

## Acceptance through resignation: healing or surviving?

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### A personal premise

More than ten years have elapsed since the end of apartheid in South Africa and the General Elections which took place in 1994. The government in power opportunely represents the multicultural population of the country and, at last, the great majority of South Africans of African origin. South Africa is considered to be one of the most developed and industrialised countries on the African continent: the example to be imitated. This in spite of the numerous problems the country is still having. We may mention the high level of violence in South Africa (due, in the present period, more to socio-economic problems than to the ancient confrontations related to the apartheid policy and its numerous forms of discrimination). Moreover corruption, which already existed at the time, has spread widely, particularly inside the political world (though some noteworthy examples of honest behaviour clearly exist).

Another problem, yet to be solved, is the insufficient progression of the building of new adapted houses for a great part of the economically weaker population and the consequent too slow disappearance of the still existing shack areas, in the once called South African “townships”. There is a proliferation of illegally built corrugated iron shacks, overriding the often delayed State planning and where whole families still live. They are even destroyed by the present administrations, before they are able to provide their residents with new decent housing. This provokes legitimate riots against such demolition policies (an example happened recently in Mamelodi, a former black township of Pretoria with more than one million residents, but also in other parts of South Africa, mostly in Gauteng region) and evokes the sad memories of the tragic conduct of the past apartheid regime, which systematically used to break to pieces illegal constructions during the worst periods of that regime. The present occupants of these shacks are therefore in great anger because of such demolitions and because of the disappointment they resent. Nevertheless nowadays, in the new South Africa, there is a legal possibility to challenge such decisions in court and it is a constitutional right. One problem is that very often the people involved are not aware of their rights and a group of local community journalists are now involved in providing the information to the people concerned. (Mail & Guardian *on line*, 26 June 2007, *Our government has forgotten us*)

Equally insufficient is the land redistribution to the African people. A great part of the lands are still in the hands of their ancient owners, and this creates a constant feeling of frustration among farm-workers, who are sometimes the previous owners themselves. Other worker-categories are now reacting through long-term strikes of public services, basically in order to settle for wage increases, while more strikes loom in major sectors of the economy. Interestingly, many of the disputes involve black and white unions. As a matter of fact the high level of unemployment is a recurring problem, sometimes also due to the insufficient educational level of the generation of people who are now around forty

and who profoundly suffered from the apartheid discrimination policy with respect to study access, above all among African people. This factor, and the low wages of the people who are lucky enough to have a job, are now creating big reactions in the country (Mail & Guardian *on line*, June 2007).

According to the Mail & Guardian (26 June 2007) “thirteen years after the end of apartheid, the poverty gap in South Africa remains one of the largest in the world - second only to Brazil by some measurements.” And the same South African newspaper underlines that “more than 40% of South Africans live on less than R8 a day.” Moreover more than one third of the working-age population is unemployed, but what seems to have more contributed nowadays to bitter divisions within the ANC over the government’s economic strategy is, according to the same article, the evident wealth of a group of privileged people, which is not only white, but includes also a newly enriched black elite.

Generally speaking there is a health problem due to the fact that hospitals are always overcrowded, while there is a shortage of medical staff and of local medical centres. Much more tragically, we must add the often inadequate, sometimes controversial policies chosen by the government from 1994 so as to stop the spreading of the HIV virus among the country’s inhabitants: this virus seems to have infected at least one third of the population by now (though very reliable and precise data are difficult to quote). Deaths because of Aids are very numerous, but the real causes of the deaths are rarely admitted (and even concealed in official declarations) because the relatives of the dead persons still consider the disease as unmentionable and a great social shame. Combination therapies are available, but their distribution is more or less efficient according to the different local administrations, and again because of more or less developed local corruption. The idea of integrating different ways of prevention has been frequently promoted, even relatively early, by the professionals in charge through multiple networks, but such ideas have to be confronted to traditional and cultural barriers and they really have great difficulties penetrating to the majority of the population.

