



**Transforming cultural identity: Textual
analysis of Aawambo cultural practices
in three post-independence Namibian
texts**



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DECLARATION

I, Hilya Navula Nangula Nuunyango, declare that the work, *Transforming cultural identity: Textual analysis of Aawambo cultural practices in three post-independence Namibian texts*, is entirely my own work. I am, hereby, submitting it to the North-West University in compliance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics and Literary Theory, and declare that it has not been submitted to any other university for the same purpose.



15 July 2024

Student signature

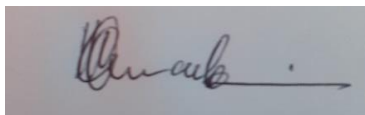
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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my late parents, my father, Immanuel Nengele IyaMbendeka and my mother, Jacobina Lomboleni yaMwaalwa. Thank you very much for raising me with such character. I will always cherish your hard work. Continue resting in peace, Daddy and Mummy.

ABSTRACT

The issue of transforming cultural identity has emerged in the writings of Namibian post-independence female authors, particularly in the context of the cultural identity of women. In the name of culture, widows face numerous challenges while they grieve for their departed husbands. Marriage is seen as a means of honouring a woman. She is humiliated, abused, and left without dignity after the spouse passes away. Women are also subjected to biological parenting to gain the status of motherhood and being respected as mothers in society.

As a qualitative desktop study, this research purposely selected three books written by Namibian female authors, following independence of the country, to promote the idea of self-narrative, women empowerment and self-determination for women to fight the injustice of the patriarchal system. Approached from a womanist concept, the study employed African womanism, African post-colonial feminism and literary criticism to establish the arguments from a feminist point of view.

The study employed a qualitative desktop approach within a womanist paradigm of textual analysis. It was designed to investigate Aawambo cultural practices as depicted in Namibian female autobiographies in terms of self-narrative, biography and prose as literary genres. These theories were used to determine how the authors created a platform to challenge the patriarchal system, enabling the characters – mothers, women and widows – to express their own experiences in a more comprehensible manner.

In the study, I examined cultural practices as portrayed in the narratives and interpreted specific aspects related to transforming cultural identity. The focus was on Oshiwambo culture, which formed the basis for the general conclusions as derived from the research findings. The research concludes that the selected texts respond to the Namibian postcolonial situation. The main characters depicted in these texts carry the torch of women's liberation, constituting both a liberating and transformative voice. They portray eagerness and strength in mobilising other women, despite facing numerous challenges in a patriarchal environment.

Key terms: cultural identity, (Aawambo) cultural practices, tradition, transformation, autobiography, fiction, memoir, African womanism, patriarchy, post-independence, oral history.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Contextualisation

This study investigates the critical representation of African (Aawambo) cultural practices in three selected Namibian post-independence texts written in English: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas (2001), *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* as told by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila (2013) and *Taming my Elephant* by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (2016). Although belonging to different genres – novel, oral history, autobiography – all three texts portray a female narrator's critical perspective on traditional Aawambo cultural practices. These practices include *Olufuko* (girls' initiation), rituals performed at various cultural events, kinship, traditional marriage, widowhood, and birthing. This portrayal is depicted as part of the struggle to reclaim and re-engineer self-identity (Asma, 2015). These female characters' views on, and experience of, traditional cultural practices are not mediated by male writers or narrators, as is the case in Joseph Diescho's *Troubled Waters* (1993), Brian Harlech-Jones's *A Small Space* (1999), or Peter Orner's *The Second Coming of Mavala Shikongo* (2006).

In general, this study will follow the route of literary theory to enable the understanding and interpretation of literary works (North, 2017). It aims to examine and evaluate how culture and tradition are portrayed in the selected texts. The theory enables the interpretation of literary texts in the context of language and literature, to discuss the African culture and tradition in terms of addressing Aawambo cultural practices as depicted in the texts. Wrenn (2024) states that literary theory formulates the relationship between author and work; literary theory develops the significance of race, class, and gender for literary study, both from the standpoint of the biography of the author and an analysis of their thematic presence within texts. Yaqoob (2011), Jauss (2022) and Baldick (2014) delineate that the theory of literature recognises the social function of literature in the context of society, wherein the reader applies critical analysis, a method to outline and construct a meaningful link between literature and society. This approach enhances the understanding and meanings regarding the portrayal of names, elements of male dominance and oppression, women's representation and black female sisterhood in the books: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*

(2013), and *Taming my Elephant*, (2016). It is also worth saying that, although cultural practices of Aawambo¹ people such as rituals, birthing, widowhood and traditional marriages have been represented in many genres of literature like poetry, dramas and costumes, the same practices did not receive much attention in terms of literary theory specifically. Therefore, the proposed study aims to delve into the narratives, investigating and revealing the underlying meanings behind literal expressions in the texts. It also seeks to illustrate potential transformational elements for the African culture and tradition. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to the expansion of the current body of cultural studies within the context of Namibian literature. This includes exploring how authors bravely expose the social norms and native patriarchal beliefs within Oshiwambo culture.

Andreas' novel, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, illuminates the subordinate status and role of women in a Namibian society with "deeply embedded role expectations and traditional practices" (Arich-Gerz, 2010:25). Patriarchal conventions are demonstrated and mirrored in the story of Kauna, the central figure, and her violent and philandering husband, Shange. Through issues like "marriage, divorce, widowhood, reproductive rights, religion, inheritance, and economic status of women, the novel critiques a traditional system that seeks to silence women and close any pattern to empowerment" (Victor, 2013:54). Set in Oshaantu Village in northern Namibia, the novel is narrated by Kauna's older friend and confidante, Mee Ali. Like the female protagonists in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1979), Kauna's marriage is portrayed as the "intersection of multiple oppressions" (Newton & Rosenfelt, 1985). While female characters, like Mee Maïta, passively accept the spousal abuse of women in the community, characters like Mee Ali and Mee Mukwankala resist these oppressive patriarchal practices without compromise. Their actions keep the hope alive for the eventual transformation of the entire community.

¹ Aawambo is a proper noun used to refer to the seven ethnic groups of people living in the northern part of Namibia called Owamboland, while Oshiwambo (a proper noun) is the language that Aawambo people speak. It also refers to the customs and social behaviour of the Aawambo as used in the context of this research.

Hence, the importance of this study which seeks to dissect the status and role of women in traditional Namibian society (Victor, 2013), focusing on issues like marriage, divorce, widowhood, reproductive rights, religion, inheritance and ownership.

Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother (2013) is the story of an extraordinary first Namibian woman who joined SWAPO in the early sixties, as recorded and translated by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, a librarian at the University of Namibia. Mukwahepo left her home in Namibia in 1963, followed the instruction of her fiancé into exile, without knowing exactly where she was going or what she was getting herself into as she first settled in Angola. They proceeded to Tanzania, where she was the first woman to undergo military training under SWAPO movement liberation struggle. This text preserves the oral² history not only of the 'dominant male voice' among the colonised people of Namibia but also brings to light the hidden, untold and forgotten story of an ordinary woman and the outstanding role she played during the struggle (Akawa, 2013:184). Like the South African writer, Sindiwe Magona, Mukwahepo's life story demonstrates different ways in which she uses a largely womanist consciousness. Namhila the author, depicts the character of Mukwahepo to contemplate on the women's roles in the domestic sphere and outside the house, aiming "to foreground the ideologies that serve to mystify women's experiences as wives and as mothers and the hierarchical divisions that generate conflict and struggle within families" (Koyana, 2001:64). She also demonstrates the interrelationship between the personal space (home and family) and the larger political context. Finally, she encourages other women to write and to challenge, resist, and participate at a political level.

In her memoir, *Taming my Elephant*³, Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu "puts Namibia's past into the focus of attention, while highlighting her own personal role in it" (Rensing, 2017:111). Amulungu's reflection on her experiences in exile (in Angola and France), is preceded by a large section on the traditional background of her paternal and maternal family in Oshiwambo context, including a visualised family tree. The autobiographical approach

² In this context, 'oral' refers to shared verbal stories about culture and tradition, eventually transcribed to preserve the history of the Aawambo people.

³ In Oshiwambo culture, the elephant symbolises the most challenging situation a person can face. For Amulungu, the elephant appeared many mornings, and she had no choice but to tame it.

will be employed to guide the argument in *Taming my Elephant*, focusing on Amulungu's personal legitimacy and her testimony as a witness to her own cultural experiences. Hence, this study aims to outline how Amulungu makes sense of societal issues and conflicts throughout the narrative, using personal memories as a centre of inspiration to narrate stories of her personal life with the intention to inform the reader about past events (Nawale *et al.*, 2019). In other words, Amulungu assumes the role of the author, using personal experience as evidence for her narrative.

Moreover, a prime motivation for the book was to educate her own children (as well as all the children in post-independent Namibia) on her personal background: "My first concern was to provide my children with some account in order for them to get some understanding of the society I was from and the path I had travelled before settling into the posh Windhoek suburb of Ludwigsdorf" (Amulungu, 2016:4). She reflects on her cultural background and recounts the huge discoveries she made along her journey with honesty, emotion, and humour. Amulungu's memoir has an empowering function: a woman writer's account of her personal, political, and intellectual maturing process serving to assert her role as a woman, a freedom-fighter, and an author with a striking life story. Amulungu uses the metaphor, "taming my elephant", to symbolise perseverance in her journey to personal freedom, to reflect on the good people she met and how they helped her to overcome the challenges of life as a woman.

Supported and carried by the viewpoints of female characters, the three texts selected for this study highlight "the various possibilities inherent in a thoughtful and intelligent handling of the prevailing traditions in a male-dominated and patriarchal culture or society" (Arich-Gerz, 2010:25). These texts also exemplify modest forms of "counteraction inscribed in small acts of defiance and a refusal of approved forms of behaviour" (Rhode, 2003:45). As such, they creatively engage with Spivak's discourse (1988:66-111) "on whether and "in what form subaltern subjects, can speak". Also, considering the other existing patriarchal environments under which female characters display their subjugation perceive or recall being discriminated, whether subaltern subjects pose the ground of advocating for issues affecting them and to share their own views and wishes. Like her biographical counterparts, Mukwahepo and Amulungu, the character Kauna, ultimately "subverts the dominant ideology by speaking out when

expected to remain silent when societal convention demands that she speaks” (Rhode, 2003:52), thereby confirming the idea that the emancipation of women requires very careful negotiation and bargaining with existing cultural traditions and practices (Rubaya, 2021).

Taking into account the conclusions drawn in socio-anthropological studies of postcolonial Oshiwambo culture, like *Cultural Loss, Change, and Recuperation in Ovamboland* (Brasche, 2003), *Christianisation and Cultural Change in Northern Namibia* (Nampala, 2004), *The Changing Faces of Aawambo Musical Arts* (Mans, 2017), *Olufuko Festival: Practice and Perspectives of the Female Initiation Rite: A Research Study Prepared for Outapi Town Council* (MuAshekele et al., 2018) and *Gender Stereotypes in Oshiwambo Orature* (Mbenzi, 2018), this study seeks to investigate the critical representation of cultural practices in women-centred, post-independent literary texts from Namibia. More specifically, light will be shed on the strategies three women authors adopt to subvert patriarchal norms and other hegemonic systems of domination, in an attempt to contribute towards a transformation of cultural identity.

Understanding the transformation of cultural identity encompasses both cultural reconstruction and a sense of cultural belonging. It sheds light on the transition – often extremely challenging – from outdated traditional practices to more modern cultural practices. In other words, it explores the emergence, sustainability, manifestation, and impact of these oppressive traditional norms and practices on African women’s lives (Okoli, 2021).

This study intends to analyse how the three authors address the issues of transforming and re-imagining identity in a modern society, recreating a sense of selfhood, rebuilding, and reconnecting to their roots and shared values, as well as remembering past events by narrating them in the present. By doing this, the research hopes to restore and increase awareness of a cultural identity that has been lost as a result of modernity’s effects on Africa’s social environment (Bitrus, 2017).

In addition, the writers of these texts employ a flashback style in which all three make use of previously occurring or unrepresented events (Bitrus, 2017). Neshani demonstrates throughout the story how events are intricately linked to individual characters, particularly

through the portrayal of Kauna, the protagonist. This depiction serves to highlight the traditional role of women within the domestic sphere while also challenging the prevailing status quo favouring men.

In *Mukwahepo*, Namhila uses the story of Auguste (Mukwahepo) Immanuel, the first Namibian tasked with reconstructing Namibia in exile as established by various engagements she involves in the liberation struggle, and the situation she encounters upon returning to Namibia after independence. Thus, the story of Mukwahepo in exile is the tool to interrogate the forces of culture in an independent Namibia: “I used Mukwahepo’s story to develop themes in this book, such as childhood and family roots.” (2013: xi). Amulungu titles her book *Taming my Elephant* to gather the courage to confront the ways the oppressive traditional norms and practices arise, how they are sustained and the effect they have on African women’s lives. She begins the story of her life at the two Catholic missionary schools in the northern region of Namibia, Anamulenge and Okatana, to highlight the beginning of cultural identity transformation initiated by Christianity, and she concludes with the element of transformation, stating “... And finally, it was tamed!” (Amulungu, 2016:293)

1.2 Problem statement

Although the Namibian culture and tradition offer a variety of notable aspects to appreciate, cherish and preserve, the issue of cultural practices has been a thorn in the flesh, especially concerning the treatment of men and women in cultural contexts. Gender cultural practices such as widowhood and Olufuko (girls’ initiation) are perceived to apply only to women, while the situation of widowers is rarely addressed in Oshiwambo setting. The inequality in treatment of those who have lost their spouses to death should be addressed to ensure equality. After the country gained its independence in 1990, both Namibian men and women started to write and reflect on the culture, history and politics of the country. Female authors responded to the issues of women’s oppression, with cultural practices at the core. Namibian women, especially those who were in exile, realised that even after independence, their rights have not been fully recognised. They feel disrespected, devalued, suppressed and under-represented. The notion that men are superior to them still affects them in the modern world. Against this background, this study

will investigate the writing formula of Namibian post-independence texts by female authors to understand their perceptions of cultural practices as a step forward to break the silence and liberate themselves.

1.3 Research question

This study will explore the following research questions:

How are Aawambo cultural practices depicted in the three selected Namibian postindependence texts?

The main question will be subdivided into the following sub-questions:

- How, and to what effect, are cultural practices associated with kinship, heritage, traditional marriage, and widowhood (in the Oshiwambo context) portrayed in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*?
- To what extent does Ellen Ndeshi Namhila use the story of Mukwahepo to reflect on the Namibian liberation struggle to challenge the cultural belief of patriarchy in *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*?
- How does Tshiwa Trudy Amulungu address the issue of self-narrative and empowering function regarding tradition and cultural practices in *Taming my Elephant*?

1.4 Research aims and objectives

The aims of the study are to:

- Identify and discuss the narrative strategies employed by Neshani Andreas in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* to critically interrogate the patriarchal norms underlying traditional Oshiwambo cultural practices.
- Examine how Ellen Ndeshi Namhila's African womanist perspective in *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* challenges the inherent androcentric view of Namibia's liberation struggle.

- Critically investigate Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu's views on the issue of self-narrative and empowering function regarding tradition and cultural practices in *Taming my Elephant*.

1.5 Research hypothesis

As this study examines the concept of culture through the lens of Aawambo cultural practices in post-independent Namibia, the findings are expected to illuminate the shades of meanings and expressions essential for understanding the arguments presented in the literary texts. The researcher anticipates that this preliminary investigation will reveal the key elements of transforming cultural identity in relation to the dynamics of culture, both internal (within the African culture) and external (through assimilation of other cultures), which may influence the operating principles of the modern cultural paradigm in Namibia. Simultaneously, through the examination of the literary texts – *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas (2001), *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*, as narrated by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila (2013) and *Taming my Elephant* by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu (2016) – the researcher believes that the analysis will reveal transformational strategies aimed at creating the spirit of sameness among Namibian women and society at large. These strategies seek to subvert traditional gender norms and other women-dominating systems that uphold the patriarchal system as practised in Oshiwambo culture.

The researcher also expects to find that the relationality of both males and females in Namibia manifests itself in the emerging themes across a wide variety of disciplines exhibiting a relational kinship. The researcher believes that investigating this relational kinship in conjunction with the modern cultural paradigm will enhance our understanding of relationality as a leading operating principle in the modern cultural landscape. It will also cultivate growth at the intersections of these areas of study. These growth points will contribute to an integrated understanding of Namibians' current cultural context.

Additionally, they will play a crucial role in formulating a literary theory capable of interpreting and evaluating cultural texts currently emerging in Namibia and across Africa.

Furthermore, the researcher expects to find that theoretical developments in the cultural context have emerged in dependence on digital technology. The researcher also expects

to find that relationality in the emerging modern cultural paradigm is intertwined with the altered nature of information, as emphasised by the Internet.

Lastly, the researcher anticipates the importance of developing an alternative logical structure to present this study in a manner that preserves the integrity of the information. This structure should reflect the interconnected nature of the information involved.

1.6 Literature review

1.6.1 Introduction

Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) define literature review as a framework that examines and critically assesses existing knowledge in a particular problem domain, forming a foundation for identifying weaknesses and poorly understood phenomena, or enabling problematisation of assumptions and theoretical claims in the existing body of knowledge. For the purpose of this study, literature review entails a critical evaluation of books, journals and research articles which fall within the scope of the problem the study intended to investigate, which is transforming cultural identity through the textual analysis of three post-independence Namibian texts.

The study seeks to investigate the views of other researchers and scholars who have already written about cultural identity in a broader context, as well as to ascertain what has been discovered about the African culture as far as cultural practices are concerned. This endeavour is aimed at contributing to the transformation of cultural identity in contemporary Namibia.

1.6.2 Widowhood in African literature

Ngongkum (2016) defines widowhood or the state of being a widow as a condition that occurs when a wife loses her husband through death and does not remarry. According to Buitelaar, as cited by Ngongkum (2016:140), the word “widow” derives from the Latin, *vidua* which relates to a root meaning, “to place apart”. As reflected by this root word,

widowhood is thus a separation, a placing apart, of a wife from her husband through death. The loss of the husband through death generally represents the loss of a partner, a friend and a breadwinner. In most cases, this results in a radical change in the woman's social status and lifestyle. Based on this sentiment, as Owen cited by Nahole (2020), argues that "widowhood tends to impact more traumatically on the woman, forever altering the way she is perceived and consequently affecting her self-image". (p,21).

Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015), researching the *Culture of Widowhood Practices in Africa: Deinstitutionalizing the Plights of Women and Communicating Development through Theatre*, argues that, in most African cultures, widowhood practices have become the exclusive preserve of widows with accompanying elaborate guiding regulations, and not for widowers for whom the culture or tradition has prescribed little or no mourning rites. Furthermore, Sheetheni (2016) submits that, in many Africa cultures, death is thought to contaminate people and their homes and, therefore, after completion of the mourning period, members of the family and the home of the deceased are subjected to a cleansing ritual. This means that any misfortune, impurities and darkness, brought on by death, get removed.

In the context of this research, the term 'widowhood' is interpreted based on findings from literature, particularly works by female authors. For example, Ntozi, as cited by Nahole (2020), states that "rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression" are characteristic aspects of the process of widowhood. Sossou (2002) and Ngongkum (2016), in *A Crushing Curse: Widowhood in Contemporary Anglophone Cameroon Literature*, state that widowhood is likely to impact far less traumatically upon men than women at the hands of their society. The outcome often involves widows being denied their rightful inheritance by their in-laws, even though they may have contributed equally to the fortune they possessed.

Widowhood is thus seen as a reduction of women to a position of dependency, thus framing it as a problem that needs to be resolved by men. The present study contends that there is a notable absence of literary discussions concerning widowhood, particularly in relation to the rituals and customs surrounding death. This oversight, which appears to

be rooted in certain aspects of African culture, is concerning and deserves closer examination (Ohale, 2012).

Tasie (2013) notes that the studies on widowhood rites in Africa often adhere to defined stereotypes, with scholars primarily focusing on cataloguing the perceived woes of widows, rather than recognising it as a situation that marks a new beginning in a woman's life. In this regard, scholars observe that African literature demonstrates several instances of widowhood and the difficult situations widows endure. Some notable works by both male and female African writers include those by John Munonye, Elechi Amadi, Mariama Ba, Akachi Ezeigbo, Flora Nwapa, and Chimamanda Adichie, among others.

Diallo (2020), in her article entitled *Mariama Ba: An Early Intersectional Feminist*, focuses on Mariama Bâ's novel *So Long a Letter* dealing with intersectional feminism. The article contextualises the social mutations in Senegal and displays the realities of Senegalese society. She explores the sad situation of Ramatoulaye, the widow of Modou. The couple had been married for thirty years and had twelve children. Ramatoulaye immersed herself in purifying baths and changed her mourning cloths every Monday and Friday, adhering to the Islamic tradition of mourning her husband for four months and ten days. In her humiliation, Ramatoulaye's house was stripped, and belongings were stolen by her inlaws. They also took a wad of notes and left her in need of material support. It is against this notion that Chukwuma (2000:109) claims that "African feminism should be understood in the context of the family, where family transcends the nuclear family of husband, wife and biological children".

