

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **A SCREAMING MAN / Un Homme qui crie (2010)**

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun (1961-)

### OVERVIEW

*Auteur* Mahamat-Saleh Haroun is Chad's first feature film director. Born in 1961 in Abéché, Chad, Haroun studied cinema at the Conservatoire Libre du Cinéma in Paris, then journalism at the Institut Technique in Bordeaux. Haroun has produced several documentaries and short films. He has produced eight feature films, including *Bye Bye Africa* (1999), *Abouna* (2002), *Daratt* (2006), *Sex, Okra and Salted Butter* (2008), *A Screaming Man* (2010), *Grigris* (2013), *A season in France* (2017), and *Lingui, Sacred Bonds* (2021). For a brief period, from February 2017 to February 2018, Haroun held the political post of Minister of Tourism, Culture and Crafts in Chad. Haroun's films have won him several awards and international accolades. In 2011, Haroun sat on the jury for the main competition that Robert De Niro chaired at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2012, Haroun was selected as a president of the 28th International Love Film Festival at Mons.

*Film* Haroun explains that *A Screaming Man* is less about war than about how war affects people. It is from this perspective that the film explores themes of love, betrayal, guilt, selfishness, and more. *A Screaming Man* won the Cannes Film Festival Jury Prize, making Haroun the only Chadian filmmaker to win one of the festival's awards. *A Screaming Man* also won the Silver Hugo for best screenplay at the 46th Chicago International Film Festival. Youssouf Djaoro (Adam) was awarded the Silver Hugo for best actor. The film was awarded the prize for Best French-Language Film to be made from outside France at the 2011 Lumières Awards.

*Background* *A Screaming Man* was shot in Chad, in the cities of Abéché and N'Djamena. The languages spoken in the film are French and Chadian Arabic. The film is a co-production by Chadian production company Goï Goï and French production company Pili. Haroun cast Youssouf Djaoro (Adam) because of his previous great acting. Diouc Koma (Abdel) was born and raised in Paris. For this film, Haroun asked him to ditch his Parisian accent and manners and act more like a Chadian. Djénéba Koné (Abdel's girlfriend) was a real-life 17-year-old singer from Mali. She died in Mali in a car accident a year after the film was released.

### SYNOPSIS

Chad is in the grip of an armed rebellion, which is dangerously on the outskirts of the capital, Ndjamen. As insecurity spreads across the country, the Chadians who still have work are clinging to their jobs. Adam, a 55-year-old former swimming champion, works as a pool attendant in a local hotel, assisted by his 20-year-old son, Abdel, whom he trained for the job. To save her business, which is suffering from a shortage of customers, Mrs. Wang, the hotel's Chinese owner, decides to downsize her staff. The gatekeeper and the cook are laid off. Adam is lucky to still have a job, but no longer as the pool attendant. Mrs. Wang replaces him with his son, and Adam is downgraded to gatekeeper. Adam feels humiliated by the hotel management because he has devoted 30 years of his life to the hotel. He feels betrayed by his own son, Abdel, whom he has trained and who now agrees to take his place. For some time now, the neighborhood leader has been harassing Adam to pay his contribution to the war effort. Adam has no money, and the leader suggests he give his son to the army as his contribution. Adam, who hates the idea at first, finally accepts. He hands his son over to the army, who come looking to forcibly enlist him. As the war intensifies, the hotel employees abandon their posts and go into exile, and Adam returns to his job as pool attendant. Mrs. Wang is grateful to him for staying. However, Adam's conscience is not clear after handing his son over to the army. When a pregnant girl named Djénéba presents herself to Abdel's parents, claiming to be carrying Abdel's child, the father's guilt to have given Abdel to the army is insurmountable. Adam confesses to Djénéba that it was he who betrayed his son. An audio recording from Abdel brought from the front by one of his war buddies confirms his love for Djénéba and announces

that he is in hospital with serious injuries. Adam decides to bring his son home. The father finds his son and confesses that it was he who delivered him to the army. Abdel tells his father that he knew, and forgives him. Adam manages to sneak Abdel out of his hospital tent, and father and son begin a difficult journey across the desert. Abdel does not survive his injuries. He succumbs just as his father's motorcycle arrives on the banks of the river where Abdel had hoped to take one last swim. The grieving father entrusts his son's body to the river's currents and watches him float away.

