


Bosman: A proto-postcolonial author?

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Bosman scholars tend either to have focused on the humour and entertainment value of his works or to have leaned towards appreciation for the satirical quality of his writing and the serious political commentary that accompanies and underpins it. Building on these insights, the present study investigates Bosman's preoccupation with South Africa's politics in order to determine whether he could be classified a 'proto-postcolonial author'. It discusses key features of postcolonial theory and writing and elucidates the term 'proto-postcolonial'. It then analyses selected texts in terms of their political themes – five short stories from the collections *Ramoutsa Road* (1987), *Unto Dust* (1991) and the novel *Willemsdorp* (written in 1951, first published in 1977). The focus is on Bosman's form of subtle protest against contemporary inequalities and injustices through his use of satire and techniques such as parody, irony and other linguistic and stylistic devices. Political themes that emerge from this analysis – including the detrimental effects of colonisation, racism, displacement, subjugation, repression and hybridity – are echoed and developed further in discussion of other, subsequent postcolonial writing. This study, therefore, reveals Bosman as a precursor of this later important body of literature and as a writer ahead of his times who has earned his place as a 'proto-postcolonial' author.

Keywords: Herman Charles Bosman; postcolonial theory; proto-postcolonial author; English colonialism; South African War; apartheid; cultural hybridity; multiculturalism; linguistic hybridity; parody.

Introduction

Bosman scholars cover a wide spectrum of concerns. Some earlier scholars analysed their linguistic talents, especially their use of irony and satire, to create humorous depictions of the bushveld Afrikaner who have attracted and entertained readers. Meihuizen (1991:35) contends that Bosman's 'principal concern, is to entertain', as illustrated by the quirky narrator in most of his short stories, Oom Schalk Lourens. Other scholars have read between the lines, disclosing political themes and concerns through their use of this same narrator as a parodic tool, embodying the writer's critique of Afrikaner racial ideology. They have noted that Bosman conveys his most compelling, subversive messages and serious political statements through parody, amusing his readers as he works with themes later exemplified in postcolonial literature. The present study explores Bosman as a satirical political writer who worked in a historical context of colonialism, but whose work also anticipated key characteristics of a movement that had not yet found its voice. In other words, this study assesses the extent to which Bosman can be classified as a 'proto-colonial' author.

Bosman's political intentions have frequently been overlooked. In a 1986 collection of critical essays on Bosman (Gray 1986:147), Dickson sees Bosman as appearing 'much too involved with his personal life to show any of that obsession with racial conflicts which have been so marked in some of his contemporaries'. Similarly, Davis (2006:8) questions the presence of any political beliefs in Bosman's writing, indicating that 'The reader who seeks evidence of firmly-held political beliefs of whatever kind in Bosman's work will, inevitably, be disappointed'. By contrast, Hayden (2002:1) contends that Bosman's 'bushveld stories concern themselves directly with race, and are devoted to a meticulously constructed recording of Afrikaner ideology'. She sees in Bosman's complex use of metaphor, irony and symbolism, the delivery of a highly politicised message.

Bosman, at times, has been called a racist because he used the 'k-word'¹ so often that the reader 'is left to wonder where Bosman stands in relation to the views of his character-narrator' (Chapman 2006:155–156). Author Phaswane Mpe admits to being 'a little shocked' at the racist terminology when first reading *Makapan's Caves* but recognises Bosman's satirical intention: 'I don't think words in themselves are bad. I'm more interested in how those words get used. We need to

1.This is a reference to the derogatory and offensive term 'kaffir', which was used to refer to black South Africans.

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distinguish between insults and ironies' (in Miller 2006:n.p.). Cuthbertson (2006) similarly defends Bosman against accusations of racism:

[N]aming is such a controversial matter that for many Africans, it is difficult to see beyond the offensive designation of the commonly used word 'kafir' in Bosman's writing, to appreciate the extent to which he systematically lampoons the meanings behind the prejudiced ascriptions of his own time. That Bosman was actually trying to subvert the content of racist epithets is not always acknowledged in a society which is literal about political correctness and unsophisticated about, and insensitive to, contextuality. (p. 159)

Contextualising Bosman's narratives, Mackenzie (1999) shows how the socio-economic and political changes in South Africa during Bosman's time are reflected in his stories. He later notes that as Bosman wrote:

[I]n an era of increasing Afrikaner control of the State and its propaganda apparatus, he sought to expose the flaws in developing Afrikaner nationalist ideology. He, therefore, wrote stories that drew attention to the darker, little-known and still less welcome secrets. (Mackenzie 2003:3)

Although critical of Afrikaner racist ideology, Bosman was also sympathetic to their plight under British colonial rule. Cuthbertson (2006:151), for example, points to Bosman's use of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) image in portraying the suffering, yet emotionally strong Afrikaner women in concentration camps during the South African War.² Nevertheless, Cuthbertson (2006) also notes that even though most of Bosman's literary historians:

[R]evere his irony, see his satire as a way of writing 'another' war, and admire his conscious antipathy to stereotypes, they read in his work a dislike of white racism, particularly in his criticism of Boer wars against Africans. (p. 157)

Bosman may not have openly condemned racism in his narratives, but what Hayden (2002:n.p.) observes as 'remarkable' is the 'unique, unflinching manner in which he documents racial discrimination in South Africa'.