Tamsir, Modou's brother, proposed marriage to Ramatoulaye, but she refused the proposal. Ramatoulaye declares: "I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand.... I shall never be the one to complete your collection" (Ba, 1981:58). She thus breaks her long years of silence and speaks up against patriarchal injustice and conflicts in her life. By rejecting Tamsir's proposal, Ramatoulaye asserts her selfhood and demonstrates that she is not Tamsir's sex object, as De Beauvoir (1974: 22) says: "For him she is sex, no less. ...she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential." Ramatoulaye also demonstrates that Ogundipe-Leslie's (1999:68) claim that once a woman is married

“she becomes a possession, voiceless and often rightless in her husband’s family, except for what accrues to her through her children” is false.

Similarly, in Flora Nwapa’s *Idu*, the protagonist, Idu, rejects a forced marriage to her husband’s useless brother, Isiodu, following the death of her husband, Adiewere. Rather than subjecting herself to the practice of levirate, she chooses to commit suicide.

Acholonu (2007) opines as follows about Idu’s death:

... in Idu’s case, there is more to it; Idu’s death is an act of protest against the traditional practice of wife inheritance, whereby a less than sensible man like Isiodu, is expected to inherit her, his late brother’s wife by right of kinship... There is therefore a marked feminist streak in the heroine, Idu, as she challenges tradition and successfully rejects the inferiorized sexual stereotyped role decreed by her society. (p. 12)

Idu’s death marks the rejection of the socio-cultural practice of marrying the widow of one’s brother to maintain his line, as required by the family.

Egbung (2013) in *Reinventing the African Woman: Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s The Last of the Strong Ones* notes that Onyekozuru, who married her spouse out of poverty, was widowed at the age of twenty-six. Onyekozuru liberates herself by rejecting the forced customary marriage, as Ramatoulaye and Idu did. She chooses her lover, Obiatu, and leaves peacefully.

On the same note of liberating widows, Hunsu (2015), in her article ‘Redefining Otherness: Writing (Auto) Biography and Centring Female Subjectivity in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Children of the Eagle*’, interrogates Eaglewoman’s difficult situation after the death of her husband Osai. Umeaku had owed the late Osai. As Umeaku could not pay Osai, he sold a piece of land to Osai to settle his debt. After the death of Eaglewoman’s husband, she could not own the land according to the Umuga community conventions. In addition to her painful situation, Eaglewoman is forced to mourn for one year and during this period, she develops knee pain that nearly cripples her. In order to ensure peace and fulfil the funeral rites for Osai, Eaglewoman agrees to the women’s plan. In doing so, she helps in resolving conflicts and appeasing her children’s discontent.

Simon and Obeten (2012) in *Widowhood and Conflict Resolution in Selected African Novels*, opine that the plight of the widow Chiaku is exacerbated by Amanze, her brother-in-law. Chiaku becomes a widow at the age of eighteen, with a six-month-old child. After the death of her husband, she is left in a dilapidated house. Millet, as cited in Simon and

Obeten (2012:261), states that “patriarchal culture is resolute as a system of power relationship, whereby men as a group, control women as a group and possess more social wealth, power, esteem as well as control over these resources than women.”

Furthermore, Amanze takes all the fertile lands, leaving Chiaku with barren, arid lands to further impoverish and frustrate her. Amanze also abuses Chiaku physically, prompting her son, Nnanna, to intervene as he tries to defend and protect his mother from his scoundrel uncle and his relatives. To avoid conflict and brutality from Amanze, Chiaku relocates to Nade, her paternal home. She is able to liberate herself and remarries Okere, a widower, and discovers that she is pregnant. In Nade, she is able to live in peace and raise her son in the traditional way.

According to Kuoppala (2018), Ovambo societies were typically matrilineal during precolonial times, with property inherited along the maternal line. This often led to the mistreatment of women when their husbands passed away because they were stereotypically marginalised and stigmatised as widows. Authors like Namhila in *The Price of Freedom* (1997) examined the challenge of being a widow in Namibia, highlighting the significant shift in status experienced by married women upon the passing of their spouses, as dictated by the patriarchal system. Namhila exposes the social injustices and ill-treatment of widows when she registers her annoyance at the persistent gender disparities in the country even after independence. Moreover, several scholars have used a feminist approach to address the agony of widowhood as a cultural practice, which sparks debates in literary work aimed at addressing the injustices perpetrated by the patriarchal system against widows. These works shed light on the struggles faced by women during the mourning period for their husbands, during which they often feel powerless to defend themselves.

In Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* (2000), the reader is presented with the plight of uneducated African women in sub-Saharan Africa. The main character, Nasula, is subjected to the injustice of cultural practice as a widow when she is forced to marry her late husband's brother, Isaki Chiswebe (Ben-Daniels, 2020). This practice is regarded as a way of protecting her daughter, as "it is the only way by which the family of her late husband would continue to be responsible for her upkeep and that of her daughter's" (Ben-Daniels, 2020:63). A similar episode is observed in Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), where the main character, Kauna, paves the way for liberation of African women who live in abusive marriages. She challenges the societal expectation for widows to uphold a saintly image in the eyes of their in-laws after their abusive husbands have passed away.

Both novels, *A Cowrie of Hope* and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, serve as a recollection of the face of African womanism, which seeks to address the plight of African women who are widowed. In both narratives, the main characters are determined to defy the cultural tradition that a widow should be obedient to the dictates of her in-laws. For instance, Nasula refuses to marry her late husband's brother, while Kauna refuses to fulfil the customary widowhood duties for a husband who never showed her love but constantly abused her physically and emotionally (Ben-Daniels, 2020). Akpemado and Walla (2019) explain the concept of widowhood as the situation in which a surviving spouse especially a wife perceived to be the cause of the husband's death, while Ntozi, as cited by Nahole (2020), sheds light on various aspects of this ritual, including "forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression, which characterise the experience of widowhood". (p,10).

Similarly, in the analysis conducted by Hangula (2016) on *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, the findings indicate that widows experience more suffering "during the mourning process of their deceased spouses than widowers. This can be attested to when Andreas (2001) in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* illustrates how the widows Mee Kauna and Mee Saara are subjected to multiple accusations of being responsible for the deaths of their husbands, which subsequently caused them to be victimised and harassed". (p.77). On a related note, Shipahu (2021) conducted an analytical examination of the literary representation of marriage in Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. The sudden death

of Shange subjected his wife, Kauna, to countless thoughts of widowhood, raising numerous questions in the minds of readers, particularly regarding the future for Kauna and her children. The point that evoked the current research is to determine how Andreas has applied the same technique to denote the status of widowhood in terms of advocating for cultural transformation.

It is evident from the literature review that in many African communities, widows are often marginalised and perceived as outcasts within mainstream society, relegated to a state of conflict with the broader world until they successfully complete all the required widowhood rites (Okoye, cited by Nahole, 2020). The issue of inheritance subjects' women as surviving spouses to discrimination as it robs them their right of pivotal benefits. In this light, women are viewed as not worthy of inheriting their families' properties.

1.6.4 Interracial marriage and cultural transformation

According to Fay and Frese (2001), "processes of modernisation have transformed the majority of today's societies by changing their infrastructures, their functions, and the communications within and between them as well as the individuals who inhabit them." This thesis examines the concept of 'transformation' in relation to interracial marriage, as discussed by Eaton (2008). Eaton views this transformation as stemming from a revolutionary period that emerged from what was commonly regarded as black feminist theory within the global and public spheres. This movement or organisation, along with the attention of black women, regained its position as a true vanguard of black women community activism.

Kaschula (2007) highlights the concept of identity and communication within intercultural communication by arguing that the interaction that takes place between the characters in the Siyagruva Series of novels for young adults can be considered as intercultural. In this context, the analysis of transforming cultural identity in the novels was conducted in relation to Kaschula's explanation that cultural differences emanating from different social and racial backgrounds influence how individuals perceive their reality, as they endeavour to derive meaning from social experiences.

Ogede (1995) explains the agony of apartheid in South Africa that prohibited sexual intimacy between blacks and whites, using the example of Bessie Head's mother in *Maru* (1971) who was sent to a mental home when her pregnancy was discovered. Herr (2009) conducted a study addressing black-white interracial marriages and their experiences of racism within the context of family dynamics. The study revealed that black-white interracial couples living in black communities are more often accepted by the black spouse's relatives and friends than by the white spouse's relatives and friends. In this regard, Stephan and Stephan (2003) highlight that social identity concerns, stereotypes and cognitive biases create problems such as anxiety, uncertainty, feelings of injustice, prejudice and other negative affective reactions in intercultural interactions among people in society.

In addition, the concept of transformation in this thesis is used to introduce valuable new ideas into the repertoire of humankind, yet it is rooted, in the opinion of the authors' expression in the texts. Regarding *Taming my Elephant*, Cloete (2019) exemplifies the issue of transforming cultural identity through the yellow letter that Amulungu receives from her mother-in-law, Wilfried's mother, containing the rather hegemonic line that the Brocks as a family speak German and will continue to do so. Cloete concludes that Amulungu has already crossed this threshold. The fact that she speaks several languages, including German, in addition to the language she learned at school in Namibia prior to independence and in France at university, makes her the embodiment of the wandering subject, carrying cultural identity across space and time. Rensing (2017) alludes to Amulungu's reaction of surprise, in regard to how remote she considered the possibility of a black and white togetherness. In outlining her thoughts during this specific encounter, the author not only underlines the total separation of the two groups, but also the essential importance of her exclusivity to what is termed the "in-group", her black comrades.

In the context of transformation as used in this research, Akujobi (2011) cites Patricia Hill Collins' who expresses her disdain for the view that women should accept victimisation as part of their experience. Instead, in line with Adebayo (1993), Akujobi (2011:3) suggests that "it is important that a woman tears this veil because if she does not, it will mask her identity, it will muffle her voice and distort her vision". Literature often employs

the metaphor of the 'veil', particularly in predominantly patriarchal societies. Fay and Frese (2001) posit that "this dynamism represents one of the most evident characteristics of the modern era, distinguishing it from any other period in history. It involves not only a much faster pace of social change than in any prior system, but also a greater extent and profoundness with which it affects pre-existing modes of behaviour and social traditions." Similarly, Shiyoka (2019) cites Kukah who argues that since culture is "a tool kit of identities for our survival", African governments must commit resources towards cultural rejuvenation. Institutions and scholars must courageously accept the challenge of transformation in pan-African cultural studies, demonstrating commitment and vision.

This is essential to elevate the knowledge of future leadership in cultural identity and to document what remains in oral history (Shiyoka, 2019). Shiyoka recommends that this consideration should be prioritised with the aim of avoiding what has become an imperative. Any development paradigm that views development as an autonomous process and ignores the cultural framework in Africa is bound to fail. Therefore, the phenomenon of interracial marriages in Amulungu's autobiography and other social issues in Andreas and Namhila's works under this study as Shiyoka (2019) states that "they need to be explored as there is poverty of literary criticism on these phenomena within the Namibian context". (p.11).

Additionally, in relation to literature reviewed for this study, the researcher uses Keating's (2012) concept of transformational identity politics to refer to critical engagement with hegemonic cultural representations through the creation of new discourses of identity that model a subjectivity-in-process. These historical women experienced a liberation of consciousness and became leaders of social change through dialogues with other individuals, with whom they would build communities of resistance (Formwalt, 2011).

1.6.5 Womanhood in the liberation struggle

According to Andima and Tjiramanga (2014), when Namibia gained its independence from South Africa in 1990, the country made massive changes aimed at improving and addressing women's issues. The authorisation of affirmative action and the prohibition of discrimination based on sex were some of the issues that received attention during social

transformation. Various post-independence writings by Namibian female writers emerged, bringing forth their long-standing silence and suffering. Their voices advocated for change, marking the beginning of a feminist era aimed at reshaping the portrayal of traditional women portrayal in the eyes of their own societies and those of the entire world (Ambunda & De Klerk, 2008).

In the short narrative, *Stolen Youth*, by Niilenge (2008) a young girl, named Taati, is depicted in a patriarchal society where she is married off at a tender age. At the age of 15, negotiations are made by the elders for her to marry Enias, who is 10 years her senior. However, she cannot reject her father's decision because, according to their tradition, women and girls are not involved in decision-making, even on matters that directly affect them (Andima & Tjiramanga, 2014:82). Andima and Tjiramanga express the liberation struggle for women as achieving freedom from a cultural practice dictated by a patriarchal system. They indicate how patriarchy empowers men while depriving women of their rights, making them powerless and vulnerable. In *Efuru* (Nwapa, 1966), the character of the young and intelligent Efuru is portrayed to show her struggle and development as a role model, catalysing change in her own culture and society (Mohite & Ghorpade, 2023).

Marrying Apartheid (Hishongwa, 1986), the first novel in English written by a black Namibian woman, Ndeutala Hishongwa, is noted to be a central manifestation of the wide exploration of the complex relation between racism and sexism within the context of the changes introduced by colonialism (Gijón, 2014). In the study conducted by Gijón, emphasis is placed on the struggle of women against apartheid, exemplified through Tanga, a protagonist in *Marrying Apartheid*, who suffers the dual effect of apartheid and domestic violence. Furthermore, Gijón argues that this form of resistance illustrates the notion of dual colonisation, whereby women in formally colonised societies were subjected to dual oppression by both imperial and patriarchal systems. This notion became a catchphrase in post-colonial and feminist discourses in the 1980s (Ashcroft, 1995).

In addition, Hassim (2014), in her paper titled *A Life of Refusal*, investigates the role of the late Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in the South African freedom struggle. Hassim's investigation focuses on Madikizela-Mandela's personal narratives, showing how she

constructed her own identity, refusing to be defined by others. This argument is complemented by the narrative of Mukwahepo during her time in exile and upon returning home to Namibia after independence, as depicted in her biography by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila.

In similar research, Cloete (2019) explores the reconstruction of identity in the newly liberated Namibia through familial relations and public identities. According to the findings, interracial marriages depicted in Namhila's and Amulungu's works show how challenging it was for Namibians who lived under apartheid to embrace white people. However, with the assistance of family members, negotiations and cultural exchange, people changed and embraced the new Namibia. Thus, this research study focuses on similar issues presented in *Taming my Elephant* to identify the features of cultural practices that might need reconstruction to transform cultural identity in a new cultural landscape in Namibia for all people.

According to Malan (1995), the rule of descent reckoning followed by the Owambo is basically matrilineal. Kinship is determined through the mother, and consequently children are affiliated with the lineage and clan of their mother only. We observe the same sentiment in *The Purple Violent of Oshaantu*. Andreas uses the story of her friend Kauna, who, upon departing to her family after her husband's death, states, referring to her children: "This is my baggage and your own baggage is never too heavy to carry. I am taking them with me" (Andreas, 2001:67).

1.6.6 Cultural identity

"Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others" (Weeks, as cited by May, 2011). According to Castells (2010), identity serves as the source of meaning and experience for individuals, referring to social actors who engage in the process of constructing meaning based on a cultural attribute or a related set of cultural attributes, which are given priority over other sources of meaning. Castells further argues that for a given individual or collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities, which can lead to stress and contradiction in both selfrepresentation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from

what sociologists have traditionally called roles, and role-sets. Instead, it is referred to as a recognition of cultural belonging, which is internal to the individual, while culture is external.

It should also be noted that identity is no longer seen as a unitary or even stable construct. Nunan and Choi (2010) state that cultural identity consists of the constructions and perceptions of the human imagination and emotion. The way in which people imagine the world to be and the ways they envision that others exist in the world is central to the construction of identity. It does not matter that such beliefs may be based more on fiction than on fact because the human imagination is central to identity construction.

Although literature informs us that transforming cultural identity is marked by several factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender and class, it is important to note that the context of this thesis may diverge from these conventional understandings. The question of differences is emotive and brings forth ideas about belonging and not belonging, ingroups and out-groups, defining various cultural relations among characters and others in the texts. From this point, we get ideas about communities, even imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) and ethno-national boundaries (Clarke, 2008). Therefore, the notion of cultural identity in this research becomes much stronger and firmer when the authors define and express themselves in relation to a cultural affiliation.

However, it should be noted that the intention of this research is not to analyse ideas around racism, hatred and exclusion of others per se, but to review the ideas of the authors as they have narrated the issues of culture as women in a contemporary society. The purpose is to avoid the notion that says: "If cultural identities are essentially defined by difference, then the concept of stranger brings a whole new set of rules and ambiguities into the equation" (Clarke, 2008). As Clarke states, we are literally no longer sure who 'we' are, and in some sense, we have to learn to live with ambiguity.

Against this background, the concept of transforming cultural identity in this thesis is mirrored with the sense of reconstructing identity by Namibian authors after independence, as narrated in the books *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001),

Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother (2013) and *Taming my Elephant* (2016). In essence, Andreas, Namhila and Amulungu use literary work to reconnect with their ancestors, to reconfigure identity, culture and the hybridity of a new life.

1.6.7 Cultural identity in African literature

Tulasi (2022), in her article *African Women Writing and Gender Identities: A Review*, says the following about African women writers:

Their works stand elevated for women empowerment and the other debased sections of the social order. The works of female writers are passionate and replicate the occurrences in the general public. They depict characters which are near the real world. In addition to this, their novels are profound established in compassion, anticipating issues identified with gender, marriage, motherhood, social inequality and sexual misuse. (p. 1)

Tulasi (2022) contends that the position of these women is to empower and liberate women and daughters within the institution of oppressive marriages, such as polygamy, cultures that suppress women, and gender inequality.

Brown (1981), in his book entitled *Women Writers in Black Africa*, emphasises the fact that for a long time, women have been excluded from most African literature, as it was dominated by male writers. His views are based on the facts that women were overlooked because of male-oriented domination, colonialism, and traditional and cultural norms of African societies reflecting male supremacy.

Brown (1981) argues that the women writers of Africa represent the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have found significant space or time for African women writers. Ignoring women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless – and a rather unfortunate one at that (Brown, 1981).

Brown (1981) is crying for the voices of African women to be heard, highlighting the need for writers and authors of all races to provide a leeway and opportunity for African women writers to write freely about the issues concerning women. He emphasises that women have historically been excluded from most African literature and argues that it is now time for their voices to be heard.

In this regard, articles discussing the literary contributions of some of these prominent women writers like Flora Nwapa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tsitsi Dangarembga are incorporated into this study. Their literary works are much celebrated in the contemporary literary field of Africa women writers.

In the article *Female Self-Affirmation and Self-Fulfilment in Nwapa's One is Enough* (1981), Sene (2022) focuses on the portrayal of women as they appear in novels written by male writers. In most novels written by male writers, women are downgraded to the lower-class. Sene (2022) pays much attention on how Nwapa (1981) portrays her women characters after the Nigerian Civil War.

Nwapa (1981) empowers her female characters by giving them a voice and presence in the male-dominated literary world. Like her fellow African women writers, Nwapa challenges and corrects the faulty image of African women perpetuated by male writers. Her female characters are not objects; they can resist male-dominating ideas within literary texts.

Gbaguidi, cited by Sene (2022), says the following about the portrayal of female characters by Nwapa:

Nwapa does not believe a woman should be passive or voiceless. The female characters in her fiction do not exist only for the services they provide inside the home for their husbands and children. They count in significant matters affecting community and national life; by doing so, Nwapa proceeds to a redefinition of the female gender. (p. 1014)

Through this quotation, Sene (2022) maintains that Nwapa presents readers with female characters who speak their mind and who are not afraid to fight for their rights.

Cakpo-Chichi Zanou *et al.* (2017) define African feminism in the following way:

... feminism is the woman's freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex determined role, freedom from society's oppression and restrictions, freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. (p. 113)

From the above extract, it is evident that feminism advocates for a woman's right to choose the type of life she wants to lead without any fear of being limited to any circumstances of her being a woman. The feminism theory also creates awareness for a woman to stand up, act upon her point of view and express her opinion. It also advocates the woman's right to express her opinions and put them into practice.

In a pivotal scene between Amaka and her husband Obiora, a conflict arises where Amaka challenges gender inequality. When Obiora, visibly displeased by his first wife's response, asserts his dominance by declaring, "I am a man," Amaka boldly counters with, "I am a woman" (Nwapa, 1981:26 cited in Sene, 2022:1015). In response to Obiora's aggression, Amaka refuses to be passive; instead, she defends herself against his physical attack. Amaka's actions not only reinforce her words but also serve as a powerful message to other newly married women, encouraging them to resist abuse and fight back against domestic violence. She emerges as a symbol of empowerment and resilience, representing the silenced voices of women in patriarchal societies.

Amaka separates from Obiora and relocates to Lagos, where she rebuilds her life. Aladji, a man working for the Minister, gives her a contract to supply toilet rolls and earn three thousand naira. Amaka buys a site to store timber and blocks and eventually builds her own house. Amaka gives birth to two sons, fathered by Izu, who holds a high position in government. He wants to marry her, but Amaka refuses. In other words, she only prefers Izu to be a partner rather than them having a spousal relationship. According to Amaka, her marriage to Obiora has been enough for her. Amaka's experiences in her marital status with Obiora is reasonable why she does not want to enter into another marriage, the fact that proves that she is prospering on her own without a husband.

Amaka achieves two assets which women are urged to achieve in the novel, which is financial independence and children. Amaka ends up being respected by those who once disrespected her. Obiora and his mother disrespected her because they thought she

could not give birth. Amaka's mother also changed her attitude towards Amaka. Her mother once advised her to leave her marriage with Obiora and go to another man in order to have children. Through Amaka's character, the author encourages women to become more independent psychologically and find fulfilment, pleasure and even happiness outside of marriage, by being single women.

