African Comics and Medical Discourse: A Study of Benjamin Kouadio's *John Koutoukou: le sida tue, et alors?* as a Narrative Pathography

Ajah, Richard (PhD)

richardajah@uniuyo.edu.ng – University of Uyo

ABSTRACT

The study on comics and its interdisciplinary relationship with medicine has become increasingly recognized around the world due to the emergence of the new field of medical humanities. Although Africa produces its graphic writings, studies on African comics are minimal and its contribution to medical discourse has not been fully brought to light in African literature. In this study, I aim to investigate how African comics engage with medical discourse in Benjamin Kouadio's John Koutoukou: le sida tue, et alors? which mirrors the city of Abidjan's HIV/AIDS epidemic. Based on visual discourse and conceptual metaphor theory, I intend to closely examine the visual metaphors and metonymies that the author uses to convey feelings and empathy in an attempt to promote his therapeutic education, to deconstruct stereotypes against the sufferers, and raise awareness among the Ivorian public as regards the ravage of HIV/AIDS. The cognitive architecture and the organization of the graphic modality of the narrative depend on the author's artistic ideology, constructing the graphic characterization, the verbal expressivity of the characters, and the spatio-temporal elements which are evoked in the visually scenic topographies of Kouadio's "pathography". It is imperative, therefore, to interrogate pictorial runes which the illustrator evokes to demonstrate the psychological state of the characters for educational purposes. Bubbles, flying cap, falling hat, question mark, icons, etc., are metaphorical signifiers that are infused with cultural meanings, denoting surprise, fear, joy, and all the negative emotions that should censure the sexual attitudes of the Ivorian public. In its medical discourse, Kouadio's narrative pathography points us to the danger of HIV/AIDS and how to curtail its spread in African cities.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor theory, Medical humanities, African comics, Graphic pathography, Visual metaphors

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the new field of medical humanities and its subgenre of graphic medicine has reconditioned the public perception and acceptability of comics in the Western world. This development has ignited the research interests of scholars of both literature and medicine, and it has encouraged the production and consumption of graphic illness narratives, used to "articulate aspects of social experience that escape both the normal realms of medicine and the comforts of canonical literature" (Squier 130). Although Africa produces its graphic writings (graphic novels, comics), studies on African comics are minimal, and their contribution to medical discourse has not been fully brought to light in African literature. This study reveals how African comics engage in medical discourse and demonstrates how the Ivorian writer and illustrator, Benjamin Kouadio's graphic narrative *John Koutoukou: le sida tue et alors* can be read as medical pathography and HIV/AIDS literature even though he is not a patient of HIV/AIDS. The hypothesis is grounded in the established scholarly definition of pathographies as narratives of illness written from the perspective of the patient (Hawkins 127; Mazurek 48). However, for this essay, the subjective definitional values of pathography in the African context, where the philosophy of Ubuntu makes a personal injury a collective injury, will be problematized. This will no doubt push for the epistemological expansion of what constitutes a pathography.

Based on visual discourse and conceptual metaphor theory, there will also be a close examination of the cathartic functions of visual metaphors and metonymies which the author uses to convey feelings and empathy, in a bid to promote his therapeutic education, deconstruct stereotypes against the sufferers and raise an awareness of the Ivorian populace with regards to the ravage of HIV/AIDS. The cognitive architecture of the graphic modality of Kouadio's narrative depends on his artistic ideology and social function, which constructs the graphic characterization, the verbal expressivity of the characters, and the spatio-temporal elements, evoked in the topographies of his "narrative pathography". It is necessary to prioritize the interrogation of pictorial runes that the illustrator evokes to demonstrate the psychological state of the characters for educational purposes. By that, I mean to establish that the narrative's narrator John Koutoukou's bubbles, flying cap, falling hat, question mark, icons, etc., are metaphorical signifiers that are infused with cultural meanings, denoting surprise, fear, joy, and all the negative emotions that should censure the sexual exploits of the Ivorian public. In its medical discourse, Kouadio's narrative pathography portrays the danger of HIV/AIDS and how to stop its spread in African cities, thereby contributing to Francophone African literary works that engage in medical discourse, but are part of the very few that use the medium of comics.

