

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

## **Bye Bye Africa (1999)**

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* This film, which Mahamat-Saleh Haroun defines as a manifesto, that is, a questioning of how to make cinema with the means at hand, deals mainly with the future of cinema in Africa, and specifically in Chad. The film also deals with family, community, love, exile, war, superstition and many other subjects. The film won Special Mention at the 1999 Amiens International Film Festival, the Luigi de Larentiis Award for Best Debut Film at the 1999 Venice International Film Festival, and the CinemAvvenire Award for Best First Film. At the 2000 Kerala International Film Festival, Mahamat-Saleh Haroun won the FIPRESCI Prize and the Golden Crow Pheasant.

*Background* Contrary to critics who see *Bye Bye Africa* as an autobiography, Mahamat-Saleh Haroun prefers to describe his film as "auto-fiction". This is not a film about his life, but about a Chadian reality to which he has grafted his own memory and added his own questions. This 86-minute debut feature is set in France and Chad. The film is low-budget, and was shot with amateur actors recruited from among the filmmaker's own family and friends. The languages spoken in the film are mainly French, with a few instances of Chadian Arabic.

### SYNOPSIS

Haroun, a Chadian filmmaker living in Paris, cuts short his ten years of French exile to travel to Chad for his mother's funeral. Shocked by the ravages of war in his country, Haroun takes out his camera and documents what he sees. N'Djamena, the Chadian capital, presents a lunar landscape, with buildings crumbling under the impact of bullets and shells. But that does not stop the members of the government from showing off in an ostentatious carnival of big, gleaming cars blaring their horns. The cab driver who drives Haroun home explains that this is how it is every weekend, and that they are going to party. At home, Haroun's father, happy to have his son back, tells him that he should have been a doctor to be useful to society, because cinema is a useless profession. It does not matter what his father thinks, because Haroun, who has reunited with his childhood friend Garba, his guide in this country where he is still struggling to find his bearings, tells Garba that he wants to revive cinema in Chad. Garba doubts whether this is even possible, and dreams only of emigrating to the United States. Garba, a disillusioned former projectionist, who has become a tomato farmer, takes Haroun to see what has become of the movie theaters of their childhood, so as to convince Haroun that his dream of reviving cinema in Chad is futile. The cinemas are like the town itself: in ruins. While filming, Haroun is attacked and his camera taken away by a man who accuses him of imprisoning his soul in his camera. Garba manages to retrieve Haroun's camera and explains to him that his compatriots have a particular perception of film. Garba tells him about Isabelle, an actress who played the role of an AIDS sufferer in one of Haroun films, and who is now rejected by her compatriots, who identify her with the character she played in the film. Haroun remembers having a good time with Isabelle. He seeks her out and finds her. She tells him she has been

waiting for him, and that she has his child. He does not believe her, finds her too sentimental and wants nothing more than to sleep with her. Chagrined, Isabelle commits suicide one night. Haroun, who is vainly looking for the necessary funding to make a film in tribute to his mother, has to return to France before he has begun his project. As he leaves, Garba gives his camera to his twelve-year-old nephew, Ali, who is fascinated by the camera and has tried everything to make it his own. Garba, who has been granted an American visa, finally decides to stay in Chad and open a cinema to promote Chadian films. Ali, Haroun's young nephew, films the farewell of his uncle, who has promised to return one day to finish his film, to be entitled *Bye Bye Africa*.

## CHARACTERS

*Haroun* A Chadian filmmaker living in France, who goes back home for his mother's funeral.  
*Garba* Haroun's childhood friend, who acts as Haroun's guide when the latter returns to Chad  
*Isabelle* A young Chadian actress, who is driven to suicide by people's intolerance  
*Ali* Haroun's 12-year-old nephew, who is passionate about cinema

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### HAROUN

Haroun is an optimistic figure for the future of cinema culture in Chad. However, he remains alienated from the Chad he left 10 years ago for France. Haroun's selfishness blinds him to Isabelle's love for him.

*Alienated* The 10 long years Haroun has spent in France have somewhat alienated him from his Chadian culture. Haroun no longer recognizes the buildings of his childhood, destroyed by the war. He takes offence at the lifestyle of members of the government and the dilapidation in which his country finds itself, and above all at the indifference of the people, who seem to accept this state of affairs. Haroun no longer even knows how to interact with his compatriots, but fortunately his friend Garba is there to guide him.

