

# Power and the Prison: A Foucauldian Perspective on Herman Charles Bosman's *Cold Stone Jug* and *Willemsdorp*

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## Abstract

Although the political angle in Bosman's writings as expressed in his language style is recognised, the prison writings as featured in his two late novels, *Cold Stone Jug* (1949) and *Willemsdorp* (written in 1951, first published posthumously in censored form in 1977 and in full in 1998), have received less scholarly attention in terms of his political intent. The present study explores his preoccupation in these works with the brutality of the prison system and the power of the apartheid state. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* was employed as a useful theoretical lens in examining Bosman's critique of the prison system in South Africa and the abuse of power within it. An analysis of the details of police brutality and abuse of power in the censored and uncensored published versions of *Willemsdorp* has also been included, highlighting the applicability of Foucault's theorisation on discipline and punishment in the penal system to Bosman's texts. This study brings to the fore Bosman's political intention behind his writing, through his critique of the state, its officials and unjust practices.

**Keywords:** prison; power; apartheid; brutality; Foucault; Bosman

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## Introduction

Herman Charles Bosman wrote three novels in the last years of his life. His first, *Jacaranda in the Night* (1947), was reworked into his second novel, *Willemsdorp*, written in 1951, and first published posthumously as a censored version in 1977,<sup>1</sup> then in full in 1998. The third novel, *Cold Stone Jug* ([1949] 1999), features semi-autobiographical accounts of his own prison experiences.

Bosman scholarship has focused mainly on his skilful use of satire and irony. The political intention in his writing has also been recognised, despite his own claim of being “essentially apolitical” (Bosman 2003, 9). Abrahams (1988, 269) portrays Bosman as a man of contradictions who “took on the roles of entertainer and clown, philosopher of art, mocking prankster, [and] imperious priest of a demonic aestheticism.” These roles allowed Bosman to write subversively, engaging with controversial political subject matter. Abrahams (1964, 7) also describes Bosman as “a rebel against many of the commonly accepted values.” He did not accept the social and political values and norms of his time and used his ironic writing style to criticise them. Snyman (2012, 62) observes this quality in *Willemsdorp*, where Bosman’s “satirical eye” on the *dorp* (small town) enabled him to “dissect the society that it represents” in response to structures put in place by the apartheid government to uphold the laws it was implementing at the time. These included the Immorality Act (No. 21 of 1950), forbidding extra-marital sexual relations between whites and all other races.<sup>2</sup>

The present study explores Bosman’s political intention in the novels *Cold Stone Jug* and *Willemsdorp*, both of which foreground his concerns about the state’s power and its abuse within the prison system, through different manifestations of brutality that are officially condoned and encouraged, as aggressive and suppressive laws are implemented. Foucault’s theorisation on discipline, punishment and the prison system, in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), offers a useful analytical tool in understanding Bosman’s depiction of South Africa’s prison system and the apartheid regime’s exercise of power within and beyond the prison.

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<sup>1</sup> Bosman’s untimely death in 1951, and having no will, led to his papers being sold at a public auction. Thereafter they were stored for more than 20 years in the archives of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin. In 1977, Human and Rousseau agreed to publish *Willemsdorp* in South Africa, with omissions approved by his wife, Helena (Gray 1997, 32).

<sup>2</sup> In *Willemsdorp*, it is informally referred to as the “Tielman Roos Act” (Act 5 of 1927), named after the then Minister of Justice who piloted the Act and who often referred to miscegenation as “evil” and a “sin” (Martens 2007, 238). The political rationale for the Immorality Act was to prevent “race hybridisation” (225) as this would complicate the ruling on franchise rights. The government’s ideology was that “only ‘civilised’ men had the right to be citizens ... [and] that all white men by virtue of their race were entitled to citizenship rights,” the most important of which was the right to vote. In an attempt to create a unified white South African nation, Africans were excluded from “civil society,” thus restricting them from voting (224). Segregationists argued that black people were inherently lacking in “civilisation” and “thus civilised whites were obliged to rule over them” (231).

*Cold Stone Jug* is based on Bosman's imprisonment (from 1926 to 1930)<sup>3</sup> at the age of 21 for the unpremeditated murder of his step-brother. Scholars focusing on Bosman's prison writings have examined the appalling conditions and highlighted aspects of power and control, but none have delved into the underlying political critique linked to the context in which the novels were written. Roberts (1985, 62) notes that Bosman "writes in detail of that horrifying time, and such details are to be repeated again and again in South African prison literature over the next fifteen years," but she does not explore any of those "detail[s]." The present study extends this previous analysis by exploring the macabre details of prison life as depicted in Bosman's novels. Folli's (1994, v) account of Bosman's prison experience as depicted in *Cold Stone Jug* touches only briefly on aspects of control and abuse of power by prison officials as her primary focus is on the imprisoned artist's "existential need to communicate." She employs a Foucauldian lens in her study, which is useful in a literal understanding of power and its abuse within the prison. By contrast, this study explores prison life in *Cold Stone Jug* as well as *Willemsdorp* in further depth. It focuses not only on the abuse of power as explored by Folli, but also uses key concepts from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and furthermore applies them to both novels to reveal their relationship to the wider sociopolitical context of South Africa.