## SCENES

**Father-son Working at the Pool** Adam and his son, Abdel, swim in the pool of the hotel where they both work. Abdel challenges his father to the longest underwater breath-holding. The father reminds the son that he was an African swimming champion. The son emerges victorious from the competition. Adam reminds Abdel that the regulation uniform for pool attendants is white shorts and T-shirt. Abdel apologizes and explains that the washing machine was out of order and he was unable to wash his uniform in time. Abdel asks his father to pose for a photo. Adam tells him to stop playing games and get to work, because the boss is watching them. Adam gives swimming lessons to the hotel's guests. He does this without getting into the pool with them. Adam and Abdel ride home. Adam rides the hotel's service bike, with Abdel in the sidecar. Abdel's mother has cooked a meal, which she sensually shares with her husband. Adam and his wife eat slices of melon mouth-to-mouth. The couple's affection is interrupted by their new neighbor, who comes to ask for onions.



**News of the war** Adam seems worried by what he hears on TV. Patriotic organizations in Chad accuse international organizations of helping the rebels by supplying them with arms. Images of rebels killed are broadcast. The police stop and search all vehicles in the city of N'Djamena. Adam is also stopped. He is searched, then let go.

**Adam is summoned by the Boss** David, the hotel cook, confides in Adam that he is worried. Adam asks him if it has anything to do with the civil war. The cook tells him he fears that with the privatization of the hotel their jobs are in danger. Adam reassures him that they gave thirty years of their lives to this hotel, and that not even the new owner would think of firing them. Adam sits nervously in the waiting room of the boss's office. The cook comes out of Mrs. Wang's office, distressed. He tells Adam that he has just been fired. Adam enters Mrs. Wang's office. She asks him how old he is. He replies that he is 55. She tells him that he seems to have nothing to do, and that she always sees him sitting. Adam replies that he is the head pool attendant, and that he has trained his assistant, his son, Abdel, well. He says Abdel is doing fine without him. Mrs. Wang then asks him if he thinks the hotel needs two pool attendants. Adam comes out of Mrs. Wang's office dejected.



**Abdel is also summoned** Mrs. Wang's assistant comes to fetch Abdel. She tells him that the boss wants to see him. Abdel tells his father that he will be going home alone and that he and his mother should not wait for him for dinner. Adam and his son work in silence around the pool. Adam asks Abdel why Mrs. Wang wanted to see him. Abdel does not answer and moves further and further away from his father. As night falls, Adam returns home alone without Abdel in the sidecar.

**Adam is the new gatekeeper and Abdel is the new pool attendant.** The hotel gatekeeper is behaving in a hostile manner towards Adam today. Adam asks him the reason for his hostility, but the gatekeeper remains silent. Souad, Mrs. Wang's assistant, tells Adam that he is no longer in charge of the pool and that he is now the new gatekeeper. Adam gets angry and knocks on the table. He tells Souad that the pool is his life. He asks if the hotel has decided to get rid of the pool. Souad tells him that Abdel is now in charge of the pool. Adam is shocked.

**Adam cannot keep up** On his way to the locker room to pick up his uniform, Adam sees Abdel conducting a water aerobics session with some of the hotel's guests. In the locker room, Adam stops in front of a mirror. He looks at himself for a long moment. He touches his belly. He



takes his shirt off and sucks in his stomach. Adam inherits the uniform of the previous gatekeeper. The uniform is too small for him. Abdel tells his dad that he wants to apologize, and that he really needs this job because he will soon have responsibilities. Adam tells him he has nothing to apologize for and leaves. At the gate, the cars follow one another. Adam is unable to keep up. The motorists get impatient and honk their horns. Adam sweats profusely in his new uniform. He sits down, exhausted. Adam does pushups to lose some belly fat. He quickly tires and gives up. Adam sees Abdel riding by on the hotel service motorcycle. A girl in the sidecar gives Abdel a big smile. Adam watches them go.

**A heavy silence at home** During the evening meal, Adam's mother finds the silence of her son and husband intriguing. She asks them both what is going on, but neither of them wants to talk about the changes at the hotel. The neighbor breaks the silence. She has come to ask for salt.

