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COHEN MEDIA GROUP

PRESENTS



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF  
TIMBUKTU

# BLACK TEA

A FILM BY  
ABDERRAHMANE SISSAKO

NINA MÉLO

CHANG HAN

WU KE-XI

MICHAEL CHANG YU PEI-JEN HUANG WEI EMERY GAHURANYI ISABELLE KABANO MARIE ODO FRANCK PYCARDHY CHEIKH AHMED KENKOU  
SCENARIO KESSEN FATOUMATA TALL ABDERRAHMANE SISSAKO

LENGTH: 1H49

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## SYNOPSIS

After saying no on her wedding day, Aya leaves the Ivory Coast for a new life in the buzzing “Chocolate City” in Guangzhou, China. In this district where the African diaspora meets the Chinese culture, she gets hired in a tea boutique owned by Cai, a Chinese man.

In the secrecy of the back shop, Cai decides to initiate Aya to the tea ceremony. Through the teaching of this ancient art, their relationship slowly turns into tender love.

But for their burgeoning passion to lean on trust, they must let go of their burdens and face their past.

INTERVIEW WITH

# ABDERRAHMANE SISSAKO

**BLACK TEA IS ABOUT THE EXILE OF AN IVORIAN IN CHINA AND HER LOVE AFFAIR WITH A TEA MERCHANT. IT SEEMS TO BE UNIQUE IN YOUR FILMOGRAPHY, BUT IT MAY PERHAPS BE A RETURN TO YOUR ROOTS: BLACK TEA CONTINUES THE INTERROGATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY THAT RUNS THROUGH SEVERAL OF YOUR FILMS. HOW DO YOU SITUATE IT?**

There were probably the first stirrings of *BLACK TEA* in a scene in *WAITING FOR HAPPINESS*. A Chinese immigrant is having dinner with an African woman and he breaks out into karaoke. In it, I tackled what I consider a fundamental theme: encounters. As for cultural identity, I never explore characters as defined by their belonging to a particular group of people. I have the feeling that those who leave have left mentally long before their actual voyage.

Voluntary departure and exile have something interesting to say about identity. And for me, the cinema is a way to express that. And especially *BLACK TEA*, in which I explain that wherever they come from, people share a common desire to live a happy life understanding and comprehending others. Which is the case with Aya and Cai.

**AYA AND CAI REPRESENT THE MEETING OF AFRICA AND CHINA IN A SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS.**

Clearly. But beyond that, it was a way to enrich my cinema with new and startling imagery. I could have just as well told this story against any other geographical background.





**YOU LITERALLY DID THAT BY SHOOTING A PART OF THE FILM IN TAIWAN INSTEAD OF CHINA. WAS THAT A WAY OF PREVENTING *BLACK TEA* FROM BEING HIJACKED BY THE COMPLEX RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICA AND CHINA?**

I never thought of this film in terms of location, but as a way to look at my characters. Hence the importance of opening *BLACK TEA* behind closed doors. We infer that we are in Africa, but without being able to say where exactly. The same is true of the transition scene: Aya passes from an African to a Chinese street in one fell swoop. What counts is not the location, but that the woman's gait remains the same. That she asserts a freedom that cannot be confined to any one country. In fact, while observing her surroundings, Aya creates the world in which she lives. The place where *BLACK TEA* takes place no longer has any importance. What was most important to me was to capture on film the quasi-symmetrical nature of Aya and Cai's gestures, to show how much they have in common. That is one of the first things I had in mind for this film, and I talked with my DP much more about that than about where we might shoot. That being said, I couldn't let myself be distracted by certain aspects of Sino-African relations: I want my cinema to remain faithful to its objective, talking about Africa as it exists in relation to the rest of the world. Which does not hinder *BLACK TEA* from showing the new China. The dinner scene with Cai, his parents-in-law and son, for example, illustrates the inter-generational antagonism.

