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FILM AND FEMINISMS IN AFRICA

EDITED BY
JYOTI MISTRY & ANTJE SCHUHMANN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

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In the spring of 2010 the Goethe-Institut in Johannesburg initiated the forum 'ARTSWork Platform: Meeting of African Women Filmmakers' with the primary objective to build a platform for women pursuing careers in art. The inaugural focus was on women filmmakers.

Established filmmakers from 14 different countries across Africa came together to discuss the state of the industry from the perspective of women professionals, to promote female talent and to support each other in their efforts to ensure gender equality.

The processes and outcomes of the three-day meeting were astonishing. The main questions raised were of a concrete, professional nature. Challenges in terms of discrimination, access to funding and difficulties to operate confidently as professionals and employers in a male dominated field, were also addressed.

A fruitful discussion also centered on the content side of filmmaking. The production of images of Africa that challenge (neo-) colonial, patriarchal narratives, on the one hand, and patriarchal traditionalism on the other, is vital to women in Africa, who continue to assert spaces for self-expression and self-determinism.

Though a gathering of both men and women professionals might not have proceeded much differently, the impression is that this platform provided a space fruitful for the uninhibited exchange of such concerns.

Above all, though, the meeting emphasised the need for collaboration between women through co-productions or informal networks that would result from these spaces and similar contexts.

This publication is another valuable outcome of the meeting, which serves as a timely document of concerns and thoughts by women film practitioners at a certain moment in time and – hopefully – as a catalyst for future discussions.

BY WAY OF CONTEXT AND CONTENT

JYOTI MISTRY AND ANTJE SCHUHMANN

The initial impetus for this book was to collect, archive and document the very disparate stories that emerged from a unique gathering of women all working in and with film, who came to Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2010 from different parts of the African continent and from Germany, and met at the Goethe-Institut. The occasion was the ARTSWork Platform: Meeting of African Women Filmmakers. At first sight, the context for a dialogue between a German cultural institution, invited participants from Germany and film practitioners from all over Africa was an obvious axis through which the meeting should be mediated. However, it turned out very differently. We soon realised that this was only a starting point. The direction and breadth of the views and opinions expressed, and the workshop topics and the discussions that arose out of these sessions, saw a far more complex web emerging than anyone had anticipated – of co-dependencies and inter-relationships on the African continent, where national similarities were shared and divides interrogated, all against the rich landscape of film, festivals, feminism and funding politics.

ARTSWork (2010) was the spark for a series of engagements that would take place over the following two years, on occasion facilitated through other Goethe-Institut events in Johannesburg, such as the 'Über (w)unden (Art in Troubled Times)' conference (September 2011),

but also at other events that were ripe with opportunities for film practitioners to meet in a single place, such as the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) in 2010.

There were multiple forms of simultaneous conversation taking place among women – and also some men – at different times, in formal and informal spaces, on planned and unplanned occasions, where various people met, exchanged, disagreed, shared and collaborated. Some exchanges were once-off conversations, some had to be revisited and some are still ongoing. The common thread was that all of the participants were active in one or several aspects of filmmaking.

It is almost a cliché to say that women need to tell their own stories, that women's voices need to be heard, that Africa has numerous stories and experiences that have to be shown. Yet the cliché holds a kernel of truth. We would add: these stories and experiences not only need to be shown, but to be shown by women, on their own terms.

Filmmakers often describe themselves as storytellers, though the modes of storytelling may come in different forms and present unique experiences. And theorists often position themselves as interpreters on the outside of these stories. If filmmaking is about storytelling, this book is also about storytelling, and its stories are ongoing. But it is also about the *conditions* of storytelling and it is these conditions that partly shaped the process of how we decided to put these voices together and how we chose the framework within which to share them.

Given the focus on filmmakers who identify as female and who live and work in different countries in Africa, a feminist framework to interpret these women's experiences and to 'read' their filmic work was an obvious choice. Africa as a geo-political location is also a space of collective and shared memories within which conflict and post-conflict narratives emerge. These narratives of historical and personal traumas are further transferred between generations and inform the subject content for healing and restitutive politics across the African continent. Film is a vehicle for releasing the repressed and the silenced, for remembering, altering and transforming narratives that might otherwise be forgotten. These processes are not only highly gendered but also racialised and infused with anti-/post-/neo-colonial legacies. There are no longer any simple divisions between a global South and North – imperial gaze regimes and relations are steadily reproduced, opposed,

subverted and further altered based on historical-political conditions. Therefore a third aspect of the framework for the book was an analysis of how gender, racial and cultural identity (either self-determined or imposed) intersect with the politics of representation. The complex socio-political landscape within which women work (inclusive of their experiences), the work they produce and the reception of their work shapes the through-line of the book.

The circumstances that fund the telling of these stories provides context for understanding what stories are told and under what conditions. Festivals provide a further context for interpretation since these circuits of exhibition function as a framing device for the stories and their storytellers. While this book brings together women filmmakers who tell stories, it also positions these stories in the context of the interpreters, the theorists who search for representations and meaning, which reveal something of the women themselves, their contexts and their practices.

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'Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.' Anthills of the Savannah, *Chinua Achebe*

Historically, theorists are seen to be separate from storytellers and filmmakers. Filmmakers and theorists are each circumscribed by the language paradigms of their practice (film language in the case of filmmakers and theoretical discourse in the case of interpreters) and one is often seen as impenetrable to the other.

These specific positions are not held apart in this book; instead they are brought together in conversation with each other. At times this conversation is a collision of ideas and at other times it is a contestation of experiences and a desire to be heard from the unique point of where these women are located.

What does it mean for academics to be in conversation with creative practitioners, and how do practitioners involved in reading films as texts interpret the curatorial strategies that frame films at film festivals? Film practitioners and theorists are assumed to speak different languages. Words that have a cadence and value in one context are understood and appropriated wholly differently in another. In a few instances filmmaking

is also explored as a theoretical interrogation where filmmakers are also theorists, and theorists are also filmmakers, creatively engaged intellectuals searching through the medium for ways that will challenge historically inspired modes of working or storytelling. For African women this also means challenging knowledge paradigms from within patriarchal and colonial legacies.

The current African reorientation towards itself reveals the significant role women play in this self-definition of Africa. This includes the gradual recognition, outside Africa, of the need to engage differently with the continent that has been referred to as the 'heart of darkness'. Increasingly Africans are approached as strategic partners and collaborators. Both aspects, the self-reorientating and a less paternalistic Northern approach, require and produce alternative image productions about and within Africa. This forms a crucial construction site, where women play a key role.

This book of texts and conversations is not a mere static receptacle. It explores not only the conditions of making films in post-colonial Africa with a gender-sensitive and feminist analysis, it also discusses the complexities of individual and/or collective positioning when art meets politics and vice versa. In part analytical, in part inspired by reception studies addressing how audiences view films, the contributions seek to theorise the lines of insider-outsider positions. It further documents and intervenes in an ongoing process from the particular angle of feminism and trauma studies in relation to cultural production. It invites the exploration of different and sometimes contradictory approaches towards social and political change from varied positions, depending on the contributors, their experiences and their geo-political histories.

The overall commitment of contributors to this project was explicable precisely because it gave opportunities for women to voice their opinions and their experiences in a context that would be heard in a refreshed way. They worked to ensure that their voices would be heard via these pages by new audiences, different from those of their films.

There were many tensions with which we had to grapple in the overall process: tensions between the analytical languages, concepts and theories we use in trying to understand, to represent and sometimes to intervene in realities that are often perceived as too complex or too simple. In other words: tensions between our scholarly tools organised in various disciplines – post-colonial studies, film studies, critical theory, feminist

theory and practice, developmental studies and so forth – on the one hand, and the lived experiences of diverse people – women, men and differently identified practitioners – on the other.

We also tried to transcend some of the confines of individualised knowledge production and so we assembled not only a broad variety of perspectives, but also a wide spectrum of positionalities. This is further reflected in the diversity of text genres and writing styles in these pages. People contributed to this cacophonic counter-canon through writing and through conversations, some from the inside, some from the outside, and some inside-out of academia and filmmaking. Consequently, this book challenges notions of what it means to be positioned as a woman in a man's world when engaged with cultural and intellectual production, both within academia and within the 'industries' of filmmaking, festivals and art production. These strategic and highly political questions transcend seemingly different environments: How do I (as a woman) position myself towards inequality? As an individual or as part of an imagined (heterodox) community of people all navigating and/or battling intersecting structures of discrimination?

Feminist theory contributes to a growing intellectual uncertainty about how most adequately to explain or interpret human experiences. However, knowledge production within the normative framework of academic publishing still meets deviations (such as speaking from the position of a subjective first person narrator) with scepticism. We believed it was important to straddle this by generating alternative opportunities and by acknowledging that relevant knowledge production is in fact taking place also in contexts outside of institutional frameworks. It is exactly the arrangement of traditional academic texts on the 'seeing-eye', with the knowledge gained through the reflections of filmmakers, producers and festival curators regarding their respective experiences that is reflected in this collection. Once again, this facilitates a dialectic; a mutual validation and exchange between these varying types of knowledge production site and their circulation.

Wishing to apply this dialectical approach to our assembly of the varying contributions to this book, we were inspired by the critical and methodological approach of *bricolage*.

Traditionally, a single theoretical approach, alluding to the illusion of a universal, objective representation of facts and truth, seems more

desirable for academic scholarship. We decided to divert from this path. The conceptual framework of the collection, as Matt Rogers puts it, is 'explicitly based on notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality. Further, it signifies approaches that examine phenomena from multiple, and sometimes competing, theoretical and methodological perspectives' (Rogers 2012:1). Inspired by critical theory, French philosophy and feminist theory in conversation with psychoanalytically informed cultural studies and anti-imperial and anti-capitalist film theory, the various contributors who share their experiences, reflections and positions here, offer alternatives to the more canonised approach in African cinema and gender studies scholarship. The use of interviews with practitioners as well as theoreticians, critical essays coupled with reflexive positions, and storytelling (anecdotes and experiences) serves to create a heterodox practice.

By positioning the multiple discourses alongside one another, we suggest that the assumed different paradigms of practice and theory and the circuits of exhibition and reception are in the service of one another. Listening to the stories of filmmakers, alongside watching their films and recognising the multiple theoretical possibilities of films made, and seen, is a way of enriching our understanding of the layered facets that inform how women make sense of their experiences, tell their stories and generate theoretical and practical possibilities that enable an increased and more nuanced understanding of the conditions for women film practitioners working in and on Africa.

As we collected and began to sift through all the material we were gathering it became clear that there were important resonances in the experiences of women, but there were also important dissonances and productive disagreements that revealed complex and interesting differences. One that began to emerge during the inaugural event at the Goethe-Institut, for example, was in the socio-political climates of Germany and Africa. We felt that these needed to be heard not just in the confines of a single event, but also in a wider context where reception would be greater and the issues would receive the necessary political attention when the collection was published and circulated. If change is to take place for persons who are identified or who self-identify as women, it is necessary that the multiplicity of their voices be disseminated in as many forums as possible.

The structure of the book should not be viewed as a linear progression, although attempts at this 'linearity' are evident in terms of certain organising principles that provide thematic coherence. However, in keeping with *bricolage*, the contributions serve to inform one another more as a lattice and we encourage readers to see the relational or referential connections between texts even when they do not sit alongside one another.

Broadly speaking, the material is organised to evoke themes. The first theme is a historical and theoretical contextualisation which is then informed by dialogue (in the form of interviews) which in some way addresses the continuities or discontinuities between the theoretical or conceptual frameworks offered and the lived experiences of the participants.

The second theme gives cognisance to the layers in the construction of gender in historical-political terms and considers how this is reflected in artistic expression and cultural production. It therefore draws on strategies of reading or audience/viewer responses to texts (films) as a way of reflecting on the intentions of filmmakers and artists dealing with gender and trauma, history and memory, and nation and state.

The third thematic component of the book considers conditions of production as a way of informing content creation. Informed by the broader theoretical framework of the previous theme, the production contributions offer a way of revealing how ideas of gender relations, issues of gendered power relations in the state and in the production process are 'soft' factors, tacit but highly significant in influencing production processes and content generation.

The final thematic area brings together a series of invaluable impressions and experiences in the value chain of meaning-making and production processes. The influence and role of curators and exhibition platforms (in the form of festivals and distribution) is assessed to reveal the challenges for African women to have their films approached outside of historical, aesthetic and content prejudices that presuppose a creative essentialism which further disenfranchises them on a global platform.

In many ways this approach is an evolution from the seminal works of Manthia Diawara (1992) and Frank Ukadike (1994) and is in keeping with the contemporary contributions of Stephanie Newell and Onokoome Okome (2013) and Carmela Garritano (2013). As such, it speaks to

the work of authors such as Beti Ellerson, Jane Bryce (2010, 2011) and Audrey McCluskey (2009) and is part of a newly emerging scholarly trend exemplified by publications such as *Feminist Africa*.

As *bricoleurs* we may not always have agreed with the different voices we assembled. For instance, in our understanding of gender as a social construct we problematise hegemonic gaze regimes seeing sex, seeing bodies, as organised along the 'natural' binary of being *either* male *or* female. We prefer exploring the intersections along which we are all situated in one or another way: gender-race-class-sexuality-age and so forth; intersections that position us simultaneously as discriminated against and privileged in different aspects of our being in the world.

We prioritise gender as an analytic category in addition to exploring notions of an anti-imperial gaze, as promoted by Third Cinema and various film festivals founded at the peak of anti-colonial struggles (see contributions by Beti Ellerson and Max Annas and Henriette Gunkel), of a post-colonial gaze invested in nation-building (see Nobunye Levin) or of the more or less successful practices of decolonisation (Dorothee Wenner, Katarina Hedrén, Jyoti Mistry). Our intention is to provide an *interruption*, to rupture classic and too often andro-centric or supposedly gender-neutral approaches to academic knowledge production and publication politics. Knowledge is *also* produced from the lived experiences of storytellers, as well as from their stories.

'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,' argued Audre Lorde (2007:110). Changing dominant power relations and systems of privilege, which are not limited to unequal gender relations, also needs the (re)framing of the North-South divide, too often seen as either only disabling or mainly enabling, in order to develop a constructive deliberation of contemporary practices in full recognition of historic legacies. New tools, a fresh gaze and different stories are required in order to dismantle the master's house and this collection of writing allows for certain sets of possibilities to emerge as a way of proposing praxis and paradigm shifts.

Examining the relationship between gender politics and film practice also opened up the dialogue on strained issues such as funding resources and their relationship to content production and, in a much broader sense, led to questioning conceptions of knowledge production between the North and South and within and outside of academia.

The essays and interviews are informed by a set of different inquiries unified not by an essentialising retreat to a universal womanhood, but by an interrogation of what it means for people who self-identify as women to work with and in film in various contemporary contexts on the African continent.

The stories are nomadic. They transgress the shores of Africa as a geographical location, inviting reflections from the post-colonial West, including perspectives from the African diaspora in the USA and Europe, and sympathetic positions of anti-imperial self-reflections on North-South collaboration. Whereas the initial conversations at the Goethe-Institut also included practitioners from countries formerly colonised by Portugal and France, one could argue that due to the prevalence of Anglophone academic structures and the linguistic hegemony of English, not only in Africa, the British Empire has succeeded posthumously one more time. Therefore this compilation is, with some exceptions, located in an Anglo-Saxon-inspired framework.

After the Goethe-Institut's ARTSWork: Meeting of African Women Filmmakers in 2010, we took three years to search for more stories, experiences, insights and analyses to enable the evolution of the project. Our 'field research' resulted in a heterotopian set of contributions, interviews, manifestos, keynote addresses, reflections and discussion statements which form an assemblage – coming together here as *bricolage*.

As mentioned earlier, this approach also implied a grappling with the expectations and restrictions of academic publishing, which at times appeared to be at odds with Claude Levi-Strauss's concept of 'wild thinking', introduced in his book *The Savage Mind* (1962), which 'employed the *bricolage* metaphor in his search for underlying structures that govern human meaning-making' (Rogers 2012:2), and this became an inspiration for our textual assemblage. The value chain of cultural practitioners is reflected in the *bricolage* approach of this collection, which seeks to create a way of understanding the multiple factors that are involved in meaning-making and knowledge production, specifically in relation to the conditions that women in film practice encounter.

The stories required alternative research methodologies to echo the layered understanding and knowledge of what it means to identify as a woman film practitioner on the African continent. As 'wild thinking'

bricoleurs, we employed another concept from Levi-Strauss: the notion of 'mythical rationalities'.[1]

This notion was useful for collecting stories on two levels: firstly, the filmmakers are storytellers within the narrative world of the films they make; and secondly, they tell the stories of their practice of making films: the obstacles, trials, tribulations and triumphs. The sum of these narratives further contributes to how meaning is made and serves to enhance the understanding of the socio-cultural and economic circulation of these products as cultural and political artefacts.

The multiple layers of making meaning and making sense of the climate and landscape of filmmaking are seen through the veneer of the different strata at which knowledge production is possible. The conditions for differing regimes of hetero-patriarchy and (neo)-post-colonialities are inscribed in the hierarchy of cultural production: from the producers, filmmakers, curators, businesswomen and entrepreneurs, to the cultural commentators. To reflect the multiple positions women encounter in their work lives, often very much entwined with their private lives, situated within the public complexities of post-conflict and sometimes neo-colonial societies, necessitated a non-dogmatic approach, an approach that could hold ambiguities and seeming contradictions together, that did not position all women as those to whom something is done and all men as those who are doing and that enabled us to reflect on the lived realities of a North-South exchange within multiple sets of power relations without searching for innocent authenticities. What was needed was an approach recognising and promoting a different kind of knowledge production.

The socio-cultural and economic circulation of films as cultural and political artefacts provides the context to engage the relationship of filmic practices with modes of social change and justice, as well as forms that engage collective traumata.

An increasingly wide range of studies on the social, political, cultural and psycho-social consequences of regimes of terror and violence, most prominently of the Holocaust and transatlantic slavery, speak to the inter-generational transmission of trauma. This happens not only between individuals but, due to the intersection of collective and individual traumata, also within the different generations of traumatised collectives more broadly. These processes are highly gendered and

racialised as they are based in past and present identification politics: who has been identified/labelled by whom as what and consequently been violated? These politics often inform till today, in more or less subtle ways, individuals' and groups' access to redress and to resources. These politics are used to reinforce or to dismantle systems of privilege. Trauma is intimately linked to the hidden, the repressed and the forbidden – to taboos and silences. As such, collective traumata are related to memory politics: to acts of silencing and to the remembrance of certain experiences and stories on behalf of others. The politics of memory itself reflects gendered and racialised power relations (see the interviews with Djo Tunda wa Munga and Rumbi Katedza and the examination of Zanele Muholi's work).

The political condition of colonial histories, coupled with the violence of creating post-colonial freedoms in Africa, emphasises the significance of trauma as subject matter in film. As subject matter it enables filmmakers to access production possibilities (funding and exhibition) and it circumscribes form and content.

These circumstances lead to questions around establishing women's film productions as normal commodities within the framework of an (often still to be established) industry versus artistic freedom under conditions of severe financial restrictions and a lack of infrastructure and state support. The gap is often filled with NGO money, which poses new questions about independence and 'agenda setting'.

Access is not simply about navigating the local and regional production terrain. One of the complexities for women practitioners is the recurring issue of funding, resources and infrastructure. There is an important double bind in the funding models for filmmakers on the African continent. Many projects which allow opportunities for filmmakers are projects commissioned by NGOs which have specific mandates on their content production. Often themes that pertain to health, children and women's issues, or human rights programmes, or those that deal with the traumatic impact of civil unrest are well funded and offer filmmakers sustainable employment. But these projects are not necessarily the projects with which filmmakers themselves want constantly to be involved in the way that NGOs require.

NGOs are invariably positioned in the North and create varying dependencies on how content is generated on the African continent

and across classic North-South divides. Through these platforms of North-South exchange a conversation between cultural agents in film production, film programming (film curating), film criticism and the reception of film offers further reflection on how meanings come to be made differently, based on the various contexts of their reception. This is dealt with through the interviews and case studies documented in the latter part of the book.

The initial three chapters serve as a way of establishing the themes of the book in relation to one another. Beti Ellerson's historical overview of women filmmakers in Africa, alongside Christina von Braun's interrogation of the development on ideas of 'the gaze' in relation to feminist theory take the reader into a direct conversation, mediated by Ines Kappert, that questions experiences of feminist values versus practice and its lived experiences.

> Since 1969, the Third Cinema manifesto written by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino has challenged dominant modes of production and representation inscribed in North American and European ideologies. However, the politics of the manifesto and its underlying theories were developed further to address its appropriation in an African context and, more recently, to incorporate multi-culturalism as one of the means to find elasticity in its definition. Feminist re-readings acknowledge not only the need to critically (re)-examine the maybe too-positive notions of the post-colonial state as *the* agent for change, but also the need for more awareness of the complex intersections between gender and ethnicity. Notions of authentic culture often reinscribe patriarchal hegemony, while claiming anti-colonial agency:
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>> In relation to who is able to make claims on the state, and how those claims might advance Third Cinema, it is useful to note the masculinist and occidental bias in the original theories, given that approaches may vary not only according to historical circumstances (which Solanas and Getino recommend), but according to gender and ethnicity. Feminist cinema and indigenous media have had [a] far-reaching impact on the mode of production, chosen film language, and targeted audience, which might not always be a "mass" audience, yet is viewed as no less conducive to generating change at the national level. Finally, there is the complex goal of cultural self-determination, and the extent to which a

truly autochthonous media practice can develop in under-industrialized
or in neo- and postcolonial circumstances (Benamou [nd]).

To write against, or rather re-frame, the revolutionary discourse of
Third Cinema is not simply to bring gender into the equation, but
to further account for technological shifts that inform production
conditions and to recognise that some of the canonised discourses on
African representation also need to be reconsidered against emerging
nationalist discourses which serve to subvert the historically more
'homogenising' discourses on cultural production in Africa.

In a broad historical overview, Beti Ellerson's account offers some
of the key moments and early women contributors to the building of
cinema on the African continent. Her contribution sets the terrain
to contextualise the establishment of the Pan African Film and
Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) and the Pan African
Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) in 1969 and the political agenda
that informed these initiatives. African Cinema taxonomy and theory
was, in part, the recognition of the representation of colonialism – the
use of films to rethink pre-colonial knowledge and as a mode of realist
storytelling to capture the experiences of colonialism and the post-
colonial state. In this historical context the notion of 'privileged' is a
way of suggesting that the filmmakers mostly referred to in this canon
were formally trained as filmmakers – many of them in institutions
abroad. This distinction is necessary as contemporary practices of
filmmaking on the continent, as result of technological accessibility,
have revolutionised the landscape of contemporary filmmaking in
Africa. African Cinema, posited as a Pan-African concept with its
impetus informed by a political vision to use cinema not only to
connect and make accessible the experiences of Africans to each
other, also served as a vehicle for different, non-Eurocentric, cultural
representations. As Diawara writes:

… the new members of the FEPACI believed their prophetic mission
was to unite and to use film as a tool for the liberation of the colonized
countries and as a step toward the total unity of Africa. It was in this
sense that in its early days FEPACI sought to be affiliated with its
sister association, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In 1969,

at the Festival Panafricain de la Culture in Algiers, African filmmakers gathered to create an inter-African organization (1992:39).

The establishment of FEPACI was a defining moment for the programmatic agenda of 'decolonising cinema'.

Decolonisation by rejecting white imaginations in cinematic representations was a way of building solidarity; a way to provide a platform for a conscious political will through cinema and to 'take back' African history which, through colonialism, had denied Africans the ability to tell stories in a uniquely African way. While FEPACI continues to be instrumental in organising the biennial film festival in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, exponential changes and growth of film production on the continent have created a new generation of filmmakers who, firstly, do not rely on the privilege of formal film school training and, secondly, are able to tap directly into markets and create content outside of the infrastructure that has historically been necessary for the making of films (for example, national funding sources and foreign funding agencies).

There are a number of important and interesting contradictions emerging from these contemporary production conditions. These are largely informed by the collapse of certain infrastructures (for example, the closing down of many movie theatres and a lack of funding from broadcasters). Digital technology and the rapid turnover from production to distribution have further facilitated and revolutionised how films as products move into markets, not only locally and nationally, but through the current prolific network for moving products into the diaspora more globally.

Christina von Braun's chapter, 'Staged Authenticity' makes a significant departure from the more accepted idea that filmic gaze is gendered. She argues for a neutrality of the gaze on account of its mediation through the camera apparatus and rethinks the position of the observer and the potential offered in reordering gender. It is an important political move that suggests that the camera and the act of filming can 'choose between identifying with masculinity or femininity, between the experience of "inviolability" and that of "lack", and even both simultaneously'. Such a hypothesis allows for a radical shift in the politics of gaze regimes initially inscribed in cinema studies (Laura Mulvey 1975, 1981, 1989), and creates the possibility for

reconfiguring identity formations to serve the multiple functions that the 'cinema-arm' offers in an African context. Von Braun concludes: '[t]hat means learning to differentiate between the phantasmal self-images of the collective imaginary and one's own individual violability. Only then can the images of the collective imaginary be "made legible"'. It is this invitation to view the apparatus as the camera with infinite identity possibilities that enables women's film narratives to be extricated from a gendered gaze. This offers the starting point for the rest of the contributions, where there is an acute awareness that the women who reflect on their experiences and observations do so from multiple historical-political positions: colonial histories, histories of liberation and oppression. These histories and places of personal memory constitute the place for a re-imagined sense of the collective which informs a number of the underlying concerns expressed by the subjects who are interviewed in this book: Jihan El-Tahri and Taghreed Elsanhouri.

In the interview that Ines Kappert conducts with Christina von Braun and Taghreed Elsanhouri, the two subjects answer very differently to the question 'Are you a feminist?' Elsanhouri speaks of her identification as a 'feminist' as a private articulation while Von Braun offers a public declaration of her political subject positioning. Herein lies the summation of the recurring tensions that emerge in the interviews that follow and the prevailing themes that underpin the experiences of women on the African continent. The multiple roles of women, not simply as cultural practitioners in film, is bifurcated if not multi-furcated; a split-consciousness with dual agendas that inform their politics and their practices and reveal the tensions between private positions and public articulations.

There are other participants who totally refute any feminist categories, who do not ascribe to feminist politics as collective identity, as tools of analysis and as vehicle for change. Feminism for them is neither instrumental in informing their practice nor relevant in transforming the patriarchal structures in their communities. Instead, in their discussions femininity and feminism come to be conflated or are viewed as mutually exclusive. Feminism is an individual experience, a private act, and the collectivisation of feminist politics is seen, in part, as anti-feminine. In this instance, these film practitioners claim an individual agency but refuse a collective political identity. This refusal is not infused with a post-

modern anti-identitarian critique as raised by post-colonial and/or queer feminists, who problematise politics of belonging based on imagining a homogenous 'we'. The rejection of the need to adopt a position within a chosen political collective is often grounded in situating oneself as an individual, in notions of natural femininity and heterosexuality and/or a tactical disguise of one's sympathies with a collective battle in order to better 'work the system from within'. Mozambican filmmaker Isabel Noronha in her interview with Max Annas and Henriette Gunkel calls her filmmaking practice 'cinema of resistance', in which she explores life in a post-colonial state. In the detailed account of her development towards a film practice she shows how personal will rather than a collective identification is the source from which she draws her emancipation, a sentiment not unlike those expressed in the interview with Jihan El-Tahri. These women are less concerned with the immediate politics of gender as a collective identification and more focused on the broader terrain of the politics of patriarchy and the way in which individual experience enables individual emancipation.

What are the challenges of representing these non-conforming paradigmatic and pragmatic experiences? How do we reflect on knowledge production that belies any programmatic structure, that is responsive, spontaneous to opportunity and motivated by a desire to reinvent as determined by individual will and yet inspired on occasion by a collective consciousness?

We refer to Spivak's notion of *strategic essentialism* to ground political agency in a universal understanding (culturally, socially, biologically) of 'womanhood'. But acknowledging that the political, theoretical and/or personal preferences 'we' women have are informed by our different socio-political positions means also acknowledging that such preferences amongst women do differ. We might agree or disagree on how to claim agency and in the course of claiming agency we might agree or disagree on how we as women identify ourselves. One might call herself feminist, another might reject this label as anti-feminine, anti-men, a white Western legacy, and might prefer to identify as womanist (Alice Walker), or as a woman of colour activist, or as 'woman-identified woman' (the Radical Lesbian manifesto; see Radicalesbians 1970) or simply as a woman empowered by her mother rather than by any political movement.

But beyond all differences, it is obvious that the marginality of women in society and of women as film practitioners needs to be radically and consciously challenged, with multiple direct and indirect tactics, and with both individual and collective strategies. Consequently, this book documents a repositioning that is demanded, insisted upon, not by proxy but by women themselves working in this field who speak vividly of reconfiguring their positions as cultural practitioners.

Given that gender is a relational social construct, framing proper femininity as well as proper masculinity by Othering alternative gender performances, we recognise that gender relations experienced by practitioners in film are not a matter to be addressed (or challenged) by women only; there are also (male) scholars and practitioners, such as Annas and Wa Munga, who are interested in how to subvert and change dominant gender hierarchies in societies in general and in cultural productions specifically, particularly cultural productions which inform hegemonic and alternative ways of seeing gender.

Women making films have historically always been on the margins. *African* women making films are a doubly over-determined marginality. How should one approach this subject matter, which requires considered deliberation not simply as a matter of historical redress, but which begs a political (re)positioning on its own terms? Similar but different in its vision and agenda, Djo Tunda wa Munga and Rumbi Katedza, in a highly charged conversation, express the differences and similarities in their experiences of making films as a vehicle for healing. The traumatic histories of their respective countries, the DRC and Zimbabwe, offer a backdrop for what, in part, informs their film projects. Each sees art and the film medium as a means for holding a mirror up to the societies they come from. In this interview both film practitioners regard film as a means to educate and conscientise and as a tool to create a site for socio-political change in their countries. And even though their agendas might be similar, the fact that Katedza is a woman means that her access and experiences are markedly different from those of Wa Munga.

Visual artist and photographer, Zanele Muholi, makes films that have a strong aesthetic awareness of violence as a landscape on which to offer her socio-political and historical commentary. Antje Schuhmann's analysis of Muholi's work not only serves as a site that confronts violence against women and the politics of Othering in an either hetero-normative or (post-)

colonial context, but is augmented through autobiographical reflection and activism. Schuhmann is able to bring to the fore the significance of film as a creative, artistic practice which intervenes in dominant memory politics and national identity projects. Collective trauma is a subtext in Schuhmann's discussion of Muholi's visual activism and its forms of archiving, documenting, giving voice and claiming voice, of making visible the invisible; a reading of Muholi's mixed media work is situated in a psychoanalytically informed cultural analysis. Navigating topographies of violence leads to the question of how to 'heal' an imperial, hetero-normative gaze and how to correct or subvert hegemonic gaze regimes. The role of film as artistic expression, coupled with visual activism, is an addition to the conditions of production informing the multi-layered possibilities of how and why women on the African continent make films. While Muholi is unambiguous in her commitment to an art practice, she expresses the need for didactism: her artistic practice is about educating an audience and creating a space for black lesbian women to be recognised and centred in a contemporary democratic South Africa.

In the case study of Fanta Régina Nacro's *Puk Nini* (1995) a sample audience reveals some of the competing factors at play in what is considered desirable (or plausible) for different markets and/or audiences. What is apparent from the conversation held at a roundtable in Johannesburg, South Africa is that audiences in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, responded to the same film in a different context (South Africa) in a way that was notably distinct. Perceptions differ not only due to locality, but also due to age; African societies are made up of young people navigating the tensions between innovation and tradition. The perceptions of gender relations vary from place to place and from one generation to the next, while the lived realities of hegemonic understandings of masculinity and femininity at the intersection of class and race often seem relatively similar but differ in rural and urban contexts. These differences are constructive in that they are opportunities for addressing similarities and differences in the issues raised: gender relations, the representation of women and men and issues that emerge through discourses on culture.

Discourses on the female body politics, mobilised for the purposes of national culture and nation state formation, is reflected in Nobunye Levin's chapter 'I am Saartjie Baartman'. In her chapter she considers the significance of the repatriation of the body of Sarah Baartman (otherwise

known as the Hottentot Venus) in forging a post-apartheid South African identity. Levin provides a close reading of the historically ascribed white European male gaze on Baartman's black female body. The place of male narrators in Baartman's history, defined in the documentaries of Swazi-born filmmaker Zola Maseko, is another position from which she considers dominant discourses of this historical figure. It is at this point that she shifts from her analytical position to her role as a filmmaker. Her strategy for countering and challenging these male narratives that have been in the service of empirical or nationalist discourses is to reclaim the personal in Baartman's history. In her film *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009), Levin describes her creative and narrative choices: to return to personal and intimate experiences of Baartman as a woman and to explore her loves and losses. As a filmmaker, Levin is aware of the recurrent cinematic representation of women's bodies as symbolic of the nation state, and her insistence on reclaiming the space of the private is a political strategy to subvert official and prevalent histories that have been codified through predominantly male representations.

Making films might be considered an artistic practice but it is also a business endeavour; films are also a commodity. In addition, films can be used as instruments to educate and/or as a mode of activism. For women on the African continent it is also a potential site for labour and economic empowerment. It is a vehicle through which to render histories and experiences visible. It is also a cultural product which travels – it crosses borders – and in this movement new meanings are produced. 'Africa' is no more a homogenous continent than 'woman' is a single universal category. The experiences of regional and geographical loci are inflected by gender, by class, by sexual orientation, by ethnic positioning, by rural or urban contexts, not to mention specific national histories of pre-colonial formations, slavery, colonialism, apartheid, liberation struggles and current conditions of post-coloniality. Logically, the question 'What does it mean for women to be involved in cultural production in film in Africa?' can only produce more questions. Given the differences amongst women, what are the intersections or similarities in the ways in which they experience their cultural practice? What are the coping mechanisms which they might share? What are the specifics? What are the challenges and chances of succeeding as women film practitioners on the African continent?

Women who work in film as cultural practitioners are not only filmmakers. They are also businesswomen and entrepreneurs, curators and cultural critics. They are writers or producers. Some of these women's voices are collected in this book.

The chapters on production and curatorial practices reposition women's film and filmmaking from the margin to a more visible, prominent position and allow these voices to be heard, at times even in their disharmony.

The film practitioners, also as producers and directors and interview subjects, reflect a multi-faceted understanding of gender relations, gendered inequalities and political agency – either as individual or collective and at times both. This agency may be claimed in the name of feminism or not. In Jyoti Mistry's contribution, 'Filmmaking at the Margins of a Community', a number of competing understandings of agency emerge. In the course of her role as co-producer of *Elelwani* (Ntshavheni wa Luruli, 2012), the tensions between the narrative world of the film and the real-world experience of the rural women participating in its production becomes starkly evident. She analyses the experiences of agency for the women in the local Venda community as a split experience, as double consciousness: women at once the subjects of a sovereign and citizens in a South African democratic state. For some women filmmakers the identification with feminist theory and practice is political in various enabling ways; it connects their filmmaking practice with socio-political change. While on the one hand they acknowledge their agency, as in the case of Jihan El-Tahri's interview, they also recognise their marginality in the broader hegemonic, patriarchal sense in the 'business' of filmmaking, as expressed in Tsitsi Dangarembga's 'A Manifesto'.

The inclusion of conversations and reflections by Shannon Walsh and Arya Lalloo on their collaborative filmmaking project *Jeppe on a Friday* (2012) is an important marker of how women filmmakers are not only experimenting with alternative film languages but are also finding different approaches to the production process of filmmaking. It is a conversation about the centrality of new aesthetics emerging in the context of different ways of filmmaking, and about how content and form are mutually informative.

Their collaborative project sets into motion numerous interrogatory questions regarding how geo-political positions and cultural assumptions

come to inform content, one filmmaker being from the North (Walsh) and the other from the South (Lalloo). As Lalloo and Walsh observe, there are inherent mistrusts from the outside that are also imposed on these forms of collaboration as to the equity of conceptual and creative inputs. These filmmakers not only reflect on how these mistrusts operate, but show how they become productive spaces for ensuring their own interrogation of the power of representation in both the characters they choose and how they tell their stories.

In some ways the issue of mistrust mirrors the debates expressed by Dorothee Wenner regarding North-South initiatives that have enabled African filmmakers in various projects. It is worth considering how the opportunity afforded to the young and talented filmmaker Hawa Essuman (see Wenner's contribution) is in part undermined through this rhetoric and instead of the opportunity being seen as empowering it reproduces, in dangerous ways, the absence of creative and political agency that has historically been denied to women. But in their interview, Lalloo and Walsh reflect a powerful political agency not only in the production choice to collaborate, but also in the demand to reconsider historical privileging of the male gaze. In their film they select five male characters from the inner-city neighbourhood of Jeppestown to explore urban regeneration and development. Their stylistic choices of how to shoot, engage with and represent the male protagonists provide a refreshing observation of masculinity in an urban context. The decision to represent women in their absence against a backdrop of a male-dominated part of the city provides a significant creative and political intervention. These decisions invite debate and Walsh and Lallo express their differing lack of resolution regarding the gender politics of this choice.

Anita Khanna, as a seasoned writer, festival director and producer, offers a general overview of the local South African and global climate for women filmmakers, balancing the tensions between commercial imperatives, independent filmmaking and the specifics of the African context for women filmmakers. She suggests that women work differently in the production process, and she shows how this results in different kinds of films. Women's approach to filmmaking is different, she maintains, not only in the narratives they choose, but significantly also, in how they work on set and with crews.

This duality of critical analysis and creative practice is one of the modes through which women filmmakers seek to interrupt, to destabilise and to defy dominant representations of women's histories, and in so doing seek to create new cinematic languages that best express women's histories and women's experiences.

Katarina Hedrén's review of *Barakat!* (Djamila Sahraoui, 2006) addresses the representation of the film's main female characters who access public spaces in search of one of their husbands in war-torn Algeria. She problematises the tensions between 'normative' modes of representing women in Africa and those representations from *African women* filmmakers that challenge this 'normativity'. Hedrén briefly discusses three film narratives which empower women in different ways before presenting a close reading of *Barakat!* She examines how Sahraoui moves the women protagonists in her film away from the 'victim' label that society is so ready to put on women affected by war, oppression and trauma and in so doing shapes a narrative that reflects on the split consciousness of the women and their feelings about their political environment. In Hedrén's words, Sahraoui 'chooses to portray women who, out of desperation, fear or simply because "they are done" with being oppressed and victimised, decide to take control over their own destinies'.

The place of co-productions and collaborations with European countries plays a vital role in how content is produced and exhibited, but is also the site of contested politics, as is revealed in Dorothee Wenner's candid piece on festival programming. She recounts the making of *Soul Boy* (Hawa Essuman and Tom Tykwer, 2010) and the 'external forces' that effect, shape or challenge definitions. While co-productions with France, Germany and Portugal are less foregrounded in the book, it is evident through experiences recounted by filmmakers like Taghreed Elsanhouri and Jihan El-Tahri that funding plays a pivotal role in how films come to be made and eventually distributed.

Limited infrastructure locally and nationally are just two of many production obstacles and why funding is often sought abroad. Funding from abroad, however, often determines the content. Taghreed Elsanhouri, Jihan El-Tahri and Tsitsi Dangarembga all offer reflections and experiences regarding this context and the political terrain which, at times, both enables and disables the possibility of a climate more conducive to women's making films on the African continent. Often

foreign agencies that commission content are the primary sources for women filmmakers to produce content, and while this sector is a viable mode for income and employment as film practitioners, the content is often determined by the briefs from these agencies.

These push-pull factors are the underlying source of tensions, which also inform the conditions of reception for films. Films commissioned by agencies are, in some instances, not for local consumption, and films produced with local markets in mind are driven by a different set of imperatives. Wenner's contribution on the politics in the world of film festival programming is a revealing and complex unfolding of how festivals are perfectly poised to introduce African content to European audiences. In the context of film festivals, there is an openness and receptivity to African films even though there remains a 'stigma' that African films are issue driven or bleak. However, the economic drivers outside the festival circuit paint a wholly different picture: European distributors and exhibitors are less likely to sign on African films as part of their general programming because African films still do not perform well at the box office when compared with other art house films. Yet the video-film industry in Africa is part of a booming informal economy where content is made locally for specific local audiences whose expectations and reception are very distinct from those informing the selection made for international film festivals.

The capacity for cinema as an instrument of political commentary and as a challenge to colonialism, as a reflection of post-colonial experiences and as a challenge to hegemonic, Eurocentric and bourgeois representations, is historically well anchored in the theories of Third Cinema.

Paul Willemen makes a valuable observation about Indian cinema that may usefully be applied to the shift in conditions of film production in Africa:

> It allows us to address questions regarding the mobilization of pre-capitalist ideologies and capitalist but anti-imperialist tendencies among urban workers and underclasses; about the operative differences between central and regional capitals, and so on. This type of approach allows us to envisage the possibility that in some circumstances, bourgeois cultural trends may have a greater emancipatory potential

than anti-capitalist ones which hark back to an idealized fantasy of pre-colonial innocence (2006:40).

Such an observation speaks directly to the issue of the shifting economic and political landscapes in contemporary Africa. The tension between 'bourgeois trends' and a socio-political drive is well captured in Wenner's reflections on the complexities of programming films made in Africa for European festivals.

And again, as *bricoleurs* our aim was not to find voices that echo our positions, but rather to position multiple perspectives in their contradictions next to one another and allow them to be interpreted within the socio-political and cultural context, as well as the local and national position of the speaker and the reader. The perspectives of the women whose voices we collected for this book are shaped by their respective experiences of empowerment or disempowerment. They are shaped by class, gender, sexuality and race and so are their interpretations. Willemen draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) concept 'creative understanding' to address the relationship between reading, interpretation and the position of the reader relative to how meaning is produced:

> … one must be "other" oneself if anything is learned about the meanings of other cultures, of another culture's limits, the effectiveness of its borders, of the areas where, … "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place." … for Bakhtin, creative understanding requires a thorough knowledge of at least two cultural spheres. It is not simply a matter of engaging in a dialogue with some other culture's products, but of using one's understanding of another cultural practice to re-perceive and rethink one's own cultural constellation at the same time (Willemen 2006:37–38).

In offering this assemblage as *bricoleurs* we have brought together some of the most vocal and instrumental female-identified cultural practitioners working in film on the African continent today. We follow hereby a notion of creative understanding that not only demands that the writer and participant be subject to making meaning but also, as Bakhtin suggests, invites the reader to rethink their own position when engaging these contributions.

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NOTES

1 'In societies adopting mythical rationalities, Levi Strauss explains, meaning-making processes mirror a bricolage process. Like an "intellectual bricolage", he explains, mythical-knowers piece together their life-history with artifacts (e.g. texts, discourses, social practices) of their given cultural context to construct meaning' (Rogers 2012:3).

AFRICAN WOMEN IN CINEMA: AN OVERVIEW[1]

BETI ELLERSON

African cinema born during the African independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s re-appropriated the camera as a tool to counter the colonialist gaze that had dominated representations of Africa up until that time. The emergence of women in African cinema coincided with this nascent period during which a cadre of film professionals positioned themselves for the creation of a veritable African cinema culture. One such professional of note is the pioneer of Senegalese media culture, Annette Mbaye d'Erneville: feminist, journalist, writer, communications specialist, media activist and culture critic. The first Senegalese to earn a degree in journalism, she studied in Paris in the late 1940s, and since returning to Senegal in 1957 she has devoted her life to the cultural politics of the country, forging important institutions such as the Association Sénégalaise de la Critique Cinématographique, Rencontres Cinématographiques de Dakar (RECIDAK), and the Henriette Bathily Women's House. [2]

Similarly, Guadeloupean Sarah Maldoror, who was born and raised in France, joined forces with artists from Africa and the Caribbean during a time of heightened cultural, intellectual and political discovery. In the early 1960s she went to Moscow to study filmmaking.

[3] Having already joined the pro-independence movements, it is not surprising that her films would take on similar anti-colonialist themes. She has been a mentor and role model to many African women filmmakers, notably Togolese Anne-Laure Folly Reimann, whose film *Sarah Maldoror ou la nostalgie de l'utopie* (1998) traces her own life as filmmaker *engagée*.

