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Matsotsi: The Migrant Detective and the Postcolonial State

Stephanie Bosch Santana 

University of California, Los Angeles, USA
Email: sbsantana@humnet.ucla.edu

Abstract

Recent work on crime fiction has highlighted the genre's increasingly transnational focus and the growing number of migrant detectives. *Matsotsi*, a little-known Nyanja text published in Zambia in the early 1960s, provides a much earlier example of this figure in Sergeant Balala, an Angolan detective fighting to contain the tsotsi menace in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Matsotsi*, however, does more than point to cross-border detection as a means of elucidating transnational relationships. Shonga and Zulu's text manipulates the genres of the detective novel and the bildungsroman to tell a story about the relationships among the individual, the state, and the wider region at a key moment in southern African history, when Zambia and Malawi were on the cusp of independence. Although African language writing has often been considered too localized to be used for nationalist purposes, here it is mobilized for the purpose of state-making in a transnational context.

Keywords: Nyanja; Zambia; crime fiction; bildungsroman; postcolonial state; migrant; region; South Africa; southern Africa

Three Arrivals

Gavin Hood's 2005 *Tsotsi*, which won the Academy Award for best foreign language film, opens with the eponymous Tsotsi, or "thug," and his crew leaving Alexandra township and traveling by train to Johannesburg's notoriously dangerous Park Station in search of a mark.¹ Zola's catchy "Mdlwembe" pounds as the camera cuts from an aerial shot of the township to the train tracks and then the train, thundering toward Johannesburg's iconic skyline. Once in the station, Tsotsi's eyes flicker over several potential targets—a woman and man rushing to embrace each other; a backpacker—before settling on an older man in a too-

¹ *Tsotsi*, directed by Gavin Hood (Miramax Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.

large suit and hat who is buying a red tie and blue scarf from a vendor. The man smiles with pleasure as he makes his purchases, committing the fatal error of flashing a packet of cash. Aboard the train, Tsotsi and his gang sidle up to the man and tell him not to make a sound as they ease the money from his pocket. The man obeys, but this does not stop Tsotsi's hatchet man, Butcher, from shoving a thin dagger into his chest. The man's eyes widen as blood blooms on his white shirt; he slumps into the arms of his attackers, who hold him upright so as not to draw attention from the other commuters as he dies in silence.

Tsotsi is a contemporary take on Athol Fugard's novel of the same title, which was written in the 1960s but remained unpublished until 1980. Set in Sophiatown, Johannesburg's storied mixed-race township, on the eve of its destruction by the apartheid government in the mid- to late 1950s, Fugard's novel also begins with Tsotsi and his friends heading out to "take one on the trains."² Their victim, however, is a different type of man than in Hood's reimagining. To start, he has a name—Gumboot Dhlamini—and a detailed backstory of his arrival in the City of Gold. Gumboot migrated to Johannesburg to work in the mines, leaving his pregnant wife at home. He has been in the city for nearly a year and has saved enough money to finally return home when the tsotsis rob and kill him on a train filled with other migrant workers. We learn that Gumboot had "travelled safe for a year because he heeded the advice of others," but on this, his last day, he made several "mistakes," including wearing a bright red tie and exposing his pay packet while buying his train ticket.³ The first mistake he makes, however, is the most heartrending: he smiles. He smiles because he is among "his people," the many other migrants making a living in Johannesburg: "the smell of these other men, their impatience to be home, some sad, most happy; it was because of all this that he smiled and Tsotsi noticed him because that smile was as white as light."⁴

These hopeful migrant figures on the train, who coalesce in the character of Gumboot, are absent from *Tsotsi* the film. Their omission signals the culmination of a shift that Stephen Gray, who edited Fugard's unpublished *Tsotsi* manuscript for publication, first observed in Fugard's own text. According to Gray, the Jim Comes to Joburg genre that features the migrant-hero who journeys to the city to make his fortune, is effectively "laid to rest" in Fugard's novel, making way for a different protagonist who is a product of the urban environment.⁵ The thoroughly urban tsotsi defied the apartheid state's insistence that Black South Africans return to the rural areas after working in white-run industries rather than settle permanently in the city, as captured by the Jim Comes to Joburg genre. With Gumboot's death, "Tsotsi himself is the new hero; born in a slumyard, an ashpit scavenger."⁶ But while the gangster emerges as an archetype

² Athol Fugard, *Tsotsi* (New York: Grove Press, 2008): 7.

³ Fugard, *Tsotsi*, 9.

⁴ Fugard, *Tsotsi*, 10.

⁵ Stephen Gray, "Third World Meets First World: The Theme of 'Jim Comes to Joburg' in South African English Fiction," *Kunapipi* 7.1 (1985): 77.

⁶ Gray, "Third World Meets First World," 77.

in South African fiction at this moment, a different kind of hero appears in fiction from elsewhere in the region: the migrant detective.

At the same time that Fugard began writing *Tsotsi* in the early 1960s, the Zambia Publications Bureau published another text with a strikingly similar title. *Matsotsi*, by G. H. Shonga and J. N. Zulu, tells the story of Sergeant Balala, an Angolan detective in Johannesburg who works to expose the tsotsis' crimes.⁷ In Nyanja, the southern African language in which the novel is written, *matsotsi* is simply the plural form of *tsotsi*, meaning "gangsters." And yet, the slight variation in the titles of these works marks a key difference between them. Although *Tsotsi* focuses on a single man and his evolution, the gangsters in *Matsotsi* are an indistinct, insidious mass whose reach extends beyond South Africa into the neighboring region, threatening other nations like the authors' own soon-to-be independent Zambia.

Matsotsi's opening bears an uncanny resemblance to that of *Tsotsi* the film, but it is told from the diametrically opposite point of view. As Balala and Msingo, his assistant, arrive in Johannesburg by train, we also see it from above, with the city in the background: "Nyumba zazitali zosanjikizana zinalikuoneka kuti deru, deru, deru. Kwa amene anali pa nsanjo ndi amene anali m'ndege ankaiona sitimayo ngati bongololo alikupita motero."⁸ Arriving at Park Station, the detectives encounter a large crowd of migrants and travelers as well as the tsotsis who are there to rob them. The dangers of the train station are well known, and Zambians and Malawians refer to it as "Keep Your Eyes Open": "Inde ambiri a ku Zambia ndi a ku Malawi amacha malowa pa 'Tsegula-Maso' cifukwa sipafunika munthu watulo."⁹ Across the decades between their moments of publication, the characters from *Tsotsi* and *Matsotsi* inhabit the same milieu, but as opposing figures. The detectives are also migrants, but unlike the hapless Gumboot, who ends up with a bicycle spoke protruding from his chest, Sergeant Balala arrives in Johannesburg in a position of power as part of the state apparatus. He has both the individual savvy as well as the institutional support necessary to fight the tsotsi menace that threatens to spill over into the rest of southern Africa.

