

HERSTORY, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN FEMALE NARRATIVES OF  
THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN NAMIBIA: THE CASE OF NDESHI NAMHILA, LYDIA  
SHAKETANGE, LIBERTINE AMATHILA, AND TSHIWA TRUDIE AMULUNGU

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## ABSTRACT

This study was an exploration of the autobiographical representation of the experiences of four Namibian women who participated in the country's liberation struggle. The premise of this study was to interrogate how the autobiography genre was used to depict 'herstory', subjectivity and the public sphere in these female narratives. *Herstory* in this study portrays autobiography as a tool of narrating women's personal history, analysed from the postcolonial-feminist perspective; *subjectivity* depicts how these women represented themselves as makers of history, taking cognisance of the fact that each individual is unique. Though they all participated in the liberation struggle, they exclusively narrate herstory as individuals through *experience, memory, identity, space, and embodiment*; as the material/ physical body of the narrator, "the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge, as well as a textual surface upon which a person's life is inscribed (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 37) and *agency*.

The study was premised on the postcolonial-feminist and autobiography theories. These two theories helped in critiquing the distinctiveness of each narrative analysed in this study. The study employed a qualitative, desktop research design, whereby four Namibian female autobiographies were critiqued. The selected autobiographies were; *The Price of Freedom* by Namhila (1997), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Amathila (2010) and *Taming my Elephant* by Amulungu (2016). The purposive sampling procedure using the criterion sampling technique was employed to select the four autobiographies analysed in this study. These works were chosen firstly, because they best informed the research questions presented in this study. The works tell 'herstory' during and after the colonial period. Also, through purposive sampling, the researcher was able to select autobiographies that provided the richest information as these autobiographies were most

interesting and manifested the characteristics that were closely related to the topic of the study. Critical concepts and issues in the works were identified and interpreted using the postcolonial feminist and autobiography theories. The theory of postcolonial feminist provides a useful account of how women from third world countries make a strong case against the general Western feminist theory that had for a long time attempted to exclusively advocate for experiences of all women in the world. The autobiography theory is also relevant to this study because the development of women autobiography in general and the African women autobiography in particular challenges the classical conceptualisation of the genre of autobiography as proposed by Gusdorf (1956).

The findings of this study revealed that human agency is ubiquitous because despite the different places that the authors lived in during the apartheid era, their human instincts for survival led them into exile in the quest for Namibian independence. The narrators successfully negotiated the public sphere despite the challenges that sometimes overwhelmed them in their private spheres. It was concluded in this study that women tend to portray their identities as relational to others. Therefore, the analysed autobiographies' 'I' is not only personal but it tends to be inclusive of all significant others in the life experiences of the narrators. Consequently, the personal lives of the narrators are exposed to the public through the autobiography genre which eventually finds its way into the public domain. This study concluded that autobiography was used as a powerful tool to articulate herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere by the narrators of the selected autobiographies in order to claim their places in the liberation struggle of Namibia and nation building thereof.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my sisters; Precious Mbidzo-Lisao and Meed Mbidzo-Chatu, and my brother, Bonnie Mbidzo who understand the significance of gender equality and equity in the upbringing of their own children.

**DECLARATION**

I, Agnes A. Simataa 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 other institution of higher education.

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AGNES A SIMATAA

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 Introduction

The concept of autobiography according to Smith and Watson (2001) was derived from three Greek words; *auto-bio-graphia*, meaning "self-life-writing" in 1809 by Robert Southey, a poet of the Romantic school. However, autobiography had been in existence before 1809 as attested by the narratives of the following men; Plato in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. wrote his life experiences in form of letters, with his seventh letter becoming the most read and referred to as the seventh epistle. Further, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. St Augustine wrote his life story as confessions. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Montaigne's narrative was written in the form of essays. And *Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister* was an autobiography written by W.P. Scargill, which was published 1834. Though autobiography has such a rich history, the same cannot be said about its criticism, which will be discussed further on in this current study.

Despite the long history of autobiography, life narratives from the African continent for a long time were not accorded the same status as those written from the Western part of the world. However, the postcolonial era opened doors for the once 'voiceless' people from all walks of life to tell their personal experiences of this era. In line with this argument, Tyagi (2014) defines postcolonialism as a concept that denotes a challenge to colonial regimes and its dialogues that persist in shaping different cultures in the third world, even after the overthrow of such regimes. On the concept of post-colony,

Mbembe (2001) postulates that this concept identifies particularly a given historical trajectory of communities that emerged from colonisation and its related oppressive laws.

Postcolonialism, as argued by Tyagi (2014) is a theory that concentrates on challenging the colonisers' discourse that has for a long time distorted "the experience and realities, and inscribed inferiority on the colonised people in order to exercise total control" (p. 45). As a result, many Africans through their writings have used the genre of the autobiography to reconstruct their participation in the struggles of liberation in their countries, thus making autobiography a tool to disclose individuals' participation in private and public spaces. In so doing, they also take ownership of the histories of African people and write such histories in a manner that is accurate as much as their perspectives and interpretation of life is concerned. This study also aims at challenging a Western notion that depicts the African experience as solely gloomy and negative Mbembe (2001) argues that "the African human experience constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through negative interpretation" (p. 1). To this end, the autobiographies analysed in this study clearly challenge this negative notion as they are analysed as a celebration of works of African women who actively contributed to the building of the Namibian nation. These autobiographies clearly portray African writers who were focused on emancipating themselves and their fellow human beings from the colonial yoke and the violence that coupled this oppressive regime. The negative interpretation of the African experience and humanity by the coloniser or former coloniser is thus challenged by the analysis of the narratives selected for this study. Furthermore, Mbembe (2001) argues that the "postcolony is a period of embedding, a space of proliferation that is not solely disorder, chance, and madness, but emerges from a sort of violent gust, with its languages, its beauty and ugliness, its ways of summing the world (p. 242). The authors of

the selected autobiographies narrate their stories as complete human beings who have exercised their agency to show the world that the people of Africa in general and women in particular are not less human because of the colonial factor but rather complete human beings who fought for their human rights as colonised subjects and continue to do so as free people in independent Namibia.

Consequently, life-writing has taken its own share in the postcolonial literary theory discourses. As such, autobiography narrators of the postcolonial era use the autobiography mode not only as a form of resistance to the misrepresentation of the African people by the coloniser, but the autobiography is also used as a means of illustrating personal and collective systems that oppressed the postcolonial subject for a very long time. Moreover, the narrators of the autobiographies that were selected for this study have furthered this debate by telling their own stories of resistance and survival as firstly, subaltern subjects in the colonial regimes and secondly, as marginalised subjects in independent Africa on the ground of their gender orientation. Accordingly, this study takes an interest in the special aspects of what is hereby termed herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in four female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia.

The researcher of this study asserts that, undoubtedly, male and female experiences tend to be divergent, even in the face of being subjected to similar events, for example, colonialism. In this case, both Namibian men and women were subject to the marginalisation that was brought by colonialism; the German colonial era and the South African apartheid era. However, the female colonial experience seems to have been intensified from three angles; firstly, by the colonial discriminatory laws against the indigenous Black people in general. Secondly, these laws were advanced further to discriminate against women in particular, especially in the workplace. This is attested, for example,

by Amathila (2012) who argued that the Namibian Municipal Ordinance at independence contained laws that dated back to the 1930s. This example could be equated to other laws that the newly independent Namibia inherited from the apartheid period. Women had lower incomes than their male counterparts, for example, they could not purchase nor own property until when women themselves had to fight against such disparities. Also, the patriarchal systems that were and still are operational in Namibian communities regard women as inferior to men and women are not privy to certain privileges that men are privy to.

The above-mentioned discrepancies are analysed in the next chapters. Therefore, Namibian women suffered from a ‘double edged sword’ effect; from the laws of the coloniser and the patriarchal systems that govern many Namibian communities. Thus, the need to explore these divergences as societal expectations of individuals are in most cases gender constructed. It is more often than not, to hear Namibians declare that an assertive woman acts like a ‘man’ and for a man that is denigrating to be equated to a ‘woman’ or mocked as ‘female’; female in this context being perceived as a weaker sex. Hence, females are perceived by some people in society as weak and males are hailed as strong. This is not surprising as gender disparities tend to be nurtured in many homes; girls are expected to behave differently from boys on the virtue of being female or vice versa. In this manner, gender differences are inevitably socially and culturally constructed as these distinctions are engraved on the minds of many individuals from an early age.

To substantiate the above argument, in her analysis of *Masculinities and femininities in Zimbabwean autobiographies of the political struggle: The case of Edgar Tekere’s and Fay Chung*, Ngoshi (2013) argues that “because masculinities and femininities are socially and culturally constructed, they often

play significant roles in constructing identities and distinguishing one another” (p.119). The same argument is also alluded to by other scholars such as; Azikiwe (2010), Bosničová (2011), Fisiak (2011), Garreta (2008), Haman (2015) and Mekgwe (2008), who posit that women and men’s experiences have a different impact on individuals, not only as individuals but, also depending on whether the individuals are either male or female. Therefore, on this basis, female and male autobiographies are likely to differ in how they convey individuals’ life experiences. For that reason, scholars of autobiographical texts should analyse such acts bearing in mind that though a community might go through a shared experience, such experience may not only be perceived by different people based on their individuality but also on whether these individuals are male or female.

However, it should be noted that the history of autobiography lacked this gendered transformation as autobiography criticism was often understood as autonomous. According to Smith and Watson (2010), scholars of autobiography criticism focused on analysing autobiographical writings of what they termed as narratives of ‘great men’ thus ignoring the writings of those they did not regard as ‘great’, especially females. To underscore this point, Gusdorf (1956) (as cited in Olney, 1980) argues that the existence of the autobiography is unquestionable, however, its conditions and limits are prescriptive in nature. In his argument, Gusdorf suggests that autobiography as a genre is a term limited in time and in space because according to Gusdorf autobiographical writing is not universal, thus limiting autobiography to gender, location, and status in society. However, this suggestion can be challenged in today’s scholarship as people from all walks of life continue to write their life-narratives through autobiographical texts. This implies that Gusdorf’s argument was too limited to Western circumstances thus leaving out people from elsewhere around the world. However, with time, his limits and conditions of autobiography became contested as many people, regardless of

gender, location and status, have found it necessary to share their life experiences through published autobiographies. This study therefore, argues that human beings from all over the world, despite their gender, position in society, colour or creed are capable of sharing their life experiences in a manner they see fit.

The historical, autobiographical pact of the author's promise to the reader of writing about the self and only about the truth of the self has much been debated by scholars from diverse fields of study. Smith and Watson (2001) posit that in the historical perspectives of autobiography, the author was expected to speak the evident truth about his/her life and the autobiography critic was expected to be the judge and the jury of the quality of the author's life and determine the truthfulness of their portrayed self. Moreover, Smith and Watson (2001) argue that the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a shift from the above view of the Enlightenment or liberal-humanist notion of selfhood who believed in both a coherent 'self' and the 'truth' of self narrating. This shift was caused by the Marxist analysis of class consciousness; who linked individual lives to economic forces that governed their livelihoods. As a result, the Marxists "defined the individual as subjected to economic structures and relationships, rather than as autonomous agents" Smith and Watson (2001, p. 123). In so doing, individuals are devoid of agency as they are manipulated by the economic forces that govern their lives. In addition to this, in psychoanalysis, the notion of 'truth' and 'coherent self' is challenged since the reconstruction of the 'self' is influenced by the forces beyond individuals' conscious control, therefore, individuals conscious control over identity are seen as illusory in the presence of a subversive unconscious that threatens such control. However, this study argues that though the individual's life can be controlled at times by their social, economic and political circumstances, the individual still retains some level of agency as they may choose to react or not to react to such forces.



For example, the autobiographies selected in this study depict females that were born in the colonial regime with its segregational and restrictive laws, but they depict agency as they had to choose whether to sit back and languish in their circumstances or leave the country in a quest for emancipation from colonialism. Though they had to embark on a journey to the unknown, they still depict a choice regardless of how difficult this choice could have been.

Moreover, Smith and Watson (2001) explain that Freud also added another dimension to the shift the universal 'I' by arguing that language is also important in defining the self as language is subjective because "it speaks through the subject and is mysterious to its speaker because it encodes his desire... the unconscious is a language through which the subject spoken is always other to his own desire" (p. 124). This implies that the choice of language used by the narrator has the power to fracture the 'truth' of the 'self' thus making self representation a more complicated undertaking than a simple act of representing the truth about the self. Additionally, Smith and Watson (2001) also add another linguistic view to 'truth' and 'self' representation. Language is said to be unable to emulate the actual reality of individuals, rather, language is defined as "a system of meaning produced through the relationship of signifier... and signified. As a system, language operates outside the individual subject; and so, entering into language, the individual becomes more 'spoken by' language than the agentic speaker of it" (p.124). In this view, the narrators of autobiographies are products of discursive regimes than the creators of the 'self'.

Therefore, this implied pact may also be problematic today as autobiographies that are in the public domain are written in different languages, and language is subject to autofiction, thus the fictionalisation of personal history. Therefore, this study takes cognisance of the fact that

autobiography is subjective and events are experienced and interpreted in autobiography from an individual's point of view. Hence, the title of this study, 'Herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia: the case of Ndeshi Namhila (1997), Lydia Shaketange (2009), Libertine Amathila, (2012) and Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (2016). Therefore, this study sought to analyse the afore-mentioned autobiographies with regards to how each narrator tells her personal experiences and how they portray themselves in the public realm taking cognisance of their private experiences. These women of the Namibian liberation struggle left the country in pursuit for freedom, equality and equity. As they narrate their personal experiences of the liberation struggle, they write subjectively, portraying a personal experience that can only be conveyed by them as individuals who construct their own social realities.

Therefore, it is important for scholars of today to recognise that though Gusdorf (1956) (as cited in Olney, 1980) suggested that autobiography is subject to certain conditions and limits which can be unsubstantiated in recent studies, he paved the way for autobiographical criticism as expressed in the present study. Olney (1980) suggests that the existence of autobiography is traced back to Augustine's *Confessions*. As a result, the genre of autobiography was also said to be limited to 'great' Western men only. This notion inevitably dismisses and excludes the existence of autobiography in other parts of the world and it also assumes that women, despite of their geographical locations and status in the world are incapable of publishing 'authentic' autobiographies as the features of autobiography are strictly bound to specific limitations and conditions. Despite this argument, over the years, the world has thus far seen many autobiographies published by both men and women, who are equally 'great and small' and for Black women, this can be traced to as far back as Harriet Jacobs in African-American slave narratives up to the present ones under study here. And

these autobiographies have equivalently been critiqued by scholars from diverse fields of study. Therefore, these writings have produced fertile grounds for research by scholars from the social sciences that critic the nuances that underlie self-life narratives.

However, as a result of this diversity, the critique of published autobiographies has been inundated by controversy, thus the foregrounding of the current study. The study joins in the gendered discussion of autobiography, focusing on Namibian autobiographies, written by women who participated in the liberation struggle. For this reason, this study explores autobiography as a genre in literary studies. It presents two theoretical approaches; postcolonial feminist and autobiographical theories in exploring how autobiography is used by Namibian women writers to articulate their unique (herstory) experiences in the struggle for Namibia's independence. In so doing, the study aimed to examine the role of Namibian women in postcolonial Namibia as told from the point of view of these women. To consolidate this study, the analysis applied the two above mentioned theories using two critical domains; subjectivity and the public sphere in selected women's autobiographies. The main argument in this study is that, though autobiography analysis is common globally, it has not received much attention in Namibia in general. For the purpose of this study, only four autobiographies written by Namibian women in the postcolonial era were analysed.

The role of autobiography in literary studies has received increased attention in social studies in recent years. This argument is congruent with Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers' (2015) line of reasoning, who posit that in the present day, there is certainly no doubt that there is an increase in interest in autobiography analysis. This is evident through existing approaches to autobiographies that suggest that the "literary field offers a renewal and sometimes even a revolution

of life writing regarding views of recent world events (the Holocaust, the two World Wars, the postcolonial era, to mention but a few)” (Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, & Ferreira-Meyers, 2015, p. 26). This is evident because many notable and ordinary people across the world have written their own life experiences in reaction to world events that have shaped today’s world, thus, inevitably increasing autobiography analysis in various disciplines.

The above criticism is evidenced by scholarly criticisms that analysed self-narratives such as *Writing the self essays on autobiography and autofiction* by Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers (2015); *Masculinities and femininities in Zimbabwean autobiographies of political struggle: The case of Edgar Tekere and Fay Chung* by Ngoshi (2013); *Memory, Trauma, and Resilience: The Autobiographies of Winnie Madikizela Mandela* by Lebda (2015); *The ‘Absent Presence’ and the art of autobiography: Barack Obama’s dreams from my father* by Nanda (2015); *Memory politics in ‘Where Others Wavered the Autobiography of Sam Nujoma My Life in SWAPO and my participation in the liberation struggle of Namibia* by Du Pisani (2007), the list is inexhaustible.

The above proliferation in published autobiographies is envisaged since the written word tends to easily reach many people across the globe because writers’ intentions are to reach a wide audience so that their individual and societal stories can be heard by many people. The other reason could be that the African autobiography is a result of the liberation struggle of Africa, which brought with it the end of censorship on writings by Africans, both on the African continent and for those in the diaspora. Thus, people are no longer apprehensive about sharing their personal colonial experiences; an act they would not have otherwise freely embarked on under colonial domination. These autobiographies provide readers with a synopsis of the writers’ personal lives and the history of

societies in which these writers lived in. Therefore, in general, autobiographies serve two frontiers; one of a personal nature and the other of the public domain. In so doing, the postcolonial autobiography portrays a personal and public story of resistance and a quest for social justice.

Moreover, there are different reasons as to why one may feel the urge to write an autobiography. Firstly, writers may feel compelled to share their life stories for different reasons. One of these reasons could be that the process of autobiography writing provides the writers with a platform to tell their own stories from their own perspectives, thus empowering themselves and rewriting their own history as opposed to the colonial times when their history was often written for them and in many instances, such history was distorted by the oppressors. This is true in the case of African people who were once colonised, who felt an urgent need to reconstruct their own stories as the images of the African people were previously distorted by their former colonial 'masters'. In advancing this debate, Tyagi (2014) postulates that;

Postcolonialism is also concerned with the production of literature by colonized peoples that articulates their identity and reclaims their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. The task of a postcolonial theorist is to insert the often 'absent' colonized subject into the dominant discourse in a way that it resists/subverts the authority of the colonizer. (p. 45)

In this study therefore, Namhila (1997), Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2012) and Amulungu (2016); as Namibian women of the liberation struggle, recount their experience as children before they joined the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). They move on to recount their exilic experiences and their experiences of the independent Namibia. In so doing, they give a voice to many

women and children who joined the struggle in the 1960s and 1970s. Namhila (1997) and Amulungu (2016) reveal that they wrote their stories to leave a legacy for their children when they are no longer there. Amathila (2012) also argues that her story is written to inspire young Namibian women to pursue their dreams. Shaketange (2009) also wrote her story to leave the footprints of her participation in the liberation struggle in the archives and libraries of the country.

On the issue of who was heard on the national front in the process of decolonising Africa, Fisiak (2011) claims that in the early years of the decolonisation process of the African continent, it has been usually men who told their experiences as African men. However, later on, African women also embraced the benefits of reconstructing their own lives through autobiography; they found it necessary to write about their own experiences from the perspective of women, thus inscribing herstory. This argument is substantiated as Fisiak (2011) argues that women use autobiographical acts as tools for self-empowerment; “to liberate their creative potential and regain the territory for unlimited expression” (p. 183). This is true in instances where women experienced discrimination either on a personal level, national level and or racial level. In order to fight the system and to make their mark, some of them write about their life experiences in autobiographies. In addition, the idea of situated knowledge and context sensitivity by Fisiak (2011) is proven by the above line of reasoning. Situated knowledge, according to Fisiak (2011), is comprised of three methodologies that regard the text as vital in expressing one’s autobiography; the politics of location, self-reflexivity and feminist autobiography. The politics of location refers to the laws and legislation that govern a specific geographical area or country.

In the case of the autobiographies analysed in this study, the politics of location would firstly, refer to the Namibian political situation during the South African apartheid era, its rules and regulations that discriminated against the indigenous people because of their skin colour and ethnic backgrounds. Secondly, it also encompasses the different places in the world that the authors found themselves in and the rules and regulations that governed these locations. Moreover, it also includes the politics of independent Namibia, while self-reflexivity pertains to one's self-contemplation as writers write their own stories. This implies that as the writers of these autobiographies were writing their life narratives and experiences, they had to go through the process of self-examination and reflection on their lives and what their experiences meant for them. As a result the process of writing an autobiography is also a process of recreating one's identity. The feminist autobiography constitutes representational life narratives that are written by radical women who advocate for women's rights in a 'male-dominated' context. Baisnee (as cited in Fisiak, 2013), draws attention to the fact that an autobiography is a place where women record personal growth and challenges that pertain to women in their societies, therefore, making the feminist autobiography border between public and private discourse.

The above-mentioned phenomenon can be glossed out of Amathila (2012) because as she writes about her personal experiences as a public figure in Namibia, she inevitably narrates the story of the nation and how she contributed to the developments that took place before and after independence. Amulungu (2016) also does the same but she writes more about her private life and less about the public sphere that she occupied as an ambassador to different African countries. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) also write their stories following their personal growth from childhood to

adulthood, and as such this is not only about their physical growth but also about their emotional maturity, hence to some extent each rendering the autobiography some form of a Bildungsroman.

However, it should be noted here that the autobiographies cited in this study are not analysed from a radical feminist point of view, but rather from a general African postcolonial feminist perspective that is discussed in the subsequent chapters. For this reason, the concept of postcolonial feminism has been employed in this study. As alluded to by Mishra (2013), the experiences of women in postcolonial countries are different from the experiences of Western women, therefore, the circumstances of a postcolonial woman “should be judged, evaluated, and treated as such, hence ‘postcolonial feminism’ consolidated” (p. 129). This argument, therefore justifies the reason to use postcolonial feminism to analyse Namibian women's autobiographies selected for the present study.

Moreover, just as there are benefits of writing autobiographies, there are also grounds for reading them. Baroque (2015) sums up three benefits of reading an autobiography as follows; firstly, autobiographies are said to give readers an opportunity to learn history through the texts, as the books reveal the eras and experiences of those times in which they were written. Thus, autobiographical texts can serve as historical literature (which is a form of fictionalisation of history to some extent). This, however, Baroque (2015) argues, should be done judiciously, as autobiographies are written from a personal point of view, thus the existence of an element of subjectivity, which has caused controversy in accepting autobiography as a legitimate genre in literary studies. In the case of this study, the authors situated their narratives in postcolonial Namibia, which is the time and space during and after the colonial era of the country. In so doing, the autobiographies teach the readers not only about a personal history, but also the history of the Namibian nation.



Though the texts were written after Namibia had attained her independence the experiences that the authors share also date back to the colonial times of the country. The authors, Namhila (1997), Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2010), and Amulungu (2016) share their private and public experiences with their readers. All of them went through challenging experiences in their quest for survival during the colonial era and they share how they overcame such challenges, as a result, teaching their audience practical ways of overcoming difficult situations. For example; Namhila, Shaketange, Amathila and Amulungu went to foreign countries to escape the apartheid regime and its harsh treatment of the indigenous people of Namibia. This was not just an escapade to save their own skins only, but rather a strategy to fight and prepare for an independent Namibia. In exile, they were also confronted with many challenges as refugees and individuals; again, they had to adopt certain survival skills to endure and to find solutions to such challenges. Not only did they experience difficult situations in exile, but upon their return to independent Namibia, they faced some challenges in a search for their identities, professional, socioeconomic and political difficulties and yet again, they had to deal with the state of affairs.

In addition to the above, Baroque (2015) posits that autobiographical texts provide the readers with information about the authors; they reveal the achievements and struggles of the authors, thus possibly inspiring the readers in many ways. In the four texts; *The Price of Freedom* by Ndeshi Namhila (1997), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Lydia Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Libertine Amathila (2010), and *Taming my Elephant* by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (2016), the writers, to an extent, share private and public encounters with their readers; thus, providing information to their readers about how they went through certain life challenges, consequently, providing possible survival tactics to the reader. However, it should also be noted that the writers

choose what to write about and what to leave out. Furthermore, autobiographical texts tend to be subjective as they are written from a personal point of view and the writers rely on their memories to construct/ reconstruct their experiences. However, this should not be the basis for dismissing autobiography as a literary genre. These features of this genre, in fact, make autobiography different from other genres, thus, bringing in the element of the fictionalisation of history.

Thirdly, according to Baroque (2015), autobiographies allow the writers to leave legacies for future generations. Autobiographies are capable of inspiring readers as they understand the stories of others. These writings become legacies, personal histories that are written in different contexts which become family histories and national histories at the same time. This argument can be deduced from Namhila (1997) who questions whether her children would be able to find a story of Namibians in exile in Namibian libraries. Namhila's wish was to leave a legacy for her children in order to understand the struggles that Namibians went through in fighting for the liberation of the country. In general, as the writers publish their life stories, they leave a piece of themselves and their societies for future generations.

Moreover, Lebdaï (2015) suggests that if a writer encountered a disturbing or a traumatising experience in his/her life, autobiographical writing becomes an antidote that can help the writer to heal from the emotional wounds sustained in that experience, thus providing the postcolonial autobiography a literary and political assignment. For example, Namhila and Amulungu share experiences of loss while they were in exile, as they both lost their mothers when they were in exile and coming to terms with such a tragedy was not an easy task. To compound it all, they also both write about the loss of their husbands; Namhila, through death during the transition to independence

and Amulungu, through a divorce only nine months into her marriage. These events were traumatic to these authors, so autobiography became a tool to voice out their pain and disappointment. In doing so, self-life narration became the remedy that helped the authors to come to terms with their past circumstances and help them heal the emotional wounds that stemmed from such experiences.

The genre of autobiography has been on the increase in Namibia since independence; for example; *The Exile Child* by Nghiwete (2010), *Archeologically Yours* by Beatrice Sandelowsky (2004), *Where Others Wavered* by Sam Nujoma (2001), *Price of Freedom* by Ndeshi Namhila (1997), *Undisciplined Heart* by Jane Katjavivi (2010), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Lydia Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Libertine Amathila (2010), *Taming my Elephant* by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (2016), just to name a few. Therefore, this study critically analysed the critical concepts of herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia using four of these autobiographies.

The focus of this study was on *Price of Freedom* by Namhila (1997), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Amathila (2010), and *Taming my Elephant* by Amulungu (2016). The purpose of this analysis, therefore, was to explore the issues of subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia as represented by the selected autobiographies.

This chapter explains the orientation of this study, the statement of the problem, the research questions that guided the study, the significance, limitations, and delimitations of the study, and the definitions of terms that are prominently used in this study.

## 1.2 Orientation of the study

Recent literature has shown that autobiography as a genre has come a long way. According to Leb dai (2015), the concept of autobiography was not always received by literary traditionalists as belonging to the distinguished practice of literature. It was viewed as a report, or simply a personal diary of the writer. However, today this artistic expression has progressed into a genre that has developed its own theorists, theories, critics, and specialists. Furthermore, Leb dai (2015) posits that autobiographical studies have played a very important role in establishing autobiographical texts as literary, thus emphasising it as a genre. To this effect, Latha (2013) argues that autobiography as a genre follows a certain sequel, for example; first-person narration and the story is told in a chronological order and its emphasis is placed on the 'I' or first person. Moreover, Leb dai (2015) maintains that South African, African-American (slave narratives) and women's autobiographies of the postcolonial era in particular, have played a critical role in advancing the autobiographical genre. In these writings, the writers tell their personal stories to the world within the specific colonial and postcolonial political and social contexts. This line of argument indicates that writers of autobiographies are part and parcel of a larger society, whose experiences are intertwined with those of their society. Though, this is the case of autobiography writing, it should be noted that individuals' experiences diverge within society, therefore, if people from the same communities who lived in that community at the same time wrote their autobiographies, some of their shared experiences would differ because experience and its impact differ from one individual to the next.

There are many genres (fifty-two) that fall under the category of life writing as posited by Smith and Watson (2001). For the purpose of this study, the term autobiography and memoir (as they are

closely related) need to be briefly explained as postulated by Smith and Watson (2001). The memoir is defined as a mode of writing that “historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” (p. 198). Though in contemporary jargon the terms autobiography and memoir are sometimes used interchangeably, there exist distinctions between the two terms that need to be highlighted. The ‘I’ in memoir as postulated by Smith and Watson (2001) is more related to reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. The ‘I’ in autobiography, though relational to others, especially in female narratives is more subjective and more personal to the life of the author. However, the life narratives selected for this study will be interchangeably termed as autobiographies / life narratives.

The Namibian experience in autobiographical writing and analysis is still in its infancy, therefore, a small number of autobiographies have been critically analysed. This insinuation is supported by Winterfeldt and Vale (2011), who posit that the literary genres such as the novel, poetry and autobiography only emerged towards the end of the apartheid regime in Namibia. Some Namibians felt the need to share their Namibian postcolonial experiences and they did so through writing and publishing their autobiographies. Congruent with the argument of the Namibian experience with autobiographical writing, Winterfeldt and Vale (2011) further argue that after independence, some Namibians took it upon themselves to tell, through autobiographical texts, their individual experiences in the apartheid society. The aforementioned autobiographical writers selected for this study take the reader through their life experiences in exile and in post independent Namibia.

In this study, the autobiographies were also used as literary tools to document the liberation struggle and the individual experiences of these women both in the public and private spheres. However, autobiography as a genre has been plagued with criticism; one of the contentions that gave rise to such criticism is the element of subjectivity embedded in autobiographical texts. This criticism is due to the fact that it is difficult to attain complete subjectivity or objectivity in self-life narratives. However, writers relate to their personal experiences in social contexts, therefore, historical facts are used to corroborate the narrations. Contributing to this criticism, Raditlhalo (2015) postulates that the autobiographical act is different from fiction in that in autobiography, the 'truth' is its core motivation above all, since the reading public may make it a point to check for factual accuracy (or inaccuracy) hence the authors tend to tell the truth as far as their memories can remember. It is also nevertheless, a challenge to avoid subjectivity in personal narratives as the authors' remembrances are the sources of information from which the authors source information on what was and what might have been. This argument, however, does not discredit autobiography as a genre, for it is generally individuals that create their different realities. For example; social constructivist theorists in social studies believe that there is no social reality without individuals to construct such reality. According to Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) (as cited in Amineh & Asl, 2015);

Social constructivism is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals. This theory assumes that understanding, significance, and meaning are developed in coordination with other human beings. The most important elements in this theory are (a) the assumption that human beings justify their experience by creating a model of the social world and the way that it functions and,

(b) the belief in language as the most essential system through which humans construct reality. (p. 9)

The above argument is relevant in the process of writing an autobiography because writers use their own experience and the understanding of their world to construct and reconstruct their experiences. Therefore, life experiences are quite personalised. A common experience can be narrated by individuals differently; as a result, the truth is subjective as individuals can express the same encounter differently. Thus, subjectivity does not refute autobiography as a literary genre, but rather as one of the characteristics that differentiate it from other genres. Nichols (as cited in Mlambo, 2015), maintains that autobiographies must be critically evaluated through historical evidence. It should be understood from the onset that writers share their public and private lives with their readers; as a result, the public if need be, can corroborate content with context; and experiences can be compared with the history of the time-frame the authors write about. The personal does not necessarily need to be authenticated since in many instances the personal lives are in the mind of the writer. The mixture of memory, history, and knowledge, therefore, enable writers of the selected texts to write their autobiographies.

Contributing to the debate of subjectivity in autobiography, Smith and Watson (2010, p. 13) posit that “to reduce autobiographical narration to facticity is to strip it of the densities of rhetorical, literary, ethical, political, and cultural dimensions.” As a result, the researcher analysed the selected autobiographies bearing in mind the individual experiences, backgrounds, political and cultural dimensions. Consequently, the study also analysed how successfully the writers used autobiographical tenets in their accounts. Accordingly, autobiographical subjectivity was explored

through the concepts of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency as suggested by Smith and Watson (2010, p. 21).

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The issue of gender inequality in Namibia is at the heart of many political, social and economic platforms. On gender equality, Office of the President (2004) declares that; “Namibia is a just, moral, tolerant and safe society, with legislative, economic and social structures in place that eliminate marginalisation and ensure peace and equity between women and men, the diverse ethnic groups, and people of different interests”, (p. 108). However, women in the world in general, and Namibia in particular are seen as subordinate citizens of the world’s population in many countries. This argument is supported by the UNICEF (2007) supplementary report on the state of the world’s children 2007 that highlights three challenges that are quite precarious to Namibian women and girls. These issues are; gender-based violence, the multiple impacts of HIV and AIDS on women and girls and gender inequality in political participation. These issues hamper the country’s success in attaining the Millennium Development goals (MDGs) and Vision 2030 goals. UNICEF (2007) argues that the belief of women’s inferiority is entrenched in the minds of many men and women alike, thus holding back “the nation’s development since half its population is not enabled to actively contribute and participate towards this development” (UNICEF, 2007, p. 2). It is in light of the above problem that this study was conducted with the aim of highlighting the personal challenges of four women of the liberation struggle from their own perspectives, especially in view of the third challenge which is gender inequality in political participation.



The present study traced back the lives of four Black Namibian women from the colonial era to independent Namibia, analysing their involvement in the politics of the country and how they overcame the challenges they faced in their different life journeys as articulated in their autobiographies. Autobiography in this study is thus seen as a tool of self-empowerment for these women as they publicly share their private lives and how they fared in the public realm.

Secondly, though Namibia has been independent for a couple of years now (28 years as of the year 2018), the academic sphere is deficient in the criticism of gendered constructions of the self. This means that the autobiographical act, its criticism, and consequences are important in literary studies; however, they are understudied in Namibia, which is a cause for concern. In advancing this argument, Krishnamurthy and Vale (2018), postulate that there is “a huge gap in the literature on Namibian writing since national independence” (p. 1). Also, according to Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers (2015, p. 7), “the present avalanche of autobiographical writing indicates that our time has a great interest in questions of self and identity.” In spite of this rush in autobiographical criticism, this trend is not as popular in Namibia as it is in many parts of the world. A gap in literature was identified in women autobiography analysis in the Namibian context, which necessitated this study. Though the questions of female subjectivity, agency, and history in making in African studies and the general public discourse have been gaining attention in recent studies, such attention had not been accorded to Namibian autobiographies in general and women's self-narratives in particular.

On the surge of life narratives, Smith and Watson (2010) postulate that there has been an increase of scholarly writings on autobiographical texts. Likewise, the world has also for a long time now seen a

plethora of postcolonial and feminist literary and textual analysis, therefore, the researcher of the current study posits that Namibia is yet to significantly occupy a niche in this phenomenon. Thus, there was a critical need for an analysis as the one in this research study.

Therefore, this study was necessitated by the general deficiency in the academic literature of female autobiographical analysis in Namibia, particularly capturing the essence of how the autobiography is used as a literary tool. Autobiography analysis in general and female autobiography in particular and its significance are important, but understudied, which is a cause for concern. As a result, the study attempted to narrow the gap in literature in autobiographical analysis in general, and in female narratives in particular, with a specific focus on 'herstory' as written by Namhila (1997), Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2010) and Amulungu (2016). Given the above statement of the problem, the purpose of this literary study was to analyse how Namibian women of the liberation struggle presented their exilic experiences through the literary genre of autobiography. The elements of subjectivity and the public sphere were analysed using the autobiography theory and the postcolonial-feminist theory.

## **1.4 Research questions**

This study explored the themes of memory, subjectivity and the public sphere in female autobiographies of the liberation struggle in Namibia as it envisaged answering the following questions:

- How do Namibian women writers represent the ‘self’ and subjectivity through the use of the self-life narratives?
- How did the authors of the selected texts reclaim and recreate the public sphere in postcolonial Namibia?
- How do the issues and concerns that were raised through the selected autobiographies impact on nation building in Namibia?

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

Female autobiography criticism is quite significant in literary studies since it allows scholars to engage in an in-depth exploration of the arguments and concealed nuances of the intentions of women’s autobiographical acts. Using the postcolonial feminism and autobiography theories makes this study noteworthy as well, as it explores the infrequently divulged experiences and participation of Namibian women in the liberation struggle. Such exploration aids literary scholars to comprehend and appreciate how societal masculinities and femininities in autobiographical works interplay as stipulated by narrators in the published autobiographies. Therefore, reading autobiography has many

purposes such as; it has the power to inspire readers, through the challenges that the author(s) went through and how they solved the problems and challenges they encountered.

Autobiographies may open doors for reconciliation as the authors of the chosen autobiographies went through challenging experiences related to the colonial era in Namibia, experiences that are traumatizing even though they contributed towards the liberation struggle of the nation. According to Ngoshi (2013), autobiography allows authors to “define the self by positioning themselves strategically along the historical and cultural continuum” (p. 120). As a result of this argument, I, therefore, argue that this study is quite significant in that the chosen autobiographies messages resonate with the history of the Namibian nation and the role played by the authors in shaping that history. This sentiment is also echoed by Lopičić (n. d.) who argues that “when the subject is silenced by the forces more powerful than himself, the autobiographical narrative may give voice to pain, anger, and desire” (p. 129). The women who authored the autobiographies selected for this study make use of autobiography to reveal their individualised painful recollections of colonialism and the liberation struggle thereof. They unapologetically share their anger, anxieties and perhaps the joys they experienced in their search for freedom and self-definition, and their subsequent lives in independent Namibia.

This study greatly contributes to English and literary studies in general in Namibia. The literature on autobiographical studies has largely critiqued the argument of autobiography as a literary genre and the element of subjectivity in autobiography. According to Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers (2015, p. 7), “the present avalanche of autobiographical writing indicates that our time has a

great interest in questions of self and identity.” Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the intrinsic elements of autobiography in general and women's autobiography in Namibia.

Moreover, this study contributes to the body of literature by considering subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia. From this perspective, therefore, autobiography analysis does not stop at whether autobiography should be categorised as a literary genre or not, but also encompasses the issues of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency as suggested by Smith and Watson (2001; 2010). Below is a brief explanation of the terms above as envisaged by Smith and Watson (2001).

Autobiography is a construction of lived experiences and the narrator is the best constructor of their own life experiences into a coherent whole. Therefore, Smith and Watson (2001) argue that memory in autobiography is more than just personal; it is “mediated through memory and language, “experience” is already an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (p. 24). Also, Identity is imperative in autobiography subjectivity because according to Smith and Watson (2001), in autobiographical writing, the authors demonstrate how they negotiate fictions of identity and resistances to constraints of a given identity in presenting her or himself as a gendered subject, or a racialised subject, or an ethnic subject.

Moreover, memory is also pivotal in this study since without memory, the narrator of an autobiography will be devoid of a means to narrate the lived life, as memory authenticates the remembered life and also memory is contextual as Smith and Watson (2001) argue, “acts of remembering take place at particular sites and in particular circumstances” (p. 18). Moreover, the

issue of space in this study entails the geographic places and epochs that the authors lived in. Furthermore, embodiment involves the material body of the narrator “as the body is the site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied. And life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects” (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 37).

In addition to these concepts, is the notion of agency which relates to the fact that narrators are human beings that possess freewill to actively participate in their own lives and they are active participants in the transmission of cultural scripts and models of identity. However, as argued by Smith and Watson (2001), the issue of free choice is complicated and a debatable one as individuals write their stories through cultural scripts and strictures that are available to them, which in turn dictates to them how to present themselves in the public domain. These constraints thus bring the issue of free-choice into disrepute as it seems that the narrator might be devoid of complete free choice to represent the self. This study consequently, critically analysed four autobiographies that were written by Namibian women whose life experiences during the colonial era denote limited choices. However, they embraced the available choices and made the most out of them.

Proponents of the autobiography analysis postulate that autobiographies occupy a significant role in literary studies. Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers (2015) contribute to the debate on the significance of analysing autobiographies by postulating that:

Autobiographical texts increasingly attract critical attention, and work on autobiography from a number of perspectives has become a vital area of research, engaging in questions about what is private and public along with notions of truth and fiction, identity and

authenticity, as well as in discussions of what constitutes experience and narration, and theories concerning the very boundaries and limits of the genre. (p. 7)

This argument is relevant to this study as the four autobiographies selected for this analysis captured the attention of the researcher in critically analysing the messages they brought forth; as it tackled the issues of the public sphere, subjectivity, experience, memory, identity, agency and embodiment in female narratives of the liberation struggle. In addition, the study also contributes to research areas commonly studied within the domain of English studies; literary analysis and criticism surrounding autobiography as a genre. Although much is known about autobiographical criticism in general, not much has been written about the postcolonial female autobiography in Namibia.

The purpose of this study was thus to explore the issues of subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives in the Namibian liberation struggle. The significance of this literary analysis and self-life narratives in literature studies cannot be overstated. According to Winterfeldt and Vale (2011), literary narratives form artistic ways of knowing society and the social world. As narrators reconstruct their past experiences, Winterfeldt and Vale (2011) suggest that “the fashioning of the narrative, the modelling of the story, re-enacts reality. It reflects the act of intellectual appropriation of the world by aesthetic means” (p. 85).

The selected texts in this study were used as tools for self-identification within the larger society in general. Winterfeldt and Vale (2011) further argue that the literary work encompasses the social structural treatment of the author’s view of her story and her identification. Olasakinju (2011) also affirms that Africans in the past were misrepresented and portrayed inappropriately in non-African

literature. The same could be said of African women, in particular. However, the tables have been turned since the inception of postcolonial literature. Africans, in general, and, noteworthy, female writers now share their experiences through the autobiography genre. The chosen texts heighten shared humanity, and the lifestyles of the authors are portrayed as distinctive and dynamic.

