



The iREP Report

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Nollywood, for the Record

by Olumuyiwa Akinkuolie



L to R: Bankole Olayebi, Shaibu Husseini, Mahmood Alli-Balogun, Jonathan Haynes, Tunde Kelani, Paul Ugor, Chidia Maduekwe and Bond Emeruwa at the book presentation.

Archiving the African experience or creativity has always been the epicenter of Jonathan Haynes' work. Since his entry into Nigeria in 1992, Haynes, a Professor of English at the University of Long Island, New York, has been in love with the story-telling style in the Nigerian video-film industry. According to him, "they are funny and highly entertaining".

However, years after the inception of 'Nollywood', most of the content which heralded the industry are hardly found on the stands anymore. Haynes points out that the Nollywood model of making films quickly and cheaply is one of the reasons they disappear from the stands almost as soon as they are produced. In fact, over 2000 films are currently in danger of having no records of ever being produced. Among other things, the poor archiving practice of the film industry is

what Haynes' book, *NOLLYWOOD: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* addresses.

The 375-page book which was published in 2017 by Bookcraft, an indigenous publishing company, was presented on Day 1 at the 2018 IREP Film Festival. The tome chronicles the Nigerian video-film industry, or 'Nollywood' as it is fondly called, shedding light on the works of its veterans, and the genres that have graced TV screens.

While describing Haynes and his work, Paul Ugor, an assistant Professor at the University of Illinois, reveals that Haynes is responsible for the creation of a field of study: Nollywood Studies, which is being offered in several higher institutions of learning across the world. According to Ugor, Haynes - through the prominence

given to Nollywood - has succeeded in giving a textual interpretation to the portrayal of a global experience from the perspective of average people on the street.

Haynes is of the view that, "Nollywood deserves credit for its roles as a chronicler of social history, as an organ of cultural and moral response to the extreme provocations and dislocations of contemporary Nigeria, and as the bearer of a true nationalism...". He then appealed to stakeholders in the industry and government representatives who were seated in the audience to give Nollywood the enabling environment to thrive and for their works to be properly documented.

NOLLYWOOD: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres is available for N4000 at the IREP Festival until Sunday, March 25.

Requiem for A Misadventure

by Agnes Atsuah

Cringeworthy. From the cover art for this 54-minute documentary by director Hunter Woo, to the title itself. The synopsis for MY HEART IN KENYA is telling enough: Zeynab, a Muslim Ethiopian refugee resettles in Canada without her sixth child Nasteya, who she is forced to leave behind in Kenya in her sister's care. She pulls the heart strings of a white social service worker with a heart of gold who then decides to travel thousands of miles to Africa, fight all manners of diplomatic red tape, corruption and deplorable roads while spending emotionally draining hours trying to gain the trust of the little black girl she is determined to reunite with her family.

In the process, she learns an 'African' phrase or two while feasting on authentic African food ("This is pure African food, we make them in our garden."). Everyone involved with this film probably had good intentions but the delivery feels off in some way. Perhaps it is because we live in a time where many films and documentaries effortlessly and gracefully break down racial stereotypes of the white saviour complex while telling a story that is relatable and relevant.

MY HEART IN KENYA feels outdated and struggles to connect fully. Even the music - featuring an epic, uplifting, clichéd score when Ruth Beardsley decides to go to Kenya and fix things herself - feels poorly thought out and roughly thrown together. There is no doubt that Beardsley had good intentions and her efforts deserve to be applauded and emulated. The issue is the very little screen time given to the people at the core of this story: Zeynab and her sister Ebla.

Refugees almost never get to tell their stories; the spotlight flickers over them briefly to shine brightly on their saviours and rescuers, with little discourse on the issues that led to them needing to be saved in the first place. It isn't hard to wonder why the focus and narrative is not on Ebla and her sister,

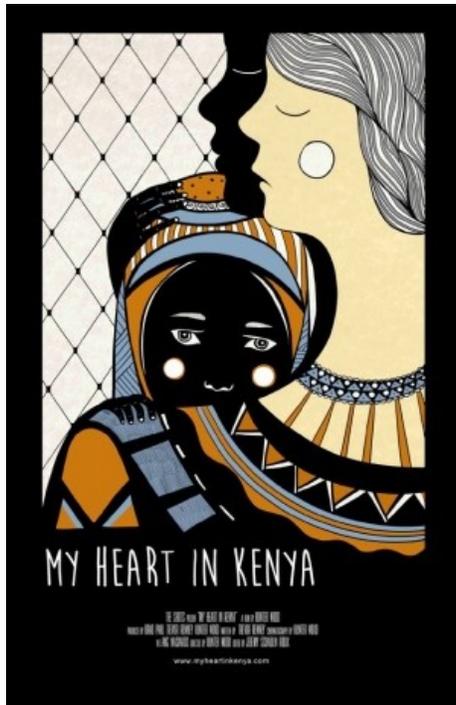
since this is their story too. In the end, we are all Nasteya and her understandable distrust of this strange white lady, who eventually straps her into a walker and takes her from the only family she has ever known in order to improve her life in a country that will struggle to fully welcome and accept her.

