

YOU WILL DIE AT TWENTY

A film by
Amjad Abu Alala



105 min/Sudan/France/Egypt/Germany/Norway/Qatar/In Arabic/2019/Cert. TBC
Winner – Best Debut Film – Venice Film Festival 2019
Winner – Best First Film, Best Screenplay, FIPRESCI Award - Carthage Film Festival 2019
Winner – Hamburg Producers Award – Hamburg Film Festival

Release
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SYNOPSIS:

Based on Sudanese writer Hammour Ziada's short story, *Sleeping at the Foot of the Mountain*, *You Will Die at Twenty* follows the life of Muzamil (Mustafa Shehata) from birth until his 20th birthday. Muzamil's religious Sufi village lies between the Blue and White Nile in Al Jazira state, Sudan, and at the boy's initiation ceremony, a sheik prophesizes that Muzamil will meet an early death at the age of twenty. Transfixed by his grim fate, his mother, Sakina (Islam Mubarak), becomes overprotective and forbids his education, and his despairing father, Alnoor (Talal Afifi), leaves home for many years. The villagers taunt Muzamil, referring to him as "son of death", and he becomes increasingly isolated, with only the opportunity to study the Koran. The quality of his life changes when he meets Suliman (Mahmoud Elsaraj), a Sudanese cinematographer, who imparts his passion for cinema and existential ideas with the curious teenager. A conflict grows within Muzamil between his traditional values and newfound modern aspirations. Will he have the time to act out his desires?

Further information and downloads [here](#)

Photo set can be downloaded [here](#)



CAST

Muzamil	MUSTAFA SHEHATA
Sakina	ISLAM MUBARAK
Sulaiman	MAHMOUD ELSARAJ
Naima	BUNNA KHALID
Almoor	TALAL AFIFI
Set Alnesea	AMAL MUSTAFA
Muzamil (kid)	MOATASEM RASHID
NAIMA (kid)	ASJAD MOHAMED

CREW

Director	AMJAD ABU ALALA
Screenwriter	YOUSEF IBRAHIM, AMJAD ABU ALALA
Production companies	ANDOLFI (France),TRANSIT FILMS (Egypt) DUOFILM (Norway), DIE GESELLSCHAFT DGS (GERMANY)
Co-production companies	STATION FILMS (Sudan), FILM CLINIC (Egypt)
Producers	ARNAUD DOMMERC, HOSSAM ELOUAN INGRID LILL HØGTUN, MICHAEL HENRICHS
Co-producers	AMJAD ABU ALALA, MOHAMMED ALOMDA LINDA BOLSTAD STRØNEN MARIE FUGLESTEIN LÆGREID, MOHAMED HEFZY
DOP	SÉBASTIEN GOEPFERT
Editor	HEBA OTHMAN
Sound mixer	RAWAD HOBEIKA
Sound designer	RANA EID
Re-Recording mixer	FLORENT LAVALLÉE
Colourist	BRICE PANCOT
Original music	AMINE BOUHAFI
With the support of	AIDE AUX CINEMAS DU MONDE OF THE CNC INSTITUT FRANÇAIS, DOHA FILM INSTITUTE SØRFOND+, CREATIVE EUROPE MEDIA ARRI INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM BERLINALE WORLD CINEMA FUND FILM- UND MEDIENSTIFTUNG NRW SUDAN FILM FACTORY ARAB FUND FOR ARTS AND CULTUR
In co-production with	CANAL+ INTERNATIONAL SUNNYLAND FILMAS AS A MEMBER OF ART GROUP THE CELL POST PRODUCTION

105 mins

1:2.39 5.1

Sudan/France/Egypt/Germany/Norway/Qatar 2019

AMJAD ABU ALALA

Amjad Abu Alala is a Sudanese Director and Producer, born and currently residing in the UAE. He studied media at Emirates University and has worked with various media institutions as a film and documentary director for Arab and Western channels. He has made a variety of short films, which have screened at many different international film festivals. These include: *Oranges and Coffee* (2004), *Feathers of the Birds* (2007), *Teena* (2009) and *Studio* (2012). In 2012 he was supervised by Abbas Kiarostami and in 2013 he received the Best Arabic Theater Script award from the Arab Authority for Theater for *Apple Pies*. He produced a Film Narrative Lab with Doha Film Institute that created five short films. He currently works as Head of Programming Committee at the Sudan Independent Film Festival.

2019 *You Will Die at Twenty*

2012 *Studio*

2009 *Tina*

2007 *Feathers of the Birds*

2004 *Coffee and Oranges*



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

What drew you to filmmaking?

I am 37-year-old Sudanese with Sudanese nationality, but I was born and raised in Dubai. I spent five years in Sudan when I was a teenager and *You Will Die at Twenty* has a lot to do with this period. This is where I fell in love with cinema and where I watched a film by the late Egyptian director, Youssef Chahine, for the first time. I began to look for all his films and then for works by other directors. Years later, at the university in Dubai, there was a camera available for the students and I used it for my first short films.

Was shooting this film a way to get back to your Sudanese roots?

Certainly! Being raised in Dubai helped me understand what a film industry could be and how to meet people. I created a production company and produced some shorts by other directors. Meanwhile, I was always wondering why Sudanese cinema had totally stopped. The older directors were waiting in vain for government money but as a new generation, we saw new ways.

From 2009, we began doing workshops through the Sudan Film Factory and in 2014 we held the first edition of the Sudan Independent Film Festival in Khartoum, which I really enjoyed programming. In Sudan, young aspiring filmmakers can only see Arabic or US commercial films. They feel a big gap between what they see and what they want to do. The idea was to open a window to show another kind of cinema from the world. The government let us proceed and officially supported the Festival, but their means of support was by just not forbidding it!

