East European Film Bulletin

INTERVIEW

Alexandru Solomon on *Kapitalism: Our Improved Formula*

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In "Kapitalism: Our Improved Formula", director Alexandru Solomon looks at current Romania from the perspective of seven powerful men. We spoke to Solomon about the idea for the film, the way Romanians deal with politics and documentary filmmaking.

How did you get the idea for "Kapitalism: Our Improved Formula"?

I was 21 in 1990 when Ceaușescu was overthrown and like most young people I thought that the revolution would lead us to capitalism and a civilised democracy. With this film, I wanted to see what has happened since and see why we didn't get where we were hoping to get.

Why did you decide to tell the film from the perspective of the seven businessmen?

Usually, when people talk about capitalism, they talk to the neglected and the poor. I wanted to take the angle of the top, partially because these seven men we follow in the film are part of a class that decide over the fate of Romania.

How did they receive the film?

Obviously, most of them were unhappy with the film and expressed their discontent in the press. One of them did screen the film on his TV channel which means that he liked it, but the problem is that he did not buy the rights or ask me, so I managed to force him to stop the broadcast.
Some of them even went to the Bucharest premiere where they were confronted with the reaction of the audience, which was probably what shocked them most because they are usually not exposed directly to the opinion of normal people.

Are people in Romania aware of the reality you depict in your film?

I do think that there is a sort of common knowledge that everyone is told. Romanians know that people in power have become enriched and that corruption is part of everyday life, but they blame Romanian reality on the authorities instead of fighting it on a small scale.

Are Romanians becoming apolitical?

I do think that Romanians are very apolitical. The political landscape in Romania is very strange- the parties do not act on a ideological basis. What they have in common is their affinity for business.

Do you have an explanation for this lack of political culture in Romania?

I don't think it is a Romanian problem we are talking about. With *Kapitalism:Our Improved Formula*, I traveled to many Eastern European countries where this problem was well-known. For instance, I talked to people in the Czech Republic who told me that privatization there was a disaster.

How was the film received in Eastern Europe? Is there a difference to the audience in the West?

I think that people in Eastern Europe understand my film better, they feel closer to the problem and participate.

What about Romania?

People were very interested in the film, it had good attendance and press coverage. Although the things I talk about in the film are not a surprise for many Romanians, what it does for them is that they begin to identify with the businessmen on a human level.

Do you think that Romanian directors share a critical opinion towards the authorities?

Yes, but I don't think that Romanian cinema is very critical of the common political situation, as most films that are considered part of the Romanian New Wave are either set in Communism or in lowlife settings.

Do you think that things in Romania are changing?

I think things will change. New generations are coming that are, so to say, not infected by the past as much as we are.

Do you see documentary filmmaking as a responsibility that bonds you with Romania?

I think that I will probably keep living in Romania. I am bound to Romania, but I think that this connection does not derive from an idea or a mission. What I know best in the world is this country, and I think that you need to talk about things that you went through and that you know by heart. It would be naïve to say that I want to change Romania, but at least I want to speak about the reality here openly.

What do you think documentary is, compared to fictional filmmaking and journalism?

I practice documentary that is very close to fiction, while Romanian fiction films are getting closer to documentary filmmaking, so I don't see documentary and fiction as opposites. If anything is supposed to be objective, then it is journalism. Documentaries on the other hand show a certain point of view. But in the last few years, Romanian TV and press have become closer to tabloids than objective journalism. They stress entertainment, while information is becoming less and less important and balanced. Somehow, documentaries have began to take over this aspect and created an alternative to mass media.

Are documentaries in Romania overshadowed by the New Wave?

Obviously, documentaries are overshadowed by the New Wave, but it is a growing culture. I am organizing a documentary festival in Romania (One World Romania) that started four years ago and we almost doubled the attendance at the last edition.

Do you have an upcoming project?

I am working on a few ideas, but nothing has materialized yet. I wanted to take a break after *Kapitalism: Our Improved Formula* and figure out what to do next, because after *Great Communist Bank Robbery* and *Cold Waves* it is the last piece in a series of films I did on Romania.

Thank you for the Interview.