*Optimistic* An optimist, Haroun is convinced that Chadian cinema must be revived, and he wants to be one of the players in its rebirth. His friend Garba's pessimism does little to dampen Haroun's enthusiasm, as he seeks funds to finance a new film in tribute to his mother. Production conditions are difficult, and funding scarce. Nevertheless, Haroun returns to France, promising to be back in Chad one day to make his film.

*Selfish* In his relationship with Isabelle, Haroun reveals himself to be a selfish man. While Isabelle expects him to be serious, Haroun only wants to have fun. When Isabelle tells him she loves him and has been waiting for him, he tells her that she is too emotional, and invites her instead to go to bed without being overly sentimental. Haroun's self-centeredness, which prevents him from seeing Isabelle beyond her being his sexual playground, drives the girl, who is already depressed, to suicide.

### GARBA

The optimism of Garba, a former projectionist, has been eroded by Chad's long war. This loyal childhood friend of Haroun, who serves as his cultural guide, says he no longer believes in the future of cinema in Chad. However, Garba's decision to stay in Chad and open a cinema to show Chadian films, just when he has been granted the American visa of his dreams, shows his strong commitment to Chadian culture.

*Pessimistic* Garba is like many Chadians who, having seen the war drag on in their country and cause so much destruction to people and property, no longer believe in Chad's future. So, when his friend Haroun tells him that he intends to resurrect cinema in Chad, Garba tells him that this is an illusory task. For his part, Garba intends to steer clear of Tchad and go live in America. However, when Garba's visa for America arrives, this great pessimist decides to give Chad one more chance. He decides to stay put.

*Loyal* Garba is as loyal to his friend Haroun as he is to his country, Chad. A childhood friend of Haroun's, Garba is at Haroun's disposal as soon as he returns to Chad after a ten-year absence. Garba acts as Haroun's guide, helping him out of difficult situations. Determined to escape war-torn Chad, Garba

tries his luck in the American visa lottery. And when that chance finally comes, rather than emigrate, Garba chooses to stay in Chad and rebuild his country.

*Grounded* Garba has his feet firmly planted in his Chadian culture. He knows its protocols, rituals and habits. Serving as a guide to his childhood friend Haroun, Garba reminds Haroun of the rules that govern interpersonal relationships. He accompanies Haroun to pray at his mother's grave. He advises Haroun on how to behave as a filmmaker in a country where fiction and reality merge, and helps to calm tempers and recover Haroun's camera when the latter is attacked by a man who refuses to be filmed. In the end, Garba decides to stay in Chad and contribute to his country's development, even when he receives a visa for America.

## **ISABELLE**

Isabelle is an isolated, melancholic girl. For 10 years, she has lived as an outcast in her community. She could have been happy if, in the end, Haroun, with whom she hoped to live, had accepted her. But Haroun rejected her, further adding to her grief.

*Isolated* Isabelle is an isolated girl in the Chadian society. Having been cast as an AIDS sufferer in one of Haroun's films, she is blurred with the character she portrayed in the film, and stigmatized and ostracized by her family and community, who see the disease as a disgrace and an abomination. Haroun, from whom she has had a child, and on whom she was counting for a family life, also rejects her, because he is not convinced that Isabelle's child is his and does not want a serious relationship with her.

*Melancholic* During the ten years Haroun was in France, Isabelle brooded while waiting for him, distressed by the intolerance of her family and neighbors. Isabelle's sadness increases dramatically when Haroun, whom she has waited for with high hopes, also rejects her, calling her a girl of loose morals. Isabelle's sadness is such that she refuses to live. Isabelle takes her own life.

## **ALI**

Ali is an ingenious and determined boy. He has built himself a toy camera in the likeness of his uncle Haroun's, but it is his uncle's professional camera that really fascinates him. He uses all kinds of subterfuge to get his hands on the camera, which his uncle ends up giving him.

*Inventive* Ali is a very inventive boy. He does not wait for his parents to buy him toys from a toy store. He makes them himself. Fascinated by his uncle's camera, Ali makes his own using wire, tin can, cardboard and glass. Ali's invention impresses both his playmate and his uncle, who finds the details faithful to those of a real camera.

*Determined* Ali sets out to get his uncle's camera, and he finally does. Having first bluntly asked his uncle to give him his camera, and having been scolded by his uncle, Ali then tries twice to steal it. Having been caught and had his ears pulled, Ali then offers his uncle a proper barter: his toy camera for his uncle's professional camera. In the end, seeing his nephew's passion for cinema, Haroun offers him his camera.