Besides the above arguments, there are several other reasons why this study is significant. Firstly, the autobiographical analysis is classic for historical reasons. The chosen texts depict the lives of the narrators before and after the independence of Namibia, thus contributing to the historical knowledge of the country. Olatunji (2010) states that history is of great importance in postcolonial discourse as the history of postcolonial subjects helps the readers understand the narratives of such subjects. History is paramount in any given society as it allows human beings to learn from their past mistakes in order to change the future for the benefit of humanity. Woodson (as cited in Olatunji, 2010, p. 127) further contends that “If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world and it stands the danger of being exterminated”.

Therefore, it is imperative that Namibians conduct studies like the one presented in this study so as to preserve the history of the country and its inhabitants for the benefit of future generations. This means that the Namibian history needs to be reaffirmed in academic, social, economic, cultural and political spheres in order to disseminate the history of the country to all Namibians and the world at large. Accordingly, knowledge creation and dissemination are of great importance in any given society. Thus, this study contributes to the body of knowledge in Namibian autobiographical and literary analysis. The findings and recommendations from this study will benefit intellectuals in the field of literature and African studies in general by providing them with ideas for further research.



## 1.6 Limitations of the study

This study is limited to subjectivity and the public sphere in four female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia. This study is limited to; *The Price of Freedom* by Namhila (1997), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Amathila (2010) and *Taming my Elephant* by Amulungu (2016). Thus, not all themes and autobiographical elements could be studied in-depth in this present study. Another constraint was time; due to the fact that scholarly qualifications are limited to a specified time frame, this study could only analyse four autobiographies in order to complete the study within the given time frame. Therefore, the research findings cannot be generalised to all women's autobiographies written in Namibia, Africa in general or women's autobiographies the world over.

## 1.7 Delimitations of the study

This study is not a complete analysis of all autobiographies written by Namibian women of the liberation struggle, but rather about the personal perspectives of four autobiographies written in English by four Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle. Though there are various autobiographies written in Namibia by Namibians, this study was limited to; *The Price of Freedom* by Namhila (1997), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Amathila (2010) and *Taming my Elephant* by Amulungu (2016). This selection was limited to autobiographies that were written in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century besides Namhila who wrote towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, all the four narrators joined the liberation struggle

between 1962 and 1977. These narrators contributed in their own ways towards the independence of Namibia. This limited selection of texts was intended to afford the researcher research manageability. This study did not focus on men autobiographies as the researcher felt that there is more urgency to analyse women's autobiographies, as in general, men autobiographies have been analysed since the recognition of autobiography as a literary genre. Though the general literature of autobiography criticism was analysed in this study, the presidency was given to the literature that dealt with women's autobiography. This was because the four autobiographies that were analysed were written by women. Moreover, there are many theories that can be used to analyse autobiography, but this study only focused on two of them; the autobiography theory and postcolonial-feminist theory. This choice was necessitated by the fact that the researcher felt that the two theories are more closely related to the focus of the study.

## **1.8 Methodology**

This study was conducted through an analysis of four autobiographies; *The Price of Freedom* by Namhila (1997), *Walking the Boeing 707* by Shaketange (2009), *Making a Difference* by Amathila (2010) and *Taming my Elephant* by Amulungu (2016). The four autobiographies were critically analysed using the identified theoretical frameworks; postcolonial feminism and autobiographical theory in general. In addition, scholarly articles and critical works were analysed and interpreted to substantiate the interpretation and evaluation of the four texts.

### **1.8.1 Research design**

This study is a literary analysis of autobiographical texts; therefore, it employed a qualitative, desktop research design, whereby Namibian female autobiographies were analysed. Critical concepts and issues in the works were identified and interpreted using the postcolonial feminism and autobiography genre theories. This made the qualitative research method essential for this study as it dealt with subjective views of the autobiography writers selected for this study. In this case, this analysis was on autobiographies which are inevitably written from a subjective point of view. The study also compared and contrasted experiences articulated in the four autobiographies. The common reasoning process of this analysis was as follows; finding out the messages, facts, reasons, and conclusions conveyed by the autobiographies.

### **1.8.2 Population**

The research population comprised all autobiographies which are written by Namibians women depicting their lives during the country's liberation struggle and after the nation's independence.

### 1.8.3 Sample

The study was restricted to the content analysis of four female autobiographies which are from the colonial and postcolonial era as indicated above, which formed the core period this study was interested in. Purposive sampling, using the criterion sampling technique, was used to choose the sample for this study. The autobiographies were purposely selected. Hashemnezhad (2015) states that in the qualitative content analysis, purposefully chosen texts best inform research questions that are being investigated. Also, the qualitative approach as adopted in this study helped the researcher in reflecting on how the writers of the four autobiographies viewed their social world. Accordingly, Best and Kahn (2006, p. 19) argue that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select those participants who will provide the richest information, those who are most interesting, and those who manifest the characteristics of most interest to the researcher; thus, the choice of the four autobiographical works by the four Namibian women writers. These works tell 'herstory' during the colonial period and the period after independence. The main idea was to identify and interpret the female experience, through the autobiographical act, during the given periods. This research used inductive reasoning, "by which themes and categories emerged from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison" (Best & Kahn 2006, p. 19). Each autobiography was thoroughly analysed in order to formulate the themes from each text. Throughout text analysis, continuous comparisons and evaluations of each writer's text were being conducted.

#### **1.8.4 Procedure**

Due to the nature of the study, a qualitative content analysis was used. As indicated above, Hashemnezhad (2015) states that qualitative content analysis consists of purposively selected texts. In this study, four autobiographies of the women of the liberation struggle in Namibia were selected to inform the research questions that were being investigated. In addition, the analysis was mainly inductive, grounding the examination of topics and themes in the autobiographies, as well as the inferences drawn from them. In this analysis, the researcher paid attention to distinctive themes that were illustrated in the autobiographies. The four autobiographies were critically analysed using a desktop design. This design comprised of an extensive analysis of journal articles and critical works on literature in the form of secondary literature, which was also examined to understand the views of other scholars in literary studies and autobiographical analysis in general. These instruments were used to gather information which was critically scrutinised to write a comprehensive and authentic research study.

#### **1.8.5 Data analysis**

As a desktop literary study, the data were collected through critical reading and analysis of the selected autobiographies by applying the specified theories of literature; autobiographical and postcolonial feminism theories. The autobiographies were carefully read and revised in order to identify relevant information and noted in the margins of the texts. After a detailed analysis of the texts and notes, information from the selected texts was evaluated and listed. Then, through

the list, information about each item was categorised in a way that offered a description of what it was about.

Further, the researcher had to determine whether the categories could be linked in any way and then these categories were listed as themes. Then, the information obtained from each book was compared and contrasted. This analysis procedure enabled the researcher to ensure that the selected texts were analytically examined. I used the texts, the literature reviewed as well as my reasoning to demonstrate how the evidence provided supported the interpretation of the texts. In other words, this study was an argument about the work that expressed my objective perspective, interpretation, judgment and critical evaluation of the four texts I read for this study. The texts were read several times in order to comprehend them. Different portions of each text were highlighted in order to address the themes of herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in the narratives.

#### **1.8.6 Research ethics**

The study did not use human participants, but used autobiographies that are in the public domain. However, the autobiographies were analysed objectively, in order to avoid ridiculing the authors and characters within the works in any way. In addition to this, research findings were not manipulated or misrepresented. Furthermore, in order to address the issues surrounding research ethics, the researcher, as avoided plagiarism, thus all literature cited was accurately cited and

referenced. I also did not have any unrevealed conflict of interest that could have affected the interpretation of the findings.

## **1.9 Chapter summary**

This first chapter provided an introduction and background of the study. which stipulated a broad overview of the study including; the orientation of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, Limitations and delimitations of the study, methodology; which included Research instruments, research design, population, sample, procedure, data analysis and research ethics.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter surveys research that was conducted in autobiographical criticism in the past. Not only does the chapter survey past literature, but it evaluates, expands, compares and contrasts literature that relates to this study as a way of establishing the research gap. As already indicated in the previous chapter, the purpose of this study is to analyse four autobiographies written by four Namibian women; with the main focus on subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia. Cuesta (2011) posits that the term autobiography is used for a practice of life narrative; which celebrates the autonomous individual and the universalising of the meaning of a life story. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the terms life-narratives and autobiography will be used interchangeably. This chapter, therefore, critically explores selected critical literature that constitutes autobiography criticism in general and female autobiography in particular.

This literature review helped to place the relevance of this study in the larger context of what other researchers have already written on this topic. Firstly, the chapter provides an overview of the writing of African literature in relation to literary studies. The chapter moves on to discuss the theories that cement this study; a synopsis of the historical background of autobiography as a literary genre, in general, will be analysed. Furthermore, the questions of subjectivity and the public sphere in



autobiography in general, and in women's autobiography, in particular, are analysed. The study was also approached from the postcolonial-feminist theory, which was analysed and discussed.

## **2.2. Postcolonial African literature**

In order to situate this study, postcolonial African literature in general was briefly discussed. In justifying postcolonial African literature, Olatunji (2010) argues that this literature arose as a result of colonialism, thus postcolonial African literature was a reaction of the colonised peoples of the Africa to colonialism. It became a reactionary theory and practice to the laws that governed the colonised subject. “It comes under the banner of postcolonialism, a theory of oppositionality that encapsulates the totality of practices which characterise the third world nations, especially in Africa, from the inception of colonialism to the present day” (Olatunji, 2010, p.125).

As a consequence, the autobiographies selected for this study are analysed in this view, they are scripts that portray resistance to the apartheid regime in Namibia and they are also discourses of the social injustices and ills experienced in an independent Namibia. These social injustices and ills are more apparent in Namhila (1997) and Amathila (2012) especially in the way they register their annoyance at the gender disparities that continued to rock the country even after independence. Much of African literature has been characterised by the cultural, political and social transformation that has taken place upon the African continent. According to Lindfors

(2010), most literature published from the twentieth century till now in Africa is greatly influenced by the politics of the continent. Shaketange (2009) and Amulungu also depict their colonial experience and reactions to this colonial factor. They too illustrate that identities are not constant by ever shifting and changing according to the circumstances they found themselves in.

In advancing this debate, Asante-Darko (2000) also declares that postcolonial African literature is a combination of resistance and replication; replication referring to the way Postcolonial African literature resembles “European and colonial literary discourse in matters such as thematic concerns, aesthetics, and methodology. It blends revolt and conciliation” (Asante-Darko, 2000, p. 2). However, this study focuses on the former aspect of African literature being a literature of resistance, rather than the latter aspect of imitation.

Also, postcolonialism in this study is interpreted from its conceptualisation by Olatunji (2010) who maintains that “postcolonial writers have made it a major issue to re-inscribe the history of Africa by a subversion of Euro-American concept of history and by celebrating the past of the African peoples” (p. 128). Namhila, Shaketange, Amathila and Amulungu through their autobiographies celebrate the struggles and achievements of Namibians in overcoming the apartheid regime that had wrecked the lives of the indigenous people of Namibia. They write about their cultures, families and the politics of the country. And they also locate themselves as individuals in all these contexts and how they contributed to the making of the Republic of Namibia. Therefore, in this study, autobiography is not only seen as a personal story but, it is also a societal account. The individual narrators’ experiences are intertwined with the

experiences the particular societies that they found themselves in; however, experiences cannot be universalised because perception and interpretation of such experience is very personal.

It is worth noting that individuals live in a social world, therefore, their writing taps on the experiences of their social experiences as individuals and as members of a larger society. On the importance of postcolonial African literature Lindfors (2010) also argues that African writers have not only served as narrators of contemporary political history, but, they have also served as proponents of a far reaching transformation. In corroboration with the above perception, Namhila, Shaketange, Amathila and Amulungu's narratives can be viewed as scripts that advocate for transformation as they reveal social ills such as alcohol abuse and gender discrepancies that are still visible in an independent Namibia today. Also, they write about the colonial experience of many Namibians and the reaction to colonialism, thus articulating the transformation of South West Africa to the Republic of Namibia. They also pronounce a personal transformation as they were uprooted from their motherland to foreign countries. However, they do not remain uprooted, they are also transplanted into different countries they went to, thus transcribing a life of development and grabbing the opportunities that came with such relocation. As a result, not only do they transform from young girls to mature women, they also transform in so many ways through their interactions with different people in different societies. Thus their life experiences and personal development were of a metamorphical nature.

Correspondingly, Gikandi (2010) stipulates that modern African literature resulted from African writers' experiences with the colonial factor. Furthermore, as these African writers were subjects of colonialism, the chief concern in their work was about colonialism. Moreover, Balandier (as cited in Gikandi, 2010) argues that though many changes appeared in the decolonisation era, many African writers still regard the colonial problem as a challenge that social scientists still have to grapple with. In defining postcolonialism, Olatunji (2010) further analyses the concept of postcolonialism in the following manner:

The "post" in postcolonialism is something slightly different from the "post" in a compound word like post-independent. It has an extended meaning. It has interrogative and subversive tendencies. The "post" suggests the prefix "anti". Inherent in postcolonialism is the subversion of existing structures; decentring of established centres and orthodoxies; recognition of and encouragement of plurality of centres; indeterminacy of meaning; interrogation of the process of history, and so on. (p. 126)

The above argument means that the work of the writers from the continent of Africa mostly reflects an African transformation in different African societies. Therefore, African literature in the postcolonial era depict resistance to colonialism in all its forms, central to its philosophy is rebellion against suppressive regimes and the political and social transformation of African societies. In line with this study, women autobiography could be analysed from different angles such as personal history, national history, social and economic factors. These autobiographies could be read as literatures of emancipation; emancipation from colonialism and the patriarchy

systems that have oppressed the women of Africa from diverse social, political and economic backgrounds.

Another argument that Olatunji (2010) brings forth is that African postcolonial literature resists and challenges the Western “ethnocentric philosophy which considers the western culture as the centre of human cultures or a “sommun bonum” that all other cultures must aspire towards. It emphasises the beauty and potentialities of the “third world” cultures tactically pushed to the margins” (p. 127). In so doing, this study celebrates the uniqueness of the diverse cultures of the African people. This is well implied in Amathila (2012) when she writes about how people from other cultures tend to misunderstand and misrepresent the operations and realities of African men and women. Amathila (2012) wrote;

I also decided to tell my story because during my life as a doctor and a government minister, I often came across well-meaning but annoyingly ignorant remarks from people of other cultures, who assumed that every Black person automatically came from grinding poverty. (p. xvii)

Therefore, in retrospect, African literature is also used as a tool to correct misconceptions about the conditions and circumstances of Black African people, in this case, Namibian women. According to Olatunji (2010), this Eurocentric philosophy was advanced by European imperialists for cultural, economic and political reasons. “For instance, it is important for the western imperialists to deny, distort or bastardise the history of the Black race to authenticate their erroneous claims to cultural supremacy, and economic and cultural deprivation of Africans”

(Olatunji, 2010, p. 128). As a result, Olatunji (2010) further posits that postcolonial African literature, thus, challenges Western universalism of the human condition by maintaining a difference that encourages decentredness and cultural plurality.

On the issue of language in postcolonial literature, Lindfors (2010) asserts that many writers have opted to write the African experience in the English, French, Portuguese languages, in general, the languages of the colonisers, for a good reason. Using the languages of the former colonisers has enabled African writing to reach a wider audience since African languages are numerous and fragmented in such a way that if authors chose to write in native languages, they would not be able to communicate with the general world population. As Lindfors (2010) argues on the politics, and literary form in Africa; it was befitting for the writing of the twentieth century to be written in the language of the colonial master as it had to reach the desk of the oppressor, as to teach him/her the 'real' African experience, not the distorted one as written by the colonialist about the African for the African and the wider global audience.

Below Lindfors (2010) explains two patterns that have shaped literary development in African writings. Firstly Lindfors (2010) claims that since the Second World War there has been two patterns in Black Africa in the development of literary studies in the languages of the former colonisers of the African continent. These patterns are characterised by decolonisation of African literature in the two parts of African that first recognised political independence; that is West and East Africa. In these parts of Africa authors embarked on the task of Africanising their literature.

Moreover, Lindfors (2010) maintains South Africans who were in the diaspora also embarked on;

the rapid de-Africanization of South African literary expression as repeated repression at home gave way to a vigorous tradition of protest writing among exiled South Africans abroad. Writers in each area have chosen forms appropriate for conveying a political message to a particular audience and have switched to other forms when environmental changes have altered. Thus, in morphology as well as ideology, literary art has been responsive to the winds of change that swept across sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-twentieth century. The intellectual history of a continent undergoing rapid cultural transformation can be discerned in the significant mutations such literature manifest. (p. 30)

The above argument is pertinent in the autobiographies selected for this study. The authors write in the English language to reach the general Namibian audience and the worldwide audience. Though the books were written after the independence of Namibia in 1990, it is befitting to write in a language that can be understood by the world audience rather than just the national audience. This argument, however, does not dismiss the importance of indigenous languages in nation-building. In Namibia, it is also befitting to write in English since it is the official language of the country. The authors shared their postcolonial experience as a contribution to the Namibian cultural evolution literature and to highlight their personal experience from a broader perspective of the transformation of the Namibian politics, economy, culture, and history.

Still on the issue of language, Dar (2017) posits that African writers “have made a successful use of the European languages and their traditional literary forms in order represent their emotional turmoil and culture shock, the result of their traumatic colonial experience” (p. 613). Namibians also have followed in the footsteps of their African predecessors in taking responsibility in writing their own personal and national history; thus embarking on a literary journey of decolonising the narrative from the African continent. In addition to this, Dar (2017) postulates that postcolonial African writing has thus far received an astounding response from across the globe mainly because Africans themselves are revealing their own experiences of the malicious atrocities committed against them by the coloniser and they do so in international languages that are understood by a wide audience of their readership. In this manner, the people that read this literature worldwide become “emotionally moved by the haunting experience of the African psyche. With the passage of time, African literature evoked gaining ground as is noticeable by the huge amount of material both creative and critical coming out of the press each year” (p. 614). As a matter of fact, the publishing of the autobiographies that are analysed in this study is another contribution of literature from the African continent. Below is the continuation of the literature review of this study through the theoretical framework that cements the analysis of the Namibian women autobiographies.



### **2.3 Theoretical framework**

This section of the study analyses theories that were used to explain and understand autobiographical texts that were selected for this study. The section introduces and analyses the autobiography genre and postcolonial-feminist theories to explain and understand the research problem of this study. The section consists of concepts, their definitions, and reference to appropriate scholarly literature that was used for this study. The research borrows Cutajar's (2008) argument that "knowledge is a source of power, and that we need to come up with pedagogical and academic tools to ensure that disparately positioned individuals/groups within society can voice their experiences and are heard" (p. 27).

In line with the above line of reasoning, the autobiographies explored in the current study are scripts of Black Namibian women that participated in the liberation struggle. Historically, Namibians were colonised firstly by German, then South Africa. This history is summarised in Amathila (2012) and Amulungu (2016) who explain that Namibia suffered under the German and South African occupation for more than a hundred years and Namibians suffered marginalisation in both occupations; during the German invasion over 80,000 Blacks were killed in the Herero/Nama Genocide. During the South African regime, Namibians suffered more under the regime's segregation laws. So, the narratives in this study are regarded as stories of Black women that were once subjected to marginalisation because of their skin colour and also because of their gender, society in general expected them to behave in specific manner and carry out certain roles that are 'reserved' for 'proper' women. These women used their published

autobiographies as tools that gave them a voice to reveal their life experiences as subaltern subjects and as women today in the Republic of Namibia. Therefore, the selected theories provide the researcher with a platform to link the autobiography to the autobiography genre theory and as these works are also postcolonial autobiographies of Black Namibian women, a linkage to the postcolonial-feminist theory was also constructed.

## **2.4 Autobiography as a literary genre**

As will be seen throughout this study, there are challenging issues that surround autobiography as a genre. Among other challenges, Summa-Knoop (2017) particularly points out three of these complications that have constantly concerned the study of autobiography as a genre. Firstly, there exists a question of whether autobiography represents the entire truth of the narrator's life experiences or whether it is somehow fractured by fictional elements. Similarly, Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, Ferreira-Meyers, (2015) argue that modern autobiographical theory focused its attention on the 'troubled boundary between truth and falsehoods, how facts and beliefs are represented'. This remark shows that individuals can narrate their life stories from individualised perspectives, naturally, writing their experiences subjectively. Autobiographies as argued by Summa-Knoop (2017) asks their readers to be involved in a reading mode that is inclusive of the reader's role as a believer with her capability to understand and sympathise and also to provide an intellectual judgement and question the content of the autobiography. Thus, suggesting that not only is the construction of autobiography a complex process but, its reading is an intricate practice too that needs critical analytical lenses. Secondly, is the question of what constitutes an autobiographical narrative, here the question is on its structural conditions.

Therefore, in analysing these autobiographies this study took cognisance of the fact that one's life experiences are quite personal, however, it should be noted that these works depict experiences that are not exclusively individual, but they illustrate experiences that are borne out of social contexts, therefore, identity is depicted as relational to significant others. Also, most of the experiences presented follow a chronological order, in which the narrators presented their experiences from childhood in colonial Namibia, to adulthood at the helm of independence and their experiences thereafter. Thirdly is "the problem of personal identity and the related question of what counts as a self: what is an autobiographical self? Are we autobiographical selves? Can autobiographies truly reveal something more about who we are?" (Summa-Knoop, 2017, p. 2). Thus, also in analysing the selected autobiographies, the issue of identity is one that requires a 'proper' analysis as 'I' especially as presented in female autobiographies might connote more than the narrating subject. With these challenges in mind, the current study will also attempt to answer these reservations in the analysis as depicted by the four narrators.

The issue of the fictionalisation of history has plagued autobiography, doubting its legitimacy as a representation of truth; which in turn, has challenged the genre of autobiography for a long time leading many scholars to question its authenticity. These challenges have also been compounded, according to Gurses (2017), by "the consistency of authorial identity, the involvement of temporal distance and the complications involved in translating a lived memory into a text" (p. 117). Therefore, this section reviewed the literature that addresses the challenges that bring about the debate that surrounds the autobiographical genre.

Many scholars have critically analysed the literary genre of autobiography, with some of these scholars disputing its relevance as a genre and some supporting it as a legitimate literary genre that has stood the test of time. Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) maintains that the genre of autobiography is laden with challenges, especially regarding the element of truth-telling that it portrays and its authenticity when it narrates the stories of women and other minority groups. Autobiography, according to Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) is portrayed in post-modern and postcolonial literature as a canonised genre which has been disapproved for its agentic nature, language restrictions, the historical implications, and colonial/ patriarchal past.

Again, another argument that Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) brings forth is the controversy surrounding African autobiography, which some scholars dispute, they claim that African autobiography can only exist in the shadow of Western autobiography. However, such claims are dismissed by Olney (1980), who asserts that African autobiography is an authentic genre, that is independent of the Western autobiography.

This support is echoed in Latha (2013), who maintains that the autobiography genre holds an important position in literary studies. According to Latha (2013), autobiography also holds an important position among the writing of Black Americans, similarly, this can be said for Black narrative traditions in general. Black autobiography is regarded as a powerful force in contemporary culture as it has thus far attracted criticism and commentary from various viewpoints such as; historical, ideological, literary, philosophical, sociological and psychological. Berryman (1999) echoes the same sentiments by stating that there was a shift of autobiography from being limited to

Western patriarchy systems to a universal genre that encompasses life writings of all the people in world, and as such “this diversity attests to the genre’s complexity, the difficulties in defining its varieties, and the mines of information and insight contained” (2013, p. 44).

The above argument implies that autobiography has a history of controversy about its legitimacy as a genre. Though a plethora of information can be obtained from autobiographical writing, its history is shrouded with uncertainty whether to categorise it as a genre or not. Partly, this study was also necessitated by such doubt. The selected life-narratives are regarded as autobiographies thus challenging the notion that marginalised people are incapable of ‘properly’ constructing such writing.

By way of illustrating this debate on autobiographical genre, McCooey (2017) debates on the issue of off-limits in an autobiography by arguing that the matter of limits spearheaded the study of life writing because “the rise of auto/biography studies in the 1970s and 80s was in large part a concern with the generic and disciplinary limits of what constituted both auto/biography and ‘literature’” (p. 277). In explaining these limits, McCooey (2017) posits that they (limits) border between literary and factual writing, between narrative as a literary device and a narrative as a lived experience. This study focuses on the narrative as a lived experience as it analyses autobiographies of selected women of the liberation struggle in Namibia in an attempt to critically delve each one’s involvement and experience in the struggle. However, the reconstruction of these experiences; whether lived or imagined, are a depiction of how the narrators perceived their personal histories, the narrators share their experiences in a subjective manner as personal experiences can only be better shared.

Furthermore, McCooey (2017) explains that another limit that is of concern in autobiography is between autobiography and fiction. However, on the doubt whether an autobiography is truth or fiction, Mlambo (2015) maintains that the doubt that overshadows autobiography on its truthfulness can be cleared by accepted standards of historical evidence. Thus, much of the information in the selected autobiography for this study can be, if need be, corroborated by Namibian historical documents. In illustrating how autobiography can be authenticated through historical evidence, Mlambo (2015) compares claims made by Frederick Douglass in his autobiography with a historical presentation of the slave institution and the Black family under slavery as a verification of Douglass' claims. This argument implies that if in doubt about the level of truthfulness written in any autobiography text, one may tap on the history of the community. As can be borrowed from Mlambo (2015) in the example of this slave narrative, autobiography "is a rich resource, a gem of plantation truth of how slaves lived, recorded by slaves themselves and attested as true by many" (p. 264). The same argument can be put forward for postcolonial feminist autobiography, that finally the women that experienced the struggle for liberation write their own experiences and this first-hand information is valuable as it captures the subjective truth of each individual as they encountered different events and sometimes similar events but felt and perceived differently by each individual narrator.

In an attempt to shed some light on the history of autobiography, Singh (2015) posits that the writing of autobiography stems from the Catholic ritual of confessions. This is because the historical autobiographies addressed issues of confessions of sin, expression of remorse and guilt. St Augustine is said to have been the pioneer of the autobiographical genre when he wrote his autobiography entitled 'Confessions' in CE 379. In German, Schwalm (2014) affirms that the term *Selbstbiographie*

(autobiography) made its first appearance in the collective volume *Selbstbiographien berühmter Männer* (self-biographies of famous men) in 1796. D'Israeli spoke of "self-biography" in 1796. Taylor, a critic of D'Israeli proposed the term "autobiography". These coinages, according to Schwalm (2014), reflect a concern with a mode of writing only just considered to be a distinct species of (factual) literature at the time.

Moreover, not until the mid-18th century was autobiography separated from historiography as well as from a general notion of biography. The question of what constitutes autobiography has also been an ongoing debate among literary studies scholars. Smith and Watson (2010) also trace it back to 1797 when William Taylor of Norwich reviewed Isaac Disraeli's *Miscellanies*. Henceforth, 'autobiography' was defined by Robert Southey, who coined it from three Greek words, *auto-biographia*, meaning "self-life-writing" in 1809. These words were combined to describe a literature already existing under other names (memoirs and confessions, for example). Throughout this period to the present day, the term has been defined by scholars in different ways. Many scholars have debated the simplicity of Robert Southey's definition and have argued that there is more to autobiography than simply a narration of one's life.

In addition, as stated by Schwalm (2014), the development of autobiography as a literary genre and critical term coincides with what was frequently called the advent of the modern subject around 1800. It evolved as a genre of non-fictional, yet 'constructed' autodiegetic narration wherein, a self-reflective subject enquires into his/her identity. In other words, the narrator is also the protagonist in the narration of his/her life. For that reason, some critics argued that autobiography was not factual as

it was subject to ‘reconstruction of the narrator’s life by the narrator. This argument may be valid in that a narrator may exaggerate their self-worth because published autobiographies are in the public domains. It is almost impossible to narrate a story of one’s life and make yourself look bad in front of the whole world. Even dictators may reconstruct their stories in such a way that they represent themselves as heroes and their tyrannical actions may be depicted as heroic and selfless. Consequently, writers of autobiographies affirm and reaffirm their identities through their texts. This argument is substantiated by Dobos (2010) who posits that even today;

The legitimacy of the contraposition in literary works between the factual and the fictitious, between recollection and imagination, between denominations and the denominated, between language and reality, between image and representation, and between the intratextual and extratextual worlds has become questionable. (Dobos, 2010, p. 7)

In this argument, Dobos (2010) implies that there is a fine line in the relationship between what is the truth and what is fictitious in autobiography; as it may be difficult for writers to sometimes clearly discern what was real and what is assumed as they recall and reconstruct their past experiences. In some cases, an experience might have taken place too long ago that the narrator might not be able to recall it as it happened, so in the process of attempting to make the experience meaningful, the narrator may embellish it with language.

Again, the issue of polished language in writing could create an element of artificial memories. Artificial memories could be created in the sense that the reader might misconstrue the disclosed



memory due to language use and usage. To compound this rift, Dobos (2010) argues that the complex interrelationship between the autobiographical texts with the same setting and reality is debatable. In analysing the autobiographies chosen for this study one should remember that the settling is not the same as the narrators portray their experiences as exilic. They were frequently moving from one location to the next and their reality also constantly shifted, however, in constructing their stories they tried to make them a comprehensive whole though their experiences constantly shifted geographically, emotionally, socially and politically.

The definition of autobiography and its intrinsic inferences has been a contested one. Therefore, Smith and Watson (2010) argue that autobiographical texts are complex and “require reading practices that engage narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical or chronological trajectory of the text” (p. 13). Hence, Latha (2013) posits that “all autobiography, in fact, communicates on several levels at once; it is simultaneously a private history, artful story, and rich outpouring of energies” (p. 46). It is a private history because the authors share their life experiences with their readers, it is an artful story because as during the writing process, the author is mindful of his/her readership, it is a story that requires a careful selection of words, a strategic flow of events, the plot, the setting, the general literary elements need to be adhered to so that the story appeals to the attention of the reader. In autobiographies, writers also share with their audiences their emotions as they recount their experiences, thus, compounding the debate of subjectivity in autobiography.

Similarly, Schwalm (2014) posits that in detail, autobiography as a literary genre signifies a retrospective narrative that undertakes to tell the author's own life, or at least a substantial part of it, with the aim of (at least in its classic version) to reconstruct his/ her personal development within a given historical, social and cultural framework. This implies that the process of autobiographical writing is a complex one; it is a progressive process that requires the writer to reflect on her life experiences in a contextualised manner. Contextualised, in the sense that individuals live in societies that one way or another shape their experiences thus identifying them as individuals whose individuality is shaped to an extent by society.

Congruent with the above arguments, Lopičić, (n. d.) explains the features of autobiography in the following manner; firstly, autobiography naturally consists of fictions that are part and parcel of one's life, these are; fears, dreams, ideas, hopes, and reveries. These fictions (are neither lies or truths) account for the way one would view their experiences, their aspirations, successes and regrets, therefore the account of the self, 'I' that is the narrator of autobiography and thus cannot be ignored in the making of the identities that make the writer who they are. These elements are quite significant in the lives of life-narrators, thus cannot be ignored. Secondly, for the genre of autobiography to exist, the author is the subject of the accounts that are written, thus separating it from biography.

The third feature is that autobiography has an introspective character, the author analyses the self. As stipulated by Lopičić (n.d.) "autobiographies present a form of identity quest in which the author is trying to answer the question best formulated by Esmeralda Santiago, "how do I become me." This means that the element of the introspective character is imperative in autobiographical writing. This

identity quest is better stipulated by Namhila (1997) who admits an identity crisis that seem to have been caused by the colonial factor and her exilic experiences she deliberated that “if I am lost, if my past is lost amongst historical events over which I have no control, who then shall make or remake my history. This story was the beginning of a mission in search of my uprooted roots” (p. 199). The identity question is a critical one, especially amongst African people who experienced and were affected by colonialism and its laws that marginalised people because of their skin colour.

The above-mentioned retrospective process calls for the reading of autobiography from a historical, social and cultural perspective. Humm (2004) asserts that all mobilities, including literary mobilities are histories of cultural changes. Conscious of this transformation, in this study, autobiography was perceived through the lenses of Smith and Watson (2010) who argue that the process of writing an autobiography is a complex one, since the writers become “both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation” (p. 1). As a result, in analysing the selected texts, the researcher took cognisance of the two hats that the writer wears as he/she reconstructs his/her life experiences. In advancing the discussion on the autobiography genre, Muchiri (2014) remarked that:

Life writing has increasingly become a popular genre which calls for sustained interrogation and analysis of the narratives produced. The autobiography is not only the story of the narrating subject, but can be read as the history of the society within which the subject writes or lives. (p. 83)

The above quotation shows that autobiographies, with emphasis on the selected texts, are intertwined with society and its history. Therefore, as narrators recount their life encounters in that particular

society, they inevitably refer to the history and experiences of their societies. Similarly, Cuesta (2011) argues that the autobiography is important for verifying authors' lives and experiences as they are interconnected with society and they can thus be understood from many different angles. Therefore, Cuesta (2011, p. 1) defines autobiography as “a term for a particular practice of life narrative, a concept which celebrates the impact of the autonomous individual, but also the universalising meaning of the life story.” This argument makes autobiographical texts a central tool for understanding the multiplicity of individuals and society.

## **2.5 Exploring subjectivity as the chief element in autobiography**

This study also explored the suggested texts from three angles; the fictionalisation of history through the aspects of private and the public spheres, and subjectivity. It is worth noting that though these self-life narratives, originate from real-life encounters, they are inevitably subjective as they are narrated from a personal point of view. Accordingly, Holland and Kensinger (2010) assert that the emotional content of an experience can influence the way in which an event is remembered. Also, emotions and emotional goals experienced at the time of autobiographical retrieval can influence the information recalled. Therefore, the selected texts were analysed with the awareness of the question of subjectivity within autobiographical texts.

The selected autobiographies are from the onset subjective as they are distinguished through gender. They were written by Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle. This fact also

makes them subjective as they were deliberately selected by the researcher of the current study. However, it is their content that primarily makes them subjective as will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

These autobiographies portray these women as strong, courageous and hardworking. These characteristics are seen through the development of the individual narrators. Congruent with this argument, Adak (2007) maintains that “women’s autobiographies center on tracing personal history as a development, at the end point of which the self may or may not reach a certain level of maturation” (p. 28). This argument is visible in the selected autobiographies as even at the end of the narratives, the narrators see themselves as shifting subjects whose life will continue to present them with opportunities for growth. Amulungu states that she was ready to face more challenges with each day. Namhila sees her autobiography as the beginning for her quest for an identity. Shaketange signs off her autobiography differently by stating the reason she wrote her autobiography but her autobiography in general progresses from childhood to adulthood. And, Amathila does not sign off at retirement, she illustrates a life of continued duty, making a difference in the lives of domestic workers; therefore, also her autobiography shows a continuity of experiences.

The selected autobiographies are largely subjective as the narrators reveal the crisis they went through in their lives. Experiences that are emotional tend to be quite subjective as the authors reveal the meanings of such experiences in their lives. These emotional experiences do not only leave the narrators scarred for life in some cases, but their intensity may also leave the reader filled with emotion thus in the end sympathising with the writer.

In addition to the question of subjectivity, autobiographical texts also encompass the notion of the public sphere. Garreta (2008) maintains that narrators portray one or both of the following images; the public sphere and the private sphere. In so doing, this study also interrogated the aspect of the public sphere as could be inferred from the chosen self-life narratives of the female experience in Namibian autobiographies. The study also examined the texts, taking cognisance of the fact that the narrators are part and parcel of a larger society, with emphasis on their roles as females in the public and private spheres.

## **2.6 Examining memory as an element of subjectivity in women autobiography**

In the literature on autobiography criticism, the relative importance of the element of memory has been subject to considerable discussion. The reliance on memory in autobiographical writing has been subject to intense debate within some branches of social studies such as literary studies, sociology, and psychological studies. Dobos (2010) suggests that the human memory recollects the past experiences and the sociocultural aspects of such experiences through language. Therefore, the ‘perceived reality’ of the writer’s encounters is created by acts of imagination and the experience obtained through the knowledge names of entities, together with the point of view. Moreover, Dobos (2010) continues to argue that “language is the source, the carrier, and the recreator of memories, so it would be a mistake to assume that, as opposed to fiction, autobiography reports about events that preceded language” (p. 9). However, it can also be argued that memory is the carrier of experiences since, without memory, such experiences cannot be articulated by individuals.

Consequently, though language is the medium in which the narrators use to articulate life experiences, language does not pave the way for such memories. Rather, people encounter certain events in their lives, then, through remembrance are they able to recall and translate such experiences into language. Therefore, in line with this argument, language helps to construct the meaning of human lives.

Dobos (2010) continues to argue that the use of language makes the gap between intended meaning and actual meaning, comprehensible for the readers. Therefore, this argument implies that there is a difference between what the writer says and what actually happened, which thus means that there exists a gap between the written self and the intended self. “The tension arising between the self that has been made the cognitive object of narration and the self-forming in the text calls for an epitaphic reading of the autobiographical subject doubled by the creative operation of language’ (p. 9). Dobos’ (2010) argument of the over embellishment of language leaves a lot to be desired. The questions that arise from this argument are that;

- What is the intention of the writer?
- Does the author want to portray a false image of themselves?
- Can all biographical texts be doubted?

In light of the above arguments, this study, therefore, adopts Harbus’ (2011) definition of autobiographical memory, which is defined as the remembrance of a person’s life experiences, “a reconstructive act that is always culturally situated, context-sensitive and susceptible to narrative configuration.” This definition is befitting for this study, as the experiences that the

authors selected for this study, share with their readers are a recollection of experiences from their pasts. Pasts that are shaped by their social, cultural contexts. Correspondingly, Du Pisani (2007) argues that all memory is unavoidably shaped by individual subjective experience and fashioned by collective consciousness and shared processes so that any understanding of the representation of remembrances and of the past more generally, must necessarily consider both contexts. For that reason, as writers of autobiography narrate their stories, they rely on memory to reconstruct their past experiences and they also select what to share with their readers.

Contributing to the debate of autobiography as a genre, Singh (2015) also states that autobiography as a genre has been subject to much criticism, one of the reasons being that of its subjectivity. Subjectivity in the sense that autobiography is a narration of one's life experiences from that person's point of view. Obviously, the author relies on memory to narrate such events. However, a pure recollection of events has been questioned by many critics of autobiography analysis. Can one remember all the events of their lives as they exactly happened? Correspondingly, Cuesta (2011) suggests that autobiography in an epistemological standpoint is a combination of a partial truth and a personal truth. Therefore, human memory is limited and cannot be entirely trusted. This, according to Cuesta, is significant in autobiographical writing as it indicates that the truth is relative and can be seen and interpreted from different angles. This view illustrates that individuals are autonomous but at the same time they are dependent on society to shape their experiences.



As a result of the above argument, readers of autobiography should bear in mind that the events in the story are susceptible to subjectivity, which is unavoidable as autobiography is highly selective and its reliance on memory doesn't imply that the work is fiction, it simply means that autobiography is to some degree subjective. This, however, does not mean that autobiography should be dismissed as subjective, but a literary genre that should be objectively critically analysed. Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers (2015) postulate that literature provides a platform for analysing texts as they provide topics that are of significant interest to human beings. These topics are multifaceted therefore, they call upon scholars of literary criticism to interrogate them without prejudice;

Literature is a place where subjective and collective truths can be voiced, where a restorative re-imagining and re-inventing can take place, and where elusive and complex issues of deep significance to us as human beings can be explored without the need to prove points, empirically or quantitatively. (Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik and Ferreira-Meyers, 2015, p. 12)

The above citation indicates that in writing literature, writers tend to be subjective as different individuals interpret their life experiences from their own perspectives and from the perspective of the society in which they live in. The same sentiment could be argued in autobiographical writing. Congruent with that argument, Cuesta (2011) posits that autobiography is about the story and experiences that the author chooses to share and on the other hand, that story is also shaped by the imagination of the reader. The latter being of significance as autobiographical texts represent everyday experiences and situations.

These events' interpretations depend on individual interpretations as individuals in general and writers in particular experience these events differently. These common experiences are constructed and reconstructed "... both materially and through imagination, under similar and opposite contexts and points of views. Thus, they are a central form of material in reflection about complexes of objectivity" (Cuesta, 2011, p. 1). Thus, autobiographical texts are subject to the subjective-objective continuum and how readers interpret and judge such experiences.

Bosničová (2011) posits that 'the self and the truth are the main features on which the modern theory of autobiography revolves. Mostern (1999, as cited in Bosničová, 2011) says that autobiography theory has two main features; subjectivity and referentiality. Subjectivity refers to the position of the writer who narrates his/her own story and the referentiality denotes whether autobiography is to be identified with representational, or as non-representational with regard to, a real world, external to the text.

## **2.7 Postcolonial-feminist theory**

This section discusses the postcolonial feminist theory as related to this study. The autobiography and postcolonial-feminist theories are used as related theories in this study because the selected autobiographies were written by Black women about their postcolonial experiences. These postcolonial women autobiographies portray female agency as the writers take the readers from their

home villages, beyond national borders as freedom fighters and their experiences after the national independence. According to Bennet and Royle (2004) feminist criticism aims to interrogate the difference in the representation of men and women in literary works. Also, it seeks to reflect on literary history by investigating women's writing which is often marginalised. In so doing, feminist criticism questions and challenges traditional perceptions of masculinity and femininity and explores the ways in which such perceptions are portrayed in literature that is largely male dominated. Also, feminist criticism as argued by Bennet and Royle (2004) examines the extent to which writing, language and literary form itself are infused with issues of gender difference. Also, in the introduction of the biography of Mukwahepo, Namhila (2013) postulates that there is a lack of literature on the Namibian liberation struggle and the little that is in existence focuses on men and does not acknowledge the participation of women in the struggle. Therefore, the theory of postcolonial feminist as selected for this study, provides a useful account of how women from third world countries make a strong case against the general Western feminism that had for a long time attempted to exclusively advocate for the experiences of all women in the world. Firstly, it is important to understand that postcolonialism itself was borne out of the question of resistance, resistance by the third world countries of Western domination in all spheres of life. On the popularity of life-narratives, Huddart (2008) argues that recent years have seen a keen interest in life writing and prefers the term *life-writing* to the term *autobiography* because autobiography tends to show partiality towards discriminatory ways of writing life experiences, this tendency may be seen by some critics as too abstract, too manly and of a Western orientation. In pursuit of this contention, Olatunji, (2010) maintains that "another main issue in postcolonial discourse is the maintenance of difference as a subversion of western universalism.