From this premise one realizes that most of the present problems connected with the development of South Africa are also common to other countries which have not been confronted to the terrible cancer of apartheid. Some of them are of course consequences of the apartheid regime, but they could also be found in other undemocratic or badly run regimes. One may therefore ask what has remained which is peculiar to the fifty years of such a cruel and terrifying system? Have memories faded or, on the contrary, are the wounds still bleeding? The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has done an outstanding work of healing inside the country, but not everybody, among the very numerous persons struck by the apartheid system, has accepted to testify before the Commission, perhaps because they wanted a decision of justice which simply could not be granted by the Commission. This was in search of *Peace* and Reconciliation, Truth and Forgiveness being, in some cases, impossible to achieve. The “Rainbow Country” has entered democracy without being confronted to a bloody revolution, as was expected by many at the time, but what about the psychological inner consequences of such a long period of deep injustice, persecution, and humiliation? The body can often heal more

rapidly than the soul. And a violated soul can render a body sick. Or frustrated or, quite often, resigned.

### **One book: one interpretation**

We can attempt to answer the very complicated question of the devastating psychological consequences of the apartheid regime, which persist even today in the minds of most South Africans, by examining a specific example of a South African family from Soweto, the Mashinini family, as reported in the very interesting and well-documented book, “*A Burning Hunger: One Family’s Struggle Against Apartheid*”, by Lynda Schuster<sup>1</sup> (Jonathan Cape, London 2004). I had the opportunity to buy it in 2005 in the bookshop of Soweto’s Hector Pieterse<sup>2</sup> Museum, inaugurated on 16 June 2002.

The reason why the story of the Mashininis, as described in this book, fundamentally interests me is linked to the fact that through it we can follow the history of the last 30 years of South Africa and, at the same time, enter aspects of it that are now either almost forgotten or neglected. One of the main explanations for this oblivion is, in my view, that from the multiple forces in activity (in the country and in exile) in the 70’s and in the 80’s, only a few have entered the balance of forces in power in South Africa at the present time. Moreover the Mashininis’ story shows very clearly that the political ideals and aims of the struggle in the 70’s and 80’s, however diverse they may have been, have been practically eradicated, making way to a liberal political model which is almost the opposite of the one, socialist (or even openly communist), longed for at the time.

Whole political movements, for instance Black Consciousness, which was so important in inspiring the Soweto uprising in 1976, are now almost forgotten. Even more interestingly, only a few people among those who took a very active part in the struggle in those periods (in and out of the country) have been integrated into the present-day structure of power in South Africa. The others are still there, at least physically, but they have been dispossessed of their own identity and pride.

My question is therefore as follows: Is the recent history of South Africa, as described by the people in power and the critical writers admitted into the elite’s intelligentsia, really more objective than the one, surely deeply biased, imposed under the apartheid system? Much has been voluntary and systematically avoided, circumvented, and even deleted. As I briefly mentioned in my premise, some strong interests have prevailed over others. Many commitments have not been fulfilled or have not been considered important enough.

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<sup>1</sup> The author has worked as a foreign correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Christian Science Monitor* in Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle East. For the book we are referring to she has done numerous interviews of the Mashinini family members and researches on vital texts and sources. She has also lived in Mozambique for a while, when her husband was the US ambassador in that country.

<sup>2</sup> The museum was created in memory of the lifeless body of 12-year old Zolile Hector Pieterse, immortalized by the black photographer Samuel Nzima in a picture which was shown all over the world and became a symbol for the brutality of the apartheid regime.

How much have the present people in power compromised on their ancient aims and their original roots?

Many South Africans have given their life for the struggle against apartheid and they are no more here to oppose this tendency. Many others, who have not entered *the* system, sometimes have no choice, as they are politically and even physically too weak and frustrated simply to speak of the past or to recall it. The new generations do not even know their own past; their fathers' histories occurred at the time of their birth or only a little before.

