

Exploring the Rich Tapestry of Cultural Identity in Selected Siswati Short Stories



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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to examine the function of Siswati short stories in promoting cultural identity through an analytical lens. The researchers meticulously collected data from a diverse array of sources, such as online platforms, scholarly journals, library books, and articles. Subsequently, the thematic analysis was employed to critically and qualitatively analyse the function of Siswati short stories in advancing cultural identity. The findings exhibit that Swati people's customs and beliefs are sustained because elders transmit wisdom and knowledge to younger generations through the art of storytelling. Siswati folktales weave together parts of mythology, folklore, and daily life to provide a nation and restore a sense of pride and belonging in its people. However, upholding conventional values and social conventions is one of the main purposes of Siswati short stories. On this basis, these tales frequently touch on issues of deference to elders, harmony within the community, and the value of community cohesion. These tales are essential in forming the social and cultural fabric of society, serving as a means of moral instruction and a means of remembering the traditions and celebrations of the Swati people. The contribution of this paper, Swati short stories, is a valuable instrument for preserving a harmonious and cohesive community by teaching cultural values and ethics in the minds of their readers through the fascinating narrative style of these moral lessons.

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INTRODUCTION

For a considerable amount of time, Swati society's rich cultural legacy has been preserved and promoted with Siswati short stories. Significantly, Siswati short stories serve as a historical and cultural archive, preserving the Swati people's collective memory. These stories shed light on the genesis of customs, the importance of cultural practices, and the experiences of earlier generations through mythological tales and historical anecdotes. Future generations might draw inspiration from the Swati identity by conserving and disseminating this cultural legacy. Mazibuko argues that African literature often serves as a reflection of the social fabric of communities, capturing their ethos and guiding future generations through stories passed down orally.¹ The shift from oral to written form in Siswati literature marks a critical development in preserving this identity in the face of globalising pressures. Honouring variety and cohesion, Siswati short stories illustrate the cohabitation of various tribes, dialects, and cultures, reflecting the diversity of the nation. These tales encourage harmony and understanding among the Swati people by appreciating

¹ S. Mazibuko, *Oral Tradition and African Identity in Literature*. (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press., n.d.).

their variety. They function as a uniting factor, encouraging a feeling of pride and inclusion in the Swati community's cultural fabric.

Swati short stories have a greater cultural impact on modern society than just the oral tradition. Modern technology has made it possible to translate these stories into written works, audio recordings, and digital media, which have expanded their audience within the global Swati community. Additionally, Swati short stories are becoming more widely known and adding to the global appreciation of Swazi culture by utilising digital platforms, which promotes respect and understanding across distinct cultures.

Furthermore, cultural identity in Siswati short stories often engages with themes of belonging, tradition, and social cohesion, emphasizing the importance of community.

According to Nyembezi the depiction of community life in these stories highlights the interdependence of individuals within the collective, a key feature of African identity that contrasts with more individualistic Western notions of selfhood.² This collective identity is maintained and transmitted through the stories' rich depiction of traditional practices, rituals, and values, which provide a sense of continuity in the face of rapid social change.

This study aims to explore how selected Siswati short stories delve into the complexities of cultural identity, reflecting on the challenges of modernity while preserving traditional values. Through a close reading of these stories, the study analyses how Siswati writers negotiate the tensions between preserving cultural heritage and engaging with contemporary issues such as globalisation, migration, and changing social dynamics. By doing so, a deeper understanding of how literature serves as a profound expression of cultural identity and a tool for its preservation will be gained. This study's primary goal is to investigate the function that Siswati short stories perform in supporting and maintaining cultural identity. Even though there are currently few writers who are steadfast in preserving what our ancestors laid for us, one may still agree that Siswati literature has been put to excellent use. It is used to inform the public, particularly the youth, about the cultural facets of life that they are unaware of and lack. However, the current study recognised the significance that the Swati literature writers play in educating, conserving, and promoting the culture and identity of the Swati people by observing the features of their culture, tradition, and traditions in the literary works.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Cohesion

