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Identity in the Siyagruva Series of novels: Toward an intercultural literary discourse

Identity in the Siyagruva series of novels

This article explores the notion of changing South African youth identity and how it is depicted in the Siyagruva [We are Grooving] Series of novels for young adults. The article highlights the need for a broadening of literary theory in order to include an appropriate theoretical approach for new South African youth literature. This theory explores intercultural literary discourse by making use of, for example, the work of intercultural theorists such as Ting-Toomey (1999), Gudykunst (2003) and others. It is argued that this form of literary discourse is now appropriate as a theoretical paradigm within multilingual South Africa where intercultural communication is becoming a reality. There is also reference to intracultural communication where differences are beginning to appear between young people who are perceived to come from the same cultural group, for example, the character Brunette in the Siyagruva Series who is perceived as a "coconut" by her friends, and thus finds herself having to justify her belonging within a particular in-group or culture. The article concentrates on selected novels, though reference is made to many of the twenty three published novels in the Siyagruva Series, twenty in English, and three translated into isiXhosa. **Key words:** identity, intercultural studies, youth literature.

Introduction

The innovation of the Siyagruva Series of novels can be found in the fact that it is the first series of novels for young adults, which has a distinctly South African feel and identity. It is an open-ended debate as to whether South African literature, in English and in the indigenous languages, has ever really reflected a point of connectedness within South African society, a point of connectedness, which could only have existed clandestinely in the past. It is only since 1994 that assimilation into a South African identity has been encouraged and legally permitted. Arguably, literature in South Africa has often been caught up with conflicts between individuals within a disputed political system, which encouraged division rather than unity, exclusion rather than inclusion. Examples of prominent isiXhosa authors dealing with conflict between groups and nations include A. C. Jordan in his novel *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* (*The Wrath of the Ancestors*, 1940), and R. L. Peteni's *Kwazidenge* (*Hill of Fools*, 1980).

If it is true that literature is often a credible reflection of society, then the notion of unity in diversity, the notion of the rainbow nation, should form part of South Africa's literary tapestry. Chris Swanepoel, already two decades ago observes that: "In

South Africa the exclusiveness of the past has already started to give way to a wide sense of togetherness" (Swanepoel 1990: 72). It is argued that the Siyagruva Series of novels indeed does just that – it explores an intercultural paradigm within a contemporary South African reality. Furthermore, if this be the case, then it is further argued that literary theory should be broadened in order to take cognisance of this new literary reality. This would be in line with what could be termed "transformation literature" in South Africa (Kaschula 2003: 64).

In the same vain, Zulu (2000: 277) is of the opinion that:

The second half of the 1990s has witnessed […] an increase in the number of novels that deal with cross-cultural themes. Yet little attention has been paid to the ways cross-cultural issues are handled in the African languages novels of the 1990s. There is a need to explore what the "new" African languages novel has to say about racial issues after 1994 […]

This could be applied to all youth fiction in South Africa. This intersection of young people from various cultures is what underpins the Siyagruva Series, as well as novels such as Bhengu's isiZulu novel, *Itshwele Lempangele* ("The Guinea fowl's Chick," 1998), dealing with a love relationship between a Zulu and Indian youth. This is also true of the recently published isiXhosa novel, *Emthonjeni* ("At the Fountain," 2006), which looks at the complex relationships between Coloured and Xhosa youth. It will become evident that the characters, the use of language, as well as choice of theme in the Siyagruva Series, indeed support this point of intersection between contemporary youth.

Firstly, the article provides some background to the Siyagruva Series. Secondly, existing literary theories as they have been applied to African literature are explored. Thirdly, the notion of changing identity and how this is reflected in the series of novels is analysed. Fourthly, an intercultural paradigm is constructed as a theoretical approach in order to analyse South African literature, followed by a general conclusion.

The Siyagruva Series

Twenty English novels have already been published in the series since 2002. The first four novels published included *High Heels and Hijack,* which deals with peer jealousy, hijackings and threats to people with physical disabilities. *Troubles, Taxis and Toilets*, takes one into the world of drugs, gangs and the associated difficulties of maintaining one's sexual integrity. *Divine Dump Dancer* looks at the notion of poverty, rapid identity change associated with urbanisation, and how ancestral callings can still play a role in an urban environment. Finally, *Breaking Out* unpacks Muslim religious discrimination and uncertainty about sexual orientation. These titles immediately suggest a local South African flavour. Even so, in later novels, this flavour is

sometimes exported to other countries when the characters are taken on journeys to various parts of the world. For example, the novel *Flying High* (2003), in which the Siyagruvers are taken on a trip to America; Colleen Moroukian and Brion Mnala's *Namibian Kwaito* (2004), as well as Nokuthula Mazibuko's *Mozambican Summer* (2004). Malan (2003) states that: "We decided to set the series in a dance studio, as dance sport is hugely popular with young people at the moment […] dance exhibitions and competitions would allow us to `travel' the series to other parts of Southern Africa – and even abroad."