The concept of universalism is predicated on the erroneous notion that there exists a unitary and homogenous human nature” (p.128). The same could also be said about the postcolonial feminist theory; Postcolonial feminism was borne out of the need of the women of the third world to speak for themselves rather than universalising the experience of all women in the ‘Western feminists’ bracket. Therefore, traditionally, the feminist theory had subscribed to the belief that no matter where a woman finds herself, her experiences were similar to other women in the world. However, recent trends in the criticism of feminisms have led to a proliferation of studies that have attempted to alienate the alleged women universal experiences to different kinds of African feminisms that have developed in Africa. In joining this debate, Cutajar (2008) maintains that “feminist post-colonial theories derive from the recognition that the generic term ‘women’ does not exist. Women derive from different cultures and social backgrounds, and hence tend to have different interests and concerns” (p. 30). In relation to this study, this position implies that the postcoloniality factor has a lot to offer to the postcolonial scholar/ researcher, thus, prompting a surge in literature around the theme of different experiences of women in different parts of the world.

The concept of feminism has been a controversial and much-disputed subject within the field of gender and literary studies. According to Chigwedere (2010, as cited in Nkealah, 2016), some African feminism scholars have rejected traditional western feminism that does not take the experiences of African women into consideration, ignoring their philosophical ideologies and belief systems as found on the African continent. Therefore, these scholars have reconsidered the traditional western feminism and restructured such to correspond to the cultures of Africa people. Nkeala (2016) continues to posit that in response to western feminism, African scholars have attempted to create feminism platforms that address the disparities that were created by the traditional feminism theory.

Western feminism universalised the experiences of all women, despite their geography and cultural experiences, thus a need for a different philosophy that would assist in criticising the African woman experience. Such a platform takes into consideration; an African cultural perspective, an African geopolitical location and an African ideological point of view. There are six distinct African feminisms as discussed by Nkealah (2016). These are; womanism, stiwanism, motherism, formalism, nego-feminism and snail-sense feminism. So far, there has been little agreement on what constitutes African feminism. As stated by Nkeala (2016), the above-mentioned categories of African feminisms share some common grounds as they advocate for African feminism that embraces an African feminist ideology that is not tarnished by the definition of western feminism. The African feminisms mentioned above also take into account the histories and cultures of the African people in order to empower women and enlighten man on the plight and experiences of African women. Moreover, these feminisms' common ground is that gender inclusion in decision making should be considered by both men and women in power. However, a detailed analysis of these theories is beyond these theories is beyond this study. Thus the application of postcolonial feminism to this study.

As a result of the above argument, this study in some measure relies on the argument by Gikandi (2010) who states that modern African writing emerged as a consequence of colonialism on the continent. This, according to Gikandi (2010) was as a result of the drama and trauma that was subjected to the colonised people. The colonial strain became unbearable for African writers that they tended to intellectually react to its effects through the written word. This section first analyses the postcolonial theory in analysing the chosen autobiographies. This theory was selected because postcolonial discourse addresses the challenges and experiences of the once colonised peoples of the third world countries. The four writers experienced the Namibian apartheid era with its

discriminatory and segregational laws against the Black indigenous people and after independence, these narrators played different roles in the building of the Republic of Namibia. Postcolonial, according to Tyagi (2014), advocates resistance to colonial regimes and discourses that still influence different societies. These societies either dismembered all relationships with their former colonisers or some sort of mutual relationship still exists between the now free people and those that once colonised them.

In furthering this debate, Ngoshi (2013) asserts that women life writing narrators identify themselves in these works in a relational manner. Relational in that women write about themselves in relation to others and the institutions of powers that they are involved in. For example, the authors of the selected autobiographies align themselves with the structures and politics of the liberation struggle and in the independent Namibia they are also in one way or another supporters or sympathisers of the SWAPO party which is the ruling party. In her analysis of Chung's book, Ngoshi (2013) argues that Chung rather than celebrating her own public achievements, she celebrates the pain and heroic acts of women during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle and the successes that the women achieved in the political history of the country. This very same scenario can be equated to the role of the lives of Namibian women in the selected autobiographies. Their lives are intertwined with that of their fellow women; the hardships of the liberation struggle and the triumph they experienced upon and after the independence of the country.

The postcolonial theory, therefore, is befitting in this criticism as it attempts to overcome the distortions of the colonised experiences by the coloniser. The discourse of the coloniser portrayed

inferiority on the colonised people in order to thoroughly subjugate them. Therefore, postcolonial discourse attempts to produce literature by the once colonized peoples that express their real identity and reclaims their history amidst the distorted literature about them written by their former oppressors. “The task of a postcolonial theorist is to insert the often ‘absent’ colonized subject into the dominant discourse in a way that it resists/subverts the authority of the colonizer” (Tyagi, 2014, 45). Consequently, Gikandi (2010) argues that though the African experience of colonialism was that of much loss and suffering, in some instances, colonialism also represented challenges and opportunities for modernity. It is, therefore, befitting in my opinion, to analyse the texts from a ‘partial’ postcolonial perspective on one hand.

On the other hand, the other theory that corresponds with the writing of the chosen autobiographies is the feminist theory, this is not to claim that the authors selected for this study claim to be feminists; but, I argue that their work can be analysed from a feminist point of view. Feminism, though a concept of much debate is suitable for this study as the four writers are female and thus write from a female point of view. They write about experiences they went through in the fight against colonialism and the experiences they encountered after the liberation struggle. However, a considerable amount of research has been published on feminism as a loose term that should not be generalised to all women in general. These studies as already alluded in the preceding paragraphs have argued that the western definition of feminism is not a ‘one size fits all’ theory as women from Africa and or those in third world countries have different experiences from their western counterparts. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the establishment of feminist theories that befit the experiences of African women.

The postcolonial discourse deals mainly with the suffering of the colonised, while as, postcolonial feminism deals with a double-edged sword; colonialism in general and the female experience under patriarchal societies. Funk (2011) maintains that “feminist and postcolonial studies have shown a similar concern with the production of new and more empowering subjectivities for those historically cast as subaltern in androcentric western contexts” (p. 66). For the reason that the writers of the selected texts do not claim to write from a feminist point of view, this study was viewed from an integrated theory of postcolonial feminist theory. The primary concern of a postcolonial feminist theory according to Tyagi (2014), is how women are represented in formerly colonised societies. It focuses on the construction of gender difference in colonial and post-colonial literature, the depiction of women in colonial and postcolonial discourses with emphasis on the work of women writers. “The postcolonial feminist critics raise a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of the representation of gender” (Tyagi, 2014).

The postcolonial feminism theory is relevant to this study because the selected texts can be analysed from both the postcolonial approach and the feminism approach. Postcolonial feminism seeks to address the social, political, economic and cultural dimensions of females in the postcolonial world. Therefore, the selected texts for this study date back to the colonial era to the time when Namibia gained its independence. Olatunji (2010) asserts that African literature began as a consequence of colonialism as theory and practice. All African literature was originally put under the “banner of postcolonialism - a theory of oppositionality that encapsulates the totality of practices which characterize the third world nations, especially in Africa, from the inception of colonialism to the present day” (p. 25). In addition to this, Cuesta (2011) argues that;



Autobiographical methods are very useful in connection with a postcolonial view, as these representations highlight questions about how personal legitimacy and testimony is articulated. All these contextual narratives – voices that integrate *place* (i.e. Latin America), *time* (i.e. late modernity), *specific society* (i.e. Mexico) and *special circumstances* (i.e. ethnicity, gender, class, religion, etc.), and *the reasons* (i.e. political, economical etc.) *for mainstream acceptance* (publication) of a specific *story* (testimony or witness) – have to be considered critically. In other words, we must regard how certain individuals' work makes sense and illuminates societal conflicts through their narratives of texts that point out structural contradictions and processes in society. (p. 1)

The above quotation speaks of this study as the study partially analysed the chosen texts from a postcolonial point of view. Lebdaï (2015) posits that “postcolonial writers express themselves through the more traditional genres of the novel, poetry, and drama, but they also give voice to their selves and their cultural contexts through self-storytelling, autofiction or autobiography” (p. 2). This study interrogates how each individual writer selected for this study articulates herstory from a personal point of view and from an autonomous perspective. The experiences of the writers take them from and back to Namibia. They also experienced life in other African countries and European countries. The time is the postcolonial era. Though the readers come from different societies, they are brought together by the fact that they are all Namibians. All the writers are women, from different ethnic groups. From the glimpse of their texts, they are somewhat driven by political reasons to share their life experiences as they articulate their experiences of the colonial era of Namibia and their contribution to the independence of the nation thereof.

Correspondingly, Tyagi (2014) asserts that the postcolonial theory also relates to the production of literature by previously colonised people that express their identity and “reclaims their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. The task of a postcolonial theorist is to insert the often ‘absent’ colonised subject into the dominant discourse in a way that it resists/subverts the authority of the coloniser” (p. 45). Similarly, Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik, and Ferreira-Meyers (2015) state that postcolonial literature in English is quite significant in today’s world as it provides room for the readers and the postcolonial population to listen to the voices of the once oppressed individuals and participate in a cross-cultural and multi-voiced dialogue. By introducing new artistic norms and modes of appraisal and challenging notions of English exclusiveness, postcolonial writers, in general unravel the once suppressed histories of the once colonised individuals, thus revealing the interests and ethnic diversities of the African people to the ears of the world, and highlighting cultural dimensions and ways of life previously disregarded by the former colonial ‘masters’.

However, Tyagi (2014) further argues that postcolonial feminist theorists critique the postcolonial theory of its lack of emphasis and consideration of gender concerns. Moreover, other feminist critics argue that postcolonial theory is male-dominated because it has marginalised the concerns of women and also exploited them. “Postcolonial feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of obliterating the role of women from the struggle for independence but also of misrepresenting them in the nationalist discourses” (Tyagi, 2014, p. 46). This argument is also supported by McCooey (2017) who firstly, reasons that life-writing significantly was a result of feminist and postcolonial theory, the development of cultural studies. This surge of this kind of writing can be seen in the significant concentration given to subjects previously silenced, such as women, black people, and indigenous peoples and children. Moreover, life-writing criticism began with an analysis

of the human subject which was universalised and limited to male subjects who were European and self-present and autonomous. Such criticism restructured subjectivity so that it could be seen as diverse, conditional and intersubjective. The life writing of such subjects was seen to deconstruct the supposedly secure limits of selfhood and auto/biographical expressions of selfhood.

The move from auto/biography The selected for this study; Namhila (2011), Shaketange (2009) and Amathila (2010) and Amulungu (2016) write about their experiences as women in general and as women in particular in the colonial era to their experiences thereafter. The authors make what was understated about women's participation in the Namibian liberation struggle obvious. Issues of identity, dislocation, and relocation, of exile and repatriation, are discussed in the aforementioned texts, thus depicting personal and social identities.

Furthermore, McClintock and Peterson as cited in Tyagi (2014) contends that African nationalist writing was a predominantly male-centered tradition in which women's political agency was conceived of in terms of motherhood. In order for the notion of women being homemakers, only women writers need to tell their own experiences and their contribution towards nationhood. It is befitting for the researcher to analyse these texts partly from a historical point of view, as Olatunji (2010) further states that history is of great importance in postcolonial discourse. In cognisance of the above argument, the introduction of history into the understanding of how life is presented and interpreted within the selected texts is of critical significance. Aurel (2015) argues that autobiography can be used as a tool for historiographical intervention.

On the other hand, the study also seeks to interrogate the experiences of these writers from a feminist perspective. Though the selected texts do not claim to be feminists, the fact that the writers are women allows the texts to be analysed from a feminist approach. This stance is fostered by the fact that feminism is concerned with the examination of the position of women in society; their position in history thus offering change and advancement in all spheres of society.

The above argument brings about the link between the feminism and postcolonial approaches. Therefore, it is of importance to think of parallels between the two theories and how they contribute to the analysis of the selected texts. Haman (2015) argues that postcolonialism and feminism should be brought together as an intersectional discourse within the deconstructive framework of analysis, rather than approaching them as separate, opposing theories. This approach, according to Haman (2015), makes it possible for the reconceptualization of postcolonial feminism as an intersubjective, collective space where discourse debates among women are realised. Accordingly, the texts selected for this study will be analysed from the postcolonial feminist theory as the study also seeks to investigate the female experience in the postcolonial era. Namhila, Shaketange, and Amathila left Namibia to contribute towards the liberation struggle; therefore, their texts are significant not only that they share their individual experiences, but, also because they represent the experience of female Namibians who went into exile.

The researcher would like to interrogate the different experiences the four writers went through in their respective contexts. Haman (2015) maintains that intertwining postcolonialism and feminism facilitates the creation of a dynamic and contextualised discourse that interrogates postcolonial

female experience. Tyagi (2014) affirms that postcolonial feminist theorists advocate for the recognition of women's participation in the struggle for independence and nationalist discourses. This is yet another reason for choosing the postcolonial feminist approach to this study. "Postcolonial feminism theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonised countries and in Western locations. It concentrates on the construction of gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers" Tyagi (2014, p. 45).

In addition to the postcolonial feminist approach, the autobiographical theory is also commissioned to support this proposed study. Autobiography is inevitably linked to *subjectivity* as authors write about their experiences from a personal point of view. Smith and Watson (2010) define self-life writing as historically situated practices of self-representation that may take many guises as narrators *selectively* engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling. As a result, the writers are confronted with the processes and archives of memory. Smith and Watson (2010) further identify *memory*, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency as concepts that are sources and dynamic processes of autobiographical *subjectivity*.

Likewise, Abrahão (2012) explains that memory is an active process of the creation of meanings. As the writers of the selected texts wrote about their life experiences, they inevitably relied on memory to reconstruct their previous experiences. The life narrative study is, therefore, according to Abrahão (2012), a process of collecting different facts in various narrative contexts and also of participating in the elaboration of a memory which constructs meaning. Though memory may create biases of stories

as they are retold, it is the cornerstone of autobiography, thus the responsibility of the reader to analyse the literature objectively.

Abrahão (2012) and Smith and Watson (2010) agree that memory is pivotal in autobiographical writing and analysis. It is a distinctive characteristic of the narrator and component for narration. It is a component with which the researcher works in order to reconstruct elements of analysis that may help in understanding the object of study. Again, memory is seen as “the source, authenticator, and destabiliser of autobiographical acts” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 22). Therefore, it should be noted here that the four texts selected for this study are subject to subjectivity.

The element of subjectivity is central to self-life writing. Schwalm (2014) maintains that autobiography constructs the writers’ experiences as logical and meaningful. Though authors re-live experiences, rendering incidents as they were experienced at the time, the superior ‘interpreting’ position of the narrative presented remains paramount, turning past events into a meaningful plot, making sense of contingency. Du Pisani (2007, p. 97) on the other hand, states that all memory is inescapably shaped by individual subjective encounters and shaped by collective consciousness and shared social processes so that any understanding of the representation of memories and of the past more generally, must necessarily consider both contexts. For that reason, autobiography is personal and open to criticism. Therefore, this study proposes to analyse how the writers use their life stories to explore questions about meaning, the self, and the social and political forces that affect that self and the general *public sphere*. Using autobiographical theory, the study will inevitably also analyse

how language and narrative give meaning and give a sense of 'self'. As a result, autobiography calls for a meticulous scientific evaluation, which this study will attempt to execute.

## **2.8 Chapter summary**

This chapter surveyed research that was conducted in autobiographical criticism in the past and it also evaluated, expanded, compared and contrasted literature that is related to this study. As already indicated in chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to analyse four autobiographies written by four Namibian women; with the main focus on herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in narratives of women who participated in the liberation struggle of Namibia. All the authors are women who joined the liberation struggle when they were teenagers and only returned to Namibia during the transition to independence as grown up women. Therefore, the literature reviewed was literature that is related and suitable for the analysis of each individual autobiography as defined in chapter 1 and the introduction of this chapter. Cuesta (2011) posits that the term autobiography is used for a practice of life narrative; which celebrates the autonomous individual and the universalising of the meaning of a life story. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the terms life-narratives and autobiography are interchangeably used. In so doing, this chapter, therefore, critically explored selected critical literature that constitutes autobiography criticism in general and female autobiography in particular.

This literature review helped to place the relevance of this study in the larger context of what other researchers have already written on this topic. Firstly, the chapter provided an overview of the

writing on postcolonial African literature in relation to literary studies. The chapter moved on to discuss the theories that cement this study and provided a synopsis of the historical background of autobiography as a literary genre, in general. Furthermore, the questions of subjectivity and the public sphere in autobiography in general, and in women's autobiography, in particular, were reviewed and analysed. In addition to this, an important aspect, that of memory as an element of subjectivity in autobiographical construction was also evaluated. The study was also approached from the postcolonial-feminist theory, which was analysed and discussed as a theory suitable in the analysis of the autobiographies of Namhila (1997), Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2012) and Amulungu (2016).



## CHAPTER 3

### THE RE-ENACTMENT OF SELFHOOD AND OTHERNESS IN AFRICAN WOMEN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS REPRESENTED IN NAMHILA'S *THE PRICE OF FREEDOM* AND SHAKETANGE'S *WALKING THE BOEING 707*

#### 3.1 Introduction: The historical backgrounds of Namhila and Shaketange's experiences

Autobiographical acts provide the postcolonial woman with a platform to reconstruct her identities as these identities are reconstructed through time, space and circumstances. In doing so, Namhila (1997) wrote about her exilic journey which began in 1976 when she was just twelve years old. She reconstructs the challenges that led to this journey and the hardships and resilience that accompanied her displacement and the eventual plantation of her roots. She further illustrated the joys that were brought about by the Namibian independence. However, she also reconstructs a personal and national story of turbulence after the independence of the country.

In tandem with the quest for independence, Shaketange (2009) also embarked on the treacherous journey into exile in 1974 when she was just fourteen years old. In *Walking the Boeing 707*, she re-enacts her 'long walk to freedom' through Angola to Zambia, leading her to educational institutions in Sierra Leone, Finland and the UK. The title of her autobiography is derived from the lengthy journey she undertook on foot from her home village in present-day Omusati region to the Oshikango border post; bordering Namibia and Angola. From Oshikango she and others

travelled by bus to Ondjiva, a town in Angola. From Ondjiva, Shaketange and her group of young Namibians walked long distances in transit to Zambia, though a rumour had circulated amongst them that they would be travelling by plane, a Boeing 707 to Zambia.

Therefore, these two autobiographies depict stories of hardships, displacement, transition and development both on personal and national levels. Through the reconstruction of these experiences, the autobiography is also used as a tool for self-identification. In addition, González Díaz, 2009) argues that autobiography can also “be understood as an element of power, an instrument which individuals can use to become agents of change, whereby they construct their own discourses and so escape the common tendency to homogenize discourses” (p.90). These two Namibian narrators use autobiography to empower themselves and the others that participated in the liberation struggle, especially the women and children that joined the liberation struggle. Their narratives are also narratives of transformation as they narrate their struggles and how they overcame them through hard work and determination. Moreover, they challenge Gusdorf’s (1956) notion of the ‘limits and conditions of autobiography’, as they are ordinary African women who successfully write their own experiences, using their own styles.

From the above synopsis, this study argues that postcolonial life narratives that are in the public domain provoke readers to interrogate the associations of the narratives and actual contexts of shared experiences as autobiographical acts overlap and demolish confinements between the truth and fiction, between what is remembered and what is concealed and between female and male autobiography amongst others. This argument is cemented by Smith and Watson (2010) (as

argued in Chapter 2) who posit that an analysis of autobiography is a complex one thus, it needs critical reading practices that interrogate it from different angles; narrative tropes, social contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical trajectory of the text. As a result, life narratives, in general, are highly subjective as authors narrate their own personal life experiences both in the private and public spheres.

Therefore, these changes, which may perhaps be traumatic at times, could present a challenging scenario in the quest for a comprehensive personal identity. More so, to transnational autobiographies of the once colonised people of Africa as an exilic self-life-narrator may also grapple with transformations that come along with displacement or uprootment from the familiar physical and emotional environment and circumstances to the unfamiliar territory and its foreign state of affairs. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) went public with their private journeys through the publications of their respective autobiographies. By going public, this study argues, the autobiographies illuminate the personal struggles of the authors themselves and the great efforts of girl children and women who went into exile during the liberation period of Namibia. Therefore, in writing their private lives, they provide the readers with the effects of the apartheid system on the lives of many Namibians in general and women in particular thus, narrating their role in their private spaces and their positions in the public sphere.

In her autobiography, Namhila (1997) depicts the price she and the other participants of the Namibian liberation struggle had to pay for the independence of Namibia. Similarly, Shaketange (2008) also portrays the exigent treacherous journey that she and others had to undertake from

her home village to Angola, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Finland, the United Kingdom and back to Namibia. Therefore, from the synopsis above, it can be inferred that firstly, these two women's identities are depicted in a relational manner, a common trait in women's autobiography as argued by Ngoshi (2013) and Smith and Watson (2010). Secondly, as a result of their constant movements from one refugee camp to the other and from one country to the next, the two women of the Namibian liberation struggle are in constant search for coherent identities. This position is congruent with Adak's (2007) argument that "women's autobiographies centre on tracing personal history as a development, at the end point of which the self may or may not reach a certain level of maturation. Furthermore, as the authors write their idiosyncratic selves, negotiating their identities could be quite daunting because of the 'otherness' that is common in women's autobiography.

This chapter, therefore, analyses Namhila's (1997) *The Price of Freedom* and Shaketange (2009) *Walking the Boeing 707*, focusing on how Namhila and Shaketange represent their life experiences as women who were associated with the liberation struggle at a tender age, emphasising on their individual roles in relation to others they encountered as oppressed women, during the apartheid era, and as free women, at the helm of the Namibian independence. However, this analyses was conducted bearing in mind Harbus' (2011) definition of autobiographical memory which suggests that in autobiography writing, narrators have to remember their past experiences and reconstruct these experiences in a culturally situated manner, which is context sensitive and subject to narrative configuration. In so doing, the chapter interrogates Namhila and Shaketange's presentation of autobiographical subjectivity which entails how they portrayed themselves, by narrating their own life experiences from a personal

point of view and the role they played in the Namibian public space as seen from their individual perspectives. In this manner, their personal voice and agency are analysed through the theories of autobiography and postcolonial feminism.

### **3.2 Theorising subjectivity in *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707***

As already established above, the experiences and identities of Namhila and Shaketange are relational to others, thus, they establish the existence of the female other as they write about personal experiences that are intertwined with the experiences of other women and girl children; the subaltern and peripheral and often than not, the pariah-lised subject's voice is finally awakened to, resonating in the Namibian national discourse, through autobiography. This means that not only do the authors celebrate their selfhood, but they also sing the praises to the 'others' whose encounters helped them to make meaning of their personal experiences. The coloniser did everything in their power to keep the Black women, men, and children from all decision-making processes and to aggravate the situation, the Namibian history had for some time excluded women and children from nationalist debates, history is loud and clear about 'founding-fathers of nationalism' and yet does not acknowledge the role of the 'founding-mothers' of Namibian nationalism in the struggle of building the Namibian nation.

It is, therefore, of importance that women find their own voices and speak for themselves and the others, whose voices were subdued by gender disparities that prevailed and still prevailing in

Namibia. This is congruent with Tyagi (2014) who argues that the postcolonial-feminist theory challenges the general postcolonial theory of its lack of emphasis and consideration of gender concerns. Also, this theory questions the postcolonial theory for its biases as it highlights the role of the postcolonial male in Africa and it has marginalised the concerns of women and also exploited them. Therefore, the “postcolonial-feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of obliterating the role of women from the struggle for independence, but also of misrepresenting them in the nationalist discourses” (Tyagi, 2014, p. 46).

Though Namhila and Shaketange wrote about their own life experiences, they did so in social contexts because inherently, human beings are social people whose individual lives are also interconnected with other people through social, political and cultural constructions of their immediate environment. As a result, Namhila and Shaketange’s personal experiences were influenced by their situational dynamics, thus they inevitably wrote about themselves in relation to the people they met on their life journeys and the places that they lived in; both outside Namibia as refugees and as liberated women living in independent Namibia.

In these life narratives, Namhila and Shaketange private experiences become public as they reveal their inner selves; personal thoughts, opinions and emotions of their lives from childhood to the challenges they went through as adults. For example; Namhila (1997) wrote about her search for a personal identity and provides the reader with testimonies of her life in exile and her subsequent return to independent Namibia. Also, Shaketange (2009) wrote about her personal fears and anxieties as she left Namibia and on foot embarked on a perilous journey into exile, her

life in exile and her emotions about returning to a transitioning Namibia in 1989. In order to understand the complexities of autobiographical study, this chapter is analysed through a set of concepts that are termed by Smith and Watson (2010) as concepts that are useful in interpreting the sources and dynamic processes of autobiographical subjectivity. These concepts are; memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency. Furthermore, in justifying the use of these terms, Smith and Watson (2010) firstly, assert that the theorisation of these concepts allows critics of autobiography to understand the intricacies of autobiographical subjectivity. As a result, the concepts are in this study used to explore the concern of subjectivity as embedded in *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*.

However, it is also valuable to secondly, understand that these constituencies are not separate entities of autobiographical subjectivity, but rather, interlinked characteristics of autobiography subjectivity, therefore, they will be unquestionably interconnected in this study. Further, as already indicated, this examination is also premised on the postcolonial feminist theory, a vanguard of African women epistemology for postcolonial autobiography analysis and the autobiography theory, without which the debate on postcolonial woman's autobiography subjectivity will not be clearly circumscribed. These theories were necessitated by the fact that Namhila and Shaketange wrote as women who reflected on their personal experiences in colonial and post-colonial Namibia. Therefore, in the process of writing, they had to reevaluate their memories of the past in order to negotiate and understand their present selfhood, thus producing logical representations of their personal experiences. This notion is clarified by Du Pisani (2007) who argues that all memory is unavoidably shaped by individual subjective experience and

fashioned by collective consciousness and shared processes so that any understanding of the representation of remembrances and of the past more generally, must consider both contexts.

Events like places have multiple stories, therefore, though Namhila and Shaketange experienced colonialism and shared exilic experiences, their stories are personal. *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* are life narratives that are analysed through the viewpoint of female experience and subjectivity. For that reason, Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) are analysed in this section of the study from a female subjectivity perspective. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) logically wrote their stories from a personal point of view (a universal feature in autobiographical writing) thus, making their life narratives subjective. Namhila under the section of ‘*my childhood*’, started off by referring to her birthplace. By doing so, she established her autonomy from the onset as she cemented her origins. She wrote about who her parents were, the transformation of her family name from Nampira to Namhila, her position in the family of seven siblings.

Namhila and Shaketange thus used their autobiographies as a tool to restate their roots and how they felt a sense of belonging amidst their family members, therefore, the family factor that they introduced indicates that as Africans, the family is of paramount importance as it provides one with a support system. Again, in order to bring out their identities as children, they wrote about the importance of an extended family among the Ovambo culture. This sentiment of familial relations indicates that one’s family defines one’s identity, thus Namhila and Shaketange gained agency by establishing their identities in relation to their family members in particular and the



Ovambo people in general. They both used the personal pronoun '*I*' to indicate that their respective autobiographies are mainly about their own personal experiences.

Also from the onset, Shaketange (2009) writes, "I was born in January 1960 and named Lydia Shaketange" (p. 9). Shaketange continues also like Namhila to indicate her birthplace; this information does not only depict the mere knowledge of their places of origin but, it symbolises the marginalisation of the people from the northern parts of Namibia by the apartheid regime. The indication of their birthplaces provokes in the mind of the reader the seclusion of northern people from the rest of the country through the establishment of the red line. This notion of severe discrimination of people from the northern parts of the country was also recapitulated in Shaketange (2009) who posited that;

I felt held captive by the restrictions that reinforced the apartheid system. I wanted to be free so that when I grew up, I would have no restrictions on where I wanted to study. Uncle Elia used to tell me about children in Otavi who were learning English and I wanted to learn English too. But, I asked myself, How would I go to Otavi without a pass? Why should I have to get a pass anyway. (p. 11)

Firstly, the above sentiment does not only reiterate on the injustice that came along with the apartheid system, but it also reflected the childhood memories of Shaketange as reflected through the lens of an adult Shaketange. In so doing, the authors cemented the fact that their childhood experience was critically related to how they viewed themselves as children that were subjected to the apartheid system and how these experiences shaped their adult identities. The country's

northern regions were separated from the rest of the country with a red line, this line symbolised the second class citizenry status that was accorded to Blacks by the government during the apartheid regime. Secondly, Shaketange pointed out a critical concern for the educational system that was offered to the people of her ethnic group. Education, is a cornerstone of national development in any given country, but the apartheid system deprived black people of this essential ingredient in the development of the country, thus the SWAPO leadership in exile had to look elsewhere for the education of Namibian children who were deprived of a good education that would ensure a bright future for them and independent Namibia.

Therefore, Shaketange and Namhila also used autobiography to pinpoint the fact that colonialism was embedded in all aspects of life in the country. Their teachers resorted to teaching their learners in vernacular, maybe a strategy by the coloniser to keep Namibian people apart, to prevent en masse nationalism amongst the indigenous people. The fact that Namhila and Shaketange were taught in Oshiwambo could mean that the apartheid system did not intend on introducing a common national language that would unify Namibians but meant to restrict all social and political dialogue of the Namibians.

This view is also interesting in analysing the objectivity-subjectivity continuum in Namhila and Shaketange's life narratives as it reminds the readers of these narratives to always bear in mind that instead of spending time on the facticity or fictionalisation of autobiography, one might want to consider analysing autobiography from a different angle. Rather, as suggested by Smith and Watson (2001), autobiography can be analysed as a performative act. Therefore, as Namhila and

Shaketange express their life experiences, they write statements which perform two interrelated acts which are; firstly, they portray a given reality and sometimes the way an experience is uttered may also modify or change the meaning of the social reality they try to depict.

Accordingly, at the centre of these narratives is the critical concern for identity and self-definition. However, the question of identity will be critically analysed in another section of this chapter. Hence, in order to gain author agency, both Shaketange and Namhila use the personal pronoun 'I' to prove that their work represents their life experiences; lived or imagined. In this manner, they reveal their subjective views of their experiences and their identities to their audiences. The historical context in which Namhila and Shaketange write about their childhood experiences also influences the way they reflect and depict their childhood subjectivities. For example; Namhila (1997) writes about social constructs that were changed by Christianity through the colonial regime of Namibia, such as the polygamous marriage of her grandfather; she writes that "as a child, I never fully understood the reasons for 'depolygamizing' Grandfather. All the church managed to do was to change him from an open polygamist to a hidden one" (p. 16). However, she is mute in her adult opinion of polygamy, thus the reader wonders whether her childhood view on polygamy as reflected through the adult lens of the grown-up Namhila is not tainted by the views of the now mature Namhila.

Again, on another level of analysis, as authors, Namhila and Shaketange had the prerogative to select memories they deemed necessary for *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. For example; Namhila's life narrative was published in 1997, only seven years after the

country's independence, thus, her choice of shared experiences could perhaps have been inspired by the euphoria of the politics of the young Namibia. Her apartheid experience was still fresh in her mind, thus, the reason why at the time it was important for her to ponder on her position in an independent Namibia.

Therefore, the historical context of her autobiography plays an important role in her representation of the life she experienced as a subaltern subject. One may also add that Shaketange and Namhila are educated women of the liberation struggle, therefore, their writings, reflect a great deal about their transnational education and advancement in their careers. Bantu education in apartheid Namibia was developed to keep the Namibian child under the political hierarchy, the apartheid system used education as a strategy of keeping the Namibian child isolated and inferior. In expressing this sentiment, Namhila (1997) argues that the education they received at that time was the teacher-centred approach which stifled independent thinking skills of the children. Instead of focusing on the child, the education instilled fear in the children and the teacher was seen as the alpha and the omega of the education system. In so doing, the children grew up with fear of authority. In this manner, one may argue that it was possible that when these children grew up, they would have 'submissive adults' who did not question the governing power. But, Shaketange and Namhila through the education they received in exile became critical thinkers, thus their transnational education became an antidote to the possible mind-stifling of the Bantu education system. Therefore, Namhila and Shaketange used autobiography as a tool for social commentary, calling for the current government not to repeat the injustices of the past.

For the reason that, subjectivity is a prominent feature in life narratives, it is worth noting that self-representation is problematic since the truth could be relative in the processes of narrating an experience. The autobiographer might not represent his/her experiences in the manner in which these encounters were shaped as it could be difficult to relive an experience that took place a long time ago. Sometimes, the intended effect of a lived experience could be lost in language usage. Namhila for example; though now an eloquent speaker of the English language, received her education firstly, through her mother tongue and then in Finnish. Therefore, the meanings and effects of certain experiences could be lost in the quest to look for words that would best explain such an experience. Moreover, the Namhila and Shaketange write about their past experiences from an adult point of view, therefore, their childhood experiences could be modified and sifted through their adult lenses, thus, the possibility of the autobiographer, in this case, Namhila and Shaketange misrepresenting themselves and others. Consequently, the irony in life narratives is whether the autobiographies analysed in this section objectively represent the subjective self of the narrators. However, this misrepresentation may not be intentional because children see and experience events differently from adults.

This historical representation will then provide the reader with a clear picture of the encounters of women who went into exile with the notion of liberating Namibia. Congruent with Mlambo's (2015) suggestion, Muchiri (2014) also argues that as scholars analyse autobiography they should remember that the author does not only celebrate their selfhood, but they also celebrate the histories of the communities and the times they reflect on. It is, therefore, not surprising that Namhila and Shaketange's experiences are not isolated, but they reflect on their experiences

since they were children and in so doing they inevitably situate their experiences within given contexts.

Likewise, it is also imperative to note that the female '*I*' is in contrast with the 'me' in male autobiography; whereby men tend to position themselves at the centre of every event of their lives, they represent themselves in such a way that they seem to live in isolation as their experiences are expressed in a very individualistic manner. This shows that autobiography acts are gender constructed; while men prefer to write about their experiences in isolation, women, on the other hand, opt to write about themselves in a relational manner, they portray themselves as part of a society and their experiences are part and parcel of that society, therefore, in some instances they refer to themselves and others using collective nouns such as we, our, us etc. For example; Namhila states that "our lives in the village had been turned upside down since the South African Defence Force (SADF) military camp at the village at the end of 1975" (Namhila, 1997, p. 8).

An analysis of the above statement reveals that instead of referring to her solitary self, Namhila brings into the equation, members of her community by using the pronoun 'our'. Correspondingly, Shaketange (2008) writes "we were happy to see a SWAPO soldier for the first time... (his) name was Lungada... he was one of the greatest SWAPO combatants" (Shaketange, 2008, p. 23). She uses the collective "we" to express how she felt upon meeting this soldier, her 'I' is relational to the others that she took the journey into exile with. The manner Shaketange and Namhila refer to themselves represents the social groups they belonged to. They provide a

voice to the voiceless, they establish the existence of the female other, the subaltern and peripheral and often than not pariahed being. Their autobiographies stem from their historical, political status of being the oppressed before Namibia became an independent state, therefore, they write about the collective selves and for the marginalised, the black Namibians that were oppressed and ostracised by the Apartheid South Africa regime that suppressed the voices of the Black people.

Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2008) represent their selfhood from a personal point of view, thus making their autobiographies subjective from the onset as is inevitable in self-life writing. In explaining the contribution of memory on the subjectivity feature of self-narration, Du Pisani (2007) argues that all memory is unavoidably shaped by individual subjective experiences, thus when Namhila and Shaketange share their experiences they do so from a subjective point of view. Subjectivity, as already alluded to in chapter 2, is an outstanding feature of autobiography writing and as a result, Bilá (2014) advances the debate on subjectivity by questioning the truthfulness of self-representation. On the argument of the challenges that autobiography as a genre has faced due to its subjectivity is further illustrated by Bilá (2014) who states that;

First, the subject is a subject to itself, an “I,” however difficult or even impossible it may be for others to understand this “I” from its viewpoint, within its own experience. Simultaneously, the subject is a subject to, and of, others; in fact, it is often an “Other” to others, which also affects its sense of its own subjectivity. (Gagnier 1991, p. 8, as cited in Bilá, 2014, p. 63)

The above argument, indicates writing self-life narratives are a complicated process as Namhila and Shaketange in the process of writing their autobiographies, they become subjects of their own investigation, which is an act of subjectivity on its own. They write about individual experiences from the way they perceive their own life histories in a way that is comprehensible because life experiences are fragmented. It is, therefore, the task of the writer to evaluate memories and negotiate life experiences so that their reconstruction of the self is logical in the mind of the readership of these narratives. And again to complicate an already complex task Namhila and Shaketange are identified by themselves and the readers in a relational manner. Moreover, Bilá (2014) questions whether autobiography writers truthfully represent an accurate self-image of themselves. However, it should be noted that subjectivity is inevitable in autobiographical writing; because writers narrate their life experiences from a personal point of view. Therefore, according to Smith and Watson (2010), as stated in Chapter 2, the writer of an autobiography is “both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 1).

On the other hand, Gusdorf (1980) in his thesis on *Conditions and limits of autobiography*, argued that autobiography should be defined as a true reflection of the author’s life and the author was usually a male of Western descent, holding a particular ‘outstanding’ position in society. Of course, this is an argument that is rejected in the current study since anyone, no matter their creed, race, gender, and geographical location can share their life stories through published autobiographies and autobiography is an accepted genre in literary studies that cut across cultures. Therefore, autobiography in this study is defined as life-writings of people from



different backgrounds despite of their sexual orientation, race or creed or their geographical location.

To emphasise this denunciation, the present analysis focuses on Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2008), Black women from Southern Africa, originating from Namibia, way out of Gusdorf's limiting conditions. Though they are educated women, they do not hold prominent positions in the politics of the country. Rather, they advance the presence of women as significant players in building the Namibian nation. Consistent with the above stance, Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) maintains that "within the genre of African autobiography, the unique niche of African female autobiographical writing has surfaced"(p. 59). The two narrations interrogated in the present study testify how they experienced the struggle and through their autobiographies, Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) argues, the women are able to obtain autonomy and agency in the telling of their stories. In addition, as can be interpreted from Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) in their individual stories; Namhila and Shaketange also use autobiography as documentation of the Namibian history as they reflect on their own transitions from childhood to adulthood. They also transition from the inhabitants of apartheid Namibia to diasporic positions in exile and eventually to free citizens of independent Namibia as women of the liberation struggle.

Since autobiographers speak mostly for themselves, it is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve complete autobiographical objectivity. Autobiography is argued in this study to be a literary genre that can barely escape subjectivity. Subjectivity, in this study, does not nullify autobiography as a literary genre, but rather validates its distinctiveness from other literary

genres. Therefore, Namhila and Shaketange's 'I', reflect on their experiences as independent women and individuals who participated in the liberation struggle in their own right. Though like many men and women during the apartheid era, they participated in the war of liberation against the South African apartheid regime, their experiences, anxieties, joys, and dreams were uniquely theirs, they were personal.

Therefore, this chapter has thus far critically analysed herstory from Namhila and Shaketange's own perspectives as subjective selves. However, their experiences are also not isolated as they lived in a social world that was and is shaped by the geopolitical and cultural landscape of their encounters. Therefore, in the same vein, herstory one might argue, is also corroborated by social events that took place in the then Southwest Africa and present-day Namibia.

Through the autobiographical mode, Shaketange and Namhila write about their individual experiences of the liberation struggle even though they generally share many of their experiences, they use autobiography to accentuate their individual encounters. They both walked from Namibia to Angola in search of a platform to fight the country's apartheid regime. Namhila left Namibia at the age of 12 while Shaketange was 12 years old. Though both narrators walked to Angola, the circumstances they describe their experiences is very individualistic. While Namhila explains that she and her friend were discouraged into going into exile because the SWAPO combatants were supposedly going to sexually exploit them, Shaketange and her friends did not encounter such threats, but were rather discouraged by a man at Oshikango who

told them to go back home since they did not have sixteen Rand to take a bus to Zambia and they nearly went back home as a result.

Upon a close analysis of Namhila's *The Price of Freedom* as observed by Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018), Namhila's tells her story in such a way that she also reflects on the social ills of independent Namibia as she reflects on her experiences. In remembering their childhoods, Namhila and Shaketange use adult's lenses to comment on their childhood memories. For example; In reflecting on her childhood experience, Shaketange (2009) comments on the work she had to do as a girl child, living with her extended family. She had to pound millet, collect firewood, fetch water and help in the preparation of meals. Namhila also ponders over the punishment she received as a child when she did something wrong, she maintains that she did not agree with how he uncle instilled discipline in her and others, by enforcing discipline through corporal punishment.

Namhila furthermore, also ponders on the household responsibilities, she experienced as a child; she was often late for school because of the duties she had to do at the age of 11. She had to pound millet, weed the field before going to school. Furthermore, as these women use autobiography to write about individual experiences, they also infuse such experiences with the experiences of their fellow woman and man as their circumstances changed over time. Thus, Namhila and Shaketange though individuals, their subjective views are intertwined with the presence of the other in their lived lives. Nevertheless, Namhila and Shaketange's subjectivities are portrayed in their representation of the self; for example; Namhila maintains that;

Returnees, to me, are individuals whose experience of life in exile differed. They did not all live in the same country and for that reason alone their experiences must have been different. It would be wrong for me to generalise 'the refugee situation because everyone concerned lived it differently. It will be wrong for me to explain, for one and all, why other refugees have not shared their experience with other Namibians who did not experience it. (Namhila, 1997, p. 196)

Namihila takes cognisance of the issue of subjectivity in personal experience. Though many Namibians experienced life as refugees, she acknowledges that personal experiences were not the same as human beings in general view experiences from an individual point of view. Namhila continues to share an experience she had had in Paris, where a French woman shouted at her, because she was Black, for touching her cherries with the intention of buying them. She states that she felt so bad that she started to walk away but, some French people offered her to test or buy their cherries, thus, she asserts that; "had I generalised that day, I would have concluded that all French or white, people are racists" (Namhila, 1997, p. 175). This shows that people's reactions to different situations are also different as Namhila realised that each individual occupies their own space.