Humanities and Medicine: Medical Humanities

Literary writers' interest in medicine predates the Enlightenment period in Europe, especially in France, because Molière's *Le médecin malgré lui* and *Le malade imaginaire* (1673) and Albert Camus' *La peste* (1947), among others, are testimonies of the relationship between the humanities and medicine. Atzenhoffer (40) admits that the theme of disease had

attracted lots of critical studies, and the names of some great writers are often linked to a sickness that they had suffered: Th. Mann with tuberculosis, Nietzsche with madness, Dostoevsky with epilepsy, and Proust with asthma. Literature as a society's mirror has a mandate to reflect diseases which are physio-social human realities, depicting writers as sufferers, sympathizers, and spectators of illnesses. The authors have the self-appointed responsibility to represent themselves fictionally or non-fictionally because "fiction operates as a crucial site for articulating the biomedical imaginary-the zone in which the psychic investments of biomedicine are articulated" (Squier 128). However, it is not only writers who capture their experiences through medical memoirs; medical practitioners are also involved in medical humanities.

Squier (124) identified Jo Banks as one of the founding editors of the journal, *Literature and Medicine*. She told a story about her son, Piers, who suffered from Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome all through his life. Scholars have shown relationships between some aspects of the humanities and medicine. Safar (626) has identified the "use of art making in treating older patients with dementia" because "art activities can help develop cognitive abilities, including visuo-spatial and attentional capacity, abstract thinking, and fine motor skills, all involved in the executing of an art project". The role of the humanities and arts in medical education, with special reference to neurosurgery, was discussed at the European Congress of Neurosurgery in Moscow in 1991 (Staricoff). Art activities could be an antidote for managing physio-behavioral challenges in dementia patients because music and healing have always been linked. Wong (684) admits that the Greek god Apollo was not only god of the sun, but god of both healing and music, chronicling that several innovative physicians in the last 300 years were also highly accomplished musicians. The talking cure has also been part of psychoanalysis and cathartic experience has been witnessed through cinematographic representations, demonstrating the role of language in therapeutic procedures. Incidentally, the most modern artistic way that literature and medical science have synergized is using comics or graphics in the character education of medical students and the therapeutic education of patients and caregivers.

In the 2015 Comics and Medicine Conference, Ian Williams, physician, comics artist, and author of *The Bad Doctor* gave the keynote on "Comic in Medicine and Teaching: Rethinking Comic as Educational and Therapeutic Tool" (Giboney 30). Such a topic is a marriage of strange partners, yet it intends to address certain aspects of medical education and practice. In tackling the challenges associated with the practice of medicine and its ethics, "advocates for the arts and the humanities in medicine have offered their disciplines as a partial solution to the challenge of character education. They argue that the arts and the humanities can be used to teach empathy, professionalism, and other character competencies" (Jones 636). The choice of comics for medical pedagogies on character is premised on the artistic, aesthetic, and cathartic potentials of comic literature. Comics are part of Rudd *et al.*'s (187) small but accumulating body of literature which includes the study of materials that use symbols, cartoons, and pictograms for communicating critical health and medical information. In comics, "words and pictures combine to form something new, a condensed and potent medium that could convey complicated stories and intense emotion (Leavitt 655). Some comics now engage in medical discourse; hence they are referred to as illness narratives or "graphic medicine." Leavitt identifies Miriam Engleberg's *Cancer made me a shallower person*, Brian Fies' *Mom's cancer*, and David B's *Epileptic* as excellent examples of "graphic medicine"

(653). This article is interested in this subgenre of graphic medicine and its visual language as its classification is still problematized.