After all, it is so tempting to believe that the beautiful South African beaches are like those of California or those of the numerous exotic isles in the world. And a safari in the Kruger Park, where South Africans or even Africans do not flock as tourists, but are well present as tourist labour, is only important for going and watching the big fives: elephants, lions, rhinos, leopards, and buffalos. This brings foreign currency into the country: money on the level of the balance of trade. If a shack is pulled down with people still living in it, and if their new house is not yet ready, "never mind!" The beautiful "rainbow country" will ever be so beautiful. Nobody will care about them. After all, those shacks were so ugly!

### **Contextualisation of a thirty-year family struggle**

Lynda Schuster's book "*A Burning Hunger*" relates the story of the Mashinini family over a long period of their lives, focusing especially on the period beginning before the 1976 uprising in Soweto till 2003. In the fight for black liberation the Mashininis can be considered a paradigm of the younger generation's demands and actions. In Soweto, where the uprising began, they are historically integrated as *heroes* and a photo of Tsietsi Mashinini, brilliantly speaking at a students' meeting at that time, appears in the Soweto museum together with other documents of the famous 1976 demonstration, which turned into a down-right uprising. Tsietsi, aged 19, was one of the main organisers of the pacific protest of most of Soweto's school students, who were trying to convince the government to abolish the law obliging black students to learn half of their school-subjects (including for instance mathematics) in Afrikaans: a language they did not know and did not want to learn because it was the one of the minority in power, who had legally created and strongly developed the system of apartheid in South Africa.

Tsietsi Mashinini's parents were not in the least politicized. They only wanted their numerous children, almost all boys, to study as much as possible. The mother was a cultivated woman coming from a good rural family where her father was a well-known *imbongi* (praise-poet), attached to a chief in Transkei, and also the owner of a farm, as at the time it was still possible for blacks to own a farm (that one, by the way, would later be confiscated by the apartheid government). She had tried to go on with her studies as a nurse, but for different reasons she was not able to do so. She had instead married a man of simple origins and both of them, but especially the mother, tried to inculcate into the sons the pleasure of reading and learning. The four eldest sons: Rocks, Tsietsi, Dee and Mpho, were very good students, and the first three really outstanding. They were also

lucky to attend a school in Soweto (Morris Isaacson)<sup>3</sup> whose principal was very supportive of the students and also a sympathizer of the PAC ideology.

What the four brothers have in common is that all of them entered the struggle against apartheid, though according to their different choices and points of view. Another important element, which has been their common denominator, is that all of them had been obliged, or had chosen, to go into exile to continue their struggle to free South Africa from the apartheid system.

Lynda Schuster had to wait for quite some years before she was able to convince the Mashinini family to give evidence on the events concerning themselves and that specific period of “the struggle” (as it is commonly called in South Africa). What appears clearly visible through her book is that the 1976 Soweto demonstration was completely thought up and organised by students of the highest grades of the Soweto high schools. Schuster states that neither adults nor already known political organisations were part of its original conception. If this can be mainly accepted, I would nevertheless add (as Schuster by the way also briefly underlines on page 53 and in other parts of her book) that the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement, from<sup>4</sup> 1968/69 until Biko’s death in detention on 12 September 1977 (under circumstances which were clearly connected with torture), was of major importance for the university students’ world and its ideology. Therefore the demonstration was also directly connected with the world of the students in the terminal years of the high schools all over South Africa. The Black Consciousness ideology is sometimes misunderstood and too frequently linked uniquely to the American Black Panthers movement.