Various studies have drawn attention to evidence of political intent in Bosman's writing. The purpose of the present investigation is to explore these claims further by examining his work for themes that characterise later postcolonial literature by writers who, from a decolonised perspective, portray the legacy that colonialism left behind. The question guiding this study was whether Bosman's political concerns about the colonial and apartheid world around him sufficiently reflect the themes of subsequent postcolonial writers to warrant considering him a 'proto-postcolonial writer', that is, a writer whose work, although produced during a colonial period and decades before the development of postcolonial literature and theory, shares and prefigures its key themes and concerns. This study, therefore, focuses in particular on his portrayal of the psycho-social impact of

²Formerly known as the second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), this new term is considered more appropriate as it suggests that all South Africans were affected

colonialism, racism and attempts by colonial authorities to suppress cultural hybridity. The analysis focuses on five short stories and one novel, each of which relates to the socio-political effects of colonialism, in the context, first, of the aftermath of the South African War (1899–1902) and, second, of the rise to power of the National Party in 1948 and its implementation of the system of apartheid.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonial studies and theory

Postcolonialism or postcolonial studies refer to the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. Loomba (1998:2) observed that when colonisers formed a community in the colonised land, it meant '*unforming* or re-forming the communities that existed there already' and involved adverse effects such as 'warfare, plunder, genocide and enslavement'. Loomba (1998:12) therefore reflected that the term 'postcolonialism' should not be considered literally, as a period after colonialism, but that it should signify the 'contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism'.

Postcolonial theory, on the authority of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2003):

involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe. (p. 2)

Driving developments in postcolonial theory, according to Mambrol (2016), is a concern at the heart of postcolonial studies, which analyse:

[T]he metaphysical, ethical and political concerns about cultural identity, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, subjectivity, language and power. Once colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this problematic and contested ... mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial 'theory' came into being. (n.p.)

This view implies that the detrimental effects of colonialism triggered the creation of postcolonial theory and writing.

Three decades earlier, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) already saw the purpose of postcolonial studies as assisting in the decolonisation of societies, both psychologically and politically, intending to re-assess and sometimes reject the master discourses of imperial Europe and thus revive pre-colonial cultures. Stam and Spence (1983:4) had understood that racism was always an 'ally and product of the colonisation process', and that race, therefore, remained a relevant and significant aspect of postcolonial theory, being central to the power of imperial discourse. More recently, Overbey (2012:146) continued to see, amongst the fundamental concerns of postcolonial studies, the key issues of race, conquest and socio-political representation.

Postcolonial literature

Postcolonial literature, by people from countries that were formerly colonised, often addresses the problems and consequences of a country's decolonisation. For Katrak (1989:157), such writers characteristically 'respond seriously to the many urgent issues of their societies' such as divisions of race and culture. Typical postcolonial themes include a special concern with the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people.

Bosman's life (1905–1951) witnessed two forms of colonisation in South Africa: first, the British colonisation of the country, which included the Union period (1910–1961) and, second, the apartheid form created by the Boers in 1948. This study analyses the grave concerns expressed in Bosman's writing in this socio-historical context and examines them in terms of concerns that appear later in postcolonial writing.

The 'proto-postcolonial author'

Although not concretely theorised, the term has been used specifically to describe authors who anticipated postcolonial views even whilst writing within their colonial context. Rao (2007), for example, views James Joyce and Rabindranath Tagore as writers who, within their own colonial context, were critical of nationalism and its 'stifling of the individual spirit' and calls them 'proto-postcolonial thinkers' (p. 182) who articulate their thoughts 'beyond the temporal context in which they are writing' (p. 184).

Similarly, Clarke (2015:127) refers to English novelist Anthony Burgess' 'proto-postcolonial perspective' on the fall of the British Empire, which, written *during* the high noon of English colonial rule, demonstrated his thinking beyond his own context. Kimber (2018) examines five short stories by author Katherine Mansfield published between 1912 and 1913 that 'display a conspicuous leaning towards an exposé of the harsh realities of colonial life' and that, therefore, 'can be considered in the context of proto-postcolonialism' (p. 104). Mansfield's depictions of life in colonial New Zealand 'with a postcolonial mind-set' mean, according to Kimber (p. 121), that they form 'a subconscious story cycle in Mansfield's work at a specific moment in her writing career: a proto-postcolonial cycle' (Kimber 2018:109).

Drawing on these uses of the term, I have defined a 'proto-postcolonial author' as a writer whose works are constructed during a colonial period, but in using a postcolonial viewpoint when writing about the effects and anticipated legacies of colonialism, prefigure and pioneer postcolonial discourse.

The colonising power: Bosman's depiction of the political and sociological impacts of the South African War

Recalling Overbey (2012:146), the issue of conquest is central to postcolonial discourse, and Bosman's critique of English conquest is conducted mainly through his parody of the English army. The short story, 'Karel Flysman', set during the

South African War, was first published in 1931, the year in which South Africa became legislatively independent from Britain with the passing of the Statute of Westminster, which abolished the remaining powers of the UK Parliament to legislate on the country. The story reflects this significant moment in history as shaping the attitudes of Afrikaners and of Bosman, towards stronger resistance to colonial rule. Bosman satirises the English general using the wrong map to plan his attack on the Boers:

[A]nyway, they would work out the plans of our position for half an hour, and at the end of that time, they would find out that they had got it all wrong, because they had been using a map of the Rustenburg District and actually they were half-way into the Marico. So by the time they had everything ready to attack us, we had already moved off and were making coffee under some other trees. (Bosman 1987:26)

Nevertheless, the English general is pompous, disdainful and snobbish in describing the 'lowly' Boers:

... that is the enemy. I can see them under those trees. There's that man with the long beard eating out of a pot with his hands. Why doesn't he use a knife and fork? I don't think he can be a gentleman. Bring out the maps and we'll attack them. (Bosman 1987:25)

Bosman's strong irony in this extract resides in the genuinely *ungentlemanly* behaviour of the English who savagely 'attack' the Boers. The Boers' resistance to the English army is a typical response of people who experience colonial domination and thus portrays one of the key postcolonial themes as explained by Ashcroft et al. (2003).