**Contribution to the War effort** Adam goes for a coffee. The local leader, Ahmat, enters the café, and all the customers stand up to greet him. Adam also stands up as soon as he sees him. The leader scolds Adam for not having paid his contribution to the war effort. He warns Adam to fulfill his duty to the nation. Ahmat asks Adam if he will not pay his contribution because he supports the rebels. Adam defends himself. He explains that he has financial difficulties. Ahmat says his son, Abdellah, is 17. Ahmat tells Adam that he gave his son to the army as his contribution to the war effort. Adam is shocked by the revelation. Ahmat tells Adam that he will give him three days to pay his contribution to the war effort.



**Abdel is drafted by force** Abdel is having breakfast with his mother. He goes into Adam's room to see why Adam is still in bed. Adam does not answer. Abdel urges his father to come out and eat. Abdel decides to bring Adam his coffee in bed. From his room, Adam hears voices asking where Abdel is. Adam freezes. Abdel's mother asks what they want with her son. They tell her Abdel has been drafted. Adam peeks through his bedroom window. He sees soldiers violently pulling Adam towards them. Abdel's mother cries and tries in vain to rescue her son from the soldiers. The son and mother call out to Adam for help. The father stands frozen in front of his window, watching the soldiers take his son away.



**Adam gets his job back** The next day, Adam gets his old job back at the pool. Sitting pensively at his usual observation post, Adam watches the UN peacekeepers enjoying themselves in the hotel pool.

**Pregnant Girl Friend** A pregnant girl shows up at Abdel's mother's house. She says she is Abdel's girlfriend. The mother glances at the girl's belly and says, "Welcome my child," then she leads the girl into a room in the compound. Djénéba asks where Abdel is. Abdel's mother simply replies that from now on she will live with them and occupy Abdel's room. Djénéba replies, "Thanks, Mom."

**Adam is unhappy** Between two chores, Adam withdraws to a room in the hotel to listen to his short-wave radio and catch up on news of the war. Reports of increasingly frequent rebel incursions and intense fighting between rebels and government forces create a situation of insecurity. Adam refuses to eat. He tells his wife that it will be like this until his son returns. Djénéba, Abdel's girlfriend, is 17. She comes from a line of Malian singers. She says she met Abdel in a bar one night, when she had just finished performing.

**Two regretful fathers** Adam runs to Ahmat, the local leader. He begs him to bring his son back, and tells him that he has changed his mind. Ahmat asks him if he wants the army to shoot them both for treason. Ahmat tells him that it is too late and that the army will not give Abdel back to him. Adam says that he is ready to take his son's place. Ahmat tells him it is too late. Ahmat says he, too, offered to take his son's place, but the army turned him down. The army thought he was too old. Adam is visibly devastated. Ahmat tells Adam that he, too, is tired of everything, tired of the dirty work they make him do. Adam leaves, visibly broken. On the way, he comes across other young men like his son, forcibly conscripted by the army.



**A message from Abdel** A wounded soldier returns from the front carrying a message from Abdel to his girlfriend, Djénéba. It is an audio recording in which Abdel talks about the harsh conditions at the front, the awful food, the repeated rebel assaults, the friends he sees falling around him, and the fear of dying. Abdel says that there is no future for their baby in Chad. Abdel says he plans to desert and come for Djénéba, so that the two of them can flee Chad to raise their child elsewhere. Djénéba sings an ode to Abdel.

**The panic in the city** The rebels are at the gates of N'Djamena. The frightened population flees the city. All Mrs. Wang's employees have deserted their posts, fleeing the growing insecurity in N'Djamena. Adam is the only employee still at his post. Mrs. Wang tells him she is grateful for his loyalty. Adam's wife tells Adam that they should leave, too. Adam tells her he cannot leave his job. She tells him she no longer understands him. Adam recognizes Ahmat in disguise, trying to escape the city. Adam throws himself at Ahmat and pins him against the wall. Ahmet pulls out a pistol and puts it to Adam's head. Adam lets go. Ahmat flees while government army loudspeakers urge the people to stay calm and not flee.

**The confession** Adam confesses to Djénéba that it was he who handed Abdel over to the army. Djénéba starts screaming. Adam covers her mouth so that his wife will not hear.

**Fetching Abdel** Adam rides the service motorcycle to fetch his son. Adam finds his son in a tent for wounded soldiers in a military camp. Abdel tells his father he wants to go home. Adam replies that he has come to fetch him. As night falls, Adam sneaks into the tent and takes Abdel. Abdel tells his father that he knows he will not survive. He also confides that he knows all about his capture by the soldiers.