A week is all it takes for this to happen, for Ruth to navigate the intricacies of immigration, gain Nasteya's trust and whisk her away to the land of milk and honey. The sense of urgency of those six days completely misses the mark when you understand that this same process would take double, triple that time for someone with less privilege. There is barely any sense of foreboding or anxiety as there is no doubt that Ruth will succeed and all will be well as she only has to use her connections and make phone calls to get the ball of stamps of approval rolling. Her reward for her struggles: a fund in her name.

Something is heavily flawed in this narrative. Nothing is said about the jobs of the family or a real glimpse into their daily lives or if the child even goes to school.

Beautiful Nairobi is portrayed as a country that needs escaping from, even unable to provide adequate healthcare for the sickly Nasteya, as they must wait until Canada to seek care. Yet, this is an almost hour-long film with enough time to fill in a few gaps and tell a more rounded story.

MY HEART IN KENYA offends, more than it illuminates the issues faced by refugees around the world. There is a sense of relief at the four-year flash forward that shows that Nasteya does eventually settle in with her birth family and all is seemingly well. That sense of relief is fleeting however, as one wonders just how many white people it will take to save the many refugees in similar situations.

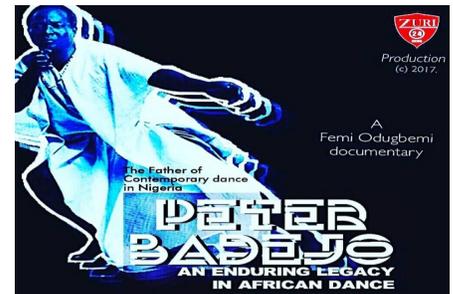


Celebrating Nigeria's Dance King

by Adefoye Aja

PETER BADEJO is a 40-minute documentary that explores the life and work of Professor Peter Adegboyega Badejo (OBE), a universal artist and global dance ambassador. Directed by Femi Odugbemi, it offers a melange of narratives from Peter Badejo himself as well as interviews with other stakeholders within the arts and culture sector.

This film is an excursion from the protagonist's past achievements into his plans for the future. It is not enough that the master choreographer and his associates tell his story, the director buttresses everything they say with relevant archival and modern footage to ensure that the film is more than a retinue of talking heads.



Badejo's passion for his chosen profession is palpable (and almost infectious) throughout the film's runtime, and it is impossible to miss his expertise and the respect he has for indigenous African arts, which he has resolved to study and preserve. It is this resolve that has earned him global recognition and numerous accolades.

PETER BADEJO is a fitting tribute to a celebrated arts legend and Odugbemi should be given credit for documenting the life of a man widely credited with earning African dance some global recognition. However, while Odugbemi does not stint on picture and sound quality, his integration of stock images to portray some of the universities where Badejo has conducted research is a shocking blight that halts an erstwhile seamless flow. It is a setback that makes a largely good film look as if it is barely scratching the surface of its subject.

Where do displaced people go?

Etched on film: David Dale

By Lucia Edafioka

by Olumuyiwa Akinkuolie

Often, governments of cities across the world, in a bid to open up spaces for tourism and state development, uproot people from lands where their ancestors toiled and died, to make way for fancy hotels and tourist sites.

Along the coast of Limbe in Cameroon, lived a thriving fishing community whose ancestors originally migrated from Ghana. Like many primitive fishing communities, their boats were handmade and fishing was done manually. As the men fished, the women prepared the fish for the market by smoking them. Sales of the fish provided for their day-to-day survival and a little medicine. A school was too much of a luxury, only a few families could afford. However, over time the combination of too many fishermen and the activities of Chinese industrial fishers slowly began to crumble the fishing business. Prices were too low, and there were no fish in the water. While the children walked around naked on muddy ground, the adults went around barefoot in ragged clothes. The fall of the fishing businesses affected the families really hard. It was becoming too difficult to provide food. Children who had dreams of starting their own fishing fleet or becoming engineers suddenly faced a future bleaker than they imagined. In the midst of their financial troubles, enter the government with its developmental plans.

In 21 minutes, Delphine Ithambi's *A PEOPLE AT SEA* used actors to show and narrate the individual and collective agony of a people on the verge of being uprooted from the only life and work they have ever known. Although, the people know they are powerless against the state, they tell the government representative that they will not move out. Slowly, fear becomes the cloak around their shoulders as they carry on with their lives, waiting for a time the government will use force to move them out. But until then, they hold on to God, pleading for mercy.

