Djo Tunda Wa Munga and Rumbi Katedza both live in transitional (post-)conflict societies – the former in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the latter in Zimbabwe – which impacts on how they make films and on the kinds of films they make. In recognition of their work and its considerable impact, both filmmakers were invited to deliver keynote addresses at the ‘Über(w)unden (Art in Troubled Times)’ conference, which was convened at the Goethe-Institut in September 2011.

Prior to this meeting in 2011, we had occasion to meet Wa Munga for discussions at the Durban International Film Festival 2010, where he premiered his film *Viva Riva!* (2010) while Katedza was a participant in the ‘ARTSWork: Meeting of African Women Filmmakers’ in 2010 at the Goethe-Institut in Johannesburg.

Katedza is an accomplished filmmaker whose position in Zimbabwe has been twofold. Firstly, she has sought to use the medium as a way of interrogating representations of the political climate in her country. Secondly, she has used the medium to empower a new generation of Zimbabweans generally and women in particular. Her articles and short stories have been published widely. Her award-winning documentary *The
Axe and the Tree (2010) explores the processes of collective healing and community accountability for the perpetration of violence. The success of the film is its ability to represent the sometimes fine line between the survivors of violence and the perpetrators of violence.

After an anti-colonial civil war, Zimbabwe gained its independence from the British in 1980. The country suffered international sanctions in relation to its politics of land redistribution and, since the 1990s, has experienced growing internal opposition demanding freedom of speech next to other citizens’ rights, as well as the upholding of human rights. Internal conflict and violence have intensified further in the context of contested elections.

Wa Munga is also a highly skilled and award-winning filmmaker, whose film practice draws from a series of close observations of his social and political circumstances in the DRC. Wa Munga’s debut feature film Viva Riva! has played at a number of international film festivals. His highly acclaimed documentary State of Mind (2010) offers an in-depth examination of how trauma from civil war and socio-political instability can be dealt with particularly in the DRC, where the history of the country has created an environment in which violence has become something of a ‘naturalised’ state. The social and political conditions in the DRC have made it almost impossible for civil society to have a distance with which to heal itself.

The following extracts from these two filmmakers are from their ‘Keynote Address’ presented at the Über(w)unden (Art in Troubled Times) conference held in Johannesburg in September 2011. Subsequently, we had an opportunity to discuss their presentations and facilitate a conversation between them.

RUMBI: The landscape of the arts in Zimbabwe is fraught by the political and economic circumstances; those of us who worked in film and video had to either leave the country, diversify into other industries, work for the national broadcaster, which posed its own challenges, work in journalism, or work specifically within the framework of NGOs, which were the organisations with the money. Funding for projects was otherwise scarce, and there was
no government support for productions. So as an independent filmmaker, if you wanted to continue creating, you created within the framework of NGO buzzwords. If your film wasn’t about good governance, HIV/AIDS or human rights, chances were it wouldn’t get made.

DJO: In the Democratic Republic of the Congo people carry out actions, they put a lot of energy into them, and yet they do not produce. The notion of carrying out a job that has a starting point and an outcome, and adding quality to that job, does not exist. Everything is at the same level. Doing or not doing does not make any real difference. The principle of consequences as [it relates] to carrying out a job or not, has no hold in the real world. The nature of traumatic suffering leads the self to act in an uncontrollable way. If no assistance is offered, the person remains blocked and in danger. The therapeutic effects of art are unquestionable. Its strength resides in not offering a single solution, but a plurality of possibilities that can reach a larger number of people within the singularity of their suffering.

RUMBI: One of the reasons that so many people do not know much about what happened in Zimbabwe in 2008 is because it was almost invisible; as a passing story on your evening news, it could easily be ignored as a ‘minor chapter in history’, along with countless other conflicts around the world. In Zimbabwe, our symbolic battleground had to change its tactics. There was a need for artists to find new resource bases to tell a broader story about Zimbabwe, different from the usual news broadcasts and message films. The deeper reality of the situation went by almost unnoticed. We know that the arts engage our deepest emotions and embody our beliefs. The arts are a powerful form of expression, described by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in Unthinking Eurocentrism (1994) as symbolic battlegrounds.