Several women were among the film professionals who established the Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) and the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI), both created in 1969. These two exemplary African cinema institutions continue to be a reference for continental co-operation and organisation in the area of culture. Zalika Souley, trailblazing actress from Niger, served on the founding committee of FEPACI, while Burkinabé Alimata Salembéré, one of the founding members of FESPACO, and whose compatriot Odette Sangho was also a member, presided over the organising committee of the first festival. The documentary *Tam Tam à Paris*, made in 1963 by journalist Thérèse Sita-Bella, was among the entries at the festival and is considered the earliest film by an African woman. Four years later, in 1967, Ghanaian dramatist and writer Efua Sutherland collaborated with the US television network ABC in the production of *Arabia: The Village Story*, a major documentary film. These pioneering women continued in their respective fields of journalism and drama, having made only one film, a common practice among the women who also utilise the moving image as a mode of expression in their chosen career. Moreover, recent developments in the seminal organisations FESPACO and FEPACI attest to the desire to continue to include women in key decision-making positions. Seipati Bulane-Hopa of South Africa served as general secretary of FEPACI from 2006 to 2013, and at the 23rd edition of FESPACO, in 2013, women took on leadership roles – one of them as president of the main juries. At the same edition, Alimata Salembéré was in the spotlight as guest of honour, in recognition of her pioneering role in the organisation.

The 1960s also witnessed the first World Festival of Black Arts, a seminal event hosted in Senegal in 1966, during which Safi Faye, Senegalese film director and ethnologist, and the first sub-Saharan African woman to direct a commercially distributed feature film, would

enter a world that would change the course of her career (Pfaff 2004).

The 1970s, a decade of unprecedented global focus on women, heralded a call to action in all spheres of women's lives: the declaration of the United Nations Decade of Women (1976–1985); the evolution of a universal women's rights movement; and the maturation of second-wave feminism, which would influence the development of women's studies in the academy, feminist film theory and a critical inquiry into the visual representation of women all brought about global changes. A noteworthy development during the decade was the emergence of the bilingual feminist research group the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), created in 1977 and based in Senegal. Moreover, from this defining decade emerged a sustained presence of African women filmmakers. Pioneer Safi Faye recalls the curiosity in the early 1970s around her enrolment at the École Nationale Supérieure Louis-Lumière in Paris as the first African woman to attend the prestigious film school. [4]

The internationality of the UN Decade of Women engendered the notion of a global sisterhood, though not without tension[5] – at five-year intervals (1975, 1980, 1985) three conferences were convened on three continents, in America, Europe and Africa (Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi respectively). With it came a flurry of research, conferences, reports and monographs, reflecting the diverse experiences of women around the world. For example, in 1978 women scholars throughout the African continent participated in a study visit organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to conduct research on African women in the media (Anani, Keita & Rahman 1981). One of the first of its kind, the study's purpose was to analyse images of women in the media and the representation of women in policy-making positions in the African media. One of the principle premises postulated was that if there was an increase in the number of women representatives in media policy-making decisions, there would be the likelihood of more positive images appearing in the media, since a cadre of women in positions of power would serve as role models. Similarly, in 1984, in preparation for the final UN Women's Decade Conference, and in collaboration with the Association of Women Professionals in Communications, AAWORD organised the seminar 'Women, Communication, Development:

What perspectives for Nairobi 1985?' This initiative underscored AAWORD's understanding of the importance of women at the intersection of media and African development.

In the 1980s many African women's films reiterated the themes of the UN Decade for Women. It is no coincidence that during and after the UN Decade for Women there was a surge of African women filmmakers and, correspondingly, international visibility of these filmmakers and their films, many of which focused on the subjects of women and empowerment, calling attention to economic, social and cultural development from the perspective of women. The 1980s also witnessed a remarkable growth in film production by women. Many of the first generation of Burkinabé women passed through the doors of the Institut Africain d'Education Cinématographique (INAFEC), the historic film school based in Burkina Faso (which closed in 1987). Similarly, the first wave of Kenyan women film practitioners appeared during the early 1980s, many of whom studied at the Film Training Department at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication. This impressive showing confirms the observations of Kenyan scholar Wanjiku Beatrice Mukora that women performed a key role in shaping a national cinema in Kenya (Mukora 1999).

In the final decade of the 20th century a combination of disparate movements would be instrumental to the professionalisation of African women in cinema and their growth throughout the continent and beyond.

The strengthening of networks through organising, outreach and advocacy during the 1990s ensured a visible continent-wide and international presence. Having already developed a framework for action at the seminal 'Colloque Images de Femmes', the women's film forum at Vues d'Afrique (Montreal) in 1989, the genesis of an organised movement emerged. The 12th edition of FESPACO in 1991 marked a historical moment for African women in the visual media as they forged a framework for the organisation that is now known as the Pan-African Union of Women in the Image Industry.

Paradoxically, at the end of the Decade for Women in 1985, second-wave feminism started to wane, with a post-feminist discourse arising in the 1990s and asserting that feminism had achieved its goal of eradicating sexism and confronting masculinity and machismo. At

the 'L'Engagement de femmes cineastes' roundtable organised by the Cinemas of the South Pavilion at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival (Africultures 2008), the use of the word 'generation' initially suggested a shift in attitudes about and among women.

Veteran filmmaker Moufida Tlatli recounted her experiences as a young student at the 'l'IDHEC École Nationale Supérieure des Métiers de l'Image et du Son' in Paris in 1968, at a time when women were expected to settle into careers as film editors or script supervisors. Her younger counterparts talked about very different experiences, much more on par with their male counterparts. The most edifying aspect of the discussion was its inter-generational and inter-continental focus on the plurality of experiences across generations, ethnicities, cultures and locations. Personal histories and post-colonial legacies were part of the mix of a very exciting dialogue among women of the South in general, and of African women in particular, who expressed a genuine willingness to address the complex issues in their experiences head on. In spite of the generational shift in experiences *vis-à-vis* women's role as film practitioners, the current practices and experiences of women in Africa echoed those sentiments expressed by the first generation of African women film practitioners. For instance, as I have explored elsewhere:

> feminists [sic] film studies that emerged in the 1970s were centred around the term "women and cinema" as [their] point of departure … [whereas] Safi Faye of that generation had already taken a non-gendered position, thus not distinguishing herself from a male filmmaker: "I do not make a difference between Safi the woman or Safi the man". This position echoes the present-day sentiments of Osvalde Lewat, who comes from a later generation of filmmakers, [and who] brought into question the gendering of the term *cineaste* in the colloquy title at Cannes (Africultures 2008) that specified "women cineastes" (Kelly & Robson 2014).

The increased migration of Africans to North America for study and work, coupled with the coming-of-age of Africans born and/or raised in the African diasporas of the West have resulted in changing dynamics in the construction of identities and their politics. These conditions have informed how African women are utilising cinema

to examine their social, political and cultural location, which is contextualised within the larger framework of post-colonialism, encompassing a Duboisian 'double consciousness' (Du Bois 1903) and a Fanonian 'black skin white mask' (Fanon 1967). As early as 1972, Safi Faye explored the notion of dual identity in the film *La Passante*, as a young woman navigates between French and Senegalese cultures. More than a generation later, Afro-Europeans – born and/or raised in the West, who have both European and African parents, or who have migrated to Europe (and now call it home) – also negotiate an Afro-European identity. However, these contemporary filmmakers pose questions on the contemporary issues of nationality, citizenship, integration, clandestine migration and the plight of the *sans-papiers*. And, not unlike their elders, layered within these themes are also questions of Euro-centred aesthetics, values and attitudes about beauty, culture, dress and behaviour. Filmmakers of this generation include Franco-Burkina Fasoan Sarah Bouyain (*Children of the White Man*, 2000 and *The Place In Between*, 2010); Franco-Congolese Claude Haffner (*Footprints of My Other*, 2011); Belgo-Congolese Pauline Mulombe (*Everyone has Reasons to be Angry with their Mother,* 2010); Paris-based Rwandan Jacqueline Kalimunda (*About Braids*, 2003); and Cameroonian Pascale Obolo (*La Femme Invisible,* 2008).

While much focus has been placed on African filmmakers who migrate to European metropoles to work, there is also an increasing number of filmmakers who journey to North America, both to Canada and to the United States. Furthermore, the 1990s witnessed a first generation of 'hybrids', born in the USA to African parents, who are grappling with and confronting issues of duality and fragmentation, as well as notions of home. Among these are Eritrean-American Asmara Beraki (*Anywhere Else*, 2012) and Sierra Leonean-American Nikyatu Jusu (*African Booty Scratcher*, 2008).

Identity has been a persistent theme in African filmmaking since its inception. The idea of a 'triple consciousness' explored by Akosua Adoma Owusu problematises the theme of dual identities in *Me Broni Ba* (2009), and is a more recent phenomenon experienced by this generation. They are not among the historical African diaspora known as African-American, yet are not wholly African in the sense of culture and language. None the less, they embrace both cultures and view the

world much more universally, including their ancestral homes as part of the measure of their identities. On the other hand, the omnipresence of 'African-American' history and culture encourages an identification with this dominant ethnic minority that is so present and defined in the culture of the US.

The first decade of the new millennium witnessed the rise to pre-eminence of the Internet and the digital dominance of new media, which have become essential to the work of African women film practitioners. Websites and blogs are a popular means to showcase artists' statements, biographies, filmographies and trailers. Online video hosting and sharing sites such as YouTube, Dailymotion and Vimeo have enormous potential in the areas of African film spectatorship and distribution. The phenomenal success of social networking utilities such as Facebook and Twitter has also not gone unnoticed by African filmmakers. On a continent that has been frustrated by the difficulties of communication, these digital platforms have been an important means for networking, especially to exchange current information and up-to-the-minute activity. This burst of energy fostered by these unprecedented media tools may indeed suggest that a new era has begun. While this is an exciting and potentially game-changing development, it must be viewed with equal caution as the digital divide continues to plague Africa in particular. As the Internet becomes the standard for communication, those in the more impoverished parts of the African continent who have limited access to these communication capabilities will be rendered less visible or left out completely.

At the start of the second decade of the millennium the African Union declared 2010–2020 the African Women's Decade. Since the end of the UN Decade for Women in 1985, the achievements of a generation have come to fruition. The hope is that the efforts of women since the inception of African cinema some half a century ago will continue to serve as a model for this generation of women who, having learnt important lessons from their elders, will forge ahead into a future that has many more opportunities, resources and possibilities.

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NOTES

1   Versions of this article have been published in: Kelly & Robson (2014) and in Ellerson (2012).

2   See Institut Panos Afrique de l'Ouest (The Panos Institute West Africa). 'Femmes africaines des médias: Portraits de journalists et de cinéastes africaines'. January 2005. [Online]. Available: http://www.panos-ao.org/ipao/IMG/Femmes_Afric_Medias.pdf (accessed 1 March 2014).

3   While in Moscow, Maldoror met the late Ousmane Sembene, who is regarded as the father of African cinema, while studying on a scholarship at the Gerasimov Institute

of Cinematography (VGIK) (formerly known as the All- Union-State Institute of Cinematography). Josephine Woll traces the connection between the Soviet Union and francophone African filmmakers who trained there, noting that in the 1960s and 1970s the Soviet Union offered support to sub-Saharan African countries (In Pfaff 2004).

4   Interview with author, February 1997 at FESPACO in Ouagadaougou,Burkina Faso.

5   The Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) was created in order to address Western feminist hegemony on women's studies, feminist ideology and research on women in general, which became increasing visible during the United Nations Programme for International Women's Year in 1975 (see AAWORD 1982).

'I AM A FEMINIST ONLY IN SECRET'

INTERVIEW WITH

**TAGHREED ELSANHOURI AND
CHRISTINA VON BRAUN**

INTERVIEW BY

INES KAPPERT

I n September 2010 African women filmmakers met with *taz* editor, German author and journalist Ines Kappert, who also took the time to interview German intellectual, filmmaker and feminist academic Christina von Braun and Sudanese filmmaker Taghreed Elsanhouri. While debate about the state of filmmaking on the continent continues, especially for women practitioners, there is an increasing demand for stories which capture authentic perspectives and reveal how women from the continent narrate stories from an African point of view. Within the framework of the three-day 'ARTSWork: Meeting of African Women Filmmakers' conference, Elsanhouri and von Braun met to discuss what it means to take a camera in one's hand as a woman in the Sudan and why feminism has a bad reputation in African societies.

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INES KAPPERT: *In your films and in your work in general, the gender perspective and negotiations between men and women play an important role. Would you call yourselves feminists?*

TAGHREED ELSANHOURI: Only in secret.

CHRISTINA VON BRAUN: Naturally I am a feminist. The term is used almost only in a defamatory sense in the public domain; this is all the more reason to confess to it.

TAGHREED: To label myself a feminist would be counterproductive. We, that is my generation of women between 20 and 40 years old, are all grateful today for what women achieved in the seventies, but in our everyday lives we have learned that we have to proceed more strategically in order to get from A to B. Apart from that, for me as a black woman, race is just as important as gender.

INES [TO CHRISTINA]: Younger women, especially, dismiss the feminist movement as a point of reference in the struggle for their own freedom of action remarkably often. Does that annoy you?

CHRISTINA: Annoy? I don't know. If women can't relate to feminism, then they are entitled not to. That doesn't affect me. But, unfortunately, closet feminists *de facto* put their names to the defamatory attributions to feminism. We shouldn't participate in these derogatory discourses, and that doesn't at all mean adopting an uncritical stance towards women's movements and the different shades of feminism. But of course I understand that it is somewhat different for a Sudanese woman than for myself.

TAGHREED: Perhaps it is time to rehabilitate the term. At the moment to be a feminist is just as much as to be despised for saying: 'I am a Communist.'

INES: What meaning does solidarity have for you?

TAGHREED: That has to do with my multi-culturalism, too. I was born in the Sudan and then grew up in London and also went to school there. I am completely clear about what Western women have achieved in the West. I am aware also that I profit from their achievements, whether it has to do with the right to a divorce or the right to vote. But I don't believe that I'm dishonouring this legacy because I don't wear a feminist badge on my chest all the time. There are very diverse forms of solidarity.

CHRISTINA: One should never forget: the first women's movement, the Suffragettes, was used by the colonial rulers, male and female, to undermine Egyptian society. The same people who stood up for doing away with the veil and promoted the 'modernisation' of women in Egypt fought against the franchise for women in Great Britain. To that extent, it isn't surprising that in African societies, feminism is seen as a Western import and has accordingly been given a bad reputation. But I'm pleading for people to keep in mind that there isn't only one 'feminism', but very many different forms – in the West, too. In France, for instance, emancipation is understood somewhat differently from in, say, Germany or Scandinavia.

INES: The wholesale rejection of feminist ideas today as always paternalistic, if not colonialist, could also harm Western women because they have nothing to do with colonialism – even if it is only because of being born at a later time, or just because they're trying to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors.

TAGHREED: I'd like to tell you both a story. When I was travelling around in South Sudan for the first time, I came across Nomad women who had never been to school. This shocked me greatly because the women looked just like me and in spite of that, they almost appeared to belong to another species. I thought at the time, for heaven's sake, they can't even write, what happens to them and what is my responsibility here? Such a thought made me think for the first time about the differences in the experiences of women in the Sudan. Perhaps white women felt like that when they encountered us, women in Africa. Perhaps they felt as if too much was asked of them and they were full of sympathy. In this sense there might be a similarity in this situation. And I wanted to help but hadn't a clue as to how to do it or where to start.

CHRISTINA: I have never been an activist who attended large street demonstrations, it isn't my thing. But in my research work I have continually asked myself the question: What were the circumstances that produced particular images of men and women? What were the cultural, societal and spiritual factors that characterised gender and the role of images in creating role models? Probably even the demand for emancipation is the product of historical circumstances. If we are to view it internationally, every society

has its own type of emancipation. No one else can do it for you, it has to be created by the people, the women themselves.

INES [TO CHRISTINA]: Among other things, your scientific interest is directed toward the genealogy of cinema and the dominant ways of looking or gaze regimes. How are these connected?

CHRISTINA: Every new technology in the media was accompanied by a change in the order of the sexes. It does not matter whether we are speaking about the invention of the alphabet, the central perspective, the printing press or even the invention of the cinema at the end of the 19th century. Photography – and, following on from that, cinema – has adopted dominant ways of looking at the central perspective. Put simply, these have defined looking as male and being-looked-at as female. But the visual techniques are Western inventions and so these dominant ways of looking, the idea of the gendered gaze, are genuinely Western, too. In a different historical or social context these techniques may have a different effect on how technology, its relation to the gaze and gender intersect.

TAGHREED: Without doubt there is a cultural difference with regard to the gaze. The Western gaze is very direct as opposed to that of the East. In the East it is not customary to look one another in the eyes. Women and men, especially, routinely avoid direct eye contact and because of this I always find it exciting when a protagonist in film looks at me unabashedly or looks directly into the camera.

INES: Why?

TAGHREED: Maybe it is only curiosity because the man or woman concerned isn't perhaps so familiar with the visual media. In spite of this there is always something radical and confrontational about not avoiding the eye of the camera but presenting oneself openly to it.

CHRISTINA: This would mean that in a culture that avoids the direct gaze or eye contact, a dialogue with the eyes is subverted by the direct gaze into the camera. This would represent an act of subversion in your own culture?

TAGHREED: Perhaps, yes.

CHRISTINA: But it could also mean that you employ the technique and in so doing use Western tradition subversively. This tradition actually claims that the human being cannot return the one-sided gaze of the camera eye.

INES [TO TAGHREED]: When you were in your mid-20s you returned to the home country of your parents for the first time, and in 2006 you made your first documentary film, All About Darfur. *What meaning does 'own culture' have for you?*

TAGHREED: I haven't any 'own culture'. I live in a state of continuous psychological stress and tension. As an adolescent I felt this hybridity to be burdensome, but today I experience it as a source of creativity.

CHRISTINA: You mentioned that in *All About Darfur* many women didn't want to express an opinion in front of the camera. Why is this?

TAGHREED: There are many reasons. For a start, I am a city woman and many of my interview partners in the Sudan came from the countryside and had never been to school. For that reason, there was an enormous gap in education. In addition, I was working with a cameraman. But, interestingly, the women always immediately understood that I was the boss and not the cameraman. Most Sudanese women aren't used to being asked for their opinion or advice, especially not where political topics are concerned. My question as to how they experienced the partition of the Sudan was probably too political, and because of their insecurity in being invited to express an opinion, the women then hid behind their veils. The younger ones started to giggle while the older ones become pointedly quiet. In the end I needed a week to gain their confidence, but I learnt my lesson. If I wanted the voices of women, especially in remote regions, then I had to plan in production to spend more time with the women and gain their confidence. This additional time also costs more money.

CHRISTINA: What does it mean to be a woman with a camera and to be filming in a culture that prefers to avoid direct eye contact? Isn't that almost obscene?

TAGHREED: In some ways it is brutal, to say the least, but it's very important to me. In fact, I insist on direct eye contact. Perhaps this is where my Western education comes into play or perhaps I'm too hard on my culture. But no, I don't think that I should have to apologise only because I'm demanding something.

CHRISTINA: But couldn't the avoidance of eye contact between the sexes also be a sign of respect?

TAGHREED: It does involve respect, but it is a double-edged respect. I interpret men's looking away from me particularly as a lack of attention to me. It is as if they don't believe I could be capable of understanding their words and deliberations.

INES: If you were a man, do you believe you would have been addressed directly?

TAGHREED: Yes, of course. Men address each other directly and women address each other directly. Men to men and women to women.

INES: According to this, the camera does assist in adopting a male subject position as women therefore garner more respect?

TAGHREED: As a documentary filmmaker the camera unconditionally is subject to my control and I can ask the questions, and in this context one can't just ignore me. For me, the averted gaze is a metaphor for the majority of people in the Sudan who don't want to confront reality. They want to look away and they don't want to take any responsibility. This is what makes me very angry. But with the camera – my camera can confront people with their averted gaze and it relentlessly demands attention. If I speak in front of the camera, I am then always challenged to reflect on my words and this requires self-reflection from both the filmmaker and the conversation partner.

CHRISTINA: What a wonderful description of the work of a female cinematographer!

INES [TO CHRISTINA] : *At the same time, this intimacy with the camera eye, connoted as masculine, diverges clearly from your interpretation. You rather saw the camera as an instrument of repression that transformed women into objects of the male gaze.*

CHRISTINA: Yes, certainly; historically, this analysis is correct. In the early days of the cinema, the eye of the camera continually unveiled women and thus subjected them to the desire of the 'armed eye'. It is not by chance that simultaneously with the invention of photography and cinema, the phenomenon of anorexia nervosa emerged. Anorexia is the refusal to offer one's own flesh to be devoured by the 'voracious' eye. Women withdraw from this gaze regime or ways of looking by attempting to become invisible. Today female cinematographers frequently deconstruct this system of looking through their own films as a matter of course.

INES: *Is unveiling always negative? Especially in Western cultures, we enjoy putting the female body on display, being able to reveal and celebrate it.*

CHRISTINA: Our 'veil' is called the pressure towards nudity. Think of the bikini. Since its invention women [have been] becoming increasingly thinner … The freedom to be naked is always accompanied by a compulsion to conform to stereotypes and to assume a different body. We should proceed very carefully with this assumption that Western women are freer because they are dressed more revealingly. Of course, one can walk better with flat shoes and a life without a corset is also a better one, but freedom has not yet been achieved by an exposed navel.

INES [TO TAGHREED]: *Do you agree with that?*

TAGHREED: Of course. I'm also a victim of the Western ideal of beauty and would be glad to have a flat stomach and legs free of cellulite. But here in Johannesburg when I look at my colleagues who come from all over Africa, I think, *so what, my figure is quite okay*. The women here are all very proud of their bellies and they aren't all flat! Even in the Sudan, the women are more relaxed with regard to their figures than the women in London, but without doubt the veil does have a repressive side.

CHRISTINA: Of course.

TAGHREED: For me, the veil symbolises compromise above all. I wear it as a courtesy to others or as a protective precaution against aggression to the extent that both the compulsion to reveal and that to conceal are instruments for the oppression of women. They serve exactly the same purpose, namely to force a feminine ideal onto the individual woman.

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As is evident from this interview, the lived experiences of Christina von Braun and Taghreed Elsanhouri inform how each expresses her political positioning in relation to feminism. Their social contexts shape how the term is understood and, whether or not, it is enabling or disabling, depending on the filmmaker's political and artistic agendas – which are informed by the geo-political places they occupy. While they may differ on the matter of feminism as a term and its multiple interpretations, they are unambiguous and unanimous on the subject of the 'power of the camera'. Both celebrate its value as an instrument for social commentary. Both harness its power to subvert hegemonic gender dispositives. And both use the camera as an instrument to challenge acts of looking and ways of seeing to counter the historical construction of the gaze.

STAGED AUTHENTICITY: FEMININITY IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

CHRISTINA VON BRAUN

Identity constitutes itself through the possible continuities offered by collective memory. This is also the case for gender identity, since cultural memory shapes the structures of individual memory. The concept of 'destabilised identity' was first used during the Second World War to describe the psychological damage of people who had lost their sense of place within a particular cultural continuity. But what are the channels through which cultural memory transmits knowledge, emotions and thus also identities? I am going to outline these 'channels' using the concept of the collective imaginary and, in doing so, attempt to show that gender identity is closely connected to the medial conditions of the given time – not only because collective memory relies on the storage system of the media, but also because the media form and its interconnected communities impact individuals and gender roles via those communities. Marshall McLuhan (1964) defined media not only as the conveyors of the message but also as the message itself, insofar as media demand different kinds of attention, modes of reception and thus emotionality. However, McLuhan failed to consider a crucial aspect of medial identity formation: the creation of symbolic gender roles.[1] The symbolic gender order constitutes the most important point of contact

between the 'collective imaginary', the media and the community. In the gender order, the collective imaginary that is formed by the media becomes visible, tangible; the imaginary is incorporated.

How should the concept of the collective imaginary be defined? It has nothing to do with the archetypes of CG Jung, which are characterised by ahistoricality and immutability; nor does it refer to the collective unconscious, in which are buried the traces of a common cultural tradition or the traumata of a nation. Rather, the collective imaginary is related to what the German philosopher Walter Benjamin called 'ideal images' (Benjamin 1982a:1226) or 'images [that] belong to a particular time [and that] only become legible after a certain time' (Benjamin 1982b:577). The collective imaginary, as I would formulate it, thus consists of the historically variable models or ideals thrown up by every epoch which contribute to the formation of the self-image and visage of society.

The different ideals of the collective imaginary have three common characteristics:

1 In one way or another they convey a message of salvation, promising a revocation of human violability and expressing the yearning for an end to the transience of existence. This message is communicated both to the individual and to the collective.
2 Unlike an individual fantasy or a social utopia, whose imaginary qualities are generally recognised, the phantasmal models of the collective imaginary are comprehended by their adherents as *reality* or even equated with biological facts. Only when equivalence with reality is relinquished do they become 'legible'.
3 Because the collective possesses no corporeally delineated 'I', unlike the human body the community has no 'skin', unless one understands language or cultural memory in these terms. The phantasmal models of the collective imaginary are always precisely that: imaginary, ie an invention or a construct. Because the self-definition of the collective 'I' requires demarcation from what it perceives as 'foreign', it looks for an Other that is both imaginary and corporeal – for example, the opposite sex or another race. Demarcation from this imaginary and simultaneously physical-real Other gives the collective 'I' the appearance of reality. The same construct underlies the – culturally

diverse – symbolic gender orders. Like the images of the Other race, the imaginary attaches itself to a biological body, rendering itself visible through this body (cf von Braun 1990).

In the third process, visual techniques play an important role. However, this can only be understood if one recognises that long before modern optical machines media technologies emerged that generated new rules for community formation and also profoundly altered symbolic gender roles. Broadly speaking, the symbolic gender order was redefined with each media invention. Before discussing how this took place in connection with photography and film, I will briefly describe the transformations that occurred in connection with the emergence of the alphabet. Here, the impact of media on gender roles appears particularly clearly.

WRITING

The alphabetical system, in which phonemes are translated into signs, created a structure of thought that signified abstraction from the visible yet also entailed the materialisation of the abstract. The process of abstraction is constituted by the transformation of the sounds of language into visual signs. In this system of writing, language is detached from the living and mortal body and 'immortalised' on paper (cf von Braun 2009). One example of this materialisation is the emergence of monotheistic religions proclaiming an invisible god that created the world 'from the word'. Another example is the invention of the concept of 'utopia', that is, an abstract idea demanding realisation. All the utopias written in the Occident have assumed real form sometime in the course of history. Often, the results of this realisation were different to what their authors had imagined; yet these utopias were nothing other than material transpositions of ways of thinking (cf von Braun 1984). This means that thought detached from the body has an effective power of its own – and one of the most important instruments of this transposition is the media. This is what is meant by 'the medium is the message'.

The thought structures created by the three alphabets (Hebrew, Greek and Arabic) can be characterised in six ways (which varied in importance in the various epochs):

1 Thinking in a language that does not require a living, speaking body for its communication.

2 The concomitant belief in the existence of an immortal spirit or 'neutral', abstract, objective concept of knowledge; the idea that there is a 'truth' that is not contingent upon the knower or would-be knower.

3 The consequent hope of *human* immortality. If human beings wish to overcome mortality, they must become like writing itself, i.e. become 'thought' and assume a 'sublime body', a concept used in Christianity.[2]

4 The phantasm of an immortal spirit led to the notion of the *superiority* of the spirit over visible, perceptible reality. The dichotomy between spirit and matter, culture and nature, especially characteristic of the Occident, derived from this phantasm.

5 In this dichotomy, femininity became the symbol of human determination by nature, and thus a symbol for the transience of existence. 'Being human' was, as it were, divided into mortal 'matter', embodied by femininity (the word 'matter' derives from the Latin *mater*, meaning mother) and the immortal 'spirit', embodied by masculinity. In other words, the opposition of spirit and matter, which is alien to pre-literate societies and which found particularly clear expression in Christianity, sought its mirror image in the visible difference between the sexes and hence established a connection with reality. Sexual difference, which tended to be experienced as a 'lack' (each sex is, in itself, 'incomplete'), became synonymous with the dichotomy between life and death. This aspect plays an important role in photography and film, albeit in an altered form.

6 Lastly, through writing, the phantasmal notion emerged that the message of salvation, that is, the 'becoming spirit,' would obtain fulfilment after visible reality had been shaped according to the laws of writing and the *logos*, also known as rationality, which excluded unpredictability and chance – in other words, when the divine 'Word becomes flesh'. Optical technology was thought to enhance this 'embodiment' of the abstract. 'Photography,' according to the philosopher of media Vilém Flusser, was 'invented in the 19th century as the first ever technically-generated image, in order to infuse texts with magical content once again' (Flusser 1991:16).

While some of the first characteristics also apply to other, non-alphabetic cultures of writing, this last aspect, which can be described as the materialisation of the spiritual, is characteristic of the occidental culture of writing, which is based on a full phonetic alphabet. No other culture of writing has followed *this* particular phantasm as unconditionally as Christian-occidental culture. Other cultures also had alphabets; however, their structures were different. The Semitic and Arabic alphabets originally included only the consonants, not the vowels; this meant that they could be read only by someone who could also *speak* the language, that is, someone who knew whether an *o* (*rose*), an *i* (*rise*), an *ai* (*raise*) or a *u* (*ruse*) belonged between the consonants *r* and *s*; or if the consonants even indicated the word *erase*. The Greek alphabet, in contrast, included the vowels and thus became a *full alphabet* that required no spoken element. The emergence of 'full literacy' – which can be defined as the visualisation of the rules of writing – was the basis for the dominance, characteristic of modernity, of the eye over the other forms of perception. This explains why, at the historical moment at which occidental society became, as a result of the invention of the printing press, a fully literate culture, new techniques of visualisation also arose. These, in turn, caused a profound transformation of gender roles.

During the Renaissance period, in parallel with the development of a society based on the principle of writing, a new phantasm of inviolability emerged that was closely connected with the rise of new optical technologies and images. Though this phantasm is present in the new electronic media, its basic structure first obtained clarity in the 'classical' forms of conveyance: film and photography. In the following section, I will attempt to describe its structure in both these areas of media.

PHOTOGRAPHY

A basic theory of photography (with numerous variants) maintains that the eye of the observer is always 'dominant'.[3] Its 'activity' and 'power over reality' express themselves in two ways: on the one hand, the photographic eye subsumes the Other, devouring it whole, in order to empower itself – a form of optical appropriation described by the psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel in his 1935 essay 'Voyeurism and identification' as: 'to devour the observed object, to become like it (to be compelled to imitate it) or, conversely, to compel it to become like one' (Fenichel 1972:149).

Hence, through the visual incorporation of the Other, the 'voracious eye' (Mattenklott 1982:78–102) obtains 'inviolability' or 'wholeness'.

However, the photographic eye also takes possession of the Other, insofar as it brings the *time* the Other inhabits to a standstill. (This explains the prohibition of the portrayal of humans amongst some cultures which identify life with continuous time.) The French cultural theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes wrote that the experience of being photographed was equivalent to 'the event of death in miniature' (Barthes 1985). 'When I see myself in the image resulting from the process,' wrote Barthes, 'I see that I have become UTTERLY AND COMPLETELY image, that means DEATH in person' (Barthes 1985:22ff).

For the photographer, on the other hand, photography conveys a sense of empowerment over the Other. The photographer has the power to bring the *life* of the Other to a standstill at the moment the shutter release is pressed. Yet the photographic eye also experiences itself as the *creator* of the Other. It offers the Other immortality 'as a gift' and makes the Other 'capable of being reproduced' (forever) on the photographic plate or celluloid strip.

The fantasy of the generative power of the gaze existed long before the birth of photography: its potency was revealed in the perspectival gaze of the Renaissance, which re-ordered the world from the viewpoint of an omnipotent subject. However, the move from fantasy to phantasm ('illegible fantasy') occurs only with the emergence of the technically produced image.

The impact of the new generative power of the gaze on gender roles can clearly be seen in the mutation of the meaning of the word *shame* – a concept closely related to seeing as well as to the gender order.

Originally, the word *shame* denoted the visible sexual characteristics of both sexes. The feeling of shame derived from the need to render the visible sexual characteristics 'invisible,' whether behind clothing or via body language signalling reserve. In many cultures, the man was said to be reduced to a state of powerlessness at the sight of the female genitals – an image reflected in the idea of the 'evil eye' of the woman or the fatal gaze of the Medusa.[4] With the Renaissance, *shame* as a feeling became detached semantically from *genitals*. At the same time, *seeing* assumed an increasingly sexual connotation, expressing male invasion and penetration. Formerly, the principle of writing was attributed to

masculinity and the oral tradition to femininity; now, the gaze was attributed to the male body and the object of the gaze to the female body. Whether the real female body, natural phenomena, or the 'foreign lands' under colonial rule – the object of the gaze was always equated with femininity.[5]

From the second half of the 18th century (although photography was still to be invented, all the necessary 'ingredients' had long since existed), the concept of *shame* takes on a new meaning, this time connected to the new power of seeing. The shift shows itself particularly clearly in the work of one of the major philosophers of the Enlightenment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose Bildungsroman *Emile,* published in 1782, simultaneously served as the basis for a new gender order. Rousseau proclaimed the *blush of shame* as one of the most important signs of femininity and the only permissible symptom of female desire.[6] With Rousseau, for whom nothing seemed more attractive than this physical sign of shame, the visible blush of the woman in a certain sense replaced her visible sexual characteristics. For Rousseau, the woman's blush was caused by the man's 'penetrating' gaze. If the 'normative gaze at the woman' had already been established in previous centuries, making 'her body essentially appear as a product of male fantasies' (Kleinspehn 1989:123), Rousseau took this fantasy a step further. The gaze was now interpreted as enabling the man to *create* female shame with his eyes – and thus her visible sexuality.[7]

Alongside this shift in the meaning of the concept of 'female shame' was a shift in the understanding of male shame, which now moved away from the male body towards denoting the visible sexual characteristics. Masculinity is transposed to the gaze. According to Rousseau, the 'shame' of the man consists of being *caught looking*. In *Confessions*, describing his admiration for a young woman, Rousseau writes that he 'devoured with greedy eyes everything that he could without being noticed'. He secretly follows her into her bedroom, where he is discovered. 'Deeply ashamed', he sinks to his knees. The feeling of shame does not deter him, however, from holding the moment in lustful memory: 'Perhaps,' he writes, 'this is precisely why the image of this lovely woman has imprinted itself so deeply onto my heart' (Rousseau 1981:77ff).

To sum up: the transformation of the concept of shame and the different meanings attributed to the male and the female sex reveal that with the Enlightenment, a particular order in relations between the sexes

was established that was determined by the eye; an order in which the sexual act was substituted by the act of seeing and being observed, and which was constituted by the generation of femininity or Otherness.

FILM

Theoretical considerations about the workings of photography, in which the 'supremacy' of the observer is coupled with the powerlessness of the observed, contrast with theories about film, which in a certain sense claim the exact opposite. These considerations are, in part, derived from psychoanalytic theories that happened to emerge at the same time as film. In these theories, cinema is the site of experiences of omnipotence and impotence simultaneously. For the spectator, the feeling of supremacy created by identification with the view of the camera combines with a feeling of powerlessness, because the eye of the camera is determined by someone or something else (the director, camera, etc.). Thus, a double identification arises – on the one hand with the eye of the camera, i.e. the subject of the gaze, and on the other hand with the actors and the roles that they embody, i.e. the objects of the gaze, which, unlike the objects of the photograph, are perceived as an active subject. In her essay 'Voyeurism and masochistic aesthetics' (1985), the American film theorist Gaylyn Studlar expands on these ideas. She claims that the experience of cinematic pleasure consists precisely in viewers' ability to experience power *and* powerlessness. This possibility is provided not only through identification with the gaze of the camera, but through the free choice of identification with the male *and* the female roles. Indeed, the 'active-omnipotent' roles are by no means always tied to the male protagonist, any more than the 'passive-impotent' roles are always played by female characters.

Studlar cites the classic films of Josef von Sternberg, in which Marlene Dietrich embodies the 'active gaze' while her male partners embody the model of passivity. The attraction of these films – and the mythology surrounding Dietrich (according to Studlar) – resides in this blurring of gender patterns and the possibility that they offer to men and women of being able to slip into the role of either sex (Studlar 1985).

According to these theories, the power of the moving image consists in sensing omnipotence at the moment of impotence, thereby transgressing the boundary between the sexes drawn by the symbolic gender order.

However, the symbolic order of writing allocated to one sex the role of being 'different'. If the word 'differ' is understood in the sense of 'part' (as in to part from), then to place oneself freely in the role of powerlessness or as object of the gaze – femininity – means to expose oneself to the knowledge of one's own mortality, or parting from life (in German, the word for 'different' – *verschieden* – can also mean 'deceased'/'departed'). This implies that the spectator in the cinema experiences precisely the lack that the photographic gaze purports to overcome.

Seen from the perspective of the self-image, however, these theories are by no means as contradictory as they might appear. If the subject can freely choose between identifying with masculinity or femininity, between the experience of 'inviolability' and that of 'lack', and even both simultaneously, then underlying this is a new phantasm of 'completeness'. If photography conveys the experience of omnipotence over the extinction and generation of the Other, film brings forth an idea of completeness that permits the self all possibilities of being: the possibility of being subject *and* object, I *and* you, life *and* death, man *and* woman.

VIRTUAL VIOLABILITY

The filmic illusion of completeness opens up an additional perspective on medial identity formation. If the subject is willing to experience and identify with impotence in the cinema, then it is only because he or she perceives this experience not as a real threat, but as a fiction. This means that the sense of fear and the experience of mortality are accompanied by the reassuring certainty that 'none of this is true'.[8] In the cinema – not to mention the even more immersive worlds of cyber-space – the modern media subject can imagine herself as a victim or a perpetrator, as in decline or ascendant. The fact that cinema is a medium permits her to experience such feelings without a profound threat: her vulnerability (and that of others) becomes a 'thrill,' a pleasurable 'splitting of the self', as Friedrich Nietzsche called it.[9] To emphasise the religious dimension of this experience, one could say: the psyche embarks on a transcendental experience encompassing its own destruction and renewal. It undergoes Dionysian dismemberment and, crucially, escapes unharmed. That it is indeed a religious phantasm is supported by the visions of Stanislav Grof, the consciousness researcher, for whom the 'virtual realities' made

possible by electronics offer the revolutionary possibility of attaining the mystics' 'other state of consciousness' (Grof 1993). In contrast with other cultures, the Christian-occident has always treated mystical and esoteric experiences with scepticism or even anxiety. But, thanks to the new media (according to Grof), even the rational occidental human being can now become a mystic. In other words, thanks to a technique owing to the exertions of his consciousness (logic, calculation, planning), the spiritually impoverished occidental being can finally dare to leave the state of waking consciousness. The vulnerability experienced in this state is regarded as being technically controllable by the occidental being. This experience, too, becomes a sign of one's own omnipotence.

It could be argued that the influence of the 'new media' on the subjective and objective image of the individual may well be observable in fictional film or the 'virtual realities' of electronics, but not in the optical representation of social and political reality or the construction of one's own identity. Yet the manner of perception that allows the transgression of boundaries in the fictional film also extends to the documentary; indeed, it is in documentary that the significance of this identity-creating mechanism is perhaps most pronounced. The realities shown in the documentary film are also perceived as *images* and thereby removed from their relationship with reality. That was already the case for the first films of the Lumière brothers, which rendered scenes from everyday life – and for precisely this reason fascinated their audiences: it was not the usual sight of working women leaving the factory that captivated people but the fact that this process had become 'eternalised' and reproducible, and thus transformed into a picture (cf also Zielinski 1989:78). That means that documentary film, too, intensifies the feeling of reality 'as-if' (in fiction this would be the 'suspension of disbelief'). This has two consequences, both of which are highly political. The first is the fact that many directors merge documentary and fiction in the hope that what is shown is perceived as 'reality'. The 'documentary' character of a film might be conveyed through the employment of stylistic devices typical of documentary film, such as the unsteady camera movement mimicking the hand-held camera. However, it is also generated through the use of documentary footage in fictional film, or the insistence on filming on original location, as Steven Spielberg did in *Schindler's List*, for example. The presence of the real extermination camp at Auschwitz lent

his film the 'myth of the real'. In reality, the film contributed to Krakow becoming a tourist destination; indeed, it is only a matter of time before Auschwitz becomes an 'as-if' reality, even in collective memory.

The second consequence has to do with the politics of memory. This is seen in film reports of totalitarian show trials. The trial of the men involved in the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 June 1944, for example, was filmed in a way intended to show the men as being 'unworthy of identification'. However, the films were never shown to the public because it was sensed that viewers' identification was directed towards the men on trial and not the judge or the court – or the eye of the camera. The reports of Stalinist show trials in Moscow and Prague demonstrated a similar effect. It became clear within a year or two that the consequence of these (publicised) reports was an intensification of resistance *against* the regime. This suggests that the patterns of identification in documentary film (to which these reports should be counted) are less predictable than in fictional film, which is not perceived to be about *reality*. Moreover, one can assume that identification (in this case unintended) with the victim and the object of the gaze is probably stronger in documentary than in fictional film.

That a profound transformation in the ability to perceive and remember has taken place with the emergence of the new media was demonstrated clearly with the deployment of cameras in the Gulf War. It was not just the media politics of the American army that caused the 'simulated images' of the Gulf War to leave a deeper mark on the memory than documentary shots. Admittedly, in this war there were very few pictures at all of the destruction and annihilation caused by the bombardments. However, the pictures shown on 13 February 1991 of a bombed-out civilian air raid bunker in Baghdad and its charred corpses might have been sufficient to reach the eye – the inner eye, the perceiving, sympathetic eye (Willich, in Haller 1991). Despite this, as Stuttgart-based sociologist Franz Willich has shown, these pictures did not become 'engraved' in memory. In the early summer of 1991, Willich carried out a survey among 20 students who had watched at least 120 hours of television over the six weeks of the war (as had hundreds of thousands of people). He established that all remembered quite vividly the video film shown in the first week of the war, in which a laser-piloted bomb was seen passing through the cross-hairs and hitting an equally abstract target with centimetre precision.

None of the respondents mentioned the pictures of the air raid bunker in Baghdad (Haller 1991). The television network NBC reported a similar phenomenon eight weeks after the end of the war, when the pictures of the massacre of the Kurds went around the world. 'Most people had somehow forgotten the horror that the war caused within the civilian population. However, almost everyone could remember the high-tech videos of the American arts of weaponry' (Haller 1991). Meanwhile, not a week goes by in which no pictures of catastrophes and victims of war appear on the screen – yet nobody investigates the perception of these images any more. The employment and recycling of these pictures has become matter of course, even a part of consumerism.

Clearly, visual perception and the collective memory that derives from it records what serves to confirm the integrity of the community and one's membership of it, rather than what calls this integrity into question. This means that memory, the constituent factor of our 'construction of identity', seeks images that resist the remembering of reality and thereby also the constitution of self in the sense of violability. Of course, one could ask why we need reality at all, if things go so well without it. Could we not live without the perception of our violability? Could we not manage without a memory that transforms past traumas into fictions? The fact is that human violability is the only uncontested certainty available to us. Vilém Flusser defines reality as that 'which we come up against on our way towards death' (Flusser 1991:77). To renounce this certainty would mean to renounce the historicity able to provide the imaginary community with the claim to be a real – or living – community.

What does this mean for the perception of femininity and the symbolic gender order? It can be surmised from the gender order – understood as a cultural code, as the close reciprocity between media and gender would suggest – that the collective imaginary is subject to historical change and can itself be comprehended as a historical force. Because the gender order is subject to permanent transformation, it can be used as a 'code-breaking machine' through which the desires of a given epoch become legible. Of course, this presupposes that one wants and is able to see the 'staging' behind the 'authentic', including one's own staging. Here, perhaps, lies the difficulty. It is relatively easy to understand the 'authentic' of other epochs as masquerade or staging. However, it is much more difficult to get to grips with one's own 'reality', that is, to

comprehend one's own existence not so much as fake, but as culturally coded. That means learning to differentiate between the phantasmal self-images of the collective imaginary and one's own, individual violability. Only then can the images of the collective imaginary be 'made legible'. 'It is precisely the ability to observe oneself as observer that characterizes modern individuality,' writes the German philosopher Niklas Luhmann in his essay 'Perception and communication in connection with works of art' (Luhmann 1991:71).

The female sex is, I think, predestined for this task – not for biological reasons, but because of the cultural role historically ascribed to it as 'violated gender' and as symbol of mortality. This perennial cultural coding of femininity would imply that a movement to make 'legible' the images of the collective imaginary must emanate from the 'feminine gaze'. In other words, the factor that for centuries caused women to be excluded from culture today turns out to enable cultural work in the best sense as contemporary critique. It can be no coincidence that numerous female cinematographers reflect on the medium of film in their work. The reflection on film and how it works in turn offers an exceptional possibility for visualising the genesis and medial coding of gender roles.

