

# IN THE SOAP OPERA *EGOLI*: AND CONSUMPTION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Egoli*<sup>1</sup> is the only locally produced daily soap opera in South Africa. It is broadcast on the Electronic Media Network<sup>2</sup> (M-Net) every weekday from 18h00 to 18h30. According to the All Media and Product Survey (AMPS) more than 1.3 million viewers watch *Egoli* every day (June 1996).

Soap opera is often seen as providing mere entertainment from which the audience derives pleasure. Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) states that soap opera is literally the personalisation of *entertainment* (chaff entertainment) with no specific underlying message. My argument is, however, that any text, no matter whether it is literature or media, has meaning or meanings in the sense that it is produced and interpreted by certain communities. To argue therefore that a soap opera provides only entertainment and that it conveys no messages is problematic.

As a result of its number of viewers, *Egoli* is in a powerful position in terms of incorporating context-specific events and utilising these to supply the audience with sufficient information. The storyline regarding prejudices against AIDS, for example, heightened awareness amongst the *Egoli* viewers and so helped to conscientise viewers (Pitout, 1996). In the same way, the dominant ideologies in South Africa, such as capitalism, racism and male domination, can also be contested. Ideology can be defined as a *system of ideas* (Gramsci, 1971: 375) which serves as an agent for social unification.

For Gramsci (1971) hegemony is a tool for understanding society in order to contest or change it. **Hegemony** consists of 1) the spontaneous consent given by the masses and 2) the apparatus of state coercive power, which enforces discipline on those groups who do not consent (Gramsci; 1971: 12). There is always tension between the dominant and the subordinate group, and as such the dominant group achieves domination through both coercion and consent. A soap opera, such as *Egoli*, can challenge the hegemonic order prevalent in society through 1) criticism and 2) presenting an alternative way of living and thinking.

*Egoli* can serve as a cultural forum with the aim of making different cultural groups aware of each other's customs, habits, attitudes and values (Pitout, 1996: 203-206). Magrietha Pitout (1996: 2) states that since 2 February 1990 when the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party

political hierarchies such as the National Party led to 'Africanisation'<sup>3</sup> which found resonance especially those aimed at mixed audiences. As such *Egoli* can serve as an information source concerning different cultural groups in South Africa.

Pitout (1996: 4) investigates the possibility of *Egoli* being a popular symbolic form, which propagates the ideal values of the new South Africa, for example tolerance of other cultures. Symbolic forms entail language and images being utilised in the media to produce a specific message. The aim can be to inform, to convince or to entertain. Pitout (1996: 205) argues that in *Egoli* an idealised society is represented where different cultural groups interact without any conflict.

I agree with Pitout (1996: 4) that *Egoli* can in some respects be a cultural forum where viewers can learn about other cultures and learn to interact with one another in an idealised manner. This article argues, however, that the intertextuality that is used in *Egoli* should be politicised, that the relationship *Egoli* has with the context should be a critical one rather than merely reflectional.

Certain aspects of South African life are portrayed in an idealistic way in *Egoli*, especially those relating to racial relations in the work environment. This is done deliberately by Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) who attempts to present an idealised Johannesburg. Apart from presenting preferred interrelationships, *Egoli* also manages to be critical of some socio-political issues, for example prejudice against people with AIDS. These critical relationships with the context should, however, be extended to include all socio-political issues such as gender and ethnic equality.

Since any production of a text is a cultural activity, the cultural context of the producer is incorporated into the text, whether consciously or not. The producers also have a specific target audience for whom they produce the soap opera, which colours the way in which they present the South African context in their productions. It is important for producers to be aware of their own ideological perspectives. In this way a certain viewpoint is not propagated and audiences are provided with sufficient information from all involved parties so that they may create informed opinions regarding socio-political issues.

**Culture** is a useful tool in understanding the way meaning is constructed through the production and the interpretation process. Both producers and audiences play a salient role in the way in which they actively react to their socially determined identities. Culture can be defined as follows:

*Culture is the ensemble of meaningful practices and 'uniformities of behaviour' through which self-defined groups within or across social classes express themselves in a unique way or locate themselves within an identifiable 'field of signification' (Tomaselli, 1988: 39).*

It must be noted that cultures are not homogeneous wholes and that the interpretations and behaviours of individuals from one specific culture differ according to their various identities that constitute their culture, such as gender, ethnicity, class and language.

The production of *Egoli* will be analysed as being influenced not only by culture but also by **consumption**. The latter can be defined as 'the processes

and services are created, bought and used+ two aspects determine the way *Egoli* presents Using episodes aired between 14-29 November

1996, I will analyse whether the various audiences interpret these texts as being critical or merely reflectional of the South African context it incorporates.

As theoretical basis I will apply Julia Kristeva's (1980) definition of intertextuality to a Peircean model of Semiotics. The different types of intertextual relationships will be discussed as proposed by Genette (1982) and a new term will be introduced, namely contextuality. The latter form of intertextuality entails the relationship between a text and the context to which it refers. I will argue that *Egoli* needs to be critical of the context it represents in order to make its audiences aware of the options available to them.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

I interviewed producer Franz Marx, executive producer Laurence Lurie and head writer Danie Odendal who has recently become the associate producer of *Egoli*, to determine the process of production. I also attended a meeting between the writers and the head writer on which occasion episodes were allocated to the writers.

Nine structured one-on-one interviews of approximately 30 minutes each, based on theoretical construct sampling+ (Lindlof 1995: 128) were conducted. This type of sampling entails that the terms in which the theoretical argument defines a phenomenon must be translated somehow into criteria for identifying and selecting its manifestations in the field+ (Lindlof 1995: 128). My theoretical argument for this particular study is how the various audiences interpret intertextual relationships the text has with the context in terms of their respective cultural identities. I therefore needed a heterogeneous group of interviewees in terms of gender, language, income group, age and ethnicity.

The viewing audience of *Egoli* was established through the AMPS ratings (June 1996). The weekly average AMPS ratings (1996) during the period 14 - 29 November 1996 for White, Coloured and Asian (WCA) viewers in terms of gender, language, age and income groups are as follows:

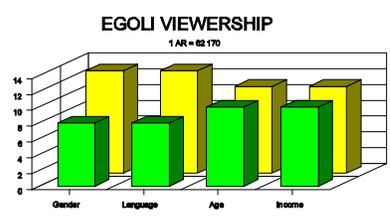
Gender	Language	Age	Income Group
13 AR (Women)	13 AR (Afrikaans)	11 AR (35+)	11 AR (High Income)
8 AR (Men)	8 AR (English)	10 AR (35-)	10 AR (Low Income)

The percentages of the *Egoli* audience according to the AMPS (1996) were used to give an indication of the various viewers' gender, language, age, income group and ethnicity. Since this is an exploratory research article, interviewees were limited to nine. The numbers were as follows: 7 women and 2 men; 4 Afrikaans and 5 English; 6 white, 2 coloured and 1 Indian; 6 interviewees are over the age of 35 and 3 under the age of 35. No black interviewees were interviewed as they comprise only a small percentage of the *Egoli* audience, which does not register on the AMPS ratings (June 1996). Five interviewees

6 000+ per month) and four from the B income (month) as the viewers from the C and D income e AMPS.