Like Sene (2022), Feghabo (2022) also demonstrates the oppression and liberation of women in *Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun and the Valorization of Womanhood*. Feghabo explores the gender inequalities following the civil war in Nigeria, through the characters, Olanna and Kainene her twin sister. Feghabo (2022) employs African feminism, by highlighting the socio-economic struggles of women living in a patriarchal society. The author reveals the portrayal of gender dynamics and cultural norms in relation to the system of dominant experienced by women and the need for societal transformation.

Female characters in Adichie's novel are confronted by challenges in forming their identities and achieving empowerment related to living in a patriarchal society. Feghabo (2022) presents a compelling critique of traditional norms and the systemic oppression of women, calling for a dismantling of patriarchal structures.

Feghabo (2022) advocates for challenging African cultural dictates that favour male privilege and oppress women. Adichie, as a feminist, confronts these dictates through her portrayal of the educated middle-class female twins, Olanna and Kainene, who are dominant female characters in the narrative.

The twin sisters, both highly educated with master's degrees from foreign universities, symbolise a modern parallel of the traditional African woman. The traditional African woman is symbolised by women such as their mother and other women such as Odenigbo's illiterate rural mother, as well as the female relatives of the twins' mother.

Adichie models the empowered female figure through characters like Olanna, who holds a position as a Sociology lecturer, reflecting the advocacy of African feminists for the elevation of women's status and the rewriting of history to reflect their contributions and achievements. In a radical choice, Olanna prefers the job of an academic and getting married to Odenigbo instead of getting married to the Minister for Finance, Chief Okonji, who is assumed to be wealthy but barely literate. Her defiance of her parents' desire to

arrange her marriage for financial gain and her insistence on choosing her own path resonates with the struggles against patriarchal systems, as depicted in Adichie's narrative.

The importance of education for females is well demonstrated in *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988). Tambudzai, who lives in the village, witnesses her brother's opportunity to attend school and receive an education while she is forced to stay and work at home. When Babamukuru returns from London after completing his graduate studies, he decides to support the education of Nhamo, his brother's male child, who is sent to a missionary school. His sister, Tambudzai, who sees her brother's opportunity, gets frustrated because she is not offered the opportunity to attend school. Her parents justify this decision by arguing that girls should prioritise learning domestic skills, as they will eventually contribute to their future husband's family after marriage. They assert that males should be educated and have careers, as they are expected to provide for their families.

However, things do not go according to plan for the family when Nhamo gets sick and dies. As there is no other male child in the family, the death of Nhamo gives Tambudzai a chance to occupy his place in Babamukuru's house. Here, Dangarembga (1988) suggests that education is important for both boys and girls. She advises parents that by providing education for their daughters, they can empower them to challenge and break free from the oppressive patriarchal culture, thereby enabling them to assert their cultural identity.

Against this background, the concept of transforming cultural identity in this thesis mirrors the process of reconstructing identity by Namibian authors after independence, as depicted in books like *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* (2013) and *Taming my Elephant* (2016). In essence, authors like Andreas, Namhila and Amulungu use literature to reconnect with their ancestors and to reconfigure identity, culture and the hybridity of a new life.

A considerable amount of literature has been written on the three texts under scrutiny in this study: Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), Tshiwa Trudie

Amulungu's *Taming my Elephant* (2016) and Ellen Ndeshi Namhila's *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* (2013).

Victor (2013) focuses on women's position of victimhood regarding spousal abuse in his article "Violet without Purple". He argues that wife battering persists due to the silence of the women, emphasising the need for women to free themselves from the oppressive patriarchal yoke.

Akawa (2013), Nepunda (2020), Williams and Chrisman (1994) and Uusiku (2021) focus on trauma and resilience of all women who took part in the Namibian liberation struggle in general.

Rhode (2003) and Goremusandu (2016) assert that in the narrative of *Mukwahepo*, women experience oppression stemming from gender subjugation, which is further exacerbated by patriarchal, cultural, and religious practices.

Uko (2019) advocates for the importance of recognising Kauna's authentic selfhood, which arises from her identity as the "purple violet of Oshaantu." This notion is deeply intertwined with the concept of transforming cultural identity, a gap that the current research aims to address. Other researchers, like Victor (2013) and Okeke (2015), have conducted insightful research studies focusing on critical issues that lead to marriage failure in African fiction, including *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). These studies focus mainly on marital instability, abusive husbands, infidelity, witchcraft, communication breakdown and divorce, among others.

Shiyoka (2019) explores the literary presentation of transnational identities, while Mauta (2023) uses cognitive linguistics to study trauma in *Taming my Elephant* (2016). Hence, it can be argued that these issues have been represented only from a unidirectional perspective.

The theme of cultural identity is a recurring motif in various Namibian female-authored texts that emerged after independence, especially those written by authors who were in exile during the liberation struggle. *The Price of Freedom* (1997) by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, *Undisciplined Heart* (2013) by Jane Katjavivi, and *Making a Difference* by Libertina Inaaviposa Amathila (2012) are notable memoirs that attest to this statement. In these

autobiographies, the authors narrate their experiences of grappling with their Namibian identity, particularly after returning from exile. Despite being citizens of Namibia, they often express a sense of displacement and struggle to fully embrace their national identity.

Simataa (2019) highlights Namhila's journey, noting that her prolonged exile led to a rupture in her connection to her homeland, as the memories she cherished from her childhood were shattered upon her return. Simataa (2019:132) reflects on Namhila's struggle with identity, noting that her initial observation as a young "Oshiwambo girl whose perspective on her cultural oriented life-style is interrupted by the imminent presence of the apartheid South African army in her village". (p.132). This disruption prompts Namhila to question who she truly is and grapple with her sense of self. Simataa further observes that Namhila's identity is shaped in relation to others, highlighting her pursuit of selfidentification and the importance of agency in her process of constructing her identity.

Rensing (2017) reaffirms the significance of cultural identity in the context of being black or white in Namibia, particularly exemplified through Amulungu's personal experiences with Wilfried's parents in *Taming my Elephant*: "The Brock family had serious reservations towards their new black daughter-in-law and refused to accept their relationship."

(Rensing, 2017:115). Like Namhila, Amulungu's identity is shifting due to the different circumstances that she finds herself in. However, Amulungu takes a different approach to transform her identity. She raises the tone of her voice to remind "her reading public that it is her present voice speaking from a privileged position which she only reached by overcoming many obstacles in the past" (Rensing, 2017:115). The same issue was alluded to by Simataa (2019), noting Amulungu overcoming the challenge of racial identity when she reconciles with Wilfried's parents and accepts herself for who she is. In this context, the concept of transforming cultural identity emerges as a means to address the fear and anxiety. This fear and anxiety contribute to the incompatibility observed in intimate relationships between Africans and individuals of other cultural backgrounds, leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes within African communities.

The present research identified a gap in the analysis of certain cultural practices, notably motherhood and widowhood, which have received little to no attention in previous studies concerning the victories gained despite experiencing harsh treatment from husbands and

other male counterparts. Several studies have emphasised the negative consequences and impacts of these cultural practices on women in general. However, there has been a lack of focus on how these practices empower characters, enabling them to gain strength, defeat the patriarchal system and attain independence. This gap in the literature is what the current research seeks to fill. The current study expands further on critical dimensions such as interracial marriage and the relationships between people of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, which represent a new trend promoting multiculturalism in Namibia. The study provides a holistic and balanced analysis of the presentation of cultural practices as a means of transforming cultural identity in women, equal to men, in a positive way.

1.7 Methodology

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:63) emphasise the importance of research methods being relevant, reliable and valid for the collection and analysis of data. This study follows a qualitative approach, employing desk analysis to assess the portrayal of Aawambo cultural practices and beliefs in three literary texts produced and published in English by female authors after Namibian independence in 1990. This approach was found relevant to this study as it involves textual analysis, allowing the researcher to analyse narrative information in an organised way. Additionally, the nature of the problem investigated, required a qualitative research method.

Although decolonised, the Oshiwambo culture portrayed in these texts is characterised by deeply embedded role expectations and traditional practices. Special attention is given to the selected texts as instruments of understanding, reproducing, but also transforming cultural practices and ultimately seeking an equal distribution of cultural capital.

The relevant tools for collecting data were primary and secondary sources. *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* (2013) and *Taming my Elephant* (2016), were used as primary sources. Secondary sources were articles from scientific journals, internet articles, books and published research reports.

In addition, the research adopts a feminist literary criticism approach to examine the way female characters are attached to cultural issues and to critique the elevation of

malecultural outlooks in the texts. According to Appleman (2007), “literary theories were developed as a means to understand the various ways people read texts... All literary theories are lenses through which we can see texts.” For the purpose of this study, the selected texts under discussion were read in such a way that African womanism theory might be of help in examining their key messages. Thus, it is deemed relevant to apply feminist literary theory to analyse the plight of woman as depicted in their stories and to see how the authors’ cultural backgrounds influence their attitudes in writing their stories. Although all three texts were written after Namibian independence, they are – in one way or another – influenced and shaped by experiences during the colonial period in Namibia. Therefore, they critically reflect on the role expectations and patriarchal assumptions underlying Aawambo cultural practices from a feminist, and more specifically an African womanist, perspective.

1.8 Ethical matters

According to Drew *et al.* (1996:43), researchers are accountable for their behaviour while conducting their investigation. In this study, every attempt was made to identify the main ethical considerations and to take precautions in order to conduct this research project competently.

The study involved an interpretative study of texts in the public domain, and no human subjects participated in the study. Ethics matters were therefore not complex and ethical approval was received from the North-West University Ethics Committee.

Lastly, the researcher effectively managed all resources, ensuring proper acknowledgement of sources by providing a comprehensive list of all the books or texts that contributed to this research, and communicated the results accurately.

1.9 Provisional chapter division

This study composed six chapters. The first chapter introduces the research. It provides an overview of the background, contextualisation, problem statement, research questions and objectives of the research. It also looks at the methodology, central theoretical argument, chapter division and the significance of the research.

The second chapter is regarded as the heart of the research, as it deals with African womanism, the literary theory underpinning the study. The study focuses on African womanist perspectives in post-independent Namibian texts by women authors, with special reference to the critical representation of traditional cultural practices.

The third chapter critically analyses Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) regarding perceptions towards culture and tradition in an independent Namibia.

The fourth chapter entails a critical analysis of *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* as recorded and translated by Namhila (2013). The focus is on the extent to which Namhila interprets the issue of culture and modernity in the text.

The fifth chapter involves a critical analysis of Amulungu's *Taming my Elephant* (2016). The researcher focuses on the influence of culture in a modern society as depicted in Amulungu's text.

The sixth chapter concludes the study by summarising the findings and results of the research. It also offers recommendations for further engagements on the same topic.

1.10 Contribution of the study

This study intends to critically investigate and analyse the cultural practices perceived to connote the life of a woman in Oshiwambo culture as depicted in three selected texts, in which the perception of the authors towards the belief of Aawambo people in various cultural issues are navigated and articulated through artistic ways of expression with the assumption to transform cultural identity. As discussed in the problem statement, it is hoped that insights gained in this study will contribute to the knowledge of the existing body of axiology in African literature surrounding the genres of novels, memoirs and autobiography in identified Aawambo cultural issues such as Olufuko, birthing, widowhood and rituals. The study also intends to broaden the perception of cultural transformation regarding the aforementioned practices and to enhance cultural understanding not in Aawambo communities only, but promote understanding of social life on the ground, as well as to embrace self-identity through normative transformations of culture and tradition. Emphasis is placed on narratives produced by female authors portraying female characters, as well as the issues affecting them as women.

The study will also contribute to a better understanding of Namibian literature written after independence, offering insights into the authenticity of narratives constructed from personal and political perspectives. Through the authors' recounting of cultural predicaments using stories from their past lives in the present, the study sheds light on the cultural concerns and challenges faced in Namibian society. Ojaide (1992) contends that modern African literature serves as the repository of the cultural life of the people and is a significant source of education for younger generations of readers. Therefore, this research aims to enlighten future scholars on how to continue addressing and contributing to discussions concerning African cultural knowledge in academia.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter served as the introduction section of the thesis, delineating various components of the research. It provided an overview of the conceptualisation and background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives, and the research question. Additionally, it highlighted the literature review conducted to explore how authors address cultural issues in their narratives, particularly those impacting women within patriarchal systems. One such domain explored was interracial marriage, which might involve cultural factors from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, influencing cultural identity transformation. The analysis also delved into widowhood and motherhood, which attract significant attention in studies of cultural issues, particularly in narratives by female scholars and researchers seeking to liberate women from political and gender discrimination. Specifically, authors such as Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu and Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, who were involved in the liberation struggle as teenagers and returned to Namibia as adults, along with Neshani Andreas, whose novel *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) reflects her profound respect for the women she encountered in rural culture, were examined.

In short, this chapter presented the layout that was followed in the development of this thesis. The following chapter focuses on African womanism as a theoretical framework of the present study.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to define and present the theoretical framework chosen for analysing the transformation of cultural identity through a textual analysis of Aawambo cultural practices in Namibian post-independence texts. The chapter aims to shed light on the theoretical framework used to guide the methodology in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and presentation from the literary texts selected for this study.

Initially, an overview is provided about the concept of a theoretical framework in general, explaining what it is and how it functions in research. Specifically, in this current study, the aim is to create an understanding of how the issue of cultural practices in Namibian texts after independence is mirrored through the ideologies of those who came before us. The narratives are analysed from a womanist and feminist perspective because they were produced by female authors. Therefore, the framework of this research draws from feminists who have studied the lives of women as women and have either experienced or observed similar situations to those depicted in the texts selected for this research.

The current research hinges on the concept of African womanism as the principal theory, complemented by African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminism. The researcher found the three theories to be relevant to the topic of transforming cultural identity because they align with the phenomenon of women's perspectives on striving to reconstruct their cultural identity. This is expressed through narratives about Aawambo cultural practices, reflecting how culture manifests against women in the discussions established in the selected texts. The selection of these theories is also grounded in Brewer's (2020) contention that, in contrast to feminism, African womanism engenders a one-sided gender role in the understanding of African culture, thereby introducing complexity and influencing Western ideologies within African societies.

However, the researcher differs from this notion because it is not the intention of this research to focus solely on the influence of Western ideology or any non-African ideology. Instead, the study acknowledges these influences to a certain extent but remains primarily

focused on its aims and objectives related to transforming cultural identity within the context of Namibian post-independence texts.

Moreover, the chapter offers detailed insights into views on cultural transformation and related features that correlate with the content in the selected literary texts. For instance, it aligns the theories with an investigation into how women are depicted in the specific literary works of Namibian female writers, aiming to identify agents of cultural reconstruction. This involves redefining cultural norms and rejecting harmful cultural practices. Characters in the novels are portrayed as refusing to passively accept conditions or situations imposed on them by culture or politics. The chapter also engages with how the specific theories intersect to influence the exploration of transforming cultural identity, a key focus of this research. By examining these intersections, the research aims to generate findings that contribute to a deeper understanding of African culture and tradition. This exploration seeks to develop new knowledge that sheds light on the complexities of cultural identity transformation within the context of Namibian literature.

According to Swanson (2013), a theoretical argument plays a central role in demonstrating an understanding of theories and concepts relevant to the topic of a research paper, linking it to broader areas of knowledge under consideration. Connelly *et al.*, cited by Struckmann (2017), define a theoretical framework “as a system of ideas or conceptual structures that aid in understanding, explaining, and changing the world.” This framework serves as the foundation upon which a researcher’s ideas are constructed, utilising pre-established theories to capture insights from existing literature and propose solutions to new research problems.

Theoretical frameworks, as highlighted by theorists, are crafted by researchers and scholars to delineate various theories, establish connections between ideas, and draw informed conclusions. It is likely that multiple existing theories can support a research proposal, allowing researchers to choose the most suitable one for their study. The formulation of a theoretical framework enables researchers to pose pertinent questions, select appropriate methods and sources, and chart a clear path toward addressing research inquiries that contribute to their respective fields.

The definition provided facilitated the selection of the appropriate theoretical framework to shape the argument of this study. As a result, this research is anchored in African womanism as the primary conceptual framework, complemented by African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminist perception theories. These frameworks serve to contextualise the discussions surrounding the events depicted in the selected texts and situate them within a feminist perspective from an African standpoint. Additionally, these three theories were deemed relevant to the study as they all advocate for the selfrealisation of African women, a theme prominently articulated in the texts under examination.

Furthermore, the amalgamation of African womanism, African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminism as philosophical and literary theories examine the emerging perspectives of many of today's leading African women writers and scholars regarding the living conditions of the African woman, particularly pertaining to African family forms. Thus, in conjunction with the other theories mentioned, the researcher found literary theories to be at the forefront of reading and analysing African literary texts within the context of Oshiwambo culture as an African tradition.

Since these texts were written after Namibian independence, the narratives are regarded as subjects that play roles in creating the background of colonial and patriarchal history, with the intention to establish an African-centred theory grounded in African thought and action (Ahmed, 2017). Thus, African womanism, African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminism are meant, in one way or another, to influence and shape the discussion about the experiences of Namibian women during the colonial era. It is also worth mentioning that the researcher opted for these particular theories to contextualise the articulation of these authors' behaviour, aiming to understand their reasons as Namibian women for raising their voices in public. Perhaps they did so to applaud the success of political independence, but more particularly, the freedom of women, as Phillips (2006) states that womanist methods of social transformation cohere around the activities of harmonising, coordinating, balancing, and healing. In this regard, Ahmed (2017) cites Aptheker, who explains that:

[w]hen we place women at the center of our thinking, we are going about the business of creating an historical and cultural matrix from which women may claim autonomy and independence over their own lives. (p. 61)

The researcher argues that engaging womanist and feminist theories in female-authored texts brings forth a feminine perspective on societal constructs traditionally associated with women's identity, which are often used against them. Issues such as Olufuko, childbearing, abusive marriages, widowhood and yielding to male authority can empower these women, allowing them to exert influence over both women and men. This empowerment strengthens their ability to live out the main goals of their chosen lifestyle, socio-political agenda, and culture they seek to establish and maintain (Blackmon, 2008). Hence, the interplay between African womanism, African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminism and their relevance to this study, will be discussed later in this chapter. These theories are intertwined to underpin the ideas of these authors when they reclaim and redesign their African culture in an innovative way. They critically reflect on the role expectations and patriarchal assumptions underlying Aawambo cultural practices from both feminist and African womanist perspectives.

2.2 African womanism

The term womanism originated from the insightful words of Alice Walker in her short story collection *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981) and her novels *The Color Purple* (1982) and *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Walker used this term to refer to feminists of colour, specifically black feminists. Womanism centres around the experiences, contributions and efforts of black feminists to better the world around them for all of humanity, not just themselves. The theory addresses the injustices faced by black women, men, children and families. Walker described womanism as encompassing the bravery, determination, boldness and mature demeanour of black women, along with their love for fellow women, themselves and humanity (Collins, 1996). In the same vein, Phillips (2006) defined the word womanism as a social-change perspective rooted in black women's and other women of colour's everyday experiences and methods of problem-solving. It is concerned with ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment, and reconciling

human life with the spiritual dimension. Thomas, cited by Coleman and Maparyan (2013), explains that although Walker coined the term, womanism became a religious movement when black women religious scholars began to unite theological reflection with social transformation. It also became a movement within feminism, primarily championed by black feminists, when the initial use of the term evolved to cover a spectrum of issues and perspectives facing black women and others.

Since its inception, womanism has expanded to encompass various domains, giving rise to concepts like Africana womanism and womanist theology or spirituality. Scholars such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, Ifi Amadiume, Mary Ebun Modupe Kolawole, and others have shaped the arguments in the concept of Africana womanism whereby they have indicated the theory to be a continuation of the Afrocentric theory. For instance, Andreas portrays Kauna responding to Spivak's query, "Can the subaltern speak?" in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. (Spivak, 1988) Amulungu disagrees with the racial identity cliché in *Taming my Elephant* when she marries a white person. Namhila demonstrates the compatibility of men and women in *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*. This will be covered in more detail in the research's later parts.

The researcher has also established that the term womanism as used by Ogunyemi (1985) to describe the African female experience in her conception of African womanism might differ slightly from the womanism presented by Alice Walker, although there are many points of similarities. Hudson-Weems (1993) explains how the concept of Africana womanism encompasses female identity and indicate how female experience is transformed into female consciousness, often in reaction to male paradigms for female experience. Thus, in this context, Africana womanism pays more attention to and focuses more on the realities and the injustices in society with regard to race (Ntiri, 2001).

Ogunyemi (1985:74) states that "womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideal of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanism". The theory concerns itself as much with a black sexual power tussle as with a world power structure that subjugates blacks. Similarly, Alice Walker, the African American author, formulated a so-called "womanist approach" in 1983 that focuses on black women's identity and commitment to gender issues. According to Walker, a womanist is a "black

feminist or feminist of colour committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male *and* female” (1983: xi). Walker, therefore, implies that womanists are concerned with overcoming not only gender discrimination, but also discrimination based on race and socio-economic status. Collins (1996:11) asserts that Walker’s definition invokes three important, yet contradictory, philosophies that frame black social and political thought, namely: “black nationalism via her claims of black women’s moral and epistemological superiority via suffering under racial and gender oppression; pluralism via the cultural integrity provided by the metaphor of the garden; and integration/assimilation via her claims that black women are ‘traditionally universalist’ (Van DeBurg, 1992). In a similar vein, Ogunyemi (1985) states that womanism, while widely applied in literary criticism, is also highly controversial because it posits the ideology of feminism in the context of black women in conflict with culture, domination including other related issues that subject the lives of African women in a narrow environment.