Oswald's (2005, 3) discussion on the history of South African prisons includes the aspect of racial segregation within the prison space as early as 1859, with reference to Breakwater Prison: "Authorities believed that blacks were less able to respond to rehabilitative programmes and would need punitive treatment longer than whites. Therefore, they argued that it was in the best interests of whites to be kept away from blacks." This racial ideology thrived a century later during the apartheid period in which Bosman wrote *Willemsdorp* and *Cold Stone Jug*. Oswald (2005, 55) accounts for Bosman's writing about his prison experience only after his release: "The emotion that accompanies incarceration was a huge obstacle for Bosman in terms of his writing ... [H]e had to adjust to a *lebensraum* that was completely different to that which he was used to. He was living in a hostile space. He was surrounded by hardened criminals, [and] treated inhumanely by prison warders." Oswald also acknowledges Bosman scholars who focus on similar themes in *Cold Stone Jug*, namely, M.C. Andersen (1992), who "examines the prison life of prison-authors" (Oswald 2005, 23), and N. Rusch (1979), who "examines how Bosman writes about prison conditions, breaking the silence about what was happening on the 'inside'" (Oswald 2005, 18). Oswald's emphasis on the "hostile space" of prison is merely one aspect of the prison experience. The present study expands on the Foucauldian notion of "space" as a disciplinary mechanism and it incorporates other disciplinary mechanisms explored by Foucault, such as panopticism, the implementation of rigid routine and the dehumanising practices of the prison system through subtle punishments, to show how these also applied outside of the prison walls in the country at large, even 19 years after his release when Bosman

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<sup>3</sup> Bosman was given the death penalty, but his sentence was reduced to 10 years with hard labour, of which he served only four at the Pretoria Central Prison and was released with parole. In his fictional account of this prison experience, he refers to the Swartklei Great Prison.

chose to write this novel. The underlying ideology of the apartheid state enabled the space presented in the novel.

The publication of *Cold Stone Jug* in 1949 is significant in that it appeared some seven months after the National Party's ascent to power in June 1948. Gray (2005, 325) notes that "at the very moment *Cold Stone Jug* was coming out, [Bosman] was writing 'Unto Dust'... featur[ing]the neurotic sifting apart of South Africa's bones, the divided tombs." Postel's (2008, 198) similar view of "Unto Dust," that it "mocks the segregationist ideology as a way of not only averting fundamental social change but also trying to create a true Heimat, at the expense of a plural reality," clearly reveals Bosman's concerns with the suppressive political climate of 1949. Roux (2007, 57) also points to the novel's position at just the moment when "South African society began its transformation into the form of a Police State, with the prison at the very heart of its strategies of coercion and control." The political underpinning of *Cold Stone Jug* is thereby made clear—however subtly Bosman presents it—in the context in which it went public and revealed the brutality of the South African prison system.

Written within three years of the National Party's election victory, a more graphic depiction of the South African prison system is encapsulated in Bosman's last novel, *Willemsdorp*, through its "satirical exposé of the effects of legalized racial separation" (Andersen 1997, 130). The year of the novel's first censored publication, 1977, was also politically volatile, following the Soweto uprising, with many restraints on the press. In the same year, political activist and icon, Steve Biko, was tortured and died whilst in police custody.<sup>4</sup> Biko's death in detention attests to the brutality of the security police during apartheid and the state's hand in covering up the torture and abuse of political detainees. In this context the publishers, Human and Rousseau, excised selected passages depicting police brutality before its first publication, which were reinserted two decades later, in 1998, four years after the country's democratisation. Pendock (1999, 15) describes the powerful effect of the reinstatement of Bosman's original text: "The casual brutality and sadism [of the police] are now restored to the story and, in a terrifying way, it is almost as if *Willemsdorp* foreshadows the truth commission report or one of the handful of recent books which deal with the barbarity of apartheid, like Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull*." Snyman (2009, 118) describes the reinstated passages as "graphic descriptions of police brutality," but her analysis of the "small-town novel" does not include details of the omitted content. The present study, however, compares the censored content with the subsequently restored scenes (two pages on each of Detective Sergeant Brits's speeches in chapters 9 and 11 and a four-page section 2 in chapter 12) to show how powerfully Bosman was already linking the exercise and

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<sup>4</sup> James Kruger (then Minister of Justice) reported that Biko had died of an alleged hunger strike. However, Biko was brutally beaten in a room by five security policemen, one of whom "thrashed him with a reinforced hose pipe," and he was left "shackled by leg-irons" to a security gate for several hours until he lost consciousness. Specialist evidence revealed severe head trauma and death resulting from brain damage (Wilson 2011, 12–13).

abuse of power in prisons to the political climate in the early years of apartheid at the time of writing.

