



TOURA D´OR 2008

Category “Informational films and documentaries”

Journey of a red fridge

Lunam Docs, Serbien

(52 minutes, Nepali and Thulung Rai with English subtitles, 2007)

Lucian and Natasa Muntean from Novi Sad/Serbia share a story with the audience that may strike as absurd: From the heights of the Himalayas at an altitude of about 3,000 m in the Annapurna region, 17-year-old Hari Prasad Rai carries a big red fridge down into the valley to have it repaired.

The Nepalese scenery in which the young man carries his heavy load over a period of several days is inhospitable and at the same time so beautiful that it seems unreal. The landscape and the boy's encounters with the people are documented in an unobtrusive manner. The film team completely remains in the background – only at the end of the film are there a few final, sparing sentences regarding a decision the protagonist had been struggling with. The film fascinates due to the might of the images, the excellent camera work, the editing, the music which has been used sparingly, the original sound and the often surprising conversations by the wayside.

In between, Hari Rai talks about his daily life as a porter, in a modest, self-critical and humorous way. At the age of 14, he started to work as a porter to earn money for his education – and this tour is also meant to help him finance his studies which he had taken up in the meantime. By joining him along his way, we learn a lot about people's living conditions in the Himalayas, about the clash between tradition and modernity. And about the tourists whose luggage Hari carried – and once even a tourist herself. In a few sentences about Western tourists, the young Nepali holds a mirror up to the western audience – and without any difficulty the viewer recognises his own society in the boy's description.

Investments into education as a perspective for a promising future: The example given in this documentary shows how difficult, yet promising this can be, for Hari's goal is to learn English and to contribute – as a tourism manager – to the prosperity of his native place.

In a surprising, captivating and touching manner, the story shows the opportunities as well as the dark sides associated with tourism. The audience learns a lot about the working conditions of the porters and, not least, about the brutality of child labour. About one third of the children in Nepal have to contribute to their families' livelihoods. The film project was supported, among others, by the "Global Fund for Children."

It needs to be stressed that the film does not use a strong moralizing undertone to highlight problems. Rather, it criticises tourism in a very subtle and therefore even stronger manner. The film manages to address particularly young people: by its witty presentation, the aesthetic and authentic documentary work, the fascinating encounters with local people and the very likeable protagonist Hari – a character with whom viewers can identify.