



# DAO

a film by ALAIN GOMIS

LES FILMS DU WORSO, SRAB FILMS AND YENNENGA PRODUCTION

present



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Filmfestspiele  
Berlin

**Berlinale** Competition

# DAO

a film by  
**ALAIN GOMIS**

FRANCE – SENEGAL – GUINEA-BISSAU  
FICTION • FRENCH, MANJAK, WOLOF, CREOLE PORTUGUESE • 2026 • 185'  
FORMAT: 1.85 • SOUND 5.1

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# SYNOPSIS

*Dao is a perpetual circular movement framing reality.*

A family weaves the threads of a heritage that travels between worlds. Joy and pain, memory and transmission. A wedding in France, a commemorative ceremony in Guinea-Bissau. Two celebrations, organically intertwined through bodies and time, leading to a rebirth.



# ALAIN GOMIS

In 2001, *L'AFRANCE*, Alain Gomis' first fiction feature film, narrated the struggles of a Senegalese student in France. The film was awarded a Silver Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival.

His second film *ANDALUCIA*, starring Samir Guesmi, was shown at the Venice Film Festival in 2007. *TEY (AUJOURD'HUI)*, his third feature starring Saul Williams, shown in competition at the Berlinale, won a Golden Stallion at Fespaco.

He returned to the Berlinale in 2017 with *FÉLICITÉ* where it won the competition's Grand Jury Prize, followed by a second Golden Stallion at Fespaco. The film represented Senegal at the Oscars where it was shortlisted for Best Foreign Language Film.

In 2022, *REWIND & PLAY*, his first feature-length documentary was a free archives based archival film on the legendary jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk. It premiered at the Berlinale (Forum) and won the best middle-length documentary at Toronto's HotDocs.

In 2018, he created the Yennenga Centre in Dakar, Senegal, a cinema socio-cultural center and school, to develop production and post-production in West Africa.

In 2026, he will present *DAO*, his sixth feature film.



# INTERVIEW

with ALAIN GOMIS

## How did *Dao* come about?

The film didn't spring from a specific idea at a given moment, it came together from things that accumulated over time.

My father's funeral ceremony in Guinea-Bissau was an incredibly powerful and important moment in the process. I knew I wanted to create something from that experience, but I didn't yet know what form it would take. And then a year or two later, I went to a wedding...

I started writing in 2018, after *Félicité*. Then came the documentary *Rewind and Play*, and alongside that, I was working on another fiction project. *Dao* took shape during that period, while I was juggling several projects – it's a story that came together slowly, layer by layer.

## What fueled your thought process as the project evolved?

*Dao* explores a generation of immigrants' children who've reached the age where they're supposed to pass things on, but often without ever knowing their grandparents. It's a generational gap that raises questions about time and the life cycle. What interests me is this idea that you're never really prepared for the age you are. You're no more prepared to turn fifty than you were to turn ten. Each age comes with its share of naivety.

At the same time, there's something comforting about having already been through hardships. You tell yourself that you held strong, you overcame certain things. That can give you a kind of confidence going forward, even when you don't know exactly what's coming. But most importantly comes the question of transmission. What are we actually able to pass down?

What's beautiful about reunions is that pleasure of seeing each other older, seeing the kids who've grown up strong, and the handful of elders still with us. When they go, the past goes with them, and what's left is the weight of the present.

### **You sometimes refer to this generation as "survivors"...**

In France, I feel like these are people who had to invent everything from scratch, with no models to follow, earning every step forward, creating their own images and their own ways of existing. There's this deep tenderness and immense pride, almost a sense of surprise.

In Guinea-Bissau, they grew up in absence: parents gone, scattered everywhere. The notion of here no longer holds any value.

We come together for weddings and funerals, and it's in those moments that we decide what to pass down, what to transform, what to invent – and where we heal the fear of what's been lost.



In *Dao*, transmission is a lived experience: from mother to daughter, from the dead to the living, through ceremonies that, beyond any specific beliefs, allow us to define ourselves together. *Dao* speaks to this perpetual movement, to the constant relations between beings and the world.