With her conceptualisation of womanism, critically acclaimed author, Alice Walker, highlighted the need for black women to carve out their own niche within the discourse of patriarchy. She defined womanism as encapsulating the experiences of women of colour and black feminists who shared bonds of love with other women, whether sexually or nonsexually. These individuals embraced women’s culture, exhibited emotional flexibility and strength, and committed themselves to the survival and wholeness of their entire people, male and female. While useful in providing agency and identity for black women where they have been historically ignored, womanism in and of itself was not sufficient to describe the experience of women in these specific cultural groups.

In response to Walker’s notion of womanism, the African American author and academic Hudson-Weems (1993) proposed an Africana womanist theory that critically examines the limitations of Western (but also black) feminist theory and helps to explain, comprehensively, the ideas and experiences of some African woman who have contributed to womanist theory from differing ideological perspectives (Dove, 1998). The theory disapproves the distorted representation of black women through feminist discourse, by emphasising the rejection of feminism and other feminist movements for

their inadequacy to encompass the African woman's experience (Al-Harbi, 2017). Hudson-Weems (1993) states:

Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker womanism that some African women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women... The primary goal of Africana women, then, is to create their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action. (p. 24)

Moreover, the core of Ogunyemi's (1985: 74) "definition of African womanism is the conviction that gender questions can be dealt with only in the context of other issues that are relevant for African women". She stresses that an African womanist "will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy" (Dove, 1985:64). Unlike Amulungu, both Namhila and Neshani use stories of other characters to address gender challenges by depicting the issues of barrenness and widowhood in Oshiwambo culture as some of the cultural aspects that confine a woman within a discriminative sphere.

According to Chigwedere (2010:24), "African womanism is a philosophy that has 'wholeness' and 'healing' as one of its primary aims, as it calls for a holistic approach to African life". The philosophy seeks to simultaneously revise and retain African cultural traditions. Chigwedere further stresses that the African womanism assesses the literary work of the Africans from the Afrocentric approach using cultural textual analysis. The theory includes characteristics such as self-naming, self-definition, adaptability, respect, authenticity, mothering and nurturing, of which some of these characteristics will feature in the current study.

Allagbé (2016) suggests that the naming or labelling of characters in contemporary African literature reflects a womanist effort, as portrayed through their narratives and the depiction of character names. Allagbé further explains that character naming, as the

name implies, is a process whereby writers name or label their characters in a literary text to serve a specific function. Thus, the researcher views the three theories as effectively complementing each other, particularly in the authors' creation and conveyance of ideological meanings in their fiction, especially through the selection of names for their characters in their books. This aspect is also significant in the context of this specific research as it complements the intention of this analysis, which is to understand the narratives of these particular Namibian writers when they opt to share their experiences and to signify the semantic relevance of the texts in the transformation of cultural identity from a womanistic approach.

In essence, the theories identified for this research are among those others found relevant for interpreting the narratives selected, particularly from the perspectives of African women. Arbaoui (2023) states that African female authors discuss the issues that concern traditional African women, as education, marriage, motherhood, polygamy, economic independence, political discrimination of women and domestic abuse feature as major themes in their works. Similarly, African womanism and other related theories are embodied in this research to examine the literary works of female writers when they delve into the position of African women within society and their determination to liberate themselves and other women from all forms of cultural perversion.

Taiwo (2019) states that African womanism emerged with the representation of the plight of black women, embodying an ideology predicated on the unity and togetherness of African kinship. Taiwo further interprets the involvement of the African womanism as indicated by Mary Modupe Kolawole that it is regarded as a syndicate in existing feminist discourses to mute the African women as it referred to 'voice-throwing'. Hudson-Weems (1993) states that Africana womanism theory intends to accommodate the unique characteristics of African society, which differ because of its distinct cultural, political, historical and social backgrounds, much like other feminisms are peculiar to their specific places of origin. She contends that Africana womanism is a lived experience and a fight for self-definition in real life rather than only an abstract notion. Since Africana womanism provides a potent framework for African women to reclaim their narratives, identities, and agency in a world that frequently erases or marginalizes their contributions, African women all around the world have embraced the philosophy. Africana womanism uses the

tenets of self-naming, wholeness, authenticity, and resistance to give African women the strength to confront oppressive structures, reconstruct their communities, and imagine a time when their experiences and voices are respected and honoured. The work of Hudson-Weems has spurred a self-empowerment movement, emphasizing the necessity of continuous action and discussion to carry on the struggle for justice and equality.

Africana womanism, which draws on its African cultural heritage, aims to empower black women worldwide and foster a sense of community among Africana women. Africana womanism, which draws on its African cultural heritage, aims to empower black women worldwide and foster a sense of community among Africana women. In this respect, Kolawole (1997:25) states that Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism "underscores a closer affinity among all African women globally". The theory is applied to differentiate it from other feminist frameworks, as it acknowledges some of the inherent values of African culture, which encourages compatibility and congruity between men and women and enhances the centrality of the family. The theory is used to set it apart from other feminist frameworks because it recognises some of the innate African cultural values that promote gender congruity and compatibility as well as the importance of the family.

By embracing characteristics that characterise Africana womanism—such as self-naming, self-definition, genuine sisterhood, family-centeredness, cooperation with men in struggle, adaptability in role-playing, strength, compatibility with men, authenticity, spirituality, respect and appreciation of elders, adaptability, ambition, and a tendency toward mothering and nurturing Hudson-Weems sets Africana womanism apart from other feminist discourses. The theory is used to set it apart from other feminist frameworks because it recognizes some of the innate African cultural values that promote gender congruity and compatibility as well as the importance of the family. By embracing characteristics that characterize Africana womanism such as self-naming, self-definition, genuine sisterhood, family-centeredness, cooperation with men in struggle, adaptability in role-playing, strength, compatibility with men, authenticity, spirituality, respect and appreciation of elders, adaptability, ambition, and a tendency toward mothering and nurturing—Hudson-Weems sets Africana womanism apart from other feminist discourses. (Izgarjan & Markov, 2012). Barry and Grady (2019) argue that Africana womanism, as an African theoretical perspective, places a higher priority on historical

oppression (racism) than sexism, particularly during hostile moments among African women. Additionally, they argue that individual needs are a Westernized, colonial, and patriarchal concept, and that community and family needs come before individual needs (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Oyewumi, 1997; Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006; Iromuanya, 2008; Pellerin, 2012). These attributes are also reflected in black women's literature (Kolawole, 1997), where through the creativity of a group of black women writers, the world is introduced to the authentic experiences of black women's lives.

Therefore, in this current research, the aim is to present a new critical perspective for interpreting and understanding perceptions of cultural aspects as articulated by the authors in their narratives. This involves utilising elements of other theories such as African postcolonial feminism as a viable and practical method of analysis in individual narratives, such as *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). For instance, in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), Andreas reflects on the destructive impact of colonialism and colonial education on black people, particularly women. European colonialism introduced a type of education into Africa which perpetuated subjugation, underdevelopment and inferiority. European education inculcated into the minds of African students the superiority of the white race and the inferiority of the black.

Therefore, in this educational system, African history and tradition were replaced by European culture and values. Consequently, many colonised Africans dissociated themselves from their own cultural roots and became assimilated into the Western culture (Nwanosike *et al.*, 2011). As a committed African writer, Dangarembga has fictionally delineated some African womanist characters who strive to correct the distorted selfimage of the African woman to regain their self-confidence about their past cultural heritage.

This study therefore integrates feminist criticism concepts, contextualising post-colonial feminism, African womanism and autobiography in the transformation of cultural identity, with a focus on cultural practices within the Oshiwambo setting of African culture. The researcher also wants to emphasise that the three selected fiction narratives are set to portray the contextualisation of African identities. These texts represent the histories of colonialism in Africa and reflect on postcolonialism from different perspectives. In

essence, from a philosophical standpoint, this research can be viewed within a cultural context, representing a paradigm concerned with what makes society real. As a study on cultural practices, it aims to understand the social realities depicted in the texts under investigation. These practices may be perceived as social constructs, created by people from specific cultural and historical backgrounds, in all three analysed texts.

The conceptual framework of this study is a blend of literary theory approaches, including autobiography, feminist literary criticism, and textual analysis. These are contextualised within African postcolonial feminism and Africana womanism to examine the works of Namibian female writers following independence. The analysis of individual texts is guided by these sub-theories, shaping the research objectives and exploring the perspectives of authors such as Amulungu, Andreas and Namhila as they challenge cultural manifestations and traditions, particularly regarding the oppression of women in the Oshiwambo cultural context. The aim is to generate reliable knowledge for future reference, in line with the holistic perspective of womanism advocated by Alice Walker, which encompasses the entirety of women's experiences, including the issue of sexism.

Furthermore, Walker argues that womanist theory fosters an awareness of a woman's intrinsic value. It should be noted that the perception of the womanist theory in this thesis does not exclusively centre on the concept of black womanism, but rather it encompasses the recognition of ethnicity and class-based oppression in a broader sense. Moreover, the concept of womanism is embedded in the political struggle depicted in the story of Mukwahepo that Namhila so elegantly narrates from a heroism perspective. Therefore, the term 'transforming cultural identity' has been selected to encapsulate the evolution of female characters in Namibian literature created by female authors post-independence who journey towards a new dawn for women (Al-Harbi, 2017). This journey is not limited to the Oshiwambo culture but extends to the broader African cultural landscape. Similarly, Afro-politico womanism is dedicated to portraying positive literary depictions of black female political activists, often within the context of 20th-century efforts to disrupt existing power structures (Eaton, 2008). According to this sentiment, Hudson-Weems (1993) suggests that Africana womanism is a conceptual framework which stems from African culture to provide an authentic image of black women as reflected in black literature. In the context of this project, literary representations of black female political activism include

a character's struggle for justice within the black community and an understanding of how healthy gender relationships can be used to heal the black community. Amulungu, Andreas and Namhila are black female authors whose works fall under this definition, writing within the socio-political context of insurgency or transformation in their 'imagined' black community.

Coined in the late 1980s by Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana womanism represents an ideology which focuses on the experiences, realities, struggles and needs of all African women" (Ntiri, 2001:166). Relying on African cultural roots, Africana womanism is addressed to all black women to empower black people and to establish a kind of familiarity among all Africana women all over the world. In this respect, Kolawole (1997) states that Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism "underscores a closer affinity among all African women globally" (Kolawole, 1997: 25). Africana womanism posits that African women are marginalised due to their race, socio-economic condition and gender. In this context, the comparison is made with the situation of Amulungu and her in-laws' family. Despite that, Africana womanism distinguishes itself from feminism in that it is perceived to operate on the assumption that race is of paramount importance in any discussion related to black women (Ntiri, 2001). In the same vein, Ordu (2021) argues that African feminism is exclusively concerned with the experiences of African women and how to bring about societal change by including both men and women. Thus, the focus lies on the racial and gender disparities faced by white women, a perspective dismissed by black women who refuse to accept inferiority to the white race and view their men as essential allies in the struggle against oppression, marginalisation, and poverty. Hence, feminism is seen as "a separatist and non-inclusive agenda for Africana women" (Ntiri, 2001:164).

Walker states that womanism can be compared to feminism as purple to lavender. In light of this argument, Andreas titled her book *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). This title serves as a metaphor, portraying a woman's beauty as an antagonistic expression amidst the cultural life of the Oshaantu village, where the protagonist, Kauna, grapples with an abusive marriage. Hence, this identity refers to the feminism aspect of the narrative, embodying the meaning of the term "womanist" as synonymous with black feminist or women of colour, as posited by Walker. Thus, on some basic level, Walker herself uses the two terms as being virtually interchangeable.

Indeed, womanism reflects the decision of women of colour to assertively voice their objections to the exclusive stance of white feminists and to establish a paradigm that incorporates values significant to them. Not only did womanism distance itself from feminism, but it also positioned itself as stronger and more original, employing the feminist strategy of differentiation to highlight the limitations of the feminist paradigm. In conjunction with black feminist thinkers, womanists have played a major role in recentring the understanding of how the position of black women articulate complex systems of oppression and resistance to it. Brewer (2020) argues that the racialised and capitalist patriarchy was noted to be foundational to most radical expressions of black feminism, while a deeply rooted cultural lens informs womanist approaches to black women's oppositional consciousness. Brewer further exemplifies the situation that womanists and black feminists articulate the ideas of the lived experiences of black women, culture, selfdefinition, and self-determination. Black feminism propagates an intersectional analysis which, as noted, catalyses a series of organising ideas which emphasise the multiplicity of oppressions. The notion alluded to above is relevant to this study as it examines cultural and racial identities in *Taming my Elephant* when Amulungu meets her in-laws, Wilfried's parents and her white husband.

Against this explanation, as an alternative to dominant patriarchal and feminist models, womanism serves as an example of different modes of behaviour and thinking, reclaiming the submerged history that has led to the transformation and redefinition of existing norms, and expanding traditional views (Chikafa-Chipiro, 2019). According to Bryson (2003), black women's analysis of the interlocking and interdependent nature of oppression has constituted a paradigm shift in feminist understanding. Bryson states:

Placing African American women and other excluded groups in the centre of analysis opens up possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess varying amounts of power and privilege in one historically created system. (p. 229)

While womanism does not claim that black women have discovered the 'truth', their insight into the multi-faceted and interlocking nature of class, race and gender can enable awareness of other systems of oppression such as age, physical ability and sexual

orientation (Bryson, 2003). Montelaro (1996) posits that women from Africa and the African diaspora, especially, have embraced the idea of a network of women who support each other, especially mothers, since mothers are most vulnerable in the early stages of their children's development and need additional sustenance in African countries which often struggle with poverty, diseases and political turmoil. This womanist concept of universality also emphasises its primary goal of the well-being of the entire community, as articulated by Walker who highlights the importance of survival, wholeness, and "love for the Folk" (Walker, 1983:xii). These tenets gain special value in societies torn by ethnic divisions and civil wars in Africa.

Montelaro further argues that: "Womanism allows women to weave together their maternal identities and histories in order to revise their oppressive circumstances and to rewrite more acceptable scripts for themselves" (Montelaro 1996:71). This expansion of womanism encompasses various other women's movements within and beyond feminism, blending political activism, spirituality (with a specific focus on female expressions of divine authority), and environmental concerns during the 1990s. Notably, recent iterations of womanism have embraced elements of eco-feminism, emphasising wholeness, environmental stewardship, and the safeguarding of natural assets. As ecofeminism posits that all life forms are sacred and interconnected, it opposes patriarchal norms that result in the exploitation of the planet's resources without regard for long-term repercussions. Many adherents of eco-feminism draw parallels between society's treatment of animals, the environment, and women.

Scholars have reaffirmed that African womanism continues to reinvent itself and functions as an operational paradigm which carefully monitors processes of creation and definition of the roles that women play in their communities so that previous mistakes can be avoided, and essential balance maintained. The theory remains dedicated to the struggle against oppression and fragmentation, rejecting any kind of behaviour whose goal is to denigrate a community or individual based on differences in race, culture or class. It can therefore be asserted that womanism has evolved from a policy to a philosophy of life. Montelaro (1996) supports the argument that Walker (1983) articulates by urging all women to create a platform based on the communality of female experiences, which would allow them to communicate better with one other.

In contrast, in her works, Walker painstakingly demonstrates that women become supporters of patriarchy when they subscribe to power games whose aim is to win dominance through the subjugation of others which can take many forms such as racism, sexism and classism. In Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Al-Harbi (2017) portrays the situation of Maiguru, Nyasha and Chido's mother, who represents the ultimate image of an Africana mother and nurturer, when she constantly provides her love and concern to her children and all children of her community. Tambu recounts the sweet welcome and kind treatment she received from Maiguru when she arrived at the mission.

Al-Harbi (2017) goes on to say that postcolonial feminist theory challenges both the hegemonic power that indigenous men built after the Empire and the colonial forces. For instance, Salman Rushdie depicted the division of British India into Pakistan and India in his novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), and Chinua Achebe argued the need of understanding one's own history by presenting precolonial Igbo civilization in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). On the other hand, Indian author Bapsi Sidhwa depicted the tragedy of the Aya the violent sexual assaults committed in the sake of establishing two independent nations in *Cracking India* (1991), a book that dealt with partition. *Both God of Women: A Play in Three Acts* (2008) and *The Other Presence* (2008) by Sifiso Nyathi made the same observation. For example, in *The Other Presence*, Nyathi writes about Kachana, a woman character who is depicted as being of loose morals, a woman known to drink excessively and keep company with men, unlike her female counterparts who restrict their company to women. According to Absalom (2019), this picture is unfair because it denigrates women because the author fails to mention the males who accompany Kachana, who are likewise assumed to bear the responsibility for their companionship and are therefore equally terrible or unworthy. That is why this research emerges within the framework of African womanism to challenge the historical patriarchal gender oppression that has shaped the material circumstances of African women. In brief, it aims to demonstrate how women resist their socially constructed cultural identities. To achieve this, the study relies on the texts by Namibian female writers and other scholars who have explored similar topics, utilising them as secondary sources.

2.3 African postcolonial feminism

According to Okpokwasil and Chidimma (2023) feminism is a branch of philosophy and an aspect of existentialism that does not seek to set men against women nor women against men, but it is a philosophy of re-integration, opportunity, development and care. It is a philosophy of self-realisation and actualisation: a philosophy of womanism or of egalitarianism (an egalitarian philosophy), which helps women realise that they are neither sex tools nor chattels but that they are persons, bundles of possibilities as well as ends in themselves. Feminism is further grouped into various kinds such as equity, liberal or first-wave feminism, gender, radical or second-wave feminism and socialist or Marxist feminism.

In this study, the feminism theory is employed in the context of African postcolonial feminism as an African womanist literary criticism to address black women's genderspecific issues, including all aspects of oppression. It focuses on the experiences and struggles of African women in all parts of the world. African womanism is a version of African feminism that has discarded Western epistemologies. It considers the indigenisation of the once-colonised peoples. Terborg-Penn (1995:3) states that "African feminism is a theoretical approach devised in the early 1980s by Filomina Chioma Steady, an anthropologist, who herself is an offspring of the African diaspora". Born in Sierra Leone, Steady's ancestors were enslaved in another area of the African continent, (Terborg-Penn, 1995). The legacy of her family experience motivated Steady to reformulate African feminist theory so that it covers not only the experiences of women of African origin, but also of women of the African diaspora, globally.

The discussion in this section, therefore, opens with Western feminism and moves to African feminism, through the lens of African womanism. When African women's writing first appeared in the 1970s, it was primarily intended to correct misrepresentations of African femininity that were then common in African literature (Dube, 2020). Through their literature and activities, feminist practitioners aimed to show that they were pertinent to the African context and, moreover, that they were not just copying the practices of their Western feminist counterparts. The researcher concurs with Ordu (2021) who suggests

that womanism, as a subset of African feminism, provides a framework for assessing the works of African female authors critically.

Ordu (2021) stresses:

It could be argued that Ogunyemi's womanism is just one of many forms of African feminism, such as motherism, a theory proposed by Catherine Acholonu that puts motherhood, nature, nurture, and environmental respect at the center of its theorizing; and 'stiwanism,' which comes from the acronym 'STIWA', which stands for "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa", developed by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie; and 'stiwa'. As a result, womanism is a social change approach based on the experiences of African, African American, and other women of color. (p. 62)

Thus, in this study, it is essential to recognise that feminism, both as an activist movement and as a body of ideas, underlines the need for a positive transformation of society. This transformation ensures that women are not marginalised but are treated as full citizens in all spheres of life, warranting extensive theoretical examination. It is beyond the scope of this study to offer a comprehensive survey of these debates, and therefore the researcher will focus on those that are most pertinent to her research. It should also be noted that this study does not intend to portray African postcolonial feminism as antagonistic to men. Rather, it is viewed as a framework aimed at challenging the forces of patriarchy and raising awareness about aspects of women's subjugation that may differ from the generalised oppression experienced by all African people. In other words, in agreement with feminist politics, it is evident that many women writers in Africa have either rejected the feminist label altogether or have vacillated between endorsing the label and refuting it.

The term postcolonial has been defined in different ways by various authors. It describes all cultures that have been affected by modern imperial movements. Buchanan (2010:373) states that postcolonial studies are a loosely applied rubric for a large variety of work (creative and critical)... "with a shared interest in the effects of colonisation on the cultures of both the colonisers and the colonised". They focus on the historical movements that began when colonisers and the colonised first made contact, the chain response that

was evoked from both parties in all aspects of their lives, and the manifestation in the literary production and practices of such contexts. The postcolonial framework of reading interrogates the various strategies employed by the empire to impose its domination, the multiple strategies adopted by the colonised to resist, survive, revolt or collaborate with their dominators, as well as the 'space in between' created by the 'contact zone' (Pratt,1992).

