



# The iREP Report

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## “We don’t know what we have”: An Interview with Remi Vaughan-Richards

by IfeOluwa Nihinlola

To watch Remi Vaughan-Richards’ *HIDDEN TREASURES - DAVID DALE* is to encounter a tale now familiar—the story of a once illustrious Nigerian artist now forgotten, left to suffer in poverty. Yet, to hear Dale speak about his past, his work and his present condition with endearing charm is to see how each story is saddening in their particular details. Since filming the award-winning *FAAJI AGBA*, a documentary that follows Kunle Tejuosho of Jazzhole, Lagos as he rediscovers some of Southwestern Nigeria’s master-musicians, Vaughan-Richards has documented even more stories of Nigerian artists in a series titled *HIDDEN TREASURES*. And David Dale is her fourth subject.

“Old people seem to like me,” she says with a big laugh. “As you can see, I got him to act very naturally. I have a way with people, especially old people.” She didn’t intentionally set out to make a record of these old artists post-*FAAJI AGBA*, but she was approached by a private collector who commissioned the interviews. “There seems to be a pattern and I love it, because I am seeing history. So, I’m really privileged.”

Vaughan-Richards is indeed very concerned about history and culture. “I’m very very very passionate about our culture,” she says, “and very worried that Nigerians are too busy trying to be Oyinbo to know they have an amazing culture here.”

This is a sentiment she has also expressed in her director’s statement about *FAAJI AGBA*, where she writes: “It is almost like Nigerians are not proud of their legacy...this is the message I wanted to pass



on in *Faaji Agba* – if we lose our identity, we lose our culture and sense of who we are.”

In talking about culture, a minor frown forms on her face, a rare break in her ever-present smile. “Punk, that punk movement came from Africa. All those earrings, the hairstyle, came from here,” she says. “Even Picasso the artist got his stuff from here. Everyone comes to mine ours, and we don’t know what we have. We are busy destroying it. I’m very sad about that. So, I keep doing these things.”

Next in the *HIDDEN TREASURES* series is 83-year-old Nigerian artist, architect and designer Demas Nwoko, who she hopes to interview quickly. She talks about him as one who is aware that she is in a battle against time.

“Don’t you think you young people should get up and do something about it?” she asks in return, when I wonder if

she thinks the narrative of old artists wallowing in poverty will ever change. “How do you let this culture, this history go away? Why aren’t we combining it to do something really funky? Why are we letting everyone else borrow our culture and do something with it and we’re just putting it down?”

While we talk, another artist comes and tells her about his effort at making a documentary and how they’ve tried in vain to get money. She laughs as she tells him, “But you know I made *FAAJI AGBA* with my money.”

She’s been making movies since 1990, and has been involved in many projects, some funded by institutions like the BBC and Ford Foundation, and others funded from her own pocket. But whether the money comes in or not, she’s not ready to stop making art. “It’s all I know. Art is my life. I just have to do it.”

# Understanding the Almajiri Problem

by Amarachukwu Iwuala & Wome Uyeye

Ishaya Bako's documentaries are not only well-researched but employ suspense to keep the audience on the edge of their seats. FUELLING POVERTY and SILENT TEARS, for obvious reasons, remain subjects of conversations in Nigeria and beyond. His new work, READ, RECITE, MEMORISE, takes on the Almajiri

ety because it is conceived to polish character. For that to happen, she says, it must be rescued from neglect, underdevelopment and the fraudulent people who use it to orchestrate child trafficking.

Lovatt, a retired educationist from New Zealand, now lives in Kano where she runs her foundation, which rehabilitates street urchins by offering them education and setting them up in business.

gious Education, Western education is also required for people to do well.

Vital questions arise from READ, RECITE, MEMORISE. It has been reported that the 165 Almajiri schools constructed in several states in Northern Nigeria by the Jonathan government have been abandoned. In February, 2016, the Kano State Government described the Almajiri schools built by the Jonathan government as abnormal. In September, 2016, the Adamawa State Government said that the

same schools were too expensive to run.