## **THEMES**

**War** Chad is a country continually at war. The devastating effects of this war, which has been going on for over 45 years, are visible in every socio-cultural and economic sector of the country. Haroun takes his camera through the streets of the Chadian capital, deploring what he sees through the lens of his camera. N'Djamena presents the face of a decaying city in which a population desensitized by war tries to get by as best it can. But not all is doom and gloom. As a long procession of gaily decorated cars passes by, amid a cacophony of horns, the driver of Haroun's cab explains to him that all these people in gleaming cars are on their way to a reception at the home of a member of the government, and that receptions of this kind are held every weekend. So, while the little people of Chad barely survive in times of war, this is not the case for the war's decision-makers, those who make the rain and the sun shine, and who can put an end to the suffering of the Chadian people at any time. Perhaps these decision-makers prefer the sound of the shelling to never stop, because war has become a business for them, a cash cow whose breasts they suck greedily, the only difference being that what these breasts produce is Chadian oil,

which, it is said, funds the war, or at least feeds the major decision-makers in this war that is slaughtering the little people.

**Cinema** Mahamat-Saleh deplores the disappearance of movie theaters in Chad, not simply as the disappearance of architectural and commercial structures, but rather as the evanescence of a way of life. Movie theaters in Africa are places around which a whole social, cultural and economic dynamic revolves. In an interview, Haroun recalls life around the cinemas of his childhood. He talks about the posers who come to show off their finery, the romantic encounters and bonds forged there; he recalls the night markets and street-foods that attract movie-goers and onlookers alike. Cinema, both the infrastructure and the art form, must be revived if this social organization is to be preserved. Haroun explains *Bye Bye Africa* as a leap of faith, a plunge into the uncertain world of African cinema, his decision to do something to revive cinema, rather than ranting and raving about the difficult conditions of film production and the almost programmed death of Chadian cinema. In this endeavor, Haroun seeks out partners, men and women who still have faith in the future of cinema in Chad. He interviews the owner of a cinema destroyed in the war, who is still dreaming of restoring her building. Haroun meets cinephiles, who continue to flock to N'Djamena's only decrepit cinema. He interviews projectionists, who are convinced that a renewal of equipment will resuscitate cinema in Chad. And despite the reluctance of financiers incredulous about the future of cinema in Chad, Haroun returns to France, with the promise of returning to Chad to work at the completion of his film and at the revival of cinema in Chad.

**Betrayal** Haroun had a love affair with Isabelle, a young Chadian woman who had played the character of an AIDS victim in one of his films. From this affair, it seems, a child was born while Haroun was in exile in France. Rejected by her family and by an intolerant Chadian society which, associating her with the AIDS victim she played in the film, made her an untouchable, Isabelle waited for Haroun to come and marry her and take her to France with him. Meanwhile, Haroun married another woman in France, had two children and divorced his wife. When Haroun returned to Chad for his mother's funeral, he sought out Isabelle, more to continue the adventure with her than for a serious relationship. When she told him she loved him, and had waited for him all this time, Haroun scoffed at Isabelle, and even called her a girl of loose morals. Isabelle felt triply betrayed. First of all, Isabelle was betrayed by her family, the very unit that should be her first place of refuge in any circumstance. Her family, afraid of being stigmatized as having produced a promiscuous member (as AIDS was still very much associated with sexual promiscuity), rejected her. Secondly, Isabelle has been betrayed by the Chadian people, for whose AIDS awareness she has put herself in front of the cameras in the role of an AIDS sufferer. This betrayal is also that of cinema towards Isabelle, which has thrown her image to the intolerant Chadian people, leaving her to struggle alone. In the end, Isabelle is betrayed by the man she loves, and who she believes also loves her, Haroun. With no one left to turn to, Isabelle takes her own life.