The story of David Dale, a highly talented and well-trained artist, simultaneously wows and dampens the spirit. The former is the effect you get from Dale's astonishing work, and the latter is as a result of the visual artist's current state: a far cry from what an accomplished artist's residence and state of life should be. This much we see in the documentary *HIDDEN TREASURES - DAVID DALE*, directed by Remi Vaughan-Richards. Initially trained by Europeans, Dale is a deviant, who created his own style of contemporary art. His works are detailed and have a strong African theme. As such, the film's accompanying music is a



mix of upbeat urban and traditional percussion tunes.

Dale is responsible for the stained glass depiction of religious representations at Our Saviour's Church, close to the Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos, and St. Agnes Catholic Church, Maryland amongst others. The artist who attended Ahmadu Bello University (1971) and specialized in illustration and graphic design, uses mostly charcoal, etching, metal foil, water colour and sand beads in his works. In all, he has worked in 23 different media. When he is not working, the veteran seeks solace in his garden.

One would think that a man of such talent and array of unique art works would be living in affluence. The opposite, sadly

is the case for David Dale. His genius only reflects on the canvas of his works and on people's lips. His finances and the ambience of his home leave little to be desired of greatness.

He is now frail due to old age and the effects of a stroke, which he suffered some years back. This has impaired his speech and slowed down his physical coordination.

The documentary on David Dale is fourth in the *HIDDEN TREASURES* series profiling several artistic veterans in the shadow of life. This instalment

sought to do two things: show the brilliance of David Dale, and the downturn that his fortunes have taken. It does just that.

One would ask, where are Dale's family members or friends in this mix as is expected of the African communal nature? The director, Remi Vaughan-Richards explains that she was commissioned by a client to do the documentary thus hampering her exploratory skills into other things that define the artist.

On the question of whether the documentary series would help improve the fortunes of the featured artists, Vaughan-Richards was not too sure, but appealed to anyone who was interested to come to the aid of the 'hidden treasures'.

“Archiving is Discriminatory” – Paul Ugor

by Amarachukwu Iwuala



The keynote address at the 8th edition of the annual iREPRESENT International Documentary Film Festival (iREP) was delivered by Dr. Paul Ugor, an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, USA. Ugor asserted that archiving is discriminatory and subjective because the person or institution working on an archive determines what is important to their project through pre-arranged criteria.

For instance, if two different organizations have the same newspapers from which they intend to build an archive, an organization that is interested in sports will preserve the sports pages while an entertainment outfit will cut out the pages relevant to their business. In the end, it does not mean that the pages they discard are not worth filing.

For Ugor, archives are sites of historical information and knowledge as well as political and cultural power. “Archival work, it must be noted, is not random; it is a science, for it involves a process of structuration and order that includes identification, naming, classification, unification, codification and postulation.

“I want to argue for a recognition of the powerful links between culture, politics and social transformation, and insist that an awareness of how these three realms are interconnected, should occupy the interest of the African filmmaker,” he said.

In his opening speech, the Minister of Information and Culture, who was represented by the Managing Director of the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), Dr. Chidia Maduekwe, commended iREP for making archiving the focus of the festival for the second year running. He noted that archiving is crucial to the preservation of Africa’s rich visual heritage and expressed his organization’s willingness to offer institutional support in that regard.

According to him, the theme of the film festival – Archiving Africa 2 – is reflected in the current undertaking of the NFC, which is now digitizing thousands of films in their archives in order to develop a rich collection of content and research materials for contemporary filmmakers and posterity too. He urged filmmakers to encourage their colleagues to warehouse their works with the National Film and Video Sound Archive.

Maduekwe equally informed the audience that the Corporation’s collaboration with the Berlin-based Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art recently culminated in the successful restoration and digitization of a Nigerian classic SHAIHU UMAR. He said, “The film could have been forgotten if not that those before me had the foresight to establish a film archive where SHAIHU UMAR was stored for over four decades. Today, this film is making waves after a successful outing at the just concluded Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Germany.”

Maduekwe concluded by saying that the NFC is presently in talks with the Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany, so as to have a German government aid agency – DAAD – fund, for the first four years, the establishment of a Master’s degree programme in Archival Studies at the National Film Institute, Jos, an institution that is affiliated to the University of Jos.

In his welcome address, the Executive Director of iREP, Femi Odugbemi, remarked that a people’s journey to the future is enriched by their knowledge of their past. He said, “Many people still make mistakes because of the lack of knowledge of the past.” According to Odugbemi, the reason for laying emphasis on Archives is due to the urgency of capturing the images of the present, engaging technology, critiquing and contextualizing the cinema culture in a bid to understand how films represent Nigerians and Africans.

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