Theorising Graphic Medicine, Visual Language and Conceptual Metaphor

The "Graphic Medicine Manifesto" is a great contribution to medical humanities. As a collection of essays, it introduces us to the history, interdisciplinary framework, and intersections, as well as visions for the growing fields of Graphic Medicine (McMullin) popularizing this emerging subgenre and art form. It was not until the 20th century that comics became an acclaimed artistic medium, with profound and relevant writing and technically strong and aesthetically pleasing visuals (Mulholland 42; Caraballo; Green & Myers 574). Part of comics' legitimization has been shown, as discussed above, in medical education and practice, resulting in studies in graphic medicine. This phenomenon is figured because "artists and writers began to use events in their lives that had caused them joy, pain, fear, and envy, and in a cathartic process, used their creations to relieve themselves of heavy emotions. In a way, the works began to take an aspect of their creators and became possible form of therapy as well as art" (Mulholland 42). Green and Myers call these memoirs graphic pathographies which "provide doctors with new insights into the personal experience of illness (especially regarding concerns patients might not mention in a clinical setting) and misconceptions about disease and treatment that could affect compliance and prognosis" (574) In this form, comics appear as "a reflective tool that attempts to bridge the gap between knowing about a disease and understanding the patient's experience of that disease" (William 1). The legitimisation of comics as an art form, earlier talked about, presupposes the cultural stigma that equally describes why comics is not widely promoted within healthcare and social care education and explains why "this kind of visual narratives targeted at the general public remain poorly studied in terms of their design and efficacy" (Farinella 1). Comics is generally characterized by structural multimodality as it cohabits texts and images, giving rise to "polygraphy", a concept that is inspired by Bakhtin's polyphony (Nofuentes).

Graphic pathographies are comics because they are often defined by the sequential relationship between panels (Farinella 6) whether it is a question of comics or illustrated books which generally use images in isolation and often for affective purposes, rather than for narrative progression (Farthing &Priego 3). Green and Myers agree that "the use of images with text universalizes the illness experience, facilitating greater connections with characters" and the medium is equally and particularly "appropriate for educating patients…" (576). Besides its therapeutic value, emotional bonding as reader's response is achieved through the use of imagery. Metaphor and metonymy are powerful devices that enable the universalization of human experience because both are linked to the embodiment hypothesis which is "based on the idea that all aspects of cognition and the human mind are largely determined by the form and function of the human body" (Stamenkovic & Tasic 157). My use of the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) is justified in this regard because it presents the cognitive linguistics perspective in comics studies.

Cohn (92) agrees that visual attention and perception will be necessary for a complete theory of the comprehension and appreciation of comics. The thrust of my theorization in graphic pathography's visual language and conceptual metaphor theory in particular is premised on the lack of attention on the non-linguistic resources in meaning-making of

multimodal texts (Lui 1259), but it does not foreclose the verbal aspect of signification. In essence, both visual and textual modes are studied as cultural signifiers in medical discourse. Metaphors are transporters of cultural signification, and they can be verbalized or visualized because "metaphor is a matter of concept and cognition not limited to language" (Stamenkovic &Tasic 159). It is the pioneering work of Lakoff and Johnson that has led to the development of CMT (Alousque 366) where metaphor and metonymy are its primary preoccupation as they relate to mapping. Alousque defines metaphor as "a mapping (i.e., a set of correspondences between two different domains while metonymy is a domain-internal conceptual mapping" (367).

The non/verbal discourse of graphic pathographies permits the subjective construction of empathy as texts and images "conspire" and aspire to work on the sentiment of readers because the play on topography helps in *graphicalizing* the emotions of characters through panels. Within each panel, graphic illness narratives "negotiate meaning through the relationship established between the words and the pictures" (Squier 129) and the psychological application of colour traits as vehicles for transporting, with the help of facial expressions, the sentiments of characters (Nofuentes). It is this relationship between visual imagery and text that creates what E. Goldsmith calls "text parallels", one of the factors that affect the comprehensibility of an image (Racine) in illness discourse of all comics including French and francophone medical comics.