Does it mean the state governments and the communities were not consulted to make inputs in the Almajiri school project in order to make it worthwhile? How can the huge danger posed by illiteracy be forestalled? "Why haven't successive governments made concrete efforts to tackle the monster

that the Almajiri system has become? Who knows the undue exposure that girls, who are not shown at all in the film, deal with? What is the connection between the mismanaged Almajiri system and child or human trafficking?

What is the link between these abused children and crime: Boko Haram, kidnapping and robbery? The above are some of the questions and ideas that the viewer hopes that the filmmaker will confront as he concludes the film, which is still work-in-progress.

Bako is commended for eliciting emotional response from his audience with his redoubtable documentaries. When concluded, READ, RECITE, MEMORISE will resonate like other documentaries by the same filmmaker.



question, offering valuable insights into this phenomenon, for which millions of children roam the streets endlessly when they are supposed to be in school.

The audience is informed that the Almajiri system of education was conceptualized to cater for migrating and foreign students, who received religious and Western education simultaneously with a view to making them well-adjusted individuals capable of contributing to the development of the society. The developments in Northern Nigerian is said to have been made possible by these individuals.

From education, which is fit-for purpose, being Almajiri has however mutated to becoming synonymous with destitution. Fiona Lovatt of the Lovatt Foundation remarks that the Almajiri system, if well-harnessed, could become the jewel of soci-

Bako's film shows the deplorable conditions under which the Almajiri children of today live. They reside in overcrowded rooms in makeshift accommodation, eat very little food, mostly with their unwashed (bare) hands. They roam endlessly, meaning that they totally lack parental guidance and support.

The small quantity of water available for each child to wash his hands and feet during ablution is unfortunate. The filmmaker uses effective visuals in the narrative to display the grinding poverty faced by these young children who are abandoned to fend for themselves.

A young man, who grants an interview, acknowledges that religious knowledge is not enough to make an individual self-reliant; he affirms that apart from Reli-



# Kicking above his Weight

by Olumuyiwa Akinkuolie

There are so many documentaries that have cultural integration as a central theme. The approaches are somewhat similar. **THE AFRICAN WHO WANTED TO FLY** is one of such movies but with an interesting twist. The twist being the form (Martial Arts) through which an African finds purpose and fulfilment.

Luc Bendza has always wanted to fly. Chinese movies laden with acrobatic and martial arts displays catch his fancy, and the young Congolese boy creates a lifestyle of discipline, physical and mental exercise, and ultimately, a career from the sport. Always mocked, chastised but revered by his friends and family for his adoption of a foreign culture and imbibing it in its totality - more so that he speaks more of Mandarin than French -, Luc's story typifies the average African youth: a believer in a prospect beyond his country; an adopter of a fad, with some extra dedication.

A master of his chosen martial arts style 'Wushu', Luc's voyage to China and his striving to be relevant amongst custodians of the contact sport reveal that flying, for an African man in a foreign country, is more of a mind-propelling exercise than a limb-propelling one. Although the foreigners are impressed by his Mandarin and Wushu skills -in which he is more proficient than most-, it does not protect him from experiencing racism and nepotism: According to Luc, "a foreigner can never win in a Chinese technique they

know very well". **THE AFRICAN WHO WANTED TO FLY** brings to fore the existing need for an image revamp about Africa. Most people in China know next to nothing about the African Continent. Their view of Africa, from Luc's interactions, portrays Africans as a disease-stricken people, often plagued by hun-

be on the map of the sport. Yet, the unbelief in a 'son of the soil' almost drives him back to China, but for persistence and a willing few.

The capture of the fun-side of Luc's martial arts practice, from the viewpoint of his family and friends, gives a comical ring to the documentary.



ger, and who revel in all manner of crimes.

For Luc, spending over 30 years in China, working at the University of Beijing and getting to the pinnacle of the Wushu martial arts form, is inadequate. His home country Congo, -where he, like the biblical stone was rejected and had now become the chief cornerstone- needed to

The re-enactment of his training sessions with compatriots gives wholeness to plot of **THE AFRICAN WHO WANTED TO FLY**. Just like the films that inspired him to pick up martial arts against all odds, Luc features in a couple movies using the same medium, thus emphasizing the kindred spirit that could spark the interest of younger African martial arts enthusiasts.