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NOTES

1 Translator's and editors' note: the symbolic gender order includes symbolic gender roles.

2 Werner Sombart (1901) calls writing the 'language of the absent'.

3 Translator's and editors' note: among the most notable variants of this theory can be found in Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977), Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), and Laura Mulvey's theories of the male gaze, as expounded in her article 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1975).

4 On the 'evil eye' see Kleinspehn (1989: 42ff).

5 Translator's and editors' note: see Yuval-Davis (1997) and Schülting (1997).

6 Emile and Sophie's engagement plays out according to the following pattern: 'She had barely kissed him when her delighted father clapped his hands and called out *once more, once more* and Sophie, without having to be begged, immediately gave him two kisses on the other cheek; but almost in the same time moment, she fled into her mother's arms and hid her blushing face, inflamed by bashfulness, on this motherly bosom, frightened by everything that she had done.' (Rousseau (1980) (1762): 880ff).

7 The so-called 'characteristics of pregnancy' currently receive a very high profile. (cf Kleinspehn 1989:170). They are signs that the female body is being fantasised as 'transparent': the gaze is penetrating it.

8 'The world itself,' as Niklas Luhmann writes, 'becomes topical in the news only as a contingency, and in fact as a threefold negation: as a consciousness that the transmitted occurrences didn't have to happen; as a consciousness that they didn't have to be communicated at all; and as a consciousness that one does not need to listen at all and occasionally, for example during the holidays, that one does not do so either'. (Luhmann 1972: 315).

9 Nietzsche described the state of the Bayreuth Pilgrim as a 'wonderful splitting of the self'. Norbert Bolz, who sees Richard Wagner as the real inventor of this medial experience, writes that the individual 'incarnated in other bodies, shakes off his bourgeois past, his social standing; he enjoys the "wondrous self-splitting" of that which turns from destruction into luxury, from pain into pleasure and decline into enjoyment of the first order' (Bolz 1990:36).

'POWER IS IN YOUR OWN HANDS': WHY JIHAN EL-TAHRI DOES NOT LIKE MOVEMENTS

INTERVIEW WITH
JIHAN EL-TAHRI

INTERVIEW BY
JYOTI MISTRY AND ANTJE SCHUHMANN

Jihan El-Tahri is one of the most recognisable and visible filmmakers on the African continent. Born in Lebanon, as an adult she worked internationally as a news correspondent. In the early 1990s she turned to producing and writing documentaries. She is well known for her politically charged documentaries and her uncompromising approach to her political, visual and creative vision. Her award-winning documentaries include: *House of Saud* (2004), *Cuba: An African Odyssey*[1] (2007) and *Behind the Rainbow* (2009).

The kind of documentaries that El-Tahri has focused on makes her a filmmaker to be reckoned with not just in terms of her subject matter but also for her relentless approach in dealing with complex political and ideological issues. In *House of Saud* she focused on the history of Saudi Arabia and its complex military and economic co-dependency with America. In *Cuba: An African Odyssey*, her subject matter was the important historical and political connection between African liberation movements and their ideological and military support from Cuba. Her sourcing of rare archival footage, coupled with candid interviews, provides the audience with an in-depth and layered understanding of the political significance of these alliances.

Continuing with her exploration of liberation movements, *Behind the Rainbow* is a fascinating account of an exiled liberation movement, the African National Congress, which came to power in 1994 in South Africa. The film charts the compromises and shifts in power and lays bare the influence of South Africa's political transition on the continent. It is clear from the film that the interviews secured for this documentary were neither easy to facilitate nor without specified preconditions, but once again the conversations are charged and insightfully refreshing. El-Tahri has often said on public platforms that her choice of subject matter seems to create an 'absence of women' but her own voice-over as the filmmaker narrating her documentaries not only marks her subjectivity but produces a poignancy in affirming the place of women in the 'histories that men write'.

Even when she reflects on her experiences as a filmmaker El-Tahri often recounts film projects from which she chose to walk away. If, once she had commenced her research work, she felt the political or ideological investigation of the film would be compromised by funders, broadcasters or the parameters of its participants, she elected not to continue.

Over the years, Jihan El-Tahri has given extensive interviews relating to her various films. The main focus of this interview, however, is to address the personal and the political rather than the body of work she has produced. In this particular instance El-Tahri draws from her personal experiences and challenges to reflect on women's social movements, and on the place of her individual agency versus a collective feminist struggle in creating political change. El-Tahri's energy and tenacity are legendary, but in this interview we gain access to the layered complexities and contradictions in her thoughts and approaches to filmmaking. There is an interesting interplay between her positions on personal gender politics and the politically charged films for which she is famous.

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ANTJE SCHUHMANN: *What role can women filmmakers play in social change?*

JIHAN EL-TAHRI: When we are talking about social change, what I'm missing is: What is the objective? What is the finality that we as women feel we need to reach to feel we have achieved positive social change? Personally,

I disagree profoundly with modernity as being the goal ... The number, the percentage of women having high-powered jobs as the indicator of social change, I personally believe is wrong. But I do believe that women should be able to be fully fledged members and participants in whatever they want. I was in Sudan some time ago and I went to see a university friend of mine. She is now the Dean of the Arts at the University of Khartoum. I was quite surprised. I couldn't help expressing my surprise. I thought she was the first woman Dean. She looked at me quite shocked saying she's not the first but the fourth woman Dean. I think when we're talking about the bigger things we want to achieve we don't all need to be striving for the same thing at the same time. I don't think women in South Africa [should] be striving for the same thing as women in Burkina Faso.

For me, power is in your own hands and you can actually change your destiny. In my case, I was lucky because I rebelled early on and for the right reasons. I'm not talking about rebelling for personal reasons but rebelling against the structure of society. When I was going to university my father didn't want me to go to the university of my choice because that wasn't the right university. I had 96% in my Matric and I decided *not* to go to university if I was not going to go study where I wanted. Six months later my father freaked out because he realised I wouldn't have an education, so I started taking part-time jobs to pay for my own education like at the library, and registrar's office. I was 16 and I was at the point of confronting paternal authority: Arab, Muslim, diplomat. For the first time ever I had a conversation with my father. For him, all his concerns were social. For example he said, 'This is the university that *our* class goes to.' These are issues I did not care about. Once I broke all these norms and he didn't have an option, this changed our rapport, not only as father-daughter but also as male-female. It allowed me to think that if I can break the male paternal authority with good arguments then every other structure that I believe is not right for me, can be challenged.

JYOTI MISTRY: Do you translate your personal experiences into collective politics?

JIHAN: I don't like movements because they have a dynamic of their own that needs to be sustained, but I like associations where I can do things. I am in contact with a few females all over the world who want to break the mould. I came to the conclusion that where we're at as African women

filmmakers, we're not at the level of contesting for the bigger picture. The bigger picture is: what are our principles, what are we making, why are we all still fighting for our little film? Movements and trends are still going to come, but at the moment it's still about getting the one little film done. Getting people to engage and trust one [another] is still a problem.

ANTJE: *I understand that movement politics are often difficult, but do you not see the value of women coming together, across all internal divides, in order to collectively challenge and battle discrimination targeting women? This is one of the main principles of feminism.*

JIHAN: I don't see myself as a feminist. I'm a female but I don't subscribe to the feminist movement. Maybe because I decided not to engage too closely with it because I think the battles for females are many and the last thing I want to do is to fight for something I'm not. I think we define our battles in terms of what we fight against and what we fight for. The feminist movement, or at least the way I've understood it, is a battle against the male domination of the world. I feel that as a female I'm in a society that has its constraints but as long as I see what *my* personal objective is then I can work against these constraints. I used to be the correspondent for the *Washington Post* (North Africa), which [was] quite … a high-powered job. I was based in Tunisia at the time. It was then that I realised I could write 500 articles and have the scoop of the day, but that a single TV camera could change everything. I had experienced the power of the camera for the first time. This is part of the reason why I moved to film. The power of the lens, I never underestimate it. Representation is very, very powerful!

JYOTI: *To what extent do you believe that gender is a significant category to be considered when we talk about filmmaking and the aesthetics of cinema?*

JIHAN: I do not think that gender is relevant when we talk about filmmaking on most occasions. Filmmaking is about storytelling; the art of capturing the essence of a story and maintaining the other person's interest. This is not at all gender specific. However, the choice of content of a film, which is quite separate from filmmaking as such, can be gender relevant. The kind of stories that women feel are important to tell, and the angle they choose as being the most significant, is often a reflection of how a female sees

the world as opposed to how a male sees it. The aesthetics can also be influenced by the filmmakers' gender; there is indeed a 'feminine touch' in the aesthetics of many female directors. But overall, I believe that it doesn't matter if you are male or female. A good story is a good story. Telling a good story well from the technical perspective is a matter of professionalism and that definitely has nothing to do with gender.

ANTJE: Historically, at least in the field of literature, women claimed, as a response to patriarchal exclusion, to write different stories and with a different, essentially feminine aesthetic. Today this notion is challenged by many female artists and it also seems to be a very different approach to how you describe your practice.

JIHAN: Talking about my own work, I am often criticised [because] there are no women in my films. In practically all of my films there are no women. Every Q and A, I get attacked because there are no women in my films. I don't care about that. I'm addressing a topic and an argument and a whole train of thought. If there were no women, I'm not going to invent them to have a woman's face.

JYOTI: Do you think you approach your work environment the same way as men do?

JIHAN: I'll tell you it boils down to one word: security! Females are more vulnerable. When you don't have funding and you have to go to Juba [South Sudan], for example, to film, there are questions like 'where will I stay?' I won't go if I don't have my security organised, whereas a man would say he's going to stay in a tent. As women we are less capable – no, not *capable*; women are less *prone* – to doing that. We're susceptible to doing that because we have other concerns. Why? Because my first reaction is always security because we're always protected by males. Security is a big thing.

When I was in the Congo I had just had my daughter. She was four months old and the country was still at war. Everyone thought I was nuts. Everyone was worried about my security. If you look at the reality, it's completely stupid going to Kinshasa. But there are hotels there, women, children and people giving birth in that country. The idea is that you don't go to places that are unsafe and even [more] so, not with your child. The integrity of your

body is what's at question! Men never worry about being raped. I think the underlying fear of security is related to rape. I have to admit that sometimes I do hesitate – should I go or not go? But on a personal level, breaking this security code has been one of the main elements of my success.

ANTJE: Motherhood has been a recurrent theme in many discussions we have had with women filmmakers. How do you think about the connections which are made between filmmaking, being a woman and motherhood?

JIHAN: Filmmaking is a profession and it doesn't matter if you're a woman or a man. Filmmaking is [also] much more flexible than most other jobs that women do. So as a mother and filmmaker you have more space in your private life. It's my profession but also my passion. I find it more flexible but it's not harder than any other profession. As women we demand equality; we've been demanding equality for a long time, so if you demand equality, we have to deal with it. It's part of our lot. One of the things which I've always resisted is hiding behind the womanhood thing because you're either a filmmaker or you're not. Your gender or what that implies, in terms of the [level of] difficulty, is part of the deal. Yes, motherhood is hard, but filmmaking is quite an interesting and adaptable job in terms of what we do as mothers.

ANTJE: Why do you think the identity of 'mother' and 'motherhood' has been so important to many of the female filmmakers we spoke with?

JIHAN: It's a status thing. Its about being able to show that you have been there and you know what you're talking about. I think there is pressure on women to go for a certain kind of filmmaking which makes them adopt certain expectations. I have seen this from the outside – that women are expected to make better films [about] children because they're softer or more patient. But I think putting women in boxes is part of what I've been fighting against as a woman.

ANTJE: Who would you argue is putting women filmmakers in boxes?

JIHAN: Commissioning editors.

ANTJE: I'd like to reconnect a few things with the bigger question of unequal

gender relations. It is often argued that the underlying problem is a prevailing notion of entitlement, that men 'own' female bodies and sexuality. To control the female body is seen as a man's right.

JIHAN: When I first arrived in South Africa, one of the things that shocked me most was the way women in South Africa exposed their boobs. I spent quite a bit of time observing this: it was white, black, most women, and the notion of beauty was about the exposure. There was a double thing taking place. I was proud of these women for their bodies, but also I felt a sense of indecency, not even moral but purely indecent. There is a difference between the private and the public space. I asked friends about it: they said they're proud of their boobs. On the one hand, it's rebellion, but on the other they're also claiming their own bodies. By claiming your own body, you need to claim it to exist, but for me the question was: 'Do you have to expose it to claim it?'

JYOTI: It might be easy to talk about the hetero-normative in this context but where is the space for the homosexual/homoerotic experience for women in this context? Is there space for this in this conversation?

JIHAN: I think there's space but it depends on who you are or [are] not. Film is about expression. For me making a film about lesbians wouldn't work because that's not who I am. I could do it but I'd need a reason to do it. I was in Zanzibar having a debate with a group of people. Nodi Murphy [co-founder of the *Out in Africa* film festival] asked: 'Where is the space for homosexuality in our films?' Everyone was quite dismissive because there are bigger issues and in comparison this is a smaller issue. I think the reality is that homosexuality and alternative sexual practices is a minority issue on the continent and even in Europe. In that sense I think it tends to take up minimal space. I don't think that it takes [up] more space than what it represents.

JYOTI: The way we are talking about women on the continent is hetero-normative. At the heart of the problem, if we're talking about big issues, is the treatment of all women, homo- or heterosexual.

JIHAN: Nadia El-Fani [Tunisian filmmaker, *Neither God nor Master* (2011)] has a child and came out, and now they're trying to kill her. It hasn't altered

whether there's violence against her because she lives up to her sexuality. In terms of representation we're not halfway there. I hate to be a party pooper … I agree, but what I *disagree* with entirely is imposing too soon things that we're just not ready to grapple with yet. To get to certain social transformation you need to get the people to believe that it's necessary … let's talk about this now – it means alienating … The reason why the rest of the continent thinks SA is an elephant in a china shop is because we're light years ahead.

JYOTI: *I would like to add a question to that idea of industry and perhaps how you would describe the film industry in Africa. Would you describe Africa as having a film industry? Or are there various niches? Even these video niches that have taken off?*

JIHAN: On the continent the film industry in Egypt has existed since the 1940s – it's calculated in the P+B of the country. In the understanding of an industry, an industry existed with studio, export deals etcetera so, yes, there was an industry and there's a notion of a film industry. However, what's happened since the 1960s/1970s is a whole new model of production. The film and art production sector became aid reliant, so there was no sustainability and it was practically impossible to build an industry. So the French, on the one hand, allowed the birth of a cinema and film production movement, but in [another] way clipped its wings and hampered its ability to be self-sufficient. So the system from the 1960s to now [has been] largely based on French financial assistance – this has fragmented the notion of a film community. The film industry … I'm not sure if it's a good or bad thing to have one, I'd rather *not* say [whether it's a good or a bad thing]. South Africa aspires to have film industry.

JYOTI: *Given that you said how important it is for women to make their films: can a person just walk away from the opportunity of making their film? Have you been able to?*

JIHAN: I have. I was making a film on Franz Fanon and I was in Algeria [where] I spoke to the Algerians. I needed archive and shooting permission from them. I had a meeting with the minister and it was all fine. They wanted to co-produce and give me money and as time went on, they started

meddling in terms of content. And I said, 'No, sorry, I don't do meddling with content.' We had a discussion and I knew they were going to meddle content-wise because they needed to hog Fanon. I didn't even have a fight. I just got up one morning and said I'm not making that film.

JYOTI: What are the conditions like for women filmmakers on the continent and what are the differences between the North and the South on the continent?

JIHAN: Conditions for women on the continent are generally harder than in Europe, if only because filmmaking as a profession has traditionally been male dominated. The chores women are traditionally expected to fulfil stand in the way of the dedication which is crucial for being a filmmaker. A woman is expected to stay at home and look after the kids rather than run around with a crew and a camera. But I am not certain that this narrow perspective is still the major problem. Women on my continent have always been strong and have always managed to multi-task. So as long as the obligations incumbent on us as women are not neglected, we can do what we want today. There are of course differences between North and South of the continent as to why and how tradition weighs women down. The North of the continent is predominantly Muslim and Islam decrees very specific and confined roles for women. The predominantly Christian South has its own traditional confinements for women, but at the end of the day the difficulty is comparable.

   Despite the difficulties, women filmmakers also have advantages that are not given to our male counterparts. In many circumstances women are underestimated and thus they manage to get away with much more than men do. We get access more easily because we are underestimated and we are not seen to pose a threat. Female filmmakers today are much luckier than the previous generation since our world today acknowledges the need for equality and thus the hurdles facing them are not as rigid as in the past.

JYOTI: Younger women filmmakers often claim they don't have sufficient choices because of the socio-political restrictions they face and the cultural landscape in which they work.

JIHAN: When I spoke to Taghreed [Elsanhouri], she said she felt like she didn't have a choice. I had to sit her down and say: 'Why do you feel like that?' She responded that it was because of obstacles and challenges of making films. For me, it is important that you stay true to the one thing you're pursuing. When you strap yourself down to the industry, funding, funders' choices, or if you think, if I do this, *my culture* will regard me as this or that – all these things, I think, are self-imposed.

JYOTI: *What do you see your filmmaking practice as: an industry-related activity, or is it about personal or political or cultural expression?*

JIHAN: This is a complicated question because I do not feel that it is either/or! On a personal level I make films out of the desire for personal, political and cultural expression. I feel the need to add my voice and make it relevant. I also feel the need to reflect my perspective in a way that allows others to understand me better. I guess when I say me, I am talking mainly as an African. I want my African voice to be considered and understood on its own terms. So on that level filmmaking for me is about expression.

However, since I have made filmmaking my profession rather than a part-time hobby, it is thus by definition an industry-related activity. What I do is not an afterthought in my spare time; my income and livelihood are connected to my desire for political and cultural expression. It doesn't matter how different and culturally specific my work is. It is part of my profession and part of an industry that needs to be economically and technically viable.

'As improbable as it might sound, Africa will prosper.'[2] On a continental level I do believe this, for many reasons. If you look at [it], for the first time in our history, as filmmakers on this continent we're dealing with a level playing field. Many people are still bogged down in the old model, but for the first time there is the opportunity for someone who has an idea to do it and not just be bogged down by the financials. For a very long time being a woman and being African meant that conditions were very restrained. But now with an 80-euro camera, you can do your thing and show what you have to offer. We are already seeing films that are outside of the constrained and regulated TV and cinema world. These films will be recognised because they're good enough. For me, film and filmmaking is mainly about expression and about engaging and transmitting stories.

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While Jihan El-Tahri might not necessarily subscribe to movements in its collective sense, her firm resolve to the power of individual will and her tenacity to maintain the integrity of her vision as a visual storyteller are an inspiration to many women filmmakers and not only on the African continent. She has mentored a number of emerging filmmakers, including Taghreed Elsanhouri and, in her capacity on the Focus Features short film competition board, has championed African stories which counter African stereotypes. As a filmmaker, she has found strategic and innovative ways to show how 'Africa is certainly able to prosper' by mining its incredible wealth of stories.

NOTES

1 There are a few different titles that refer to the same film depending on the distribution region. *Requiem for Revolution: Cuba's African Odyssey* (2007) and *Cuba! Africa! Revolution!* (2007).

2   Jihan references Thabo Mbeki's speech 'I am an African'(8 May 1996). At the time Mbeki was the deputy president of South Africa under Nelson Mandela.

AFTERMATH — A FOCUS ON COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

INTERVIEW WITH

**DJO TUNDA WA MUNGA
AND RUMBI KATEDZA**

INTERVIEW BY

**ANTJE SCHUHMANN
AND JYOTI MISTRY**

D jo 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.

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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.[1] 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.

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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?

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NOTES

1   A version of the keynotes was previously published in *Über(w)unden: Art in Troubled Times.* Eds. L Heidenreich-Selene and S O'Toole. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2012.

SHOOTING VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA: TRAVERSING VISUAL AND SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHIES IN ZANELE MUHOLI'S WORK

ANTJE SCHUHMANN

Zanele Muholi is currently one of South Africa's internationally acclaimed artists. The main focus of her work is the representation of black lesbians and transgender people at the intersection of race and class.

Although she is perhaps best known as a photographer, she does not work exclusively in this medium, but in dialogue with films, clips, installations, beadwork and other media. Her intention is not to produce single masterpieces – *l'art pour l'art* – but rather an inter-textual multitude of visual representations of the Other. Her work may be situated in the context of feminist artists such as Phybia Dlamini and Gabrielle le Roux, who produce art at the intersection of community engagement, youth development and the documentation of the margins of hetero-normative societies through the *bricolage* of film, installations, writing, drawing and photography.

Muholi's aim is to challenge not only the normativity of heterosexuality, but also to subvert the dominant impression of homosexuality as a mainly white, Western and middle-class phenomenon. Her artistic exploration of body politics produces a voice that articulates a community's condition into the collective silence.

The multiple forms of her artistic expression follow Muholi's political interests: the promotion of human rights and equality for persons with non-conforming gender-performances. She herself locates her artwork within what she calls 'visual activism'.

Feminist and post-colonial analyses of representational politics generate particular aesthetic and ethical questions and dilemmas which can be well illustrated through a consideration of Muholi's art (Schuhmann 2014b). This chapter looks at her work in its own right, while at the same time using Muholi's art to engage a resonant spectrum of questions around the wider political economy of representing violence and trauma. This includes the challenge of subverting contemporary practices of Othering and their multiple legacies of oppression, as well as the risk of inadvertent complicity with hegemonic gaze regimes. To understand fully the representative strategies mobilised by Muholi, and in order to engage these questions, it is necessary to embrace her full body of work and to try to interpret it within wider theoretical considerations, from post-colonial film theory, trauma studies, socio-linguistics and psychoanalytic cultural theory. It is only through a multi-perspectival analysis that the complexity of the context and the achievement of Muholi's work can be mobilised for a better understanding of today's visual politics.

Rooted in the tradition of critical theory, this chapter locates her art within the socio-political realities with which she grapples:

> My project attempts to reclaim citizenship and calls for an end to Queercide – a term I coined for the systematic atrocities and hate crimes against lesbians, gay men and trans-people in my country (Muholi films4peace [nd]).

This chapter relates her work to various artistic traditions which also mobilise the body as a site of desire and destruction. As such this chapter engages Muholi's manifold visual modalities intending to reflect on those forms, contents, rhythms, perspectives and streams of consciousness that she employs through a transdisciplinary mode of analysis. The chapter is written and composed as a theoretical reflection and queer inquiry which intends to promote post-colonial feminist epistemologies. As such, it is not concerned with a straightforward question-answer schema, with static and essentialising

politics, but rather with contemporary understandings of the fluidity of concepts.

When analysing the politics of visual representations, moving or not (Zanele films and shoots all the time; one medium traverses into the other), diverse realities and expressions are more constructively theorised if normative notions (for example, of 'women' as opposed to man, 'film' as strictly distinct from photography, or 'Africa' as being non-Western) are conceptualised not as mutually contradictory binaries, but as continuums. The writer, the subject and the reader are no longer distinct entities in search of a truth but rather, a multitude on a journey of finding different ways of seeing and reading:

> Through the various projects of activism I have worked on in the sphere of the visual and the creative, I not only reflect on absence, but attempt to begin to imagine different futures, different ways of thinking about our lived experiences, other ways of being, seeing and being seen (Muholi 2011).

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Let's begin with following Zanele Muholi into three exhibitions of her work in recent years.

Insila Yami/Isilumo Siyaluma 2006–2011[1] opens at Blank Projects in Cape Town in November 2011.

Red on white, a black body in the night, naked, moving images on a monitor, murderous headlines in a crowded collage. Turn around: poems and text stretched out over the opposite wall, photos, images of blood, clots, smears, interrupted traces of pain when time becomes spatial, a cycle is rearranged in the form of ornaments as wallpaper.

One year later. It is the Johannesburg opening of the *Faces and Phases* show. The lobby of the Goethe-Institut is filled with music and a large crowd. Words fly around the courtyard looking for space to be contemplated. In the writings about Muholi's work, terms such as intimacy, pleasure, private/public, playfulness, positive images, home stories with public impact, counter stories, utopia, autobiographical, family album, commemoration and celebration surface (Baderoon 2011; Gqola 2006; Gunkel 2010; Schuhmann 2014 a & b; Smith 2004). Words, images, activity.

Exhibition of *Faces and Phases* at the Venice Biennale (2013).

In 2014, and several awards later, and at this time already an honorary professor at the University of Bremen, Muholi, together with Gabrielle le Roux, opens the *Queer and Trans Art-iculations: Collaborative Art for Social Change* show at the Wits Art Museum, located on the street corner where Braamfontein intersects with the university campus. The appropriation of a social and physical space is now no longer symbolic. The outnumbering by young black queers/activists/students is striking – and even if only temporary, an aspirational de- and re-territorialisation of the museum's 'white cube' renders the usual audiences slightly puzzled at the margins.

The show includes Muholi's photographs, beadwork and an installation of gravesites. An international aspect is added by Le Roux's drawings and film projects portraying transgender people in Africa and Turkey.

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Muholi grew up in Umlazi township in KwaZulu-Natal, raised by a single mother who worked as a domestic worker. She started out as an activist in the South African NGO environment in the early 2000s when she

Zanele Muholi at the Wits Art Museum exhibition: *Queer and Trans Art-iculations: Collaborative Art for Social Change* (2014).

was co-founder of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), a membership-based organisation for black lesbians in Johannesburg. She was involved in initiating the campaign 'The Rose has Thorns' – one of the first campaigns to tackle the increase in hate crimes against black lesbians in South African townships.

Muholi's working-class background, combined with her being a member of the South African Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community, whose social and geographical topography is still highly segregated along the axis of race and class, place her at the intersection of the international art circuit and those still living at the hetero-patriarchal margins of apartheid's legacies. For her shows Muholi makes sure to bridge this gap by providing transport for members of the local communities represented in her work; from the margins of society she brings them to the privileged space of the white cube.

The community Muholi archives in her work is the community she comes from, and the one she returns to when documenting how hate crimes affect the lesbian community and their friends and families. She also mentors young LGBTIs in how to self-document their

experiences in visual or textual contributions to *Inkanyiso* – Muholi's Queer Media platform.

According to Hakim Bey, we could argue that by including those normally excluded from a still predominantly white, heterosexual, male-dominated, and middle/upper-class art world, Muholi generates a 'temporary autonomous' zone (Bey 1991). When the combi taxis arrive from the townships it enables Muholi the artist to decentre, through her bussed-in audience, a traditionally white comfort zone. At the same time, the artist allows the inhabitants of white hetero-normative comfort zones to experience and maybe interact with the Other without the risk of leaving behind their green suburbs or the secure pockets of gentrification in the inner city when looking or gazing at – or consuming – Other realities. No wonder, then, that the opening of her *Love and Lust* exhibition at the Stevenson Gallery in February 2014 was described thus:

> The prevailing tone in the air was that which acknowledged Muholi as a messiah, who has united us all; black, white, drag queen, Butch, township dwellers and suburbanites in a space where the societal and cultural etiquette was challenged to fit the context of diverse people in the Museum and Gallery, thus embraced the contrasts of love and loss under one roof … It became a melting pot of culture and norms as all protocol was abandoned. Songs of freedom were chanted in celebration of a 'soldier' who had fought a good fight and was now being rightfully honoured (Humbane 2014).

Is this a carnivalesque moment of transgression, where legacies of violence and difference are contested, transgressed, and momentarily dissolved in a container of proclaimed equal status, looking and speaking, soon to dissolve again in one way or another? These situations earn Muholi a twofold credit: on the one hand, for organising a social and spatial transgression which provides access to those excluded and which exposes those historically – and currently – sheltered and removed from those at the margins. On the other hand, it reinforces her street credibility and authenticity within the white cube as a member of what is referred to in South Africa as the 'previously/ historically disadvantaged' group. This, in turn, enhances her two mutually reinforcing statuses: being an artist and being an activist.

Muholi is well aware of the dialectics of power in post-apartheid

South Africa. She grapples with this not only through her participatory approach towards the communities with whom she works, but also in the form of her work itself. How to present, to *re*present, those at the margins for the sake of documenting and celebrating their/one's own joy, while at the same time risking feeding the regimes of imperial gazes, hungry for the 'new': the black homosexual or transsexual female beaten and raped? How to tell a counter-story without referencing the very normative politics of Otherness one aims to counter? How to intervene in hegemonic white feminist imaginaries of the black Other as a poor, abused, black shemale without restating or denying it? Is experiencing international fame and exposure only a chance to table an important issue, or is it also a risk? Are there ways, moments, in which an artist and/or activist can escape the forces of commodification in a context where rape is consumed in the gesture of disgust, fed by a proclaimed colour-blind interest in gender-based violence, which is, in fact, often overlooking the supposedly peaceful homes of white suburbs? Focusing on the over-researched misery of black townships, imagined as colonised by a black hyper-masculinity, frames past and present white violent masculinities as either tragic incidents or singular monstrosities outside of the imaginary of a civilised white norm.

A vivid recent illustration of this discursive paradigm was evident in the reporting about, and the analysis of, the Oscar Pistorius murder trial. Media reports presented the femicide mainly as rooted in the circumstance of the situation, whereas his biography located the violence outside of broader societal patterns through individualising. This analysis outnumbered by far those reports which situated the man's deeds within a broader analysis of a society where trigger-happy, hard-body, white alpha masculinity is still an intrinsic element of various forms of structural violence.

How to visualise, to write, or to speak about violence in the context of multi-layered signification processes? How to exile one's perspective from the conflation of hegemonic white, middle class, feminist, of imperial, of racist, and of hetero-normative gaze regimes surrounding us? Subverting and disturbing normative signification processes can impact on the imaginary and, as such, produce social change or, as Toni Morrison says: 'imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the Other. It is, for the purposes of the work,

becoming' (Morrison 1992:4 in Kaplan 1997:xvii). What do we become, and how?

Freud speaks of *Schaulust*, which one could translate as 'pleasure in seeing' (scopophilia), which is understood to be opposed to a narcissistic pleasure in looking. In this context, Otto Fenichel speaks of the child's capacity to look at an object and to feel along with it; looking that stimulates empathy. Kaplan states that children learn about the culture they find themselves in through looking, meaning: What we are supposed to look at and what not? Who may look and who may not? She argues that subjectivity is constituted through looking. But before that children learn to be in relation with someone through engaging in looking (Kaplan 1997:xvi). Contrary to this mutual process of looking as relating to each other with curiosity, and this includes also the wish to know, the notion of the gaze, according to Kaplan, signifies anxiety and the attempt to not know, to deny, to keep at a distance (Kaplan 1997:xvii).

In the aftermath of the prohibition of cross-race looking in the American South and elsewhere, tied into the prohibition of interracial sexual looking, looking for the Other today should be free. It should be applicable without boundaries '… but the weight of white supremacy tends to limit its meaning within the west to whites looking for non-whites' (Kaplan 1997:xx). The commodification of lesbian sexuality within a predominantly hetero-patriarchal porn industry also speaks to this complex paradox, as does the recurrent resurfacing of poverty-chic in the fashion industry. An innocent looking at the Other often becomes a consuming and appropriating gaze, locking the Other in the position of remaining an exoticised object of desire.

The question is how to represent violence in art, in order to conscientise people and to subvert normative gaze regimes, by either avoiding these regimes or undermining them though estranging mimicry?

> I have kept the visuals and the story line illustrative, avoiding an artistic rendering of the story – this would only hide the truth, the grit and the shocking reality of Queercide. Employing an aesthetic that mimics a public broadcaster documentary, it aims to challenge viewers who have a choice to act – to intervene – but seldom exercise those choices (Muholi films4peace [nd]).

Muholi explores societal voids which enable a violent topography of extermination where race, class, gender and (sometimes only assumed) sexual orientation intersect. In South African townships, poor black lesbians (and especially those who are male-performing) live in a permanent 'state of emergency', as Wendy Isaack (2003) calls it. Her description of this existence resonates with Georgio Agamben's notion of *bare life*, which he developed in *Homo Sacer* (1998). Agamben theorised the global growth of lawless spaces where certain categories of persons, stripped of access to societal protections, are reduced to their 'naked' selves, to their bare life. His gender-neutral argument was developed further by Ronit Lentin in her text 'Femina sacra: Gendered memory and political violence' (2006). Lentin explores a 'specific form of state-sanctioned violence enacted towards survivors of Transnistira, Ukraine, using testimonies of women survivors of Transnistiria' (2006:463). She looks at the women who survived genocide in Europe in the 1940s to develop the concept of *femina sacra* '… she who can be killed without charge of homicide' (2006:463). Ronit Lentin's gendered historical adoption of Agamben's concept speaks to Isaack's notion of a gendered 'state of emergency' in contemporary South Africa, a situation which practically equals a state of non-accountability and lawlessness. This is best illustrated in a representative study of the South African Medical Research Council according to which every fourth man in the country admits to having raped at least once (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell & Dunkle 2010). Agamben situates his notion of the 'bare life' in a cultural history of political imprisonment, which works via inclusion as well as exclusion (to be locked out/*Auschließung*) through social barring (*Ausgrenzung*) in the German sense of placing someone beyond or outside of the boundaries of the social. This is precisely how Laurie Penny describes the dialectics of democratic liberal inclusion and exclusion as experienced by women:

> After women gained complete legal rights in many countries, our societies still cultivate a rigorous, stage managed loathing for female flesh … We do not look young enough, slim enough, white enough and willing enough – messages that come to us subtly and not so subtly… and are manifest in rituals of self-discipline ... It is not enough to locate women's oppression in the body only. Oppressive normative body

politics, which are reinforcing essential gender difference and hetero-normativity have to be seen in their intersection with intensifying capitalist modes of consumption, unpaid reproductive labor and so forth (2011:3). … [W]e are aware that our bodies are not our own; we are at constant risk of sexual violence and murder; one in five women in Britain and America is a victim of rape, and the rest of us learn to live in fear of rape (2011:1).

Given that sequential traumatisation is not unusual for women in South Africa, the serial character of Zanele Muholi's cultural work can also be read as a representation of the repetitive patterns of traumatic acts, of homophobia in particular and of the everyday re-occurrence of structural violence against women in general. It claims a voice to enunciate a community's conditioning into the collective silence.

The Greek word *traῦma* signifies an injury, a wound. Translated into today's psychological understandings, a trauma is the experience of an event which causes feelings of extreme horror and helplessness. If the traumatisation does not stop and/or is not reintegrated through a healing process of the scattered sense of self, psychic and somatic symptoms might continue beyond the actual experience in form of post-traumatic stress symptoms. Total repression of memory, a split of self, the multiplication of self, dissociation and flashbacks are only some of the effects dealt with in different phases of trauma therapy: stabilisation, trauma exposition, processing of trauma consequences. Attempting to reunite, to create a synthesis of lost body sensations, to undo survival mechanisms which are helpful during the traumatic event, such as dissociation and splitting, but are potentially harmful thereafter, and to learn to live with the memories inscribed into the psyche and the body – all this forms part of trauma therapy.

Re-establishing a sense of security is key for traumatised individuals and communities. This is in deep contradiction with the phenomenon of sequential trauma, which was extensively studied in the context of Jewish adults and especially children who survived the Holocaust. Rosenblum speaks about the hardship of surviving a major historical trauma and the feelings of guilt and shame that are often triggered by having survived, sometimes under degrading circumstances. Whereas silence might condemn the survivor to a 'dried out life', speaking

out, especially when done publicly, might trigger such strong somatic reactions and psychotic episodes that these might lead to suicide (Rosenblum 2009:1319).

This new approach, challenging the psychoanalytic key concepts for cure – remembering and telling – is also a challenge to political approaches towards change. Political approaches are often based on making atrocities visible in order to stop them, and inserting survivors' voices into the collective amnesia in the form of eyewitness narrative. Muholi's key approach of visual activism is centred on generating visibility, representation, documentation, archiving and commemoration. But how to represent trauma, violence, cruelty? How to interlink healing and memorising through commemoration? How to celebrate having survived within a space of being continuously at risk?

Kaplan's thinking about how to deal with one's exposure to the imperial gaze – a gaze that carries parallel structures with the male gaze, as she argues, and the hetero-normative gaze, as I would like to add – speaks to this. She reasons:

> … if it is true that all people's eyes in the west have been imperialized, white Americans' eyes as well as those of African Americans and other minorities, the 'healing' of this imperialized vision is more urgent for minorities. Easing the pain of having had to endure the imperial gaze is most needed for those whose bodies were damaged by the camera (Kaplan 1997:222).

Liberation theorists like Steve Biko and Albert Memmi spoke to the dialectics of power: 'The colonial relationship which I had tried to define chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependency' (Memmi 1992:ix). Biko's description of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed makes the mutual condition of liberation and (self)-healing even more clear: 'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Biko 2002:92). How do we disentangle such a condition, which we can read through the prisms of racial oppression, gender discrimination, and homophobia?

Kaplan reflects on how to 'heal imperialized eyes' and she identifies two main filmic approaches:

> Some undertake an ideological project of reversing the oppressive gaze (and as such remain to a certain extent within the parameters of western structures). Other films I call 'healing' (following Bambara) because they seek to see from the perspective of the oppressed, the diasporian, without specifically confronting the oppressor's strategies (1997:221).

Muholi's work follows both approaches. Her different series and individual pieces of work develop a visual inter-texuality. This is perhaps most prominent in her film *Difficult Love* (2011). Here the artist speaks about herself, traces her roots, and confronts us with the violence suffered by women as well as with the dreams and joys women share amongst themselves and with Muholi, and, consequently, with us. It is about 'making seeing happen': the women being seen, the audience seeing the women, and seeing Muholi as she is seeing them, and looking back at us through the camera as we see. Differently. Differently? In *Difficult Love* we see a film about hate crimes against black lesbians; we see a film about the artist at work; we see the camera shooting and we see Muholi taking a series of photographs which we then see reproduced in the film. The unashamed emotionality of herself and of others in this award-winning film urges the viewer to acknowledge the humanity of the protagonists and to empathise and undo the ongoing de-personalisation that is revealed.

Photographs are more intense than moving images, Susan Sontag says, because they show a precise moment without the flow of time (Sontag 1991). She speaks of photography as a way of storing the world, of capturing experiences in our head (1991:10). When shooting we appropriate the object in the process of relating ourselves to the world. And yet, photos are not so much a statement about the world as fragments of reality, accessible to everyone. A passport with an ID photo reverberates through the South African history of apartheid, a time when all who were considered non-white were forced to carry passbooks (the *dompas*) so the state could control their movements (Baderoon 2011). Today, identification papers and photographs are central to the various global migration and border regimes, regulating exclusion or belonging. The imperial gaze verifies your identity with your legal status in terms of citizenship; it parallels the patriarchal and hetero-normative gaze and related powers of identification when policing who is proper enough and who may pass through public spaces unharmed. And it differentiates who will be targeted. Photographs are utilised as a proof of the

Being, 2007. Film poster for *Difficult Love* (2010).

brutalised reality of an individual/collective out there so that it can no longer be denied. Photographs can cause us a momentary turmoil, before releasing the viewers' eyes to move sideways again:

> When I produced my early photos I was angry. I had no language. I was just angry. I took photos at the height of hate crime: I thought people are raped but you can't erase this image (Muholi in Baderoon 2011:405).

You can't erase the image. What does this imply? Does it mean that the existence of an image in and of itself has a potentially transformative capacity because it frames a 'truth' that would otherwise be lost to the collective memory?

Beyond old or new regimes of producing 'truth' and 'proof', according to Sontag (1991) the impact of photography relies on the existence of a political consciousness as a relevant prerequisite for the moral signification process that photographs may trigger. Given such a context, images such as Nick Ut's photo of a naked Kim Phuis fleeing her just napalmed village during the Vietnam war, or Sam Nzima's photograph of the fatally wounded Hector Pieterson during the Soweto uprisings in 1976, gain and generate momentum and raise consciousness. The pitfalls accompanying the attempts to engage with the scope of violence are manifold.

I remember the concentration camp Dachau next to the town where I grew up in the 1970s in the south of Germany. My class went to the site for educational purposes. Back in school, we watched movies shot by the US army when they were liberating the concentration camps. I saw images of survivors of the gas chambers, walking skeletons in black and white, mountains of cut hair which filled chambers, next to rooms filled ceiling high with extracted teeth. I still see myself watching.

The stream of consciousness can be cut into a 'before seeing' and an 'after seeing' photographic representation of horrors. In the case of Sontag (1991:25), this 'negative epiphany' of seeing happened in 1945 when she was paging through a book and came across images of the Nazi concentration camps Bergen-Belsen and Dachau. For myself the stream of consciousness was cut, disturbed and awakened when I saw similar images as part of educating a new generation of democratic Germans. But does the representation of suffering automatically have a conscientising effect? Is it enhancing empathy, or does it also numb, or even corrupt?

> How do you speak to people who don't understand how a black lesbian face looks [when it is] not raped and bruised? …. I have the choice to portray my community in a manner that will turn us once again into a commodity to be consumed by the outside world or to create a body of meaning that is welcomed by us as a community (Muholi in Baderoon 2011:401).

Different explanations attempt to understand the hate crimes that take root in societal acts against black lesbians in South Africa and often involve gang rape, torture and humiliation, as well as murder, while also trying to understand the perceived increase in hate crimes. Due to inconsistent reporting and data collection, as well as massive forms of silencing, epidemic secondary victimisation, neglect and/or ignorance at the hands of the police and justice system, many hate crimes are either not reported at all, not processed as hate crimes, or, in the majority of all cases, are not thoroughly prosecuted. Through strong lobbying since the mid-2000s, largely done with the sparse resources of a few NGOs and networks which, in the course of this lobbying, often over-stretched their financial, organisational, human and emotional resources and capacities, the media and government began to respond, albeit with reluctance.

In 2011 a Corrective Rape Task Team was established by the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security cluster to conduct a legislative audit of existing hate crime legislation. In early 2013 the National Council Against Gender-Based Violence, based within the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, was established. Both structures are unfortunately regarded as passive and dysfunctional. In spite of the existence of small-scale reports and research with multiple recommendations (for instance, the very comprehensive *Outside the Safety Zone* [2013] by Susan Holland-Mutter), neither legislative nor broad-based societal interventions have been effectively implemented. Successfully prosecuted cases are by and large outnumbered by cases that are not investigated and not processed. This produces a sense of impunity.

The cycle of either taboo or scandalised visibility of the experiences of black lesbians in South Africa mirrors Sontag's (1991) argument that there cannot be photographic proof of evidence of a reality as long as there is no definition of such an event. Similarly, Theresa de Lauretis (1989:32) argues for the recognition of the semiotic relationship between the discursive and the social as always being a reflexive one. Materiality precedes the sign – in our context, the image – but follows it as well. She argues that the materiality of domestic violence only comes into existence once it is named as such, because only then do we anchor such phenomena in our collective consciousness. The ways in which we linguistically frame violence inform

our (non)-understanding of it. Do we label a husband and father shooting his wife and children due to his loss of income as simply another 'family drama', and is this not hiding specific aspects of violence that occur when patriarchal role models under precarious capitalist modes of living become overheated? In the context of a globally increasing femicide, the gender-neutral cover-up term 'spouse abuse' is another example to illustrate why De Lauretis (1989) couples the concept of the 'rhetoric of violence' with what she calls the 'violence of rhetoric'. Our language, including visual language, is based on specific codes with engraved imperial, gendered and hetero-normative asymmetries.[2] It seems there is no neutral space from which to speak or shoot.

Kaplan's feminist film theory places the emerging new images made by women from ethnic minorities in the USA in the 1990s in a historic context:

> These images necessarily function in relation to prior images and stereotypes – in relation, then, to the history of imagining minorities – rather than aim to produce any new truth about minority groups. Women filmmakers … seek to intervene in the imaginary – to change how these images are produced – rather than to present minorities 'as they really are' (1997:219).

Muholi is archiving lives and communities that are often rendered invisible. She is also generating material for a genealogy to enable an understanding of the power of normativity and violence when documenting the formation and existence of non-hegemonic subjectivities:

> For the longest time I have reflected on absence: the absence of recognition of our black queer identities; the absence or lack of visual and textual representation of queer lives; the absence of queer voices in the articulation of contemporary arts; the absence of queer representation in post-apartheid citizenship (Muholi 2011).

Mercer summarises Isaac Julien's visual strategy to not only address but to counter the double bind that black people are objects of representation as they are denied access to the means of representation. In Julien's films '… the black subject "looks back" to ask the audience who or what they are

looking for' (Mercer 1991:200 in Kaplan 1997:xxi). Consequently, Kaplan argues that white people – and I would like to add also people identifying as heterosexual – 'can also be destabilised when exposed to the gaze of the Other, since this is a gaze to which such subjects have not traditionally been subjected' (1997:xix). This confrontation is not always welcomed.