The African writer has grown up in a culture that values community more than anything else. The idea that "I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am" is fundamental to comprehending African perspectives on humanity.³ In South Africa, literature has consistently served as a means of reaffirming one's belief in cultural ideas. Because Africans consider that "the earliest act of civilisation was...the establishment of a cooperative, interactive, human community," social cohesion is particularly essential to them says Kunene.⁴

Integrating an artist's vision into a wide-ranging social experience becomes a common and organic process that does not need guidelines to be followed. The fields of philosophy and art combine to create a discipline that seeks to validate the social function of all manifestations of human existence. In summary, the goal of social cohesion is portrayed. African modern literature is highly assimilated. Literature that focuses on the person is different from other literature. The characterisation and sociological critique of Soyinka's interpreters, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, and Achebe's *Anthills of Savannah* are all shaped by the communal spirit. Each of these books emphasizes a group above a single character.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers meticulously collected data from a diverse array of sources, such as online platforms, scholarly journals, library books, and articles. Notably, the textbooks employed in educational institutions

² Staff Reporter, "Translating Nyembezi, No Walk in the Park," Mail and Guidian, January 11, 2019, <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-01-11-00-translating-nyembezi-no-walk-in-the-park/>.

³ J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Publications, 1969), 108-109

⁴ M. Kunene, *The Ancestors and the Sacred Maintain*. (London: Heineman., 19820), 1.

stand out as crucial evidence of the significant role that Siswati literature plays in safeguarding and promoting our cultural heritage. The carefully selected texts embody unique cultural, traditional, ritualistic, and numerous other characteristics that the researchers thoughtfully analysed, underscoring the profound importance of these works in enriching our understanding and appreciation of cultural identity. The goal of the study is to increase Swati people's appreciation for Siswati short stories and other literary works that have been used to uphold and foster cultural identity. Not only should people value the literature, but they should also value the way the Swati people's culture, rituals, and traditions are exploited. Furthermore, the researchers believe that both individuals and authors would make it their mission to keep using Swati literature in Swati culture.

The Impact of Literature on Culture Preservation

Culture encompasses the traits and understanding of a community, indicated by various aspects such as dialect, spirituality, gastronomy, customs, music, and artistic expression. This indicates that a group's culture is the way they conduct their daily lives. It is a group's customary procedure. Additional definitions of culture include shared social and behavioural patterns, cognitive frameworks, and understanding acquired through socialisation. Nkuna and Zitha go on to say that culture can be seen as the development of a collective identity supported by social norms specific to the group.⁵ Above all, the group members share characteristics in the way they have lived their lives. What they do is similar, and they continue with their regular activities and business.

Furthermore, according to Madden et al., culture is a priceless legacy that has been passed down through the generations.⁶ They go on to say that culture appears to permeate every facet of social life, including oral, commercial, exchange, and emotional cultures. Above all, they think that in the process of international integration, a nation's culture is its greatest asset. Every country can offer comfort based on the lessons learned from its predecessors. Although cultures have changed significantly, there are still aspects of life that are valued and passed down from one generation to the next. Although these problems have caused society to change, other aspects of their way of life have not changed, which indicates that some things have been passed down from the older to the younger generations and are therefore valued. Certain items from the previous generation are difficult to get rid of. Society holds such facets of life in high regard.

Culture is the entire complex of observable, classifiable, spiritual, fabric, intellectual, and emotional characteristics that define a society or social group, as noted by Nkuna, Zitha and Khoza.⁷ This description includes art, literature, lifestyle, communal living arrangements, values, established systems, customs, and beliefs.⁸ Culture is unique in the sense that every culture has a unique characteristic that sets it apart from the next. In certain cultures, a young man who greets a senior while sporting a hat or cap without taking it off could be interpreted as disrespectful. That is not a problem in another civilisation. Distinct societies hold distinct spiritual beliefs. Regarding spiritual things, every society has its own style of life.