This study draws parallels between *Cold Stone Jug* and *Willemsdorp* to examine the political voice in Bosman's late phase as the apartheid government was strengthening its grip. It uses Foucault's key ideas on discipline, punishment, power and the prison to analyse these novels in order to understand in greater depth Bosman's protest against the state through his critique of the exercise and abuse of power in the prison and legal systems of South Africa.

## Foucault's Analysis of Discipline, Punishment and the Prison

The essence of Foucault's thoughts in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) can be summarised into key ideas: Torture, Punishment, Prison and Discipline. He viewed each as the state's means of exercising or asserting power over individuals and his explanations, drawn from selected periods in history, delve into aspects of the penal system that underpin the abuse of such power. This study focuses on the central ideas in Foucault's analysis, which link specifically to state control within and beyond the prison.

Foucault explains that, in France during the 18th century and even long before, torture occurred in the form of public displays and, because criminals were viewed as committing crimes against the sovereign, this symbolised the sovereign's triumph. Foucault (1995, 34) explains how torture was systematised:

Torture correlates the type of corporal effect, the quality, intensity, duration of pain, with the gravity of the crime, the person of the criminal, the rank of his victims. There is a legal code of pain; when it involves torture, punishment does not fall upon the body indiscriminately or equally; it is calculated according to detailed rules: the number of lashes of the whip, the positioning of the branding iron, the duration of the death agony on the stake or the wheel (the court decides whether the criminal is to be strangled at once or allowed to die slowly, and the points at which this gesture of pity must occur), the type of mutilation to be used (hand cut off, lips or tongue pierced). (34)

Torture was also a core aspect of criminal investigation. Foucault (1995, 38) explains that "another form of torture ... 'la question', [is] the extraction of confessions by interrogation and systematic application of pain." He notes the importance of confessions during the 18th century, which "constituted so strong a proof that there was scarcely any need to add others, or to enter the difficult and dubious combinatory of clues" (37–38).

Foucault (1995, 72) notes that in France "[p]rotests against public executions proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century." Through outcries from the reformists, torture was followed by a second, ostensibly "gentler" and more "subtle power" that Foucault called "Punishment" (Cohen 2019, 30). While still carried out in

the public eye, criminals were forced to perform specified hard labour for several hours a day, to repay society for their infractions. The strict regimen indicated that the nature of punishment was no longer inflicted randomly by a sovereign power but instead was more controlled through defined imprisonments and stringent schedules for convicts (Cohen 2019, 29). Foucault argues that this controlled means of punishment was a first step away from the ultimate power of the sovereign and marked the birth of the state prison.

Foucault presents the state-run prison from the start of the 19th century as a newly envisaged, more acceptable form of punishment. It separated the criminal from society through degrees of punishment by incarceration that stripped the individual of his liberty for periods of time measured out in sentences deemed appropriate for the types of crime that had been committed (Foucault 1995, 105). Although liberty was compromised, imprisonment was intended to include an aspect of reformation, correction and improvement of the individual (233).

Of prison, Foucault notes that

in the succession of days and even years, [it] may regulate for man the time of waking and sleeping, of activity and rest, the number and duration of meals, the quality and ration of food, the nature and product of labour, the time of prayer, the use of speech and even, so to speak, that of thought, that education which, in the short, simple journeys from refectory to workshop, from workshop to the cell, regulates the movements of the body, and even in moments of rest, determines the use of time. (236)

Although this degree of control exercised in prison was intended to reform through instilling discipline, Foucault argues that in practice its effect was more severe, as the point was “not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body” (82).

Exercising discipline produces “subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies” (138), which may be “subjected, used, transformed, improved” (136). Looking beyond the prison, Foucault proposes that these various forms of discipline are also practised in society—in monasteries, schools, workshops and hospitals. The “control of activity” within these institutions was key in instilling discipline and creating productive, useful citizens (149). However, he also explains the way in which such discipline exploits the individual by focusing on obedience and subjection:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an “aptitude”, a “capacity”, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (138)

Discipline and training of the prisoner can be achieved through “time-tables,” strict procedures and prescribed activities, all of which entail close observation and constant, “detailed surveillance” from prison warders (220).

Bentham’s Panopticon is a disciplinary concept brought to life in the form of a building—a high central observation tower placed within a circle of prison cells. From the lit tower, a guard can see every cell and prisoner, but the inmate “is caught up in a power which is visible (he can always see the central observation tower) but unverifiable (he must never know when he is being looked upon)” (Cohen 2019, 30). Foucault (1995, 201) explains the Panopticon’s effect as inducing “in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power,” whereby they spontaneously police themselves, conforming to the rules and required behaviour of prisoners (202–203). His analysis of the Panopticon is that it is an architectural representation of power and a means to illustrate how prisoners (and society) could be subjugated (200).