## Hope Restrained

by Adefoyeke Ajao

Lingering images of various landmarks across Nigeria's Centre of Excellence dominate the opening scenes of **HOPE RESTORED; THE ARTISTRY OF FREEDOM PARK**. Laitan Adeniji's 19-minute documentary spotlights Freedom Park, a former prison yard reconstructed into a public recreation centre by the Lagos State Government. Redesigned by architect, Theo Lawson, Freedom Park has earned a reputation as a place that accommodates performing artists and allows them to freely express their talents - thanks to its

enabling structures. Hence, it is understandable that Adeniji skirts the park's dark history and emphasises its present appropriation as an art hub. Without prejudice to Adeniji's talent, **HOPE RESTORED; THE ARTISTRY OF FREEDOM PARK** might have made judicious use of its running time had the filmmaker focused on Freedom Park itself. Adeniji's visuals dither more on Lagos' landmarks and Freedom Park's aerial view than they do on the park's structures or their functionality. Whenever the buildings do come into the frame, they are rushed out

like unwanted guests and replaced with shots of the park's signpost or the artworks that dot its premises. For a film that relies heavily on testimonials from artists and visitors who frequent the recreation spot, it is often difficult to hear what is being said in this film as the quality of sound is poor and music regularly overshadows dialogue. Although **HOPE RESTORED; THE ARTISTRY OF FREEDOM PARK** is an attempt to show how impactful Freedom Park has been on artistic development and expression, it comes across as a lacking venture that doesn't quite hit the nail on the head.

## GALAMSEY: Actors in a Tale of Plundering

by IfeOluwa Nihinlola

Stories of harnessing natural resources on the African continent are singular in content. They are the tales of outsiders plundering the resource-rich continent to furnish their capitalist desires.

This plundering goes on with an intent to keep wealth gotten from the resources away from the locals, while also ignoring the environmental impact of their activities. In the telling of these stories, however, the locals can sometimes be presented as naive victims who are innocent to the evils done to their land.



GALAMSEY: FOR A FISTFUL OF GOLD tells the story of locals exploiting their own land with practices similar to the outsiders (Americans, Europeans, Chinese, etc.).

Galamsey is a pidgin word formed from the English words gather and sell. It is used to refer to small scale mining, which also implies illegal mining.

For years, Ghana's gold was mined by big corporations with large scale operations that employed very few Ghanaians. But around the year 2000, Chinese prospectors flooded the country with equipment that facilitated small scale mining. In the process, they replicated the terraforming act of mining that transforms lush, green landscapes on the gold coast into brown wastelands around the country.

The Chinese were booted out of the country in 2013, but they left behind equipment, which became of use to locals who tried to get their own share of the gold out of their land.

This mining process that involves an introduction of mercury and other harmful substances into the country's waterways is performed with knowledge of its repercussions. But the people just want to make money. GALAMSEY follows a crew of these local gold prospectors, whom

director Johannes Preuss and his team gain access to via a crafty plan thought up by his Ghanaian guide. The film moves quickly over land and water, with clear graphics offering an explanation of the processes. Characters are introduced by the narrator like figures in an action movie: their name, their abilities, and their part in the story.

Two galamsey are killed by policemen, and unravelling the stories behind their death reveals an underbelly of corruption that seems ubiquitous on the continent. It's easy to see the evil of all the actors in this tale of plundering. It is also easy to understand their motivations: They've watched wealth siphoned off their lands and waters and are eager to grab a fistful of that for themselves too; murder, mud and mercury poisoning be damned.

## ABIKU: The Cost of Biological Ignorance

by IfeOluwa Nihinlola

It is to Derek Bok, president of Harvard University, that this observation couched in sarcastic questioning is attributed: If you think education is expensive – try ignorance. This is now generally called Bok's law and has been used to terrorize wayward school students for ages. However, the true cost of ignorance is felt the most in places outside the school. One of such expensive costs of ignorance is the loss of pregnancies and children to rhesus incompatibility.