In summary, culture is the source of an individual's identity and is inherited by successive generations. Both consciously and unconsciously, this occurs. Certain lifestyles are associated with societies. It is like having a set mark that they might not want to lose. Not only is it clear that culture encompasses shared norms of behaviour, attitudes, and ideas, but culture also has an impact on society. It is important to remember that it is improper to draw a knife between two civilisations and declare which is superior to the other. Rather, cultures are distinct from one another and hold significance.

⁵ Khulisile Nkuna and Innocent Zitha, "Exploring the Divine: A Deeper Look into Religious Motifs in Siswati Poetry," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147- 4478) 14, no. 1 (February 25, 2025): 112–19, <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v14i1.3859>.

⁶ Oneil Madden et al., "Teletandem and the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence: Reflections from the ClerKing Project," *Language Education and Technology* 4, no. 2 (2024).

⁷ Khulisile Judith Nkuna, Innocent Zitha, and Sikhumbuzo Sibusiso Khoza, "Unveiling the Complexities of Gender Identity in Siswati Short Stories: A Nuanced Analysis," *TWIST* 20, no. 2 (2025): 21–28.

⁸ N. Nkuna, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Marginalized Communities in South Africa," *Journal of Human Rights* 15, no. 2 (2021): 143–56.

Overview and Description of Short Stories

Many researchers have attempted to define a short tale, and the strange and astounding thing about their efforts is how hard it is to come to a consensus on a concise yet comprehensive definition of this genre, the short story. The study will look at the numerous definitions that currently exist before attempting to define the short tale. The term will help distinguish short stories from other literary works, including folktales, sketches, and anecdotes. It also highlights the distinctions between short stories and other genres. The researchers will watch how the characters are presented to see how well the author can depict them in the short story.

On the other hand, short stories are composed of numerous structural elements. Topic, introduction, setting, conflict, dialogue, complexities, lesson, climax, anticlimax, and conclusion are the terms that make up the plot. Short stories have succinct writing. Short stories are helpful, but they might be lengthy. An essay that is meant for a broad readership is called a short narrative. From elementary schools to higher education institutions, students are exposed to short stories. The primary points of the structure or each subheading may be included in this kind of text. When authoring their short stories, authors of short stories frequently select key plot components. This is because they will not be able to convey all the structure's subheadings and tenets because the narrative is so short. When creating a short story, the introduction, the body of the story, the conflict, the climax, and the conclusion are all crucial components of the structure.

In addition, the writer's intention when penning the short story is to convey a message to the reader. In the short narrative, the characters are the ones who convey a message about the issues and difficulties they are dealing with. For this reason, as soon as the student closes the book, he or she is given a profound lesson. The author employs the characters in the work to make a point for the reader. The many roles that the characters play in the narrative drive its development and resolution. Gordimer, who states it this way, lends weight to this assertion:

The only thing one can be certain of in the here and now is their craft; short story writers see with the eyes of the body. Ideally, they have mastered the skill without needing to be told about previous steps or what occurs next. Since cumulative effects are not discussed in the short story, there is a discrete decisive moment.⁹

Nonetheless, the author notes numerous events that transpire throughout the book and writes about them. As a consequence, the authors of the short story wrote about experiences they have personally had or heard about, and the events and messages depict what is going on in society. To do this, the author asks his characters to reflect on the lessons he wishes to impart through the story, after which the speaker enacts the lessons learned. Writing about issues that have an impact on people's lives is crucial because it encourages readers to pay attention and broaden their horizons.

Stated differently, the author asserts that the value of short stories lies in their abundance of lessons that may be applied to everyday situations. However, the student must continue reading the story until he understands the message the author was trying to convey to the reader. We might state that the lesson that the reader will take away from short stories is one that they should emphasize. However, Smith and Hart assert that contemporary short tales represent a unique literary genre with their own traits.¹⁰ The following is an inventory of the features:

- It is always fictitious.
- It is usually no longer than ten printed pages and seldom exceeds thirty.
- It may contain verse, but it is written in prose.
- It addresses a single, overarching topic, which could be a dramatized event, something recalled, or something imagined.
- It emphasizes human values and character strongly against the backdrop of modern civilisation.
- It includes conflict, a crisis, a climax, and a resolution, which can be simplified or acted out.