Foucault states that the “discipline-mechanism” of panopticism is “a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come” (209). Cohen (2019, 30) explains Foucault’s understanding that “the prison may be the purest form of the panoptic principle, but its applications are far wider than that.” Panopticism becomes a new model of control, which extends beyond the prison and is practised throughout society and in various institutions. The same disciplinary mechanisms applied in prisons, to institute power, were later applied in society, within schools, workshops and hospitals (Foucault 1995, 149), through constant supervision by teachers in schools, “pressure from supervisors” in workplaces, all constituting “totally useful time” (150). Such panoptic arrangements, Foucault explains, apply to “the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms” (209). The concept of the “carceral society” is thus born from the surveillance and implementation of techniques that regulate human behaviour.

The liberty that accompanies light and space is often revoked in the prison system that aims to reform through discipline. Foucault (1995, 141) notes that “[d]iscipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space” and that “discipline requires enclosure ... the protected space of disciplinary monotony.” Disciplinary space allows supervision of “the conduct of each individual” (143). He notes that discipline is achieved in prison and society by partitioning people into specified spaces:

In organizing “cells”, “places”, and “ranks,” the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical. It is spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; ... they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture. (148)

In its application to broader society, for example within the “educational space,” Foucault argues that

[b]y assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all. ... It made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding. (147)

In a greater sense, enclosure and “partitioning” of people into spaces, even in workplaces, educational institutions and communities, is a means of exercising control and discipline.

Concerning confined spaces, Foucault explains another disciplinary measure of the prison, solitary confinement, which was intended to produce a favourable outcome: “through the reflection that it gives rise to and the remorse that cannot fail to follow, solitude must be a positive instrument of reform” (237).

Foucault (1995, 129) deduced that “[the] training of behaviour by a full time-table, the acquisition of habits, the constraints of the body imply a very special relation between the individual who is punished and the individual who punishes him. ... The agent of punishment must exercise a total power.” However, Foucault argues, the abuse of such power by prison officials through the implementation of disciplinary practices leads to the failure of the system’s goal of reforming the individual. This relationship between punisher and the punished also applies to the wider world, whereby the exercise of “total power” by institutions (through controlling, constricting and conditioning individuals) leads to subjugated, docile citizens (251).

Rhetorical questions posed by Foucault poignantly link such prison practices to greater society:

Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? (Foucault 1995, 227–28)

Foucault’s proposal that key elements of imprisonment and discipline extend beyond the prison and pervade the social realm suggests that *Discipline and Punish* serves as a useful theoretical lens through which to examine, in greater depth, not only the workings of the South African prison system as depicted in Bosman’s *Cold Stone Jug* and *Willemsdorp*, but also conditions outside it. The present study, therefore, employs Foucault’s theorisation on power and discipline in the context of state power and control, to show the brutality and fear that ensue when such power is abused within the prison and beyond.

## *Willemsdorp* and *Cold Stone Jug*

Bosman's writing of *Willemsdorp* in 1951 coincided with apartheid's brutal measures to prevent racial integration and enforce racist laws. The novel explores the consequences and implications of police enforcement of the Immorality Act in this context, for, as Van der Westhuizen (2001, 40) points out, South African policing during the apartheid years was a "political activity," concerned primarily with policing race relations, rather than the business of safety and security. The posthumous publication in 1977 excised passages that explicitly depicted police sadism and incidents behind closed doors of police interrogation rooms.

*Cold Stone Jug* was completed and published in 1949, a time when the police force was becoming the state's primary resource to entrench and uphold the regime's oppressive, racist laws and in the same year that the earliest apartheid legislation was passed—the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (No. 55 of 1949)—which prohibited marriages between white people and other races. Bosman's critique of the state can be viewed in this context. Even though he relates his pre-apartheid prison experience and does not overtly reflect on the racist laws,<sup>5</sup> his primary focus in the novel is the abuse of power in the country's prisons. Bosman's depiction of the prison experience illustrates the elements presented in Foucault's analysis of the prison and demonstrates specific ways in which the system failed in its primary function of correction and reformation and how power was abused to suppress and subjugate the inmates. This study shows how the prison mindset—as represented in the novel—permeated beyond the prison walls during the apartheid regime.

