

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE LITERARY PORTRAYAL OF CHILDREN AS  
PARTICIPANTS IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE AS ILLUSTRATED IN ELLEN  
NAMHILA'S *THE PRICE OF FREEDOM* AND LYDIA SHAKETANGE'S *WALKING  
THE BOEING 707*

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the literary portrayal of children as participants of the liberation struggle as illustrated in Ellen Namhila's *The Price of Freedom* and Lydia Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707*. The focus of the study was to investigate how the two Namibian autobiographical texts represent children in the liberation struggle. It examines whether children are portrayed as agents in the liberation struggle or simply objects of pity and victims in the exilic environment.

The study was primarily a qualitative, desktop research whereby two Namibian authored autobiographies were purposefully selected and analysed. This analysis was informed by post-colonial theory as a theoretical framework. Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonised countries, or literature written in colonising countries which deals with the colonisation or colonised people. It focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonising culture distorts the experiences and realities of, and inscribes the inferiority of the colonised people. On the contrary, the colonised's attempts is to articulate their identity and reclaim their past which they were robbed of by the colonisers.

The study contributes to the creation and dissemination of knowledge since it addresses contemporary overarching issues such as that of the children of the liberation struggle which appears to be a controversial issue in Namibia today. The study also contributes to the body of knowledge which seeks to acknowledge the efforts of previously disadvantaged people such as children. It also recognises the innovativeness and agency of children as represented in the autobiographical work of Shaketange and Namhila.

The findings in this study revealed that children appear to be active agents and subjects of the liberation struggle, the study debunks the portrayal of children as passive victims of the exilic environment only as it is portrayed in some literary and academic texts. Although at some point they tend to suffer victimisation and the brutality of the struggle, the children characters in the autobiographies have proven agency by taking part in activities that enable them to attain independence, for instance, the maintenance of the camps, working as teachers and material developers, and as nurses. It has further been revealed that children are intelligent and perseverant beings. Implicitly, they are portrayed as compassionate, assertive, full of endurance, as well as heroes of the exilic environment. Through these findings, the study seeks to elucidate the disagreements of the literary representation of ‘children as objects’ in some literary and academic texts. The study then intends to re-vision the representation of children as opposed to the representation already existing in canonised literary texts, and this fulfils the goal of the post-colonial theory. Hence, the study posits that children characters are not as passive as they are assumed to be. It also argues that, issues of child subjectivity in the struggle are rarely foregrounded in Namibian literary studies; hence this study is a platform to interrogate the conventional objectification of children characters in the autobiographical works of Shaketange and Namhila. The study thus, argues that children characters in the selected texts have proven agency in their participation in the struggle.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to all Namibians who have contributed to the liberation struggle at their young age, while either inside the country or beyond the borders. Your contribution must be saluted!

**DECLARATION**

I, Martha Nahole, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any institution of higher education.

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Martha Nahole

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Date

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

In its exploration of childhood, this study explores the representation of children's experiences in the liberation struggle as presented in Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila's *The Price of Freedom*. The study endeavours to address issues such as how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle, as well as exploring the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle in the selected autobiographies. The study seeks to interrogate silenced issues about children in the liberation struggle, in order to unravel the perception of children as objects and victims in the adult environment. The intention of this study is to unravel the perceptions that children are mere artefacts and subjects of pity in the adults' environment as presented by some authors such as Jones in his introduction to the 1998 special issue of *African Literature Today* entitled "Childhood in African Literature". He argues that African authors use child narrators/protagonists to disclose the - grim reality of cruelty, harshness, parental (particularly paternal) egocentricism and extraordinary bruising of the vulnerable child psyche. Writers such as Jones presents the child narrator as a vulnerable being who is only prone to subjections and abuse, but these writers seem to have turned a blind eye on the subjectivity and agency of an African child. The present study presents children in a different light of agency and subjectivity. The study therefore intends to contextualise and explore the representation of children's experiences in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom*. This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. The chapter discusses the orientation of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and limitations of the study respectively.

### 1.1. Orientation of the study

The literary representation of children in war novels in Africa is a critical yet understudied phenomenon. Chronicles about the liberation struggle have their focus mostly on the portrayal of fathers and mothers in the liberation struggle as heroic figures and these chronicles accord them titles such as “founding fathers” and “heroes” and yet they seem to be silent about the experiences of children. Among such chronicles are Nuuyoma’s *Where others weavered* (2001), Namhila’s *Mukwahepo: women, soldier and mother* (2013); and Schivute’s *Go and Come Back Home: A Namibian’s Journey into Exile and Back* (1997) just to mention but a few. These memoirs only dwell much on the heroic status of these heroes and heroines and seem to say little of nothing about children or childhood that might have shaped their adulthood. Although they seem to be exploited, children in war zones are not necessarily only defenceless, but they are also diligent individuals who are active participants of the liberation struggle. Gray (as cited in Nabutanyi 2013, p.5) proves that war affected children are not only victims, but they rather occupy the triad position of both victim-witness-perpetrator. In support with Gray’s argument Ndlovu (n.d, p.53) in his essay about “Soweto revolt” presents a testimony as it was submitted by Kleingeld one of the police officer (commissioner) which tells about how the children in South Africa attacked the police during the Soweto revolt, and this is one of the episodes that justify children agency;

As we (the police) came directly opposite the street they (children) were moving, they immediately started throwing stones and move toward us. At this stage it was clear that they were aggressive. It would not be possible to try to speak to them...I deduced that the purpose of the marching was to destroy properties and endanger lives. They were now so close that I was hit on the left thigh. The windscreen of my vehicle was shattered. I threw three tear gas canisters into the crowd in an attempt to stop their attack and disperse them. The tear gas had no significant effect on the crowd and

further stoning was let loose on us. I put my hands in the air and shouted “wait”, but it was unlikely that anybody will hear. Because the teargas had no effect on the crowd, it was now decided to launch a dog and baton attack to disperse the crowd. The purpose was to push the crowd back until help arrived... I realised that one of the dogs had been beaten to death. I also saw that we were completely surrounded and stone throwing came from all directions. I threw gun shots in the air...(p.53).

The efforts taken by the South African children in efforts of claiming their rights to education is one of the actions that proves children agency in an apartheid nation. Through this account, children are proven not only to be ‘victims’, but ‘perpetrators’ as well. They have overcome the police in whatever effort the police made and they stood their ground and never wavered. This account is enough to prove that, although they seem to be vulnerable in war situations, children are not always victims, but agents as well.

Muponde (2004) also supports the idea that children are active agents in warfare, by alluding to Muriuki, a boy child and character in Ngugi waThiongo’s *Matigari*. Muponde (2004) describes Muriuki as a character who portrays the roles of children in the anti-colonial resistance, and the Namibian children who are portrayed in the selected autobiographies by Namhila and Shaketange are presented similarly, as Namhila and Shaketange present a realistic account of children’s involvement in the Namibian liberation movement, and their autobiographical writings portray the child as a willing history maker. These two Namibian writers attempt to portray the Namibian literary context as a possible site of expression, by uprooting the silenced issues and giving back the voice to the children who have been de-oracised. The researcher bases her clues on the base set by academic writers such as Pasi (2015, p.160). Though Pasi’s argument is based on a girl-child in particular, the issue of de-oracisation may not be an exception to a boy-child, African children in general and Namibian children in particular. Pasi’s core argument is that the African girl-child is a “conspicuously

‘silenced’ person in a conspicuously ‘silenced’ continent” (Kaschula, as cited in Pasi 2015, p.160). “Her power of oracy is stifled by her family and the patriarchal milieu she finds herself. In this regard she becomes invisible and powerless” (p.161). One may put it that the reason why children seem to be left out in literature and in academic writings may be due to “silencing or de-oracy”. This argument is furthered by Maxted (as cited in Muponde, 2013) who claim that children together with women have been denied a political ‘voice’; and this is the same ‘voice’ Kaschula (2001, p.33) refers to as the “facility of oracy”, and the ‘voice’ which the present study seeks to interrogate. In their narratives Shaketange (2009) and Namhila (1997) have also alluded to the issue of ‘silence’ when they stated that children of their time were excluded in the decision making of issues concerning their political and everyday lives. It was thus unheard of to claim what they wanted as it is perceived as a signal of disrespect. This is the same ‘voice’ that the researcher is claiming for in this study; the voice that Bukenya (1994, as cited in Pasi, 2015, p. 161) reiterates that, “productive oracy would entails self-definition, self-assertion, negotiation of relationships, resolution of conflicts, claiming of rights and indictment of their violation.” In this study the researcher found it critical to have an understanding of how children are portrayed in the struggle and also to explore their experiences from the chosen autobiographies.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Children are part and parcel of the liberation struggle, yet the representation of children in war novels and autobiographies is often peripherally treated. According to Lee (2009) the global policy discourse defines a ‘child soldier’ as ‘any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members’. The central thesis of the global discourse is that children

have no place in war under any circumstance and that child soldiering is an unambiguous violation of universal children's rights. With this belief, humanitarian organisations have petitioned for various international legal instruments that prohibit the military recruitment of under 18 year-olds and hold adults who recruit children criminally culpable for war crimes.

The set background of global humanitarian discourse on child soldiers seems to be disregarding the complex local understandings and experiences of child soldier, (Lee 2009, p.5). Thus, there is a gap between the discourse and local realities by examining how some under-18-year-olds have participated in military activities with a sense of legitimacy and with their eyes wide open, (p.5).

In addition to that, Nabutanyi (2013) has portrayed how the social scientists and humanitarian organisations like UNICEF present only one side of the coin by touting the "victim", "helpless" and "miserable" status of children, which though true also unfortunately, fails to recognise children's potential. The acts in movies like *Sarafina* show that children have agency, energy and a consciousness which can read the political environment, and therefore should not only be labelled as victims only.

Ndlovu (n.d, p.335) provides evidence that children have agency, energy and a consciousness which can read the political environment. Basing this argument on Soweto uprising of the 1976 Ndlovu (n.d, p.334) states that a group of students who were reported by the media under the banner "Anti-Afrikaans pupils" resisted apartheid:

Students threatened to beat up their headmaster and threw Afrikaans textbooks out of the classroom windows in a demonstration against being taught Afrikaans. The students namely from Phefeni Junior Secondary School, went on strike and refused to

attend classes... Some students let down the tyres of the principal's car. They confronted the school principal and they demanded he call the school inspector (p.334).

The events in what has become known as Soweto Revolt are not isolated happenings; they have their roots in the crisis which has been building up at every level of socio-political structure. The intensity of Soweto events thus, reflects the development over the years of these children's reactions to the growing crisis of apartheid. Ndlovu (n.d, p. 336) puts it that "There was a growing awareness of the liberating ideas and a search for the correct politics of social revolution amongst children." The aforementioned evidence point to the idea of child activism and direct engagement in warfare, and these acts qualifies children to be part and parcel of the warfare documentations.

In novels about the liberation struggle, the focus is more on adult heroic figures and how much they have contributed to the liberation struggle. There are many African novels addressing political themes such as the autobiography of Sam Nuuyoma's *Where Others Weaved* (2001); Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which addresses devastating depiction of clash between traditional tribal value and the effect of colonial rule; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) which is based on social and political issue; Aminata Forna's *The Devil that Danced on Water* (2003) that depicts an extraordinary brave account of a family experiences living in war torn Sierra Leon and particularly her father's tragic fate as a political dissident; Nadine Gordiner's *Burger's Daughter* and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* just to mention a few. Authors in such novels seem to downplay the participation of children in the liberation struggle. Maxted (as cited in Muponde, 2004) alludes to the same idea as she explores children as actors whose politics is to open up a discourse on the nature of society, and they do so in settings in which traditionally they, together with women, have been denied a political voice and have limited bargaining power.

A systematic review of literature on children in war zones reveals a presentation of the “child soldier” who is only a victim, an object of abuse and a symbol of docility, thereby denying them subjectivity and agency (Muponde, 2004). Moreover in other instances, the child is virtually absent in the independence struggle discourse, therefore it is critical to make the child more visible, hence the reason to carry out the present study on the portrayal of children and their experiences during the liberation struggle in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom*. This study is a way of re-visioning child characters and viewing them through a new lens as active participants in the liberation struggle, and individuals whose experiences should be recognised. Castaneda (as cited in Muponde, 2004), suggests a call for the adequate representation and understanding of childhood and children’s experiences by locating the children at the centre of the social, political and cultural concerns. “Society needs to understand that children are not “an artefact or mere potentiality, but an actuality” Muponde (as cited in Chunga 2015, p.10). Children are actual beings. They are not just a creation of the author. Therefore, their conditions of being should be reflected through their portrayal in literature (Chunga 2015, p.10). According to Rudd (2005, p. 22), although children can be seen as powerless objects in adult discourse, they have subject positions that can resist this objectivity. It is therefore against this background that this thesis would acknowledge the efforts and contributions made by the children in the liberation struggle as represented in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* respectively.

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

The study intends to:

- Examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle.
- Explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle.

#### **1.4. Significance of the study**

The study aims to investigate the portrayal of children as well as their experiences in the liberation struggle. This investigation is likely to benefit those who appreciate the art of literature and the autobiography in particular, and to view children in literature not as objects, but as individuals who play a constructive role. This study might as well contribute to the body of knowledge on post-independence Namibian literature as the researcher explores the issue of children in post-independence contexts which seem to have been overlooked in the past.

#### **1.5. Limitations of the study**

The results obtained from this study cannot be generalisable to other children who were in the liberation struggle, as the two autobiographical novels are only a representation of experiences that might not have been experienced by all children who went into exile.

#### **1.6 Outline of the chapters**

This study is composed of five chapters which are subdivided into titles and subtitles. Chapter One contains the introduction, orientation of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, significance and limitation of the study. Chapter Two reviews the literature related to the literary portrayal of children as participants of the liberation struggle as well as the representation of children's experiences in the liberation struggle as presented in Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila's *The Price of Freedom*. The review is arranged according to the following subtopics: understanding the notion of childhood, the invisibility of children in Namibian literature, the representation of the experiences of children during the liberation struggle and the portrayal of children in the independence struggle literature. The section also incorporates the Post-colonial literary theory that informed this study. Chapter Three provides an overview of the research methodology used

in this study. The chapter is outlined as follows; the research design, population, sample, procedure, data analysis and finally the research ethics. Chapter Four discusses the findings of the study. Firstly, the summaries of the two autobiographies are given and then the analysis of the two novels is done. Chapter Five then concludes the study and offers recommendations.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter acts as an introduction of the thesis “An investigation of the literary portrayal of children as participants of the liberation struggle as illustrated in Ellen Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom* and Lydia Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707*. The chapter contains the introduction, orientation of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, significance and limitation of the study. The next chapter reviews the literature related to the literary portrayal of children as participants of the liberation struggle as well as the representation of children’s experiences in the liberation struggle as presented in Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom*. Chapter two helps to gather the literature related to the research topic, which will help to illuminate the study as well as enable the researcher to find the gap in knowledge related to the topic.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter intends to review the literature related to the literary portrayal of children as participants in the liberation struggle as illustrated in Ellen Namhila's *The Price of Freedom* and Lydia Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707*. The review is arranged according to the following subtopics: understanding the notion of childhood; the representation of the experiences of children during the liberation struggle and the portrayal of children in the independence struggle literature. The section also incorporates the Post-colonial literary theory that informed this study. This study aimed to explore the idea that there seems to be a need to move away from the conception of childhood and children as mere archetypes of innocence and hope, to a real active subject of history.

#### 2.1 Understanding the notion of childhood

According to Pasi (2015, p.159) "in the African cosmology, the question of who is a child is shrouded with complexities as one is confronted with a plethora of definitions." The use of age as a defining feature of childhood obscures the space for discussion on children's understandings, children's experiences and children's need and desires.

In an African context, the notion of childhood is not defined by age; this is because different ethnic groups define childhood differently (Pasi, 2015, p.159). According to Lee (2009, p.15) many societies define the boundaries of childhood and adulthood in social terms rather than by a chronological age as it is articulated in Honwana (1999); James and Prout (1997), and Francis (2007). In Afghanistan, for instance, a girl becomes an adult with her marriage and

particularly after the birth of her first child, while a young man may not attain his social adulthood until he becomes the head of a family after the death of his father and assumes responsibility for relatives and households (de Berry, 2003, p.6). Furthermore, the transition to adulthood in many African societies takes place gradually through rites and practices that mark and confirm one's social status (Tefferi, 2007). Part of this social definition comes from practical circumstances in many societies.

Childhood is the foundation stone on which our lives are constructed. The question about the beginning and end of childhood in different societies remains undefined. According to Lee (2009, p.19) in the global policy discourse, a 'child soldier' is commonly defined as 'any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members'. The approach to understanding and addressing the issue of 'child soldiers' at the global level has been dominated by the rights-based approach; that is, humanitarian agencies conceptualise 'child soldiering' in terms of a clear violation of universal children's rights and a breach of international humanitarian law (Seaman 2000; Rosen 2007; Francis 2007). Here, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has played a critical role. It declared that children 'should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' and charged adults and governments to help fulfil various rights of children (CRC Preamble), (Lee 2009, p.7).

