

The Politics of Race in Bosman's and Vladislavić's Johannesburg

Farzanah Loonate

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8220-0625>

North-West University, South Africa

farzanah.loonate@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

South Africa's socio-historical context is shaped by the country's various phases of colonial domination: Dutch then British and finally, the institutionalisation of strict racial segregation through apartheid. This was followed by democratic governance from 1994 to the present day. Within postcolonial literary discourse, racism and its related practices of stereotyping and "othering" remain prominent themes. These concerns are especially pronounced in literary representations of Johannesburg, a city that has continually transformed alongside South Africa's shifting political regimes, functioning as a critical site for the persistence and reconfiguration of racial ideology across historical periods. While existing scholarship on Herman Charles Bosman has largely focused on the immanent theme of racism mainly in his bushveld short stories, his city writings, with the exception of his novel, *Willemsdorp*, have received little critical attention. Addressing this gap, this study employs a postcolonial theoretical lens to offer a comparative analysis of how racialised perceptions shape urban experience in Johannesburg as depicted by two South African writers working in distinct yet connected historical moments: Bosman's writing during the British dominion years of South Africa and into the early years of apartheid (1920–1951), and Ivan Vladislavić's fiction published between 1996 and 2006. The diachronic comparison reveals the authors' shared socio-political concerns, their yearning for transformation, and demonstrates how racialised modes of seeing, entrenched during colonial and apartheid rule, persist despite the shift in South Africa's political order.

Keywords: Herman Charles Bosman; Ivan Vladislavić; Johannesburg; racism; stereotyping; "othering"; postcolonial theory

UNISA 

Journal of Literary Studies

Volume 42 | 2026 | #21568 | 22 pages



<https://doi.org/10.25159/1753-5387/21568>

ISSN 1753-5387 (Online)

© The Author(s) 2026



Published by the Literature Association of South Africa and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

Introduction

Herman Charles Bosman's writing from 1920 to 1951, produced during the period of South Africa's dominion status under British control and in the shadow of early apartheid, reflects a postcolonial perspective through its focus on the socio-political effects of colonisation on the colonised. He has thus been referred to as a "proto-postcolonial" author (see Loonate 2022). Since his earliest work published in 1989, Ivan Vladislavić's writing similarly examines the legacies of apartheid colonial rule in South Africa, spanning the period immediately preceding apartheid's collapse and the first decades of the country's transition to a democratic state. Although writing from divergent periods, these authors share similar concerns regarding the impact of colonisation and its manifestation as racism—a major theme in postcolonial discourse and in their writing. This study, grounded in postcolonial theory, adopts a comparative approach to examine how two South African authors, writing from distinct historical periods, represent Johannesburg's racial politics through irony and satire.

Although their use of satire to deliver socio-political critique is the most cogent parallel, there are a multitude of similarities between Bosman and Vladislavić and their works, which provide a rationale for a comparative analysis. Bosman took as his literary protégé Lionel Abrahams, who in turn mentored Vladislavić (Richard Poplak 2010, n.p.). Subsequently, there is an imbrication in their work as evidenced by Lionel Abrahams's critical essays, biographical reflections, and personal memoirs about Bosman,¹ and Vladislavić's (2006) reference to both Bosman and Abrahams in *Portrait with Keys* (44, 187). He also vividly refers to a "Bosmanesque moment" in *The Near North* (2024, 171) as he recalls how Bosman, during his time, lived in and walked the very same streets of his own neighbourhood in Johannesburg. Having a close affinity with this city, Bosman and Vladislavić regard themselves as "Johannesburgers," and as flâneur writers, both authors document the nuances of human nature and their interaction with the environment. Memoir and autobiography also serve as shared genres through which these authors navigate and process their respective lived moments and traumas.

The analysis of Herman Charles Bosman's and Ivan Vladislavić's works in this study specifically traces continuities in racial ideology and shows how "othering" and racial stereotyping are imagined in the urban space. Although both authors are white, this study demonstrates that their perspectives and insights on racial issues are by no means limited and transcend their own racial background. The authors show direct empathy and provide real insight into the lived experience of racism, thereby challenging power structures. It is productive to read these two authors together as the comparison reveals how attitudes towards race and social hierarchies have remained static despite the shifts in power and changing political contexts over the different time periods. The

1 For some examples, see "Mr Bosman: A Protégé's Memoir of Herman Charles Bosman" (2001), the Foreword to *The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman* (1981), and the Introduction to *Bosman at His Best* (1965).

comparison attends to literary form as much as to theme, revealing how each author's narrative style mirrors the racial consciousness of their respective times. Through this, the study demonstrates how the lingering effects of past racial laws continue to shape the social landscape of the present.

Bosman's Marico and bushveld short stories have received considerable scholarly attention regarding his treatment of racism and racial power relations in the Afrikaner rural communities. Glen Lawson (1986, 151) argues that Bosman exposes the master–servant dynamic and normalised physical abuse of black people in the Marico. Rhinas Malinda (2000, 4) similarly focuses on the dehumanisation of black characters in *Mafeking Road* (1967). Her reading of “The Prophet” highlights Bosman's subversive irony, where the authority of the black prophet Mosiko disrupts “the familiar situation in which [whites] have always defined themselves in relation to the ‘kaffirs’”² (2000, 31). Susan Hayden (2002) acknowledges Bosman's sophisticated use of his ironic racist narrator, Oom Schalk Lourens. She posits that “the tension between what the narratives say and what they mean comprises a large-scale commentary on politics in South Africa and exists as a motif through many of the Bushveld stories” (Hayden 2002, 65). Salomé Snyman (2003) correspondingly acknowledges Bosman's concern with racism, which is embedded in the narratives of this same ironic narrator of his bushveld story “Unto Dust.” She quotes a *Sunday Times* reader using the pseudonym “English Teacher” who wrote in the 11 July 1999 edition:

I teach *Unto Dust* to pupils every year. It is the ideal vehicle to demonstrate the difference between author and narrator—how an author with a non-racist message reveals his sentiments by using a racist narrator. (in Snyman 2003, 47)

Building on these insights, more recently, Loonate (2020) examines Bosman's employment of satire, irony, and parody in his Marico short stories, using them as a medium for his political protest against the injustices and racism of his times.

While the scholarship illustrates a fair reflection of Bosman's treatment of racism in his bushveld short stories, his city writing, especially in this regard, has not been explored in much detail. Bosman's strong predilection for Johannesburg has been briefly noted by Stephen Gray (1986), Lucille Davie (2004), and David Saks (2015), but this existing scholarship omits a critical examination of how the author's experiences of systemic racism shaped his Johannesburg narratives. Applying a postcolonial theoretical lens, this study offers a sustained analysis of Bosman's treatment of racism as a thematic concern in his Johannesburg writings (written between 1944 and 1948 and appearing in Stephan Gray's collection, *Bosman's Johannesburg* [1986]) and extends this inquiry by undertaking a comparative analysis with the work of Ivan Vladislavić.