Since 2002, there have been four titles published each year, and five titles published in 2004–2005. Three of the novels have been re-worked and published in isiXhosa. These were published in 2004 under the following titles: *Khwela-Khwela yimoto kaMama* (*Mom's Taxi* by Mteto Mzongwana, Onele Mfeketo & Orbin Lamna translated by Pamella Maseko); *Oomashayela phezulu* (*In the fast lane* by Nokuthula Mazibuko translated by Xolisa Guzula) and *Lajuxuz' igqirha lemk' etiphini* (*Divine Dump Dancer* by Russell Kaschula translated by Pamella Maseko & Xolisa Guzula).

What makes these Siyagruva novels unique is that there is a set of eight characters. At least two of the characters appear in any particular book. Unlike other series, the novels are not chronological. One can read the novels in any order. The stories are not sequential. Each of these works stands alone and acts as an autonomous novel. However, the dance-studio where the novels are set, known as the Siyagruva Scene, located in Stadium-on-Main in Claremont, Cape Town, as well as the characters, remain constant throughout. A combination of characters can appear in any novel, confronted by various challenges and opportunities. The novels are aimed mainly at young people who have English as a second or third language. According to Robin Malan, the series editor, "the stories are anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist, anti-classist, anti-abledist, anti-ageist, anti-eurocentric, anti-xenophobist" (Malan, personal interview, 2006).

Briefly, the eight characters running through the series are the following: Thabiso, from Khayelitsha, is wheelchair bound, and the manager of the dance group. He is a technical wizard, and he looks after everyone. Brunette is from Soweto. When her parents divorce, she joins her father in Langa. She is an independent and free spirit. Samantha lives in Pinelands with her rich parents. They are very much part of the well-off black elite. She is unable to resist what is trendy in clothes, style and attitude. Mncedisi is from Engcobo in the Eastern Cape. He arrived in Cape Town with his mother. They initially make a living from the dump near where they live in the informal settlement of Marconi Beam. Later on she sells fruit and vegetables in Claremont. He has an ancestral calling to become a diviner, an *igqirha*. Zadie lives with her domestic worker mother and her sister in a room in the back garden of a house in Rondebosch. She is trying to keep herself a virgin in the sexually fluid peer-group in which she operates. Regan lives with his parents in a two-roomed flat in Lavender Hill. He has managed to extricate himself from the gang culture, mainly because of

his love of breakdancing and hip-hop. Rashaad is from a wealthy, protective Muslim family in a small Boland town. He is battling to reconcile his sexual orientation with his religion. Lastly, there is Shelley. She is from an affluent family who lives in Gardens. She finds it difficult being white and rich, and she espouses any cause that is going. Again, these characters are carefully crafted in order to represent a wide cross-section of South African youth.

The thematic repertoire on which the novels draw is extensive, but primarily rooted within the South African experience. For example, Mazibuko's *In the Fast Lane* (2003) deals with teenage pregnancy and those infected and affected by HIV. Alnam's *No problem, man* (2003) deals with physical abuse by parents, unintended violence and homophobia. Malbusch's *Boy in da City* (2003) deals with child abandonment, xenophobia and identity issues. Lamna et al in *Mom's Taxi* (2003), look at social and class distinctions between people living in suburbs-and-townships, as well as suburbs-and-Cape-Flats, whilst Fritz's *Taking the Rap* (2004), confronts the issue of poor whites and racial stereotyping. A 14-year-old reviewer in *The Star*'s Tonight News, Mooniq Shaikjee, said of the series:

> It deals with matters that are present in an adolescent's life, such as racial and religious discrimination, people with disabilities, living with HIV/Aids, teenage pregnancy, drugs, issues about sexual orientation, and over-protective parents. Despite tackling weighty issues, the books are not grave and humourless. They're exciting and funny, with unexpected things happening all the time.