Each of these three works—the two versions of *Tsotsi* and *Matsotsi*—expresses a different vision of the (post)colonial state, its relationship to the individual, and its role in maintaining law and order to facilitate "development"—both personal and national. In an essay titled "Tsotsis: on Law, the Outlaw, and the Postcolonial State," Rita Barnard argues that in 1950s South Africa, gangster stories like *Tsotsi* "would not readily translate into national allegory."¹⁰ Barnard reads Fugard's novel as a proto-bildungsroman, one that represents the impossibility of *Tsotsi*

⁷ G. H. Shonga and J. N. Zulu, *Matsotsi* (Lusaka: NECZAM, 1973).

⁸ "Tall multistory houses appeared to pass by quickly, quickly, quickly. For those who were on the platform as well as those who were in the air, the train was like a centipede going along"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 5. All translations are my own. I would like to thank Shadreck Chikoti for looking them over prior to publication.

⁹ "Indeed many from Zambia and Malawi called this place 'Keep Your Eyes Open' because you don't want to be caught off guard"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 6.

¹⁰ Rita Barnard, "Tsotsis: On Law, the Outlaw, and the Postcolonial State," *Contemporary Literature* 49.4 (2008): 567.

“to become a fully developed ‘person’” under apartheid.¹¹ By contrast, in Barnard’s reading, Hood’s filmic interpretation is a more traditional, and uncritical, bildungsroman: one that seeks to “dramatize the legitimacy of the post-apartheid state” despite the rainbow nation’s persistent inequalities.¹² The police, as representatives of the state’s power, are a constant, albeit peripheral, presence in both versions of *Tsotsi*, but are represented quite differently in each. In Fugard’s text, “the police are the nefarious, prowling agents of an oppressive state,” whereas in the twenty-first-century remake, the police are multiracial, multilingual, and much more sympathetic, serving as emblems of the neoliberal state’s promise of “freedom from fear,” if not from want of basic necessities.¹³

Matsotsi contains elements of both of *Tsotsi*’s iterations, not only in its opening scenes, but in its representations of the role and function of the state/police and its manipulation of the genres of the South African gangster story and the bildungsroman. Like the novel, with which it shares its time of writing, *Matsotsi* cannot be read as a straightforward national allegory, in this case due to its emphasis on transnationalism through the depiction of formal and informal regional networks. Nevertheless, like the film, it ultimately endorses the power of the (post)colonial state to maintain law and order at a time of social and political turbulence. Like other texts published by colonial publications bureaus throughout the region, *Matsotsi* was subject to censorship and would not have been published if it were deemed threatening to the colonial state.¹⁴ As Ranka Primorac observes, however, fellow Zambian writer Stephen Mpashi’s novels, which were also published by the bureau, “were intended to bolster the colonial state, yet may be described as proto-nationalist in some respects.”¹⁵ *Matsotsi* is particularly interesting to consider in this regard because its emphasis on the right of the state to protect its borders is nonthreatening in a colonial context and yet may also be applied to the postcolonial state. Like Mpashi’s novels, many of which were published before independence and reprinted afterward, *Matsotsi* “defies conventional divisions between ... colonial and postcolonial literatures.”¹⁶ After its initial publication in 1963, *Matsotsi* was reprinted in 1967 and again in 1973 and 1978 under the auspices of the Educational Company of Zambia (NECZAM), suggesting its perceived relevance to postcolonial Zambia.

During this period in which *Matsotsi* was published and republished, the new Zambian nation emerged in a region plagued by ongoing Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique and more and more deeply entrenched white supremacist regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia. In insisting on the importance of detection across borders to contain the tsotsis, *Matsotsi* dramatizes the struggle of new nations like Zambia to define and assert the power of the

¹¹ Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 547.

¹² Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 559.

¹³ Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 559, 560.

¹⁴ Cheela Himutwe K. Chilala, “Anatomy of the Challenges Facing Zambian Writers and Publishers of Literary Works,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40.3 (2014): 595.

¹⁵ Ranka Primorac, “At Home in the World? Re-Framing Zambia’s Literature in English,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40. 3 (2014): 580.

¹⁶ Primorac, “At Home in the World?,” 580.

postcolonial state at a moment when state power in the region was both increasingly threatened by transnational forces and still intimately tied to its colonial and white supremacist iterations. As a Black migrant detective who works with the police across borders but also relies on his own informal, transnational networks to solve crime, Balala embodies some of the contradictions of Zambia's position and political ethos in this moment. Zambian Humanism, the new state's official ideology, emphasized the collective but also the individual, "concretely existing man."¹⁷ Similarly, Zambia saw its own development as hinging on matters both internal and external, given its reality as a "frontline state" deeply impacted by the continuing struggles for freedom across its borders, a reality gestured to by Balala's Angolan (as opposed to Zambian) background.¹⁸

A nontraditional text told in three interrelated but distinct parts, *Matsotsi* is an early and overlooked example of several figures/genres that have gained attention only recently: the "migrant detective" and the "migrant bildungsroman."¹⁹ This is due, in part, to its being written in Nyanja. Like many African language texts, *Matsotsi's* contributions to postcolonial literature and to visions of the postcolony remain absent from a largely Anglo-centric field. While English-language writing is associated with the national allegory, it is often assumed that African languages, which are rarely elevated to the status of national language, serve to "undermine" the nation-state through ethnic division.²⁰ Nevertheless, as Rita Nnodim observes in relation to Yoruba print culture, Yoruba writers address not only "locally situated audiences" but "inscribe their texts with imaginings of larger social formations, such as publics, ethnic communities or nations."²¹ Citing Nnodim's work, Karin Barber and Graham Furniss call for comparative readings of African language novels to expand our understanding "of the relation between colonial/postcolonial 'nation' and 'narration' (Bhabha)."²² This article contributes to these efforts by examining what African language writing can tell us about how the African state was envisioned at the time of independence. More than serve as a means of "detecting the nation,"²³ however, Balala's investigation in *Matsotsi* takes the form of physical, cultural, generic, and linguistic border crossing; one that puts various regional languages

¹⁷ Kenneth David Kaunda, *Humanism in Zambia and A Guide to Its Implementation*, part 2 (Lusaka: The Division of National Guidance, 1974): 1.