### **3.3 Analysing memory as an ingredient of subjectivity in Namhila and Shaketange's recollections of past experiences**

*Over a century of colonial occupation, countless Namibians left their footprints on the long journey to freedom. Their traces in the sand have long been covered over, but remain etched in their memories* (Shaketange, 2009, blurb).

In light of the above quotation, this section of this chapter analyses memory as a significant feature of women's autobiography as depicted in Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) recount the effects of the colonial factor in Namibia on their personal lives and how colonialism led them across the Namibian borders in search of freedom. Their experiences from childhood to adulthood are imprinted on their memories and they draw upon these memories to write their selfhoods`. Though memory has already been alluded to in the above section, the section that follows shades more light on the element of memory as a constituent of autobiography subjectivity as articulated in Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009). According to Bruner (1990, as cited in Pascuzzi & Smorti, 2017), the scholarship in memory in autobiographical acts is inexhaustible, as critics in neuroscience, sociology, politics and literary studies are continuously studying its role and manifest in self-life narratives. Likewise, this section of the study interrogates how Namhila and Shaketange rely on their memories to evoke past experiences in order to write their life stories.

In this section of the study, memory is pivotal to autobiographical acts and *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* denotes a personal recollection of the past in the present. These

recollections according to Du Pisani (2007) as he explains memory in *Where others wavered*, (an autobiography of the first president of the Republic of Namibia); “attempt to reclaim and negotiate the past and to instill dignity, hope and human agency, despite the vicissitudes of exile life and the humiliation and brutality endured at the hands of the former apartheid state” (p. 98). Also contributing to the discussion on memory in self-narratives Sharrad (1990) submits that memory is quite significant in postcolonial narratives and its associated with the reminiscence of childhood experiences and the sentience of exilic experiences of colonial subjects.

It is clear that Namhila and Shaketange wrote about their childhood and exilic experiences to negotiate self-identities through such recollections. As already argued in this study, the apartheid regime was ruthless in the lives of many Namibians as their human rights were violated without any concern for their dignity. Namhila was shot at as a child, an act that left her traumatized; Shaketange’s family experienced emotional abuse at the hands of the South African Defence Force because they could not reveal to them the whereabouts of her uncle Elia. Again, the actual walk to freedom was quite traumatizing as it was ruthless and unforgiving. Therefore, their recollections of those experiences depict trauma as they endured it. Shaketange, at the beginning of her narrative, wrote about her imminent trek in exile. She encouraged herself to take the journey by stipulating that;

The ultimate goal was to seek freedom: “it is time to rise up! It's time that all Namibian people rise up against the apartheid regime” I mumbled to myself as I tried to balance the bucket of water on my head during the cold winter month of

July 1974, weeks before I left Namibia to join SWAPO and fight against the South African colonialists. (Shaketange, 2009, p. 9)

The above citation on one hand, portrays Shaketange's personal emotions about joining the liberation struggle, however, it also resonates uncertainties in the mind of the reader about the accuracy of that utterance because life narratives may consist of autofiction elements therefore, Shaketange may have embellished the events in her life for thematic reasons. Thus, the existence of the fictionalisation of experience as portrayed in autobiographical writing. It was in 1974 that Shaketange supposedly had these thoughts and she was only 14 years old, not that one cannot recall past experiences, but the manner in which she wrote this recollection is questionable. Her narrative was published in 2009 which means thirty-five years had passed.

The above-mentioned scenario creates uncertainties about the authenticity of autobiographical narration. Would Shaketange genuinely have recalled those exact thoughts about the liberation struggle? If she did, is it possible that as she remembered those thoughts, she also remembered exactly what she was doing, except if she kept a record of her life during that time? This reflection, as a result, causes the reader to wonder if this was a real life replication of a lived experience or an embellishment of language in order to attract the attention of the reader. It is on the note of autobiographical memory that Summa-Knoop (2017) posits that memories change over a period of time and the memorisation of past events are prone to subjective remodeling. Therefore, "... the alteration of memories is dictated by the need of "making sense" of what happened; we need, in other words, to connect our memories into a whole, to spell out their

connections” (Summa-Knoop, 2017, p. 3). As a result, some of Shaketange and Namhila’s articulations might have been caused by the need to connect their memories into a coherent whole.

The complications with memory are not only peculiar to autobiographical acts but are universal. As a result, Smith and Watson (2001) argue that authors just like all other people are incapable of recalling all their past life experiences. “We are always fragmented in time taking a particular or provisional perspective on the moving target of our pasts, addressing multiple and disparate audiences” (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 47). The above argument also brings into play the problems of autobiographical memory as the events of the past are remembered in certain contexts, and the context may influence how a story is recalled and articulated. For example; a sad event may not sound so sad if it is told in a cheerful context. Therefore, Smith and Watson (2001) on the matter of memory being contextual, maintain that the memory invoked in the autobiographical narrative is specific to the time of writing and the contexts of telling. Thus the memories of Namhila and Shaketange’s experiences are not isolatable facts but situated associations. Subsequently, in reading Namhila and Shaketange’s life narratives, it is up to the reader to establish their own agency as they analyse the texts because reading and understanding texts is also a subjective act and the reader makes a choice on what to learn from a reading text. As a result, the reader has the freedom and ability to gloss out the intricacies of the two autobiographies analysed in this chapter.



As already explained above, in the process of writing life narrative authors write about themselves in a subjective manner, they select memories that they would like to reconstruct. This subjective susceptibility in life narratives has brought about a debate among critics of life narratives. In joining this debate, Dobos (2010) maintains that the issue of fact and fiction, the actual remembered life experiences and the imagined ones, “concerning denominations and denominated, relating to language and reality, between image and representation and between intratextual and extratextual worlds as presented in life narratives has become problematic. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange’s (2009) life narratives are among the few narratives written by Namibian women who joined the liberation struggle, the narratives have revealed the challenges of the journey to liberate Namibia and the collective and personal struggles encountered by the authors on their reintegration into the independent Namibian societies. Since the element of truth is problematic in autobiography; Mlambo (2015) suggests that in order to authenticate life narratives, the question of the fact-fiction continuum requires a historical perspective of the political institution of the country. This reflection should focus on the lives of black people as a verification of, for example, the role played by Namibian women in the liberation struggle.

The titles of the two narratives also symbolize the traumatizing circumstances of the journey to freedom. Namhila’s *The Price of Freedom* depicts a substantial amount of sacrifice that she had to endure in order to obtain personal and collective freedom from the apartheid regime. Also, Shaketange’s *Walking the Boeing 707* depicts the long journey that she walked from Namibia to Angola and to Zambia in search of freedom. Du Pisani (2007) further posits that “personal memory becomes social and public by its display and enactment, and as such is important for the production and reproduction of society and its history” (p. 99). In *The Price of Freedom* and

*Walking the Boeing 707* Namhila and Shaketange make public their recollections of their lived lives and at the same time, they also document the history of Namibia. In his argument about the place of memory in life narratives Du Pisani (2007) posits that memory is given precedence in autobiographies that represent a chronicled past. In this case, in the two life narratives, the authors use autobiography as documentation of their remembered life experiences. Holland and Kensinger (2010) argue that the concept of memory in autobiographic acts is used colloquially as the ability of human beings to coherently remember past events.

When Namhila returned to Namibia in 1989, she travelled by bus to her home village and on that journey, she started to recall her life experiences before she left the village to go into exile. “I remembered the people, my school, and the church I used to go to, the clinic...., my picture of home was of things I could remember” (Namhila, 1997, p.152). This statement illustrates that Namhila had to rely on her memory to reconstruct and interpret her past life in her home village. She left the village when she was quite young; therefore, it is possible that she, in her mind saw her village in the eyes of a 12-year-old. Also, in an attempt to bring clarity to the notion transnational scholarship, Brah (as cited in Boehmer, 2004) supposes that “diaspora takes account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for home”. In the same article also, Gilroy posits that contemporary identities of Black people as depicted in postcolonial and cultural studies “were developed in motion, through the transmission of peoples and cultural influences, through encounter and dialogue” Boehmer, 2004, p. 174). As a result, Boehmer (2004) argues that the position above allows for the discussion of identities as subjective.

Being all grown up, Namhila's childhood memories are affected by her exilic experience, level of education and the perceptions of the adult Namhila. She explained that she was shocked when she eventually reached her village. Many things had changed. She had returned to her ancestral village after 15 years of being in Finland, a first world country. Sometimes, when someone experiences different environments, their perception of home as they saw it through a child's eyes could be disappointing because what seemed to be great and beautiful in the past, would not seem the same after having stayed in advanced communities for a long time. Therefore, because of the duration of her stay in other cultures and locations, many things could have happened, but again, adults tend to see things differently from the way children see them. Societal values can appreciate or depreciate as time passes.

The importance of memory in life narratives cannot be overlooked as memory helps individuals in constructing their identities. Namhila was shocked to observe that her village and the social lives of its inhabitants had transformed tremendously. She explained that "everything had changed. Nothing was as I remembered it. My family had changed. My brothers had outgrown me, two of my sisters lived with their husbands elsewhere" (Namhila, 1997, p. 152). This was a heart-breaking revelation for Namhila as she could not recognise anything familiar. This shows that the memories she had of her village were different from the reality that confronted her on her return.

This change in her perception of her former circumstances might imply that as she matured, her worldview changed from that of a 12-year-old to a grown-up who has been exposed to different

cultures and environments. On memory and self-identity Wilson and Ross (2003), posit that “Individuals’ current self-views, beliefs, and goals influence their recollections and appraisals of former selves. In turn, people's current self-views are influenced by what they remember about their personal past, as well as how they recall earlier selves and episodes” (Wilson & Ross 2003, p. 137). As typical in female autobiography, Namhila is overcome by emotion due to what she believed of her village as she recalled her childhood experiences. As a result of these emotions, Namhila might have used language that exaggerated the manner in which her village had depreciated and how the inhabitants had also lost their norms.

Also, self-narratives by women represent the narrator in a relational manner; in relation to members of her society and the collective social experiences of society. As can be understood from Namhila’s reactions to the change in her village, her people meant a great deal to her. Therefore, the female ‘*I*’ does not only represent the author, but it also represents the community in which Namhila had grown up in. Namhila viewed her community as an extension of her sense of belonging as they had shared socio-political experiences of apartheid.

In addition to this, Wilson and Ross (2003) argue that narrators’ evaluations of their reconstructed memories, their perceived distance from past experiences, and the point of view of their recollections have implications on how the past affects the present” (p. 137). This argument implies that as Namhila reconstructed her childhood memories she evaluated those memories from an adult point of view, therefore, this evaluation of memories might have led to the way she reacted to her relatives demands; she felt that they expected her to provide for their wants and

needs because she had a job, a house, and a car. It is interesting to note that Shaketange on the other had noted that life in Namibia was expected to change since she was gone for a long time. “While I left at age 14 and returned at age 29, I had to face the fact that Namibia did not come to a standstill in 1974 when I left, awaiting my return in 1989. Things moved on without me” (Shaketange, 2009, p. 123). Shaketange continues to explain that though she saw changes amongst her people some things remained the way they were before she went into exile. The Ovambo continued to plant, harvest, pound millet and they ate the same staple food.

Naturally, without the reconstruction and evaluation of their past memories, Namhila and Shaketange would not have public their autobiographies. On the issue of memory in autobiographical acts, Smith and Watson (2010) argue that memory is pivotal in narrating life experiences as memory aids the narrator to situate his/her past experiences into the present. “Memory is thus the source, authenticator, and destabilizer of autobiographical acts” (p. 22). As a result, Namhila and Shaketange life narrations begin with their lives in the village, their exiled lives and their lives in independent Namibia. These narrations would not have taken place in the absence of memory as memory is the driving force in remembering past events and their interpretations thereof.

Though memory is the foundation of writing life narratives, it is difficult, if not impossible, for life narrators to remember all events of the past as they happened, which means that one cannot fully recall all events of their past experiences. This reconstruction of memories brings in the question of autobiographical truth, thus autobiography is in a way a fictionalised history of the

narrator's life experiences. Thus, remembering the past required Namhila and Shaketange to reinterpret their remembered pasts in the present. Thus, unavoidably, they formed bits and pieces of remembered events into complicated interpretations that became changing stories of their experiences. Furthermore, Smith and Watson (2010) postulate that memory is contextual because individuals remember the past in certain circumstances. Namhila wrote *The Price of Freedom* seven years after Namibia became independent and Shaketange autobiography was published 10 years after independence, therefore, they had to recall and attach meaning to their recollections of past experiences as they replayed them in their minds and also as shaped by present circumstances that defined their interpretations and re-interpretations of life. In this manner, the line between fact and fiction becomes blurred, thus not fulfilling the autobiographical pact as envisaged by Gusdorf (1980). In authoring their lives, authors may exaggerate their experiences for artistic purposes. The narrator may make use of language that appeals to the senses of her perceived readership, such as; imagery, irony, figurative language, tone, and mode. All these may account to the fictionalisation of history.

When Namhila and Shaketange narrated their personal experiences, they did not do so in isolation, but rather, their memories are specific in time and contextual in the time of the telling these experiences. Despite the fact that, going into exile was in Namhila and Shaketange cases, a group effort, when they narrated their experiences, they narrated them subjectively as Cuesta (2011) points out that though people may experience the same events, each individual experience and internalise these everyday situations differently. Therefore, Namhila and Shaketange were inspired to write about their life experiences as they remembered them; they probably chose what to write and what to leave out, thus making *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*

subjectively unique individual experiences. The issue of selectivity and self-censorship of autobiographical acts is proffered in Mlambo and Pasi (2010) who posit that autobiographical acts are deliberate acts of choice; the writer chooses memories befitting their purpose of writing. Moreover, Mlambo and Pasi (2010) maintain that in autobiography rhetoric, there is a general reliance on memory thus inevitably memory is subjective.

Memory in autobiographical acts is paramount as authors heavily rely on it to construct and reconstruct these life experiences. Namhila and Shaketange left Namibia when they were just 12 and 14 years old respectively and they probably did not keep records to, later on, rely on when they decided to write their life narratives, in fact as they travelled their life journeys, they may not have thought of writing down their experiences. They, therefore, relied on their memories to tell their stories. These memories were evaluated and re-evaluated in order to construct and reconstruct their lived experiences. Accordingly, in remembering these events, Namhila and Shaketange had to recall the contexts of their past experiences and attach meanings and implications of such encounters.

It is important to note that human beings are social beings and their life experiences are shared by community members. In substantiating this argument, Cuesta (2011) confirms that autobiographies are written through social interactions; as a consequence, human beings are intrinsically social in their behaviour as they interact with other human beings in their environment. In this manner, social situations are borne out of societal events. In the same manner, recalling events of the past means that the author should be able to correlate their life

experiences with significant events for individuals and societies. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange recall the very secretive days they left Namibia in 1976 and 1974 respectively to join the liberation struggle, their departure into the unknown was well planned and executed since they had to join others on the same mission.

Namhila and Shaketange's stories, though intertwined with the lives of others, tell a personal truth of remembering experiences. Therefore, memory is the vehicle conveys the lived experiences in Namhila and Shaketange, however, the experiences of the past are internalised differently by individuals even those that share such experiences. Memory helped Namhila and Shaketange to shape their experiences in a meaningful manner. Further, the authors used the apartheid regime as a backdrop to their decisions to go into exile; this indicates that the Namibian history played a vital role in the construction of their narratives.

Moreover, the contexts in which Namhila and Shaketange wrote their stories also had an influence on how they remembered and wrote their stories. For example; Shaketange wrote her experiences of the liberation struggle under the auspices of The Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS), a cooperation programme between the Namibian and German governments to collect and preserve, document and popularise records of the struggle of the Namibian people against colonialism and apartheid for freedom and apartheid. Therefore, the context of her recollections tends to be strictly based on her participation in the struggle, since it seems that she was encouraged by the AACRLS to share her revolutionary



story. Therefore, she in a way is mostly forced to only document parts of her life she deemed necessary for the AACRLS project.

However, Namhila's recollections seem to be grounded in her own personal desire to document her experiences. Her emotions were clearly captured and her frustrations clearly documented. It should not be forgotten that both Namhila and Shaketange were traumatised, of course on different levels, by the torture and suffering they witnessed and experienced at the hands of the apartheid system, therefore, their shared memories could still haunt them even after independence if not dealt with properly on a psychological level.

Hence, in telling their stories through autobiography, Namhila and Shaketange could have experienced healing. Autobiography, as a result, provides the authors with a platform to voice these traumatic experiences and on trauma and memory. Watson and Smith (2001) argue that "narrators of trauma often testify to the therapeutic effects of telling or writing a story, acknowledging how the process of writing has changed the narrator and the life story itself" (p. 22). Thus, the above argument illustrates that memory is an important constituent of autobiographical subjectivity.

### **3.4 Exploring Namhila's (1997) and Shaketange's (2009) depiction of postcolonial Namibia**

Postcolonial writing in Africa has become centre stage for the once oppressed people to freely express themselves on issues they consider pertinent to themselves as individuals and the African people in general (for the purpose of this study, Namibians, in particular). For the purpose of this study, autobiographies written by Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) are interrogated through the postcolonial theory in general, which is narrowed down to the postcolonial feminist theory. The emphasis on the postcolonial feminism theory is necessitated by the fact that women's autobiography differs in its representations from the male autobiography.

According to Shabanirad and Seifi (2014) it is the postcolonial feminist agenda to fairly represent “women in non-Western societies as passive, docile, voiceless victims, who submit to an immutable patriarchy, the sufferers of ignorance, and restrictive culture and religion; while the Western women are represented as modern, educated, progressive and empowered (p. 243). The above-mentioned trend is contrasted by the analysis of Namhila and Shaketange's autobiographies. The two women are by no means passive nor docile since they actively and willingly played significant roles in the liberation struggle of Namibia. Their voices are clear and loud in their private and public spheres; neither do they only speak for themselves but, they also break the silence of the children and women that were in exile, partaking in the making of the Namibian nation.

In congruent with the above argument, Lindfors (2010) argues that African writers have not only served as narrators of contemporary political history, but, they have also served as proponents of far reaching transformation. This is seen in Namhila and Shaketange's autobiographies as they address the issues of gender inequality, alcohol abuse, dependency syndrome amongst their relatives and other social ills that have plagued Namibia since independence.

The postcolonial theory is beneficial in the general analysis of writing about African people, regardless of gender. Nevertheless, the postcolonial feminist theory directly addresses the themes addressed in African women's autobiographies, in particular. The postcolonial view is expounded in Innes (2007) who argues that "another strategy frequently found in postcolonial writing sidesteps entering into dialogue about the colonizer's terms by grounding the text in autobiography, starting from the self as the central point of reference" (p. 56). As a result, the postcolonial theory is used in this study as a general theory that decolonizes literary work that is written by Black Namibians. Furthermore, the general postcolonial theory is narrowed down to feminism, thus the concept of postcolonial feminism, which is a theory used as a philosophy of decolonization that goes beyond the decolonization of literary work of African people in general, rather it is employed as a backdrop of analysing the writing of Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle of the country.

Therefore, postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism as theories in literary studies are employed to interrogate the themes and nuances that are depicted in the literary work of the African people. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) write about themselves as postcolonial women who as

children lived in Namibia as oppressed people during the apartheid era, and their decisions to thereof, leave the country to join the liberation struggle. In joining the debate on postcolonial feminism, Ozkazanc-Pan (2012) posits that “postcolonial feminist approaches, through their different analyses, bring into visibility the diversity of postcolonial subjects’ experiences and the material conditions under which they live” (p. 574). As a result of the apartheid era, Namhila and Shaketange narratives require an inquiry that embraces the fact that the two women are from the African continent and as postcolonial female subjects they advance their distinctiveness to autobiographical subjectivity. They went through different experiences anchored on different physical locations and social, political and cultural contexts.

The discourses of postcolonial and feminist theories are expounded in Parashar (2016) who regard the two theories as critical discourses that have enhanced the construction and interpretation of international studies. As a result, the two theories in the last two decades have increasingly developed in their ability to incorporate the ever-changing trends of the politics and social life of the global world. The two theories have stood the test of time with the inevitable political, cultural and social changes of the current world. They have done so not only to narrow the gap between the centre and the margins but also to bring the knowledge of and from the margins to the centre. Gandhi (as cited in Parashar, 2016) explains this more clearly by stating that;

It is the encounter with feminism that encourages postcolonialism to ‘produce a more critical and self-reflexive account of cultural nationalism. On the other hand, postcolonialism offers feminism the conceptual toolbox to see multiple sites of

oppression and to reject universalisms around gendered experiences of both men and women. (Gandi, as cited Parashar, 2016, p. 371)

Therefore, this study takes cognisance of the fact that postcolonial feminism stemmed out of the postcolonial theory, a theory that spoke to the people of the once colonised communities, the third world, however, feminists saw it as a theory that left women of the third world out of the national discourse, thus, the birth of postcolonial feminism which embraced gender constructs as the divergence between the two theories. Shabanirad and Seifi (2014) in advancing the postcolonial feminist theory argue against radical and liberal feminisms by maintaining that “third world women are the production of culturally and historically bound relationships in the societies in which they live and act; thus, the universalism of womanhood erases all cultural specificities, whether social, racial, cultural or sexual. This argument tallies with the analysis of Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2008) which is grounded in the postcolonial feminism perspective which takes cognisance of the fact that they are Namibian women who were born and bred in the cultural contexts of the Oshiwambo speaking people of Namibia.

In advancing the debate on postcolonial narratives Sharrad (1990) posits that in an attempt to explain the self, communal and individuals to the reader, narrators provide a picture of where they started from, in so doing the postcolonial narrative tends to offer a lot of childhood experiences. It is the “time most closely associated with the traditional, unspoiled and pre-colonial era, and so its portrayal-often idyllic or, at worst, comic and picaresque-becomes an

educational and inspirational activity having both a particular person and a general social role” (Sharrad, 1990, p. 140).

Therefore, Namhila and Shaketange indicated that before the South African Defence force camps were erected in their villages, their lives seemed to have been fairly enjoyable until when their peaceful lives were disrupted by the activities of the apartheid regime. Certainly, Namhila and Shaketange used the postcolonial female autobiography as a tool to document childhood experiences through the eyes of the narrating adult subject; an act that could jeopardise the true reflection of the childhoods of the narrators because adults might filter their childhood memories to suit their narrative agendas, notwithstanding the fact that recollections of the past are contextual and situational.

As these two autobiographies are exilic, Namhila and Shaketange’s interrogation of their transnational experiences is inevitable. These two texts recount a common “experience of (post) colonialism that has resulted in diasporic migration and multiculturalism, rendering them hybrid subjects (Were, 2017, p. 101). Namhila and Shaketange’s hybridity is portrayed in their representations of the self; for example; Namhila (1997) maintains that the assistance that Namibians, she included, received from the Finns (since she studied in Finland) was enormous, therefore, she argues that; “it was situations and exposure like this that helped me decide that my friends are people of whatever culture or ethnicity. When we were refugees we were provided shelter by people who cared about humanity and not about colour (Namhila, 1997, p. 175). Emanating through this argument is the result of Namhila’s transnational identity. She realises

that her exilic experience provided her with a different perception of humanity. She learned to appreciate people because of their benevolence, rather than the shade of their skins. In apartheid Namibia, she had learned that the issue of skin colour differentiated her from the white minority that had ruled the country and her brothers and sisters were those that had the same skin tone as hers.

It is imperative to view Namhila's (1997) and Shaketange's (2008) texts as contents of women that were once colonised as their subjective voices resonance how they view themselves as subjects of colonialism. As postcolonial female subjects, they make the record of their involvement in the liberation struggle reputable by speaking for themselves and the girl children of the struggle, who is usually absent from the Namibian historical political discourse. The hegemonic power (South African regime) marginalised Namibian indigenous groups on the basis of their skin colour and women experienced double colonialism because they were women and Black thus worsened their already exacerbating colonial experience.

Women generally, were seen as subordinate to their male counterparts; as a result, they experienced gender disparities in many spheres of their lives. Therefore, Namhila and Shaketange's subaltern voices can now, after colonial emancipation, through autobiography, be heard by government and the general public as they were previously silenced by the colonial factor in the country. Black Namibians were generally excluded from positions of power in all institutions of governance, as a result, they were denied the means to effectively participate in the politics of their own country and they did not have a say in the political processes that

negatively impacted on their lives. For example; Shaketange (2009) narrates through her autobiography about the pass, a kind of permission document, which Black people were required to carry to move from the Northern parts of the country to the central and Southern parts of Namibia. This pass prerequisite to a great extent, constrained people's movements since it was also a daunting task to obtain one. Thus, one may conclude, was also a scheme by the apartheid regime to stop Namibians from mass mobilising for emancipation because of the longstanding strategy of colonial powers to divide and conquer African people.

In trying to maintain control over the natural resources and the indigenous people of Namibia, the apartheid regime tried to keep Namibians apart, thus hindering them from unifying in resisting the apartheid regime that had no regard for the Black population of the country. However, as can be seen from Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009), Namibian people who had never met before were against all odds unified in exile by a common goal of liberating their motherland. Namibians came from all corners of the country to Zambia and Angola with the main goal of overthrowing the apartheid regime from Namibia, a goal that was finally achieved in 1990.

To exacerbate the situation of the Black people, they could not voice their dismay towards such restrictive laws in fear for their lives. Therefore, Namhila and Shaketange in independent Namibia through life narratives have an opportunity to finally have their subaltern voices heard, thus gaining subaltern agency. It should be noted here that this present analysis does not attempt to produce more authentic representations or misrepresentations of Namhila (1997) and



Shaketange (2008). Instead, the aim of this chapter is to analyse the given texts from the postcolonial feminist perspective and how the narrators represent the self through the private and public spaces.

It is of importance to note that the two authors' experiences of the apartheid regime are deliberated from their childhood lifetimes. Namhila was twelve years old and Shaketange was slightly older than Namhila, she was just fourteen years old. This revelation brings to light that children also significantly contributed to the struggle of liberation of Namibia, a fact that is often overlooked in the analysis of postcolonial life narratives. Shaketange and Namhila speak for the voiceless (the children of the liberation struggle) as their young ages at the time of going into exile brings in another critical dimension that is not often told, they bring to the fore the presence of the in (visible) child, girl child and boy-child (as their identities are relational to the otherness), in the liberation struggle. This presence of the child is valuable because the reader can easily discern the role played by adults in the decolonisation process, forgetting that these adults or at least some of them took the decision to liberate the country when they were just children, decisions that drastically changed their outlook on life. It is this decision that shaped the experiences they share in their autobiographies, at the same time, this decision also dictates how they share such experiences.

This involvement of children in the liberation struggle deconstructs the notion of childhood innocence and how children are only viewed as victims of their circumstances. Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) through autobiography do not only give voice to the children who went

to join the liberation struggle, but also to those that were born in exile, Namhila argues “no-one mentions children born in exile finding themselves in the war situation; we do not know how they felt about being in the war and coming to Namibia as foreigners” (Namhila, 1997, p. 195). This shows that the children of the liberation struggle factor are an important element in the postcolonial national discourse. Their voices are pertinent to national discourse and postcolonial scholarship because in the process their plight is revealed and appreciated in the liberation struggle of the country. On the topic of voice, Mishra (2013) argues that “the question of voice that is who speaks for whom and whose voices are being heard in discussions on postcolonial women’s issues is another moot point in postcolonial feminism”(p. 132). Therefore, Namhila’s autobiography provides a platform for the child of the liberation struggle to be heard. This voice is also subjective since Namhila and Shaketange reflect on their childhoods to represent the children of the liberation struggle.

The above argument also exposes the issue of the ‘the struggle kids’ as they have come to be known in Namibia. These are the offspring of Namibian refugees who were born in exile, it seems the SWAPO government had either forgotten or ignored their plight and they took it upon themselves to have government and the Namibian people to listen to them. In underscoring the plight of the children of the liberation struggle, Shiningayamwe, Shalyefu, and Kanyimba (2014) posit that since 2008, the children of the liberation struggle had been demonstrating to the government through the Ministry of Veteran Affairs in Windhoek and other SWAPO offices in the country. They have been demanding for the government to take heed of their concerns. They need job opportunities, educational opportunities, identity documents, and financial assistance to improve their livelihoods in Namibia. Namhila documents the marginalisation of the children of

the liberation struggle to indicate that they are of a grave concern in the Namibian postcolonial politics. Autobiography, therefore, becomes a canvass that Namhila paints social ills and disparities on in Namibia, that require urgent government intervention.

Similarly, Shaketange (2009) does the same, she uses autobiography as a tool to expose the ‘forgotten children’ of the liberation struggle. With the inception of Resolution 435 and the imminent repatriation to Namibia, Shaketange was tasked to look after 200 children who ranged between 7 to 10 years old. Most of these children were orphaned which means that they needed special care by the SWAPO government. In emphasizing the presence of children in the liberation struggle, for example, Namhila (1997) writes about how the South African Defence Force (SADF) military camp in her village in 1975 when she was just 11, brought about untold suffering of people, she witnessed these sufferings as a child, she was even shot at herself, thus advancing her political awakening. As she planned her escape from Namibia, she maintains that;

I did not discuss my plans to go into exile with my parents or any of my relatives.

I kept my plans a tight secret between me and Maria, who informed me about her brother’s plans to leave the country and asked whether I was interested to join them. I had always wanted to escape from the repression, so I thought this was my opportunity to do so. (Namhila, 1997, p. 8)

The citation above implies that age-wise, Namhila was just a child, but she was quite intelligent and aware of her circumstances. In general, adults think that children do not hear nor see evil, but, Shaketange and Namhila prove that children are responsive to their surroundings and

circumstances, thus, through the written word, they diminish the old adage that children are to be seen only and not to be heard as they bring to light their childhood memories. According to Namhila (1997) revealing her plans would have meant two things; firstly, her parents would not have allowed her to take this treacherous journey because she was too young. Secondly, if her escape was revealed to the South African soldiers, she and her accomplices would have suffered untold torture. Shaketange was also matured beyond her age; she also kept her escape cryptic, lest her intentions and Tuhafeni's (her friend) were revealed. She reasoned that;

It was clear in our young minds that if others knew of our plans, they would either try to stop us or maybe they would go to the South African police. Deep inside, I was afraid that if anyone knew of our plans, they would say things that would shake my courage to escape and make me less strong for the long journey.

(Shaketange, 2009, p. 16)

Though Namhila and Shaketange as children from a colonised country wanted to become soldiers and fight for the liberation of their motherland, they realised later on in SWAPO camps, that the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the army wing of SWAPO, did not use the children of their ages to fight against the South African regime, but rather, to equip them with the necessary skills that would have been required when Namibians had achieved self-governance. These experiences as they reveal them, through autobiographical acts, define the narrators when they became educated adults.

In cementing the above argument, Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) posits that “the child’s voice is, therefore, articulated through an adult lens and this presentation demonstrates the ways in which each of these women feels that she is directly shaped and influenced by her childhood circumstances” (p. 61). Namhila (1997) found it befitting in telling her story that one of the subtitles of her story should be *My Childhood*. In so doing, she accords great value to her childhood memories because she believes that these childhood experiences eventually defined who she is as an adult. In this section, she provides the reader with a synopsis of her roots; where her family originated from, the kind of household, she was born into, the extended kinship environment she experienced as a child and the Ovambo notion of marriage. As a result, she uses autobiography to emphasise her roots and her position in her family. To emphasise her identity as a child, she stipulated that she was the third among seven siblings. “Growing up in a big family provided me with the social advantage of being part of a family and being an accepted member of a social group, and it gave me a sense of belonging” (Namhila, 1997, p. 14).

Correspondingly, Shaketange (2009) in bolstering her identity, briefly starts by telling the reader about her date of birth and where she comes from and her stay with her Uncle, Elia. However, as Namhila and Shaketange write their childhood memories, they reveal a disturbing picture of their childhood innocence being disrupted by the apartheid regime. As a result of the colonial factor, they are somehow forced to mature quite early to escape the tyrannical government that ruled the land. As a result, colonialism, location, and sociocultural transformation influenced how they, as adults, reflect on their childhood experiences.

Experience; personal experience, in particular, is the cornerstone of autobiographical acts. This sentiment is echoed in Smith and Watson (2010) who declare that “mediated through memory and language, “experience” is already an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (p. 31). Namhila and Shaketange as girl children and then women of Namibia’s liberation struggle, explore the experiences they went through not only as individuals, but firstly, as children then as well as women. Moreover, in an analysis of experience in autobiographical acts, Smith and Watson (2010) assert that experience is defined as constitutive to the subject, discursive, interpretative, and authoritative. As a result, Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) experiences enable them to evaluate their childhood memories in order to reconstruct their identities in Namibia during the apartheid era, in exile as refugees and back in independent Namibia. Through experience, they analytically delve into the past, revealing memories of their lives. Consequently, as they witnessed and lived these experiences, their narratives can be regarded as accurate and reliable. Through autobiography; Shaketange and Namhila as now independent Namibian women of the liberation struggle, gain power and agency through disclosing their individual stories as heroic acts.

Namhila and Shaketange draw on their childhood experiences to teach their readers about certain norms and cultures that were observed by their people before independence. For example, Namhila (1997) draws on how she witnessed alcohol abuse when she came back from exile, she matter of fact stated that one of her first shocks was the extent to which alcohol had destroyed people’s lives. In general, alcohol consumption in Namibia is at a high level. Therefore, Namhila is commended for her critical awareness of social ills that have a precarious impact on the lives of many Namibians. In this manner, the act of life writing becomes an act of social activism and

how the female autobiographer becomes more concerned not only about herself and her immediate family, but rather she becomes concerned about the society she lives in and the behaviour of other human beings as opposed to the male autobiographer who is more individualistic.

Before she went into exile, Namhila had known of a traditional beer called Omalodu that was consumed during special ceremonies. From what she could remember, stronger alcoholic drinks were accepted for adults only, but, abuse of such drinks was generally frowned upon by her people. She saw children drinking strong alcohol beverages with adults and this culture transformation left her speechless. In explaining this tendency of writing by postcolonial writers, Innes (2007) posits that usually, postcolonial writers draw on their childhood encounters to transmit precolonial culture, a world that was not tainted by colonial influence and simultaneously suggesting a viewpoint which challenges the premises and beliefs that are taken by the postcolonial adult population.

Therefore, the postcolonial culture, as depicted by Namhila (1997) before independence depicts an environment of innocence and strong morals, however, the depiction after independence does not portray an ideal picture of the indigenous people of Namibia as many of them consumed alcohol excessively, something that Namhila did not expect. It seemed as if people's morals decayed with the apartheid regime stronghold. Shaketange (2009) also writes about how she thought Namibia would turn out to be after independence, but, many things remained the same.

Returnees, just like most people, had high hopes and expectations. People had hoped that independence would create more employment opportunities, distribute the wealth of the country more evenly, reduce poverty, only to find out that while the apartheid system and colonialism were uprooted, most other things stayed put. (Shaketange, 2009, p. 122)

Shaketange through autobiography portrays an atmosphere of euphoria for the imminent independence in 1990. They hoped for better opportunities in free Namibia. During the transition period to independence, many people were excited about the changes that would take place in the country, but not all change is welcome as illustrated by Namhila and Shaketange. The change in the alcohol consumption of the people upset Namhila greatly and lack of opportunities also frustrated Shaketange. As a result, Namhila and Shaketange's narrations tell the reader that not all change is positive and post-independence is not necessarily a leap into Utopia; people will in many aspects of their lives have to struggle on personal and collective levels to achieve an environment that is favourable for their livelihoods.

Other ills, unacceptable behaviour, and social problems always come into play hence *aluta continua!* The struggle continues. These revelations can be linked to Namhila's autobiography entitled '*The Price of Freedom*' as one does not pay money for freedom but, even when freedom is gained through struggle and sacrifice, life struggles continue; these can be political, economic, cultural or social struggles. This continuation of problems could be equated to the Silozi proverb; *mo wa wina mo wa luza*, literally translated it means, *you win here and you lose there*, showing



that the struggle continues, it depicts the inevitable conditions human struggles in general, one way or another, struggle will find human beings wherever they are. Life is like a continuous jigsaw puzzle, that needs to be solved day by day. Therefore, autobiography is also used to theorise the human condition.

Namhila and Shaketange narratives take the reader back to their childhoods, then going into exile and constantly moving from one refugee camp to the next. They thus share their experiences as Namibian children, becoming refugees and adults, their respective stay in West Africa, moving to Finland and Britain for studies and coming back to Namibia as free women and the hardships they then experienced in an independent Namibia. In their quest for a better future, Shaketange and Namhila went beyond their national borders, constantly negotiating their identities. Thus, transnational and global citizenry greatly contributes to the making of individuals, in this case, the making of Namhila and Shaketange identities. In today's globalised world, the present generation should be aware of the fact that many people are constantly moving beyond their own borders in search of better opportunities. People may relocate beyond their national borders from time to time to either escape political and economic instability or because they simply want to experience a new environment.

One of the highlights that Shaketange brings forth is the issue of land in Namibia, just like elsewhere in Africa where people had been dislocated, the issue of land is pertinent as land symbolises belonging and at the same time it also represents productivity. Many people in Africa, Namibians included, live off their land. This land, especially in rural areas is ancestral

land which is inherited from one generation to the next. She writes; “others asked if they had the freedom to settle wherever they wanted. Still, others wondered how the land would be distributed once they were back” (Shaketange, 2009, p. 106). Therefore, land rights are pertinent to many people as land is associated with belonging that shaping one’s identity. Moreover, though Namhila and Shaketange were educated, they also speak for those that were illiterate, the soldiers that liberated Namibia with the barrel of the gun and those that were older when they went to exile and did not have an opportunity to go to school. They bring the issue of language through their narratives; a language that was adopted in independent Namibia as a language of all official communication. In echoing the same pertinent issue Namhila maintains that;

Before the elections, political parties had election manifestos that outlined their economic programmes. The manifestos were mainly available in English and those who could read it. The manifestos meant nothing for the large public for whom written texts are objects in black and white. (Namhila, 1997, p. 189)

Corresponding with the above sentiment, Shaketange speaks for those that had no education and suffered because they did not qualify for white collar jobs. The SWAPO combatants became marginalised as they were initially not offered support in independent Namibia. Shaketange argues that these people were not counseled in order to integrate into society and there were also no “job-training or skills development programmes provided to returnees to prepare them for civilian life. Many did not even have language training in English to try to get jobs. Some were illiterate and had left school at very young ages” (Shaketange, 2009, p. 122).

From the above sentiments one can conclude that firstly, Namhila and Shaketange used autobiography as a tool to speak for others, thus intertwining their liberation struggle with the experiences of others. Once more they emphasise on the relational identity construction visible in female autobiography. Secondly, they also highlight on social issues that have rocked Namibia since independence such as unemployment that begets poverty, especially for people that are illiterate, thus calling for action to rectify such an issue, indirectly Shaketange and Namhila advocate for vocational training for such people. Further, the authors also question the use of English as a language of all formal communication in the country. Thus, implicitly advocating for a language/ language that people are articulate in which is propounded in Simataa and Simataa (2017) who suggest the need to use English in conjunction with the country's indigenous languages in order to include everyone in the development processes of Namibia.

As depicted in the two narratives, it is noteworthy to mention that experience is not isolated as it takes place in social and historical perspectives. This again depicts the notion of a relational female identity as represented in women's autobiographies. Namhila (1997) categories her experiences in six parts to indicate the different socio-cultural contexts she underwent as a refugee awaiting the independence of Namibia. One of the experiences she shares with her readers is entitled "*what it means to be a woman in Namibia*" (p. 186). Under this subheading, she underscores the hardships she as an individual endured as a woman in independent Namibia. But she is not only disturbed about her own welfare alone, but she is also concerned about the welfare of other women. Through autobiography, Namhila fights for the rights of women, she finds it inequitable to accept the notion that women should be subservient to men when she writes;

I see myself as an independent woman who can think, plan and make decisions of her own. I can consult my husband, but I do not need his shadow in everything...  
The Namibian society, women included, seem to only see a woman as subordinate to man. (Namhila, 1997, p. 186)

As can be clearly deduced from the above citation of Namhila (1997), the author of the autobiography gains agency through her writing as she firmly establishes her distinct individuality. Though Shaketange (2009) does not narrate much on gender disparities, one realises that her strong personality was also established as she was nominated for scholarships and when she was put in charge of about 200 orphans and children whose parents were elsewhere during the country's transition period. In doing so doing, Shaketange shows that she was an independent woman as her efforts were recognised by SWAPO so much that the party entrusted her with such a responsibility. Shaketange also divided her story into seven subheadings to illustrate the different locations and situations she underwent; this shows that she also gained agency through autobiographical writing, as she writes about her individual experiences as a participant in the liberation struggle.

### **3.5 Identity shattering, fragmentation, crisis and reformulation in Namhila and Shaketange's postcolonial experience**

This section of the study explores the theme of identity as it is something recurrent in Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009). The exilic autobiography is shaped by the chronicles of a journey, a journey motif that in essence is complicated and to some extent makes the text read like a *Bildungsroman*. Therefore, identity construction and reconstruction are a grave concern for the postcolonial life narrator. The two self-life narrations by Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) respectively, as analysed in this section represents how the authors lived in Namibia as children and the analysis continues to analyse the shifting of their identities from being Namibians to being stateless as they become refugees and again their identities had to be renegotiated upon their return to Namibia. If Namhila and Shaketange's narratives were to be read as *Bildungsroman*, the two autobiographies would be a representation of Namhila and Shaketange's growth; psychological, physical and moral, from being young girls in their respective villages to adulthood. Namhila and Shaketange take the reader through their character transformations as they find themselves in different circumstances.