Loomba's (1998) inclusion of 'warfare and plunder' as characteristically postcolonial themes is aptly reflected in Bosman's presentation of the harshness endured by Afrikaners under British rule. His realistic depiction of the physical, emotional and psychological effects on the Afrikaners during the South African War is embodied in the character Ben Myburg in 'Peaches Ripening in the Sun'. Whilst fighting in the war, his farmhouse and peach orchard were burnt down by the English, and his wife had taken comfort in the arms of an English soldier. Upon his return, the devastation and trauma he experiences on seeing the charred peach farm plunge him into a state of psychological shock and his memory is so severely affected that he is unaware that the farm belongs to him (Bosman 1991:59). This scene highlights the plight of many farmers affected by the implementation of the British scorched-earth policy that included the burning of Boer houses and farms during the war. Postcolonial writing, as pointed out by Loomba (1998), highlights and contests such destructive legacies of colonialism, and in this story, Bosman sympathetically presents the Boers as oppressed victims of war at the hands of the colonising power.

Resistance, as a further significant postcolonial theme, appears in 'The Traitor's Wife', which depicts the guerrilla tactics used by the Boer troops against the English. The

characters Jan Vermeulen and Kobus Ferreira are wearing clothing unbecoming of their soldierly status, during an attack by the English:

[A]nd instead of a jacket, he was now wearing a mealie sack with holes cut in it for his head and arms [...] Kobus Ferreira was wearing a missionary's frock-coat that he had found outside Kroendal, where it had been hung on a clothes-line to air. (Bosman 1991:78)

The imagery may superficially ridicule the Afrikaners, but their pitiful sight also evokes empathy.

These two short stories, with their postcolonial themes of suppression and resistance, take on poignant human dimensions in portraying the destructive colonial power of the English 'plundering warlord' robbing the Afrikaners of their land, livelihood, dignity and women.

Whilst these short stories reveal Bosman's serious political objection to the English colonisation of South Africa, his critique of the Afrikaner is also skilfully and subtly woven into the same narratives. He ensures that the reader's sympathetic response towards the Afrikaner does not entirely obscure their own shortcomings. Through parody, the eponymous character, Karel Flysman, is portrayed as behaving in cowardly fashion by running away and hiding during several attacks in the war. This story was Bosman's first experiment with the socio-political *hensopper*³ theme, repeated subsequently in his writings. Mackenzie's (2003:3) analysis of Bosman's '*A Boer Rip Van Winkel*' elucidates Bosman's aim to 'de-bunk the over-glamorised and embellished tales that he heard about the war' by exposing the cowardice of Afrikaners who betray their comrades by joining the English troops in the South African War.

In 'Peaches Ripening in the Sun', the heart-rending depiction of Ben Myburg also includes the narrator's earlier recollection of Ben's arrogance and racism in his younger days in boasting, after his engagement to his fiancé, Mimi: 'I was so happy that I just kicked the first three kafirs I saw' (Bosman 1991:58). This recollection of the disregard for human dignity renders a negative impression of the character and his racial ideology.

Kobus Ferreira in 'The Traitor's Wife', ironically adorned in missionary garb, not only spits out violent instructions to his troops but also hints at having 'unholy' thoughts about Serfina, the traitor's wife. Oom Schalk, the story's narrator, hints at hypocrisy in concluding that 'in a strange way, it seemed as though his violent language was not out of place in a missionary's frock coat' (Bosman 1991:79), adding that 'It would not be the first time a man in ecclesiastical dress called on a woman while her husband was away' (p. 80). Such tongue-in-cheek comments have the effect of discrediting the 'Doppers',⁴ whose leaders may not be as godly or holy as

they portray themselves to be but who represent the religious institution at the heart of the Afrikaner community, controlling its values, mindset and political views.⁵ Bosman highlights religious hypocrisy as the foundation of the Afrikaner community's racial attitudes and criticises the use of religion to sanctify discriminatory practices.

Scathing critique of the Afrikaner is also evident in 'Unto Dust', written in 1949, 1 year after apartheid was instituted by the newly elected National Party government. This story depicts the racial ideology of the Afrikaner and is one 'in which apartheid's obsessions are made to bite the common earth' (Meihuizen 1991:37). Oom Schalk approvingly shares Stoffel Oosthuizen's opposition to inclusively liberal racial policies of the British government:

[A]fter all, that was one of the reasons why the Boers trekked away into the Transvaal and the Free State [...] because the British Government wanted to give the vote to any Cape Coloured person walking about with a *kroes*⁶ head and big cracks in his feet. (Bosman 1991:16)

This racist comment refers to the National Convention in 1908 (just before South Africa became a Union in 1910), which permitted former Boer republics to exclude African people from their electoral rolls, whilst the Cape was allowed to retain its own franchise qualifications. This compromise secured the franchise rights of coloured people in the Cape Province (Dugard 1978:26–27). Bosman's representation of Oom Schalk's and Stoffel Oosthuizen's racially derogatory attitudes towards non-white⁷ people in this short story is in keeping with his critique of the Afrikaners' (as colonisers) sense of superiority and echoes the fundamental postcolonial concerns of socio-political representation and racism as expressed by Overbey (2012).

Bosman's critical view of the Afrikaner in these four short stories comes mainly from his experiences of their racial ideology. Whilst it is evident that the critique of the Afrikaner features in Bosman's writings, his stinging critique of the English during the South African War is relentless and features equally strongly in his short stories and novels. The experience of suppression, which is highlighted by Ashcroft et al. (2003) as one of the focal points in postcolonial theory, features strongly in Bosman's writing through conveying the experiences of Boers under British rule, as well as black people before and after apartheid.