Jamiu Shoyode's *ABIKU: A TALE OF RHESUS FACTOR* begins with the story of three women – one speaks English, the other two Yoruba – who are all victims of rhesus factor incompatibility. Before science caught up with the reality of losing children, their stories would have been accepted as just another case of still birth caused by abiku or ogbanje, spirit beings who are reluctant to live in the flesh. But secondary-school biology lessons reveal that most of these children are lost because their mothers carry negative rhesus factors. Yet, this knowledge isn't widespread enough as to minimize the loss of children to the myth.

Shoyode's film is not just the tale of these women and the physical and emotional trauma they suffer due to inherited traits (one of them is known in her street as the aunty who loses her pregnancy). *ABIKU* is the story of the Rhesus Solution Initiative (RSI), a non-governmental organization founded by Mrs Olufumilayo Opa-mire with the goal of ensuring no woman loses a child to rhesus incompatibility.

The film is shot almost exclusively with talking heads, giving it the feeling of a late-night news report. Medical practitioners, including traditional birth attendants, offer sound bites about the prevalence of this otherwise simple problem and how the work of RSI helps alleviate it. The lives of the three women who form the emotional core of the story aren't adequately shown as to make the audience understand their experience viscerally. But one thing is clear, biological illiteracy is expensive. And the film, however inelegantly told, makes its cost very obvious.



# Disrupting the status quo

by Olumuyiwa Akinkuolie

One of the leading brand schools in Nigeria, Orange Academy was at the 2018 iREP International Film Festival to give a feel of what they teach: an experience. The Provost of the academy who is also the convener of iREP, Femi Odugbemi admonished the students to make the

made is the need for collaboration among creatives so as to create engaging content. For him, there is a direct correlation between the existence of problems and the need for solutions. He also spoke about the need for creative people to run the creative business, as most times, core business people make decisions that frustrate a creative process.



most of the session and also explore the awesomeness and essence of 'Freedom Park'.

Having been in the business of imparting practical knowledge for over a decade, and having churned out media professionals who are doing well in the media space, the academy held its first edition of 'Orange Exchange', an interactive session between Orange alumni who have gotten cognate experience, and current students in school.

One of such Alumni is Bada Akintunde-Johnson, a seasoned creative who has worked for several brands and agencies and also, a former sports pundit. Akintunde-Johnson shared with the students his life trajectory as a creative and some challenges he encountered along the way. One of the salient points he

Again, like it does in most public fora where career is discussed, the question about the employability of Nigerian youth sprung up and Akintunde-Johnson was of the opinion that most job-seekers are unemployable. He hinged his argument on the premise that Nigerian graduates are mostly a product of theoretical stuffing from their various institutions of learning. The practical sides to the job description that Orange Academy and iREP provide are often left out. Another twist to the recurrent narrative which is the 'jack of all trades' expectation from employers, especially for creatives wasn't addressed.

Another alumnus, Chinedu Abili-Mordi, co-founder of VIBEOO Media, a disruptive radio platform, spoke about the power of ideas and how to refine ideas into a viable product. He spoke about the need

for creatives to nurture their ideas, even if they are currently employed.

To end the session, a set of videos by the various teams in the IBX (Integrated Brand Experience) programme of Orange Academy were shown. The videos were campaigns aimed at creating awareness and canvassing support for people living with dyslexia.

## How equal are we?

by Lucia Edafioka

It is true that all humans are born free and equal, Linda Diatta however tells a different story with her 25-minute short film JACKENSON.

JACKENSON explores the struggle of a teenage boy from one of Haiti's most notorious slums Cité Soleil, who dreams of becoming a world class boxer.

The boxing club was formed by former members of the community, who escaped the hard life of the slum community through boxing. They returned to give hope to the younger boys, to keep them occupied from engaging in dangerous activities and joining gangs. The club also instils in the young teenage boys a sense of brotherhood, and esprit de corps.

The young boys lack everything needed for their training, from equipment to gear and even footwear. They train in the open with their bare feet. A lot of the boys show up for practice in tattered clothes, and sometimes without any food in their stomachs. The coaches are frustrated. Sometimes there is barely any money to buy sachet water for the boys, but they must keep training, they must keep practicing to keep the boys safe, to give them a ticket out of the slum.