The interviewees were asked questions pertaining to the type of relationship *Egoli* has with its South African context. These questions included %What do you think of the racial relations portrayed on *Egoli*?+, %How do you feel about the language mix?+, %What do you think about the gender relations?+and %What do you see as the messages of *Egoli* and do you agree with them?+

It must be added that the interviewees were all residents in the Durban area<sup>5</sup> where Afrikaans is not spoken by as many people as in some other South African cities and towns. Both men and four women work full-time, two women are homemakers and one woman is a student. The interviews were conducted from 15-30 November 1996.



### 3. PLOT OUTLINE

14-29 November 1996:

Lynette Strydom, a journalist, asks Elsa du Plessis and Bertie Roelofse to be in her documentary explaining the valuable role the aged and disabled can play in society. Beth Edwards returns from Switzerland and is welcomed by her children and ex-husband, Chris Edwards. Chrisq present wife, Kimberley Edwards, is jealous and confronts Beth.

The duel between the two companies, Walco and Niekor continues. Sonet Naudé, Public Relations Officer at Niekor, organises a Niekor publicity fashion show in aid of funds for animals in distress. Mitch (Gregory Mitchell) wins technicians from Walco for Niekor's new factory, leaving Walco management furious. Niek Naudé wants to renew his marriage to Sonet but she

ing the Niekor staff furious. Monica Vorster, a  
that Sonet should be the new manager. She  
back. Sonet organises another publicity drive,  
this time a playground for underprivileged children.

#### 4. INTERTEXTUALITY

The term intertextuality originated as Julia Kristeva's translation of the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism. Dialogism is defined by Bakhtin (1986) as 'the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances'. An utterance refers to a 'complex of signs'<sup>6</sup> which could be a phrase, a poem, a novel and even a soap opera. The relationship a soap opera has with any other utterances such as the socio-political context, for example, constitutes dialogism.

Intertextuality is defined as 'the transposition of one or more system of signs in another+ system of signs (Kristeva, 1980). This notion cannot be reduced to merely the influence one text has on another or the relationship between a text and its sources. For Kristeva (1980) a text consists of a complex system, a montage of heterogeneous discourses, a 'palimpsest of traces'+ (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 204).

Kristeva's study of signs is rooted in the tradition of semiology, founded by Saussure. The latter (1966: 68) preferred arbitrary signs for his study:

*Signs that are wholly arbitrary realise better than the others which is the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic.*

Preference is thus given to language as a privileged system, as signs of language are totally arbitrary. For example, there is no logical connection between the word 'tree'+ (signifier) and the concept tree (signified). Silverman (1981: 8) argues that the preference for arbitrary signs over motivated signs creates a value-system. This leads to the exclusion of areas such as psychoanalysis, and film and television-analysis as they study motivated (iconic) signs. Peirce (1931), on the other hand, proposes another model for reading signs that does not exclude these areas of study. Intertextuality based on Charles Sanders Peirce's model of signification is therefore a much less restrictive study where not only symbolic, but also iconic and indexical signification can be studied (Peirce, 1931: IV: 359). I will therefore use Kristeva's definition of intertextuality based on a Peircean model of signification, as this model enables the analysis of language as well as images, the latter being essential for the study of television.

Peirce, founder of Semiotics, distinguishes three components which constitute any signification. These are the **sign**, **interpretant** and the **object**. He (1931: II: 135) explains these terms as follows:

*A sign ... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands*

stands for that object, not in all respects, but in which I have sometimes called the ground.

A *sign* is thus the word or visual image (the Saussurian signifier), the interpretant is the mental-image created in the viewer or reader (the Saussurian signified) and the object is the idea. It seems as though the interpretant and the object indicate the same notion, namely the mental-image. This, however, is not the case.

Peirce distinguished between experience and knowledge. For him we have %direct experience of things in themselves+ (1931: VI: 73) yet %our knowledge of things in themselves are entirely relative+(1931: VI: 73). In other words we have direct experience of things but when we attempt to express this in words or images, the knowledge contained in these words and images only *represents* our experience and is not a true reflection of the experience itself.

These *signs* are then combined according to a particular system in order to produce meaning. A system can be defined as the rules or codes to which signs adhere. The system of language, for example, consists of various *signs* and is combined according to grammatical rules to generate meaning. Television has a different set of codes, which are defined as follows:

*Codes are links between producers, texts, and audiences, and are the agents of intertextuality through which texts interrelate in a network of meanings that constitute our cultural world (Fiske, 1987: 4).*

A system of signs must therefore comply with certain codes in order for meaning to be conveyed from the producers to the audiences. This leads to a common understanding regarding the text despite certain discrepancies between the various interpretations of the producers and the audiences. Intertextual knowledge is therefore required by both producers and audiences to respectively produce and interpret the specific text. The intertextual knowledge required includes knowledge of the context and the genre.

In an interview with Mieke Bal (1981: 118) Gerard Genette misinterprets Kristeva's intertextuality as referring only to the presence of one text in another. He regards this term as inadequate and proposes in its place transtextuality. According to Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis (1992: 206) Genette (1982) defines transtextuality in *Palimpsests* as %all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts+. He distinguishes five types of transtextuality. In terms of the type of the text that is referred to, Genette distinguishes **paratextuality**, **architextuality** and **intertextuality**. In terms of the nature of the relationship one text has with another, Genette distinguishes **metatextuality** and **hypertextuality**. Paratextuality refers to the relationship between a text and its pre- and post-text, architextuality to the relationship between a text and its archetype and intertextuality, which he defines more narrowly than Kristeva, to the relationship between a text and the cited text within it. I will refer to the latter as *intertextuality* to avoid confusion with Kristeva's intertextuality. If there exists a critical relationship between two texts the relationship is metatextual. If there exists a relation between one text and an anterior, which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends, the relationship is hypertextual. For example, if *Egoli* has a critical relationship with



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of metatextuality but if the context was merely but unchallenged, then it would be a form of

Apart from intertextuality, architextuality and paratextuality, Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis (1992: 207) identify other forms of intertextuality such as celebrity intertextuality, genetic intertextuality, intratextuality. All these terms have a preoccupation with the relationship between two texts, disregarding references to the context. Tomaselli (1996: 29) states:

*These [semiotic] approaches largely derive from “dualistic Western philosophical assumptions which tend to imprison researchers into an obsession with the ‘Text’ - the representation only is ‘studied’ ”. The result of this is that context, the political, economic, social and historical processes out of which specific texts - films, television and radio programmes, print, fashion, etc. - arise, are suppressed from analysis. The text-context relationship is thus also eliminated from study.*

Knowledge of the context is, however, imperative for both producing and interpreting a text. **Contextuality**, or the context to which the text refers will therefore be the main focus of this article.