On the same question of the definition of a child and childhood, Chitando (as cited in Chunga 2015, p. 9), observes that generally children are regarded as those that are 12 years and below. Chitando (2008) cites writers who include young adults in their definition of

childhood and others like Wilson Tagoe who classify childhood to be between the ages of 4 and 12. Chitando, however, is quick to point out that childhood is not only limited to numbers. Different societies define a child or childhood differently, depending on different social attributes such as the rites of passage such as circumcision.

However, in the social media in Namibia the concept “children of the liberation struggle” generally refers to the children and young adults who either left the country for the liberation struggle as children; or born in exile and repatriated at their young or youthful age. In this study the notion of children therefore refers to school-going individuals who are still under guardianship. In the case of the liberation struggle, the guardians were the SWAPO and other bodies which were caring for and funding the children during the liberation struggle. This study will thus examine the representation of experiences of children as represented in adult’s literature of the liberation struggle; the autobiographies.

Since there is a complex definition of childhood in African literature, some characters in the selected autobiographies in this study may be called “children” although they may be physically and even psychologically adults. The definition of childhood in this thesis fails to set clear boundaries between childhood and adulthood since some children are represented as children because of their age, while others were referred to by the context of the autobiographies as children although they were literary adults or youths. This was mostly so because many young adults were either still under the care of their foster parents or at the secondary school under the guidance of SWAPO.

## **2.2 The invisibility of children in Namibian literature**

Children appear to be peripherally represented in Namibian literature. The militant child and youth activists in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s were

hailed as heroes who were ‘undoubtedly important to the broader struggle for liberation, democracy, and transformation’ (Bundy as cited in Lee 2009, p.4). Despite the enormous vitality of the subject of childhood and the liberation struggle, “serious academic inquiry into the issue of child soldiers has been scarce”, especially in Namibia, (Lee, 2009, p.4). However, Chunga (2015) a Namibian academic writer has contributed enormously to the understanding of a (girl) child agency as represented in literature, although not specifically on child soldier. In the Namibian literary and academic discourse, many voices have concentrated on telling “her-story” and the subjugation of women, HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, masculinities and father figures, and little has been written on children’s literature or simply children as they are represented in the adult’s literature. Nevertheless, Chunga’s voice has been a welcome one, but his focus is on the present day child and thus does not specifically provide the root for understanding the circumstances surrounding ‘children in the liberation struggle’. There is therefore a gap in literature, especially with regards to Namibian literary studies on children which by itself has been overshadowed by South African, Zimbabwean and to a lesser extent Botswana literature.

Some non-Namibian authors within the field of anthropology and the emerging discipline of child studies have emphasised the notion of children’s agency. Amongst them are Hart 2006, 2007; Boyden and de Berry 2004; Boyden and Mann 2005. Other authors such as Shepler 2005; Utas 2003; Honwana 2006 have undertaken country-specific ethnographic studies on young combatants. Despite such existing body of knowledge there still seems to be a lack of an explicit attempt to engage on studies about or related to the issue of “child soldier’s agency” in Namibia. To be clear, it is not my intention to argue that Namibian children were only “agents” in the liberation struggle and were not in any way victimised by the war situation. Young people did indeed suffer in armed conflict around the world. Nevertheless, they have fought and experienced liberation struggle in ways that the contemporary discourse

on child soldiers does not capture or anticipate. It is therefore against this set background that the researcher observes a gap between the representation of children as presented in the autobiographies under study and what the existing contemporary discourse have presented, because what is presented in the discourse seem to be distant from the lived local realities in presented in the autobiographies.

### **2.3 Children's experiences during the liberation struggle**

Most of the experiences represented in the literary works under study “constitute another way of capturing the ordeals of people who, in one way or the other have become victims of violence and their exile is therefore an attempt to escape the hostile conditions of home in order to be part of a perceived better life elsewhere”, (Akawa 2014). The pressures of living have forced people to seek greener pastures in foreign countries as it is presented in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* respectively.

MacCann and Maddy (2001) argue that children have made outstanding and remarkable contributions to the liberation struggle through apartheid resistance. This justifies children agency. Young people usually play what Honwana (as cited in Lee 2009, p.26), calls a ‘tactical agency,’ which is the agency of the weak within structural confinements. Nevertheless, I contend that the concept of agency is a critical one in understanding the phenomenon of ‘child soldiers,’ as it refers to one’s active engagement with the world and their own efforts to cope with adversity. It is this agency that the present study wishes to interrogate, and wish that it is presented in the contemporary discourse.

Although in Namibia children presented in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* are not portrayed to have taken part in any battle, as Shaketange (2008) recites what Tate Namalambo their group leader said to the pioneers when they arrived in Zambia: “You

have come to school. SWAPO does not use people of your age for war” (p. 53); their actions and responsibilities have in one way or another contributed to the liberation struggle.

Cairns (as cited in Muponde and Primorac, 2005, p.126), posit that the liberation movement is an identification which is strengthened by the maturation of a political consciousness which results from children feeling that their “historical and deeply-rooted identities are being threatened” by the colonial rule. With respect to the texts under study, it is evident that displaced people did not experience exile equally or uniformly. Additionally, from reading the chosen autobiographies, it also seems to appear that the theme of exile is undoubtedly multifaceted and also sensitive. This is evident from the narratives of Shaketange and Namhila as each presents history from her own experience. For instance Ellen seems to have experienced too much trauma especially via the Kassinga massacre of which Lydia could not experience. Lydia on the other hand has endured the long walk to Zambia, of which Namhila could not experience in her being in exile. This proves that exile was not experienced uniformly by all Namibian children.

Another instance that provides evidence that exile was not experienced uniformly and narrators of the same episodes may differ in many different ways, is that provided by Baines (2009). According to Baines (2009), perpetrators and victims of the war have contradictory memories and construct competing narratives about their roles in events such as Kassinga. When narrated by those who were colonised, the same Kassinga narrative might differ from the narrative that one may get from those who have colonised others. What also caught the attention of the researcher is the fact that ‘although part of Namibia's exile past, children appear to be excluded from the dominant narrative told about it’.

It further appears that, in different autobiographies also, the narratives of different authors may differ because of the different experiences that the narrators might have gone through, and these narratives may result into diverse childhoods and identities. It may also depend on

the angle or point of view from which the liberation struggle is narrated. It may also appear that the victims of the same episode may tell completely different narratives, each depending on their viewpoint. This is evident from the two selected autobiographies, where each of the authors narrates history from her unique perspective.

Autobiographies are typically written from the first person point of view. According to Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik and Ferreira-Meyers (2015) the pronoun “I” used in the autobiographies makes the autobiography to be a focused account of the writer’s life told from the writer’s own point of view. The pronoun “I” therefore makes it easier for the writer to reflect upon and provide some perspective on life events.

The above idea then proves that autobiographical works are fictional. An autobiography draws on “real life” and “real events”, in the end; it is not an objective or pure version of the life being told. Shands, et al. (2015) explain that the aspects of autobiography are subjective and interpretative, thus autobiography is not really about facts and events related, but it is about how the writer chooses to interpret and make sense of these events. Firstly the writer may make choices about what to include and what to exclude, how to arrange events, and what degree of emphasis to give to different kinds of events. Secondly, to tap from the idea of Schipper (n.d) as it is presented by Nabutanyi (2013, p.21), writers of the autobiographies use the first person point of view to present their narratives. First person narrators take different positions with regards to the narrated event: first, they can tell a story in which they are or have been the hero or heroine; second, they may tell a story in which they mainly figure as observers or third, they can tell a story which has been transmitted to them by someone else (p.21). *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* are autobiographies that offer emphatic archives of the experiences of war affected children and

the authors in these narratives use the first person point of view each to mirror their individual experiences as heroines of the liberation struggle of Namibia.

Muponde (2004, as cited in Nabutanyi 2013, p.22) maintains that childhood act as a metaphor of “creativity to articulate a longing for new form of self-writing. He goes on to argue that childhood in this instance is viewed as a space of experience as well as a place of memory in which the struggle of self-authorship and self-capitalisation can be achieved. Here Muponde frames childhood as a space in which the writer read and write their autobiographies.

The autobiographical novels under study portray how the children characters are undergoing both physical development and mental consciousness; this growth leading to their political awareness. It is the aspect of growth from being children that is of interest to this study, as well as how childhood shapes adulthood, because it is via childhood that the phenomenon of adulthood can be mirrored. Eyre (2005, p.34) states that most English autobiographies are written in a form of Bildungsroman. “Bildungsroman is characterised by growth, education and development of a character both in world and ultimately within himself” (Eyre, 2005). The central feature of a bildungsroman is the protagonist’s process of psychological and moral growing and developing from childhood until maturity. It is natural that an author brings something of his/her personal experiences into his/her work, in particular when childhood remembrances and digestions are so important to the protagonist’s development. On top of that, it makes the whole story more authentic. In autobiographies it should be understood that, the development of a character takes place over a long time, often decades and therefore shows features of a bildungsroman.

In *Walking the Boing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* Lydia and Ellen the protagonists are portrayed as very young children who had little or no idea of what was going on in their

country. At times they would come from school having heard of certain political terms such as “SWAPO and PLAN fighter” of which they would come and enquire from their parents at home; who instead of explaining to them such terms, would rather threaten to give them a hiding if they continue to ask about such “things”. Meanwhile, they had developed political consciousness and had become independent thinkers who are capable of planning on their escape to exile. The autobiographies have revealed how children, as they are growing, had started to be questionable about the education system they are exposed to at school; as Lydia states “I wanted to learn English but I needed to have a ‘pass’ to go to Otavi were children learned English” (Shaketange 2008, p.11); Ellen also recalls her education: “A student could be failed for answering questions from her own understanding. For a student to pass they had to parrot what was taught in class. So in Namibia, I was not taught to be an independent thinker but a repeater of my teachers.” This growth has continued until the characters had to partake in the struggle by escaping to the foreign countries and involving in ‘real struggle’ of supporting their country by being teachers and nurses respectively. When they repatriated they were grown up women with children. The above descriptive proves that the involvement of children in the liberation struggle did not occur overnight, but rather it took decades. Through such a period characters undergo growth and maturation, thus the autobiographies in this study are considered to be written in a form of Bildungsroman, as they shows the development of a character from childhood to adulthood.

During their participation in the struggle in exile, children were exposed to adverse conditions of the struggle. Parasad and Parasad (2009, p.167) explain that children living in refugee camps experience more psychological problems than non-refugee children. Moreover, children may display a wide range of emotional and psychological reactions following a disaster. An example is “the classroom humiliation of cowering when Ellen

Namhila heard the plane flying overhead, even when she was far from frontlines”, which is an example of the accounts that are explored in this study that show the impact that the war might have on those who were part of it, especially the children.

In addition to the above mentioned, Purwar, Dhabal and Chakravarty (2010) also declare that a young child lacks the cognitive capacities available to the adult. His/her theories are ego-centric. They are rarely able to talk about their traumatic experiences. Unable to transform their internal conflicts and feelings into words, they are expressed in repetitive re-enactments, intrusive visual images, trauma specific fears, aggressive and regressive activities, and other behavioural states. Bloch, Silber, and Perry (as cited in Purwar et al., 2010) have also noted that older children are more vulnerable to the psychological effects of war than younger children. Ellen Namhila’s reaction to the plane is therefore not to be questionable. Her reactions are one way that captures the idea that the war has affected children in many different ways, and in most cases children have undergone traumatic experiences that have left them with permanent and persistent ‘wounds of the mind’. It is therefore at the heart of this study to explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle.

Sharlene (2015) explored the roles of the youth in the war against the apartheid state. According to Sharlene (2015) the youth had to withstand the violence of the apartheid state, not only in the brutal accounts of suffering and malevolence, but through the means it was achieved: persistent supremacy, control, and restriction over the majority of the inhabitants. According to Sharlene (2015), the state targeted the youth because they were young and black and not necessarily because of evidence of their involvement in politics. Sharlene (2015) also provides portrayals of the number of youth killings, abductions and tortures from

multiple sources. Therefore studying the depiction of childhood in Namibian autobiographies is very crucial, as it helps us to understand ourselves better.

Jones and Jones (2000)' study did not present children as victims, but rather as agents of political resistance to colonial rule. A poem by Ingrid Jonker "Die kind" or "The child" is an example that proves to us that literature was used as a weapon against the apartheid state as well as a way of looking forward to freedom; with "the child" featuring as another critical piece of the building blocks to nationhood. This shows how the war is a creative melting pot that results in many works of fiction such as those of Namhila and Shaketange. This poem portrays the child as an "agent" rather than simply an "object" and this has been further explored in the study. Moreover, Olaoluwa (2008, p. 3) reveals that most of the literary works in Africa were indeed an attempt to "write back" in the same manner of textual articulation with which the West had depicted Africa. Women writers as presented by Muponde

Former child soldiers who have been acculturated into a world of violence and destruction have been expected to go through peaceful transition back into society without the necessary skills, support system and opportunities to do so. In ICRC (as cited in Berents n.d, p.4) it is stipulated that "every child has the right to a normal childhood...former child soldiers must be helped to pick up the pieces of their shattered childhood." It is indeed important to know how to restore childhood to those deprived of it. By exploring the experiences accounted in the selected autobiographies, more insights are gained on childhood in the harsh war front and it is quiet important to rehabilitate these children and support them to cope in what is considered to be a 'normal environments'.

Shiningayamwe, Shalyefu and Kanyimba (2014, p. 288) provide narratives of "children of the liberation struggle" and the social challenges they experienced as "exile kids" when they returned into the country. An issue such as that of "children of the liberation struggle" should

not be overlooked as it may be a direct result of the background from which these children emerged.

In the same vein, Akawa (2013, p. 183) reflects on the sad realities of what some people experienced after the liberation struggle. Mukwahepo the woman soldier narrated in Akawa (2013): “Having royally served the liberation struggle, only to be forgotten after the attainment of independence” (Akawa, 2013). This does not apply to women only, but also to children who went through that experience whether in exile or inside the country and through Namhila and Shaketange we also are faced with the issue of the ‘children of the liberation struggle’ which call for more detailed.

Most touching is the issue of the “children of the liberation struggle” in Namibia. Ironically, these children’s struggle did not end with the attainment of independence, since they still continue to struggle economically due to their ruined backgrounds because of the liberation struggle. This implies that childhood offers enough indicators of the image of the future adult. Though it is not the heart of this study, it is however pertinent to point out that Namibians should recognise, acknowledge and understand with sensitivity the issue of “children of the liberation struggle.”

There has been much resentment towards the children of the liberation struggle especially through the print media. In general, children born or raised in exile have been branded as extremely lazy, selfish, uneducated, unskilled, arrogant, annoying, out of order, stubborn and uncontrollable people that are only interested in drinking and making babies, instead of studying and working hard. Other claims are that children of the struggle commonly failed school and wasted whatever opportunity they got. It is also advocated that since independence children of the liberation struggle did not do anything for themselves and have received everything from Government on a silver platter. It is not an exaggeration to note that

there is a sentiment that children of the liberation struggle are simply useless, spoilt and annoying brats. Iipumbu (n.d) “SWAPO-children of the liberation struggle”. There are also concerns as to why these adults are still called 'kids'. I however believe that the term 'exile kids' or ‘children of the liberation struggle’ must be seen as a concept or a referral matter, because it seems to refer neither to age nor maturity of individuals.

It is also important to note that not all children of the liberation struggle are uneducated and simply depend on the government as per vilifications raised in the social media. Some exile children are in fact successful individuals as they are represented in the autobiographies under study. One can therefore say that the issue of children of the liberation struggle can better be understood through the lens of exile. Thus, Olaoluwa (2008) argues that the quest of exile in contemporary African literature remains central to the understanding of its people. The autobiographies by Ellen Namhila and Lydia Shaketange are accounts to prove the reality of what happened in exile; events that might have shaped their lifestyle and understanding of the “children of the liberation struggle”. An autobiographical work is thus seen as an expression of the writer’s attitude to life arising from personal and epochal experiences.

Williams (2011) highlights the experiences of Namibians during the 1960s at Kongwa camp in Tanzania, and states that this camp has shaped the social hierarchy of many refugees. The refugees in this camp were not idle, but took part in many activities, for instance bartering their clothes for cash; and others created their own gardens near the camp so that they could sell their produce to the local people. It was especially noted that some Namibian refugees surprised and impressed the Tanzanians near Kongwa with their farming techniques of growing beans and maize which yielded better crops than the locals could produce

themselves. The portrayal of Namibian refugees, and particularly the children, as good farmers is further explored later in this study as represented in *Walking the Boeing 707*.

The war does not only affect those who were involved in it. According to Akbulut-Yukset (2009), war also has a great impact on the physical space. Akbulut-Yukset (2009) alludes to some of the effects such as the physical destruction caused by the war, which can interrupt the education of children through the demolition of schools, change in family structures, the deterioration of children's health due to starvation, malnutrition and outbreaks of diseases. It is through such allusions that this study using the selected autobiographies has therefore explored the representation of the experiences of the children as participants of the liberation struggle.