In 2009 the South African Minister of Arts and Culture, Ms Xingwana refused to open the *Innovative Women* art exhibition funded by her own department, after previewing Muholi's work. *The Times* of 1 March 2010 reported that after she saw a series of photographs of 'naked, black women embracing each other', Xingwana considered the work to be 'pornographic' and stormed out of the exhibition. In a statement read by her spokeswoman, Lisa Combrinck, Xingwana reported: 'Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation-building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this. It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building' (Evans 2010).

Xingwana did not look with curiosity originating from wanting to get to know the Other, which can, but not necessarily must, be oppressive. Her gaze reflected rather '… extreme anxiety – an attempt in a sense to *not* know, to deny, in fact' (Kaplan 1997:xvii). Well, one could argue that the minister was not mistaken. The autobiographical gestures in Muholi's work remind one of family albums but her images do not promote a family of citizens which, in mainstream nationalist thinking, is imagined as a patriarchal, heterosexual unit. In this sense, Muholi's images do challenge hegemonic nation-building. They present a collection of stories that do not fit into hegemonic understandings of race and gender and their intersections with the compulsory heterosexuality of dominant, nationalist discourses that despise the transgressions of normative values.

In a Foucauldian sense, Muholi's archiving generates not only an archaeology but also a genealogy of black queer lives. According to Gerald Posselt (2003, author's translation), Foucault tried in his last years to unfold 'the intrinsic connections between the production of power and knowledge as well as the origins of the constitution of the modern subject'. Foucault is not so much interested in writing the history of the past, but aims rather to describe the transformation of contemporary discursive formations, institutions, and practices (the prison system, the study of sexuality etc). As such, the notion of genealogy is invested in deconstructing the notion of truth. In this theoretical framework,

Muholi's work, in spite of her own position as a black lesbian with a township background, should not be read as showing a 'this is how they are' truth about black lesbians and transgender people, which white and homo-/heterosexual audiences do not access; rather it can be seen as an intervention into the scopes of hegemonic imaginaries and their respective voids. Posselt's reading of Judith Butler's notions of genealogy provides us with further tools to unpack Muholi's intervention in hetero-normative ways of seeing, bound to the imaginary of a static two-sex system. According to Posselt, Butler argues that genealogy is a

> … critical method for the uncovering of the fundamental categories of sex, gender and desire, as well as the materiality of the body, as effects of specific power- and knowledge-formations. Her aim is to identify assumed origins as naturalised effects of a discursive practice, and to debunk binary oppositions as transformable constructions (Posselt 2003).

The aspect of serialism in Muholi's work *Faces and Phases*, or the mandala-like images, framed and printed as an eternal wallpaper pattern, plays with the tension of individualism and collectivism, construction and deconstruction. This is displayed by the women and trans-people looking back at the narrow regime of two sexes and matching normative gender performances from a position of fluidity, as if saying 'I am what I want to be'. At the same time it challenges the notion of exceptionalism as the serial character seems to demonstrate 'we are here and we are many'; and it speaks to the serial rapes and killings based on the deeply engrained societal structures enabling violence against women and trans-people. Muholi's invitation to the opening of *Insila Yami/Isilumo Siyaluma 2006–2011* says:

> Note: Between March 2011 – September 2011, four young black lesbians under the age of 25 were brutally murdered in South African townships. Some of the reported cases, known to the police, are:
> 2011 March: **Nokuthula Radebe** (age 20)
> 2011 April: **Noxolo Nogwaza** (age 24)
> 2011 May: **Nqobile Khumalo** (age 23)

In the exhibition news clippings, headlines and newspaper reports form a collage. They are glued to the wall like wallpaper with the beautiful

Ummeli (2011).
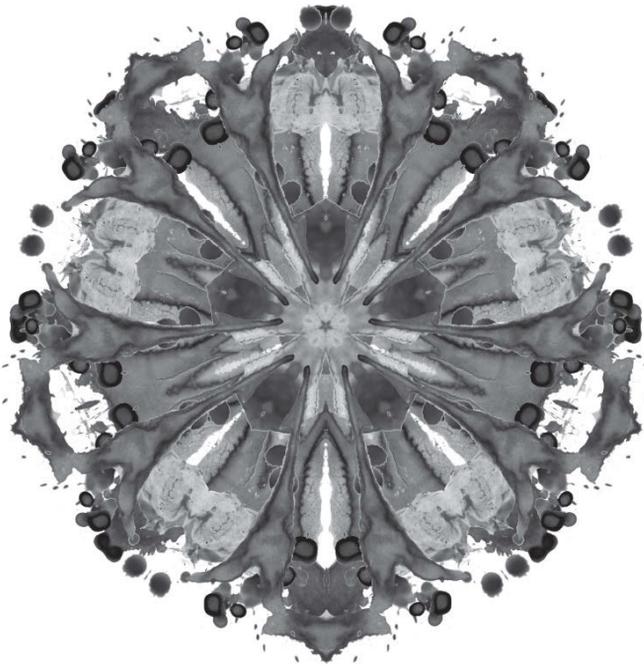
Witnesses (2011).

reproduction of ornamental images. Blood drips on the paper, the camera eye preserves the traces, some altered by an imprint of a finger. The computer cuts and multiplies them by mirroring the red form into ornaments resembling flowers, police badges, spiderwebs and mandalas. Muholi seduces us to look through a kaleidoscope, a tube internally coated with mirrors, reflecting the puzzle of colourful, transparent pieces at its end as one ever-changing ornament. Similar but always different, uncontrollable but artificially fabricated, tricking your eye but real in your hand. Our gaze, seduced by beauty, meanders over these red mandalas.

Mandala making is a spiritual image and practice. It symbolises abstraction and concentration with the purpose of transgressing our bodily identification and spatial experience. It is a repetitive process, creating a form which is meant to vanish and, by doing so, reminds us about the fragility and transitory reality of life. Muholi's blood ornaments are beautiful and it is exactly *not* displaying the aftermath in the form of scars or the threat of being/becoming violated that is captured like an atmospheric trace connecting some of the serious faces or even the bravery of a daring posture. The uncanny gains presence in the subtleness of violence reverberating as a constant stream of consciousness in Muholi's work, even within themes of intimacy, joy and beauty, and it does so especially when far removed from the concrete, when it is turned into an abstract sign fabricated out of the artist's blood.

Muholi's work not only references itself, but also stands in for a larger context of artists working conceptually within the thematic field of violence, identity, sexuality, lust, joy and intimacy. Marcuse (2001) links the use of blood in Jenny Holzer's series *LUSTMORD* (1994) to the work of Anthony Viti in his Berlin show *GEWALT/Geschäfte* (1994), where he attempts to introduce his body's materiality into his work by using semen and blood to address his mourning for the loss gay communities suffered due to AIDS, and to highlight the post-traumatic stress of war-torn communities. Marcuse describes how Jenny Holzer designed one issue of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* magazine (46, 1993), a weekly glossy supplement of one of the largest national newspapers in Germany. On the cover and the following 15 pages, Holzer addressed through her artwork and in an interview the rape of Yugoslavian women during war. The front page carries an attached card reading in red letters: 'There where women die, I am wide awake'. The text on the back of the attached card is printed

in black letters. To read it you need to touch and turn the card. In the magazine a brief introduction is followed by a series of photographs with zoomed images of English and German texts written on skin in red, blue and black. The position of the text on the card represents a victim from a perpetrator's or an observer's perspective. In the tradition of agitprop, the shock element was the red ink on the front page's attached card which the reader has touched without knowing that the colour red not only symbolises blood, but that the ink actually carries traces of blood donated by the survivors of war rape.

Precisely because Holzer is reporting from a war zone without depicting the 'real' horrors, without sensational 'authentic' images, but using artificially constructed photos and text, clearly *re*presenting and signifying the violence, she is provoking high-impact social resistance.

Muholi's work speaks to such processes of abjection and transgression:

> The passage in which we bleed
> The passage where we were born
> The passage through which we become (wo)men?
> The erotic passage meant to be aroused, is raped
> The passage we love is hated and called names
> The sacred passage is ever persecuted
> (Muholi press release, Opening of *Insila Yami/ Isilumo Siyaluma,*
> *2006–2011* [27 October 2011]).

Muholi preserves her bodily fluid, released through her vagina, on translucent tracing paper. Paper, immersed in sulphuric acid and then washed and dried, allows the artist to trace an image onto it, to re-present the image covered by the paper itself onto its surface. The air between the cellulose fibres makes the paper appear like a blank, white *tabula rasa*, but it is the beating of the fibres that make the paper translucent and enable us to see what is underneath. We resist this work; we do not want to see what Muholi calls 'other ways of being, seeing and being seen'. Her translucent pages connect us with the South African Constitution. Through the pages of the constitution, which hold the post-apartheid promise to protect the vulnerable, to make right what was wrong, to free those formerly not free, to constitute a society of equals, the violent processes of everyday abjection keep resurfacing.

Psychoanalytic readings of cultural and social practices uncover the residual traces of the hidden, the internal, the repressed and explore the projection of the expelled onto the margins, wherein language serves as the tracing paper through which we see an image ascending. Ann McClintock (1995) explores the violence of abjection, a psychoanalytic concept, which, according to Julia Kristeva (1982:84), lies at the core of constituting social beings through acts of expulsion, as formative for modern industrial imperialism. To imagine oneself as social we learn to expunge 'certain elements that society deems as impure: excrement, menstrual blood, urine, semen, tears, vomit' (McClintock 1995:72). What else do we cast away? We have *abject objects* like the clitoris, domestic dirt and menstrual blood. We have *abject groups* like prostitutes, Palestinians and lesbians. We have *abject zones* like Israeli territories, prisons, battered women's shelters. As the 'expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary', McClintock argues, in line with Kristeva, that

> … abject people are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed and so on … Inhabiting the cusp of domesticity and market, industry and empire, the abject returns to haunt modernity as its inner constitutive repudiation: the rejected from which one does not part (1995:72).

According to Kristeva, (1984:84) the self and society will not succeed with its purification work of abjection. Expelled elements keep haunting and disrupting, possibly even dissolving, the edges of what we consider to be the norm, the identity of the self or society:

> I see myself as a person occupying insider/outsider status, tracing and crossing delineated borders in order to reflect upon both our displacement as black LGBTI individuals around the globe and our creative resiliency in building 'homes' through our bodies and communities. In facing these complexities, my pictures are meant to dare us all to question the act of refusing citizenship, of rejecting visas and turning people away at borders, and even of denying people their right to medical care due to lack of funds. I dare us to ask why queer bodies remain on the outside of an unquestioned heteronormative sociality (Muholi 2011).

The materiality of the images '*Ummeli*' and 'Witnesses' (2011) through the blood of the artist, standing in for the blood shed by countless victims, symbolises the horrors, yet it is also an everyday fluid that we all share. As such, blood is banal. Zaltzman reminds us of the void, experienced by Hanna Arendt when exploring the tension between horror and banality in her book *The Banality of Evil*, her report of the trial of the Nazi mass-murderer Adolf Eichmann. 'It is finding nothing where she was seeking to grasp the roots of evil that engenders the frustration of thought, and not finding any deep meaning for it is for Arendt what reveals the banality of evil' (Villa 2010:669).

It is precisely *not* the singular exception – the psychopath behind the tree in the night – but the normal guy from next door; the politician's hate speech; the second victimisation of the police force, that is at the centre of the problem. The problem is to be found at the *middle* of society and *not* its pathologised and criminalised margins.

When we acknowledge the absence of the extraordinary we are forced to face the everyday normality of violence against women and/or LGBTI people: from silencing and misrepresentation to the physical control of women's sexuality and assaults of their bodies because 'you dare to wear pants', 'your skirt is too short', and what is critically referred to as 'corrective rape'. 'You want to be a man? I'll show you your place.'

In the context of war, Zilla Eisenstein argues, with reference to Clausewitz:

> If war is politics in another form, and if gender is a political configuration, then the process of gendering males and females is a continuation of politics and war in other forms. It is why the rape of females continues to be so central to war, and a form of war, and not simply a crime of war (Eisenstein 2007:12).

Here, Eisenstein argues that rape is not an exception to the rule but a camouflaged rule of warfare and conflict itself. What could this mean for our understanding of what is often referred to as South African 'rape culture'? It is argued that post-apartheid South Africa is experiencing a low intensity warfare, at least; that its transition remains unfulfilled, that it is not post-conflict on a societal level considering its increasing economic inequality, the high levels of crime, an increasingly murderous xenophobia, and its topping of global rape statistics.

Acts of violence targeting women and transgender people are reflected in an uncanny routine of anticipation, shock nevertheless, outcry, followed by commemoration. This continuum of 'sexual terrorism', as Arriola describes the femicide at the Mexican border (2003), shines in the form of traumatic flashbacks and an anticipation of no tomorrow through the continuum of women's fragile recreations of the everyday as liveable. Acts of homophobia consume lives, which now are no more. Acts of homophobia consume the lives of those who still struggle – tired, sad, angry – to keep going with their own lives against the continuation of homophobia; for justice for those murdered; for allies amongst progressive forces and movements against a conservative backlash of traditional authorities, politicians and religious leaders.

In her work Muholi photographs scars, smears blood, sucks tampons, stages cross-dressing, celebrates same-sex tenderness, mimics domestic workers, loads intestines onto her naked body, films herself naked at night on the beach, twists her pubic hair, parts her lips, looks into the white porcelain closet. She traces pockets of joy as well as documenting the regimes of destruction that traumatise LGBTI communities in spite of their protection in the Constitution.

Her visual activism is constructed as a set of practices which collapse boundaries through form and content. Muholi stages the representation of her visual work as a social transgression and a temporary symbolic redistribution of territory beyond the private/public and periphery/metropole; at the same time she translates her social interventions into politicising and positioning her visual project prominently. This is a project of applied interferences, reimagining and redistributing visual and social topographies, in order to de-centre the centre and re-centre the margins.

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NOTES

1 An isiZulu expression for period pains.

2 See problematisation of the term 'hate crime' in Schuhmann 2008.

PUK NINI — A FILMIC INSTRUCTION IN SEDUCTION: EXPLORING CLASS AND SEXUALITY IN GENDER RELATIONS

ANTJE SCHUHMANN AND JYOTI MISTRY

Fanta Régina Nacro is a well-known and highly respected filmmaker from Burkina Faso who made the critically acclaimed feature film *The Night of Truth* (2004). Earlier in her career she also made a short film, *Puk Nini* (1995). Nacro's reflections on the multiple roles that women are expected to perform both professionally (public) and domestically (private) motivated the roundtable discussion that follows, which took place at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The objective of this roundtable was to address her reflections – the 'creative understanding' of the film – in a South African context and outside of Burkina Faso's immediate local and geographic context. The premise of the discussion was to explore, investigate and engage Nacro's intention (as a filmmaker) with *Puk Nini*. Furthermore, the discussion aimed to engage her intention and interpretation of gender relations as represented in *Puk Nini* with the next generation of artistically and socio-politically conscientised young adults in South Africa, some 20 years since the film's making. In other words, the research intention was twofold: firstly to use the film as a vehicle to gauge how much gender relations might have changed since the making of this film and, secondly, to explore its reception in a different geo-social environment. We wanted

to discover how diverse, young, urban-based audiences in South Africa might interpret *Puk Nini* through the lens of their own experiences and also to understand how they think about contemporary gender relations and sexuality.

In the context of this roundtable, which we as teachers at the university initiated, the point was less the aesthetic considerations and more to allow students to bring their scope of film theory and cinematic representations, in conjunction with their reading of the socio-cultural issues explored in the film *Puk Nini*. It was an invitation to share respective interpretations of the film.

The diversity of audience reception in Africa has been well documented recently in the works of anthropologists Brian Larkin (author of *Signal and Noise: Media, infrastructure, and urban culture in Nigeria* [2008]) and Onokoome Okome (author of *Nollywood: Spectatorship, Audience and the Sites of Consumption* [2007]), both of whom have done extensive field research on how video films made in Africa (à la Nollywood style) are consumed and interpreted differently across regional borders, across the continent and in the diaspora. One of the reasons for the success of these films in their home markets can be attributed in part to the fact that the films speak to the immediacy of the experiences of their audiences where local and regional nuances are identifiable to their viewers. The complexity emerges when audience expectations shift and when the immediacy of the issues is less apparent, as the film moves further and further away from its (local) geographic and cultural proximity.

Using an approach similar to the seminal communication model proposed by Stuart Hall in 'Encoding/Decoding' (1980), first published in 1973 as 'Encoding and decoding in the television discourse', the roundtable discussion works within the paradigm of audience reception.

Hall proposed in his model of encoding/decoding that the circuit of communication was made up of discrete communication moments. The encoding takes place through the conditions of the practice. In this case it would be the filmmaker's intention, the socio-cultural context and the institutional framework that informs the message (by implication it is the ideological intent informing the film). The second moment is that of the text. Here the codes are embedded in the form and content of the film. The third moment is the act of decoding, or the reception of

the text (film), and the way in which an audience makes sense of the codes in the text. Hall pressed upon the idea that the social positioning (identification) informed how these codes were interpreted and made meaningful. This social standing ascribes importance to how race, class, gender, ethnicity, education and, in the case of this roundtable, how geo-social and historical contexts determine reception.

Processes of identification within and across gender, class, and/or cultural/ethnic boundaries are key to the reception of films. African film studies also require consideration to national, regional, ethnic and linguistic differences to circumvent African essentialism in considering audience reception. Reflecting on the diversity of audience reception is not only an acknowledgement of the diversity on and across the continent, but is a significant way to address social positioning in Africa.

As with conversation and discussion (in this case with the catalyst of the film *Puk Nini*) collective reflections are sometimes erratic and critical, and at other times circuitous and even prosaic, revealing the many contradictory positions of the speakers, their social positioning and how they reconcile the encoded messages of the text with its decoding based on their identification.

There is a reason that *Puk Nini* was chosen from so many other successful films made by women filmmakers on the African continent. The opportunity emerged from Nacro discussing her film directly, as well as from her engagement with the gender issues and stereotypes of women from different parts of Africa. The film also raises the issue of the solidarity of women. Nacro made a point of suggesting anecdotally that the success of the film was predicated on showing how women should 'act or behave' in order to be more attractive to men, and this also raised an opportunity to further address how gender relations operate and how 'tradition' is a constitutive factor in this relation.

Puk Nini tells the story of an urban professional couple living in Ouagadougou. They are (visibly) happily married when the film starts. They have a young daughter who enjoys watching their wedding video and aspires to have a wedding day just like her parents' one. While the husband would like to spend more time with his wife, she is always occupied with domestic responsibilities after work, like helping the daughter with homework, preparing the meals and taking care of the home. The husband, who feels rejected when he makes advances to

his wife, seeks alternative company with men, but in the process is introduced to an attractive woman who turns out to be a sex worker at the local tavern. What unfolds is a comedy of the husband's attempts to deceive his wife about the affair. There are two important narrative turns: the first is that the husband asks a family member to 'talk' to his wife and explain to her that this is what men do (have affairs). The second event is that this family member takes the wife to a traditional spiritual healer to help her with the problem. This family member (herself a victim of domestic abuse) tries to convince the wife that it is best for her to become accustomed to this and to rather seek the advice of a traditional healer to cope with the problem. The wife, however, pursues the commercial sex worker and befriends her in order to understand how she successfully seduced her husband and to learn about the different sexual methods the sex worker uses. By the end of the film, the wife and sex worker are friends and the husband is caught leaving a brothel with another sex worker.

At the first ARTSWork Women's conference at the Goethe-Institut in September 2010 Nacro made the following observations about the impact of her film *Puk Nini* in a local Burkina Faso context:

> I went to film school in Burkina Faso and started to make short films in my country. Here the people and the state really appreciate cinema. I received my Master's and Doctorate in Paris. Every time I returned to Burkina Faso, my colleagues talked about the problem of having to share their husbands, who were seeing other women. They would talk about these women as first and second "offices". The question for me was: how is it that these men have beautiful intelligent women [wives] and yet they go to have these other offices [women]? Women from Burkina Faso do not hold back with their opinions, and the women from neighbouring countries like Senegal and Ghana are much more gentle and do not put pressure on the men, and this is why they are considered [less] work. *Puk Nini* means "open your eyes" and so the message is that if you have a problem, open your eyes and see what you can do about it.
>
> This film is about a professional couple where the woman has a double burden: looking after her child and family, and doing her job. When the man wants to go out after work and have fun, after her job

stops she starts her domestic work at home. This film is a comedy, so when she discovers the other woman, she does not react with shouting and fighting in the way women in Burkina Faso would do normally. This wife is more sophisticated and instead gets to know the other woman and asks her how she attracted her husband. The Senegalese woman gives her tips.

It was a very controversial film as it talks about women and seduction; actually, it was seen as pornographic in Burkina Faso and it was critiqued because of the portrayal of Senegalese women as prostitutes. I had a reaction from women in Burkina Faso who said that I portrayed them as not being able to take care of their men. There were also some television panels where questions were raised about how as working women we can make space for our men? These discussions raised questions about how to create a home, a marriage and a good life but also have a happy love life. After *Puk Nini* came out, Burkina Faso women changed: they are more beautiful; they changed their looks. Even though I made the film in 1995, I am still approached by women today who ask me if I will make a sequel (Nacro 2010).

Teaching at the University of the Witwatersrand in the Department of Political Studies and the Centre for Diversity Studies, I (Antje Schuhmann) often have conversations with students about how they experience gender relations. Together with the students I try collectively to theorise their thinking and their experiences about the intersections of gender, sexuality, race and class. Most of these students are so-called 'born frees'. However, many do not feel free at all, although maybe a bit more free from past discriminations. Many issues remain contested, however. For example: Who has the agency to promote change? Do women or men or both need to change? In the sense of Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1982) or Steve Biko's statement that the most powerful weapon of the oppressor is the minds of the oppressed (Biko 1986), students wonder to what extent, as women, they themselves are complicit in their own discrimination and in the upholding of a patriarchal symbolic gender order. What role do new representations play in transformative societal settings, and how do we represent something 'new' without somehow referring to the 'old'? And, in referring to the old, how do we not repeat gender and racial stereotypes?

In spite of being born into a democracy with applauded protection mechanisms for gender equality, young people in South Africa grapple with what might be seen as the intersection of modernity and tradition. When sharing their everyday anecdotes in the classroom these are some of their reflections:

'If I want to be an emancipated woman … [and this term seems more acceptable than the often misunderstood term 'feminist'] … a woman in an urban environment who has her own career, what do I do about lobola? The whole time I was sure my husband-to-be would negotiate the financial compensation with my family before marriage, but now I do not know anymore. Isn't this problematic?'

Another student responded to this by saying, 'Well, I had tea the other day with my girlfriends and one has a new boyfriend and the mother of one friend instructed her: "Good, he is Jewish. Well done, and please make sure he will pay and smooth your everyday life." I thought, This is one of those blonde, old-fashioned women, but then all my friends agreed with her!'

Another student affirmed this. 'Yes, at home in Zimbabwe it's the same. Women instruct women to let the man pay to not undermine his masculinity, as men like to play the role of the provider.'

Then a male student interjected: 'Hey, girls, how can you all allow this to happen, and then you complain when my pals and I speak of a "sex tax" we have to pay in the form of dinners, handbags, fashion?'

We were interested in how students from Film and Television and Social Sciences today might understand the complexity of gender relations, ideas of power and (in)equality, and the different strategies of surviving and/or challenging the patriarchy as portrayed in *Puk Nini*. The complexities of the film, which was shot at a time when South Africa was transitioning into a supposedly non-racial, non-sexist democracy, are manifold and sometimes contradictory. We wondered how today's young adults might respond to what we perceived as a tension between a clear 'feminist' or, rather, 'women-identified' approach and aspects we considered as an uncritical buy-in into hegemonic patriarchal understandings of gender relations. How would they read a film which seems partly still to mirror contemporary gender relations, but which is also different from how young urban Joburgers imagine themselves and their intimate relationships?
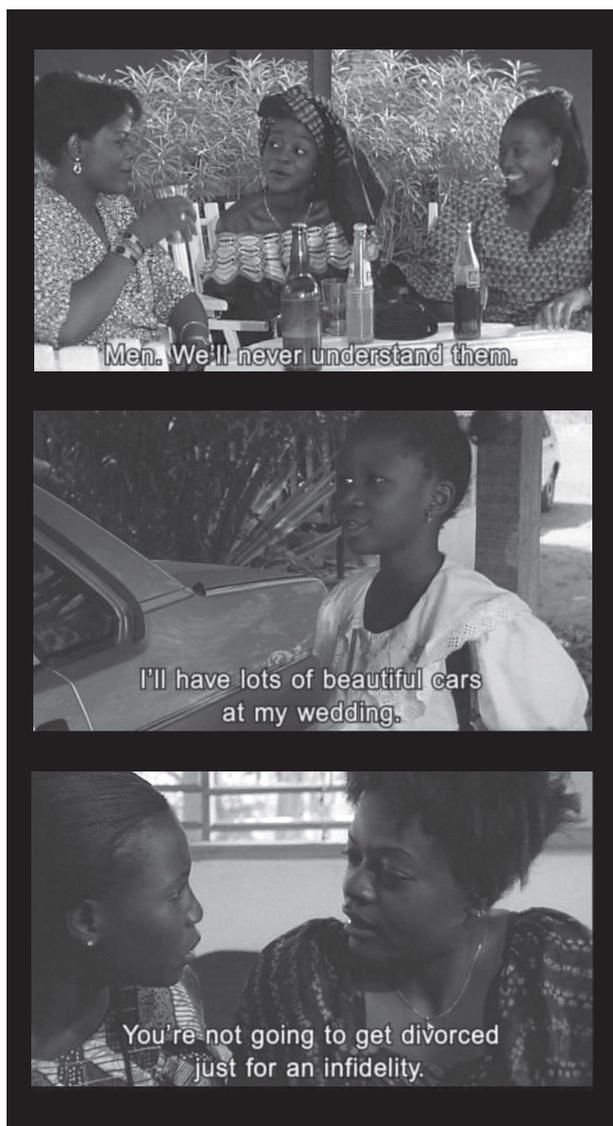
Frame grabs from *Puk Nini*.

Puk Nini was therefore an open invitation to address whatever issues the participants felt the film raised as they pertained to the representation of femininity, masculinity, sexuality and class, at the intersection of modernity and tradition, and, of course, the highly gendered politics of belonging that play out in the film.

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The discussion that followed the viewing also touched on aspects that were relevant in post-colonial feminist debates. The group that attended the screening of *Puk Nini* were: Antje Schuhmann, Athinangamso Nkopo, Jyoti Mistry, Komnas Poriazis, Lesiba Maile, Lurdes Laice, Molemo Ramphalile, Nikki Comninos, Nobunye Levin, Vivek Mehta, Welcome Lishivha. The role of facilitator went to Nobunye Levin.

VIVEK MEHTA: The beginning was interesting for me: you see all these women hanging up washing on the line in the courtyard and in the next scene there is the main character with her husband, going to select a washing machine in town. Despite the husband's initial concern with brand names he agrees to buy his wife what she wants. He says: 'But for you, my love, I will buy it.'

ANTJE SCHUHMANN: In this rather traditional interaction it seems significant that the wife is not only a housewife. She is represented with all the insignia of modernity: she works as a professional with computers in an office; she drives the family car and cares for the child – so she is clearly portrayed as a modern woman who is not necessarily financially dependent on her husband.

VIVEK: You are right. And also the husband was set up initially to be a really good husband in the sense of 'I'll take care of my wife'. But then he does these things [having the affair] on the side; it felt like Astou [the sex worker] was presented as the catalyst to his infidelity. He [the husband] is presented as weak throughout the film. In the beginning he says: 'Okay, I will buy the washing machine for you.' He goes home and wants to have sex but he doesn't get it from his wife. Then he meets Astou. I wasn't sure if he knew that she was a prostitute because I wasn't sure if she was a prostitute or not. It is interesting that the film keeps her status ambiguous for a while.

ANTJE: This ambiguity enables the narrative to not be judgemental about her trade as a sex worker – Astou is portrayed initially in a way which allows us as an audience to identify with her foremost as a character before it is revealed what she does for a living. She herself says later to the wife: 'I actually don't like your husband. All I want from men is their money.' She is very unashamed about this and I would call her a sex worker because she is without a pimp, working very much on her own terms.

WELCOME LISHIVHA: I thought the film portrayed women in a way that didn't victimise them. Particularly with regard to sexuality and the kind of relations they have with men, they are represented as somehow empowered. In many films women are portrayed as passive sexual objects, but in this film they have a voice! I like this.

ATHINANGAMSO NKOPO: There was some kind of build up to the husband's infidelity; he kept trying to have sex with his wife, but she kept on turning him down because her focus was on taking care of their daughter. So he does [have] some sort of [reason] for why he is cheating, but then it just spins out of control because he moves from one woman to others. I do think, though, that the depiction of the man is a little problematic. His weakness is his penis and in the end the women are making fun of him.

LESIBA MAILE: I felt that the film was overall biased against men because it seemed like every male in the film was a dog, from the *sangoma* [traditional healer] to the husband and the aunt's husband. There was not one positive male role model in the film or a male figure whom you want to identify with.

NIKKI COMNINOS: Also, there was no ability for him [the husband] to grow. There is solidarity amongst women, and in the beginning some kind of forgiveness and understanding. You would expect this to be reflected in the male's journey, but this was not the case. The husband is a two-dimensional character with no character arc. He is unable to develop as a character because, unlike the female characters, he is not endowed with the self-awareness that shows their character development and their narrative arcs. Having offered that comparison, I maintain some reservations about the representation of the female characters. The female gender roles are incredibly static as well. There is little complexity to them: there is Astou the sex worker, [and] the wife and mother who helps the child with homework. I don't feel that these gender roles are particularly nuanced. Amongst women a kind of solidarity developed, based on the acceptance that this is what men are like anyway – some kind of 'genetic' makeup – rather than a socio-political construction. In that sense it felt like women pushing the boundaries is useless anyway because no change is possible. I don't think that women were represented as any more empowered than their male counterparts.

Instead it felt like all gender positions were resigned to the constructions that were inherited.

MOLEMO RAMPHALILE: I am interested in the complexity of the representation of the domestic space and the role of the woman as a wife. I think in many black movies – broadly speaking – there is always this conflict black women face: just let him [the husband] be; he is a good man because he takes care of you, so just let the other stuff [the infidelities] be. I feel that there should be more in representing a male character, something that makes you think about how contradictory representations are not always separate but how a single character can be conflicted, and I think this speaks to what Nikki said about the two-dimensional-ness of the male character.

NOBUNYE LEVIN: The husband is both the provider and 'the dog' at the same time, who becomes the fool. I feel those three viewpoints, provider, dog, fool, make him more complex. However, it does reinforce a colonial stereotype around black men and their unbridled sexuality, which includes fantasies about the size of their penis and their insatiable libido. So the way he is represented definitely works on that level of stereotypes and as such the film re-inscribes certain colonial stereotypes of the black male.

NIKKI: There is also something compelling about the portrayal of the daughter in the film. She has this love for the idea of marriage and weddings. In the film she is introduced watching her parents' wedding video and her fascination with the wedding video works throughout the film, eventually until the mother destroys it. It can be read like her dream [of weddings and marriage] is literally pulled apart in front of her when her angry mum breaks the tape after the mother discovers her husband has been cheating on her. The wedding videotape is used quite directly as a metaphor for how the mother feels about the marriage. I wonder if the daughter is simply growing up to become another woman who has to accept 'Well, marriage is not what I thought it is.' Is this film offering a warning or expressing something of how gender relations are reproduced across generations?

MOLEMO: In a way, the middle-class girl becomes sensitised and made aware of the myth of marriage when compared to its real life experiences. She moves from adoring an idealised fairy-tale wedding to a 'This is what

I should be expecting of marriage and therefore if my husband would ever cheat or beat me, I will take it'. The film breaks the myth of the 'white wedding' and marriage is demythologised as a glorious thing.

ANTJE: The film offers a proposed trajectory for two girl-children. First the daughter of the middle-class family set against the young girl who lives with Astou in her quarters. Can we say that the two futures of each of these girls in the film are already mapped out through the specific socialising they receive? Is this where gender and class intersect?

WELCOME: I thought it was interesting that the kids in the courtyard look at Astou when she is talking with the wife. There was an everyday normality to it and at the same time this scene spoke to the Othering of sex workers.

NIKKI: I am not sure about this. Was it not more the boy-children watching the girl-child when she is being moulded into the desirable woman she will come to be?

WELCOME: Yeah, maybe one could say Astou was 'the pimp' in this scene, pimping the girl to become a future sex object.

ANTJE: I would like to come back to the question of class and tradition. On the one hand, you have the middle-class girl with nothing else on her mind but her future wedding in spite of her professional, working mother saying to her 'But you have to get an education first.' On the other hand there is Astou, who is working in the brothel, and the young girl who is already her apprentice, whom we are shown is being groomed by the way in which Astou shows her how to adorn herself and carry her body. She's modelled particularly through a very traditional way of shaping the body in how the stone is weighted down on her buttocks. Body politics, class and questions around tradition and modernity intersect here.

VIVEK: I found this part of the film fascinating because it reveals something of how also women participate in the objectification of the female body and how this grooming takes place from a very young age. On the one hand, the one girl is being raised to be a strong, independent woman who is going to have an education and be self-sufficient; on the other hand, the

other girl is being moulded to have control over her sexuality, her body and, consequently, over men. She will get some benefits and money to sustain herself and this is paralleled with the middle-class girl who gets an education to ensure her independence. The one girl goes to school and the other one is told, 'If you work on your body, you will get what you want in life'.

ATHINANGAMSO: What do you mean by 'independent'? In fact, the girl who is going to be a sex worker, similar to Astou, seems to be independent as she just gets what she wants from men and [learns from a woman] who probably also did not have an education [referring to Astou]. Similarly, the other girl [from the middle-class family] will also be in the situation like her mother. [She] may have an education, work and be independent in *that* way, so what is the difference?

JYOTI MISTRY: The issue of how to define independence or independent is significant as it relates to the historical and socio-political context in which gender relations are examined. The film makes evident a theoretical position that has often been enunciated, which suggests that women are ultimately in contractual relationships with men. Even in a marriage there is the contract of conjugal duty, but what does it actually mean and how does this relate to power? Can power be manipulated through withholding sexual 'favours' or providing sex for 'favours' even within a marriage? In the end the film seems to suggest that men are 'dogs' or only defined by their libido, which is an 'uncontrollable' trait that men must fulfil. But this argument is not specific to an African context. Although Nobunye's point is well taken: that it is made stereotypical in colonial contexts with regard to African men and their sexuality. In that sense this film seems to evoke a tension between surviving patriarchy and/or fighting patriarchy. What would then constitute a feminist film? Is this a feminist film?

ATHINANGAMSO: I don't think this is a feminist film. I think a lot of the things that happen in the film are not a challenge to patriarchy. They [the women] are trying to survive patriarchy and they play into it. I am bothered by the sisterhood at the end of the film; that all the women get together and laugh at the man and this is supposed to come across as representing empowered women. I feel it is a sisterhood-happy-end movie and the women are represented as unburdened by their positions: wife, mistress and

the sister who is beaten up by her husband. It doesn't feel real. No one is angry, no one is emotional. I don't see it playing out as authentic to a lived experience.

LESIBA: I agree with you. The filmmaker is representing the cycle of patriarchy that is so naturalised that it is in part represented as a cycle of life. The film ends with Salif [the husband] being caught again and I don't see a divorce coming. It will just keep on happening to women again and again across generations. In this sense the film is not breaking the cycle but simply representing it with a comical twist, which perhaps makes the feeling of the cyclic nature of the gender relationships more bearable.

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Generally speaking, the symbolic gender order is essentialised through two main avenues: either we are told that biology is the main factor in generating a fundamental difference between the sexes or it is argued in the name of tradition and culture that static gender order requires preservation: it was always like this and so it must remain as it is. In other words, men are men and women are women. *Puk Nini*, however, mirrors the tradition of the so-called second-wave women's movement's consciousness-raising efforts. Women do change. Maybe they will not step out of a normative heterosexual marriage arrangement or will not seek a different trade; maybe the way they relate to men becomes only a bit more cynical and estranged in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy. But what *does* change is how women relate to one another and how they might come to reflect on their positions as opposed to simply inhabiting those positions *sans* a reflectivity.

  This is of particular interest because in her film Nacro focused exclusively on a heterosexual framework of female/male gender relations. Within this perspective women were inspired to relate differently to themselves in order to relate differently to men by enhancing their femininity and therefore their desirability. This re-establishes the man as the primary point of reference around which women circle in relation to both their individual and collective self-imagination. One of the complexities of this film is that it also points us in a different direction: female bonding and solidarity are imagined as cause and effect of the de-centring of men. It is a gradual estrangement where

the wife loses all her respect for men. In the course of trying to fix her marriage she aims to learn the tricks of the sex worker, who shares her (the sex worker's) insights on how to play or reduce the simple constitution or make-up of men as biological beings. The loss of respect for men finally enables the wife to reach out to a woman positioned at the symbolic fringes of a patriarchal society, whose centre and value system the wife abandons in the process of seeking female company and solidarity. The utopia offered here is not the changing of men but rather mutual female empowerment across the societal segregation of women in the 'holy wife' or 'whore' binary. This solidarity unfolds in the face of a seemingly simple reality: all that men want is sex and within this framework women are replaceable. This seems to be the context of the so-called 'sugar-daddy' phenomenon and related forms of transactional sex: to hell with romance, it is an illusion anyway, so let's get real and take as long as you can before you are replaced.

Translated, this means women are made to be as materialistic as their male counterparts. Women focus in this scenario on the commodification and the exchange of body, beauty and youth with the intent to accumulate material goods.

Puk Nini and the subsequent roundtable conversation that arose after viewing it 20 years after it was made situates the crisis of gender relations within the tensions of tradition and modernity under conditions of late capitalism. One woman, the wife, symbolises the modern woman and her double burden of paid labour and unpaid reproductive labour, household and care work. The other woman, the sex worker, represents an independent businesswoman, who sustains her children back home through the commodification of her body, as she lives and works at the margins of societal exclusion and the precariousness of a migrant labour existence.

What is revealing from the multiple views and observations expressed by the focus group in the roundtable discussion are their own social positions and points of identification (or not), which enable an engagement with the text (film). It is not simply about recognising the codes and revealing their own decoding strategies that suggest an already different understanding of gender relations generationally; it is also the recognition of what is similar and familiar from a previous generation. As a focus group of university students, their exposure to

theoretical concepts and concerns with film aesthetics further addresses their need or desire to see the characters less as types or representative but rather to expose the contradictions. To this end the narrative scenario or context denies them the nuances and experiences that the students feel is authentic to their own immediate lived experiences. These lived experiences are represented through the contradictions expressed previously by students in Antje Schuhmann's classes in, for example: 'As a woman in an urban environment who has her own career, what do I do about lobola?' And 'Hey, girls, you complain when my pals and I speak of a "sex tax" we have to pay in the form of dinners, handbags, fashion?'

The gendered labour division embedded within a heterosexual framework of marriage, sugar-coated with romantic love, is a relatively young invention, whereas the trade of sexuality is a comparatively old tradition. In this reading, modernity and tradition resurface again. Another reading, this time formulated in relation to Western societies, but partly transferable to certain post-colonial societies, is Laurie Penny's description from her book *Meat Market: Female Flesh under Capitalism* (2011:3):

> After women gained complete legal rights in many countries, our societies still "cultivate a rigorous, stage managed loathing for female flesh … We do not look young enough, slim enough, white enough and willing enough" – messages that come to us subtly and not so subtly … and are manifest in "rituals of self-discipline …" It is not enough to locate women's oppression in the body only. Oppressive normative body politics, which are reinforcing essential gender difference and hetero-normativity, have to be seen in their intersection with intensifying capitalist modes of consumption, unpaid reproductive labour and so forth.

There are multiple contradictions at play – on the one side within the film's narrative and aesthetics, but on the other side also within Fanta Nacro's own relationship to her film and her interpretation of its reception initially in her own country, and how it is later interpreted in a different historical and geo-social context. These ambiguities are highly productive for our critical analysis of gender relations within a hegemonic symbolic

gender order; within an order intersecting with representations of race and class; and an order which is often upheld by both men and women, and which is passed on to the next generation in all its complexities. What *Puk Nini* enables us to do – precisely because of its often rather slapstick comedic elements and not necessarily because of a conscious direct suggestion – is engage with our own complicities. In addition to this, it allows us to search for possible escape routes, within and beyond normative gendered social relations.

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I AM SAARTJIE BAARTMAN

NOBUNYE LEVIN

Saartjie Baartman has been utilised in a broad range of public articulations, including works by artists, writers, scientists, historians and filmmakers. These articulations can be located across Europe, Africa and the United States of America. Within the European context, specifically, the most significant writing on Baartman begins with the pseudo-scientific offerings made by French comparative anatomist and zoologist[1] Georges Cuvier.[2]

Baartman is an iconic figure who became a signifier of European cultural and scientific imperialism. Scientific racism constructed racialised notions of her body and genitalia, such as: the primitive, the savage, the animalistic, and the uncontrolled. The racialising and over-sexualising of her body and genitalia, and the ideas espoused by this racialising process, produced images of 'nation'. These were useful to her European exploiters and colonisers under the rubric of science. Later, in the South African context, the assumptions of Saartjie Baartman's life that rely on seeing her as a victim furnished the imaginary reconstructive project of the post-apartheid nation.

In more recent times, within the South African context there have been offerings made by Penny Siopis in visual arts[3] and by Zola Maseko in film.

A comparative focus of this chapter will be Zola Maseko's films *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman* (2003). These films function within the rhetoric and image-making associated with the post-apartheid South African nation-building project as they employ representations of Baartman, her narrative and her body as tools in the broader political project of re-imagining and reconstructing the image of the post-apartheid nation.

This nation-building agenda relies on Baartman's perceived lack of personal will. The myths of Baartman's life have allowed the post-apartheid South African national imaginary and its institutions of nation-building to overlook the sense of self-determinism that Baartman demonstrated within the social milieu of her lifetime. While Baartman's historical context did not contain social and political structures that allowed someone of her race and gender to make her agency public, she did, however, continuously demonstrate acts of self-determination. This is exemplified by what we know of her performances, singing on stages, and dancing and playing the guitar[4] in the taverns of Cape Town (Holmes 2007:34). These performances defied her colonially-ascribed and actual role as a servant.[5]

The institutions and proponents of the nation-building project – which include the nation state, the institutions of the nation state and its actors, consisting of both 'official' state actors as well as the 'citizens' of the nation – choose generally to disregard such acts of self-determination. Rather, they utilise Baartman and the inhumanity that she suffered as a symbol of the inhumanity the South African nation suffered under colonialism and apartheid. These processes of consecration, which have created Baartman as a symbol of her times and therefore as an icon, risk re-establishing her as a curiosity (Qureshi 2004:251). This is similar to her construction in discourses of scientific racism.

My research and film project, *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009), aimed to counter this use of Baartman, particularly with regard to Baartman's symbolic utilisation and representation in Maseko's films, through offering a feminist reading of Baartman, which situates her in a feminist historiography that privileges the private and experiential and in the process foregrounds her acts of self-determination. Broadly speaking, I intend to destabilise certain articulations within political projects that have often employed Baartman as a tool in the service of various

discourses or causes. Furthermore, I specifically seek to posit a critique of Maseko's films concerning Baartman, while also offering an alternative representation of Baartman through a discussion of my film project.

Maseko's film *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* provides a broad overview of the life of Saartjie Baartman and the various roles she played. However, Maseko mainly focuses on the period when she became known as the 'Hottentot Venus' and by doing this he begins to create in Baartman a passive victim with no real personal history. It is the perfect site for the narration of the suffering of a nation and its people.

In the film, Maseko provides the voice-over, along with an unidentified British male voice that provides the commentary for the various historical documents and extracts, which comment on Baartman's time as the 'Hottentot Venus'. In addition Maseko interviews a number of people who offer their commentary and who debate Baartman as an object. These are principally men. Baartman's body therefore largely becomes the scene of rival exchanges among men.

The only woman among these male experts is academic Yvette Abrahams, but Abrahams offers a reading of Baartman which elides her personal experience and self-determinism. She continuously portrays Baartman as a victim. Abrahams comments on Baartman's refusal to be repatriated back to South Africa when her case was brought forward by a group of abolitionists: 'She was a kid. She didn't know what she was doing (Abrahams in Maseko 1998).' Abrahams assumes, as many have, then and now, that Baartman had been coerced into refusing repatriation back to South Africa by her 'handlers', Alexander Dunlop and Hendrick Cesars.

