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**COMPETITION**  
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# A SCREAMING MAN

A FILM BY MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN



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W W W . P Y R A M I D E F I L M S . C O M

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RUNNING TIME 92 MN





Present-day Chad. Adam, sixty something, a former swimming champion, is pool attendant at a smart N'Djaména hotel. When the hotel gets taken over by new Chinese owners, he is forced to give up his job to his son Abdel. Terribly resentful, he feels socially humiliated. The country is in the throes of a civil war. Rebel forces are attacking the government. The authorities demand that the population contributes to the «war effort», giving money or volunteers old enough to fight off the assailants. The District Chief constantly harasses Adam for his contribution. But Adam is penniless; he only has his son....





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

# LOSING GROUND

**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 neighbouring 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 traumatised the population...

Against this background of tension, instability and impending war, the hotel in which Adam works gets privatised. 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 realisation that despite his cry of pain God remains silent... He realises that there will be no redemption. That he will never find peace.

**MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN**



# INTERVIEW

WITH MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN

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 misdemeanour until he realises there is a real danger. All those "officials" play some sort of poker game: as soon as they realise 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.

Globalisation 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 behaviour 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 honour: 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 neighbourhood 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 if 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.



## 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, is nominated for the Palme d'Or Award at the Cannes Film Festival. It is his first film to be selected in official competition.

### OTHER FILMS

2008 EXPECTATIONS, short film (28 mn)   2005 KALALA, documentary (52 mn)   2001 LETTER FROM NEW YORK CITY, short film (13 mn)

1996 SOTIGUI KOUYATÉ, UN GRIOT MODERNE, documentary (52 mn)   1996 GOÏ-GOÏ, short film (15 mn)





# CAST

**YOUSSEUF DJAORO** ADAM

**DIOUC KOMA** ABDEL

**EMIL ABOSSOLO M'BO** DISTRICT CHIEF

**HADJÉ FATIMÉ N'GOUA** MARIAM

**MARIUS YELOLO** DAVID

**DJÉNÉBA KONÉ** DJENEBA

**LI HELING** Mrs WANG

**RÉMADJI ADÈLE NGARADOUMBAYE** SOUAD

**JOHN MBAIEDOUM** ETIENNE

**SYLVAIN MBAIKOUBOU** THE NEW COOK

**ABDOU BOUKAR** THE MAITRE D'HOTEL

**FATIMÉ NGUENABAYE** THE NEIGHBOUR

**GÉRARD GANDA MAYOUMBILA** NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICIER

**MAHAMAT CHOUKOU & TOURGOUDI OUMAR** SOLDIERS AT ROADBLOCK

**HADRE DOUNIA** YOUNG WOUNDED SOLDIER



# 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

In coproduction with **DIANA ELBAUM & SÉBASTIEN DELLOYE (ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP)**

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