#### **2.4 The portrayal of children in the liberation struggle**

The narration and representation of the liberation struggle of Namibia in whatever form such as monuments and memorials, documentaries, songs and exhibitions seem to have omitted the contributions done by the children. Even though some Namibian autobiographies such as Nuuyoma's *Where other wavered*, Namhila's *Mukwahepo: Woman, mother and soldier*, as well as Amathila's *Making a Difference* have made significant contributions to the understanding of exile and the liberation struggle, the voice of the largest segment of the population worldwide, the youth and children is missing, even though this is merely by default. The authors seem to focus more on their lives as adults, at times failing to capture the voice of their childhood that might have in ways shaped their adulthood. Canu (2006, p. 25) reveals that there is a growing recognition, especially at academic level on the understanding of childhood and exile. The modern literature especially is oriented to believe that so far the role played by children engaged in conflicts has been inadequately explored (Canu 2006,

p.25). It is therefore deemed very important in this study that issues regarding childhood and exile be interrogated and explored in detail.

Schauer (2009) argues that among a number of at risk populations, children of war and child soldiers are a particularly vulnerable group and often suffer from devastating long term consequences of experienced or witnessed acts of violence. Based on the definition of a 'child' given earlier on this chapter, the global humanitarian discourse assumes that children are vulnerable who lack moral, physical, and mental competence. Thereby conceptualise all children as vulnerable and child soldiers as victims without any social and political agency (Lee 2009, p.10). Based on this assumption of vulnerability, child soldiers are also believed to have no real agency in their military participation, Save the Children (as cited in Lee 2009, p.10).

A similar dynamic exists also in what Lee (2009) calls the 'Beah Phenomenon'. Ismael Beah, an ex-child soldier from Sierra Leone, has written his memoir (2007) and has since received a sponsorship from the Starbucks Company and spoken on behalf of 'child soldiers' at the UN as well as on the Jon Stewart Show in the US. Here, Beah's book actually shows an ample example of his bravery, agency, resilience, and active participation in the war, powerfully illustrating that he was not a 'vulnerable little child victim' but a war survivor.

However, Beah's book has been appropriated and held up as 'evidence' by UNICEF as the 'traumatised child soldier who reclaimed his humanity', while those parts of his book that actually counter a simplistic 'saved victim' narrative have been largely excluded from the media coverage and discussions of Beah (Lee 2009, p.11). This is a clear indication that the humanitarian discourse views children from the perspective of the protection of 'Human Rights' therefore, in some ways failing to consider and capture the lived realities of the children in war.

The present study advocates the need to move beyond the “vulnerability” perspective and critically scrutinise the discourse marking children as vulnerable only. This is to say; children portrayed in Namhila and Shaketange should not be viewed from a perspective of vulnerability, but their efforts and participation in the liberation struggle should be recognised and acknowledged. Muponde (2004) suggest that critics and writers have not always looked for the transformations in creative agency that children in war represent. What has caught the attention of writers and critics is the spectre of "plundered childhoods" Maxted (as cited in Muponde 2014), and an unrelieved fatalism which sees children as having "been the pawns of the mighty ever since Herod slaughtered the Innocents" Acker (as cited in Muponde 2004), hence the enormity of the suffering of children in war Machel (as cited in Muponde 2014). The present study therefore advocate the need to register this state of affair (vulnerability) and the necessity of moving beyond that; to understand children from a different perspective of subjects and agents of the liberation struggle.

Children agency has been concretised by ethnographic studies such as that of Peters and Richards (as cited in Lee 2009, p.14) in Sierra Leone that show that young combatants have a remarkable understanding of the political causes of the war they fight. In this context, it becomes possible that the global humanitarian discourse on child soldiers may not accurately reflect the lived realities at the local level, (Lee 2009, p.14). In this case one may conclude that ethnographic studies demonstrate how the global discourse of child soldiers fails to take into account the local understandings and experiences of ‘child soldiering’. It is therefore against the set background that the present study seeks to bring back the recognition of child soldier agency in both literary and academic texts.

Critical to this study, Akawa (2013, p. 183) reviews a novel that presents and reflects what life in exile was like, particularly in the camps. The author presents that life in the camps

“was not a walk in the park as all was not that rosy” (p. 182). Akawa (2013) further explains that many exile life stories do not really present these hardships. Many of the exile stories are only presented as “we were determined to fight and liberate our country” (p. 182). This sanitised version does not reflect on issues of lack of basic materials, lack of food, the administration of the camps, the youth or girls falling pregnant and security issues. Hence, this research’s argument is that such issues should not be pushed to the periphery; there is a need for such issues to be addressed. The selected autobiographies used in this study reveal areas such as the above that were either not fully presented or were masked in some war accounts.

In addition to the above, Akawa (2014) proves that life in the camps gives an idea of a community that lived together - men, women and children. They positioned themselves in exile in terms of the roles they played as teachers and as nurses respectively. The role they played was also determined by gender, and women always worked as subordinates alongside men. However, in this exile community we also find the children and amplifying their voice and experience is at the heart of this research.

In UNICEF (as cited in Berents n.d, p.21) it is revealed that children perform many tasks beyond active combat duties. They act as potters, fulfil domestic roles such as cooking, cleaning and scavenging for food; and they are used as lookouts, spies and messengers. Canu (2006, p. 22) also argues that it was also soon realised that the role of the children in conflict is not minor, but children feature prominently at all levels during warfare: by spying for the enemy, supporting with camp duties as well as directly participating in suicide missions. Likewise, in the autobiographies under study children are accorded by these authors a central role in political concern by being depicted as not only victims, but also agents of history.

The selected autobiographies portray children who are not refined by effective parental guidance, but also children who exhibit leadership qualities. It is crucial for the children's needs to be visible, heard and addressed separately, because their pain and trauma might be different from that of adults. As Reynolds (as cited in Canu 2006, p. 34) observes: "Children help to shape society: their contribution cannot be unravelled until they are studied as individuals and not merely as members of the procession through childhood."

In his research, Ashipala (2014) portrays Zambia as a host country for Namibian refugees as he states that there was a place called Old Farm and "it was here that most young people who had left for exile in the waves of the 1970s would receive education training" (p. 105). Here they also participated in different activities including farming. Shaketange (2008) states in her autobiography the different activities that were assigned to the children when they were constructing the camp; and through an analysis of *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* the study further interrogates the notions of childhood in exile.

The study done by Shigwedha (2011, p. 4) presents the report by Peter Katjavivi that portrays the number of victims of the Kassinga massacre. Katjavivi reports that 612 Namibian refugees were killed (147 men, 167 women and 298 children); 12 Angolan soldiers and 3 Angolan citizens killed. 611 Namibian refugees were wounded; 63 Angolan soldiers and 15 Angolan civilians wounded. Another 611 were physically wounded, while many more were affected by gas. "Most of the Kassinga survivors were mentally traumatised by the gruesome events they had witnessed" (Shigwedha, 2011). These are some of the experiences that the Namibian refugees have gone through, especially Namibian children, as their number is topping that of men and women. This thus proves to us that children constantly

experienced, directly or indirectly the effect of war. Chapter four of this study explores more on the representation of children's experiences as portrayed in the novels under study.

Williams (2009) alludes to the responsibilities and roles that children and other dwellers of SWAPO camps were performing, which contributed to their well-being in such places. Most work at Cassinga focused on gathering and preparing materials necessary for daily survival.

According to Williams (2009):

Water could be collected in large buckets from the Cuilonga River. Wood was available in the moderately forested savanna surrounding Cassinga and was necessary not for cooking and heating, but also for housing. It was therefore common for groups to be sent to collect wood and grasses that others will use to make huts with wooden pole frames and thatch roof (p. 57).

Williams (2009) further states that after the Kassinga massacre, in the remaining wreckage there were "a jumble of broken desks and benches, home-made by the young people themselves" (p. 57). This proves to us that camps were places that were alive with activities and this is critically explored in *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. The study thus seeks to add voice to such accounts by exploring the literary representation of children in the selected autobiographies. This in total may help in recognising and appreciating the children's liberative potential.

According to Williams (2009, p.14) refugees who were residing in Kassinga camp performed daily routines of gathering at the parade ground to communicate information and express solidarity; they attended training courses to improve their skills in different fields and worked to meet the daily food and health needs of the camp community. A large number of

Kassinga's inhabitants were also involved in health and education related works. In the camp there was a clinic where several trained nurses worked. There were also several schools in Kassinga aimed at improving the inhabitants' literacy and numeracy skills. There were no teaching aids or books since none was available. In different camps refugees were acting as teachers and nurses, as it is portrayed in *The Price of Freedom* as the writer Ellen Namhila was a teacher, nurse and secretary of the camp at a very young age of 14. Williams (2009, p.15) further posits that some of the settlements with large civilian populations, like Kwanza Sul and Nyango camp, also supported other activities including church services, youth group meetings and cultural performances. Children were also not an exception to these activities as they were members of the camp community. They also participated in daily activities of the camps such as cooking and collecting fire wood as well as participating in cultural activities. This in itself proves children as agents in the liberation struggle and not just some objects of pity and victims in the environment.

According to Lee (2009, p.8) child soldiers perform a range of tasks including participation in combat, laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; logistics and support functions, pottering, cooking and domestic labour; and sexual slavery or other recruitment for sexual purposes. As a result, a 'child soldier' can be anything from a cook to a fierce fighter, and all of those who are identified as a 'child soldier' are assumed to share essentially the same characteristics or experiences and children in the autobiographies under study are not an exception. "It is left unacknowledged or unexplored that 'child soldiers' may perform various roles that have very different meanings in the local context" (Lee 2009, p.8).

Despite the privileges that exile appears to offer, its challenges and low moments far outweigh what such perceived privileges are assumed to offer. Njogu and Muriiki (2013, p. 31) state that “there is nothing abominable as being a refugee...from the sweeper to the highest official they subtly remind you that you don’t belong – being a refugee is always associated with hunger and deprivation.” Namhila’s narrative also proves that being a refugee is comparable to carrying a heavy load on your shoulders. The author thus states “I wanted to feel what it is like to live the life of a non-refugee.” Namhila also indicates that she was longing for independence; to be free and finally throw away the refugee label. This justifies how exile has led to societal rejection and disapproval of the refugees.

Muponde (2004) observes children as actors who traditionally have been denied a political voice and are often excluded in literature, hence the need to include them in literature by recognising their presence and acknowledging their contributions to history. According to Ward (as cited in Muponde, 2004, p. 8), it is observed that many novels or fictions portray the image of a child as vulnerable and innocent, and needful of protection. Okolie (as cited in Jones and Jones, 2000, p. 24), further argues that a child; an African child particularly, has been perceived as a subject of pity, a victim of environment and therefore a miserable being in a hostile world. Under the above perception therefore, children’s voices and social contributions remain largely unacknowledged. This image is a sentimental mythology of socially constructed vulnerabilities. The representation of the African child as a “victim of the environment” necessitated that the notion of childhood be interrogated and have African children be presented in their true light through the novels, in order to clear such doubts as to whether they have any childhood to remember. Thus Muponde (2004) asserts that the child in literature, whether children’s or adult literature is not an “object”, but plays an active role in the making of history, particularly the worlds of human nature and human culture.

Maxted (as cited in Muponde, 2004, p.4), suggests of ways of looking at how to reconfigure children's space in the "African social landscape": "The contributions, responsibility and agency of youth are still largely confined to liminal spaces, whereas they increasingly assume central importance in the African social landscape. Their agency should be recognised" (p. 4).

Similarly, Brocklehurst (as cited in Canu, 2006, p. 27) proposes the image of a child who is determined, influential and, to a high degree, very powerful. Through her explanation of the term "agency" Brocklehurst (as cited in Canu, 2006), reveals that a child's power is manifest and significant and that it can easily determine a change in the society. Parts of literature therefore depict children as active political actors, and it is such activism which manifests in the production of autobiographies like the ones under study here.

Moreover, particularly relevant is the contribution of Swaine and Feeny (as cited in Canu, 2006), when they observe that frequently during conflicts children assume roles and responsibilities that in normal circumstances would have been assumed only by adults. In his research on "child soldiering" Canu (2006, p. 28) provides some useful examples of how children who were actively involved as warriors were considered by their own community as heroes, and an example to follow and imitate, rather than merely passive victims. From the above idea one can therefore observe the image of a child who shows more elevated levels of consciousness and fully expresses the willingness to influence change. In this regard, it might therefore not be appropriate to consider children exposed to war just in terms of individuals who are suffering and are pitiful beings.

Iyama (as cited in Jones and Jones 2000, p.44), reveals that the experience of exile is a phenomenon that quite a few African writers are familiar with. However, it has also been observed that writers from Africa are fascinating in the way they have chosen to represent

children's centrality in history in war situations. Therefore there is a gap in literature with regards to the exploration of childhood experience in African discourse.

Some literature in Africa further shows children as agents in the liberation struggle. Muponde and Primorac (2005, p.119) state that children played a central role in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. In Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) the country actively recruited school children by making them more conscious of the poverty and misery of their situation and telling them that there was a way out and that they could fight for better conditions (Zimfep, 1992, p. 22).

However, some writers view children in literature as vulnerable species to be conserved. Huttunen (2010, p. 24) asserts that recurrent themes in the documents such as Global Report for Human Rights were also those of children as inherently innocent, passive and vulnerable. Only very little discourse address children's subjective experience in a meaningful way. The innocence discourse is well exemplified by the language of the Global Report (2008), where a point is made of charging "those who recruit and use children in hostilities [for war crimes] relating to the conscription, enlistment and active participation in hostilities of children under 15" (Coalition, 2008). This implies that children should not be held culpable since it is the adults' fault if they are to take part in these hostilities. Taking this position signifies that children are exploited and powerless and have no legally relevant agency. This view, however, may contradict with the experience of the victims of crimes committed by child soldiers. Part of this discourse (Legal documents) is depicting children as vulnerable and victims and needful of adult's support. Based on this assumption of vulnerability, child soldiers are also believed to have no real agency in their military participation.

The victimisation of children is further underlined by recounting in detail the horrors experienced by former child soldiers. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2008) highlight the

idea that during the liberation struggle children were deprived of rights, food, rest and social relationships and they were subjected to extreme violence and some to sexual abuse. They were drugged and forced to carry heavy loads and walk long distances. Young people have learned to live in and with segregation, to live apart from their parents, to grow up in barren “homelands” far away from their rightful community of birth. This is to say, the narrators’ childhoods represents redemptive suffering. The exile life itself was nomadic that it could not allow children to grow up in a family-like structure. Their journey to the national liberation comprised of pitfalls and stumbling blocks that most children encountered. Their testimonies reveal how much they endured. Not only were they forced to suffer when in the bush, but they also had to encounter the rejection and stigmatisation by the community after returning home. Hence the persistent current issue of “children of the liberation struggle” in Namibia today. To be treated this way is obviously negative for the children, but all these deeds can still not qualify children as victims only; their contributions through resistance against the colonial rule should also be acknowledged.

Other examples from the literature proves children’s agency. Among others are James and Prout (as cited in Berents, n. d., p. 20), who state that children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the society in which they live. They can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinations. Not recognising the agency of child soldier amounts to denying the children a voice they deserve. What is of particular significance to this study however, is constructing children as agents of their own identity and not solely subjects to adults’ representation. As James and Prout (as cited in Berents, n.d, p.20), further argue that children’s social relationship and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults. However, the present study further expands this

notion through its use of an autobiographical mode which uses an adult's perspective which looks back in hindsight to the lives and perspectives of a child.

Berents (n. d., p. 23) reveals that it is only in the last decades that the conception recognising children's agency has emerged. The agency discourse recognises children as worthy of study. It is therefore revealed that "in acknowledging that children have a desecrate viewpoint it follows that children have a desecrate voice."

In South Africa, where the role of children in the anti-apartheid resistance is well documented, O'Brien (as cited in MacCann & Maddy, 2001, p. 21), strongly asserts that children's contributions to the struggle and to apartheid resistance should not be overlooked. It was the children as O'Brien notes:

Who made life impossible, often literary for the agents of white power in black's township. It is the children who enforce the boycotts, whether of schools or of white shops. It is the children who disciplined those who are seen to slip out of line (MacCann & Maddy, 2001, p. 21).

This in itself is sufficient to acknowledge the participation and agency of children. These acts by children have contributed to the wellbeing of children and those around them, and therefore should be recognised.

Muponde and Primorac (2005, p. 120) also prove that writers such as Alison Acker (1986) and Roger Rosenblat (1984) have attempted to study the varied nature of children's autonomy in war situations, and found that each situation produces its own version of agency. The children in Alison Acker's books "are not just victims; many of them are actively trying to change their own lives and those of others, in societies where this attempt is dangerous" (Muponde and Primorac 2005, p.120).