**TO WHAT EXTENT DOES IT ALSO MEAN THAT YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF A CYCLE? *BAMAKO* AND *TIMBUKTU*, BUT ALSO THE OPERA THAT YOU DIRECTED, *LE VOL DU BOLI*, WERE LINKED BY A STORY THAT SPOKE OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE MUCH MORE FRONTALLY AND POLITICALLY THAN *BLACK TEA*.**

There is some of that. But that rupture was probably already perceptible in *LE VOL DU BOLI*, even though like *BAMAKO* and *TIMBUKTU* it was rather frontal: doing that opera with Damon Albarn, a British musician, and with dancers and singers from around the world, sparked my desire to spotlight relations that give rise to harmony. *BLACK TEA* foreshadows what the world will inevitably become, a place where everything is created via encounters. That is proven by our world in motion, that has become globalized, whether for good or evil. But I have not abandoned the political approach in this film: when one of the characters says that the Silk Road does not work anymore, that is a way of saying that we can no longer build bridges between countries to transport only material goods. Those bridges must also serve to connect human beings. The same is true for the family dinner during which Cai and his son are confronted with the vision of an older generation that is the total opposite of their own. That is my way of saying that we must not restrict China to stereotypes, to a world unto itself.



**WAS IT THAT DESIRE THAT LED TO THE SINGULAR UNIVERSE OF BLACK TEA WHICH IS PRACTICALLY A BUBBLE OF HARMONIOUS COHABITATION BETWEEN CHINA AND AFRICA?**

I think it's a pity that we view the voyage of Africans to Europe or Asia exclusively through an economic prism. And all the more so since the world of BLACK TEA already exists. When you travel in Africa, you come across markets where Chinese speak Wolof or Bambara. And vice versa. But that is invisible to Europe because it continually retreats into its shell. But that normality that is underway can be seen in working class markets where foreign languages mix and match.

In BLACK TEA, I could only reproduce that world in a miniaturized version, with the neighborhood of Chocolate City, but I am convinced that such is our future. Diverse identities will subsist but will integrate with each other. My first film OCTOBER was inspired by my life as an African in Russia. I loved the country. I lived there for ten years. I learned a lot, even while experiencing rejection by the Other – it had nothing to do with racism, but with incomprehension. BLACK TEA is partially an updating of all that.

**YOU SPEAK OF A FILM THAT ANNOUNCES THE FUTURE. BUT WITH THE TEA CEREMONY SEQUENCES, THERE IS ALSO THE ISSUE OF HANDING DOWN TRADITIONS AND RITUALS, OF HOW IMPORTANT IT IS THAT THEY PERDURE.**

Of course, but what is most important is showing that Aya is curious about the Other. Because that is part of any voyage. When you travel abroad, you also want to learn about a country's culture. Conversely, the care with which Cai initiates Aya into the tea ceremony is his way of telling her that she can adapt, that she is no longer a lowly African immigrant in China. And that I think is a specific cultural attitude: you will never see a French or Englishwoman argue with an African woman in Wolof or Bambara in a market, because their immigration depended on dominating the Other. Today, the Chinese who emigrate to Africa or vice versa are "simple folk" who go to discover others, and when they share their traditions, they follow a logic of exchange. In BLACK TEA, I also wanted to show what Aimé Césaire meant by "it is through the particular that we discover the universal".

**THE UNIVERSAL CAN ALSO BE FOUND FORMALLY IN BLACK TEA, FILMED ESSENTIALLY AT A MARKET THAT SEEMS TO EXIST OUT OF TIME, EVEN AT TIMES BECOMING THE STUFF OF DREAMS.**

Basically, I know that the film is also the story of a dream: Aya has emigrated mentally more than physically. And so BLACK TEA had to cultivate that dreamlike aspect. And that is why it takes place almost exclusively by night. But I also had to include Cai's own hopes via his own dream. But the film is not anti-realist: there are some uncanny similarities between the streets in Abidjan and Guangzhou, or other Chinese cities. Their densely crowded markets look practically the same. Although both Aya and Cai learn that wherever you go, you cannot break totally free from the society you come from. A society is stronger than any one individual.

