

Review – Africa in Motion Film Festival Edinburgh 2011

☒ If you missed this year's [Africa in Motion Film Festival](#), you really missed out.

You missed several UK premieres of some startling films. You missed out on some eye-opening documentaries. You missed out on the ambience of what was an [exceptional five days of films and events](#) that shared the works and promoted the voices of a variety of Africa's talented film makers while giving people a sample of what Africa *is* today.

Wednesday 2nd November: The majority of the films were shown in the [Filmhouse](#) cinema, which is where the first showing took place. Just before it started, drums roared through the auditorium, really setting the rhythm for the night. Everyone in the packed cinema clapped and was encouraged to sing along with the musicians and dancers, with hollers and jeers which gave the whole building a sense that it was about to take off. The momentum was palpable as the self-named 'professional key-changer' instructed us to point and shout at the people next to us to get everything off our chests. It was a unique thing to experience in a cinema to say the least, with the participation in African song reflecting what the festival was there to achieve: to engage people with Africa and its issues and to become acquainted with African film.

The introduction came from two of the managers – Isabel Moura Mendes and Kari Ann Shiff – who welcomed the cinema-goers and acknowledged the sponsors of the event whose support was truly appreciated. Thanks were given to Lizelle Bisschoff, the festival's founder and the person responsible for giving so many films such a substantial platform. Peter West from the Scotland Malawi Partnership also spoke, referring to recent comments made by artist Grayson Perry who commented on the

'guilt and fear' that the majority of people in the West supposedly feel towards Africa. West was reassuring when he said that there is a lot more to the country and the vitality, enthusiasm and hope that African cinema portrays is not reported often enough in the wider media. "This is to be the African century," he concluded.

The theme of this year's festival was childhood and youth. The opening film was 'Bab'Aziz: The Prince Who Contemplated His Soul', an imaginative and heart-warming story that had a real sense of discovery through each of the character's journeys. Confusing at times, nonetheless the film was stunningly shot, with sweeping sand scenes that were magnificent to see on the big screen. After the screening there were some complimentary South African wine and canapés enjoyed by all, as well as music from Cynthia Gentle. It was a tremendous start to the festival proceedings.

Thursday 3rd November: The first showing of the day was 'The Mirror Boy', the highest grossing and most watched film this year in Nigeria. [Obi Emelonye](#), Director of the film, attended the screening and gave a question and answer session before his full seminar in the afternoon.

He said: "It's a great opportunity to be at this festival – it's what you dream about when you want to become a film maker. 'The Mirror Boy' is about a boy getting lost to discover himself, and I feel the film was a child of destiny. People have really supported it and I think it's been so successful because of its ambition and the universality of the story. People have found a connection with it, for which I can only be grateful.

"In pursuit of becoming an African film-maker I have travelled far and learned that we need to be bold enough to see what is good or bad and needs changing in the country. 'The Mirror Boy' sees the story through the eyes of a Westernised 'Africa-phobe' which some people in the UK can relate to. It's been a

blessed project and I tried to accommodate everyone by increasing the number of supporting roles to sow the seed of success and leave something positive behind. I'm thankful to the President and the public for the access we were given which created a conducive, productive environment to work in."

The other screenings of the day were 'L'arbre aux esprits' and 3 UK premieres: 'Hidden Truth', 'De corpo e alma (Body and Soul)' and 'Notre etrangere (The Place in Between)'.

Friday 4th November: One of the highlights of the festival was the AiM Short Film Competition that showcased seven films that were individually incredible, but when shown together gave an impressive snapshot of some of the issues that Africa faces today. The format was perfect; to get 7 angles within 2 and a half hours was immersing and the audience had the chance to vote for their favourite as part of the Audience Choice Award. The films were 'Lezare (For Today)', an engaging, thought-provoking film, 'The Tailored Suit', which had a haunting final sequence, 'Dina', an engrossing tale which had a particularly startling scene, 'Garagouz', a story about storytelling, 'Khouya (My Brother)', a powerful, violent production with an emotional ending, 'Umkhungo (Gift)', a professional piece with fantastic special effects and a real message and 'Tinye So', a spiritual, musical escapade that was nicely shot. 'Umkhungo' won the AiM Short Film Competition, and the result of the Audience Choice Award was revealed and shown again on Sunday.