The film pays tribute to this generation while naming what hasn't been passed down: colonization, wars, forced displacements. Stories often silenced because they're traumatic, but crucial for constituting identity and reclaiming dignity. So, the film embraces direct, necessary language – certain things have to be said out loud.

In the film, my cousin tells the story of his father's death, he was killed by a landmine while delivering weapons for the PAIGC<sup>1</sup>. A story he's never told his own children. I only found out by listening to him.

And ultimately, it's everyone's story.

### ***Dao* also embodies a desire to show oneself differently...**

The film is constructed as a space for collective expression, where we ask ourselves together what we want to pass down, what we want to look like. Fiction allows us to challenge each other more deeply.

I felt like there were things we didn't show, out of fear of being judged, disregarded, or reduced to certain images. As if, to be accepted, we had to conform to what other expected of us.

With *Dao*, I wanted to do the opposite: show things as they are, in their entirety, and the way the people being filmed want to show them.

This question – how do we want to represent ourselves – became central. I feel like we're often frustrated by the way we're perceived. *Dao* was also born from that desire.

In that sense, the film is a celebration and an act of affirmation. These men and women aren't claiming anything, they just are, for themselves, and for the world. They said very simple things to each other that they themselves needed to say and hear.

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<sup>1</sup> African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde.

## Why does casting play such an important role in the film?

Sometimes, what happens during casting sessions is so powerful that I wish it were in the film itself.

In *Dao*, the script already had these “casting” sections, open zones where what was written was going to be tested by the reality of actual encounters. Sometimes, I got what I’d imagined. A lot of times, it produced something completely different.

There’s something incredibly physical about these first encounters, something deeply intuitive. The possibility of connection, truth, and trust appears. You can risk everything. A unique relationship forms: a mother and daughter are born simultaneously.





When Katy and D'Johé find something together – a rapport, a way of talking to each other – it's very powerful. D'Johé can speak to a mother without being herself, choosing what she wants to say. And Katy can step into that space with a force like that of an actual mother-daughter bond, but with far more freedom. Fiction offers protection, and the chance to explore, to say things to each other they couldn't otherwise say.

And casting was also a place for exchange, for sharing experiences, for a common History. And I felt that conversation had real value. Showing the process is also a way of trying to draw the viewer into an experience that could be their own.

### **Can you talk about the writing process during the shoot?**

With each film, I work more and more with what happens in the present. *Dao* pushes this logic, of making the film as we're shooting it, even further.

Almost none of the dialogue is scripted in advance. It's like making the film from the inside, seeing it, adapting...

Rehearsals only serve to establish relationships between characters. Then, the scenes unfold during the shoot as they need to in that particular moment.

It's mainly about creating a framework to enrich the film collectively, almost writing it together. This process was a real pleasure, an awakening.

On set, we do as little as possible of "quiet, rolling, action". Working with Céline Bozon on camera, and the whole technical crew, makes that possible. Céline and I wear earpieces and communicate constantly. It's up to us to adapt to what's happening. We shoot very long takes, sometimes thirty minutes...

The shoot ended up extending beyond the film itself: people kept interacting even when they were far from the camera. Older guests would come give advice to the bride and groom off-screen... At a certain point, the wedding became a "real" wedding and the ceremony a "real" ceremony.

I think that by stripping away the ornamental attributes of fiction filmmaking, we simply see more clearly. And by showing the mechanics, we restore belief... conscious belief.

### **Like *Félicité*, the film adopts a female perspective...**

The film first comes to me that way, with a character... Take the ceremony in Guinea-Bissau, I'm familiar with it, but not from a woman's perspective. By looking through that lens, I discover the ceremony in a different way. I don't know everything; I don't understand everything.

### **The ritual ceremony as a cinematic experience...**

Going to Guinea, to my father's village, and showing those things, meant the risk of falling back into the capture of an ethnographic gaze. The challenge was precisely to escape that: to reclaim the image and the representation of oneself. And to show its fluid nature, in perpetual adaptation. Tradition is made in the present.