**CAI AND AYA ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES WITH HOPES: MOST OF YOUR CHARACTERS SPEAK AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER ABOUT THEIR ANXIETIES ABOUT EVER FINDING HAPPINESS. THAT BECOMES A LEITMOTIF IN BLACK TEA.**

It is already present in the opening scene in Ivory Coast: Aya sees an interracial couple at a wedding, African and Chinese, and realizes that happiness is possible. That is what probably triggered her voyage, and mine too. It is the creator's view of things that prompts him or her to transmit to his audience their capacity to have their own views, because for them, like for Aya, it is an invitation to freedom.

Therefore, the opening sequence takes place in a kind of isolated world. All that we see is the wedding hall and its courtyard, in very tight shots and close ups. Otherwise, Aya and the audience would not be able to move towards a horizon. But BLACK TEA does not only tell the stories of Aya and Cai, but just as much the stories of the hairdresser Douyue, Ying, Cai's ex-wife, and their son. When they meet Aya, who looks so liberated to them, they each invent something to offset what they lack.



**THAT IDEA OF DEPRIVATION SATURATES *BLACK TEA*, INCLUDING THE UNFULFILLMENT OF ITS MULTIPLE LOVE STORIES. WOULD YOU SAY THAT THIS IS YOUR MOST ROMANTIC FILM? THE MOST MELANCHOLIC?**

I wanted *BLACK TEA* to be both melancholic and romantic. Like the moment when Ying meets Aya for the first time: the two women understand and forgive each other immediately. Or when Cai confides in Aya, and we see on screen the visit to Cape Verde.

**ANOTHER RECURRENCE IN *BLACK TEA* IS NINA SIMONE'S SONG *FEELING GOOD*. SHE SINGS "IT'S A NEW DAY, IT'S A NEW DAWN". ULTIMATELY, IS THAT WHAT THIS FILM IS ABOUT FOR YOU?**

Absolutely. And that cover of "Feeling good" by Fatoumata Diawara expresses it perfectly. Thanks to the power of the song and Fatoumata's personality. She is an extraordinary woman who fights for women. The fact that she sings Nina Simone in Bambara parallels what I consider the driving force of the film: the desire to talk about a world that may be moving toward harmony. I waited fifteen years to make *BLACK TEA*. It has existed in my head since 2007. The success of *TIMBUKTU* would have allowed me to make it, but in the meantime, it had to mature...





## BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

# NINA MÉLO / AYA

From childhood, Nina dreamed of being a lawyer or a rock star. When she was at school, she wanted to write Harry Potter-style stories, but by the time she was a teenager, she had turned her attention to the camera and acting.

It was thanks in part to American films and TV series that she was able to identify with characters who looked like her, and that she felt the urge to act. She made her first TV film and finally felt she really belonged on a film set.

The days when she wanted to be a rock star are long gone. Today, she feels that acting brings her a kind of healing, by connecting her to her own emotions. Each character brings her a message to help her evolve. Through her work as a performer, she wants to share emotions that people can identify with, she wants to get a message across and bring a certain sense of well-being.

### AUTHOR-DIRECTOR SERIES

2021-2023 ELLES, PHASENT !

### CINEMA

2024 BLACK TEA | Abderrahmane Sissako

2017 STARVING GENERATION | Léa Fredeval

2016 FRIDAY NIGHT | Alexis Michalik

2015 ORPHAN | Arnaud Des Pallières

2015 WHILE WE LIVE | Dani Kouyate

2013 GIRLHOOD | Céline Sciamma

2013 SOLEILS | O.Delahaye and D.Kouyate

2012 FAMILY MATTERS | Nick Quinn

2010 HEARTBREAKER | Pascal Chaumeil

2008 DES POUPÉES ET DES ANGES | Nora Hamdi





## BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

# CHANG HAN / CAI

Born in 1974, Chang Han is Taiwanese actor. He graduated from One-Year Intensive Program of Department of Directing of Beijing Film Academy. His father is the senior actor Chang Kuo-Chu and his younger brother is the famous actor Chang Chen. He made his acting debut in Edward Yang A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY in 1991. He also participated in Wong Kar Wai's work HAPPY TOGETHER.