Postcolonial literature is often concerned with cruelty against subjugated people of a colonised land. The opening chapter of Bosman's novel, *Willemsdorp* (written in 1951 but first published in 1977), shows the Afrikaner escaping the English, through the Great Trek, to where 'the might of the British

5. See Oliver's (2010) view of the church and politics: 'The church shared the government's power and control by ensuring that laws were passed to shape and discipline society to conform to Christian values and laws ...' (Oliver 2010:6).

6. The term 'kroes' is an offensive reference to tightly curled/frizzy African hair. <https://dsae.co.za/entry/kroes/e04120>

7. A term devised by the apartheid authorities to refer to black, coloured or Indian people in South Africa and could be considered to be offensive or problematic.

3. An Afrikaans word, originally used as a derogatory term for Boers who surrendered to the British during the Boer War, ultimately derived from the English phrase – 'hands up!'

4. The Afrikaans term, used by Bosman, refers to members of the Reformed Church.

empire could not reach them' (Bosman 1977:7). Reasons include the cruelty of the British concentration camps, where Afrikaner women and children were interned as a means of coercing the Boer guerrilla soldiers to surrender: 'And in each small town there is a Boer War Cemetery: women and children of the concentration camps lie there. Time does not heal all wounds' (Bosman 1977:8). The implication of such cruelty is that generations of future Afrikaner men and women would carry the pain and bitterness of this British colonial policy. Postcolonial writing correspondingly focuses on the legacies of colonialism through the scars that remain after decolonisation.

Postcolonial discourse centres on the severe consequences of control and exploitation of the colonised people and their land. In Chapter 5 of *Willemsdorp*, Bosman portrays the Afrikaner as a 'refugee', fleeing from such control and exploitation:

And in the end, the thousand miles turned out not to have been enough. A thousand miles by ox-wagon was very far. And that was the only form of transport that the Voortrekkers knew. And they thought that a distance of a thousand miles between themselves and the English – an ox-wagon's thousand miles – would be enough. They could not foresee the day of steam and the petrol engine. (Bosman 1977:70)

The violence and destruction of colonisers seeking to retain power are also evident in *Willemsdorp* through the bitter remarks of Jack Brummer, the mining commissioner:

[I]f they did not burn down all our farm houses and if they did not put our women and children in concentration camps, the English would never have won the Boer War. (Bosman 1977:95)

Similar human consequences of British colonisation are embodied in other characters in the novel. Krisjan Erasmus represents the impoverished white Afrikaner.⁸ His brother, Johannes Erasmus, through his connection to the character Cyril Stein, can secure a job for Krisjan as a lorry driver:

[T]o be a lorry driver was to be a king. That was how he felt about it, after the poverty and the misery and the degradation of his life as a *bywoner* [poor-white tenant farmer]. (Bosman 1977:97)

This basic form of employment becomes a lifeline for the starving *bywoner* and reflects the extent of poverty experienced by the Afrikaner population under British colonial rule.

Lena Cordier, who leaves Willemsdorp to teach in the city of Johannesburg, relays a tragic story of the plight of 'poor white' Afrikaner schoolchildren:

[T]hey came from very poor families. And you could see that their parents tried to keep them decent. And that was what seemed so awful about it, because it was so hopeless – poor whites trying to keep up a show of respectability. Your people and my people are there in the slums of Johannesburg. You've got no idea how awful it is. (Bosman 1977:146–147)

8.The 'Poor White Problem' was a social phenomenon officially named by the 1932 Carnegie Commission.

Such examples show Bosman portraying Afrikaners suffering at the hands of the powerful colonial government. Postcolonial writing similarly concerns itself with the powerlessness of the colonised.

Cultural identity, a topic associated with postcolonial discourse, also appears in Bosman's portrayal of Johannes Erasmus who, when he sees the 'half-castes' (children of mixed race) playing in the Willemsdorp streets, is reluctant to admit that the 'pure white identity' of the town does not exist. Snyman (2009) associates this reluctance with Erasmus's own sense of inferiority as an after-effect of the colonial experience and his need to make up for it by denigrating others:

[H]is inferiority complex – which he tries to hide behind a facade of self-assuredness – haunts him and causes him to suffer spells of depression and melancholy. At another level, Erasmus's state of mind is emblematic of the demoralised Afrikaner psyche after the Boer War. It appears that racially superior attitudes were, for many Afrikaners, a means of compensating for the humiliation suffered during the war and the rebellion. (p. 129)

Opperman-Lewis (2016) supports the view that the psychological trauma and humiliation inflicted on Afrikaners under British colonial rule resulted in 'narcissistic rage' against black South Africans and that Afrikaners reflexively undertook to oppress black people in markedly similar ways to which they themselves had experienced oppression (Opperman-Lewis 2016:15). She examines the psychological impact that this historical scar left not only on the Afrikaners who suffered under harsh British rule, but also on future generations of Afrikaners.

Bosman already notes this legacy of colonialism in his short story 'Funeral Earth'. He highlights the irony of the Afrikaners' attempt to 'teach Sijefu's tribe of Mtosas to become civilized' (Bosman 1991:160). Oom Schalk's sarcastic tone brings this critique to the fore:

[E]ven after we had set fire to their huts in a long row round the slopes of Abjaterskop, so that you could see the smoke almost as far as Nietverdiend, the Mtosas remained just about as unenlightened as ever. (Bosman 1991:160)

Just as the English had burnt down the Afrikaners' farms, so do the Afrikaners repeat similar atrocities against black people. Postcolonial writers, such as Fanon (1963:29–30), expressed the view that colonialism is characterised by 'pervasive violence against the marginalised natives', by the State and the settlers. This behaviour is clearly evident in Bosman's texts as he presents the destruction and devastation experienced by Afrikaners under English colonialism and, later, by Africans under Afrikaner rule. De Kiewiet (1957:48) interpreted Black-Boer conflicts as fed more by their similarities than by their differences. Both struggled for control over the same natural resources such as water and land. By the end of this story, Bosman presents the Afrikaners' awareness of the irony when they realise that black people, too, have a love for and an attachment to their land:

... picking up handfuls of soil and pressing it together. We felt the deep loam in it, and saw how springy it was and we let it trickle through our fingers. And we could remember only that it was for sowing. I understood then how, in an earlier war, the Mtosas had felt, they who were also farmers. (Bosman 1991:164)

Bosman's concern with the injustice of land dispossession resulting from Black-Boer land conflicts and the *Natives Land Act* (No. 27 of 1913)⁹ was because of the long-term effect of such laws. Independent, prosperous African farmers who owned land and livestock were forced to surrender these possessions and reduced to migrant mine labourers or wage labourers on white-owned farms (Ross 1999:88). These concerns are synonymous with postcolonial themes of dispossession, displacement and exploitation of the colonised people and their land. Although Bosman is critical of such laws, he also sympathises with the Afrikaner, whose deep love and appreciation for the land come from their forebears, the first Dutch settlers in the 1600s. Afrikaners view themselves as 'belonging' to Africa, regarding it as their indigenous home, as Bosman explains in his critical personal writings:

[T]he Afrikaner accepts himself as part of Africa. Out of his own traditions and history and background, out of the stones and the soil and the red guts of Africa, he is fashioning a literature that has not reached a very high inspirational level [...] but that has struck an authentic note, somehow, and that you can *feel* has got a power in it that must become an enduring part of the Afrikaner's national heritage. (Bosman 2003:168–169)

However, Bosman acknowledged that Africa belongs to Africans. This is successfully portrayed in the description of the 'African Woman', Marjorie Jones, in *Willemsdorp*, as the character Cyril Stein admires her:

[I]n the movement of her hips, there was, for all the world, to take note of Africa ... The African woman's backside, Cyril Stein was thinking to himself. It was like the shape of the African continent on the map. From the loins of the negro¹⁰ woman would spring all the future generations of the people of the African continent. The white man would come and go. His brief sojourn and his passing would leave behind few traces. In the loins of the black woman, the history and the destiny of Africa were wrapped up. The white man would come and go and be forgotten. Africa, wombed in the negro woman's pelvis, was secure. Africa would go on forever. (Bosman 1977:90–91)

It is clear, from the passage above, that Bosman felt that Africans have a rightful place in Africa – the verb 'wombed' emphasising that it is indeed their natural home. The repeated phrase, 'the white man would come and go', conveys the message that the colonists would never successfully conquer

9. The *Natives Land Act* was passed in 1913, by the Union Government. It allocated less than one-tenth of South African land to black people (who at the time were a majority at 61% of the population). It limited land acquisition amongst black people and resulted in land dispossession. The Act also made it an illegal practice for black people to make use of white land and to recompense the landowner in any form except for labour.

10. *Willemsdorp* was initially written for publication in the United States of America and for an American readership. The use of this term is by the character Cyril Stein and its use is thus being *represented* by Bosman.

and claim Africa – a highly political statement to make in light of the time in which Bosman wrote this novel.

Bosman, like later postcolonial writers, was clearly concerned with and critical of the coloniser's power, control and conquest of the colonised and of the socio-political impacts that follow.

A hindrance to hybridity: The apartheid colonial state

Typical in postcolonial writing is the theme of hybridity. Mambrol (2016:n.p.) notes that, as 'One of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory', it 'commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization'. The present study explores cultural and linguistic hybridity through the theme of racism in *Willemsdorp*, Bosman's own hybridity and the stylistic aspects of his writing, which is characterised by the inclusion of Afrikaans and African words in his English texts. Issues relating to the mixing of races and co-habitation are central to the novel. The main storyline concerns inter-racial relationships in the context of the *Immorality Act* (No. 21 of 1950)¹¹ and the *Group Areas Act* (No. 41 of 1950),¹² both passed by the newly elected apartheid government the year before the novel was written. These policies, implemented by the Afrikaners as the previously colonised people and now the colonisers, feature in the novel as examples of racial discrimination that deliberately hinders cultural hybridity or multiculturalism. Hybridity, discrimination and racism similarly feature in the discourse of postcolonial writers such as Bhabha (1994) and Fanon ([1952]1986), which is discussed in the analysis of *Willemsdorp*.

Cultural hybridity: Strictly taboo

Willemsdorp was written during a politically volatile time in South Africa. Its first posthumous publication in 1977 contained significant cuts, which according to Gray (in Bosman 1998:216), contain 'painful revelations of illegal brutality on the part of the South African Police'. This brutality is a direct result of enforcing the aforementioned statutes. As such, the content was censored drastically by its publishers. Gray continues:

[O]mitting them effectively got rid of the swingeing exposure Bosman intended of such routine practices. An element of tyranny, of menace, simply disappeared from the book – which to say the least, is unfortunate. (Gray, in Bosman 1998:216)

The year 1977, as *Sunday Times* journalist, Pendock (1999) recalls, was:

[T]he dark night of Apartheid. Soweto had exploded the previous year and 1977 saw a clampdown on the press. *World* and *Weekend World* were closed down and their editors placed in 'preventative detention'. (p. 15)

11. This Act prohibited intercourse or sexual relationships between white people and non-white people, which included black, coloured or Asian people.

12. This Act permitted the government to establish separate residential areas based on racial categories. Members from other races were barred from living in areas not assigned to them.

It is, therefore, in this context that the publishers of *Willemsdorp*, Human & Rousseau, excluded the numerous passages on police brutality and only published the full version in 1998.¹³

The setting of the novel is a small town in the Northern Transvaal. Snyman (2012:61) observes that 'small-town society was for Bosman the ideal vehicle for commentary on social and moral issues in an era of political turmoil in South Africa'. *Willemsdorp* clearly reveals Bosman's critique of the contentious, racist policies and laws passed by the new government in 1950 and 1951.