Jackenson is the one of the brightest boys, not only at boxing but also at school. His coaches and team mates have high hopes for him. As Jackenson prepares for his big fight, with only the instructions of his coaches, director Linda Diatta slowly takes the audience through the practice sessions focusing on the odds against Jackenson.

Will he win his first big fight?

## Caesar Kagho, the Disco Historian of the Mid-West

Caesar Kagho was 27 when he returned from England in the late 1970s and was given the option of working as a political or entertainment reporter with *The Observer* newspapers, a popular newspaper in then Bendel State, which before then was known as the Mid-Western region. Bendel was split into Edo and Delta States by the military government of Ibrahim Babangida in 1991.

Caesar Kagho first became a political reporter, but was discouraged by his father after the latter read one of the former's reports. The older Kagho, himself a politician, did not want his son to be consumed by the wiles of politics. Caesar requested to be transferred to the entertainment desk and so he came in contact with the popular musicians and disc jockeys of that era who were from that part of the country.

He left the job in the early 1980s, but decided to write a book, chronicling his sojourn as a reporter. Thankfully, he makes the book, *Bendel Dee Jays*, very pictorial and includes cuttings of his reportage in it. Caesar is eulogized for considering *Bendel Dee Jays* an important legacy to bequeath to a younger generation because, according to him, he sold his Volkswagen Beetle in order to fund the publication of the book.

His sons, Idhebor and Akpor, a director of photography and screenwriter respectively, ingeniously decide to make a documentary film on *Bendel Dee Jays*. So, they conduct a hilarious interview with Caesar, incorporating pictures and re-enacting a DJ at work. The DJ is admirably portrayed by Brutus Mfon Richard. The inclusion, in the film, of several reports written by Caesar Kagho is a visual delight.

Caesar describes himself as a partygoer and a reporter who was courted by fame-seeking musicians. It will be fascinating to know what some of the people he mentioned in the documentary think about him, meaning that the Kagho

by Amarachukwu Iwuala

brothers should locate a few of them.

The film-makers also need to work on the subtitle. There are typographical errors here and there. Repeatedly, 'were' was written as 'where.' Bongos Ikwue's surname was written as 'Ikwe' while there is place in the interview where Caesar uses slash i.e. stroke or -cum-, the word is written in the subtitle whereas the punctuation mark (/) should have been applied there.

Beautiful cinematography combined with good sound and editing result in an illuminating, engaging and seminal film that will surely be selected to film festivals at home and abroad. Kudos to Idhebor and Akpor Kagho for MY FATHER'S BOOK.

### The Revolution is Live

by Wome Uyeye

In 84 minutes, the documentary film *PLACE À LA RÉVOLUTION* plunges the viewer into the moments of struggle leading to the fall of Burkina Faso's former president, Blaise Compaoré. The Director, Galadio Parfait Kabore is particularly interested in the organization, the mobilization, the sensitization and the fight led on the ground by the leaders of the Balai Citoyen (Citizen Broom) against the modification of the article 37 of the Constitution of Burkina Faso.

This move allowed Compaoré, at the time, to seek a new term of office and to establish his power for life. *PLACE À LA RÉVOLUTION* attempts to summarise the Burkinabe people's political struggles as led by the Citizen Broom Party, whose two main leaders Sams'K Le Jah and Smockey founded the party in the summer of 2013. They were inspired by the ideas of Thomas Sankara. Both organized various protests in 2014, in-

cluding the holding of a joint meeting with thirty opposition parties on May 31, 2014, against the then president Compaoré.

Kabore's camera is focused mainly on Sams K The Jah and his trusty side-kick Smockey. An unpleasant fact considering that there were several other opposition party leaders who played a key role in this struggle and eventual uprising that were not featured, let alone mentioned. They could easily have been mentioned using the voice of God method.