⁹ Nadine Gordimer, "The Flash of Fireflies," in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles E May (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 263–67, 265.

¹⁰ George Davey Smith et al., "Adverse Socioeconomic Conditions in Childhood and Cause-Specific Adult Mortality: Prospective Observational Study," in *Health Inequalities* (Policy Press, 2003), 191–204.

- Like lyrical poetry, it aims to convey a single idea or feeling before fading away.

Furthermore, as can be seen from the descriptions above, the terms "single action," "single situation," and "moment" emphasize the central idea or characteristic of a well-structured short tale. Of course, a short story must be brief and have a tight unit. However, the traits exhibited by the scholars demonstrate that, while a few guidelines influence the composition of a short story, these traits are merely meant to be used as a guide; one is not required to adhere to the theme of the latter.

As a result of the diverse character of this genre, it would seem reasonable to conclude that a definitive definition of a short tale cannot be achieved. Therefore, watching a short story's shape is a better way to grasp it than trying to define it. Moreover, a description of other genres is included to help readers better comprehend the short tale and how it complements or contrasts with it.

DISCUSSION

Educational significance and literary legacy Siswati's short stories offer insights into language, narrative techniques, and historical issues, making them both culturally and educationally relevant. These stories contribute to the rich tapestry of African storytelling traditions and serve as literary works that inspire future writers and scholars. Mabuza illustrates several cultural facets in her short narrative, Umcebo (wealth) and Litsambo (figuratively meaning pay in the story), referencing Msibi.¹¹ Wild fruits are customary in Swati culture. Food is a component of societal legacy. Other civilisations might not have access to Swati wild fruits. Buildings are constructed on the cleared area because of infrastructure development and global change. When land is cleared, trees that provide the Swati people with food through wild fruit are lost. Mabuza quotes Msibi as mentioning a variety of fruits that are essential to the Swati cuisine.¹²

Satsite sihleti Gogo wasipha intfutfu. Ahleke afe Sakhile sekakhumbule kahle, bese uyamlungisa dzadzewabo, "cha Temashayina, ngicabanga kutsi wenta liphutsa, Gogo utsite ngematfundvuluka lawo."

("We received a smoke from our grandmother when we were seated." When she remembered a term, Sakhile laughed at her sister. And she gave her the correction. "No, Temashayina, Granny said those are ematfundvuluka, I believe you are misinformed.")

In the Lowveld, the Swati fruit *ematfundvuluka* is widely available. Her older sister corrects her when she names them "smoke" (*intfutfu*) rather than "*ematfundvuluka*," referring to them as "fruit" instead. The younger generation is denied the opportunity to gain more experience with indigenous knowledge, customs, and values due to urbanisation and the adoption of Western culture. Many methods are used to expose the present generation to Swati fruits, and this information will be passed down to the following generation. In addition, the narrative reveals that their grandmother is enhancing their Aboriginal wisdom.

The narrative provides yet another illustration of the cultural lesson. The chat is between the grandmother and her grandchildren, who live in urban areas most of the time. They visited her during the break in classes:

"Ngemantulwa lawa batukulu bami."

(These are emantulwa my grandchildren)

"Ucondze esihlahleni semgwava?"

"Are you heading directly to the guava tree?"

"Utsite gogo singakukhi lokungadliwa."

"Our grandmother advised against harvesting inedible plants."¹³

The exception teaches current and future generations a valuable cultural lesson about the inaudibility of some wild fruits. The author has preserved and promoted Swati fruits through short stories.

¹¹ L. Msibi, "The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa," *Gender & Development* 28, no. 2 (2020): 2002-29

¹² Msibi, "The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa," 2002-30

¹³ Msibi, "The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa," 2002:31.