The schoolchildren (aged 12 to 19) started the march at Naledi High School, West of Soweto, picking up pupils from other schools along the way, and reached Orlando West’s High School and its Junior Secondary School. Tsietsi had proposed a meeting on 13th June to discuss the government’s imposed use of Afrikaans. He was the respected leader of the South African Students’ Movement at the Morris Isaacson School. The organisers strongly agreed to Tsietsi’s wishes that there would be no violence at all. The march was marked by protest songs<sup>5</sup> and slogans like the now well-known black-power salute *Amandla!* (Power!) and its response *Ngawethu!* (It is ours!). As they drew closer to Orlando West, Tsietsi halted more frequently to address the youths and plead for calm: “Do not throw stones. If the police confront you, show them the peace sign.” (Schuster:67). In Orlando West, the students, who had previously arranged to meet in Orlando Stadium, and numbering more than 10,000 by that time, met the police at the corner of Vilakazi and Moema Streets. The police let loose one of their Alsatian dogs into the crowd; the youngsters, terrified, reacted by throwing stones at the dog; the police fired tear gas canisters, and the students turned their stones on the security men. (Schuster:68)

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<sup>3</sup> When the Fred Clarke Secondary School closed its doors in 1957, the pupils were transferred to the Mohloding Secondary School in Jabavu. This school later took the name of Morris Isaacson.

<sup>4</sup> The South African Students’ Organisation was founded in July 1969, with Steve Biko as their first president and main conceiver.

<sup>5</sup> Like the famous *Senzeni na ? Senzeni na ?* (What have we done? What is our crime?)

Hector Pieterse was only one of the hundreds of students who lost their life on that day. A serious confrontation set Soweto in flames and the riots continued for two more days, resulting in the deaths of numerous people and thousands more wounded. It also spread to other townships and even to Central Johannesburg, when about 300 white students of the Witwatersrand University marched from the Campus to protest against the indiscriminate killing of school children in Soweto (Schuster:75). The township of Soweto was practically sealed off by 1,500 policemen with *hippos*<sup>6</sup> and arms. It was the beginning of a period during which police harassment against supposed terrorists became more and more constant and unbearable. Students were in hiding while their families had to try to survive normally, though being constantly persecuted.

### **Going into exile: in-between struggle and survival**

In a sense the 1976 Soweto uprising was the beginning of the end of the apartheid system (though this would still last for almost two decades). On the other hand, it was the origin of a psychological and physical destabilization of an entire generation, which very soon became estranged from its usual way of living, its familiar milieu, and its own country, where participants in a demonstration could not live any more without facing imprisonment and possible torture, or even murder. Very soon this generation was obliged to go into exile, with the hope of returning into a new and, above all, free South Africa. Separated from their families and detached from their usual activities and roots, they soon lost their points of reference and some of them became psychologically weak and desperate.

The 1976 youth was quite different from the activists of the 50's. Nelson Mandela's generation had been willing to toil, slowly and methodically, towards its political goal of independence. Tsietsi and his fellow students were impatient to do things. At the time of the protest they felt empowered and challenged, and *proud of their being black*, but the apartheid system was still very strong and by no means willing to be overthrown. The world outside South Africa was surely sympathetic, but it was also an unknown world, very often dominated by rules and organisations which were alien to the vision of life of those young people. The struggle to fight (and also merely to cope with the situation) was everywhere: inside and outside South Africa. They went to Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, and Tanzania, among other African countries where they passed or completed their political and sometimes armed instruction. Even Moscow, East-Germany, Cuba, (and Red China, concerning the PAC cadres, who were trained by Red Chinese instructors in Tanzania)) were part of the network when the South African struggle leaders in exile judged that a deeper training in these countries would be profitable to some of their members.

Lynda Schuster demonstrates very well in her book how the four older sons of the Mashinini family went through different experiences and choices to escape their destinies. The example of Tsietsi was surely the more dramatic one. In 1990 the apartheid exiles started returning home, but Tsietsi, one of the student leaders of the 1976

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<sup>6</sup> Name under which armoured police vehicles were known in South Africa.

demonstration, came home in a coffin, having lived in exile for 14 years. He had been a good son and a member of the Methodist Church, like his father. Particularly gifted for his studies at school (like most of the Mashininis' sons) he was brilliant and very fond of literature and poetry. He was a good organiser and an extraordinary communicator. He also became a militant of Black Consciousness: on his grave in the Avalon cemetery in Soweto, the words *Black Power* are distinctly written in broad letters.

