

Lagos Film Review



iREP 2016 Daily Coverage Vol. 2

“We have a responsibility to document the world honestly.” – Jane Mote

By Amarachukwu Iwuala

The 6th edition of the annual iREP International Documentary Film Festival - with the theme **#Change, Documentary Film as Agent Provocateur** - commenced on March 24, 2016. Delivering the keynote address, Jane Mote, a TV and media consultant for various companies including BBC Worldwide, made a rallying call to aspiring and established documentary filmmakers: “We have a responsibility to document the world honestly and ask the questions that get us nearer to the truth.”

She further stressed that images are powerful, but create false stories that shape the views of generations when wrongly used. She mentioned how she, in conjunction with Ugandan filmmaker Carol Kanya, has been training young Ugandans to empower them for documentary film-making, which was borne out of the unrelenting practice by Western film-makers to degrade Africa for their own selfish interests through false representations.

During her presentation, Mote displayed the picture of the Queen of England being welcomed by a little girl in Uganda in 1953. Narrating how the beautifully-dressed barefoot girl Bataya from a wealthy and influential family was asked to remove her shoes just before she stepped on the tarmac.



This event producer was convinced that it would make a better picture to see a barefoot African girl, offering a bouquet of flowers to the queen.

According to the keynote speaker, “The documentary series **ON TOUR WITH THE QUEEN** wasn’t designed to change the world, but it has changed this now older woman’s life, finally allowing her to express her distress about succumbing reluctantly to colonial coercion.” All her adult life, Bayata had been ashamed that she consented to doing the producer’s bidding that day. Mote, who spent 16 years at the BBC and had the opportunity

of working with former American Vice President Al Gore on his documentary, **AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH**, listed several documentaries that she believes can be aptly described as *agent provocateur*, observing that well-done documentaries are the noblest of purposes for the media. The documentaries she highlighted included **THE THIN BLUE LINE** (Errol Morris; 1988), **IN THE LAND OF THE FREE** (Vadim Jean; 2010), **GASLAND** (Josh Fox; 2010) and **VIRUNGA** (Orlando von Einsiedel, 2014).

Earlier in his welcome address, Executive Director, iREP, Femi Odugbemi, said that about 50 documentaries will be screened across 3 venues in this year’s

festival from March 24 to 27, 2016. He announced the launch of the IREP Foundation for the Promotion of Documentary Filmmaking in Africa.

The opening event also featured the presentation of a self-portrait to Nobel laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka.

Odugbemi also mentioned that the Director of Goethe-Institut Nigeria, Marc-André Schmachtel, will be rounding off his tenure in June 2016 and he was extolled for partnering iREP since inception. In his short remarks, Schmachtel was full of praises for the people behind iREP, saying that he envisages a situation where his successor would uphold the partnership.

For Man and Country

By Adefoyeke Ajao

It is pretty much cliché to say “behind every successful man, there is a woman”, but for 27 minutes, filmmaker Dare Akpata goes all out to prove this saying. His film, **HID AWOLOWO: THE LEGEND, THE LEGACY**, celebrates the wife of late nationalist Obafemi Awolowo, first premier of the Western Region and former Minister of Finance.

In this film, Akpata tells the story of a wife and mother whose support and confidence – we are made to believe – ensured the success of her husband’s pursuits and the preservation of his legacy.

HID, short for Hannah Idowu Dideolu, is widely regarded as a pillar in the Awolowo family, but Akpata tries to make us realise that the late statesman’s “jewel of inestimable value” was a treasure that Nigerians as well should be thankful for. His narrative emphasises the character and strength of a woman who could hold the forte amidst intimidation and oppression. Nearly all his respondents share this view. Although much of the film dwells on this matriarchal side to Mrs. Awolowo, the director

gives an insight into the publicity-shy HID’s life by using archival footage; interviews with his subject, and leading citizens including Wole Soyinka, Emeka Anyaoku as well as politicians and businessmen. By allowing her to tell her own story and by showing her as a strong and sound woman whose support was instrumental to her renowned husband’s success, the viewer encounters a one-sided narrative. It also begs the question, why she herself could very well not have been the politician or statesman that her late husband was. Akpata, however tries to show, that not participating actively in politics could very well have helped HID remain the objective one in the relationship.