The thematic repertoire represents a collage of experiences emanating form various intercultural, as well as universal experiences. The characters are ideally placed to explore each other's intellectual spaces, as well as their changing environments. In this lies the key to a new type of reconciliation and intercultural South African literature. Malan (2003) makes the following point in the *Mail and Guardian*: "There's some cross-cultural language-switching and code-switching in the texts, which helps to make them accessible to new or reluctant readers of English." Take, for example, Clive E. Smith's *Girl Goes Missing* (2003: 65-66) where Giempie and Walter are negotiating the use of Walter's car so that Giempie can carry out a crime:

"Cut me in?"

"*Wa', is djy mal? Djy's dan 'n ke'kbroe'!*" ["What, are you mad? You're then a church brother!"]

"*Ek wil net 'n* cut *hê, ek willie wiet warr'ie geld vandaan kom nie, broe*-Giempie. ["I just want a cut, I don't want to know where the money comes from, brother Giempie."] Where the money come from is not my business."

"*Net om'at my ma en jou ma saam ke'k toe ga'n meanie djy kan 'n* cut *kry nie*. ["Just because my mother and your mother go to church together doesn't mean you get a cut."] You shouldn' mix church and business."

"No cut, no car," Walter said, and hugged the keys to his chest.

"*Twee honnit rand*, [two hundred rand] not a cent more. *Djy's vannie duiwel af*!" [You are of the devil] Giempie exclaimed, looking left, then right. "*Wat van honnit-en-vyftig*?" ["What about one-hundred and fifty?"]

"Deal!" Walter said, and handed him the keys.

"*Blerrie ke'kbroe's is oekma' net soe skelm*!" ["Bloody church brothers are just as crafty!"] Giempie mumbled…

In this extract, it is clear that Smith not only captures an Afrikaans-speaking audience within his English language text, he also captures a particular Cape dialect of Afrikaans which would appeal to speakers of that dialect. Within this variety is contained an entire identity.

Similarly, Nokuthula Mazibuko's *In the Fast Lane* (2003: 36) has a distinctly Zulu feel about it, facilitated through code-switched isiZulu and English:

"She drank the whole bottle of jik!" Thabang's voice was shaking.

"*Nkosi*, [God Almighty] please don't let my cousin die. Kedi, *mntwana sekhaya ungafi, Kedi…*" [child of my home don't die, Kedi…]

Later, one of the characters comments as follows: "[…] After all, we are all people, *singa bantu sonke, mntwan'ami. Amaphutha siyawenza*, [we are all people, my child. We all make mistakes] it's no use crying over spilt milk"' (Mazibuko 2003: 45). Regarding Kedi's HIV status, Ma' Cele comments as follows: "[…] Kedi, *mntwan'ami, qina, konke kuzo lunga*, [my child, be strong, everything will be alright] everything will be fine. You know that having HIV does not mean that you will die tomorrow"' (Mazibuko 2003: 50).

Any analysis of this kind of literature may now require a different type of theoretical paradigm that does not rely on language purity, or identity fixity, but rather takes a more fluid, intercultural approach to literary discourse.

Existing literary theory in African Literature

The book, *African Literature: Approaches and Applications*, provides a concise summary of the various approaches, together with a careful documentation of their individual proponents, which have been applied to African mother tongue literature over the years (Swanepoel 1990).

These approaches include "author-oriented approaches" such as the "historical-biographical approach". This approach suggests that literary works, for the greater part, reflect the authors' life and times within the given characters and how they interact. There is also the "moral-philosophical approach", which emphasises that literature should be didactic, either from a religious or philosophical point of view.

Finally, under "author-oriented approaches", Swanepoel emphasises the "impressionistic approach", which encourages the reader to create their own impressions concerning any particular work (Swanepoel 1990: 4-9).

The second major category referred to are the well-documented "text-oriented approaches". These include the "Russian formalist movement, which focuses attention on the literary text as a work of art. It emphasises the "literariness" of the text. Secondly, there is "structuralism", which refers to the total of relations between the elements of the text, between the part and the whole, and between parts of the whole. Thirdly, there is "semiotics", where the literary sign assumes a key role in the crossroads of text and context. Fourthly, there are "linguistic approaches", where stylistic features associated with phonology, syntax, semantics, morphology, pragmatics, and so on can be analysed. Lastly, there is "deconstruction", where the critic is expected to deconstruct a given text and view it as a "structure of concealment", where meaning is construed as emanating from forms of opposition in the text (Swanepoel, 1990: 10–33).

