

Katrin Kuba

**Review of
„Tsotsi“**

South Africa in Films

University of Duisburg-Essen,
Dr. Claudia Drawe

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Review Tsotsi

The film *Tsotsi* throws the observer into an emotional roller-coaster! It shocks and makes angry, sad and sympathetic at the same time.

Tsotsi, which means *gangster*, is a nineteen-year-old boy living in one of the townships of Johannesburg, South Africa. He is the leader of a gang and a really bad guy. One day, he steals a car, shoots the owner down and flees. On his escape, he recognizes a baby in the back and decides to take it with him to his home. The film shows his rising care for the baby, that rouses memories of his own childhood he repressed before.

At first sight, *Tsotsi* is the stereotypical criminal and violent teenager, but during the story, he turns out to be a rather round character, i.e. he is not such a simple character as one initially assumes. He becomes interesting.

Inner fight

Throughout the film, one can observe the development of *Tsotsi*'s conscience. In the beginning, the boy is situated in a hopeless situation. He is uneducated, has no job and steals in order to survive. Throughout the story, he seems to go through a kind of inner fight. On the one hand, he sees the richer people of the suburbs, on the other hand, the people, whose situation is even worse than his own. With the latter the film shows some very strong personalities, which, perhaps, seem to be weak externally, but which, on closer inspection, prove to be rather strong and the boy recognizes that they try to make the best out of their situation. More and more he becomes aware of what is right and what is wrong and seems to experience that there are always options, namely that it is possible to make the best of one's life, if one just tries.

Great pictures and stirring music

At this point, Gavin Hood, the director of the film, should be complimented on managing to turn a rather superficial and simple story into a film which is deeply emotional, impressive and thought-provoking. Gavin Hood says that the book written by Fugard is very much an internal, psychological dialogue of the characters, particularly of the character of *Tsotsi* and that it is an inner journey of awakening and of the rediscovery of memory and

humanity.¹ With just a few dialogues, but by means of great images, stirring music and, not least, a fantastic main actor, the director creates a film, which is able to convey this journey.

The film deeply touches you

Especially in the beginning, Tsotsi presents himself as an aggressive and dangerous guy. Surprisingly, the audience starts sympathizing with him very early. Although the viewer wants to hate the boy, s/he more and more feels sorry for him and the question arises why one feels this way. Certainly, the bad circumstances he lives in, the memories of his childhood and his development throughout the story contribute to these feelings. The ending forms the emotional climax of the story and gives room for discussions.

Post-apartheid society

The feature film was shot in South Africa in late 2004 after the producer Peter Fudakowski had asked Gavin Hood to write a screenplay on the basis of the novel *Tsotsi* by Athol Fugard in 2003.² It shows the post-apartheid society of Johannesburg. Aspects like crime and violence are taken up and also problems like HIV/AIDS occur in the subplot of the story. It shows the shift from race to class and thus illustrates the gap between those blacks living in the townships, on the one hand, and the new black middle class living in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, on the other hand. Due to the fact that the actors speak Tswana, the story becomes more realistic and authentic and the viewer really feels exposed to the current post-apartheid townships of Johannesburg. This is also true for the music, which is called Kwaito, a kind of hip hop that comes out of the townships, and which expressively underlines the story.

Invitation to all of us

¹ cf. DVD *Tsotsi*. Extras: Making of.

² cf. Gavin Hood – Director.

<http://www.tsotsi.com/english/index.php?m1=film&m2=director> [11.02.07].

As just mentioned, *Tsotsi* shows extracts of the present-day situation in South Africa with its new arising problems. It reminds the audience of the fact that even after the end of apartheid, the separation of races, there is still much need for action. The film is very thought-provoking and makes you consider your own situation and the aspect that it is still possible in the 21st century to live under such circumstances like *Tsotsi* and the people living in the townships. In this regard, Gavin Hood says that *Tsotsi* is an invitation to say put your feet into this man's shoes; if fate had wanted it, you could be in his position!³

Rating: ** (four of five stars)**

³ cf. DVD. *Tsotsi*: Making of.

Film facts:

director: Gavin Hood

based on the novel *Tsotsi* by Athol Fugard

producer: Peter Fudakowski

co-producer: Paul Raleigh

casting director: Moonyeenn Lee

director of photography: Lance Gewer

production designer: Emelia Weavind

art director: Mark Walker

costume designers: Nadia Kruger, Pierre Vienings

cast: Presley Chweneyagae (Tsotsi), Terry Pheto (Miriam), Kenneth Nkosi (Aap), Mothusi Magano (Boston), Zenzo Ngqobe (Butcher), Zola (Fela), Rapulana Seiphemo (John Dube), Nambitha Mpumlwana (Pumla Dube), Nonhuthu Sibisi/Nthuthuko Sibisi (the baby), Jerry Mofokeng (Morris), Ian Roberts (Captain Smit), Percy Matsemela (Sergeant Zuma), Thembi Nyandeni (Soekie), Owen Sejake (Gumboot Dlamini), Israel Makoe (Tsotsi's father), Sindi Khambule (Tsotsi's mother), Benny Moshe (young Tsotsi), Craig Palm (young Cop), Jeremiah Ndlovu as Old Man at the Tap, Sibusiso Mkize (young Aap), Lindokuhle Tloubatla (Miriam's baby)

length: 94 minutes

start (Germany): 04.05.2006