Fiske (1987: 108) distinguishes between **horizontal** and **vertical** intertextuality. The former refers to the relation between primary texts such as genre, character, content, and I will also add context, while the latter refers to all other texts that refer to the primary text. The other texts can be secondary texts, for example studio publicity, journalistic features or criticism; and tertiary texts or texts that the viewers produce themselves such as fanmail and gossip. Fiske's distinction is useful as intertextuality can be extended to include not only the texts to which the primary text refers, but also to all the texts that refer to the primary text.

Pitout (1996: 190) uses Fiske's model for her discussion of secondary and tertiary intertextuality. She (1996: 195) argues that secondary and tertiary texts produce a specific reality for viewers which impacts on their interpretations of *Egoli*. These texts are therefore agents in forming the various interpretations of the audiences. Pitout's (1996: 195) study of intertextuality is largely based on the controversy regarding Hennie Smit who plays Bertie in *Egoli*. The actor was charged with child molestation in 1993<sup>7</sup> but the charges were withdrawn a year later due to insufficient evidence. Viewers responded by writing letters (tertiary texts) to Franz Marx and demanding that Hennie Smit be removed from *Egoli*. This character and actor is still unpopular due to the court case (Pitout, 1996: 193). Though these secondary and tertiary texts are influential in forming and expressing the opinions of the audiences and producers, it must not be forgotten that this response was not only initiated by a secondary text but by the context itself. The newspaper article did not have such an effect on the *Egoli* viewers because it was a secondary text but because it reported on an event that occurred in reality. A secondary text, such as a review, would therefore not have had such an impact on the *Egoli* audiences.

In the interviews conducted, there was an absence of interest shown in the production of tertiary texts as well as the reception of secondary texts. The interviewees were all aware of the vertical intertextuality but their responses were

ly responses regarding contextual horizontal is that there were no controversial issues at ors to provoke such a strong response as was evident in the case of Pitout (1996: 195) study.

Though certain viewers enjoy reading secondary texts and producing tertiary texts, vertical intertextuality is more important to the producers who use it for the promotion of *Egoli*. Secondary texts can be promotional texts that the producers of *Egoli* use to advertise the programme. These are the *Egoli* Spectaculars<sup>8</sup>, the *Egoli* Club<sup>9</sup> and the *Egoli* adverts and teasers<sup>10</sup> shown on M-Net. These texts all refer to the primary text and serve to advertise the programme. The *Egoli* Club also functions to reply to tertiary texts that the viewers produce and so promote the programme on a private level.

Intertextuality is not only influential in the production process, but producers are also influenced by their cultural perspectives. According to Tomaselli (1996: 35) culture can be said to be the prime determinant of meaning. People from different cultures will produce reality through language and images in different ways. The producers of *Egoli* will therefore produce an episode coloured according to their various cultural perspectives. Similarly, the same *sign* will create different interpretants in the minds of the viewers. The *Egoli* audiences may therefore also interpret the same text, consisting of various images and words, differently as their experiences of reality are different, coloured as they are by ethnicity, class, gender, geographical and linguistic perspectives.

Tomaselli (1996: 35) argues, however, that closely-knit communities demonstrate consistency of interpretation. These **interpretive communities** (Fish, 1980) account for the meaning produced by the community rather than the meaning that was intended by the constructor of the message.

Not only culture, but one's position in the consumption process is significant in establishing the way the interpretive community conceives of the specific text. There are various stages of production and interpretation of a text which change the meaning in some way. Eric Michaels (1990) proposes a model of teleported texts. He identifies the **conceived text**, the creative idea on the part of the producers; the **production text**, the script; the **produced text**, the visual representation and the **transmitted text**, which is the way in which the produced text is presented. The **received text** is how the viewer watches the text on the television, for example sound/audio. The **perceived text** is the mental image created in the viewer's mind, the **social text** is the negotiated text with the viewing community and the **public text** is the conception that producers develop of their audience's interpretation through ratings and other forms of audience assessment.

This article will focus on the conceived text and the public text in terms of the producers, as well as the perceived text and the social text in terms of the audiences. It will analyse whether 1) the producers maintain a hypertextual or metatextual relationship with the context and 2) the audiences interpret the programme as maintaining a hypertextual or metatextual relationship with the context.

The conception of texts therefore differs on two levels: 1) the position the person has in the consumption process and 2) the cultural context from which the person either produces or interprets the texts. The producers and audiences do,



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knowledge concerning the texts or genre known as three levels; namely reality, representation and enables them to correlate their conceptions concerning genre to a certain degree.

## 5. ARCHITEXTUALITY

This term refers to the relationship a text has with its archetype. Genre is defined by Tomaselli and Van Zyl (1992: 398), citing Tom Ryall's definition of genre, as follows:

*The master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist/ film/ audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/ forms/ styles/ structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by an audience.*

Tomaselli and Van Zyl (1992: 398) argue that genre is analogous with the agreed code of a sign system, linking the interpretations of both audience and producer. Genre accounts for the ways in which certain films are produced. It therefore provides the producers with a predetermined form which corresponds with viewers' expectations. These expectations are then measured by producers through ratings.

Soap operas are not written for mass audiences, but by them as well. The audiences participate in the production of the genre in terms of the public text; namely AMPS ratings and the qualitative and quantitative market research done for Franz Marx Films by Markinor (1996). Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) states that intensive market research is done four times a year to establish which stories, characters and approaches are successful and popular with audiences. Even future stories are tested to assess whether the audiences will enjoy the stories or object to them. The public text thus plays a salient role in determining the content of future episodes.

*Produced by depersonalised representatives of the collective, anonymous public and functioning to celebrate basic beliefs and values, their formulas might be regarded not only as popular or even elite art but also as cultural ritual - as a form of collective expression seemingly obsolete in an age of mass technology and a genuinely 'silent majority' (Schatz, 1981: 12).*

Although audience participation in *Egoli* is passive, that is the audience only respond by saying what they like and dislike in terms of content rather than propose new material, the influence of the public text is still important. Franz Marx (Schoombie, 1992: 65) states that the target audience, namely coloured and white Afrikaans-speaking women between the ages of 25 and 45 years and in the A and B income group (Franz Marx; personal interview; 9 July 1996), is the only group that censors him in terms of programme content. In other words if this group does not like a particular storyline, for example, it will be stopped or changed as soon as possible.

As the target audience is sought after by advertisers and also one of the most expensive for advertisers, according to a representative at Oracle, M-Net's

at this group is dominant in terms of buying power, values and beliefs that will be represented in advertising capital sought after by advertisers. In turn the production company needs high ratings of this particular group to attract the needed advertising revenue. High ratings are attained by the producers through reflecting the interests of this group, although the programme is watched by both the dominant and subordinate groups.