¹⁸ Primorac, "At Home in the World?," 575–91.

¹⁹ See Rebecca Fasselt, "Making and Unmaking 'African Foreignness': African Settings, African Migrants and the Migrant Detective in Contemporary South African Crime Fiction," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42.6 (2016): 1109–24, and Mary Jane Androne, "Adichie's *Americanah*: A Migrant Bildungsroman," *A Companion to Chimamanda Adichie*, ed. Ernest N. Emenyonu (Woodbridge, England: James Currey, 2017): 229–44.

²⁰ Karin Barber and Graham Furniss, "African-Language Writing," *Research in African Literatures* 37.3 (2006): 4, 11.

²¹ Rita Nnodim, "Configuring Audiences in Yorùbá Novels, Print and Media Poetry," *Research in African Literatures* 37.3 (2006): 157.

²² Barber and Furniss, "African-Language Writing," 11.

²³ Caroline Reitz, *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004).

in relation to one another and situates the nation in a wide regional geography. Balala's individual fate is tied to the fates of the nation and the region, which, in *Matsotsi*, are under constant threat from border-crossing tsotsis, whose "crimes of mobility" represent a form of rampant individualism that imperils new nations like Zambia.²⁴ In this way, *Matsotsi* serves as an example of what Primorac identifies as Zambia's regionally inflected nationalism.²⁵ It is also a precursor to South African crime fiction focused on migration²⁶ as well as other contemporary African novels that are concerned with "regionality."²⁷ Ultimately, *Matsotsi* stretches the parameters of the crime story and the bildungsroman to account for both the individual and the larger collective, the postcolonial state and its role in a changing region.

The Migrant Detective's Mobility

In one of the only published critiques of *Matsotsi*, John Reed suggests that it "displays the decline and trivialization of story-telling under the influence of the magazine story."²⁸ Reed is also critical of *Matsotsi*'s portrayal of urban Johannesburg as well as of its use of the detective genre, writing, "The South Africa of these stories has no relation to reality, for Sergeant Balala seems to operate in a world where there are no whites. As the 'detection' depends on lucky accidents the stories have no element of intellectual puzzle."²⁹ Indeed, *Matsotsi* is indebted in both its form and content to magazine fiction, which grew in popularity in the 1950s with the publication of the first "modern" magazines in the region. The progenitor of these publications was South Africa's *Drum* magazine, an emblem of Black urban modernity upon which myriad other magazines modeled themselves, including *African Parade* in the former Central African Federation (composed of today's Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe). These monthly lifestyle magazines contained news, essays, and investigative journalism as well as short and serialized fiction, entertainment news, horoscopes, and crossword puzzles. Crime stories, both fictional and nonfictional, were a perennial favorite, and the popular crime serials in these magazines likely inspired *Matsotsi*'s basic form.

Matsotsi's portrayal of South Africa also owes much to the influence of magazines like the Johannesburg-based *Drum*. Whereas Reed sees a lack of realism in *Matsotsi*'s depictions of South Africa, I see a conscious effort to bring to life the Black urban landscape that *Drum* displayed, often quite glamorously. In this regard, *Matsotsi* is an early example of a phenomenon that critics have

²⁴ Maarit Piipponen et al., "From Mobile Crimes to Crimes of Mobility," *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders, Detection*, eds. Maarit Piipponen et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 1–41.

²⁵ Primorac, "At Home in the World?," 578.

²⁶ Fasselt, "Making and Unmaking 'African Foreignness.'"

²⁷ Jeanne-Marie Jackson, "Reading for the Region in New African Novels: Flight, Form, and the Metonymic Ideal," *Research in African Literatures* 49.1 (2018): 43.

²⁸ John Reed, "Zambian Fiction," *The Writing of East and Central Africa*, ed. G. D. Killam (London: Heinemann, 1984): 82–99, esp. 85.

²⁹ Reed, "Zambian Fiction," 85.

observed in contemporary crime fiction, the readers of which “are less interested in methods of deduction and how crimes are solved than in constantly discovering new exciting places or digging deep into the details of a specific location.”³⁰ Although *Matsotsi* does contain detection—and specifically, border crossing as a form of detection, as I argue in what follows—it also takes readers into Joburg as it was imagined by *Drum*: as a dangerous, exciting, stylish, and thoroughly modern Black city. White people do appear in *Matsotsi*—Reed is wrong about this—but they play peripheral roles as compared to its Black protagonists, much like in *Drum* itself.³¹

In fact, in Balala’s first run-in with the tsotsis, it is as if he has walked into the pages of *Drum*, so closely does his encounter resemble the events described in an installment of George Magwaza’s “Talk o’ the Rand” column in the magazine from 1956 about a performance featuring famed South African singer Miriam Makeba: “The other day during the Manhattan Brothers’ Anniversary show at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre, thugs of all description, delegates from all Johannesburg’s crime dens, were at each other’s throats to take her [Makeba] away. And revolvers were drawn.”³²

Similarly, six months after Sergeant Balala and his friend and assistant Jabula Msingo arrive in Joburg, they attend a “Miss Johannesburg” beauty pageant at the Bantu Men’s Social Center that features a performance by the jive (“jaivi”) band the Thula Brothers. Balala and Msingo, who have gained a reputation for uncovering the tsotsis’ crimes, attend the event with Guduza Mbanje, the editor of *The Rand Reporter*, who exposes the tsotsis’ misdoings in the paper. As they walk into the hall, the men feel people’s eyes on them, looking at them as if they are famous. In *Drum* in the 1950s, this kind of movie-star status was associated with the tsotsis themselves, who were known for wearing fashionable zoot-suits. Here, however, it is the tsotsis who are watching Balala and his friends, whispering to one another that the detectives will be the ones in the news for a change. As in Magwaza’s *Drum* column, a fight ensues over who will leave the Social Center with the event’s most desirable woman when the tsotsis attack the detectives and Mbanje as they are getting into their car with the winning beauty queen.

It is significant that the tsotsis threaten to turn the tables on Balala and his friends by landing them in the newspaper, and not only because this crossing of the newspaper’s fold gestures to the way that *Matsotsi* journeys into the pages of *Drum*. It also demonstrates the fluid relationship between law and outlaw in crime fiction, a kind of boundary crossing that *Drum*’s crime stories readily

³⁰ Andrea Hynynen, “Across National, Cultural and Ethnic Borders: The Detectives in Olivier Truc’s Reindeer Police Series,” *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders, Detection*, eds. Maarit Piipponen et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 233–34.

