

# Foreign film evokes one man's darkness



Photos courtesy of rottentomatoes.com

Chadian Youssouf Djaoro plays Adam, a man who does the unthinkable to preserve what is most sacred to him. No shot is used carelessly, including the somber close-ups of Adam (below).



BY KEN DUSOLD  
Staff Reviewer

Imagine you are living amid constant fear of death or hunger due to civil war. Once an honored athlete of your country and continent, you now clean the pool at a local hotel. Due to globalization, your livelihood is threatened by new owners and their lack of confidence in your ability to work at an advanced age.

For Adam, the primary character of "A Screaming Man," the uncertainty associated with his life in Chad is beyond his control. Why complain to those who cannot help him? Only God is in a position to intercede on his behalf, but will God step in for Adam?

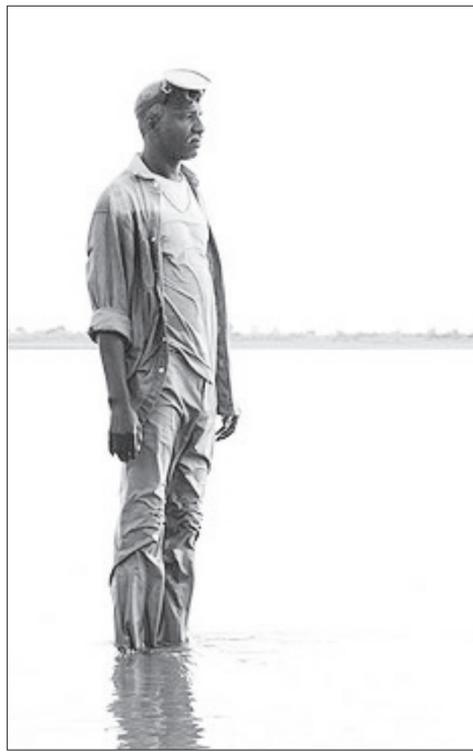
"A Screaming Man," directed by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, masterfully tells the tale of Adam (Youssouf Djaoro), whose life brings him to an important crossroads: He can face his own fate, or he can affect the fate of others.

Adam's destiny is wrapped up in the loss of control over his own life. He was once an African swimming champion — his friends still affectionately call him "Champ." Now, he is a gray-haired pool attendant who sees his lost youth in his only son (Dioucounda Koma), who also works at the hotel. He supports the na-

tional government and military in their mission to defeat the rebel forces, listening to the radio updates at work and watching the evening news as the civil war in Chad heats up. However, he does not place the cause at the top of his priority list, nor does Haroun, who sensibly refrains from wading too deep into the war. The film's focus is always on the quiet and unimposing, yet complex figure that is Adam. Indeed, what means the most to him is that which he can control, namely the hotel pool.

The pool is his sanctuary. He cannot control the war effort or the government's insistence that he donate money to help fund it — he does not have any money to donate. He cannot control aging. He does not even have any control over who his employer is, as a Chinese businesswoman takes ownership of the hotel and quickly sets her sights on downsizing. These things are left for God to control. The pool is Adam's paradise.

Unfortunately, his control of the pool becomes threatened too, when his son is asked to replace him. As any man faced with the prospect of losing the last vestige of power or freedom in his life would do, Adam considers the possible options available to him. With officials looking for money or soldiers to fight in the war and Adam having no money, he makes the incomprehensible decision to betray his son in an attempt to save that which he holds most dear. Of course, the realiza-



tion that the two are not mutually exclusive quickly manifests itself. But is it too late?

Djaoro is exceptional and powerful in his ability to affect audiences without speaking or physically doing anything. Close-ups on Adam speak volumes about the character's progression from that of a broken, frustrated old man to that of a distraught, helpless and guilt-ridden father. In a scene where Adam, standing within a sea of people fleeing the city because of the war and its growing dangers, fully realizes the magnitude of what he has done, no words need be spoken to see his remorse and the disgust he feels toward himself.

The film moves slowly, with very little action. However, at only 92 minutes long, there is never an un-

necessary image used. The film is an unabashed study of humanism through a situation that depicts mankind at its worst. Haroun's use of almost all natural light means that night shots are steeped in very near-to-pure darkness, giving the viewer just a semblance of the discomfort Adam feels as he descends into his own personal hell.