Bosman's parody targets government officials responsible for enforcing the laws that separated cultures and races in South Africa. From his awful grammar and unsophisticated use of language to his nonsensical, nocturnal investigations whereby he uses a torch to identify footprints in the dark, which *he* feels could only belong to a non-white person, Detective Sergeant Brits functions as Bosman's parodic weapon to convey his critique of the apartheid state and its absurd racial laws. He informs Charlie Hendricks, the editor of one of the town's local newspapers, of his 'instructions from the new Government to clean up the place' (Bosman 1977:24) by apprehending people who contravened the *Immorality Act*.

In view of Bosman's critique of this Act, a significant scene in *Willemsdorp* highlights the potential dangers of hybridity in the colonial context. When Marjorie Jones, a coloured prostitute, pays Charlie Hendricks a visit at his apartment, he does not invite her to sit down, for, as we are told by the narrator, it 'would be out of the question' (Bosman 1977:79) for a white man to offer a coloured woman a seat in his home:

[B]ut otherwise, when he lay with her on the divan, Charlie Hendricks could not detect that she was essentially different from a white girl that might have come to lie on the divan in his arms. And – although he was unconscious – he had also solved the problem as to how a white man had to act when a coloured girl came into his room. He couldn't offer her a chair, but he could, the divan. (Bosman 1977:80)

In this scene, the narrator's opinions reflect those of the author. Davis (2006) investigates the source of multiple ironies in Bosman's texts, focusing on the nature of the relationship between the author and the narrator and highlights Bosman's lack of consistency in applying his authorial voice. Davis explains that at times, the distance between the author and narrator is a notable and definite one, whilst at other times, there is no clear distinction as to whether it is Bosman or the narrator's voice (or both) that is heard between the lines (as is the case in many of his short stories). It is clear in this scene that the authorial voice highlights the hypocrisy of the racist values held by white men and reflects their ideology regarding the inequality of races.

13. Except for the scenes on police brutality and the use of an indigenous African word (explained later), the two versions are almost identical. In the analysis, I make use of the 1977 version in order to highlight the differences when compared with the 1998 version.

Once the affair between Marjorie and Charlie begins, his conscience is ruled by the indoctrination of the government's law and by his own heritage. Charlie feels tainted and is 'filled with self-loathing' (Bosman 1977:80). The phrase, 'He felt low', is repeated several times, but this does not stop him from physically engaging further with Marjorie, as though he instinctively knows, on a human rather than a racial level that as two consenting adults, they had not faulted:

[H]e knew, of course. It wasn't that there was anything wrong per se with his relations with Marjorie. At least, it was rotten, and all that, stinking, and all that. But, it wasn't just that. He was, in spite of all kinds of liberal and even egalitarian views that he might hold, still, at heart, a Boer and a Calvinist. Charlie Hendricks knew that about himself. He was the editor of a Union Party newspaper. And intellectually he recoiled from the Volksparty tenets. But in his blood, he was a Boer. And, he was sleeping with a kaffir woman. The generations of Boer ancestry were stronger than he was. He felt a lost soul. (Bosman 1977:133)

Charlie's own hybrid identity, as revealed in the above passage, leads to his psychological strife. This reflects what, postcolonial author, Bhabha (1994) notes, occurs in a hybrid identity:

[T]wo contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the same place, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of a multiple and contradictory belief. (p. 132)

In presenting Charlie's predicament, Bosman demonstrates how the racial ideologies of the time, many of which were used to justify colonialism, shaped the ways in which white people viewed themselves in relation to non-white people.

Bhabha (1994) further explains that in cases of hybrid identity, the person experiences:

[I]ntellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negation or elision; it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief. (p. 132)

Charlie clearly experiences similar uncertainty and anxiety in his emotional and psychological struggle as he crosses racial and cultural boundaries.

Hybridity was anathema from the perspective of Afrikaner Calvinism and the government. Thus, in the novel, the government (and the ideologies it was based on) is presented as the major obstacle hindering cultural hybridity, especially through its implementation of *The Immorality Act* of 1927, amended later again in 1950. Even though laws had been passed and serious penalties put into place for miscegenation, Bosman reveals how certain characters in the novel are compelled to disobey these laws, cross the racial boundaries and are in fact not opposed to multiculturalism.

As an attractive coloured woman, Marjorie represents the proverbial forbidden fruit to which the white Afrikaner male characters, such as Charlie and Dap van Zyl, are deeply attracted. This attraction and interaction occur in what

Bhabha (1994) later termed the 'Third Space', where new identities can be constructed, combining the identities and cultures of all individuals interacting in that space:

[I]t is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew. (Bhabha 1994:37)

It is in this Third Space, according to Bhabha, that a community can exist as a cultural hybrid, creating new meanings and new identities.

The consequence of crossing these boundaries and experiencing social and political interaction in the 'Third Space' between Marjorie, Charlie and Dap van Zyl, precipitates the prejudice that Marjorie encounters, which leads to her untimely demise. The envisioned unity of a 'Third Space', which Bhabha believes hybridity could bring, could not materialise in current South African conditions, as Bosman poignantly points out. Marjorie Jones (believed to have been illegitimately fathered by a white man named Jones) is a product of miscegenation and personifies the notion of cultural hybridity – a concept not welcomed in this colonial context and thus symbolically renounced through her murder (Bosman 1997:127).

