This year’s film programme was an animated affair acknowledging the theme of Sails of History: Citizens of the Sea. It was particularly topical what with the current upheavals around the globe reflecting the struggle for identity and self assertion.

Identity is an issue of expression and aspiration both individually and communally. Zanzibar is therefore an appropriate location and ZIFF particularly so since the confluence that is the dhow culture reflects also intercultural communication, the main goal of ZIFF. As a mode of communication film asserts both cultural difference and plurality. As a distinct component of multiculturalism cinema (and international cinema in particular) best expresses this ethos through preserving and describing specific cultures while also celebrating global interaction expressed through film distribution.

Indeed the opening film of the festival, *Wrestling Grounds* (2006, Cheick Ndiaye Senegal/Morocco, Burkina Faso) is a visual description of the bonds that bind genders, and in this film the patriarchal bonds are described sensitively and creatively. Coming from Senegal the film shows a unique feature of life in Senegal. However the film also endeavours to highlight cultures that accept male bonding as a necessary part of human experience. The sport of wrestling often entombed in the fear of violence and crass commercialism is here represented as a milieu for human assertion and expression. It should be no surprise to anybody who views this award-winning film (accorded the Golden Dhow Award at ZIFF 2006) that males also have inbuilt fears and need male bonding and company, and the film reflects social contradictions and expectations.

Produced in 2006 the presentation of this film at ZIFF 2006 marks a growth for ZIFF since the mark of a good festival is one that attracts new films to it. Having only been shown at Cannes in May, its showing at ZIFF shows the growing status of ZIFF to African filmmakers. Indeed this years crop of 2006 produced feature films presented at ZIFF included such films as *Men at Work* (Iran), *Mizoga* (Kenya), *Barakat* (Algeria/France) and *Sobhi* (Iran), with an even bigger number of 2005-produced films. More documentaries that were produced in 2006 were shown at ZIFF including excellent films such as *Mzee and Owen* and *Mo and Me,* (Kenya) the eventual winner of ZIFF Chairman’s Award, *Heyna Square, Haiba ya Zanzibar* and *Kwetu* all from Tanzania, *Real Sabarawi* (Uganda) eventual winner of ZIFF East African Production Award, *Betrayal, Swahili Islanders* (South Africa), and *Black Starlets* (Germany). Its themes of friendship, courage, self discovery and spirituality are often a reflection of the African world coming out of communalism into urbanization with trepidation but with the assuredness of surviving the odds.

Particularly appropriate to this years theme of citizens of the sea, which foregrounds com-
monality of humanity in site of ideology, race and creed, most of the films describe the his-
torical discourse of cultural integration and coming together, symbolised in the movement of
peoples all over the world in their travels over the waters that separate them.

The question of citizenship in also amply captured in this year’s crop of films including
the film *Barakat* (Djawla Sahraoui, Algeria/France, 2006) which describes the struggle of two
women friends as they encounter their inimical male compatriots in their journey across
Algeria. The films *Basta* (Phillipe Aractingi, Lebanon, 2006), *Real Saharawi* (Caroline Kamya,
Uganda, 2006), and *Lyarn Ngarn* (Martin Mhando, Australia, 2006) describe the feeling of
belonging away from the homeland as one journeys to discover self and citizen. *Real Saharawi*,
for instance, relates the story of Zrug returning to Western Sahara after years spent in Cuba
and goes in search of family and can only reconnect with them through stories he hears from
people he encounters in his search.

This 15 minute film is beautifully and playfully shot reflecting a sensitiveness that issues of
identity always encompasses. The fusion of form and content is uniquely reflected as we see
in the vast spaces images of pain, disruption, desire, longing described in the protagonists
search for self, family, country and sense of ownership. The brutal history of invasion and
denial of human rights is complemented by the harsh living conditions that the people have
to endure, but they also assert the humanity of all through describing the sense of loss felt
through exile and the desire to reconnect.