An over-abundance of respondents, ill-suited music, poor sound and visual quality do little to make HID’s story appealing were one not already curious. The lowest low-point though could just be the narrator, in voice-over, bidding her “Adieu” – in reference to her passing – followed by a scene where she thanks him for this audio-visual



Photo by Peace BenWilliams

Akpata may have convinced us that Obafemi Awolowo’s legacy is incomplete without a mention of his wife, but without prejudice to his film-making abilities, it is rather impossible to get rid of the thought that this particular work is a commissioned documercial.

A View from the Cage

By Agnes Atsuah

Most documentary films exploring male friendship and masculinity tend to get carried away by focusing too much on physicality while leaving dialogue, emotional connection and affection to suffer as though the male subjects were incapable of expressing themselves through anything but their muscularity, and aggressive competitiveness.

Director Julian Reich’s debut feature film **WARRIOR FATHER KING** is a refreshing exception, an 85-minute documentary that follows the lives of two cage fighters, Ismail Cetinkaya and Carlos Eduardo Rocha, their desperate quest for better lives and the different paths they each follow to reach it. The title alone hints at the nature of this film, and despite the language barrier and a slight niggling suspicion that the subtitles do not do enough justice to the



dialogue, the emotions, struggles and interactions are genuine. This film refuses to soften any blows as it follows the two fighters both within the cages of their fights and the cages of their everyday realities. Yet the director manages to capture moments of tenderness through the blood and grit, the perturbing undertone of impending violence and barely-controlled aggression, which is a commendable feat in itself.

The use of close-up shots works well and adds to the personal touch of the film although some were not particularly necessary and for a film of this length, the pacing sometimes felt too slow perhaps because of an impatience to follow the fighters on their next misadventure. Surprising comedic moments add even more layers and show an unapologetic need to find and appreciate the humour in life, tribulations and all.

This is not a film about a typical bromance that riddles most films, but a film about real friendships, believable strife and in-your-face experiences and the responses to them, shaped by an environment that can harden boys into warriors, troubled fathers and perhaps through redemption, even kings.

Full schedule for LFS screenings at IREP

With support from Goethe-Institut Nigeria and the Nigerian Film Corporation, Lagos Film Society is organising a 2-day programme of screenings and discussions on Friday, March 25 and Saturday, March 26, 2016. The LFS programme is a satellite event of the IREP International Documentary Film Festival, and will take place daily at the Nigerian Film Corporation, beside Voice of Nigeria, Obalende Rd., Ikoyi, Lagos. Entry is free and all films are in English or with English subtitles.

SATURDAY, 26 MARCH 2016

Panel discussion

IS THERE A FUTURE FOR [NIGERIAN] FILM CRITICISM?

Time: 11AM

Good movie criticism can take you out of the confusion you're left with when the lights come back on; it can make you care about movies, make you aware of the possibilities of movies. This panel confronts the question: Is there a future for [Nigerian] film criticism? Featured panelists include Oris Aigbokhaevbolo (Music In Africa) and Espera Donouvossi (Federation of African Cinema Critics). A keynote address will be delivered by Steve Ayorinde, Hon. Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Lagos State.

Film screening

STATUES ALSO DIE (D: Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Ghislain Cloquet, France, 1953, 30mins)

Time: 1PM

Statues Also Die traces the devastating impact of French colonialism on African art. This film was banned in France for 12 years.

BLACK MARKET MASQUERADE (D: Peter Heller, Germany, 2016, 53min).

In the past months, single art objects have been auctioned off for millions. The film follows the tracks from the poorest carvers in West Africa to the posh trade fair for gallery owners in Brussels and to Paris, where the prices for the art market are made.

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

Presentation and Panel discussion

RECLAIMING HISTORY, UNVEILING MEMORY

Time: 3PM

(A public presentation of an archive project of Lagos Film society, in cooperation with Goethe-Institut Nigeria and British Council Nigeria)

RECLAIMING HISTORY, UNVEILING MEMORY is an invitation to the uncomfortable, but nonetheless exciting journey of reclamation and negotiation through restoration and projection. It is a look back - to the future. In the sense that it seems to place archiving - beyond restoration and digitization - in a curatorial context, in relation to the present and the future.