After the demonstration and its tragic development Tsietsi became one of the main targets of the government. The only solution for him was to leave the country, as he had been identified as the president of the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) and therefore one of the student leaders at the origin of the 16th June protest. With the help of Drake Koka<sup>7</sup> (a Black Consciousness founding member and general secretary of the Black Allied Workers' Union) and that of Reverend Legotlo (p.92), Tsietsi and two of his friends (Barney Makhatlle and Selby Semela), disguised with church-goers' clothes, left the country and were able (by car, on foot through the border, and by car again) to enter Botswana. One day before their departure, Tsietsi was interviewed in the Planet Cinema (in Fordsburg: an Indian neighbourhood) by a journalist of the London Thames Television, who had arranged with Drake to speak to the student leader. The reporter and his crew were working on a programme about the June 16th uprising, and the film (*There is no crisis*) was broadcast in Britain a few days later (p.89). This meeting with the journalist would be of great help for Tsietsi and his friends once they landed, some fifteen days later, by mistake and without any visa, at London Gatwick airport instead of transiting through Heathrow. The young men were supposed to leave Gaborone to reach Holland, as Drake had made arrangements to have student visas for them, through the offices of a Christian group. Nevertheless while they were waiting in Lusaka, Zambia, to board another plane, Tsietsi and his friends, surely enthralled by this new experience of a journey abroad and because of their young age, decided to switch their tickets for a bigger plane, a jumbo jet, parked on the tarmac in Lusaka, which also went to London. Once they arrived there, the officials did not believe their story and made them realize that they had arrived at the wrong airport for going on to Holland. Without any visa to commute from one airport to the other through the British capital, they seemed condemned to be expelled back to Botswana. It was then that Tsietsi remembered he still had the journalist's business card and he managed to contact him. Considering the special political situation in South Africa after the recent Soweto uprising, when Tsietsi called the journalist in London the reaction was quite important: not only producers from the Thames Television arrived, but also representatives from the ANC and from the Home

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<sup>7</sup> Dr Kalushi Drake Koka died on 20th December 2005. He first started his career in politics in 1960. He was a co-founder of the Black Consciousness Movement with Steve Biko, and was appointed secretary of the organisation. He worked closely with student leaders such as Tsietsi Mashinini and Kgotsotlo Seatholo. He spent 15 years in exile and returned to South Africa in 1990. The South African President Thabo Mbeki and the Minister of Health, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, visited him just before his death. President Mbeki publicly said on that occasion: "Ntate Koka spent all his life in the service of his people. Despite being driven into exile by the erstwhile Apartheid regime, he never gave up hope that one day his country will be free and he'll once again set foot on his native South Africa." (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/2005/koka1220.htm>; and <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2005/05122014451001.htm>)

Office. It was then easy to free the three young men from their delicate situation and to find an authorization to make them enter Great Britain.

This is how the exile of Tsietsi and his friends began. Young men inexperienced of the world abroad, who were bound to spend years and years strolling around different foreign countries, sometimes in control of their own destinies, but very often making choices that they would not completely master and that, sometimes, they would also sadly regret.

At the time of his complicated landing in London, Tsietsi was not very happy to be supported by the ANC. He judged that the ANC in exile had given up the struggle and that it had no presence inside South Africa, nor was the organisation accessible to people inside the country. He was also strongly reacting to the fact that the ANC in exile was at the time implying and declaring to the world that they had supported the 1976 uprising in Soweto. He therefore hardly opposed the organisation in London and abroad, which he moreover accused of being under the influence of the white Communists' power. On his arrival in London he clearly refused to be "recuperated" by the ANC and to be integrated into their exile structures. On the contrary, at that moment the ANC was highly recognized for its anti-apartheid struggle in exile. Oliver Thambo, the ANC president who, unlike Nelson Mandela, had been able to flee from South Africa during the repression in the 1960's, had constantly worked for this wide recognition.