Fiske (1987: 1) reiterates this point when he states that television attempts to control and focus the meanings and pleasures of television into a more singular preferred meaning that performs the work of the dominant ideology. A degree of resistance to the way audiences interact with television can however be argued:

*It is not enough to dismiss popular culture as merely serving the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy, peddling 'false consciousness' to the duped masses. It can also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where the dominant ideologies can be disturbed (Gamman and Marshment, 1989: 1).*

Soap opera can therefore challenge the consciousness (the term is Karl Marx's; 1977: 167) of a capitalist, racist and male dominated society. An example of this is the way in which soap operas recognise and value the emotional work which women undertake in the personal sphere so often undervalued in a male dominated society (Geraghty, 1991: 43). As such, this form of expression can disturb the dominant ideology supportive of various forms of domination.

Producers are often preoccupied with attracting high audience ratings in order to ensure advertising revenue, and not with disturbing or challenging the dominant ideologies. Without the capital generated from advertising, the soap opera cannot be produced and ratings are therefore producers' first priority. Social responsibility is often neglected by producers and so audiences are not made aware of alternative perspectives to the dominant ideologies. Criticising the hegemonic order would entail running the risk of losing audience ratings and therefore advertising income.

Franz Marx argues, however:

*It is not this genre's place to change social politics or religious norms. It can represent them. It is not its place to show the way. The audience does not expect it (Schoombie, 1992: 65).*

For Franz Marx, soap opera is not there to challenge or to change any norms present in society. It is made with the aim of pure entertainment (Franz Marx; personal interview; 9 July 1996).

While *Egoli* is perhaps not made by the producers to challenge any norms in society, certain storylines have done so. I want to argue that producers of mass culture should not just see their products as entertainment for the masses who need escapism of some sort but also as conveying a message, whether implicit or explicit. This will be discussed further when analysing the conceptual interpretations of both the producers and audiences.

moments in *Egoli* where distinct changes are noticeable since its launch in April 1992. These moments will then be related to the political, economic and social context of South Africa at the time.

In 1984 the Afrikaans and English newspaper owners, namely Nasionale Pers, Perskor, Argus Newspapers (which became Independent Newspapers in 1994) and Times Media Limited presented a proposal to the government that asked for the permission to launch an independent television station. The reason was to compensate for the loss in advertising revenue that was largely attributed to the launch and sustainment of the only television broadcaster in South Africa at the time, namely the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). On 1 October 1986 M-Net was launched, the first paying subscription network in South Africa and then the only competitor of the SABC.

When *Egoli* was launched in 1992, South Africa was still under National Party rule. President F.W. de Klerk and ANC leader Nelson Mandela were busy with negotiations for the transition from the apartheid government to one of National Unity. During this transition period the SABC<sup>11</sup> was still prescriptive in terms of programme content. Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) states that the SABC was still censoring television programmes during this time and prescribing what could and could not be said. Other programmes produced by Franz Marx includes the SABC television series *Agter elke man I and II* and the films *Agter elke man* and *Die prins van Pretoria*. This was, however, not the case with M-Net, then the only other television broadcaster in South Africa. According to Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) he received and has still received no prescription from M-Net in terms of programme content.

The programme content in *Egoli* was controversial when it was launched on M-Net in April 1992. For the first time interracial romantic relationships were represented on television in the form of Margaret Rose Willemse's relationships with the characters Johan Vorster and also with Niek and verbally represented through Nenna Willemse's previous relationship with her white employer, Dr Sinclair<sup>12</sup>. Explicit domestic violence was represented between the characters Deon du Plessis and Jo-Anne Logan as well as sex scenes between the character Johan and his numerous girlfriends. A great freedom was experienced by the producers, especially Franz Marx, who described his experience at M-Net in comparison to the SABC as follows:

*I am no more kept in check by political conventions. No one watches over my shoulder* (Schoombie, 1992: 65).

In an interview with Schoombie (1992: 65), Franz Marx states that the stories used in *Egoli* were ones the target audience could relate to, including abortion, living together outside of marriage and premarital sex<sup>13</sup>. Franz Marx (Schoombie, 1992: 65) said that an AIDS-story, for example, would not evoke identification with the audience as they will experience it from a distance. Domestic issues were preferred, although these were politicised in the form of interracial romantic relationships. In 1992 the Mixed Marriages Act was still not nullified and it was therefore challenging for the producers of *Egoli* not only to represent this visually on television, but to reveal that these relationships did

apartheid government. This was done in *Egoli* relationship. Although the latter character was referred to by other characters, reference to the relationship still managed to comment on the injustices of the apartheid regime where the characters had to keep their relationship secret for fear of prosecution.

During 1994 the first democratic elections were conducted in South Africa. The ANC won this election and the Government of National Unity was installed. This was also the year that a black family became part of the *Egoli* storyline. Previously there had been black characters in the story, but only white and coloured families were represented in their home environments. With the changing political climate, *Egoli* producers presumably felt that more black characters needed to be incorporated. Despite their attempts to create a more representative picture of Johannesburg life, they received negative feedback according to Odendal (1996) who feels that the audience saw it as affirmative action and not necessarily warranted in the story. The predominant white and coloured Afrikaans audience who watched the programme found the storyline concerning the black family in Soweto foreign.

It was also during 1994 that the portrayal of crime and violence increased in *Egoli*, including such incidents as mugging, kidnapping, murders and rape. It was a time of great uncertainty in South Africa, especially for the previously privileged white minority who now found their privileges threatened. The producers reflected this in the *Egoli* plots, but without attempting to address the possible reasons or solutions for this.

During 1995 a storyline developed where the coloured Afrikaans character, Nenna, and the white Afrikaans character, Elsa, were competing to see which one could cook the best. In this sense food was politicised and served to personify the conflict that existed between the white Afrikaans community and the coloured Afrikaans community. During the apartheid regime, white Afrikaans culture was the dominant hegemonic order and this group's political rule was challenged and replaced in 1994 by the Government of National Unity. Food in *Egoli* became cultural *signs* that represented certain cultural groups. As the foods were compared, so too were the cultures. As there was no conclusion reached as to which culture's food was better, the equality of the two cultures was emphasised. This story was so successful and Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) received so many inquiries from the audiences<sup>14</sup> that he finally allowed Eduan Naudé, owner of the Gramadoela restaurant in Pretoria, and Brian Shalkoff to write and publish the *Egoli recipe book* (1995). The book contained recipes used in the storylines of 1994 and 1995. The recipe book is, however, not only a promotional item of *Egoli*, but the profits serve as a trust for people in the television industry<sup>15</sup>.

Another significant change is the company Walco<sup>16</sup> that initially belonged to the Afrikaans Vorster family now belongs to the English Chris Edwards. While capital moved from the Afrikaans family to the English family, a new Afrikaans company Niekor simultaneously arose that competed with the established English company Walco. Keeping in mind that *Egoli* caters for a predominant Afrikaans audience, the fact that the Afrikaans company is now the underdog, yet still successful, is indicative on a symbolic level of the threat the Afrikaans community feel towards English capital.

deals with issues such as the rights of minority the elderly and the disabled. An AIDS baby, story in contrast with 1992 when Franz Marx did not think the issue relevant for his target audience. This is indicative of the changing attitudes of the producer but also the changing attitudes of the target audience. The AIDS-story also attempted to break down prejudices regarding this disease. Through the character Deon, the myths believed about the illness were presented and then challenged through the facts as presented by the characters Donna Makaula and Gretchen du Plessis.