Vladislavić's writing mainly encompasses his Johannesburg experience and the present study examines his vivid depictions of racism across four works spanning a decade of

2 The derogatory term “kaffir” is a racist slur for black South Africans.

transition in South Africa: selected short stories in *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996), his novels, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) and *The Exploded View* (2004), as well as one of his memoirs, *Portrait with Keys: Joburg and What-What* (2006, hereafter referred to as *Portrait with Keys*).

The scholarship on Vladislavić engages with a diverse array of themes ranging from depictions of nature in the urban space (Manià 2013, 2016; Nuttall 2011) to representations of history, memory, and monuments (Graham 2007; Swanepoel 2011, Warnes 2000) and aspects of Vladislavić's flânerie (Gaylard 2023; Leff 2019). Themes that resonate with this study's focus are also evident in the extensive body of scholarly research: Gerald Gaylard's earlier work (2005) explores how Vladislavić's satire lampoons apartheid monumentalism. His subsequent research into Vladislavić's oeuvre culminated in an edited volume of essays wherein one of the chapters he contributes examines "apartheid masculinity" in *The Folly*. More recently, Gaylard's (2023) monograph explores how Vladislavić's African flâneur navigates the divided spaces of the postcolonial city of Johannesburg. Analysing the post-apartheid urban space, Shameem Black argues that by "immersing readers in the haunted space of Johannesburg after apartheid," Vladislavić's *The Exploded View* "reflects on the changing urban space of Johannesburg" (2008, 5). Kirby Manià's examination of *Double Negative* and *Portrait with Keys* reveals Vladislavić's representation of Johannesburg as a perpetual "interregal space" suspended in a state of "post-apartheid liminality" (2017, 48). The significance of literary analysis in addressing colonial racial dynamics, particularly in the city of Johannesburg, can be found in the words of Achille Mbembe. He notes that from its humble inception as a mining camp, Johannesburg developed into "one of the critical nodes of Southern Hemispheric capitalism and globalisation. ... As elsewhere in the global South, it has been shaped in the crucible of colonialism and by the labor of race" (2008, 1). Drawing on Mbembe's work, Nandi Weder (2016, 25) elaborates that "colonialism constructed a hierarchical urban space, rigidly defined by the binaries of centre/margins and privileged/underprivileged which were exploited and reinforced during the apartheid era in which black people were largely confined to the peripheries of the city." From this theoretical perspective, Weder's research on Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* thus focuses on Johannesburg's transformation when "legalised racial distinction and segregation ceased to exist" (2016, 25) and how the characters shaped their identities within this changing landscape of the city spaces. Weder argues that the reshaping of identities involved "social reversals," in which previously disadvantaged groups gained a "strong sense of belonging," while the white middle class who had once "boldly occupied" these same spaces no longer do so (155).

Expanding on Weder's (2016) analysis of identity, Kudzayi Ngara (2019) examines the fluidity of racial identity in post-apartheid Johannesburg in Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*. This text consists of four interconnected segments, each having a male protagonist. Ngara argues that the protagonist Simeon Majara (in "Curiouser") does not convincingly perform "blackness" and appears "not to be culturally embedded," as his

social circle is largely white (2019, 222). He contends that Majara adopts an African identity only as a “defensive strategy” when accused of exploiting African art like colonial and European “wheeler-dealers” (229). As a result, African identity becomes a “convenient cloak” that can be “worn and discarded as the situation requires” (230). Ngara concludes that the postcolonial city enables characters to adopt racially “fluid” identities shaped by the spaces they inhabit (229).

While Ngara focuses on “blackness,” Chloë Webb (2006) contrastingly focuses on “whiteness” in her discussion on race in Vladislavić’s writing. She suggests that “[w]ith the advent of democracy the notion of whiteness shifts, as there is a perceived social demotion. The literature of Ivan Vladislavić reflects this dissonance and sense of displacement, providing a space in which to question the multifaceted category that is whiteness” (19). Webb (2006, 14) maintains that regardless of the social demotion, whiteness “still functions within a set of social discourses that provide the category with its power,” even within a transitioning society.

Focusing on “the ensuing sense of displacement” of white characters in Vladislavić’s *The Restless Supermarket*, Irikidzayi Manase (2009, 57) explains that this focus provides “significant insight into some of the processes and impact of the transition in Johannesburg.” His exploration of white anxiety shows that these characters possess an “apocalyptic vision of Johannesburg” (54), noting a downward spiral in living conditions and the “degeneration of the once glorious city into crime and grime” (59). The present study goes further, demonstrating how this very “social demotion,” this pervasive “sense of displacement,” and underlying white anxiety fuel a deeper cleavage between black and white communities, giving rise to reversed segregation, entrenched stereotyping, and ongoing “othering” and racism.

While evidently scholars have highlighted aspects of apartheid legacies, race, and racial identity in Vladislavić’s writing, in addition to his deployment of “postcolonial satire” which has a “piquantly sharp political bite” (Gaylard and Titlestad 2006, 7), the representation of racism in a transforming South African context and its application as a theme has not been a focus in the analysis of his works. This study’s focus is to critically explore this theme in Vladislavić’s writing, especially in light of his own thoughts about his writing as expressed in a conversation with Oscar Hemer: “You can’t write about inequality or poverty or urban decay or any of these issues without it having a racial dimension” (Hemer et al. 2023, 5). The analysis reveals how Vladislavić’s writing “picks up” where Bosman’s “left off” at his untimely death, tracing the human responses to the ever-changing political context of South Africa, and further shows how racial attitudes, exemplified by stereotyping and “othering,” continue to pervade from one period to the next.

Postcolonialism and the Construction of “Otherness”

Postcolonialism, in critical discourse, explores the discursive experiences of imperialism and the contestation of the legacies of colonialism. Gilbert and Tompkins

(1996, 3) propose that postcolonialism entails a political agenda: “To dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as ‘us and them’, ‘first world and third world’, ‘white and black’, ‘coloniser and colonised.’” Binary oppositions are similarly foregrounded in Abdul JanMohamed’s (1985) exploration of dualism in postcolonial literature where “[t]he dominant model of power—and interest—relations in all colonial societies is the Manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native” (63).

This perception of inferiority signifies one of the material effects of colonisation—racism, which Albert Memmi (1968, 221) defines as “the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser’s benefit and at his victim’s expense, in order to justify the former’s own privilege or aggression.” While Memmi’s definition highlights the use of racism, it more importantly draws attention to the notion of values being “assigned,” rather than being inherent. In the “assigning” of values, it is implied that stereotypes are formed. Homi Bhabha identifies the racial and cultural stereotypes in the colonial context where the overarching objective is “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (1994, 70). Bhabha argues that “an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in this ideological construction of otherness” (75).