Chang Han has now been acting for more than 25 years. His performing works are countless. He was nominated for Best Supporting Actor in a Mini-series/TV movie of Golden Bell Awards with UPSTREAM, and Best Leading Actor in a Mini-series/TV movie of Golden Bell Awards with THE STRANGER.

### CINEMA

2024 BLACK TEA | Abderrahmane Sissako  
2020 LITTLE BIG WOMEN | Joseph Chen-Chieh Hsu  
2019 A SUN | Chung Mong-Hong  
2016 BLACK SHEEP | Pang An  
2016 WHITE LIES, BLACK LIES | Lou Yi-an  
2015 WHEN MIRACLE MEETS MATHS | Lin Junyang  
2013 APOLITICAL ROMANCE | Chun-Yi Hsieh  
2012 VIVA BASEBALL | Yin Qi

2009 TAIPEI EXCHANGES | Hsiao Ya-Chuan  
2009 GOD MAN DOG | Singing Chen  
2007 BALLISTIC | Lawrence Lau  
2007 AMOUR LEGENDE | Wu Mi-sen  
2006 EXIT NO. 6 | Lin Yu-Hsien  
2000 DOUBLE VISION | Chen Kuo-fu  
1997 BLUE MOON | Yipzen Ker  
1997 HAPPY TOGETHER | Wong Kar Wai  
1991 A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY | Edward Yang

## BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

# WU KE-XI / YING

Wu Ke-Xi is an actress and screenwriter from Taiwan. In 2014, she was named Best Actress at the second Canada International Film and Television Festival and received a Best Actress nomination at the 15th Chinese Film Media Awards for her performance in the critically acclaimed ICE POISON, which premiered at the 2014 Berlin Film Festival. The film was Taiwan's selection for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

In 2016, Wu Ke-Xi was nominated for Best Actress at the 53rd Golden Horse Awards for her role in THE ROAD TO MANDALAY, which premiered at the Venice International Film Festival and awarded the Federa Award for Best Film and screened at the Toronto International Film Festival. In 2017, she starred in THE BOLD, THE CORRUPT, AND THE BEAUTIFUL. The film was named Best Feature Film and won the Audience Choice Award at the 54th Golden Horse Awards.

In 2019, Wu Ke-Xi originally wrote and starred in Midi Z's film NINA WU, a psychological thriller inspired by the #MeToo movement. It was screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 72nd Cannes Film Festival, awarded Excellent Screenplay Awards Taiwan, Youth Film Handbook China, and nominated for Best Original Screenplay at the 56th Golden Horse Awards.

In 2020, Wu Ke-Xi participated in an US film REDEEMING LOVE directed by D.J. Caruso and was selected for Variety's 2020 International Women's Impact Report.

In 2022, Wu Ke-Xi was served as jury in Malaysia International Film Festival and wrapped the shooting of BLACK TEA directed by Abderrahmane Sissako.

In 2023, Wu Ke-Xi was served as jury in Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival in France and wrapped an US film BLUE SUN PALACE directed by Constance Tsang, co-stared with Lee Kang-Sheng.

### CINEMA

To be released BLUE SUN PALACE | Constance Tsang

2024 BLACK TEA | Abderrahmane Sissako

2023 FUTURE SHOCK | Su Hui Yu

2022 REDEEMING LOVE | D.J. Caruso

2021 KIDNAPPED SOUL | Huang-Ming Su

2019 BRICK | Wenjian Ding

2019 NINA WU | Midi Z

2017 THE BOLD, THE CORRUPT, AND THE BEAUTIFUL  
Ya-che Yang

2016 ADIEU MANDALAY | Midi Z

2014 ICE POISON | Midi Z

2012 POOR FOLK | Midi Z

### TELEVISION

2020 DREAM RAIDER | Simon Hung\*HBO





## BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

# ABDERRAHMANE SISSAKO / DIRECTOR

Born in Mauritania in 1961 and brought up in Mali, Abderrahmane Sissako went to Soviet Union to attend the VGIK film school in Moscow. He shot there his first shorts.