It is evident that *Egoli* has always been closely related to the South African context of the time. In many instances it took a metatextual relationship to the socio-political issues such as interracial romantic relationships and prejudices against AIDS. In most cases, however, the relationship is one of hypertextuality, where the current context is merely presented or extended to the world of fiction. Issues concerning the increase of violence, however, are not represented critically but merely mentioned in a passing comment.

## 7. CONTEXTUALITY

This term can be defined as the relationship the text has with the current context. This includes the economic, political and social aspects within which the text was produced and received. All the interviewees enjoy watching programmes with high levels of contextuality. Some of the responses were as follows:

- 1) *Many times you look at the programme and think "Gee, that's really what we are experiencing now" (Coloured English woman from the B income group).*
- 2) *You can relate the set up of Egoli to reality and it's actually quite nice to hear their remarks. It gives it a sense of immediacy, living their lives along your own line (White Afrikaans woman from the A income group).*
- 3) *It's issues that I feel strongly about and somehow get ignored by so many other programmes on our television (White Afrikaans woman from the B income group).*
- 4) *It actually brings out a lot of issues that some people would not necessarily even bother thinking about if they watch something like that (White English woman from the A income group).*
- 5) *It makes it current and identifies it more with the people who watch it (White Afrikaans man from the A income group).*

The producer Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) admits that contextuality is a deliberate ploy to assure high audience ratings. He terms it **faction** - a combination of fact and fiction. The reason why this is used is because it gives the audience a certain sense of enjoyment as it is difficult for them to distinguish between reality and unreality+ (Franz Marx: personal interview; 9 July 1996). The story is given an immediacy which causes the audience confusion as to what is fact and what is fiction. Faction is thus used by the producers to increase the consumption by the audience.

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ual in most cases. The audiences are therefore

not made aware of certain socio-political issues in South Africa that need to be addressed.

As a story originates out of a cultural context and as these cultural contexts are not always perfect in terms of equality for all, the stories themselves can be challenged and questioned. In *Egoli* the stories often mention socio-political issues but do not discuss them critically. There is mostly a hypertextual relationship being maintained with the context and very seldom a metatextual relationship. For example, it is merely accepted that large corporations only assist charitable organisations for publicity and so create a positive media image for themselves. Niekor organises a big publicity drive for animals in distress (*Egoli*, 15 November 1996) and sponsors a playground for underprivileged children (*Egoli*, 25 November 1996) but the real social issues facing South Africa are not mentioned. Problems such as lack of housing, electricity, water, sanitation, education and other issues concerning the working class of South Africa are not mentioned and it is only middle to upper class values and concerns that are depicted. The fact that there are people that do need help is seen only in terms of a way for big businesses to get media coverage.

Another aspect of the economic situation in South Africa is also addressed in *Egoli* but this storyline is also hypertextual. Tim Harold has problems finding new employees as %the brain drain from South Africa is far more serious than the politicians would like us to believe+ (*Egoli*, 21 November 1996). Though this is only one character that makes such a statement, it is neither disputed nor challenged by any other characters in the story. By providing only one side to a story, a specific message is brought across to the audience; namely that there is indeed a brain drain from South Africa.

The journalist in *Egoli*, Lynette, attempts to address minority issues through the production of a television story regarding the value of the family unit but this storyline is also hypertextual. Lynette interviews Elsa who represents the elderly (*Egoli*, 29 November 1996) and Bertie who represents the mentally disabled (*Egoli*, 27 November 1996). Though it is admirable that minorities are mentioned, these issues are not discussed critically but merely mentioned.

Though certain socio-political issues are mentioned, these are not dealt with metatextually. *Egoli* has however had a metatextual relationship to context in the past such as in the AIDS storyline, and therefore it cannot be argued that it is not the place of soap opera to do so.

*Egoli* should have a metatextual relationship to its context so that viewersq attitudes regarding certain issues can be influenced or changed. **Influence and persuasion communication** is a part of the communication science which immediately conjures up negative associations such as brainwashing, psychological warfare and propaganda. This type of communication can, however, be used for positive ends such as the prevention of AIDS and unwanted pregnancies (Bouwer, 1994: 74).

I am by no means suggesting that during the communication process viewers can be passively brainwashed for positive ends.

ers are not passive receivers of encoded  
to process television images according to their  
/ experiences (Douglas Kellner in Newcomb,

1987: 483).

The viewer therefore makes up his/her own mind whether he/she will be influenced and/or persuaded. We already know that viewers' interpretations can be oppositional, negotiated or sympathetic (Fiske, 1987) and do not necessarily correspond to the intended message. Theorists such as Bettinghaus (1981), Simons (1986) and Johnston (1994) have argued that persuasion is a democratic process and that anyone is entitled to give his/her opinion in an attempt to convince the viewers of certain matters.

I will argue that it is necessary for *Egoli* to change the attitudes of its viewers for positive ends namely towards equality for all groups in society. As the producers are preoccupied with increasing the consumption of *Egoli* they neglect their social responsibility towards their audiences. As such they do not maintain a metatextual relationship with the context although they are quite capable of doing so.

## 8. PRODUCERS

Producers of *Egoli* are preoccupied with economic considerations. *Egoli* is a product that has to be advertised and sold. Vertical intertextuality is used by producers to advertise *Egoli* to current and future viewers, for example the *Egoli* Spectaculars as well as the advertisements and teasers shown on M-Net. M-Net has a specific footprint in South Africa which is much smaller than the SABC. Every few months M-Net expands into a new city or town whose residents are able to receive the M-Net terrestrial signal. These residents then have to be made aware of *Egoli* so that the programme is watched. This is done through the *Egoli* Spectaculars which are held in the area that just received the M-Net signal.

Intertextuality is used to supplement production costs available for the production of *Egoli* (Franz Marx; personal interview; 9 July 1996). Certain products are advertised by incorporating them into the storyline, for example the visual incorporation of the products Liquifruit, Standard Bank, Bimbo's fast food and House of Coffees. These products serve two purposes; in terms of consumption it increases the profits for the production company and keeps the audience ratings high while on a cultural level it adds to the level of contextuality enjoyed by the audiences.

Since producers are preoccupied with making a profit and consequently see culture as a commodity that can be used in episodes to sell the programme, they neglect their social responsibility towards the audience. Culture is used as a commodity to keep the public text profitable. When I asked Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) what cultural groups he incorporates in *Egoli*, he replied:

*Mainly Afrikaans<sup>17</sup> and then a certain amount of English and other ethnicities. But the programme is controlled from an Afrikaans perspective. A certain amount of English is incorporated because our*

a certain amount of other ethnicities is used, but blind.

The characters' ethnicities and languages serve as cultural *signs*, representing in the minds of the viewers a certain cultural group. Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) states that the coloured community is represented by the character Nenna and her family. Similarly, the white upper class is represented by the Edwards and the white middle class by the Naudés.