Therefore, the theme of identity is recurrent in the two autobiographies. Their narrations are coming of age stories that represent their lived experience of formal and informal education and their international and national cultural experiences which in turn shaped their identity constructions. The narratives depict the author's experiences and how these experiences shifted their identities. Personal identities are influenced not only by who we are (man/woman, race,

religion, genealogy etc.) but also by experiences people go through. Namhila and Shaketange's experiences were constantly shifting as can be deduced in the different experiences Namhila and Shaketange encountered. For example; Namhila is firstly portrayed as an Oshiwambo young girl whose perspective on her culturally oriented life-style is interrupted by the imminent presence of the apartheid South African army in her village. As a result, she voluntarily leaves her village on a mission she did not have enough insight on, which led to her exilic identities. The gruesome treatment of her village people changed her childhood innocence. New experiences awaited her across the border into Angola, Zambia, Gambia and Finland. All these shifting experiences thus influence her identities.

Exilic subjects tend to feel uprooted and misplaced in their migrant lives. This notion can be viewed through Namhila's revelation of her struggle to grasp her 'true' identity. At the beginning of her autobiography, Namhila (1997) acknowledges the contribution of her husband to her narration, who encouraged her to "come to terms with the shattered fragments" (p. 4) of her life in the writing of her life story. This implies that she used the writing process and production of her autobiography as a healing process, to bring together 'the shattered fragments' of her life. Namhila and Shaketange lives were shattered in many ways by the colonial forces, the circumstances they found themselves in whilst in exile, the death of Namhila's husband during the transition to independence and the struggles that both authors had to endure in independent Namibia. Between the ages of 12 and 14, the two authors were just children innocently living in their respective villages, but the presence of the South African military bases in their villages ended their innocence. They were suddenly robbed of their virtuousness; they had to urgently mature in their states of mind in order to become part of a bigger national dream, the notion of

liberating motherland from the yoke of colonialism. At these ages, they understood the implications of the presence of an enemy that subjugated them and fellow Black Namibians. They realised that they had to assume other identities in order to reclaim the identities they were to lose in the process.

In the discussion of memory and identity, Wilson and Ross (2003) suggest that “people do not always appear to value personal consistency; instead they often highlight shifts in their identities over time. The tendency to exaggerate the personal change seems to be more widespread” (p. 138). In light of this argument, one may posit that Namhila and Shaketange’s narratives are written in a way that they indicate major shifts in their identities and experiences. For example; on one hand, Shaketange start her autobiography by reflecting on her childhood experiences and her subsequent journey into exile, narrating the major incidences of moving from one refugee camp/country to the next, the major turn of her exilic lives, the transition to independence and her subsequent return to Namibia. However, on the other hand, though Namhila’s narration follows the sequence of Shaketange’s narration, she provided more detailed information as she divulged intimate details of her life experiences such as; the bad treatment she was subjected to by her in-laws as a result of not getting pregnant as they expected, her personal struggles as a mother raising her child alone due to different circumstances and her professional and personal dilemmas in independent Namibia, her fears, joys and anxieties. This synopsis shows that Shaketange’s narrative is incongruent with the above assertion by Wilson and Michael (2003), however, Namhila’s is unrelated to the assertion as she provided major and minute details that helped shape her identity.

Namibia being their motherland was being taken away from them by the colonial forces and they wanted to repossess this land. Once more, autobiography is used as a blueprint for identity entitlements. In Africa, the issue of land is of paramount quintessence. The land is the main reason why the people of Africa fought protracted wars of liberation. They wanted to reclaim their ancestral land, thus regaining their dignity and identity. In this analysis, autobiography, allows the reader to deeply analyse the present-day questions on land. Wars have been waged because of land capture by outside forces. Land in Namibia, like in many other countries in Africa is used to establish the origins and identities of the people who own the land. Land expropriation debates, certainly, have been seen and heard in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia and has caused much controversy on the political, social and economic fronts and in some instances, it has caused violence amongst inhabitants of these countries, a clear example is the Zimbabwean experience where some White farmers and their labourers experienced extreme violence at the hands of those that felt that Zimbabwean land belonged to the Black man rather than the White population that lived in the country.

Therefore, autobiography brings to the fore issues and concerns surrounding land reclamation and its value in instilling a sense of identity to the people. Land does not only establish the identities of the people, who own it, but it is also a source of income and in traditional communities, the land is used for subsistence farming, it is an integral part of the people's livelihood. Thus, it also symbolises production and spells the end of poverty in the minds of many. The issue of land is critical in life writing, especially amongst the people of Africa. Autobiography thus provides a scholarly platform for readers to gauge some of the present-day issues that have thus far been pivotal to the Namibian public.



At the end of her autobiography, Namhila (1997) writes about her struggle with identity. Unsure of whom she is, she writes about her identity when she was in exile, at that time and locations she was not doubtful about whom she was. She, as a refugee irrefutably felt that she was a Namibian and there was no question about it. This means that Namhila's desire to one day go back home as a free citizen, undoubtedly made her to proudly identify herself as a Namibian. This conviction may perhaps have been a result of her intention to join the liberation struggle of Namibia and reclaim her identity as the daughter of Namibia. As a Namibian, she had felt victimised in her own homeland and her conviction to one day to come back to reclaim her ancestral land entrenched her identity as a Namibian refugee at the time. Yet from another perspective the idea of trying to ascertain her 'Namibianness' might also mean that she had self-doubts about her identity. She finds herself defending her identity, this could mean that she wanted to convince herself that her identity was not fragmented at all, but was a cohesive one. Therefore, an autobiography, in this case, is also used to question, construct and reconstruct Namhila's identity.

Moreover, when Namhila returned to Namibia, she did not feel at home either. She once again finds herself at a crossroad by not possessing a sense of belonging to the Namibia she had so willingly sacrificed for. One would have expected her to embrace her Namibianness but everything had changed so much. This confusion and incongruence was a result of her childhood memories of her home. Many changes had taken place while she was away. Her mother had died and some of her relatives had moved away from her village. Things had changed so much that there was nothing left, she could compare with the memories she had had before she went into exile. She was upset and felt traumatised by these changes. She recalls the pain she went through

when she was confronted with so many transformations in her village, and she states that "... many people did not understand that these changes robbed me of my childhood memories which were the only things that represented home and Namibia to me" (Namhila, 1997, p. 153).

Therefore, her homecoming did not clarify her identity, but rather it complicated her identity crisis. Namhila, through autobiography, demonstrates that a sense of belonging is imperative in identity construction. Namhila grappled with her identity because she had lost her sense of belonging to Namibia. This sense of displacement was caused by the drastic changes that had taken place both in the environment and the people that inhabited the environment. This shows that change can be shattering and can displace a person's sense of identity. In order to understand these conflicting sentiments that Namhila went through, one needs to understand that she left her motherland when she was just a child of 12 years old, only to return as a mother herself. Namhila had had a chance in exile to experience extreme life changes; therefore, her perception of Namibia would have been something she could not appreciate. She had lived in Finland, a developed country, which was way more advanced than rural Namibia that was deprived of any meaningful development by the apartheid regime. It is, thus, normal for her to have felt disappointed and robbed of her untainted childhood perception of how Namibians conducted themselves. In the excerpt below, she describes the identity crisis she went through when she returned to Namibia as a result of what she thought Namibia was supposed to be:

Now that I am in Namibia, all that I knew of Namibia, of home, has changed. I am finding myself lost in my own country. So, I began to search for home. My heart tells me that I am home because Namibia was my place of birth, even

though I do not have the feel of home. This is the conflict of identity my brain is going through now, now that I am at home and at the same time I am not because my picture of the home is different. I am constantly negotiating and renegotiating the matter. ... This is my struggle, to search for those very basic things to make me feel human and belong somewhere. I am in Namibia but I feel culturally uprooted and displaced. (Namhila, 1997, p. 198)

From the above excerpt, one can, therefore, contend that self-introspection is one of the most important attributes of autobiography. Human beings are perpetually growing and they contend with new experiences relentlessly. However, some of these encounters have a greater impact on our lives than others. Lopičić (n.d.) holds that all autobiographical acts are acts of a quest for self-identity in which the author tries to understand herself/ himself. This can be seen in *The Price of Freedom* as Namhila tries to grapple with who she is. Her identity was forever shifting with the different circumstances that she found herself in. Of course, she understood that she was a Namibian but, as an individual, she didn't feel at home. This struggle with her identity is expected as she had spent most of her life in exile and the memories she had held dear to her heart of home as a child were all shattered upon her return. Officially, she was Namibian, however, her perspective on life had changed because she had become a global citizen; therefore, she struggles to negotiate between her national identity and her transnational and transcultural citizenry. Justifiably, She looks for a comprehensive identity, but, that is difficult to achieve because her transnational experience has not only unhinged her from the one identity she had accepted in Namibia, but it also dislocated her psychological concept of who she was. After she survived the Cassinga massacre, Namhila started to worry about her identity, she wanted to

understand her individuality in the struggle, this quest might have been caused by her near-death experience of the massacre. She, therefore, has to discern who she was amidst all that was happening;

I realised that just being a refugee was not enough. I was an individual and was going to live with people, but how was I to relate to them? It was becoming important that I had an identity. I was questioning how I could preserve this identity without isolating myself. I also questioned where I belonged in the whole wide world and how I would ensure that my children would one day have my culture and speak my mother tongue. (Namhila, 1997, p. 48)

The concern for the mother tongue deficit is a critical one among African people because the knowledge of one's mother tongue also provides individuals with a sense of belonging as can be glimpsed through Namhila's apprehensions. And the sense of belonging, in turn, determines one's identity. Namhila was worried about how lost her children would be if they would not be able to communicate in the language of their predecessors. On the importance of indigenous languages in Namibia, Simataa and Simataa (2017) contend that language is the embodiment of culture and culture can be well articulated through language. To this effect, Namhila's children would establish a sense of belonging if they understood their mother-tongue which would translate to the understanding of the cultures of their forefathers. The fact that some African languages are extinct or on the verge of extinction, through globalisation and the adoption of foreign languages as official languages in African countries, calls for the urgent need to address this issue on a national level. Therefore, Namhila's postcolonial autobiography reveals such

challenges that need urgent intervention by government and civil society. Through autobiography, Namhila tries to put the fragments of her shattered identity back together.

Though Namhila was part and parcel of a larger organisation, she realises that her individuality was paramount in constructing her own identity. Despite the fact that her identity as reflected in *The Price of Freedom* resonates an identity that was relational to the others, she also pursues self-identification, therefore, she ponders on the issue of agency as she realises her personhood was important in the process of identity construction. Namhila finds herself in a situation where she had to evaluate and reevaluate her self-worth, she was self-aware thus the quest for establishing a sense of being separate and distinct from others. Human beings as can be glimpsed from Shaketange (2009) and Namhila (1997) continuously ask themselves questions relating to their identities, as such, human beings are perpetually on the search for individualised identities depending on their circumstances. For that reason, the establishment of agency by both authors is quite significant in post-colonial women's autobiography. Namhila (1997) shows the reader that though individuals live in social contexts, each individual also lives distinctly from others and he/she lives over their own space and time. Individuals are distinct from others because of age, gender, skills, amongst other characteristics. Also Shaketange (2009) at first found it difficult to accept her new identity of being a refugee, but, as time progressed she started to accept her new circumstances when she was 22 and had completed her secondary school, she said;

I had been away for eight years and yet, I did not feel homeless or without roots. I felt part of something important, the struggle for freedom, and I felt I had played a

role in the struggle just like those who fought on the front lines or had another job with SWAPO. (Shaketange, 2009, p. 95)

Shaketange also presents her distinctiveness by revealing that she had accepted her new experiences and circumstances, while Namhila was finding it difficult to easily accept her new identity. Both authors, make a case for identity construction, and in so doing, they embrace certain choices that would enable them to have control over their lives, though they engage socially with other people, as can be seen clearly in their autobiographies, their personal space is well defined. They worked tirelessly to achieve their educational goals and they went back to the camps to educate those that came after them.

It is, consequently, not surprising that Namhila felt displaced in her own country as she had spent a significant part of her life and developmental years in other countries. Namhila's quest for identity is embodied in her footsteps back into exile and back again to Namibia. She went back to Zambia and she described this journey in the following manner; "In 1994 I went back to Zambia, one of my former homes, to try and reclaim my identity there. I tried so hard to make myself feel at home, but I could not. In 1995 I went back to Finland to relocate my roots, my identity, my home, but I could not fit in with the Finnish society either..." (Namhila 1997, p. 198). This bold, unapologetic act of sharing her private self in a narrative voice indicates that the question of identity is quite significant to her as it is significant in many autobiographical acts. This self-revealing identity quest is analogous to Todorović' and his *Book of Revenge* (as cited in Lopičić, n. d) when he states that he knew that his disease was the identity crisis "it is but one

piece in the jigsaw puzzle that is his identity, but it creates the sense of progress and development, pleasing however minute”. Thus, individual identity is not constant, it seems rather that individuals carry many identities in their lives.

When Namhila and Shaketange were children, they saw individual and social life differently, and while in exile they were refugees but they knew they were Namibians. Upon independence, they reassess their life experiences and venture into another quest for their identities. The constant metamorphosis of the human identity, thus becomes a noteworthy segment of their autobiographies. This is reinforced by Smith and Watson (2010) who maintain that social organisations and symbolic communications are not stable, are subject to constant change thus making identities impermanent. Perhaps, a comprehensive single identity is difficult to achieve for human beings in general, but it becomes even more challenging for migrants who are continuously on the move both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, because when Namhila and Shaketange left Namibia they did not settle in one place, neither did they play one role; Namhila became a nurse, both of them became students in different countries and they eventually became teachers. This view of assuming many roles is common in exilic autobiography because people move from one place to the next as circumstances dictate, thus establishing the notion of multiple identities of autobiography writers. Implicitly, in general, human beings grapple with their inner selves trying to figure out what they really want in their lives and who they really are. Therefore, there is a constant struggle with identity construction and comprehension in the lives of human beings, even among those that have lived in one place since their dates of births.

Namhila tries to solve what she assumes is her identity crisis by looking back to her childhood in Namibia, her different homes in exile and finally her new life in the newly independent Namibia. She once more in her narration reveals the complexity of transnational identities, which could be viewed as beneficial from a different angle. Namhila and Shaketange's identities had become enriched because they had moved away from the known to the unknown. Their worldviews had taken on different shapes. Rather than being confined to the villages of their origins, they experienced life as they would have never known if they had not '*walked the Boeing 707*' and experienced *The Price of Freedom*. Shaketange on her experiences explains that "it seemed that people looked at us as different. I believed my experiences in exile made me stronger, not different" (Shaketange, 2009, p. 122). Their experiences had equipped them with survival skills, they would be able to live anywhere in the world and adjust to the contexts of their new environments. They had in a way, developed through their experiences in exile, resilience, that would drive them to fight and overcome the hardships of life.

Namhila (1997) acknowledged in the final paragraph of her autobiography that the story in her book was the beginning of a quest for her uprooted roots. Though Namhila views her identity complexity as a crisis, there is an element of uprooting, then transplanting in exilic autobiography. One may be uprooted from their place of origin, but then again, they can be transplanted elsewhere. When one comes out of a toxic situation, similar to the apartheid regime experienced by Shaketange and Namhila, they tend to find their roots elsewhere. Their experiences in exile give them opportunities they would have otherwise not obtained in Namibia if they had not left the country. Their transnational experiences defined their identities as the experience provided them with a wider view of life, yet in the case of Namhila (1997), she had



not embraced the notion of being transplanted. Namhila only regards exile life as a form of displacement, of course, by all means, individuals are displaced but, there are also benefits gained, such as better education opportunities and travelling to countries that one would never have seen otherwise.

The hardships of exile life also strengthen the characters of other people. It is possible that Namhila and Shaketange's experiences of life in other countries strengthened their characters, these experiences made them resilient thus, empowering them to overcome the challenges of the life-after the exile. In this manner, they use life-narratives to reflect on their ever-changing identities in search of, if possible at all, a singular unified individual identity.

The above sentiment is substantiated by Lopičić (n. d) who postulates that autobiography writing not only provides an author with a platform to recognise and identify herself/himself as an individual, but also provides an opportunity for the author "to identify himself, to realise how gradually through experience, knowledge and understanding his self-emerges in the constant process of becoming, rather than the fixed state of being" (p. 127). Through the writing process of her autobiography, Namhila went through a journey of self-introspection in which she reveals who she is as she puts the pieces of her life together and these pieces had to be retrieved from her memory in order to contemplate and analyse them for the present perspective.

Further Lopičić (n. d.) describes autobiography as transformative as the author analyses the self. The author uses mental images stored in his/her memory, these mental images are then analysed by the author to decide whether they are worth writing about or not. The images are usually of significance in the author's life. Moreover, Lopičić (n. d) argues that autobiography provides a voice to the author, especially if they were one way or another oppressed. When the subject (Namhila/ Shaketange) is silenced by the forces (the South Africa apartheid regime) more powerful than herself, then autobiographical narrative; *The Price of Freedom/ Walking the Boeing 707* may have given voice to her pain, anger, and desires. When Namhila went back to Finland in 1995, she realised that she had not had a significant social life when she lived there, most of all because she was too angry and bitter about her refugee situation. She felt that she was a victim of a war and an apartheid system she had no control over. She felt empty and worthless as a human being. She confessed that though the war was over she still had identity crises, but, her situation was then different as she appreciated the struggle for independence that has gotten her back to her country of origin. And she noted that she has decided to keep on finding her identity in independent Namibia.

*The Price of Freedom* is powerful because Namhila chose to divulge her intimate personal experiences, thus disclosing her innermost sentiments of who she was. Conversely, autobiography does not only reveal the experiences of an individual but, intertwines individual encounters with public events as individuals live in social contexts. As a result, people's identities are shaped to a certain extent, by social events that transpire around them. Namhila existed against different forces in Namibia and outside Namibia. Before independence, she had

to flee the apartheid system, into exile, she had to be content with the negative perceptions that emanated as a result of being a refugee.

After independence, Namhila had to fight for recognition in the workplace and at the same time wrestle the ghosts of the past that haunted her existence in the country she loved so dearly. She accepts that she is the way she is today because of the struggle she endured; she posited that still carried the scars of that struggle. She had to figure out how she was going to identify herself with the Namibian history. She continued to argue that, “if I am lost, if my past is lost amongst historical events over which I have no control, who then shall make or remake my history?” (Namhila, 1997, p. 199). She, therefore, took the responsibility to construct and reconstruct her experiences in “The price of freedom” in order to share her experiences as no one could tell these experiences better than herself. “This story was the beginning of a mission in search of my uprooted roots. It is my past roots that form the basis for my children’s future” (Namhila, 1997, p. 199).

Therefore, in this light, the autobiographical genre is used as both a remedy to cure the wounds of the past and a means to find and reclaim one’s identity. Namhila uses autobiography as a means to find her identity. Namhila and Shaketange courageously disclosed their private and public challenges as they went through the struggle for independence and after that struggle, they had to struggle still in order to reclaim their respective places in independent Namibia. As a consequence, the two women continuously negotiate and renegotiate their identities in their life journeys.

Through their quest for independence, they found themselves displaced hence the actual beginning of their quest for a cohesive identity. As a result of their refugee status, they found themselves stateless; and as formal identity is usually situated in the context of belonging to a state, they at times found themselves grappling with questions of belonging and self-concept. In this manner, the process of relocation and dislocation shattered their identities. However, as time passed in refugee camps and other countries they developed a strong sense of belonging to Namibia though they were away from home because the SWAPO Party family in exile provided them with a sense of belonging. The Namibian refugee community in exile provided the authors with a much-needed support system that eventually made them feel secure in their migrant circumstances.

### **3.6 The documentation of Namibian history in Namhila and Shaketange's self-life-narratives**

The above section analysed identity as an element of autobiographical writing because Namhila and Shaketange divulge in their writing the intricacies of their personal lives that articulate how they perceived themselves as firstly, subaltern subjects and consequently, as free women whose identities were fashioned by their respective experiences of the Namibian liberation struggle. Above and beyond memory, experience, space, identity and embodiment, another ingredient of subjectivity in written African self-life-narrations is the illustration of national history in the African autobiography. The African autobiography portrays histories of the communities that the authors lived in, as a consequence, the personal lives of the authors are intertwined with the

histories of their communities. Therefore, it is such history that the authors believe define who they ultimately become. Thus, in this study, personal identity is perceived as an embodiment of postcolonial feminism writing.

This section of the study interrogates the above-mentioned aspect of Shaketange and Namhila's autobiographies; the portrayal of Namibian history from the colonial period to the post-colonial period of the country. Namhila and Shaketange use autobiography as a tool to document the subaltern history of the Black Namibians, their journey to independence and they also provide the political and social commentary of independent Namibia. *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* depict the history of Namibia in view of the fact that Namhila and Shaketange lived in colonial Namibia and experienced the harshness of the apartheid regime that subsequently led to their transnational and globalised citizenry. On one hand, to illustrate the colonial history of the country, the authors provide a colonial image that was experienced in the northern parts of the country where black Namibians, women included, opposed the order of the day which was the apartheid regime with its discriminatory practices. On the other hand, Namhila and Shaketange also provide the reader with the cultural settings and norms of the Ovambo people before independence, however, some of these cultural and traditional practices are still observed today. Furthermore, the two authors also interpret the political and social image of the country from the transition to independence up to the life in free Namibia. They do so by revealing their personal and collective experiences in the country they had left in search for a way to liberate it from the yoke of foreign subjugation.

The Namibian history books are vital documents in recording the general life experiences of Namibians through time but, the books do not have a personal touch. On the other hand, autobiography tends to provide the reader with a vivid image of the historical experience as the authors tease out the imagination of the reader through descriptive language. As a result of the use of language that appeals to the senses of the readers, written autobiographical acts provide Namibian scholars with the history of the country that is laden with the actual lived personal experiences. This is demonstrated by Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) who traces the transition to Namibian independence with the deployment of The United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in 1989 to Namibia to monitor the historical free and fair elections in the country. Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) further notes the formation of Ovambo People's Organisation (OPO) which later translated into SWAPO. However, Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) maintains that though UNTAG, was crucial to effecting policy-level changes, the transition also took place through individuals. Self-life-narratives like *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707*, have also reported these individual experiences before, during and after the transition. It is, therefore, the stance of this study that autobiography writings explicitly communicates the history of the country in more detail than the ordinary school textbooks. Since the story is more personal, the reader pays closer attention to detail than the abstract documentation of national history done in school books textbooks.

However, on the other hand, it is worth noting that national history as portrayed in self-writing narratives can be fictionalised through language use as authors use descriptive language to create the image of the lived experience in the mind of the reader. Therefore, as one reads an autobiography, he/ she should be cautious of language embellishment as narratives are written to

obtain and capture the reader's attention. In order to fully benefit from such reading, readers have to employ critical thinking skills that would enable them to dissect and appreciate the nuances of the Namibian history from a general point of view to specific personal experiences of such history as illustrated in autobiographies of the liberation struggle.

However, this does not mean that the reader should be sceptical about everything they read in an autobiography because experience, even national historical experience is personal. For example; if a comparison of Namhila and Shaketange's personal apartheid experiences is to be conducted, there are obvious divergences in the way they articulate their personal experiences, not only from a linguistic point of view but also, from the actual lived experiences portrayal. For example; around the age of six Shaketange witnessed the harassment that her aunt Olivia experienced at the hands of the apartheid security forces, but, she did not experience first-hand harassment herself.

On one hand, Shaketange (2009) maintains that "although I had not directly experienced the beating and physical harassment like many other children of the apartheid regime, I felt I was held captive by the restrictions that reinforced the apartheid system" (p. 11). This confession indicates that Shaketange was aware of the difference of in personal apartheid experience.

On the other hand, Namhila (1997) reveals that she was shot in the arm and leg by white soldiers "I was in pain and terrified by my bleeding injuries. I was all alone and surrounded by white

soldiers with guns and military uniforms. I was frightened as I did not know what else they would do to harm me” (p. 31). This revelation, not only depicts the cruelty of the apartheid regime, but, it also shows that Namhila and Shaketange experienced the regime on divergent personal levels though their general experiences of the apartheid system were similar.

This similarity can be observed from the educational segregation policies as portrayed by the authors. They both allude to the education system that was designed to keep the Namibian child under subjugation. Namhila and Shaketange were both taught in Oshiwambo their mother tongue, though this was good to cultivate language skills in a language they were familiar with, they also realised that this status quo would only have restricted them to communicate with the people of their ethnicity and exclude them from global communication. As a result, Shaketange (2009) longed to be taught in the English language and Namhila (1997) yearned for an education system that would cultivate her critical thinking skills.

Hence, it can be argued that typically, historical documents, especially school textbooks are documented in such a way that the collective experiences of a community are recorded on a superficial level without actually recording the depth and the breadth of individual experiences; their fears, opinions, and joys. Such historical documentation does not capture the imagination of the reader the way a personal encounter does. For example, though history books teach learners about the apartheid era, they do not capture the way people lived and how they survived the day to day harassment by the apartheid armed forces. Namhila (1997) wrote about the curfews that were imposed on the people in her village. Of course, as a child, she did not understand what



they meant. She went on to explain that she was shot in her arm and leg and was traumatised by that event because she was not aware that she had to be indoors before sunset. In so doing, both Namhila and Shaketange reveal a part of the country's history that is not found in general school books. She brings in the dimension of the voice of the child that is often neglected or absent in the documentation of the national history.

These first-hand representations of encounters of the brutality of the apartheid forces are not written about in school books, so, autobiographical writing, in this case, seals the gaps that are visible in the school books. These cracks in the education system are also expounded in *The Price of Freedom* when Namhila (1997) criticised the educational system by pointing out that “the new educational system does not teach Namibian history as experienced by an exiled Namibian. It is rather fictitious ‘national unity’ and so-called ‘reconciliation’, where everybody is allowed to feel good about his or her own past, even if this consisted in actively promoting apartheid and fighting against independence” (p. 195). This show of anger is not misplaced as the actual experiences of the exiled Namibian are not explored in the classroom. The exiled Namibians sacrificed and risked their lives by firstly, embarking on a treacherous journey into the unknown in search of national freedom. They risked being uprooted from their country and becoming stateless and in most cases, the exiled subjects felt that they had lost their identities and the issue of identity is an important one in the lives of human beings. Therefore, Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) contemplate the history of the country in order to situate their changing identities in the context of the political and social background of the country.

For that reason, postcolonial autobiographical acts capture both the colonial and postcolonial experience of the once colonised Namibian communities. Consequently, making African autobiography a distinct genre and according to Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) “within the genre of African autobiography, the unique niche of African female autobiographical writing has surfaced” (p. 59). This emergence contradicts the traditional belief that autobiography is primarily western and male-dominated. Namhila, like Amathila, Shaketange and Amulungu used autobiography to document the struggle for independence, their participation, and experiences as Namibian women. The authors also “gain power and agency in telling their stories” (p. 59). Further, Fulkerson-Dikuwa argues that these women (Namhila, Amathila, and Shaketange) write about their experiences through the transition to independence and they document such history as they also transition from childhood to adulthood.

Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) wrote about the history of the kind of education that they received as children in the then Southwest Africa. The education has been just sufficient to teach them to read and write and it never occurred to them and their people that education could help one to improve their economic status. The traditional belief that education was only for boys was also articulated in Namhila (1997) because it was considered insignificant to educate a girl who would eventually leave her biological family and join her matrimonial family upon marriage. Here, the reader is made aware of the Namibian education system before independence and the gender bias that left the girl child on the margins of formal education. Namhila also posits that the colonial education system was teacher-centred rather than learner-centred. This type of education is frowned on today as it did not motivate one to be inquisitive rather, it taught the Namibian child not to question her teachers but rather to become a passive recipient of

information. Learners were taught to rote learn and to answer questions as they were trained by their teachers. If a learner attempted to answer questions in their own words, they risked being failed. Thus, learners were encouraged to learn parrot style where they had to reproduce information precisely as taught in their classes. So in Southwest Africa, both Namhila and Shaketange were not encouraged to think independently, but, to repeat information as it was written in their textbooks and as provided by their teachers.

Given the above arguments, one can conclude that it is difficult to separate Namibian postcolonial feminism autobiography from the history of the people that the writer interacted with. Therefore, autobiography becomes a tool for recalling personal and societal experiences. Besides, Namhila and Shaketange's experiences with the Bantu education system that was imposed upon the Namibian people, Namhila (1997) in part two of her autobiography, illustrated the causes that led her into exile, the constant fear that she and her people lived in because of the inhumane treatment of the apartheid forces. She also experienced the brutal force of these soldiers when they shot her for no apparent reason. Even out of Namibia into exile, Namhila narrates her close encounter with death at Cassinga in Angola. The Cassinga massacre is commemorated on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May every year in Namibia. This massacre took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May in 1978, where women and children were killed in this refugee camp by heavily armed South African soldiers.

This section of the novel depicts Namibian history as it illustrated how and why many Namibians joined the liberation struggle and their personal struggles henceforth. In order to

successfully accomplish her mission of escaping into exile, Namhila and Shaketange had to rely on the guidance and the goodwill of others. As the authors interweave their personal encounters with the events that were taking place in the country at that time, they create an intersection between the private and the public. This tendency of autobiography to tap on past events is articulated by Ngoshi (2015) who argue that autobiographical narration is beset with historical consciousness, as a result, “the public experiences of narrating a subject are brought into the private act of narrating the self” (p. 12). In *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* Namhila and Shaketange use the Namibian socio-political backdrop to write their personal experiences thus explicitly and implicitly using autobiography as a tool to circumscribe the history of the country.

Further, historical identities are brought to the fore by autobiographical texts as they assist the reader to understand the narrators’ subjectivities. This argument is substantiated in Namhila (1997) and Shaketange’s (2009) experiences and recollections as they take the reader back to their home villages and how they witnessed the harsh treatment subjected on their people by the colonial power’s military forces as articulated below:

Our lives in the village had been turned upside down since the arrival of the South African Defence Force (SADF) military camp at the village at the end of 1975. Many young people had fled the country in order to organise themselves for the liberation struggle. (Namhila, 1997, p. 8)

The evidence of the social-political transformation and upheaval brought about by the South African apartheid regime also indicates the change in individuals' personal lives. The above citation proves the argument that Ngoshi (2015) puts forward; that in reading autobiography the readers anticipate to the coexistence of the narrator with the history of their time such as national or world history. Thus the writers of autobiography reconstruct their personal and social experiences in the autobiographical narration. In so doing, the private and the public lives of the authors are intertwined with historical evidence, thus Namhila and Shaketange used autobiography a tool for national and general world history.

In substantiating her recollections of the past, Shaketange (2009) also provides the reader with pictures of life in exile. On page 30 she presented a picture of the metaphorical *Walking the Boeing 707*, which was her long trek to Zambia. ON page 43 she also availed a photograph of refugees waiting to register on arrival at a camp. Though the pictures could serve as evidence of Shaketange's exilic experience, they also could be substantiated the fictionalisations of the history of autobiography. For example; the picture on page 43 gives an impression of Shaketange's arrival at Yuka camp in Zambia but upon close inspection, one realises that in small font the caption is written Namibians waiting to register on arrival at a camp. This could have been any camp in exile not necessarily depicting her arrival at the camp. However, the same pictures also provide a collective history as experienced by Namibian refugees. For example; on page 64 she provided a picture of a teacher helping pupils with school work at the Old Farm, one of the SWAPO refugee Camps in Zambia. Also on page 68, she presents a picture of people mixing sand to make bricks as a typical responsibility of Platoon 4. Therefore, the pictures are used to validate the exilic experiences of Namibians in different camps.

Therefore, as argued by Nossery (2016) women's autobiography serves as a tool to document the flaws of national historical documentation. As a result of juxtaposing personal and collective photographs with the history of exile life, Shaketange validates the actual lived experiences of the Namibian political past while commenting on personal hardships. Further, Nossery (2016) posits that;

By bringing the image and story (history) together, the author makes the past part of the present in critical and productive ways, thus calling for the reexamination of a violent and polarising history (History) and allowing for the constitution of a revised collective memory that is intended to heal and remediate. (p. 281)

In light of the above argument, Namhila and Shaketange's life narratives are important documents that reveal the painful experiences of the past because autobiography allows the reader to connect historical events with a face. Experience, as understood from an individual's point of view, provides an image that is real in the mind of the reader thus in this case, appreciating the contributions of those that sacrificed their lives to actively participate in the liberation struggle of the country.

### **3.7 Analysing Namibian gender divergences as represented in the female autobiography in independent Namibia**

Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) used autobiography as a means to communicate gender disparities as experienced in Namibia. On the issue of gender, Butler (1988) argues that gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts (p.519). Not only do they merely voice out these social ills, but they use autobiography as a tool for activism; politicking for equal rights for all Namibians and calling for political and social action against gender inequality in the country. Though both authors reflect on gender issues, they do so at different levels. It is, therefore, important to note that Namhila's autobiography discusses these gender biases in more detail than Shaketange does.

As Namhila began to share her journey into exile, she revealed an experience she underwent as a girl aspiring to join the liberation struggle; on one of their (her journey mates included) hosts that advised her and her friend, Maria to go back home because not only were they too young, but he referred to the common traditional societal role of an African woman, the prospect of becoming wives at their tender age of the liberation struggle soldiers. This illustrates that the man had a false image of the SWAPO men in exile. This could be attributed to the fact that masculinities and femininities differences are so much engraved in people's minds that when one sees a person, he/she does not only see a human being but, he/she sees individuals either as men or woman. The woman is usually expected to carry out feminine duties such as being a wife, the

bearer of children and generally, a homemaker. However, as Namhila explained later the men of the Namibian liberation struggle as reflected in the narrative treated both girls and boys as equal partners in the quest for a free Namibia.

The prologue goes on to explain the atrocities and repression she had observed as a child to plant the seed of her ultimate escape from Namibia into the unknown and the subsequent return to liberate her community from the yoke of oppression that was invoked by the South African Defence force. This interaction of human beings is further articulated by Cuesta (2011) who explains that the act of recalling past events indicate that autobiography can be regarded as a reflection of history.

The above argument also resonates in Ngoshi (2015) who argues that “masculine and feminine identities in Zimbabwe’s political discourse remain bound up with the historical processes of colonial and nationalist liberation struggles. Namibians, like Zimbabweans, went through the wars of liberation to emancipate themselves from the colonial bondage that oppressed the rights and freedoms of the indigenous peoples of these countries. Both women and men from these countries participated in the struggles on personal and national levels. However, individual identities apart from the common experience of colonialism were established by whether one was male or female.



After the prologue, Namhila recounted her childhood in the present day Ohangwena region. Not only did she provide the reader with a synopsis of her childhood, but, also provided a glance into the socio-cultural aspect of the Oshiwambo communities. For example, Namhila (1997) provided the reader with different traditions observed by Oshiwambo communities, one of them is the premise of marriage. “In the Oshiwambo tradition, the main purpose of marriage has been and still is to carry out social responsibilities such as carrying on the family tree and looking after the elderly people” (p. 15). Therefore, the woman should be able to conceive and extend the family name of her husband. Also too much was expected from the woman than the man because it should be noted that a woman had to impress her future in-laws if they were going to allow their male relative to marry the woman. This indicates that a wife, in essence, was married not only to be united with her husband, but, to impress and serve her husband’s extended family as well. It is of the researcher’s opinion that socially, there is nothing wrong with serving other people as long as one is willing to do so, nevertheless, it becomes a challenge when one has to be forced by cultural norms to a ‘people-pleaser’, this may present a situation where the wife may be unhappy and may resent her circumstances.

Gender issues that are depicted in *The Price of Freedom* show the struggles that a postcolonial woman has to go through. This study employs a the loose term of African feminism, which Kaboré (2017), argues as a common battlefield for African women and men firstly, against foreign exploitation. Secondly, this branch of feminism acknowledges evident traditional societal inequalities that women suffer on account of being female, women’s financial self-reliance, and the focus on women’s concerns, such as not having a choice in which their life partner is, the oppression and stigmatisation of barren women and in some cases forced genital mutilations in

other African cultures. *The Price of Freedom* does not clearly state whether Namhila is a feminist or not, but the book reveals her gender concerns as a woman living in free Namibia. Intentionally or coincidentally, she seems to advocate for women's rights and demanding for equality of the sexes.

When Namhila was sent to school in the Gambia, she and her Namibian female colleagues were confronted with the realisation that the Namibian boys they had gone to study with were chauvinistic. They would beat up girls if they suspected them of having sexual relations with Gambian boys. Namhila (1997) disclosed that “as soon as we arrived in these foreign countries, the boys amongst us wanted to take on the role of father or some kind of big brother to the girls” (p. 69). This explanation indicates that on the virtue of being male, the boys felt that they had authority over the girls as Namhila continues to explain that the boys portrayed traits of being possessive of ‘their’ girls to an extent that they would beat up the girls or spread hateful and hurtful stories as some form of retribution for their ‘wrongdoings’ as perceived by those boys. The boys probably felt that they reigned supreme over girls because of the common cultural norm that males are more often than not believed to be more superior to their female counterparts. When these chauvinistic behaviours were reported, some SWAPO representatives in Dakar did not see any fault in the way the boys conducted themselves, except for one representative who believed that the boys had no right in meddling in the affairs of the girls and the girls were capable of taking care of themselves. As a result of such fair reasoning, the girls respected the representative as he fought alongside the girls in their fight for equality with the boys and to be treated with dignity as human beings. This reflection also brings in another dimension of African feminisms, the Nego-feminism as proposed by Nnaemeka (2004) who

believes that culturally, African women and men are partners in all aspects of their lives, as a result, they should strive as partners to fight the scourge of gender biases as experienced in Africa currently.

The above scenario was not the only time that Namhila felt discriminated against on the virtue of being a woman. When she married her first husband, her ‘supposedly’ in-laws who had joyously welcomed her into the family, started to act differently as she had not fallen pregnant after some time into the marriage, as generally expected within African societies. The general traditional role of a woman is to reproduce and expand the name of her husband. However, the couple did not have plans in extending their family; all they wanted was to commit to each other before they furthered their studies. Her in-laws started to gossip about her that she was barren, and they hated her for it as they believed that she was not woman enough to conceive. In most African traditions, a woman gets married not only to her husband, but to the whole family. She’s even referred to as ‘our’ wife’, a shocking realisation that Namhila had to live with when her husband’s family decided to openly discuss and rebuke her ‘lack of ability to conceive’. She revealed that “Suddenly I realised that I was no longer married to Billy but to his people” (p. 91). This was another blow she received as a woman, both men and women treated her badly and stigmatised her because they believed that she was infertile, but she and her husband did not bow to this stigmatisation as they believed that they were not ready to have children.

To counter gender inequality, Namhila writes about gender equality campaigns that were undertaken in Kwanza Sul, a Namibian refugee settlement that was in Angola. These educational

initiatives were meant to sensitise both men and women on the importance of gender equality. This was an initiative of some teachers to promote gender awareness amongst the Namibian refugees. According to Namhila (1997), “these activists did not turn other women into feminists; they assisted them in gaining better control of their lives under the circumstances” (p. 97). The main emphasis of these awareness campaigns was on the day to day issues such as hygiene, childcare, family planning and the working conditions of women in the refugee camps and they were also taught to communicate their challenges in a convincing way.

As a result of these campaigns, Namhila posits that men in the settlements started to see the need to help around the house and women started to embark on professions and jobs that were previously regarded to belong to men. For example; men took up jobs like cooking, collecting firewood, drawing water, childminding and other domestic duties. Also, issues surrounding polygamy were discussed and some men that attended these discussions were usually against such practices as they saw them as a way to discriminate against women. This argument calls upon a feminism that sees men as equal partners in fighting against practices that regard women as inferior to man. Thus, one can argue that Nnaemeka’s (2004) nego-feminism best describes such cooperation.

In addition to the above experience, Namhila also wrote about her struggles in Finland as a student and a mother of a small baby at the same time. As a young mother who was separated from her husband by circumstances beyond her control, she went through difficulties that she had never expected. She found herself in a predicament which was worsened by the fact that she

was a refugee as she was stigmatised because of such a status. She wrote that “at times I would walk down the street and someone would shout at me, ‘*Pakolainen mene kotiin!* Refugee go home” (p. 119). Her stay in Finland was more difficult because as a woman she needed emotional support to be able to cope with taking care of the baby.

When Namhila left her refugee life, she came to realise that as a woman in Namibia, she had to fight much harder for equality than her second husband or men in general. As a woman and Black for that matter, she had to work harder to establish professional opportunities and integrity for herself. The feminism depictions that can be glimpsed from *The Price of Freedom* convey the hardships a Black woman, in general, undergoes when looking for professional opportunities in a gendered country like Namibia. When Namhila started to look for employment in Namibia after her studies in Finland, though well qualified in her field of Library Science, she was met with hostility and rejection. One of the excuses she was provided for that rejection was that she was over qualified and that she was a woman and to compound it, she was also told that she was a mother. In most cases, even today, women are not regarded on equal footing with men, therefore, women have to work twice as hard and prove themselves before they are recognised especially in the professional sphere. When she finally got a job, her supervisor that was male did not care much about her pregnancy; she was expected to work overtime and to travel long distances by road, which can be very frustrating for an expectant mother.

Again, whether Namhila is a feminist or not, she can be regarded as an advocate of African feminism in general. She sees her husband as an equal partner in their marriage contract. Firstly,

she decided to keep her maiden surname despite the struggle she had to go through in a male-dominated society like Namibia. According to Namhila (1997), “the Namibian society, women included, seem to only see a woman as a subordinate to men” (p. 186). Therefore, women are expected to play a subservient role at home and at work. Though, she obtained a loan in her name to buy a house, the insurer that dealt with the insurance of their home still regarded her husband as the main holder of the bond even when she protested this situation, as a woman she again was expected to be under the thumb and the rule of her husband.

African societies are gendered constructions; thus, masculinities and femininities often play an important role in how society regard and treat men and women. Ngoshi (2013) states that “because masculinities and femininities are socially and culturally constructed, they often play significant roles in constructing identities and distinguishing one another” (p. 119). Therefore, African communities are culturally constructed and divided along gender lines. As a consequence, women are in general expected to perform duties that are separate from those performed by men. This expectation is visible in *The Price of Freedom* as women were expected to perform household chores as depicted in the story of the visit of her uncle’s fiance. Women had to wake up earlier than usual to stump millet that was used to cook thick porridge that was to be eaten for the occasion and generally prepare for this visit. And, also, the fiance was expected to behave very well otherwise she would not get married if the family of the husband-to-be did not approve of her behaviour and physical appearance.

