

# ENCOUNTERS ON THE MILKY WAY



**A film by Juerg Neuschwander**

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR **HAMIDOU FATOUMATA DIALLO, MOHAMED SADOU DIAGAYÉTÉ** | MUSIC **ALI FARKA TOURÉ, DINDA SARRÉ, WELTARÉ DOUENTZA, BAZOUNOU**  
CAMERA **PATRICK LINDENMAIER, STEFF BOSSERT** | FILM EDITOR **REGINA BAERTSCHI** | SOUND **INGRID STAEDLI, SANDRA BLUMATI** | SOUND EDITOR **PETER VON SIEBENTHAL**  
PRODUCTION **CONTAINER FILM AG, JUERG NEUSCHWANDER**

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We Peul sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of our animals, we don't do it for the profit. We want the wellbeing of the cows. Whenever possible we avoid selling our animals. Many of us want a huge herd instead of milk and butter. We don't think that the animal signifies wealth that needs to be exploited. In Switzerland we saw how you can profit from cows. But it is difficult to exploit something that you regard as your brother.

*(Amadou Dicko, Baraboulé)*

On our farm we have to branch out into non-agricultural areas. The programme «Manager as Farmer» is a project in which managers take a break from the working world, we try to integrate them into life on the farm, to teach them how to treat nature, and what a cow is, and so they can relax a little.

*(Hanspeter Heimberg, Lobsigen)*



We produce an energy-drink from whey because nature, pure nature is something very powerful. It is a gift. When you drink it you work a lot faster, and you enjoy working. We call it fresh natural energy from Gstaad – Cow Power. The natural response to Red Bull.

*(Hanspeter Reust, Gstaad)*

The world is not static, it changes inevitably. God doesn't accept standstill. Duality reigns the world: day and night, light and darkness. Those who reject this change stand in contradiction to the creator. The Peul used to have the power, a better life, space, territory. Circumstances have changed, and so has knowledge. The intelligent ones, those who understand and have visions for the future are beginning to change. Those who haven't understood, deny change. Those who do not want to change, waste away.

*(El Hadji Boubacar Sankoro, Somena)*





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A film by Juerg Neuenschwander (The Power of Healing)

## THE MILKY WAY AT THE FRONT DOOR

A meadow in the Alps, veiled in a light haze, cowbells are ringing. Cows appear out of nothing like shadows, like mythical creatures from legendary worlds. A man in the morning mist is trying to call the animals to him. A herdsman? If so, he's not from the Alps, not from the Simmental mountains, he's a dark-skinned man from Burkina Faso, wearing a turban.

«Encounters on the Milky Way», these are encounters between different worlds – between savannahs and alpine meadows, between West Africa and Switzerland. Or a road movie with a difference, one that doesn't move from city to city, from adventure to adventure, but one that unites people with people. Snapshots documenting contrasts and revealing similarities.



In the film people from Switzerland and West Africa meet in pairs: a breeder from Burkina Faso meets a big dairy farmer from the Swiss Lake District, an organic farmer meets a charismatic vet from the Sahel. In spite of all the differences they always find things in common: their eye for economic profit, their respect for people and animals, or their striving for development.

Images cut in a surprising way speak for themselves. They talk about encounters of the second dimension, between the Third World and consumer society. They open our eyes – to see beyond udder and yoghurt – in a cunning analysis of the philosophy of milk.

The film is part burlesque, part poetry. It shows watchful people willing to risk change. The director, Juerg Neuenschwander, was himself born in the Emmental. His previous film about herbalists and faith-healers, «The Power of Healing», was a great success.



## THE MILKY WAY IS SO NEAR...

«Who dominates, you or the cow?»

«Me!»

«No. You think you dominate the cow by thinking, but you don't know that it does not think.»

«But I'm sure that it does not think.»

«A cow is a wonderful being, it is not simply an animal, it is nearly a friend.»

«Amadou, do you see the ugly cows?»

«I have seen them.»

«They don't have horns!»

«They don't.»

«They don't have humps and they are too fat.»

«Indeed!»

«We in Africa, we like sugar very much. I have noticed that none of the cheeses I have tasted here contain any sugar. Don't you like sugar in your country or why don't you put sugar in the cheese?»



### **A film with cattle breeders and cows - isn't this risky?**

*Juerg Neuenschwander:* Yes, of course. This subject has a very burdened history; in Switzerland there have been a few exoticising or pessimistic films about peasants/farmers that I didn't want to approach. That's why I decided to work with people who look forward and say, «We want to change the situation for the better.» The cow serves, so to speak, as a bridge to fascinating people of the most different origins.

### **Globalisation is a hot topic but you relate it to milk, one of the oldest consumer goods.**

*J. N.:* Milk has had a forming influence on us in Switzerland. Somehow we're all cow herdsman. Exactly the same thing is true for the Peul. In their legend of the origins of the world – as told in the film – the world grows from a drop of milk. I'm interested in this traditional track. I didn't want to transport the topic of globalisation via a modern global product that is pushed on people with the same publicity campaigns world-wide. Another starting point for my research was that the Swiss agricultural production has been market-oriented for a long time. The Peul are still at the very beginning of this development. Subsistence agriculture is still most important for the Peul. The cow has a value in their daily lives, not on the market. For them the cow is, as they put it, «a brother». That's why a traditional Peul can't commercialise what his cow produces, at the most he can give the milk as a gift. There is no urge to refine the product and to conserve it. The Swiss farmers, however, stand at the end of this development. Many have to ask themselves nowadays if the production of cheese is still worthwhile.

### **Are the scenes in the car real?**

*J. N.:* Hamadou and Amadou arrived in Switzerland, and I installed the camera in the car overnight. The next day we started. They knew that we wanted to make a film. We went to one of the Swiss farmers. I didn't make any suggestions concerning the content of the interview.



### **Will the film be shown in Africa?**

*J.N.:* Of course, we are going to show it in West Africa as well. We can show it at the Panafrican Festival FESPACO in Ouagadougou – as a special film, however, because in the official programme they show only films entirely made by Africans. We will travel to the people in the villages and in the cities by Cinemobiles, small cinemas on wheels. Various regional organisations of the Peul will organise it all by themselves. It is going to be my assistant director, Fatoumata Diallo's concern that the film will be shown wherever the Peul live, all over the Sahel, from Cameroon to Senegal.

### **This was your first visit to Africa. What did you experience?**

*J.N.:* I was impressed by the slow pace. I'm a hectic person but the heat, the climate, the food in the Sahel knocked me down. I was virtually slowed down. It was a thrilling experience. Another one was the courtesy among the Peul. When I wanted to have things my own way or when I was irritated, everything came to an immediate halt – either they became sad or they went away. Finally, I will always remember these cows. They are like oversized deer, fast, nimble, nervy. They don't lie about like ours, but are always on the move. And they don't have to chew continually like our cows that eat 80 kilos of grass every day.

## **ENCOUNTERS ON THE MILKY WAY**

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94 Minutes / 35mm / Colour / 1:1,85 / Dolby SRD EX

Burkina Faso, Mali, Switzerland

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Festivals:

Locarno International Film Festival, Switzerland

International Film Festival Duisburg, Germany

Solothurn Film Festival, Switzerland

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