Finally, the third major category includes the "reader-oriented approaches" which can be traced back to the impressionistic approach. "Reception aesthetics" involves a combination of semiotics, sociology and psychology, where each reception reveals a perception of literature. There is also the "reader response" which acknowledges that while the formal structures of the text are visible, they acquire significance only in the context of the reader's experience thereof (Swanepoel 1990: 34–40).

Swanepoel (1990: 41–66) refers also to "other approaches" which include the "comparative approach" where literature is seen as a universal phenomenon. Furthermore, "psychoanalytical approaches" analyse literature in terms of Freud's theory regarding sexual energy, namely, the libido as the primary psychic force in humans.

Most importantly, Swanepoel (1990: 48–62) refers to "emerging African approaches. These include "Irele's sociological approach" (1971), which takes into account the whole imaginative African experience. There is also "Marxism and Africa" where economic structures are taken to underpin social, political and cultural structures. Finally, "myth criticism" is considered, an approach developed by scholars such as Wole Soyinka through his publication on *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) and Isidore Okpewho's *Myth in Africa* (1983).

It is under the umbrella of "emerging African approaches" that an additional approach is proposed, namely, "intercultural literary discourse". In a sense, such an approach combines and amalgamates many of the approaches set out above, for example the "sociological", "historical-biographical", "psychoanalytical" approaches and so on. Essentially this intercultural approach takes into account changing identity and the influence of multiculturalism and multilingualism on the literary word. It is argued further that the initial approaches as outlined here are no longer individually relevant for analysing contemporary youth literature in South Africa.

Language and identity in the Siyagruva Series

There is a largely unexplored link between communication and identity in intercultural communicative situations. Social identity theory makes the point that an individual's self concept is composed of both social and personal identities (Abrams et al 2003: 209).

This article contends that this is a continually changing and dynamic process among the youth of South Africa. The sense of identity changes constantly in relation to new social dynamics, which influence self-perception, whereas personal identity remains more static, though not entirely so, for example, a character such as Rashaad's journey in exploring his homosexuality. Though, he explores his sexuality, he remains Muslim. This dichotomy is well depicted in Moroukian's *Breaking Out* when Rashaad responds as follows to Brunette's question about whether he is gay:

"What did you say?"

"I asked if you were gay. Lots of people are, you know. It's no big deal these days."

"It may not be for you," said Rashaad, "but for a Muslim it's almost a death sentence if your family finds out…" (Moroukian 2002: 37).

Throughout the Siyagruva series, Rashaad's character is continually changing in order to facilitate a marriage between changing personal identity and the demands of social pressure. Abrams et al (2003: 210) contend that:

Personal identity refers to an individual's unique personal characteristics, irrespective of cultural or social group, and social identity is defined as one's knowledge of membership in certain social groups and the social meanings attached to the group […] Age, gender, profession, nationality, region, religion, and so forth all serve as different social identities and have their own cultural components of shared values, habits, and history.

In essence this creates an in-group with a specific identity in which pride and belonging is infused. This does not negate ethnic identity and the ability of an individual to engage competently in activities associated with their respective ethnic group. Arguably, as a result of transformation in South Africa, and the interaction with new environments for many, an intercultural identity is emerging more strongly among the youth. As far as Rashaad's identity is concerned, his sexuality progresses from the self doubt expressed above to a more definitive reaction when he is called a *moffie* [faggot] in *Mom's Taxi:*

The drunken guy mumbles something as he turns to look at Rashaad. When he sees who it is, he says, "Hey, *jou moffie …* [you faggot] come over here, man … *lat ek vir jou 'n soentjie gee …* [let me give you a little kiss] come on, man, jus' a little kiss, hey!"

Rashaad tries to break away and move off.

> "Hey, *jy dink jy's mooi en slim, nê*? [you think you are nice and clever, hey?] Well, you *boggerol,* [nothing] man …" and he lurches towards Rashaad.
>
> Rashaad deftly sidesteps, and the guy falls heavily on the floor. He's got a bottle in his pocket, and you can hear it smash, and suddenly there's a mixture of liquor and blood spreading on the floor. (Lamna et al 2003: 46)

Later, when he is asked by Raymondo, the dance instructor, how he feels about being called a *moffie*, [faggot] Rashaad responds as follows: "'If I *am* gay – if I am a moffie – then that's fine, he can call me whatever he likes […]'" (Lamna et al 2003: 56).

