Sails of History:
Citizens of the Sea

Edited by Professor Abdul Sheriff
ZIFF Journal

An organ of the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF)

ZIFF Journal is a forum for dialogue on the nature and contemporary significance of the Dhow Culture. It seeks:
‘To nurture an awareness of the historical and cultural interactions that have shaped the cultural memory of its peoples;
‘To highlight the culture of mutual respect, understanding, tolerance and sharing, and the celebration of difference that are its hallmarks;
‘To bring out the significance of this dialogue between civilisations in the contemporary discussions on globalisation;
‘To provide a forum for discussion and debate between the stakeholders in this world heritage, through all the media of human expression.’

The Journal presents a selection of activities sponsored by ZIFF, including conferences, workshops, the Literary Forum, Women’s, Children’s, Village and Pemba Panoramas, and of course the film festival itself. It will publish articles in both English and Kiswahili.

Published by
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Designed & Printed by ZG Design
Graphic Designer Ali Khamis

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This is the third issue of the ZIFF Journal. ZIFF which held its 9th Festival of the Dhow in Zanzibar, continues to attract a large body of local, regional and international knowledge, information and contacts in its quest to develop further the concept of the dhow culture.

This years’ Festival paid tribute to a legendary director Melvin van Peebles, the ‘godfather of Independent and African-American cinema’, Idi Farhan who spent his whole life participating in, influencing, developing and documenting Zanzibar’s cultural heritage; and Mohammed Amin whose reporting on 1984 famine in Ethiopia shamed the world into the greatest act of giving in the 20th century in the form of Live Aid: Heal the World & Live.

Reflecting the theme of the 9th ZIFF Festival of the Dhow Countries, ‘Sails of History: Citizens of the Sea’, the Festival Conference proceedings which form the core of the Journal discussed the archaeology of the dhow and sailing, and the building of vessels that criss-crossed the Indian ocean. This maritime culture was discussed within its cultural context at the conference.

The Literary Forum took a turn as teachers began to document the oral stories which children draw values from, and culminating in a storytelling technique workshop led by Zanzibar-born Nisar Sheraly. Given that oral tradition of Africa remains predominantly undocument-ed, this workshop was an important contribution matched by the inspiration of author Abdulrazak Gurnah to this year’s Literary Forum, with his latest book Desertion in the wake of Paradise. Unquiet, the story of a pioneer of the labour movement in East Africa authored by Zarina Patel was also launched at the forum. Book signing at the Gallery Bookshop in the heart of the Stone Town as part of the Literary Forum was an indicator of our commitment to documenting our stories within the dhow culture.

The presence and recognition of the three juries - FIPRESCI, SIGNIS and ZIFF - gives the Festival of the Dhow an important accountability status in the cultural arts in the recognition of the awards, as did the one-day UNESCO roundtable on Images & Memory of Slavery organized in partnership with UNESCO and the BlackFilm Project.

Exhibitions on Princess Salme by Said el-Gheithy, Zanzibar painters, contemporary East African art, and photographic art formed a vibrant part of the Festival, as did the bull fights of Pemba, the dances of the Children’s Panorama, the vibrancy of the Village Panoramas, the artistic talents and soul searching workshops of the Women’s Panorama, the theatre performances of ‘Migritude’ by Shailja Patel and ‘Nkhomanile’ by Binti Leo directed by Amandina Lihamba, were some of the highlights of this year’s 9th Festival of Dhow event.

This preface will be incomplete if we do not thank and acknowledge the tremendous work and commitment of our staff, volunteers, well-wishers, the ZIFF Board of Directors, and support from the people of Zanzibar in our quest for the Dhow Culture. Our partners with whom we have been walking along this path in our quest for global culture of ‘living together’ – the Prince Claus Fund and the Ford Foundation, to name a few - who chose to hold our hands in this journey of the dhow culture, remain close to our hearts with gratitude.

We say thank you to Prof. Abdul Sheriff who tirelessly continues to be our ally in making sure this culture of the dhow remains steered into next year’s theme ‘Celebrations: Of Waters and Dreams,’ culminating in an exciting conference and next year’s journal.

We take this opportunity to congratulate Professor Sheriff for winning the Prince Claus Award for his contribution to cultural development of Zanzibar.

Fatma Mohamed Alloo
Vice Chairperson of ZIFF - August 2006

Martin Mhando
CEO of ZIFF - August 2006