We wanted to create a “fake” ceremony: we decided together what to show and what to leave out. We replicated and reimagined things that couldn’t actually be filmed or used like, sacred spaces... But at some point, the lines became blurred.

The film kept moving between reality and fiction, to the point that certain moments seemed ostensibly documentary, even though they are not, and vice versa. The film has a life of its own. It’s an act of collective fiction, and within that, independent, and sometimes unsettling things emerge.

**That collective dimension also comes through in the music, which plays a central role in the film...**

Yes. Whether it’s the traditional music played during the ceremony or at the wedding, it isn’t meant to just accompany, it’s part of what we’re experiencing and what we’re transmitting.

There's *Blues for a Hip King* by Abdullah Ibrahim, which stayed with me throughout the film. And then Gaspard Gomis, my nephew, and the young, incredibly gifted saxophonist Keïta Janota. The next generation. For me, culture is where we construct ourselves – it's what connects us to other people and to the world.

Cinema, especially, is a shared intimacy, a collective "I".



# IN CONVERSATION

with actresses **KATY CORRÉA** and **D'JOHÉ KOUADIO**

**Your journeys toward *Dao* are very different. How did you each come to the project?**

**Katy Corr ea:** At first, I absolutely did not want to act in this film. I really didn't. I could easily picture other professional actresses in that role. I don't like putting myself out there and, more importantly, it's not what I do. I didn't feel qualified. I turned it down several times.

I eventually agreed, but for reasons I can't share here. Let's just say this project meant the world to Alain. He was deeply invested in it. He had me in mind, but for me, it wasn't a given. I kept thinking it wasn't my story, not my place.

I gradually understood why he wanted to make this film. Through our conversations, the discussions that opened up, everything started falling into place. He talked about his story, his village, his family – his uncles and aunts – his father's house, that place that's so deeply his. We went through the emotions together. It was deeply personal, because we knew exactly who and what we were talking about.

I understood that this film was a way to honor my uncle, Alain's father, as well as our customs, our traditions, and our stories, told from the inside. From that point onward, I knew I had to commit fully, take it seriously, for him.

Then, when Samir Guesmi arrived during the casting process, everything happened very naturally. We talked, we worked, and at one point, I even forgot we were already in the film.



**D’Johé Kouadio:** I came onto the project through a very unusual casting process. Juliette, the casting director, had told me beforehand: there was nothing to prepare, and I should just bring a photo of myself. We started by talking about me. There was no script, no written character. And then, little by little, something shifted toward the film. It felt more like a meeting than an audition.

The casting worked like an actual shoot. We acted in very different situations, with multiple partners, without strict instructions. It was incredibly free and very rare. We took our time.



## What was it like meeting each other?

**Katy Corr ea:** When I first met D’Joh , I just wanted to hug her. It happens very rarely, but in that moment, it was immediate. Something very clear happened between us. We chose each other. When she spoke to me, I understood the emotion she was carrying. There are no coincidences. All these people had a reason to be there, in Guinea, in this film.

**D’Joh  Kouadio:** We spent a lot of time looking at each other before we spoke. We did physical exercises, vocal work. We screamed together. It might sound strange, but it creates an instant connection. After that, stepping into a mother-daughter relationship felt much more natural. It allowed us to build a very organic, very instinctive rapport.

There were also coincidences, little signs that matter in this kind of process.

## How did you navigate the boundary between you and your character?

**Katy Corr ea:** I don’t see myself on screen. That person isn’t me, I’m playing a role. I understand now what actors mean when they talk about concentration.

It’s almost like splitting in two: you’re asked to become someone else, to inhabit another life. I didn’t draw from my own experiences. I never experienced that with my own daughter. That family trip to the ancestral village – I’d never done that in real life, so I was discovering it through acting it out. There was improvisation, but within a precise framework. We were making it up together while knowing our destination.

**D’Joh  Kouadio:** The boundary was very thin. From the beginning, I was moved by the idea of the ceremony, of death, of burial. My grandfather had died shortly before in Ivory Coast, and I couldn’t attend his funeral. There was something deeply intimate, almost healing, in that story. At that point in my life, there was very little distance between me and my character. My doubts fed directly into the film. That was the beautiful part, too: the film seemed to be weaving invisible threads between things, almost without us realizing it.