Thereafter his identity further develops in *No Problem, Man* where he actually takes on a gay identity. This identity is full exposed in *Flying High* when he finds himself in America, and kissing an American boy, Paul, for the first time. The acceptance of his own identity, including his sexuality, as well as the acceptance of him by others, even in a foreign land, shows intercultural contact, both physical and mental, which manifests in personal identity change and self acceptance, though his social identity of being Muslim remains static.

The changing intercultural and intracultural identity related to personal identity, is evident in the portrayal of many of the characters in the Siyagruva Series. This is also borne out, for example, in *Mom's Taxi* (Lamna et al 2003: 3–4) where Brunette is referred to as a coconut, due to her accent and ability to speak English, and she responds as follows: "'You know what I'm worried about? Young township girls. They think that because they go to township schools, they've got no future. They call those of us who go to school in the suburbs 'coconuts' or 'Oreos'.'"

A new type of communication emerges, which in turn entrenches both new and old identities. Mark Collier (1997: 36–44) talks of avowal and ascription processes:

> Avowal is the self an individual portrays (i.e., saying, "This is who I am"), whereas ascription is the process by which others attribute identities to an individual (e.g., through stereotypes). The avowal and ascription processes acknowledge that identity is shaped by our own and by others' communicated views of us. Identities are also expressed through core symbols, norms, and labels (Collier 1997: 40).

According to Ochs (2005: 79), "the relation of language to social identity is not direct but rather *mediated* by the interlocutors' understandings of conventions for doing particular social acts and stances […]" In the Siyagruva series this is intrinsically bound to dancing and the discourse, which accompanies it, as well as the identity, which emanates from it. The "stance" and the "act" are linked, and are closely associated with the collective Siyagruva Scene identity in this instance.

The Siyagruva dance scene allows for a social identity to form among the characters. This identity is borne out of the need for a support base, which supersedes racial and cultural differences. According to Stella Ting-Toomey (1999: 26):

> […] individuals tend to feel secure when communicating with people whom they
> view as supportive and with a high sense of familiarity. They tend to experience
> identity vulnerability when interacting with people whom they view as unfamiliar.
> With similar others, individuals tend to share a common set of values, norms and
> scripts. […] Thus, the theme of identity security and vulnerability is viewed as a
> springboard from which other facets of intercultural communication are affected.

The environment of the Siyagruva dance studio reinforces the notion of "identity security" and "familiarity".

An intercultural paradigm

Ting-Toomey (1999: 10) states that: "Culture is like an iceberg: the deeper layers (e.g., traditions, beliefs, values) are hidden from our view; we only see and hear the upper-most layers of cultural artefacts (e.g., fashion, trends, pop music) and of verbal and nonverbal symbols." She continues to point out that culture is "[…] dynamic and changes with the people within the system" (Ting-Toomey 1999: 14). This dynamism is arguably reflected in the "cultural artefact" of ballroom dancing in the Siyagruva Series. The feeling of a shared South African culture emerges at this "uppermost layer" amongst the characters. In *Divine Dump Dancer* (Kaschula 2002: 22) the dance group unity is depicted as follows: "'We were always making fun of one another. That's the way the group was. Everyone enjoyed a good laugh.'" McLaren (1998: 14) makes a similar point when stating that:

> Culture is a human phenomenon; it is the way we are, both physically and mental-
> ly. It is both a state in which each of us exists and a process which changes constant-
> ly according to the individuals, the time and the place. This combined state and
> process called culture affects us all as we respond to others, to events and to the
> environment.

This is made clear in the following extract from *Mom's Taxi* (Lamna et al 2003: 2) which depicts changes in the way black youth perceive one another:

> One of the girls sees Brunette […] She screams at Brunette, "hey, you coconut! Go
> and tell them *ekasie* [in the township] I am arrested for shoplifting […]"
>
> Brunette thinks to herself, "How can this kid call me a `coconut' when she
> needs my help? If I don't tell them, how will her people in the township know
> what's happened to her?

McLaren continues to point out that culture moulds and makes an individual, but that his does not mean that individuals cannot vary from one another within this specific culture. Furthermore, the term "cultural relativism" is used to emphasise the

point that the individuals should respect both their own and others' values; that all cultures are of equal value (McLaren 1998: 16).