Using a handheld camera, which resulted in a deliberately imperfect yet unique imagery, Kabore takes us behind the scenes of this revolution process. A huge chunk of it seemed almost like a musical epic of sorts: public awareness concerts, reforestation campaigns and especially exchange meetings in different neighbourhoods or villages conducted under trees and at night, in schools far away from the capital Ouagadougou.

Indeed, this film contrasts with several others like it, take for instance, *BURKINABE RISING* by Iara Lee, which focused more on the revolutionary spirit of Thomas Sankara, killed in a coup d'état led by his best friend and advisor Blaise Compaoré.

The fact that *PLACE À LA RÉVOLUTION* comes off as entirely focused on the Citizen Broom's leaders was more than compensated for by their first-hand reaction to riot police brutality in various forms. Kabore's camera techniques take



viewers from their comfort zone and land them inside the documentary, on the frontlines.

# Archiving Africa's Teutonic Remnants

by Adefoyeke Ajao

THE FIRE, A FOWL AND AN UN (FORGOTTEN) PAST, by Jürgen Ellinghaus is a 13-minute short film that explores the contemporary remnants of Togo's colonial history. On the other hand, Gregor Kasper and Chih Musquiqui's CAFÉ TOGO is a 27-minute film that queries the politics of street-naming in Berlin. It was previously screened at the 13th Forum Expanded of the 68th Berlinale, earlier this year. Producer/filmmaker, Barbel Mauch, engaged the directors of both films on their motivations for exploring post-colonial perceptions of Germany's incursion into Africa.

Though the filmmakers confessed that both films are low-budget, they gave detailed consideration to the structured violence that characterised Germany's invasion of Africa, and recreate a more comprehensive and affective account of history by depending on both oral and documented explanations.

During the session on 'Managing Colonial Archival Materials in Germany', the filmmakers give the impression that memories of German colonialism in Africa are skewed: while there's emphasis on Germany's role in countries such as Namibia, colonies such as Togo seem to have little or no prominence in public recollections. This influenced the curiosity of Ellinghaus whose documentary decided to explore this history through both oral and archival accounts of Teutonic invasion of then 'Togoland'. As Ellinghaus questions perceptions of colonialism across both divides, he reaches the

conclusion that "the knowledge you get depends on where you go and who you speak with".

Kasper and Musquiqui, on the other hand are more interested in how official accounts and commemorations favour "perpetrators of colonialism" as opposed to the victims. They explore this subject by re-enacting history based on the introspections of Abdel Amine Mohammed - a black activist whose resolve is to nudge the superpower into taking responsibility for its colonial actions - instead of relying solely on government-commissioned documents.

Ellinghaus' mention of dusty, untouched boxes of personal and national archives and Musquiqui's observation of street



signs celebrating imperialists is evidence that both countries actually keep account of their shared history but differ in their attitudes towards these records. The colonised seem blissfully indifferent to their colonial ancestry, while the colonist proudly flaunts its imperialist legacy.

Pelu Awofeso, a CNN /Multichoice African journalist awardee in the Tourism category has witnessed over 60 festivals across Nigeria. Although he has a published book titled 'WHITE LAGOS' on the Eyo festival, Awofeso takes a bold step into showcasing an audio-visual format of his documentations about the glamorous festival which is held in downtown Lagos.

The documentary's opening scenes of rhythmic percussion and accompanying dance steps by celebrants of the festival sets the tone for a voyage into rich cultural practices. The Eyo festival, which is over 300 years old, is actually a festival in honour of the dead, who have contributed to the growth and development of Lagos. The five royal houses in Lagos are involved in the process and procession of the festival. A full week is dedicated to the festival and the date for celebration is often determined by Ifa (a Yoruba consulting deity).

Awofeso's focus on the commercial benefits of partaking in the festival, especially by food vendors, tailors, hat makers, musicians and so on in downtown Lagos does the perfect PR for the festival. Alongside the narrative of the festival, he also debunks the widespread notion that women aren't allowed to participate in the festival thereby putting away the gender discourse. Although only men are allowed to wear the white Eyo mask, the women hold sway mostly in the commercial realization from the festival.

In as much as the documentary has good pictures and a rich script, the suspension of the underlying sound and music almost every time the narration begins, makes the narration sound more like a long report than a documentary.