## What do you remember most about filming?

**D’Johé Kouadio:** Our arrival in Guinea-Bissau, with that feeling of being both at home and a foreigner. For the sequence where we arrive in the village, it was the first time we’d actually been there – Alain had insisted that we not go there before the shoot.

The welcome was overwhelming. All these people I’d never met greeted us with incredible warmth. In that moment, we couldn’t tell if we were acting or experiencing something real anymore. The emotion was there, felt by everyone. That scene, along with the ceremony, was one of the most intense moments I’ve ever experienced.

**Katy Corr ea:** The day I got to the village of Cacheu was the first time I’d ever been there. I’d just come out of a short hospitalization. I was tired, fragile, and at the same time overwhelmed by what I was discovering. A real sense of calm, a peace – something very powerful.

The village women are extraordinary – strong, courageous, resilient. Their history isn't written down, it's spoken. Listening to them commands respect. The children have something in their eyes you don't find anywhere else. There's no explaining it.

I was a novice: I didn't think I could act alongside professional actors. I put a lot of pressure on myself, but my scene partners were incredibly generous, patient, and kind. Alain, too. He has a very unique directing style. There was some scripted dialogue, but so much came through his presence, through what he'd whisper in our ears right before shooting. He'd sometimes remind me that it wasn't me who had to speak, but Gloria. He pulled the strings without you feeling it. Sometimes, I'd run from the camera, and he'd come find me in the forest: "You're not here to heal people, you're here to make a film."

I had two lives for a while. I was Gloria on set and myself everywhere else.

## What did this film change for you?

**Katy Corr ea:** The film helped me understand certain things about ceremonies. We often do things on autopilot, because they need to be done. Usually, you learn while doing. This time, we were asked to take time, to observe, understand, and analyze. The meaning, the purpose, was explained to us, and suddenly everything took on a different dimension.

**D'Joh  Kouadio:** This filming experience forced me to let go, to disconnect from my classical training and usual reference points. It was my first film experience, a journey to a country I'd never been to, and the creation of a fictional family that became very real all at once. It acted as an accelerator for me.

It also confirmed why I love cinema: for its ability to create connection, to build worlds, to stir something deep inside us.

Being part of this massive machinery while simultaneously feeling completely free the moment someone says the word "action", that's a unique, magical experience.



# CAST

**Gloria**

Katy Correa

**Pierre**

Nicolas Gomis

**Nour**

D'Johé Kouadio

**Jean**

Fara Baco Gomis

**Slimane**

Samir Guesmi

**Diminga**

Poundo Gomis

**James**

Mike Etienne



# CREDITS

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Director</b>               | Alain Gomis   |
| <b>Screenplay</b>             | Alain Gomis   |
| <b>Cinematography</b>         | Céline Bozon, Amath Niane, Mabeye Deme  |
| <b>Sound</b>                  | Dana Farzanepour, Franck Cartaut, Barnabé Marie Sadio   |
| <b>Set Designers</b>          | Moussa Diene, Eliane Lorthiois  |
| <b>Music</b>                  | Abdullah Ibrahim (existing music), Gaspard Gomis & Space Dukes and Keïta Janota & Cie                                       |
| <b>Editor</b>                 | Alain Gomis, Fabrice Rouaud, Assetou Koné, Dimitri Ouedraogo, Elizabeth Ndiaye, Moustapha Mbalo Dieng                       |
| <b>Production</b>             | Les Films du Worso (France) – Sylvie Pialat and Benoît Quainon and Srab Films (France) – Toufik Ayadi and Christophe Barral |
| <b>Coproduction</b>           | Yennenga Production (Senegal) – Yoro Mbaye and Alain Gomis  |
| <b>Coproduction</b>           | Nafi Films (Senegal) – Yoro Mbaye   |
| <b>Coproduction</b>           | Telecine Bissau Produções (Guinea Bissau) – Carlos Vaz  |
| <b>Additional Producer(s)</b> | Canal+ Afrique  |