The agency of children is explored in detail in Chapter four of this study as it is represented in *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. The children characters in the stated autobiographies stored in their childhood memories, the great emotional moments that enriched their lives; recollections of joys and disappointments, hidden treasures that gave them a sense of completeness and perfection which the conquering hands of colonisation was actively busy robbing them of. Okolie (as cited in Jones and Jones, 1998), asserts that a human being has a way of leaving himself behind in the events and experiences that initiate him into existence. By talking or writing about them, they gather themselves once more into one undivided entity across time and space; in this way one is able to see what he/she used to be that he/she may not be at the present time. Consequently recalling childhood experiences as Shaketange and Namhila did, amounts to revisiting and reconstructing the self; and this helps to remould their existence as human.

Namhila's narrative highlights the idea that, many Namibian children who were born; both inside and outside the country during the liberation struggle were given names that reflected the conditions and happenings of the liberation struggle. "Many children born during the struggle were named 'Mekondjo' which means *struggle*, 'Haita' meaning *the warrior*. The belief was that the predominant characteristic at the time of birth would be a major influence in a child's life" (Namhila, 1997, p. 97). The said names by themselves suggest the narrative of war and simply carried a symbolic significance. Cairns (as cited in Muponde and Primorac, 2005, p.126), states that this way of naming the child is a politically symbolic act and may well be instrumental in constructing the child's political views from birth.

Moreover, according to Mashiri, Chabata and Chitando (2013, p.163) naming is a specific, conscious and deliberate linguistic act intimately linked with values, traditions, hopes, fears and events in people's lives. To exemplify this, black Zimbabwean parents communicate

messages reflecting the above dispositions through names that they create for their children. Not only that, indigenous people used names and nicknames to express their resentment to settler brutality, oppression, repression and exploitation, as well as to express that they were a distinct people with a heritage they took pride in. Mashiri, Chabata and Chitando (2013, p.167) conclude that language can therefore be used as a lens to view and understand the social practices and daily activities of the society.

## **2.5 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework through which this research will be explored is post-colonial theory. The post-colonial theory provides an appropriate template for the exploration of exilic issues in the work under study. The researcher finds the thoughts of postcolonial theorists a useful point of departure. Not only do they point out that colonialism does not only belong to the past and that contemporary cultural processes cannot be analysed as situated outside the colonial history, but they take into account such essential factors such as identity and subjectivity; and it is this subjectivity that is central to the notion of childhood and their participation in this study.

According to Hamadi (2014), Edward Said is considered the one who laid the cornerstone of this theory, despite the importance of other leading figures such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha in this respect. Many practitioners credit Edward Said's book *Orientalism* as being the founding work of the post-colonial theory. Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonised countries, or literature written in colonising countries which deals with colonisation or colonised people (Hamadi 2014). It focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonising culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority of the colonised people; while the

colonised's attempt is to articulate their identity and reclaim their past of which was robbed off by the colonisers. Hamadi (2014) further states that post-colonial literature seeks to address and analyse unjust power relations; that is the unjust interactions between the West and the colonised nations.

Setting off against the background of Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin (1989, p. 2) postcolonial literature is writing which has been "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day." Lye (1998) also defines post-colonial theory as "a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries." Many Anglophone post-colonial writers write in English and focus on common themes such as the struggle for independence, emigration, national identity, allegiance and childhood. Post-colonial theory also explores the concept of otherness and resistance. Children are often excluded in the adult literature, and their contributions are not valued. They are considered to have contributed little or nothing to the social or political concerns, such that they are considered to be individual others. Post-colonial literature seeks to revise history; to tell history from the perspective of those who were colonised. Referring to some works of colonial and post-colonial writers, it becomes clear how being free from repression, the natives could eventually produce their own works as a response and as resistance to the history of subjugation, as Namhila and Shaketange's literary works also demonstrate. The process of writing is in a way a reaction of the people who were colonised, because through writing, writers seem to be unearthing the already elapsed memories and histories. The piece of writing reflects the influence of colonialism on people who were colonised as these people have their lives influenced by the experiences of colonialism.

According to Ashcroft et al. (1989, p. 2), one aim of post-colonial literature is revising history. Colonisers often depicted their colonial subjects as existing “outside of history” in unchanging, timeless societies, unable to progress or develop without their intervention and assistance. In this way, they justified their actions, including violence against those who resisted colonial rule. Colonialism was, above all, a means of claiming and exploiting foreign lands, resources, and people. Revising history to tell things from the perspective of those colonised is thus a major preoccupation of postcolonial writing. The literature as well depicts the dominated people’s efforts at resisting the strangulating hold of the empire (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 2).

Ashcroft et al. (1989, p. 2) further assert that during colonisation, the indigenous cultures of those countries subjected to foreign rule were often side-lined, suppressed, and openly denigrated in favour of elevating the social and cultural preferences and conventions of the colonisers. In response, much postcolonial literature seeks to assert the richness and validity of indigenous cultures in an effort to restore pride in practices and traditions that were systematically degraded under colonialism. Post-colonial writers also use resistant descriptions in their novels and autobiographies. Postcolonial writers use detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices to counteract or “resist” the stereotypes, inaccuracies, and generalisations which the colonisers circulated in educational, legal, political, and social texts and settings. Although many colonised countries are home to multiple indigenous languages, many postcolonial writers choose to write in the colonisers’ “tongue”. However, some authors deliberately play with English, remoulding it to reflect the rhythms and syntax of indigenous languages, and inventing new words and styles to demonstrate a mastery of a language that was, in a sense, forced upon them (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 2). In “*Decolonising the mind*” Chinua Achebe argues that the authors feel that

English language will be able to carry the weight of the African's experiences. But it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit new African surroundings. Based on the above premise, the post-colonial writers' major objective is to decolonise both the African environment and the African mind, accepting that there are imperatives towards the building of strong independent and self-reliant continent.

Finally, according to Hamadi (2014), Said believes that the consequences of colonialism are still persisting in the form of chaos, coups, corruption, civil wars, and bloodshed, which pervade many of the then colonised countries, mainly because of the residues of colonisation. In this respect, Said believes that a powerful coloniser has imposed a language and a culture, whereas cultures, histories, values, and languages of the Oriental people have been ignored and even distorted by the colonialists. Producing literary works narrating the liberation struggle may thus be an attempt to reclaim spaces and places, assert cultural integrity as well as revising history.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature related to the topic under study. Different authors have accorded children with different traits that are of interest to the researcher, as they qualify children as agents in both in social and political affairs. The next chapter will present the research methodology. The chapter is outlined as follows: the research design, population, sample, procedure, data analysis and finally the research ethics. It is the chapter that outline the method of collecting and analysing data.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine how children are portrayed as participants in the liberation struggle, as well as explore the representations of the experiences that children had during the liberation struggle. This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology used in this study. Creswell (2008) defines the research methodology as the system of collecting data for a research project. The chapter is outlined as follows; the research design, population, sample, procedure, data analysis and finally the research ethics. Following are the objectives of the study that serve as a pillar for this study:

The study objectives are to:

- Examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle.
- Explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle.

#### **3.1. Research design**

Setting off against the background of Kothari (2004, p. 31), a research design is the arrangement of the conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose. A research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted. Kothari (2004) further puts it that: research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. It thus includes an outline of what the researcher will do from writing the research problem to the final analysis of data (p. 31).

Polit, London, and Martinez (2001, p.167) define a research design as “the researcher’s overall for answering the research question or testing the research hypothesis.” Research designs are further defined as plans and procedures for research that span the decision from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. That is to say, a research design is a plan that describes how, when and where data are to be collected and analysed.

The study has employed a qualitative design. It is not easy to give a simple definition of qualitative design; however, many authors have attempted to define qualitative research design by looking at its features. Masson (2002) identifies the following as features of qualitative research design:

Firstly, qualitative research design is interpretative. This means that qualitative research design is concerned with the understanding, experience and interpretation of the social world.

Secondly, qualitative research methods of data collection “are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced” (Masson, 2002, p. 3). This is opposed to the rigid and standardised methods of quantitative research where standard methods are designed for every study.

Lastly, qualitative data analysis methods are based on arguments and explanations aimed at understanding the complex and detailed nature of the social world within a given context.

Kothari (2004, p. 5) contends that the “qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour.” Based on this definition, a qualitative research design is best suited for this study since the study is interpretive in nature.

The study sought to understand the portrayal of children in the liberation struggle and explore the representations of their experiences as portrayed in Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom*.

Other authors who defined qualitative design include Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 113) who defines qualitative analysis as “a method of research which is heavily dependent on the researcher’s analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected.” Moreover, Holloway and Wheeler (2010, p. 30) define qualitative research approach as “a form of social enquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experience and the world in which they live.” Researchers use the qualitative approach to explore the behaviour, perspectives, experiences and feelings of people and emphasise the understanding of these elements. Qualitative researchers are also interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world. Researchers who use this approach therefore adopt a person-centred holistic and humanistic perspective to understand human lived experiences without focusing on the specific concept. As the results of this study were obtained after a critical analysis of the autobiographies, qualitative design is an appropriate design which assisted the researcher to be able to understand human lived experiences, by scrutinising what children characters have gone through. In terms of this study the research seeks to understand how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle and explore the representations of their experiences during the liberation struggle.

In many cases, in a qualitative research findings may not be projected to represent an entire population, hence through the use of the two selected autobiographies will also not be meant to represent the entire population of autobiographies and children’s experiences of war. Polit (2010, p.142) states that generalisation which is an act of reasoning that involves drawing broad inferences from particular observations, is widely acknowledged as a quality standard in quantitative research, but is more controversial in qualitative research. Polit (2010) further argues that, the goal of most qualitative research is not to generalise the findings but rather

provide a rich, contextualised understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases, as it will be demonstrated in this study. For instance, in this context, the value of qualitative research is often questioned because one cannot make generalisations from the results when the sample is not statistically representative of the whole population. The present study sought to critically analyse two autobiographies in order to acquire a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. The autobiographical works such as those under study, are rich source materials that provides a deep insight of the studied phenomenon, therefore qualitative design is an appropriate method in understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of a specific aspect.

The rationale for using qualitative approach in this study is to examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle as well as to explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle. This would better help the researcher to explore and understand children's lived experiences as well as understand children's feelings and behaviour.

Qualitative approach in this research is appropriate because it "seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participant in the context perceive them" (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009, p.12). Qualitative research enables the researcher to investigate and understand the social phenomenon that human beings experience in their social settings and the experience in this case comes through the autobiographical experiences of Ellen and Lydia; and the war zone, and by extension post-independence Namibia is the social setting for exploration.

Creswell (2014, p.6) outlines the advantages of using qualitative research. One of the benefits of qualitative research is that through both verbal and non-verbal communication, the researcher is likely to expand his or her understanding of the phenomenon under

investigation. Furthermore, without being subjective the researcher will be in better position to understand how people make sense of their world and their experiences in the world. People have framed meanings in a uniqueness of the way their society functions and the interaction thereof. Therefore, the researcher chose a qualitative approach to the study in order to understand the context of the liberation struggle, as to examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle, as well as to explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle, in the social context of the liberation struggle.

The researcher qualitatively analysed two autobiographies; *Walking the Boeing 707* by Lydia Shaketange and *The Price of Freedom* by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, using content analysis as a technique to study the two literary works. According to Bhattercherjee (2012), content analysis involves sampling of the population, breaking down the data into smaller units, naming the units according to themes and finally the actual data analysis according to the themes is done. Even though content analysis has limitations as the available data are the in-text form only, it is relevant for this study as the study analyses written novels. The study looked at how the children are portrayed in the liberation struggle as well as the representations of their experiences in the liberation struggle. This study was a desktop study, hence no field work was involved, but the study relied on primary and secondary data.

### **3.2. Population**

Bhatacherjee (2012, p. 65) defines a population as all people or items (units of analysis) with the characteristics that one wishes to study. In the same vein Burns and Grove (2003, p. 213) define a research population as “all the elements that meet the criteria for inclusion in a study.” That is to say, the population is the entire group that represents the other parts that the researcher wishes to study. Usually, the population consists of the totality of units having

specific defined features in common. In many cases the population is invariably alike in some facets. From the foregoing definitions by Burns and Grove (2003) the population of this study are the autobiographies portraying children in the liberation struggle that are written in English by Namibian authors. The autobiographies in the chosen population have the similar theme of the liberation struggle. This delineation of the population supports the definition by Fox and Bayat (2007) that a population is any group or individuals that share similar characteristics and represent the whole case that is involved in a study.

### **3.3. Sample**

Research on a population is demanding, as one cannot study the entire population due to the feasibility and lengthy process; thus it is worth to select a sample. According to Kothari (2004, p. 110), sampling is the process of obtaining information about an entire population by examining only a part of it. Sampling may also be referred to as the statistical process of selecting a subset (called a sample) of a population of interest for purposes of making observations and statistical inferences about that population. It is extremely important to choose a sample that is truly representative of the population, so that the inferences derived from the sample can be generalised back to the population when need be.

However, in the research under study, the results that were obtained from the sample will not be generalised to the whole population because children in the liberation struggle may not have gone through similar experiences. This is evident in the narratives under study, *The Price of freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. In these autobiographies the narratives of different authors differ, because of the different experiences that the narrators might have gone through. It might also depend on the angle or point of view from which the liberation struggle is narrated by individual authors. It may also appear that the victims of the same

episode may also tell completely different narratives. This proves why the authors of the two selected autobiographies each narrate history from her unique perspective.

Burns and Grove (2003, p. 31) also define sampling as a process of selecting a group of people, events or behaviour with which to conduct a study. A sample as defined by Polit et al. (2001, p. 234) is “a portion of the population.” Usually, a sample is drawn from a large population to represent such a population in a smaller size where a researcher stands in a better position to understand the circumstances surrounding the entire population. In other words, smaller samples allow the researcher to make broader inferences of the entire population represented.

In this study, the two autobiographies, *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008) by Lydia Shaketange and *The Price of Freedom* (1997) by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila will form the sample. It is from these autobiographies where the selected themes will be extracted and analysed. The sample was selected by purposive sampling, because these autobiographies have similar themes and focus. The purpose for using purposive sampling is because the autobiographies under study share a similar theme of the liberation struggle. Purposive sampling as defined by Burns and Grove (2003, p. 31) is “a method of sampling where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide necessary data.” Purposive sampling, also known as relevance sampling is a sampling method used in qualitative research whereby the researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 300). In purposive sampling the researcher may chose a case that illustrates certain features and or processes that one is interested in. However, the interests of the researcher should not merely to take a study for personal interest. The autobiographies under study were

purposively selected as they share a similar theme therefore would help answer the objectives of the study.

### **3.4. Procedure**

The two autobiographies were acquired and an in-depth reading and critical analysis of the two texts was done. The researcher evaluated the portrayal of children as well as the portrayal of their experiences in the selected autobiographies. The primary data was collected through reading the selected novels; *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008) by Lydia Shaketange and *The Price of Freedom* (1997) by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila. Kothari (2004, p.32) defines primary data as those data which are collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happen to be original in character. Primary data are those which are collected or observed for the first time and always given in the form of raw materials and original character. Content analysis was used as a technique to critically analyse the two novels. Content analysis is described as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns and themes” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 144). Kothari (2004, p.110) posits that content analysis consists of analysing the contents of documentary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and the content of all other verbal materials which can either be spoken or printed. Moreover, Polit (2010) defines content analysis as the objective, systematic and qualitative description and evaluation of the contents of documents including print media and broadcast coverage. The term content analysis is as old as 60 years where Krippendorff (2013, p.1) traces it from Webster’s dictionary of the English Language 1961’s edition where content analysis is defined as “analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated materials (as book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect.” Krippendorff (2013) further expands the definition of content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful

matter) to the context of their use” (p. 24). Through their definitions all authors concentrate on the meaning of the texts. This is an indication that by using content analysis, larger texts can be simplified. In this study, the autobiographical texts under study were critically analysed to find themes and understand the necessary perspectives to be explored. The literary analysis was based on post-colonial theory. The data from the two autobiographies was categorised into themes such as the portrayal of children and the representation of children’s experiences in the liberation struggle. The data was summarised to bring meaning to the text. The conclusions were then drawn depending on and as guided by the analysis made.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Data analysis is the interpretation of the collected data in a study. Data analysis involves organising data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organising themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organising the data (i.e., text data as transcripts, or image data in photographs), for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Creswell, 2013, p.180).

The data that was collected from studying the two autobiographies was analysed by using content analysis. The researcher particularly paid attention to themes related to the portrayal of children in the liberation struggle and children’s representations of experiences in the liberation struggle. The interpretation of data was done by the way of post-colonial theory. Conclusions were then be drawn from the interpretations and analysis, and data collected was presented in a narrative form.