Tsietsi left Britain soon after for a Lectures Speaking Tour in the United States, sponsored by the Socialist Workers' Party. Later he lived in various African countries, like many other exiles, but he spent most of his time in Nigeria, supported by General Obasanjo. He got married to Miss Liberia 1977, Welma Campbell, with whom he had two children: Nomkhitha and Thembi, but the marriage was a failure and they divorced two years later. His ex-wife and children, then living in Sierra Leone, attended his funeral in 1990.

Tsietsi, who would be 50 years old now and a grandfather, was perhaps the more brilliant of the four brothers involved in the struggle, but he also seemed to be the one who became the more alienated to all the places where he had lived and, in the end, even to the people, South African or not, who had surrounded him. The ancient adolescent, the defender of the weaker students who were victimised and the fighter of common criminals in his home place in the early 70's became, once in exile, more and more socially and psychologically lost. According to Schuster he even suffered from a mental breakdown while studying for a UNHCR scholarship in Jos, a Plateau State Polytechnic located several hundred miles from Lagos. He was still a good student and completed his studies, but he seemed unrecognizable to those who knew him (pp. 317-320). His younger brother Dee, who at the age of 15 followed him into exile in 1977, very recently explained: "He [Tsietsi] was not coping at all. His situation had turned for the worse from what he was in earlier days".<sup>8</sup> In 1990 he was found dead in Guinea under unclear circumstances which were never elucidated. The engraving on the white marble base of

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<sup>8</sup> *The homecoming that wasn't* by Lucille Davie, June 12, 2006, [http://www.joburg.org.za/2006/june/jun12\\_june16.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/2006/june/jun12_june16.stm).

his black granite tombstone reads: “At the height of repression he gave impetus to the liberation struggle”.

### **The other brothers**

The older brother of Tsietsi, Mokete (or Rocks as he was called) and his younger brothers Mpho and Dee, also became voluntarily or involuntarily involved in the struggle and exile after the 1976 uprising.

During the 1976 uprising, Rocks was studying engineering at the university through a scholarship received from his father’s employer. According to Schuster’s interviews and documents, he entered — much in contrast with Tsietsi’s ideas — the operation structure of the Armed Branch of the ANC (*Umkhonto we Sizwe*) in Tanzania and Angola. He received intensive training from the armed branch of the ANC in exile, later occupying a position which gave him a lot of responsibility (like infiltrating the South African security forces through potential candidates or creating different forms of sabotage). Around 1984 and 1986 Umkhonto seemed able to realize its dream of creating command structures throughout South Africa. But the heightened tension and the Nationalist government’s reaction exacerbated Rocks’ already fragile state. He was under severe stress psychologically and he fell into alcoholic dependence. Because of an error he did in the organisation, he was badly discredited and never regained anything of his previous high position inside it. Rocks could not endure to become a pariah within the community that had, in essence, been his family in exile. Eventually he decided he could not let them ruin him and that he would fulfil his mother’s hope for her children and study (Schuster:323-330).

From my point of view, the events we have mentioned, and those concerning the subsequent part of his life, make Rocks a very representative symbol of the destabilization which was provoked by exile and by belonging to the anti-apartheid struggle, with all its contradictions. This destabilization has been observed in the life of many militants. In a different historical period and setting, they would have been able to live a normal, and even very productive, life, but their hopes were destroyed. After waiting for months in Lusaka, Rocks had finally received a scholarship from the East German government to study to be a draftsman, but he found it difficult to get integrated in the country; and studying in a completely foreign language was a real obstacle for him. He had hoped to start a new life, but at the age of thirty-four he had little in common with other students. When his younger brother Tshepiso, who was studying in England, came to visit him in Cologne, he told him: “I should never have joined Umkhonto. I should have just gone on with my studies like you and Dee” (Schuster:362-3). Later he moved to Botswana with visions of starting up an electronics firm in Gaborone, the capital. Apart from the difficulty to find the necessary capital, the Botswana authorities had begun to pursue him because he had a police record, as he had been arrested twice in the country while working for Umkhonto. At the time of Tsietsi’s funeral he was denied the right to return to South Africa, since the police refused to provide assurances they would not arrest him. Though Rocks went to Harare to attend a memorial service for Tsietsi together with his brother Dee, who was living there at that time and who was taking the