DJO: Art is a tremendous vehicle for integration into society. It allows us to restructure an identity and to open new horizons to people who are adrift. And it plays a determining role in the economic development of people and groups. To visit a therapist is neither ‘acceptable’ nor, in any case, is it a possibility in so-called Southern cultures. So what is one left with, to heal a society from its historical trauma? Art is a viable solution, even if it can only be made by a small number of people – artists – at a time. The artist, when he creates, carries out an investigation that is unconsciously linked to his
trauma. As he produces the work, he delivers the contents that represent, in a subliminal manner, the trauma that he manages to overcome or to tame by means of his work. By proffering the creative work, he frees himself from the chains that bound him.

**RUMBI:** The power of the arts is not lost on any government. Simply speaking about one’s reality could be seen as subversive. While, as artists, we do not speak about our social responsibility, we also have to be cognisant of what our work could mean to our lives and the livelihoods of those close to us. The disregard [for] fundamental rights, [for] freedom of expression, [for] freedom of assembly and association, notwithstanding the unlawful arrests of journalists conducting their lawful duties of gathering and disseminating information, and artists in their creative process, depicts a repressive environment backed by oppressive laws such as the Access to Information and Protection Agency of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), Broadcasting Services Act (BAS) and a battery of other restrictive legislations.

It was against this backdrop that I made my documentary. People were affected by the violence in 2008. My film looks at how communities are dealing with the aftermath. I wanted to document the voices of ordinary people, to let them tell their stories, so we could make sure this never [happens] again.

**DJO:** We must not forget that most artists work on the same main theme over many years; oftentimes, this is an unconscious decision. Externally, their works may appear to be very different; however, at the end of the day, we can ascertain that they focus over and over again on the same obsessions. Filmmakers remake the same film. Writers speak of the same characters. However, with each creative work, they go further; they are more specific, more concentrated as they near a truth. More concretely, we can take the following example. The filmmaker who, as a child or a teenager, suffered a trauma, when working for months, even years, on a screenplay 15 or 20 years later, carries out an investigation that allows him to define what made him suffer years earlier; a trauma that he has not understood is explored through art years later. What happened scarred him; however, the consequences of that pain, the area that suffered the aftershocks, remain a mystery.
RUMBI: As a filmmaker, I had many battles with my own conscience, as I wondered how far I could take the documentary without compromising the safety of its participants. I found myself in a quandary of self-censorship necessitated by the reality of the situation. Because our country is still in time of struggle and transition to a certain extent, we sometimes have to tread with caution, knowing that there can be consequences in the execution of our work. As a filmmaker, I will always be grateful to the brave people who agreed to be in the documentary, because, to this day, they still live in communities where the conditions that caused the violence continue to exist; that is their reality.

DJO: What is interesting about the connection between the film process and the internal drama is that there is rarely a scene or a part of the film that exactly represents what we are trying to talk about or that is directly linked to our memories. It is never that simple. No, it works by association. It is surprising to see how, in creative works, nothing is explicit. Nevertheless, it is all there. To sum it up, we could say that the artist manages to heal himself in a way. Creative production after creative production, he is on a path that grants access and facilitates higher levels of access to himself and that allows him to heal his injuries.

RUMBI: Creating films and other artistic pieces in times of crisis is not easy and forces a great deal of soul searching on the part of the artists. Living in a country where the laws do not support an enabling environment for creativity brings many challenges with it. Do we sometimes compromise on our creativity in favour of our personal safety, even if it means being silent about our own lives? Are we freer to create and comment if we live outside of our country of origin? I think it is very clear that we cannot separate our lives as creative practitioners as distinct from our human rights. Our freedom to create, to express ourselves and comment on life is a necessary human right. In engaging in our creative processes, we often have to make life choices and continue to create and interpret our reality in order to preserve our humanity.

In the interview that follows, we explore with Wa Munga and Katedza the role of film in representing trauma and the significance of gender in the experience of trauma and how it impacts their respective film practices.
**Jyoti Mistry:** In both your films, each of you grapples with the complexity of representing trauma, including in its more contemporary forms. You are doing this not in a generic sense, but more specifically as it has been historically experienced in Africa. The legacies of the slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, impoverishment, displacement and violent conflict are but a few in the accumulation of these individual and collective traumas. In that sense, trauma and the violence associated with it is never gender neutral and women suffer traumatic events in similar but different ways from men.