### **3.6. Research ethics**

According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009, p.114), sensitivity to possible sensitive issues that may arise during the study is critical to the success of the research. In order to ensure the objectivity and integrity of the research study, the researcher aims to report the findings fully and not to misinterpret the results in any manner. The data collected will only be used for the purpose of this study. The researcher has endeavoured to be objective in the interpretation of data in order to avoid misinterpretation of data. Although the post-colonial theory was used, the researcher has striven to be impartial in order to uphold honesty in both interpreting and presenting the data.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher gave insights into the research methodology used in this study, by beginning with the research design. The chapter also highlighted the objectives of the study in order to remind the reader what the study is about. The population of the study was defined, and consists of the autobiographies by Namibian authors written in English, which are based on the liberation struggle. Sample and sampling procedure, a comprehensive data collection and data analysis details were also discussed in this chapter, and finally the research ethics considered in this study was also addressed. In the next chapter the researcher will present data analysis from the two selected autobiographies; *The price of Freedom* by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila and *Walking the Boeing 707* by Lydia Shaketange.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

In its exploration of childhood, this chapter navigates the contours of the notion of “childhood agency” by examining how children are portrayed as participants in the liberation struggle in Lydia Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707* and Ellen Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom*, respectively. The post-colonial theory guides the analysis of this study, and the analysis is done in a narrative format.

As a way of recap, the study’s endeavour is to:

- Examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle.
- Explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle.

Firstly, the summaries of the two autobiographies are given, followed by the analysis of the two novels in an alternating format.

#### 4.1 Summary of *Walking the Boeing 707*

*Walking the Boeing 707* is a personal tale of the hardships endured by one female Namibian, Lydia Shaketange, who crossed into Angola in August 1974 with a small group of school friends to join the liberation struggle. The pupils were inspired by a teacher, Barkias Haimbodi, at their primary school in Hakadu. Contrary to the colonial Bantu education school syllabus imposed by South Africa on South West Africa (Namibia), he spoke to them about freedom. He used Oshiwambo, not Afrikaans, and began by telling his students about a trip he had made to Oshikango, on the border of Namibia and Angola, 50km to the east. He told them that SWAPO, to further the struggle, was collecting people there who wanted to go to Ondjiva in Angola, and then on to Lusaka in Zambia. “It is dangerous, but those who want

to go to Zambia would have to be very careful and not reveal their plans to anyone.” Lydia Shaketange, only 14 years old and still in primary school, decided that the time had come to secretly leave family and friends, to join the independence struggle. There had been a hint in the subtle recruiting speeches that they would fly away to Zambia in a Boeing 707, but this did not happen.. Instead they walked, occasionally got rides, but usually walked across this part of Southern Africa. Thus the title of her memoir: *Walking the Boeing 707*. When she left Namibia as a young adolescent, little did she know that her exile would encompass the next 16 years. She had no idea that they would move between camps in Zambia and Angola, go to Sierra Leone for her secondary education, only to return to a new base in Angola, Kwanza Sul. From there, she went to Finland for two years to learn about curriculum material production, only to return to Kwanza Sul again. She, again, left for Leeds in Britain, where she studied for a diploma in education for two more years. There, she gave birth to a son, who was one year old when she finally returned to Namibia in July 1989. This time she flew into Ondangwa airport in northern Namibia with 200 children who were born abroad and were being repatriated to their real homes. The returnees were received at a repatriation transit camp at Oshigambo. It took some time before Lydia was reunited with her family. Elections which led to full independence under SWAPO in March 1990, were held in September 1989. Those repatriated had high hopes as they could now go home or look for employment elsewhere. This was not easy for people like Lydia, because for 16 years SWAPO had taken care of most of their needs.

#### **4.2 Summary of *The Price of Freedom***

*The Price of Freedom* is a dignified and moving account of Ellen Namhila’s life in exile. It is a story of an escape from violence and the atrocities of war in Namibia, “to the unknown”. On their way to seek freedom, Ellen and others of her age (12) survived on drinking water

from the PLAN soldiers which they carried in small green bags around the waist. They endured difficulties such as hunger, thirst, sacrifice; and dedicating their lives to the bitter struggle which would cost lives. Thus, the title of her autobiography '*The Price of Freedom*' is the theme revolving about 'what she as a child and others had to go through' or the price they had to pay in order to attain freedom. In Angola Namhila was appointed by the camp authority to be the secretary of the camp; whose responsibilities were to send and receive mail for the camp commander. Most surprisingly, at the age of 14, she and other children were given a short nursing course and she became the nurse in charge of Efitu clinic, where she further trained other nurses. Namhila survived the Kassinga massacre, which left her with the "wounds of the mind". This affected her to the extent that even when she was far away from the scene of war, she still had nightmares. Being born at the beginning of Namibia's liberation struggle period, Namhila's birth, childhood and young adulthood was surrounded by colonial wars and apartheid repression which displaced her at the age of 12; making her a refugee for nearly 15 years. Namhila schooled in Angola, Zambia, The Gambia, and finally, Finland.

### **4.3 How children are portrayed as participants in the liberation struggle in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom***

#### **4.3.1 Children as intelligent and perseverant beings**

As the narratives *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* open we are confronted with children characteristics which qualify them as smart and perseverant beings. In their attempt to escape from Namibia, Tuhafeni, Lydia and Philemon; the children characters in *Walking the Boeing 707* appear to be convincingly smart and perseverant in their plans. In the first place, they decided to keep their "escape plan" a secret, as it was clear in their young minds that should their plan leak, somebody is capable of thwarting it. That is, parents would

possibly stop them from going or the South African police would get to know, resulting in an obvious consequence.

Apart from that, Lydia had to make sure that her dressing as she left home was not at all suspicious; otherwise her aunt will question her. She narrates, in *Walking the Boeing 707*, that she quickly put one dress under the dress that she was wearing, put on two more underpants and took her shoes in her hands. Usually she would only put on her shoes when she went to church on Sundays. This time she could not put them on or else it would raise suspicions. This act in itself proves children to be intelligent individuals whose thinking and innovativeness is of a quality worthy noting.

Children also appear to be perseverant in their actions, as they do not give up easily during their journey to the struggle. When asked by the suspicious man who gave them accommodation, Tuhafeni, Lydia and Philemon lied to him that they were going to a Sunday school seminar and had been left behind by a lorry driver. The man was surely convinced. These children were between the ages of 13 and 14, yet they were intelligent enough to withhold or only release information depending on the need.

When they were accommodated by a certain man in his house, the three snuck out of the house before sunrise to avoid further interrogations by the suspicious man. Even after several attempts to be sent back home, the three children found ways to escape and continue with their journey until they crossed the border. In *Walking the Boeing 707* Lydia proves to be perseverant when she says “I was determined to reach the end whatever it would cost...if freedom was to cost my sweat, then I welcomed the challenge” (p. 39). These actions prove children to be perseverant beings, and individuals who are persistent in their plans, regardless of the challenges that they faced.

In *The Price Freedom*, Ellen and Maria prove to be also highly perseverant. In spite of the rumours that they heard about there being no other roles to play except to act as the soldiers' wives when they got to the camps, they still did not surrender their idea. Although they were extremely terrified, they decided to face anything that they may encounter; "marriage to the soldiers included". Here we are exposed to the types of children who have bold personalities and who cannot easily be shaken by any outside influences. These are the same characteristics given by Sharlene (2015) who states that the youth had to withstand the violence of the apartheid state, not only in the brutal accounts of suffering and malevolence, but through the means it was achieved: persistent supremacy, control, and restriction over the majority of the inhabitants. This, in other words, shows children who have the ability to endure the harsh situations imposed upon them. These are willing participants of the liberation struggle who are eager to liberate their own country, no matter what they have to go through. Traits such as these concur with what has been highlighted in the literature review, about the observation made by Brocklehurst (as cited in Canu 2006) who proposes the image of a child who is "determined, influential and, to a high degree, very powerful". This is the same calibre of children we are exposed to in Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2008).

#### **4.3.2 Children who have the urge to help others**

Both autobiographies; *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* demonstrate caregiving as an attribute of children of the liberation struggle. Shaketange depicts children throughout the novel as caring beings and individuals who are always concerned about the wellbeing of others. At the onset, Philemon is presented as a person who cares about others. During their escape, Philemon had a bicycle and because he did not want to leave his two friends (Lydia and Tuhafeni) behind, he decide to cycle with one friend while the other one ran, holding on to the bicycle. This was because all three of them could not fit on it. By doing

this they travelled quite a significant distance. This act is a direct contradiction of how children are presented in many literary works, as they hardly depict children as caring individuals. Most of them portray children as objects that need a lot of adult care, a trait usually associated only with elders. This sense of personal enrichment which the world exhibits – the selfishness and self-serving nature in post-colonial African politics- does not reflect the true nature of children, as in this instance children are portrayed as very caring.

In addition to that, when the three friends got accommodated in one house, Philemon was caring enough to make sure that he wakes Lydia and Tuhafeni up. “Philemon knocked at the door of the hut where Tuhafeni and I were sleeping; it was easy to hear him knocking so we sneaked out quietly before the other girls in the house were awake” (Shaketange 2008, p.18). At this instance a boy child is depicted as a caring and responsible person, even more than the girl child.

Children further demonstrate their caring nature in *Walking the Boeing 707* when Erastus, Lydia’s cousin, always warned and urged her (Lydia) not to start dating at a very young age;

He would remind me of our original goal in coming to Zambia. He would tell me not to have boyfriends, or have sex, because this would end up in teenage pregnancy rather than good education that we were looking for... (p.62).

It might be this piece of advice that may have guided Lydia to growing up into a decent girl who is responsible, without falling victim to teenage pregnancy. The author demonstrated how other girls of her age got pregnant while very young, and how this forfeited deprived them of their chance to continue with secondary education in other countries. Erastus, in this case, represents an image of a child who is helpful, responsible, caring for himself and other children, as well as a boy child who shows a sense of maturity in his thought pattern.

The same character, Erastus, has also demonstrated care for others when he takes care of Lydia when she was sick. “He came back (from the storeroom) with milk and slowly fed me. I was too weak to help myself. Erastus fed me about three to four spoons every half an hour” (p. 62). All these deeds prove to us that children take it upon themselves to help others. This also shows children who have developed the spirit of comradeship, and cannot stand to see other children suffer. This is supported by Williams (2011), that living in camps has shaped the social hierarchy of many refugees. They have, therefore, learned to assist each other and live like a family. Thus, one might conclude that the traits of care, compassion, love and friendship were ruling amongst children of the liberation struggle.

#### **4.3.3 Assertiveness and children of the liberation struggle**

Leaving the country to go to other countries was a way of children self-defining and asserting themselves. They wish to set themselves free from the colonial chains. Thus, the character Lydia in *Walking the Boeing 707* states:

I came to believe that since Namibia was occupied, we needed to do something about it. I thought that if Namibia becomes independent, Boers would no longer come at will with their helicopters to villagers and threaten them. I thought it was a big problem that black school children were not allowed to learn English in schools and could not travel without passes. I needed to contribute to whatever that would help stop these evils (p.14).

This shows how children have developed the urge to fight back. This is supported by Cairns (as cited in Muponde and Primorac, 2005, p.126) when they state that a/the liberation movement is an identification which is triggered by the maturation of a political consciousness which results from children feeling that their “historical and deeply-rooted identities are being threatened” by the colonial rule.

Children in *The Price of Freedom* prove to fight back in the same way because they had been disturbed and annoyed by unnecessary curfews imposed on them and people in their villages. As the author states, one could be cooking during late evenings and would be suspected of preparing food for SWAPO. People could be gathered at a fireplace listening to folktale, or just socialising, but would be suspected of holding SWAPO meetings in their homes. Due to the curfews, Ellen a child character in *The Price of Freedom* states:

I wanted freedom to associate with people of my own choice, to eat my supper at normal times, to spend my evenings at the fireplace listening to stories instead of being forced to go to bed early due to the curfew...It was some of these atrocities that compelled most of us to look for answers and seek for alternatives by going into exile (p.32).

The above quotation in some ways supports the idea of the post-colonial theory or literature which Hamadi (2014) clarifies that it seeks to address and analyse unjust power relations; that is, the unjust interactions between the West and the colonised nations. The above extract shows how the strong force of the colonising hand is almost pushing the life of the colonised to the extreme. It is these forces that have resulted in many post-colonial writings.

#### **4.3.4 Endurance as an attribute of children of the liberation struggle**

The authors of both *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* have portrayed children as individuals who can endure and withstand challenges that they are confronted with in their lives. Children in *Walking the Boeing 707* are not just victims, but rather individuals who demonstrate endurance despite the harsh conditions of the struggle they were undergoing. On their long, hard and strenuous journey to Zambia; the long walk that is also ironically referred to as “Walking the Boeing 707” by the text; children demonstrated strength and commitment to the struggle. Although during this heavy “exercise” children

were given a privilege whereby “the children should always be treated as children, if they tire, then the whole group would rest”, they still seem to be significantly strong and do not tire as easily as the adults. Although this is a literary “walk” it resonates with the metaphorical ‘walk’ in *Mandela: Long Walk to freedom* (2003), which is based on the former South African President Nelson Mandela's autobiography, which chronicles his early life, coming of age, education and 27 years in prison before becoming the President and working to rebuild the country's once segregated society. The situation in *Shaketange* (2008), therefore, presents children as the unsung heroes and heroines of the liberation struggle, who desperately need to have their voice heard and recognised.

One episode that demonstrates that children are strong characters is that of Lydia, a child character in *Walking the Boeing707* picking up a handbag for a senior woman who has thrown it away because she cannot endure carrying it any longer. It is interesting to note that there was money in the handbag, and though Meme Iyenda was too exhausted, she did not take the money from the bag, because the “weight of money” she believed would add some extra burden to her already devastated body. Meme Iyenda ended up too weak to walk further, and some men had to construct a “wooden stretcher” with which they carried her. Despite the weariness she was experiencing during that same journey, Lydia picked up the handbag and carried it until they reached Zambia. These characteristics of endurance are supported by the contribution made by Swaine and Feeny (as cited in Canu, 2006) that frequently during conflicts, children assume roles and responsibilities that in normal circumstances would have been assumed only by adults. The children in this autobiography have proven to have a high magnitude of endurance in comparison to the adults, as there appears to be no incident in this autobiography where children are portrayed as weak characters that waver or fall short.

In *The Price of Freedom*, the plot revolves around a child character who withstands harsh political conditions. Apart from walking long distances on foot to Angola, Namhila (the child character in *The Price of Freedom*) portrays tough characteristics that many children of her age might not possess. Namhila was confronted with difficulties when she had to attend school in The Gambia where the culture was completely antagonistic to that of her own. She endured living in a foster home where her foster mother would always perform a ritual, of up and down movements and unintelligible mumbling, every morning in the living room where Ellen slept. This terrified Ellen, who concluded that this practice should probably have been some form of witchcraft, before she came to understand that the ritual was actually a prayer that the Muslim religion performs.

Ellen endures until she completes her secondary education, in spite of the challenges she faced at school where she was labelled as a “refugee”- a term associated with deprivation and poverty. She would be called names and be humiliated every day, while simultaneously trying to recover from the persistent effects of war. This is the situation Akawa (2013) explained that “life in exile was not a walk in the park as all was not rosy.” This is to show us that life in exile comprises of challenges that individuals have to endure. The reality is that, there is a limit to endurance in humans; that is, a human being’s endurance can only last until a certain point. However, the magnitude of endurance which the children in the autobiographies under study have seems to be that excessive. Instead of challenges and problems experienced by these children acting as stumbling blocks, they fuelled and gave them courage to work harder. Consequentially, Ellen passed her secondary school well and her performance secured a scholarship to further her studies in Finland.

In both autobiographies, children are largely portrayed as individuals with tough minds, because they have endured life challenges with which they were confronted during the time of the struggle. These challenges involve living far away from the family, which completely

broke the ties of a family structure, coping with stress after separating with friends who have either died from sickness or were relocated to different sites, battling with cultural differences such as the language, religion, food and morals at every place they went to that did not share the same cultural practices as them. While in the forest, they also “slept under trees with or without blankets”, just to mention few challenges”. Since the objective of this study was to examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle as well as to explore the representation of their experiences, from the foregoing analysis it is evident that children were exposed to many challenges that could have caused them to surrender the decision they took. Due to the fact that children have a tough mind and resilient traits, they endured these challenges. What is presented above is what Akawa (2013) refers to when saying many exile stories do not really present hardships of the liberation struggle, but provide a sanitised version that does not reflect on the hardships above. However, in this thesis’ intention is that the hardships of the liberation struggle be presented in their true light, because it is via such traits that we understand the strength, resilience, subjectivity and agency of children.

#### **4.3.5 Children who are victims of indoctrination**

Although children appear to have a tough mind on one hand, on the other hand, they appear to be victims of false myths and indoctrination. Due to their young minds and the limited thinking capability of children, it would not take one much time to convince, mobilise or indoctrinate them. In the autobiographies under study, it is clearly demonstrated how children have fallen victim to mobilisation and have taken steps without fully understanding the implications behind their actions.