Whilst Bhabha's idea of hybridity is generally a favourable one, Fanon's ([1952] 1986) theorisation of inter-cultural or inter-racial desire is, by contrast, based on the view that the consequence of attempts at hybridity is often the self-destruction of the colonised. Fanon believed that inter-racial sexuality under colonial conditions was fundamentally pathological. The black woman who desires a white man suffers under the delusion that his body is a bridge to wealth and access (Fanon [1952] 1986). Marjorie's actions echo Fanon's theorisation of inter-racial desire as a form of self-destruction. He also elaborated on the objectification of women through his theory of colonisation. Bergner (1995:77) explains that in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, women are considered as objects (just as the colonised are considered objects) in terms of their sexual relationships with men. Nicholls (2012), in her Fanonian analysis of colonising the female body, explains:

[A]s I read Fanon, his deconstruction of colonisation and his development of a theory of decolonisation are grounded in an analysis of power relations that is as applicable to gender as it is to conquest of foreign territories. (n.p.)

Bosman's novel lends itself to a similar analysis when one reflects on Cyril Stein's admiration of Marjorie's body in the extract discussed earlier (Bosman 1977:90–91). At first glance, it seems to be a compelling image of an African woman representing the power of creation and the sustainability of Africans in Africa. However, a closer Fanonian analysis suggests that this white man's admiration, in fact, deconstructs her body, reducing it to a sexual object with the sole function of fulfilling male desire. Bosman's attempt to

show how hybridity is negated by political agendas is represented through Marjorie's pathological behaviour and self-destruction – a colonised woman who was not only sexually objectified and exploited but also conquered by the colonist/white male, through her tragic death.

Bosman's irony is searing where miscegenation, which is presented as an act of 'immorality' where Marjorie is concerned, is made to seem lighter when compared to Lena Cordier, a white woman, who has an abortion, which is performed by an Indian doctor. 'Dr Pee', doing house calls to check on Lena's health after the abortion, becomes 'embarrassing' to her:

[A]fter all, he was an Indian. And she could not help but wonder what the landlady of Repton House was beginning to think of his visits. Lena was sure that the land lady would be prepared to overlook Dr Pee's presence in the building if she knew that his coming around was connected only with a matter of procuring an abortion. But she would never tolerate his paying social calls in the place. (Bosman 1977:174–175)

Bosman foregrounds the ideo-cultural indoctrination of white superiority, as endorsed through colonialism. As a result of the broader racial ideologies of the time, which negated the idea of cultural hybridity, both Charlie and Lena display anxiety about being sexually or romantically associated with people across the colour bar.

In an attempt to prevent hybridity and multiculturalism, government vigorously implemented the *Group Areas Act*, which brought an end to racially mixed residential areas by creating physical boundaries between white and non-white people. The latter were forced to leave their homes and were relocated to specified areas. This legislation by the new colonising power could also be considered a form of what Bunch (2015) calls 'distributive epistemic violence', a category adapted from the postcolonial scholar Spivak's (1988) term, 'epistemic violence'.¹⁴ Bunch (2015) refers to the withholding, from the marginalised 'other',¹⁵ of education, land and other resources that allow for a productive life. In this way, the 'otherness' is entrenched and further separates the marginalised from the dominating group. Epistemic violence, in whatever form, subjugates and controls the 'other' and has its roots in wide-ranging discriminatory practices that help the dominant group to maintain power and control.

Korf (2010) argues that part of the apartheid government's moral justification for the policy of separate development included the upliftment and development of Africans, albeit separately from whites. However, she explains, 'during Malan's tenure [from 1948 to 1954], Apartheid seemed to consist of anti-measures, and little came of the promises to "uplift" Africans' (Korf 2010:464–465).

14.The concept of 'epistemic violence' was introduced to postcolonial studies in Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), where it refers to the Westerners' exclusion or marginalisation of the voice of indigenous people through projecting Eurocentric knowledge about Third-World countries.

15.The important postcolonial concern of 'othering' – a concept coined by Spivak in her essay, 'The Rani of Sirmur' (1985) – refers to engendering marginality of an individual or a group that does not fit in with the norms of a dominant social group.

The description in *Willemsdorp* of the 'Native location' where Marjorie lives reflects these postcolonial aspects of entrenching 'otherness' by withholding resources, neglecting to uplift Africans and disempowerment through separate development, and Bosman (1977) here refers implicitly to the results of the implementation of the *Group Areas Act*:

[T]he houses were a haphazard collection of wood-and-iron and unbaked brick structures, with holes in the walls to take the place of windows. A lot of them were mud huts with flat roofs of corrugated iron held down with huge stones. (p. 153)

Charlie Hendricks realises that should he father a child with Marjorie, the child would have to live in the township as a 'half caste' according to the law. The plight of such a child is powerfully conveyed in his thoughts:

He was not prepared to go through life with the feeling that there was that illegitimate coloured child – born into the world without hope and without opportunity. Born into a world in which all the doors were shut. His child, his own child, begotten in sin and disgustingness, that child is a human being. And that human being a coloured bastard, bred in the nigger location, there was no other place for a part-white child to grow up in. And with no future – no matter what talents that child had, was there an avenue that would afford a part-white, part-coloured child any hope of self-expression? (Bosman 1977:141)

Bosman's implicit political views on separate development as implemented in the Group Areas Act, as well as on apartheid, are highlighted in the concluding rhetorical question. These views prefigure Loomba's (1998:2) view of the coloniser's role in 'unforming or re-forming the communities'. Bosman's bleak description of the locations also prefigures subsequent postcolonial discourse relating to racism, difference, subjugation and suppression of colonised people.

Linguistic hybridity: A political act

Willemsdorp depicts a divided South Africa, not just on a racial level, between white and non-white people, but also between the English and the Afrikaners. Bosman conveys this division through the language differences between these two groups in the town, accentuated by the exclusive names of the two main newspapers: *The Willemsdorp News*, which promotes the interests of the Union Party and English-speaking supporters, and the *Noordelike Transvaal Nuus*, which is the 'vehicle of the Boer Volksparty' (Bosman 1977:10).