Abrahams and the men who offer commentary on Baartman play the role of 'experts'. This collection of patriarchal voices elides any sense of the personal and experiential that Baartman might have had by implicitly claiming the role of seer. Consequently, the film claims all knowledge and power. The 'experts' and academics illustrate this by constantly referring to Baartman as a victim and by situating her within linear history as a cultural artefact upon whom they feel privileged to comment. On the level of the personal, Baartman is silenced and so her public function is amplified.

Baartman's absence in Maseko's film renders her a symbol of her times and of black experience in order to furnish a project that has broad political ends that have little to do with her (other than in her exploitative

appropriation as a tool). Baartman functions as an ideological tool in the construction of a 'new' post-apartheid nation.

In 'Framing National Cinemas', Susan Hayward highlights how the female body is symbolically employed within nationalist discourse. She asserts that this employment is usually one where the female body represents ideas of nation that are linked to invasion, violation, occupation and rape, through the female body being representative of the violated 'motherland'. Hayward reveals how this implicitly frames agency and power as being traits of masculinity. She describes how the female body, which is envisioned as 'motherland', becomes a vehicle for the nation's 'male-driven narratives that have appropriated the female body'. She further argues that 'in these male-driven narratives, the female body by extension becomes the site of the life and death of a nation, the rise and fall of the nation' (Hayward 2000:98).

Baartman is utilised as a tool in recounting the horrors of a formerly subjugated people, and again as a tool in nation-building and unity when her body is finally returned home in Maseko's second film, *The Return of Sara Baartman.*

The Return continues the story told in *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman*. It chronicles the return of Baartman's remains to South Africa by the French on 29 April 2002. It documents the official handover of Baartman's remains and her plaster cast to the South African people at the country's embassy in Paris. It then goes on to show her official burial, on Women's Day, in Hankey in the Eastern Cape by her supposed 'descendants'. The film also chronicles the lobbying involved in Baartman's repatriation by people such as poet Diana Ferrus, palaeontologist Professor Phillip Tobias and French senator Nicolas About.

The Return of Sara Baartman seems to cement Baartman's position as a symbol of the nation. This is perhaps most apparent in the climax of the film, which takes place at the site of the funeral in Hankey, where Baartman's body is returned to the earth and buried. Thabo Mbeki reads a speech that reveals how Baartman and her body have 'come to represent the pain and suffering of all exploited black women and the psychic, cultural and emotional impact of racism and its legacy' (Holmes 2007:187).

Mbeki's speech articulates how 'women's bodies are closely aligned with nationalist discourse' (Hayward 2000:97) and consequently how the

nation is imagined. It is therefore imperative that Saartjie Baartman's body be buried. Her burial acts as a reclaiming of the nation's ancestry and also one which buries the legacy of racism and all its consequences. The restoration of her body to the soil of the nation of her birth means that she will come to embody both the death of a racist imperial legacy and, importantly, the rebirth of a nation.

Through positioning her as a symbol of the nation, a victim and a cultural icon, Maseko's films thus deny Baartman a sense of humanity, subjectivity and self-determinism. Furthermore, Maseko's films generally elide a sense of personal memory and desire, one that asks: What does the body do? (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:56)

In contrast, my film, *I am Saartjie Baartman*, focuses on an interpretation of Baartman's memories and offers an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity. Filmically, this was a way to speak back to and potentially challenge Maseko's project.

Deleuze and Guattari explore the question 'What does the body do?' in their radical re-conceptualising of the body. They wrest a perspective of the body from Spinoza which does not consider the body as either object or subject, but interrogates what the body is capable of. This is also the site at which my film offers an interventionist position. *I am Saartjie Baartman*, following Spinoza, considers how much 'joy, affirmation, sadness and decomposition a body can endure within its various relations with other bodies' (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:55).

Such a conception of the body foregrounds 'the passions and actions of the body', which 'replace the system of genus, species, and its differences and the hierarchy of the mind-body dualism'. This understanding of the body and the questions that arise from it lead to questions of desire (Olkowski 1999:55).

Elizabeth Grosz points out that 'Deleuze and Guattari, following from Spinoza and Nietzsche, conceive of desire not as longing for something but as that which creates connections and relations' (in Olkowski 1999:56). This is an overturning of a Platonic conception of desire which envisions desire as lack (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:56). Deleuze and Guattari, following from Spinoza and Nietzsche, therefore re-conceptualise the body and desire, and see them as productive and affirmative as opposed to old conceptions predicated on negation and lack. Importantly, their recognition of the body is predicated on the

recognition of multiplicities which are irreducible to one metaphysical unity (Grosz, in Olkowski 1999:56).

All of these articulations concerning the body are imperative for the re-imagining of Saartjie Baartman because they disavow a system of representation which 'operates by establishing a fixed standard as the norm or model' (Olkowski 1999:2). Dorothea Olkowski argues that in order to bring about a change to this, a 'ruin of representation' is required.[6] She further asserts that 'With this ruin underway – with static structures of time and space, of life and thought, disassembled – a philosophy of change becomes viable' (1999:2).

Olkowski argues that efforts to analyse the representational norm, specifically by feminists, have fallen short as 'these analyses have operated with categorical generalisations: concepts neither abstract enough nor particular enough, which represent women merely in terms of pre-established, even naturalized, standards'. She argues that these 'representations do no more than register a complaint against the norms of images, language and social and political structures'. Rather, she proposes:

> an abstract but fluid ontology which can make sense of difference by accounting for the reality of temporal and spatial change on a pragmatic level while providing appropriate theoretical constructs in whose terms change can be conceived (Olkowski 1999:2).

Olkowski's articulations concerning 'the ruin of representation' and the 'philosophy of change' this enables are imperative for my research and film project because they are important for the disassembly of the representational categories that have historically and scientifically constructed Baartman's body. These categories construct the body as inferior lack within the mind-body dualism. The body is therefore reduced to static materiality rather than fluid interaction, relation and creation. In addition, within this dichotomy, woman is seen as being inherently linked with the body, as a being that is inferior to the hierarchy of man and reason/mind. In addition to this, these binaries create blackness as a monstrous 'Other'. It is these conceptions of the body, woman and the racialised 'Other' that allow the extreme over-determinism that Baartman suffers.

My research and film project consider and begin with 'difference' (Derrida in Boyne 1990:92), which is enabled by Olkowski's notion of 'the ruin of representation' and its disassembly of static structures of time, space, life and thought so that 'a philosophy of change' becomes viable.[7] This difference is located in an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity, which is central to *I am Saartjie Baartman*. My interpretative stance proposes a continual becoming, which is contingent on experiential time. Furthermore, this interpretative stance is fluid and concerned with the relations between objects, spaces and people.

The film is a short experimental film shot on digital video. It brings together archive footage with live action footage. Its privileging of a sense of experiential time and memory places it within 'the empirical avant-garde' (Mellencamp 1995:174). Mellencamp argues that 'the empirical avant-garde destabilises history through the experimental, granting women the authority of the experiential which includes both knowledge and memory' (1995:175). Such a practice therefore privileges memory and experience rather than the generalisations of linear history. Deleuze says these works of memory 'sketch a geography of relations' (in Mellencamp 1995:175). The works of memory in *I am Saartjie Baartman* are predicated on relations located in Baartman's desire.

The 'connections and relations' of Baartman's desire are represented through two love affairs. Rachel Holmes' book *The Hottentot Venus: The life and death of Saartjie Baartman, born 1789 – buried 2002* was imperative in providing the information about these two love affairs. Furthermore, it was critical in my project because it enabled me to locate an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity, as it recaptures Baartman's humanity by carefully contextualising her and her story in a feminist historiography. It was also instrumental in creating a skeleton for the content of my film, its locations and its chronology. I was able to garner enough information to create a sketch of Baartman's life and the events that shaped it. This sketch was teased out and infused with my own interpretations and projected imaginary. Additionally, I was able to retrieve a number of phrases, allegedly uttered by Baartman, from Holmes' book. This was important for the creation of an interpretation of her subjectivity.

I chose to use the name Saartjie rather than Sara or Sarah (the name Baartman was given when she was baptised in England [Holmes 2007:112]) because of something that Holmes pointed out in her

book. The *-tjie* in Afrikaaans has two different functions: it indicates the diminutive (and inferior) but 'is also a powerful way of expressing sentiment' (Holmes 2007:xiii-xiv). 'The key emotion expressed by the *-tjie* diminutive is endearment. It is a verbal demonstration of affection and care' (Holmes 2007:xiii). My film is about relations and revealing the personal. The name *Saartjie* enables this project because it is the name family and friends might have called her (Holmes 2007: xiii).

Baartman's first love affair took place when she was about 17 or 18, and was with a young Khoisan man named Skolar. Skolar and Baartman were to marry. On the night of the feast that was thrown for Baartman to celebrate her forthcoming marriage, Skolar was killed. He was murdered by a commando raid led by Europeans (Holmes 2007:18–19).

The second love affair was with a young soldier, whom she met in her first year in Cape Town, possibly at church or in a tavern (Holmes 2007:34). In *I am Saartjie Baartman* I chose to imagine that they met at a tavern. The soldier's name is lost, yet what is known of him is that he was 'a regimental drummer attached to the Cape Town Garrison' (Holmes 2007:34). It is not known whether he was Irish, Nguni, West Indian, Khoisan or 'a slave made free through military service' (Holmes 2007:36–37). In my film he is imagined as Irish. I decided to do this because an interracial relationship, within the social and historical milieu in which Baartman existed, would further demonstrate her sense of self-determinism.

Still from *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009).

As a Khoisan woman in a colonial historical moment Baartman would have been perceived as a servant, so it is almost certain that white people largely did not see her as a legitimate person who might embark on a love affair with a white person. The concept of an interracial relationship is therefore extremely radical. It illustrates a sense of self-determinism that destabilised pre-existing norms and social behaviour. In this way Baartman's act becomes political and transgressive through her wilful act of miscegenation.

Baartman's love affair with her soldier progressed to the point that she moved in with him (Holmes 2007:35–36) and soon she discovered she was pregnant. She gave birth to a child whom they raised together, until the child died of unknown causes shortly before its second birthday. After this loss, the drummer and Baartman broke up. It is not known if this was due to their baby's death (Holmes 2007:39–40).

The two love affairs explored in *I am Saartjie Baartman* are in the form of a series of impressions. These impressions focus on images, sounds and the relationship between bodies on a physical and psychic level. This requires a re-conceptualisation of Baartman's body. Baartman's representation has historically and scientifically relied on over-determinism of her figure, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This over-determinism finds its signifier in the iconography that exists of Baartman. It is illustrated in the images drawn and painted by artists in the 19th century.

Notable among these images are those commissioned by Georges Cuvier, who 'employed a small cadre of artists to depict her likeness for a collection of illustrations showing the diversity of "flora and fauna" housed in the library of the French Natural Museum' (Collins 2010:72).

These images depicted Baartman naked, in contrast to how she was exhibited in the popular shows that she was shown in at the time. Nicolas Huet le Jeune's image of Baartman depicts her in profile in order to highlight her buttocks.

These representations of Baartman were and remain deeply problematic. They represent a fixed and static body, which does not act and therefore has no agency. And this 'fixity' continually re-inscribes the colonial stereotype. Homi Bhabha writes:

> An important feature of colonial discourse is 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial

difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise, the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known and something that must be anxiously repeated (in Enwezor 1999:388).

On one level *I am Saartjie Baartman* seeks to re-imagine this official image, which 'is a text, an argument, an idea, inscribed in line and colour, by means of representation' (Bal in Moxey 1994:29). In the film Baartman's image is re-imagined through a series of projections that seek to disrupt and in many ways implode the fixity of her representation. Le Jeune's image of Baartman is used in these projections.

The projection of Baartman's official image in the film begins as a referential site with which to identify the character of Baartman. This referential site also functions as a place in which to introduce Baartman's pre-determined official articulations and then to work towards their deconstruction.

We first see the image of Baartman's official representation in a sort of Eisensteinian intellectual montage[8] which seeks to challenge the scopophilic gaze that Baartman has been subjected to in the past and present. The montage utilises archive footage from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The montage disavows the provenance of the archive in this instance. Images from Eisenstein's film are distilled in order to construct a montage that comments on and challenges Baartman's objectification.

The montage begins with an image of an eye looking through a lens taken from Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). The eye dissolves into a pool of optical blue light and the first image of Baartman's body appears. Its head is cut off and it slowly tracks in. The montage continues with a juxtaposition of a group of sailors handling a piece of meat infested with maggots. This is continually intercut with the image of Baartman's buttocks and the image of an eye looking through an eye-piece. Now and again the eye-piece touches the maggot-infested meat. We see a woman, who is meant to be Baartman, standing in a darkened blue-lit interior. She is outside of the world of the projection.

She stands looking back at the sailors, the image of herself and the audience. She looks on with a fixed, challenging gaze on her face. Her image continually moves forward in tandem with the projection of her official representation.

The projection of Baartman's image continues to move forward and the pace quickens. The sailors continue to violently prod and smell the maggot-infested meat. A man continually casts leering glances at the woman. Eventually, Baartman's image has been blown up to the point that we no longer recognise it. The montage ends with Baartman's character staring back in a close up, victorious.

Close up on Saartjie to counter the historical drawings in which she is dominantly depicted. Film stills from *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009).

This treatment of Baartman's official image (its blowing up and eventual destruction as it becomes unrecognisable) is similar to the way that the director David Cronenberg conceptualises the cinematic body. He foregrounds the monstrosity of the flesh 'to refuse the pacifying lures of specular idealisation' (Shaviro 1993: 132–133). 'This new regime of the image abolishes the distance required either for disinterested aesthetic contemplation or for stupefied ascription in spectacle' (Shaviro 1993: 140–41).

The second projection of Baartman's official representation in *I am Saartjie Baartman* is found in a sequence that utilises archival footage from Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*. In this instance the provenance of the archive is maintained as Vertov's film is about the cinematic gaze; it is about a man who walks around Moscow with a camera. The film continually comes back to an image of an eye looking through a camera lens. This is to highlight the idea of looking and how the cinematic gaze plays a part in this. Vertov documents various scenes and people. Often the people are unaware of the eye of the camera on them. These anonymous people and scenes become the spectacle upon which the camera eye gazes.

The second sequence in *I am Saartjie Baartman* involving Baartman's official representation begins with the close up of the eye looking through the camera lens. This is followed by a sequence from Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* depicting an auditorium being prepared for a screening and a projectionist preparing the film for projection. People begin to walk in and take their seats, awaiting the show. We are, once again, shown the eye. Then the optical blue light appears to reveal Baartman's official image. It is a naked body revealed in its entirety. Contrary to the previous representation of Baartman's official image, in *I am Saartjie Baartman* here it is static and at the mercy of the gaze. Here the film re-creates the distance required 'for stupefied ascription in spectacle' (Shaviro 1993: 140–141). This is to illustrate the imperial/colonial gaze to which Baartman was subjected.

This second sequence is meant to represent Baartman's period of display in London and in Paris at the *Jardin des Plantes*. The inscription of the imperial gaze and its European context is reinforced by a voice-over which runs concurrently with the images. This voice-over is in French and is meant to represent Georges Cuvier. It authoritatively says:

> We could verify that the protuberance of her buttocks had nothing
> muscular about it but arose from a [fatty] mass of a trembling and
> elastic consistency, situated immediately under her skin. It vibrated with
> all the movements that the woman made (Cuvier in Gould 1985:297).

This sequence reiterates Baartman's scopophilic objectification by Europeans. This is to illustrate her experiences in the white worlds of Europe and Cape Town. The reiteration of this gaze, after its initial moment of resistance by Baartman's character, is to illustrate how 'submissiveness to authority in one context is as frequent as defiance in another; it is these two elements that together constitute the subaltern mentality' (Bhadra 1997:63).

Baartman was a wilful woman. However, the social and historic milieu in which she existed determined and ensured that she was socially inferior. As a Khoisan woman she was most likely a member of one of the lowest social groups of her time. Although she may have been a wilful woman, her society did not permit Baartman the political agency that allowed defiance in all instances.

This initial use of projections in the film is interspersed with projections that become less concerned with scopophilia and Baartman's official images. Rather, these projections begin to represent Baartman's memories. Some of these additional projections consist of archival photographs from Pippa Skotnes's book *Claim to the Country: The archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek* (2007).

In *I am Saartjie Baartman* the use of these archival images disregards (not with the intention to disavow) the provenance and identity of the individuals represented as well as their personal narratives. Rather the images of the San people function as memories of Baartman's family, suitors and compatriots. Thus they are re-purposed in order to inscribe Baartman's personal history and reveal her as a person, while also situating her in the ancestral realm as she becomes located within the archive of her people.[9] Situating Baartman within this realm affords her a sense of political agency, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The use of archival material to depict Baartman's memories is utilised further in the film. As Baartman dances in the taverns and on the stages of Cape Town and Europe (Holmes 2007:60), the narrator in the film

comments on men with whom she may have come into contact in these places. These men are represented through archival photographs, which are intercut with Baartman dancing. The archival photographs of these men no longer function in their original context; the provenance is unacknowledged and the men in the photographs are never named. Rather the men become representative of the types of men she may have met and seen while she performed in the taverns and on stages. Additionally, they become indicative of Baartman's interiority as the narrator describes the relations that she may have had with these men who watched her dance.

Thus the film interrogates what the body can do (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:56) and, like Deleuze and Guattari, following from Spinoza, it also asks what the body is capable of (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:55*). I am Saartjie Baartman* stages an intervention which diminishes the over-determinism of Baartman's figure and instead foregrounds how it acts in relation with other bodies (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski 1999:215), and consequently how this might articulate Baartman's desire. This, as Spinoza argues, 'is a matter of how much joy, affirmation, sadness and decomposition a body can endure within its various relations with other bodies' (as described above) (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:55).

In the film these relations and the emotions they conjure are explored through themes of loving and loss. This loving and loss not only resides in Baartman's memories and experiences of her two love affairs, but also in the memories of her lost childhood home and her dead parents (Holmes 2007:19 and 23). The film seeks to show the relation of bodies and their desire in a manner that includes the tactility and corporeality of the body. And so Baartman's body is seen in relation to other bodies, as it smells, speaks, touches and tastes, and in so doing it communicates a sense of a life lived not only in a psychic sense but also in terms of its corporeal experience.

The film, perhaps for one of the first times, also clothes Baartman's body. This is done, once again, to disavow previous articulations that have focused on her naked – or nearly naked – figure. Clothing Baartman diminishes her objectification. It allows us to see her as a person, one who acts in multiple ways. This contradicts and challenges Maseko's articulation of her as a cultural artefact who symbolises a political project of race and nation.

Throughout the film Baartman is mostly clothed in a billowy white nightdress, except for one scene, where she is seen in a brown peasant dress with a frilly white trim at the cuff. The costuming in the film is designed to suggest a historical period rather than attempt a period (historical) in costume design. This is because the film is concerned with a sense of experiential time rather than historic linear time. Having said this, however, the white nightdress that Baartman's character is seen in has a definite purpose: the garment suggests a sense of the private and intimate. She wears a garment that is primarily worn within the confines of the home.

Fundamental to the design is a white cloth, which functions as an object of narration and also a marker of time. This cloth comments on Baartman's interiority and narrative journey. It also illustrates the processes of the body. It becomes different things at different points in the narrative; its shape, colour and size change as it assumes different uses and marks different periods in her life. The cloth functions as a prop within her dance routines and as a shroud when she gives birth or comforts herself after Skolar's death. It marks time as it moves from the dance routines in Cape Town *before* the death of her baby, to a cloth marked by blood and time *after* the death of her baby. The cloth becomes a tool of resistance. It morphs into the handkerchief that Baartman used to hide her genitalia as she was probed and observed by Georges Cuvier and his colleagues.

Baartman's bodily fluids stain the cloth and thus comment on her lived experience and interiority. The cloth which hides her genitalia becomes the cloth upon which she first makes love and loses her virginity with Skolar. It is stained red in order to suggest blood and the consummating of their love. The cloth morphs once again, and the red hue, which suggested the consummation of their love, foreshadows and suggests Skolar's blood in death. Further on in the narrative the cloth becomes the sheet on which she gives birth. The bloodied sheet then suggests the death of her child.

This concern with bodily fluids and emissions follows on from Julia Kristeva's essay, *Powers of Horror: An essay on abjection* (1982). In this essay Kristeva explores the significance of the taboos surrounding bodily emissions and fluids, arguing that these articulate more than simply a revulsion against a lack of cleanliness. Since the body can function as

a metaphor for social structures, a dread of its emissions is bound up with recognition of their capacity to threaten the social fabric. Kristeva's argument is that a focus on such marginal matter – on what she calls 'abjection' or 'the abject' – can be potentially subversive. She argues that it can disturb 'identity, system, order' and suggest a lack of respect for societal 'borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva in Schmahmann 2004:3).

This focus on bodily emissions therefore functions as a form of resistance for Baartman, as a threat to the societal fabric that has created her as a representational tool. The white colour of the nightdress and its large size continues the narrative function of the cloth. When Baartman washes the cloth after her child's death, the nightdress is splattered with the bloodied water. It, too, becomes stained by her lived experiences and thus becomes a reflection of her narrative journey and her personal experiences as opposed to her public display.

A key feature of *I am Saartjie Baartman* is the function of the voice-over. The voice-over acts in two ways. Firstly, it functions as the voice of the filmmaker (my voice). The conversation between the narrator and Baartman inserts the 'I' of the filmmaker in the film, without asserting a visual presence. In this way my own subjective interpretation is written into the film and made present, but without disturbing the focus of the film, which is primarily concerned with Saartjie Baartman. Secondly (but by no means less important), a conversation with a historical figure in the form of a dialogue consisting of call and response is imperative in ascribing a subjectivity to Baartman that has thus far historically been absent. Furthermore, the images that we see of Baartman are of a young woman. This is to reflect Baartman's actual age while she was still alive. The voice-over that acts as Baartman's voice, however, is communicated by an old woman. This is to infer and suggest a sense of reflection; to inscribe the sense of a woman looking back at her life.

The desire to create a film that privileges the experiential and the private is reflected in the visual style, shot size, composition and lighting. The film is shot in a combination of red, indigo, ochre, jade and yellow. The four last mentioned colours are meant to evoke the landscape of Baartman's childhood (Holmes 2007:8). The lighting aesthetic is influenced by a sense of the private. Images are lit in order to create a sense of intimacy. This often means that there is a play with shadows and concepts of light and dark. Baartman's character is often shot as if she

were emerging from and framed by darkness. This is to suggest a narrative world that foregrounds and privileges the experiential and the private.

Additionally, the film consists of a textured look that sought to enhance emotional resonance and intimacy. This was done through the use of out-of-focus shots and extreme close ups. The images were often tightly framed and positioned in low angles. Once again this is intended to evoke a sense of intimacy suggesting Baartman's private world rather than an empirical, historical project. The need to evoke the sense of experiential time was articulated through the use of 'long takes which capture the rhythm of life' (Gabriel in Mellencamp 1995:176). And although the film concerns itself with chronology, it is deliberately non-linear in structure.

An important facet of *I am Saartjie Baartman* is the issue of how to deal with her remains. As I have already mentioned, the return of Baartman's remains played a crucial role in Maseko's film *The Return of Sara Baartman*, symbolising the re-birth of the nation. One of my principal concerns was to disrupt this symbolic usage. I believe I managed to do this at the end of my film.

The end explores a return of Baartman that does not focus on her remains and their metaphorical significance in terms of constructing narratives of the nation. These articulations focus on her material remains and their material burial in the soil of the nation. In order to disrupt this objectifying usage of Baartman's body, my film seeks to concentrate on a concept of return that is spiritual in nature. Baartman returns home as a spiritual entity, as an ancestor, who does not live above us or below us, but among us. In this way, her iconicism is infused with a sense of political agency that unveils her as a person who, in one way or another, is constantly speaking and acting both within the past and present.

This is exemplified by the voice-over at the end of *I am Saartjie Baartman*. Baartman's character says in Xhosa (Holmes [2007:13] claims that she may have spoken some Xhosa, and it functions as an African counterbalance to the English and French otherwise spoken in the film): 'I lost my way; I didn't know where I was. I was out of my mind.' The home in this passage does not refer to a material home within the earth; rather, it refers to a spiritual home. The voice-over continues and says: 'Oh, what is this I see? It seemed like someone in red blankets was sitting there. Oh, how beautiful this woman was. Her face was so beautiful.' The woman that Baartman's character sees is an ancestor inviting Baartman

to join the realm of the ancestors. The red of her blankets refers to the colours that *sangomas* (traditional healers) wear and reinforces the idea that Baartman's character is having a conversation with the spiritual world and that she is about to become part of it.

In my film and also in this chapter I have sought to challenge Baartman's symbolic employment as a tool in nationalist discourses (Hayward 2000:99). 'This symbolism disguises real questions of gendered agency and power', as agency and power are invested in the male body rather than the female body (Hayward 2000:99). Contesting masculine inscriptions of Baartman's body, which construct her as a symbolic tool through continually concealing her self-determinism, I chose to situate Baartman in a feminist historiography which articulates a sense of self-determinism even within the confines of colonial imperialism and patriarchy.

This re-imagining of Baartman allows her a voice outside of discourses concerning the nation and nation-building, which is how Maseko's films have positioned her. It is premised on an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity that is enabled by 'the ruin of representation', 'where a philosophy of change becomes viable' (Olkowski 1999:2).

I am Saartjie Baartman privileges experiential time above notions of the historical (linear or historic time). This concept of experiential time is crucial to the ruin of Baartman's representation and therefore her re-imagining. 'The ruin of representation' can, however, only exist in the moment of the film *I am Saartjie Baartman.*

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NOTES

1   Rachel Holmes states that Cuvier specialised in comparative anatomy and zoology (2007:136).

2   Cuvier's infamous and racist report on Baartman, written after her death and
    entitled *Report on the observations made on the body of a woman known in Paris
    and in London as the Hottentot Venus* (1817) racialised Baartman's genitalia and
    buttocks and attributed animalistic traits and features to them. Cuvier's writings
    became famous across America and Europe. They became 'foundational texts in
    comparative and evolutionary anatomy and biology, anthropology, as well as racial
    science and sexology' (Crais and Scully 2009:135).

3   Penny Siopis has featured Baartman extensively in her work. For example in her
    painting *Dora and the Other Woman* (1988), Siopis looks at Baartman 'in relation to
    Freud's Dora' (Siopis in Coombes 1997:121). Siopis (in Coombes 1997:121) says that
    the painting makes a 'direct connection between the way white women's sexuality
    was pathologised in psychoanalysis, most of all through Freud, and the image of
    Saartjie Baartman'. Therefore Siopis connects the two women's stories through
    ideas of 'objectification and looking', which was a connecting theme in both their
    stories.

4   I have assumed that she played the guitar in the taverns of Cape Town, although it is
    not stipulated in the page that I have cited from Holmes' book. However, earlier on
    in her book, while discussing how Baartman became an almost overnight sensation
    in London, she states that Baartman played the guitar (2007:6). So I have assumed
    that Baartman's 'ability to play' that Holmes refers to in terms of her popularity in
    'tavern nightlife' in Cape Town (2007:34) refers to the playing of the guitar.

5   This assertion is based on Holmes' argument that 'over time, colonisers forced an
    association between "Hottentots" and servility' (2007:11). Additionally, at the time of
    Baartman's performances in Cape Town, she was registered by the Cape census as a
    servant in the home of Hendrick and Anna Cesars (Holmes 2007:27).

6   'The ruin of representation' is a term coined by Michele Montrelay and has been
    'adopted and reconfigured' by Dorothea Olkowski for her book *Gilles Deleuze and
    the Ruin of Representation*(1999).

7   However, it is important to note that I do not advocate a complete disavowal of
    Baartman's position as a cultural icon. This would merely duplicate the structure
    which I seek to critique, relying as it does on the concept of 'origin' or 'presence',
    which is utterly unavailable to us (Derrida in Boyne 1990:97). Furthermore, the
    disavowal of Baartman as a cultural icon would deny a nation of national icons at a
    time when it needs to constitute a nation-building project.

8   The technical innovation, which Eisenstein dubbed 'intellectual montage', 'resulted
    from his studies of Kuleshov's famous experiments (which demonstrated that the
    meaning of any shot is contextual) and of Japanese ideograms (where two separate

symbols can be juxtaposed to create a third meaning, eg child + mouth = scream; white bird + mouth = sing)' (Cook in Shaw 2004).

9   She is situated within the archive of her people as 'the Khoekhoen and the San emerged from one people and were not separate races' (Holmes 2007:192). I am also imagining her through 'the collective term *Khoisan* (*khoi* or *khoe,* and San)', which 'is now used when speaking of the long shared history of South Africa's first peoples' (Holmes 2007:192). Furthermore, Holmes states that 'Saartjie was descended from the Eastern Cape Khoisan, the long intermingled society of herding, pastoralist Khoenkhoen (Khoi) and the hunter-gathering, nomadic San, native to South Africa since pre-historic times' (2007:9).

FILMMAKING AT THE MARGINS OF A COMMUNITY: ON CO-PRODUCING *ELELWANI*

JYOTI MISTRY

Nestled in the most north-eastern part of South Africa, close to the border of Zimbabwe, lies the rich cultural landscape of the Venda people. It is a community informed by a long tradition of royal lineage and a vibrant history woven with incredible legends of sacred forests and lakes. It is the smallest ethnic group in South Africa and its language, Tshivenda, is spoken almost exclusively by those of the community. Tshivenda has not been widely adopted like isiZulu or isiXhosa in an urban environment. The language is described as melodic and lyrical in its use of innuendo, which draws strongly from the oral histories and customs of the community. It was this location and the language that was the inspiration for director Nshavheni Wa Luruli's film *Elelwani* (2012), which is based on the first Tshivenda novel (of the same name) by Dr Titus Maumela.

The experiences of being a co-producer on *Elelwani* gave me immediate access to the community and a privileged perspective of how the community had viewed the novel historically, and how they interacted with the material in a contemporary context through the production process.

It is my intention here to connect aspects of the production process with the narrative content of the film and its interpretation, both from a close textual reading (as is the convention of textual analysis), and with the interpretation of the story and characters as experienced during the production process by the community (particularly by the women) it claimed to be representing. The aim of this approach is to offer some reflection on what the expectations of filmmaking were in a community that is economically impoverished. In this sense, the idea of film is not simply a didactic tool but an instrument (through the production and location filming) to empower people economically in the region. This relationship between filmmaking as an instrument to empower a community so that they might gain economically from the 'industry' component of filmmaking is distinct from considering the film (the end product) that serves to empower women through its representation. Finally, I will turn my attention to how content might reflect some of the inherent gender contradictions in this community, bringing to the fore questions of gender empowerment and, perhaps, how it belies expectations when interpreted from a Western-normative paradigm.

Wa Luruli had the idea to adapt Maumela's 1954 novel to a contemporary context because, as Venda himself, he wanted to represent Venda people and their cultural history in a way that he felt was only possible for an insider. The original novel was a handwritten manuscript and it told the story of a young girl bequeathed to the king. She challenges this idea of marriage because she would rather complete her schooling. In an interview that Maumela gave (*Elelwani the documentary*, 2007) he explained that, as a schoolteacher, he was frustrated that the only text he could teach in Tshivenda was the Bible, which did not capture anything that his students could relate to culturally. As a way of bringing Tshivenda to a written language, he wrote the novel to expose scholars to what he felt was relevant to their lives. The handwritten manuscript was 'lost' but Maumela was not deterred. He rewrote the manuscript and submitted it for publication so that it would be possible to teach Tshivenda as a written language. Maumela went on to write and publish a significant number of titles in TshiVenda thereafter.

This back story is significant because it goes a long way towards explaining some of the emotional 'buy-in' when the decision was being

made to adapt the novel for the screen. The director had read this novel as one of his setworks at school.

Wa Luruli as the writer/director was very clear that he wanted to find a way to make the film contemporary and relevant to an audience almost 50 years later and in the context of a changed political system.

What relevance would such a story have in a democratic South Africa and how would a young girl or woman expressing her wish for freedom be shown differently (if differently at all) than in the 1950s under apartheid? My interest in this project stemmed from the way in which the director spoke very convincingly about the multiple layers informing the treatment of women in Venda, and the different social spheres that women had to navigate between life in a village, the privileges of the royal family and the role of legends and myths that inform the plight of women in that community.

The character of Elelwani in the film version is not a schoolgirl, but a university educated woman who returns after her graduation to inform her parents of her academic success and the opportunity to continue her studies abroad on a scholarship. On her return to her parents in the village, she is confronted with the reality that she is not the architect of her future as her education allows her to believe. Unbeknown to her, she is indebted to the king who has been paying for her university studies and now expects a wife whom he has been sponsoring.

By offering the narrative from the position of an older and more educated character, the director seeks not only to give his protagonist more agency in her own personal choice, but to create the space for more complex discussion on the political agency of women generally in this community.

While Elelwani is subject to the traditional laws and expectations that are deemed culturally specific in terms of Venda customs and expectations of women who must comply with parents and community – as a character Elelwani is able to challenge these expectations by illustrating to her parents that she sees herself as a woman with options, who can make choices as an individual, but also on account of her political awareness. The turning point of the story is when her parents finally concede that they cannot force her into a marriage with the king. Instead, the parents offer to the royal family Elelwani's young sister Rendane, who is seven or eight years old, as a substitute. The narrative at this point is also a matter of foregrounding the unspoken sacrifices that women are complicit in,

Elelwani film poster (2012).

either in the name of tradition or in the face of choices that challenge their instinct and moral duty. Elelwani recognises the importance of education, of protecting her sister's childhood and innocence, and, rather than have her sister robbed of these things, she offers herself up against her own will. In this gesture she sacrifices her own romantic love and her opportunity for a life outside of the village, and concedes to the custom of women's duty.

In a compelling scene between Elelwani and her mother, Elelwani questions her 'worth' as a woman in this society, and that of women in general. She complains to her mother that women have simply been viewed as property, as providers of heirs and as possessions. Her mother listens and finally, in responding to Elelwani's introspection, her maternal response is simply: 'That is how it's always been.' There are no other words.

Later in the film when Elelwani accepts her parents' request (demand) to honour her family's duty to the royal family, the instruction from her mother reiterates this idea that women must comply: 'Don't ask questions, and obey.'

Director Wa Luruli accomplishes a cinematic tour de force in this sequence as the mother disrobes her daughter of her city (modern) clothing and, with incredible pride, grooms her in a beautiful traditional MuVenda. The double entendre is not lost: there is the pride of a mother (as any mother) seeing her daughter as the potential bride, but the sacrifice and Elelwani's reluctance are palpable, as though she were being sent to a slaughterhouse.

The film content itself, the contemporary re-contextualisation, creates a narrative possibility for exploring both the representation of women's experience in what is perceived as traditional roles and, contrastingly, modern (emancipated) aspirations and values as reflected in a democratic state. The balancing act in the narrative comes from reflecting on how traditional values come to be assimilated with modern aspirations. The democratic state in South Africa does not have the same meaning or experience for all its citizens. This inequality is based not on differentiation, but rather on the latticing of two distinct and discrete experiences of governmentality (Foucault 1991); of simultaneously being a citizen in a liberal state, while also being subject to sovereignty in a Venda kingdom. Michel Foucault's seminal work on governmentality is useful in this context for reflecting on how these varying political organising structures across history in society produce different subjects through varied 'policing' systems of the self (as in the case of the latter) or regulating subjects through systems of governance outside of a liberal political logic (as in the case of the former in the Venda kingdom):

The theory of sovereignty is something which refers to the displacement and appropriation on the part of power, not of time and labour, but of goods and wealth. It allows discontinuous obligations distributed over time to be given legal expression but it does not allow for the codification of a continuous surveillance. It enables power to be founded in the physical existence of the sovereign, but not in continuous and permanent systems of surveillance. The theory of sovereignty permits the foundation of an absolute power in the absolute expenditure of power. [The] new type of power has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and of the type of society that is its accompaniment (Foucault 1972:104–105).

This political tension has been subject to continuous debate in South Africa, and while traditional leaders are constitutionally recognised, their powers have been limited in the democratic South Africa. In a controversial proposition in 2012 by South African president Jacob Zuma, the draft of the Traditional Courts Bill proposed granting traditional leaders greater authority within their territories. This would not only have had devastating consequences for women and children, but would have also seriously influenced issues of land inheritance and property ownership, with further consequences for land rights as well.

In the context of the film narrative, land rights and property feature strongly as one of the motivations for why Elelwani must commit to being part of the royal family, and her leadership is sought to protect the land and the heritage of the Venda people. Through a complex series of narrative twists, Elelwani realises that she is part of a much broader royal conspiracy. Her role is to prevent the sale of Venda land to property developers and big businesses that intend to deforest indigenous forests for development of luxurious resorts, thus destroying sacred plants used in herb practices.

The political complexity of traditional rights as it relates to empowerment of women is a strong motif in the film. As the 'opening night' film at the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) 2012, the film was evocative on these numerous levels, with no uncertainty. The film *Elelwani* does not offer a platform to solve these issues, but instead reflects on the complexities and the straddling of multiple conflicting forces that come into play in the discussion of women's

rights relative to traditional expectations and the protection granted by the new South African Constitution. The film further implies these relations as it pertains to land, inheritance and heritage. Moreover, it points to the recurring conflict between the discourse of responsibility to the community (Ubuntu, if one is aligned to this philosophy) and individual aspirations (the idea of personal will). At DIFF 2012, one of the recurring observations was the film's representation of Venda culture. The film offers a depiction that is about affording and reclaiming a cultural dignity and reverence but without shying away from offering critique. This balance of observation and pointed cultural commentary is the space that allowed for debate and discussion. Rather than assuming the responsibility to pose any possible solutions that align cultural practices with the aspirations of a modern society, with its recognition of the rights and contribution of women to civil society, the film reflects on the constant tension and negotiation between these two forms of governance.

Unencumbered by any will to social or political didacticism, the director sees himself first and foremost as a filmmaker whose function is to offer acute observation of this culture (his culture) as an insider; and then with the ability to step away by balancing the narrative with interpretation and critical commentary through the choices his characters make.

Elelwani is neither a documentary nor an ethnographic film in the tradition of capturing the nuances of ritual or cultural practices to explain their significance to a broad audience. As stated earlier, in adapting the novel for the screen the relevance of the narrative to a contemporary context was paramount to the director. In this sense, the representation of the cultural aspects is a stylisation and (director's) interpretation of the Venda culture that serves to heighten the narrative from the point of view of the young woman Elelwani. This is further a creative strategy, allowing the director to move against the normative expectations of an African film. Such an artistic strategy allows the film a two-fold accessibility: firstly, it subverts the prevailing misconceptions of the Venda culture in South Africa for a local audience, and secondly, it marks a radical shift away from the broader expectation of African films as ethnographically representative. This has been one of the hugely debilitating problems (with stories set in rural communities) with regard

to expectations and reception of films made in Africa when they travel to a broader international audience.

At this point, I would like to deviate briefly to explore this idea of expectations or perceptions of 'what constitutes an African film' before returning to the details of the film itself.

Broadly speaking, there are two audience-distribution frameworks when the issue of films made in Africa is addressed. There is the immediacy of African video films which have become hugely popular across the continent and which are made with a focus on an immediate local or regional market. This is what is commonly understood as the 'Nollywood model'. This business model of film production allows for films to be read easily as 'consumables', commodities, from the producer's perspective: a product that can be created over a shorter period of time, with a faster turnaround from conception to final film and with a straight-to-DVD distribution. There is a lesser expectation of technical competency and the narratives serve the immediacy of the local and regional expectations of the audiences. The success of these straight-to-DVD distribution platforms has been important in ensuring the market success of African video films, since there is no competition with other distribution platforms like theatrical releases or licensing to broadcasters. Instead, the value chain is significantly compressed, allowing the producers to recoup their investment immediately from DVD sales; this cycle creates the capital to start the next film, with less time between each production.

Of course, this model particularly was subject to much criticism in its first ten years owing to technical proficiency (or lack thereof), low production value, the issue of representation that seemed not to offer interrogative space but instead reproduced gender or ethnic prejudices, and storylines that were highly specific to the immediate concerns of the local or regional experiences of its audiences and which did not necessarily translate to broader audiences (excluding the diaspora audiences). The issue of copyright infringement and piracy has also been a recurrent aspect in the discussion of straight-to-DVD distribution. This cultural specificity or local appeal is also what made the study of local African video films so popular initially for anthropologists, before its much later – or reluctant – uptake by scholars in the disciplines of film/cinema studies. In this sense, video films made in Africa were being used and read as ethnographic traces of the communities in which they were produced, and little, if any,

consideration was given to the film as a form of creative expression. In some ways this further reproduced the assumptions that African films were first and foremost ethnographic representations or inclined to didacticism over any form of creative expression or artistic imperative.

However, the climate for African video films has most certainly shifted in recent years, and with the economic success of the Nollywood model and its emulation in other local African markets (including South Africa), some of this filmmaking has matured out of its infancy. The African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) has become an important initiative to promote the technical and conceptual aspects of this business model. It also serves to bridge the divide between the various African filmmaking approaches on the continent. These are recent and invaluable developments for African filmmakers to recognise and promote their own industry from within, and this platform attempts to bridge the divide between the business and the creative imperatives of filmmaking. This is in stark contrast to the legacy and initiatives of FESPACO, the biennale film festival in Ouagadougou, Burkino Faso, that has historically been strongly informed by a 'politics' of representation and filmmaking practice, and has been less concerned about the 'business' (industry) of making films. I am taking some time to talk about the idea of markets and audience in the context of *Elelwani* because this is important since 'the market for the film' informs some of the creative decisions for story, the development of the woman's character in *Elelwani*, and the artistic choices made in representing the Venda culture.

For the director, and for the producer Florian Schattauer, this was not a straight-to-DVD film made for a singular local Venda or South African audience, although these audiences would be important in ensuring its local box-office success and in affirming the authenticity of the narrative world. The idea was to create an art house film that would offer a window into Venda culture to a broader international audience as well. The artistic merits of the film were also an important vehicle for the director to showcase the culture and language so as not to reproduce any stereotypes of either an African film or the misperceptions of Venda culture to a local South African audience. As stated earlier, as the smallest ethnic group located in the poorest part of the country, the Venda community has had many prejudices directed towards it, and the idea of reworking a historically ground-breaking novel in a contemporary setting would

allow for a representation of this community that would challenge the prevailing preconceptions of the Venda culture in South Africa.

In a series of interviews he gave at Berlinale 2013, the director Nshavheni Wa Luruli made a point of stressing that he felt that, as a minority ethnic group in South Africa, the Venda people and their culture were severely misunderstood in a broader South African context. In that sense, the film was a desire to not only subvert the dominant and prevailing ideas of what constituted the dominant ethnic representations in South Africa from a foreign perspective (his reference was to the fact that Zulus and Xhosas were the most well known), but that he also wanted to challenge myths about the Venda culture.

Limpopo province, which is home to the Venda people, while lush and fertile in its climate and farming activities, remains one of the most economically disenfranchised regions in South Africa. It has been plagued by continuous cycles of political corruption, and while the landscape is visually stunning, few film crews have chosen this province as a location on account of minimal support from local authorities and an absence of infrastructure to support production crews. Given the absence of the infrastructure necessary to take even a modest crew into the region, film production has been an almost non-existent form of income for Limpopo. In this sense, *Elelwani* was a first: the first feature film shot entirely on location in this region with the support of the local community, both in terms of performance and infrastructure. As producers we required not only the support of the local municipality but also the royal family, who generously gave us access to their royal village for filming.

In South Africa, almost every business sector, including film, requires that some part of the project has a development component. With the high rates of unemployment and the lack of skills and training, it was necessary that the production complied with development and the skills transfer required. In this sense, the decision to film entirely on location and involve the community directly would also enable *Elelwani* as a production to fulfil its business and community development responsibility, but in a way that also directly addressed the experiences of the community through their connection with the language and the culture. In setting up the production, a cultural representative from the community was appointed who also would be the liaison person with the royal family. This point person was able not only successfully to offer

support in terms of logistics, but also explain to the community what the production was about, to relate the vision of the director, and to create an awareness of what was required for making the production possible over the four-week shoot period.

All the cultural events and crowd scenes, and the wedding march depicted in the film, are locals from the community who participated in its making: this was the production participation in front of the camera. Many more participants were involved behind the camera. The production ensured that for each department in the production, at least two interns were appointed to give locals exposure and access to the experience of working as film crew. The impact of this was two-fold: it meant that the crew were exposed to the community in a more immediate way than just having the experience of entering and leaving without having a 'lived experience' of the community they were representing. And for the community involved it also meant exposure to the challenges of what it means to represent the community they live in and have no critical distance from. The narrative and the role of women raised a number of talking points for the people involved, and while it might sound far-fetched, by the time the production was in its second week, the entire local community was aware of the film's production and the presence of the film crew that was 'shooting the film of Dr Maumela's book'.

