

On the right side of history

By Aderinsola Ajao



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IT is hard to pick a favourite moment from the *IREP Documentary Film Festival*. Apart from its buffet of films, you have the insightful keynote addresses and filmmaker Q&As; the workshops and producer's roundtables, and more – an array of events that hugely complements each edition's thematic focus. Knowledge transfer is prioritised and this is manifested in the interactions and exchanges that the festival facilitates and enables.

Over the years, I've attended the festival in different roles and I was looking forward to its tenth edition until COVID19 led to its postponement. This would not be the first time that an incident of national - and potentially catastrophic proportions - would affect the festival schedule.

I've been to all of IREP's previous editions: as an independent reporter in its first edition in 2010, and subsequently initiating and co-ordinating the festival newsletter in 2012 with support from Goethe-Institut. The festival's litany of subject matters has prompted memorable discussions at the newsletter team meetings, a major highlight of my involvement with the IREP Festival. Here, a dedicated team of writers and graphic designers convene to produce the newsletter daily over the course of the 4-day event. Later at Goethe-Institut, I would also become involved in organising festival visits for African and German film professionals.

IREP's first edition in 2010 is also special for me, as the festival was - and still is - the only film festival in Nigeria dedicated to documentaries. One of my memories from that year is of watching a film about hip-hop culture in a war-ravaged Sudan.

IREP was also, at that time, one of only few events taking place in the first quarter of the year (rather than in the jam-packed – no pun intended – last quarter), with little else in its way. The festival was however forced to reschedule in 2012 as a result of events that followed the announcement of a fuel subsidy removal. The festival moved from January to March and retained its spot in the latter month.

Until 2020.

2012 now seems so long ago considering how much has happened in 2020.

In 2014, a film about the fuel subsidy protests screened at the IREP Festival. It won't be a surprise to find a film about a recent health pandemic on the festival programme soon.

In its decade of existence, the diversity of sub-themes at the IREP festival remains a constant draw. There is also a dedication to continuity in presenting works by particular filmmakers: Ronke Macaulay's '*Green Passport...*' series come to mind here, as do homages to Tunde Kelani,

Jihan El-Tahri and Jean-Marie Teno, giving film enthusiasts an exposition to these revered filmmakers' oeuvres.

IREP's partnerships with international documentary bodies also ensure that authentic narratives are presented. That the programme spotlights both established and amateur filmmakers also give the impression that all storytellers stand a chance regardless of their proficiency in filmmaking.

Someone once asked if the festival ever rejected submissions. I wouldn't know but with themes spanning the arts and history, governance, religion, identity, resource politics, land theft, race relations, colonialism, mobile telephony, sports and so much more, there is something for everyone.

IREP remains Nigeria's lone documentary film festival. However, guerrilla or last-minute the preparations sometime seem, we have come to anticipate the event as a regular rendezvous boasting a bouquet of discussions and audio-visual historical records that contribute to underscore the festival's over-arching theme of *Africa in Self-Conversation*.

- *Ajao, Art Journalist and literary enthusiast, she was Head of **iREP Report** – an annual project that documents happenings in the course of the festival daily*