The characters in the Siyagruva Series of novels come from different cultural backgrounds, but they are subsumed under a broader overarching South African culture where individuals interact with each other, often making use of a lingua franca, namely English. Ting-Toomey (1999: 3) argues that in such situations: "In order to achieve effective intercultural communication, we have to learn to manage differences flexibly and mindfully."

This article has already pointed out the link between identity and communication within intercultural communication. It is argued that the interaction that takes place between the characters in the Siyagruva Series can be considered as intercultural. The Siyagruvers mix languages and share each other's physical spaces in various contexts. Scholars sometimes refer to cross-cultural and intercultural as interchangeable. However, there are differences. According to Gudykunst (2003: 159–160):

> Cross-cultural research involves comparing behavior in two or more cultures (e.g., comparing self disclosure in Japan, the United States, and Iran when individuals interact with members of their own culture). Intercultural research involves examining behavior when members of two or more cultures interact (e.g., examining self-disclosure when Japanese and Iranians communicate with each other). Intercultural behavior often is compared with intracultural behavior (e.g., behavior within a culture). To illustrate, Iranian self-disclosure when communicating with Japanese might be compared with Iranian communication with other Iranians.

Gudykunst (2003: 163) continues to point out that "[i]ntercultural communication generally is conceptualised as communication between people from different national cultures […] intergenerational communication, communication between members of different social classes, and interracial/interethnic communication." This type of communication therefore unravels the communication process between two or more different cultural groups embedded within a common environment.

For example, in *Boy in da City* (Malbusch 2003: 43–44) this is well illustrated when Equiano, fondly known as Keeno, a boy from Burundi, finds himself drawn into the Siyagruva Scene:

> "Me, I tell you some word in my language," ventured Equiano.
> "What word?"
> "*Mi impole,*" said Keeno.
> "What does that mean?" asked a bewildered Reagan.
> "It mean `Cool', it mean `is okay'…"
> "Okay, cool, dude," smiled Reagan.

Ting-Toomey (1999: 16), states that:

Intercultural communication is defined as the *symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation.* The major characteristics of this definition include the following concepts: symbolic exchange, process, different cultural communities, negotiate shared meanings, and an interactive situation (my emphasis).

These cultural differences emanating from different social and racial backgrounds influence the way that one understands one's reality in our attempt to create meaning from social reality. Ethnocentricism, social identity concerns, stereotypes and cognitive biases create problems in communicative events such as these. Similarly anxiety, uncertainty, feelings of injustice, prejudice and other negative affective reactions to intercultural contact can create problems during communicative events (Stephan & Stephan 2003: 122). This is borne out in the following interaction concerning Equiano's well-being:

"Oh, *ja*, I want to ask you to let a little friend of mine Keeno stay in your room for the week."

"His name is 'Keeno'?"

"Well, it's actually 'Equiano'. But we call him 'Keeno'."

"Why don't you call him 'Ekway … Ekwu …'?"

"Because, Varkie, we can't pronounce it! Okay?"

"Okay," Varkie gave in. "Why can't he stay with you?"

"Well, he's a '*foreigner*'. And you know what my mother thinks about *them*", said Shelley, rolling her eyes heavenwards.

Varkie laughed. "Sure he can stay with me, I don't mind 'foreigners'."

"Thanks, Varkie, I'll smuggle him in this afternoon" (Malbusch 2003: 49–50, original emphasis).

In these situations where intercultural communication takes place, speakers will make use of linguistic strategies such as code-switching in order to break down barriers as indicated in the interaction between Reagan and Equiano. By doing so they either increase or decrease linguistic distance between interlocutors. This is clearly visible in the Siyagruva Series, where language is used strategically in order to create a point of connectedness between characters with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Differences in cultural and linguistic background are often used to create unity and connectedness. For example, the difficulty in pronouncing Mncedisi's name in *Divine Dump Dancer* (Kaschula 2002: 21) also illustrates such a point of connectedness:

"Shelley still couldn't pronounce my name. And so she called me Deesi. I didn't like that."

"Just say Mncedisi. It's a click, with the tip of your tongue behind your top teeth. And then you let it drop quickly," I tried to explain to her. But it was no use.

My name always seemed to come out as Mkedi. The rest of the group thought that this was very funny. When the two of us danced together, they jokingly called us the salt-and-pepper duo."