Contextuality is thus used by producers for the sole purpose of ensuring high audience ratings. Little attention is paid to providing audiences with all the involved parties' perspectives. The relation *Egoli* has with the context is merely hypertextual and so certain occurrences are merely mentioned, such as Red Nose Day and Women's Day. There is no critical engagement in socio-political issues which would enable the audiences to work towards equality in South Africa.

Soap opera is produced within a certain community; namely the production team. As individuals are to a large extent influenced by their cultural background, it follows that the way they present reality will reflect their specific values and beliefs. It therefore cannot be said that there is no specific message that is portrayed in the *Egoli* episodes, even if this message is implicit and not explicit.

I want to argue that since the *Egoli* texts inevitably contain a message, the production of this message should be accompanied by a certain amount of social responsibility. **Social responsibility theory's** main impetus was a growing awareness that in some important respects the free market had failed to deliver expected benefits to society (McQuail, 1984: 90). The obligations towards society that the media should fulfill are mainly to meet high standards of informativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance (McQuail, 1984: 91). I am not suggesting that in this process the entertainment value of soap opera be lost, only that producers should be aware of the ideological messages in their texts so that they can consider the effects on the audiences. These ideological messages become evident once the production process is explained.

The production team consists of the following members; Franz Marx, head writer Annie Basson and seven writers<sup>18</sup>. All these members contribute to the production text in various ways. All the members have weekly meetings to brainstorm story ideas. Franz Marx then decides what stories are used, the head writer breaks these stories down into what is going to happen every day and supplies the writers with a summary of the episode which they must then write (Franz Marx; personal interview; 9 July 1996).

The nine members of the writing team, apart from gender and language (there are English and Afrikaans writers), are all homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and class. They are all white and from the A and B income groups. The reasoning behind these writers' appointment is understandable as they are from the same interpretive community as the target audience for whom they are writing. They thus share the same ideology as their audience to a degree. It is evident, however, that since these writers all come from a specific socio-political context this will be reflected in the produced text.

ed by culture when incorporating intertextuality Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) where he replied:

*It comes from newspapers, magazines, conversations, my head, my imagination or wherever a story presents itself... You use things as background that have actuality for the viewers.*

In other words, the material that is selected for these stories is inevitably culturally produced within a specific socio-historic context. Similarly, the other writers also find material for story ideas from other sources that are culturally specific. During the meeting that I attended at *Egoli* it became clear that the writers' story ideas were derivative from films, documentaries and other texts. Robert C. Allen (1987: 151-152) observes the intertextuality present in soap operas:

*The soap opera frequently includes references to other texts: a plot line "borrowed" from a popular novel or film, the appearance of a movie star or other show-business personality as him/herself. In each case a level of meaning is created by reference to another texts or set of texts.*

It can only be expected that the writers, coming from the same cultural group in terms of ethnicity and class, will reflect these values, whether consciously or not, in the produced text.

The second factor that constructs an underlying message in *Egoli* is the fact that the episodes are produced for a certain community, namely the target audience. Socio-political issues in *Egoli* will reflect the interests and beliefs of white and coloured Afrikaans-speaking women from the A and B income groups of society. The social responsibility theory criticises the free press theory for exactly this reason; namely that it increases the power of a single class (McQuail, 1984: 90). This explains why issues regarding the lower income groups and other social and political groups of South Africa will not be depicted from the latter's point of view. For example, the playground for underprivileged children (*Egoli*, 25 November 1996) is only presented as a way for affluent businesses to gain media exposure and so increase their profits, and not from the perspective of the underprivileged children themselves.

Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) argues that the conceived text of *Egoli* does not have a specific message. It does however cater for a specific audience, namely Afrikaans-speaking women. Although English and other ethnic groups apart from Afrikaans groups are incorporated in *Egoli*, the overwhelming criterion remains a coloured and white Afrikaans perspective (Franz Marx; personal interview; 9 July 1996) with the intention of reflecting the idealised face of Johannesburg. The writers will therefore have to reflect this ideology in the stories they write in order for the audience ratings to remain high.

It is important to establish how the audiences interpret *Egoli* and whether their interpretations correspond to the producer-oriented meanings. Once this is established, the argument for more social responsibility on behalf of the producers can be continued. There would be no point in arguing for a

context if the audience interprets the episodes as  
nt information regarding socio-political issues.

## 9. AUDIENCES

The way in which viewersqinterpretations of *Egoli* differ from one another is related to their different contexts and cultural perspectives. According to Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) the target audience of *Egoli* is Afrikaans-speaking women between the ages of 25 and 45 years and in the A and B income group. The reason why this specific audience was chosen is because M-Net did market research regarding which market the advertisers wanted to reach during this time slot. *Egoli* was then designed to cater for this specific group. As South Africans were already familiar with the genre by watching *Loving, The Bold and the Beautiful, Santa Barbara* and *The days of our lives* the success of *Egoli* was less uncertain.

The audiences of *Egoli* comprise groups other than the target audience, such as men and English speakers. I have argued that the production of *Egoli* is a cultural activity in that the producers are influenced by their own cultural identities and those of the target audience for whom they are writing. In a similar way, the *Egoli* audiences are also influenced by their own cultural identities when interpreting the texts. I will analyse the various perceived texts and establish whether the audiences interpret the episodes as having a metatextual or hypertextual relationship with the context. I will focus on how the audiences interpret *Egoli*q representation of ethnicity, gender and language.

### 9.1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity plays an important role when interpreting texts, especially in South Africa where black, coloured and Asian people were allowed to vote only in 1994. During the apartheid legacy, %deep-rooted racism and separatism+ (R. Tomaselli, K.G. Tomaselli and Muller, 1989) were engrained into South Africa citizens and the results are still evident. Separatism prevails in areas such as housing, social activities and religion, keeping South Africa segregated even today.

Four of the six white interviewees said that the racial relationships depicted in *Egoli* were realistic, even if it was only on the surface level. The fifth interviewee considered the relationships on *Egoli* to be unrealistic, claiming that the portrayal of a friendship between a white and black woman is idealised. The sixth interviewee felt that certain social problems such as the lack of education amongst black people were ignored in the *Egoli* texts. Their responses were as follows:

- 1) *For example, the woman that works in the coffee shop that stays with Tarien in the same flat. I mean it's not impossible that it does exist. It's the ideal, they're portraying the ideal situation but it's not realistic at this point* (White Afrikaans man from the A income group).
- 2) *It's a bit of a Utopian society sometimes. I wish South Africa was like that. Like that female in the coffee shop, she can speak English perfectly.*

...ne there that battles with English, or can't speak  
an from the B income group).

The two coloured interviewees also interpreted the *Egoli* text as being very realistic, in other words hypertextual. One said the following:

1) *It's good actually. I mean you can actually see, coming from our point of view, that there's no pretense, it's real* (Coloured English woman from the B income group).