The “other,” Gayatri Spivak (1985, 255) contends, is the indigenous and oppressed colonised subject, who is viewed unfavourably by the coloniser in terms of “depravity,” “treachery,” “brutality,” and “perfidy.” Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007, 156) argue that this “othering” of the indigene is an expression of racism that engenders inequality and marginality. The forces that structure such “othering” create boundaries, which become institutionally embedded (Powell and Menendian 2017). In the South African context, “othering” provided a justification for the multitude of racial laws that were passed by the colonial and apartheid governments. The Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950) was one such law set in motion to promote “othering” through establishing separate residential areas based on racial categories. Powell and Menendian (2017) maintain that when segregation is

implemented on the basis of group membership, [it] is not simply physical separation; it is an attempt to deny and prevent association with another group. Denying association with another group is another way of denying that group’s basic humanity. In that sense, segregation is not just spatial projects but ontological.

This was certainly the case in apartheid South Africa, where spatial segregation also entailed the unequal distribution of resources, services, and facilities, leaving the “other” in a less than desirable state.

Paradoxically, however, the issue of “othering” suffused under the new dispensation where segregation occurs voluntarily. Powell and Menendian refer to this phenomenon

as “secession,” whereby as a response to “othering,” “[r]ather than being forcibly separated or expelled, this occurs when a group seeks to separate from another by choice” (2017). Secession is thus a form of segregation, “a denial of civic bonds and, therefore, seeks to cement group-based differences into nationalistic identities” (2017).

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2003, 8) explain that in “recognising how the binarisms of colonial discourse operate (the self-other, civilised-native, us-them Manichaeic polarities),” postcolonial writers or critics can encourage an engaged interpretation of texts and render them accessible for challenge. This, I believe, is evident in the works of Herman Charles Bosman and Ivan Vladislavić whose subversive writing during and after the colonial periods of South Africa carry a politicised message, which is embedded in their application of satire and irony.

Engaging the “Other”: Segregation, Inequality, and the Dynamics of Secession

Following the inauguration of the newly elected democratic government of 1994, white South Africans responded in varying ways to the country’s multicultural environment. While some embraced the diversity and change, others persisted in the conditioned racial mindset from the old regime. In Vladislavić’s *Portrait with Keys*, he observes and examines such responses in the everyday life of Johannesburg. This memoir consists of 138 non-chronological portraits—snippets of the author-narrator’s recollections from the mid-1970s to present times in post-apartheid Johannesburg. Through his observations and memories, recorded in the portraits of varying length, racism emerges as a key theme in his writing. Spivak’s (1985) analysis of the perceptions of the “other” as treacherous and untrustworthy can be applied in this text when examining the actions and movements of people in the city and suburbs. The narrator, Vlad, informs the reader about The Mary Mount Nursing Home situated in Troyeville where he resides, which, under the new dispensation, had transformed into a multiracial suburb. He tells us that the number of births at the nursing home had been dwindling over the years following 1994 and explains how the demographic shift influenced this change: “white doctors moved further North, taking their patients with them. People in the northern suburbs no longer believe that a decent person would want to be born on this side of town” (Vladislavić 2006, 15). Therefore, white people “born on this side of town” would imply being born amongst people of colour, the “other,” who are regarded as “[in]decent” (15). This text’s fragmented and disjointed narrative thus performs the fractured and divided city of Johannesburg, where race permeates everyday realities in unexpected ways, regardless of the country’s turn to democracy. It is also clear that despite the end of apartheid, secession, a phenomenon of voluntary segregation as outlined by Powell and Menendian (2017), was a response of South Africans, in order to maintain the divided living arrangements entrenched by previous segregation laws.

These segregation laws were firmly in place during Bosman’s time of writing. His essay “A Visit to Shanty Town” emerges from a landscape shaped by the Group Areas Act,

which forced black communities into informal, self-built “shanties.” Bosman claims an intention to “provide an objective description of an interesting little town ... it will be left to the reader to make his own comments, such as ‘dastardly’ or ‘delightful’, depending alike on his own subjective reactions and his capacity for reading between the lines” (Bosman in Gray 1986, 60). Yet, far from withholding judgement, Bosman subtly steers the reader through his characteristic sarcasm and irony, exposing the racial inequalities:

[T]wo distinct types of building material are employed in the erection of the shanties. Most of the residential abodes are covered over with mielie sacks. A few—and these belonging obviously to the more aristocratic section—have their walls and roofs constructed of sugar-pockets bearing the trademark of Messrs Hulett. Close examination shows that the hessian is a sugar-pocket of fine texture and better woven than that in a mealie-bag and a consequently superior building material. It keeps out the elements better. (Bosman in Gray 1986, 60)

The racial hierarchies imposed under apartheid are illustrated starkly through Bosman’s ironic reference to hessian sugar-pockets, a material wholly at odds with aristocratic tastes or preferences. This detail emphasises the shared deprivation and poverty of all Shanty Town’s inhabitants, all equally destitute and existing at the lowest rung of society.

Bosman’s sarcasm persists as he explains how a negligent government might casually rationalise the supposed adequacy of such fragile and unstable housing structures:

There is little about these hessian-covered shacks that is in conflict with the fundamental laws of architecture, which are that a building should be planned in accordance with the purpose for which it is required, that it should carry no ornamentation that is outside of this purpose, and that its design should be guided by the type of material that is employed. (Bosman in Gray 1986, 61)

By “reading between the lines,” the attentive reader discerns that Bosman does, in fact, articulate his “indignation against the existing economic order” (60), clearly exposing the inequities of segregation through his portrayal of the severe lack of resources provided by the apartheid government when relocating black communities to townships.

Apartheid’s segregationist policies therefore construct the “other” who are reduced to a sub-human status. In recognising this dehumanisation, Bosman subtly reveals his political stance through his admiration for the resilience and endurance of Shanty Town’s residents:

Living under what are nothing less than ghastly conditions, deprived, apparently, of even the barest necessities of human existence, the inhabitants of Shanty Town are displaying in the face of adversity, a sublime courage that goes far beyond questions of economics and sociology. (Bosman in Gray 1986, 62)

These social injustices persist beyond apartheid's end, ironically resurfacing in post-apartheid South Africa. Vladislavić's *The Exploded View* demonstrates this continuity, depicting informal housing as an equally characteristic feature under the new political order. The narrator refers to "squatter camps" and "board shacks" made from corrugated iron which "sprung up" in an open veld (Vladislavić 2004, 20). Budlender, the statistician and protagonist from "Villa Toscana," the first of the four segments in the novel, while doing his rounds in the affluent "Tuscany" (6), accidentally detours and quite suddenly finds himself in an informal settlement. The narrator explains the reason for this sudden change of environment: "The boundaries of Johannesburg are drifting away. ... At its edges, where the city fades momentarily into the veld, unimaginable new atmospheres evolve" (6). Stefan Helgesson (2006, 28–29) offers a postcolonial reading of these blurred boundaries in the text: "[T]he very phenomenon of the boundary that Bill Ashcroft (2001, 164) sees as 'a metonymy for the regulatory practices of Western epistemology' is undergoing a process of erasure here ... The destabilisation of boundaries is a prerequisite for the identification of this metropolis with an African modernity."