For me as a co-producer, this interface was an important reflection of how the interpretation offered by the director would be read. It was a way to also gauge how the community viewed its own gender politics and whether Elelwani's ambition and emancipation as a character were aspects that resonated with the local population, and the women in particular. This is where the conversations were interesting. While most of the women thought that Elelwani was brave – courageous, in fact – to want to pursue her education and defy her parents, there was an incredibly engaged conversation about not recognising why marrying the king was such a bad idea. After all, he is the king and life would be not be as demanding if one were to marry the king. In fact, there would be no need for an education at all because life in royalty would also offer extraordinary benefits.

The significance of economic security as a form of emancipation seemed to be viewed exclusively from the point of view of having the ability to be emancipated through political agency offered through

education and economic self-empowerment. Elelwani's choice to leave with her romantic love to pursue a further academic path would appear pointless if the end goal of economic security with a king is immediate, as opposed to the long-term efforts of continuing with one's education. The pursuit of further education is related directly to economic security, which was rationalised as insecure and uncertain anyway (given the high levels of unemployment in the country) when compared to the security assured by marriage to a king.

Returning then to Foucault's idea of governmentality and the differences between how the self is constructed (or 'self-esteem' as Foucault also suggests) and how it is perceived, the idea of this tension between the citizen and the subject becomes all the more pronounced in South Africa. For women in rural communities who are often subjected to the immediacy of local traditional laws, the idea of a democratic state that protects your rights and interests as a woman seems to be a far-reaching idea, not just in terms of its practice, but by virtue of its geography. Town and city magistrate offices in a democratic state are distant places that require economic means and time to access. Let me exemplify.

It became clear during the principle photography of this film that the

Royal emissaries and Venda maidens lead Elelwani out of her father's house.
Film still from *Elelwani* (2012).

© Shadowy Meadows Productions

Florence Masebe plays Elelwani as the sovereign queen in the final scene.

Film still from *Elelwani* (2012).

community represented were at a distance from the character portrayed precisely *because* Elelwani is educated and seems to be making choices outside of the gamut of their immediate realities as women living in this rural community. She is not really representative of the realities in which they live, and even though she might have been a Venda girl from a rural village some time ago, her education and access distinguish her from other women in this community. Of course, this seems obvious given that the character returns to her family after successfully completing her tertiary education; her life is informed by different ambitions and with clear self-determinism. But the film narrative is also representative of the community and reveals the plight of women and their understanding of their situation as being without agency. Some of these tensions are explored at various junctions in the film when Elelwani is confronted with obstacles and choices that foreground the differing experiences of what it means to be emancipated, as well as what the reach of self-determinism and ambition might constitute.

In the final act in *Elelwani*, a significant narrative shift occurs, which bridges the tension and divide in the two registers of the women's experiences: that of the local rural women and that of Elelwani, the educated woman who eventually becomes the sovereign. Once at the royal palace, Elelwani is confronted with a series of palace intrigues and,

unbeknown to her, she is a conduit to fulfilling a promise/prophecy. This promise not only pertains to her sovereignty, but also alludes to an educated woman who must now shepherd an institutional change that will lead to the emancipation of other women in her community.

In her seminal essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1994), Gayatri Spivak addresses the question of the agency (and the lack thereof) of the subaltern. One of the defining factors is that these women (women in this underclass) might be seen to be without social mobility. Agency for these women, therefore, would be about building a relationship with the state. In her articulation, Spivak is clear that this relationship with the state is not one that is whole; instead, the building of the infrastructure is one part of the constituting structure in the state which would recognise these women as part of its labour system. The potential embodied in the character of Elelwani is thus a bifurcated relationship which must at once recognise that these women (the rural women in Limpopo) have not been a part of a productive labour system, and also that in order for Elelwani (as the new sovereign) to be the agent of change, she will have to be responsible for reconstituting the system of governance. Elelwani is therefore the agent for building the infrastructure but she is also a heterogeneous subject – produced from a post-colonial condition – who will be required in some way to enable a relationship (for the local rural women) to the state as a metonym/synecdoche and create new possibility, as is suggested at the end of the film narrative:

> In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systemically 'unlearns' female privilege. This systemic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse (Spivak 1994:91).

Elelwani is a strong but open-ended narrative that invites the character of Elelwani as an intellectual to unlearn some of her privileges as a subject; to in part unlearn the alternative governance structure she represents. At the same time, she is now the conduit that speaks for and on behalf of the underclass of women who are now her subjects. Spivak concludes in her influential paper: 'The subaltern cannot speak' but is quick to add the

significance of the intellectual: 'Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with flourish' (Spivak 1994:104) In this film, Elelwani owns her responsibility, and in the final sequence, in a voice-over, declares: 'I am free.' *Elelwani* means 'promise' in Tshivenda, and this is the promise she brings for the rural Venda women of Limpopo. Her freedom represents the promise of freedom that may be possible, even if only metonymically, for this underclass of women in contemporary South Africa.

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ON COLLECTIVE PRACTICES AND COLLECTED REFLECTIONS

INTERVIEW WITH

**SHANNON WALSH
AND ARYA LALLOO**

INTERVIEW BY

JYOTI MISTRY

Jeppe on a Friday (2013) is a multi-narrative feature documentary, made by filmmakers Shannon Walsh and Arya Lalloo, which explores the lives of five people in the neighbourhood of Jeppestown, Johannesburg, filmed over the course of one day. The documentary was shot in a collaborative format, with multiple crews simultaneously shooting various stories over 24 hours. Using a common set of visual criteria that was predetermined by the two directors, each team consisted of a unit director, cinematographer, sound recordist and production assistant.

Walsh and Lalloo directed the overall process from its conception to the final finished film. In the months that preceded the shoot, workshops were held with the unit directors and technical crew to watch films, discuss documentary filmmaking and cinema *verité*, work through processes for the shoot, and report on research and character development.

Lalloo was born in South Africa but spent her formative years in the United Kingdom. Walsh had previously completed a similar documentary concept in Montreal, Canada, titled *À St-Henri, le 26 août* (2011). This coming together of two very different individuals on a singular project is a unique collaborative approach to filmmaking that belies the singular auteur paradigm of conventional film practice. The

overall approach offers a refreshing way forward, not just in collaborative filmmaking, but in how documentary works to mirror justice issues and to provide a platform to initiate conversations about politically and socio-economically prevalent issues.

The intersection between how the two filmmakers came together, their interests in politically conscious documentary filmmaking, the eventual choice of the women unit directors and the five male subjects in the film, make for engaging reflection on how contexts shape content. It further brings to light the various filmmaking strategies that women are employing to find inclusionary strategies in the production of films. In some ways, the process also invites consideration of how women might choose to work differently as a politically subversive strategy to the conventional practices of filmmaking.

The format of this contribution to the book also reflects 'collaborative writing', which in some ways is a testament to Lalloo and Walsh's engagement with inclusive production processes and also redefines authorship and resurrects the value of 'the collective' coupled with the clarity of a single vision.

In order better to understand what shaped, in part, the two filmmakers' research and informed their choices, some historical and social context of Jeppestown in relation to Johannesburg's downtown development regeneration as a city is necessary. They offer the following contextualising piece.

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SHANNON WALSH AND ARYA LALLOO: Post-liberation South Africa saw a natural dissolution of the apartheid-modelled Johannesburg which had enforced strict regulations on access to the city and, as white capital pulled out of the politically symbolic Central Business District (CBD), a new society emerged. Migrants moved from across the continent and South Africa's rural areas and townships and came to occupy neglected buildings, especially in the downtown east side, giving areas like Jeppestown a distinctive Pan-African identity. The once heavily policed and controlled streets now teem with life. A dazzling range of music from all over the continent can be heard and a similar array of different languages, reflecting attitudes and traditional and contemporary urban styles.

But the area is not without its problems. Jeppestown, or Jeppe, as it is commonly or affectionately referred to, is at the centre of the tensions of divisions: racial divisions that are now along class and nationality lines, separating immigrant communities from the local population.

Racism and xenophobia have caused community tensions and violence, making the informal migrant population particularly vulnerable. Slum conditions have emerged as the city council battles to provide services to areas where no rent, rates or taxes are being paid. As a result, Jeppe has become infamous for urban decay and crime and is considered a 'no go' zone by many. High levels of poverty and unemployment, urban environmental issues, limited access to health care, education and adequate housing, are par for the course. The city council, mandated to convert Johannesburg into a world-class African city, has had little choice but to partner with private developers to renew the city, and in 2011 (some 20 years into the South African democracy) a significant gentrification project has been added to the existing complexities in the area.

Today, Jeppe is a dynamic multi-cultural and mixed-class area on the brink of rapid change. Led by a new generation of entrepreneurs, old Jeppestown is getting a facelift and being re-imagined as a hub for young professionals, students and creative practitioners. Many people believe that these developments will bring life back to the decayed city centre. But they ignore the fact that Jeppe has always had a life of its own.

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JYOTI MISTRY: I can imagine in some ways an immediate connection between the two of you as filmmakers because in each of your work is an engagement with pressing social and political issues. How and where did you come to meet on the topic of urban regeneration and a specific neighbourhood as subject matter for a documentary?

ARYA LALLOO: Do we have to admit where we met?

SHANNON WALSH: I think so. A bit of irony is always good.

ARYA: We met at a sunset rooftop party in the Maboneng Precinct,[1] the 'improvement' project encroaching on Jeppestown, and had a great conversation about the rapid gentrification of the area and Johannesburg's

contradictions and complexities more generally. It was a robust political discussion fuelled by chilled Mojitos.

SHANNON: It was clear that we shared some common ground that was both exciting and inspiring. I was actually living in one of the buildings in Maboneng at the time. I had been living on and off in South Africa for over a decade and had just moved to Joburg when we met. I was looking for a local collaborator to elaborate an idea for a neighbourhood documentary on the political climate of the city. The previous year I led a collaborative neighbourhood documentary in Montreal (*À St-Henri le 26 Août*) (*St-Henri, the 26th of August*) inspired by a Quebec film made in 1962 by Hubert Aquin about the working-class neighbourhood of Saint-Henri. My interest in neighbourhoods came out of a desire to make political films that were not didactic and that allowed space for viewers to have an experience of the world without condescending to them.

ARYA: When we met, I had been living in a decayed city neighbourhood next to Jeppe for many years and was negotiating the much hyped regeneration of Johannesburg in personal and professional ways as it was unfolding.

At that point the Maboneng precinct was in its early phase. While we discussed the developments lack of dialogue and tacit exclusion of the organic city outside its perimeters, I don't think either of us imagined then that it would become as large and visible as it has today. That said, I do remember talking a lot about the threat it already posed to the existing cultural milieu in the area, which included my neighbourhood.

SHANNON: Jeppestown is very different from the Montreal neighbourhood of Saint-Henri where I made my previous film in that there was little nostalgia or known representation to draw on. In Jeppestown there was a blank space in the collective imaginary, which for the most part was being overwritten by developers involved in urban 'renewal'. They were using the language of cowboys at the frontier coming to reclaim the city and the new developments were proposed as the edgy choice for an emergent hip middle class styling itself on the inner-city chic of New York.

ARYA: When Shannon and I met, a number of problematic, dehumanising words and phrases had become commonplace, like 'decanting' when referring

to the eviction of squatters from buildings, or 'clean-up' as a euphemism for the arrest of migrants. There was also a popular phrase doing the rounds – that developments like Maboneng were bringing 'life back to the city'.

When we started making the film we were asking ourselves why and how a certain part of South African society could so readily reduce and dismiss the everyday life of another.
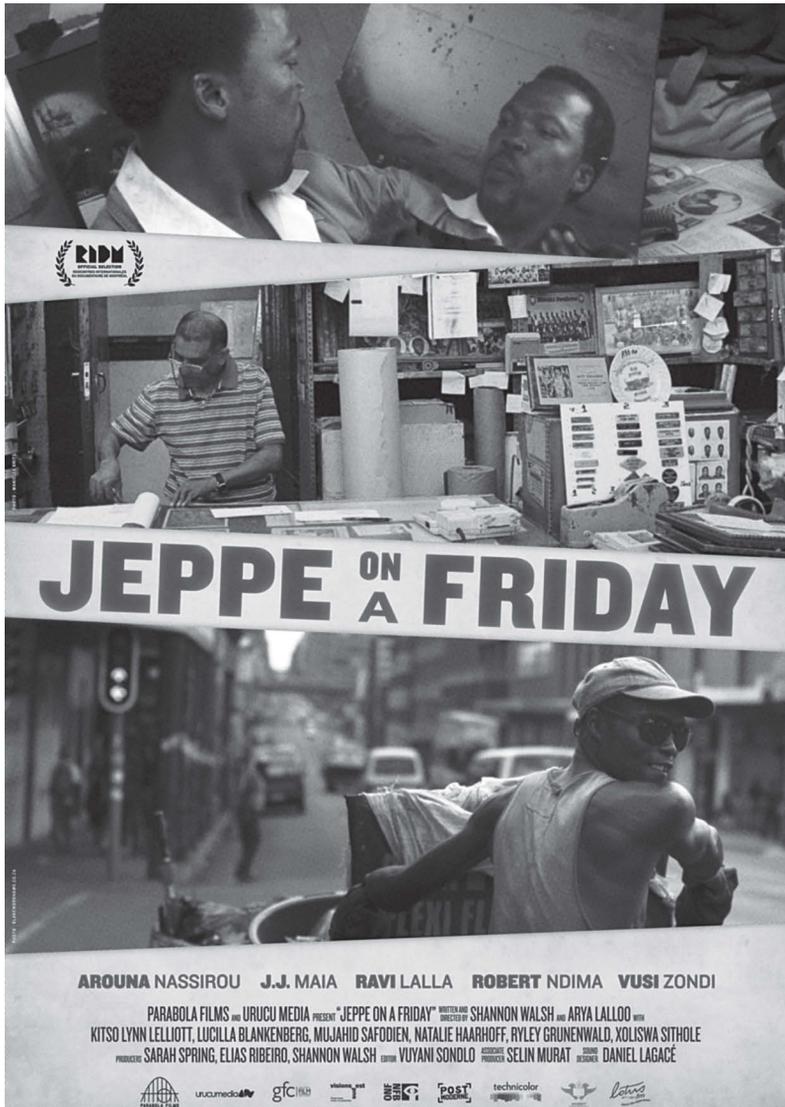
Jeppe on a Friday film poster (2013).

SHANNON: We were aware of capturing an aspect of the city that would not be there for much longer as a result of urban development. In this way, our initial idea of a collaborative documentary project was not just to represent *any neighbourhood* in Johannesburg and the details of everyday life there, but to make a political move with the documentary; to wedge it into a space that had been created by the emergent narratives of 'urban renewal' and to create an incontestable visual document of the social histories and life worlds that could not be easily ignored. This choice was a conscious decision in relation to the kind of disruption we thought we could have, at a narrative level, into what was happening in the particular neighbourhood of Jeppestown and at this particular moment in the story of the city of Johannesburg.

ARYA: We wanted to treat the vastly different experiences in this single area as equal and not objectify the neighbourhood's violence or its poverty – or simplistically vilify the gentrification that was taking [place]. How could we avoid romanticism while still undermining prejudicial and pessimistic attitudes about 'untamed' Johannesburg? What position would the collective of filmmakers assembled assume in relation to the community and would the film expose this position or render it invisible? All these questions around representation were important to us in the early days of conceptualising this film.

SHANNON: So within this context, representation was power. A good example of the very real tension around the question of representation happened in our own discussions early on, during the workshops with unit directors. A heated argument broke out about the inclusion of the white male developer in the film. Why should he be represented when the developers had already been represented so much? In the end we agreed that it was important to show the multiple worlds in their proximity and contradiction, but it was interesting to consider together the force that we all felt about who gets seen and how. I think this is particularly strong in South Africa.

ARYA: I have yet to hear of a filmmaking process that isn't fraught in one way or the other. That said, I'm pretty sure it's more difficult when you're a woman and intent on breaking the rules or doing things differently. It cannot

be denied that we dealt with multiple levels of racism and patriarchy making the film. At many times we felt we were fighting against a set of insidious prescriptions for the film that were tied to problematic and prejudicial perceptions of Johannesburg.

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The unit directors, all women, were charged to follow a single character on one day. This meant that Lalloo and Walsh were responsible as directors for overseeing five shoots simultaneously on that day. The unit directors: Kitso Lynn Lelliot, Lucilla Blankenberg, Mujahid Safodien, Natalie Haarhoff, Ryley Grunenwald and Xoliswa Sithole, were each responsible for the interactions with the protagonists, coverage and ensuring the story developed as had been discussed in the research-writing process The shoot took place in Jeppestown on 9 March 2012, and teams worked from early morning through to the evening. Once the film was shot, Lalloo and Walsh worked with editor, Vuyani Sondlo to bring the five discrete characters' stories together into a single coherent narrative. The protagonists are an interesting selection of people who inhabit Jeppe as residents or who commute to Jeppe for work or have their final destination in Jeppe.

Ravi is an Indian retailer who has a framing business. The inter-title that names him also informs us that he has been in Jeppe for the last 65 years. We meet him in his car on his drive to his shop where he employs a number of black staff. In the course of the film we learn that one of the employees has been part of the family business longer than Ravi has been running the shop. In a static medium-shot portrait of this employee (Peter), we are led to understand that here (embodied in Peter) are also many untold stories, worn only as the wrinkles on his face. But he is not the main character of the film. Ravi is able to express the history of Jeppe and affirm his nostalgia for a past Jeppe; he is able to reflect on the changes in the neighbourhood and the city.

Arouna is used symbolically to offer the story of the immigrant family in Jeppe. He owns a restaurant called Oduduwa – one of the clues that mark his possibly Nigerian roots. He is Muslim and his day is metered through the prayers performed throughout the day, starting with the morning prayer as his wife gets the children ready for school. In

an interesting observational mode of filmmaking, the story of Arouna also reveals the story of his wife, who is responsible for cooking and apparently oversees the running of the business. While the camera observes her directly or in the consequence of observing Arouna, she is never engaged directly. Arouna takes the children to school, talks to the clients at the restaurant, discusses the violence directed at immigrants (making reference particularly to the spate of 'xenophobic attacks' that took place in 2008). He does the midday prayers and picks the children up from school. In a direct interview with the camera, he praises the strength of his wife and wishes for all people 'to have a good woman like his wife'. His faith in god is another reason for his success and South Africa is the place that he now considers his home.

Robert is a Zulu chief who lives in a single-sex hostel in Jeppe. The hostels are a legacy of apartheid where dense housing was created for single men who came to work in the city and on the mines; the hostels remain a highly controversial part of the urban infrastructure. Robert is the leader of an a cappella choir and commands the respect and authority of his group by being able to constantly deliver sets of instructions that others perform. It is interesting that there are times when the camera is able to achieve real intimacy with this character in the context of the single-sex hostel, and at other times observes from a distance. In a compelling scene when Robert invites another chief from the rural homestead to lunch, the camera shies away from the feast of meat that the men share communally. As part of the story resolution for this character, the audience is 'treated' to the choir's rehearsal. In a reflexive gesture to reveal the construction of this 'pay-off', the camera, lights and recording mikes set up for the shoot are made visible. It is moving in its performance because the choir also sings the South African national anthem, intercut with men from the hostel who are at the rehearsal, watching and listening. In this context the use of a series of close-up shots is emotive.

Vusi is a young garbage collector. He picks up recyclable garbage from a suburb 26 kilometres away from Jeppe, and makes his way to the recycle depot with his day's collection of plastics, paper and metal. He engages the director and camera often in conversation, also asking questions of the unit director, which offers an interesting and refreshing rapport. He shares his back-story of being abandoned in childhood, a period of incarceration, his current choice of work as opposed to returning to

criminal activity and his dreams and aspirations. In a poignant moment in an interview he says, 'I do have dreams like [any] human being. And they are serious dreams. I am a gardener. I am serious. I can change the lawns. I can change things to nice things. Nice trees, nice flowers, roses, anything, you name it. Water fixtures, you name it. This is my project, I like to work with my hands.' At the end of the day after he has earned his day's takings, he sits against a wall and smokes a cigarette, having just expressed that his only wish now is to 'wash my whole body with cold water'. The camera observes him from a distance and with restraint.

JJ is the only white character in the film and it is not only his whiteness that marks him, but his class. In some ways he represents the 'threat' to the history and socio-economic future of Jeppe. He is a property developer whose work, when followed throughout the day, appears abstract: a series of meetings, phone calls, constant email-checking, overseeing craftsmanship, which might too simply paint him unsympathetically. But his position in the film is complicated. He lives in a white cube loft that overlooks the city and his girlfriend, like Arouna's wife, is seen but never heard in a direct way. More than any of the other characters, JJ is aware of the camera and its observation of him. When he arrives home at the end of his work day, he pours a glass of wine for his girlfriend and himself and later plays the piano. He tells the audience that it is his girlfriend who reminds him to play the piano; that it's his way of relaxing at the end of the day. In a wide shot which cannot but be read metaphorically, JJ plays the piano as dark smoke from what looks like a rubber or a rubbish-heap fire, clouds the sky. The city that he is trying to build burns beneath him.

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JYOTI: I had an immediate awareness of the selection of characters in the film, based on the fact that they seemed to capture an array of 'types' and appeared to be selected to capture ethnic, racial and class diversities that would function as immediate contrasts and implied conflict that is necessary for the narrative construction of the documentary; which I found a successful strategy.

ARYA: Someone said that the group of characters we selected was too iconic. It's true we were looking for people who were recognisable; to local audiences at least. The Indian shopkeeper, the white developer, the Zulu

choirmaster, for example. We wanted the cast to represent the make-up of the community fairly superficially. If we hadn't chosen these iconic types, we couldn't have deconstructed them in the same way and wouldn't have made a film with the same power that we ultimately did. To undermine a stereotype, the point of departure has to be in setting up the stereotype.

SHANNON: Even the young white developer was never treated as a cardboard cut-out or an 'example' or a type. He is whole, a human being with relationships and with complexity. He exists as a person you can choose to like, but one that is part of a certain kind of world. Making him a one-dimensional 'bad guy' would defeat the purpose of what we were trying to do within the South African space: to create multiple points of entry for viewers to engage with the film, while simultaneously travelling to worlds [that] they normally disregard or do not have access to. We weren't setting people up just to take easy jabs at them or to create icons. There are a lot of uncomfortable moments with each of the characters and their perceptions of each other. None of us is reducible to a single identity. Of course the choice to represent women by their absence was also a very weighty and significant decision we made, and [one] that we end up discussing a lot with audiences.

ARYA: We continue to interrogate our choices, especially now that audiences define the film's meaning more than we do. Shannon and I argued about our decision to reflect upon the dominant masculinity in Jeppestown through an all-male cast and all female directing crew. Our theory, that women's marginalisation in the community would be rendered more 'visible' by omitting them, has worked to create conversations about gender, but I'm unsure whether this approach isn't inherently problematic. The continuing discussion around representation is politically important for us as it creates a space for constructive conversation if not debate.

SHANNON: Many decisions were made as we went along and had their own set of imperatives. So having all women shooting all men was not a conscious decision at the outset, but something that emerged through the material, even though at times we tried to fight against it along the way. We had to contend with what the material gave us, and make decisions about how to represent the world that was captured. It's created a tension in the film that for me, at

least, has been really productive, *but* also problematic. In fact, it is productive [precisely] because the lack of women strikes people, displays itself as absence and forces the question. This has been a nice surprise in the way people read the film and the kinds of conversations it generates.

JYOTI: Not only the form of the film but the process of working with a group of directors to shoot simultaneously on a single day offers an opportunity for new collaborative forms and processes of working to emerge and, this seems to have affected the representation in the film itself.

ARYA: On that rooftop Shannon and I decided we would take a shot at representing Johannesburg as a place not just of dystopian violence or political importance, but as a city like any other where people live in ordinary and complex ways.

SHANNON: Beyond what we were trying to represent with the film itself, the process was also really important. In its most idealistic incarnation, the project was meant to engender genuine relationships**,** discussions and different kinds of collaborations — both behind and in front of the camera. For me, I've been exploring form in filmmaking as a political process, or an embodied process. So the way the films are made is as important as the final object that emerges in the world.

  Even after *Jeppe on a Friday* was 'locked' our discussions have continued, and for both of us I think it has been really enriching. Arya and I are not always in agreement about everything and continue to revisit ideas, concepts and our own motivations. It's also been the case that from funders to festivals, many people have tried in various ways to undermine the legitimacy of our collaboration as filmmakers working across what they perceived as the North/South divide. This has also been a critical part of the experience of the process of making the film, to have our collaboration undermined in various ways.

ARYA: When the film began travelling internationally, the question of expectations emerged. African documentaries and African experiences seem to occupy a very particular space in the European and North American imagination. The preponderance of apocalyptic 'macro-Africa narratives' like debt, poverty, Aids and 'the Chinese', for one or [another] reason seem to

dominate expectations of films from Africa. We also suffer the dominance of narratives that have a clear political purpose and, as a result, a deficit of complex self-imaging. Paris can be imagined, by someone who has seen films about it, as the city of love or as the violent world of *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995). Like most of the human race, I am also intimately familiar with dozens of different renderings of New York and other major cities around the world. Through them, I understand that life in these places involves vastly different experiences, perspectives and histories, and it's important that we change predetermined registers about Africa in favour of showing its complexities.

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The issue of creating a female presence through its absence remains a discussion if not a debate for some. It certainly is a legitimate one given the complexity of how the documentary chooses to explore the different forms of masculinity through its various protagonists. The 'eye' of the female directors is also not lost on an audience. There is a restraint that comes from how intimacies are observed in the world of these five male characters. Their characters are revealed to us over time, and it is demanded that we spend time with them; watch them in order to learn who they are: their aspirations and their fears are expressed in observational mode and revealed through small gestures – for example, the attention to certain types of close-up shots that observe the characters unobtrusively in what seems like takes between questions and conversations. Ravi sits and watches the clock before he pays his staff; Robert at the end of the day's work wants to be left alone to watch television (but it's not possible in a room occupied by so many other men). Arouna fears for the safety of his family even though he appreciates the opportunities in South Africa. JJ makes a phone call on a building rooftop alone with prominent graffiti in the background signposting the protest to gentrification – 'we won't move' – and Vusi watches a fire he builds after sorting his recycle garbage.

The mix of observational and direct address to camera through interaction and engagement rather than only interviews is balanced with each director's interaction with their subjects. Instead of revealing the black men as 'victims of poverty' in a situation, what is most evident

is that all these men are concerned with their masculinity through the dignity of labour. From the Zulu chief Robert, to the garbage collector, Vusi, there is a sense of self-worth that is gained through the act of work. Mahatma Gandhi, in reflecting on how value is derived from labour and work, remarked that 'all labour, if honest and recognised as valuable by others, no matter how menial and in the service of keeping one's self, produces a self-worth; a dignity not only for the self but in the way others view us. Just as there is no shame in being a labourer for one's self, so also is there no shame in labouring for others' (Gandhi 1917: 1045). There remain a number of complex debates around this in India, on account of its connection to the caste system, but in its intrinsic sentiment it offers an interesting approach to how we might consider the intersections between poverty, crime and the dignity of labour in South Africa.

In terms of the representation of black men in the film, it challenges the pervasive stereotypes of black men in African cinema as incapable of committing to labour and honest work in the absence of glory and community recognition. It subverts the pervasive assumption that in poverty there is no desire for or sense of self-worth. It further raises the question of how labour is understood across class divides and across racial privileges in contemporary South Africa.

The film raises questions regarding the construction of masculinity against neo-liberal capital and access: JJ's neo-liberal capital and access foregrounds his white privilege in contemporary South Africa as he navigates the streets of Jeppestown and, through his interaction with the black men he employs at the construction sites and in the furniture workshops, we recognise that he is aware of his race-class subject position.

The representations in this film are neither comfortable nor shorthand for 'all black men' or 'all white men' or 'all poor men' or 'all rich men', but reveal these men as self-aware and in pursuit of their own dreams set against the challenges of their own class and identity positions: immigrant, Zulu, uneducated, Indian, white; privileged or not. They each take on the responsibility to redefine what it 'means to be a man' – not just by providing for oneself, but to be a part of a system; whether that system is being part of a neighbourhood or a citizen. The filmmakers explore the dignity of these men through the work they do (through their

labour) and in some ways their work is connected to how they define themselves as men.

Jeppe on a Friday has been screened in 13 countries and at numerous prestigious film festivals. Apart from offering an opportunity to address gender representation and the role of cinema in the 'developing world' this film has provided a valuable access point for debates on the gentrification of the Johannesburg city centre. It brings to the fore the significance of film as a political tool to mobilise people and ideas; and as a vehicle to build political, social and community solidarity around prevailing issues. Since the making of the film, the drive to gentrify Jeppestown radiating from the Maboneng precinct has spread further.

On 18 March 2015, protests erupted when hostel dwellers were served eviction notices and resulted in incidents of violence with 22 people arrested.[2] The building occupied by hostel dwellers was bought by property developers to further develop Maboneng; however, identifying the parties or individuals responsible for serving the eviction notices were not disclosed and no one was forthcoming in taking responsibility for the eviction orders.[3]

The film in the wake of this violence appears prophetic in its implicit layering of the tensions and contrasts in the aspirations of the five men that are represented in the place they occupy. It is a narrative that continues to unfold outside of the frame and past the historical moment it documents in the film.

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NOTES

1   'Maboneng, meaning 'Place of Light', is a privately developed urban neighbourhood on the east side of Johannesburg CBD. A fully fledged thriving community, Maboneng is home to several independent retail stores, restaurants and entertainment venues, as well as loft apartments, offices, a hotel, a museum and creative factory spaces in a connected urban environment' (see http://www.mabonengprecinct.com).

2   'Calm restored in Maboneng after violent protests'. *City Press* 18 March 2015.
    [online]. Available at http://www.citypress.co.za/news/calm-restored-in-maboneng-after-violent-protests/ (accessed 28 March 2015).

3   'Uncertainty as to who ordered Jeppestown evictions'. *ENCA,* 18 March 2015.
    [Online]. Available at http://www.enca.com/south-africa/uncertainty-who-ordered-evictions-residents-continue-clash-cops (accessed 28 March 2015).

'CINEMA OF RESISTANCE'[1]

INTERVIEW WITH / INTERVIEW BY

ISABEL NORONHA / **MAX ANNAS**

AND HENRIETTE GUNKEL

K*uxa Kanema* was the name of the newsreel in Mozambique with which the post-independent government of Samora Machel regained control over the moving image as a conscious act of decolonisation. The newsreel was screened in cinemas prior to the main film and via mobile cinema units throughout the provinces, which included rural areas. *Kuxa Kanema* is also the title of a 2003 documentary, directed by Margarida Cardoso, which describes the development of image production from newsreel to documentary and feature film productions to the point of the establishment of the Instituto Nacional de Cinema (INC). In her film Cardoso symbolises the beginning of the new republic in 1975 by lowering the Portuguese flag and by raising the Mozambican flag in its place. This further symbolises the beginning of the image-production of the country. Cardoso says in her off-screen commentary in the documentary that she [Cardoso] was aware that President Machel was conscious of the power of the image. It was with Cardoso's film that we opened the second African film festival, Cinemameu, in 2011 in Inhambane, 500 kilometres north of the capital of Maputo.

Inhambane is a provincial town along Mozambique's coastline, and capital of the province of the same name, a calm place whose cultural

attractions lie particularly in the rich legacies of Portuguese architecture. Two examples are buildings by Pancho Guedes: the post office and the university. Among the amenities of Inhambane is the Cinema Tofo, where 35mm films were once screened. Years ago the cinema was turned into a communal hall and the old projectors are now dusty. It was here that the 2011 Cinemameu film festival took place. Over the course of a long weekend, contemporary Mozambican films were shown in combination with winners of FESPACO, the Pan African film festival in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Cinemameu 2011 was organised by a group of local and international cultural activists; the screenings were digital and entrance was free. As a result, a large number of children were present throughout the festival, sharing the cinema hall with a mix of passionate cinemagoers, development aid workers and passers by. The provincial cultural attaché sat through the entire opening evening ignoring the critique articulated by the filmmakers present that the government was neglecting support for filmmaking in general.

In Cardoso's *Kuxa Kanema*, filmmakers Isabel Noronha, Camilo de Sousa[2] and Licínio Azevedo[3] are interviewed as contemporary witnesses who organise themselves collectively through the company Ébano Multimedia in Maputo. They shoot, as do other filmmakers in the company, predominantly documentary films, although Azevedo also occasionally produces feature films. After the screening of *Kuxa Kanema* Noronha, De Sousa and Azevedo faced the audience in Inhambane for the first time, and Noronha explained, remarkably, 'I have never shown my movies outside the capital.'

It should thus come as no surprise that the cinema of Mozambique is hardly known outside its national borders – its films being screened only within Mozambique, in Maputo. Those who visit the worldwide festivals and retrospectives that focus on African cinema hardly find any traces of the country that lies on the coast of the Indian Ocean. Noronha understands the marginal presence of Mozambican films in the international context primarily as a result of belonging to the Portuguese-speaking part of the world (this is also why the three filmmakers have better chances of showing their films at festivals in Brazil than at FESPACO), but also due to the specifics of the liberation struggles in the former Portuguese colonies. Another factor might be the inward perspective that

Poster of 'Festival de Cine Africano'(2011).

characterises many Mozambican films, which document precisely the conditions of post-colonial and post-civil war society. By doing so, most films focus on people and living conditions in the country itself without gearing themselves towards an international audience.

In 1984 Noronha began studying film at the INC which, in the 1970s, had invited a number of international filmmakers and technicians to set up a national film project for Mozambique – in order to reclaim the moving image. Among those invited were Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard from France, and Brazilian filmmaker Ruy Guerra.[4] It was

Festival venue, 'Cine Teatro Tofo' in Inhambane, Mozambique (2011).

in this environment that Noronha learned the entire spectrum of film production before she decided to focus on directing. Since her first documentary film, *Manjacaze* (1987), she has produced eighteen films, most of them documentaries. She has known De Sousa and Azevedo since the beginning of her professional career and stresses that they 'are more than just a business collective – we're a group of old friends and we share many years of struggle; struggle so that we don't stop making cinema in the various stages of the country's history, marked by almost opposite political contexts'[5].

Noronha's latest works include the feature-length documentary *Ngwenya, o Crocodilo* (2007), and her 2008 12-minute short film, *Ali Aleluia*, both of which were shown at Cinemameu 2011. The former is a portrait of Malangatana Valente Ngwenya (1936–2011), painter and poet and one of the most important artists in Mozambique. The latter

follows the main character through the festival town of Inhambane. While at first sight these are two different films, they are remarkably similar in their intimate closeness to their protagonists, a product of their participatory method of observation, which makes it near impossible for the viewer to clearly distinguish between the documentary material that has been filmed with an outsider's view and the directed elements of re-enactment. Both films further show that Noronha's work remains a social and political commentary – and critique – of a post-colonial reality that continues to be so different from the images of an imagined future portrayed in Cardoso's documentary *Kuxa Kanema*, the imaginary portrait that inspired Noronha's own understanding and dreams of a post-colonial and post-independence society, as she points out in this interview with us. She calls this the 'cinema of resistance'.

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MAX ANNAS: *How did you make your way into filmmaking?*

ISABEL NORONHA: Incredible though it may seem, it was an accident, even though I was always very fond of cinema and I spent my youth in post-independent Mozambique, where parties, discotheques and these other entertainments, which are normal for any young person today, were banned. Sport and cinema, along with reading, were among the few recreational and cultural activities available to us.

In that socialist epoch, there was very careful programming of cinema. There was a cultural boycott of the United States against Mozambique, and so we saw cinema from all over the world except from Hollywood – which may have been an advantage in forming our tastes. We would go every week, even when the film on the poster was the same, to watch the *Kuxa Kanema* newsreel, which told us what was happening in our recently independent country.

And I looked with respect at the list of names on the credits at the end of the newsreel, never imagining that I might one day be part of that list. That's because I, like the other young people of my generation, grew up thinking that we were very small as individuals. We were living in a time when we felt very small in comparison to the grandeur of the country, which we had just found out belonged to us. All we wanted was to be worthy of this

country, which we would one day inherit from the previous generation, the generation which had fought for independence, and we had deserved that.

So the country was everything, the task of making it grow was enormous, the dream of turning it into a country different from all the others, where there would be no hunger, misery, poverty, social injustice – that was something bigger than us, it was an inheritance which we took inside ourselves and to which we gave our youth and our courage.

Little by little, we found that they [our aspirations and the needs of our country] rarely coincided. At the age of 12, we saw our first colleagues being sent to study in Cuba. At the age of 15, many others were integrated into a military career, or became agronomists or trained as teachers, regardless of their vocation and without being consulted: the country urgently needed cadres in these areas. They conformed and they went.

To say no, at that time, was regarded as a serious act of indiscipline, punished by removal from school, if the refusal came from the parents, and re-education in some distant camp in the north of the country, if it came from the pupil himself. I survived these precocious recruitments until 12th grade. At that time, in 1981, we received a survey asking us what career we wanted to follow. We were all happy, thinking that the country had recruited enough cadres compulsively for its needs and that now we were going to be able to choose what we wanted to be. Some were that lucky, but not all, and in particular, not me.

HENRIETTE GUNKEL: *What was your choice at that time?*

ISABEL: I had chosen to study psychology, a dream which I had secretly nurtured since I was 14, when I put money together to buy a book with a yellow cover which was displayed in the bookshop near my house and was called *Tornar-se Pessoa* (*Becoming a Person* by Karl Rogers). For two months I saved money from my school snacks to buy it, because I was convinced that this book was a kind of recipe for how I would be able to become a person in such a difficult context: two years earlier, in 1976, all my school mates and friends from the neighbourhood disappeared (their parents went to Portugal at the time of the nationalisations). They were replaced by others who looked at me strangely because I was the daughter of Portuguese parents and didn't have 'the right colour'. My mother vanished, swallowed up by the urgent tasks of the revolution and of a country without technical staff, who must now be

trained in a hurry in order to rebuild it. My 75-year-old father, depressed at the nationalisation of his properties, was unable to handle, in addition to his daily life as a doctor, the brusque changes to a system of food rationing, queues to buy goods, the re-structuring of the schools, and racial hostility from new neighbours. I was the oldest of five children and, in the absence of my mother, I felt responsible for this family.

I greatly wanted to find this magic recipe for how to become a person, to grow up speedily, but when I finally managed to buy the book and opened it, I couldn't understand anything of the complex words of Karl Rogers. But I promised myself that I would study psychology in order to understand them.

I didn't have this luck. When, at the end of 12th grade, lists went up saying what course each of us would take, my name was among those who would study history in Czechoslovakia. I didn't like history. I didn't want to go to Bratislava, where it was cold and they spoke a language I didn't understand. But above all, I couldn't bear the idea of staying abroad for six years, leaving behind my younger brothers and my father. Since he was now 81, this would certainly mean I would never see him again.

MAX: *So what happened then?*

ISABEL: I said no, the first no. I even tried to seek an audience, where my mother explained to the then minister of Education that I wanted to study psychology, that my father had the money to finance my studies, and that I had family in Portugal who could accommodate me. The reply she received was that psychology was something bourgeois, that in Mozambique people didn't have problems, and so didn't need psychologists, and that financing one's own studies was a still more bourgeois idea. My mother, who was then pedagogical director in the ministry of Health, left there humiliated. I remember well her expression of rage and silent revolt.

But neither of us had the courage to challenge the system, so I was included in a training course for teachers of Portuguese and English for 10th and 11th grades. I agreed, thinking that at least I would teach Portuguese. I really liked reading and writing, so it would be easy. But the course ended and they said all the students would have to give English classes. I had a very poor mastery of that language, since English had only been taught on my secondary curriculum up to 9th grade. Once again, I had to refuse, this time to undertake a task for which I was not competent. A second no was something serious, and

I knew that the reprisal following teacher training was to be called up for the army, at a time when the war had already begun (1984).

I left the faculty not knowing what to do, feeling useless, rudderless, without a place in this country. I went down Julius Nyerere Avenue, trying to ensure that nobody would see that I was wandering without direction, and I bumped into Camilo de Sousa, whom I already knew, Licínio Azevedo, Pedro Pimenta[6], then the deputy director of the INC, and Luis Carlos Patraquim,[7] who had just finished a session writing the script for *Time of The Leopards*,[8] the first Mozambican fiction film. They were in the street waiting for the *Kuxa Kanema* car to come and fetch them. I talked with them. Told them of my anguish and lack of direction, and they invited me to go to the INC, to see if the director would accept me as 'a cadre', even though I had 'run away from education', because at least I had a bachelor's degree, a level of education which was then rare in the state apparatus. Institutions were competing to obtain the few students being trained, and the INC had not yet received anyone from this new wave of graduates.

I introduced myself the following Monday, and I was accepted under the condition that I would present a psychiatric certificate, proving my 'incapacity to continue studies'. It was thus, with a psychiatric certificate, that I begin my career as a filmmaker.

MAX: *What – at that time – was the situation like for women in filmmaking? Were there women in the business at all?*

ISABEL: When I joined the INC, there were already several women working on film production: professional journalist Fátima Albuquerque[9] already had some news items for *Kuxa Kanema* and shortly afterwards she made her first documentary, on street kids. In the *Kuxa Kanema* team, there was also Lina Manuel, working as a production assistant. Some years later she was sent to study cinema in Cuba. Several women worked in the laboratory, including Ana Paula, who had studied in the Soviet Union and was a specialist in developing film. There was also Sarita, who was in charge of the archive, and the sisters Isabel and Maria Deve. One worked on revising films for distribution, and the other worked in the laboratory. Then there were the secretaries, accountants, telephonists and cleaners. This was a time when politically any kind of discrimination was expressly forbidden and could be punished, and so there were no episodes of gender discrimination.

I think the only difficulty I felt in my integration into the INC was that I had a few more qualifications than was normal among people there, which made them fear that I had come to occupy their leadership positions. But since it soon became clear that I did not intend to take charge of anything, but to learn humbly with them how to do things by doing them, this was easily overcome.

MAX: *How would you describe the INC as an institution and what made it different from other film teaching institutions as far as you can tell?*

ISABEL: The INC was not a school in the classical sense of the term. There was no curriculum for cinema education. You learnt by doing things. You were included in an area and immediately became part of the production team. This was the first time in my life that I could really make a free choice, and in accordance with what I wanted. But I was so unfamiliar with desiring things, and much more unfamiliar with expressing what I wanted, that it was extremely difficult for me to make this choice.

I started to work first as a production assistant on *Kuxa Kanema*. I first chose the trade of production, to learn a little of everything, so that afterwards I could choose with certainty what I felt capable of doing. At that time I was in contact with all the production departments and processes. I was particularly interested in photography and camera work, and I went into this area in more detail in 1987 … when I did the photography for the 16mm colour film *Le Son C'est La Vie* of Fátima Albuquerque.[10]

In 1985, after I had mastered the production techniques that I had learnt on a day-to-day basis with José Passe, the INC production co-ordinator, and Luis Simão, INC production director, I worked as Director of Production on the 1984 film *Frutos da Nossa Colheita*[11] (*Fruits of our Harvest*), by José Cardoso.[12] Here, with Cardoso, I acquired a lot of knowledge about field production. I then worked as a production assistant on the film *O Tempo dos Leopardos* (*Time of The Leopards*), the first Mozambican fiction film, which was a Yugoslavian/Mozambican co-production …

During this film, I began to become more interested in aspects of directing. When I went back to *Kuxa Kanema*, I approached directors such as Camilo de Sousa, Ismael Vuvo[13] and João Costa[14]. I worked with them as an assistant director on documentaries they made. It was a period of great learning, in which I spent almost my entire time, day and night, following film production

processes and learning all that I could, both in the area of directing, and in the technical areas of photography, sound, laboratory work and copying.

The following year, nearer to directing, I worked on continuity on the 1987 fiction film *O Vento Sopra do Norte*[15] (*The Wind Blows from the North*) by José Cardoso, when I had the marvellous experience of following from beginning to end a 16mm black-and-white fiction film, from its conception and drafting the script, to the preparation, filming, and soundtrack, to the developing and copying in the laboratory.

In 1986, I began to direct news items for *Kuxa Kanema*, in which we practically only filmed the war; in 1987, I made my first war documentary, *Manjacaze*, when I went with the film crew into the town of Manjacaze while it was still burning, on a morning of a war that would not end for another six years, and which I would film until the fire which destroyed the INC and led to the halting of production in 1989.