³¹ White people make brief appearances throughout the text, almost always in positions of authority (policeman, mayor, company owner), and are shown to be free of prejudice and keen to help the detectives. After Balala and Msingo arrive at the police station, they are greeted by a white policeman (“mzungu wa Polisi”), who shows them around the office “and also told them how their work was to be done” (“nawauzanso magwiridwe a nchito yao”); Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 10.

³² George Magwaza, “Talk o’ the Rand,” *Drum*, February 1956, 15.

embrace and exploit. *Drum's* fictional detectives, such as Arthur Maimane's Chief in "Crime for Sale," play both sides of the law. The Chief leaves the police force to operate as a private detective, affiliating with cops or criminals as it suits him. Similarly, the *Drum* writers cultivated a gangster-inspired stylishness and attitude in a bid to toe the line between respectability and criminality, fashioning themselves as "intellectual tsotsis."³³ The tsotsi, Rosalind Morris argues, is a figure of fluidity and mobility, one that challenged the efforts of the apartheid government to assign fixed racial and even national categories (through its designation of bantustans or ethnic homelands) to the country's Black majority population.³⁴ Characters like the Chief, in moving between the law and lawlessness, attained a similar freedom and "power of mobility," epitomized for the Chief by his "souped-up" Buick Roadmaster, which he occasionally uses to "outrun" his enemies.³⁵

Although *Matsotsi's* detectives might at first appear to have some of the tsotsi's stylish lawlessness in the scene that unfolds at the Bantu Men's Social Center, Balala rejects tsotsism, instead aligning himself unequivocally with the law. What can we make of a Black migrant detective in apartheid South Africa who affiliates himself with the state police? *Matsotsi* depicts the complex positionality of the migrant detective, who, due to the vulnerability of migrants in South African society, relies on the state for his authority. Whereas "the state severely delimits the characters' social options and mobility" in *Tsotsi*, in Shonga and Zulu's text, the state affords Balala both physical and professional mobility.³⁶ Balala moves from Angola to South Africa and begins working for the police in Joburg after he finishes school; the government then sends him to work in Pretoria, eventually transferring him to criminal investigations and confiscating his government issued clothing so that he won't be recognized by people: "Patapita zaka zisanu boma linandisinthira ku nchito yofufuza mirandu nandilanda zobvala za boma kuti ndisamadziwika kwa anthu."³⁷ Symbolically, by giving him plainclothes, the government enables Balala to engage in detection without being detected, an important kind of mobility and form of protection in his line of work. Balala is soon promoted to sergeant and transferred back to Joburg, and the text's opening description of Balala's journey by train from Pretoria to Joburg spatializes this professional advancement.

Rather than the state, *Matsotsi* depicts outlaws, like the tsotsis, as negatively impacting the mobility of others and of migrants, in particular. Balala and Msingo arrive at Park Station in the company of other migrants, but their

³³ Lewis Nkosi quoted in Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 33–34. Nixon expands upon Lewis Nkosi's use of the term *intellectual tsotsi* to describe Can Themba in Nkosi's introduction to Themba's *The Will to Die* (Heinemann, 1972, x).

³⁴ Rosalind C. Morris, "Style, Tsotsi-style, and Tsotsitaal: The Histories, Aesthetics, and Politics of a South African Figure," *Social Text* 28.2(103) (Summer 2010): 85–112.

³⁵ Tyler Scott Ball, "Softown Sleuths: The Hard-Boiled Genre Goes to Jo'Burg," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 5.1 (2018): 29–30.

³⁶ Barnard, "Tsotsis," 552.

³⁷ "After five years the government transferred me to criminal investigations and confiscated my government clothes so that I wouldn't be recognized by people"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 58.

position as government detectives provides them with much safer means of travel through the city. While they are waiting for the police driver to pick them up, they observe a stylishly dressed young man warning everyone who has just disembarked to board his taxi rather than travel to the city by foot: “Inu amene mwafika m’Jubeki muno nthawi yoyamba ndikuuzani kuti makomboni akuno anawamangira kutali, ndipo ngati mukwera takisi mudzafika kwa abale anu bwino osabvutika; osalingana ndi anthu oyenda pansi.”³⁸ The tsotsis seek to control and exploit migrant mobilities, as compared to the state, which seemingly protects them. When the police driver, Gonappa Mazani, a migrant from Lesotho, arrives to fetch the detectives at the station, he insists that if all taxi drivers were tsotsis, then the government would have banned them: “Bwenzi boma litaleta kale nchito yoyendetsa magalimotowa.”³⁹ Balala, however, is unconvinced that all taxi drivers are not gangsters, planting a small seed of doubt as to the state’s ability to contain the tsotsis.

Indeed, in the drama that unfolds, the tsotsis successfully entrap and attack the detectives, targeting precisely what the state seems to afford Balala: his professional and physical mobility as symbolized by the police car. After the event at the Men’s Social Center, it is the car that sustains the most damage, and Balala and Msingo are forced to abandon it. In a note tied to a rock that the tsotsis use to smash the car’s window, they make it clear that they are targeting the detectives’ freedom of movement and warn them not to travel again at night: “Mbanje, Balala, Mazani ndi Msingo; inu anthu anai ndinu amene mwatsala kuti muphedwe. Lero tikusiyani amoyo, koma ino ndiyo nthawi yanu yotsiriza kumayenda usiku.”⁴⁰ The tsotsis’ desire to immobilize the detectives is initially successful; Balala and Msingo arrive home in fear, shut the door tightly, and board up the windows.

While seeking to control the mobility of others, the tsotsis in *Matsotsi* are characterized by their unbridled movement, which is key to both their cachet and their criminal endeavors. Compared to the taxis they control that pack in dozens of riders in often dangerous ways, the tsotsis travel by more individualized and expensive means, such as cars. The tsotsis’ stylishness also marks a form of illicit social mobility. Shortly after their arrival in Joburg, Balala warns Msingo that the tsotsis’ stylishness shouldn’t be mistaken for trustworthiness: “Tiyenera kucenjera poti anthu akunowa ngosakhulupirika ngakhale abvale zotani.”⁴¹ Overall, the tsotsis represent a dangerous form of mobility that threatens broader society.

In seeking to capture and contain the tsotsis, Balala, like many “early detectives,” as Rebecca Fasselt reminds us, is engaged in “the policing of foreign

³⁸ “You who have arrived in Joburg for the first time, I tell you that the compounds here are far away, and if you board the taxi you will arrive safely at your relatives’ place without a problem; it is not like that for people who go on foot”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 7.