**Djo:** I view the Congo as an open psychiatric centre with its historical and general instability. In my work I think I do gender all the time, and in my daily life meetings. I try to ensure that female colleagues do not work at night and I avoid putting them in situations where they have to meet clients [by] whom they might feel compromised. Especially with younger female colleagues I am adamant that their parents must understand how production works, like asking them: ‘Do your parents understand what you do?’ This is particularly important during night shoots or late hours since it is a very rudimentary misunderstanding that working at night is equated with prostitution. In my experience, the best staff are women who have the support of their parents in pursuing a career in production. In terms of how I view the camera, I think of the camera as having no gender. It is a tool with which to make aesthetic choices.

**Rumbi:** Zimbabwe has many female film practitioners and one is constantly trying to bring more women into the fold. There is a very conscious effort for women to empower each other. However, I tend to be harder with my female staff; I expect them to constantly raise the bar, not only in my expectations of them, but of their own expectations for themselves. I tell the girls early on when they come to work for me: ‘I push you for a reason.’ ‘Tell me your problems and we can work on this.’ During production, though, the situation is very different for me than the one Djo has described as his experience. In the rural areas patriarchal protocol is still [something] that I have to navigate. Men are on chairs and women on the floor; so then I send the crew in first. Once they lay out the space and follow the protocol, then I can go in as the director and, even though I am aware of the problems, this is what I have to do to access the community and to get my films made.
**DJO:** I would forbid that [women sitting on the floor and men on chairs]. Men and women are equal. I of course understand culture and protocol, but in my strategy I want to fight these protocols so we do not even get to this question of different treatment of my crew because then I would just stop it.

**RUMBI:** You as a man can forbid this, but I as a woman cannot. I need to find cleverer and more constructive ways to subvert things.

**DJO:** Women! Wow, women, I do not understand you. You need to battle from one day to the next!

**RUMBI:** No, Djo, not a battle. It is a protocol. If the chief says to you: ‘You are no different from a colonialist who wanted to define the agenda’, well, then I think one has to find other ways to get inside the space that you are trying to intervene in and to make a film about.

**ANTJE SCHUHMANN [TO DJO]:** You refer to yourself as an artist who himself is traumatised and as healing yourself through the transferral of traumatic experiences into art – do you feel that it is more difficult for men to address this as ‘men’, who are generally not perceived as vulnerable, but more often seen as perpetrators of violence?

**DJO:** Black men have historically had no right to feel anything. It has all been about a phallic discourse: supermen. Being like that limits you as an artist; it creates tension in your muscles; you cannot expand, your muscles are not flexible. In this debate we need to include the feminine and masculine parts. It is my choice to embrace myself totally, including accessing [my] feminine side; including the fragile, sensitive and vulnerable parts. But I realise I am also limited as a black man in what other people expect of the black man, the stereotype. But over time, and usually from a distance, there is a slow acceptance. Artists also need distance from their community. I am often asked by younger people: ‘Why do you not have a Mercedes Benz? You need the macho things.’ But for me, I think artists need other things that help you understand something of your society and your community.

**RUMBI:** As a producer and director, I am often expected to be more like a man, to not display emotions. The feeling is that you have to be a general.
I am expected to be the one who never breaks down. There is a dichotomy between traditional living and living in town. There is also a changed notion of what a successful woman is: single mother, no father and the woman as provider. It feels like there is an imagination of ‘playing warriors’.

**DJO:** That says a lot about the differences for women and men in production.

**RUMBI:** Most of the women want to be professional and [also] not forget traditional things ... but what you want to do is not always possible. [You have] to find a space within your community and there is constant tension between traditional roles and modern expectations or aspirations.

**ANTJE:** *How would you describe the work environment that you create in your productions?*

**DJO:** Our offices are open plan and while there is an awareness of the hierarchy, one has to try and break these links to create an environment where people feel like they are a part of something, a structure that they are contributing to. In the [meantime], I am also aware [that], as a man, there are things that are [socially] more permissible. In my office the second-in-charge is a woman and for the production drivers, for example, this is quite a surprise because they make observations [like]: ‘I like her, she is nice and works well – too bad she is a woman.’ She represents power to him. In my case there is a superstructure, but this is accessible and even when I travel, they text me, email me, and there is a direct link to me.