### **The Dreaded Omnipresent Gaze**

Panopticism, recalling Foucault, as a political activity, is notable in the character of Sergeant Brits, a law enforcer in Willemsdorp, who prides himself in tracking and surveilling citizens whom he suspects are involved in miscegenation. His obsession with this task is evident when he tracks footprints in the darkness of the night, which he believes are those of a black woman (Bosman 1977, 24). Hoping to catch those who are contravening the Immorality Act, he pays impromptu visits to as many white males as possible, including the religious leaders of Willemsdorp, and ambushes the Bloemhoek town councillor (Bosman 1998, 153–54). The movements of Willemsdorp citizens are tracked and closely monitored under his watchful gaze. His proud boasts about his previously employed fellow "trackers" in "South-West" (what is now, Namibia)—a "booze"-drinking "trained baboon" and "a bushman what hadn't any clothes on but a copper ring in his nose,"—undermine the "qualifications" which he claims to have as a serious investigative "tracker" (Bosman 1977, 37). Bosman's parody of state officials

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<sup>5</sup> Racial generalisations of black people and the prevailing derogatory attitudes are represented in *Cold Stone Jug*: the convicts Slangvel's (Bosman 1999, 129) and Parkins' (183) comments and references to "kaffirs" are fitting examples.

here translates into a critique of the apartheid government and its law enforcers who tried to control the movements and behaviour of all individuals.

*Cold Stone Jug* presents the law enforcers of the Swartklei Great Prison in a similar negative light. While Bosman does not depict a literal panoptic surveillance tower, he refers to the categories of warders who constantly monitor prisoners in every area of the prison: there are discipline warders, and warders on duty in the condemned cells, the mortuary gate, the hospital and outside:

In front of whatever shop the span is working in, a halt is made and the number of convicts is checked again. (In the course of a day, between the workshops and the sections, the convicts in the Swartklei Great Prison are checked fifteen times. That's how conscientious the authorities are about nobody leaving the place unofficially). (Bosman 1999, 82)

Foucault suggests that such penetrating surveillance is worse than punishment in its dehumanising effect. The carceral system in *Cold Stone Jug* is in a sense a microcosmic representation of what was practised throughout South African society at the time of writing. The omnipresent gaze of authorities who tracked human behaviour captures the essence of a “carceral society” in which citizens lived and the panoptic anxiety associated with the surveillance of every movement. *Willemsdorp* demonstrates this practice more explicitly through the actions of Sergeant Brits, who represents the power of the apartheid government as it monitored, controlled and subjugated its citizens.

### **State Brutality and the Abuse of Power**

Power and control were at the centre of the apartheid government’s strategy of enforcing boundaries between races. The measures taken by the police and law enforcers to achieve this, as depicted in the novel, are synonymous with Foucault’s description of 18th-century Europe, whereby the torture of criminals was a widely used and acceptable form of punishment.

In *Willemsdorp*, the character Dap van Zyl—a member of the Afrikaner Volk’s Party—has a secret affair with a coloured sex worker, Marjorie Jones. After her murder, he is arrested as a suspect, which leads to his confession:

He made a statement. He made it gladly. Even though his whole political career went to hell, he didn’t give a damn. “I slept with her, but I didn’t murder her”, was what Dap van Zyl said and put his signature to. But because he was himself a legislator, a man who had a share in making the country’s laws, he was himself suspicious of the law. He did not trust the law to help him. He wanted to live—just to stay alive. And he felt that there was nothing—keeping within the strict letter of the law—that they couldn’t do to him, if they had a mind to. (Bosman 1977, 181)

This fear-laden confession foregrounds Bosman’s critique of the “carceral society,” police corruption and brutality which characterised the political climate of South Africa

at the time. Van Zyl wanted “just to stay alive” even as he was fully aware of the lengths to which the law and all-powerful officials could go to extract confessions.

In the same way that torture is linked to confession in Foucault’s analysis, *Willemsdorp* similarly reveals the sadism of prison officials who used torture in their criminal investigations and to extract confessions. Brits’s goal of achieving a record arrest and conviction rate is achieved by such means when interrogating suspects of the robbery and alleged murder of Vermaak, an owner of a bottle store:

And getting them kaffirs to confess wasn’t too hard, neither. At the end of the week they all squawked. Except one nigger that I had to do up pretty bad with the sjambok. He just wouldn’t come his guts. Claimed he was just passing the hut and seen there was a brandy-drinking party and got drinking also. He knowed nothing about Vermaak, he said never having been near the store. And today I still think as maybe he was only telling God’s truth. But of course, I wouldn’t have none of that. What’s the good of swinging only seven, when there’s eight as you can have swung? (Bosman 1977, 118)

An examination of the two versions of *Willemsdorp* discloses police interrogation as synonymous with brute force and the abuse of power. Brits’s speech, omitted from the 1977 published text, demonstrates his revelling in the freedom of applying such atrocities to black people during his interrogation stints:

It was one of them short-handled whips and sometimes it broke. But you should of seen that kaffir’s shoulders and backside. It was a real treat, man. And I’m not talking about his guts, where I kicked him a couple of times. Or what I done with his face. You can say what you like, but there is nothing as tough as a kaffir. If it was a white man, he would have been dead end of the first day. But you should of seen that kaffir, the places where the whip got him. After you have been laying into a kaffir pretty solid for a few days—just knocking off to go and eat, now and again, or going out for a drink, so’s to get strength—well, a kaffir turns all green. He don’t go black and blue like a white man. He goes all green, and yellow-green. (Bosman 1998, 120)