coffin home, he strongly felt that his life was plagued with misfortune. (Ibidem:379-382) Rocks returned to South Africa in 1991. He had spent all his adult life trying to evade his pursuers and still suffered from the extreme anxiety he had acquired from living in exile under constant fear of attack. Though he was given the important rank of lieutenant colonel in the recently constituted South African National Defence Force, Rocks found the upper echelons still dominated by Afrikaners. Over the years he tried everything he could to create a new life for himself, but he could not adapt to being home in this new South Africa for which he had sacrificed everything. Rocks became more and more depressed and drank steadily. No one – parents, siblings or friends –knew how to rescue him. Some years later, on 12th March of the new millennium 2001, he pulled his pistol into his mouth and committed suicide. (Schuster, Epilogue: 395-398)

The other younger brothers, Mpho and Dee, both entered the ANC structures and also went into exile quite early. Mpho was unluckily arrested while temporarily coming back to South Africa. He was tortured by the Afrikaner Special Branch, without charge, and he was finally liberated after a late trial. He happened to be imprisoned for a longer period about ten years later as part of the Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO). Though he was not tortured, the conditions he had to go through while in jail were very difficult to bear, but this time he fought back: it was a kind of revenge of what he had had to endure in 1976. Also the fact that he was not alone gave him some courage. But once he came back at last, Mpho did not see a role for himself with so many people involved in the uprising and the state of emergency which was then extended to the entire country. When he met a member of a non-governmental organisation, *Operation Hunger*, he decided to on working for them as he found that he had a talent for such an activity. “After the years of shouting slogans and engaging in abstract political pursuits, he was doing something concrete. He was helping to empower his people.” (Schuster:331-349)

Dee, after a number of vicissitudes, managed to receive a scholarship for studying journalism. But when he returned home from Harare in 1992, he felt totally disoriented and like a stranger in his own country. Even his so far happy marriage turned into a failure. Around the beginning of the new century he still felt an enormous sense of disappointment. “To Dee’s mind the skills he and other exiles acquired were not real skills; industry did not value them. (...) Dee’s life, by contrast, had been defined by a culture of politics — a culture that, in its old form, was no longer wanted.” (403)

Nomkhitha, their mother, who had never done politics herself, also got involved in the desperate confrontation of that long period. She had thirteen children, whom she had raised with the ideal of evolving through studies and cultural achievements. But, because some of her oldest sons had suffered the consequences of the 1976 uprising and had then entered political organisations in exile, she was also imprisoned, and she spent 197 days in solitary confinement in a South African jail. In reality she had simply tried to go and visit Dee in Swaziland, as she had done for Tsietsi in Gaborone. Her only desire was to see these children of hers again and to try and comfort them, who were still so young. She also tried to help them with some money. Her other numerous very young children were, meanwhile, at home with her husband, helped by other members of the family or by friends. They were subjected to four or five harassment visits by the police even

during a single night, at an age when they could not understand but only be frightened. They constantly asked if the police was to come again and again. (Schuster:146-157)

A lot of known and unknown people cruelly suffered from the consequences of the confrontations of the 70's and 80's during an important part of their lives. They were constantly persecuted for more than a decade and they had to move, sometimes going abroad, trying to survive in places where they did not belong. Sam Zima, the black photographer who took the famous six sequence shots of twelve-year-old Hector Pieterse, which would be seen all around the world, was a photographer for *The World*, a newspaper in Johannesburg which was banned and closed down only a few months later. He decided to go to Limpopo, to avoid being constantly harassed by the police Security Branch in Johannesburg. Even there, anyway, the Security branch from Nelspruit telephoned him to let him know that they were on him. Zima had to change activity and he set up a bottle-store in the North. Only later did he open a school of photography in Bushbuckridge after being donated a black and white enlarger by *The Sowetan* newspaper. When the Independent Group bought Argus newspapers in 1999, he was given the copyright to his photographs. Hector's elder sister, Antoinette Sithole, was supposed to give tours at the museum when it opened in 2002.<sup>9</sup>