There are different types of feminisms, such as liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, cultural, developmental, echo and third-wave feminisms, among others (Mann, 2012). Although they may all recognise the problem of patriarchal-centred structures and their impact on women, they utilise different frameworks of analysis and propose different solutions, including resistance, particularly towards the cultures of the colonised. For example, postcolonial subjects resisted the coloniser by asserting the relevance and reverence of their cultures, economic and political structures, and early feminism called upon women to reject established cultures, literary canons, interrogate history, religion, and related matters – virtually every aspect of life. The call included showing that colonisation had been conceived from a patriarchal point of view that suppressed the presence, contribution and subjectivity of women. Apart from being oppressed under patriarchal modes, they were also subjected to their race, class or religion. On the contrary, postcolonial resistance required colonised men and women to affirm their cultures, economies, and political structures, given that the colonial ideology of domination proceeded by dismissing the cultures of the colonised by labelling them as pagan, childish, devilish, uncivilised, barbaric and only worth to be replaced by the civilised cultural systems of the coloniser (wa Thiong'o 1986:4-33). For colonised women to name their own cultures as patriarchal and deserving to be re-imagined was perceived as dangerously befriending the colonising ideology (Dube, 2020).

For many black women intellectuals, developing a suitable theoretical framework for assessing the writings of African women is crucial. According to these thinkers, interpreting African literature through the lens of Western feminism means distorting the continent's rich cultural legacy and the African experience.

The arguments in this research are based on African womanism and postcolonial feminism as master theories, supported by a mixture of concepts under the umbrella of literary criticism as an evaluation of literary works, in terms of feminist aspects. Dube and Rukundwa (2020) and Van Aarde (2009) define the contextual framework as a theory linked to race, culture and gender, settler and native dynamics. Additionally, the creative practices of postcolonialism within the context of African women writers have been highlighted by scholars such as Rhode (2003) and Ben-Daniels (2020). Ntiri (2001) and Chikafa-Chipiro (2019) elaborate on African womanism as both a theoretical concept and an ideology tailored for women of African descent, deeply rooted in African culture, and emphasising the pivotal role of black women in various spheres from family to national politics (Hudson-Weems, 1993). "This framework serves as a means to address the unique struggles and experiences of African women globally, emphasising the imperative of self-definition and empowerment in the face of historical marginalisation and oppression" (Chikafa-Chipiro, 2019).

Examining the definition of womanism, the researcher aligns herself with Izgarjan and Markov (2012), who describe womanism as the concern for women and their roles within their immediate surroundings, whether in the family, local community, or workplace, as well as within the broader global context. They reference Walker's characterisation of a womanist as a "black feminist or feminist of color" who embraces and prefers women's culture, emotional flexibility, and strength, and is dedicated to the well-being and wholeness of all individuals, regardless of gender (Walker, 1983:xi). Walker roots womanism firmly within black matrilineal culture, deriving the term from "womanish," a term used by black mothers to describe girls who seek knowledge beyond societal norms and exhibit behaviour considered "outrageous, courageous, or willful" (Izgarjan and Markov, 2012:305).

In contrast, Taiwo (2019) posits that womanism transcends gender specificity, focusing instead on harmonising and coordinating differences, ending all forms of oppression and dehumanisation, and promoting well-being and the common good for all individuals, irrespective of identity, social status, or origins. Furthermore, Walker's definition of womanism differs notably from feminism on various fronts, although there are likely additional distinctions beyond those highlighted.

Izgarjan and Markov (2012) states:

For one, womanism focuses on race in a way that feminism does not. The second is also womanism's commitment to the 'entire people' rather than just women. Alice Walker is an African American woman, and womanism is therefore a principle founded and grounded by the experiences of African American women. I am appropriating this term for my own use (as opposed to feminism), since as stated before, I am a South African Indian woman, and issues of color and class are a significant part of our lives. Further, my ancestors, like those of African women, stand in the history of discrimination. The term womanist takes these important issues into account. I recognize that this is an African American term, but while women in South Africa struggle to come up with a term that fits our contexts I am content with using the term "womanist." Womanists accuse feminists of focusing on finishing gender based oppression that ignored race and class. (p. 305)

Kolawole (1997) states that African American scholar Clenora Hudson-Weems created the idea of Africana womanism in the early 1990s in reaction to mainstream feminism's constraints and exclusions, which did not sufficiently address the complexity and intersectionality of black women's experiences. The researcher will examine the fundamental ideas of Africana womanism and how it aims to recover the stories and identities of the African women chosen for this study, drawing on Kolawole's work. Africana womanism is illustrated by Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) through the use of two female characters, Nyasha and Tambu, whose names and identities are derived on their actual experiences as Africana women. They understand that by taking on their Africana names, they are rejecting the inaccurate and misleading label of the coloniser. Two characteristics of Africana womanism are their authenticity and wholeness, which are derived from their unwavering desire to identify themselves in accordance with their cultural reality. Their sincere sisterhood is emphasized by their intense love and care for one another, which is another aspect of Africana womanism. Moreover, an African woman in *Nervous Conditions* is not oppressed by her male counterpart; rather, as Maiguru's character demonstrates, she understands her place as a vital partner and compatible with her man in building their existence. Given her

established identity as a functional mother and nurturer to her family and community, she realizes the futility of fighting her spouse for a voice. In this regard, the character of Kauna will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this research to establish cultural awareness of womanism as confined to African women. In the same sentiment, Muslim and Arab women should strive to attain their cultural autonomy instead of blindly imitating other foreign agenda. Utilising the approach of Africana womanism, Muslim and Arab women should cooperate in creating their own paradigm which stems from their own social reality and reflects their cultural autonomy and integrity.

Furthermore, there are many epistemological positions in which these women's writings may be situated. These include feminism, African feminism, black feminism, Stiwanism, Motherism, Africana womanism, and so on. While the application of feminism removes these African women's works far from their socio-cultural milieu, others like black feminism has failed to adequately address the need for an African-centred framework for these works. In this context, Africana womanism emerges as a more suitable framework through which to analyse the texts of this thesis, given that the womanist theory articulated by Hudson-Weems highlights the distinctive African characteristics of African women. Therefore, my examination and adjustment of the arguments in this research are grounded in the relevance and appropriateness of the Africana womanist theory for analysing *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas (2001), *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* as told by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila (2013) and *Taming my Elephant* (2016) by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu. The focus of the argument will be on the portrayal and elevation of womanist principles through the female characters in these books, aiming to provide context for how these authors depict the transformation of the African woman's image. Additionally, it serves as a strategy to challenge and undermine stereotypical perceptions about African women that have prevailed in male-authored works.

Like Walker, Namhila, indeed expresses the feelings of the main character from a womanist androcentric perspective, the term that Walker uses to connect black women to feminism. This is in line with what Eboh (2000) says:

Gender inequality is the same everywhere. So, the problem arising from the subjugation of women is necessarily a universal one. Besides, if Africans speak and transact business with the language of the colonial masters, then they must have imbibed Western androcentric philosophies, gendered ontologies and concepts. Therefore, feminist emancipatory politics should apply in Africa. However, sexism is historically prior to colonialism, for gender politics was here in African nations long before colonial invasion, given that women were in the polity but not of it. (p. 105)

Walker further elaborates the meaning of womanism by saying that a womanist is “[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Further, Maparyan (2012) argues that womanism has a distinct internal logic of black political organising but challenges the unquestioned dominance of black men in those formations. Maparyan traces the idea beyond Alice Walker as womanism was pioneered by women of African descent; however, Maparyan does not limit it to African feminism. Hence, the concept strives to challenge all power structures which inhibit human growth and development and largely contributes to the discussions about dynamics of power, not just within feminist and womanist circles.

Contemporary African feminists acknowledge the fluctuating and contingent specificities of the African continent in relation to its culture and diversity. They argue that feminism in Africa entails creating spaces for women to participate in the management of their societies. This includes empowering women through access to resources such as health, education and housing. (Contemporary) ‘African feminism’ does not focus only on juxtaposing male dominance with female subordination or on fighting battles with men (Oyewumi, 2005), nor on fertility rates and poverty, but is also about challenging the status quo, describing the ways in which contemporary ‘patriarchies’ in Africa constrain women and prevent them from realising their potential beyond their traditional roles as hardworking income-generating wives and mothers (Mama, 2001). African feminism, Lewis (2005) argues, is not about reifying culture and tradition but paying attention to ‘voice, communication’ and ‘the understanding of women’s roles as political and historical actors’ (Lewis, 2005: 381).

2.4 Postcolonial feminism

According to Milto (2021), postcolonial feminism is a response to Western Eurocentric feminism, which did not pay attention to racial differences, feelings and the position of women in the once colonised territories. The theory is known as 'Third-World feminism' and partly draws on postcolonialism, which encompasses experiences endured during colonialism, "including migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, race, gender and responses to influential discourse of imperial Europe" (Elechi & Idika, 2021). According to Hidalgo (2020), postcolonial feminism was born out of resistance to the exclusions and generalisations of second-wave feminism. The variants of feminism are considered in this study to align the combination of disciplines in postcolonial feminism. This approach is novel in the examination of Namibian literature, particularly concerning cultural identity, as it influenced the direction and construction of postcolonial politics and culture (Kim, 2015). Therefore, it should be noted that this study adopts an analytical framework rooted in non-Western feminisms to discuss political demands, cultural emancipation and various social challenges.

As previously mentioned, there has been limited exploration of Namibian women's experiences in literary texts. Therefore, postcolonial feminism emerges as a guiding framework to investigate Namibian women's responses to colonialism in this study. In this specific research, postcolonial feminism is utilised to examine issues such as women's political participation, as demonstrated by characters like Amulungu and Mukwahepo. This analysis aims to highlight the persistence of patriarchal structures within both the family and the state, particularly during the liberation struggle. Furthermore, it explores how social inequalities, influenced by processes of globalisation and integration, affect the status of women in society.

Dube (1997) posits that:

The search for gender justice has led to the emergence of new theories and models reflecting the problems of oppression of women in the Afro-Asian world. (p. 16)

Given that the book of Mukwahepo deals with the issues of men and women participating in war during the liberation struggle of Namibia, the research aims to explore how gender

equality was practised within this context and what implications independence brought for both men and women who were in exile. In this context, the researcher's argument is supported by Al-Wazedi (2021), who suggests that postcolonial feminism serves as a critical theoretical approach aimed at examining the legacies of colonialism and their enduring impacts on women and gender. Al-Wazedi further states that the critical perspective of postcolonial feminism addresses inequalities related to hegemonic power relations by examining the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, as well as critiquing postcolonial gender roles.

This theory does not only focus on patriarchy as a source of oppression, but also examines how social inequalities are located in and constructed by a political, historical, cultural and economic context (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991; Quayson, 2000). Al-Wazedi further postulates that postcolonial feminism emerged as a reaction to the early proponents of postcolonial theory, who were predominantly men focused on nation-building after the devastation wrought by empire and colonialism on indigenous people's history. In this context, the concept of postcolonial feminism has been introduced in this research to avoid solely relying on pure feminism. As stated by Orjinta (2014), feminism was initially created to liberate all women from sexist oppression, but it fell short by not adequately addressing the unique challenges faced by black women.

According to womanism, the demands of black women vary from those of white women because womanism focuses more on black principles that highlight the significance of family, community, and motherhood. "Feminists usually fight to have space" (Orjinta, 2014:60). They strive to enter and venture into domains, responsibilities, and positions normally believed to belong to the domain of men. Consequently, they perceive men as their primary adversaries, as they are seen to hinder women's emancipation (Makaudze, 2014:135). From the womanist's perspective, women do not seek to fight for their own space or exclusivity, but aim to foster inclusivity among all individuals to collaborate in ensuring the survival and well-being of the entire African community (Gilliam, 2013). Gilliam further states that a woman does not compete for roles, duties, and privileges with her masculine counterpart. Instead, she and her masculine counterpart are versatile role players. Womanism is instilled in the girl at a tender age to inculcate meaning of life and to nurture her to be a woman with character. There are games which a girl is subjected

to, that teach her more about life and how life should be perceived. These games have meaning, wisdom, and education for the betterment of the girl in society. Thus, having considered the perspectives of both ideologies, the researcher acknowledges the complexity inherent in feminism and womanism theories, thereby avoiding bias in the findings of this research. Additionally, recognising the limitations of theory alone, the researcher is incorporating other approaches to ensure a comprehensive analysis in this thesis.

Although it attempts to accommodate black women, postcolonial feminism theory can be viewed as “[a] war waged against men which may not be the pre-occupation of the black woman in the African context who values relationship of men and women” (Sibanda, 2012:11). The theory also does not fully address the unique experiences of African women, prompting the researcher to make Africana womanism a master theory of this study. Africana womanism is uniquely aligned with the interests and concerns of African women (Al-Wazedi, 2021), providing a more comprehensive framework for analysis in this research.

Postcolonial African women’s writing explores how the female protagonists react to oppression in all its manifestations, both physical and psychological, and brings women’s voices ‘to the fore’ in Adeola James’s words “not as a token concession, but as a moving and determining force” (Begum, 2016). The character of Kauna in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* is pertinent to this statement, as it highlights the common perception held by many African writers that African women are mistreated or abused by their husbands and fathers. This situation also encourages many African writers to advocate for other women and men in their novels, dramas, and short stories.

In contrast, Schwarz & Ray (2008) posit that postcolonial feminism cannot be regarded simply as a subset of postcolonial studies as another variety of feminism. Rather, it is an intervention that is changing the configurations of postcolonial and feminist studies. Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of the intersection of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their subjective, work, sexuality, and rights. “Though such an enterprise is necessarily multidisciplinary in scope, like other postcolonial and feminist studies it

primarily inhabits the discursive space of cultural studies, which will provide the focus of this essay” (Schwarz & Ray, 2008:52). The researcher will endeavour to identify what are perceived as, and in some cases what are believed to be, the major concerns of postcolonial feminism, acknowledging the inherent limitations of our scholarship and the influence of our biases.

In addition, postcolonial feminist work in the metropolitan academy, especially as defined by the frame of cultural studies, is broadly of two kinds. The first is what we might call ‘theory’ as such, and the other is the newly motivated study of Third-World women’s writings in the classroom. Fisher (2013:1) states that postcolonial feminism, also known as Third-World feminism, is a “subset of feminism that developed in the 1980s because it appeared that feminism only focused on the experience of women in the western cultures”. It is founded on the premise that colonialism was an important factor that heightened the gender struggles of women. According to the same sentiment, Brooks (1992) defines postcolonial feminism as a feminism that is centred around the idea that racism, and the long-lasting effects of colonialism are inextricably bound up with the unique gendered realities of non-white and non-western women. Brooks’ (1992) view accommodates the reality that black women in former colonies have a plight that is peculiar to them, moulded by their skin colour and colonisation. Its scope, therefore, “focuses on the women who are in colonised territories and it engages with the political, economic and cultural effects of colonialism on women in the postcolonial world” (Brooks, 1992:47).

Furthermore, postcolonial feminist argues that colonial oppression, particularly, racial class, and ethnic, has in large part overlooked women in postcolonial society (Hidalgo, 2020). They oppose liberal and radical forms of feminism because they homogenise women’s experiences in the whole world. On the contrary, postcolonial feminism explored different context such as women’s lives, work, identity, sexuality, and rights in the light of colonialism and neo-colonialism alongside gender, nation, race, and sexuality.

The fact is that postcolonial women refuse to remain passive and continue to bear maleoppressive environments. These women seek to emancipate themselves through

education, struggle, and hard work. Postcolonial men re-colonised the bodies and minds of their women in the name of preserving their cultural values.

2.5 Intersection of African womanism: African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminism

The concept of feminism alone may not fully facilitate the completion of this study, particularly as the theory is perceived to have its roots in not serving Africa well, especially when both the messenger and the receiver are disconnected from their past, the origins of the concept, and their relationship to it. Feminism is a belief that women are suffering from subjugation, domination, exploitation, oppression and deprivation in various aspects of their lives in contrast to men. It is also a movement aimed at securing and defending equal rights and opportunities for women. Mohanty (1988:334) observes that “Western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests or analyses”. This notion implies the connotation of the term in the Western context, which firstly suggests that all feminism is Western feminism; secondly, that all feminist scholarship is Western feminist scholarship; and thirdly, that all Western feminist scholarship is uniform (Chambers & Watkins, 2012).

Despite its limitations, considerable successes have been achieved both politically and critically in a variety of contexts under the auspices of the ‘feminist individualist’ narrative. Therefore, for this research to avoid bias, a combination of theories in women’s writing was selected to establish the layer of intersectionality, aiming to develop a common understanding in all texts. One issue with the phrase, though, is that while it is frequently hailed as a fantastic new development in feminism, this really obscures its roots in black feminist philosophy. Intersectionality highlights the different simultaneous layers of oppression or discrimination (Haavardsholm, 2020). Like Indian postcolonial feminist thinkers, African feminists and writers believe that colonialism reinforced the inequalities and limitations that existed in many traditional African societies and that continue to exist now.

Postcolonial African feminism examines national liberation and socialist reconstruction by asserting that African women’s lives are diverse and dependent on where they live.

Clenora Hudson-Weems in her book *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1994) emphasises that Africana womanism differs from black feminism, African feminism, or Alice Walker's womanism, which celebrates womanhood and is all-inclusive. Hudson-Weems indicated that Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. The theory is grounded in African culture, and therefore it focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women (Hudson-Weems, 1994:24). In this research, the intersection of the three theories occurs in the realm of African women's writing. They guide the exploration of narratives by female African authors who identify female protagonists in their stories as a technique to respond to the manifestations of oppression within cultural perspectives. Through these protagonists, the authors amplify women's voices to liberate themselves and others. One of the striking characteristics of Africana womanist novelists is that their female characters search for wholeness; sometimes, they work side-by-side with their male counterparts, and at other times they strive to take care of themselves and aim not to be scapegoats of their male companions.

Additionally, Gilliam (2013) states that applying the African-centred perspective to AfroBrazilian female writing allows the writers to describe women of African descent in their own words. Gilliam further states that this method locates women as subjects of the investigation, as they offer authentic depictions of Afro-Brazilian womanhood in their own words. Like comparative studies of the construction of national identity in the works of Afro-Brazilian and other Afrocentric writings, including Africana American female writers, the ideology that Africana womanism and other feminist theories use, traces the element of transformation in literary works of women of African origin from "what she denominated as written subject to writing subject" Gilliam (2013:27). African postcolonial feminism examines national liberation and socialist reconstruction by asserting that African women's lives are diverse and dependent on where they live.

Davis & Adams (1986) delineate African feminism into seven subsections:

- (i) that women's struggle is due to European exploitation, (ii) that certain

“inequities and limitations” exist in traditional societies, (iii) that there were powerful women leaders and warriors in precolonial times, (iv) that African feminism respects traditional motherhood but questions traditional favouring of sons, (v) that women are self-reliant, (vi) that African feminism has to look “objectively” at women’s situation as these societies have gone through wars of national liberation and socialist reconstruction, and (vii) that African women are telling their own stories.

(p.8 -10)

The woman writer in Africa has a special task. Stratton (1994) cites Mariama Bâ who states in *So Long a Letter* (2008):

As women, we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which harms us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon. *We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa.* Women have a place within African literature, the place due to them on the basis of their participation – side by side with men – in all phases of the liberation struggle... (p. 55)

While discussing African feminism as part of postcolonial feminism, one needs to focus on Africana womanism as well. Clenora Hudson-Weems in her book *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1994), points out that Africana womanism is not similar to black feminism or African feminism or Alice Walker’s womanism (which celebrates womanhood and is all-inclusive). Hudson-Weems (1994) writes:

Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Namibian women writers who strive to liberate themselves from the master colonial and the colonial of gender as they expose it through the articulation of their culture. (p.2)

In addition, postcolonial feminism involves raising more awareness about the anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements, as well as the emergence of broader theory, and connections between the anti-globalised movement and feminism. In her own voice, Mukwahepo (Namhila, 2013) says:

Kwanza-Sul was an interesting place to live. It had a life of its own and, even though we were in a war situation, people were happy. Everyone was kind and helpful towards each other. An individual struggle was a shared struggle. We tried to create a real family life within the camp. (p. 97)

Similarly, Andreas explicitly engages with 'postcolonialism' and 'feminism', and locates their narrative in relation to Third-World feminism. For instance, Andreas challenges the norms of Oshiwambo culture and its patriarchal influences through the character of Kauna, portraying a rebellion against their historical connections to Western colonialism which continue to influence the cultural identity of African women.

For this reason, this study does not exclusively centre on womanism as a singular theory, but rather incorporates the perspectives of African women writers whose thoughts are intertwined with "the literary responses of Afro-American feminists, providing a platform for marginalized black women to assert their identity and free themselves from patriarchal constraints" (Arab, 2020:64). Thus, this study operates under the premise that postcolonial feminism and womanism are employed interchangeably.

According to Akwanya (2015), courses in literary theory are designed to present theoretical approaches, usually derived from other disciplines mainly within the human and social sciences, which open certain doors to literary works or help to throw light on aspects of literature, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, history/historicism, philosophy and ethics, cultural anthropology, and gender studies. Utilising these approaches and concepts often leads to a richer understanding of character or incident, discourse or power relations, but language is typically explored in these approaches for its information content about the specific object of interest, whether it be the hidden motivations of character or the ideological basis of decisions which appear on the surface to be disinterested.

The theories examined in this chapter can extend beyond literary analysis and offer insights into various research domains, including cultural relativism, a fundamental aspect of cultural anthropology. Cultural relativism entails comprehending each cultural context on its own terms, relative to its unique beliefs, values, practices, institutions, and historical context (Eller, 2015).

The review of previous work will enrich the interpretation of the texts to be studied by identifying cultural issues that were not addressed to an extent that they deserve preservation or need reconsideration due to multiculturalism. The researcher foresees the utilisation of a combination of modernisation theory, post-colonial theory and other possible theories to enhance the interpretation of transforming modernity and the aspects of culture in the selected post-independence Namibian texts.