On the other hand *Lyarn Ngarn*, presented at ZIFF as a work in progress is a hard and sad
story about a sense of conscience felt by the British actor and academy nominee Pete
Postlethwaite (*In the name of the Father*) as a visiting British citizen encountering the effects of
colonialism amongst the indigenous people of Australia. The actor’s call to action to his fel-
low British citizens to revisit the still painful effects of the common history affords a moment
to reflect what it means to identify oneself with the perpetrator nation in the stories of pain
and oppression.

Indeed films like these and Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi* and *Cry Freedom* are cries in the
dark by citizens of the perpetrator nation which leave indelible marks on the citizen who is
both in the country and outside of it. Present in the conscience of the film but absent in the
physical execution of the oppression (India and South Africa respectively), the identity of the
principle character and subject becomes a key factor to discussing the pain and pride of citi-
zenship.

Another contemplative film on citizenship is *Streetcar From Zanzibar* (Karen Yarovsky,
Canada, 2006). This 23 minute jewel of a film is outstanding in its approach and simplicity.
Following the story of a young Zanzibari girl Nuru, growing up now in Canada, it presents
the love/hate relationship that many exiles have with their homelands and in a startling but
involving manner. The closeness that we feel towards the key participants (Nuru and Rukia)
and their families, their lives and fears is a lesson in what making documentaries is all about.
The access that the filmmaker had and the sensitivity with which she conducts the filming and
even the manner in which the film reaches the audience attests to the importance of creating
positive access to our film subjects.

While one may regard documentaries as telling truths due to the immediacy of the inter-
view and the captured reality, we also fail to recognise the hand of the director editing the film.
However in this film that certain reality presented feels like an accumulation of confidence of
the access to the subjects that the filmmaker had during the making of the film.
As we follow the memories of this young girl having trouble to acclimatise with the wintry days of Toronto, and symbolically unable to weather the storms of the geographical and cultural uprooting, the character endears herself to the audience through her candidness and troubled conscience. But best of all is that we have here an approach to Zanzibari cultural life through the story of her cousins who are still in Zanzibar. The dream island of Zanzibar is the island of dreams, dreams of departed identities, dreams of love and the resounding pleasure of cinematic dreaming. It was indeed a joy to see Zanzibaris watch her experience on the screen and see how closely the story reaffirms their experience of watching films in the Old Fort! This is the definitive ZIFF experience and dream – to be in the audience in the Old Fort. One will find it difficult to be engaged in a more self reflexive atmosphere, in the true sense of the term, than this.

Indeed that self reflexivity was further enhanced at this festival when we read about life in Zanzibar in the novel by Nisar Sheraly’s Majestic On Fire. The majesty of Majestic Cinema, the last surviving theatre in Zanzibar (not currently in use but ZIFF is working towards opening it) is more than a symbol of dreams and hopes. Majestic’s longevity attests to the desires and cultural strengths of the people of Zanzibar whose tenacity is reflected in the novel while on the ground its tenacity is reflected in the ideals of ZIFF to bring film to the masses of Zanzibar.

In its 9th edition the festival still has its bumps and hiccups, and it is now becoming overly clear that as it moves towards maturity, the festival needs to girdle itself with a new sense of purpose. The organisers have indeed taken a number of steps in that direction though more still needs to be done. Gone are the days when a film would be hardly audible in the beautiful and picturesque Ngome Kongwe amphitheatre (the 300 year old Omani Fort) because a band would be playing just 100 metres away in the Mambo Club! While the musical charm of the festival can not be under-rated, there is still need to give due importance to both the musical and filmic expressions. This year the programming was organized in such a manner as not to have that problem ever appear again. ‘A remarkable feat’, a visitor was heard commenting, since it had become a feature of the festival to hear comments about this sound problem each year with no action taken.