Where does the subject of *You Will Die at Twenty* come from?

It comes from a short story by a very well-known Sudanese writer and activist, Hammour Ziada. He lives in Egypt because he was banned from Sudan for ten years. I read his story in 2016 and immediately knew it would inspire my first feature. This story connected me deeply with my own childhood. I am quite a joyful guy, I love life, I talk too much, I drink and I love partying. But there is always something in my mind about death. When I was a child in Sudan, I lost my best friend and then three months later, one of my aunts. Those two deaths struck me. I became a very quiet child, stopped talking for weeks, then started again, but very little until I went to university and discovered theatre and cinema. Then I spoke a lot and have never stopped since!

Would you say that this story is a fable about what prevents people from really living their lives?

The film addresses the extent to which a strong belief can really affect people's lives and the way this is sometimes used politically. The Sudanese government of al-Bashir used

Islam to shut everyone's mouth. When you say, "God says", no one talks any more. My film is an invitation for freedom. Nothing and no one can ever tell you: this is your destiny, it is written somewhere. You have to decide for yourself what your life will be. That is what Suleiman tries to teach Muzamil. Suleiman says you have to experience sin to choose the right way. Why say "sorry" before making the mistake? Go make the mistake and then be sorry. Suleiman wants Muzamil to live his life: a life full of good and bad, where nobody tells you what is the right way. You have to experience life to know who you are.



Is the story set in today's Sudan? Is the village realistic?

We shot in my dad's village, where we used to go on vacation, and apart from changing some colours here and there, we did not build anything. This is the village as it is. The short story was set where Hammour Ziada was raised, in the north of the country, close to Egypt. I told him I wanted to bring it to my home, central Sudan. It was even truer because Sufiism, this kind of mystic Islam, opposed to Salafism, is very strong in this region. The ceremony where the dervish collapses is Sufiism. The village is three hours south of Khartoum – it is the part of the country between the two Niles: the Blue Nile, which we see in the film, and the White Nile, both meeting in Khartoum to give birth to the large Nile.

Where do the images Suleiman shows to Muzamil come from?

Those clips of Sudan before the Islamic regime come from a documentary called *Khartoum*, made by a very well-known director, Jadallah Jubarra, who died in 2008. We see people dancing in Khartoum – people were free before 1989. When the Islamic government closed every bar and then shut down the national cinema institution, the religion card was played and Sudan became a dark spot for thirty years.

Last spring, Sudan finally got rid of Omar al-Bashir, who ran the country since the 1989 coup. Is the film a message to Sudanese people, a call for freedom?

Muzamil's final running is a metaphor of what the Sudanese people are doing right now, even if eventually they still have to deal with the army. I wrote the film before the

revolution, but freedom was always my subject. We started shooting mid-December, on the same day as the first spark of revolution started in the very north of Sudan, in Atbara. Everyone on the set was so excited. Even the foreigners, and in particular the French people, were especially passionate. The smell of freedom was all over our set.

In April 2019, I left post-production in Cairo to get back to Sudan to be part of the events. I spent two months there. I was in Khartoum on the 6th of April when the giant sit-in began, brutally ended by the military forces a few weeks later. Most of my crew were there and were beaten very badly, and I even lost a friend amongst the victims. Of course, all this affected the film. One example was the first time Muzamil goes to Suleiman's house and listens to a song. I had thought of playing this French song *La Bohême* by Charles Aznavour but then decided to rather use a song by Muhammad Wardi, which was the anthem of the 1983 revolution and could be heard everywhere in Khartoum this April. Wardi was a very well-known communist singer in Africa, who was banished from Sudan. The words go something like, "We are all inspired by revolution... and we will get what we deserve."

Tell us about your actors and crew...

There is no cinema industry in Sudan and therefore very few actors. But I only needed professional actors for Sakina and Suleiman's parts. For Muzamil, I met 150 boys, and at the end of the second day, Mustafa appeared. I put together an international crew, but if the heads of departments were foreigners, their assistants were Sudanese. I wanted Sudanese technicians to learn how a film is made. I deeply wish for the re-birth of a Sudanese film industry. My film is only the eighth fiction feature film ever produced in Sudan!



A FEW HISTORICAL LANDMARKS ABOUT SUDAN

Sudan became independent in 1956, after having spent more than half a century under Anglo-Egyptian rule. For thirty years, the country has been ruled by al-Bashir, brought to power by a coup in 1989. He appointed himself leader of the Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation, turning Sudan into a dictatorship. By 1991, he applied the Islamic law, accelerating the opposition between the Muslim North of the country and the Christian and Animist South.

In 2009, he was charged in vain by the International Criminal Court of crimes against humanity and genocide because of his participation in the Darfur civil war. Last December, a huge wave of protests began in the north of the country because of the rise in bread prices and general impoverishment since the independence in 2011 of South Sudan, an oil-rich region. The government violently fought the demonstrators throughout the country, injuring or killing tens of thousands of Sudanese citizens.

On 11th April 2019, al-Bashir was overthrown by a military coup. Demonstrations continued to try force the army to give back the power to the people. On 3rd June, soldiers brutally destroyed a peaceful demonstrators' camp set up in front of the army headquarters in Khartoum leaving more than a hundred dead, a thousand injured, and some raped. At the beginning of July, an agreement was made – a transition regime, which will last at least three years, with civilians and soldiers sharing power.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

By Nina E. Rothe

<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/i-think-cinema-is-experience-amjad-abu-alalas-you-will-die-at-twenty-in-venice/>