Again on the virtue of being female, girls had to do more chores than boys. Namhila says that she was usually late for school because she had chores to complete before school. Both Namhila and Shaketange were expected at a tender age to pound millet and weed the fields during the ploughing season, these expectations made them feel like slaves. As a result of so much to do, the school became an escape from home and its endless work. If Namhila came home late from school, she was grounded from going to school. For this reason, one may conclude that education was not regarded to be of significance in the life of the girl child. Namhila was unhappy because of the hardships she had to endure, she says that “these were hard times for a child of my age and since I was the only girl at home I was expected to perform miracles” (Namhila 1997, p. 23).

Namhila continued to state her dismay by stating that “unfortunately, many girls in rural areas of Namibia continue to suffer the same hardship” (p. 23). This phenomenon, unfortunately, incites gender parity in today’s society. Moreover, Namhila (1997) reveals that;

In those days, it was still unheard of for a girl to leave home and go and board so that she would have time to prepare for examinations. A girl’s place was very much in the kitchen beside her mother or aunt. Her school work could suffer from her household chores, but not the other way round” (p. 24).

The above reflection confirms that educating a girl was not a priority in the past since she was not regarded as a permanent member of her biological family, but, rather, she would soon or later be married off to another family. However, the reader is brought to the realisation that Both Namhila and Shaketange defied these cultural beliefs by ensuring that they get educated;

Shaketange through her determination is currently a lecturer at the University of Namibia (UNAM). Namhila, also, through her determination has worked in different organisations in Namibia and is currently part of UNAM's management as Pro Vice-Chancellor (Administration, Finance & Resource Mobilization) and also as a Council Member: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Administration, Finance & Resource Mobilization). In her testimonies of the resiliency of gender disparities in the country, Namhila seeks to change consciousness, enables herself and fellow Namibians to resist oppressive regimes and fight for women's rights. Shaketange and Namhila's testimonies attest to a process of exercising agency in telling and withholding cultural stories.

Not only did Namhila experience gender parities in independent Namibia but, she also had to fight for gender equality in exile. When Namhila came back to Namibia she had another personal fight to go through. Being a woman in an independent Namibia was not easy either as it was as difficult in exile. As an adult and a woman, in particular, Namhila would like to be independent and thus make her own decisions. Both, Namhila and Shaketange demonstrated through their shared experiences that they were the creators and actors of their destinies. They chose to embark on treacherous journeys into exile as children, in exile, they worked hard in attaining both personal and collective goals. This human agency is also demonstrated in their actions and reactions upon their return to Namibia. Though these narrators are independent, free women, the reader should not forget that total freedom might be difficult to achieve. There were political and cultural forces they could not change that influenced certain decisions in their lives. However, they obtained agency through their choices to react or not react to such situations. Also, it should be noted that the mere fact of narrating their life stories is a testimony to their agency. The act of



writing became a platform for the two authors to bring to the fore their concerns in independent Namibia.

### **3.8. Chapter summary**

This chapter has critically analysed *The Price of Freedom* and *Walking the Boeing 707* illustrating how Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2008) depicted autobiographical subjectivity through the concepts of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency. Namhila and Shaketange represent themselves as women that are resilient from the depictions of their childhoods and girl children that took it upon themselves to go into exile with the intention of liberating their country. The two women of the liberation struggle surmount most of their hardships as subaltern subjects and as free women in independent Namibia. As can be glimpsed from this chapter, the concepts of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency are interrelated and complicated to discuss as separate entities. This is because each concept is closely linked to the other. For the reason that experience is quite personal, it can only be articulated from a subjective point of view.

The experiences of Namhila and Shaketange can only be realistically related (by the narrators themselves) through the places (physical and emotional) where they had been to. Smith and Watson (2001) analyses experiences quite well when they argue that experience, as articulated in autobiography, is more than just personal, but, rather, it is “mediated through memory and

language, experience is already an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (p. 24). On embodiment Smith and Watson (2001) posit that “the ability to recover memories, in fact, depends upon the material body. There must be a body that perceives and internalises the images, sensations, and experiences of the external world” (p. 57). Therefore, the female bodies in this study have a great influence on how and what the life narrators choose to make public. The issue of subjectivity is universal in autobiographical writing thus; Namhila’s and Shaketange autobiographies inevitably depict their stories as individuals who went into exile to participate in the liberation struggle of Namibia. Their experiences are unique because too many people went into exile, remembered experiences are not necessarily similar to human beings perceive experiences differently. Again, autobiographical acts are written and shared using memory and experience to recall events of the past. Thus, without memory, remembrances cannot be articulated because memory facilitates individuals in meaning-making of their past experiences.

Therefore, it should be noted that the act of remembrance is an active one which involves many processes. This is supported by Smith and Watson (2010) who argue that the writer of autobiography actively negotiates what is remembered in order to create the meaning of past events. It is a result of this interpretation and negotiation of memory that constructs Compatible Similar subjects as the events of the past can only be partially and not fully recovered. Nevertheless, this argument does not dismiss autobiography as an authentic literary genre because personal memories can be corroborated by public events that took place in the past. For example; historical records show that the Cassinga massacre took place on 4 May 1978 Gleijeses (2007), the period that the struggle for independence was intensifying. Though the survivors of

the massacre, Namhila included, shared the same horrific and devastating events, when their experiences are articulated, this experience is unique to each individual. Congruent with the above statement, Baines, (2009) posits that “the past is a conflictual terrain and memories are contested” (p. 8). In this manner, memory is subjective and as can be perceived from Namhila and Shaketange, lived experience is quite personal and it can only be well articulated through a personal point of view since individuals are in a better position to understand and interpret the emotions that they went through when a certain event took place.

Again, it is also recorded in historical or archival documents that a South African army base was established in Eenhana village in 1975. Thus, personal lives are intertwined in one way or another with the events of the community. Throughout *The Price of Freedom*, Namhila (1997) and *Walking the Boeing 707* Shaketange (2009) demonstrate that they lived in societies that influenced their actions and reactions in colonial and independent Namibia. Moreover, Smith and Watson (2010) advance that memory is also contextual because “acts of remembering take place at particular sites and in particular circumstances” (p. 24). In the same vein, autobiographical memory depends on the reason, context and time of writing one’s story. In *The Price of Freedom*, Namhila (1997) and *Walking the Boeing 707* Shaketange (2009) explored their past experiences as women in postcolonial Namibia and they reconstructed their personal experiences as they reflected on their individual journeys into exile and back on the eve of the Namibian independence. The way individuals remember past events, one may argue, is affected by other autobiographical subjectivity influences such as; space, embodiment, agency, experience, and identity.

The experiences that Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) went through are personal but these personal experiences are as posited by Smith and Watson (2010) an “interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present” (p. 30). Another influence on autobiography subjectivity is identity. Namhila and Shaketange revealed their multiple identities to their audience, ‘identities’ as they negotiated and unraveled them as illustrated by their experiences, locations, and gender. Therefore, identity is not constant; their identities continually shifted from girl children that left Namibia and lived in exile as refugees. And again, as a nurse (in the case of Namhila) and teachers in refugee camps, students in other countries, just to name a few. Thus, almost all experienced circumstances shifted their identities and Namhila (1997) finished her narrative by contending that she was lost in her own country and was still on the quest to find out who she really was in independent Namibia. Thus, subjectivity in these autobiographies is quite clear through the above discussion and analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEORISING WRITING THE SELF IN AMATHILA'S *MAKING A DIFFERENCE*

#### 4.1 Introduction

Although Namibia has had a number of high-ranking female politicians since independence, there remains little critical scholarship on the agency and the contribution of Namibian women in the liberation struggle and the politics of an independent Namibia. Commenting on the African nationalist writing, McClintock and Peterson (as cited in Tyagi, 2014) contends that African nationalist writing was a predominantly male-centred tradition in which women's political agency was conceived of in terms of motherhood. However, this notion of women's pivotal place being in the home is defied by life-narrations such as Amathila (2012) who explicitly illustrates that she had to dream big and exert herself to be appointed into different Namibian political platforms which were usually male-dominated. In advancing the debate on gender equality, Bience Gawanas, a former Ombudswoman in Namibia from 1996 to 2003, in the preface of *The gender politics of the Namibian liberation struggle* by Akawa (2014), argues that it is imperative that women's participation in the Namibian nation-building processes is accurately represented as they have been, for a long time absent from national discourse. Gawanas continues to maintain that due to historical factors, Namibian women's history is obscured because;

History has been written and interpreted by men and what has been recorded was about what men have done and experienced. But we know that women's participation has been

crucial for the maintenance of our societies and for the success of the liberation struggles.

(Akawa, 2014, p. xi)

This section of the study, therefore, examines how subjectivity is denoted in the life narrative a prominent woman who was part and parcel of Namibia's first generation of women parliamentarians. In order to do so, the chapter interrogates how Amathila authored the subjective and political self in *Making a Difference*. Amathila in her autobiography, as an individual woman of the liberation struggle, she represents her individual experiences in the development of the Namibian nation and how she, as an individual has made a difference in the gender politics of the nation. She also writes about the private and public challenges she had to face in order to survive in difficult situations beyond the borders of South West Africa, during the apartheid era, and inside Namibia, after the attainment of the country's independence. Therefore, Amathila's autobiography plays a pivotal role in the articulation of the politics of Namibia. This significance of women autobiography is well articulated by Hunsu (2017) who emphasises that "autobiography occupies a central space in African women's writing as the primal genre through which African women have participated in the representation of African experience and the shaping of African literature" (p. 319).

*Making a Difference* by Amathila (2012) is a powerful tool for women's representation in the politics of Namibia because from the onset of the liberation struggle of Namibia and in the processes of building the Namibian nation, women joined forces with their male-counterparts to combat colonialism and fight for equal rights of all Namibians, irrespective of their gender differences. Thus, likewise, as explicated in the previous chapter, this interrogation will make use of the concepts of agency, memory, experience,

identity and embodiment to expound on the notion of subjectivity as represented in the above-mentioned autobiographies.

#### **4.2 Reading Amathila's narrative as a testimony of female agency**

Amathila (2012) portrays the life of a Namibian woman who left her home country to join the liberation struggle in quest for better educational opportunities. Amathila actively participated in the liberation struggle of Namibia independently with the aim of changing her lives and the lives of her country-men and women. Her life narrative indicates that she was formidable woman to be reckoned with, who was not an “unconscious transmitter of cultural scripts and models of identity” (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 42). Rather, the narrative illustrates the efforts and determination of the Amathila to change and improve her destiny. Amathila's autobiography portrays a story of an individual who tenaciously, against all odds, fought for her rights and the rights of marginalised Namibians both in exile and in an independent Namibia.

The title of Amathila's (2012) autobiography, *Making a Difference*, echoes herstory in the private sphere and the public space that Amathila occupied on the political scene of Namibia. In order to make a difference in the lives of many, as a government official who held prominent offices in her political career, Amathila had to relentlessly, through negotiation, improve the status quo of Namibian women's lives in general and the lives of the marginalised communities such as the San and the Ovatie tribes. Amathila narrates her story from a personal point of view, thus tapping on the issue of autobiographical

subjectivity, an element central to life writing. In so doing the narrative should be read as “proofs of human agency, relating to actions in which people exercise free choice over the interpretations of their lives and express their “true” selves” (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 42). Therefore, below a discussion on how Amathila claim, exercise and narrate agency is expounded.

It is important to remark that traditionally, the role of African women in nation building was left on the periphery of African politics as if their contribution is less significant compared to that of their male counterparts. For that reason, women like Amathila (2012) took it upon themselves through autobiographical acts, to tell their stories and the impact of their contribution towards the development of African nations, thus representing how they, as individuals, made a difference in the lives of many. In Africa, “nationalist discourses are largely male-centric and control women by capturing them in traditional stereotypes” (Tyagi, 2014, p. 47). Contrary to the traditional stereotype of women belonging to the kitchen, Amathila’s narration represents her as a strong female politician, who defied the traditional African stereotype of women as homemakers. For that reason, autobiographies like Amathila portray how women have challenged such categorisation and have given women of Africa a platform to personally share their life experiences and their roles as significant contributors to national development.

In this study, Amathila’s life story represents her individual fights against discrimination of black people in general, during the apartheid era in Namibia and her fight against the inequalities of women in the Namibian communities she worked in as a doctor during and after the liberation struggle. As a result of the publication of life narratives by women, autobiography as a literary genre has been a fertile ground for analysing African women’s individual stories, taking cognisance of the factors of subjectivity and



how the women of the continent negotiate private and public spaces through memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency. The present chapter critically analyses Amathila (2012), *Making the Difference*, taking cognisance of subjectivity and the role Amathila played in the public space in the process of politically decolonising and building Namibia as an independent state.

As a consequence of the above argument, *Making a Difference* is presented in this chapter as a literary representation of Namibian women's participation in the country's liberation struggle as it necessitates their personal space and their involvement in the public sphere. The analysis of this chapter is fostered by the fact that African women in general and Namibian women, in particular, have come a long way in matters of nation building, but their voices have been stifled on the political front, thus this chapter's analysis attempts to advance women's private and public spaces as they negotiate for the recognition of their efforts in the national dialogue of Namibian politics. Amathila's work is a classic example of a postcolonial representation of women's participation in instituting government bodies that protect and enable the mobilisation and participation of women in government affairs. Therefore, *Making a Difference* is written by an iconic woman who actively participated in the politics of the Namibia nation. In herstory, Amathila navigates between her private and public identities, thus using the autobiography genre as a tool for self-representation. This autobiography is significant as stipulated by Harris, (2005) who advocates for autobiography writing by Black women. She justifies autobiographical writing in the following manner;

There is a need for Black women to write their lives, as much for the correcting of the history of their lives as for the personal benefits they gain from engaging in the process of developing autobiography. The autobiographical process permits

the writer to think deeply about her life and to develop a positive self-identity. The creation of autobiography is, in these ways, a therapeutic process that is useful to all who write their lives. (Harris, 2005, p. 38)

Taking the above citation into consideration, Amathila as a black woman narrates her own experiences as a resolute woman who had to find a way to pursue her dream of becoming a medical doctor and meaningfully contribute to the lives of the ordinary men and women in Namibia. In the pursuit of writing her own story, she in a way avoids being misrepresented in the politics of the country because, at the initial stages of the newly formed government of Namibia, high ranking positions were mostly occupied by men. Amathila (2012), represents herself image in a positive manner, she reevaluates her experiences and shares those experiences that made her successful in the Namibian public space. In so doing, she represents herself from an exceptional point of view, thus, authoring her identities in a positive manner. Since she is the author and the subject of investigation, she accords herself an opportunity to choose from her experiences what is worth sharing with her audience. In this manner, her autobiography is subjective in nature since she writes about herself from a personal point of view, she has the power to recall past experiences, evaluate these experiences and reconstruct her life from the eyes of the wiser and older woman she was at the time she wrote her story.

### **4.3 African autobiography versus Gusdorf's restrictive constructions of the autobiography genre through the lenses of Amathila's *Making a Difference***

It is interesting to note that at the beginning of her writing, Amathila is careful not to tame her narrative an autobiography but, a story about her life. Perhaps, taking cognisance of the fact that the genre of autobiography is a contested one, she, therefore, rather dissociated the use of the concept of autobiography from the story of her life. As an alternative, she insists that her narrative is simply a story of her life which is geared towards inspiring young women to realise that they are as good as their male counterparts and as a consequence, they should work hard towards the attainment their aspirations. This argument implies that these young women's hard work would eventually level the ground on gender equity and equality in Namibia. The above observation by Amathila (2012) generates an interest in the debate of what constitutes autobiography as a literary genre. As a result, this section of the chapter analyses the conditions and limits of autobiography as proposed by Gusdorf (1980) in relation to Amathila's (2010) *Making a Difference*.

Deliberating on the establishment of a theory of autobiography, Berryman (1999) maintains that the attempt to create a theory of autobiography only started in the 1980's with the views of Albert Stone who in 1981 described the study of autobiography as a relatively new field. Then in 1983 Fleishman advanced the debate by arguing the complexity of defining the concept of autobiography. However, Smith (1995 as cited in Berryman, 1999) remarked that the study of autobiography theory had progressed to a stage where many scholars are acquainted with the theory and as a result, a number of autobiographical theories have been conceptualised. Consequently, the development of autobiography

theories in the 1980s and 1990s has thus advanced its discussion into the 21st century, as more debate and critical studies on autobiographical acts are constantly being published. In his exploration of the theory of autobiography, Berryman (1999) also advances the debate on the autobiography by analysing how autobiography became such a contested field in academia, in so doing, he grapples with whether there is a particular theory that could unite autobiography in all its forms among other pertinent questions related to autobiography. For the purpose of this study, this question will not be dwelt on as the study is anchored on postcolonial feminism and autobiography genre theories, theories that have a standing history and anchored on African women's autobiography.

In order to understand the debate surrounding autobiography as a genre, it is imperative that an analysis of Gusdorf's (1980) *Conditions and limits of autobiography* is briefly undertaken because it is Gusdorf's treatise that provided a 'prescriptive antidote' to the controversy surrounding autobiography. And his suggestions of what entails a legitimate autobiography sparked much deliberation when he declared that "... autobiography seems limited in time and in space: it has not always existed nor does it exist everywhere" (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 28). The existence of autobiography here is restricted to the Western part of the world as Gusdorf (1980) claims that autobiography seemingly does not exist outside the realm of the Western world. Further, autobiography is also restricted to Western man only, implying the exclusion of woman even those women of Western descent. Moreover, "The concern, which seems so natural to us, to turn back on one's own past, to recollect one's life in order to narrate it, is not at all universal" (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 29). This argument too challenges the existence of natural autobiographical acts in everyday activities of human beings. Gusdorf's (1980) claim could also imply that people from other cultures and other parts of the world do not possess the intelligence to remember and reconstruct their life experiences, thus restricting autobiography only to Western men who occupy

certain positions in society. However, in contrast to this view Kehily (1995) argues that “Traditional forms of autobiographical writing have been challenged, individually and collectively, by people who have been marginalised by dominant forms” (p. 29). In writing her autobiography, Amathila also challenges the traditional notions of what constituted autobiography.

The current study, therefore, contradicts this assertion by stating that autobiography is universal as it exists in all parts of the world where human beings find themselves. It has shifted from Gusdorf’s (1980) limits and conditions over centuries of debate and in today’s globalised world; it would seem imprudent to restrict human activities and intelligence in some parts of the world only. Therefore, autobiography is not restricted to the limits and conditions as provided by Gusdorf (1980), African autobiography authors like Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life Of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), Mandela’s (1994) *Long Walk to Freedom*, Tekere’s, *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007), *The Exile Child* of Rachael Valentina Nghiwete (2011), *Archeologically Yours* by Beatrice Sandelowsky (2004), *Where Others Wavered* by Sam Nujoma (2010), the list is inexhaustible, have all written autobiographies in order to share their personal experiences with the world. It is quite interesting that in 1789, a man of African descent had already published an autobiography, despite its criticism on the issues of accuracy as stipulated in the article *Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah, the African* by Lovejoy (2006). This fact invalidates the conditions and limits of autobiography as proposed by Gusdorf (1980).

The argument brought forth by Geesey (1997) shows that autobiography has been in existence in Africa for a long time, despite the historic prescriptive conditions offered by Gusdorf (1980). “Even to the

casual observer looking at the development of contemporary African writing, autobiography would certainly seem to stand out as a major component in the vast array of cultural productions from that continent” (Geesey, 1997, p. 1). The work of authors selected for this study (Namhila, 1997; Shaketange, 2009; Amathila, 2012; Amulungu, 2016) is also testimony to the existence of autobiography in the other parts of the world in general. Amathila (2010) a Black woman from Africa successfully narrates her life experiences from childhood to adulthood and she does so by evaluating and re-evaluating what she considered was suitable for the purpose of her story. In her autobiography, Amathila (2012) negotiates between her private life and the public the space she occupied in the politics of Namibia.

#### **4.4 Exploring the Postcoloniality feminism factor in Amathila, *Making a Difference* (2012)**

This section of the chapter analyses Amathila’s (2012) *Making a Difference* from a general postcolonial feminist point of view, but, towards the end, the discussion is, however, narrowed down to the Postcoloniality feminism factor of nego-feminism as a theory deemed suitable in analysing this autobiography. Therefore, in the current study, the chosen narratives are considered to be authentic autobiographies despite Gusdorf’s (1980) restrictive conditions of what entails a legitimate autobiography, autobiography in this study is posited as a genre that occupies significant space in the writings of African women, a genre “through which African women have participated in the representation of African experience and the shaping of African literature” (Hunsu, 2017, p. 319). Amathila’s story provides autobiographical data that assist the reader to understand her personal

experience of the liberation struggle of Namibia and experiences she encountered as a high ranking political woman in independent Namibia.

From the onset of the story, the reader can readily discern from her representation of herself that this life narrative can be deduced from the postcolonial feminism lenses as Amathila's main intention in writing her story was to highlight her influence and involvement in Namibian national development projects that endeavoured to bring woman on a par with their countrymen. In an attempt to combat gender inequalities in the world, women, in general, have espoused the notion of feminism as postcolonial "feminism has been about challenging the representations of women and arguing for better conditions for them. The representation itself has at least two meanings, both of which are relevant to postcolonialism and to feminism" (Quayson, 2010, p. 586). This argument is relevant to the current study as this analysis as indicated in Chapter 1 advocates for the exploration of Amathila's (2012) story and the three others (Namhila, 1997, Shaketange, 2009 and Amulungu, 2016) from the autobiographical genre and postcolonial feminism perspectives. A critical observation that can be glimpsed from this narrative is that Amathila emphasised, from the onset, that she was going to write about her personal participation in the liberation struggle.

Amathila (2012) is as a matter of the fact, Black, a woman and an African thus justifying the grounding of her narrative on the postcolonial feminist theory. In discussing postcolonial feminism, Tyagi (2014) asserts that "Black feminists have accused Western feminists of reading gender as a monolithic entity, and emphasized the need to consider race and class as issues related to questions of gender" (Tyagi, 2014, p. 47). Therefore, this discussion of Amathila (2012) is cognisant of the rejection of the general

concept of feminism by African feminists and it adopted a feminist theory that addresses the concerns of black women from a context-specific perspective. The cultures, traditions, and circumstances of African women need to be put in perspective if a suitable theory grounding African women's discourse is to be used in a study such as the current one.

It is, thus, imperative that the postcolonial feminist theory is discussed in relation to Amathila's (2012) autobiography. Postcolonial feminist was chosen as a decolonisation philosophy of feminism from the Eurocentric perspective in which all women are regarded as similar in all aspects of their lives, but in reality, women from once colonised third world countries have experienced gender disparities on a different level compared to women in the Western part of the world, especially white women. In providing clarity to the debate on universalising feminism, Tyagi (2014) posits that postcolonial feminism concentrates on how gender differences are constructed in colonial and anti-colonial dialogues, it is also concerned with women's representation in postcolonial discourses with emphasis on the work of women writers. Therefore, women that have experienced colonialism experience gender disparities from a double-edged sword perspective. These women have endured colonialism by foreign regimes, and the patriarchal societies they find themselves in compounds their suffering.

Amathila (2012) presents her plight as a colonised subject in apartheid Namibia and once the apartheid regime relinquished its power on Namibia, she still had to fight against the patriarchal ideologies of the men who also once fought side by side with her for equal rights for all during the colonial era. She had to recover from the colonial factor that discriminated against black people on the virtue of their colour and also fight the ideologies of the Namibian patriarchal hierarchy. Not only did she fight for her own



rights as an individual black woman, but, she also had to grapple against gender disparities as experienced by Namibian women in general through national projects. The apartheid regime left legislature that discriminated against women and it took Amathila some considerable efforts to sensitize the Namibian government on the discriminatory impact of such laws. The citation below shows the breadth and depth of the gender inequalities that are faced by black women from the once colonised countries as posited by Tyagi (2014);

She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject but also as a woman. In this oppression, her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the colonizer, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses. Not only that, but she also suffers at the hands of Western feminists from the colonizer countries who misrepresent their colonized counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their “sisters”. (Tyagi, 2014, p. 45)

In order to explicate the above citation, it is important to glimpse at how Amathila represents examples of the discrimination she once witnessed and experienced. For example; Amathila shares her experience of her first visit to the Windhoek municipal councillors in 1990 after SWAPO gained the power to rule the country. “There was not a single woman or any black face in that hall except me – a black woman” (Amathila 2012, p. 144). When she studied the Municipal Ordinance, she realised that the laws governing all municipalities were discriminatory against black people and women of all races. In order to become a councillor, one had to be a

white male of over 50 years of age to become a councillor and of South African citizenry. This indicates that white men who did not possess a South African citizen were unlikely to be employed in the country's municipalities. All women, regardless of race, creed or origin were totally excluded from such work. Namibian women were regarded as inferior and were not allowed buy property and in general, their salaries in jobs they were permitted to occupy, were lower than the salaries of their male counterparts in every organ of the state. Amathila continues to share a personal experience when she realised that she was paid lesser than her fellow ministers, she asserts that she I directly underwent the effects of some of these discriminatory laws. "One day in parliament I was sitting next to comrade Hidipo Hamutenya when I peered over his shoulder and saw his pay cheque. On closer inspection, I noticed that his pay was higher than mine" (Amathila, 2012, p. 144).

This discrepancy in salaries demonstrates that instead of altering the old practices of the discriminatory apartheid regime, the SWAPO government seemed contented with some practices that regarded women as second-class citizens of independent Namibia. When she inquired from the Minister of Finance at the time she was told that women were regarded as inferior to men as men were considered the breadwinners of their families, therefore, they had to be paid higher to fend for their family members. As a result of this discovery, Amathila had to fight for equal pay, for equal work in the workplace for women. This argument is grounded by Parashar (2016) who suggests that:

It is the absence of the state and the failure of its institutions to bring social justice and equality that has led to deepening identity politics and even armed resistance

by sections of its population. Feminists have cautiously argued that while the state's policies can lead to social inequalities and the undermining of gender justice and rights, it is also the only hope for those who will always be excluded and marginalised in any identity politics. (p. 371)

Through Amathila's autobiography, the reader can deduce that the Namibian government at this stage had failed the Namibian women. It is also possible that had Amathila not observed this discrepancy between female and male salaries, Namibian women today would still be regarded as inferior to their male counterparts. And the issue of equal pay for equal work would still be a debate in independent Namibia. Furthermore, Amathila also writes about her struggle to buy a house and could not be accorded a loan immediately because she was a woman, her bank manager had to convince the senior management of the bank that she could afford the house she was interested in buying. "So there again, I broke the mould. The door was now open for women to buy properties in their own names and not to go and find their husbands" (Amathila, 2012, p. 146). She later on amended the most discriminatory sections of the Municipal Ordinance, the section on property ownership was first amended. She also started the Built-together-project and her concern was for women to be given an equal chance to own property through the programme. She further claims that if she had not changed that section of the ordinance, women would not have been able to buy and own property. She also brought in the property ownership amendment clause that covered municipal houses that women could buy and own without intimidation from their male counterparts.

This double colonisation factor is articulated by Amathila's (2012) representation of her sense of selfhood. She ran away from the apartheid era in then South West Africa with its segregated laws and legislation, upon return to independent Namibia, only to be confronted with a different kind of discrimination on the basis of being a woman. On the misunderstanding of African culture by people from other cultures, Amathila (2012) shares her frustration when people from other cultures remark on African cultural issues that they do not well understand. She stated that; "... I often came across well-meaning but annoyingly ignorant remarks from people of other cultures, who assumed that every black person automatically came from grinding poverty" (Amathila, 2012, p. xvii), such sentiments infuriated her because;

Being black does not mean that you are automatically poor. What we black people regard as being well to do is not the same as having loads of money in the bank, rather for us it is how much grain you have in your storage bins or the number of cattle or animals you have, and whether you are able to feed your family.  
(Amathila, 2012, p. xvii)

Amathila's assertion above implies that it was about time she wrote a book that would allow her to define herself in relation to other Africans. She was concerned about how Africans, in general, were misrepresented by people from other cultures who perceived and judged them as poor because they define wealth according to their own concepts. Therefore, her quest is to provide a self-concept from a subjective point of view. The above example could be equated to Western feminists assuming that the problems they face in the West are similar to the problems faced by all women around the world. Postcolonial feminism, therefore, alienates the experiences of

Western women from those of women in other parts of the world. This argument is emphasised on by Tyagi (2014) who asserts that;

Postcolonial feminist theory has always concerned itself with the relationship between White feminist and her indigenous counterparts. In their eagerness to voice the concern of the colonized women, White feminists have overlooked racial, cultural and historical specificities that mark the condition of these women. In so doing, they have imposed White feminist models on colonized women, and thereby, worked as an oppressor. (Tyagi, 2014, p. 47)

Though postcolonial feminism accounts for people of once colonised nations of the third world, one may not ignore that a grounded theory that speaks directly to the needs of African women is also needed to express the concerns of women on the African continent in particular. Therefore, this study draws on the theory of nego-feminism as proposed by Nnaemeka, (2004) who lists some proverbs from different parts of African to show the point where Africans ideologies are similar, despite their specific geographic location. To further root this analysis, a recap of nego-feminism is also provided here. Nnaemeka (2004, p. 376), starts her discussion on nego-feminism by tapping into African wisdom through proverbs. The following are the proverbs which she draws her argument from;

- When something stands, something stands *beside* it (Igbo proverb).
- A person is a person because of other people! (Sotho proverb).
- One head cannot go into counsel (Ashanti proverb).
- The sky is vast enough for all birds to fly without colliding (Yoruba proverb).

The above proverbs insinuate that Africans believe in the principle of working together for the greater good of humanity. Thus men and women can only succeed in their endeavours if they work as partners rather than competitors. In providing the functions of proverbs in Africa, Udoidem (1984) argues that “proverbs are the kernel which contains the wisdom of the people. They are philosophical and moral expositions shrunk to a few words and form a mnemonic device for effective communication” (p. 129). Therefore, nego feminism is an African feminism that embraces the ideologies and the traditions of the people of the African continent. The wisdom behind this kind of feminism is that there is no need for men and women to fight over, for example, issues of gender inequality, which are issues of national interest. There is thus a need for meaningful dialogue in order to reach a consensus, the element of negotiation in African cultures is commonly shared among African people. Therefore, Nnaemeka (2014) proposed nego-feminism as a theory that would encompass the concerns of African women in the following manner;

In documenting the features of African feminism, I noted elsewhere that “to meaningfully explain the phenomenon called African feminism, it is not to Western feminism but rather to the African environment that one must refer. African feminism is not reactive; it is proactive. It has a life of its own that is rooted in the African environment. Its uniqueness emanates from the cultural and philosophical specificity of its provenance”. (Nnaemeka 1998a, p. 9 as cited in Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 376)

From this point of view, through nego-feminism, women do not perceive their male counterparts as the enemy, but rather, they are partners in the process of negotiation for an equal society, which would eventually benefit all that live in such a society. For instance, the Shona people of Zimbabwe have a popular proverb that lauds the position of women in society, *Musha mukadzi* which means that a woman is the hinge and the heart of the village. In national discourse, It could mean that a woman is pivotal in national accomplishments. This is a common understanding among Zimbabweans, for example, one does not weapons to fight men for equitable conditions, the men of Zimbabwe could easily, then listen and negotiates with women for better conditions of the female experience. In Africa, women play a pivotal role in nurturing their families, but they cannot accomplish this role in an amicable way if they are not empowered by government to attain skills and means to play their role in a meaningful manner. In order for the Namibian legislature to cater for women, all stakeholders need to come together and negotiate for an enabling environment. In Amathila's (2012) case, she had to negotiate with the SWAPO government to amend and pass laws that would eventually position women on an equivalent basis with Namibian men. In the process, both parties had to give and take, making compromises for the benefit of all.

In joining the debate on nego-feminism, Nkealah (2016) maintains that the purpose of the proverbs provided by Nnaemeka (2004) is to emphasise the idea that in African cultures, all people despite their gender, work together in supporting, educating and learning from one another. There are instances in Amathila (2012) where she applauds the work that was carried out by the men she worked with; for instance, when the need arose to promulgate and ratify the Local Government Act, she writes about a male lawyer who was very patient and knowledgeable

in the work of municipalities and she worked very well with him. Nnaemeka (2004) starts by explaining nego- feminism firstly, as a theory of negotiation, secondly as a feminism with no ego.

Further, Nnaemeka (2014) argues that the principle of negotiation is not new to African people, notions of negotiation such as, “give and take compromise, and balance are standing philosophies in the cultures of the people of the African continent. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of “give and take/exchange” and “cope with successfully/go around. “African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise” (Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 378). As Amathila (2012) negotiated for gender equality, she had to bargain with her fellow lawmakers in order to attain equal rights for Namibian women. Though sometimes Amathila (2012) comes through quite forceful in getting what she wants, she would not have gotten where she got on the issues of gender equality if she had single-handedly endeavoured to change the discriminatory laws that the Namibian government had inherited from the apartheid regime.

The issue of amending established legislature in Namibia is a team endeavour, not one that can be accomplished by one person. For example; there was an urgent need to change the rules that spoke to the appointment of councillors. Amathila (2012) points out, this was not an easy task as it required the Namibian parliament to promulgate and ratify the Local Government Act, different processes had to be carried out in order to enact this law. In the initial draft of the bill Amathila (2012) writes that in order for women to be considered as councillors in the proposed



law, she stipulated that “we put in a clause which gave quotas for women's representation in the council, e.g. Where there are 12 councillors at least 5 should be women and where there are 7 councillors at least 3 should be women” (Amathila, 2010, p. 147). She uses the pronoun ‘we’ to illustrate that she had a team she was working with and also the bill had to go to parliament for discussion, again, the element of negotiation of nego-feminism filters through this passage. So it took negotiation upon negotiation in order to accomplish this task. Though, in these negotiations and processes, Amathila (2012) was shocked by the reaction of some SWAPO male members who opposed the quota system as proposed by Amathila and her team. These male parliamentarians insinuated that both men and women had equal rights so the idea of quotas was to show favouritism for women. In justifying the quota clause, Amathila (2012) posits that, in Namibia, women are burdened with all the household tasks of homemaking, from raising their families, working outside the home to bring food into the home, to labour in the fields in rural areas. Again, this assertion indicates that in order for women to occupy space on the leadership ladder of governance, much had to be negotiated and at its final stages, even those that opposed it voted for it with the quota system intact. Thus the importance of negotiation as alluded to in nego-feminism.

#### **4.5 Subjectivity in authoring the self in *Making a Difference***

Autobiography subjectivity comes quite strong in Amathila (2012) *Making a Difference* Amathila clearly highlights her personal and public struggles. This female narrator of the liberation struggle discloses to the reader how she in most cases single-handedly triumphed in

her private space and public space as represented in *Making a Difference*. Amathila's story is a narration of her personal willingness to join the liberation struggle in order to get a better education and to become of service to her fellow Black people. She at times constructs her identity as relational to others. Ngoshi's (2013) argues that, life writing by women is writing that constitutes identity as relational; the personal identity of the self is regarded in relation to others, in this case, Amathila's identity is articulated in relation to individuals that shared her experiences. Just like Chung autobiography, as discussed in Ngoshi's (2013) analysis, Amathila's identity is not only shaped by her own personal experiences alone but, it is also shaped by the experiences she went through in the government structures that she represented and the people she came across in her life journey. An argument that can be borrowed from Gusdorf (1980) that substantiates Amathila's identity as relational to others is that "... lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is that never the isolated being-or rather, isolation is impossible in such a scheme of total cohesiveness as this" (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 30). Thus, this study concurs with Gusdorf on the aspect of individual identities being intertwined with the other members of their societies. When Amathila writes about her childhood, she represents herself in relation to the other children, she grew up with in her village of Fransfontein. For instance, she writes; "we used slates and wrote with chalks; we didn't have books. The first class at our school was Klein (small)..." (Amathila, 2012, p. 5). In this quotation, she uses pronouns such as 'we' and 'our' to refer to herself in relation to her class/ schoolmates.

In advancing the notion of autobiography subjectivity, in this narrative, Amathila also attempts to clear her name in instances where she was misunderstood. For example; in the chapter entitled

*Looking back and looking forward*, she explains how a certain journalist thought she wasn't doing her work as Deputy Prime Minister because she devoted much of her time to the plight of marginalised communities. She matter of fact states that;

Well, I was assigned to take care of marginalised communities: take care and assist the mountain people, find a place for them to come down, settle them, and make sure they didn't go back up into the mountain again. This was what the President had asked me to do". (Amathila, 2012, p. 151)

In so doing Amathila uses autobiography to set the record straight, to record her views on past assumptions created by the media. In this manner, she creates an identity, an identity that one might term as one without fault, one that is falsely accused of doing wrong. Whether she did her job as Deputy Prime Minister or not, however, one may wonder if she exaggerated the way she viewed herself. But again, in autobiography authors are able to clearly distinguish themselves from others and present their identities in the way they perceive their experiences; actions and reactions to such experiences. Amathila moreover, continues to explain the role she played in the politics of the country on three occasions when she acted as President because both the President and Prime Minister were out of the country. This emphasis on the significant roles she played in government brings in more skepticism as if she wants the reader to understand and exalt her because of the positions she held in the public space.

However, it should be noted that autobiography is highly subjective; Amathila (2012) wrote about herself from a personal point of view; she continually negotiates and renegotiates her

identities, the identity being one of the triggers of subjectivity. Further, it goes without saying that autobiography celebrates the 'I' in all its forms, it could be on one hand, 'I' the girlchild, 'I', the student, 'I' the medical doctor, 'I' the Minister and prime minister in the public sphere. On the other hand the 'I' could be 'my' the daughter, 'I' the friend, 'I' the wife or any identity she assumed as circumstances dictated. In this manner, the agency in autobiography subjectivity is pronounced. As a result of agency, *Making a Difference* portrays Amathila as an individual, an autonomous woman, black and African. Her story differs from the stories of other black Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle because of the salience of the agency. Amathila as the narrator and subject of her narration chose aspects of her experiences she deemed necessary for her story and she wrote her story in a manner she deemed it. The prominent positions she held in the Namibian government also in a way, dictated the manner in which she wrote the story and articulated her identity.

Another aspect that is prominent in autobiography subjectivity is memory. Memory is the basis on which lifetime experiences are founded. Life narratives are written through the memories collected; the narrator evaluates these memories and reconstructs their identities. They use memories to authenticate their stories. Like Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2012) and Amulungu (2016) commence their life narratives by presenting the reader with their childhood memories. This trend is not only peculiar to Namibian postcolonial-feminist autobiography, It can also be seen in other autobiographies written by African people. Generally, for writers to present comprehensive contextualised life stories, they generally infuse them with their childhood memories. *Making a Difference* and *Taming my Elephant* focus on Amathila and Amulungu's life journeys and from childhood to adulthood. Okuyade (2011) emphasises this

point in an examination of the *Bildungsroman* within the tradition of Nigerian third generation novels, which clearly deal with the maturity of the main actor (in this case, Amathila and Amulungu). As the narrators physically grew, they attained self-knowledge and eventually fully grasped the socio-cultural trends around them. Also, as argued by Dobos (2010) in chapter 2 of this study, human memory recollects the past experiences and the sociocultural aspects of such experiences through language. Therefore, the 'perceived reality' of the writers' encounters is created by acts of imagination and the experience obtained through the knowledge names of entities, together with the point of view. This argument brings in the fictionalisation of history because a recollection of memories is also context oriented, the mood and context in which one remembers an event could influence how the narrator recounts that particular experience. Since the source of memory articulation is language, Dobos (2010) maintains that language is the source, the carrier, and the recreator of memories, so it would be a mistake to assume that, as opposed to fiction, autobiography reports about events that preceded language.

However, it can also be argued that memory is the carrier of experiences without memory, such experiences cannot be articulated by individuals. Consequently, though language is the medium in which the narrators use to articulate life experiences, language does not pave the way for such memories. Rather, people encounter certain events in their lives, then, through the act of remembrance, they are able to recall and translate such experiences into language. Language is the medium of the construction of the meaning of human lives. However, narrators may sometimes overembellish their experiences through the choices they make in language construction.

In her life story, Amathila (2012) focuses on her role in the decolonisation process of Namibia and the post-independent happenings that she was mostly directly involved in. In this narrative, Amathila reflects on the adversities she endured for an independent Namibia and the hardships of nationhood in her quest for a stable national identity. However, as postulated by Okuyade (2011), “every writer derives his/her thematic preoccupation from society. Invariably, the novel becomes the shadow of the society that produces it” (p. 139). This perception is similar to the manner in which Amathila communicates herstory; she interweaves it with the experiences of the societies that she lived in. For example; she writes about her experiences in relation to societal experiences in Fransfontein as a child, in Otjiwarongo as a primary school girl, at Augustinism secondary school in Okahandja, at Wellington college as a senior secondary school learner, at Warsaw Medical Academy, Poland as a medical student, at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in France, in Mali, in the United States of America and other places she found herself either as a student or refugee or medical doctor or as a civil servant of the Republic of Namibia.

In shedding more light on the above argument, Okuyade (2011) calls attention to the fact that African writers tend to use the politics and history of their countries as literary and artistic intensifiers. Similarly, this infusion of politics and history into the representation of a life lived is visible in Amathila’s work. Though in the prologue of *Making a Difference* Amathila argues that “This book is not about the political history of Namibia but about how I contributed to the struggle for independence” (Amathila, 2012, p. xviii), one realises that she cannot help it but to infuse her experiences with the history and politics of the societies she lived in since she was directly involved in building Namibia as a nation, as a prominent figure in government it was

difficult to separate her personal life from the events that shaped Namibia as a colonized country and as an independent state. She writes about social issues that Namibians had to deal with such as; gender disparity, the Namibian historical background and the politics that governed such issues in the country.