Teacher Barkias Haimbodi, in *Walking the Boeing 707*, has proven to be a strong character that can indirectly mobilise school children to go into exile. He lured these young minds by telling them how easy it was to cross the borders into Angola. He also alluded to the fact that

SWAPO was very supportive in welcoming those who are coming from Namibia. Most vital to note is that the teacher diverted from Afrikaans, a language that was normally used as a medium of instruction in schools, to Oshiwambo. There was a reason for diverting to Oshiwambo as he wanted the students to fully understand his message. The teacher also only seems to stress on the advantages of going into exile without really touching on the implication thereof, as that could cultivate fear in their young minds. It also seems that the teacher was afraid of the children telling the South African Police about the lesson he had given. He probably wanted to mobilise school children to go into exile, but had a fear of what might happen once his words and actions were reported. Children seem to take ideas simply, but immediately after the lesson many children started to plan their journey to the unknown, without considering the obstacles in such journey.

Muponde and Primorac (2005) state that in Zimbabwe, children were made conscious of the poverty and misery of their situation; were made to understand that there was a way out; and that they could fight for better conditions. This practice is considered as a form of indoctrination of children. Many narratives about the struggle have also proven how much teachers have used different tactics to brainwash the young minds of the children whom they were entitled to teach. In addition to teacher Barkias Haimbodi described above, Ms Masombuka in the movie titled *Sarafina* is another example of a teacher who teaches the students the reality of the apartheid system which they are going through and encourages them to take action against the apartheid regime. This political awareness compelled the children and youth to take action. The action taken made the oppressor sense that the seed they had planted among the Namibian or South African youth and children, were bearing bitter fruits for them oppressor. This is one of the actions referred to as agency in this study.

According to Williams (2009, p. vi), central to the history of most Southern African nations is a narrative about the oppression which drove people into exile, and the sacrifices made by the people in exile to liberate their country of origin. As people interact in, and make claims on, Southern African nation-states, they relate to the socially accepted history of exile in different ways. “They may appeal to it when it strengthens their position, elaborate on it when they have been excluded from it, or challenge its authority when it associates them with stigma” (p.vi). In the process, occurrences in the past become a basis for mediating relationships between people in the present. It is this relationship between the past in exile and present which Williams (2009) calls “exile history.”

In *The Price of Freedom* Namhila reveals how she went into exile without really considering what exile may entail. Thus the author reveals; “I was already in exile when I realised that leaving Namibia meant leaving my family, friends and country, probably never to see them again. It meant leaving my food, my language, my culture and traditions (p.33).”

Children seem to portray cowardice traits and appear to be victims of indoctrination, especially towards myths regarding witchcraft in the camps. In many African tribes the issue of witchcraft is often spoken or thought of with great fear. This is proven by the reaction of Ellen Namhila after the death of her friend Ndaenda, who was allegedly bewitched by the camp commander, comrade Nauta. This terrified Ellen to the extent that she always had nightmares of comrade Nauta coming towards her with a chicken to bewitch her. The rumours of comrade Nauta having bewitched Ndaenda made Ellen’s life a living hell in the camp such that she convinced the camp authority to relocate her from that camp. It is not justified whether it was true that it is in fact comrade Nauta who had bewitched the young girl or not, but he had to cope with the stigma attached to him as a wizard. Due to such rumours, the young minds of children were fully convinced to believe that comrade Nauta is

a wizard. Many other people started attributing their illness to witchcraft so much that the children also started believing in the existence of witches in the camp.

It is depicted in both *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* that when children went into exile, they had in their minds all sorts of ‘unjustified truths’ about exile. As Namhila narrates, she had imagined that all those who went into exile lived in one big village and thought that as soon as she got there she would meet them. There were unsubstantiated rumours about the PLAN fighters. Some said the PLAN would first take you to Zambia where you will be cooked in a big pot, from which you would rise with magical powers that would enable you to fight and defeat the colonisers. They also heard of myths that, it was very important that people were cooked before becoming members of the SWAPO because they lived in lands occupied by the cannibals, and by being cooked people became resistant to cannibals. Ellen also heard that skinny people did not stand much of a chance to come out of the boiling pots alive as they were either scorched or deformed. She was frightened so much by this myth because she was very skinny.

It is the same in *Walking the Boeing 707*, where children believed that fighters were cooked in big pots as part of their training to master guerrilla warfare; also that the SWAPO fighters were not real people, but ghosts. This was apparently propaganda that was spread by the South African propagandists in order to instil fear in the young minds of children so as to halt their plans of escaping the country. If the children saw any soldier amongst them without having seen him coming, they associated his appearance with magical powers. Children started to develop a fear of the soldiers, but were impressed by their ‘magical power.’

#### **4.3.6 Heroism and children of the liberation struggle**

“While Muriungu and Muraya (2014) mourn the limited and uninteresting presentation of the females in traditional African tales, Muller uses her two novels to celebrate the bravery and

heroism of the girl-child” (Chunga 2015, p. 87). The traits of heroism are not only confined to the children explored by Chunga (2015), but those in the two autobiographies have also proven to be heroes and heroines who do not waver in spite of the challenges they have to go through. The authors of the autobiographies under study have proven how children and other participants of the liberation struggle were determined to fight for their country at all costs. They sang revolutionary songs to boost their moral, and proved to be brave, whatever the cost might be. In *The Price of Freedom* some of the children like Ellen Namhila suffered direct effects of the war, for instance she (Ellen) was shot in the arm and leg while cycling from a friend’s house, and she survived the Kassinga massacre, an event that left her with emotional scars. We have also seen how Ellen was depicted as a brave girl when she ran away with a two year old baby from the Kassinga scene.

In *Walking the Boeing 707*, children and other participants of the struggle walked a long distance from the Angolan borders to Zambia, a practice that Shaketange still narrates with courage. Although they were extremely tired, they were determined to reach their goal; ‘to attain freedom.’ Shaketange narrates her experience saying “[She] was very tired and did not want to think of continuing to walk, but [she] had no other choice, [she] wanted to go through this thick path and [she] must complete it” (p. 37). They were tired but they endured. Some of them were sent to secondary schools in West Africa where they withstood the differences in culture, food and religion; and suffered humiliation and loneliness as refugees. Shaketange narrates how she and her friend struggled to cope with a “strange dish” of cassava soup in Sierra Leone.

It was a strange dish to the two of us...To make matter incredibly worse, the soup was full of hot, hot, hot, pepper. It tasted as if a ton of pepper had been put into it. Mama Wambi the hostel matron shouted loudly and forcefully and absolutely ordered us to eat the food. We ate the food with a glass of water at the side. The right hand will put

the spoon in the mouth, while the left hand will put in water to neutralise the hot spicy food. I (Lydia) actually ate with my eyes closed, because I did not want to look at the blood red palm oil spread over the brownish particles (p. 79).

Despite the nature of the food, Shaketange and Rosalia got accustomed to eating the hot spicy food of Sierra Leone and started to eat hot pepper just like other girls in the hostel. This fact is enough to present children as heroes as it portrays how the children had to overcome the “food challenge” they were faced with.

The principal of the school in Sierra Leone, in some ways, perpetuated the suffering of the Namibian children who were there because of the way she introduced them to the school. All the other children in the hostel kept referring to Shaketange and Rosalia as ‘refugees’ because that is how the school principal introduced them. This made the children suffer. However, in this narrative, they possess a heroic figure that enables them to withstand the ups and downs of the struggle. Shaketange spoke softly to herself; “How could I attain freedom, if I could be so discouraged by these differences? I wanted to go to school and learn; here I was, in school, with the ability to learn. So my duty was to study and learn. I vowed from that point to face the challenge, come what may (p.81).” The above statement depicts the courageous children who have the ability to analyse issues and come to terms with life problems without any assistance from adults. This demonstrates how resolute she was, with a strong willed spirit of determination, which to some extent, proves heroism.

The above experiences of the children of the liberation struggle are concrete evidence that literature exposes enough to qualify children not as passive individuals, but active agents of the struggle, who are able to put up with challenges of life.

Shaketange and Namhila’s narratives are some of the most outstanding exilic narratives which have immortalised the horrors of the liberation struggle. Children in both *The Price of*

*Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* have demonstrated the traits of patriotism, boldness and heroism, because the challenges they encountered in exile did not discourage them from attaining their goal- which was “winning freedom through education.” Children, rather, shouldered all the challenges while fighting their battle of being educated. Through the autobiographies, we have seen how Namibian children who were sent to West African countries for secondary education emerged victorious and secured scholarships to further their studies in England. This has given the researcher more reason, to support the argument that children in literature, whether in children or adults’ literature, are not just objects of pity but active agents of the world affairs. It is, therefore, important and necessary to further explore the theme of childhood agency in literature.

#### **4.3.7 Children as fun-seeking and adventurous**

The authors of the two autobiographies under study have depicted children as outgoing and adventurous. In both autobiographies, children are portrayed in such a way that they are trying to escape the boredom of the camps and seek happiness and a “good life” elsewhere. The authors have demonstrated how girl-children would play under moon light at night, and how boy children used this platform to seek for and propose to the girls to be their ‘girlfriends’. This is the situation that Shaketange has mocked at by saying; “Well as children of our age, we had these boyfriends although not in the real sense of the word. In fact those boys were just friends and nothing more, although of course some girls had relationships” (p. 72). These acts show how the children of their age would engage in certain activities to seek for happiness; which they were deprived of by the colonial hand.

Children in Shaketange’s autobiography appear to be willing to experience and expose themselves to situations that are necessary to make them grow up as social beings. Lydia and her friends; Ndapewa, Helena and Tuhafeni once decided to visit the ‘discotheque’ in order to see what exactly happens in such a place. Their interest was not in going to do whatever is

done at the disco, but rather to quench their curiosity of knowing what exactly happens there. The way they narrate their experiences can help us to truly understand their purpose;

The noise of the music was deafening, the place was dark with coloured lights revolving in the ceilings, some girls wore very short and tight skirts, most girls or women's lips were painted red...there was a man who was kissing a woman in front of everybody....(p. 26)

Shaketange reveals how she and other girls who grew up at the village were surprised to see the 'kissing couple.' This proves to the reader that the reason why these children went to the disco was actually to observe what happens there. In addition, none of them actually had any money to pay for a drink, they just sat in the disco and observed. The time came when Lydia and Tuhafeni decided to entertain themselves by dancing. They did not mind the fact that their steps did not synchronise with the sound of the music. What mattered a lot was to enjoy the night as much as they could. This proves how fun-seeking the children were.

Furthermore, we are exposed to other instances whereby children are depicted to be social beings which are eager to entertain themselves and explore new experiences. The narrative portrays how Lydia, who is not a strong or fast swimmer, was impressed to see her friend- and expert swimmer Tuhafeni- swimming across the stream such that she decided to follow her through the stream and tried to be as fast as Tuhafeni was. Due to her lack of swimming skills Lydia is portrayed as someone who struggles in water and she almost drowned. This episode shows how children are willing to engage in new activities during their spare time, and they are always willing to do away with boredom through having fun. This is an indication that although children lived in an environment of war, the limitations of war and exile could not extinguish the children's desire to live an adventurous life. In other words, the children are able to burst out of the enclosures and restrictions imposed by their limiting

circumstances (war) and get themselves to live the “normal life” that non-exilic children living in countries that are free of war are living.

Another episode is that of Lydia and Tuhafeni who are thrilled by the idea of ‘The Boeing 707.’ The main reason behind their happiness was the ‘new feeling’ they were going to have as they fly for the first time in their lifetime. We have read how their faces dropped, and how heartbroken they were in learning that ‘The Boeing 707’ is not real. They felt cheated; although nobody had actually told them that they shall go to Zambia by flight. It was all a rumour. This has shown how much children are more interested in satisfying their ego of experience and how they are fun seeking. It is also one way of proving that like adults, children also have dreams, ambitions, desires and hopes which can as well be deflated. In the case that their wishes are not fulfilled, they also tend to get emotional and feel as if they have been cheated.

The author has also demonstrated how children, through their seeking of entertainment and new experiences, almost behaved irresponsibly by engaging in risky activities. Shaketange narrates, “Although we did not drink at first, we later tasted beer and wine and realised that dancing became more enjoyable when you drank something” (p. 87). One may conclude that the above act seems to portray children as irrational beings whose level of maturity is partial. The way children in Shaketange behave is what Muponde explained by saying; ‘Children love to have fun and at times get carried away. Because of this fact adults understand childhood as a stage that warrants protection’ Muponde (as cited in Chunga 2015, p.84). “However, sometimes children refuse to be protected by adults because of their adventurous nature” (Chunga 2015, p.84).

Children in *The Price of Freedom*, also have proven to be fun-loving as they are depicted as always willing to take part in activities that would entertain them. The author exposes us to

the sauna experience that Ellen and other children had for fun. At other times, children appear to be irrational beings that are not willing to adhere to orders. They are strong willed and daring such that they want to chart their own course, and seem to be unwilling to get advice from anybody. When other children got scholarships to leave Angola and continue with their secondary education elsewhere, Ellen and three others could not get a scholarship due to their young age. This frustrated them to an extent that they started behaving irresponsibly, as the author narrates; “We started behaving irresponsibly. We started drinking, and when we were drunk, we got up to all sorts of mischief” (p. 55). Namhila decided to be sick every morning so that she does not have to attend classes. In other instances, we observe school children who have taken a vehicle from the camp without permission, and went to Kalulu to have fun. They got drunk and the vehicle ran out of petrol on their way back; and they had to spend their night in the bush. It was after the alcohol had worn off when they realised the magnitude of the trouble they had landed themselves into. After a long period of struggling to acquire petrol from the Angolan soldiers, they came to the camp, just to realise that the camp was vacated. Regardless of the fact that children know that they are living a nomadic lifestyle in the camp, they still take the risk of going away without permission. Somehow this behaviour has proven children to be daring and meaning making beings, who get involved in risky activities as a way to discover the world around them; to be makers of history and not simply objects or passive recipients of commands and instructions.

#### **4.3.8 Children who portray political resistance to colonial rule**

The authors of *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* seem not to have portrayed children who are submissive to the liberation struggle, but rather, children and youths who show resistance to colonial rule. In the first place, both Shaketange and Namhila portray children who appear to refuse the colonial rule when they realised that their lives were at risk in Namibia. They were subjected to unnecessary curfews, and to make matters worse, their

education was threatened. This refusal to be colonised compelled many children to leave the country as depicted in Shaketange and Namhila's narratives. This is what Ashcroft et al. (1989, p.2) state by saying that postcolonial literature depicts the dominated people's efforts of resisting the 'strangulating hold of the empire'.

The psychological, social, economic and cultural impact of the war on communities, the atmosphere of repression, fear and suspicion that permeated society during the war, military actions such as the violent enforcement of the nightly curfew or the public display of the corpses of dead guerrillas left residents traumatised. It was of course some of these political evils that triggered the children to leave the country in order to seek political answers to their problems. This can be associated with what Ndlovu (n.d, p.53) states in his essay about the "Soweto revolt" that when the injustices of Bantu education became increasingly intolerable in South Africa, it created a growing awareness of the liberating ideas and search for correct politics of social revolution amongst children. Therefore, it is arguable that though not publicised, the actions by Namibian children- and their level of consciousness and positive rebellion- are traits which demonstrate that children have amazing capacities of agency and activism.

Another effort to rebut the colonial threats was through understanding its negativity towards the people who were being colonised. Children were made to fully understand the implications that colonialism had caused to their country and to themselves. This can be linked with what Muponde and Primorac (2005, p.119) have stated that in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), the liberation movement of the country actively recruited school children by making them more conscious of the poverty and the misery of their situation and telling them that there was a way out; that they could fight for better conditions (Zimfep1992, p. 22). Namhila also demonstrates that they attended rallies where they normally got political education. He further states that it was at rallies that they received training on political theory;

they were taught of concepts such as ‘liberation struggle’ and ‘guerrilla warfare’ as well as ‘freedom fighters’ as opposed to ‘terrorists’. They also learnt about socialist countries which supported their struggle. It is this understanding that opened the eyes of the children and triggered, within them, the urge to oppose colonialism; thereby, making them conscious participants of the liberation struggle.

In addition, Namhila chronicles that “At rallies we learned to say *viva!* to those countries which supported our liberation struggle, and *down!* with those which saw us as a threat to their lucrative business with South Africa.” This demonstrates the extent to which education has conscientised the minds of the children, which has led to them rejecting all forms of colonialism imposed on them.

#### **4.4 Children’s experiences during the liberation struggle**

The autobiographies under study show that children have contributed differently to the liberation struggle, some suffered terrorist attacks, beatings and other atrocities of the struggle. This section discusses some of the children’s experiences as portrayed in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom*. These experiences help the researcher to further interrogate the notion of childhood agency in literature.

##### **4.4.1 Children as victims of societal rejection and disapproval**

The scholars Njogu, Waita and Muriiki (2013, p.31) state that “there is nothing abominable as being a refugee...from the sweeper to the highest official, they subtly remind you that you don’t belong – being a refugee is always associated with hunger and deprivation.” Namhila’s narrative also supports that being a refugee is comparable to carrying a heavy load on your shoulders. The author states that “I wanted to feel what it is like to live the life of a non-refugee” (p.66). As a refugee in The Gambia, Ellen was called “Jola” a word that she later came to learn that it refers to the most disadvantaged tribe in The Gambia. She was called this

name because she was a refugee, and being a refugee in The Gambia is associated with destitution, deprivation and hunger.