Kouadio's *John Koutoukou : le sida tue et alors?*: Ubuntu Philosophy and Narrative Pathography

Literary works on HIV/AIDS have grown since the discovery of the disease in the 80s in Africa. Kouadio's graphic work is one of the Francophone African texts that uses comic strips to present a medical discourse. Others use the traditional form of prose: Jacques Bazié's *L'épave d'Absouya*, Abibatou Traoré's *Sidagamie*, Moudjib Dinadou's *Mogbé*de, Daniel Biyaoula's *L'impasse*, Florent Couao-Zotti's *Filles de Mexico* among others. The Ivorian artist's preoccupation with social issues, is evidenced with his *John Koutoukou* series. My chosen corpus *John Koutoukou: le sida tue et alors?* tells a story of irresponsible sexual comportments of Ivorian youths (Sita) and adults (Difouêté) and how this attitudinal orientation leads to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Côte d'Ivoire. It is a sad story about HIV/AIDS, prostitution, and marital infidelity in Abidjan. Sita is a young active prostitute with HIV. M. Difouete, as an executive director and married man, engages in extramarital relationships, using his affluence as a means of enticing young women and girls. Sita is one of his numerous lovers ; others are "Djantra la superbe", "Toutou Brodai sexuelle et très impudique" and "Lagrosse toujours potelée à souhait" (Kouadio 12). He ends up with HIV that traumatizes and stigmatizes his family and children in school. His death ends his great career. Kouadio's social commitment in HIV/AIDS writing is premised on the fact that "to date sub-Saharan Africa remains the epicentre of the HIV epidemic, accounting for 68% of all people living with HIV, which is about two-thirds of the global total" (Tarkang, Pencille and Komesuor 96) and Cote d'Ivoire is the worst hit in West Africa. The spread of HIV in Abidjan is alarming. It is recognized that 80% of this spread is through sexual relationships, and since this epidemic, the first cause of death of male adults and the second cause of death of female adults are HIV/AIDS (Séry and Gozé 83). It is the author's personal experiences with sufferers and the collective memory he

shares with them that necessitate his fictional graphic writing. Though he dabbles in HIV discourse, Kouadio's illness narrative cannot be judged as graphic pathography because he is not a sufferer of HIV.

Experts of medical humanities have given definitions of pathography or illness narrative that my article intends to problematize in the context of African literature. Hawkins opines that pathographies deal with illness and treatment as it is understood by the ill person, or "provide the story of illness from the perspective of the individual life" (128). Mazurek cites copiously Hawkins and admits that "stories containing the memories of ill people from the periods of the occurrence of the symptoms of an illness, learning about the diagnosis and the course of treatment, and recovery are referred to in the literature with several names: illness narratives, suffering narratives, pathographies or auto-pathographies" (49) Hawkins classifies pathography into four narrative types: didactic, angry, alternative and ecopathographies. I identify Kouadio's narrative with Hawkins's taxonomy of ecopathography, which connects "the personal experience of illness with global problems in the environment, politics and culture" (Mazurek 51); for example, Abidjan's social space is characterized by sexual perversions, social vices, and prevalence of the HIV epidemic. However, I will prefer to refer to the narrative as fictional ecopathography since Kouadio's authorial narrative perspective is not a product of personal experiences as a sufferer. I will use two hypotheses to justify my perspectives. Firstly, as a sympathizer, Kouadio is culturally positioned to write on behalf of his African HIV/AIDS sufferers who, being poor, are not part of Hawkins's heterogeneous group of authors of pathographies. Her group excludes the very poor but includes the middle-class and the rich who are mostly movie stars, hairdressers, housewives, ministers, journalists, athletes, truck drivers, and college teachers (Hawkins 127). Secondly, the author's narrative positionality is enhanced by the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* that makes a personal injury a collective injury. The notion of Ubuntu as it relates to Kouadio's medical discourse deserves further explanation.