Postcolonialism delves into the interconnected issues of power, religion, and culture as they relate to human experiences (Warren, 2000). This study focuses on examining the concept of transforming cultural identity within Aawambo cultural practices in postindependence Namibia. The anticipated findings are expected to offer nuanced insights into the interpretations and expressions found within literary texts. The researcher anticipates that this initial investigation will uncover the fundamental aspects of transforming cultural identity, considering both internal dynamics within African culture and external influences from assimilated cultures. These findings are expected to elucidate strategies for cultural transformation aimed at fostering unity among the Namibian people, challenging gender norms, and dismantling male-dominant systems.

Ultimately, the goal is to relegate the patriarchal system to the annals of history within the Aawambo community and Namibia as a whole.

The researcher anticipates discovering that the relationality between males and females in Namibia is reflected in emerging themes across various disciplines, indicating a relational kinship. Exploring this relational kinship in conjunction with the modern cultural paradigm is expected to enhance comprehension of relationality as a fundamental operating principle in contemporary cultural contexts. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this investigation will foster growth at the intersections of these study areas, leading to a more integrated understanding of Namibia's current cultural landscape. These growth

points will also contribute to the development of a literary theory capable of interpreting and evaluating cultural texts being produced in Namibia and across Africa.

Moreover, the researcher anticipates discovering that theoretical advancements in cultural contexts have evolved in tandem with digital technology. Additionally, the researcher expects to observe that relationality within the emerging modern cultural paradigm is intertwined with the evolving nature of information, as exemplified by the Internet.

Finally, the researcher anticipates the necessity of developing an alternative logical structure to present this study in a manner that preserves the integrity of the information. This structure should reflect the interconnected nature of the involved information.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted various features of African womanism and African postcolonial feminism, demonstrating their relevance to the exploration of the selected texts within the African context. The authors, united in their opposition to apartheid, have utilised the transitioning context to address issues concerning both the marginalised majority and the subalternised women. The main aim of this chapter was to discuss the theoretical framework by examining these prominent theories as the central arguments of this study, calling for the transformation of cultural identity. The idea was to draw upon the insights of feminist thinkers and elucidate some of their concerns regarding the representation of women, particularly from Western perspectives, where women have often been depicted as objects rather than subjects. The theories facilitate the comprehension of Namibian post-independence literature, aligning it with the works of other African women writers and theorists. They provide insight into how these writers articulated their own and others' experiences of cultural subjugation, as seen in characters like Kauna and Mukwahepo, as well as in narratives depicting interracial marriages, such as those found in Amulungu's work. In summary, the chapter concludes that paradigms such as African postcolonial feminism and African womanism are not entirely separate from mainstream feminism theory, as their proponents might argue.

Instead, they complement each other, providing a grounded significance and analysis of the experiences of African women (Kerner, 2017).

In addition, it was concluded that the illustrations of Africana womanism and African postcolonial feminism theories in this research have highlighted significant disparities between the formulation and purposes of African feminism and Western feminism. These disparities stem from factors such as race, sex, and the global oppression of women. Researchers such as Karenga and Tembo (2012) have emphasised that the African-centred womanism tradition is diverse and rich, with its origins in Africa. It concerns itself with the rights and dignity of women, their agency, their rightful relationships with men, and the vital roles they play in the construction, maintenance, and development of family, community, society, and the world at large. On the other hand, Western feminism and other feminist movements were found to inadequately encompass the experiences of African women.

Furthermore, the discussions in this chapter reveal that Africana womanism emerges from an intellectual arena of modern black critics and writers. This contributes to its full representation in this research, as it serves a multidimensional and flexible approach due to its influence of Africanism in African texts and the heroism of the authors as African women eager to transform their African cultural identity. In this regard, the theory provides a method for accomplishing the objective of this analysis, as it was designed to provide a framework to overview female writings in the context of Oshiwambo culture. This serves as a way to address and transform the cultural environment that affects them as African women in modern society, advocating for the cultivation of a new conducive African culture and tradition.

Finally, the incorporation of other postcolonial feminist theories and methodologies, in addition to Africana womanism, provides a comprehensive reading list of issues identified in this thesis. This attempt uncovers an African-based female perspective and demonstrates that authors such as Amulungu, Andreas, and Namhila do not merely designate their writings as Africana womanist, but they extend beyond unidimensional representations of womanhood. As Gilliam (2013) suggests, they reflect multiple experiences and realities of women. Additionally, as Taiwo (2019) argues, black female

writers integrate womanist objectives that revolve around ideas of motherhood, spirituality, community, hospitality, healing, mutual aid, and self-help. Therefore, the application of womanism and feminism theories supports the deconstruction of the protagonists' characters, indicating hope for reshaping the perceived irreversible culture and tradition that position women at the centre of the patriarchal system.

The following chapter will focus on the critical analysis of Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*.

CHAPTER 3 AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN MARRIAGES, INHERITANCE, AND WIDOWHOOD IN “THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU” BY NESHANI ANDREAS

3.1 Introduction

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu presents an imaginative narrative set within the cultural milieu of Oshiwambo society. Neshani Andreas skilfully portrays life in this cultural setting, drawing upon well-documented perceptions of Aawambo cultural practices and norms. The story unfolds through the perspective of a narrator who is not directly involved in the action but possesses intimate knowledge of the characters and their lives.

Central to the narrative is Kauna, the protagonist and close friend of the author. Through Kauna's experiences and interactions, Andreas explores themes of womanism as defined by Alice Walker, emphasising a commitment to the survival and well-being of the entire community, irrespective of gender. This echoes the principles of Africana postcolonial womanism, which seeks to depict positive representations of black female political

activism. Often, such activism manifests as a strong desire to challenge and disrupt existing power structures, as reflected in the literature of the 20th century written by black women.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Andreas's storytelling serves as a vehicle for highlighting the complexities and nuances of Oshiwambo culture, while also addressing broader themes of gender, identity, and social change within the context of postcolonial Africa.

According to Alexander (2022), *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* is set in postindependence northern Namibia in the imaginary village of Oshaantu. The plot revolves around the contrasting marriages of two friends, Kauna and Mee Ali. Kauna's abusive and violent marriage to Shange is narrated by Mee Ali, who, in contrast to Kauna, is happily married and enjoys a loving and caring relationship. Mee Ali weaves tales of various women exploring their relationships with one another, the village, the land and the seasons.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), the analysis will adopt a postcolonial perspective to investigate the cultural issues that Andreas exposes, particularly concerning the subjugation experienced by women in Oshiwambo culture. The word "postcolonial" refers to resistance against the "colonial" power and its discourses that continue to influence different cultures, even those whose revolutions have severed their official connections to their colonial overlords (Tyagi, 2014).

Sarkowsky (2012) argues that narratives of black women find ways of rendering their experiences as extremely marginalised subjects of colonial systems of oppression and thus as both aesthetic and ethical interventions. Asma (2015) concludes in his research that an African novel is a very striking example of postcolonial literature since it explores the struggle for the quest of identity. In this context, the interpretation of the selected texts in this research will assume the views of representation of women, when these authors challenge and justify the era of colonialism regarding the elevation of men over women. Their efforts to introduce ideas of reshaping self-identity, and publishing cultural issues as they do it through literary work, are acknowledged.

Andreas' novel, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, sheds light on the inferior status and role of women in a Namibian society with "deeply embedded role expectations and traditional

practices” (Arich-Gerz, 2010:25). Patriarchal conventions are demonstrated and mirrored in the story of Kauna, the central figure, and her violent and philandering husband, Shange. Through issues like “marriage, divorce, widowhood, reproductive rights, religion, inheritance, and economic status of women, the novel critiques a traditional system that seeks to silence women and close any pattern to empowerment” (Victor, 2013:54). Set in the Oshaantu Village in northern Namibia, the novel is narrated by Kauna’s older friend and confidante, Mee Ali. Like the female protagonists in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* (1979), Kauna’s marriage is portrayed as an “intersection of multiple oppressions” (Newton & Rosenfelt, 1985). While female characters like Mee Maita passively accept the spousal abuse of women in the community, characters like Mee Ali and Mee Mukwankala resist these oppressive patriarchal practices without compromise, keeping the hope alive that the eventual transformation of the entire community might be possible. Hence, the importance of this study which seeks to dissect the status and role of women in traditional Namibian society (Victor, 2013), focusing on issues like marriage, divorce, widowhood, reproductive rights, religion, inheritance and ownership.

Furthermore, in her introduction to *Unravelling Taboos: Gender and Sexuality in Namibia*, LaFont and Hubbard (2007:1) state that although the advent of Namibian independence in 1990 offered the hope for the realisation of the restructuring of gender roles and sexual liberation, it also “fostered nationalism which in turn has fostered a self-consciousness about national identity and morality”⁴, as well as a “reverence for ‘traditions’, including those that deny gender equality and sexual determination”, under the auspices of nationalism.

In her critiques of the colonial implications of scholarship on and about Africa, Oyewumi (1997) invites us to return to history by asking fundamental questions about African societies. Positioning her work within Yoruba society, she delves into the pre-colonial histories of Oyo life, juxtaposing them with colonial social formations to expose the inaccuracies and biases imposed on that society. Through conceptual and linguistic analysis, she conducts archaeological excavations to challenge and question scholarly interpretations of African cultures by Western and colonised African scholars. Her argument is based on the premise that both Western and colonised Africans utilise

structures and frameworks that are foreign to local contexts, thereby distorting realities and imposing interpretations that restrict and misrepresent African experiences (Apusigah, 2008). In her narrative, Andreas vividly portrays the dynamics among village women, illustrating both their competition and their solidarity and friendship. She affirms the inherent beauty of their spirits and personalities, emphasising their right to dignity and choice. Throughout the novel, she delves into themes such as widowhood, the traditional agricultural society, and the oppressive sociocultural realities faced by women. Andreas skilfully depicts the violence and abuse endured by women, in conjunction with their essential economic, cultural, and social roles within society (Alexander, 2022).

4 Choudhary (2019) explains national identity as a person's identity or sense of belonging to one state or to one nation. Moral identity is about the importance of moral ideas, traits and actions to a person's sense of identity.

This portrayal may serve to underscore the dual oppression experienced by African women, both under colonialism and patriarchy. Unlike Jezile, who does not explicitly address patriarchy, Mukwahepo's narrative sheds light on these issues for the reader. Ngcobo (1990) crafts highly gendered female characters whose lives often rely on men for survival. Women who manage to excel in professional roles tend to pursue traditionally gendered occupations such as knitting or home economics (domestic science). However, in *Boleo* by Olebile Gaborone (1991), the protagonist is depicted in a radically different light compared to Ngcobo's works. Boleo emerges as a courageous visionary, traversing borders, engaging in political activism, and assuming leadership roles within the community.

In this way, the texts studied in postcolonial literature are necessarily framed by their historical and political contexts and traced along the structures of power.

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu adopts an omniscient point of view, elevating the narrative's explicitness as the narrator exhibits self-awareness by addressing the reader as an observer resembling Kauna, the protagonist. This storytelling technique aligns with omniscient narration, typically presented from a third-person perspective. Andreas, the author, assumes the role of an intrusive narrator, possessing comprehensive knowledge of all events and characters, as she offers commentary throughout the narrative (Peck &

Coyle, 1993). Andreas sheds light on the inferior status and role of women in a Namibian society with “deeply embedded role expectations and traditional practices” (Arich-Gerz, 2010:25). She takes the notion of an “all knowing” (Diasamidze, 2014), becoming flexible to direct the reader’s attention and controls what she tells about her friend Kauna. She imposes herself between the reader and what is happening in the life of Kauna and her husband, Shange, to maintain the omniscient position in the narrative. In the story, it is clear and obvious that Andreas is neither a character nor involved in the plot, except that she monitors and informs the reader about everything regarding Kauna, including the way she looks. Patriarchal conventions are demonstrated and mirrored in the story of Kauna, the central figure, and her violent and philandering husband, Shange. *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Neshani Andreas’ first novel, is an ambitious effort. According to Coxson (2006:693), the novel *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* aims to uncover the patriarchal violence and injustices inherent in traditional Namibian beliefs and practices.” Additionally, it endeavours to challenge the detrimental impacts of misogyny by offering critiques of the social institution of marriage. “The novel appears to be transformative, as it suggests that positive female friendships can help to change a patriarchal society (Coxson, 2006: 693).” This is demonstrated through the interrogation of issues like marriage, divorce, widowhood, reproductive rights, religion, inheritance and the economic status of women – all elements that Andreas highlighted to critique a traditional system that seeks to silence women and close any pattern to empowerment (Goremusandu, 2016:20). In other words, Andreas outlines specific cultural issues and gender aspects perceived by men as taboo and that men apply as tactics to discriminate against women to strengthen their own patriarchal nature in society. Thus, this analysis focuses on transforming cultural identity by looking at Aawambo cultural practices raised in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and how they are they perceived to shape the life of a woman in society.

Furthermore, the novel is based on gender issues such as feminism and patriarchy in Namibia, especially in Oshiwambo culture. Beukes, cited by Hafeni (2019), suggests that the novel presents a personal narrative focusing on two dynamic women in the village of Oshaantu, located in northern Namibia. It unfolds within a post-apartheid Namibian context, where HIV/AIDS is often perceived as a myth, and domestic violence is

rationalised by certain elders as an accepted aspect of marital life Andreas depicts Mee Maita as an elderly woman and a member of the church council who believes that marriage is one miserable, long experience. Husband and wife should fight every day, a man should exercise manhood by abusing his wife and children, and he should sleep with other women, otherwise “okwa tulwa mo⁴” (Andreas, 2001:4).

At this juncture, the researcher adopts Mama’s approach (1995) to analyse *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) from the point of view of African postcolonial feminism and literary criticism. Mama (1995) asserts, “Basically, I envision working on my analysis using

the work of one of the major voices in feminist postcolonial theory of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who is interested in how narratives are created and articulated in academic language.” In her best-known and critically acclaimed essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak explores the position of the colonised to find out if the subaltern is truly rendered mute by the colonizer (Spivak, 2004:14). Similarly, Riach (2017:12) states: “because they are always spoken for by those who are in position of power and they are never able to represent themselves”. Like Spivak, Andreas pays attention to the position of the female subject in (post)colonial societies as she depicts her own tribe Oshiwambo, narrowing the path she takes to specify the condition of woman in the African cultural setting using a microcosm technique.

Andreas (2001) observes issues of culture and tradition as they are happening and performed in the African environment. She takes Oshaantu, a small village, in Owamboland as route to narrate her story as a novel. The whole story takes place in an Oshiwambo setting, bringing a little scent of a modern life.

Starting her narrative with the customary traditional greeting signals adherence to cultural norms, a prevalent practice among villagers to express gratitude for the blessings provided by nature on that particular day. Exchanging greetings serves as a symbol of

⁴ *Okwa tulwa mo* is a phrase used in Oshiwambo culture to discourage women who are well taken care of by their husbands. It implies that a man should treat his wife poorly, akin to a slave, or else he is perceived as being dominated by his wife and is disparagingly likened to being ‘stuffed in the anus’.

respect, often accompanied by the honorific 'meme' for older women or 'tate' for older men, reflecting the cultural values of the community.

The adverse colonial portrayals of colonised women persist unchallenged even within the writings of postcolonial authors. Instead, these portrayals are often reinforced and echoed, particularly in texts where women are subjected to stereotypes.

3.2 Naming and stereotype

Naming is part of Oshiwambo culture. Highwater, as cited by Seema (2020), had this to say about culture:

Any culture is a series of related structures which comprise social forms, values, cosmology, the whole of knowledge and through which all experience is mediated. The rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these visible expressions they enable people to know their own society. (p. 2)

"What do we call one another? How do we identify ourselves?" (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). In Oshiwambo culture, it is customary for a woman to be affectionately addressed by her totem name, a practice that also extends to how a husband is expected to address his wife, using her totem name rather than her given name as a sign of respect. Similarly, children are typically referred to by their paternal totem and clans. This makes Oshiwambo culture matrilineal, and therefore this is the name that is passed on to one's children (Andreas, 2001:228). It should be noted that sometimes a woman is given a totem name associated with her natal family or clan, a dominant cultural identity pattern for women, the norm stated by Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) that promotes Westernstyle naming practices. On the contrary, the main character gets the name that exempts her from the norm. Kauna endures her childhood diminutive form of her given name, the identity that men drop and leave behind when they grow up: "many men leave behind childhood diminutive forms of their given names" (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003:69). She bears the name Kauna with several negative connotations, to fit the negative connotation, discrimination and the cultural injustice of society.

In addition, in Oshiwambo culture, children are regarded as gifts from the ancestors, and at times, as ancestors. If a child was born during disputes between the neighbours or during wartime or any other conflict situation, that baby could be named Kaunambili or Kaunalenga depending on the sex of the child. Kaunamwene referred to a situation of rejection, while Kaunamwene could be given to a baby whose father rejected responsibility for the pregnancy, Kaunapawa was a message regarding the world and the workings of the world and how best to live in the world (Nakapunda & Nakapunda, 2019). Therefore, the name Kauna literally refers to various unstable conditions under which a baby was born, usually a baby girl, although Andreas leaves the reader in doubt by using only the name Kauna as a stem without specifying the exact condition under which the name is used in the story. However, this has enabled her to deeply navigate all constraints, as anticipated in the connotation that the name carries.

Hypothetically, the main character receives the name Kauna at birth, which predicts the abuse, hardship and discrimination she will experience during her childhood. Perhaps Andreas selects the name Kauna as a stem to encompass all negativities and bad connotations commonly associated with the name. Like Akuuna in *The Bride Price* by Buchi Emecheta (1976), which means, 'I have nothing', Kauna carries the economic and social misnomer in her name. Kauna means 'there is nothing'. As a female character, Kauna, as her name suggests, dignifies Shange as *Rider* (2005:190) argues that "When a name begins to gain popularity among one sex, it tends to lose popularity with the other sex."

Initially, Kauna's name symbolises the deprivation of education, a fate decided by her own parents who prioritise her brother Blacky's education up to the secondary level instead. This scenario mirrors a common occurrence in many African cultures of the past, where parents invested in their sons' education while neglecting their daughters' educational opportunities. However, Blacky ultimately misses the chance to pursue further studies, rendering the parental decision futile.

One of the well-known African feminists, Dangarembga, in her *Nervous Conditions*, examines women fighting against colonialism and patriarchal oppression. Tambu, the

narrator, views her educational aunt Maiguru as overcoming the patriarchal oppression through education. Tambu says (Dangarembga, 1988):

My mother said being black was a burden because it made you poor, but Babamukuru was not poor. My mother said being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true. Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru in a big house on the mission which I had not seen but of which I had heard rumours concerning its vastness and elegance. Maiguru was driven about in a car, looked well-kept and fresh, clean all the time. She was altogether a different kind of woman from my mother. I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood. (p. 16)

From the extract, it is clear that Tambu opines that education gave Maiguru freedom and material comfort and also released her from gender responsibilities such as looking after children and the husband.

One feminist, Rana (2022), avers that:

Denying women access to equal and quality education opportunities encourages gender segregation and stereotypical behaviour in society. Perceptions towards gender roles are sowed by members of family and society very early on in the lives of men and women which adversely impacts the quality of the socialization process. (p. 4).

In the same vein, Oprah Winfrey (2023) says the following about the importance of education for girls:

But all the studies show that if you teach a girl, the girl goes back and teaches her community. So training a young woman in the way that she should go, as the Bible says, allows that woman to feel a sense of empowerment. And in most cases, that woman goes back and she teaches. When she learns, she teaches, she gives back to the community. (p. 11)

In this regard, Kauna becomes a victim of inequality when her parents discriminate and deny her the right to education, even when they realise that her brother Blacky jeopardises the opportunity given to him. Instead, he succumbs to unruly behaviour, including alcohol abuse, which later causes his death.

Angrily, Kauna blames her parents for not giving her a chance to go to school, especially her mother, who is impressed by the various latest cars that Shange brings when he pays them a visit. King (1996) states that, “women accept abusive relationships with men out of desperation for food for their children” (Andreas, 2001:68). Kauna becomes a victim of desperation as she says that her brother has sold her into slavery.

The name ‘Shange’ is also symbolic; it connotes ownership or belongingness. Shange means, ‘It is mine or it belongs to me’. Therefore, we can see how Kauna as a name determines the dignity of the female character, which in turn empowers Shange the male character to possess everything in the house and abuse his wife. Granny-Francis (2003) argues, “Stereotype permits people to immediately recognise and classify others by processing a few simple visual clues in the type of situation they found themselves.” Thus, Shange’s name contains characteristics that are socially desirable and favourable in society, while Kauna’s name contains characteristics that are undesirable and discriminative.

Hence, in onomastic practices of some traditional societies in Nigeria, stereotyped gender roles and patriarchy are deliberately perpetuated in the naming of female children, thus using naming traditions as weapons against girl-children (Mensah, 2023). Similarly, Andreas indirectly addresses this practice in her novel by exemplifying the name of the main character, Kauna, which is evaluated based on her identity and actions within the village of Oshaantu. The prefix ‘Kauna’ alludes to the universe, with a direct translation meaning ‘world’. The root words are ‘lenga, pawa, mwene’, for the full names, Kaunalenga, Kaunamwene and Kaunamwene.

