

...A common ground for nondiscriminatory relations

By Lydie Diakhate



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FIRST of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Femi Odugbemi, Jahman Anikulapo and Makin Soyinka. It has been a countless pleasure to meet them and have them attend the six editions of the *Real Life Documentary Festival* in Accra, Ghana. From 2006 to 2011, the festival showcased films and brought together filmmakers from over 15 African countries, including Haiti, Jamaica, France, England, Germany and the United States. The objective was to stimulate Africans and the Diaspora to document their own histories while exchanging film vocabularies, methods and contexts with filmmakers from Africa and other continents. We had memorable and inspiring conversations about theory and aesthetics as it relates to African cinema and its diaspora. We staged numerous workshops and trainings to imagine and foster a film industry in Africa we could be proud of together.

Furthermore, the intent of *Real Life Documentary Festival* was to amplify the place of African visions in the world and its art forms. For that reason, you can imagine my excitement when, in 2010, Femi, Jahman and Makin decided to found iREP, in Lagos, following the *Real Life Documentary Festival's* programming and format.

I WAS blessed to have been invited to introduce a film program and a series of workshops during the first edition of the iREP Festival in Lagos, a pulsating and fascinating metropole. This program was a selection of documentaries from the *Real Life* in Accra.

The theme for the maiden edition was '*Can Documentary Change the World?*' This past decade, numbers of documentaries have been produced. They have all shown that documentary can change the world's perspectives and that new African documentary cinema can rejuvenate the visual expression and political approach of African societies and African descents.

The first workshop series was launched by the talented and worldwide acclaimed Franco-Egyptian filmmaker and producer, Jihan El Tahir. The room was packed -- not only by the usual attendees who

aspired to become directors or cinematographers, but also by the huge number of girls and boys passionate about cinema who aimed to become producers, sound or light engineers, editors, or make-up artists. This was an extraordinary surprise and heartening moment to foresee the future.

Professionals and image lovers, we could call ourselves the jugglers of images; the visual tightrope walkers constantly finding balance between the real and the virtual; the experienced acrobats faced with the multiple challenges imposed by the permanent evolution of new technologies.

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I would also like to acknowledge the rehabilitation of the former prison — Her Majesty's Broad Street Prisons — turned into a successful cultural art center renamed "Freedom Park". A key challenge that improves the notion of patrimony and its rehabilitation, as well as the way we can find resilience in reconsidering dark history engraved in historical landmarks and the pattern of our contemporary societies.

Festivals and encounters around the arts aspire to feed the viewer and the apprentice that we remain throughout our lives, beyond all cultural, social and political boundaries. iREP is one of the platforms that offers new common grounds for respectful and nondiscriminatory relations.

Unexpectedly today, we are facing a violent and extraordinary time for change happening worldwide. More than ever, documentaries have to be supported and distributed widely to continue those engaging and crucial discussions and to nurture our constantly moving societies to find new directions to answer the recurring question: **What is being human?**

- *Diakhaté, Film Producer, Curator for Exhibitions & Cultural Programs, is co-founder/director of the Real Life Documentary Festival (2006-2011)*