³⁹ “The government would have long ago banned driving these cars”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 8.

⁴⁰ “Mbanje, Balala, Mazani and Msingo; you four people are the remaining ones that will be killed. Today we leave you alive, but this is your last time to travel at night”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 17.

⁴¹ “We must be careful because people here just aren’t trustworthy however they might dress”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 6.

bodies and borders with the attempt to regulate and control their inherent instability.”⁴² As a migrant detective in a city where foreigners were particularly susceptible to tsotsi violence, as the opening scenes of *Matsotsi* make clear, it is unsurprising that Balala relies on the power of the state for his authority. Nevertheless, he is effectively part of the apartheid apparatus and a member of the South African police, whose atrocities include the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, which occurred only several years before *Matsotsi*’s publication. *Matsotsi* ignores these realities in favor of portraying a stylish and urban Black Johannesburg and a migrant protagonist who gains the upper hand against the tsotsis—who are depicted as unredeemable thugs. But the question remains as to why Shonga and Zulu seemingly condone the state in this moment, when the National Party was further cementing apartheid. It is my argument here that *Matsotsi* is not an endorsement of the South African state, specifically, but rather of the power of the state writ large to impose law and order and to regulate potentially dangerous mobilities. This reading becomes apparent when we situate it in its particular historical moment: the eve of independence for Zambia and Malawi and of deepening white minority rule in other parts of the region.

“Crimes of Mobility” and the Postcolonial State

Shonga and Zulu’s preface to *Matsotsi* provides some clues as to how they understand the text’s setting of apartheid South Africa in relation to its place of publication in soon-to-be independent Zambia. In it, they invite their readers “here at home” to interpret the text as a national allegory and take pains to distinguish the tsotsis, who prey upon their fellow countrymen, from South Africa’s anticolonial heroes: “Matsotsi asiyana ndi ngwazi zimene zimenya nkondo yofuna kutenga ufulu wa dziko lao m’manja mwa atsamunda. Kwao ndi kufuna kusakaza miyoyo ya anthu anzao pakufuna kutolapo phindu la iwo okha panthawi yocepa. Kwathu kuno matsotsi kulibe, komatu tikapusa, mtsogolomu adzawanda cifukwa dziko likutukuka. Motero tiyeni tikhale maso! Angatilowere.”⁴³

In *Matsotsi*, the tsotsi “invasion” is both literal and figurative. In the story’s third part, a band of tsotsis flees northward into Rhodesia from South Africa, and it is up to Balala to track and arrest them before they cross the border into Zambia. At the same time, tsotsis are symbolic of a ruthless individualism that is antithetical to the communal ethos of Zambian socialism/Humanism. The tsotsis’ “crimes of mobility” are thus twofold, both spatial and sociopolitical.⁴⁴ The tsotsis’ predatory nature and their desire to get rich quickly is reiterated throughout *Matsotsi*. Their violence is exacted indiscriminately against the rich

⁴² Fasselt, “Making and Unmaking ‘African Foreignness,’” 1110.

⁴³ “Tsotsis are different from the heroes who are fighting the war to free their nation from the hands of the colonialists. They want to destroy the lives of their friends to make quick money. Here at home there are no tsotsis, but if we are not watchful, they may soon become plentiful because the country is developing. So let us keep our eyes open! They may invade us”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 4.

⁴⁴ Piipponen, “From Mobile Crimes to Crimes of Mobility.”

and the poor: “Olemera, osauka, ncmodzi-modzi; kwao nkufuna ndalama basi.”⁴⁵ This is different from vigilantes who seek to redress social wrongs—as tsotsis were often portrayed in *Drum*—or from freedom fighters whose violence is directed at colonial actors. Many such freedom fighters found their way to Zambia in the decades that followed as protracted wars for independence and freedom from apartheid played out across its borders in Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique. The tsotsis, in contrast, were the epitome of self-interest at a moment when nationalist sentiment in Zambia was at its zenith.

As Maarit Piipponen and others note, what constitutes “crimes of mobility, or acceptable and dangerous mobilities” varies “since mobility often looks different on the other side of the border.”⁴⁶ The colonial government in Northern Rhodesia, for example, treated migrant labor differently than did Nationalist South Africa. While South African authorities and mining companies encouraged circular migration from and back to rural areas, Northern Rhodesia sought to keep its laborers in the colony to preserve its own tax revenue⁴⁷ and encouraged migrants to settle permanently on the Copperbelt with their families.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, working in South Africa, where wages were higher, remained enticing to migrant workers throughout the region. Shonga and Zulu’s depictions of a glamorous but dangerous Johannesburg and an imminent invasion of South African tsotsis, while appearing to simply reanimate the Jim Comes to Joburg genre (i.e., enticing migrants to come to the city so long as they eventually return to their “tribal” home) is more complex. On the one hand, *Matsotsi* can be read as a warning against traveling south, and thus as complicit with the colonial policy of keeping Zambian labor at home (another reason perhaps that Balala is Angolan and not Zambian).⁴⁹ On the other hand, migrant mobilities—and the permanent presence of migrants in Johannesburg—are presented positively throughout the text, affirming the right of migrants to live and work in Johannesburg and their important contributions to society. Compared to the tsotsis’ crimes of mobility, which take the form of illicit border crossing as well as ill-gotten economic and social mobility, migrancy is depicted as part of the fabric of life in Joburg, from the anonymous migrants that accompany the detectives on the train to many of the key actors in the narrative, including the victims of the first case the detectives solve.

In this first case, a Mozambican man is robbed and murdered. Kwenje Mziko had been living in Joburg for seven years and had married a woman from Mozambique four months prior. The detectives immediately suspect his widow,

⁴⁵ “Rich, poor, it’s the same; they only want money”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 6.

⁴⁶ Piipponen, “From Mobile Crimes to Crimes of Mobility,” 16.

⁴⁷ Duncan Money, “‘Aliens’ on the Copperbelt: Zambianisation, Nationalism and Non-Zambian Africans in the Mining Industry,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 45.5 (2019): 865.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams, and Sally Peberdy, “Migration in Southern Africa,” a paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration, September 2005, 5.

⁴⁹ This emphasis on recruiting Zambian workers rather than “alien” migrant workers continued in the postcolonial period as part of the new state’s “Zambianization” efforts; Money, “‘Aliens’ on the Copperbelt,” 867–68.