### FEATURES-FILMS, SHORTS & DOCUMENTARIES

2024 BLACK TEA

2014 TIMBUKTU

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival (Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and François Chalais Prize) - Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film Nomination - Won 7 Cesar Awards including Best Director, Best Film and Best Screenplay

2010 JE VOUS SOUHAITE LA PLUIE (short)

2008 STORIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS (segment: N'DIMAGU- DIGNITY)

2007 TIYA'S DREAM / 8 (short)

2006 BAMAKO I Out-of-competition, Cannes Film Festival

2002 WAITING FOR HAPPINESS I Un Certain Regard, Cannes Film Festival

1998 LIFE ON EARTH I Directors' Fortnight – Cannes

1997 ROSTOV-LUANDA (documentary)

1996 SABRIYA (short)

1995 LE CHAMEAU ET LES BÂTONS FLOTTANTS (short)

1992 OCTOBRE (short)

1989 THE GAME (short)

### OPERA

2020 LE VOL DU BOLI

Created at the Théâtre du Châtelet. Musical composition: Damon Albarn. Book and dramaturgy: Abderrahmane Sissako and Charles Castella. Stage direction: Abderrahmane Sissako.

# CAST

**Aya  
Cai  
Ying  
Li-Ben  
Mei  
Wen  
Trésor  
Vivi  
Toussaint**

**Nina Mélo  
Chang Han  
Wu Ke-Xi  
Michael Chang  
Yu Pei-Jen  
Huang Wei  
Emery Gahuranyi  
Isabelle Kabano  
Franck Pycardhy**

# CREW

A film by	Abderrahmane Sissako
Scenario	Kessen Fatoumata Tall, Abderrahmane Sissako
Original music	Armand Amar
Director of photography	Aymerick Pilarski <i>A.F.C.</i>
Chief editor	Nadia Ben Rachid
Sound	Carlo Thoss, Nicolas Leroy, Loïc Collignon
Sets design	Véronique Sacrez
Costumes	Annie Melza Tiburce
First assistant directors	Clément Comet, Demba Dièye
Production managers	Sacha Guillaume-Bourbault <i>A.D.P.</i> , Sekou Traoré, Nathalie Nghet
Post-production manager	Cédric Ettouati
Producers	David Gauquié, Julien Deris, Denis Freyd
Dune Vision Producer	Kessen Fatoumata Tall
Cinéfrance Studios Producer	Jean-Luc Ormières
Co-producers	Sidonie Dumas, Jeanne Geiben, Vincent Quénault, Vincent Wang, Nobu Tsai Hsin Hung, Philippe Lacôte
Producer	Charles S. Cohen
A production	Cinéfrance Studios, Archipel 35, Dune Vision
In coproduction with	Gaumont, Red Lion, House on Fire, House on Fire International, Wassakara Productions, Arte France Cinéma
With the support of	Film Fund Luxembourg, Eurimages, Canal+
With the participation of	Ciné+, Arte France, Orange Studio
In association with	Cohen Media Group
With the support of	L'Aide aux cinémas du monde - Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée - Institut français TAICCA - International cooperation investment project plan Kaohsiung Film Fund La République de Côte d'Ivoire - Le ministère de la Culture et de la francophonie de Côte d'Ivoire en partenariat avec le Fonsic Red Sea Fund, a Red Sea international film festival initiative



DUNE VISION



HOUSE ON FIRE



arte



eurimages



CINÉ+



COHEN MEDIA GROUP