The Indian interviewee interpreted the *Egoli* text as portraying racial discrimination still present in South Africa today. Her comment was the following:

1) *Margaret Rose and Paul seemed to go off fine, like there wasn't even a racial issue about it*<sup>19</sup>. *The fact that Lerato was black, they made an issue of it and she couldn't see someone who wasn't black* (Indian English woman from the A income group).

The Indian interviewee therefore saw the relationship *Egoli* has with the context as hypertextual. The racial discrimination and prejudice still present in post-apartheid South Africa was merely extended to *Egoli*. It must, however, be added that there have been mixed romantic relationships in the past between white men and a coloured women that were not accepted by the other characters, for example the relationships between Margaret Rose and Niek, Margaret Rose and Johan, Nenna and Dr Sinclair.

I would argue that although these relationships were not portrayed in an idealised way where all the characters merely accept the relationship, it still dealt with the issue of problems facing mixed relationships in a metatextual manner. The reason for this is that there were characters for and against the relationship who expressed their various opinions. In other words there was a constant negotiation between characters where not only one opinion was presented but rather the matter was debated through the various characters' perspectives.

The majority of interviewees therefore felt that *Egoli* maintained a hypertextual relationship with the context in terms of racial relations. In other words the South African context was merely extended to the *Egoli* text and not dealt with critically. One of the six white interviewees that interpreted the *Egoli* text as being an idealised version of reality, however, felt that the relationship maintained with the context was metatextual as it presented an alternative way of life better than the one we find ourselves in. The subtle racial discrimination present in our everyday life is replaced with a world where people of all ethnicities get along. The reason why I argue that an idealised version of reality is critical or metatextual of the South African context is that it shows an alternative way of relating to people of different ethnicities.

When I asked the interviewees what the message of *Egoli* is, they contradicted their responses concerning the interracial relationships that are portrayed. Their replies are as follows:

1) *I think Egoli is looking at the South African environment at the moment of change and they are trying to show a possibility...with people living*

...ore a sense of community than they did before.  
...lity (White Afrikaans woman from the A income

2) *The message to me is that people can learn...how to get along in the new South Africa* (White English woman from the A income group).

3) *I think the message is the new South Africa message of cohabitation, relationships and racial equality* (White Afrikaans man from the A income group).

4) *Sometimes they actually make a statement or two...Maybe they're trying to say "Hey, let's do something about this"* (White English man from the B income group).

5) *Communication with different groups for number one. Also when you party and go out for dinners...that you can sit around one table and even in the coffee shops...Everyone's the same* (Coloured English woman from the B income group).

6) *It shows you how in the new South Africa we could live. Peacefully and things like that. And you're free to live where you want to. That's how it should be. That's how it was many years ago when I was growing up* (Coloured English woman from the B income group).

The interviewees saw *Egoli* as having a metatextual relationship to the South African context when it came to the overall message yet when they were specifically asked about the racial interrelationships, the majority of them felt that only a hypertextual relationship is maintained. A possible reason for this is that at the time the interviews were conducted, there were no stories with a strong commentary on interracial relationships, while there had been such stories in the past (see socio-historic overview). This explains the general impression viewers have of *Egoli* as having a metatextual relation to the context.

The viewers' interpretations of *Egoli's* overall message correspond to the producer-oriented meanings. Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) states that he attempts to incorporate an idealised picture of Johannesburg as much as possible. It is therefore a deliberate decision on the part of the production team to incorporate certain aspirational lifestyles and characters in the text.

## 9.2. Gender

The gender of the interviewee is an important cultural element which plays a salient role in establishing how that person will read the text. Pitout (1996) does not interview male viewers despite the fact that the AMPS ratings (June 1996) show that this group comprises approximately 40% of the daily *Egoli* audience.

The gender relationships portrayed on *Egoli* are not equal as it is the men who are in the positions of power. The men are the Managing Directors while the women fulfill vocations such as secretaries, Public Relations Officers and waitresses (See Appendix C in Pitout, 1996: 245). Although characters such as Sonet challenge the male dominance of the business sphere by becoming the Managing Director, she only does this because there are no men available to fulfill the post (*Egoli*; 22 November 1996).

ees felt that the relationship *Egoli* has with the context is hypertextual. The female characters were in the positions and the men were in the positions of power agreeing with the positions both genders fulfill in reality. The male interviewees said the following:

- 1) *They're probably putting the females in the female roles when it comes to role playing in the corporate working environment. They are portraying the females at the moment in their traditional roles as secretaries, PR people, TV presenters, etc. So I don't think there's a strong statement that they're really making that females should be uplifted or enhanced via category* (White Afrikaans man from the A income group).
- 2) *Males are up there, they're in executive management. It's a buddy buddy system... Maybe in twenty years there will be equality but at the moment there isn't* (White English man from the B income group).

Five out of seven women interviewees interpreted the *Egoli* text as also having a hypertextual relationship to the context in terms of gender. The roles that they fulfill were, according to these viewers, true to the South African context. The sixth woman interviewee did not know whether the gender relations in *Egoli* were portrayed realistically or not.

The seventh interviewee felt that *Egoli* portrays the power distribution between men and women realistically but not the way women contest their disadvantaged positions. Her response was as follows:

- 1) *I think it happens like that but I don't think people keep their mouths shut like that. That's the problem* (White English woman from the A income group).

According to this interviewee, in reality women contest their disadvantaged positions unlike the women characters in *Egoli* who merely accept it. The relationship that *Egoli* has with the context, according to this interviewee, is still hypertextual as the context is extended to the programme but certain opinions are censored. Reality, as she perceives it, is thus transformed and modified to portray the woman characters as compliant with their unprivileged positions.

The majority of the interviewees therefore agreed that the relationship *Egoli* has with the context is hypertextual in terms of gender. Unlike race relations, the gender relations in *Egoli* are not depicted in either an idealistic manner or in a way that presents various opinions on certain issues. No alternative roles are presented in the programme other than the traditional roles where men are advantaged and women are disadvantaged. Due to the uncritical presentation of gender relations, audiences are only provided with a biased depiction of possibilities available to men and women in terms of gender roles.

### 9.3. Language

The language most spoken on *Egoli* is Afrikaans (70%), followed by English (30%) and the rare Sotho line with subtitles. According to Franz Marx

5) the target audience of *Egoli* is Afrikaans- that this time slot is one of the most expensive advertising time at the moment, according to a representative at Oracle, M-Net's advertising agency. It is clear that the Afrikaans language group still has large buying power, which makes them attractive for advertisers.

In every *Egoli* episode some conversations entail that one character speaks Afrikaans while the other answers in English. On one level the *Egoli* texts are promoting and affirming the right of the characters to speak their own language. However, it is only Afrikaans and English that are predominantly spoken while some characters such as Tsheko Mashabela, Lerato and Donna's first language is Sotho. This group is thus marginalised in terms of language as the majority of the audience is white, coloured or Asian and does not speak their language.