HENRIETTE: How did cinema in Mozambique start?

ISABEL: With the purpose of spreading the message that the Mozambican state thought important for mobilising Mozambicans and involving them in the construction of the country – *Kuxa Kanema*, which literally means 'the birth of cinema', was set up. This was a weekly newsreel, which was transmitted in all the cinemas in the country, and in the countryside through a mobile cinema unit. This was the context in which the first generation of filmmakers and cinema technical staff was trained, clearly committed to this idea of socialist development and to the dream of building a different country, which would be a country of greater equality and greater justice.

As these filmmakers developed, the cinema they made grew in quantity and quality. In 1984, when I joined the INC, in addition to the weekly *Kuxa Kanema*, one documentary per month and one fiction film per year were being made, financed out of the general state budget, without resorting to external resources, except for films in colour. *Pamberi Ne Zimbabwe* by João Costa, the 1980 film dealing with the independence of Zimbabwe, for example, was developed in the Harare laboratory. Though their role was clearly determined by political directives, these filmmakers did, however, find the space to speak with their own voices, not free of criticism and facing censorship. Several of the documentaries made, which criticised

political authoritarianism and denounced arbitrary behaviour and the abuse of power in this period, were never seen by the public, but stand today in the archives of INAC as historic witness of filmmakers of the time who were committed to truth.

In 1987, after the death of Samora Machel, the politics of Mozambique changed radically, from Marxist-Leninist socialism to a neo-liberal economy.[16] Strangely enough, Mozambique and Angola are perhaps the only cases in the world where this political switch was made without changing the leading figures of the country. In an episode which even today has no official explanation, the INC production unit was completely destroyed by a fire.

MAX: *How did the filmmakers reflect these changes on a production level?*

ISABEL: At the end of this decade, even before the General Peace Agreement put an end to 16 years of war in Mozambique, the filmmakers who had come out of the INC set up the first independent cinema companies. Immediately, voices that disagreed with the official discourse on the state of the country were raised in the soundtracks of the first independent films, bringing to the public the harsh reality of a country devastated by a war which had stopped making sense a long time ago.

Thus began the trajectory of a cinema which, although independent, remained committed to an ideal of the country, criticising the political and economic stances that tended towards setting up a capitalism without rules, an increasing chasm between classes, the spread of poverty and of HIV, the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources, the sexual and labour exploitation of children etc. Although this is a socially committed cinema, it is also a cinema where the individuals have their own identity, exist for themselves, are strong and wage heroic struggles, think for themselves, ask themselves questions, and show what they think and feel. And it is perhaps because of this vision they have of their own world, sometimes so distanced from and critical of the benefits of globalisation and of the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, that Western cultural markets are not interested in such films, since they are still today looking for the image of an exotic Africa, or a devastated Africa, where any and every kind of aid is welcome.

Mozambican filmmakers do not regard Mozambican cinema as a product dependent on the market, but as an act of citizenship. They understand their

voice as a voice which dares, over decades, to make itself heard, beyond political, economic and social contingencies. And so, unlike many African filmmakers who live in the great European capitals where they compete for subsidies and sign production agreements, only returning to their own countries to film, the Mozambican filmmakers live and work in Mozambique, which makes it more difficult to establish such relations.

Their creative spirit lies not only in inventing stories for their films, but also in ways of using the few existing financial resources to go on making films. Thus there appears an entire line of films which, although initially ordered as institutional films connected to the agenda of international organisations linked to the Millennium Development Goals, are creatively transformed into the films of individual authors. These films transcend the boundaries established by the classical languages, while making indiscriminate use of them, recreating them in innovative narrative forms like docudrama or mixtures of documentary and animation in the attempt to find forms that make it possible to speak of complex and stigmatising social problems while protecting the identity of the persons involved.

This narrative and aesthetic hybrid that characterises Mozambican cinema today is, on the one hand, the subject of countless academic studies in the areas of cinema, literature, anthropology and psychology; but on the other hand, it creates an additional difficulty for these films to enter and be accepted in the markets where films are shown, and where genres are still highly compartmentalised. However, nowadays there is greater acceptance of less orthodox narratives, a greater fluidity of cinematographic genres and a greater freedom of aesthetic creation within the boundaries of one and the same film. I believe that, sooner or later, this will meet up with what we have long been doing and will favour the inclusion of Mozambican cinema into the panorama of world cinema.

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NOTES

1 We would like to thank Paul Fauvet for the translation from Portuguese into English.

2 Camilo de Sousa,Mozambican filmmaker.

3 Licinio Azevedo, Brazilian-born Mocambican filmmaker.

4 See, for example: Power (2004:261-78); Fairfax (2010:55-67) and Dickinson (2011:129-34).

5 Noronha mentioned this in conversation with the authors during their collaboration in 2011.

6 Pedro Pimenta, Mocambican filmmaker and director of the documentary film festival *Dockanema* in Maputo.

7 Luis Carlos Patraquim, Mozambican journalist and writer.

8 *O Tempo dos Leopardos (Time of The Leopards)* (1985) is a Mozambican-Yugoslavian co-production about life under Portuguese colonial rule and guerrilla warfare against it.

9 Fátima Albuquerque, contemporary filmmaker in Mozambique.

10 Documentary on a watchmaker surrounded by pendulums and instruments.

11 Documentary about the politics of fieldwork.

12 José Cardoso , Mozambican filmmaker famous for his liberation cinema movie *O Vento Sopra do Norte* (1987).

13 Ismael Vuvo , Mozambican filmmaker.

14 João Costa , Portuguese-born Mozambican photographer and filmmaker.

15 The film deals with the beginning of the liberation struggle and was restored in 2011.

16 Machel's successor, Joaquim Chissano (1986-2005), changed Mozambican politics within a few years to a market-based economy and a multi-party democracy.

DARK AND PERSONAL

ANITA KHANNA

Notwithstanding natural disasters, 2010 was an exceptional year, particularly for women in film. Firstly, Kathryn Bigelow broke the gender divide and became the only woman ever to win Best Director at the Academy Awards of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Not long after this, a group of African women directors got together for a conference in Johannesburg and took part in a first-of-its-kind film festival showcasing African women directors, organised by Women of the Sun. The first event got extensive international attention, which was well deserved. The second felt like a bit of a clandestine operation. Ten years into the 21st century it seems that films made by African women, with one or two exceptions, are not able to draw crowds. The world is just not ready.

In fact it is worth asking whether the world will ever be ready, *en masse*, to sample the curio that is African women's cinema, when it appears to be no easy feat to persuade South Africans to watch South African movies on the big screen. Perhaps people were confused about the very term 'African women's cinema' and wondered: will it all look and sound the same? I once went to a women's spoken poetry evening where most of the poems made reference to menstrual blood and infidelity, and even

though I have experienced both, I can relate to the anxiety that there could be a common theme within films grouped under a 'made by a woman' banner.

Actually, the broad span of films that women on this continent make only goes to prove that they are as diverse in story, tone and style as the experiences and world views of the people who make them. Would we consider placing all black filmmakers under one aesthetic umbrella and attempt to argue that there's a black film style or a black approach to making films? If so, what do we do with Indian film? Indians in the history of South Africa are politically black too. Do you see what we are up against? If we narrow it down and discount formulaic, star-driven, action-packed commercial models and place our focus on independent films, can we find a unifying gender aesthetic, a single gender category? Could a common feminine thread be found in the works of, say, American filmmaker Sophia Coppola[1] and Algerian filmmaker Djamila Sahraoui?[2] Or if you want to compare solely within the African diaspora, could the films of Ghanaian writer and director Shirley Frimpong Manso[3] be found to have resonance with those of Burkina Faso's most renowned woman filmmaker, Fanta Régina Nacro?[4]

I would say that although the films made by each of these women could not be more different, what unites them as filmmakers is their struggle to have their films realised. Even Kathryn Bigelow, a well-respected director even before she took home her Academy Award, fought for many years to get a big film project financed. Although women have a substantial body of work in documentary and experimental genres, in the world of fiction, and particularly in terms of *auteur* filmmaking, women are woefully under-represented.

Allison Anders,[5] one of the few American filmmakers working successfully in the Hollywood studio system, calls this kind of independent cinema, where women get to write and shoot their own scripts, 'dark, personal work'. The number of women in this category is tiny and of these, many struggle to get a body of work to their name. Instead there is a constant fight to make each subsequent film (if they are lucky), a fight as though each is their first. It seems that the saying 'You are only as good as your last film' applies solely to men. For women, it is a case of having to prove yourself anew each time. When it comes to black women, these statistics get even more extreme. As Anders puts it:

> Women directors have to restart their careers each time they make a movie … I think once they've heard a woman's voice they're like, okay. Thank you. I've heard it now. Especially women of colour. Forget it (2000:27).

The depressing fact is that making an independent feature film is going to get even harder for everyone, not just women. This is first and foremost because of the huge amount of money that needs to be invested up front in a venture that may never make any money back, later or somewhere down the line. As the industry shifts and new media platforms open up to change the format of filmmaking, along with its models of distribution, the channel for getting financial backing to make a full-length, independent feature film gets narrower and narrower. Whenever there is a global financial crisis it is nearly always arts budgets that are the first to get slashed. In this context, anything that is deemed to be risky in any way, either due to subject matter or to the filmmaker being a newcomer, has very little chance of being nurtured into life. The few women who 'make it' and get the backing they need have to be extremely talented as well as passionate about what they do. They usually write like genies, or work closely with people who do, and will probably have experienced a certain amount of good fortune just managing to get all the conditions right to get their film made. It is nothing short of a miracle when this happens and you have to applaud the very small number who do get past all the hurdles and make a film that resonates with audiences. Perhaps what unites women *auteurs* is the fact that they have to struggle uphill with their legs tied together to actually achieve what they do.

Mira Nair,[6] who began as a documentary filmmaker and later went on to become one of the most renowned female fiction directors in the business, puts it beautifully when she describes how she works on set, pulling in with actors and crew and refusing to play the precious director: 'I would do anything. There are no rules ever in directing, I think. Whatever the actor needs, whatever the situation needs, you have to come up with' (Nair 2000:266). Nair's passion to make her debut feature, *India Cabaret* (1985), came out of her experience of documenting the lives of striptease artists.

Being a documentary filmmaker and living among your subjects in order to get the core of who they are and the meaning behind

their lives was the instinctive approach that Nair turned to while directing *Salaam Bombay* (1988), a story told from the point of view of orphan street children in Bombay. The majority of Nair's cast were non-actors: street kids who got through the auditions. She wanted to remain as close to their reality as possible, working for long hours in their world, getting covered 'in shit' and dealing with large crowds of onlookers on the streets of Bombay on a daily basis. What she elucidates is a whole different world to the fairytale we get shown in commercial Indian cinema. Nair and her co-writer even rewrote the script with the children to ensure that every word of dialogue would be real. She ended up with a beautiful film. 'It was a sort of guerrilla operation. Maybe it's like having a baby. You can get all the pain out' (Nair 2000:267).

Anders, who was a single parent when she went to film school, makes no secret of the highly personal nature of her filmmaking:

> It's my job, in a way, to put this stuff out there. The strange thing is that people think that when you put personal stuff into your work that it's cathartic. It's not real – or not entirely. I think it definitely helps along the way (2000:59).

The script of her first film, *Gas Food Lodging* (1992), was based on a novel by Richard Peck, *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt* (1999). The book had so much in common with Anders' reality that she wished she had written it herself. So she adapted the novel into a script and fine-tuned the facts to more closely portray what she needed to say. Anders, who was gang-raped at the age of twelve, built abuse into the storyline and even named her rapists in the script. When her producer objected she told him,

> What? Are these rapists going to come forward and say how dare she? I'm going to sue her? I said, boy, I would love that. I would love it if it drew them out of the woodwork (2000:60).

Lisa Cholodenko[7] is another independent filmmaker who writes and directs her own work. Her first feature was in part inspired by a difficult relationship with her boss:

I just felt really oppressed and denigrated. And I think the original idea for *High Art* [1998] came out of this incredible humiliation I felt at being around this person, how much repulsion I felt at the time and how unconscious and indifferent she was as to how she made people around and under her feel. I was raging, in a way, and this was my outlet (2005: 42).

Cholodenko had her first big hit with *The Kids Are Alright* (2010), which won a Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture in the category of Musical or Comedy. It is a beautiful, tender and funny film about a lesbian couple whose lives are turned upside down when their kids decide to meet their sperm-donor father. Cholodenko and co-writer Stuart Blumberg began writing the script in 2004. Despite the fear that a film about semen, lesbians and inquisitive kids would not be received well, the film was green-lit in 2006, but shooting was postponed when Lisa herself got pregnant with anonymous sperm. Once again, much of the film's strength lies in its acute proximity to the truth of the filmmaker.

When you compare Sahraoui's film *Barakat!* (2006) and Régina Nacro's *The Night of Truth* (2004), there are some strong similarities. Yet these lie not in style, tone or story, but by way of intention. Both films deal with different countries in different times. Nacro creates a fictional African state, closely akin to Rwanda, while Sahraoui's film is about the country she grew up in, Algeria. In both cases the countries are at war and lives, lots of lives, are at stake. It is the stark reality of far too many places on this continent and as Nacro points out, not just on this continent. Her film could just as easily be pointing a finger at the genocide that followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. These two women directors, both of whom easily fall into the category of independent filmmakers, were not driven to write about anything other than the all-consuming conflict they have seen around them, and of women, their strength, their complicity and their ability to represent resistance. What comes through is a love of place and, in both cases, the need to create, through film, some kind of hope. Once again, both storylines are deeply steeped in harsh, bleak, personal reality.

If you believe, as I do, that what goes on behind the camera is reflected in the final film, then you will agree that the struggle to get personal

recognition for your vision will pop up all over the place within the films themselves. And this, if anything, can begin to bleed into some kind of gender aesthetic, but only in independent cinema. It could be argued that once the independent woman filmmaker has embarked on the heroine's journey of getting her film made, there is no turning back. The only way is forward into the quagmire, and the only resources she can rely on are her original vision of the film, the quest itself and the truths that lie within her. I would argue that what comes out of this is an honest quality in women's independent cinema that resonates with audiences on a deep human level and that this candour is precisely what makes these films more poignant to watch.

However, I think there is a very important factor that needs to be pointed out to any woman thinking about sacrificing her life to the world of directing. With the job comes a certain amount of kudos. But no matter how 'down with the people' you attempt to be, crews respond predictably when it is a woman at the helm. For Anders, this is what sucks most about being in the driving seat:

> He goes, "On the plane I thought you were the wardrobe chick. I didn't know you were the director. Then the guys told me. "The redhead who was yakking it up with us? She's the director, man". Unfortunately, this kind of tedious respect has continued with my crews ever since. It's a hard thing for women directors: you don't get laid as much (2001:67).

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NOTES

1 US-American filmmaker of films such as *Lost in Translation* (2003) and *Somewhere* (2010), which won several prestigious international awards.

2 Algerian filmmaker. Her film *Barakat!* deliberately aims to undermine the image of submissive Muslim women and is discussed in this book by Katarina Hedrén.

3 Ghanaian film director, producer and writer, who tells stories with African perspectives.

4 The Grande Dame amongst Burkina Faso's filmmakers. The gender politics of her film *Puk Nini* is discussed in this book.

5 US-American filmmaker, scriptwriter and producer for film and TV. She directed episodes of *Sex and the City* and produced *The L-Word* series.

6 Filmmaker of Indian descent living in New York, who has made a number of critically and commercially successful films and is the recipient of numerous awards.

7 American filmmaker, whose debut film *High Art* (1998) received critical acclaim and attention for its portrayal of lesbian relationships.

'CHANGE? THIS MIGHT MEAN TO SHOVE A FEW MEN OUT'

INTERVIEW WITH
ANITA KHANNA

INTERVIEW BY
**ANTJE SCHUHMANN
AND JYOTI MISTRY**

Since Anita Khanna moved to South Africa and joined Uhuru Productions she has earned the company critical acclaim as scriptwriter and producer, respectively, for the company's two multi-award-winning documentaries: *Born into Struggle* and *Bushman's Secret* (Rehad Desai, 2006). She has also written and co-directed several social justice documentaries, including *Looting the Nation* (2004) and *You Chuse* (2008). She is writer and producer of *The Mating Game* (2010), an award-winning feminist drama series created for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). In 2011 Anita Khanna was the Outreach Director of Africa's first Good Pitch, a joint initiative of the Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation and the Sundance Documentary Film Programme, and supported by the Ford Foundation. She is currently the director of the Tri Continental Film Festival which takes place each year in Johannesburg and Cape Town, as well as a producer on the documentary film *Miners Shot Down* (Rehad Desai, 2014).

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JYOTI MISTRY: As a person involved in the development and creation of content on the continent, how would you describe the key challenges in the production of content? What are some of the drivers of content and what is the perceived audience for this content?

ANITA KHANNA: Freedom of expression in South Africa is facing its toughest days since the end of apartheid. This is taking place on a number of levels, but the most tangible is the Secrecy Bill that is being challenged (in 2014) by civil society, led by the Right2Know Campaign. The bill that was signed into law in April 2013 by parliament allows for the prosecution of whistle blowers, journalists or activists who disclose information that is 'classified'. This includes revealing corruption and other criminal activity, and it doesn't take a leap of the imagination to see how this would worry filmmakers who are motivated in their craft by stories that expose injustices or the deep economic fault-lines in our society.

One way that the threat to freedom of expression is playing out is in the way that the state has repeatedly interfered with the role of the SABC. I am of the belief that it is the responsibility of a public broadcaster to provide content that is exemplary and challenging. This means being prepared to take risks with audiences by commissioning programming that is of the highest quality and, at the same time, provocative. Instead, we have an institution that behaves much like it did under apartheid and this, combined with low budgets paid to production companies, results in offering the nation a poor diet of biased news, low-quality dramas and out-of-date repeat programming.

Outside of television there are limited opportunities to get funded. In this context, many filmmakers, and particularly women, are not getting an opportunity to enter the profession, and those [who] are in it struggle to sustain themselves as filmmakers.

The major film fund in the country, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), is very aware of the under-representation of women in film and has taken steps to support women filmmakers through various routes. In 2011 they launched an initiative to give financial support to a female-led production company aiming to promote female talent in feature films. This initiative, run by women and focusing on women professionals, was a good initiative to increase the numbers of women in the industry.

The other hope lies in the growing range of international digital

platforms for film distribution. Online distribution can be considered the next major technical development in benefiting female filmmakers. Online film releases that are internationally available have much more potential. If things move more in this direction it will benefit women storytellers, some of whom may produce interesting and innovative bodies of work, as long as the funders are prepared to take risks beyond the short-sighted commercial model. Basically, the only way we are going to get better at making films is if we get a chance and more chances to make films.

ANTJE SCHUHMANN: *In your work, you are also intrinsically involved in the Tri-Continental film festival. Can you describe its genesis and evolution, and how you might see 'the gender agenda' as part of the festival – if at all? Tri-Continental is also hailed as being representative of African issues in a local as well as a global sense/context. How do these representations of the continent work and do they have any specific relation to issues of gender? How would you describe the role of African women filmmakers in this context?*

ANITA: This is a festival that is dedicated to social, political and human rights and it showcases human rights documentaries from the global South in cinemas and to communities with no access to cinemas through a countrywide outreach programme. It is also one of the founding partners of the People2People International Documentary conference which takes place biennially. People2People aims to bring people and organisations together to strengthen the role of documentary film on the African continent, to develop the craft of filmmaking and to support networking amongst film practitioners.

    Gender abuse is at crisis point in South Africa and yet we have very few films coming out that deal with the reality of women's lives. This really concerns me and I therefore make a conscious effort to select films from around the world that have women as protagonists or that are made by women for the festival. There are noticeably more women internationally making documentaries than fiction films, although the ratio [of] men to women remains small. Women are trusted – as shown – with funding to make 'factuals', but not so much when it comes to fiction filmmaking which is more costly and seemingly more precious to the nation.

JYOTI: *Uhuru has been at the forefront of many issue-driven projects and you have also been key in developing women's stories for broadcast. Can*

you offer some insights into the difference in how men and women work (if at all differently), how the creative process might be influenced by gender experiences and what your experience of being a woman at the helm has been?

ANITA: When we make documentaries, I write and produce and Rehad Desai, my partner, directs and does most of the public speaking, so

Poster of the 'Tri-Continental Film Festival' (2013).

we have a definite division of labour that reflects our varied abilities. I am sometimes amazed at how many levels I work at in one day. From directing in a sound studio, to paper editing, to giving an editor notes, to – and it's mostly this – washing up in the office kitchen because we have a meeting and there isn't a single clean cup! Basically, if there's anything wrong with my creative process it's that I'm the mother of all projects, from the film to the people to the minutiae, and I have little doubt that it's linked to my gender.

Everyone works differently. I know women who direct well but express their self-doubt more openly than men. Men just hide it better. I also know women who have nerves of steel. I think honesty is good for filmmaking. Films are human subjects and the humans making them should approach them with integrity, so I don't have a problem with self-doubt and introspection as long as the job gets done. If I am to make a general comment, I would say that, in my experience, women prepare better, I think partly because of their fear of failure. If men do prepare, they do it in secret.

When I was producing *The Mating Game*, for once I was truly in charge and throughout the process I knew what kind of producer I didn't want to be. I wanted to be approachable. And I was still writing episodes as we were shooting, so I also wanted to remain in a creative space. Trying not to go over budget was a daily creative endeavour. I was also really conscious of stamping out any sexism on set. One day I got very angry when a male director insisted on a nude scene that wasn't scripted. I was made to feel that I was being uptight. I know the men on set were enjoying themselves and I didn't want that kind of crap on my show. It was really important to me that the character, one of the only lesbians portrayed on South African television at the time, was not seen as a sexual object. I wanted audiences to relate to her as a woman, not to drool over her. What came out of this was that men don't like to be challenged on set and some men find it hard having a woman as a boss.

ANTJE: Whatever aspect of society we look at, gender inequalities are still very often discussed as a 'woman's problem'. How can, or better, how should men, especially in your field, not only contribute to but actually take a lead in dismantling their own gendered privileges?

ANITA: Small production companies that are competing for little pots of funding do not bring out the best in men. This is why initiatives to promote women filmmakers are so important to transform the sector, and this is why it is particularly sad that these remain so few and so under-funded. I think there is a lot that could be done structurally, but even male individuals can make a difference. The industry mirrors society – so if you, as a man, make a decision that you no longer want to be part of the problem, then one needs to support women, to work with them as partners and speak up against other men who continue to enjoy their privileges unashamedly. Yet I am also against tokenism – we have to grow talent and we need to do so consciously by working against the grain of structural privileges, by not repeating existing power relations.

ANTJE: What is your single most desired aspiration for seeing how gender imbalances might be shifted in the film industry or as a creative artwork?

ANITA: [One] way to grow talent is to provide the best example of the craft and of relating to each other, but there is no way around it: we need to put money into women. More funding means more women can be involved in all aspects of films, and particularly as key creative figures. This requires a shift in how women creatives are still perceived as unsafe bets. The whole industry is still very male dominated, even down to the tradition of calling the director 'Sir' on set. To change this might mean shoving a few men out [of] the way to make room for our ideas and our voices. It means rocking the boat.

JYOTI: It would seem that through the politics of the storytelling choices you have made and the production protocols made operational in the projects you produce, you have succeeded in stirring parts of the industry. I would agree, though, that further momentum from like-minded players is vital to entrenching gender changes in the industry.

ANTJE: It reminds me of an expression my aunt uses: 'We [women] don't want half the rotten cake – we want to take over the bakery.'

BARAKAT! MEANS ENOUGH!

KATARINA HEDRÉN

I n her debut feature *Barakat!,* (2006) Algerian filmmaker, Djamila Sahraoui portrays two women who, out of desperation, fear, or simply because 'they are done' with being oppressed and victimised, take control of their own destinies. In the early 2000s, Sahraoui became part of a cohort of North African women filmmakers who made films that suggested new ways of seeing – and being – women: Yamina Bachir's *Rachida* (Algeria, 2002), Nadia El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker* (Tunisia, 2003) and Yasmine Kassari's *The Sleeping Child* (Morocco, 2004). These women filmmakers of the Maghreb developed original and pioneering filmic techniques to address oppression and victimisation of women in society.[1]

Sahraoui's film warrants close analysis since it offers a nuanced insider's perspective on the experiences of Muslim women in Algeria living through political revolution and social change. The narrative and characters provide a layered representation of how women strategically navigate the expectations of when to veil and when to choose to be unveiled. Moreover, the narrative point of view from two different generations of women provides a political foil that enables the director to offer a commentary on the contemporary experiences of women in Algeria. In the cohort of films produced by North African women

filmmakers *Barakat!* presents an unflinching point-of view of the multiple layers of women's subjectivities.

Algeria gained independence in 1962 after a liberation war that lasted nearly ten years. The war, which contributed to the brutalisation of the country for decades, was referred to as 'the Algerian events' by France (the former coloniser) for the official reason that the Algerian nation did not formally exist at the time.

When anti-government demonstrations broke out in 1988, the Algerian government, led by the National Liberation Front (FNL) first responded violently, before agreeing to political reform. This, in turn, led to the formation of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). This Islamist party was doing exceptionally well in the first round of Algeria's 1991 election until the military, out of fear that FIS would be voted into power, annulled the ongoing elections. Soon after, a state of emergency, which lasted until 2011, was declared. These events set off a violent civil war between Islamic groupings and government forces, which saw 200 000 dead. It polarised the population and contributed to an atmosphere of fear, terror and deep-seated mistrust.

It is in this context that Sahraoui's *Barakat!* ('Enough!' in Arabic) unfolds, somewhere in Algeria, in the early 1990s. While Gillo Pontecorvo's epic film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) is an action-filled and furious account of the urban guerrilla war waged against the coloniser during the last decade before liberation, *Barakat!* is a multi-layered unobtrusive road movie about two women, Amel and Khadidja. It is heavy with suppressed anger and determination, but there is also warmth and love. It is a film made by a woman, about women, and about a nation stuck in what can best be described as a collective and perpetual state of fear, grief and trauma.

The principal battles in the above mentioned films is their fight against men, laws and customs that seek to limit the heroines' rights and freedoms and the self-determination of their own bodies and minds. In *The Sleeping Child*, Zeinab (performed by Mounia Ousfour), refuses to parent a child alone and uses magic to prolong her pregnancy until her husband returns from Europe. Similarly, the schoolteacher Rachida (performed by Ibtissem Djouadi) in Bachir's film of the same name as well as Amel and Khadidja in *Barakat!* refuse to let fear dictate their lives. They keep on walking when someone steps in their way, both literally and metaphorically. They offer a helping hand and accept one too, despite

trust and reciprocity being in short supply. They care for and nurture children, plants and fellow human beings in settings where nothing and no one is supposed to grow, prosper or heal.

Barakat! tells of the young and conscientious medical doctor Amel (performed by Rachida Brakni), who comes home from work one day to discover that her journalist husband, Mourad, has gone missing. Amel turns to the police for help – to no avail. She soon learns that local fundamentalists, unhappy with Mourad's writing, have abducted him. When Amel's conservative young neighbour Karim, whose son's life Amel saves in the beginning of the film, tells her where Mourad is being held, she embarks on a journey to bring him back home.

Accompanying Amel on her rescue mission is Khadidja (Fettouma Bouamari). The clear-sighted, chain-smoking nurse and former freedom fighter is twice Amel's age and has a no-nonsense approach to life. In one sense, their expedition will take them right back to where they started, but in another, the two women are confronted with numerous obstacles – none of which are unrelated to their gender. These obstacles present themselves in the form of men in different places and positions. Among them is a guerrilla group leader, who is curiously kind and sadistic at the same time. Then there is the pharmacist who will not give Amel the time of the day when she is dressed in a simple dress. In another instance, the sight of two unveiled women alone in a car infuriates a fellow motorist on the road and a patron at a small eatery takes it upon himself to teach the insubordinate Amel a lesson. There is also the taxi driver who is too afraid to take the women to their destination, but unrestrained when it comes to giving them unsolicited moral advice. The authority that these men exercise with varying degrees of success, simply on account of their gender, remains assertive if not aggressive. It relies solely on the possibility of violence, and seems more often than not to be a result of these men's own fears, inadequacies and need for comfort.

Sahraoui invites her audience to meditate on the themes of disillusion, helplessness and sacrifice, as well as on commitment and conviction. She explores the human capacity to navigate and negotiate a social and political landscape designed to prevent those inhabiting it from reaching their full potential. The climate in the Algeria she portrays is one that cripples the progress of an entire nation, and the mental landscape is one where each person easily becomes both perpetrator and victim.
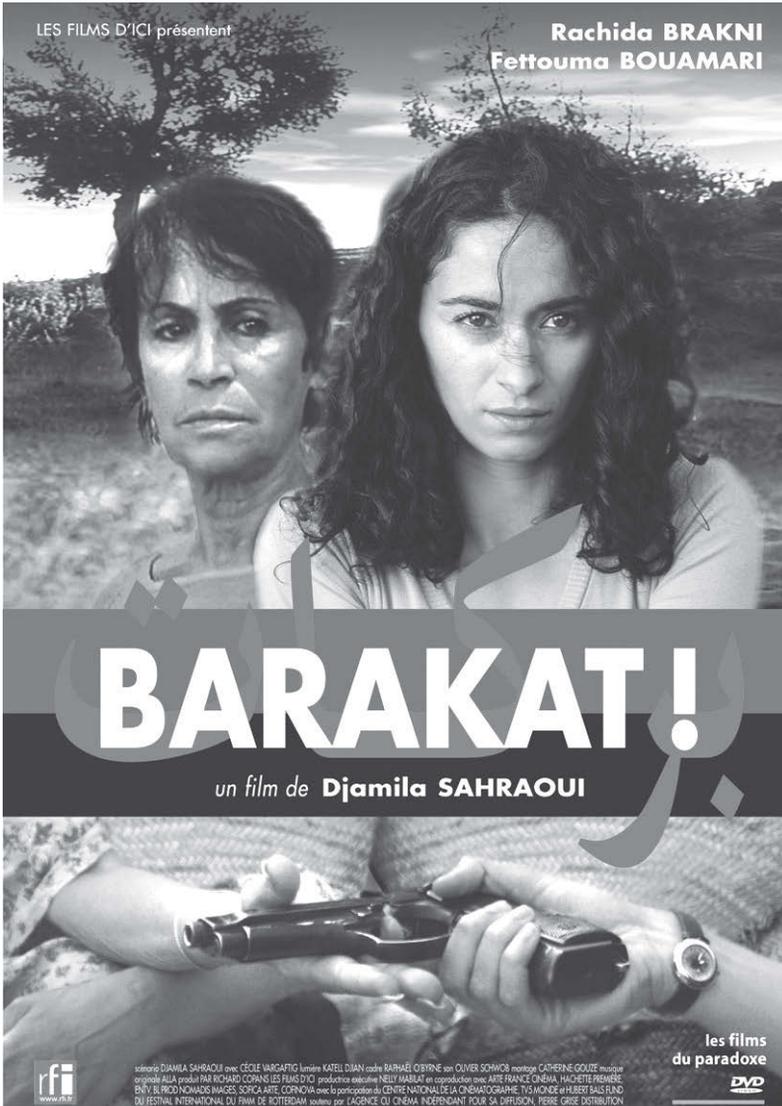
Film poster of *Barakat!* (2006).

One of the challenges when navigating unknown and dangerous ground lies in not losing ourselves out of exhaustion, fear or pain. At the same time, the flexibility to let go of strategies that no longer serve us, though they constitute an intrinsic part of who we think we are, is a useful ability.

The two women's relationship initially oscillates between interdependence and tenderness versus judgement and suspicion. The

relationship between the two is characterised by the divide caused by differences in age and class as well as the kind of dynamics, which often play out between mothers and daughters, when a self-sufficient grown-up offspring once again has to rely on her mother for support.

That Amel expects a lot from herself and others is established immediately in the opening scene where she is busy preparing dinner just hours before realising that Mourad has disappeared. The young professional is beautiful and flawless, but not vain. Amel devotes herself to the task in a tentative and meticulous way, verifying her moves with quick glances at the cookbook that lies open on the table. The scene tells us that nothing in her life happens by coincidence.

Amel's demeanour in the kitchen is strikingly similar when she diagnoses the neighbours' son with appendicitis a few moments later. When the boy's rigid father (the same man who claims to hold information about Mourad's disappearance), out of fear and lack of imagination, opposes the idea of taking his son to the hospital, Amel's eyes instantly reflect the same disgust as when she discovered a big insect in her kitchen a couple of minutes before.

The much older Khadidja occupies a delicate space where the experience and wisdom that prevent her from harbouring any illusions about her country risk turning into cynicism and resignation. Having participated in the struggle for independence, she knows that she owes nothing to anyone and remains relatively cool before the young doctor's initial smugness. Khadidja, however, violently opposes Amel's dismissal of her generation's efforts to liberate the country. 'Your generation would still be shining their shoes,' she reminds Amel who, in turn, wonders whether colonialism would really be so much worse than the current situation.

Khadidja also bemoans the demotion from freedom fighter to woman, which took place when victory was won. The demotion manifested in the expectation that the women who had fought alongside their male fellow-revolutionaries would return to the kitchen. When the furious motorist calls Khadidja and Amel names and shouts at them to leave the roads to the men, Khadidja gives as good as she gets and showers the man with abuse that includes mention of both his mother and wife (illustrating one of the ways in which women are complicit in their own oppression).

A gentle encounter later in the film, with a man who respectfully calls her 'Haija' (a Muslim woman who has completed the pilgrimage to

Mecca), similarly ends with a livid Khadidja telling him to at least wait until after her pilgrimage to Mecca before calling her 'Haija'. 'People used to say "mother" or "aunt" or "cousin",' she complains before walking away, thus expressing her frustration over the reactionary times they live in.

In stark contrast to all the hostile men, who in different ways police Khadidja and Amel's movements, stands the kind demeanour of the elderly man, who ends up accompanying Amel and Khadidja on their journey. Heavily burdened by grief and loss, he has not given in to the collective anger and fear, which has brought his life and country to a standstill.

The old man, who remains nameless throughout the film, is an unusual and gentle soul, lost in a world where nothing turned out as it was supposed to. When Amel and Khadidja enter his home in search of shelter, it has only been a month since he lost his wife. The woman died a natural death in an unnatural environment, where she and her husband had spent the last few years searching for their two sons, not knowing whether they were killing or had been killed.

Sahraoui knows that human beings can die in many different ways. One way is the actual, physical death that occurs for natural or unnatural reasons. Another is the metaphorical death of silence, both the self-inflicted kind, and the silence imposed by others. Yet another way to die, partially or in full, is when we are redefined and confined by forces and for reasons out of our control.

A strong and recurring element in the film is Sahraoui's play with the fluid constructs of gender (despite the rigid gender-normativity that dictates the film's landscape) and social positions. It shows how these constructs can be used both for the purpose of confinement and for liberation. Khadidja puts on and takes off her shroud according to the circumstances until Amel, in a scornful gesture, gives it to the guerrilla leader who has just released them but mischievously asked them to leave their shoes. 'Keep this shroud too. I hope you'll need it soon,' she says in a tone that suggests she is laying on the man a curse that will see him lose his manhood and its unearned accompanying powers.

Both lead actresses have androgynous features. The masculine and feminine aspects are emphasised or downplayed by the director according to the context. The androgynous element and the symbolism of each

wardrobe change (from modern city clothes to shroud, to simple dresses and Amel's final denim outfit) remind us that the way human beings are perceived and treated has little to do with who we are, and more to do with how we appear. If we are fortunate and privileged, we are in control of how we are perceived. If we are not, others will project their fantasies, fears and prejudice on us.

Draped in her shroud, Khadidja, usually with her rebelliously heavy make-up and cigarettes, turns into a veiled, supposedly harmless elderly woman. This transformation, we are reminded (especially if we have seen *The Battle of Algiers*), is not an act of submission. It is pure manipulation, as Khadidja is pulling the same trick that allowed her to remain invisible while carrying out illegal activities right in front of the enemy during the liberation war. Khadidja wears the simple dress given to her by their old male companion until the end of the film. As the relationship between the man and Khadidja grows stronger, Khadidja becomes increasingly playful and calm – not in a subjugated way, but in the way of a person who has reached a stage of peace, which allows her to finally let down the guard.

Amel, when dressed in neat top, chinos and a jacket at the beginning of the film, is awarded the kind of value that is directly related to a person's perceived functionality. In this outfit she is granted what could be referred to as 'honorary male status', which allows her to pass through a roadblock with the neighbour's sick boy in the car. Amel is addressed as 'Doctor', while the existence of her veiled neighbour (the boy's mother) in the back seat of the car is acknowledged without a word, and only for security reasons.

As Amel changes into a denim jacket and pants with an aggressively red T-shirt, her demeanour changes, too. It is easy to make associations with Western movies when, dressed in this cowboy-like outfit, she swindles the previously contemptuous pharmacist to get medicine for Khadidja. In the face of the vulgar patron at the eatery moments later, she literally challenges him to a Western-style brawl with a gun in her hand. The man, as soon as he sees her pistol, loses the imagined and unearned powers conferred by his male status and surrenders.

During the course of the film, Amel goes from being an elegant, perfectionist doctor to being an invisible and marginalised woman. This woman, deprived of her car and medical equipment (the attributes of functionality) and clad in the unfashionable dress of a country woman

appears almost subdued. In her final cowboy-like incarnation, Amel draws a gun, takes no prisoners. She does what she has to to make things happen her way.

There are moments when small holes in the almost perfectly woven tale become visible and leave room for a vague discrepancy between the director's intention and the outcome. While dealing bravely with complexity of story and character the director sometimes seems to doubt the audience's ability to fill in the blanks, which manifests in the urge to let the characters spell out what would have been better left implied.

Another problem or curiosity, which is in line with the dealings of the film is the absence of women. Apart from Amel and Khadidja, the only female characters in the film are the veiled neighbour and the old man's deceased wife, both of whom represent silence and invisibility (absence, in fact). The absence of other women could however also be interpreted as a manifestation of an accomplished and emancipated woman's need to distance herself from her victimised sisters, or an inability to even notice them. If this is the case, it is an interesting contradiction in the context of a film which otherwise sends a remarkably strong feminist message.

As a storyteller and social commentator Sahraoui does not shy away from the intricacies of existence. Many filmmakers with urgent stories opt not to let complexity stand in the way of a streamlined story. Sahraoui embraces ambiguity and contradiction, and skilfully lets her key characters (both the visible and the invisible, as well as the harsh physical landscape, which can be seen as a character in its own right) embody the conflicts and contradictions, the ambitions, hopes and memories of her Algeria.

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NOTES

1   See Florence Martin's *Screens and Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema* (2011) for a comprehensive study of these women filmmakers.

'WOMEN, USE THE GAZE TO CHANGE REALITY'

INTERVIEW BY
JYOTI MISTRY AND

INTERVIEW WITH
KATARINA HEDRÉN

ANTJE SCHUHMANN

Katarina Hedrén is a film programmer and festival organiser, as well as a discussion and workshop moderator/facilitator, and a writer, translator and interpreter in different contexts related to the cultural industries. She has worked with various producers, organisations and film festivals such as Women of the Sun, an advocacy organisation for African woman filmmakers, the Tri-Continental Human Rights Film Festival and the international documentary conference, People to People. She is one of two co-programmers for the First Wednesday Film Club, an independent Johannesburg-based film club which has become an institution among film- and TV-industry professionals and film enthusiasts. Her writing has appeared in Swedish, South African and pan-African publications and websites, including the Swedish film publication *FLM*, the Stockholm International Film Festival's catalogue, *The Times*, Africa is a Country and Africiné. Katarina is the author of the blog 'In the Words of Katarina'. Before moving to South Africa from Sweden she was a board member and the chairperson of the Swedish-African film festival CinemAfrica between 2001 and 2005. In addition to offering Swedish cinemagoers otherwise hard-to-access quality films made by African filmmakers from Africa and its diasporas, CinemAfrica's goal is to spread nuanced portrayals of Africa and Africans.

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JYOTI MISTRY: You have quite an extraordinary position in being able to navigate between multiple spaces, not just in terms of where you live and work but in the kinds of access you have curating and advising on African cinema for Scandinavian film festivals and film programmes. Can you offer some observations on the experiences and some of the complexities and challenges: not just in terms of the expectations but also the kind of content that is favoured and created in Africa?

KATARINA HEDRÉN: The lack of financial and infrastructural resources available to create viable African film industries is a huge problem. African filmmakers often spend more time trying to find money than focusing on aesthetics and storytelling concerns. In most cases filmmakers either make self-financed films, or they rely on the support of institutions with specific mandates and not enough regard for aesthetics and artistic concerns. Many African films deal with interesting or pressing issues, but not all of them do so in a cinematic way.

In the future, I am looking forward to seeing more African filmmakers turning the lens on geographical and cultural landscapes other than their own. While no one raises an eyebrow when Western filmmakers explore and explain remote parts of the world, African filmmakers are expected to solely focus on their own realities.

When it comes to the film festival circuit, I would like for more international film festivals to include African films in their main selections, instead of programming them separately in special-interest and separate sections.

Whether it is international film festivals or African film festivals, programmers often curate African content around particular themes or for the purpose of introducing African film to new audiences. Such themes are more often than not related to societal concerns [more] than to cinema and aesthetics. Both the Durban and the Toronto international film festivals have a history of ensuring that they showcase the best of African cinema and that their programming reflects the progress and the diversity of African cinema. If more festivals did the same, African film would become less of a curious sideshow of which not much is expected, in the eyes of both African audiences and audiences in other parts of the world. It would also, of course, help to remind audiences that behind every 'African problem' or any other circumstances that happen to unfold in African countries or

which are portrayed by filmmakers that happen to be African, is the thinking and feeling individual who makes the film. These individuals share many traits with other Africans, and have a whole lot in common with Europeans, Americans and Asians too.

ANTJE SCHUHMANN: *You have taken to creating a blog that reflects on some of your experiences and observations of the content and debates around race and gender in European-African relations. Without reducing your observations of the subtleties and nuances that you have expressed over time, how might you express the prevailing sentiments regarding representations of race and gender and the aesthetic and content considerations of films produced?*

KATARINA: Growing up on film and TV-content created by white American and European filmmakers has taught me to engage and identify with characters and contexts that at least at a superficial level do little to validate my existence as a black woman. Here I make reference to Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy, every film by Woody Allen and popular TV series like *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, as a few examples. Being able to identify with human beings regardless of gender and colour is a good thing. However, getting used to seeing people who look like me playing extras or appearing as distorted caricatures or not seeing black people at all remains the problem.

A couple of years ago Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (author of *Half of a Yellow Sun* [2006]) spoke about the danger of the 'single story'.[1] That story is one that portrays Africa as a place of misery without nuance or subtlety. Films like *The Constant Gardener* (2005) by Fernando Meirelles or Susanne Bier's Oscar-winning film *In a Better World* (2010), both made by accomplished filmmakers, illustrate this danger. This single story is a threat both to Africans who are reduced to tired stereotypes, and filmmakers, who become so distracted by fantasies that they lose the capacity to skilfully portray countries and human beings who happen to be African in nuanced and complex ways.

Obviously, not all black filmmakers treat black characters with more respect and dignity [than] all their white colleagues ... What has become clear to me, however, is that talented black filmmakers are more likely to treat *all* their characters, regardless of their skin colour, as rounded human beings in their stories.

In an insert for Radio Sweden in 2013, entitled *Senegalese film makes us smarter*, I compared Bier's *In A Better World* with French/Senegalese filmmaker Alain Gomis's *Tey* (2012). Bier's film unfolds in Denmark and what was then Sudan, and Gomis's in Dakar, Senegal. While painting complex and nuanced portraits of her Danish characters, the Sudanese end up being represented as either helpless victims or unspeakably evil villains. Satché, the main character in *Tey*, is Senegalese, but could have been of any nationality and lived in any country in the world, which is emphasised through his portrayal by American poet Saul Williams. So Alain Gomis tells a story not simply of a Senegalese man, but rather of a human being dealing with feelings of fear, joy, lust and disappointment; emotions that anyone can relate to regardless of gender, nationality or [skin] colour.

I'm obviously not saying that filmmakers must not talk about negative aspects of Africa. Filmmakers like Djamila Sahraoui, Mahamat-Saleh Haroun and Kivu Ruhorahoza do, without ever compromising their characters and themselves.

The experience of being reduced to clichés and stereotypes is as painful as it is humbling, and I am certain that this experience is partly what makes these filmmakers' films so much more nuanced than Susanne Bier's and Ferdinand Meirelles's.