Andreas chooses the prefix ‘Kauna’ without a root, perhaps to fit all the conditions Kauna encounters throughout the narrative. In contrast, the name of Kauna’s husband, Shange, does not have a negative meaning when it is uttered, especially when compared to names like ‘Mukwankala’ borne by another female character. This highlights how cultural norms

reinforce the status quo favouring men, while women are expected to conform to the patriarchal system.

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu portrays some of the cultural practices that need transformation to abolish gender discrimination and allow equal treatment of both men and women. Traditionally, Aawambo people name their children according to incidents which occurred on the day of their birth, a practice that was rejected by missionaries when they replaced those names with Biblical names (Brasche, 2003). Mensah (2023) states that naming is a linguistic universal; it is a central domain of social engagements in everyday life. It denotes identity, reinforces individuality, categorises its bearer and marks social connections and positioning through its symbolic character.

In African cultures and beyond, personal names carry significant weight beyond mere identification; they embody a wealth of social and cultural meanings for the name-givers.

This holds true in Oshiwambo culture, where men bestow names upon their children that reflect various aspects such as masculinity, entitlement, and social status. Naming practices serve as a tool for shaping power dynamics between genders, with gender roles often reinforced through the naming process. For instance, the practice of naming a child after a deceased individual is believed to invoke the spirit of the departed, illustrating the interconnectedness between the living and the ancestral realm (Mbenzi, 2006).

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Andreas employs a symbolic technique with the titles, incorporating the colours purple and violet to represent positive aspects of culture. These colours symbolise several significant themes within the narrative. Firstly, they serve to enhance the depiction of the village of Oshaantu and its homesteads. Additionally, the title holds symbolic significance, representing various transformations throughout the story. The use of 'purple' and 'violet' reflect a shift in connotations associated with women. Andreas employs these colours to liken the women of Oshaantu to the field flowers that adorn the traditional homesteads of the Aawambo, providing a broader perspective on their portrayal within the cultural context.

In addition, the colour purple-violet denotes the delicacy of Kauna as Andreas (2001) shows self-admiration of her own local environment when she compares the physical appearance of Kauna the protagonist at the time when she firstly arrived in Oshaantu with

the natural vegetation of the village Oshaantu. “Kauna is considered as beautiful, as the purple violet that grows in Oshaantu village” (Victor, 2013:55).

In other words, Andreas (2001) relates the delicacy of Kauna as a newly married woman when she arrives in the village Oshaantu. It resembles the pride of natural vegetation that grows in traditional houses, as she exemplifies the house of the old lady Mukwankala to show the pride of a woman. Andreas (2001) states:

Her homestead was just as clean as she was. The purple and white violets grew abundantly along the fence. (p. 110)

Andreas metaphorically continues to reflect the beauty of Kauna as reflected in the title of the book, when Mukwankala reminds Fiina (Andreas, 2001):

We called her the purple violet of Oshaantu. She was so delicate and she came when these flowers were in bloom... Shange turned that child's beautiful face into something that looked as if it had been through some strange incisions made by a clan from outer space... (p. 148)

From the above statements, we observe how Andreas uses the colour purple/violet to denote the delicacy of Kauna when she arrived in Oshaantu village as a newly married lady to Shange. She compares the physical appearance of Kauna with the beauty of nature, to show self-admiration of her own village and the local environment. One can also argue that Andreas depicts the two related colours to contrast the beauty of nature and cultural perceptions of human being, a woman in particular.

The presence of the colour purple-violet signifies a transformation in cultural identity, particularly in the realm of traditional medical practices within Oshaantu. The introduction of Sustera represents the emergence of modernity within the traditional medical community, as she embodies a shift towards embracing contemporary approaches.

Symbolically, the purple epaulettes adorned with three stars on Sustera's nursing uniform represent enlightenment and progress. This portrayal of women, exemplified by Sustera's role as a registered nurse, reflects positive representation and signifies the broader theme of women empowerment and emancipation within the novel. Andreas employs the contrasting imagery of the two colours to highlight the beauty of nature juxtaposed with

societal perceptions, particularly regarding women's roles and capabilities. This transformation underscores a shift from traditional social norms to more modern and inclusive perspectives, as discussed by Hall and Gieben (1992).

According to Uko (2019), at the end of the story, the symbolic implications of the colours purple and violet become central to the evolution of Kauna's character. She defies tradition by refusing to mourn her abusive husband, Shange, or pay tribute to him at his funeral. The colour red symbolises the adversity and discrimination Kauna faces as a woman, while blue represents ideals of care, protection, freedom, and happiness.

The other issue discussed in this section is the way in which women are portrayed in society, as indicated by different names given to female characters in the novel as stereotypical. Aries (1996) defines a stereotype as "a set of beliefs about characteristics presumed to be typical of members of a group", while Granny-Francis (2003) defines a stereotype as "a poured metal plate that simplifies and reduces people's value to characteristics by which they are generally said to be identified". Thus, Andreas depicts various names of the characters, mostly female characters, to show that stereotypes over-generalise, exaggerate and provide inaccurate depictions of women in society. In his definition, Rai (1996) states that "a name is something that is supposed to be a thing of pride, telling the world where you come from and a bit of your history", whereas Nakapunda and Nakapunda (2014) define a name as "a complete idea indicating what the person who gives it was feeling at the moment when the child was born." Therefore, even in Oshiwambo culture, before the missionaries came to Namibia, the Ovambo people only used their traditional names depending on specific messages indicating the conditions under which the child was born. However, many of the names are associated with negative stereotypes.

In many African cultures, there exists a societal expectation for women to bear children immediately after marriage, reflecting traditional gender roles and the importance placed on motherhood. Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), portrays the story of Nnu Ego, a woman who finds fulfilment in having children, particularly sons, despite facing poverty. Similarly, in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Kauna's inability to conceive immediately after marriage draws attention from the community. Despite her

struggles with infertility, Kauna feels pressure to fulfil societal expectations and maintain harmony within her marriage. Additionally, her husband's infidelity and abandonment further compound her challenges, leading to tensions with her in-laws and feelings of inadequacy. Kauna experiences a profound shock when she asks her mother-in-law if she has any idea of her husband's whereabouts, as he frequently fails to come home to eat. Despite her emotional turmoil, she seeks answers, only to face further distress as her in-laws shout nasty words at her and emotionally torture her by accusing her of being barren when they say (Andreas, 2001):

“*Okwa yi ku yakweni mbo haya vala*⁵!” Kauna said, shaking her head slowly, as if just thinking of what Shiwa had said all those years ago still stung her. “That killed me. Can you imagine how I felt? Since then, I have never asked anybody where Shange was: I worry, silently.” (p. 21)

Here, Andreas demonstrates how the African culture of polygamy increases Kauna's pain and humiliation when being replaced by another wife, whom her husband marries out of wedlock and for whom he builds a modern house in the same village. Andreas shows that this culture provides men with more power and choice to marry several wives as they please.

Despite Mee Ali escaping accusations of infertility, she faces allegations of using *muti* (magic) to drive a wedge between her husband and his relatives. While her mother-in-law treats her daughter well and recognises her son-in-law's genuine affection for her, she accuses Mee Ali of bewitching her son, Michael, for loving her too much. Mee Ali remarks (Andreas, 2001):

My son has a wife who has bewitched him. That woman is the laziest person I've known. Go and see for yourself. You will be confused as to whether you have entered a chicken coop, a pigsty or a homestead. (p. 25)

This is another aspect of woman abuse: Mee Ali's mother-in-law elevates her son, Ali's husband, by claiming that he is the one who keeps the house clean. However, since he is away from home working elsewhere, his mother refers to their house as dirty as a

⁵ He went to those who have fertile wombs.

pigsty. Mee Ali takes action to emancipate herself from the patriarchal society when she loses her virginity and becomes pregnant out of wedlock, aiming to avoid criticism from her in-laws regarding infertility. She recalls her teenage years to counter accusations of damaging her womb with Depo Provera contraceptives, indirectly elevating the status of men.

In contrast, Andreas (2001) rebukes the common perception of in-laws as largely practised in African tradition. She reveals how mothers-in-law take full ownership of their

sons and behave in an unruly manner towards their daughters-in-law when they are well taken care of by their husbands, yet, at the same time, they praise their sons-in-law when their daughters claim full ownership of their husbands' properties. That is why, even though Mee Ali has a caring husband who opposes the patriarchal tenets of the Oshiwambo culture by respecting his wife and giving her independence when he builds a house for her, his mother does not support the idea as she believes this is not how a real Owambo man would act. Both Kauna and Mee Ali suffer the emotional abuse of mothers-in-law.

One of the most prominent elements of Kauna's abusive marriage is the component of a consanguine family that empowers her husband, Shange, to sleep around with other women in the village to achieve the state of manhood. At the same time, her husband considers her a sexual object whose role is restricted to the household and raising children (Yasmina & Hanane, 2017). Instead of treating her as a new member of the family, Shange's mother and his sisters use this opportunity to abuse Kauna more and force her to cook for the whole family. She is being kept busy with house chores to preserve her femininity and womanhood as an in-law rather than worrying about her husband's whereabouts. The situation becomes unbearable when Kauna fails to get pregnant, and her in-laws accuse her of having used the family planning injection '*Depo Provera*' during her teenage years. Kauna becomes defenceless; she has no one to lean on, especially when her own mother indirectly joins her in-laws and shows no mercy but confronts her on why she is not getting pregnant. Traumatically, her mother tortures her more when she is overwhelmed by the fear of the lengthy period that passes without a child. Her mother reminds her that all women who got married around the same time

already have babies; even those who were married after her. Kauna becomes distressed and isolates herself from social gatherings, minimising her attendance at village functions. She wholeheartedly accepts the abusive marriage just to elevate the status quo of men, especially her father, who is a pastor at a village church – she states: “Mother told me that a divorce will have a really bad effect on daddy’s preaching” (Andreas, 2001:67).

Despite being the daughter of a pastor, the connotation carried by Kauna’s name continues to undermine the respect she is supposed to earn from the people in the village.

As a bride, she leaves her parents’ house to start a new family with empty hands, without any property in her name, marrying Shange, whose name dictates the ownership of their household’s properties. Kauna’s parents expose her to a traditional patriarchal society, particularly her father, who uses Christianity to reinforce patriarchal gender roles from the elders’ era, fearing that his daughter would not be obedient to her husband if she showed that she was also from a well-known family. Furthermore, Andreas highlights another technique applied by men to subjugate women, revealing a different form of discrimination practised within a hidden doctrine of Christianity. This doctrine encourages the victimisation of women, specifically perpetuating the subordinate position of children and wives of church leaders, such as pastors, in society.

LaFont and Hubbard (2007) assert that “the church discouraged traditional practices and beliefs, and reinforced the existing silence on gender and sexuality”. It is in this context that the guise of Christianity influences Kauna’s mother, leading her to prioritise pleasing her husband over traditional values. She convinces herself that sending her daughter as a bride with cattle could negatively impact her marriage, as a wealthy bride might challenge her husband’s ego (Andreas, 2001).

Although the Namibian Constitution prioritises the rights of women and children, as evidenced by the Married Persons Equality Act 1 of 1996, Namibian women, like their counterparts elsewhere, still face social challenges such as domestic violence, rape, and widow inheritance. In the novel, Andreas illustrates this through the character of Shange’s great uncle, Sheya, who advocates for the patriarchal doctrine of African big men. Andreas exposes the greed of men within families and their self-serving interests, leading to Kauna’s victimisation by tribalism and her suffering under the customary practice of

inheritance from her husband's kinship. This contradicts what Tripp *et al.* (2009) have stated regarding family law, which grants women the same rights as men in acquiring, administering, and controlling land and assets through inheritance or divorce.

Instead of the customary law ensuring that Kauna is protected and taken care of as the surviving spouse, Shange's relatives bribe the village headman to officiate in the grabbing of Shange's property and inform the mourners that the widow owns nothing in the house. This amuses even other women in the village who are masked behind societal male dominance over women to agree to marriage out of community of property if she is not from a wealthy family. Mee Katalina exclaims (Andreas, 2001):

Kauna did not have animals? Didn't she come with her own animals? I am sure her uncles did not send her empty-handed, just like that, without anything – cows, goats, nothing? (p. 41)

Additionally, the constraints of working in the traditional *mahangu* field and rearing children experienced by uneducated women in Namibia is another matter of concern in Andreas' novel. Relating to the life of Kauna, Andreas condemns such practices that deprive and confine women to subjective circumstances. According to culture, women are expected to spend their lives cultivating *mahangu* fields more than men in order to prove to their husbands that they are marriage material. It is also strongly believed that a woman's place is in the domestic and traditional sphere of society and women are prevented from entering the public sphere, which is reserved for men.

However, the bulk contribution of subsistence products by women is not valued. In any case, the ownership of property in families is still attached to men, as Sircar (1995) states, "a woman carried no property; she only has the right of usufruct over land for the purpose of providing food for the family". Therefore, we see how Kauna declares Shange's properties to his relatives (Andreas, 2001:101): "All the cattle are his except for a few goats and pigs."

As a result, Kauna's situation reinforces the ideal of traditional politics and jurisdiction that is redefined as exclusively male dominant.

Furthermore, Andreas reveals how Kauna disowns the benefits of womanhood that she is entitled to, as emphasised by Karim (1992):

Biologically women are different from men, and so they should be treated accordingly to be economically provided for, sheltered and protected within the containments of the house, reciprocating in moral virtue, modesty and domesticity.

In contrast, in Namibia, single mothers are often compelled to work in the informal sector or take low-paying, dead-end, insecure employment, such as the production of handicrafts and domestic work (LaFont & Hubbard, 2007).

Therefore, Kauna is perceived to carry her domestic chores not as a married woman who is supposed to receive compliments for her hard work from her husband, Shange, but just to be regarded as a woman like other women.

Although Kauna is not a single mother, her situation appears to be worse than that of a single mother. Due to her lack of alternative employment opportunities that would provide financial independence, Kauna finds herself trapped in an abusive marriage, enduring the situation until her husband's death or until they are separated by death. Instead of enjoying her status as a wife and as a mother by virtue of her predominantly private life, she does an unpaid job of cultivating the *mahangu* field to feed her children as well as to compensate for the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal society.

Initially, we observe how Kauna convinces herself to accept the type of marriage she finds herself in and to work harder for her children. Yet, her courage is consumed in a bitter struggle to survive the constant beating by her husband, Shange, who is supposed to take care of her as his wife and the children. As a breadwinner, Shange is supposed to provide for his family, but his actions make him to be a traditional functionalist model.

Hence, Kauna becomes a victim of male dominance and is subjected to societal and cultural inequality, the idea that good fathers are good providers and good providers make good fathers is something Shange rejects. In the end, Shange's death prolongs the constant pain that Kauna endures from the abusive marriage, leaving her with the branded scar of widowhood. Her in-laws and all of Shange's relatives organise his funeral

without her consent, knowing she has nothing to contribute. Consequently, they exclude her from the proceedings and accuse her of bewitching him, aiming to inherit Shange's properties without leaving anything for her as a widow and their children (Andreas, 2001):

We are not accusing you of anything. But it is important for us to know the truth about what killed our Shange. (p. 99)

Shange's relatives hide behind the old traditional authorities that invariably discriminate against widows. Yet, they overrule the customary proceedings that say a widow has to cultivate for her deceased husband the season after the husband dies. They decide not to go back to their houses to allow Kauna privacy to continue mourning her husband in peace. Instead, they formalise the act of chasing Kauna out of the house by inviting the village headman to lead the proceedings.

Furthermore, Andreas (2001) portrays Shange, the male character, as a classic example of male psychology in a patriarchal society, from the perspective of which women are inferior because of their otherness (Rhode, 2003). Rhode emphasises that Shange's manhood is the basis of his cultural identity, and as a result of racial discrimination and economic exploitation under the apartheid regime in Namibia, he is both racially and sexually insecure. As a result, he asserts his manhood in his exploitive and abusive relationship with his wife Kauna. Andreas, however, in relating the brutality of masculinity to the excess of power a patriarchal society makes available to men, shows Shange as simply conforming to a cultural norm which regards women as the mere property of a man – first of their fathers and then of their husbands.

Although Shange is not a churchgoer, and disobeys the sixth commandment by committing adultery, the connotation associated with both his name and the pastor's name (Shoopala) grants his body a decent burial when he dies. Shange receives a respectable funeral, orchestrated by Pastor Shoopala, whom Shange named his youngest son after. These practices elevate Shange's status, affording him greater respect on his final day on earth. He loves young Shoopala more than Kandiwapa, his firstborn daughter, whose name means: 'I am not able to do or say it'. As a result, and instead of the family looking for a pastor to conduct Shange's funeral, Pastor Shoopala volunteers to conduct the funeral service of his 'father' to silence the church council where

Mee Maita, one of the mourners, is a member. Proudly, one of Shange's brothers announces (Andreas, 2001):

... Pastor Shoopala will conduct the funeral service. He said he wants to bury his 'father' himself. (p. 141)

Here, Andreas sheds light on the oppression of women as a hidden agenda within the patriarchal domain of Christianity, particularly evident in the actions of church leaders like Pastor Shoopala. This portrayal resonates with the abusive behaviours depicted in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), where Emecheta critiques how colonial patriarchal policies exacerbate the marginalisation and oppression of Third-World women. Additionally, Andreas introduces the reader to gendered boundaries through the literal meanings of names, such as 'Shoopala' for a boy, meaning 'Very clean or fine', contrasting with 'Kandiwapa' for a girl, by having a negative connotation. Furthermore, Andreas uses the name 'Shoopala' for the pastor conducting Shange's funeral to expose the underlying intentions of men when naming their children. Shoopala's actions symbolise a form of self-liberation for Shange, absolving him of his transgressions and granting him a church burial, despite his need for forgiveness.

Andreas (2001) depicts Mukwankala, another name that exhibits humiliation and stereotyping of female characters in the story. The name, Mukwankala, has many meanings. It is derived from the proper noun 'Aakwankala' (Bushmen) in Oshiwambo dialect, in the plural form, and Omukwankala in the singular form (a Bushman). Generally, the name Mukwankala is used to refer to strenuous situations, for example when someone does not preserve for the future, being poor, a person without destiny or, the worst of all, a commoner. In the story, the woman who fights against women's oppression is victimised by patriarchal forces as she is perceived not to respect men when she speaks her mind and she who other women depend on to speak on their behalf. Men give her a name that identifies her among other women in order to discourage her to fight women oppression. However, Mukwankala turns up unexpectedly at Mr. Jackson's *cuca* shop, "a public arena often visited by men to confront Shange" (Victor, 2013). She reforms the respective patriarchal norm that "women don't like to speak in public" (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003:450). She gains the power of skilful talk as she debunks modesty,

discriminatory and public silence of women. Furthermore, she becomes the champion of downtrodden women in Oshaantu village and makes spousal abuse a public matter, and thereby she compels the men in her community to face their traditionally sanctioned roles as bullies. Although Mukwankala was known as a respectful person, who honours the critical aspects of the local culture, especially the exchanging of greetings, her actions when facing Shange is astonishing as she passes everyone without greeting: “Something was wrong” (Andreas, 2001:62). Mukwankala’s non-stop questions to Shange makes him mute. What he expects to be a joyous occasion of being entertained by the women at the *cuca* shop turns into a humiliation – his wife Kauna endures through his beating in public. Meanwhile, this reinforces his lost power at home. The confrontation by Mukwankala changes his face into a white ghost.

When Nnaif (in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*) comes home from Fernando Po where he worked for white men, he behaves like a lord and master at home (Munir, 2022:43). Frequently, he even refuses to answer Nnu Ego. Furthermore, being employed at the railway as a grass cutter, Nnaif is happy to reinforce his power at home, something he had lost as the consequence of colonial domination. Now, he can beat his wife (Barfi *et al.*, 2015: 28).

3.3 The subaltern speaks: A transformational view of widowhood

According to Molehe *et al.* (2020), in the olden days, women were always granted less power than men in African cultures. Too many cultural practices in African households illustrate this: it was thought that the boy child should be raised to become the supplier, whereas the girl child should take care of husbands and children. In Oshiwambo culture, practices such as the performance of rituals related to the death of a man are different from that of a woman, depending on the status of the dead person (Korieh, 1996). There are cultural aspects that justify a woman as widow. Familusi (2012), states that:

Widowhood is associated with many practices in traditional Africa, some of which is harmful and dehumanizing. These practices vary from culture to culture. Among the Yoruba, the duration of mourning for a widow is one year.

During this period, she is to refrain from sex and she must not remarry...

There is no specific mourning period for the widower. In fact, he may remarry shortly after the death of his wife because of domestic care. (p. 9)

For example, when a man dies, the widow has to vacate their main bedroom for a period of about three months, but if it is a woman, the man continues to sleep in that hut. Even, the inheritance, everything that a woman received from her husband in terms of clothing, adornment, implements and other items while he was alive, must be returned to his relatives upon his death (Tonjes,1996). Ngongkum (2016) observed that same situation in *The Widow's Might* (2006), exemplified by the sudden demise of a husband in Akwenoh's case, an unexpected catastrophe that thrusts the widow into a new and problematic status.