The four Afrikaans interviewees agreed that the relationship *Egoli* has with the context is hypertextual in terms of language. They interpreted the language mix as realistic and true to the South African context. Two responses to the language mix were:

- 1) *I like it because it comes back to the real South Africa - multilingual* (White Afrikaans woman from the B income group).
- 2) *The language mix is good. It makes it very South African* (White Afrikaans man from the A income group).

Three of the five English interviewees also interpreted *Egoli* as having a hypertextual relationship with the South African context. For them the languages spoken in *Egoli* reflected reality. Some of their responses were as follows:

- 1) *When we go down to Cape Town and Kimberley we revert back to Afrikaans or they'll (family) speak Afrikaans to us and we'll speak English* (Coloured English woman from the B income group).
- 2) *It's trying to show a portion of Jo'burg which is made up of Afrikaans and English people* (Indian English woman from the A income group).

The third English interviewee felt that the language mix was unrealistic and that it was only used by producers to attract both English and Afrikaans audiences. According to this interviewee no conversations had one person talking in Afrikaans while the other answered in English or vice versa. The fourth English interviewee interpreted the language mix in *Egoli* as having a metatextual relationship to the South African context. According to this interviewee the right to speak one's own language is important and that it was what *Egoli* was portraying. Her response was as follows:

- 1) *You've got to say "this is the new South Africa, if I speak English you're allowed to speak Afrikaans back to me and vice versa"* (White English woman from the A income group).

The majority of interviewees, however, felt that *Egoli* presented the languages in South Africa realistically<sup>20</sup>. Social issues regarding language such as the right to

right to be educated in one's own language or in languages not mentioned nor dealt with. The relationship being maintained with the context and as such the position of marginalised languages are not expressed in *Egoli*.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

*Egoli* presents the South African reality as a place where everyone can live in harmony, regardless of ethnicity. Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) attempts to reflect the idealised face of Johannesburg+. In this sense the majority of interpretations of the audiences correspond to that of the producer-oriented meanings. In terms of gender, however, *Egoli* maintains a hypertextual relationship with the context and does not address and discuss socio-political issues critically.

Pitout (1996: 224) argues that *Egoli* can serve as cultural forum where audiences are able to learn about other cultures+customs and values. South Africa has a complex ethnic and cultural composition and *Egoli* represents this in an integrated manner. It is in light of this that I want to argue for the accompaniment of social responsibility regarding the production of media products.

*Egoli* does have a metatextual relationship to the South African context regarding some socio-political issues such as tolerance of other ethnicities. My argument is that the current hypertextual relationship *Egoli* has with gender and language issues can therefore also be portrayed in a metatextual manner. In this sense the audiences can be made aware of the various possibilities available to them in terms of gender roles and so not be limited by the traditional prescribed ideas. Through maintaining a metatextual relationship with the context in terms of certain language and gender debates, *Egoli* can be informative and present the specific argument in an entertaining manner. This is not a new idea as the producers of *Suburban Bliss*, Carl Fischer and Gray Hofmeyer, say they attempt to present situations and representations of people coping with the changes in South Africa through humour+(Roome, 1996: 2).

*Egoli* needs to be critical of the context in which it is both produced and interpreted so that it may play a positive and influential role in challenging injustices present in South Africa today. As Franz Marx states:

*Because it (soap opera) has such a huge social influence, is the reason why the Americans investigate it so much, much more so than they do the theatre, films or the so-called prime time dramas (Pitout; 1996: 228).*

The producers of *Egoli* are therefore aware of the influence they have on audiences and should present socio-political issues accordingly. Social responsibility should accompany the production of *Egoli* so that the programme can contribute to the social equality of South African citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> *Egoli* is produced by Franz Marx Films.

<sup>2</sup> M-Net is a pay channel only accessible to subscribers who pay a monthly fee. There is, however, two hours unencoded time from 17h00 to 19h00. This unencoded time or open-time serves as an advertisement to attract subscribers for M-Net.

out; 1996: 2) refers to the mixing of different South African produced programmes, something that did not happen before February 1990.

<sup>4</sup> A distinction must be made between popular culture and mass culture. The former generally involves the Cultural Studies project, undertaken by Hoggart and Williams, to revalidate 50's British working class culture against the dominant elite culture. The latter refers to mass forms of entertainment such as television, radio and newspapers generated by capitalist institutions.

<sup>5</sup> The interviewees were from the following Durban areas: Berea, Amanzimtoti, Hillary, Pinetown, Merewent and Centenary Park.

<sup>6</sup> Sign will refer to the various components that constitute signification; namely the signifier and signified in the case of Saussure; and the *sign*, interpretant and object in the case of Peirce. The Peircean component *sign* will be placed in italics.

<sup>7</sup> The *Citizen* 4 November 1993.

<sup>8</sup> *Egoli* Spectaculars are live concerts in which the characters of *Egoli* dance, sing or act. These concerts are mostly held in sport stadiums in various places in South Africa and are very popular, drawing as many as 40 000 people (Franz Marx; personal interview; 9 July 1996). Franz Marx hired Jan Malan Productions to organise these promotional concerts.

<sup>9</sup> The *Egoli* Club is managed by the publicity department of Franz Marx Films. They ensure that all letters sent to the actors are answered.

<sup>10</sup> An *Egoli* teaser is approximately a minute long and contains snippets from the following day's episode. The purpose is to attract audiences to watch the next day.

<sup>11</sup> According to Pitout (1996: 60) Franz Marx offered *Egoli* to the SABC in the late 80's. As they were still a mouthpiece for the National Party, they were not interested due to the interracialism. Pitout argues that the hegemony of whites being superior to other ethnicities was thus questioned by Marx. I do not think this was the case, only that the hegemony of separatism was questioned by Marx.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Rose and Nenna are coloured characters, while Johan, Niek and Dr Sinclair are white characters.

<sup>13</sup> These story ideas are derivative of the Afrikaans film tradition in South Africa. See Tomaselli and Van Zyl (1992) for a historical analysis of the three myths that determined the choice of these ideas; namely the Eden myth, the urban trek and social position of the outsider.

<sup>14</sup> According to Karien Marx (personal interview; 16 July 1996), publicity officer of *Egoli*, someone even sent a chocolate cake (which is also a tertiary text) to

by the characters Nenna and Elsa. This is  
ted between fact and fiction.

<sup>15</sup> Franz Marx founded a trust into which the profits of the *Egoli recipe book* (1995) are deposited. *Egoli* was used to promote the recipe book and vice versa.

<sup>16</sup> Walco is a motor company in the *Egoli* storyline and its only competitor is Niekor.

<sup>17</sup> By Afrikaans Franz Marx (personal interview; 9 July 1996) means coloured and white Afrikaans speakers.

<sup>18</sup> The seven writers are Mitzi Booysen, Frans Kalp, Percy Pretorius, Linda Scheepers, Mari Snyman, Gigi Strydom and Helene Truter.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Brink is played by a white character.

<sup>20</sup> It must be noted that the interviewees were all living in the Durban area which is a predominantly English community. Therefore, the possibility exists that people in other areas will interpret the language mix differently.