Whenever I spoke with my friends in South Africa in 1993, when I went there for the first time, they referred to "a lost generation" (the one I mentioned in my premise and which has always had great difficulties in integrating the new economic and cultural standards of the country). Sometimes they have merely repressed all they have lived outside or inside South Africa. Sometimes they still mention "the struggle", but they do not really speak openly about it. For them, though a lot of work has been done through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is too early or too painful to speak about those events. By contrast, for their children, who are now around twenty, it is something which already belongs to ancient history. As Lynda Schuster so well underlines at the end of her book, in the words of Mpho, perhaps "normality" has undertaken South Africa almost too quickly (p.407). I have put 'normality' in quotes, because it does not make much sense to talk about such a subjective idea.

### **A tentative conclusion**

As Schuster says, "Through the years, the Mashinini family has struggled to have Tsietse accorded what they believe to be his rightful place in history. The Pan Africanist Congress acknowledged his contribution in a memorial it erected near the entrance to the cemetery to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the June 16 uprising. (...) But the government has remained aloof, other than to send Jackie Selebi, the national police commissioner and this former history teacher in the Tanzanian camp, to lay a wreath on Tsietse's grave at a Youth Day ceremony in 2000. For Joseph and Nomkhitha, this seeming omission was particularly painful. They have watched as the authorities, in constructing a new narrative for the country, heaped honours and official recognition on all manner of freedom fighters — all except their son. (...) Apartheid destroyed people in

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<sup>9</sup> Source: City of Johannesburg SouthAfrica.info The Official Gateway *The day Hector Pieterse died*, story and photos by Lucille Davie, 15 June 2006. <http://www.southafrica.info/pls/procs>.

many ways; what befell Tsietsi after he was forced to flee the country, they believed, did not negate the leader he was and the contribution he made.” (394/5)

Joseph, the father, who had worked for the LTA construction company, died four years ago.

Nomkhitha, the mother, is 72 now. She went for several years without working. She now works for *Meals on Wheels* with the Methodist Church<sup>10</sup>. This is a good example of the fact that the State has not in the least thought of giving her or her family a stable position concerning work and other necessities. This is by no means an exception in present-day South Africa because, though the country has strongly developed and has gained political stability, which allows foreign investments to establish without too much risk, what has been neglected is surely the social and communitarian networks.

Laws, ideas and projects surely exist, but the feeling of the man in the street is that the State is not really good and efficient in going deeply into the country's and people's requirements. Moreover, communities seem to work inside their limited space, but they do not have good exchanges with other communities. This gap between the State — which is more distant and theoretical, oriented towards the international — and the population, which has more concrete needs, plus this lack of exchange between the different communities, could work like a time bomb. People feel frustrated in many ways, and recently there has been a new increase of alcoholism.

Mandela has surely been the founder of democracy in South African politics, while Thabo Mbeki has been particularly gifted as a diplomat, especially with regard to foreign affairs. Now people are waiting for a new president in 2009, but discussions will still be very open and no sure names are proposed yet. An important meeting will take place at the end of 2007 and even a woman may be elected president as there are already three or four possible candidates. Anyway the important thing is that the president will be a “president of the country” with a good understanding of the problems and needs of the entire population of South Africa.

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<sup>10</sup> *The homecoming that wasn't* by Lucille Davie, June 12, 2006, [http://www.joburg.org.za/2006/june/jun12\\_june16.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/2006/june/jun12_june16.stm).

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