Finding himself in the space of the African "other," Budlender is overcome with anxiety and fear when he sees a naked man lying in the inner tube of a large tractor tyre in the open veld. Although the man is "smiling drowsily, waving," a gesture that would ordinarily suggest vulnerability, Budlender reads it as threatening and accelerates away, leaving him "engulfed in a surf of dust" (Vladislavić 2004, 21). His perspective reflects a common perception of the "other" as treacherous (Spivak 1985). He later recalls that "somewhere in this field of mud and rust he had once noticed a bright sign saying Vodacom, where an enterprising builder had used a billboard for the wall of his house" (Vladislavić 2004, 20). This juxtaposition serves not only as a visual critique of neoliberal policies and their role in exacerbating economic disparities but also reveals how the legacies of apartheid continue to shape contemporary life, persisting even under the new political dispensation.

In trying to secede such environments, the narrator explains how middle- and upper-class white people moved to newly built, barricaded security townhouse complexes, as depicted in "Villa Toscana" (3). This gated community is portrayed as a fortress in the narrator's account of its medieval-inspired architecture. Its wooden gates were "heavy and dark, and studded with bolts and hinges, [and] there were iron grilles in drystone walls" (7). This satirical portrayal emphasises Powell and Menendian's (2017) concept of "secession," reflecting a defensive need for protection driven by fear of the "other," who is imagined as dangerous, criminal, and even "brutal" (Spivak 1985).

The striking contrast between township life and white urban living is similarly portrayed in Bosman's essay "A Visit to Shanty Town." He sarcastically describes the township with its "washed-out yellows of the hessian roofs" and "veld-coloured huts built close to the soil [which] seem more appropriate for South African conditions than skyscrapers and blocks of flats," setting this against the "fashionable block of city flats" occupied

by white residents in Johannesburg (Bosman in Gray 1986, 61). The juxtaposition calls attention to both the material disparities and the imposition of social hierarchies under apartheid. The spatial compression of the huts built close to the ground and the flimsy, porous hessian roofs point to the vulnerability of the inhabitants and the hardships they experience during harsh weather conditions. Metaphorically, the spatial design represents racial ordering: The down-trodden black people, positioned as inferior, are in the lower ranks of the social order and thus closer to the ground. This contrasts with the white inhabitants who are situated higher from the ground in more solid structures such as the secure and fashionable flats—the height of which represents their higher rank and perceived superiority.³

Vladislavić likewise draws parallels between white and black spaces in *Portrait with Keys* through the narrator's attentive depiction of urban signage:

The white city is made of steel and glass, illuminated from within. It is printed on aluminium hoardings and perspex sheeting. It is bolted down, recessed and double-glazed, framed and sealed, it is double-sided and laminated, it is revolving in the wind on a well-greased axle. (Vladislavić 2006, 66)

This solid, durable signage is contrasted with the township signage, which is made of “cardboard and hardboard, buckling in the sunlight” (66). It is also hand-painted on “unprimed plaster, scribbled on the undersides of things ... smudged. Tied to a fence with string, leaning against a yield sign propped up by a brick ... nailed to a tree trunk” (66). The white city thus signifies wealth and stability, contrasting with Vladislavić's depiction of township signage which, ironically, also highlights an inventive, economically resourceful, and environmentally conscious use of recycled materials.

Such inequalities are distinctly evident in Bosman's portrayal of Johannesburg's past in “Johannesburg Christmas Eve.” He describes the frivolous excitement on Christmas Eve, when white youths paraded “up and down Eloff Street and Pritchard Street with many-coloured paper switches tied onto wooden handles” (Bosman in Gray 1986, 87). While this moment made one feel that “it was wonderful to be alive” (87), it was not the case for youths of all races to enjoy the nights in the city due to curfew and pass laws.⁴ Bosman's observation—“If you were as poor as a medical student, with only half a crown in your pocket, you could still have a good time, as long as you were white”—reveals a discriminatory society where privilege is inseparable from whiteness (89). Through systematic “othering,” lawful racial segregation prevented association with

3 Ironically, these high-rise apartments are currently inhabited by poor black immigrants and no longer represent higher social ranking.

4 Under apartheid, curfews prohibited black people from remaining in white urban areas after 22:00, a policy known as the “white by night rule.” Violations led to arrest and enabled police or civilian violence. The 1945 Native Urban Areas Consolidation Act further required all black people over 16 years of age to carry passes and limited their stay in urban areas to 72 hours.

black people and hence stripped them of their “basic humanity” (Powell and Menendian 2017).

The aspect of discriminatory society is similarly captured by Vladislavić’s “The ‘Whites Only’ Bench” in *Propaganda by Monuments*. A replica of this historical bench is strategically placed “in the harbour under the controversial kaffirboom” outside a museum which both “attracts and repels” the museum visitors (Vladislavić 1996, 65). The tree, fully grown at a nursery in Nelspruit, is specially transplanted to the museum, where it casts a welcoming shade over the bench. The deliberate pairing of these two objects is imbued with symbolic significance when used by some white patrons. Vladislavić’s satirical portrayal of the oblivious white history teacher, for example, who sits on the bench to rest his back and “crosses one pink leg over the other, laces his fingers behind his head and closes his eyes,” creates an evocative image of colonial and apartheid dominance and oppression (66). This image is vividly juxtaposed with the resentful reactions triggered by the bench from other passersby, in particular a black woman who is seen “muttering a protest under her breath” and despite her “aching feet” would never surrender to the bench (66).

Regardless of it being only a replica and a mere resting place, the “whites only” sign remains a powerful emblem of “othering,” recalling the racism and injustice inflicted upon black people during apartheid. The reaction of the black woman demonstrates that even within South Africa’s contemporary multicultural and democratic context, the sign continues to awaken the historical pain of oppression.

In *Portrait with Keys*, the legacy of apartheid’s discriminatory practices is revealed through the absence of dignified spaces for worship. When a black churchman steps out from a house on Albemarle Street in Kensington, the narrator’s speculations expose the degrading conditions under which black congregations are imagined to gather: “In a clearing in the veld near the municipal dump in Elandsfontein; in a sealed room under the motorway in Newtown, filled with pitted wood benches and the incense of exhaust fumes; beneath a tree on Langermann Kop?” (Vladislavić 2006, 22). Through this imagery, Vladislavić highlights how under apartheid, such rights to practise religion were disregarded, and suggests that even in the post-apartheid era, this injustice remains insufficiently addressed.

