

Visions du réel Festival : Sankara for president !

François Ekchajzer / April 22, 2012



If socialist jubilation doesn't liven up the streets of Nyon any more than the extreme rightwing wave is ruffling the surface of Lake Geneva, politics are nevertheless on everyone's mind at Visions du réel, and that in the best possible way. It's a way that cares about people's right to decide for themselves and about the eternal struggle for freedom, whether it shows a Finnish punk band, a French or a Turkish prison.

On Sunday, while the candidates of the French presidential elections were arguing about the results of the first round in France, the Nyon Festival was paying a tribute to a dead president - illustrious and courageous though more or less forgotten, having reached power after an ordinary coup d'état rather than via elections. A president about whom the Christophe Cupelin from Switzerland has made a documentary, screened at 8pm.

Capitaine Thomas Sankara tells the story of the revolution led by a former prime minister who brought big changes to a small African country (Upper Volta) – a process which he began by changing its name to Burkina Faso (« Land of the Upright Men »). In just under two hours, this film based on edited archives, recalls the various projects Sankara undertook between the summer of 1983 and the fall of 1987. We hear the frank and humorous voice of the president explains his attempts to bring political independence to his country, deal with foreign debt, attain food self-sufficiency, educate the youth, emancipate women and eradicate corruption.

« I was 19 years old and I didn't know anything about him when, in 1985, I went to Burkina for a humanitarian mission, carrying a Super 8 camera in my luggage », explains Christophe Cupelin who then also discovered what he was going to do with his life. Having never left

Europe before, he immediately fell in love with the country and its revolution, to the extent of wanting to film them.

This desire was reinforced by the murder, on 15 October 1987, of the man whose name became taboo in a country run since then by Blaise Compaoré, a close friend of Sankara and who was seemingly responsible for his death – a murder that still hasn't been elucidated. Except for a street name in Ouagadougou, there are no traces of his four-year presidency in the national memory. « I remember having spoken of Sankara to a 25-year-old Burkinabé, who only knew he had governed the country and who had a negative image of him. When I told her about what I knew and what was happening at the time in 1985, she wouldn't believe me. I wanted to make this film for her, to a certain extent ».

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