As a Namibian woman she wrote about how gender roles were portrayed in the country before and after independence, she addressed how distinctly different gender roles were represented in the socio-political front of the Namibian nation and her battle for equal rights for herself and equal rights of her country-women. Unavoidably, herstory also takes a glimpse into her identities from childhood to adulthood, thus writing about her historical background. Moreover, she discusses controversies associated with her personal life and her work as a Minister of Health and Social Services in the newly independent Namibia. As a consequence, Amathila's story is very significant in understanding the Namibian society and the beliefs that were held by the general population. On the whole, the narrative addresses political challenges and controversies such as; discrimination, human rights and equality as envisaged in Amathila (2012).

Though an autobiography, as a rule, is expected to represent the self and the truth about the self only, African women's autobiography tends to refer to the self in a relational manner, this relational manner denotes the experiences of the others that in one way or another influenced the narrator's life experiences. This, however, does not imply that the self and the truth about the self is of less significance in African women's autobiography; it simply implies that the truth of the self's perception of their experiences is socially constructed. Selfhood in Amathila's (2012)

*Making a Difference*, just like in Namhila's (1997) *The Price of Freedom*, Shaketange (2008) *Walking the Boeing 707* and Amulungu's (2016) *Taming my Elephant*, is collective, suggesting that the 'I' in herstory is interpersonal to black Namibians in general and women in particular. In her life narrative, Amathila writes a lot about the assistance and friendships she struck with other women.

Notwithstanding, however, the impact of these relationships in her life and the generosity she was offered along the way, she is still the protagonist of herstory. Through her assertive disposition, intelligence, and resourcefulness, she without a doubt represents her selfhood. Even though Amathila was assisted by various individuals and institutions, her agency is clearly depicted in her writing. She defined certain dreams in her life and the freedom to make the right choices to achieve those dreams is also distinctly represented in her story. She was able to independently and socially engage with other members of the communities she came across, she acted to achieve the desired outcomes of her endeavours, indicating the control she had over her life. However, though agency is well represented in herstory, her selfhood is in relation to others, in this case, she represents herself as an individual who is a woman in relation to other woman and the divergences of femininities and masculinities in society.



#### **4.6 Analysing Amathila's presentation of her background in relation to her political awakening**

This section provides a brief synopsis of Amathila's political awakening profile. This analysis is necessary to understand the events that shaped her passion to become a doctor and at the same time to contribute towards building the Namibian nation. Amathila's (2012) *Making a Difference* illustrates her journey from a child growing up in Fransfontein in the Kunene region in the then South West Africa, to her experiences as refugees and her return to Namibia after Resolution 435. The view of the historicity of autobiographical texts is evidently clarified by Ngoshi (2015) who asserts that in reading autobiographies, readers expect to be embarking on a literary analysis of the personal experience which is infused with the national or world experience. Further, to cement the importance of autobiography in articulating the history of a nation in which the narrator lived, Ngoshi (2015) holds that historicity and historical circumstances or specifications mediate our understanding of autobiographical subjectivities. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that one understands the historical circumstances of Namibia as seen through the eyes of Amathila to understand herstory.

Amathila attended her pre-primary school in Fransfontein in the Southern part of Namibia under the custodian of her grandmother who played a great role in her childhood development as her caretaker and mentor. Already from the onset, Amathila makes the reader aware of the importance of her grandmother, the woman that shaped her childhood and instilled discipline and the notion of hard work in her. By then she was made aware of the difference in the way black

people were treated by the apartheid regime. She claims that her political consciousness started at a very young age when she lived with her grandmother. She witnessed the cruel and inhumane treatment that was subjected to black people by the apartheid regime that segregated black Namibians from the white settlers. For example; in some butcheries, black people had to buy their supplies, already packed through a window, as they were not allowed to enter the butchery. In cases where they were allowed, they were only allowed to buy pre-packaged 'offal', which consisted of the intestines and other internal organs of animals. "The town of Outjo near Fransfontein was also known as a place for unexplained and unreported deaths of black people" (Amathila, 2012, p. 20). These injustices started to engender political awareness in her. In doing so, Amathila uses the autobiography genre to record the history of Namibia; the injustices that black people suffered at the hands of the apartheid regime.

She later on moved to live with her mother and stepfather in Otjiwarongo to continue with her primary school. In Otjiwarongo she also had a life-changing experience when she escorted her mother to a hospital. The treatment her mother received fostered in her, a dream to become a medical doctor, she asserts that black people were given castor oil for stomach aches and medicines were generally administered to patients according to their ailments not according to their individual cases. This disregard of the rights of black people and the appalling treatment she witnessed, nurtured the seed of political awareness. Therefore, Amathila (2012) uses her autobiography as a documentation of historical injustices of the country. Her desire to become a medical doctor and treat her own kind with dignity was intensified later on by the fact that her teacher died of a broken leg because he did not receive prompt medical attention. Had he been White, he would have received the best treatment the country could offer at that time and his

untimely death would have been avoided. She also observed another cruel practice at the hospital that appalled her, she states that;

I also witnessed how women in my mother's ward were teased with a cup of water, which was put in front of them after the operation, and they would want to get out of their bed to that cup. I must add here that in those days ether was used as the anesthetic of choice and it made patients very thirsty when they woke up from the operation. (Amathila, 2012, p. 18)

This kind of history is not found in Namibian history books, experiences like the above can only be well pronounced in life writing, thus autobiography is quite significant not only in providing the subjective experiences of the author but, as a document that helps Namibians understand the political history of their country from a different angle. This history of the treatment of black people plays a pivotal in shaping Amathila's dream to become a medical doctor. She expresses the atrocities she witnessed as a child, atrocities that triggered her inspiration to become a medical doctor, thus situating her dream in the colonial factor. To cement the importance of history in shaping the identity of an autobiographer, Ngoshi (2015) posits that "the autobiographer and his or her text are both social and historical constructs. In this way, autobiography assumes its ideal form when it is viewed as a form with a discerning and powerful historical dimension" (Ngoshi, 2015, p. 13). It is the Namibian historical apartheid system that shaped Amathila's dream and the career path she chose to follow. Herstory has a visible powerful historical path that shapes her identities as an individual, a medical doctor and a powerful politician in the political affairs of Namibia. In this narrative, the personal and the

public come together as both spheres construct the individual experiences thus constructing her identities.

#### **4.7 Amathila's (2010) literary construction of masculinities and femininities in nation building**

The Namibian community is a gendered community as a result, gender constructions are prominent in the lives of Namibians in general. In representing herself as the protagonist in relation to others, Amathila's (2012) story, as a result, depicts the element of intersubjectivity, another outstanding feature of African woman life narratives. Amathila's subjective views on gender and other themes in her narrative, though personal, are also influenced by the larger societal norms of different communities she lived in. One of these norms is the gender disparities that have rocked the Namibian communities since the apartheid regime.

Generally, African women are usually expected by society to play a submissive role to their male counterparts, a notion that most women, intellectual or otherwise have been rejected for a long time. In herstory, Amathila (2012) provides scholars a chance to analyse and discuss the paradoxes that circumscribe the views, beliefs, position, and distinctiveness of women in African politics in general and in Namibian politics in particular. Human beings live in gendered societies as pondered by Senkoro (2018) who argues that;

Gender is perhaps the basic category we use for sorting and assorting human beings, and it is a key issue when discussing the symbolism and representation.

Indispensable essentials of our own distinctiveness and the identities we assume other people to have, come from concepts of gender that determine what it implies to be a boy/ man or a girl/ woman. (p. 50)

This classification of human beings is presented by Amathila from a Black African woman's point of view. Thus, gender differences are often narrated in postcolonial feminism autobiography in a way that the role of men in nation building is entirely distinct from that played by women. Ebila (2015) contends that "... the social construction of womanhood in African politics is influenced by socio-cultural and patriarchal ideologies that construct the ideal African woman as the docile one, the one who does not question male authority (p. 144). However, as a result of this antiquated, subservient perceived role of African women, Amathila challenges and interrogates such perceptions as she recounts her female political experience in Namibia. She unapologetically celebrates the role that specific woman played in her experience; starting with the strong-minded grandmother who had a great impact on her childhood development; the women she met and shared experiences within her life as a refugee and the women she closely worked with and encountered in the different political roles she undertook in independent Namibia.

In her presentation of gender differences, Amathila expresses the hardships that women had to go through in relation to the rather slightly relaxed lives of their male counterparts. In postcolonial feminism literature, these divergences are mostly articulated through narratives of the self, such as in *Making the Difference* by Amathila. In clarifying the issue of masculinities

and femininities, Ngoshi (2013) postulates that since gender differences are socially and politically constructed, they, therefore, play a substantial role in nation building and in constructing individual national identities.

In the story of her life, Amathila (2012) constructs and reconstructs her own gender identity versus the gender of others. She narrates her journey as a female in building the Namibian nation and at the same time celebrating the participation of other women in building the nation. In explaining gender construction in liberation discourse, Ngoshi (2013) postulates that typical female life writing tends to demonstrate “a relational sense of identity in which the autonomous self is subordinate to or subsumed in the collective” (p. 119). As Amathila narrates herstory, she consciously or subconsciously interweaves her experiences with the experiences of the others, she crossed path with her life journey.

Autobiographical acts are significant modes of communication in postcolonial Africa. These acts articulate individual and collective efforts in colonial conquest and post-independent Africa. Through written autobiography, narrators, according to Ngoshi (2013) deliberately situate themselves alongside the historical and cultural spaces of their communities. Therefore, the historical and cultural landscapes of Namibia helped Amathila to shape her identity as an African woman that played a significant role in the Namibian history and political landscape. Amathila’s identity is also shaped by her experience of the South African apartheid regime that resulted in her exile and the subsequent return which saw her rise in political positions and her experience as such. Amathila celebrates the experiences of fellow women in the liberation struggle and their

sheer determination to rise above the poverty that submerged their livelihoods and advance their skills for their own survival and the survival of others.

From the onset of herstory, Amathila narrates her life as a child brought up by her maternal grandparents. Though she was brought up by her grandmother and grandfather, her grandmother occupies a prominent place in her narrative. It was her grandmother that admonished her childhood mischievousness and celebrated her successes. The grandmother is placed at the centre stage of her childhood memories. Her grandmother took her to church, told her stories and instilled strong cultural norms upon her. She also dedicates her work to her because she believed that she occupied a significant role in her upbringing. She also writes about her educational background in Namibia and her decision to leave the country in search of her dream to become a medical doctor. The Namibian liberation struggle and the aftermath of independence define Amathila's identity as she is known today. The apartheid regime that was exclusionary and the liberation struggle are the backdrops of Amathila's projection of her gendered self.

Amathila's story as she stated had a two-fold purpose. First and foremost, she wanted to inspire young Namibian women to realise that they were as good as boys and they had capabilities to achieve anything they wanted to become despite the challenges that come along with such dreams. This pronouncement implies that she was aware of social norms that tend to prevent women from achieving their goals, but their role in society is quite valuable for them to remain on the margins of the national dialogue. Another reason that she provides for writing this story is that she wanted to inform people from other cultures who had misconceptions about African

people's wealth. People that thought that all black people lived in poverty. She argues that *Making a Difference* is not about the political history of Namibia but how she, as an individual contributed to the struggle for independence. Amathila narrates her quest for personal achievement and how such experiences could be emulated by other women who want to become successful. However, on the other hand, she celebrates the women and the man she came across on personal, political and professional levels.

As a politician, she believes that the unequal representation of women in Namibian politics is attributed to the fact that women tend to bear the burden of nurturing their families alone. Amathila (2012) contends that in 2004 and 2009 women representation in parliament declined and this scenario was not supposed to be because it was agreed upon by the United Nations and Southern African Development protocols that women's representation was supposed to have reached at least 30% at that time. Moreover, she argues that Namibian men had not yet accepted women as equals and ganged up to support each other during elections on their virtue of being male, not on the virtue of being capable of holding high ranking positions in the government of the Republic of Namibia. Likewise, Amathila (2012) contends that until government deliberately assist women in politics, the gap in political representation will continue to widen. About the reason why women were not well represented she said that for women to be elected to political leadership positions, the parties demanded that they started from party sections to regional conferences. However, women did not have the opportunity of rallying for support in their villages and constituencies due to their gendered responsibilities.



However, their male counterparts were able to rally for support from their male comrades while socialising in bars and other leisure places and lobbying, while women had to start working for their families from dawn to dusk, tilling farmland, milking the cows, and preparing the children to go to school, feed the whole family including their husbands who were campaigning, and do the household chores for the comfort of their families. When meetings were held in villages women were unable to attend because of all the duties they had to tend to, thus diminishing the prospect of being elected for positions in their parties. Some of these meetings also commenced at night, making it difficult for rural women who had to attend to their crops till late to attend such meetings. “Women work, starting at dawn and coming home at sunset. They come home late and cook for the children and their families, so they miss meetings, and it’s obvious that unless they attend meetings, nobody will know them” (Amathila, 2012, p. 255). Whether this representation of women’s responsibilities and everyday life is accurate or not it should be noted that women have come a long way in politics. The apartheid era and cultural beliefs that disregarded women’s rights intensified gender disparities in Namibia, thus the need for a legislature that would, later on, foresee political leadership changes that would enable Namibian women to get on the political bandwagon.

Amathila uses autobiography to represent her fight for the rights of Namibian woman. She urged the SWAPO party, being the ruling party to introduce the quota system that would enable women to be elected into leadership positions where they can play a significant role in the development of Namibia. She boldly submits that many women tend to excel in their duties when given an opportunity to showcase their capabilities than their male counterparts, an argument that is debatable since work ethics are individual specific rather than gender-specific. In writing such

claims, *Making a Difference* could be more biased towards women and their work ethics. In emphasising gender disparities in Namibia, Amathila (2012) further argued that though Namibia is free and equality among individuals is the order of the day, women are in reality not totally free. She also in support of the Married Persons Equality Act of 1996, that through the adoption of the Act, women were again in principle given an opportunity to be equal to men in terms of equal pay for equal work, appointments in the workspace, political, and other spheres of their lives. This Act she contends was significant in the lives of Namibian women since their position in society had been inferior to that of men during independence.

What stands out in this section of herstory is that Amathila gives a disturbing scenario of many men's attitudes towards the tabling of the Married Persons Equality Bill in parliament when many male parliamentarians she has worked with challenged it on the basis of their Christian beliefs. They used the bible as a scapegoat for their desire to keep women in a subordinate position. Despite the controversies that were brought by the bill, it was passed to the dismay of those that vehemently opposed it. The bill was able to bring to the fore the abuse that some women went through at the hands of their husbands and it also created awareness of the rights of women. Thus, it also made women aware of the protection that the government offers when it comes to gender disparities in the home. This section shows how Amathila used autobiography to expose social ills of the Namibian society and how her personal contribution made a difference to the lives of women in the country.

## 4.8 Chapter summary

To sum up this chapter, Amathila's (2012) *Making a Difference* is analysed through the postcolonial feminist theory which is then narrowed down to the nego-feminist theory which embraces the realities that African feminists grapple with every day. Nego-feminism is introduced in this chapter because, in order for feminism to remain relevant, it should speak to the needs of women from all parts of the world. Feminism, from a Euro-centric point of view, does not address the ideologies and philosophies of the African people. Again, though, postcolonial feminism speaks to the needs of the women of the third world, it also does not embrace the belief systems of Black women of the African continent, thus, the urgent need for the adoption of nego-feminism, a theory that was introduced by Nnaemeka (2004) to foreground scholarship that interrogates the gender politics of the Black African women. Amathila's representation of her experiences shows that she is a tenacious negotiator, as according to her, she achieved all the tasks she was assigned to as a minister on two occasions and as a deputy prime minister. Though Amathila's achievements in the public sphere can be corroborated with government documentation, one cannot help it, but, wonder whether she does not celebrate her selfhood in an exaggerated manner; which is typical to male autobiography, thus bringing the relational identity as represented in female autobiography into doubt. In some instances, it sounds as if she, alone, accomplished a lot for equal rights and better living conditions for the marginalised people in Namibia. However, even ministers and government officials work with other people who also tremendously contribute to the agenda of government developmental goals. Despite this shortcoming, her negotiating skills can be commended for many of her accomplishments, thus the use of nego-feminism theory as one of the theories underlying this

chapter. Moreover, her claims of the important work she did in the refugee camps where Namibians were accommodated are also corroborated by the narrations of Amulungu (2016) who attested that;

The clinic, the kindergarten, chicken farms, and vegetable garden were the creations of Dr. Libertina Amathila, the first black Namibian woman to be a medical doctor trained in Poland in the 1960s. She expanded these facilities and services to all SWAPO settlements in Zambia and Angola for the wellbeing of Namibian women and children in exile. (Amulungu, 2016, p. 122)

In so doing Amathila's (2012) representation of herself becomes accurate if other documents can substantiate such claims. It is of interest to note that the other women of the liberation struggle like Amulungu attest to the claims made by Amathila about the important roles she played in exile as an effort to make a difference in the lives of exiled Namibians.

Again, since *Making a Difference* is an autobiography, the text is consequently also analysed from the autobiography genre perspective with its contested aspects of subjectivity, truth, identity, and memory. Amathila (2012) writes her story from a personal point of view which brings about the debate of truthfulness in autobiographical writing. The issue of subjectivity has been questioned on the ground on whether an author can duly remember all the events of his/her life and whether one is able to recall how they felt and reacted to such events. This argument brings in the question of memory, which has also brought into the intense debate in the discussion about whether autobiography qualifies to be termed a genre in literary studies.

However, memory is paramount in autobiography as it is memory that the author engages with in writing their life narratives. Amathila, like all authors of life narratives, negotiated and renegotiated with her memory as she embarked on the task of autobiographical writing. She also had to evaluate memories of her life experience to gauge whether they were worth sharing or not.

Amathila (2012) maintains that she thought about writing her story in the 1970s, but she couldn't because she got busy with other urgent matters of her life. At the time she started writing notes about her experience but lost them and had to start writing *Making a Difference* without those notes, only armed with her memory, guiding her through her life experiences. It should be noted that subjectivity is unavoidable in autobiographical writing as Amathila's story is a narration of her own life experiences written from her personal point of view. And it should also be stated here that the author chose what to write, thus making an autobiography, highly selective as Amathila had to decide whether to share or not certain experiences of her life. In line with this argument, one realises that when Amathila became a minister, she chose to write more about her life in the public sphere than her private space. Perhaps, this decision was due to the reason that she provided for the decision to write about her life story, which was to inspire young women who wanted to accomplish their life aspirations.

It is also important to note that Amathila successfully used the autobiography genre to share her personal story, whether the story is true or not it is up to the reader to accept or reject it. As a black woman, she also uses autobiography to articulate her experiences as a civil servant. The way she unapologetically tells her story is commended, especially when she writes about her

struggle for gender parity and equal rights for all Namibians. In order to understand the issue of subjectivity not only did this chapter analyse *Making a Difference* through memory alone, but the chapter also analysed subjectivity through experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency as suggested by Smith and Watson (2010). The fact that women have been left out or misrepresented in national discourse foregrounds the importance of autobiography in levelling the ground for women in the Namibian political discourse. The use of autobiography in re-writing the history of Namibian women allows the Namibian women to speak for the voiceless; the children and women of the liberation struggle. This sentiment is substantiated by Bience Gawanas who posits that; “it is my contention that unless we rewrite history from a woman’s perspective and by ourselves, we will not have a complete recollection of our past and be in a position to negotiate a space on the independence agenda” (Akawa, 2014). This statement is underpinned by Amathila (2012) who takes up the initiative not only to make a difference by publishing her personal experience of the liberation struggle to inspire young women to dream big but, by also making a difference in historicising the space of women on the national agenda.

This chapter through the analysis of Amathila’s *Making a Difference* illustrates the complexity of discussing memory, experience, identity, space and embodiment as separate entities of autobiographical subjectivity. At the beginning of her story, Amathila confesses that she thought of telling her story in the 1970s’ but other responsibilities got in the way of writing the story and when she retired, she reconsidered writing her life experiences but her initial notes were lost and she had to start from scratch. This brings the issue of memory into disrepute, as in the absence of these notes, Amathila had to rely on her memory to remember her past experiences, thus in the act of remembrance she reconstructed her life experiences and carefully selected the memories

she wanted to share with her readers. Therefore, in this way, the act of reconstruction may taint the remembered experience. As the subject narrates her story, she had to think about language use and usage in order to capture the attention of the reader, therefore, language is used as a magnet to attract the reader to written texts.

Again, the construction of experience is very personal as the same experience has the potential of being interpreted by individuals from a personal point of view depending on the individual's background, status, education, personal beliefs and the mood in which the narration takes place. To compound it all, Amathila had a choice of the experiences she chose to share with her perceived readership. But the issue of agency is also a complicated one as though Amathila expressed human agency through the act of writing her own life experiences; the reader should also note that her writing is also told through cultural scripts that were available to her and as such she was governed by the cultural strictures about self-representation available in the public domain as argued by Watson and Smith (2001).

Moreover, self-identity is complex as identities shift from time to time, from one political situation to the next and since this narrative is an exilic one, Amathila's identity also shifted from one geographic space to the next and from one political regime to the next. It should also be remembered that embodiment is an important feature of autobiography subjectivity. Amathila's recollections of her experiences are also constructed from a female point of view. Therefore, in illustrating her experience she does so as a female that experienced gender disparities in both colonised and free Namibia.

## CHAPTER 5

### USING AUTOBIOGRAPHY TO VOICE RESILIENCE AND POSTCOLONIAL EXPERIENCES IN AMULUNGU'S (2016) *TAMING MY ELEPHANT*

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed Amathila's (2012) *Making a Difference* through the autobiography and feminist theories. Though the Chapter discussed both the private and public spheres' experiences of Amathila's life, it mostly portrayed her public image as she focused more on her life as a public figure. Amathila's autobiography challenges the typical notion of female autobiography being different from male autobiography, which is considered to be more egocentric. Her portrayal of her public image can be described to resemble ego-centrism as she glorified the self and her achievements thereof. The self-image she exhumes is that of one that single-handedly fought for the rights of women both in exile and in independent Namibia. Whilst female autobiographies are considered to be more sensitive to the roles played by others and personal identity is usually portrayed as relational to other people that the narrator associated with, Amathila's portrayal of the adult-self is more individualistic, though she acknowledges the successes of women who were involved in the projects that she initiated. Also Amathila's autobiography is typical of postcolonial feminist writing as she indicated throughout the narrative her role in uplifting the lives of women in exile and in Namibia.



Amulungu's (2016) *Taming my Elephant* is a portrayal of Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu's personal battles since childhood to adulthood. Rensing (2017) posits that the realities of the politics of Namibia since the colonial era have not received the necessary international attention it deserves, however, authors like Amulungu have added their voices to the voices of others in the quest of international recognition of the Namibian experience. At the beginning of her life narrative, she explains the elephant metaphor in Oshiwambo, her mother tongue; which is an idiomatic expression that alludes to the adversities that are faced by human beings in their lives. Therefore, this Chapter analyses Amulungu's (2016) representation of the self; the challenges she faced and how she overcame such challenges. In doing so, as established in the preceding chapters, this Chapter is scrutinised through the lenses of the autobiography and postcolonial feminist theories. Also, in order to extricate the issues discussed and presented in *Taming my elephant*, autobiographical subjectivity is deliberated through memory, experience, identity, space and embodiment.

## **5.2 Theorising Amulungu's self-narration**

It is important from the onset to establish the historical person writing the autobiography. In so doing, one might understand the experiences she chooses to share with her readership and how she shares that information. Amulungu hails from the northern parts of Namibia and thus she is Oshiwambo speaking. She grew up in the north and attended her school in a Catholic boarding school; which paved her way into exile. Unlike all the other women in this study who to some extent willingly left Namibia to join SWAPO in exile, Amulungu was kidnapped and forced to

join the liberation struggle. This revelation echoes the title of her autobiography; this experience was one she had to accept and try to survive in her new environment. Her narration of this experience leaves one in awe as such stories are usually not shared, at least not by many people. Amulungu's narrative depicts a different scenario where she had not planned to go into exile. Her story divulges a shocking revelation of a forced exile, as at the beginning of her journey she did not know where she was going and why. It is in the opinion of this researcher that Amulungu's journey was more traumatising than the journeys of the other women discussed in this study. She states that she did not understand the politics of the country during that time neither did she understand political organisations like SWAPO. However, she also writes about herself in relation to others who were in the same situation as her. Therefore, Amulungu's narrative in this case is used as a documentation of this not often told story of the involuntary exilic journeys of Namibians.

However, this experience did not break her, but it became one of many that would shape her into a very strong and courageous individual. While Amathila, Namhila and Shaketange seem to have been clear of their missions into exile, Amulungu's journey was an involuntary one. Therefore, this shocking revelation makes her journey into exile different from the journeys of the other three autobiographies (Amathila, Shaketange and Amathila) analysed in this study. At least the other three were somewhat psychologically prepared for their journeys but not Amulungu. They claim that from a tender age, they had witnessed the injustices of the apartheid regime; however, Amulungu seems to not have been aware of such injustices. This shows a shared history of apartheid but not every young person was affected in the same manner.

Amulungu's narration of her journey into exile seems paradoxical at first as on the one hand, she writes about the fear and shock that engulfed her and her school mates as they were forced by PLAN combatants to go into exile. On the other hand, she also praises the combatants, the same men that had kidnapped her. Amulungu (2016) explained that armed men are known to be abusive towards women, especially when they are in a forest. But she portrayed the PLAN combatants as very caring and did not take advantage of the girls in the group. She further defended them by arguing that; "we, as women, felt safe with them...I would like to at this point to take my hat off to these young armed young men in whose company we were and who carried out their mission to the letter" (Amulungu, 2016, p. 82). Therefore, it is ironic that she bestowed such praise upon her captors. However, upon close inspection, one realises that as she started to understand SWAPO ideologies, she became a devoted SWAPO member. She therefore, justifies some of her childhood memories with her adult sentiments. Another factor that influences Amulungu's way of narration is the time of telling herstory, she wrote herstory twenty-six years later after the Namibian independence. Also, the time span of her narrative also affects the way she depicted her emotions on particular issues. Her actual experiences span from the time she was three or four as a toddler most of her memories of that time are stories she was told by her family members so some of these recollections could be imagined rather than lived experiences.

Therefore, the act of remembering is a complex one as it is sometimes difficult to discern fact from fiction. Early childhood memories, according to Wells, Morrison and Conway (2016), are difficult to verify, thus leaving the possibility of error and even that of false memory. For that reason, research can be undertaken to examine what children can remember of their lives the logic being that if children themselves cannot recall specific details and also have, at least the

occasional, overly specific memory then it seems highly unlikely that decades later, in adulthood, they would have such memories. However, it is imperative to note that narratives like Amulungu's add a lot of value to the life histories of those that found themselves in exile and the liberation struggles they represent. This is also as articulated by Saunders (2006), who posits that "many Namibians left their country during the liberation struggle, and their experiences of exile, often very traumatic, add greatly to the richness of these life histories" (p.229).

Moreover, Amulungu's narrative depicts the role of the church, the Catholic Church in this case, in the lives of Namibia and to an extent their involvement in the liberation struggle and support for the struggle. She narrates about the German nuns and fathers that taught her and how one of the fathers walked with them when they were kidnapped. The PLAN combatants allowed him to walk with them it is as if he knew about their mission, as it also seems that he did not try to stop them from abducting the school children. This revelation thus shows the involvement of the church in the struggle.

Similar to Namhila, Shaketange and Amathila, Amulungu also writes the different daily camp activities that were held in the camps. She also writes about her experiences in a collective manner. There are many instances in the narratives that she uses the pronoun 'we' making it difficult to discern her personal perception of her circumstances. However, in some instances her personal emotions come through especially when she was separated from her class mates who were moved to another camp while she had to remain for treatment as she was ill. Also, her

achievements for instance in education, her marriage and subsequent divorce and effects thereof are laden with the emotions which are frequent in female autobiographies.

### **5.3 Exploring Amulungu's identity construction in *Taming my Elephant***

Amulungu's narrative plays a significant role in the construction of her identity and identities. Her narrative of the self takes the reader to her childhood environment and its cultural denotations as she remembered them at the time of writing her story. Interestingly, in order to establish her identity, she started by narrating the chronicles of her ancestors. Certainly, this could be regarded as controversial as she had not known these forebears as her knowledge of them is pure hearsay. Therefore, some readers may conclude that this part of her story is subject to reconstruction over generations and therefore, question the authenticity of this part of the story. She also admits that:

As there is no way I could have complete information on my ancestors beyond my grandparents, a general picture can be painted from the stories told by various relatives and family friends. As usual, there are always variations in what many people make out of the same story. (Amulungu, 2016, p. 13)

As can be deduced from the above admission, firstly, not only did Amulungu write about personal experience but she infused her personal stories with the stories of the people she was related to as blood relatives, friends and counterparts. In advancing the debate on identities as

construed from autobiographies, Smith and Watson (2001) postulate that a narrator's subjective 'I' is relational to others which suggests that individuals' experiences could be interconnected to other people's experiences.

Therefore, Amulungu as a woman that partook in the liberation struggle in her own right encountered many people who one way or the other influenced the course of her life. Moreover, Smith and Watson (2001) claim that identities are not stable and rigid; they constantly shift and are flexible. As Amulungu wrote her story her identity shifted from a girl-child in apartheid Namibia to a young adult in a boarding school, to a refugee in different countries whose experiences influenced how she constructed her identity, she became a student in tertiary institutions, who became a wife, she was soon divorced and became a single parent. She eventually became a government official in the Republic of Namibia and eventually married a white man.

On identity and identities construction, Kehily's (1995) study found that the correlation between gender and identity construction is the main concern of life-narratives, the conclusion in this study was that gender is pivotal in determining how individual past experiences and subjectivity in individuals' stories are constructed. In light of this argument, Amulungu's narration follows a path that leads her to attest in the end how her current identity/ identities are shaped by her past experiences. However, identity construction and its analysis is difficult to comprehend as many factors are at play in the construction of self-identity. In contributing to the identity construction in self-narratives, Haynes (2006) argues that "the concept of identity is complex, and its study

draws from the disciplines of psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy and sociology, as well as more recent post-structuralism perspectives” (p. 400).

There are two kinds of ‘others’ that Amulungu writes about; the significant others and the less insignificant others. In explaining the two categories of ‘others; Smith and Watson (2001) speculate that “there are also contingents of others who populate the text as actors in the narrator’s script of meaning but are not deeply reflected upon (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 65). However, according to Smith and Watson (2001), there are ‘others’ too whose experiences are entrenched in the experiences of the narrator and as a result, the narrator’s construction of self-identity, is influenced and shaped this group of ‘others’, these are the significant others in the life experiences of the narrator. For example; Amulungu writes a great deal about her mother and how she tirelessly tried to bring her up ‘right’ through the household chores she tried to entrench into her life in order to become a ‘proper’ Oshiwambo woman who would one day become an industrious wife and mother.

Therefore, the implication in this argument is that the ‘significant others’ occupy a significant place in the memory of the autobiographical narrator in the process of identity construction. In articulating the process of identity construction, Wilson and Ross (2003) postulate that the process of constructing an identity is an active one as individuals tend to remember experiences that would help them establish their current self views. This sentiment can also be glossed out of Amulungu’s autobiography, for instance; after the death of her mother, Amulungu made a promise to one day fill in the gap that was left by her mother and help her siblings become

successful in their own lives. She explained that “as I was putting all efforts into adapting to the Namibian environment with all that I had got myself into, I still had young siblings to help. This has been my dream since 1979 when I lost my mother” (Amulungu, 2016, p. 282). Therefore, in memory of her mother, a woman that had played such a significant role in her life, she felt the urge to help her siblings and her father whenever she could.

Amulungu (2016) additionally acknowledged the fact that stories change over time and they may also change due to the individual that is telling the story. But the readers should also bear in mind the reasons why she wrote this story. Though the story is targeted for national and international audiences, she initially stated that “my first concern was to provide my children with some account of my background in order for them to get some understanding of the society I was from and the path I had travelled before settling in the posh suburb of Ludwigsdorf” (Amulungu, 2016, p. 4). Amulungu’s story is not only personally rooted, but it is collective as she narrates the story of the birth of the Namibian nation in the same process. Her movement from Ovamboland and eventually to Ludwisdorf, one of the posh suburbs in Windhoek, was a personal journey of many challenges and obstacles. Thus, in reconstructing herstory, a story of dislocation and transplantation Amulungu also narrates the nation’s history, and in advancing this argument, Esgalhado (2003) argues that experiences stretch across time, place and space to include the social, historical, and ideological aspects of a people, in this case, the general population of women and men whose experiences became exilic in the quest for the country’s independence.



It is of great importance to note that Amulungu's story is not only situated in one place, it takes place in different locations of Ovamboland in northern Namibia, and in other places of the world and other parts of the country. The story is also situated in different periods of time from her ancestors' experiences up to her own personal experiences in 2016 as an adult. As a result, the places and times she located her experiences in are crucial since these experiences are symbolic in her interactions with the world in general. Moreover, Harris (2005) also suggests that autobiography can also be regarded as a tool to divulge the narrator's personal history and culture. Also, according to Harris (2005) in the process of writing an autobiography, individuals get a chance to examine their formal and informal education. As can be glossed out of this narrative, Amulungu takes advantage of the process of writing her life narrative to disseminate her childhood experiences as taught by her parents and the formal education as it was offered during the apartheid era. But her educational experiences do not end with the apartheid factor; her narrative continues to divulge all the informal and formal education she obtained in exile. Through her education narration, Amulungu reveals a story of a Namibian woman who had a chance to be educated in many spheres of her life. Her informal education was quite personal as it taught her to be resilient to ordinary and special events in her life. The formal education on the other hand gave her an opportunity to gain skills that helped her to get employed and meaningfully contribute to the development of the republic of Namibia.

Also, the story of her ancestors locates her in a family and the family concept in Namibia in general goes beyond someone's position in a family, rather it also helps to establish one's identity as a family provides a sense of belonging to an African in general. For instance, the symbolism attached to the importance of an extended family that Amulungu grew up in; family

members provided emotional and material support to other the members of the family. This argument is expanded by Swigart (2001), who posits that family members act as both an economic and emotional network and presents individuals with a sense of whom they are and where they belong. As a result, it is inevitable for Amulungu (2016) to start her story by sharing with her readers the genesis of her family tree. Because Amulungu's self-representation is intertwined with the experiences and identities of others, her autobiography is a complex one as the reader has to peel off the presence of the others that sometimes overshadow her uniqueness as an individual.

Smith and Watson (2001) postulate that life narratives are multilayered as they are written in cultural and historic contexts, moreover, they are also rhetorical in the sense that they are addressed to an audience, thus the need to capture the readership's attention through language use. Also the narrator's attempt to establish her identity in the writing process plays an important role in the reconstruction of lived experiences. In corroboration with the above analysis, Kehily (1995) postulates that in the process of narrating a life-narrative, the narrator inevitably displays a language that socially "speaks of and constructs identity and which is, simultaneously, creating and presenting a sense of self. However, this sense of self for public consumption may recreate a certain version of identity which is socially recognisable and socially validated" (p. 29). Therefore, as a member of the ruling party, Amulungu inevitably constructs her identity through the relationship with the party and the party appears in her narrative to be blameless and focused on nation building even after her exilic days.

Moreover, since narratives are rhetorical, they are sometimes fractured by the attempt of the narrator to make meaning of their past experiences. The narrators constantly struggle with the balance between rhetorics and expressing their lived or imagined experiences. For example, the title of her autobiography, *Taming my Elephant*, might be interpreted by different readers from different angles; for example; her challenges were many, some could be likened to the ‘elephant’ expression in Oshiwambo, these were challenges that were quite arduous and she had to surmount her all willpower to overcome such obstacles. Her journey into exile was quite challenging as she was neither emotionally nor physically prepared for it. However, other experiences might not be equated to taming an elephant as these were ways of life in the places she eventually found herself in, she inevitably had to adjust and settle in, for example; the cold in France and the way of life in general.

Therefore, one may argue that in the case of Amulungu’s narration, she attempted to historically and culturally situate experiences that modelled her identity; she writes about her ancestors and the eventual circumstances of her birth. In explaining the factors that contribute to one’s identity/ identities, Smith and Watson (2001) argue that identities are articulated through difference and commonality because identities are denoted through “gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, family genealogy, and religious and political ideologies...” (p. 33). Amulungu’s identity is accentuated through her race, as a black Namibian woman who is of the Oshiwambo tribe, whose family hails from the northern parts of Namibia and who through exilic experiences became a SWAPO member who represented Namibia “as ambassador-designate to Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal” (Amulungu, 2016, p. 296) among other factors.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that published autobiographies are well crafted documents whose processes are well thought by the subject who is also the subject of inquiry and the authenticator of the inquiry. This tripartite role that the narrator has to assume makes the writing process of life narratives quite multifaceted. In the same vein, the reading of the narrative also becomes an intricate affair as the reader attempts to critique the narrative from all possible angles. Therefore, this analysis glosses out themes that merge from Amulungu's *Taming my Elephant* in order to understand how she conveys subjectivity in herstory and her participation in the public sphere as a Namibian woman that was involved in the liberation struggle.

#### **5.4 Examining the role of memory in Amulungu's narrative construction**

As a result of the above line of reasoning, memory is seen as a tool that the narrator uses in creating her identity. In addition to this, Wilson and Ross (2003) further argue that one's past is temporary and thus there is usually a lack of concrete evidence to verify personal memory. Thus, authors of autobiography, in this case Amulungu, write about their personal experiences in a way that they offer their readership a representation of the self that they want their audience to view them from. Another perspective of self-representation is that "people can revise their appraisals of the past selves and events, and shift the subjective distance, point of view or way of recollecting the episodes" (Wilson & Ross, 2003, p. 147). As a result, it is possible that in writing her autobiography, Amulungu had to cautiously evaluate her personal memories in the construction of the preferred self.

In addition to this Kehily (1995) argues that in life-narratives, memory is the key ingredient that shapes the narrator's story. Simply put, Campbell (1997) explains that "much of ordinary memory is autobiographical: memory of what one saw and did, where and when. It may derive from your past experiences, or from what other people told you about your past life" (p. 105). This account is evident in Amulungu's narrative; the construction of her autobiography is based on her own personal memories and the memories of experiences she was told about by relatives. As she wrote about her childhood experiences, she narrates encounters of her life that were sometimes repeatedly told by her father. In grounding this argument, Amulungu (2016) in the narration of her childhood experiences points out that "I am told that I never failed to demonstrate my grievances to him for everything that happened to my dislike. It is a pity I cannot recall much of that interesting time. A few things kept being repeated to me though" (p. 44). This confession by Amulungu shows that some of her memories were constructed through repetition by her relatives.

It is important to note that, memory is subject to lapses and clarity, thus in the process of remembering the narrator selects the memories that are more suitable to the objective of their narration. Kehily (1995) continues to posit that since remembering is selective, memory thus plays a significant role in fixing/ reconstructing personal history. "However, this fixing can be seen as a temporary state, since memory is an active process, constantly working and reworking personal experiences" (Kehily, 1995, p. 28). In this way, Amulungu also constantly reconstructs her experiences as personal memories continuously shift according to the context of the narration. As she narrated her childhood experiences, she reconstructed and re-evaluated the memories that established her as an Oshiwambo child who eventually grew up guided by the

guidance of her childhood upbringing. She also narrated the events that led her to the boarding of the Catholic school she attended in her secondary education that then resulted into her journey into exile. Mostly, her story between childhood and adulthood portrays her as an individual who joined the liberation struggle and the experiences she went through in exile and eventually those experiences that she underwent when Namibia gained its political independence.

In her life, Amulungu went through quite a number of experiences that could be construed as traumatising; her abduction into exile, the death of her mother while she was still in exile and her short-lived marriage that ended in unclear circumstances. On the issue of autobiography and emotion, Holland and Kensinger (2010) maintains that “the emotional content of an experience can influence the way in which the event is remembered. Second, emotions and emotional goals experienced at the time of autobiographical retrieval can influence the information recalled” (p. 88). For instance, as Amulungu (2016) narrated her divorce and its effects on her, it is not the divorce per say that engages the reader into the narrative, but it is the way she analysed these effects that draws the reader closer to the narrator and her narration. She portrays an anguish and loneliness of an individual torn between the reality of the divorce and the disbelief as nothing in her short-lived marriage had prepared her for such a sudden end of something she thought would last forever. It should have been quite hard for her to face a diminishing of her autonomy but, as later on revealed in the narrative, she fought these challenges and emerged whole after some time. These personal battles seemed to strengthen her character and shaped her into the formidable woman she is today.

Furthermore, Holland and Kensinger (2010) posit that individuals tend to clearly remember experiences that are more emotional than those that carry less emotional content. When Amulungu re-lived the death of her mother she wrote about this experience in depth and her reaction and the mourning for her mother stands out in the memory of the reader. Days that are remarkable in the life of the narrator are remembered with ease such as graduation, wedding or death, which means that experiences that are exciting or sad remain engraved in the memories of individuals. Amulungu's autobiography was published in 2016, thirty-seven years later after the death of her mother. She vividly remembered the minute details of the envelope that came with the bad news of the passing of her mother. She remembered the red sticker on the envelope, how she took her time to open the letter, the words in the letter and her reaction to her loss.

## **5.5 The transplantation of an uprooted lifestyle**

This section of this chapter deals with how Amulungu's life was unexpectedly disrupted by her revelation into exile. Amulungu was neither mentally nor emotionally prepared to go into exile, thus her capture into exile uprooted her life in former Ovamboland and transplanted it in other territories during her exilic life. The section depicts how this experience and experiences thereafter may have influenced her presentation of the self. Amulungu's journey into exile does not only depict an abrupt displacement of the socio-cultural life she grew up in, a life she was familiar with, it also represents a relocation of her as an individual, depicting her physical and emotional development. Through her autobiography, she presents how this relocation

transformed her perception of life in general; she and the other exiles were introduced to new environments, situations and circumstances.