In the heart of Johannesburg’s Central Business District, the Carlton Centre, as Vlad recalls in *Portrait with Keys*, during the early 1990s, boasted a full parking lot and a “sequence of coffee shops” where he and his brother, Branko,⁵ would meet monthly (Vladislavić 2006, 28). This moment is reminiscent of Bosman’s “Louis Wassenaar,” in which the protagonist encounters the Rumanian Gris Aniescu in the bustling bar of the Carlton Hotel (Bosman in Gray 1986, 121). While Bosman’s Johannesburg remains fundamentally white even as it adopts a cosmopolitan character, Vladislavić’s city

5 Branko, the “brother-character,” is a literary construct (see Twidle 2019, 99).

becomes visibly multiracial by the mid-1990s. This demographic shift, however, is marked not by integration, but by a lingering segregationist mentality that manifests as voluntary “secession” (Powell and Menendian 2017). Vladislavić captures this withdrawal through the image of the Carlton Centre parking lot, which “began to shrink ... like a barometer of change in the city centre. The people with cars were clearly going elsewhere” (2006, 29). White people did not wish to be associated with the influx of the “other”—black people—therefore what followed was their retreat to the northern suburbs, effectively removing their economic capital from the city and leading to the subsequent decline of the once-vibrant hotel and shopping centre. The Carlton Centre is thus described as “unpleasant,” marked by “empty shops and echoing corridors” (30), standing as a hollow monument to racialised flight and urban decay.

This segregation of the nation is, however, combatted by one main event that takes place annually in Johannesburg—“The Witwatersrand Show” as Bosman calls it in his eponymous essay (Bosman in Gray 1986, 53), or Vladislavić’s contemporary reference to it in *Portrait with Keys* as “The Rand Easter Show” (Vladislavić 2006, 169). Vlad recalls the “annual pilgrimages” that he and his family took from Pretoria to see the show, as did others from around the country (169). The metaphor of the pilgrimage is significant in that Vladislavić saw these gatherings of various people as purposeful and even transforming, echoing Bosman’s sentiments that it is here “where the various elements of our nation meet once a year, all idea of race and economic difference forgotten. For a while the people are at one and in peace” (Bosman in Gray 1986, 53–54). While Bosman acknowledges that this is short-lived, he is hopeful that in being “made aware of its community of interests,” the nation “has made a stride towards unity” (54).

Stereotyping the “Other”: Narratives of Racism

Racism emerges as a central theme in *Portrait with Keys*, particularly through the conventions of racial stereotyping and “othering” of black people. This is most tangibly evident in the figure of the narrator’s brother, Branko. His prejudice surfaces explicitly in portrait number 8, where Branko is perturbed by the arrival of the first black tenants on Albemarle Street, revealing the persistence of his racial exclusion mindset even within the supposedly transformed, post-apartheid city: “What’s wrong with these people? Why don’t they stay inside, like normal people?” (Vladislavić 2006, 21). He is also disgruntled that they sit outside on upturned oil drums: “Can’t they get garden furniture? You can pick up a plastic chair for twenty bucks at Dion’s” (22), to which the narrator responds in parenthesis: “(They. Branko, being a bit of a racist, means: black. The blacks.)” (40). JanMohamed’s notion of binary oppositions (1985, 63) is reflected in Branko’s repetition of the pronoun “they,” which not only signals “othering” but also reveals an attitude of superiority over the “inferior native.” Although this portrait is largely shaped by a steady narrative voice, it is sharply interrupted by this single moment that exposes Branko’s insecurity and anxiety in the face of the changes unfolding around him. The quoted words appear somewhat disjointed and isolated from

the surrounding narrative, a stylistic rupture that mirrors Branko's own inability to accommodate racial difference within his worldview.

This form of stereotyping reveals an underlying racial attitude that surfaces once more in Branko's habitual "assigning of values," a practice that reduces individuals to preconceived racial judgements (Memmi 1968, 221). Branko assumes that the new black tenants' house has been turned into a brothel and bases his assumption purely on what he perceives as a "sly smile" from one of the lady tenants (Vladislavić 2006, 22). Vladislavić subverts this stereotype through the image of the respectfully attired black churchman who emerges from the same house, carrying a Bible and a stick carved with a cross.

Aubrey Tearle, the protagonist-narrator in Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*, similarly resists the changing demographic of Johannesburg during the early 1990s. As a proofreader obsessed with linguistic errors and "declining standards" (Vladislavić 2001, 81), he goes about his retired days correcting everyone's English. The transforming multicultural context of the country is focalised through this unreliable narrator who describes a momentous occasion in the history of South Africa in the most inconsequential way: The release of "Nelson 'The Madiba' Mandela" is aired on television at Tearle's favourite haunt, Café Europa, and while the kitchen staff, who abandon their tasks and eagerly gather around the television set to witness the occasion, are filled with high emotion, Tearle feels inconvenienced for not having his pot of tea served promptly (166). Appearing unphased by the importance of this historic moment, he dismisses it as having a "carnival atmosphere," with "ululation and whatnot" (166). Furthermore, Tearle's impersonal reference to "The Madiba" as opposed to just "Madiba" serves to distance himself from this iconic political, yet fatherly, figure whom he describes using racist tropes as "not unreasonably black" (167). By the end of the scene, Tearle's unsteady nerves require more than just a pot of tea, which is indicative of his fear of change. Café Europa, Michael Titlestad (2012, 681) appropriately argues, "is a metonym for a white habitus that is being challenged at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, occurring across town, at which the first democratic election and the post-apartheid dispensation are being plotted." Vladislavić thus uses his narrator, who is emblematic of a restricted white perspective, to portray the typical attitudes and anxieties of conservative white South Africans during this country's transition phase.

Bhabha's (1994, 75) notion of "fixity" in the ideological construction of "otherness" through stereotyping is foregrounded in Tearle's bigotry. This is evident when Tearle's friend, Spilkin, enamoured with his new Indian girlfriend, Darlene, brings her to Café Europa. Tearle is annoyed that he is no longer the centre of Spilkin's attention. Recalling Weder's (2016, 155) concept of reshaped identities and "social reversals," Tearle's behaviour is attributed to his feeling slightly dislodged from a space he once "boldly occupied" as a white person. With puerile bitterness towards the multicultural element in Café Europa, Tearle resorts to overt stereotyping: "He kept switching the attention

back to Darlene, to her sayings and doings, her comings and goings, her hemlines, her hairdos, her curry and rice" (Vladislavić 2001, 238). It is hardly surprising that Darlene later refers to Tearle as being "verkrampt"—an "Afrikanerism" as Tearle dubs it, and a term synonymous with political conservatism and racism (259).