The concept of Ubuntu bestows on Kouadio the privilege of being the mouthpiece of Ivorian HIV patients and the public conscience of his society as he uses his writing to sensitize his readers on the pandemic. The term *ubuntu* (a word from the Nguni language family, which comprises Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and Ndebele) evokes unadulterated forms of African social life before the European conquest (Binsbergen 53) and it is associated with Zulu and Xhosa, meaning "a person is a person through other persons" (van Norren 256). The voice and vision of the narrator, John Koutoukou (J.K) which resonate all through the texts demonstrate the "humanity", "humanness" and "humaneness" of ubuntu as African philosophy. Louw (14) admits that the notion not only describes a human being as "being-with-others", but also prescribes inter/intrapersonal relationships i.e., what "being-with-others" should be all about. Kouadio's pathography is a product of "being-with-others" who are incapable of expressing their personal experiences as patients (such as "Sita sans capote") and "being-with-the society" that is unable to protect itself against HIV prevalence. Unlike the Cartesian individual that exists prior to, or separately and independently from the rest of the community or society in Europe, the word "individual" in African context signifies a plurality of personalities corresponding to the multiplicity of relationships (Louw 24). This explains J. K's self-appointed role of awakener of consciences deadened by bad attitudes (Kouadio 3) He uses

musical creativity to sensitise the public and the degenerate society replete with juvenile vices, improper dressing, parental irresponsibility and conjugal infidelity. His vision is public morality, a perspective that Metz (532) explored in his "ubuntu as moral theory" with respect to the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Cote d'Ivoire.

The medical discourse of HIV/AIDS and artistic censure on prostitution

Kouadio's narrative and his choice of graphic mode of representation are artistic decisions that portray his social responsibility towards his immediate society. Its title is revelatory of public disparagement of the HIV epidemic in Abidjan and an apparent indictment of the Ivorian society. The cover page shows images of a security officer's thought of money represented by icon of a bundle of CFA notes, John Koutoukou with his guitar and vibrating head, two infant lovers with icon of love painted red standing in-between their heads. These title pictures come with a textual rider that reads: "LE SIDA TUE!! ALORS… ABSTINENCE, ABSTINENCE, ABSTINENCE." These words forecast the motif that runs through the text and images, and the medical discourse that the author engages in.

Kouadio begins his medical discourse from the causes of HIV to the care for HIV patients. He discusses the sexual economy of Abidjan. The structure of the graphic novel is not obsessed with dynamics of the epidemic and its sufferers, it rather concentrates on "risky sexual behaviours [that] have been major stumbling blocks to the efforts by implementers to mitigate the effects of HIV amongst communities in Africa" (Tarkang, Pencille & Komesuor 96) because the narrative intends to "educate young readers about the cause of HIV/AIDS and how the virus is spread from one person to another." (Kahyana 160). The fictional pathography has the Ivorian youths as its primary target. Almost all pages and panels are replicate of sexual escapades of young lovers in open display of their romance (Kouadio 2, 4, 12). Some of them showcase images of underage girls with old men lovers or old women with underage male lovers, all before the alarming looks of J. K who remains omnipresent in the text. The illustrations of mismatched bodily features of these lovers create the dramatic effects of situational comic for the readers or viewers. The author attempts to opine that the HIV epidemic is caused by the prevalence of sexual depravity in major cities of Cote d'Ivoire.

The text covertly intends to say that sexual promiscuity is facilitated by incessant indecent dressing. Scanty and skimpy dresses of young girls as shown in some panels (Kouadio 1-5, 16-20, 26-27,34-35) result in some cases of rape, sexual violence, sexual harassment in the graphic novel. Prostitution and sexual promiscuity are prevalently characterized as major drivers of Abidjan's social life and HIV prevalence in the country because of the pervasiveness of unprotected sex. Kouadio's texts and images paint a shocking picture of a society where the campaign for abstinence, contraceptives and conjugal fidelity is disparaged. The author-illustrator showcases the deception and fascination that drive the disbelief in the reality of epidemic. To drive home his sensitization agenda, he employs allegory and animal satire through the introduction of dog scenes (44-45); it is a mockery on man's failure to enforce the use of contraceptives as a female dog refuses the sexual advances of a male dog until the latter presents his condom. The author's anthropomorphism through the dog story empathizes man's misfortune and misery, but it goes further to make his appeal for the use contraceptives "more interesting, non-threatening and acceptable to more people" (Mohammed Ali 68).