Due to the fact that Ellen could also not speak “Wolof” the local language, other children could not understand her because they had never seen a black girl who could not speak Wolof. All these acts made it difficult for Ellen to construct strong social relationships with other children, as no one would actually like to associate with “Jola”.

To make matters worse, Ellen’s culture could not synchronise with the cultures of the host country in many ways. Therefore, many times, she found herself practicing or engaging in some practices which were a clear contradiction to the culture of the host country. In The Gambia, especially, Ellen wrestled a lot with cultural differences. At one point, she found herself swimming with a group of boys- something that was not allowed in the Gambian culture. Due to this culture shock, the narrative presents how Ellen suffered loneliness and at times found herself in a pool of confusion, not knowing what exactly the right thing to do was in The Gambian culture.

At another time, during her studies in Finland, Ellen experienced societal rejection as a refugee. The author narrates, in *The Price of Freedom*, that there was a time the Finns believed that every African had the AIDS virus and if they shook hands or sat where an African had sat they would get it too. A peculiar incident is that of a Finn finding the Africans in the sauna, and without greeting them he started to wash all the benches in the sauna while uttering ‘*mina tapan AIDS viroksessa*’ (I am killing the AIDS virus) (p.138). All these acts made it difficult for African children to associate with the Finns and vice versa.

In addition, Ellen was once denied to buy cherries by one woman at the open market, and the woman kept on shouting that she had nothing to do with “black money”. Simply put, this

meant that she does not want to accept money from a black person. This act demonstrates how children have endured racial prejudices and discrimination.

Furthermore, in *Walking the Boeing 707* Shaketange portrayed how she and other fellow children suffered societal rejections and humiliation from the Finns in England. At every place they went, they met people who were curious to see whether their dark skins were a result of being dirty or it was really natural. “They shake our hands and look at their own hands to check if they were dirty...This was of course, rude and humiliating” (p.102).

It is because of this societal rejection of refugees that Ellen states that she was longing for independence; to be free and to finally throw away the refugee label. The above cases are a justification of how exile led to societal rejection and disapproval of people, especially the children. It is, therefore, at the heart of this study that scholars move away from only providing a sanitised version of childhood experiences, but rather explore and expose childhood experiences in their true light as portrayed in literary works. Exploring children’s experiences and representing them in their true light helps the world to fully understand childhood agency from the perspective of those who were colonised.

#### **4.4.2 Deprivation of a proper family structure**

It is quite a pity to realise that children of the liberation struggle grew up with no proper family structure necessary to groom them into socially moulded adults. The essence of growing up with a proper family structure is emphasised by Sharma (as cited in Pasi, 2015, p.161), when she states that the human child is the most helpless and weak being if not under the support of a family. A family is needed in order to maintain its existence and to coordinate or ensure a child’s balanced development. Informatively, a child’s balanced development is achieved with difficulty in the absence of parental love and in non-responsive environments. However, in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* children

appear to have learned to cope with their 'exilic home'; the camps; and seem to have been doing well in such home. They carried out some of the activities that one would carry out while at home and this has assisted them to cope well. For instance, one of the elder children amongst them will take responsibility to care for the young ones, as all women acted as mothers to everybody. In the case where somebody has grown up and would like to get married, "some elderly people are chosen to represent the bride and the groom's family, as it happened during Ellen's wedding ceremony". Thus, one may argue that, a child can be a successful being even if the family structure is somehow broken, provided that the child copes with the living condition that she/he finds himself/herself.

One of the most sorrowful sights in the autobiographies examined in this study is that of children being handed over to foster families when they had to attend secondary school in Western Africa. Most of the foster parents did not entirely understand that these children were coming from war. In fact, children were given to foster parents who treated them like 'normal children'. They did not consider the fact that these children are traumatised and had been face to face with death, some of whom had held dead bodies which had been shelled and had seen people die before their eyes. As the narratives posit, these children did not come from 'normal family life-type situations', but they were just deposited in foster families which did not have proper understanding of their situations. They took up the responsibility purely for financial reasons as they received allowances towards the children's care. Due to this situation then, Namhila tells that it became difficult for them, as children, to appreciate even the good things that these families did for them, because they seemed not to have demonstrated any care.

On the other hand, if a child did not opt to cope with the situation exposed to him/her they were likely to feel affected by the absence of a proper family structure. For example, in Shaketange and Namhila, the situation of the lack of a proper family structure has cultivated

the feeling of 'rootlessness' in children. They believe that they have lost an important aspect of their completeness as human; which is 'identity'. They tend to be fully convinced that their sense of belonging has been shattered. It is then due to this feeling of incompleteness that children perceive themselves to be living miserable lifestyles which they, however, face head-on and with courage and determination.

#### **4.4.3 Children appear to be victims of unbearable sufferings**

Akawa (2013) states that life in the refugee camps "was not a walk in the park as all was not that rosy" (p. 182). The author further explains that many exile life stories do not really present these hardships associated with the liberation struggle, but rather narrate a "sanitised version" that does not fully reflect on issues such as lack of basic materials, lack of food, the administration of the camps, the young girls falling pregnant and security issues. Hence, this study's argument that such issues should not be pushed to the periphery; there is a need for such issues to be addressed.

The themes in *The Price of Freedom* revolve around sad realities and experiences of the liberation struggle. Namhila portrays how she, as a child of fourteen years, was exposed to the atrocities of the war leaving her with emotional scars that are failing to fade away till now.

The author narrates the events that happened one early morning while they were preparing the clinic to welcome the patients of the day, when they heard what sounded like an aeroplane or thunder. Before they knew what was happening, they heard people screaming. In the deafening noise Namhila looked up and noticed in horror that the roof of the clinic and one of the walls had been blown off. There was total confusion. People were running in all directions. "Some people were running with blood streaming from their bodies, others were carrying the injured...most people who were at the rally did not make it to safety, as they

were coldly murdered there (p.40).” Like everybody else, Namhila was running aiming towards a certain rock which was ahead in order to seek refuge. Before she could reach the rock she was targeting, several bombs were dropped, turning the rock into an angry fire that destroyed everything around it.

Suddenly I could not run anymore, my knees just buckled up under me and I was drained of all strength. I must have lost consciousness. I wanted to wake up and continue running like others, but I got weaker and weaker and I slept (p.40).

This is one amongst other episodes, which reveals the sad realities of the liberation struggle and shows how the war has directly affected those who were victims, especially the children. In the same episode, Namhila further depicts how she managed to run away while carrying a two year old baby. Although both confused and tired, she spends her whole day running and hiding with the baby. The above shows what children had to go through during the struggle for independence that might still have some impact on them until today.

The author of *The Price of Freedom* further demonstrates the agency of children in the liberation struggle to the reader by revealing how a fourteen year old Namhila, a victim of the Kassinga massacre, had to continue helping other victims as a nurse. Without the basic medical facilities it was not easy to help the injured victims. The ‘young nurses’ resorted into using “tree leaves and fibres as bandages to stop bleeding (p.41).” These acts prove the creativity of the young mind. Even though affected heavily by the massacre, children are still bold in helping others. Thus, this act demonstrates children’s subjectivity and agency in literature.

Similarly, in *Walking the Boeing 707*, through herself as a young girl, Shaketange narrates how they literally ‘walked’ the path to freedom. “We walked long distances in thick forests, we walked over rough ground... some of us were barefoot...” (p. 39). The author reveals the

pain they had to go through at all age levels, to the extent that “no one was actually walking any longer, but all were simply dragging their feet.” To make the matters worse, they had not bathed for almost five days, and were not able to brush their teeth properly. Not only were they thirsty, but they had no energy left for anything except walking.

The author further reveals how they got accustomed to a routine of “sleeping under the trees” with or without blankets, and with a shower of rain drops occasionally falling on them and dampening their blankets; and how they spread their blankets on the grasses without knowing where the snakes and scorpions were hiding. The author also reveals how children suffered from nostalgia until it ceased. Clearly, all these events show the children’s suffering and leave lasting scars in them. Some of these scars might be physical, but emotional scars have long lasting effects throughout life.

Though children are depicted as victims of violence and suffering, this should not make scholars deny them voice and subjectivity. It is in fact these sufferings that prove to us how much children have featured in warfare and exilic literature. This suffering will add voice to the argument of whether children are active agents in literature, or simply objects of pity. Through children’s representations we are exposed to their diligence, and we observe how they always made efforts to pick themselves up in times when the forces of the struggle seemed to overcome them. It is, thus, at the heart of this study and befitting to look at how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle, as well as to explore the representation of their experiences as depicted in literature. Such an analysis and perspective helps to clear the doubt of whether children are really agents, or simply passive elements of literature.

#### 4.4.4 Wounds of the mind and emotional scars

In *The Price of Freedom* the author portrays how much children were affected psychologically by what they witnessed especially after the Cassinga (is it Cassinga or Kassinga?) Massacre. Namhila narrates that “There were corpses everywhere, some burned, and others with gaping wounds. Even my training as a nurse had not prepared me for what I saw. For several weeks I could not eat, I had lost my appetite.” (p. 41)

The author further recounts how the fifteen year old girls were affected by what was known as the ‘fainting illness’, whereby the girls would lose their consciousness and occasionally faint. Particularly affected was twelve year old Anna, also a Namibian girl. Although she was not injured physically, she lost two of her closest friends with whom she had left Namibia. Anna was under immense stress and also suffered the loss of her two friends. The feeling of loneliness has affected the psychological anatomy of this child so heavily. This justifies what Parasad and Parasad (2009, p.167) explain that children living in refugee camps experience more psychological problems than non-refugee children.

It appears in the autobiographies that, there were no rehabilitation and therapy services that would help the survivors deal with their nightmarish experiences. The experiences that children had to go through are enough to explain how the war has exposed children to a lot of hardships. Thus, the author narrates that “the Kassinga massacre was a living example of how dangerous life in the camps could be (p. 43).”

Another incident that provides evidence that children were affected emotionally by the war is that of Ellen cowering in The Gambia when she heard the sound of the plane flying overhead, even though she was far from the frontlines. “One day while I was at school, I

heard the sound of an airplane. I immediately took cover, lying flat on the ground like we used to do in the camps (p. 66).” The other children were hysterical about Namhila’s action; they ridiculed her actions as they could not understand someone who is afraid of the ‘sound’ of the airplane. The act of cowering shows how much children had been emotionally affected, and had not recovered from the effects of war. To the reader, this illustrates how children featured prominently in the making of history. All the scenarios demonstrated above justify that children are agents by themselves and in their own right, whose contribution to the struggle should be acknowledged; and whose needs should be addressed differently from that of the adults. Overall, these acts show the impact that the war might have on those who were part of it, especially the children.

The author of *Walking the Boeing 707* depicts how children suffered the psychological effects of the war through Lydia the child character. The author reveals how she was always extremely frightened by the loud and scary noise of the helicopter that came to intimidate her aunt Olivia, in order to find out the whereabouts of her aunt’s husband. Shaketange narrates how Lydia and Aunt Olivia used to hide in the large *omahangu* (millet) storage bin for fear of the helicopters.

Under normal circumstances children would seek refuge in parents, but Aunt Olivia- who was supposed to act as a source of security to Lydia- is hiding together with her. This must have broken the moral character of the children and instilled fear in their minds.

## 4.5 Children as agents in the liberation struggle

### 4.5.1 Domestic chores of the camps

During the liberation struggle, children were not idle. In both *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* children are portrayed as agents and subjects in the liberation struggle, rather than mere objects which wallow in passivity. This evidence supports the idea by Muponde (2004) that the child in literature, whether children's or adult literature, is not an "object", but plays an active role in the making of history, particularly the worlds of human nature and human culture.

In *The Price of Freedom*, Namhila portrays children as willing participants of the liberation struggle. For instance, Ellen and other children participated in different activities that contributed to the well-being of others, and that of the camp. At the age of fourteen, Ellen was a responsible and intelligent secretary for the camp, whose responsibilities were reading letters from the high authority of the camps to the camp commander and responding to mail.

After writing the letter, I read it back to him (the camp commander). If he was satisfied with the reply, the letter was sent by hand with the soldiers. If he was not satisfied, I had to rewrite it until it was perfect (p. 35).

Generally, Namhila in *The Price of Freedom* also portrayed children as responsible beings who took part in the maintenance of the camp. For example, "children attended classes in the morning and helped adults with construction work, gardening and the cleaning of public places in the afternoon (p. 94)." Other activities involved fetching water, pounding millet and preparing "*oshifima*" (the staple food of Namibia), and they were involved in social activities such as creating or planning cultural activities, such as the youth choir, concerts and traditional singing groups. The children got involved in all these activities in order to avoid

destructive boredom, and also as a way to entertain themselves and the rest of the Namibians exiled with them. It also seems to appear that, during such occasions, many children got an opportunity to acknowledge their sense of identity and belonging; a trait which in some ways was deprived of them.

Furthermore, such occasions were used as platforms to instil courage in each other, as children loved singing revolutionary, and other cultural songs, that raised their morale in many ways, and downgraded the idea of colonialism. Children used songs as a means to express their political feelings. Songs were a very important part of the intangible cultural heritage of the struggle and could circulate without the risk of being confiscated; unlike posters or other printed propaganda materials. The singing, and perhaps even the silent memory of the songs, could provide a source of strength within communities facing harassment for their political beliefs. They were regarded as the “weapons of the weak” Mbenzi (as cited in Sylvester 2015, p.71). In this study, children are presented in the autobiographies as too young to express their political feelings through other dangerous means which would put them at risk, but it is easy for them to do it via songs, as songs do not leave concrete evidence to be traced by the colonialist.

#### **4.5.2 Children as nurses**

Ellen and twenty other children were recruited for training as nurses, due to the urgent need for nurses in the war. At the age of fourteen Ellen was put in charge of the clinic of Efitu camp, where she stayed for nearly a year. As the nurse in charge, she was also responsible for collecting the medical supplies from other camps. It was during this mission that one day she coincided with the Kassinga massacre while she went to collect medicines from Kassinga camp.

Ellen also shouldered the responsibility of training other nurses to perform the same task. The reader is made to imagine how at the age of fourteen a child is able to carry the burdens of her own country, by balancing both her school work as a student, and taking time as an after school nurse. Thus, one can posit that the roles performed by children during the liberation struggle are enough to qualify children as agents, but not some mere objects of pity. Being a nurse was the most difficult responsibility that Ellen had ever taken upon, as this profession made her live in the war zones every day. As she narrates in *The Price of Freedom*;

The war exposed us children to a lot of hardship. Nursing as a profession in the refugee camps was therefore comparable to the work of a social work. Of all the people I treated the wounded affected me the most. Whenever I dressed their wounds I felt as if a sharp knife was going through my stomach. Although I never got used to it, working with the wounded got me involved in war because soldiers also wanted to talk about how they got wounded.... I was frustrated with my work. At the same time I felt guilty for wanting to quit because this was my only contribution to the struggle to liberate Namibia so that we could stop being refugees and go home to our parents (pp 47 - 48).

These acts all prove children to be very active agents of the liberation struggle, as real freedom fighters who saved lives and made independence a reality, and not simply “war collaborators”. The above can, therefore, be likened to the idea of Canu (2006, p.22) that it was also soon realised that the role of the children in conflict is not minor, but children feature prominently at all levels during warfare.

#### **4.5.3 Construction of the camps**

With regard to the roles and responsibilities at the camp, children in *Walking the Boeing 707* were not an exception. Shaketange portrays children in the above autobiography as diligent

individuals who actively participated in the construction of the camp as well as in other daily chores of the camp. The “pioneers”, as they were called, did not sit idle, but were directly involved in the daily activities of the camp. They cleaned the area around the camp, collected firewood for cooking; and they assisted in cutting the grass to mention a few tasks.

The author deliberately pointed out the tasks that children completed, in order to reveal their contributions to the struggle. Although children could not join men and women on the battle field, at least they were able to perform the tasks that, under normal circumstances, ‘a child can perform’ at their age. In *Walking the Boeing 707* Shaketange discusses the allocation of tasks as the children were constructing Nyango camp in Zambia. The author reveals that Nyango, as the name means “the virgin forest” was an absolute forest when they occupied it, and because of their hard work as pioneers they succeeded in constructing a camp.

The children were divided into platoons, and each platoon was assigned a task to perform. “The work was rotated among the platoons so that none of the platoons was left to do one thing for too long (p. 68).” Since the school children were many, approximately 250, they were divided into fifteen platoons of about 30 people each; and they were instructed that there would be no school for a couple of months, until some dormitories and classrooms had been built. Shaketange, therefore, concretely demonstrates how Lydia and other children constructed a refugee camp in Zambia. These children’s industriousness and innovativeness should, therefore, be saluted.

Platoon one had to work in the kitchen for the day, and was responsible for preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner. The same people were responsible for cleaning up, washing the pots and all equipment before six o’clock. About twenty people were assigned every day to collect firewood with a truck.

Platoon two had to clear the weeds at various places earmarked for the dormitories, classrooms or other buildings. It could mean that three or four areas would be weeded each day.