Conversely this decision was necessary given that the festival’s success measurement is dependent on this ethos- the education of audiences in the appreciation of different types of films. This year the festival indeed took a gamble in inviting and managing a cine-concert in the open air theatre environs of Zanzibar. A feat never undertaken for over 50 years, it remains a key success story of the festival. To see 1000 people totally engrossed in the silent film Nosferatu and hear the thunderous applause over and over after 81 minute, was a spectacle worth of a 50-year wait!

The four-member group Prima Vista Quartet has become a legend in Zanzibar. The cine-concert concept was described as a once-in-a-lifetime experience since few people will have had the experience of the days of silent cinema with the accompaniment of live music. To Buadime Jam (the composer), the experience of the two cine-concerts was intended to create authentic experience of the silent cinema era as well as show how the power of music can be harmonized with film. It is in the relationship that each instrument develops not only with the moment of the film but also with the movement of the image that demonstrates the power music in film.

Finally the festival included a number of important and interesting workshops run by a
Fig 1. Wrestling Grounds

Fig 2. Barakat

Fig 3. Attention

Fig 4. Streetcar from Zanzibar

Fig 5. Cine Concert

Fig 6. Real Saharawi
galaxy of star trainers such as the Godfather of Independent Filmmaking, Melvin Van Peebles, who was the Chief Guest of the festival and who received the ZIFF Lifetime Achievement Award, Malik Bowens, probably Africa’s most versatile actor, and Krzysztof Zanussi, one of Poland’s leading directors. These workshops and master classes squarely placed ZIFF at the centre of skill and creativity training in the region and Africa in general.

However it is also necessary for us to look beyond the work done by ZIFF currently. ZIFF is a film festival, but it is also a cultural festival. This festival allows us to ask ourselves what type of cultural development do we wish for our society? It is obvious ZIFF has stressed the culture of peace and multicultural communication.

The ZIFF Jury, one of the Juries that make ZIFF an exciting place to be (ZIFF also hosts
both the SIGNIS and the FIPRESCI Jury), and has indeed done itself well in its assessment of the films that won awards at the festival. It is therefore appropriate that we end by acknowledging the wealth of knowledge aptly found in their citations of winning films at ZIFF.

**EAST AFRICAN FILM AWARD**

*The Real Sarabawi*

Dir.: Caroline Kamya (Uganda)

The jury was impressed by the work of the filmmaker as demonstrated in two of her films which were part of a series entitled ‘Extraordinary People.’ In her selection of these two profiles, she makes a powerful contribution to the destruction of myths and preconceptions of who African people are; what their skills and capabilities are; their worldview; and the extent of their interaction with and contribution to the rest of the world. At the same time she also presents profiles that challenge myths about age, and about youth to deliver an entertaining film on an activity growing in popularity on the continent; and one that offers a unique perspective on the value of migration to the community when the migrant returns.

**Special Mention**

*Wild Sounds: Expression Raw*

Dir.: Cyril / Fabio (Uganda)

The jury found this film offered a visually rich and vibrant presentation of contemporary African youth culture and music. The film presented a refreshing and confident self-affirmation of the value of African cultural expression through the mix of worldwide popular forms of youth music and those of local and national character that are also part of their composite identity. This film captures the prism of hope through which African youth see their potential and their future of limitless possibilities.

**SHORTS**

**Winner Golden Dhow:**

*Be Kunko*

Dir.: Cheik Fantamadi Camara (Guinea/France)

The filmmaker’s skill is evident in the presentation of the fictionalised experience of displaced survivors, presented as if it were a documentary. The acting is very natural and the ease of the characters in their roles presents a poignant reality. It is rare to see a story set in a refugee camp, where the experiences of the refugees are presented not as news or current affairs cliches – but are brought to life with real people, with histories, with emotions, hopes and dreams. A well, written, directed, and acted film.