Constructing Empathy through Visual Metaphors and Metonymies in Fictional Pathography

The aesthetics of comics can be well understood when the visual and textual architecture of their production is unveiled because they have graphic forms which rely on vision in order to be perceived (Johnannessen). Studies in metaphors fall under cognitive linguistics (CL) which "holds that all human beings systematically understand abstract concepts metaphorically in terms of concrete phenomena" (Forceville 56) and inspires Conceptual Metaphor Theory. CMT was introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Its theoretical underpinning is that human cognition is structured by figurative processes such as metaphor and metonymy and that these are not merely verbal devices for poets, politicians, and other peddlers of flowery prose; it can equally be applicable to visual representations (Stetälä). Stamenkovic and Tasic chronicle Forceville's "pictorial runes" which can be described as non-mimetic graphic elements that contribute narratively salient information; they identify lines behind a running character to indicate speed, a halo of droplets around a character's head to suggest that he/she is emotionally affected. The wavy lines above a garbage bin are used to convey its smells (159). Explanatory as Stamenkovic and Tasic's work on pictorial runes is, it is Stetälä's thesis that demonstrated its usefulness in analyzing distinct types of emotion.

Relying on the emotional taxonomy of Stetälä in visual discourse which identifies V-shaped brow, closed eyes, raised brow, wide mouth, tight mouth, red face or eyes, shaking, smoke, raised head, raised hair, raised chest, hat, bold font, jagged lines, droplets and spikes as signs of emotion, I will demonstrate how these metaphors and metonymies contribute to meaning making in illness narratives. The therapeutic function of Kouadio's work regarding the creation of HIV/AIDS awareness is textually well-scripted and visually illustrated. The employment of pictorial runes serves as a detailed study because the author's array of pictorial metaphors and metonymies goes beyond Stetälä's emotional taxonomy and typology. The author's artistic inventiveness of and investment in imagery are premised on his determination to provoke catharsis which is crucial to HIV/AIDS literature, and which evokes in us the fear of contacting the disease and thus the desire to adopt lifestyles that will prevent us from contacting it (Komu).

Kouadio uses the implied author and narrator, J. K., to demonstrate his visual metaphorical and metonymical creativity. The visual metaphor of "J. K.'s flying cap" (1, 2, 3) is evoked by the sight of the juvenile Nadia and her male lover coming out of HOTEL Ninkin Ninkin and a grown-up woman with an infantile male lover (2, 3), demonstrating J. K.'s emotional state of surprise, confusion and speechlessness. The falling cap is accompanied by a large question mark that comes with a thought balloon since J. K. as autodiegetic narrator, witnesses the sexual vagabondage prevalent in Abidjan despite the HIV epidemic. Worse still, it is the sexual mismatch: underage girls or boys with adult men or women, that emotionally traumatizes J. K. and raises questions in his head. Other examples of oral metaphors and metonymies are the use of icons. The sight of a scantily dressed girl provokes the release of apple-curved love sign around Monsieur Difouêtê's head to *metonymize* sexual escapades. While the icon of love is visually used to show his sexual lust for the young girl, this girl's head shows a bubble of an icon for money: crammed notes of money. The sight of every man pops up the money icon as a bubble in the heads of Abidjan prostitutes whose sole aim is to make money. Unlike the yellow money icon, Difouêtê's love icon is painted red, a color that

culturally typifies danger in visual discourse. Incidentally, this love is consummated without the use of contraceptive. Another visual metaphor which symbolizes licentious emotion and salivation is long bulging tongues (Kouadio 26-27). Mr. Difouêtê's tongue elongates at the sight of a scantily dressed girl like Sita; it becomes dog-like. With widely opened eyes and protruding tongues, he imagines sexual foreplay and concludes: "Je suis un homme heureux voilà" [See I am a lucky man] (27). His ecstasy is predicated on Sita's predisposition to unprotected sex.

