

## ...Connecting generations of Africans

By Jihan El Tahri



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[Jihan El-Tahri - Wikipedia](#)

**I REMEMBER** clearly the first time I met Femi in 2004 at the *Ecrans Noir* film festival in Yaoundé. The two of us were a sort of minority being documentary filmmakers in yet another African film festival that mainly celebrates fiction films. I was delighted to meet a fellow storyteller who was also reflecting on how vital documentary as a genre is to shift the dominant narratives about the continent. Little did I know that Femi, Jahman and Makin would soon be quietly plotting to open up a new horizon -- not just for us documentarians to show our films, but for a whole new generation of young Africans to learn the skills to tell their stories from their own perspective.

The excitement of being invited to screen my film *“Behind The Rainbow”* at the first edition of iREP was suddenly quashed when I arrived at the Johannesburg airport and was told that I couldn’t board the flight. Anything is easier to resolve than visa issues for an Egyptian flying from South Africa to Nigeria, but somehow in no more than 30 minutes, the iREP crew had it sorted. I was profoundly impressed!

It was indeed a good start, but I had only been to Lagos once before a decade earlier and I knew that there was no guarantee for anything to be smooth sailing. I was wrong. Every detail had been thought through -- from the artfully decorated and homey boutique hotel to the gregarious gathering spot at Freedom Park -- and the stage was set for days of in-depth talks, reflection and transmission dedicated to documentary. What a treat.

Looking back a full decade, an image and a sentiment have stayed with me. The image still makes me chuckle since it captures that spirit of making things work no matter how complicated. So, some TV channel covering the festival wanted to interview me and a Sudanese

filmmaker together. Of course, I was very happy to oblige, but the detail we hadn't anticipated was that Mario Mabor who was showing his wonderful film "*Rabbaba man*" was over 2 meters tall while I am seriously short. As the cameraman stood scratching his head pondering how to somehow include us both in the same frame -- out of nowhere came the solution...



The sentiment I keep from this first edition is that of having found myself a community. A handpicked likeminded community conscious that change needs to be provoked and our tool – documentary – is crucial in that process.

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One of the students in that workshop came up to me seven (7) years later with a USB flash drive and asked if I wanted to watch the documentaries he had made since. That was only one of the many highlights of the 2017 iREP edition.

The 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the festival is understandably closest to my heart since the 3 musketeers – Femi, Makin and Jahman – went out of their way to make me feel like an African queen! Not only did iREP bestow on me the honour of a full retrospective of my films, the chosen theme of 2017, "*Archiving Africa*" could not have struck a more appropriate chord. Indeed, I am obsessive about archive, finding it, contextualizing it and questioning its representation once reused. iREP managed to gather in Lagos practically everyone who was passionate about the topic.

After a full day of screenings and workshops interspersed with exciting *Okada* rides to the market, we would still spend hours on end with Femi and the illustrious guests exchanging ideas and talking shop. It all went down very smoothly – with the help of the most delicious bottles of wine handpicked by the very best connoisseur, Mr. Makin himself. It was then that I

discovered that alongside Jahman's many talents he was an exceptional professional dancer!  
What more can a mortal soul ask for?!



I did get an additional bonus on top of all that: I was introduced to Uncle Tam. Tam Fiofori, a photographer, a writer, a critic and he had even been the music manager of Sun Ra -- in short a living legend whom I had read about in some of my research. Magic makers as usual, the iREP crew even organised a camera for me to conduct an impromptu interview with him. Now that was the concrete and tangible translation of archiving the Africa we need to celebrate.

I can only end by saying thank you to iREP, for including me in this amazing journey. Thank you for putting in the herculean effort -- year in and year out -- to make this vital space sustainable. Thank you for connecting generations of Africans who have so much to learn from each other and thank you for the generous continental inclusiveness that is often hard to come by. May iREP live happily ever after.

- *Jihan El Tahri is a filmmaker and culture activist*

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