whom she takes to Koumassi to search for le Parisien Grégoire though she does not totally approve of their relationship (94-98), among others. The interdependence of these young inhabitants is socially and communally symbolic. As the heroine, apparently impersonating Marguerite Aboutet, Aya’s character is symptomatic of communal identity as she helps in resolving internal and personal conflicts in her immediate community. However she is traumatized by her father’s unfaithfulness to her mother, or simply put in Marguerite Aboutet’s expression, the discovery of her father’s “deuxième bureau”.

### **Communitarian Feminism and Conflict of Generation in *Aya de Yopougon***

*Aya de Yopougon 3* chronicles marital conflicts in different homes of Yopougon dwellers, and the beauty pageant where Féli emerges the winner with a prize. M. Ignace's extramarital affair with Jeanne, her mistress truncates the peaceful ambiance of his family as his wife, Fanta eventually departs for her sister's residence at Treichville (54-55). At the same time that Aya supervises the departure of her mother, Bintou, Hervé and their mother, Alphonsine are being briefed by Koffi who declares his intention of taking a second wife, Rita as a reward of his financial help to Rita's father. Marguerite Abouet's allusion to matrimonial conflicts and polygamic actions, triggered off by men's infidelity to their marital vows, remains a way of portraying the omnipotence of patriarchy that still haunts the postcolonial African society.

It is widely believed that traditional women in African societies have always protected their rights in one way or another or supported the public rights of both genders such as Abeokuta Women and Aba Women Riot of 1929 (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2012: 1). These women riots are community movements, typical of Ousmane Sembene's popular female solidarity march toward the city in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*; they are neither canonical nor ideological, like modern trends of feminism, but rather instinctive and proactive. However, women's actions as represented in *Aya 3* do not seek political or economic equalities. They can rather be perceived as a new form of postcolonial African feminism which "is not essentially characteristic of the feminist debates in Western countries about the female body, sexuality, autonomies and sexual rights" (Aniekwu, 2006: 147), but they rather intend to obliterate polygamy, which is a patriarchal privilege of the old order. This can be termed 'communitarian feminism' since it demands the responsibility of the individual to the community, thereby explaining why all women of Yopougon have to intervene to save Alphonsine from the tyranny of her husband, Koffi. Fanta's feminine action imbibes the qualities of Ogunyemi's African womanism, Acholonu's motherism and Nnaemeka's nego-feminism because it accepts gender complementarities, celebrates womanhood and maternity, and yet negotiates around patriarchy to achieve its ends. During the palaver

between men and women of Yopougon in *Aya 3*, Fanta declares herself as the “capitaine” of Yopougon women when asked by Furtuné: “Fanta, c’est toi le chef, alors?” (120). She later adds: “Et puis... on voulait toutes te dire d’arrêter de traiter Aïssatou comme une moins que rien.” (121) It is Alphonsine’s threats to divorce Koffi since she is incidentally the breadwinner of the family that changes the atmosphere as Koffi declares: “Donc, si Alphonsine veut partir, là, moi, je refuse cette seconde épouse!” (120)

Unlike typical traditional women who lost their voice during community palaver, Fanta, Alphonsine and others are capable of standing for their rights and defending weaker vessels such as Aïssatou, who are members of their community; they are no longer subalterns. Alphonsine’s and Fanta’s action brings Koffi and Ignace to submission and acceptance of women’s rights in matrimonial homes. Don’t forget that the women had met in the church to harmonize their point of view; their communiqué comes in a way of advice, given by Fanta to Alphonsine: “Alors donne-lui [Koffi] un ultimatum s’il épouse la petite, tu t’en vas, tu prends une autre maison.” (103) Their use of divorce threat as “weapon” actually makes Koffi to have a rethink. In this case, Alphonsine is the one who pays the piper; she has the right to dictate the tone. Like their mothers, the young generation such as Aya, Rita, among others can be seen as “rebels” to the old order.

Generational conflict comes in the language and culture of the inhabitants of Yopougon. The children speak pure French with their parents, but speak Yopougon’s glottonym that can be termed as heterolinguistic and which is influenced by Abidjan’s *nouchi*, a mix of French, local dialect and occasional English. Aside the linguistic polarity, there is also new culture. These youngsters of Yopougon can openly disagree with their parents. Aya stands against Ignace, Moussa against Sissoki, Rita against Fortuné, not submitting totally to parental whims and caprices. Aya rejects his father’s suggestion for friendship with Moussa, the son of his boss who by the way admires her courage for scholarship, unlike his prodigal son. In *Aya 1*, she announces to his father: “je veux être médecin” (23) without blinking, though her ambition is opposed by Ignace. Aya will do all to convince him who responds that “les longues études sont faites pour les hommes” (22). In the character of Aya, Spivak’s question of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is answered in the affirmative. In Ignace’s

extramarital romance or his “deuxième bureau” episode, she does not hesitate to confront Jeanne to whom she refers as “briseuse de foyer” (*Aya* 3 10). Like Rama, Ousmane Sembene’s revolutionary feminist character in *Xala*, Aya advises her mother to rise up and fight because “...tant que les femmes acceptent cette situation, les hommes ne changeront jamais, ça c’est sûr” (22). Though communitarian, Aya stands against patriarchal traditions that persist in African postcolonial society like Yopougon.

## Conclusion

Though Marguerite Abouté’s and Clément Oubrerie’s graphic novel could be read as a portrayal of an emerging urban center and its postmodern identities, this study has investigated how *Aya de Yopougon 1-3* galvanizes juvenile nationalistic consciousness through age-long African communal identity. It is evident in the texts that communalism could be an African brand of modern nationalism and that Marguerite Abouté’s choice of graphic novel as a marginal and “mistaken” form of representation remains a means of developing the nationalistic and communalistic consciousness of the Ivorian youths who are faced with crude realities of a postcolonial society. The writer’s inclination towards communal identity can be premised on what can be referred to as the “failure of nationalism” in contemporary Africa in galvanizing togetherness of Africans; it has rather created dichotomies, class consciousness, territorialized spaces, and commoditized relationships. The youths of Yopougon, though with their myriad of attitudinal problems, are ready to take over the hegemony of Yopougon from their parents.

Aya and her group of youngsters created a network of relationships that is totally welfarist and can be a model for community development. Hervé’s prosperous auto-mechanic workshop, Adjoua’s petty trading business, Féli’s success in Miss Yopougon contest, etc. are products of communal identity of the new generation of Yopougon.

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### **Biographical note**

Dr. Richard Oko Ajah teaches literature, criticism and French language in the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Uyo in Nigeria where he graduated with First Class and with several awards. Dr. Ajah's areas of specialization are comparative, African and Maghrebian literatures, Francophone films, postcolonial studies and travel writing. He is currently doing research on African graphic novels and on what he calls *pictographic criticism*. His new research is a synergy of literature and art, aimed at creating a panacea for poor reading culture in many African societies. His works have been published in different parts of the world and he has attended local and international conferences. Richard Oko Ajah is also a published poet whose poetry works have appeared in anthologies and journals. He is a member of several professional bodies such as *UFTAN*, *FIPF*, *MLA*, *Digital Humanities Association*, and others.