

# A SCREAMING MAN

Directed by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun

*"Beautifully composed, absorbing"* - Todd McCarthy –Indiewire



**Chad, France, Belgium / 2010 / Drama / French and Arabic w. English  
Subtitles / 2.35:1 / 92 min.**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Adam, a 60-something former swimming champion, is a pool attendant at a hotel in Chad. When the hotel gets taken over by new Chinese owners, he is forced to give up his job to his son, Abdel, leaving Adam humiliated and resentful. Meanwhile the country is in the throes of civil war. Rebel forces attack the government while the authorities demand the population to contribute to the "war effort," with money or volunteers old enough to fight. The District Chief constantly harasses Adam for his contribution. But Adam is penniless; he only has his son. In a moment of weakness, Adam makes a decision that he will forever regret.

## **FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

**WINNER – Jury Prize – 2010 Cannes Film Festival**

OFFICIAL SELECTION –

**Toronto International Film Festival**

**Chicago International Film Festival**

**Karlovy Vary Film Festival**

**Durban International Film Festival**

**Wellington & Auckland Film Festival**

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

A SCREAMING MAN is not a film about war, but about those affected by the war. These people feel they have no grip on their own lives. I, for one, have been through this. I survived the civil war in Chad. In 1980 I was severely wounded. I had to leave my country on a wheelbarrow to reach neighboring Cameroon. Twenty-six years later, on April 13, 2006, just when I was shooting my film DARATT, the rebels invaded N'Djaména. Heavy weaponry fighting lasted six hours claiming 300 lives. February 2008, same situation: the rebels invaded N'Djaména again as I was shooting a short film EXPECTATIONS: Three days of fighting ensued causing hundreds of deaths.

Needless to say, war prevails in Chad. The rampant violence has deeply traumatized the population. Against this background of tension, instability and impending war, the hotel in which Adam works gets privatized. With everything going awry, Adam has got nothing left but the swimming-pool, to which he clings as if it were a buoy. The still, unruffled water has become the only place in which he feels that he can control his life, in which he feels alive, the place that allows him not to sink deeper...

I tried to depict this atmosphere of fear of the future in A SCREAMING MAN. When you see that the world around you is going to pieces, when you have lost all your bearings, when the political and social pressure is too strong, you end up being out of your depth. This is what happens to Adam. After committing the unforgivable sin, he immediately wants to atone for his misdeed in order to redeem himself. But he comes to the sorrowful realization that despite his cry of pain God remains silent. He realizes that there will be no redemption. That he will never find peace.

## BIOGRAPHIES AND FILMOGRAPHIES

### MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN

Writer & Director

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun was born in 1960 in Abéché, Chad. He studied cinema in Paris and journalism in Bordeaux. After writing for several years for many regional dailies, he directed his first short film, *MARAL TANIÉ*, in 1994. In 1999, his first feature, **BYE-BYE AFRICA**, was nominated at the Venice Film Festival and was awarded the Best First Film Prize. He then made **ABOUNA, NOTRE PÈRE** (Directors' Fortnight, 2002), and **DARATT, DRY SEASON** (Special Jury Award, Venice 2006). In 2010 **A SCREAMING MAN**, his fourth feature, was nominated for the Palme d'Or Award at the Cannes Film Festival—it was the first film by a Chadian director to screen in official competition at the festival. The film won the Grand Jury Prize.

#### Filmography

2010	A SCREAMING MAN
2008	EXPECTATIONS (short)
2006	DARATT, DRY SEASON
2005	KALALA
2002	ABOUNA, NOTRE PÈRE
2001	LETTERS FROM NEW YORK CITY (short)
1999	BYE-BYE AFRICA
1996	SOTIGUI KOUYATÉ, UN GRIOT MODERNE
1996	GOÏ-GOÏ (short)

## CAST

### YOUSOUF DJAORO

Adam

He made his debut by appearing in the film *Daresalam* in 2000, in which he played the character of Tom. It was directed by the critically acclaimed Issa Serge Coelo, and was the first of several films they have collaborated with. *Tartina City*, also directed by Coelo in 2006, in which Djaoro played a journalist, won the Innovation Award at the 31st Montreal World Film Festival. Later in 2006, he starred in the film **DARATT**, playing the role of Nassara. Directed by Mahamat Saleh Haroun, **DARATT** won the Grand Special Jury Prize at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival, as well as eight other prizes at Venice and the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou.

## **Filmography**

2010	A SCREAMING MAN
2006	DARATT
2006	TARTINA CITY
2000	DARESALAM

## **DIOUC KOMA**

Abdel

Dioucounda Koma, or Diouc Koma, born on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1980, is an actor and a writer from Mali.