**Exile** Until very recently, before the intensification of the economic insecurity in Africa due to unbridled globalization repatriating Africa's resources to the West on an unprecedented scale, just before the inter- and intra-state wars generated by this race for African resources, exile was a male affair. Although the situation has changed since then, and many African girls and young women go into exile with men, very few African films deal with female exile. Haroun follows this trend: while *Bye Bye Africa* deals with the melancholy of the (male) African exile in Europe, his alienation from his native land, and the African community he tries to recreate around the sound of drums and in solidarity associations, when it comes to women, the film only suggests the malaise experienced at home due to the man's prolonged absence. Men who go into exile almost never return for good. And the women left behind suffer the anguish of this absence. Thus, Haroun's mother dies without realizing her 10-year-old wish to see her son again and to know her grandchildren-Haroun accepts that when one chooses exile, one must accept the fact that those one loves will die far away. Thus, for 10 long years, Isabelle waits for Haroun to return, only to dash her hopes of one day seeing her by his side as his wife. Thus, Haroun's grandmother sees her grandson return to Europe with her blessings, wishing only that she would die before he does, because, she says, it is a tragedy when the youngest die before their elders. The exiled is often an alienated person, who, like a summer visitor, only casts a tourist eye at his native land, where the woman waiting for him languishes.

**Stereotypes/intolerance** Since the release of *Bye Bye Africa*, that is, since 1999, people's mindsets about AIDS and AIDS sufferers have changed considerably, both in Africa and the rest of the world.

Haroun's film bears witness to the panic and insensitivity that gripped Africans, and Chadians in general, in the early years of the disease. Indeed, in *Bye Bye*, a young actress named Isabelle, who plays the fictional role of an AIDS victim, is ostracized by her family and community, unable to separate her from the character she plays in a film. One of the issues raised by Isabelle's tragedy is society's intolerance towards AIDS victims. In its early days, this disease was considered an abomination, and those who fell victim to it were rejected by both their families and society. In the USA, for example, many professional basketball players refused to play on the same court as Magic Johnson when he announced that he was infected with the disease. This state of affairs persisted for decades, until heightened awareness made the world's populations more educated and empathetic to the plight of AIDS victims and less afraid of the disease. Clearly, 25 years after *Bye Bye Africa*, the mentality of Chadians on the subject has changed, and AIDS sufferers are no longer stigmatized to the point of contemplating suicide.

**Love** *Bye Bye*, says the film's main character, Haroun, who plays a filmmaker, is a film he wants to make as a tribute to his mother, to show his love for her. Haroun's love for his mother is such that, when he learns she has died, he remarks that he is now alone, although he still has his father, grandmother and children of his own. Haroun's affection and consideration for his mother are based on a self-centeredness that prevents him from seeing any other woman as a mother who also deserves consideration and love. Here, Haroun lacks the African wisdom that calls for treating any woman as one would like one's own mother to be treated, as he dismisses Isabelle's love for him and instead, sees her, the mother of his child, as the mere locus of sexual pleasure. For Isabelle, love is worth waiting ten years, if need be, for the return of the man she loves. So she waits for Haroun. And when Haroun briefly returns to Chad on the occasion of his mother's funeral, and rejects her, Isabelle also tells herself that, just as one must know how to wait for love, one must be able to die for love, or lack therefore. It seems that, in the end, the only love Haroun has really found worthy, and for which he would go to any length, is his love for film; for even his love for his mother, Haroun expresses through film.

**Family** In Paris, where he receives a phone call announcing the death of his mother, Haroun laments the loss of his mother as the beginning of his total isolation from his Chadian family unit. Whether in a matriarchal or patriarchal society, in Africa, the pillar of the family is the mother. As the father is often an itinerant, either by force of circumstance (the breadwinner outside of the home) or by his own volition, it is around the mother that family life is structured, and it is she who spends the most time with the children during their formative years. Psychoanalytical studies, such as those led by Jacques Lacan, demonstrate the innate attachment of children and adults to the mother, explaining that everything we do, from childhood to adulthood, is aimed at regaining the place of perfect communicability with the mother (Mother's womb). It is through the mother that the link to the family is facilitated. So, all too often, the disappearance of the mother heralds the dislocation of the family unit and its eventual evanescence, as well as the disappearance of the ancestral culture (albeit patriarchal) that the mother is naturally responsible for passing on. It is clear, then, that Haroun's mother is the cement that holds him to the family, and that with her disappearance, this bond is eroded, setting him adrift like a rudderless ship, far from the cell that, in his exile, still gave him a sense of belonging. Haroun has promised to make a film in memory of his mother, to be entitled *Bye Bye Africa*. Could this be an allusion to the family union that disintegrates with the disappearance of one's mother?