With exception to some disjointed character comparisons — Haroun failing to subtly complement Adam's situation with that of an official whose son is also a soldier — "A Screaming Man" is a great film. Having won the Jury Prize at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, do not be surprised should this film earn a nomination for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards in February 2011.



## Instant gratification backfires long-term

BY MEG BURIK  
Columnist

We are a society built upon the desire to instantly satisfy our needs and wants. I like to think of us as a bunch of Veruca Salts from the original "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory." She demands a golden-egg-laying goose from her father, a relatively unreasonable request, which he denies, and she throws a tantrum.

We all sing our own personal renditions of her demand "Don't care how, I want it now!" We each want our needs and desires to be satisfied right away. But unlike the chocolate factory, life does not have a special scale that determines a bad egg from a good egg, and so here we all are. Society conditions us to be selfish, instantly-gratified people, but hopefully without the little girl temper tantrums.

### Economic repercussions

Everyone needs a loan now and then. Many students can gain access to education only through a loan — a buy-now, pay-later approach. On an individual basis, this type of instant gratification makes sense. Students will be held accountable for repayment later and, in the meantime, are making a valuable investment in their lives. However, when the American government — the government of the largest economy in the world — uses a buy-now, pay-later approach, the only thing that is invested in is a political future for a politician, regardless of what party they are from.

Maybe you have heard of that ominous, amorphous thing called the "National debt." It is the accumulation of money we owe because our government borrows now but never wants to pay back later. All those plans to "stimulate the economy," basically pouring money into the economy through government programs, are unreasonable spending policies that don't get paid off once the economy is thoroughly "stimulated." What politician would get elected if his campaign speech included: "Well, now that we're through that recession, time to raise taxes and cut back on spending so that we eliminate the debt." That would be the economically responsible thing to do, but no one would vote for that.

### Ecological repercussions

From an ecological perspective, many of us employ a mentality of consume now, worry later. By instantly gratifying our needs through consumption of energy or resources, we may reach a point in our lifetimes when it is no longer possible to live

the way we do. The amount of fossil fuel in the world is a set amount that we are only depleting. Think about the phrase itself — fossil fuel. It was created by a process that takes place through millions of years. It's not like we can use up our fossil fuels and have a magic supply whipped up the next day, not unless someone invents an "Instant Fossilizer." We will not be able to sustain this consumption and also sustain our lives. The use of resources in a way that is not future-thinking will result in the destruction of our instantly gratified consuming lifestyles.

### Personal repercussions

Sometimes gratifying decisions only affect our personal well-being, or only ours and those close to us. How instantly gratifying would it be to kiss that really attractive girl at the party? She looks great, you're having a great conversation, that kiss would be so sweet. Oh wait, you have a girlfriend at a different party, waiting for you to join up with her. But this girl...

We've all encountered situations like this during relationships. Some charming new person comes along and all of a sudden we're confused about our relationship, our willpower and our views on polyamory. In a situation like this, if we give in and satisfy that instantly gratifying urge, in the short term, the benefits might be great. In the long run, we might lose that current relationship, feel like a jerk and end up proportionately less happy than pre-kiss. Obviously this example is just one of a myriad of instant-gratification scenarios we face all the time, but they all follow the same formula. Some of them are less heavy. How many times have you thought (because I know I have): "Hmm, I don't want to do dishes. I'll do them later." Ever notice how dishes become a thousand times harder to do the next day? Like the food superglued itself to the dish? Yet in that moment you told yourself you'd do them the next day, you were instantly gratified.

Here is my attempt to capture gratification in a universally applicable, pseudo-mathematical formula.

The formula of instant gratification: Desire for something now plus fulfillment now equals long-term neutral or negative result. Alternatively, the formula for delayed gratification: Desire for something now plus the delay of that in order to accomplish something more important equals long-term positive outcome.

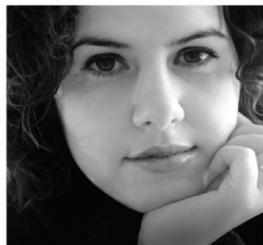
Maybe we should all try to be less like Veruca Salt and more like Charlie.

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