**RUMBI:** My company is small, with lots of children running around because there are so many women who work in the office. There is no day-care during pre-production and during production I get child care. It creates less stress and the crews can then focus on the time it takes to get the work done. It creates an optimum working environment.

**JYOTI:** *Making a film about trauma is a complex duality for a filmmaker in terms of offering a therapeutic vehicle for one’s own trauma, and yet it is also a vehicle for the representation of the trauma of others that one is documenting. How does one balance this process and at the same time address the concerns that shape the making of a creative project?*
**DJO:** Filmmaking is a practical process and for me it’s all about the choice of staff and the choice of the characters. If I as the director have resistance to characters, then I would find it difficult to represent them. In documentary I also apply the casting choices as though it is a fiction film. For *State of Mind*, we considered about 30 people in casting for the lead woman protagonist. I look for the image that is worth being represented. There, the heroine of the film has to be able to tell the story so it can free others to do so.

**RUMBI:** I would agree that there is a certain way of telling the story that can elicit strong reactions that will empower people to recognise their own experiences. But are you saying that you are manipulating the story? Really?

**DJO:** No, no, just the way I pick the character. I think of it as looking for characters with the same problems but I am not keeping the protocol, the way I am doing things. So I like to find characters that I can connect with and I think [that if] I can connect with [them], then I can find ways for other people to connect with the characters.

**JYOTI:** It is interesting that both films [The Axe and the Tree and *State of Mind*] deal with issues of healing and strategies that communities have explored locally and then eventually appropriated on a national level, for dealing with trauma, and reflect the power of healing. Yet both films are very different aesthetically. Rumbi’s film *The Axe and the Tree* uses testimony and long takes to give us as the viewer time to connect with the characters and to observe how the characters are coping with their memories and experiences. Djo’s film, on the other hand, offers more of a witness, a surveillance-style shooting of a process. The incorporation of archival material and historical context offers a broader perspective on how the therapeutic process might be used on a more national level to cope with issues of a ‘naturalised’ way in which violence is experienced in the DRC.

**RUMBI:** It took me months to find characters that were willing to talk and who were not anxious that they might experience further intimidation for participating in the film. It was about building [their] trust and confidence through workshops and interviews. I needed the buy-in from their families as
well, and then it was about making them feel comfortable with the camera and also about being comfortable with me in their homes. We used the concept of the trust circle and [opted] not [to] shoot wide shots [and to] get closer to the characters. Also the environment, in nature, gave it a calmness that made it easier to get to the characters and allowed them to share.

**ANTJE:** Can trauma be represented at all and, if so, how do you as a filmmaker represent collective and individual experience of trauma?

**RUMBI:** Timing is vital to this kind of storytelling; to be able to look back and reflect on the experiences. When people were not able to say what they were feeling [you have] to give them time and really look while you [are] cutting the film and allow the visuals to speak for themselves.

**DJO:** I agree with Rumbi, that one has to give it time and [that] it is in the details, the silence needed, and to be gentle and tender, not rough.

**RUMBI:** I, personally, felt the need for distance from 2008, both to allow for introspection and for my own security and the security of my crew. At the time, there was a naïve and desperate sense that our new transitional government, the government of national unity, would tide in a new era that would finally allow for an enabling environment for freedom of expression and creativity in the arts. Many artists felt the same, including visual artist Owen Maseko, who summed it up so well when he spoke about his exhibition, which took place at the National Gallery in Bulawayo in 2010, on the Matebeleland and Midlands massacres, commonly known as Gukurahundi.

**DJO:** To steer the discourse back to the specific problems of the South, of countries such as Congo, art may be one of the only forms that allows healing, while at the same time changing mentalities. The actions we carry out on a daily basis are a consequence of the life and culture that we know. If we wish to change a country, contribute to development, modify behaviours, we must change the people’s culture. Is there a better engine for culture modification than art?
REFERENCES

NOTES