## **Filmography:**

2010	CHRONIQUE DE L'AFRIQUE SAUVAGE
2010	A SCREAMING MAN_- Abdel
2009	CITIZEN HERO_- Dylan
2007	99 FRANCS_- Salaud #2
2007	DANS LES CORDES - Adbou
2006	DAYS OF GLORY – Toure
2005	HIDDEN - Cyclist

## **INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR**

### **When did you come up with the idea for A SCREAMING MAN?**

It all started because of the civil war, which has been going on for decades in Chad. The story of A SCREAMING MAN actually started in 2006 during the shoot of DARATT, when the rebels invaded N'Djaména: the whole team learnt about the invasion on the radio but didn't know what to do. Should we leave or stay? It was a rather weird feeling because something terrible could happen overnight. Then again, in 2008, as I was shooting a short film, EXPECTATIONS, in Chad, we witnessed the rebels' progress one more time – the whole team was so scared and paralysed... That is why I wished to talk about the people who get trapped in a war.

### **Even if the war pervades the story, it remains in the background.**

You're right, it is like a violent gust of wind blowing now and again, and then the wind abates: the narrative is governed by its movements; it contaminates the course of the story. It came naturally to me, because the war is what Chad is all about. The war is like a ghost haunting the country and making appearances from time to time.

### **The government officials and particularly the District Chief seem to be acting like scoundrels...**

You're quite right. It is not an institutional conflict: there are war lords and each one of them tries to take advantage of the situation. The District Chief, who is supposed to enforce law and order, behaves like a racketeer: he makes people commit a misdemeanor until he realizes there is a real danger. All those "officials" play some sort of poker game: as soon as they realize the tide may turn to their disadvantage, they try to swiftly change camps. And if you study the history of Chad, you see lots of people switching sides or joining the other side at the 11th hour.

### **Globalization is another kind of violence plaguing Africa.**

It's all the more violent as workers' rights are trampled in Chad. One cannot help it. I like what David, the cook, says in the film «David can't fight Goliath» because it can be applied to this story. Apart from the looming war, it is the violence toward man that little by little

assails Adam: I had to show how he lost touch with reality and how a man, robbed of what he possesses and pushed to extremes, can be made to commit the unforgivable sin. My intention was not to blame this man for his actions but to raise the question of whether his actions could be explained.

**Adam's character reminds us of Job in the Bible...**

I have always been interested in religious questions because I think they are at the origin of all things. Apart from Job, there is also in Islam the story of Ibrahim- Abraham-, which can call Adam's story to mind; Ibrahim wants to sacrifice his son, but God saves the son at the last minute. But for Adam things are different. He does not believe in God's intervention. Hence his bitterness when he says to his wife: "One can't expect anything from Heaven. I meant to draw a parallel between the mythological stories and a more topical one. Indeed in Africa, those who are metaphorically regarded as "fathers" -the political leaders- readily sacrifice their "children", in other words their countrymen.

**Your films often deal with the relationship between father and son...**

The question of the relationship between parents and children is very important to me. What can we do to transmit values from one generation to the other? Why do we fail in some cases, with our child becoming a different person? Why are there break-ups in the family chain? I think these questions are at the heart of all societies.

**There is a clash between Abdel's Westernized behavior and the traditional family customs...**

It seems to me that tradition can go hand in hand with modernity. The family dinner scene is a good case in point: the son bows to tradition when he waits on his father very respectfully but at the same time he is perhaps somewhere else, because he has his own identity. This reminds me of Khalil Gibran's beautiful line: "Your children are not your children. They come through you, but not from you." It is undoubtedly painful to feel that your own blood sort of drifts away from you, but you cannot help it.

**It is also a movie about pride and a certain sense of honor: Adam cannot stand being downgraded...**

He feels belittled. When he becomes a gateman and when he rushes to the gate to let a car into the hotel resort, he feels deeply humiliated: all of a sudden he feels that the man who used to be full of dignity now looks ridiculous. But as far as I am concerned it is not so much Adam who is ridiculous as the character he is made to play. This public humiliation is so strong that he can't stand it any more. It is all the more true as in today's world one's status is the only thing that matters. If you lose it you lose your social-identity...

**He is so obsessed by his pool attendant status that he almost forgets about the war, and by the way his wife is critical of him.**

You're quite right. In the hotel swimming pool, Adam feels at home. It is his haven. It allows him to get away momentarily from the lower class neighborhood where he lives.

**The scene where the cook speaks of his work is full of tenderness like a love story...**

I wanted to pay tribute to the act of cooking. I think that when you cook you are being most generous; you try to give the best of yourself when you cook for the others. This is the philosophy of David, the hotel cook. And he does not understand what is happening to him because he sees himself as a purveyor of love. Just like Adam, he feels at a loss and out of step with a world that he does not understand any more.