**I want to swim** Abdel tells his father he would like to swim in the river one last time. Adam takes his son to the river. On the way, Abdel dies. Adam carries Abdel to the river. The father pushes his son into the water and watches as the currents take his body away.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**ADAM** Adam is a man proud of his past as a champion, of his son, whom he has trained in swimming, and of his work. However, when Adam feels that his son has betrayed him by agreeing to take his place, Adam becomes a vengeful man. He hands his son over to the army, then feels remorse for what he has done.

*Proud* Adam is a proud man. A former champion swimmer, he makes sure that members of his community know about his exploits. In the neighborhood, he proudly answers to the nickname "Champ". He is proud of his position as pool attendant and of the training he has given his son Abdel to be his assistant. When Mrs. Wang relegates him to a gatekeeper's position, Adam is humiliated.

*Vengeful* Adam resents his son's acceptance of Mrs. Wang's appointment of him as pool attendant. He considers Abdel, whom he trained himself, to have betrayed him by taking his job. Adam broods over his revenge. When the local leader suggests that Adam give his son to the army as his war contribution, Adam sees it as a means of revenge. Adam delivers Abdel to the army, who forcibly enlist him, and Adam returns to his old position as pool attendant.

*Remorseful* Adam hands over his son, Abdel, to the army in revenge for Abdel having taken away his pool job. However, when Abdel's girlfriend, Djénéba, shows up with a pregnancy, Adam is overcome with remorse and decides to fetch his son and bring him back to his girlfriend and unborn child. Adam finds his son Abdel in a military hospital. But Abdel is too weak to make the return trip and dies on the journey. The grieving father respects his son's last wish by entrusting his body to the river's currents.

**ABDEL** Abdel is a respectful young man, proud of his parents. He loves his job as an assistant pool attendant and has a more open approach to the hotel's guests, which is why he is offered his father's job.

*Affectionate* Abdel is proud of his father and mother. He has a very open and affectionate relationship with his father, who taught him his trade as a lifeguard. Abdel likes to take photos with his parents, to preserve their image for future generations, he says.

*Respectful* Abdel is a young man who respects his parents. He never speaks out of turn when talking to them. During the family meal, Abdel observes the decorum, which gives a privileged place to the elders. He fetches water, places the cup in front of his father, and only takes a drink when his father has had some. When he sees his father hurt by losing his job, Abdel apologizes to him.

*Engaging* Abdel is an engaging young man. His work philosophy is to be approachable to the hotel guests. He jumps into the water with them to play, does water aerobics with them and teaches them to swim. Mrs. Wang, who observes him from afar, likes his approach, and offers him Adam's job.

*Optimistic* Abdel always has a camera in hand and takes photos of his family. He says he is documenting the family for generations to come. Thus, Abdel is confident that the war will not decimate his family, and that future grandchildren will want to know about their forefathers. This is a very optimistic attitude, despite the shells falling on N'Djamena.

**MRS. WANG** Mrs. Wang is the epitome of the pragmatic capitalist mentality. She follows the logic of profit, and hires and fires according to that logic. However, she is hypocritical when she expects her employees to have a sentimental attachment to the insensitive employer that she is.

*Pragmatic* Mrs. Wang is a businesswoman. As such, she has no time for sentiment when it comes to running her hotel. She recruits and dismisses employees according to her interests. David, the cook, and Adam, the pool attendant, have given 30 years of their lives to the hotel. However, Mrs. Wang does not hesitate to replace them with employees she considers more suitable. With Mrs. Wang, no one is indispensable.

*Selfish* When Mrs. Wang summons Adam to her office to tell him that the hotel has no need for two pool attendants, Adam pleads with her that the pool is his life. But Mrs. Wang, who follows only the logic of gain and not sentiment, relegates Adam to the position of gatekeeper. As the war intensifies, all of Mrs. Wang's employees, following their own interests, abandon her. Mrs. Wang confides her grief to Adam, unable to understand why her employees have not remained loyal to her. Mrs. Wang is a hypocrite, appealing to her employees' feelings when it serves her interests.