Ting-Toomey (1993: 1–2) argues that, as part of her "identity negotiation theory" that the more secure individuals' self-identification is, the more they will be open to interacting with people from other cultures. The more vulnerable they feel, the more anxiety they will experience in such interactions. Arguably, the Siyagruva Series, the setting of these novels within a common space, a dance studio, breeds a sense of in-group communication, even though participants come from differing cultures. Perhaps an extreme example of this occurs in Malbusch's *Boy in da City* (2003: 79) where Equiano finds himself accepted into the Siyagruva Scene. Ordinarily he is discriminated against as an *ikwerekwere,* a foreigner or outsider. Now he finds himself within the in-group where he is able to talk about himself and his language:

"What's your language?"
"Me, I learn speak French by de school, but my language is Kilundi…"
"Kilundi?" repeated Mncedisi.
"Yes. You write it K-i-r-u-n-d-i, but you say it *Kilundi*…"
"So, you teach me some Kilundi, and I'll teach you some isiXhosa" (original emphasis).

Another interesting aspect that reveals itself in the relationships that exist in the Siyagruva Series is the notion of intercultural dating. The field of intercultural communication has not, as yet, systematically studied intercultural communication in interpersonal relationships such as dating, marriage, and friendship. However, the Siyagruva Series allows for the study of intercultural relationships as a social phenomenon in South Africa. According to Chen (2003: 225) many of the issues such as privacy and intimacy remain the same as in any other relationship, but some of the issues have greater impact, "[…] such as dealing with differences and social perception of the intercultural relationship." In previous research pertaining to South Africa, Collier and Bornman (1999: 140) make the point that for interethnic friendship in South Africa, perceived group dissimilarity in what is considered acceptable, appropriate behaviours toward a friend greatly discourages formation of intercultural relationships. The characters analysed in the Siyagruva Series seem to prove the opposite. There is a sense of increased "social penetration", which comes with self-disclosure and sharing of the individual culture, as well as with the development of relationship intimacy (Chen 2003: 226). The Siyagruva Series shows that young people learn to interact despite their differences and the perceived stereotypes that may exist in society. In this instance, the dance studio provides a support base from which the young people can operate without prejudice.

A good example would be Mncedisi's emerging friendship with Shelley, a young white girl in *Divine Dump Dancer* . It initially appears that the author is exploiting the now exhausted theme of characters moving from the rural areas to urban areas, and the socio-economic consequences that follow. However, it soon becomes clear that the urban issues are intertwined with issues of intercultural communication and the need for characters to interact, even though they come from different cultural backgrounds and experiences. This makes this writing, as well as the series, somewhat unique. When Mncedisi decides to pursue his calling to become a diviner, Shelley responds as follows:

"You're going to have to explain all of this to me very carefully […] As long as you don't do it with me in one of those trances you spoke about," Shelley said, smiling […]

"It's not like I'm going to be in a *thwasa* [spiritual] state all the time, Shelley," I answered, feeling a little misunderstood.

"Oh, lighten up, I'm only joking! You'll make a good diviner. In fact, you're serious enough to listen to other people's problems, even mine," she said, placing her arm on my shoulder. That made me feel better. The last thing I wanted was to be seen as a freak."

The novel sets about creating a platform which is arguably, mutually inclusive, where the other becomes one. There is the constant juxtaposition of one culture against the other. Thereafter emerges the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the two, brought on by a changing society and social environment. At times this manifests in humour as in the above extract. There may also be traumatic consequences to such clashes of culture, prior to the emergence of a comfortable space accommodating both sets of beliefs. This is obvious when Mncedisi's religious aunt and family try to force him to forego his calling to divinerhood, referring to it as heathen. He then becomes ill to the point of death. It is only at this final moment of his life that the family realises that they must set him free to pursue his calling. At this point there is some form of "intracultural" dispute, followed by connectedness between the members of this in-group Xhosa family.

Conclusion

The Siyagruva Series explores the notion of changing South African youth identity within contemporary settings where the characters find themselves sharing a common setting, yet they come from various cultural backgrounds. In this lies their challenge of assimilation, but also retaining their individual identities. In this article, it has been suggested that this type of literature requires an intercultural literary discourse approach. The notion of an intercultural literary discourse is explored against

the backdrop of intercultural communication theory, as well as emerging identities and intercultural connectedness amongst South African youth as depicted in the Siyagruva Series. Michele Magwood (2003) concludes as follows regarding the Siyagruva books: "Entertaining and immensely readable, this is building into a superb series."

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