Thandiwe, who was out buying a tin of petrol and a copy of *The Rand Reporter* for her husband while he was murdered, of being involved in the crime. Perhaps, they think, she had a lover, and they had planned to take Mziko's money and run away together. However, when they see that the killer has left no "finger prints" on the neck of the deceased, a term that appears in English in the text, they decide that Thandiwe couldn't have killed him because "Nanga nzeru angazitenge kuti zoyesetsa kudzipewetsa motere?"⁵⁰ Only the tsotsis "adziwitsitsa njira zonse zozembera."⁵¹ In other words, the tsotsis' crimes of mobility include an ability to evade the eyes of the law. The rest of the case relies on equally questionable hard evidence. Mziko had saved 800 pounds for a car, which the tsotsis steal. At the crime scene, Mziko's bank book was thrown outside—likely on purpose, Balala thinks, using its placement as a clue—though it is unclear why the thief would have left the book behind at all. In other words, *Matsotsi* employs some of the genre's typical methods of detection in a haphazard and unconvincing way, seeming to give credence to Reed's critique that it involves no "intellectual puzzle."

A closer look at the text, however, suggests that the real "puzzle" it investigates is a social one. Balala's detection begins with an "inspection" of Thandiwe herself, suggesting that perhaps other men were jealous of her husband because of her beauty: "Nthawi yonseyi ndinali pano ndinali kukuyang'anitsitsani kuyambira kumutu mpaka kumapazi, ndipo ndapeza kuti ndinu mai wokongola kwabasi ndipo ndikhulupirira anyamata anali kucita nsanje ndi Bambo Mziko cifukwa ca inu."⁵² Balala's objectification of Thandiwe would not have been out of place in early 1960s southern Africa. Magazines like *Drum* and *African Parade* were also full of images of women as pinups and beauty queens. Here, however, Balala's comments are meant to point to the "jealousy" that he detects to be at the root of Mziko's murder. The detectives realize that Mziko is the same man who won the best dressed competition at the Bantu Men's Social Center and conclude that between his flashy dress and pretty wife, Mziko drew the attention of the same tsotsis who had attacked the detectives' car. Balala declares, "Mfundo yeni-yeni imene iri pa mirandu yonseyi ndi nsanje."⁵³ By linking the crimes in this way, Balala deduces a broader social malaise that has resulted from South African "development" and its consequences, one of the most damaging of which is a tsotsi culture of greed. This jealousy, which leads to stealing from others things you have not earned, is its own crime of social mobility.

As the murder investigation unfolds, the detectives uncover not only the tsotsis' envy and ruthless pursuit of individual wealth, but also the migrant networks and cooperatives that stand in stark contrast to them and that provide an alternative model of national development—one that is receptive to transnational influence. Once Thandiwe is no longer a suspect in the investigation, the

⁵⁰ "How would she know to try to avoid detection in this way?"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 31.

⁵¹ "Know all of the ways to not be seen/detected"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 31.

⁵² "The whole time that I've been here I was inspecting you from head to toe, and I found that you are a very beautiful woman and I believe that young men were jealous of Mr. Mziko because of you"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 25.

⁵³ "The central issue in all of these crimes is jealousy"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 29.

detectives focus on protecting her from the tsotsis. Thandiwe assures them that she will be well supported by, among others (including her husband's white employers), a Mozambican migrants' association that provides financial assistance to the widows of Mozambican men in South Africa. She adds that this association not only aids Mozambican women, but also South African women: "Azimaiwo ndi amitundu yakuno monga Asutu, Azulu, Axhosa, ndi ena; amawathanizabe."⁵⁴ This additional information, which is not immediately relevant to Thandiwe's own situation or the case at hand, seems designed to emphasize the overall generosity of migrants and the positive effects of migrant mobilities on South African society—especially as compared to the tsotsis' selfishness and individualism. It is, however, also indicative of Zambia's philosophy for national development. The Zambian political elite touted cooperatives as a key means of economic development and a cornerstone of Zambian socialism (the basis for Zambian Humanism post-independence).⁵⁵ These elites prized "development" above all else and imagined it in concrete terms as the state's provision of basic institutions and necessities—such as "schools, clinics, shoes for the people"—as well as the "application of the cooperative spirit to various aspects of the economy."⁵⁶

Although Balala is of Angolan origins and an agent of the South African police, he is in many ways representative of the founding ideologies of the new Zambian state. Balala espouses the values of the Zambian political elites, who favored "equality of opportunity" and discouraged extreme wealth.⁵⁷ The tsotsis, who rob the poor as well as the rich, are the antithesis of the idea of "bringing up the bottom."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, these elites thought "complete equality ... to be impossible and it was believed that talent should not be discouraged."⁵⁹ Balala also embodies this aspect of humanist philosophy, which made room for individualism—especially in service of the greater good. Balala's promotion to sergeant is a recognition of his individual skill, and it is suggested throughout that he is particularly good at his work of investigating the tsotsis and bringing them to justice.

When it came to national development, however, the Zambian political elite at the time were equally, if not more, concerned with external factors, and especially with the threats posed by the region's more and more emboldened white supremacist regimes.⁶⁰ It is not my contention that the "tsotsi invasion" symbolizes a fear of white nationalists traveling northward; there are too many positive portrayals of white people in positions of authority to support such a reading. Rather, *Matsotsi* seeks to affirm the power and legitimacy of the nascent

⁵⁴ "Women of ethnic groups from here like the Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, and others; they still help them"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 34.

⁵⁵ James R. Scarritt, "Elite Values, Ideology, and Power in Post-Independence Zambia," *African Studies Review* 14.1 (1971): 31–54.

⁵⁶ Scarritt, "Elite Values, Ideology, and Power in Post-Independence Zambia," 41.

⁵⁷ Scarritt, "Elite Values, Ideology, and Power in Post-Independence Zambia," 42.

⁵⁸ Scarritt, "Elite Values, Ideology, and Power in Post-Independence Zambia," 42.

⁵⁹ Scarritt, "Elite Values, Ideology, and Power in Post-Independence Zambia," 412.