**Power** Garba tells his friend Haroun to always be aware of his responsibility as a filmmaker. Indeed, it seems that the camera confers a certain mythical power on whoever holds it, and it is this power that Garba asks Haroun to use wisely. In fact, the camera lens has an interesting name in French; it is called "objectif", thus suggesting that whatever a camera captures can only be impartial, detached of any subjective input. And yet we know how much elements of perspectives, of the filmmaker's point of view, and of editorial decisions can make a camera subjective, that is, give the filmmaker considerable power in changing reality. In fact, Haroun was so powerful as to have tragically altered Isabelle's life following the film in which he cast her as an AIDS sufferer. If it is true that Isabelle's tragedy is due in part to her believable performance, to the ethos that she projected, it is even more true that it is the angle from which the filmmaker captured this ethos, and the latter's editorial decisions, that made Isabelle such an excellent embodiment of an AIDS sufferer, to the point of causing her stigmatization by the Chadian society. From this point of view, the filmmaker has the power to capture the souls of those he films, and to transform them at will. Thus, it is no mere coincidence that Haroun is attacked and has his camera snatched from him by a man he is trying to film in a N'Djamena street.

**Sexuality** Isabelle tells Haroun she loves him. Haroun asks her to stop being sentimental and to come to bed and make love instead. For Isabelle, who claims to have waited 10 years for Haroun, love is inseparable from sex. Isabelle loved Haroun when she was a mere 17-year-old, had a child with him, and now longs only for him. Haroun does not believe that Isabelle has known no other man. He even refuses to believe that Isabelle's 10-year-old son, to whom she gave his name, is his. If Haroun has sought out Isabelle and found her in N'Djamena after 10 years, it is less because he loves her than because, as he tells us, he spent pleasurable sexual moments with her 10 years earlier, which he hopes to relive. And although his insensitive words hurt Isabelle, up to the eve of his trip, Haroun still hopes to experience moments of sexual pleasure with Isabelle. Haroun goes to Isabelle's house and finds her dead in her bed. Isabelle could not bear Haroun's rejection, which came on top of her ostracization by the Chadian society, which treated her as untouchable for a role she had played in a film. Shocked, Haroun confides to his friend Garba that he cannot understand how Isabelle could have taken their relationship so seriously as to take her own life. Haroun repeats in amazement to his friend Garba, "It was only an adventure. It was only an adventure". For Isabelle, it was more than just about sex. It was love.

**Fiction vs reality** The other question raised by Isabelle's tragedy is how difficult it is for the public to distinguish between reality and the fiction served up by the moving image. The Chadian public confuses Isabelle with the AIDS character she plays on TV, attaching to her the stigma often associated with AIDS sufferers. Although in an interview about *Bye Bye Africa* Haroun explains it as a Chadian tragedy, this phenomenon, known as "type casting" in the jargon of the seventh art, is neither typically African, nor even less typically Chadian. In the world of cinema, some actors become so associated with the roles they play that it is sometimes impossible for them to lead a normal life, or even to find work. It is simply tragic that, in Isabelle's case, the type of casting she is subjected to is fuelled by one of the greatest intolerances of all - that related to AIDS sufferers, whose social stigmas and stereotypes of impurity are transferred to her. The transfer of stigmas is so psychologically violent for Isabelle that it drives her to suicide. Elsewhere, in the world of cinema, actors have come to tragic ends similar to Isabelle's, either because the stigma attached to them by certain films prevents them from functioning freely in the real world, or because they themselves cannot find in the real world the characters they play in the movies, and with whom they fall in love. Isabelle's identity crisis is far from being a purely Chadian issue.

**Superstition** While filming street scenes in N'Djamena, Haroun is violently attacked by a man who snatches his camera and hurts him in the face. The man reproaches Haroun for stealing his soul by filming him. After many heated negotiations, Garba finally convinces the protester to return Haroun's camera. Garba then explains to Haroun that he has stayed too long in Europe to understand that in Chad, people are wary of the camera, because for them, an image captured by the camera is tantamount to seizing the soul of the person filmed or photographed. Indeed, in war-ravaged Chad, where the population seeks an increasingly elusive paradise through prayer, the soul is one's most important asset, the last thing one would want to lose. Haroun's camera is a danger to the soul, a potential prison for the soul. In fact, this camera has already claimed a victim in the person of Isabelle. Has the camera not already relegated Isabelle to the realm of the untouchable, the pestiferous and the irredeemable? This is why Haroun is causing such a stir and clamor among the locals. As he approaches, the market women, who cover their faces with their veils, wagging their fingers, or hurling invectives at him, tell him to stop filming them. But this man goes further. He calls Haroun a soul-stealer, beats him up, and snatches his camera, which Haroun only recovers thanks to the mediation of his friend Garba, who apologizes to the angry crowd on Haroun's behalf.