ANTJE: *What is your opinion on the gendered dimensions of African cinema in terms of content and production, and the role of women in developing cinema on the continent?*

KATARINA: I am not sure that African cinemas are worse off in this regard than films from other parts of the world. Film industries in Africa are no exception. They are also male dominated. Where women are at the centre they tend to be portrayed as victims of poverty and/or of African men, or as objects of seduction. In the same way that filmmakers from other parts of the world struggle to portray Africa and Africans, male filmmakers tend to look at the world through male glasses and not pay attention to female perspectives [or] even female presence on the screen. The female body and psyche tend to be used as symbols, props and battlegrounds, rather than being considered in their own right. Again, this is as true in Africa as it is elsewhere in the world.

What is unique in Africa, though, is that many African films have been commissioned or made with the support of organisations mandated to

support development [and/or] promote healthy living, democracy and justice. As women and children are especially vulnerable in regions plagued by conflict or poverty, it is understandable that they are often portrayed as victims. What is harder to understand, however, is that we [are] so rarely introduced to women with names, histories, likes and dislikes. It is about being able to portray women as individuals who happen to exist in certain or particular contexts and who are no different from other people and individuals with hopes, dreams and ambitions – this is of course putting extreme circumstances aside.

If women in general are marginalised on and behind the big screen, then black women are even more marginalised and poor black women, as well as black lesbians and queer women, are further marginalised. Dee Rees, an African American woman filmmaker, made *Pariah* in 2011. It's a coming-of-age coming out story about a lesbian girl living in the inner city. This film won widespread acclaim and it gives me hope that the world is not completely uninterested in seeing black women on film.

Djamila Sahraoui's *Barakat!*, which I deal with in my chapter in this book, is a unique film in that it features two women on a rescue mission to save a man. *Barakat!* passes what has become known as the Bechdel Test, which stipulates that a film must include two named women who talk to each other about something other than a man. This film is unique and [not only is it] set apart from most other African films, but [it] is distinct from most films from all over the world.

JYOTI: What is your single most desired aspiration for seeing how gender inequalities might be shifted in the film industry or as a creative artwork?

KATARINA: The only solution, in my opinion, is [for] more women with a feminist agenda [to] become decision makers [who are in] control of finances, that is, producers, broadcasting directors, ministers of arts and culture, heads of film funds, as well as film schools and film festivals. I cannot imagine that such a radical change would not result in more nuanced and less gender-normative and oppressive film content [being] made by both men and women.

The wonderful bell hooks coined the concept of 'The Oppositional Gaze' in her 1992 paper [of] the same name [which was] subtitle[d] 'Black Female Spectators'. Hooks refers back to a time when slaves in America were not

allowed to look at white people but did so nevertheless. By breaking the rules, she concludes, they used their gaze to change reality. Ultimately, that is what I am hoping for – that more women making films will result in more truthful accounts not just about women [in] film, but about the world as a whole.

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NOTES

1 'The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story' (Adichie 2009).

POST-COLONIAL FILM COLLABORATION AND FESTIVAL POLITICS

DOROTHEE WENNER

As a filmmaker Dorothee Wenner has a particular interest in the relationship of the West to non-European cultures. Since 1990 she has also worked as programmer for the Berlin Film Festival/ Forum and has acted as the delegate for the regions of sub-Saharan Africa and India. Wenner is also a programme consultant for the Dubai Film Festival, and she has been a member of the board and of the jury of the Africa Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) since its inception.[1] In her capacity as film festival programmer Wenner travels extensively across Africa and India to network, source new films and spot trends. She is an expert on the development of cinematic cultures and in this piece she reflects on her observations of the existing and emerging cinematic practices of women on the African continent. In a candid and refreshing multi-faceted approach to the variables that inform the curatorial choices, exhibition platforms and reception contexts that shape how content is determined, her insights reveal the push-pull factors that position African films in an international environment. She elaborates on these insights by describing the complex layers informing the production, circulation and eventual exhibition challenges that face African filmmakers. These challenges

are about straddling the divides between the reception of their films by local audiences in their home territories and by audiences farther afield: on the African continent itself and within the international context of the festival circuit. Coupled with this is the persistent issue of the politics of representation of African cinema in Europe.

This contribution evolved as a result of conversations Dorothee Wenner and Antje Schuhmann had over three years, beginning when she shared some of her thoughts upon returning home to Berlin on the occasion of the AMAA awards in 2011 after one of her trips.

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On a flight from Port Harcourt to Lagos I had the chance to chat with Hawa Essuman, the young co-director of *Soul Boy* (2010), a Kenyan film that had recently created quite a stir internationally and had been nominated in many categories at the AMAA in Nigeria. Hawa [Essuman] was 'the chosen one' who was invited to climb on the director's seat in 'one-of-those' Euro-African projects currently so much in vogue in various African countries. Internationally acclaimed German director Tom Tykwer was her mentor. He, with support of major funding sources from Germany, had provided the infrastructure and finances that had made this film possible.

Soul Boy is as much a realistic ghost story as a romantic fairytale, with two teenagers falling in love against the background of Kibera, Nairobi's largest slum, where the entire film was shot.

Since its première, the film has been screened at virtually every other festival worldwide, and it was wonderful to watch this Kenyan success story unfolding. But the joy was not shared by all – some people in Nairobi were highly critical of the project and asked, on the occasion of the nominations, whether *Soul Boy* was really an African film, given the strong German involvement. Hawa said she could not understand the debate – she insisted that it was, indeed, her film, which she alone had directed, even though Tom Tykwer was on the set all the time, except for when they split into two units. Hawa said, 'On set, Tom and I discussed the shots and I took all his advice and suggestions.' She frankly admits that she benefited greatly from the project's framing – not only because of what she learnt back then, but

also because she was able to seek advice later on from the German crew she had worked with. She was currently busy writing the script for her next film, she said, and was making the best possible use of the advantages and networks she has thanks to *Soul Boy*. Who would not?

Hawa told me that she much prefers not to work alone, even during the writing process. Yet this time she has different company – a group of highly energetic women in Nairobi. Her remarks on the importance of a local support system brought us to an interesting new phenomenon: the 'Kenyan girls thing'. These days in Kenya there are so many young female directors and producers suddenly surfacing in the film industry that everyone is wondering: where are the men? Hawa replied, laughingly, when I asked her about it: 'Yes ... it is true. But honestly, I don't know, we don't know how it came to that, how we became an almost exclusive women-only circle ... Well, we are all anxiously awaiting the next film one of us makes. And we hang out together a lot and help and support each other, when we can.'

I also asked energetic young Kenyan filmmaker Zipporah 'Zippy' Nyaruri to give me her explanation for the 'new phenomenon' – and her first reaction was: 'Women are fighters!' But she reflected on it overnight and came back with more reasons: 'Most women in Kenya generally are independent by default, which I think reflects the situation of women in film, too. But we also want to be independent of men in our filmmaking so we are able to tell the stories in our own ways. What I feel is, we need men in the team to help with the technical aspect of things, as most of them have more experience than us in this field.'

Zippy explained to me that Kenyan men in the industry simply have the advantage of having years' more experience than women and most men also did – and still do – receive a better education. But why have female filmmakers in Kenya suddenly become so much more visible? I think it is because of a particular momentum within which a certain kind of personalities came together: these are women who are not in competition with each other, and who seemed to have understood that the success of one is not a disadvantage to the others, but rather the opposite. For me, it is also interesting that this way of being with each other – of relating to each other – is highly political, in the sense that I would say this is feminist practice at its

best. However, I realise that many African women would not situate their mutual support within this framework, as it is often perceived as exclusively Western. Of course, this solidarity amongst women – which can also include men – still does not resolve the very difficult conditions of filmmaking in a context where there are hardly any funding opportunities.

More than once, crucial movements have started in the film world as a result of some filmmakers or other film professionals becoming friends (instead of envious competitors). Of course, it takes many more 'ingredients' than just friendship to make this happen, but, time and again, personal support between people who create a 'scene' has proven to be absolutely essential to get such a movement going.[2] This fact is crucial, as there are neither governments nor other institutions that support filmmakers in any way in many African countries today. Needless to say, this is not only true for the African continent, but also in other countries around the world. It is also necessary to add that in Africa major differences exist between the various countries. In some places, like Burkina Faso or Angola, for example, filmmakers have enjoyed tremendous support from their governments, especially in the past when cinema was considered important in the process of de-colonialisation by some visionary politicians like Thomas Sankara, the famous president of Burkina Faso. The FESPACO[3] festival of Ouagadougou is but one example of that proud heritage. These are also places with historically strong traditions of filmmaking practices, but with the demise of celluloid cinema and the rise of newly-structured funding realities in Europe, that period came to an end – with sad results, like the closing of most cinema halls in sub-Saharan Africa, or the recent death of some established film festivals on the continent, such as in Mozambique.

Next to the financial precariousness, there is yet another challenge that is often overlooked. At the African Film Summit in 2006 there was a discussion about developing a blueprint media law for countries without applicable media jurisdiction: filmmakers and producers from such places know how crucial it is to get this going and they backed the idea wholeheartedly. At first glance media law might be considered a low priority when looking at the situation for filmmakers in sub-Saharan Africa – but only until one discovers that in many cases

it is a precondition, for instance, for embarking on co-productions or for receiving support and funding. Media law is actually crucial for stimulating local productions in Africa.

When trying to outline the essentials of today's challenges for filmmakers from Africa, another encounter comes to my mind: my meeting with a young filmmaker from Zambia at the Durban film festival's co-production market. I very much liked the project she presented there, and she even had a French producer attached to the project. However: she could not apply for many of the existing funds because, in her country, there is currently not even a single production house in operation; thus her film technically did not even qualify as Zambian.

Given these financial and infrastructural challenges, it becomes obvious that filmmakers have little choice but to help themselves, be they men or women. Whereas the new female-dominated set-up in Kenya is quite specific, the debate on the African identity of films made with international support is 'hot' throughout the continent. Increasingly, factors of globalisation and migration make it extremely difficult to adjust criteria and make distinctions regarding what constitutes an 'African' film or to decide on the 'authenticity' of an African film in the context of a co-production. Is a film shot in Africa by an African director based in the diaspora, who sourced money from abroad, more or less African than a production financed and made totally independent from Europe? What about productions based on scripts supervised by Western screenwriting labs? Are films by African directors, which win critical acclaim on the international festival circuit but fail to find a release in Africa, more African than box office hits from Nigeria or Ghana? What about films which are released on a wide scale, but only on DVD or on the Internet? It is an endless debate but it is none the less highly relevant. Who decides what is right or wrong, good or bad, and based on what criteria?

When it comes to reflecting on forms of collaboration between African filmmakers and their funders, whether they be individuals or organisations, it might be more productive to shift the focus of the debate towards the ambitions and intentions of foreign interests in African filmmaking. Indeed, most initiatives seem welcomed in Africa, if only because of the simple lack of other support mechanisms

available. In principle, at the moment, there is a huge difference between films produced in Africa solely or mainly for domestic markets and those made with the ambition of releasing them internationally, especially for the festival circuit. And this is not to forget the many films commissioned by Western funding agencies and NGOs for educational purposes, on topics such as HIV/Aids-awareness, which make up the bread-and-butter work for many African filmmakers. This area of commissioned films for educational purposes released only in African countries is largely ignored in the Western debate on this matter, whereas from an African perspective these films belong to the same game of dependency – just with a different set of rules. I remember a South African filmmaker complaining that she was really tired of making films on HIV/Aids in order to survive. Yet, as she continued, her main concern was her observation that, increasingly, many Western-educated filmmakers in search of work opportunities push into this one area, which used to be exclusively reserved for filmmakers from the regions for which these films are made.

In my view, one area that is overdue for study is that of the different types of films produced in Africa, which would require an in-depth analysis of the differences regarding audience expectations and distribution realities, taking into account the very few 'classical' cinemas that still operate across the African continent. It is also a fact that audiences all over Africa crave films that relate to subjects, issues and realities familiar to them. The Nollywood success story has made this clear, not least by creating ways to reach out to, and cater for, the expectations of contemporary local audiences. This analysis would also need to address issues like stereotypes and pre-conceptions of African cinema in the Western world. For example, the film *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2005)[4] by Mark Dornford-May[5], which won the Golden Bear at the Berlinale in 2006, was argued by some critics not to be a 'proper African' film because it appropriated what was seen as genuine European culture – opera. One journalist explained why he so disliked the film: he could not understand 'the necessity' of adapting George Bizet's *Carmen* given that African filmmakers have such an abundance of 'authentic' music to choose from. Such reactions can be very disturbing, even misleading, particularly in light of art produced in the West and its longstanding citing, copying and appropriating

of African artistic expressions of all kinds. In light of global accesses, these essentialist notions are caught up in a colonial perception of the 'other', which must remain the 'Other.' This notion is not only outdated, but causes manifold further misunderstandings and often harms potential for (future) collaborations.

I have often observed that African artists are afraid to (or are tired of doing so) speak out against such colonial discursive formations, either from frustration or out of fear of losing a chance with potential funders or commissioning editors for current or future projects. Worse still, some African filmmakers believe that they have to accept such realities; for example, working on scripts that cater to outdated assumptions or stereotypes. This easily causes a short-circuit effect: the more progressive jurors or lecturers in the Western film funds time and again reject such projects precisely because they dislike the outdated African reality described in the script, but at the same time these are the projects that are being developed or financed. Such matters, however, are rarely openly discussed by Westerners, especially those engaged with African art or artists because they are equally shy, or too reserved to speak up because of the fear of being labelled 'racist', or concerns of being considered as imposing on a debate which is not 'theirs'. So there is a discourse happening, but it is very complicated and multi-layered, and the conditions make it difficult to stimulate an open and honest debate in a post-colonial context. This more often than not prevents constructive/creative communication between active African and European partners. It also further complicates cultural exchange and collaboration between African filmmakers and Western decision-makers.

Yet so far many of the new and existing initiatives have failed to work towards greater transparency of intentions on both sides. I do not want to be misunderstood: by no means am I implying a conspiracy of 'bad' intentions from those active in this field. On the contrary, I think partners from the West would work more successfully with African filmmakers if they were more aware of their own historic legacies and contemporary privileges, and of how this positions them in the eyes of African artists and collaborators. For example, concerning festival politics, I know that many festivals worldwide would love to have more content from Africa, especially representations of an urban Africa with modern cinematographic aesthetics, which work well with

the rest of their programmes. The problem, however, is that, due to the multiple challenges most filmmakers in Africa face, such as a lack of access to international productions, festivals and cultural discourses, their aesthetics often do not speak to contemporary cinematographic trends elsewhere. Harun Farocki's[6] films are in vogue in Europe, but no one on the African continent wants to see them. On the other hand, there are films which are very popular on the African continent but do not fare at all well in the West. I recall screening Djo Wa Munga's[7] film *Viva Riva!* (2010) in Burundi, 40 kilometres away from the DRC, where he lives. In the DRC the film was a great success, but in Burundi the exclusive audience, filled with people from the local film community, were shocked and left the screening. This is also a reflection on the diversity of the audiences and their expectations and reception of content in different contexts.

In light of these experiences and observations I can only say that it would be of great advantage if those in decision-making positions in Europe and the West would synergise their efforts in closer co-operation with African partners. Even more important might be to understand the need to support the development of existing partner organisations of a non-private nature in African countries. Most of these organisations are deprived of any aid – financially and politically – but are requested to 'be there and function' in order to be the much sought-after partners for the next round of training to take place. When, in September 2010, some 30 of the leading women in the African film industries met in Johannesburg by invitation of the Goethe-Institut, South African filmmaker Jyoti Mistry had a wonderful idea: she suggested creating informal 'producer-hives' between African filmmakers across different countries. Her idea was a response to the fact that most of the participants pointed to their loneliness and isolation in the film world as their most difficult and burdensome struggle, apart from the chronic lack of funding, of course. The producer-hives, as they were discussed, could function as little units of three or four film professionals, who – independent of their locale – support each other by, for example, reading each other's scripts, checking budgets sent via email, sharing contacts with whom proposals could be submitted, and taking time for Skype sessions now and then, among other initiatives.

The idea clicked instantly, and less than six months later the first 'offspring' of these producer-hives were taking off. During FESPACO 2011, Egyptian producer/director Jihan El-Tahri[8] told me how excited she was about working with Sudanese Taghreed Elsanhouri[9] on a documentary in Khartoum. From Taghreed I heard more than once that Khartoum is a truly lonely city when it comes to filmmaking. It was during the conference in Johannesburg that the two had decided to work together as support for one another. The film *Our Beloved Sudan* (2011), written and produced by Taghreed and co-produced by Jihan, was released a year later.

As to how far these few inspiring and encouraging stories from Kenya and Sudan can be seen as indicators for a brighter future for women in the African film industry, it is hard to tell or predict. No doubt it would be an easy game to collect stories and biographies to prove things are getting worse and worse by the day, especially for women. To survive as a woman director or producer is hard anywhere in the world, but in Africa there are quite a few additional burdens placed on the individual's shoulders. By this I mean, for instance, traditions or framings stemming from within the various cultural backgrounds; take the small number of active female filmmakers in Africa: this is evidence that the challenges faced are different from those found in the European context. Another challenge is the global financial crisis, which has given a good excuse to prioritise the issues surrounding filmmaking as part of cultural production even less, when they were second or third on the list anyway in comparison with health issues or education. Therefore, looking at women's issues in male-dominated African filmmaking certainly falls under the category of challenges facing women filmmakers. But the women who met in Johannesburg during the conference have addressed this issue as only one burning topic amongst many others. It was both interesting and encouraging to watch the debate highlighting their opportunities, namely the access to female audiences in Africa, which are easier target groups than male audiences. Besides, who would have foreseen the events in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which are re-shaping the 'established' world order on a big scale? No matter what is yet to happen, no matter what the political consequences are, a single reality is that from now on both Europe and North America are being forced to look much more

closely at events in this region (MENA), which has historically suffered from a lack of good media coverage – or complete media oblivion – but has now got to be recognised.

During the Berlinale in February 2011, Berlin-based distributor Irit Neidhardt from MEC-film curated a programme, 'Traces of Change in Egypt', to run parallel to the festival as an impromptu reaction to the revolution which had just begun. At this event it became very clear that, contrary to the general point of view, we in Europe had simply overlooked the signs of foreboding, namely films from filmmakers of the region which offered clues as to the state of things. 'Before' there was simply no interest: no audience and no screening slot in Europe for these films which, suddenly, everyone was rushing to come and see. To paraphrase Irit Neidhardt, since 2010 an independent film scene has emerged in Egypt. With the help of digital technology, more and more filmmakers are trying to express themselves outside of the highly commercial state-run film industry and against the ever-increasing repression of the regime. In this ad hoc program, made possible with the support of Berlinale's Forum section, we showed some short films as well as trailers of full-length independent Egyptian films which introduced the range of political and aesthetic approaches to filmmaking in this context.

The current political situation seems a crucial moment to review the European and Western media and film collaborations, not only in the MENA region, but also in sub-Saharan Africa. Such a review is overdue, and yet not an easy task. For decades commissioning editors, festival programmers, sales agents and other decision-makers agreed that there were hardly any audiences in Europe for films from Africa. Thus the *circulus vitiosus* gained speed: with less and less funding available for African filmmakers, who were largely dependent on funds from Europe, fewer productions were made, resulting in many older professionals in Africa losing their skills due to a lack of practice, whereas only a few younger people were lucky enough to receive an education abroad and they joined the diaspora life in order to retain their opportunity for a filmmaking career.

Indeed, it is very hard to market African films commercially in Europe, even those of outstanding quality like, for example, *Un Homme qui Crie* by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun,[10] which was released

in 2011 in Germany. This was the first African film with a regular cinematographic release in months, and while the German critics raved in their reviews, this did not lead to full houses in Berlin. And this was far from unexpected, since in Germany films from or on Africa have long been associated with topics of hunger, deprivation and misery in all its facets, which goes against audience expectations of 'good entertainment'. More or less automatically, films from or on Africa seem to be deemed of interest only to those very few cinemagoers with a pre-existing political or cultural interest in Africa, which is certainly not enough in numbers (economically) to fill multiplexes in Hamburg or Cologne for more than a week. This comes as no surprise to people with a close eye on the market: after ignoring films from Africa for so long, it will take some time, clever strategies and 'different' films to build up audiences in Germany or any other Western country, and to 'prove' that African films have much more to offer than – and are able to challenge – outdated preconceptions of African experiences. Of course, festivals can and must play a crucial role by discovering new talents and sparking interest in fresh imagery of hitherto untold stories from countries like Kenya or Chad or South Africa. This is what people love and cherish during the festival days of Berlin, Cannes, Venice or Sundance. But once the festivals end, the very same people who willingly form long queues and wait for hours to see a film from Egypt or Senegal disappear into thin air and very few of them seem to attend such films outside of the festival context. Buyers, sales agents and cinema owners know about this and anticipate a flop even if everyone agrees that the film is a masterpiece.

Still, the most promising approach might be to keep looking for individual projects and initiatives that have the potential to bring change, whether it be with the success of a single film, one functioning network or particular training that has concrete results for participants. Building on those pilot projects would mean having intelligently to create both local and international alliances in order to further protect and nurture new and experienced talents. This might be regarded as the old-fashioned grassroots approach, but the female film practitioners who gathered at the Johannesburg conference at the Goethe-Institut were absolutely keen to explore just this route without losing time on detours.

It is just as important to accept that there is no master plan or blueprint for this process available, not in Africa, not in Europe and not anywhere else. This seemingly simple insight might bring a breeze of fresh air into this huge debate, since it is as frustrating to wait for such a revelation as it is to look for the scapegoats in charge.

In my opinion it is crucial to introduce a new approach to analysing the complexity of the situation: the interdependencies of problems, challenges and potential in media production and dissemination in the many different realities of today's Africa. Europe must accept its active role in this matter, and must deal with its own post- and sometimes neo-colonial realities and confront itself with its contemporary legacies. This very debate is currently at the top of the agenda in the academic world of post-colonial studies, which could also be of practical benefit for the film industries on both sides of the pond, as it could potentially open up spaces for mutual learning and exchange. It should be reiterated that Africa has a huge market for audio-visual products which is far from saturated and explored, and which could be of vital interest in the near future for film industries worldwide, explicitly including African players. It is also refreshing to see that Europe and the West do seem to be coming to understand that the lack of images and media from the African continent is too important an issue to further ignore, since it has not only cultural but also economic and political implications.

In the end, it *does* matter whether or not Europe takes an interest in these developments and reacts with an appropriate sense of its responsibilities. To come to terms with and define concrete actions and consequences would require urgently focused and enhanced communication between artists and politicians, decision-makers and economists stemming from both African and European backgrounds.

NOTES

1 Founded in Nigeria in 2005.

2 The French New Wave (Godard and Truffaut), Italian Neo-Realism, Dogma '95 with Lars von Tier and Thomas Vinterberg or the initial stages of Third Cinema wth Solanas and Getino are only a few examples for the creation of such productive 'scenes'.

3 FESPACO, Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévison de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou) is the largest existing African film festival, and was founded in 1969.

4 A South African remake of Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875), the operatic film is shot in isiXhosa, set in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha, and combines music from the original opera with African musical traditions.

5 Mark Dornford-May is a British-born South African theatre and film director.

6 German filmmaker who made over 90 films, many of them short documentaries with an experimental character.

7 Film director and producer from the Democratic Republic of Congo who won the African Movie. Award for *Viva Riva*! in 2011 and also an MTV Movie Award (2011). See Wa Munga in conversation with Rumbi Katedza in Chapter 5.

8 See the interview with Jihan El-Tahri in Chapter 4.

9 See the interview with Taghreed Elsanhouri in Chapter 3.

10 Well-known director, producer and writer from Chad.

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: A MANIFESTO

INTERVIEW WITH
TSITSI DANGAREMBGA

INTERVIEW BY
**JYOTI MISTRY AND
ANTJE SCHUHMANN**

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in Zimbabwe and is the author of the critically acclaimed novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988). As a filmmaker and activist she is invested in the 'capacity building' of young female visual artists. She recognised the opportunity present in the gathering of an influential group of women at the Goethe-Institut 'ARTSWork: Meeting of African Women Filmmakers' conference in 2010, and used the context of the conference to draft a preliminary Manifesto of African Women Filmmakers, the initial workings of which are outlined below. Inspired by the undertakings of the manifesto, the accompanying interview offers a contextual description of the immediate experiences, observations and rationale for how filmmaking for women in Zimbabwe has evolved. Even more significantly, Dangarembga addresses the complexity of the gendered experience for filmmakers on the continent.

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Having met at the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, at the Conference of African Women Filmmakers held from 2 to 5 September 2010;

Having deliberated on the continued misrepresentation and under-representation of women in general, and in particular of African women in all their diversity worldwide in the moving images media;

Recognising our exclusion as a group from a fair share of the resources of all natures that constitute the means of representation in the medium of moving images in all its forms;

Recognising that the media represent a social voice and position of authority so that which appears in the media is socially empowered and that which does not appear in the media is socially disadvantaged, with the result that mainstream moving images media works to continue the subjugation of women, and particularly of African women;

Acknowledging the platform availed to us by the Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg, this meeting of African Women Film Practitioners requests all national cultural ministries and all national public and private broadcasters on the continent, and the Commission of Culture in the African Union to take appropriate steps, in conjunction with representative structures of African Women Film practitioners (such as UPAFI - Pan African Women in Film - and

its affiliated membership bodies), as well as regional
bodies (such as Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe) to hold
consultations aimed at putting into place mechanisms to
implement, with critical and urgent considerations, this
manifesto.

This manifesto, drafted on this day of 3 September 2010,
states the following:

1. That African women film practitioners be availed of
   a 50% share of all public and private development,
   production, distribution and exhibition resources,
   including human resources, invested in moving image
   media in all their forms on the African continent.

2. That all broadcasting content, whether private or
   public, conform to a 50% woman-determined content
   protocol through the setting up of effective gender
   desks at all levels in all relevant public and private
   institutions.

3. That conformity to a 50% woman-determined broadcasting
   content is ensured through further affirmative action
   strategies.

4. That all official decision-making bodies concerned
   with broadcasting, whether public or private and
   in whichever capacity, initiate strategies with the
   ultimate aim in the foreseeable future of membership
   consisting of 50% women in these decision-making bodies.

ANTJE SCHUHMANN: *How would you describe the current socio-political context in Zimbabwe in which you produce films and the youth development projects you are involved with?*

TSITSI DANGAREMBGA: Almost all narrative in Zimbabwe is highly politicised. The tight, if not always obvious, grip of the state on all arts practice, including film practice, results in the fact that only those who have access to state favour are able to produce on any meaningful scale. At the same time, until recently, forces allied against the Zimbabwean state also supported their own practitioners, regardless of merit. The result of this is a polarised and often meaningless film practice that has little respect for professional production standards. Support is given due to political allegiance and [not] on merit [or] track record. Those who [might] wish to practise filmmaking in a more insightful manner fall into the gap between the two poles, much to the detriment of their practice.

This scenario unfolds in a situation where filmmaking in Zimbabwe is emerging from its 'development message era'. During this era, which peaked in the 1990s, filmmaking was driven by social issues productions which were funded by local NGOs, not from a culture budget, but from a social messaging quota. This era created the genre of the development film. This development message era mimics in a way the use of film as a medium of political indoctrination that took place during the Smith regime from 1964 to 1979. Filmmaking practices that were open to black Zimbabweans were therefore hardly ever free from direct messaging agendas. This is the kind of practice that young filmmakers have been exposed to locally. On the other hand, they are [also] exposed to any number of Hollywood B-movies and Nollywood [video films]. Professional film education and informed criticism has not flourished. This situation scarcely makes for a youth that is conscious of the great power that narrative has for positive social development. This is apparent [in] both the level of the narratives that the youth often seek to make, and [the] formal qualities of the films. Their films often result in a mimicking of Hollywood or Nollywood content and style, rather than exploring authentic Zimbabwean stories. This is the level at which I endeavour to engage. Once the need for authentic Zimbabwean stories has been understood, and some training in developing these has been given, I move on to formal technical training.

Peretera Maneta (*Spell My Name*) (2006) by director Tawanda Gunda

Mupengo, is an example of a film that was made in this way. It is the beginnings of weaning a generation off a didactic approach to film narrative, whether concerning political or social messaging, and leading them into the realm of their own imagination. To be free to express that which is within oneself without consciously aligning it to a given set of values and parameters is a highly political act in a culture that is built on conformity and which is very volatile politically. Risks of falling out of favour with any of the interests in the conflict are high. In fact, these risks are almost unavoidable as none of the 'interests' speak to the real concerns of your average Zimbabwean, or even to the real concerns of a spectrum of real Zimbabweans, whether youth or other age groups. This work is done through the NGOs that I work with: Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe (WFOZ), Nyerai Films and, most recently, the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa. Financing is through donor funds. However, as donor funds are generally not allocated to culture and even less so to the expensive practice of film, the opportunities for enabling this development work are limited. The last productions were made in the mid-2000s and we have many good scripts that have not been produced.

JYOTI MISTRY: Production and distribution on the African continent has largely taken place on an ad hoc basis, often informed by entrepreneurial strategies and largely with a business or entrepreneurial sensibility. These objectives are seldom invested in gender symmetry, with no balance in production decisions or distribution networks. What strategies would you suggest to enable the vision of the manifesto for 50% women-determined content and distribution?

TSITSI: In a situation like ours in Zimbabwe, strategies have to start from the basics, from the very beginning. Therefore, we need to ensure affirmative action in training and we have to ensure quality training. I think there is no alternative for affirmative action to support women's media initiatives and women's media houses, especially film production houses. For example, Sweden has a goal of 40% funding for women's productions. Similar affirmative action would have to be taken for women's distribution outlets, including mass media distribution. This would have to be enshrined in law because I do not see the men who control the media currently – [or] their female supporters – giving up easily. This, in turn, would require

massive and well-funded advocacy from women's organisations and other gender-sensitive forums. The women's manifesto is a beginning, but it is really the *very* beginning. I have been in the field long enough to know that I have further to go in this respect than I have covered. But I am prepared for the journey.

ANTJE: How would you see this work on a continental level as opposed to on a regional level?

TSITSI: My belief, as in other sectors, is that the continent has to organise regionally and that once regional sectors are functioning, the continental initiative can be co-ordinated. One region might serve as a pilot and as other regions come on board best practices are shared. Then there would be the final co-ordination of the successful regional initiatives at a continental level. This is the model I would prefer to ensure even distribution of activities, achievements and benefits, rather than one large 'monster' organisation controlling everything.

JYOTI: The Zimbabwean feminist theorist Patricia McFadden has described the post-colonial situation in Africa as one dominated by 'femocrats' – women in bureaucratic and/or government positions who re-inscribe patriarchal values and do not enable women's empowerment. She is particularly critical of women politicians and women in leadership positions who seem to be increasingly less empathetic to women in arts, culture and business, and to women who work for social development. How do you view the role of 'femocrats' in enabling or disabling the vision of the manifesto?

TSITSI: I think the lack of sympathy for the arts is not entirely gendered. I think there might be less sympathy from successful professional women in other sectors because of the old perception of women artists as women of lax or loose morals and as highly sexually aggressive. I do believe one has to be unashamedly passionate to be a successful artist, and that society condones this more in men than in women. So female artists have an additional border or obstacle to cross and this obviously becomes more daunting with age. On the other hand, one has to know how to direct the passion, and I think this is something that has to be learnt. In the absence of training institutions, many artists do expend themselves and this may

contribute to the negative image Zimbabweans generally have of artists and would explain why women would be particularly unsupportive of other women artists.

Having said that, the first instance of private support I ever received for my enterprise was from a woman director of Stanbic Bank, Ms Pindi Nyandoro. But I do believe she was an exception. Some women in leadership positions in current Zimbabwe are aware of the limited room at the top and therefore would not want to open the floodgates. It is only logical that they have territory to protect, and [that they must do so while not challenging the status quo too much]. They are rarely, in my opinion, in a position to change the conditions as they also are not [the] top decision-makers in their domain. So this is a manifestation of the universal divide-and-rule strategy.

JYOTI: *In your experience, has being a woman been an advantage or a disadvantage, or both, in filmmaking?*

TSITSI: When I was younger, being a woman was advantageous in the profession. There was certainly a move to promote [young] underprivileged African women in the medium.

JYOTI: *In what ways are you perceived as underprivileged? What has changed in your life that has shifted this perception of privilege as you described it earlier?*

TSITSI: When I was roaming about as a graduate without a roof over my head, having had the manuscript to *Nervous Conditions* turned down by the local publishing industry, you only had to look at me to see I was underprivileged. That was when organisations receiving sizeable amounts of donor funding would employ me on devastatingly exploitative terms. I received roughly US$2 000 for co-writing and directing *Everyone's Child*, and that was not the only case of gross exploitation which is rife in the sector. It is one thing I am working on [changing], so that people at least have the option of an honest endeavour, even if the sector does attract a lot of chancers. However, the success of my creative writing career, and having successfully completed my film studies in Germany, created the impression was that I was no longer underprivileged. One problem many of the older generation of African women artists face is that it is very difficult for us to

acquire reliable agents who will look after our business affairs. Thus we tend to be cheated regularly by publishers and others in the arts industry, and have no recourse because legal fees are prohibitively high. I am still looking for an agent to engage with my affairs. However, the general public, not knowing details of how these processes work, draws its own conclusions. Hard work and thriftiness inherited from my family background mean I do have a roof over my head and can just about afford to send my children to school. I quickly hit the glass ceiling when people decided I was no longer young or underprivileged. So I find that gender is now working against me in a big way, along with ageism and classism, which in this case is false; irrespective of my abilities and contributions. The good thing is that I don't actually feel any older, just wiser.

ANTJE: *You say: 'I quickly hit the glass ceiling when people decided I was no longer underprivileged'. What do you mean by 'the glass ceiling'? It would be interesting to hear more of your experiences?*

TSITSI: By 'the glass ceiling' I mean the limit of possibility in terms of upward mobility and career development. I found that there were exceedingly few opportunities for me. Applications were not successful; initiatives were hardly supported. Yet the results of my work when I tenaciously held on were celebrated on and off the continent. This refers to works that I was commissioned to do, such as *Everyone's Child* (1996) and the input I had on other productions by organisations like Media for Development (MFD), such as *More Time* (Isaac Mabhikwa, 1994) and *Neria (*Godwin Mawuru, 1993) and *Flame* (Ingrid Sinclair, 1996)*.* The development and training work I do with Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe (WFOZ), such as in *Peretera Maneta* (*Spell My Name*) as well as my personal creative work *Kare Kare Zvako*: *Mother's Day* – and even when I do get funding for these projects, the amounts I receive are fractions of what other organisations [with] more demographically acceptable individuals receive. The paradox is that because my product is so good, people do not believe I am being prejudiced in the way I am. So I refer to the conditions of the environment which discriminates according to demographics.

I also refer to the way in which I am interpreted in relation to my experience and track record. By my reckoning, an exceptional mid-career artist who does a lot of social responsibility work in the area of arts

development and training, should not have to beg for grants of US$2 500, but that is exactly the situation I am in most of the time. My information is that those production houses that produced films like *Neria* and *Flame* had extremely generous budgets. The other side of the story is that organisations that do not have the experience I bring are awarded large grants to do advocacy work using arts and the media. This happened with the 'Women can do it' campaign in 2008 to encourage women to stand for election at [the] national level and to encourage the electorate to vote for women. The proportion of female representation in parliament in Zimbabwe decreased in that year. There were a lot of reasons for this. However, as a media practitioner who worked professionally in advertising, I believe that the unprofessional campaign produced by a women's political advocacy organisation did not have the necessary creative or media expertise to add value as it should have. Fortunately, there are now African women who understand the need to engage in arts and cultural production at a professional international standard. Some of these women set up the African Women's Development Fund and so I am hoping that there will be some relief on the horizon. The European Union African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Fund also has a sound approach to developing African art and film, but it is one fund for all the African Pacific and Caribbean countries.

ANTJE: *In your opinion then, who produces the 'glass ceiling', or which structures are enabling it and keeping it alive?*

TSITSI: 'The glass ceiling' is produced by the powers that be. In Zimbabwe, therefore, I am dealing with people who fund films and who have control over the media. Funders of film in Zimbabwe are usually international. They may be based [inside] Zimbabwe or outside, and choose who and what to fund according to their own criteria, which are often not based on professional merit and track record. In fact, the development imperative requires that those with no track record be promoted! This is obviously contradictory and I think the solution is to put the responsibility of development in the hands of those with a proven track record in the given environment, rather than relying on the instincts of internationals. These instincts are often extremely well intentioned, but these intentions cannot make up for a lack of knowledge of the environment.

At other times, political agendas distort the picture. In Zimbabwe

the state also has funds which it disburse[s] for art and creative media products. Again, agendas dominate here, especially in the last decade or so of enormous political, economic and social tension. Thus we see arts events such as the commemoration galas and media campaigns [that use] television and radio jingles being promoted and now, increasingly, the use of popular music to spread political messages. This would be fine if all opinions could be expressed, but expression is skewed in the direction of one political group. This is the other side of the coin to the international engagement that we have seen over roughly the last decade: artistic criteria are often compromised for other expediencies. The mass media also contribute to the glass ceiling by deciding [who will be promoted] and who will be blacklisted, regardless of newsworthiness.

I think a final feature contributing to the glass ceiling is ignorance. The arts have traditionally been looked upon as a frivolity for entertainment purposes in Zimbabwe. The notion of the arts as a space for contesting how the world is understood is certainly not appreciated by the general public. So the arts page in local newspapers is very much like 'kidz korner' or some such. There is hardly ever any serious, critical analysis of arts products in terms of engagement with social issues and the efficacy of this in terms of aesthetics. However, we live in a time of change in Zimbabwe and I am still hoping that my activities based, on my convictions, will eventually prevail.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AACDD	African and African-Caribbean Design Diaspora
AAWORD	Association of African Women for Research and Development
ACP	African, Caribbean, Pacific
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
AMAA	Africa Movie Academy Awards
BAS	Broadcasting Services Act
CCRRI	Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity
DIFF	Durban International Film Festival
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FEPACI	Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (Federation of Pan-African Filmmakers)
FESPACO	Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ougadougou (Pan African Film Festival of Ougadougou)
FEW	Forum for the Empowerment of Women
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
FNL	National Liberation Front
INAFEC	Institut Africain d'Education Cinématographique
INC	Insituto Nacional de Cinema
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender and Intersex
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NFVF	National Film and Video Foundation
OAU	Organization of African Unity
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
RECIDAK	Rencontres Cinématographiques de Dakar
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
UPAFI	Pan African Women in Film
WAM	Wits Art Museum
ZIFF	Zanzibar International Film Festival
WFOZ	Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe

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À St-Henri, le 26 août. Directed by Shannon Walsh (2011, Canada).

Barakat!. Directed by Djamila Sahraoui (2006, France/Algeria).

Battleship Potemkin. Directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein (1980 [1925], Russia/London).

Bedwin Hacker. Directed by Nadia El Fani (2003, France/Morocco/Tunisia).

Behind the Rainbow. Directed by Jihan El-Tahri (2009, South Africa).

Born into Struggle. Directed by Rehad Desai (2006, South Africa).

Bushman's Secrets. Directed by Rehad Desai (2006, South Africa).

Children of the White Man. Directed by Sarah Bouyain (2000, France).

Cuba: An African Odyssey. Directed by Jihan El-Tahri (2007, France/UK).

Difficult Love. Directed by Zanele Muholi (2011, South Africa).

Elelwani. Directed by Ntshavheni wa Luruli (2012, South Africa).

Everyone has Reasons to be Angry with their Mother. Directed by Pauline Mulombe (2010, Belgium).

Everyone's Child. Directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga (1996, Zimbabwe).

Flame. Directed by Ingrid Sinclair (1996, Zimbabwe).

Footprints of My Other. Directed by Claude Haffner (2011, South Africa).

Friends. TV series. (1994–2004, USA).

Frutos da Nossa Colheita (Fruits of Our Harvest). Directed by José Cardoso (1984, Mozambique).

Gas Food Lodging. Directed by Allison Anders (1998, USA).

High Art. Directed by Lisa Cholodenko (1992, USA).

House of Saud. Directed by Jihan El-Tahri (2004, USA).

I am Saartjie Baartman. Directed by Nobunye Levin (2009, South Africa).

In a Better World. Directed by Susanne Bier (2010, Denmark).

India Cabaret. Directed by Mira Nair (1985, India).

Jeppe on a Friday. Directed by Shannon Walsh and Arya Lalloo (2013, South Africa).

Kare Kare Zvako: Mother's Day. Directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga (2005, Zimbabwe).

Kuxa Kanema. Directed by Margarida Cardosa (2003, Mozambique).

La Passante. Directed by Safi Faye (1972, France).

La Femme Invisible. Directed by Pascale Obolo (Cameroon/France).

Le Son C'est La Vie. Directed by Fatima Albuquerque (1987, France).

Looting the Nation. Directed Rehad Desai and Anita Khanna (2004, South Africa).

Manjacaze. Directed by Isabel Noronha (1987, Mozambique).

Man with the Movie Camera. Directed by Dziga Vertov (1998 [1929], Russia).

Me Broni Ba. Directed by Akosua Adoma Owusu (2009, Ghana/USA).

Miners Shot Down. Directed by Rehad Desai (2014, South Africa).

More Time. Directed by Isaac Mabhikwa (1994, Zimbabwe).

Neither God nor Master. Directed by Nadia El-Fani (2011, Tunisia/France).

Neria. Directed by Godwin Mawuru (1993, Zimbabwe).

Ngwenya, o Crocodilo. Directed by Isabel Noronha (2007, Mozambique).

O Tempo dos Leopardos (*Time of The Leopard*). Directed by Zdravko Velimirovìc (1985, Mozambique/ Yugoslavia).

O Vento Sopra do Norte (*The Wind Blows from the North*). Directed by José Cardoso (1987, Mozambique).

Our Beloved Sudan. Directed by Taghreed Elsanhouri (2011, Sudan/UK).

Pamberi Ne Zimbabwe. Directed by João Costa (1980, Angola/Mozambique).

Pariah. Directed by Dee Rees (2011, USA).

Peretera Maneta (Spell My Name). Directed by Tawanda Gunda Mupengo (2006, Zimbabwe).

Puk Nini. Directed by Fanta Régina Nacro (2004, Burkino Faso).

Rachida. Directed by Yamina Bachir (2002, Algeria/France).

Salaam Bombay. Directed by Mira Nair (1998, India/UK/France).

Sarah Maldoror ou la nostalgie de l'utopie. Directed by Anne-Lauer Folly (1998, France).

Schindler's List. Directed by Steven Spielbrg (1994, USA).

Seinfeld. TV series. (1989–1998, USA).

Sex and the City. TV series. (1998–2004, USA).

Somewhere. Directed by Sofia Coppola (2010, USA).

Soul Boy. Directed by Hawa Essuman and Tom Tykwer (2010, Kenya/Germany).

State of Mind. Directed by Djo Tunda wa Munga (2010, DRC).

Tam Tam à Paris. Directed by Thérèse Sita-Bella (1963, Cameroon/France).

Tey. Directed by Alain Gomis (2012, France/Senegal).

The Axe and the Tree. Directed by Rumbi Katedza (2010, Zimbabawe).

The Battle of Algiers. Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo (1966, Italy/Algeria).

The Constant Gardener. Directed by Fernando Meirelles (2005, UK/Germany/USA/China).

The Godfather Trilogy. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1972, 1974, 1990, USA).

The Kids Are Alright. Directed by Lisa Cholodenko (2010, USA).

*The Life and Times of Sara Baartman.*Directed by Zola Maseko (1998, South Africa).

The L-Word. TV series (2004–2009, USA/Canada).

The Mating Game. TV series. (2010, South Africa).

The Night of Truth. Directed by Fanta Régina Nacro (2004, France/Burkino Faso).

The Place In Between. Directed by Sarah Bouyain (2010, France/Burkino Faso).

The Return of Sara Baartman. Directed by Zola Maseko (2003, South Africa).

The Sleeping Child. Directed by Yasmine Kassari (2004, Belgium/Morocco).

U-Carmen eKhayelitsha. Directed by Mark Dornford-May (2005, South Africa).

Un Homme Qui Crie. Directed by Mahamet-Saleh Haroun (2011, France/Belgium/Chad).

Viva Riva!. Directed by Djo Tunda wa Munga (2010, South Africa/DRC/France).

Yema. Directed by Djamila Sahraoui (2012, Algeria/France/United Arab Emirates).

You Chuse. Directed by Rehad Desai and Anita Khanna (2008, South Africa).

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