## THEMES

**Betrayal** The day Adam learns that his son has replaced him as the head pool attendant, he feels betrayed by him as much as by his boss. Adam has always been Abdel's loving father and indulgent boss. He has always been concerned about his son's future, and has made him a very good swimmer and pool attendant. Today, as he broils in the sun in the khaki uniform and ridiculous cap he now has to wear, he, who used to love working around the pool in his very relaxed white shorts and t-shirt, watches from afar as his son Abdel laughs and splashes around in the pool with the hotel guests and teaches them to swim. The worst humiliation of all is to see the service motorcycle he used to take so much pleasure in riding on the capital's roads, and which had become something of a mark of recognition, snatched from him and handed over to Abdel. And all this humiliation is caused by Mrs. Wang, who now sees him as disposable goods. He therefore decides to take his revenge, and in turn betray Abdel, who stabbed him so deeply in the back. The neighborhood leader has been harassing him for a long time, asking him to pay his contribution to the war effort against the rebels. The leader had suggested that giving his son to the army would be a good contribution, saying that he had done it himself. Adam betrays Abdel and calls in the soldiers, who then come looking for Abdel one day to forcibly enlist him. Thus, Adam betrays the son who betrayed him.

**Tradition vs Modernity** Age is prized in tradition as the source of wisdom. Adam is an ex-swimming champion. He is full of wisdom and trains his son, Abdel, to become a good pool attendant at the hotel where he works as the head pool attendant. Adam is respected in his community, and most people call him by no other name than 'Champ'. However, for Mrs. Wang, his profit-driven boss, Adam's age is a handicap. She calls him to her office and complains to him that she always sees him sitting on the lounging chairs. Mrs. Wang believe that at 55, Adam's age is showing in his performance, and that he is

no longer suitable (that is, profitable). She does not understand that Adam has been building skills into and passing effective knowledge to his son, Abdel, and that everything Abdel knows and continues to learn he owes to his father. The terrorist threats in the region have dramatically reduced business at the hotel. Mrs. Wang is trying to reduce cost to keep up. Her targets are the older workers. She has no use for traditional considerations of the wisdom of the elderly. In the modern capitalist world in which she is attempting to carve out a place in the sun, what counts for Mrs. Wang is the bottom line. So, she fires the gatekeeper and gives his job to Adam, replacing Adam with his more vigorous twenty-year-old Abdel. She also fires the old cook, who Adam thinks is an excellent cook, under the pretext that he drinks too much, and replaces him with a younger person.

**Change** Mrs. Wang, who took over a privatized state-owned hotel, is profit-oriented. This requires her to adapt her hotel to the demands of the international market and cut her ties with traditional inefficient management. So, Mrs. Wang observes her employees to see which of them can fit into the transnational vision she has decided for her hotel. What Mrs. Wang sees is Adam and his son Abdel, who represent, respectively, the indolence of the past with compartmentalized management, and the dynamism of the future with its open, circular approach. Abdel is all the more representative of change as his relationship with Djénéba defies religious and societal paradigms. Djénéba, from Mali, and Abdel, from Chad, both come from societies that uphold religious principles, where premarital sex is unthinkable, let alone the conception of a child before marriage. Abdel and Djénéba's relationship symbolizes their respective societies' adjustments to the changes brought about by the modern world.

**Selfishness** Mrs. Wang's employees left without saying goodbye, as the atrocities of war closed in on their homes. Mrs. Wang considers this an act of betrayal and selfishness. Should Mrs. Wang complain? She who has not hesitated to get rid of Adam and the cook, without any qualms about the thirty years of service they have devoted to the hotel she acquired? Is she not paying the price for her own betrayal and selfishness towards them? When Mrs. Wang offers Abdel his father's job and demotes him to gatekeeper, Abdel accepts the position without hesitation, and defends himself to his father that he too has obligations. Abdel is dating Djénéba, a young Malian woman who is expecting his child. His responsibility to Djénéba and her unborn child takes precedence over his loyalty to his father. Abdel may be selfish, but when faced with the choice of remaining loyal to his father and refusing the post presented to him by Mrs. Wang, or accepting his father's job and putting himself in a position to take responsibility for Djénéba and their child, the choice is clear. He chooses that which is good for him. He performs an act that some would interpret as selfish. In his quest for revenge, Adam performs the same act of selfishness to regain his position. With Abdel gone, Mrs. Wang has no choice but to recall Adam, the selfish father who listened to the advice of the local leader and handed his son over to the government army.