Pendock (1999, 15) notes that Bosman’s publishers may have also been astounded by the police brutality displayed in the interrogation of the character Josias in the novel for his knowledge of white men having illicit relationships. As a result, they made significant cuts in the 1977 version of *Willemsdorp*: “Josias, a comic character and a dagga peddler and a low-grade pimp ... had to have half the backside flayed off him before he would talk” (Bosman 1977, 180). The more graphic and detailed version, however, appears in the 1998 publication:

Josias, with his clothes off, was spread-eagled across a table. It was a small table. His wrists and legs were shackled to the table legs near the floor ... “Look at the filthy mess he’s made on the floor,” the sergeant said. “Give him a few more for that. No, not on the same place, Pelsier. Hit him on another place. He doesn’t feel it if you hit him on a place that’s already cut open. Give me that strap for a bit. You’re tired. Yes, have a beer

... Yes, thanks, a small one.” The work of reasoning with Josias went on in the half-light of the prison cell. (Bosman 1998, 166)

The entire interrogation scene takes up almost three pages in the uncensored version of *Willemsdorp*. When Josias finally yields, the interrogation comes to an end. With his lashed back resembling “raw liver,” “he was on the verge of collapse when they released him from the table ... he fell across the table once more. ... He had fainted” (Bosman 1998, 166–68). This graphically parallels Foucault’s (1995, 39) understanding of the use of torture to extract a confession that was “highly valued; every possible coercion would be used to obtain it.”

In a private conversation between Sergeant Brits and his superior, Commandant Kolyn (in the censored 1977 text), they plot to extort information from a coloured woman who is the illicit lover of a white town councillor:

He wasn’t thinking of anything as crude as merely extorting a confession from the white man’s illicit partner. He had planned something more intricate ... “What I mean is for us to scare the living tripe out of the coloured woman in a cell,” Detective Sergeant Brits said, “and then for her to trap the white man.” (Bosman 1977, 150–51)

Omitted from this passage is a revealing phrase from the uncensored 1998 version: “What I means is for us to scare the living tripe out of the coloured woman in a cell *with a piece of short belt fastened on to a handle and laid across her backside*” (Bosman 1998, 153; my emphasis). The “law,” rightfully feared earlier by Van Zyl, could clearly not be trusted, as officials taking matters into their own hands routinely performed acts of excessive violence.

The warders in *Cold Stone Jug* were similarly violent against prisoners. From turning a “high-pressure hose-pipe” on prisoners locked in solitary confinement, which at times resulted in death (Bosman 1999, 167–68), to being hit over the head with a “baton” (52–53), subjection exemplified in physical abuse was the norm in Swartklei. Yet, ironically, the latter action attracts envy from the narrator on death row:

And when a warder mentioned to us that the fact that he had that morning had occasion, in the course of an altercation, to hit a convict over the head with his baton, I know how I felt about that convict, how I envied him, how infinitely privileged I felt he was to be able to be regarded by a warder as a live person, as somebody that could be hit over the head. For no warder would dream of hitting a condemned man with a baton. To a warder, a condemned man was something already dead. (Bosman 1999, 53)

In Foucauldian (1995, 138) terms, this reaction reveals how prison discipline has had a “diminishing” effect, “dissociating power” from the prisoner’s body so much that he no longer feels human or alive.

Later in the novel, when the narrator is overcome with “abysmal terrors,” a head warden reacts by displaying contempt: “bringing his booted heel down heavily on to the central part of my in-step, and with such good effect that several of my metatarsal bones got dislocated” (Bosman 1999, 177–78). Such abuse echoes the political ideology that was emerging at the time of writing, which condoned the use of force in exercising power and control, both inside and outside the prison.

### **The Disciplinary Space**

Considering the significance of space allocation and “enclosure” for Foucault, Van Zyl’s constricting holding cell in the Willemsdorp prison represents the disciplinary space in which, Foucault believes, individuals in broader society are ranked, classified and controlled. Before his confession, Van Zyl’s anxiety results in claustrophobia, as he is held “incommunicado”:

The confined nature of his cell accommodation made a farce of his pacing, seeing that he could only take a step and three-quarters in pacing lengthways ... he was a victim of that poltroon kind of neurasthenia that is linked with claustrophobia.