In panels located in pages 14-17, J. K.'s tight mouth, raised brow and wide mouth are orally metaphorical of surprise. These runes are often accompanied by multicolored question signs (red, black). They are produced at every instance of amorous advancements by Abidjan prostitutes; while the black question sign is representation of doubt of their confessed love, the red does not only signify doubt, but it also signifies warning. The avowed affection is laced with inherent danger and death from HIV/AIDS because of the notoriety of Abidjan young ladies for unprotected sex. J. K.'s campaign against sexual decadence unfortunately receives a public outcry and his refusal of Sita's unsolicited sexual overtures eventually attracts unlawful brutality. To depict his awful health condition after a rain of blows, knocks and kicks by Sita's hired street urchins, Kouadio uses a head with multicolor stars, bubbles, and ring-shaped circle. This cluster of pictorial runes points to the immediate physical effects of assault: severe pain, vertigo, confusion, and general trauma as it involves injuries and bruises: face, eye, and hand (18-19). These images engage in a visual discourse whose meanings are socially negotiated and decoded as cultural signifiers. It is important to note that facial gestures are not the only means of portraying surprise, spikes are likewise employed by the writer-illustrator. These are found around Sita's head and two women's heads when the fourteen-year-old prostitute is referred to as "Sita sankapote" (Kouadio 20) which literarily means "no condom Sita" and when she calls the two women: "vieilles mégères" [old shrews] (20). There are many other tropicalized runes in the text.

Kouadio uses droplets as visual metaphors to portray stressful and sorrowful condition of the characters: J. K. (5, 29), Mr. Difouêtê (36-38, 42), his children (48-49), and Sita's father (35). There are two types of major droplets in the text: droplets from the eyes and from the face. While the droplets from the face demonstrate stress, the droplets from the eyes are tears as seen from the eyes of Mr. Difouêtê's children (48-49) who are facing stigmatization because of their father's HIV status. His precipitation icons are more ubiquitous in the text; they come as metaphors for his worsening health condition. Mr. Difouêtê has diarrhea, necessitating his frequent use of office toilet (37). The whole panels in the thirty-seventh page capture the looseness of his bowels and its associated stress. Having been diagnosed with HIV, he eventually dies. By those episodic illustrations, the author intends to demonstrate how HIV/AIDS is propagated in Abidjan in particular. He uses his major characters, M. Difouêtê and Sita as sacrificial lambs. The author uses their death to reinforce his artistic commitment; he intends to make the public know the importance of contraceptives, abstinence, and conjugal fidelity as remedies for the control of HIV/AIDS propagation in his home country and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Benjamin Kouadio's pathography on HIV/AIDS is a product of his social commitment. Predicated on the widespread ignorance, myth and misinformation associated with the pandemic, the author uses his comics to provide therapeutic education majorly on the causes of the spread of the virus. Comical elements, as a means of transporting the author's message, are located both in texts and images sandwiched in interrelated panels, though more attention is given in this study to the images that contain visual metaphors and metonymies than texts. Flying cap, circles around the head, stars around the head, spikes, protruding tongue, opened mouth, tight mouth, money and love icons, colored question marks, etc., are pictorial runes that the illustrator deploys to represent emotions in the text. Kouadio's catalogue of oral metaphors is tropically styled, slightly different from Stetälä's inventory of graphic runes because of the illustrator's cultural space and typical message. All panels harmoniously maintain the subject matter of HIV/AIDS without artistic digressions, giving attention to different constituents of the discourse: sexual perversions, widespread prostitution, sensitization on HIV/AIDS, contraceptives, marital fidelity, and abstinence. It is on the tripod of these thematic leitmotifs that Kouadio's message to his readers and viewers stands.

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