**Some shots are reminiscent of Ozu, like the family sitting at the dinner table at the beginning of the film.**

I like Ozu very much. I like Ozu's unaffectedness and how intense emotion can arise from an apparently ordinary still shot. Then I came upon Hou Hsiao-Hsien to whom I feel very close and, by the way, it is no accident that he made the film *Café Lumière* which is a tribute to Ozu.

**You alternate between close-ups and long shots, which keep a respectful distance from the characters.**

Hardly had we started shooting when I told my director of photography that I wanted the characters to be shot from a distance, because distance prevents the audience from being emotionally manipulated. Consequently the close-ups are used only at specific times and they have a dramatic force.

## **How did you choose the cast?**

I generally don't audition too many actors because I know most of the actors I choose. I knew at a very early stage that Youssouf Djaoro, who had already played in DARATT, was going to play Adam. He is a wonderful actor who knows how to convey emotion and make it tangible. Hadjé Fatimé N'Goua, who performs his wife, is a pharmacist. She worked for a long time at the Necker Hospital in Paris before going back to Chad. She, too, played in DARATT, and in my first movie BYE BYE AFRICA. As she is generally very busy I asked her to take a week off to devote herself entirely to the shooting. Rarely does one find such an intense actress. Diouc Koma, who plays Abdel, is a born-and-bred Parisian. I directed him in SEXE, GOMBO ET BEURRE SALÉ, the TV movie I made for Arte. I asked him to drop his typically parisian style and start acting as if he were a young man from Chad. I think he has succeeded in establishing a real, often complex relationship with his "father" by expressing tenderness and emotional tension. It was the film musician Wasis Diop, who told me to meet with Djénéba Koné, who plays the young girl. She is a real find. She is a 17-year-old singer. She sang in L'Opéra du Sahel which was produced at the Châtelet Theater two years ago. She is incredibly genuine. With Marie-Hélène Dozo, the editor, we wanted Djénéba to sort of break into the story, the main elements of the narrative being already set in place. We wanted the audience to wonder who this pregnant woman was; I wanted her to be a bit wild and to leave the audience frozen.

## **How did you direct them?**

I often give an actor just his lines. He knows nothing of his partner's lines. The actors are thus caught off guard, and I like that. For instance, when the mother sends her neighbour packing, the latter is very surprised and she is deeply distressed. I took advantage of her reaction to capture her amazement. I used the same procedure for the scene in which Adam questions Djénéba: you reach some sort of reality very close to a documentary. But what matters to me is to give my actors confidence, affection and even love and I expect the same in return.

## **What is the role of music? How did you work with composer Wasis Diop?**

Wasis Diop and I are lucky because we happen to know each other quite well. What's more, he is familiar with my films, my universe, my

love of sobriety and purity. I am rather averse to putting a lot of music. I use music sparingly; therefore it was necessary to avoid demonstrative music. We have worked on accurate themes, on music revealing the feelings of the characters with their inner chaos.

## CREDITS

### CREW

Written and Directed by	MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN
Director of Photography	LAURENT BRUNET, AFC
Sound Designer	DANA FARZANEHPOUR
Editor	MARIE HÉLÈNE DOZO
Original Score	WASIS DIOP
Original Songs	DJÉNÉBA KONE
1st Assistant Director	BENJAMIN BLANC
Costume Designer	CELINE DELAIRE
Makeup Artist	NADINE OTSOBOGO-BOUCHER
Production Designer	LEDOUX MADEONA
Photographer	FRANK VERDIER
Production Managers	CLAUDE GILAIZEAU & SÉKOU TRAORE
Produced by	FLORENCE STERN, A PILI FILMS/GOÏ- GOÏ PRODUCTIONS Production

### CAST

Adam	YOUSOUF DJAORO
Abdel	DIOUC KOMA
District Chief	EMIL ABOSSOLO M'BO
Mariam	HADJÉ FATIMÉ N'GOUA
David	MARIUS YELOLO
Djeneba	DJÉNÉBA KONÉ
Mrs Wang	LI HELING
Souad	RÉMADJI ADÈLE NGARADOUMBAYE
Etienne	JOHN MBAIEDOUM
The new cook	SYLVAIN MBAIKOUBOU
The maitre d'hotel	ABDOU BOUKAR
The neighbor	FATIMÉ NGUENABAYE
Noncommissioned officer	GÉRARD GANDA MAYOUMBILA
Soldiers at roadblock	MAHAMAT CHOUKOU & TOURGOUDI OUMAR
Young wounded soldier	HADRE DOUNIA