Just because he was a tall man, and he was locked in a concrete cell, iron-doored that measured six foot two inches in height and slightly less than six foot in length and that was hardly more than three foot broad, Dap van Zyl got hold of the silly idea that he was locked up in a kind of Black Hole of Calcutta and that he couldn’t breathe. This was very foolish. For one thing, there was an air-hole at the top of the ceiling that was at least the size of a child’s fist. (Bosman 1977, 179–80)

Van Zyl’s “Black Hole” has a similar effect to the “steel cage” in which the narrator finds himself in *Cold Stone Jug*. His removal from the condemned cell into the mainstream prison system is marked by the notable change in space:

They were steel cages, partitioned from each other by bolted steel plates, like you see in a ship. One row had steel plates in front as well; the other row had bars and wire mesh. I hoped they would put me in a cage with bars and wire mesh in front. You could see a little way out into the passage through the wire. And the all-steel cage looked somewhat cold. But my luck was out. The section warden took me along a passage, unlocked an all-steel cage, waited for me to enter and then, without a word, slammed the steel door shut on me; and left. (Bosman 1999, 63)

These spaces exemplify the dehumanising effect of the prison system and, in Foucauldian terms, act as a physical “constraint” that “trains and corrects” behaviour to the point of subjection (Foucault 1995, 29).

Parallel to Van Zyl’s claustrophobia in his restricted, confining cell was Bosman’s own claustrophobia, which first developed during his time in prison and remained with him for the rest of his life. In *Cold Stone Jug* he expresses the suffocating experience of imprisonment:

But that person in the steel cage wasn't me at all. My real individuality, my real me, were those papers in the filing cabinet. So, of course I had suffocation fears. Who wouldn't get claustrophobia, shut like that between two covers, and tied up with green string and locked into a steel cabinet—with more and more folders getting piled on top of me with each year that passed? How on earth can you breathe inside a steel cabinet? (Bosman 1999, 196)

The disciplinary space as depicted in Bosman's novels is the cause of suffering and the control that it represents is experienced physically as suffocation within this confinement. The significance of "space" on a grander scale, in terms of Foucauldian thinking, can also be applied. During the time when Bosman wrote these novels, the apartheid government undertook to "partition" races into separate geographical spaces, through formal policies such as the Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950), which demarcated residential spaces according to racial categories. In doing so, the government could exercise more control over the interaction among the races. *Willemsdorp* depicts the "native location" in which Marjorie lives as a decrepit space, where houses are referred to as "tin shant[ies]"—half-made structures resembling "mud huts with flat roofs of corrugated iron" (Bosman 1977, 153)—illustrating the apartheid government's total power and its withholding of resources to subjugate black people further. In apartheid South Africa, the deformation of the human spirit occurred not only in the prison or police cells, but across society through the implementation of degrading laws which were, using Foucauldian terms, intended to "punish deeply" by controlling the movements, spaces and intimate aspects of citizens' lives, thereby exercising power in its most severe form.

### **"Subtle ... Apparently Innocent, But Profoundly Suspicious"**

Foucault's (1995, 82) notion of punishing "more deeply" implies actions harmful not only to the physical body, but also to the human spirit. These actions, performed subtly, humiliate and degrade, thereby inflicting a form of torture and punishment on a prisoner. This is evident in the harshness of prison life described by Bosman in terms of clothing, food and sleeping quarters in *Cold Stone Jug*.

Andersen (1992, 14) notes that the effect of the humiliation experienced by prisoners daily is powerfully conveyed in Bosman's description of the prison apparel, which is designed to make prisoners "feel ridiculous." Clad in clown-like attire, which included black woollen socks with red stripes and "a peculiar kind of footwear, halfway between a shoe and a boot" (Bosman 1999, 49), a "comical-looking white canvas ticket-pocket, hanging on your chest like a burlesque decoration ... [and a] red-spotted handkerchief knotted around your throat" (91), prisoners are systematically stripped of their dignity, which inflicts on them a form of emotional abuse. This is highlighted when, upon his release, the narrator peruses the contents of his suitcase:

The cool, luxurious feel of light linen against my skin after all those years in which I had worn the coarse, stinking, degrading—oh, never mind: the sensation of linen lying on my body was exquisite. (196)

He picks up his “gaudy” tie; its brightness is personified as looking “half cheeky,” while he, by contrast, having lost his identity and individuality in prison, feels faded and dull (Bosman 1999, 196):

I wondered whether I was like my tie in this respect; whether I also at the end of my imprisonment, retained something inside me that was bright hued. But I feared not. My tie didn’t have to say “Yes, sir” all day long. (197)

In Foucauldian terms, the obedience and subjection of the “docile body” is clearly achieved through such rigid practices of the prison.

Contributing to the emotional abuse of the prisoners is the inferior quality of meals served in prison. This led to large-scale protests from prisoners, some of whom physically challenged the warders. The result was a slight yet temporary improvement: “if there was still some slime floating on top of the carrot-soup, every now and again, at all events it wasn’t the kind of slime that made you feel all nauseated” (Bosman 1999, 148). Bosman makes it apparent that the subjection of prisoners occurs to such a degree that such anomalies are felt to be acceptable.