The presentation will be followed by a discussion panel with Kelani Abass and Uche Uzorka; Kayode Samuel; filmmaker Didi Cheeka; Ivorian artist Ananias Leki Dago, and curator Bisi Silva of the Centre for Contemporary Art Lagos.

Althea's Burden

By Adefoyeke Ajao

In the globalised world we live in, you do not need to be a tennis fan to have heard of Arthur Ashe or the Williams sisters - Serena in particular. But at the mention of Althea Gibson, you either draw a blank or the usual "Althea who?" However, before these black sports stars became icons of the sport, a tomboy from Harlem had blazed the trail in an era of segregation.

In 77 minutes, Rex Miller's ALTHEA (2014) focuses on the life of the first black athlete to conquer all possible barriers in lawn tennis - one who participated simply because she loved the sport. While most of her public life revolved around her success as a tennis player, Miller delves into other aspects that were hidden from public scrutiny. He makes appropriate use of archival footage,



photographs and interviews in telling a compelling story of determination and grit that is rarely heard of these days. The result is an all-encompassing narrative of the life of Althea Gibson; a meticulously-fashioned history lesson that speaks volumes of Miller's skill as a film-maker.

Miller does not set out to present ALTHEA as the usual fairy tale that biopics have now become. It is rather surprising that Gibson did not use her success as a platform to



address the problems of her era, a decision that might have haunted her later on. However, Miller ensures that the story of her depression, poverty and reclusion is told with the same enthusiasm used to portray her successes. The message of this film is clear, the fact that Althea Gibson is not as renowned as she should be does not diminish her reputation as a remarkable athlete and icon whose accomplishments remain embedded in history.

Democracy of Disappointment

By Agnes Atsuaah



As a Nigerian, a Lagosian especially, daily struggles sometimes have to be endured. THE DEMOCRATS, by director Camilla Nielson is a documentary film that shows just how easily daily struggles can become permanent. Any documentary, short film and such about Zimbabwe and her 30-plus years under the dictatorship of her president Robert Mugabe, is bound to draw considerable interest and this 100-minute documentary is no exception. From the opening archival scenes where a small look into Zimbabwe's past state of affairs is shown, to the almost flawless transition to the film itself, it is almost impossible not to be drawn in.

One can already sense a hint of the intense events to come. The film's main topic revolves around the writing of Zimbabwe's first constitution after her independence, and doesn't immediately strike one as interesting, but if you are expecting a film about a congress of politicians sitting around writing pages of rules and regulations, prepare to be sorely disappointed. Mugabe, while given very little screen time, is a constant overwhelming presence in the entire film.

Pacing is done almost perfectly as each scene seems on the verge of an impending, inevitable finale of the failed system that the two often warring political parties so desperately tried to put into place. Desperation, frustration, disappointment and laudable hope are major emotions that mostly close-up shots translate so well, one might as well be part of the unlikely team of politicians and lawyers

tasked with writing a constitution that led to a series of violent, and unexpected events. The two central subjects of this film - to whom Camilla Nielsson and her entire team had unprecedented access - are Paul Mangwana of Mugabe's ZANU-PF party and Douglas Mwonzora of MDC; both lawyers with the daunting task of leading a committee responsible for writing their country's constitution. The party representatives are so relatable and their experiences so well - captured, it is easy to forget they are not professional actors.

Emotions run high and with good reason. Some of the interactions in scenes dealing with strong themes like corruption, biased news reporting, and even senseless mob violence are so ridiculous they are almost unbelievable, until one remembers that these are actual events that happened. Unexpected moments of comedy while funny, also have sad undertones. Small technical details like occasional poor sound quality and poor colouring while unfortunate, do not distract from other details like beautiful wide shots, the reverent worship of Mugabe in certain rural areas and the almost claustrophobic shots in cars that perhaps represent the general suffocating feeling of a country under a dictatorship.

This documentary is not just a typical documentation of a series of events that can sometimes feel disjointed, rather it draws you in; humanises "characters", and gives a face to an attempt at a democratic revolution that never happened. If the ending of the film, left the

audience feeling unsatisfied, then perhaps they now have an inkling of how some of the Zimbabwean people feel.

Lagos Film Review Newsroom

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