Vladislavić's short story "The Tuba" in *Propaganda by Monuments* similarly depicts racial stereotyping and "othering." The Salvation Army Band, consisting of "a dozen black men, in sober uniforms and pious boots" (3), gather in front of the house of a group of white men to play a tune in exchange for donations. The white men react with irritation to the sound of drums, trumpets, and trombones—Sergeant Dundas, for one, exclaiming: "These jokers are giving me an earache. Funny thing about blacks, you know, they can't hold a tune. Not one of ours, I mean. Their ears are different" (Vladislavić 1996, 4). This scene exemplifies JanMohamed's concept of the binary opposition of "us and them," which constructs black people as inherently "other." Simultaneously, Bhabha's (1994, 75) notion of "fixity" is evident, as the cultural and racial differences of black men are rigidly "fixed" in a negative light, reinforcing exclusion and prejudice. Vladislavić's subversion of this stereotype, however, is presented through his use of adjectives such as "pious" and "sober"—which create a far superior and even dignified image of the black men and ironically contrasts the group of crass, "beer-drink[ing], "peanut-toss[ing]" (1996, 1), cursing, white men sitting on the veranda. In an ironic turn, Vladislavić presents a most unlikely transformative moment when Sergeant Dundas decides to join the Salvation Army Band, astonishing his peers as they watch him blowing into his tuba "passing out of our neighbourhood, our lives and our times" (12). Vladislavić thus allegorically represents the "miracle" of the 1994 transition period.

Bosman similarly undermines racist assumptions and negative stereotypes in "Johannesburg Christmas Eve" through the City Council's introduction of "finicky by-laws relating to hygiene ... making it illegal for the owner of a bakery to accommodate his Native services on the bakery premises" (Bosman in Gray 1986, 104). He reveals the hidden realities of the bakery, where the use of feet to knead dough is an emergency measure during mechanical breakdowns. Ironically, Mletshwa, a black youth, is "promoted" from kneading bread dough to kneading confectionary dough with his feet—specifically for "white people's cake," rather than for "plebeian quartern loaves" (107). Through this biting satire, Bosman exposes the hypocrisy of laws that impose inferiority and "otherness" on black workers while relying on their labour to produce food consumed by white society.

Racist language functions as a powerful tool in the process of "othering" and "fixing" identities. In *Portrait with Keys*, while Branko expresses overtly racist views, he is careful not to use derogatory terms while in conversation with his liberal brother. The infamous "k-word,"⁶ for example, appears only once in this text, uttered by Martin, who

6 The "k-word" refers to the derogatory term "kaffir," a racist slur for black South Africans, comparable to the "n-word" in the United States.

is fuelled with anger when relating the incident to his wife of the two black men who indignantly smirk and walk off after urinating on their garden door. Their refusal to flee—and their defiant continuation of the act—provokes what Vlad describes as an “unfamiliar feeling” that “drains through his body like cold water. It is rage” (Vladislavić 2006, 42).

Despite his rage, Martin is paralysed by fear of the perceived “treachery” and potential “brutality” of the racial “other” (Spivak 1985) and responds with passive hostility, merely “glower[ing] at them and shak[ing] his head” (Vladislavić 2006, 42). This moment reflects what Spivak describes as the anxiety produced by the imagined violence of the colonised subject. Drawing on Webb’s (2006, 19) notion of “demotion” and Weder’s (2016, 155) “social reversal,” the scene reveals a destabilisation of white authority, as Martin experiences a shift from assumed superiority to complete vulnerability. This perceived loss of power deepens the racial divide, prompting Martin to resort to hate speech and the “assigning of values” (Memmi 1962, 221) as his anger crystallises in the dehumanising outburst: “These fucking people. They’re like animals” (Vladislavić 2006, 42).

In contrast, Bosman’s characters employ derogatory racist language unsparingly. While contemporary readers may be taken aback by the casual use of the “k-word,” Bosman deploys this language subversively to expose its political and moral incorrectness. This is particularly evident in the voices of authority, such as Sergeant Cripps in “Johannesburg Christmas Eve,” who indiscriminately labels black men using every available slur—the “k-word,” the “c-word,” and the “n-word.”⁷ By placing such language in the mouths of government officials, Bosman emphasises how institutional power normalises and legitimises racist discourse.

A group of white youths explain to Sergeant Cripps that in order to avert a beating, black men have become wise to stay off the streets during Christmas and evening Bible classes—ironically, as Bosman notes, these are the times favoured for such beatings. Disappointed in hearing of this avoidance, the sergeant’s warped sense of reasoning is revealed in his racist remark: “It’s through their getting educated. ... A kaffir with a school learning is a useless kaffir. Education is going to be the ruin of these kaffirs, yet” (97). Bhabha’s (1994, 70) notion of the construction of “degenerate types” on the “basis of racial origin” is clearly depicted in Sergeant Cripps’s ideology.

Unlike Cripps, Martin in *Portrait with Keys* grapples with the realisation that the “archaic language is lodged in him” and he is overwhelmed by shame at having used it (Vladislavić 2006, 43). He has long understood himself as a “middle-class professional, a fourth-generation South African, a political liberal, a democrat” and certainly “not a racist” (43). As Vlad observes, unlike the “colonists who have portrayed indigenous people as brutes unable to control their urges,” Martin has never imagined himself a

7 The “c-word” and “n-word” refer to the American racial slurs “coon” and “nigger,” used to demean black people. Bosman included these terms in some works intended for an American readership.

“settler” or a racial stereotyper, and he is therefore “astonished at how easily it came to him” (43). Read through Webb’s (2006, 19) notion of “displacement,” this moment suggests that Martin’s outburst is a defensive reaction to shifting power dynamics in the post-apartheid city. Vladislavić thus implies that while the socio-political landscape may have changed, deeply embedded racial ideologies persist. Martin’s shame and self-reflection, however, gesture towards the possibility of such change, offering a fragile but significant note of hope.

This racial tension that persisted after the political transformation is aptly displayed in *Portrait with Keys* through the interaction between the narrator, Vlad, and the black hawker. As she watches Vlad fall and injure himself, she is sympathetic and wishes to help him but is reluctant to do so because of a historical impulse that prevents her from touching a white man:

If we were different people, if we were the same people in a different place, she might have put an arm around my shoulders; instead she lifts her hand and drops it a couple of times, meaningfully, and clucks sympathetically. (Vladislavić 2006, 16)

This scene may be analysed in terms of JanMohamed’s (1985, 63) notion of colonial dualism in which the colonial apartheid legacy sustains racial hierarchies. This encounter exposes how assumptions of the native’s inferiority and the white man’s superiority remain embedded within the social imagination. The hawker’s compassion is, however, deeply heart-warming and offers a glimmer of hope in a country struggling to overcome the historical scars and psychological conditioning of apartheid within an emerging multicultural context.

A comparable moment of hope depicted by the presence of the “other” is notable in Bosman’s essay “Notes on the Good Earth.” A morning in Johannesburg is described as “drab and foggy,” the street as “a long, long tunnel injected with grey, drab light,” and the inhabitants are “drab people” with “faces colourless” (Bosman in Gray 1986, 58). However, Bosman is elated when the city receives a sudden injection of colour and vibrancy: “a miracle happens, a new light and colour comes to every eye” in the form of a Hindu person, wearing a “red fez,” seen striding along with a cart filled with fresh veld flowers (58). While a fez is traditionally worn by Muslims rather than Hindus, this cultural or perhaps cross-cultural reference is significant. Bosman’s reference to this moment, where the flower seller enters the scene as “a miracle” and “a new light,” reveals his celebration of multiculturalism and yearning for unity in a future Johannesburg. Paradoxically, the intertwined roles of Vladislavić’s hawker and Bosman’s flower seller reflect the lingering systemic inequalities left behind by apartheid.