⁶⁰ Scarritt, "Elite Values, Ideology, and Power in Post-Independence Zambia," 48.

postcolonial state at a moment when it was particularly vulnerable to external influence. The popular fascination with crime and crime fictions in twenty-first-century South Africa has been read as an effort to “produce social order” at a time when the state’s ability to maintain law and order and provide for its citizens is deeply in question.⁶¹ This current crisis is exacerbated by the neoliberal state’s diminished authority in the face of extranational forces from multinational corporations to international terrorist networks. The Zambian postcolony confronted different transnational threats in the 1960s, but the logic of asserting the state’s authority, with the detective as an “embodiment of a state-under-pressure,” remains the same.⁶²

In *Matsotsi*, much like in *Tsotsi* (both the novel and the film), the threat of social disorder crystallizes in the form of the young Black gangster: “Youth or rather youths come to stand for the grotesque inversion of the progressive project of modernity.”⁶³ This, as Barnard points out, is an inversion of the role of youth in the European bildungsroman, where, according to Franco Moretti, youth operates as “the master trope of modernity.”⁶⁴ But whereas Barnard observes this playing out at a national level in *Tsotsi*, the threat of the young Black *tsotsi* is transnational in *Matsotsi*, menacing not only the state but also the wider region. To deal with such a far-reaching threat, Balala’s detection takes the form of border crossing, and the bildungsroman itself is adapted to reflect migrant perspectives and agencies.

Detecting the Region in the “Migrant Bildungsroman”

The final section of *Matsotsi* brings together the genres of the detective/gangster story with features of the traditional bildungsroman. Although the first two parts of the narrative are told in the third person, the final section begins, somewhat surprisingly, in the first person, with Balala introducing himself to the reader: “Ndiganiza ambiri a inu afunitsitsa kundidziwa. Ine dzina langa ndine Robato Balala wa ku Angola ku Loanda.”⁶⁵ *Tsotsi* ends with its titular character finally able to speak his own name—only concluding with the kind of personal development that typically takes place over the course of the typical bildungsroman⁶⁶—but *Matsotsi* gives its protagonist an entire final section in which to tell his story. This final section takes the form of a kind of “migrant bildungsroman,” wherein the individual’s growth is not only a national allegory, but a regional one.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Criminal Obsessions, after Foucault: Postcoloniality, Policing, and the Metaphysics of Disorder,” *Critical Inquiry* 30.4 (Summer 2004): 822.

⁶² Comaroff and Comaroff, “Criminal Obsessions, after Foucault,” 822.

⁶³ Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 562.

⁶⁴ Franco Moretti, quoted in Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 562.

⁶⁵ “I think many of you want to know me. My name is Robato Balala from Luanda in Angola”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 58.

⁶⁶ Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 551.

⁶⁷ Androne coins this term to describe the ongoing personal growth in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* that results not from the migrant’s incorporation into society but rather their alienation from it; Androne, “Adichie’s *Americanah*,” 328.

The migrant bildungsroman builds upon and transforms the popular Jim Comes to Joburg narrative.⁶⁸ After giving readers his name, Balala tells the reader that his mother is South African and describes (for the first time) how he came to the City of Gold to live with his uncle: “Mai wanga ndi wa konkuno ku Joni. Monga momwe anyamata ambiri a masiku ano amacitira, ndinacoka kumudzi kwathu ndi kufika kuno ku dziko la Joni kudzakhala ndi malume wanga.”⁶⁹ Although Balala is like the “many young men” who migrate, his South African parentage gives him an insider/outsider status that contributes to his ability to navigate South African society. His occupation also differs from that of most migrants. While his uncle works in the mines to support him, a common occupation of labor migrants, Balala completes his schooling and rises in the ranks through the police force. The Bildung aspect of Balala’s story in this final section is marked, in part, by his professional success in capturing the tsotsis. It is also, however, significantly, a love story, which brings it even closer to the form of the traditional bildungsroman.

After summarizing his career path, Balala notes that there is an even more fundamental and universal aspect of “growing up” that he is pursuing: “Tonsefe tidziwa kuti munthu akakula amaganiza zokwatira.”⁷⁰ Balala recounts how he fell in love with a Zulu woman, Belita, who turns out to be a gangster.⁷¹ Belita and her band of tsotsis escape to Southern Rhodesia with the money that Balala paid for her “lobola” (bridewealth). Most of the action—and detection—in this latter part of the novel takes the form of various kinds of border crossing as Balala seeks to find Betina by leveraging his physical, as well as cultural and linguistic, mobility. In the end, he arrests Betina and the tsotsis, who are heading north to Lusaka, Zambia, and returns them to South Africa to stand trial. In other words, Balala exacts his personal vengeance against the tsotsis at the same time as he thwarts the tsotsi invasion of Zambia of which Shonga and Zulu warn in their preface. In this migrant bildungsroman, Balala’s individual story and fate are sutured to that of the nation, but also, as I explore in the following, to the wider region.

⁶⁸ Barnard argues that “the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ story never really becomes what in any European nation-state it surely would have been: a Bildungsroman. This is not because the authors who contributed to this genre lacked the interest in or literary talent for representing interiority and ‘character development.’ Rather, the sociopolitical conditions for closure that pertain in the affirmative Bildungsroman were lacking: it is neither possible nor desirable (whether from the point of view of the individual or that of the colonial state) for the protagonist to become a fully developed ‘person’”; Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 547).

⁶⁹ “My mother is from Joburg. Like many young men do these days, I left our village and arrived here in Joburg to stay with my uncle”; (Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 58).

⁷⁰ “All of us we know that when people grow up they think about marrying”; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 59.

⁷¹ Ranka Primorac notes a similar situation in other post-independence Zambian detective stories such as Henry Mtonga’s Ozi stories and Gideon Phiri’s *Ticklish Sensation*, in which “discerning which ‘girl’ holds a threat and which a promise is the key aspect of a young man’s passage into adulthood”; Ranka Primorac, “The Soft Things of Life: Detection and Manhood in South-Eastern Africa,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49.1 (2013): 107.

Although it is a story of failed love, the final section of *Matsosi* depicts a successful close to the detective's case and, in so doing, reveals the region's interconnectedness. In order to track and arrest the tsotsis, Balala relies on his own skills of detection, but also, importantly, the cooperation of police forces across the region. After Balala is brutally attacked by the tsotsis and ends up in the hospital, the South African police enlist the help of the Rhodesian and Mozambican governments in finding the tsotsis' vehicle. The tsotsis' abandoned car is located in Umtali, and the police chiefs ready everything for Balala's trip to Rhodesia: "Akulu a Polisi anandikonzera zonse za ulendo wanga wa ku Rhodesia."⁷² Later, the Rhodesian police assist the South African police in the tsotsis' arrest and insist that the tsotsis be extradited to South Africa to stand trial. *Matsosi* thus affirms the right of individual states to enforce their own borders as well as the importance of international coordination in supporting state authority. Although the traditional bildungsroman suggests that no individual can operate alone outside of society, the migrant bildungsroman demonstrates how the fates of various states within the region are linked.