**Power** The Chadian government is facing a fierce armed rebel movement. The Chadian army needs financial resources and vigorous young men to wage its battle against the rebels. Chadians are called upon to contribute to the war effort, either financially or in manpower. So, through the neighborhood leaders, the people are pressured to contribute to the war efforts by giving money. The district leader pursues Adam to pay off his share. This practice is akin to racketeering. Adam has not yet been able to make any contribution. The neighborhood leader tells Adam that he has given his own son to the Chadian army, and that Adam could do the same. The idea of handing his son over to the army is repugnant to Adam. This 'kidnapping' is only possible because the Chadian government is abusing its power over the population. This abuse goes even further when Chadian army soldiers organize raids into neighborhoods to forcibly enroll young Chadians. This activity is not governed by any legislation, as an official conscription act would also put the children of the ruling elite in the crosshairs. Rather, this is a customer-driven practice, and the customer in this case is the poor. The government and the army are not the only ones to abuse their power. Mrs. Wang is the kind of employer who hires and fires at will, with no regard for the rights of her workers - rights which, incidentally, don't seem to be codified in any official document.

**War** War is always a cause of material and moral instability, Haroun seems to tell us. For the employees of Mrs. Wang's hotel, the scarcity of customers, a consequence of the insecurity brought by the war, is a source of anxiety. Obeying the law of the market, Mrs. Wang chooses to reduce her staff to keep her business going. The first to be affected are the oldest employees, including the pool attendant, the gatekeeper and the cook. In time, however, the progress of rebel troops in the city of N'Djamena, which had already seriously undermined the hotel's viability, causes the employees to flee, jeopardizing

Mrs. Wang's business. By causing Mrs. Wang to close down her business, the war has thrown entire families out into the street, leaving them at the mercy of a precarious existence. Furthermore, the situation of insecurity sows panic among the population, who, carrying their pitiful bundles on their heads, take the road of exile, towards more promising horizons. War is always a spoilation of a country's human resources. When young people are not mowed down by lethal weapons on the battlefield, they return broken and living a life on borrowed time. Such is the case of Abdel, the young man. who was once so vigorous and full of projects to accomplish with his girlfriend, but who does not survive his war wounds, and dies before seeing his son being born.

**Memory** Memory often soothes the pain of the present. Adam is a former swimming champion, who has seen his glory years go by. Today, he works as a pool attendant in Mrs. Wang's hotel. His former fans have dispersed, and he is no longer as adulated as he once was. Life is hard and job security barely guaranteed. However, Adam finds comfort in recalling his glorious past and reminding people of it whenever possible. To his son, who challenges him to an underwater breath-holding competition, which Adam loses, Adam recalls that he was the African swimming champion. His neighbors, to whom he has spoken about his past, call him 'Champ'. Adam wants to make himself believe that his Spring is still alive. However, when he loses his job as pool attendant, and is humiliated to be a mere gatekeeper, Adam no longer responds to his nickname. The moniker no longer gives him solace. He has sunk so low that the sedative of his memories remains ineffective. For Abdel, too, forcibly enrolled in the army and engaged in a merciless war against the rebels, memories of times spent with his girlfriend, Djénéba, are a palliative against the harshness of war and despair. Thus, Abdel sends an audio message to Djénéba from the front, recalling the romantic moments of their meeting and his hope of seeing her again. Memory thus becomes a temporary bandage on the open wound of the present.

**Love** The filmmaker addresses the question of love in his film on several levels. First, there is paternal love. Adam's love for his son Abdel. As a conscientious father, Adam teaches his son the nuts and bolts of his profession as a lifeguard, so that one day, Abdel will be independent and take charge of his own life. Once a swimming champion, Adam is now a lifeguard at a hotel in the Chadian capital. Having taken Abdel under his wing, the father makes the son a good lifeguard to the point where Abdel is now able to challenge and beat him at swimming. When Abdel falls in love with Djénéba and the girl is expecting his child, Abdel's love for his developing family is so strong that he does not hesitate to accept his father's job from his employer, reducing his father to a mere gatekeeper. The romantic relationship between Abdel and Djénéba is only suggested in the film. However, romantic love is very explicitly expressed between Adam and his wife in a scene where they feed each other and eat a juicy watermelon from each other's mouths. Cooking is also treated as a gesture of love. Adam's wife cooks and feeds her family with love, and she is sad when her food is eaten in silence and melancholy. For the hotel cook, too, a dish only succeeds if one puts attention - love, he says - into its preparation. His kitchen is his love. And so, he falls seriously ill when Mrs. Wang dismisses him from his job.