Although the producer did not use Asa's Eyo song due to the bottlenecks of copyright, one would think that an alternative song with a mature upbeat tone could fill up the space. The choice of music (which actually played for too long toward the end of the documentary) by a young indigenous artiste the producer met at the festival brought on something of an anticlimax.

## Masquerading Lagos

by Olumuyiwa Akinkuolie

The most populated city in Africa - Lagos, Nigeria - is known for many things. Some of them are its yellow buses, its ever busy, ever vibrant, 'endless possibilities' vibe; its business prospects; its 'area boys' whose chants and gesticulations simultaneously amuse and annoy to name a few. Lagos or Eko as it is fondly called is the

prime city in Nigeria and a landing spot for all fortune- and fun-seekers.

Another salient reason the city bustles is because of the famous Eyo cultural festival. As it is in most climes, cultural festivals are celebrated in Nigeria and the Eyo festival of Lagos is one of them.



# Inside Fela's 'Rascal' Republic

by Lucia Edafioka



The life of the Abami Eda, Fela Anikulapo Kuti has always been controversial. Who is Fela? Was he just a weed-loving, free-living musician? Was there more to Fela than his music and political activism? What did Fela do when he was not on stage? How did he start and run his Kalakuta Republic?

Ayo Adewunmi, an independent Nigerian filmmaker based in Canada addresses these questions with his short film titled KALAKUTA REPUBLIC, which was shot at the Kalakuta Museum in Ikeja, Lagos.

To take his audience inside Fela's Kalakuta Republic, Adewunmi interviewed people who had lived, worked and interacted with Fela. There were members of Fela's Egypt 80 band - Adedimeji 'Showboy' Fagbemi; Dede Mabiaku; Lekan Animashaun, also known as Baba Ani; Iyabo Adeniran; the graphic designer responsible for 26 of Fela's album covers, Gharioku Lami, and his son, Seun Kuti.

Relying on the memory of these members of Kalakuta Republic, Adewunmi expertly takes his audience inside the organized chaos that was Kalakuta Republic, and events that led to the burning down of the first Kalakuta Republic building.

First, what is Kalakuta?

"Kalakuta is a force, a movement, a place that became the freest place in the world," says Dede Mabiaku. For Seun Kuti, "Kalakuta is not just a building or place. It is a state of mind." Baba Ani says

Kalakuta is an institution. It was like a community within a country. But it was Showboy who tells the story of how "Fela's House" became Kalakuta Republic in 1974.

Kalakuta was coined from Calcutta, a cell in Alagbon police station. After one of their many scuffles with the authorities, members of Fela's household were thrown in a cell named Calcutta. After their release, Fela renamed the house Kalakuta Republic in their honour. It was later the group found a meaning for the word Kalakuta, which in Swahili meant 'rascal'.

In Kalakuta, everyone was welcome. From musicians, intellectuals, government officials to miscreants; everyone found a home with Fela. In spite of all the chaos, there were house rules that guided the day-to-day living inside Fela's Republic such as the ban on physical violence against anyone and the rule that under no circumstance must any man hit a woman. "Women came first in Kalakuta Republic," Iyabo Adeniran adds.

As Showboy told stories with exacting details, Dede Mabiaku exposed the audience to the mind of Fela - what he called Felasophy: thinking Fela, the man who spent hours studying; one he was so amazed by he called him a 'manputer.' Dede talked about Fela the prophet, Fela who drew inspiration to write songs from the chirping of birds. The man who wrote a weekly column titled Chief Priest

Says in a Lagos weekend paper. Fela who chanted victory songs as soldiers broke his bones and whipped him.

What became the bone of contention among the audience after the film wasn't unbelief in new facts about Fela's life and the Kalakuta Republic. The contention was on rights to Fela's work. After Fela died, his family signed some copyright deals to protect his work and legacy. Today those deals have it made difficult for Nigerians to get access to materials/ records by Fela. Emotions hit the roof.

"He was our Baba" Mabiaku insisted: "It has been 21 years; we shouldn't have to beg foreigners for rights to get access to his work."

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