**Change** Haroun's wish is to reverse the downwards trend of Chadian cinema caused by the protracted Chadian war, aging equipment, lack of funding, and the demotivation of the players in the film industry. Garba, Haroun's projectionist friend, who instilled in him a love of cinema, no longer believes in the return of the golden age of Chadian cinema. Waiting to strike luck with the American visa lottery, Garba has turned instead to growing tomatoes. Haroun's father tells Haroun that filmmaking is useless, and that he should have turned to a useful career like medicine, and that maybe he could have saved his mother. Haroun does not despair, and is convinced that change will come. In his crusade for the rebirth of Chadian cinema, Haroun has a few allies, like the owner of cinema *Etoile*, who is raising funds to restore her shell-battered theater, a few unrepentant cinephiles, and some projectionists still clinging to their old equipment. Haroun's greatest ally, however, is his nephew Ali, a twelve-year-old boy fascinated by the camera, who builds his own toy camera and tries several times to steal his uncle's real camera. Tired of

being pestered by his nephew, Haroun takes the child to a movie set to give him a sense of what it is to be a filmmaker. And when Haroun realizes that his nephew is a true cinema buff, he offers him his camera before returning to France. Garba, who obtained the American visa he had been seeking, decides not to immigrate to the United States, but instead to open a movie theater in his neighborhood. The change in Chadian cinema, the filmmaker suggests, will come from the partnership between young Ali and Garba. The former will make films that the latter will show in his theater.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you explain the title of the film?
2. Why do you think Haroun says he is now really alone when he is told that his mother has died, even though his father and grandmother are still alive?
3. Haroun's father tells him that filmmaking is a useless job. Do you agree with the father's position? Explain your answer.
4. Why do you watch movies?
5. In the film, how do African immigrants try to recreate Africa in France?
6. What do you think of this recreated Africa? How is it effective or ineffective?
7. Haroun gives his young nephew his camera. What does this act of donation symbolize? Why is it important?
8. What message is the filmmaker conveying in Garba's decision to not go to America?

### SCENES

**Mother died** Haroun is awakened from his Parisian sleep by a phone call from Chad. The caller tells him that his mother has died. Haroun promises to catch the next plane to Chad. Haroun's friends come to pay their respects. They have also contributed funds to help him meet the expenses of his mother's funeral. Haroun thanks his friends for their solidarity. Haroun says he has not seen his mother for 10 years, and that the hardest thing for an exiled person is to have accepted that those he loves will die far from him.





**I hope you know Chad someday** Haroun tells his two boys, who live with their mother, from whom he is divorced, that he has to go to Chad for their grandmother's funeral. He tells them he hopes one day their mother will agree to let them visit Chad.



**The homecoming** Haroun arrives in his native country, which he has not seen for 10 years. The cab driver tells him about the rising cost of living and the government's ostentatious festivities. Haroun takes out his camera to document what he sees. Haroun's father tells him that his mother has died of a heart attack. His father tells him that this is God's will. Haroun asks who this little boy is who seems particularly interested in him. His father tells him that it is his nephew, Ali. Haroun films his surroundings. His father tells him that all he thinks about is cinema, and that no one understands what he produces. Haroun's father tells him that his films are made for a white audience. Haroun's father tells him that cinema has no use. He tells him that if he had been a doctor, he could have saved his mother. He adds that the land of the whites is not Haroun's land, and that to think so would be to lose one's soul.





**Memories** Haroun visits his old friend, Garba. The two friends are happy to see each other again. After exchanging a few pleasantries, they say a prayer in memory of Haroun's mother. Garba then accompanies Haroun to the cemetery to pray at his mother's grave. Haroun shows old videos of his parents that his friend Garba made during his sister's wedding. The video brings back good times for his father, who tells him that his mother was a beautiful woman. Haroun's little nephew Ali exclaims that he would like to make films one day. Haroun decides he will make a film to honor his mother, whom he was unable to see before her death. Haroun tells Garba that he will call his film "Bye Bye Africa", and that it will be a film about exile, love, family, and life in general.