In arguing for the African women's autobiographies, Hunsu (2017) argues that significant experiences of the peoples of the African continent have played a major role in the inception and advancement of the African women autobiography. These realities are the colonisation of African people and their eventual resistance of colonialism through their struggles for independence. Thus, Hunsu (2017) suggests that the examination of the themes of colonialism and the struggle of independence, "manifesting in different forms, placed African women's autobiography alongside men's and challenged the absence or silence of women's voices in the corpus of history of nationalism and independence, which are associated with canonical male-authored texts" (p. 320). Therefore, as this study explores how Amulungu, Amathila, Shaketange and Namhila's autobiographies are constructed, it is unavoidable to link their stories to the liberation struggle of Namibia, as the struggle and its aftermath is the pulse of their self-representations.

Through her affiliation to the struggle of independence Amulungu's life was transformed, a fact she seems grateful for. From an ordinary Oshiwambo girl, her life became transnational as she settled lived in different countries. Firstly, SWAPO camps in exile became her home, therefore, the concept of what home entailed changed as she was constantly moved from one camp to the next. Under normal circumstances, a home is usually made up of permanent structures and in



cementing one's sense of belonging it is a place where one's family members live and they are usually ready to offer everyone in their family setting any support that is deemed necessary.

Exilic life in some cases had no permanent structures. Home at the beginning of her exilic life became anywhere where her friends and school mates were. At least they provided a sense of familiarity. So naturally she tended to gravitate towards the comfort that was offered by the presence of this group of friends. In describing the exilic autobiography, Davis and Meerzon (2015) stipulate that "the story of exile begins with a rupture" (p. 63). Therefore, Amulungu's autobiography depicts such a rupture and a history of living in other countries. Therefore, her story suggests the process of returning to her past, it is a symbol of reevaluating and shedding light on the meaning of her experiences. This process of reenacting her life could be a form of self-therapy, especially taking cognisance of the fact that her exile life was quite traumatic especially in the early days of displacement.

Amulungu's identity formation is influenced by different factors that suggest an inclination towards subjectivity. These factors include her childhood experiences, her educational background, her exilic experiences and her experiences as a Black woman from an independent African country. Through *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu offers her subjective view of herself as she reconstructed her life journey. Moreover, her diasporic experiences influenced her perception of life in general. As a result, her personal identity is formulated through her adult lens as dictated by the personal experiences she went through. Boehmer (2004) claim that policies and processes that are related to globalisation, and theories of diaspora inform the

modern-day understanding of transnational experiences. Therefore, Amulungu's identity construction is relational as her identity is influenced by various constituencies such as being Black (race), female (gender), Oshiwambo (ethnic affiliation/ language), SWAPO member (political affiliation) and generation. All these factors are instrumental in how she represented herself in *Taming my Elephant*.

Amulungu belongs to a generation of women who went into exile and participated in the liberation struggle for the independence of Namibia. At first it was shocking and devastating to be abruptly uprooted from the familiar environment she had known all her life. Besides the White teachers at the catholic school, Amulungu had not known about other indigenous groups of people in Namibia besides the people from her own tribe. In exile she firstly met Greenwell Matongo from the present-day Zambezi region. It is also her exilic situation that paved the way for her understanding of SWAPO as an organisation that was geared towards the independence of Namibia.

Two months later she seems to have appreciated her abduction into exile as she claimed that "two months later after I had been assisted to join SWAPO, I still could not claim to understand SWAPO, but this did not mean that we were starting to embrace SWAPO" (Amulungu, 2016, p. 101). Amulungu does not only write about her experiences in exile, she also uses her adult perspective to reflect on these encounters. She reflects at the effort that went into the organisation of her abduction and how well SWAPO camps were organised in exile.

However, upon close inspection, her portrayal of SWAPO is also quite subjective as the picture she offers is quite untarnished. One might view the way she wrote about SWAPO as too impeccable, and even the way she wrote the Andreas Shipanga's rebellion, she could be accused of playing down the severity of this conflict as it seems that the SWAPO leadership was very accommodating and did not punish those that were considered to be the enemies to the course of the liberation struggle. For example, she claims that the SWAPO leadership allowed these rebels to stay at the Nyango camp in Zambia for them to make up their minds whether they wanted to remain with SWAPO or whether they wanted to leave the organisation. She wrote; "however those who were in Nyango expressed their remorse and wanted to be reintegrated into PLAN" (Amulungu, 2016, p. 123).

However, the reader should not forget the role played by memory in the reconstruction of past experiences. In the words of Fivush (2011), "autobiographical memory is that uniquely human form of memory that moves beyond recall of experienced events to integrate perspective, interpretation, and evaluation across self, other, and time to create a personal history" (p. 560). Thus, Amulungu reconstructed her personal experiences in a manner that she simply did not just recall her past experience, but she recalled these experiences across time and space and in order of create a meaningful narrative she had to interpret these experiences through different contexts. In so doing autobiography inevitably becomes subjective as it is the narrating individual who truly understands the reality of their social world.

Also, through exile, Amulungu travelled from Angola to Zambia on a plane, an experience that was a significant shift in her life and she recounts it as it was an important step in her global experience. It was through her stay in Zambia that exposed Amulungu to the English language, a language that was eventually adopted as the official language of independent Namibia. Despite this fact, she also offers the reader how exile transformed her life for the better as she posits that “slowly but surely, we glided from the naïve, narrow minded and traditional human beings to vibrant members of the liberation struggle” (Amulungu, 2016, p. 121). Though Amungu’s identity was uprooted, her transplantation seemed have have been favourable as it taught her a variety of education that she had not received in Namibia. In cementing this notion, Amulungu (2016) argues that, “every day we bumped into new people, new ideas, new happenings and we expanded our horizons” (p. 130). This shows that different life experiences enable personal identity to shift. Therefore, one’s identity continuously evolves, forever shaping the development of an individual’s psyche.

As indicated earlier, her perception on what family entailed also changed as she explains she met a couple of women who became her ‘exile mothers’. Though there were positive changes in her life in exile she also narrates times of sadness and grief, especially the news of the passing away of her mother in Namibia after she was hit by a car at a wedding celebration. She had to grieve the passing away of her mother without the comfort of her family in Namibia but her friendship with Lydia made this tragedy bearable. As a result, she had to come to terms with her loss and moved on. However, other good things were happening for her, through her study of French, she was accorded an opportunity to go to France and advance her studies another opportunity that

helped in shaping her identity. This was quite significant in her life too as she also still remembers the actual date she landed in Paris.

However, receiving a letter from Bishop Kopmann in Namibia to return home and fill in the vacuum that was left by her mother infuriated her as she was immersed in the ideologies of SWAPO. Her refusal to return to Namibia was due to two factors; firstly, she had already embraced the ideals that SWAPO presented and returning home would have been seen as a betrayal to these beliefs. Secondly, her community back home would also have rejected her because she would have given up on the noble course of liberating Namibia from the apartheid regime. (Nervaux-Gavoty, 2015) posits that self-narratives reflect the authors' lives and they also play a central role in subjectivity construction. Therefore, Amulungu rejected the Bishop's help because of the way she personally felt about leaving the struggle for independence. Reading Amulungu's autobiography helps one to understand not only her culture, but also the manner in which she constructs her personal identity, despite many challenges. The narrative draws the readers' attention to her struggle both at home and the places she found herself in as a political refugee. This narrative informs the reader into the hardships and resilience of the writer and the survival tactics she had to master in the face of adversity.

Amulungu had to tame other elephants while she was in exile; for example, after she got married at the age of twenty-five, she had to deal with divorce nine months later. This incidence was particularly traumatic as she did not understand what had led her husband to such a decision. To make the situation worse she was with child and she had to deal with the pregnancy and

upbringing of the child on her own. Experiences are very subjective, though Amulungu was now a single mother the birth of her child brought peace in her life, peace that she had not experienced since her divorce experience. While, when Namhila (1998) gave birth she had suffered because of the health condition of her baby.

Therefore, Amulungu though had certain drawbacks in her personal life; she portrayed this drawback as temporary. This argument is substantiated by Ross and Wilson (2003) who posit that in their analysis of writing the self, individuals tend to appraise their current self and, in a way, discredit their past experiences and identities. This position is further propounded in Ross and Wilson (2003) who observed that “this observation is intriguing, because today becomes yesterday. The current exemplary self seems less praiseworthy in retrospect” (p. 66). This position could be true in some instances, while in some cases human beings are generally nostalgic about their past experiences.

The later scenario is also observed in the writing of Amulungu in how she reflects on the work of SWAPO in exile, and the comradeship that she claims to have been offered by her friends. In addition to this Ross and Wilson (2003) propose that authors also tend to recount their past experiences in a way that makes them feel good about their experiences at the time of writing. Amulungu shows that she was strong enough to overcome challenges in her past, thus making herself seem resilient and feel good about herself at the time of writing her autobiography. According to Ross and Wilson (2003) “typically, people are motivated to evaluate subjectively recent past selves favourably, especially when considering important attributes. ... by praising

past selves to whom they feel connected, they also compliment their current self” (p. 67). Through Amulungu’s (2016) analysis the reader realises she attributes her past experiences to the making of her present self. Amulungu argues that; nothing else surprises her now after having experienced and overcome some of the most daunting challenges she recounted in her autobiography. “It is perhaps an overstatement, but after having emerged intact from several challenging situations, I guess I’ve become immune to my perceived dramatic events. With age things do change” (p. 67). This sentiment is also reiterated by Ross and Wilson (2003) who postulate that “perhaps most people do learn from experience and get better with age” (p. 67). Thus, at the end of her autobiography, Amulungu seems to have reached a stage in her life where she was prepared to handle anything that come her way, because she had learned so much from her past experiences.

## **5.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter theorised how Amulungu used autobiography as a tool to disclose resilience in her life experiences; from an ordinary girl in rural South West Africa, to her journey into exile and her experiences as a refugee to an ambassador-designate to different African countries. Her story is a story of a woman who had to face many challenges and she presents a victory to most of these challenges. Amulungu’s story like the stories of Namhila, Shaketange and Amathila is a personal story whose subjectivity is encapsulated in memory, experience, identity, space and embodiment.

Memory is an important component of the autobiographical act as discussed by Smith and Watson (2001) who maintains that memory is pivotal in the process of autobiography construction as it is the authenticator of the narrator's experiences. However, memory also has its own challenges as it may lapse at times depending on the emotions attached to such an experience. The more emotional an experience seems to be, the more the narrator is likely to remember it in details. On the other hand, the less emotional an experience is, the less likely it is to be accurately remembered. This is evident in the details that Amulungu provides when she had to construct an emotional incident or experience. According to Smith and Watson (2001) "the writer of autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history" (p. 16). Memory is thus used as a source of making meaning of past events; however, in so doing there should be a context that would enable the writer to accurately recall such memories.

Also, the chapter analysed how Amulungu constructed her identity, in most cases she relates her identity to significant others, but there are instances also where she had to fight her own battles and she refers herself as a singular being than generalising her identity to those that were part of her social group. As a member of SWAPO especially during her exilic days she more often identified herself with the other SWAPO members, therefore, her identity construction is in relation with the otherness.

Another issue that was also analysed in this chapter is the uprooting of one's identity especially in the life of Amulungu. Her exilic journey was especially difficult as she had no choice in the



decision of leaving her country and family behind, as she and her school mates were abducted into exile by SWAPO combatants. However, she seemed to quickly accept her situation and took her place in the liberation struggle. She later on referred to this experience as; she was 'assisted' to join the liberation struggle. There are also other incidences in exile when her personal life was in turmoil but again as she fondly wrote, she tamed her elephant in all these circumstances.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This Chapter concludes the study and summarises the findings regarding “herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia: The case of Ndeshi Namhila (1997), Lydia Shaketange (2009), Libertine Amathila (2012) and Trudie Amulungu (2016)”. It is worth restating that this study explored subjectivity through five concepts that are namely; memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency as proposed by Smith and Watson (2010). This concluding chapter is partitioned into two sections; conclusions and findings, and recommendations of the study. In the conclusions and findings sections, an attempt is made to infuse the convergence of the topic and the theoretical framework. A review of the research questions is made to conclude and summarise the findings in relation to the themes and viewpoints constructed in chapter 2, 3, and 5. This review will help the researcher to demonstrate the significance of the study. In the final section, suggestions are brought forward relating to further studies and research in the area of autobiographical studies.

## 6.2 Summary of findings

This section of the study represents the conclusions and findings of this study. In so doing, a brief discussion is carried out on the relevance of the topic with regards to the theoretical framework selected and analysed in this study. In addition to this, in concluding the findings observed in analysing the four autobiographies of Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle, the research questions of the study are restated in order to demonstrate how they were responded to in the analysis. It is worth noting that the issue of authenticity in self-representation in autobiographical narratives can be problematic as “it is riven with its own contradictions that derive from mediations of memory and ideological and cultural biases that tend to promote the agenda of the individual subject” Javangwe (2011, p. 3).

Besides the above mentioned contradictions, the women autobiographies scrutinised in this study are also riddled with emotions that are typical in women autobiographies; thus making it difficult to discern the imagined experiences and the actual lived ones. Also, individuals’ identities are difficult to clearly discern, as women identities are usually authored in a relational manner; relational to other women, race, religion, political affiliation and cultural membership. However, it is also worth noting that these contradictions do not dismiss autobiography as a literary genre; in fact it is these challenges that attract the literary scholar in dissecting autobiography to uncover these concealed nuances of different types of autobiographies. This therefore, means that the genre of autobiography is a hive of scholarly interrogations.

Namhila (1997), Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2012) and Amulungu (2016), therefore, though belonging to the same Black race, experienced racial discrimination as instigated by the South African regime and belonged to the same political party, they however, narrate their experiences differently as experience is perceived and reflected upon by each individual in their own way. Despite of the above argument, the similarities that are embedded in these autobiographies cannot be overruled as can be seen through the structures of the texts, for example; they all write their experiences transitioning from childhood to adulthood, thus, at the same time of narrating personal experiences they also narrate the transition of the political and social history of the country.

### **6.2.1 The relevance of herstory as anchored on the postcolonial feminist and autobiographical genre theories**

The previous chapters of this study demonstrated that written autobiography is a vital tool for articulating individual experiences of the women of the liberation struggle as it provides a platform for these former subaltern women to share their exilic experiences. The autobiography is also an important tool in the field of literary studies as it provides scholars with an opportunity to philosophically critique the nuances of human subjectivity through different theoretical frameworks. As a result, this research topic is of essence through its recognition of the fact that Namibian women of the liberation struggle were not mere simpletons who suffered silently and passively at the brutality of the apartheid regime and the postcolonial gender imbalances the independent Namibia experienced, but they made choices that drastically transformed their lives

in the face of many adversities. This notion of postcolonial literature stemming from colonialism in Africa is explicated by Olatunji (2010) who states that this kind of literature arose as a result of colonialism, thus postcolonial African literature was a reaction of the colonised peoples of the Africa to colonialism. It became a reactionary theory and practice to the laws that governed the colonised subject. therefore, the autobiographies analysed in this study emanate from the concept of postcolonialism, which according to Olatunji (2010) as stipulated in Chapter 2 of this study, is a “theory of oppositionality that encapsulates the totality of practices which characterise the third world nations, especially in Africa, from the inception of colonialism to the present day” (p.125).

In general, the narration of nation building in Africa is celebrated from a male point of view, thus leaving out women from national discourse; this study therefore, celebrates the presence of women in important matters of building the Namibian nation. In corroboration with this argument, Amathila (2012) is one of the pioneers of active women parliamentarians as she passionately fought as Minister of Regional and Local Government and Housing, Minister of Health and Social Services, and Deputy Prime Minister for the rights of the marginalised groups of people in independent Namibia. Amulungu’s (2016) capabilities were also recognised by the government that she was appointed as Ambassador-designate to the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. These are Francophone countries; therefore, it is logical that she was appointed to these countries as a French language expert who pioneered the established the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre (FNCC) after independence.

Namhila (1997) and Shaketange (2009) did not hold of any Ministerial or political positions in the government of the Republic of Namibia, but their role as educators and knowledge disseminators is essential in building and developing the nation. Also, though these women in most cases had to deal with numerous challenges in their private spheres, they were not diminished in their capacity as professionals. They portray a human agency that is impeccable, illustrating that hard work and commitment is not an issue of gender, but one that is individual based, grounded on principles that are strong and formidable. This study, as a result, seals the gap in scholarly literature of the contribution of Namibian women in the liberation struggle. Therefore, herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives of the liberation struggle in Namibia: the case of Ndeshi Namhila, Lydia Shaketange, Libertine Amathila, and Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu depict stories of female survival, resilience and the establishment of agency as expressed by these women of the liberation struggle.

The women narrators as discussed in this study migrated to Angola and Zambia and through the auspices of SWAPO, they continued on their journeys to front line states that were supportive of the course of the Namibian independence. Usually, when the debate of the liberation struggle is brought up, it is not surprising to conjure images of those involved carrying guns, but these women participated in the liberation struggle from a different perspective. Instead of fighting through the barrel of the gun, they were sent by SWAPO to attain skills that would be useful in the independent Namibia, thus they obtained education to bolster the image and development of the country. Namhila is a qualified librarian who worked in different organisations, including the University of Namibia. Shaketange became an educator who has also been serving the University of Namibia for a long time. Amathila became a medical doctor, turned politician whose

contribution in SWAPO refugee camps and independent Namibia left an everlasting impact since she was in the forefront of health care in the refugee camps and she also worked tirelessly to change Namibian legislature in support of gender parity Namibia. Also, Amulungu as a woman that represented the country in diplomatic nations have tremendously contributed to the voice of women in national discourse. The analysed autobiographies portray vivacious, audacious women who relentlessly worked to improve their personal and national situations.

The authors were uprooted from their home-country which was a challenging experience as they had to continuously negotiate their identities and adjust to their constantly shifting environments. However, though they were uprooted from Namibia, they were transplanted elsewhere, where their characters were strengthened thus making them resilient to face many challenges that came their way. They acquired other languages and cultures in these countries which provided them with new perspectives on life in general. This argument is substantiated by Riedel (2017) who posits that through transnationalism individuals feel connected to both motherland and host country which leads to dual and hybrid identities. This can be deduced from Namhila's autobiography who clearly argued that though in exile she felt a close connection to Namibia but, when she got home, she had to retrace her footsteps in search for a meaningful identity. However, in her case, she felt lost in host countries and in Namibia, thus she stated that her autobiography signalled a beginning for a search for a sense of belonging.

This study is important as it provides the author with a platform to engage in the exploration of arguments and concealed nuances of the intentions of autobiographical acts as portrayed in four

autobiographies of Namibian women of the liberation struggle. The postcolonial feminism and autobiography theories helped the researcher in the exploration of the rare representations of experiences and participation of Namibian women in the liberation struggle. In so doing, helped the researcher to understand and discuss gender disparities in Namibian women autobiographical interplay as postulated by the narrators of the autobiographies examined in this study.

Therefore, this study has the power to inspire scholars to interrogate other autobiographical nuances that were not cross-examined in this study. Autobiographies of the liberation struggle may also open doors for reconciliation as the authors of the chosen autobiographies went through challenging experiences of the colonial era in Namibia, experiences that are traumatising as they contributed towards the liberation struggle of the nation. According to Ngoshi (2013) as indicated in chapter 1, autobiography allows authors to “define the self by positioning themselves strategically along the historical and cultural continuum” (p.120). As a result of this argument, this study is quite significant in that, the chosen autobiographies resonate the history of the nation and the role played by the authors in shaping that history. This sentiment is also echoed by Lopičić (n. d.) who argues that “when the subject is silenced by the forces more powerful than himself, the autobiographical narrative may give voice to pain, anger, and desire” (p. 129). The four autobiographies examined in this study make use of autobiography to reveal their individualised painful recollections of colonialism and the liberation struggle thereof. They unapologetically share their anger, anxieties and perhaps joys they encountered in the search for freedom and their subsequent experiences in self-independent Namibia. For instance, Namhila (1997) strongly voices out her concerns of the independent Namibia; she unapologetically advance that:



There are many people in Namibia who do not know anything about the lives that Namibians lived in exile. Some think that life in exile was about Lubango and the detainees issue because this is the only information the public were given through the media. The liberation struggle fought by the combatants, the diplomatic missions, life in the camps, escape into exile, the countries where we lived, and the people who gave us shelter, clothing, scholarships, and food, those are all things no one talks about. (Namhila, 1997, p.194)

The above argument thus depicts a documentation of the intimate details that are usually written about in national discourse. Therefore, the four autobiographies are used as tools to reveal and record these exceptional experiences that led to the building of Namibia as a nation; once more emphasizing on how the postcolonial-feminist autobiography is a useful tool in documenting both a personal and national history. The two are linked as individuals write their experiences in social contexts, thus also writing about the experiences of their communities.

The contribution of this study would be of interest to scholars of English studies in general and those interested in literary studies in particular. The literature on autobiographical studies has largely critiqued the argument of autobiography as a literary genre and the element of subjectivity in autobiography. According to Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik and Ferreira-Meyers (2015) “the present avalanche of autobiographical writing indicates that our time has a great interest in questions of self and identity (p. 7).” As one reads the four autobiographies that were selected in this study, one cannot help it but realise the issue of identity construction in these life-narratives. Namhila (1997) is quite forthcoming with the issue of her identity crisis and all the authors also grapple with this issue

especially during the transition to independence period. They relate how lost they felt even in the presence of their parents and siblings, a sense of belonging they held before they went into exile had vanished when they returned. They had to embark on missions of self-introspection to find the lost thread that had bound them to their families and communities.

As already alluded to in the literature review of this study; Shands, Mikrut, Pattanaik and Ferreira-Meyers (2015) contribute to the debate of the significance of analysing autobiographies by postulating that;

Autobiographical texts increasingly attract critical attention, and work on autobiography from a number of perspectives has become a vital area of research, engaging in questions about what is private and public along with notions of truth and fiction, identity and authenticity, as well as in discussions of what constitutes experience and narration, and theories concerning the very boundaries and limits of the genre. (p. 7)

The four autobiographies portray private lives of women who participated in the liberation struggle for Namibian independence. Amathila in her own capacity went into exile with the intention of becoming a medical doctor. Her situation is quite unique as she had been educated at the best school for Blacks in the country; her view on the politics of Namibia was further advanced by her education in South Africa, since Blacks in Namibia and South Africa experienced similar laws that discriminated against people because of their skin colour. Namhila on the other hand, was traumatised by the apartheid regime when she was shot at by South African soldiers as a child, had seen her teachers being violated and she had also witnessed her uncle being maliciously beaten; she wanted to escape and fight the system just like many other Blacks had done. Shaketange wrote that

she went into exile because she wanted to be taught in the English language like the other children beyond the 'red line'. She did not personally directly suffer at the hands of the oppressor but had been told of horror acts of terrorism committed against her people in her own country. Amulungu story was a different one also, she did not volunteer to go into exile, and rather she was abducted into exile, an act she later on appreciated as she stated that she was assisted to go into exile by the PLAN combatants.

The above-mentioned scenarios show that the process autobiography writing is quite subjective because lives of individuals are not similar even in the face of similar political situations. There is also the question of revealing one's private life to the general public; this thus challenges the truth of lived experiences as revealed in autobiographies. The reader might be daunted by the question of authenticity of the exposed life; thus, challenging the subjectivity-objectivity continuum. The narration of lived experiences might in some cases be over-embellished with language as writing is an art in its own right. On this basis, it could be said that when the narrators of these autobiographies reconstructed their lives, they might have done so with ardent meticulousness in order to attract the attention of the reader to their experiences. Therefore, sometimes, the lived experience could be subject to misconstruction that would eventually lead to misinterpretation by the reader. Eventually this argument, leads one back to the question of what constitutes the theories concerning the boundaries of and limits of autobiography as a genre.

In addition to the autobiography's literature, as pointed out in the section of the 'significance of the study', this study contributes to two research areas commonly studied within the domain of English studies; literary analysis and criticism surrounding autobiography as a genre. Although much is

known about autobiographical criticism in general, not much has been written about the female autobiography in Namibia. The purpose of this study was to explore the issues of subjectivity and the public sphere in female narratives in the Namibian liberation struggle. The significance of literary analysis and self-life narratives in literature studies cannot be overstated. According to Winterfeldt and Vale (2011), literary narratives form artistic ways of knowing society and the social world. “The fashioning of the narrative, the modeling of the story, re-enacts reality. It reflects the act of intellectual appropriation of the world by aesthetic means” (Winterfeldt & Vale, 2011, p. 85). The selected texts in this study were used as tools for self-identification within the larger society in general. Winterfeldt and Vale (2011) further, argue that the literary work encompasses the social structural treatment of the author’s view of history and her/his identification. Olasakinju (2011) also affirms that Africans in the past were misrepresented and portrayed inappropriately in non-African literature. The same could be said of African women, in particular. However, the tables have been turned since the inception of postcolonial literature. Africans, in general, and, noteworthy, female writers now share their experiences through the autobiography genre. The chosen texts heighten shared humanity, and the lifestyles of the authors are portrayed as distinctive and dynamic.

Besides the above arguments, there are several other reasons why this study is significant. Firstly, the autobiographical analysis is classic for historical reasons. The chosen texts depict the lives of the narrators before and after the independence of Namibia, thus contributing to the historical knowledge of the country. Olatunji (2010) states that history is of great importance in postcolonial discourse as it is the backbone of national identity. History is paramount in any given society as it allows human beings to learn from their past mistakes in order to change the future for the benefit of humanity. Woodson (as cited in Olatunji, 2010, p. 127) contends that “If a race has no history, if it has no

worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world and it stands the danger of being exterminated”. Therefore, it is imperative that Namibians conduct studies like the one presented in this study so as to preserve the history of the country and its inhabitants for the benefit of future generations. This means that the Namibian history needs to be reaffirmed in academic, social, economic, cultural and political spheres.

The theoretical framework used as a backdrop to this study is a combination of the autobiography theory and the postcolonial feminist theory. As a study that emphasised on the role of women in the liberation struggle of Namibia, the autobiography theory was chosen because the role of these women in the struggles is interrogated through their narratives which are regarded as autobiographies in this study. Also, the postcolonial feminist theory was also a theory of choice because the autobiographies selected for this study resonates the voices of women only and male autobiographies were deliberately omitted in this study.

### **6.2.2 Conclusions**

The deductions and findings presented in the preceding subheadings and paragraphs also informed the discussions that were presented in Chapter one, two, three, four, five and six. Therefore, the restatement of the research questions presented in this section of the study, presents a brief synopsis of how each question was responded to in each chapter that analysed the selected autobiographies. It is worth noting here that the premise of the study was to explore how the Namibian women of the liberation struggle presented their exilic experiences through

the literary genre of autobiography. Therefore, the following questions assisted the researcher in critically analysing the above-mentioned topic:

1. How do Namibian women writers represent the 'self' and subjectivity through the use of the self-life narratives?
2. How did the authors of the selected texts reclaim and recreate the public sphere in postcolonial Namibia?
3. How do the issues and concerns that were raised through the selected autobiographies impact on nation building in Namibia?

In responding to the first question, this study found out that subjectivity is the essence of autobiography writing as the authors of the selected autobiography wrote their own experiences not only from a personal point of view, but also through their own styles of self-representation. However, on the field of self-representation Rota (2009) posit that "the field of self-representation is potentially the most interesting and tangled one since the subject comes to face his/her own self and has to find a way out from what I figure as an embarrassment a rediscovery" (p. 50). These autobiographies were written by women and interpreted also from a postcolonial-feminist point of view.

This study evolved around the issue of subjectivity in Namibian female narratives. And since this study's stance is on the interchangeable use of the concepts of autobiography and life-narratives, these narratives/ autobiographies were viewed from Smith and Watson's (2001) perspective that "life-narrative, then might best be approached as a moving target, a set of ever-shifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present" (p. 3).

Namhila, Shaketange, Amathila and Amulungu left Namibia when they were quite young to join the liberation struggle. Their exilic experiences were regularly shifting as they either moved from one refugee camp to the next or from one country to the next. It took tact and determination to adapt to such circumstances. Each movement presented different scenarios for the narrators. However, each individual's experiences were unique and each narrator presented a set of survival strategies that enabled them to coherently survive in each context.

For instance; from the way Namhila (1997) writes, one can see that it is the attachment to other people that kept her going. At the beginning of her exilic experiences, she wrote about how her group of travellers felt and experienced their march into exile, she did not write much about her individual experiences. However, in her experience of the Kassinga massacre she delved more into the personal; how she was helped by captain Kanhana and how devastated the experience left her. But again, she reverts back to the relational 'I'. So, her writing shifts back and forth; the times she referred to the individual 'I' was when she wrote about experiences that were laden with emotion. These occasions portrayed the singular battles that the author went through. Namhila's delves considerably in the issues of identity. She embarked on a search of how her life as an individual fitted in the struggle in this search she argued that; "I was an individual and was going to live with people but how was I to relate to them? It was becoming important that I had an identity. I was questioning how I could preserve this identity without isolating myself" (p. 48). This lamentation indicates how subjective a lived experience can be; for an experience to have a social meaning, it is perhaps more representative if told from a personal point of view by the person who actually understands the emotions that coupled such experience.

As already indicated throughout the preceding chapters, the issue of subjectivity in this study was analysed through the concepts of memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency as suggested by Smith and Watson (2001). The narrators of the autobiographies selected for this study are women, whose narrations depended on how each individual narrator accessed their memories to reconstruct a retrospective past life and how they situated such a life into the present. Through their recollection of past memories, all the narrators tend to infuse these experiences with their perceptions at the time of writing. On the issue of identity (Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) postulates that; “despite the exiled state of these women, their sense of commitment to the struggle as well as their sense of identity is deeply rooted in their exile community and has curbed the sense of loneliness and nostalgia often common in exile texts” (p. 66). In affirmation with this claim, Amulungu (2016) when requested by Father Kopmann to return to Namibia after the death of her mother to fill in the gap that she had left in the family asserts that;

“As much as going back home was the yearning of every Namibian in exile, it could not happen at all costs. Independence was the prerequisite. And I couldn’t be an exception. Even something as painful as losing a mother could not be a valid reason for abandoning the liberation struggle. (p. 149)

With regards to the second question; these four narrators articulate their private life experiences through autobiography which became a means to publicise their private and collective challenges and victories. The private lives of autobiographies went public through their published life-narratives. Their private lives were quite challenging; however, they seem to successfully negotiate and reclaim the public sphere. As already argued in the literature reviewed in this



study, the African women voices were not always in national discourse, their voices were often silenced by the colonial factor and the patriarchy systems they lived in. However, through autobiography they make their concerns known and they demystify the contribution of Namibian women in the liberation struggle and their participation in nation building. The independence of Namibia and its adoption of democracy, therefore, opened doors for all Namibians despite of their gender, race or creed to voice their concerns on national and academic platforms. These narratives go beyond the traditional domesticity of women's lives to the public sphere that these women occupied.

Namhila, Shaketange and Amulungu portray their lives as mothers as well and how they had to work hard also to claim their lives in the public sphere despite the different challenges they went through as women of the Namibian liberation struggle. Namhila in the absence of her first husband who was sent to a different mission in another country had to deal with being an inexperienced young mother, whose child was sickly and also excel in her studies. Shaketange also writes about being a single mother amidst her demanding studies. Amulungu too became a single inexperienced mother, but her baby became a joy she was always looking forward to amidst her studies too. These women do not wallow in the role of being parents only, but they portray a life of dedication to SWAPO and their subsequent attainment of educational certificates that enabled them to become professional in independent Namibia.

Amathila on the other hand, portrays a life of dedication to the lives of ordinary Namibians. As a government official she shows a life that is more in the public domain, thus in a way writing little about her personal life in the private sphere. This shows that the social-political

transformation that unfolded in Namibia with the independence of the country take place in the presence of Namibians, women included as their contribution and participation is of great value to the development of the nation. In joining this debate Skalli (2016) assert that “women are shaping, impacting, and redefining the public sphere by producing alternative discourses and images about womanhood, citizenship, and political participation in their societies” (p. 35). This can be seen through the narratives explored in this study, all the narrators are educated women who meaningfully participate in the development and the politics of their country.

On the issue of nation building in Namibia; this study found out that the narrators in the autobiographies explored in this study participated in nation building since their exilic days. In her book, ‘Women and the remaking of politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating autonomy, incorporation and Representation’, Geisler (2004) claim that since the 1990s the participation of women in national-decision making bodies in Southern Africa has steadily grown. In Namibia, this can be seen through the number of female parliamentarians that continue to increase with women empowerment policies. However, this was not always the same as this inclusion only slowly took place at the inception of independence. Ministers like Amathila for example; had to pave the way for women to be heard on the national front. Amathila as a woman minister had to fight for the rights of women even in independent Namibia. As illustrated in chapter 5, Amathila had to fight many injustices that were left by the apartheid dispensation and adopted by the then Namibian parliament that was in the early 1990s male-dominated. She faced a lot of resistance when she suggested transformation in these kinds of legislature, however, as illustrated in *Making a Difference*, steadily legislature started to transform in favour of the Namibian women.

Also Namhila calls upon the government and other decision making bodies to take action in relation to social ills that they experienced in independent Namibia. Namhila and Amathila observed and experienced discrimination when they wanted to buy and possess their own houses, they had to struggle and fight for their own rights as individuals. Namhila (1997) laments that “the Namibian society, women included, seem to only see a woman as a subordinate to a man” (p. 186). It is therefore, the submission of this study that these narrators use autobiography as a tool of activism; fighting for the rights of every Namibian. Another issue that is raised is the issue of national reconciliation. Namhila (1997) points out that issues of national reconciliation were not mentioned in exile and to her dismay, the newly elected Namibian government also inherited colonial structures and personnel. She was also aggrieved by the inheritance of a capitalist society that was opposite to socialism that was preached in exile. She makes very grave remarks about the political status of the country. One of the issues she raised was the issue of exploitation; in her words she lamented that:

Blacks today identify with those who exploited them. The wealthy blacks have in practice joined the ranks of the whites of the capitalist system, which still operates in essentially the same way as it did under apartheid. It is now clear that though the colour of the exploiter is changing, the system is still the same. (Namhila, 1997, p. 191)

This lamentation is of a serious nature in the country today where generally, the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer. These concerns since they are in the public domain, they could reach the ears of the decision-making bodies who have the power to address them.

Shaketange also calls for attention to the hardships that Namibians who were in exile went through; she also bemoans how the returnees were ignored by the very same people who held their morale in exile. She argues for counselling and the attainment of skills for the civilian life of those that were members of PLAN and were not included in the Namibian Defence Force after the liberation struggle.

Namibian women were part and parcel of the liberation struggle, others were involved in the military wing of SWAPO, and however, there are those that also participated in the struggle in their own right; through the attainment of skills that are useful today in the independent Namibia. Nation building therefore is an all-inclusive effort that calls for the participation of every citizen of the country. The issues and concerns raised by the four narrators are important to nation building and they can be detrimental to the nation as a whole if they are left unattended to.

### **6.3 Recommendations for further research**

The following recommendations are made in view of the issues raised in this research:

- Since this study is only limited to four women autobiographies, research with a larger sample of women autobiographies can be conducted that would encompass autobiographical acts of women who participated in the liberation struggle from different regions in Namibia since three autobiographies were written by Aawambo women (Namhila, Shaketange, and Amulungu and one of them is of Herero/ Nama (Amathila).

This would allow for discussion on divergences and similarities of the same population but from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Namibia.

- A comparison study of women and men of the liberation struggle can be conducted to glean the intrinsic similarities and differences of Namibian men and women autobiographies of the liberation struggle.
- Future research could also examine Namibian autobiographies of the liberation struggle using other theories such as trauma and resilience theory or other theories that are suitable in analysing exilic autobiography as this could provide different results since this study only focused on the autobiography and postcolonial feminist theories.
- Further research could also compare Namibian women exilic autobiographies and autobiographies of their counterparts in other African countries that went through exilic experiences due to political upheavals in their own countries.
- The autobiographies analysed in this study were written by women who greatly celebrated the presence of SWAPO in their lives, however it should be noted that SWAPO was not faultless, for example, the issue of the SWAPO dungeons is not tackled in these life narratives, therefore, a study that deals with the other stories of exilic experiences in Namibia could be conducted.

## **6.4 Contribution of the study**

The contribution of this study to knowledge, literature, theory and nation building is presented in this section of the study. This contribution is tapped from the findings and significance of this study.

### **6.4.1 Contribution to knowledge and literature**

The findings of this study make a unique contribution to current literature on women subjectivity and the public sphere especially as presented by Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle through their autobiographies. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of how these women represented the ‘self’ through autobiography as a mode of self-representation. The fact that the study focused on Namibian women, it adds a new dimension to gender studies in Africa and Namibia in general and literary studies in particular.

A study that is close to the present study in Namibia is a chapter written by Fulkerson-Dikuwa (2018) in *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*. In this chapter, Fulkerson-Dikuwa conceptualises national transition, focusing on Namibian women’s autobiographies about the liberation struggle. In so doing, Fulkerson-Dikuwa writes about the political transition of the country and how Namhila (1997), Shaketange (2009) and Amathila (2012) experienced the transition as individual women. Though this study greatly contributes to the literature of women’s self-life-narratives in Namibia, it is not as comprehensive as the one presented in this

study as it critically focused on the issues of the intricacies of subjectivity such as memory, experience, identity, space and embodiment. Also, the present study interrogates the experiences of the above-mentioned women with a fourth addition, that of Amulungu (2016) who also portrays a very personal experience of the liberation struggle. Moreover, this study offers a new understanding of the history of Namibia and the exilic experiences of Namibians who left Namibia to either join the armed force of SWAPO in fighting for the liberation struggle of the country or to acquire intellectual skills in preparation for the development of the country upon gaining its political independence. Therefore, the study also calls for reading of autobiographies of the liberation struggle as the narrators used them to document the history of the nation. In so doing, Namibian history ‘comes to life’ when a human face is connected to it. Instead of just studying and understanding national history from scholarly textbooks, a better understanding can be achieved through autobiography reading and analysis.

#### **6.4.2 Contribution to theory**

In addition to the above contribution, this study also contributes to the literature that is available on the autobiography and postcolonial feminist theories as this study critically explored arguments and nuances of the intentions of Namibian women of the liberation struggle autobiographical acts. As a result, this study underscores the infrequently divulged personal encounters and participation of women’s role in the liberation struggle of Namibia. Though the theories used in this study are frequently explored in autobiography acts, as far as the knowledge of the present researcher is concerned, such theories have not been related to autobiography

analysis of Namibian women. Secondly, this study also to an extent calls for theories that are more closely related to the African context, thus in part, it suggested nego-feminism in studying female narratives as introduced by Nnaemeka (2004), an African feminism that does not view the African man as the enemy of progress in advancing gender equality in Africa, but views men as partners in development and collaborators in fighting social injustices and gender disparities in their societies. However, the study calls for dialogue amongst African scholars to develop a feminist theory that is befitting to the different contexts of the African women.

### **6.4.3 Contribution to nation building**

The autobiographies analysed in this study also play a pivotal role in nation building as the narrators not only reconstruct their own personal experiences of the apartheid era, but they also shared their misgivings of the apartheid regime and social ills in independent Namibia. Namhila (1997) and Amulungu (2016) write about the challenges that come along with interracial marriages as they both married White men. They show how difficult it was for them and their spouses to be accepted by their spouses' families as in exile and during the apartheid regime, this sort of marriage was unheard of, it was clear who the enemy of indigenous Namibians was. All White people were associated with apartheid and its segregation laws that depicted Black people as inferior to their White counterparts. But the two narrators depict a 'normal' life with their spouses besides the sceptic glances they get in public places. They show that human beings are the same despite of their racial differences. In so doing, the study through the analysis of the four autobiographies could assist in opening doors for national reconciliation (One Namibia, One



Nation) as the autobiographies openly discuss the oppressiveness of the apartheid regime and its cruelty towards Black Namibians and how Namibians suffered in the face of such atrocities. For example; Namhila (1997) calls for a platform where the history of Namibia and the apartheid factor is openly and honestly discussed. Namhila (1997) was aggrieved by the fact that;

The new educational system does not teach Namibian history as experienced by an exiled Namibian. It is rather based on a fictitious 'national unity' and so-called 'reconciliation', where everybody is allowed to feel good about his or her own past, even if this consisted in actively promoting apartheid and fighting against independence. (p. 195)

Namhila also calls upon the different media houses in Namibia to interrogate the lives of those that were in exile as the media are the opinion shapers in many countries in the world. In essence, this study resonates the history of the nation and the role played by the authors in shaping that history and building the Namibian nation. Not only did the study reveal the racial issues tackled in the autobiographies, it also revealed and interrogated social ills that are portrayed by the authors. The narrators divulge issues of poverty and the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots and the ongoing corruption that has deprived the masses of the equal distribution of resources. The narrators also depict a nation plagued by issues of gender disparities and the excessive alcohol abuse that the country has experienced since independence. All these ills are at the heart of national development and if left unresolved the development of the Namibian nation will remain in disrepute.

## 6.5 Chapter summary

This concluding chapter dealt with conclusion and recommendations for further research. In so doing, the chapter concluded the study and summarised the findings regarding “herstory, subjectivity and the public sphere in autobiographies of the women of the liberation struggle in Namibia, which focused on four autobiographies of Ndeshi Namhila (1997), Lydia Shaketange (2009), Amathila (2012) and Trudie Amulungu (2016). It is worth restating that this study explored subjectivity through five concepts that are namely; memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency as proposed by Smith and Watson (2010). This concluding chapter was divided into four main sections; conclusions and findings, and recommendations of the study and contribution of the study. In the conclusions and findings sections, an attempt was made to infuse the convergence of the topic and the proposed theoretical framework. A review of the research questions was also conducted to conclude and summarise the findings in relation to the themes and viewpoints constructed in chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5 This review assisted the researcher to demonstrate the significance of the study. Moreover, suggestions were brought forward relating to further studies and research in the area of autobiographical studies. In addition to these examined and discussed aspects, the chapter also provided a section on how this study contributes to knowledge in the field of literary studies.

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