**Guilt** Is Mrs. Wang remorseful for her treatment of Adam when she dismissed him and put him in the gatekeeper's uniform? She thanks him for remaining loyal when all the other employees have abandoned their posts. One would like to believe that Mrs. Wang feels some kind of guilt, but she is too good a businesswoman, too selfish, for that. On the other hand, Adam and his son Abdel do feel regret for past actions. Adam turns his son over to the army in revenge for him taking his job as head pool attendant. However, overwhelmed by guilt, Adam goes to the army's makeshift hospital to bring his wounded son back home. Adam confesses to Abdel that it was he who delivered him to the army. Abdel tells his father that he knows and also apologizes for accepting his father's job when Mrs. Wang offered it to him. Both father and son feel remorse and guilt for having betrayed the other. Adam hopes that he will enable his son to see his girlfriend, Djénéba, again, and to see the birth of the child she is carrying. His wish is not fulfilled, and his redemption is not complete. Abdel dies on the way home, and his father entrusts his body to the current of the river in which the young man had hoped to bathe once more.

**Solidarity** Abdel accepts the position of pool attendant from Mrs. Wang, the hotel owner, while his father Adam is demoted to gatekeeper. Abdel apologizes to his father for taking the job away from him, and explains to his father that he has responsibilities, too. The responsibilities Abdel refers to, as becomes clear when he is forcibly conscripted, concern his girlfriend, Djénéba, who is expecting his child. When Djénéba doesn't hear from Abdel, she goes to his parents' house. There, she tells Abdel's mother

that she is pregnant with Abdel's child. Without questioning the veracity of Djénéba's claims, the mother welcomes Djénéba as her daughter. The mother calls Djénéba "my daughter" and immediately invites her to move into Abdel's room. Whether Djénéba is telling the truth or not, Abdel's mother seems to have no doubts about her sincerity and sees a girl in distress, in need of a helping hand in this war-torn country, a war that makes women and children its first victims. The mother takes it upon herself to protect a young woman, in an act of solidarity and bonding between women. This sisterhood, this feminine bond, is a strength, a survival tool, which, as the filmmaker explains, enables women to survive in a male-dominated world that is not very attentive to women's needs. This theme of solidarity and love between women is so dear to Haroun that the filmmaker devotes a film to it, namely, *Lingui* (2021).

**Survival** War brings to the fore a dormant instinct in mankind that modern society likes to think is primal, and that we believe has been tamed by intelligence, namely the survival instinct. Faced with the terror and sense of insecurity that war brings, people's survival instincts are triggered, and they lose all sense of rationality and civility, as they jostle and trample each other to stay out of danger. The scarcity of jobs prompted by the war sparks a feeling of insecurity among the hotel workers struggling to keep their positions. When Mrs. Wang offers Abdel his father's job, Abdel rationalizes his acceptance with the fact that he has a pregnant girlfriend and soon a child to raise, a future family to care for. Who cares about the relationship forged with his father over the years? Who cares about the education and training he received from his father? Loyalty to his father is only an obstacle to his own survival, and his survival and longevity depend on his son. To refuse the job Mrs. Wang offers him is to accept his finitude. Better, he thinks, to undermine his father's wellbeing than his own. Thus, feeling betrayed by his son, Adam's instinct for self-preservation overrides his fatherly love. For his own survival, in order to regain his position as pool attendant, Adam hands his son over to the army, who conscript him by force.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which scene in the film best illustrates the title of the film?
2. N'Djamena is plunged into war, but the filmmaker only hints at this war through subtle clues. What are some of them? Are they effective?
3. Is there symbolism in the gatekeeper's uniform that turns out to be too short for Adam?
4. What symbolism do you see in the collapse of the bench on which Masra, the new cook, and Adam sit?
5. Set in the Sahel (a region known for its struggle with the ever-approaching desert) *A Screaming Man* starts in water and ends in water. What symbolic significance does water hold in the film?
6. What image does the filmmaker paint of China in Africa through the character of Mrs. Wang?