**All is in ruin** Haroun takes his camera around the city of N'Djamena. He notes that the city has fallen into disrepair since he last saw it. He visits the movie theaters of his childhood. They're all in ruins. *Le Normandie*, where Garba worked as a projectionist, is in ruins. Garba has become a tomato grower. The janitor shows Haroun and Garba around the cinema. Everything is in ruins. Garba says he has lost faith in the future of cinema in Chad. Haroun tells him that he is optimistic that cinema will be reborn in Chad. Haroun interviews the daughter of the founder of another cinema, *L'étoile*, which has seen better days. *L'étoile* is now riddled with bullets from the 1979-1980 war, and the woman tells Haroun that she intends to restore her father's legacy. In the projection room, old films are gathering dust. The projectionist believes that the problem with cinema in Chad is nothing more than aging machines and the impossibility of getting new films delivered.



**Some impenitent cinephiles** Haroun visits the only cinema in town that still shows films. The place is decrepit and its storefront has been taken over by shopkeepers of all stripes. Haroun talks to a cinephile who swears by cinema. He says he goes to the cinema 10 times a week, and doesn't believe in the death of cinema in Chad. Later, a man attacks Haroun and snatches his camera for filming him. He calls Haroun a soul snatcher. Haroun is slightly wounded and bleeds. After bitter negotiations, Garba manages to get Haroun's camera back.



**A fascination with the camera** Haroun's nephew Ali has built himself a toy camera. Ali asks his uncle to give him his camera. Haroun scolds him, telling him that the camera is not a toy, but his working tool. Ali steals his uncle's camera while his uncle is in the shower. Haroun catches him and gets the camera back. Ali gets a good ear pulling from his uncle. Ali offers his uncle to swap his professional camera with his toy camera. Haroun is impressed by the toy made by his nephew. He invites him to accompany him on a film set. Haroun leaves his nephew with Serge. He tells Serge that the child is fascinated by cinema and would be happy to spend a day seeing how a film is made. Serge readily agrees to show young Ali his craft.



**To each their dreams** Garba's only dream is to go to the United States. He plays the visa lottery. Haroun seeks financing for his film. He meets with incomprehension from potential investors, who ask him to be reasonable, reduce his budget and work with less sophisticated equipment. Garba wins the visa lottery. He comes to celebrate with Haroun. The two friends continue their celebration in a nightclub. Isabelle is there. She calls Haroun a coward who runs away from reality to hide behind his camera. But at the end, Garba has decided not to go to America. He will stay in Chad to raise some money to build a little movie theater in his neighborhood.



**Auditioning for *Bye Bye Africa*** Haroun and his nephew arrive at the film set of his friend, Issa Serge Coelho, another Chadian filmmaker. Haroun confides in his friend that he is having trouble finding funds for his film. The two filmmakers talk about the difficulties of Chadian cinema, the lack of infrastructure, the frequent power cuts and the lack of funding. Haroun prepares auditions for the casting of his film. The candidates are many and varied. There is the married woman, who has come without telling her very conservative husband, as well as the independent, assertive young girl. Then there is the young man whose only dream is to be famous and meet beautiful girls.





**Isabelle's isolation** Garba explains to Haroun that he has stayed too long in Europe to understand Chad. He tells him that in Chad, people have trouble separating cinematic fiction from reality. Garba tells him the story of Isabelle, a girl who played the role of an AIDS victim in one of Haroun's short films. She is now rejected by her family and society as a whole, because people associate her with the character she played in the film. Haroun remembers having a good time with Isabelle, and wonders where she might be hiding. Haroun manages to locate Isabelle. They meet in a hotel café and go upstairs to a room. They kiss passionately. Haroun asks Isabelle if she has a condom. Isabelle takes offense at Haroun for stigmatizing her like everyone else. Isabelle tells Haroun that she's finished, and that his film has killed her. She tells him that all the men think she is ill, and that all the medical tests she has done to prove them wrong have changed nothing. Cinema is stronger than reality, she says. Isabelle begs Haroun to take her with him. She tells him that she has been waiting for him ever since. Haroun retorts that she was waiting for him so impatiently that she had a child with another man. She tells him the child is his. He says he doesn't believe her, and leaves. Before returning to France, Haroun decides to go and say goodbye to Isabelle. He finds her dead in bed. Isabelle committed suicide. She left Haroun a video in which she explains that she no longer wishes to live alone, rejected by everyone. Haroun recalls his fling with Isabelle. He admits that he told her he loved her and left while she begged him to stay. But he says it was all an adventure, nothing more.



**The farewell** Haroun receives his grandmother's blessing. He bids farewell to his family and Garba while his nephew films.