Platoon three had to make “*omihuva*” and “*eehonga*” (threads and poles).

Platoon four had to mix sand to make the bricks which were used to build the barracks.

Platoon five to ten had to cut down trees to make the poles used for building dormitories and classrooms or any other building that was needed.

Platoon eleven to thirteen had to cut hay which could be used to thatch the roofs.

Platoon fourteen and fifteen had to build the dormitories. (p. 67).

After all, the children managed to construct three dormitories, a clinic, some classrooms, an office and a few other buildings. In *Walking the Boeing 707* Lydia, the child character and protagonist, states “I felt part of something important, the struggle for freedom, and I felt I had played a role in that struggle just like those who fought on the frontlines”. Therefore, exploring all the roles and responsibilities that children were involved in during the liberation struggle, would make the researcher differ with the idea of other scholars who consider children as “mere objects of the environment”. The above mentioned allocation of duties is concrete evidence to explain the subjectivity and agency of children in the liberation struggle. In addition, one would wonder what else could a “teenager” who could not be involved in direct fighting do, apart from daily chores. The contribution they gave at their age deserves acknowledgement and recognition. Therefore, it is worth it that children be

represented in their true light; as agents in literature with apt capacities of industriousness and innovativeness.

#### **4.5.4 Children as responsible teachers and learning material developers**

Like Ellen, who was a teacher and a nurse in *Walking the Boeing 707*, the author brings forth another aspect that may qualify children as active agents of the liberation struggle, where Lydia was a teacher. As Shaketange states, “The commitment to winning the struggle by becoming educated was strong...” (p. 30). School children were trying to win their freedom by being educated. It is through education that a colonised mind will start to understand its rights. It was also emphasised through education in the autobiography that, school children must take education seriously because after independence “Namibia will need educated people to run its affairs” (p. 97).

The “pioneers” started engaging in teaching both their fellows and the elders. “All Form Five (grade12) graduates who were in Kwanza Sul during 1982 and 1983 were required to teach at a school.” Due to an exodus of children from Namibia who needed enrolment in the school in Kwanza Sul, SWAPO needed to make use of the grade twelve graduates to teach fellow comrades.

Children did not only become teachers, but they also became material developers, as the large enrolment compelled SWAPO to develop its own learning materials Lydia and others participated in this very important exercise of developing materials for education purposes. “Teacher Shimbonde told me that I was a good teacher and had been selected to go to Finland, and learn how to write materials for SWAPO schools” (p. 98). At the end of a two year-contract, the dedicated and committed Lydia and her fellow Kandali who were responsible for the English department, produced a vast number of English textbooks, workbooks and teachers’ guidelines. Some pioneers were responsible for producing

Mathematics textbooks, while others were the artists responsible for drawing the pictures to accompany the text. This is another contribution that proves children to truly be agents in both exilic literature and the liberation struggle.

#### **4.6 Resilience and children in the liberation struggle**

Through their representation in Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila's *The Price of Freedom*, children have demonstrated a wide range of resilient characteristics as they suffered and survived a variety of psychological and emotional disturbances due to the war. In *The Price of Freedom* Ellen is portrayed to have suffered great emotional disturbance after the Kassinga massacre. However, the narrative did not end there, it further demonstrated how Ellen picked herself up and continued to support and treat her fellow victims of the Kassinga massacre. Ellen's actions demonstrate how she had to put up with, and withstand the adverse conditions presented by the liberation struggle. This can be likened to the definition of 'resilience' given by Luthar (2006) that it is "positive adaptation despite adversity."

To interrogate the theme of resilience further, *Walking the Boeing 707* depicts, through the protagonist Lydia, how children were resilient by coping with their 'nomadic lifestyle' and the conditions they had to meet at every new place they went to. Lydia further narrates that whenever the children were told to go and pack their belongings to depart to another place "there was no time for questions" (p.71), but it was a matter of packing their few belongings and loading them into the trucks.

They further demonstrated resilience towards the culture, food, behaviour and language when they were deposited in foreign countries as refugees. Despite the fact that they wrestled so heavily with the cultural differences and had at many times acted in contrast to the expected norms of the societies they were in, they adapted to the situation. Most students who were

sent to schools even emerged victorious, regardless of the conditions they were exposed to. This can be corroborated by Cloete and Mlambo (2014) who state that:

People react to life's challenges in many different ways. Some will be emotional; and others might become physically violent. However, some people may implode, go numb, feeling helpless and overwhelmed by what would have happened, while others may portray themselves as victims, blaming others for what has happened. They spiral downward and harbour unhappy feelings. Then there are people who get through this situation. They bounce back; emerge better and stronger than before. These are resilient people who can quickly adapt to the new circumstances.... (Cloete & Mlambo 2014, p.94).

Lydia, and other children, as presented in the autobiography proved herself to be those characters who 'bounce back, and emerge better and stronger than before', as they coped with hostile conditions of the struggle. These children have in fact relatively good outcomes as they excelled in school despite having experienced serious stress or adversities, as compared to other individuals who did not suffer the same challenging experiences. This is what Mlambo and Cloete (2014, p.94) meant by saying certain characters face traumatic circumstances "in a resilient manner". Mlambo (2014) defines resilience as the act of positive adaptation despite adversity, and these are the very acts which are presented in this study through the two autobiographical works.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Children have significantly contributed to history as is depicted in Shaketange and Namhila's autobiographies. One may, therefore, qualify children as an 'encyclopaedia of our history'. It is their childhood experiences that have exposed the present young generation to how history

was during the colonial era. In these autobiographies, we are introduced to children who are our source of history, and ‘archives’ of our historical records. Through children’s narratives the reader is able to trace history, and to tell how children have contributed to the liberation struggle of the country. The reader is also able to judge whether children made any contribution that is worth acknowledgement, or they were simply sufferers who were submissive to the colonial rule. If we, as scholars, are not acknowledging children’s participation in literature, how is future history going to judge us for watching the history of our young heroes and heroines fading without us recognising or acknowledging their participation? It was, thus, the priority of this study for the reader to trace children’s agency and subjectivity as represented in Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom*.

Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707* and Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom* qualify to be termed ‘postcolonial literary works’ and the postcolonial theory is the best lens through which these autobiographies should be viewed. This is because according to Hamadi (2014) postcolonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously, or currently, colonised countries; or literature written in colonising countries which deals with colonisation or colonised people.

Since Shaketange and Namhila are revising history from the perspective of those who were colonised, their main aim of writing is to articulate their identity, and reclaim their childhood past which was either not documented or falsely documented by the colonisers. This is justified by Ashcroft et al. (1989, p. 2) when they posit that one aim of postcolonial literature is revising history. Colonisers often depicted their colonial subjects as “existing outside of history” and as individuals who were unable to progress without their intervention and

assistance. Thus, many postcolonial writers opt to explore themes such as independence, emigration, national identity, allegiance, childhood, otherness and resistance.

This chapter examined how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation war in the two autobiographies; Lydia Shaketange's *Walkig the Boeing 707* and Ellen Namhila's *The Price of Freedom*. The chapter also explored the presentation of children's experiences of the liberation struggle. However, it is interesting to note that although children are portrayed as victims of suffering, the large part of the analysis has proven how children have featured prominently in the struggle as makers of history and active participants in the liberation struggle. This justifies the thesis made in this study; that of children's agency. The results of the study were also presented in this chapter by examining how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle; whereby children are portrayed in the autobiographical work as heroes and heroines of the struggle, as well as individuals who resist colonial rule. The findings about childhood agency in the liberation struggle were also presented. These showed that although children suffered during the liberation struggle, their suffering did not surpass their agency. Therefore, there is a need to register children agency in literary and academic work. The final chapter will provide the conclusions and recommendations, as well as the idea of how the study has contributed to the body of knowledge.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study that was carried out to explore the literary representations of children as participants in the liberation struggle in Lydia Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707* and Ellen Nahila's *The Price of Freedom*, respectively. The study developed out of the researcher's curiosity about whether children are portrayed to have any subjectivity and agency in literature of the liberation struggle. It was conducted by examining the representations of their experiences in exilic autobiographical works; seeking to interrogate silenced issues about children in the liberation struggle, as well as those that seem to be pushed to the periphery in Namibian autobiographical works. This was done in order to clear the doubt of childhood subjectivity and agency, as opposed to them being viewed only as objects and victims in the adults' environment as presented by some writers.

This study sought to elucidate the disagreements on the literary representation of children in literary and academic texts. It was conducted in order to revise the idea of children as innocent and passive objects of pity, but rather present children in a different light of agency and subjectivity as they are represented in the autobiographical works under study. The study, therefore, intended to contextualise the representation of children's experiences in *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom*.

The major objectives of the study were to examine how children are portrayed as participants of the liberation struggle; and to explore the representations of the experiences that children encountered during the liberation struggle.

The post-colonial theory was the theoretical framework employed in this qualitative, desktop study which used content analysis as a method to analyse the two literary works. This chapter, therefore, gives a summary of the findings and recommendations that are critical in illustrating how the study paves way for a new perception regarding children's agency. It is divided into two sections which are conclusion and findings, and recommendations. The main findings are summarised below.

### **5.1 Conclusion and findings**

This section presents the conclusions and findings of this study. While some writers portray children as passive objects in the exilic environment, this study brings forward a different perspective of children's representation. Children in Shaketange and Namhila's autobiographies do not appear as victims only, but the authors have portrayed a wide range of traits that would qualify them as agents and direct participants of the liberation struggle.

Of course, during the liberation struggle children were a target of the colonial power, and this caused them to be victims and vulnerable beings, but this can still not qualify children as sufferers only. In both *Walking the Boeing 707* and *The Price of Freedom* children are seen as active beings who took part in the maintenance of the camp in order to maintain their wellbeing and that of others. In *The Price of Freedom* Ellen is portrayed as a responsible and intelligent secretary, whose task was to read mails and respond to them on behalf of the camp commander. Additionally, in both Shaketange and Namhila's autobiographies children also took part in the construction of the camps, gardening, cleaning of public places, fetching water and pounding.

Children, in Namhila's autobiography, are depicted through Ellen and other children's characters as agents, as they took part in activities that only adults can. For instance, due to the urgent need for nurses in the war, the children characters were recruited for training as nurses. Just at the age of fourteen, Ellen was the head of the clinic of Efitu where she was responsible for both treating the patients and collecting medical supplies from the headquarters; at Kassinga and Ohaipeto. These acts all prove children to be very active agents of the liberation struggle, as critical participants. Not only were they just "war collaborators", they were also real freedom fighters who saved lives and made it possible for independence to be conceived as reality.

Apart from that, in both autobiographies children were portrayed as responsible teachers as Ellen was a teacher who taught other children in the camp. This was not an exception with Lydia in *Walking the Boeing 707* as, together with other children, she took part in educating their fellow pioneers, in order to fulfil their plan of "winning independence through education". Due to the high enrolment in schools, children did not only become teachers. They were also employed as material developers, whose responsibilities were to develop the learning materials for SWAPO schools. From these instances one may conclude that the role of children in conflict is major as they featured prominently at all levels during warfare.

Children's agency is also presented in such a manner that, in both Shaketange and Namhila's works, they tend to portray resilient characteristics as they have suffered and survived a variety of psychological and emotional disturbances due to the war situation. However, the narratives did not end there. They also demonstrated how, sometimes, children were suppressed, but they passed through thick and thin to help with the attainment of independence. The narrative *The Price of Freedom* shows how Ellen picked herself up and

continued to support and treat her fellow victims of the Kassinga massacre, despite the fact that she was also psychologically affected by the massacre. These characteristics show how children had to put up with the adverse conditions presented by the liberation struggle, and this demonstrates agency. To further cement the theme of agency in *Walking the Boeing 707*, Lydia and other children of her age had to put up with the nomadic situation of the liberation struggle, cope with cultural, food and general social behavioural differences. Despite the fact that they were going through such difficult times, children who were sent to different schools in Africa still emerged victorious. This shows that children were resilient heroes of the liberation struggle.

As part of agency, children demonstrated a sense of intelligence and perseverance. In *Walking the Boeing 707*, the reader is exposed to how children skilfully planned their escape into exile, by ensuring that they do not show any behaviour that is suspicious. This included them not telling their parents, and not revealing to anybody who asked them on their way or else their plan was going to be thwarted. The fact that children can think to the level of making critical decisions concerning their lives seems to contradict the idea of 'children as passive individuals who are heavily dependent on parental care.' Instead, this independence of children proves children to be rather active agents of the liberation struggle, than passive beings.

Moreover, children's agency is depicted right from the beginning of the two autobiographies where a reader senses the representation of children as willing history makers, as well as willing participants of the liberation struggle because they made up their minds without any assistance from the adults. It was clear in their young minds that they needed to do something in order to rescue themselves from the everyday atrocities caused by the liberation struggle.

This alone proves how children are critical and independent thinkers who can reach a high level of decision making without any assistance from the adults. This sense of independence enabled children to cope with the harsh conditions of the struggle without them wavering.

Children in both Shaketange and Namhila are depicted as individuals who have the urge to help others. In *Walking the Boeing 707*, Phillemon is portrayed as caring towards his friends Lydia and Tuhafeni. He supported them throughout the journey until they were in Angola. While in exile, Erastus shouldered the responsibility of caring for Lydia when she was sick, feeding her when she could not do it for herself. He warned her against the danger of having boyfriends, and constantly reminded her of their initial goal of relocating to Zambia 'to seek better education'. Although these children were away from their parents, and seemed to lack a proper family structure, they portrayed a sense of companionship towards each other. They seemed to have understood that one cannot attain the goal of freedom in isolation, and thus supported each other in order to run the exilic race together. This also justifies their agency.

Most children in Namibia were not directly involved in fighting on the battle field, but their actions have proven how much they rebutted colonialism. In the two autobiographies, we are introduced to children leaving the country in exile. The authors revealed that the children's plan for going into exile was actually a way of asserting themselves. In *Walking the Boeing 707* Lydia felt that they needed to do something about the atrocities of the war and the terrorism they experienced every day in Namibia. She felt that they needed to contribute to anything that would help to stop such evils. The above scenario is one amongst others that has added voice to childhood agency in this study.

Like men and women in the struggle, children did not just give in and allow colonialism to put them down. They endured and worked so hard through the liberation struggle to realise the importance of attaining independence. Lydia a child character in *Walking the Boeing 707* walked together with others from Angola to the interior of Zambia; a walk that led to many people regretting their decision of going into exile. Some elders were carried on wooden stretchers because they could not walk any longer, while others threw away the belongings they were carrying because they could not carry them anymore. This was different with children; those such as Lydia even picked up a bag that was thrown away by an elderly woman and carried it until they arrived in Zambia. This shows how much endurance and perseverance children had, thereby proving their agency.

Apart from walking long distances, children endured many conditions of the war such as living far away from the family; a situation that completely broke the ties of family structures, coping with stress after separating with the people they know who have either died from sickness or were relocated to different sites, battling with cultural differences, the language, religions, and food. These abilities of children to endure difficult situations prove that children were not just idle in exile, but went through a lot with other freedom fighters and these justify children agency.

## **5.2 Contribution to knowledge**

The researcher recognised the need to explore the theme of childhood and the liberation struggle, one that is scarce and has not been explored much, especially in Namibia. Firstly, this thesis is an eye-opener to the Namibian academic writers, to find ways to further interrogate the notion of childhood, because it is through tracing childhood that one is able to understand the present. Childhood is a symbol of history. Secondly, many academic writers

cited in this thesis have presented children as vulnerable beings in the adults' world, but this thesis attempts to re-direct the thought pattern of literary and academic writers. In literature, the medieval time researchers depicted children as vulnerable, but it does not necessarily have to stay as such as the world is constantly changing. This study has given us a new way of viewing children, because literature of the modern times hardly depicts children only as sufferers, but also as agents and subjects as well. Finally, the study sensitises the readers, especially Namibians, about the controversial issue of children of the liberation struggle. This is one of the studies, together with that of Shiningayamwe (2014) that gives a highlight about children of the liberation struggle in Namibia. It maintains that childhood constructs the future; therefore, the current acts of the children of the liberation struggle should be viewed with sensitivity. It might be that the nation is failing to recognise these children's effort, which is why these "children" are asserting themselves by proving that they should be recognised.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The study revealed that children are not as passive as they are portrayed by some literary and academic writers. It brings out that they have important characteristics of agency that are worth noting. It is; therefore, against this background that the researcher deems it necessary to further interrogate the notion of childhood agency in order to extend the understanding regarding this theme. The researcher, therefore, recommends further research on the following areas:

- Why childhood agency has been pushed to the periphery and how researchers can play a role in bringing back the children in literature as agents.
- To analyse how other Namibian writers have portrayed childhood agency in other genres of literature

- Specific research on gender; girl-child or boy-child agency in literary texts
- Comparative studies on children's roles and experiences in the war front in African literature, and
- Lastly, further research should be conducted in other genres of African literature to explore the theme of childhood agency in Africa, and compare whether African children have any shared experiences.

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