Sleep was hardly an escape from the harshness of prison life. Bosman contrasts sleeping in a prison cell to sleeping in a prison hospital bed:

[W]hen you sleep in one of the wards, on a bed with sheets and a mattress, and you wear a white shirt and hospital blues, like the patients ... the incredible alteration in your circumstances—from being locked up nightly in a steel cage and sleeping on a numnah mat on a concrete floor, with your boots as a pillow, and being fed on coarse fare—to the elegance of having a blue flannel suit to wear, and a bed to sleep in, and getting nourishing food served on an enamel plate instead of in a tin dixie. I have seen men in hospital, in the first stage of convalescence, awakening to the luxury of their surroundings and bursting into tears. (Bosman 1999, 79–80)

Foucault refers to such discomforts of prison existence as the subtle mechanisms of abuse practised there: “subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious, mechanisms that obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged, or pursued petty forms of coercion—it was nevertheless they that brought about the mutation of the punitive system” (Foucault 1995, 139). When applied to the greater South African society, noting the context in which the novel was written, it is clear that a similar punitive system was being entrenched, whereby citizens experienced humiliation and degradation through the suppressive laws being passed and were being

systematically transformed into docile beings, eventually being forced to accept the anomalies of apartheid control.<sup>6</sup>

In *Cold Stone Jug*, the exercise of, what Foucault calls, “total power” by the punisher on the punished individual is embodied by the characters of the warders and the prisoners, respectively. The warders monitor and control the prisoners through the disciplinary measure of rigid routine, executed through time-tables for activities and a strict regimen that, for Foucault (1995, 220), characterises the prison system. At Swartklei, a typical day begins with the “rising gong” at “5:30am,” followed by the methodical change of clothes; specified ways of folding blankets; then lining up at the door awaiting permission to relieve oneself and returning to the cell before the cleaners arrive with the usual breakfast (Bosman 1999, 79). Thereafter prisoners rush to clean their dishes and rush to “stand in front of [their] cage, waiting for the next bell” after which, “the whole prison then files out to work” (79). A similar, rigid routine occurred daily for the lunch break and searching procedures.

Foucault (1995, 220) explains that such formalities aiming to control and regulate the movements of prisoners add to the general discipline in the prison system. From the narrator’s perspective as a prisoner, these rigidities are the “soul-killing monotony and the bleak gloom” of prison existence (Bosman 1999, 88). Foucault argues that in the wider world, human beings are similarly conditioned and disciplined by society’s rules and regulations, which govern people’s movements and actions to produce obedient, subjugated citizens who comply with the social norms. In the context of apartheid South Africa, the behaviour and movements of citizens were constantly sculpted and controlled to ensure internalisation of the dominant beliefs and values of the state. The prison mindset portrayed in *Cold Stone Jug* represents the power and control practised by the state and, given the time of writing and publication, could also be interpreted as implying concerns about the apartheid state during its crucial, initial months.

## Conclusion

*Cold Stone Jug* and *Willemsdorp*, written shortly after the formal entrenchment of apartheid, explore the abuse of power by the state through the prison system and the violent and repressive actions of prison officials and law enforcers. Key elements of Foucault’s analysis of ways in which power is enforced through discipline, punishment and the prison system have featured in both novels. These include the prison system’s punishment “deeply into the social body” through its disciplinary techniques of rigid routine, constant surveillance, and dehumanising and degrading daily practices. The significance and effect of space allocation, the lack of individuality within the prison

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<sup>6</sup> Apartheid resistance was non-violent in its early stages, but from the 1960s it became an armed struggle with the formation of the African National Congress’s military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, led by Nelson Mandela. The state clamped down on such resistance within a few years. By 1964, Mandela and other ANC activists were arrested at their safehouse in Rivonia, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment (Ellis 2016, 10–11).

system and the brutal force associated with extracting confessions are amongst these elements that reveal the state's control and its abuse of power in the broader political context of South Africa.

Bosman's protest against the harshness of the prison system in *Cold Stone Jug* not only presents his earlier personal experiences, but also subtly incorporates his critique of the rising apartheid panopticon state that was exercising and enforcing its power through its officials and the prison system. Written within months of the National Party's rise to power, *Cold Stone Jug* (as with stories such as "Unto Dust" written in the same period) can be viewed as Bosman's critique of the state.

Completed in 1951, after the passing of critical racial laws, *Willemsdorp* is explicit in its critique of the brutality used by the state to uphold these laws. The complete (uncensored) version of *Willemsdorp*—in particular the passages removed in 1977 from the novel's first publication—portray police cunning, corruption and brutality at its worst, and vividly depicts South Africa as a police state. Snyman (2009, 125) cites Wilhelm Grütter's (*Die Burger* 7 April 1999, 9) view of *Willemsdorp* as "an important contribution to the relatively small body of politically engaged literature of the Union period in South Africa. He regards the compelling manner in which the novel illuminates the mood of the time, as its main strength." The political significance of this novel is clear and, ironically, the censoring of its initial publication in a year in which apartheid's brutality could no longer be ignored, provided further posthumous anti-state legitimacy for Bosman's work.

In their different ways, these two novels reveal Bosman's anti-state sentiment and, it is argued here, that both show political motive in the writing.

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