The other screenings of the day were 'La colere des dieux (Anger of the Gods)' and 4 UK premieres: 'Mbambu and the Mountains', 'Waited For', 'Waliden, enfant d'autrui (Waliden: Children of Others)' and 'Le collier et la perle (The Necklace and the Bead)'.

Saturday 5th November: As well as African Storytelling by Kenyan/Scottish storyteller [Mara Menzies](#), there were African Films for Children (a selection of seven) and drumming and

dancing workshops. There were two double bills that included a brief debate on some of the themes that the films brought up. 'Slaves' was shown with 'Fambul Tok' and 'Where Do I Stand?' was shown with 'State of Mind'. Ali Zaoua, prince de la rue (Ali Zaoua: Prince of the Streets)' was the final screening of the day.

The first of the double bills was quite a sombre affair. Both 'Slaves' and 'Fambul Tok' were relatively heavy viewing. 'Slaves' was an animation that interviewed two children liberated from slavery with terrible tales to tell, and 'Fambul Tok' showed the forgiving and reconciliation process that was essential for communities to move on from earlier traumas. The discussion was hosted by [Prof. Jolyon Mitchell](#), Professor of Communications, Arts and Religion at the University of Edinburgh, Dr. Eolene Boyd-MacMillan, Research Associate, Psychology & Religion Research Group (PRRG), Isabel Moura Mendes and Lizelle Bischoff. There were a number of views expressed, with the anonymous animation of 'Slaves' commended. Mitchell was initially distanced from the subject because of its format but said he was eventually haunted by it. Macmillan spoke of the responsibility of the filmmaker not to diminish the significance of the subject. The ending of 'Fambul Tok' was discussed in depth, along with the film's key themes.



Sunday 6th November: The penultimate film was 'Pegase (Pegasus)', a vibrant, engaging production that was dramatic and suspenseful throughout. The closing screening was 'Un pas en avant: les dessous de la corruption (One Step Forward: The Inside of Corruption)', an enthralling and entertaining film that was a nice way to finish the festival (pictured). The dialogue was, at times, comedic and the audience were drawn in to the main character's troubles and willed him to overcome them. The winner of the Audience Choice Award was 'Lezare (For

Today)' and was shown before the final film.

Regarding the overall success of this year's event, Isabel Moura Mendes, one of the festival managers, said: "We are extremely satisfied with how our audience responded to our programme this year. Once again we had a fantastic opening night, with our supporters, collaborators, friends and repeating audience reinstating their support and demonstrating that Africa in Motion has already truly established itself as a standalone festival of its own right, with a growing profile in the cultural calendar of Scotland".

An Africa in Motion goodie-bag containing Fairtrade products and information was generously given to all attendees – a physical memento of what was a memorable five days.



The festival is a true credit to Edinburgh. Returning to the opening sentiment, if you missed this year's Africa in Motion Film Festival, you really missed out. There's always next year though, and Isabel is hopeful that the seventh festival will be just as successful.

She continued: "AiM's profile has clearly grown, and even with a shorter festival this year, our audiences were definitely not less engaged – on the contrary. We feel the responsibility to build on this momentum and bring the festival to schools, through our Schools Tour to happen in February 2012. It is also clear to us – through the demand we have received once again this year – that there is an opportunity for the festival to expand its reach and establish a more concrete presence in Glasgow, so we will be working towards that goal too.

"In regards to next year's theme, there are clearly interesting strands, themes and discussions being had around African cinema at the moment, so we will continue being part

of these conversations by looking into other festivals, following academic discussions, and connecting with our network of filmmakers, producers and practitioners of all sorts in order to understand where Africa in Motion and our audiences will be dedicating a closer look , as we devise next year's proposition".