Nevertheless, Balala's own, more informal networks and ways of border crossing as a detective are just as important as these official ones to the tsotsis' capture. Although the police "prepared everything" for his trip, Balala ultimately relies on the help of his friend Mazani, the former police driver, when he arrives in Rhodesia. After the night at the Bantu Men's Social Center when the detectives' car was attacked, Mazani fell in love with Sara, the winning beauty queen, and the two find refuge from the jealous tsotsis with Mazani's family in Rhodesia. When Balala arrives at the airport in Salisbury, Mazani picks him up, and the two travel together to Umtali in search of the tsotsis. Without such informal migrant networks of (male) friends and family, Balala would not have succeeded in the book's core mission of containing the tsotsi menace. Indeed, throughout the text, extranational networks, like the Mozambican migrants' association and Balala's friends and associates, facilitate mobility—physical and social—for those who otherwise lack it.

Although *Matsosi* does not depict the character interiority commonly associated with the bildungsroman, Balala's character development is realized spatially through his travels as well as his other forms of border crossing. Balala's detection of the tsotsis requires physical as well as cultural and linguistic travel as he interprets and translates among various societies and languages from across the region. When Balala is first robbed by the tsotsis, for example, the text highlights his ability to translate what they shout at him in tsotsitaal: "Mnyamatayo anati, 'Eyi wena madala bwisa lo mali, khamani!' Kuteroko ndiko kuti, 'Eyi, mkuluwe patse ndalama, fulumira!'"⁷³

In this and other instances, *Matsosi* draws attention to Balala's multilingualism. In another scene, Balala listens to Zambian radio in English and Nyanja before changing the channel to hear songs in Zulu, all while reading an Angolan

⁷² "The chiefs of police prepared everything for my trip to Rhodesia"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsosi*, 72.

⁷³ "This young man said, 'Eyi wena madala bwisa lo mali, khamani!' That is to say 'Hey, old man give me the money, quickly!'" Shonga and Zulu, *Matsosi*, 64–65.

newspaper (whose language is not specified, but it is presumably in Portuguese). As he hunts the tsotsis, Balala employs an even wider repertoire of languages. After arriving in Umtali, Balala overhears a group of women chatting outside of the house at the water pump while he is showering inside. He doesn't understand most of what they are saying, only picking up the bits of Cindewere that are similar to Zulu. After a while, however, he hears two women speaking to each other in Shona, one of whom is fluent in the language and the other who makes a number of mistakes while speaking. Balala thinks that he recognizes the second voice as Belita's and quickly finishes washing to go and look outside, but the two women are gone. Nevertheless, as a result of this encounter, the case progresses: "Tsopano ndinali ndi citsimikizo cakuti anthu amene ndinali kufuna anali mu Umtali."⁷⁴ Notably, Balala's detection in this scene involves more than straightforward translation. Balala has a strong command of some languages—enough to identify native and nonnative speakers—and only a surface knowledge of others. To operate successfully in such a heterogeneous region, both kinds of knowledge must be brought to bear.

This is, ultimately, the kind of reading and detecting that *Matsotsi* elicits from us as readers as well, particularly those of us who are separated from it by time, space, language, and culture.⁷⁵ On the one hand, *Matsotsi* can be read at the surface level as an engaging, if improbable, detective story that takes place in an exoticized and unrealistic Johannesburg. On the other, the text's preface and uncommon narrative structure invite a more nuanced reading of *Matsotsi* as a text that manipulates both the detective genre and the bildungsroman to tell a story about the postcolonial state and its role in the wider region. By being written in Nyanja, a nonnational but regional language, *Matsotsi* points to a form of flexible reading across national borders.

Matsotsi affirms the power of the state, and Balala as its agent, to contain the tsotsis' dangerous mobilities that threaten national development and regional stability. Fittingly, *Matsotsi*'s final scene recognizes Balala as the individual hero while also dramatizing the state's authority to punish wrongdoers. With police backup outside, Balala enters the tsotsis' house alone and declares, "Lerotu nchito yanu yatha. Nonsenu mudzapita ku ndende."⁷⁶ The tsotsis look at one another as if to say, "Ndinakuuzani kuti Balala ali muno conco ticenjere."⁷⁷ While Balala receives this individual recognition as someone not to be trifled with, Belita is scolded by her father (who has come up from Joburg) for what she has done to Balala. He warns her with the proverb "Cuma ca ucimo sicithangata,"⁷⁸ which Balala reiterates, no longer in quotes, in the text's final line, but adds, "Indedi cuma ca ucimo sicithangata pakuti pambuyo pace umangidwa naco."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ "Now I had confirmation that the people I was searching for were in Umtali"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 74.

⁷⁵ On reading itself as a form of detection, see Ranka Primorac, "Introduction: In/visibility and African Thrillers," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49.1 (2013): 71.

⁷⁶ "Today your work is finished. All of you will go to jail"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 82.

⁷⁷ "I told you that Balala is here so we must be careful"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 83.

⁷⁸ "The riches of sin are worthless."

⁷⁹ "Indeed, the riches of sin are worthless because afterward you are bound by it"; Shonga and Zulu, *Matsotsi*, 83.

Balala plays on the idea of being bound by sin, not only morally, as the proverb intends, but literally, as Belita and the tsotsis are now in handcuffs. In the repetition of this proverb, Balala's personal triumph over Belita and the tsotsis—an affirmation of his “personhood” and manhood—coincides with the state's victory in reasserting law and order.⁸⁰

As the use of the Bible in the text's final lines suggests, this authority is understood in not only moral, but divine terms, another central tenet of Zambian Humanism. But unlike *Tsotsi*, which similarly ends with a dramatization of “submission to the state,”⁸¹ *Matsotsi* highlights Balala's victorious return to Johannesburg with his prisoners in tow. In this final reversal of the Jim Comes to Joburg narrative, Balala arrives in Johannesburg once more, this time not only as an embodiment of the state, but also of the many informal migrant networks that have aided in the tsotsis' capture. In this migrant detective-cum-bildungsroman, Balala's border crossing illuminates these transnational networks, which sustain societies across the region, and demonstrates the interconnection of the individual, the postcolonial state, and the wider region at a key moment in southern Africa's history.

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Author biography. Stephanie Bosch Santana is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her first monograph, *Forms of Mobility: Genre, Language, and Media in Southern African Literary Cultures*, is forthcoming from Northwestern University Press in 2024.

⁸⁰ On detection and manhood in Zambian fiction see Ranka Primorac, “The Soft Things in Life.”

⁸¹ Barnard, “Tsotsis,” 549.

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