In *Portrait with Keys*, the bright Ndebele design painted on house number 10 on Blenheim Street for Vlad similarly represents the “symbolic moment in the invention of the new South Africa” (Vladislavić 2006, 24). He grew to love the wall and saw it as “a metaphor for the social transformation we were living through” (26). Historically, the

geometric shapes and colours were used by the Ndebele as a coded means of communication amongst the tribes during the oppressive years of territorial disputes and eventual colonisation by the Boers in 1883. Forced to work as indentured slaves on Boer farms, the Ndebele turned their grief into a form of resistance through their art, declaring their pride in their heritage (Invaluable 2023). The Ndebele painting on the house in Blenheim Street is thus significant in that it now not only appears in what was previously a white area but in removing the cloak of “otherness,” the painting dismantles the previously known power dynamics and asserts its sense of belonging in the new multicultural context. Vlad is gutted when the mural is later obliterated after the new owner of the house has it painted over. He perceives it as an act of violence, referring to the painting over as “hacking,” a form of “vandalism” (Vladislavić 2006, 61), and he leaves the scene with “a heavy heart” (62), almost as if the eradication of the Ndebele mural symbolises the end of an era. Vlad’s sense of loss for this symbol of transformation and positivity reflects the precarious historical moment of South Africa’s transition to democracy. His anxiety can best be understood in terms of Caitlin Charos’s (2008) analysis of “transition” in Vladislavić’s *The Restless Supermarket*. Drawing on Monica Popescu’s (2005) study on South Africa’s transition, Charos makes an argument for the novel as reflecting the post-apartheid state of “liminality” (25)—a space of “cultural uncertainty” as Popescu (2005, 29) explains. Charos (2008) argues that even though 1994 marks the “historical conclusion” of apartheid, the “post” in post-apartheid does not signal an “end” (25), and the inequalities continue to linger while the process of change is still underway. With South Africa being in this “perpetual state of *becoming*” (24), it could be said that the loss of the Ndebele painting as a symbol of transformation, especially during this early phase of democracy, is seen as a disavowal of the democratic ideals that we all should share.

Whereas Vladislavić’s narrator in *Portrait with Keys* embraces the transformed Johannesburg, Tearle, on the other hand, in *The Restless Supermarket*, in representing the old regime die-hards, is typically repulsed by such “Africanness,” as noted in his reaction to the new signs on the lavatory doors at Café Europa: “That ‘Gentlemen’ [sign] in particular has always touched me. I stood up for it too, when its existence was threatened by the New Management’s ethnic expedients ‘Amadoda’ and ‘Abafazi’” (Vladislavić 2001, 33). The New Management’s attempt at embracing change, welcoming multiculturalism, and promoting multilingualism—all requisites of a transforming society—is perceived as a threatening eradication of white English culture. Vladislavić’s critique of white resistance to change therefore shows that multiculturalism is not embraced by all, as Bosman had hoped it could be.

Conclusion

In bringing Herman Charles Bosman and Ivan Vladislavić into conversation, this study utilised postcolonial theory to examine how the authors’ city writings reflect the prevailing racial ideologies of their respective times through mechanisms of stereotyping and “othering.” Bosman’s “Johannesburg Christmas Eve” depicts racial

inequalities through the country's segregation laws during apartheid, while his effective use of sarcasm and irony in "A Visit to Shanty Town" highlights the dilapidated structures and poor living conditions in informal settlements. Similar social injustices are apparent in post-apartheid South Africa, as Vladislavić reveals these same legacies of apartheid as a key feature of the new dispensation in *The Exploded View* where segregated spaces and inequalities persist. *Portrait with Keys* enacts the divided city through its fragmented narrative form while Vladislavić's distinctive choice of narrator in *The Restless Supermarket* represents the white anxiety related to a transforming city. Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*, *The Restless Supermarket*, and "The Tuba" depict white resistance to social transformation resulting in black people being described in ironically inferior ways. This parallels Bosman's ironic and satirical depictions of the "inferior" native bakery workers in "Johannesburg Christmas Eve." Through subversion of the stereotypes and perceptions of the "other," both authors encourage, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2003, 8) state, an active and critical reading of their texts, to uncover the deep political messages they convey.

Although these authors highlight the racial ideology of their time, they also see the possibility for change. Bosman's essays "The Witwatersrand Show" and "Notes on the Good Earth" both highlight his yearning and hope for unity and harmony in a multicultural South Africa. Vladislavić's hope for such unity is depicted through some of his characters in *Portrait with Keys* and *The Restless Supermarket* who embrace their transforming context.

The comparative analysis of the works of these two authors shows how irony and satire are used as a mode of racial critique and that their city writing mediates between colonial and post-apartheid racial perceptions. They deliver a politicised message about the divisions of apartheid and the legacies that remain prevalent in the new dispensation, thus showing that the economic and racial inequalities have yet to be redressed. The comparative analysis also provides a cross-temporal critique of race in urban Johannesburg, which serves to enrich current postcolonial readings of South African literature. Both authors share a yearning for change in their respective socio-political contexts: Vladislavić's post-apartheid era reflects the change that Bosman could only have dreamt about decades earlier, but the change, when it eventually arrives, is not quite what he would have expected or envisioned.

References

- Abrahams, L. 1965. Introduction to *Bosman at His Best: A Choice of Stories and Sketches*. Culled by L. Abrahams, 9–15. Pretoria: Human and Rousseau.
- Abrahams, L. 1981. Foreword to *The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman*, 1–19. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
- Abrahams, L. 2001. "Mr Bosman: A Protégé's Memoir of Herman Charles Bosman." *English in Africa* 28 (2): 11–47.

- Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, eds. 2003. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin. 2007. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Black, S. 2008. "Fictions of Rebuilding: Reconstruction in Ivan Vladislavić's South Africa." *Ariel* 39 (4): 5–30.
- Bosman, H. C. 1967. *Mafeking Road*. Pretoria: Human and Rousseau.
- Charos, C. 2008. "'The End of an Error': Transition and 'Post-Apartheid Play' in Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*." *Safundi* 9 (1): 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533170701762941>.
- Davie, L. 2004. *Herman Charles Bosman, Joburg Man*. The Heritage Portal, March 4. Accessed February 25, 2025. <https://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/herman-charles-bosman-joburg-man>.
- Gaylard, G. 2005. "Postcolonial Satire: Ivan Vladislavić." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 17 (1): 129–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2005.9678210>.
- Gaylard, G. 2011. "Fossicking in the House of Love: Apartheid Masculinity in *The Folly*." In *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*, edited by G. Gaylard, 287–308. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Gaylard, G. 2023. *At Home with Ivan Vladislavić: An African Flaneur Greens the Postcolonial City*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003318996>.
- Gaylard, G., and M. Titlestad. 2006. "Introduction: Controversial Interpretations: Ivan Vladislavić." *Scrutiny* 2 11 (2): 5–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125440608566040>.
- Gilbert, H., and J. Tompkins. 1996. *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Graham, S. 2007. "Memory, Memorialization, and the Transformation of Johannesburg: Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* and *Propaganda by Monuments*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 53 (1): 70–97. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2007.0024>.
- Gray, S. 1986. *Bosman's Johannesburg*. Pretoria: Human and Rousseau.
- Hayden, S. 2002. "Dancing the Tiekiedraai: A Socio-Historic Approach to Bosman's Bushveld Narratives." MA diss., University of Cape Town. <https://open.uct.ac.za/items/f7988ca3-c881-4222-9b91-c8a2c27db939>.

- Helgesson, S. 2006. "Johannesburg as Africa: A Postcolonial Reading of *The Exploded View* by Ivan Vladislavić." *Scrutiny* 2 11 (2): 27–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/18125440608566042>.
- Hemer, O., B. Law-Viljoen, M. Ntshanga, and I. Vladislavic. 2023. "Farewell to the Rainbow Nation?" *Parse: Conviviality and Contamination*, no. 16.
<https://doi.org/10.70733/4nsd9zsxc62d>.
- Invaluable. 2023. "Unveiling the Beauty of Ndebele Art: Exploring the Rich Heritage of Ndebele Artists." Last updated September 19, 2024. Accessed November 10, 2025.
<https://www.invaluable.com/blog/unveiling-the-beauty-of-ndebele-art/>.
- JanMohamed, A. R. 1985. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1): 59–87.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/448321>.
- Lawson, G. 1986. "Race and Identity in Bosman's Marico." In *Herman Charles Bosman*, edited by S. Gray, 143–154. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill.
- Leff, C. 2019. "The Afropolitan Flâneur: Literary Representations of the City and Contemporary Urban Identities in Selected African and Transnational Texts." PhD diss., Rhodes University.
- Loonate, F. 2020. "Politics and Protest: A Postcolonial Perspective on Selected Works by Herman Charles Bosman." MA diss., North-West University.
- Loonate, F. 2022. "Bosman: A Proto-Postcolonial Author?" *Literator* 43 (1): a1868.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v43i1.1868>.
- Malinda, R. N. 2000. "Herman Charles Bosman's Treatment of Race Relations in Mafeking Road." MA diss., University of Johannesburg.
- Manase, I. 2009. "Johannesburg during the Transition in Ivan Vladislavić's 'The Whites Only Bench' and *The Restless Supermarket*." *English Academy Review* 26 (1): 53–61.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10131750902768416>.
- Manià, K. 2013. "'On the Brink of the Mundane': Postapartheid Literary Representations of Johannesburg in the Work of Ivan Vladislavić." PhD diss., University of Witwatersrand.
- Manià, K. 2016. "Diving the Reef: Water Metaphors in the Work of Ivan Vladislavić." *English in Africa* 43 (2): 63–89. <https://doi.org/10.4314/eia.v43i2.3>.
- Manià, K. 2017. "Writing the Urban Interregnum: Teleology and Transition in Ivan Vladislavić's Johannesburg." *English Studies in Africa* 60 (2): 48–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2017.1416812>.
- Memmi, A. 1968. "Racism (1982)." In *The Albert Memmi Reader*, edited by J. Judaken and M. Lejman, 221–240. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

- Ngara, K. 2019. "Truncated Cosmopolitanisms: Post-Apartheid Literary Identities in Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*." In *New Cosmopolitanisms, Race, and Ethnicity: Cultural Perspectives*, edited by E. B. Luczak, S. Dayal, and A. Pochmara, 220–238. Berlin: De Gruyter Open. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110626209-013>.
- Nuttall, S. 2011. "The Invisible City: Surface and Underneath in Portrait with Keys." In *Marginal Spaces: Reading Ivan Vladislavić*, edited by G. Gaylard, 327–337. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Nuttall, S., and A. Mbembe, eds. 2008. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Popescu, M. 2005. *South Africa in Transition: Theorizing Post-Colonial, Post-Apartheid and Post-Communist Cultural Formations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Poplak, R. 2010. "Writing Johannesburg." *The Walrus*, July–August. Accessed February 14, 2024. <https://thewalrus.ca/writing-johannesburg/>.
- Powell, J. A., and S. Menendian. 2017. "The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging." *Othering and Belonging*, Accessed February 28, 2024. <https://www.otheringandbelonging.org/the-problem-of-othering/>.
- Saks, D. 2015. "Literary Genius Bosman Had Strong Jewish Ties." *Jewish Report*, June 25. Accessed March 15, 2024. <https://www.sajr.co.za/literary-genius-bosman-had-strong-jewish-ties>.
- Snyman, S. 2003. "Locating Bosman: Revaluating Issues of Culture, Language and Style in a Selection of Herman Charles Bosman's English and Afrikaans Short Stories (1948–1951)." MA diss., University of Johannesburg. <https://hdl.handle.net/10210/30>.
- Spivak, G. C. 1985. "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives." *History and Theory* 24 (3): 247–272. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505169>.
- Swanepoel, A. 2011. "Re-placing Memories: Time, Space and Cultural Expressions in Ivan Vladislavić's Fiction." PhD diss., North-West University.
- Titlestad, M. 2012. "Writing the City after Apartheid." In *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, edited by D. Attwell and D. Attridge, 676–694. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521199285.034>.
- Twidle, H. 2019. "Experiments with Truth: Narrative Nonfiction in South Africa." *Current Writing: Test and Reception in Southern Africa* 31 (2): 94–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2019.1618086>.
- Vladislavić, I. 1996. *Propaganda by Monuments*. Johannesburg: David Phillip.
- Vladislavić, I. 2001. *The Restless Supermarket*. Johannesburg: David Philip.

- Vladislavić, I. 2004. *The Exploded View*. Johannesburg: Random House.
- Vladislavić, I. 2006. *Portrait with Keys: Joburg and What-What*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Vladislavić, I. 2024. *The Near North*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Warnes, C. 2000. "The Making and Unmaking of History in Ivan Vladislavic's *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 46 (1): 67–89.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2000.0013>.
- Webb, C. 2006. "Whiteness in Works by Ivan Vladislavić." MA diss., University of Witwatersrand.
- Weder, N. 2016. "Urban Spaces in Transformation: Reading Social Change in Vladislavić's Johannesburg, Pamuk's Istanbul and Dalrymple's Delhi." MA diss., University of Pretoria.