He exposes the fruits humans should ingest and those that should not be consumed by using Swati literature. This is another example that is brought up by Msibi she says:¹⁴

“Temashayina losahleti embikwesihlahla semtfuma utsi yena ukha ematelemba ache.”

(Temashayina sitting in front of umntfuma tree very sure that she is eating ematelemba fruit).

“Hhayi-ke loko.”

(Not that)

Another aspect that the writers have used is the mention of livestock and how they help the citizens of the country, also preventing the youth from involving themselves in drugs. People also sell livestock to make a living. Mabuza says:

“Bashise nakungena busika”

(Burnt beginning of winter”

The above excerpt proves that negligence in terms of uncontrolled fire in other parts of the country of Swati people working against the preservation of the Swati fruits. All that is left shall be the names of the fruits and future generations shall know the existence of Swati fruits through the writing of Swati text. Another aspect that the writers have used is the mention of the fruits and how they help the citizens of the country, rather than enjoying their good taste. The fruits are *emaganu* (marula). The people not only make a traditional beer but also a bread Jam. People also sell the fruits to make a living. 2002:32) says:

“Ungibona nginje ngitphilelea ngawo lamaganu.”

(The amarula fruits give me a living.”¹⁵

“Lapha endleleni uhambe uyobutwa gogo kutsi yini-ke emaganu. Asukeleke njalo achaze. Aze abatjele ngalotjwala bemaganu lobuphiswako butsensiswe ngemali leshisiwe. Achaze nangekubhoca sinkhwa lokwentiwa ngawo emaganu.”

“On the way, the grandmother is asked a lot of questions about the Swati fruits.” She went on to explain about the Swati beer brewed from the amarula fruit that is sold expensively.

She also explained about the Swati, the bread-jam that is made from the very fruit. She says:

“Loku ningibona nje batawufika ekhaya bawafake emplastikini bese bawabita emalangenil lamabili nome lamatsatfu.

“As you see, when they get home, they shall package them in plastics and sell them R2 or R3.”

However, by indicating this, the writers not only observe the knowledge of the fruits but also determine them by depicting how crucial they are in the lives of the people of the Swati people. The Swati literature has been used effectively to determine the fruits. It helps as an example that the fruits could be used effectively to determine the fruits. It helps as an example that the fruits could be used to create money at home. The Swati literature has also been used to conserve the knowledge of the Swati fruits, as the following generation would hold the way of living of their forebears. This is after all the people that they are, their identity, and their culture.

Msibi indicates the significance of natural firewood used when making a fire.¹⁶ The Swati people cooked their food using raw firewood that had been fetched from the forests. Not all dried trees should be used in making a fire. Msibi uses her short story to educate that this is a campaign to conserve the traditional trees that are part of the Swati culture. Msibi says:

“Tinkhuni loku lenekwetfwele? “Tihlahla tini leti? Niyatati?”

“Is this firewood you are carrying?”

¹⁴ Msibi, “The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa.”

¹⁵ Dumisa Celumusa Mabuza, “Teachers’ Reactions on the Curriculum Content in Consumer Sciences of Eswatini,” *Research Journal of Family, Community and Consumer* 8 2 (2020): 15–22.

¹⁶ Msibi, “The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa.”

“Tihlahla tini leti? Niyatati?”

“What kind of trees are these? Do you know theme?”

“Asitati babe, kepha tinkhuni. Sihlale Sibasa tona ekhaya.”

“We don’t know but this is firewood we use at home.”

“Hawu bantfwabami, loku lenikwetfwele ngumlahlabantfu yinchishamuti nesihlangu. Nibatjele ekhaya kutsi lomunye babe usibute kutsi ngabe yini lelesikutfotile”

“My children, this is ‘Umlahlabantfu (desert people) ‘yinchitsamuti’ (abolish the household) and sihlangu.”