**Winner Silver Dhow**

*Attention*

Dir.: Akram Agha (Saudi Arabia)

In just three minutes this animation film skillfully and imaginatively brings to light the con-
temporary problem of regimentation in both thought and deed, and by implication, of resistance to it. Aggression is visually represented by weapons which stand in stark contrast to the vulnerability of children.

**DOCUMENTARY**

**Winner Golden Dhow:**
*Promised Paradise*
Dir.: Leonard Retel Helmrich (Indonesia/The Netherlands)

The filmmaker of this award is to be commended for having firstly selected a popular home-grown performer who perceptively employs slapstick and black humour to bring his audience face to face with one of the most burning issues that confronts the world today. In his unintrusive observational style he captures the valuable skill of the performer who is astute in revealing the meanings which lie just below the surface of every-day situations and remarks; and the feelings and interpretations that both young and old try to grapple with to make sense of the senseless violence they have witnessed

...in their country. In disarming the audience with humour it becomes possible to speak the ‘unspeakable’ in order to understand and move forward with hope for a better future for us all.

**Winner Silver Dhow**
*Les Jours A Cote* (Days Aside)
Dir.: Iliana Estanol/Ella Pugliese (Burkina Faso/Germany)

The Jury identified this film as having been incorrectly categorised as a ‘Short Fiction’ when in fact it is a Documentary.

A stylistic and innovative film combined with neo-realist humour makes this documentary stand out. During the FESPACO film festival, at a time when the whole city of Ouagadougou becomes a stage, opportunities are seized by a group of street youth who use their skills to take their place at the centre of attention. The relationship between culture and economy stand in sharp focus at this time, and this juxtaposition has an impact on their lives too.

**FEATURES**

**Winner Golden Dhow**
*Wrestling Grounds*
Dir.: Cheikh Ndiaye (Senegal/Morocco/Burkina Faso/France)

This is a sad and charming story of seemingly improbable friendships. It mixes ethnographic investigations into traditional African modes of story-telling with individual character studies in present-day Dakar. The director is to be commended for the maturity with which he handles his large ensemble of players, men and women, young and old; and for his insight into contemporary dreams, fulfilments and disasters using the institution of wrestling as a relevant and meaningful metaphor.

**Winner Silver Dhow**
*Hollow City*
Dir.: Maria Joao Ganga (Angola/Portugal)
The Jury singles out this film for the credibility and feeling with which it handles the theme of urban decay and life in the lower depths. The precarious survival of a small war orphan in the city has been brought to life with a wealth of details that give the film a strong documentary flavour. Here is a moving critique of war and the oppression it visits on all, especially the young and the vulnerable.

Special Mention

*Men At Work*
Dir.: Mani Haghighi (Iran)

A film that is minimalist in many ways from its style to the utilisation of production resources. The strength of the characters is that they carry the universal meanings of love, friendship and rootedness.

*L'Enfant Endormi*
Dir.: Yasmine Kassari (Morocco)

A film full of pathos resulting from the conflict of tradition and modernity in a closed society. Some women choose to defy the restrictions placed on them. Others, male and female, make the self-sacrifice that remaining behind requires in situations where migration is crucial to a community’s survival. Those who decide not to leave, make a conscious decision to take on responsibility for the other.

**UNICEF – TANZANIA CHILD RIGHTS AWARD**

*Peretera Maneta* (Spell My Name)
Dir.: Tawanda Gunda Mupango (Zimbabwe)

This heartbreaking story of an abused child trapped in a careless system where she is let down by all of those adults who are charged with caring for her, until one perceptive teacher makes a stand, is international because it is so truely local. The filmmaker crafts a quiet and sensitive short story that delivers the emotional impact that requires audiences to search their own consciences and to realise that we are all responsible for such vulnerable children in our society.

Ziff takes special pride in acknowledging the incremental changes that make ZIFF what it is today. We work with people who are learning to govern, people who are self confident and who want to control their destiny. ZIFF therefore is simply a journey begun.