Bosman did not support the separation of the two languages as an ideal. An anglicised Afrikaner with his own hybrid identity, he advocated a multilingual society, where English and Afrikaans could co-exist harmoniously and which was inclusive of the indigenous languages. Leff (2014:24) refers to Bosman as the 'hybrid man' and notes De Kock's (2001) interpretation of Bosman's hybridity:

[H]e could be an Afrikaner and a South African. He could be an English-speaking author and an Afrikaans writer. He could comment on Afrikaans letters as an English-speaker, and he

could assume the guise of an insider-figure and comment on Afrikaans writing in Afrikaans. (De Kock 2001:204)

In 'straddling two cultures', as Leff (2014:24) notes, Bosman's 'hyphenated identity' allowed him to bring hybridity into his texts, especially in relation to language.

Amongst stylistic devices characteristic of postcolonial authors is that of language variance, which, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002:50), 'abrogates the privileged centrality of English'. This technique is evident in Bosman's stories, which bring Afrikaans words into his English texts. The inclusion of an African indigenous language, although minimal, is also evident in Bosman's original version of *Willemsdorp*: 'Back home in his *khaya* [home] in the location, Josias did not sleep very easily that night' (Bosman 1998:167, my emphasis). The metonymic function of language variance is a strong feature of postcolonial writing. The practice of carrying words over from the mother tongue into the adopted literary form is regarded as an 'insertion of the truth of culture into the text' (Ashcroft et al. 2002:51). The word 'khaya' is unglossed in Bosman's text, thus inserting the culture that it signifies and pointing to the importance for him of cultural hybridity.

Untranslated foreign words in a text hold the power and presence of the culture that they signify and therefore have the important function of inscribing difference (Ashcroft et al. 2002). Ashcroft et al. (2002:65) further explain that:

[T]he choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status. (p. 51)

These techniques are present in Bosman's writing. By mixing untranslated/un-glossed Afrikaans (and a few African) words into his English texts, Bosman takes an anti-colonial stance, consciously promoting a 'South African English' and challenging the authority of the metropolitan language:

[T]he language in which I am writing is not pure English – it is Afrikaans-English. It took me five years of writing for the wastepaper basket, plus the ability to break a few English grammar rules effortlessly, before I could write that way automatically. (In Gray 2005:44)

New (1978) (in Ashcroft et al. 2003:305) claims that 'Literature which uses the actual language – the sounds and syntax – of the people becomes an arena in which the people's political and psychological tensions can find expression' and explains that the literary form that holds and reflects the verbal tensions of the people 'becomes a means of celebrating, or exposing, or at least recognising and communicating particular social realities'. In Bosman's writing, the tension or 'discord', aptly described by Leff (2016:117), between the English and the Afrikaners, is conveyed convincingly in the election campaign scene in *Willemsdorp*. The young, Afrikaner men cause a disruption by heckling the Union party speaker and are escorted out by Afrikaner stewards:

‘Come on now, you kèrels [*fellows*], the leader of the strong-arm men said to Faded Blazer and Soiled Shirt – speaking to them in Afrikaans – ‘you know we’re with you. But we’re getting a quid each from the Union Party bastards to keep order at their meeting. Go out quietly and we’ll be with you in the bar just now. They’re just going to sing their bloody God Save the King and then it will be all over. Come along now, Old Bul [*bull*]’... And those members of the audience who did not understand the Boer language were suitably impressed. It was comforting to think that the Union Party had as stewards determined men who would brook no nonsense from hooligans. (Bosman 1977:14–15)

This scene clearly depicts how the ‘actual language of the people’ as indicated by New (1978) reveals political tensions and divisions between the English and the Afrikaner.

Typical stylistic features of postcolonial writing are thus in evidence in Bosman’s pre-postcolonial works. Their application anticipates one of the major themes of postcolonial writing, hybridity, and shows Bosman’s acute awareness of the ways in which colonialism in its various forms in South Africa was a hindrance to hybridity.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the proposed description of Bosman as a ‘proto-postcolonial author’. The focus on themes in Bosman’s texts shows them to resonate with postcolonial concerns: the harsh and detrimental effects of colonisation; racism in the colonial context and colonialism as a hindrance to hybridity and multiculturalism. Bosman’s criticism of British colonialism is accompanied by his criticism of the reflexive nationalism of the Afrikaners that culminated in the segregationist laws of the apartheid state.

Bosman explored the impact of colonial rule on the lives of both black and white South Africans during different periods in the country’s colonial history. Like Mansfield, whom Kimber (2018:121) believed wrote about colonial New Zealand, from a ‘post-colonial mind-set’, and so did Bosman about colonial South Africa. Whilst Kimber (2018:121) described Mansfield as choosing to ‘dislocate’ herself from the cultural landscape in which she grew up in New Zealand, Lenta (2003), from a similar standpoint, describes Bosman’s:

[A]ttempt to define himself in terms of his disengagement from the codes, religious, social and political, to which South African whites in the first half of the twentieth century subscribed. (p. 113)

In doing so, it is clear that both authors were able to construct their narratives, within a colonial period, from a post-colonial viewpoint and successfully depicted the ‘darker underbelly to the accepted notion of colonialism: what we now of course call postcolonialism’ (Kimber 2018:122).

Bosman’s incisive rejections of the historical attempts around him to essentialise culture, ethnicity and race and to suppress various forms of hybridity are key to his satire. They provide sufficient evidence to substantiate the view that he was indeed a ‘proto-postcolonial author’ who, both thematically and stylistically, repudiated the dominant colonial discourses of his time.

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I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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