“Tinkhuni mbamba ngumtilazembe, mangololo nembondvo. Sekwesala sitfwetfwele kuphela letinye atisafaniswa.”¹⁷

Culturally, in Swati society, one may not just use firewood for making fire in one's home. There is a belief that some wood may be a catastrophe in a family where it has been lit. In addition, fire is expected to give warmth to the Swati people, but with the wrong use of a type of tree, it could indicate a dearth and diverse types of bad warnings. This is why in the Swati culture, it is crucial that one gets knowledge about the type of tree to be used when making fire. The name of the tree speaks a lot in the culture of the Swati people.

Moreover, *umlahlabantfu* is deserting people, and there is a Swati short story, *Inchitsamuti*, which means destroying the household. The Swati writer has used Swati literature to educate the generations. This, therefore, conserves and disseminates the correct use of the firewood as she points out the correct use of the firewood, such as naming the right firewood that should be used in the Swati way of life. Firewood indicates warmth in the culture of the Swati people, so the correct kind of it should be used, not the ‘Umlahlabantfu’ or the ‘Inchitsamuti’, which would cause cold (troubles) in the family. Most Swati people in the community are aware that their culture is gradually disappearing. Individuals have assumed personal responsibility for helping to focus others on their culture and beliefs. Authoring short stories that will function as a mirror in reflecting culture and values that must be upheld in society is only one of the many things they have done to preserve this culture. The author of the Swati short stories is merely trying to educate society about who these people are and how they should live. Furthermore, this research could advance the function that short stories serve in maintaining and advancing culture in society.

To maintain the Swati people's culture, the Swati writers turned to fictional non-fiction. Through watching members of society, writers can develop compositions that are grounded in culture. This study relies on drama (*Umdlalo*) and a selection of Swati writings in prose (novels and short stories). Most authors depict the culture, customs, values, and traditions surrounding death, bereavement, traditional marriages, dowry payments, traditional dwellings, and the various responsibilities that members of the Swati community play in society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is obvious that the Swati people's culture is gradually becoming less important in Swati society. Some people have not been exposed to it, so it is not because people do it on purpose. Subsequently, it should be noted that Swati is quite vast, making it difficult to understand every aspect of the Swati people's culture. The study suggests that to get over this problem, literature portraying the Swati people's culture in South Africa should be written in English, the other official language. Another good suggestion would be to translate the current literature into English. Even though it might eventually cause the Swati language to become extinct, Swati writers should be encouraged to write in the other official language. Still, this is superior to other methods, as far as one can tell. Additionally, authors ought to be inspired to write about the customs and rites that people have not appropriated because the Swati people have a rich cultural heritage. This could support the promotion and preservation of Swati culture. Swati, the native language, ought to be offered as a passing topic in schools. People could grow to love the language and take it seriously as a result. In addition, all first-time students at postsecondary institutions must be required to take cultural courses.

¹⁷ Msibi, “The Gendered Impact of COVID-19 in South Africa.” P. 2002:36

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Siswati short stories serve as a vital medium for the expression and preservation of cultural identity. The authors have demonstrated how Swati culture has a strong influence on their writing, which is largely considered to be written for the purpose of passing along information and for leisure. The Swati literature that has been used to preserve and advance Swati writers has examined culture. It is also clear that this has been accomplished by utilising three genres. Finally, the analysis has effectively employed oral literature as a means of promotion and preservation. Getting textbooks containing Siswati short stories written in the language has not been easy. There are not many Siswati writers and most Siswati textbooks adhere to the syllabus. Writings on schools are common. In addition, a proverbs and idioms textbook that contained inaccurate information was released. Another goal of literature is to transmit habits. Ultimately, Siswati short stories provide a unique window into the enduring power of literature as a repository of cultural knowledge. They demonstrate how storytelling remains a dynamic tool for shaping, maintaining, and expressing identity in an ever-changing world. By exploring these narratives, readers gain a deeper understanding of how literature not only reflects cultural identity but also actively contributes to its ongoing evolution and survival.

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