Ngongkum (2016) asserts:

In addition to the deep physical, emotional and psychological pain that strips her of all self-esteem and dignity, she must give her husband a befitting burial and perform the traditional widowhood rites demanded of her. (p. 141)

This is not the same for a widower; the house, wealth and the land where they live with his family belong to him; and in instances where the death of a woman or wife precedes her husband, the widowed husband stays on the land and does not pay anything for the land to be converted to his name. Similarly, Shabalala (2019) states that the same practice is happening in isiZulu culture, where all material goods accumulated before the death of the husband are given to the husband's family. Traditionally, children have been considered to belong to their mother's maternal family. The maternal family tends to hold most responsibility for children, including any social deviation or criminal behaviour. In other words, the maternal family carry the burdens of their female relatives even in a distant environment. The compassion of the woman's maternal family is anticipated and valued, while such emotion was rarely expected from the man's maternal family.

According to Kauuova (1999), once a woman is married into a family in Africa, she becomes part of that family even after her husband has passed away: "Thus the practice of levirate marriages was common in Africa. Some people call this practice 'wife inheritance' but others prefer to call it the care of widow." (Kauuova,1999:37) According

to Ngongkum (2016), in most cultures, the inheritance system which also discriminates against women (daughters) by their exclusion as heirs to the property of their natal families extends to widows too as they are precluded from inheriting their deceased husband's property, especially landed property. In contrast, it is a tradition in Oshiwambo culture that when a man or husband dies, a woman is given one year to cultivate and harvest crops, a belief that if she does that she fills up or closes up the footprints of her husband in the house and the surroundings. Thereafter, she returns to her maternal family with greater security and lives happily because that is where she belongs. In some cases, when the death of the husband is associated with witchcraft, the widow is chased away from her husband's house, immediately after the funeral, or often within days of the burial. In fact, it is unusual for the deceased man's family to descend upon the homestead the day after his burial to reclaim his items.

In contrast, Andreas (2001) demonstrates the practice of *Esiku lyomwaale*⁶ that is performed by the paternal family by setting off the fire that has been burning during the mourning period.

At a meeting to which Kauna is invited by the Shange family members, she is required to explain the cause of Shange's death, and to declare his wealth to them so that it may be shared among his brothers, sisters and mother (Uko, 2019:59).

Kauna experiences what Ngongkum (2016) emphasises as the exacerbated plight of widows in African culture, particularly regarding conflicts over property. During *Esiku lyomwaale*, instead of adhering to tradition, Shange's family compounds Kauna's emotional distress as a widow. They hold a private meeting, demanding an explanation for her husband's death. This situation leaves Kauna, already devastated by grief, torn between sorrow and frustration. The intricate questioning surrounding her husband's demise complicates the mourning process, and Kauna's family is excluded from these discussions. Consequently, her aunt, Mee Fennie, eagerly awaits updates, concerned about how Kauna is being treated by her in-laws. Kauna replies (Andreas, 2001):

⁶ *Esiku lyomwaale* refers to the day following the burial, which is a significant gathering for family members and relatives to share and inherit the properties of the deceased. It serves as the occasion for individuals who owed or were owed by the deceased to come forward and settle their obligations during the gathering.

Well, yesterday they called me and Mee Ali to a clan meeting to explain the sudden and 'mysterious' death of my husband. They think I killed Shange and they believe that I know where his wealth is and that I should give it all back to them. (p. 123)

The use of such disparate narrative strategies mirrors debates within both literary and historiographical studies on the functions of literature and the use of narrative methods when attempting to represent 'reality' or the 'truth' about the world.

Kauna's response resonates with one of the central themes in Spivak's work: agency, or the capacity of individuals to assert their own choices and perspectives. Her actions aim to advocate for the most marginalised individuals in society who lack a voice. Kauna employs a method to revive indigenous cultures that were systematically suppressed under colonialism.

Earlier in the story, we have learned that Kauna admits the hardship of her marriage and convinces herself that that is how marriage should be. Begum (2006) reaffirms the hardship of Kauna in an African marriage, by exemplifying Mara's situation in *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), stating: "I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife, and endured it just like I would menstrual pain". Symbolically, Mara adopts the depressing tone of a woman searching for a trace of her own image (Begum, 2006:113).

Kauna adheres to the cultural patriarchal notion that a woman ought to keep her feelings to herself domestic affairs in public, even when she is being abused terribly. Andreas (2001) re-affirms this notion by illustrating the situation of Mee Ali being confronted by her husband, Michael, when she tries to assist Kauna to divorce her abusive husband, Shange:

I did not think I would survive that rumour. The men hated me. They thought I was a bad influence. The women thought I was self-righteous. Shange ignored me whenever he could. My husband gave me a lecture! 'Ali, I think this time you went too far. For you to ask the church to end Shange and

Kauna's marriage. Are you crazy? You are not God... And now the men are looking at me badly. They talk behind my back; they say that I have a wife who is not disciplined. (p. 9)

Similarly, Shabalala (2019) exemplifies the same tradition in a Venda community in the past whereby a woman was never expected to be able to explore things on her own, as she was only expected to comply with the standard regulations which were set for her, like to remain at home, plough the fields, and cook for her family and bear children.

Furthermore, Kauna conceals the abuse inflicted by her husband Shange and maintains the facade of a normal marriage by remaining silent when he mistreats her in the presence of his relatives. She seeks refuge in her parents' home in silence. However, Kauna eventually decides to break her silence. She refuses to shed a tear when her husband Shange returns home dead. By doing so, she challenges the cultural expectation that a widow must display extreme grief, crying and wailing in public. Instead, Kauna bravely confronts the suffering she endured in her marriage and expresses her anger and indifference to her friend Ali. She reaches a point where she no longer cares about the societal norms dictating mourning behaviour. For Kauna, Shange's death represents a release from her suffering and a newfound freedom. She states defiantly, "I really don't care. I have nothing to lose" (Andreas, 2001:50)

Similarly, Nomonde Calata, the wife of a South African anti-apartheid campaigner who faced her husband's killers and informed them they had robbed her of a loving spouse and her children of a loving father. Her body was discovered by security police burned beyond recognition. After concluding her evidence to the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), she let out a piercing scream that shattered the stillness of the large city hall where the hearing was held. She "dared" to weep at the TRC hearing, giving voice to her suffering and expressing her years of suffering and sadness in public. She refused to be quiet, reclaiming her right to bear her pain for the world to see (Fish *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, Kauna decides to challenge cultural norms surrounding abusive relationships and the mistreatment of women, particularly widows. She chooses not to mourn her husband's death, symbolising her rejection of traditional expectations and her reclaiming of agency over her own emotions and actions.

According to Weiss (2004), in the cultural tradition, a speech on behalf of the widow is typically delivered by someone close to her, offering favourable words about the deceased. These words are often provided by the widow herself, reflecting her personal sentiments. Disregarding this tradition is considered taboo. Despite this custom, Kauna stands firm in her decision and informs her in-laws that she has nothing to say about Shange during his funeral.

Likewise, Akwenoh in John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *The Widow's Might* (2006) pessimistically postulates that (cited by Ngongkum, 2016):

'As for my husband's wealth, I don't know in the first place which wealth you are talking about. The little that I shall find, if at all I find it, will be used to bring up the children.' She looks forward to joining the Association of Happy Widows, geared towards protecting widows' rights, in the hope of being shielded from the greed of her in-laws. (p. 143)

Kauna displays no fear as she reiterates her self-awareness of the potential consequences of her perceived unconventional behaviour, candidly expressing her thoughts to her friend Ali (Andreas, 2001).

Ali, whatever I do, whether I faint or cry on top of my lungs so that I lose my voice and say how 'wonderful' a husband Shange was, they will still do what they will do. (p. 143)

This underscores the observation made by Nahole, P.N. (2020) that women often become targets of maltreatment after their husbands pass away, especially at the hands of their husbands' family members and the general public. Repeatedly, Kauna assures the mourners about her decision and continue to pour out her anger. Instead of bereavement, she shouts and says (Andreas, 2001):

No! I am not going to tell the lies that widows tell at their husbands' funerals. I am not going to say what an honourable, loving and faithful husband he was, while everybody in the village knows what type of a man he was. (p. 139)

Furthermore, Kauna initiates a transformation in the mourning practices for widows within Oshiwambo culture, a pivotal act in challenging societal norms. Recognising that agreeing to include a widow's speech in the burial programme would appease not only her in-laws but also her maternal family, she remains resolute in her decision. This decision amuses the mourners when they notice a gap in the programme where the widow's speech should be. Ultimately, Kauna achieves a victory as her maternal uncle, Nambili, feels embarrassed by the vacant position in the programme. He steps forward to speak on behalf of the Nambili family instead of the widow.

It could be argued that Kauna's silence serves as a source of inner strength, which is later revealed through the conspicuous absence of a speech on behalf of the widow in the programme. Prior to this, she informs her uncle Peetu and Shange's cousin Mee Kiito that she has no intention of delivering a speech about Shange. When Mee Kiito asks if someone will read her speech for her in the church, Kauna responds by questioning the necessity of a speech, stating firmly, "No, I will not have anybody say anything on my behalf. There is nothing to be said." (Andreas, 2001:137) Kauna takes a calculated risk; while breaking the silence carries its own consequences, she recognises that the cost of remaining silent is even greater (Hedges & Fishkin, 1994).

In Oshiwambo culture, it is customary for widows to wear black clothes during the mourning period following the death of their husbands. Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014) assert that black clothes symbolise the darkness of death and the associated feelings of loss and pain (bohloko) in Sepedi culture. Kauna defies this tradition and refuses to wear black clothes as a widow, even on the day of Shange's funeral. Despite her mother's insistence, Kauna avoids arguments and firmly states, "My husband was very superstitious about the colour black. As a result I never wore anything black." (Andreas, 2001:124) Kauna remains resolute in her decision, showing no fear as she reaffirms to her mother and her friend, Mee Ali, that she cannot pretend to speak well of her abusive husband, Shange, while everyone knows the truth. In doing so, Kauna rejects the role of the gendered subaltern as described by Spivak, refusing to conform to an imposed cultural identity and challenging traditional colonial female roles (Cook, 2001).

She states in her own words (Andreas, 2001):

But, Ali, can you imagine what I have to say about that man? Can you picture me saying... No! I am not going to tell the lies that widows tell at their husbands' funerals. I am not going to say what an honourable, loving and faithful husband he was, while everybody in the village knows what type of a man he was. (p. 139)

Kauna boldly asserts her decision to speak loudly through silence, as everyone in the church receives a programme without any mention of a speaker on behalf of the widow. In doing so, she echoes the actions of Dangarembga's protagonist in *Nervous Conditions*, who finds her voice through narration, thereby liberating herself from patriarchal silence and offering hope in the resilience and success of female challenges (Begum, 2006). Additionally, Kauna rejects the customs and cultural expectations imposed on widows, refusing to adhere to behaviours typically favoured by patriarchal societies to silence women. Her refusal to perform traditional widowhood roles to honour her abusive husband's death is justified, as it defies the societal expectation of mourning in a manner that she finds insincere (Uko, 2019). Despite objections from her friend, Ali, who warns against appearing happy about her husband's death, Kauna remains steadfast in her decision not to feign grief and succumb to societal pressures (Andreas, 2001:138).

Conversely, Ali also admits that she is aware of the dehumanising treatment that Kauna suffered in her marriage with Shange. She always wanted Kauna's suffering to end, but she never imagined that it would happen that way (Uko, 2019:59).

Mee Ali is being left with no choice than thinking about her own words and what she can say on behalf of the widow, but Kauna stands her ground not to allow anyone to say something on her behalf as a widow. At the end, the programme for the burial is printed and reads as follows (Andreas, 2001:158):

<i>Omuwiliki gwoshituthi</i> (Master of Ceremonies)	Mee Kiito
Funeral service	Pastor Shoopala
Welcoming remarks	Tate Lukasa
On behalf of Shange's clan	Tate Salomo
On behalf of the widow	
On behalf of the widow's clan	Mee Fennie Nangolo

On behalf of the neighbours

Tate Shuuya

On behalf of the friends

Mr Jackson

On behalf of the colleagues

Ricki

Kauna's transformation of cultural identity, shifting from the role of a hopeless widow to that of a strong, independent, and liberated woman emancipated from the constraints of oppressive patriarchy, is indeed possible (Victor, 2013:58). Through her actions, she harnesses the power to revolutionise an entire patriarchal world view, innovating consciously within the realm of her own experiences. In doing so, she not only achieves personal freedom but also creates a framework that enables women to choose their own paths rather than conforming to societal expectations (Hadjitheodorou, 1999). In the end, Mee Ali comes to know who the real Kauna is and embraces her decision as she states (Andreas, 2001):

I had never known Kauna to be so clear, so firm. I was upset by the situation. I felt pulled this way and that, but there was something admirable in her behaviour, some new strength that I recognised, and it was surprisingly heartwarming. (p. 143)

Furthermore, Kauna sees herself as a liberated woman, although the patriarchal society does not approve her action of freeing herself and becoming independent.

Little (1980) explains in *Shabalala* that:

A free woman is meant one who flouts or disregards conventional beliefs concerning the proper role and position of the female sex. One common thing of these beliefs is that it is wrong for a woman on her own to take a major decision. This is a male prerogative. It is also wrong to undertake roles, including occupational ones, traditionally ascribed to the male sex. Perhaps the most common belief of all is that a woman's place is in the home and her duty is to marry and have children. (p. 134)

In this context, Andreas constructs the plot of her novel to showcase how Kauna challenges the notion of widows as vulnerable and powerless, and instead bravely asserts her autonomy and dignity (Ngongkum, 2016).

3.4 Reproductive rights and childbearing

Like in any African culture, Oshiwambo culture relies on the presence of extended family members as integral participants who wield significant influence in family relationships and marriages. This is primarily rooted in the interconnectedness of individuals within the family, who govern family structures, the marital status of family members, inheritance, and other aspects. In Oshiwambo culture, a newly wed bride is expected to fulfil a variety of challenging duties to demonstrate her suitability for marriage, not only to her husband but also to the entire clan and village community. In essence, marriage involves the entire family, and families typically exhibit extended kinship ties.

In many African cultures, a woman is expected to bear her husband a child immediately after marriage. However, Kauna takes about three years to become pregnant, which makes her the centre of attention in the village. Begum (2006) argues that while women consider motherhood desirable, culturally, the failure to fulfil this role disempowers them, reducing them to a socially non-productive status. Motherhood often supersedes the role of a wife, and not having children is viewed as a curse and a failure.

Unlike Mee Ali's husband, Kauna's husband abandons her and takes another woman in the village whom his relatives regard as his real wife, despite the unlawfulness of their relationship. However, despite Shange being a 'mommy's boy', Kauna still feels obligated to please him. She remains silent when her in-laws verbally abuse her and emotionally torture her by accusing her of barrenness. They use the phrase, *Okwa yi ku yakweni mbo haya vala!* (He went to those who have fertile wombs!), to taunt her (Andreas, 2001:21).

Despite escaping accusations of infertility, Mee Ali faces the grave accusation of using *muti* to separate her husband from his relatives. Her mother-in-law accuses her of bewitching her son Michael, stating, "My son has a wife who has bewitched him" (Andreas, 2001:25). Additionally, Mee Ali takes a significant step towards emancipating herself from patriarchal society when she loses her virginity and becomes pregnant out of wedlock. She does this to avoid criticism from her in-laws regarding infertility. By victimising her teenagehood to evade accusations of ruining her womb with Depo Provera contraceptives, she indirectly reinforces the status quo of men.

Andreas challenges the common perception held by in-laws, which is prevalent in many African traditions. She exposes how mothers-in-law assert dominance over their sons and mistreat their daughters-in-law when they are well taken care of by their husbands. Simultaneously, these mothers-in-law praise their sons-in-law when their daughters assert ownership over their husbands' properties. Despite having a caring husband who defies patriarchal norms by respecting his wife and granting her independence, as evidenced by building a house for her, Mee Ali's mother-in-law does not support this notion. She views it as contrary to the characteristics of a real Owambo man. Both Kauna and Mee Ali endure emotional abuse from their mothers-in-law.

One of the most distressing elements of Kauna's abusive marriage is the influence of a consanguine family dynamic, which empowers her husband Shange to engage in extramarital affairs as a means of asserting his manhood. Instead of welcoming Kauna as a new member of the family, Shange's mother and sisters exploit her position, forcing her to shoulder responsibilities such as cooking for the entire family while turning a blind eye to her husband's infidelity. The situation becomes even more unbearable when Kauna fails to conceive, leading her in-laws to falsely accuse her of using contraceptives during her teenage years. Kauna finds herself defenceless, with no one to turn to for support, especially when her own mother indirectly sides with her in-laws, showing no empathy but instead questioning why Kauna has not conceived. Traumatically, her mother adds to her distress by highlighting the passage of time without Kauna having a child, comparing her situation to that of other women who married around the same time.

Despite being the daughter of a pastor, Kauna's name takes on a negative connotation in the eyes of the village, undermining the respect she should naturally command.

Marrying Shange, a wealthy man, Kauna leaves her parents' home empty-handed, highlighting the persistence of traditional patriarchy and its discriminatory customs. Andreas skilfully exposes the hypocrisy within church leadership, revealing how certain practices contradict the holistic ideals often professed. Kauna's parents, particularly her father, use Christianity as a pretence to reinforce traditional gender roles, fearing that her association with a prominent family might challenge her obedience to her husband. This underscores a hidden aspect of Christianity that perpetuates the subjugation of women, particularly evident in the treatment of church leaders' wives and children.

Andreas (2001) portrays her friend Kauna's experience as a newly married woman in the village of Oshaantu, where she finds herself amidst the typical Oshiwambo family structure with extended relatives acting as in-laws. This not only reflects the humanised African societal system but also sheds light on the prevalent practice of polygamy as a symbol of manhood in Oshiwambo culture. Among the Aawambo people, it is believed that a man with only one wife is considered a coward. When Tate Oiva marries a second young wife, he impresses the village of Oshaantu, but this action leads to the young wife becoming a victim of patriarchal dominance and honouring the parental choice of arranged marriage. She also experiences dominance from Mee Namutenya, the elderly wife of Tate Oiva.

Additionally, elders continue to play a role in arranging marriages alongside their children, resulting in various semi-arranged marriage types. These hybrid arrangements reflect the evolving roles of marital agents in asserting their self-determination and self-realisation in marital matters. While Mee Namutenya initially enjoys the seniority of being the 'munyalombe' or senior wife, the situation later takes a toll on her mental health. She develops an undetectable mental illness, exhibiting symptoms of craziness and self-talk. Gossip in the village predominantly revolves around accusations of witchcraft, with the second wife being unfairly targeted due to her perceived jealousy and marginalisation within the household.

Arranged marriages remain prevalent, but the significance of polygamy diminishes over time. The young wife's pregnancy by another man from the village while still residing in Tate Oiva's household further complicates the dynamics of arranged marriages and traditional family structures.

From the passage above, it is evident that Andreas not only highlights the abuse suffered by Kauna as an individual woman in the village of Oshaantu, but also extends the discourse to encompass other forms of abuse within households and extended families.

In this context, the patriarchal nature of life in Oshaantu village leads to women being subjected to various forms of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse.

For instance, Mee Ali, despite having a loving and supportive husband, faces accusations from her mother-in-law, who accuses her of bewitching her son: "My son has a wife who

has bewitched him” (Andreas, 2001:25). This pervasive abuse is so ingrained that any marriage lacking in abuse is considered abnormal by other women, particularly by the inlaws.

Another character, Mee Maita, who serves as a member of the church council in the village, perpetuates the patriarchal system by subscribing to the belief that marriage should entail enduring lifelong misery. As Andreas (2011:5) notes, “What I most dislike about her [Mee Maita] is that she does little or nothing to help women and widows who are mistreated by their husbands and in-laws, despite her position.”

Similarly, Alexander (2022) argues that women in non-abusive marriages are often accused of bewitching their husbands with traditional medicine or are subjected to vilification and ridicule, as reflected in the Oshiwambo phrase ‘*okwa tulwa mo*’.⁷

3.5 Conclusion

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu has been significantly shaped by the narrative’s emphasis on organising a series of events or experiences that lead towards a meaningful conclusion. At the centre of this narrative is Kauna, who navigates through various experiences that profoundly impact the lives of many women and eventually chooses to respond in a unique and surprising manner. According to Gilliam (2013), Kauna embodies the concept of Africana womanists who define their identities through the power of Nommo, which has the potential to transform and create new realities for African women.

In contrast to Flora Nwapa’s Amaka in *One is Enough* (1981), whose journey of cultural identity transformation is spurred by her inability to meet the cultural expectations, Kauna faces challenges in conceiving after marrying in Oshaantu village. This condition empowers her husband, Shange, to engage in extramarital relationships to assert his

⁷ The expression ‘*Okwa tulwa mo*’ in Oshiwambo culture is used by the in-laws to signify that a married woman is deeply connected to her husband and their marriage is thriving. However, its literal translation in English can carry a derogatory connotation, suggesting that the husband is completely under the control of his wife, akin to being “stuffed in her anus” or “under petticoat government.” This phrase is often used to discourage a woman from accompanying her husband to social events, implying that she exerts excessive influence over him.

manhood. Kauna endures discrimination and abuse from her maternal family, especially her mother, who indirectly aligns with Kauna's in-laws by subjecting her to domestic violence.

The disparity in the meanings of the names Kauna and Shange underscores the vast divide between the oppressor and the oppressed. Shange's family mourn their brother with pride rather than sorrow, seizing control of all funeral preparations to assert their status over Kauna and her family. They disregard Kauna's input, treating her as if she does not exist.

However, Kauna boldly rejects the traditional norms that dictate the role of a widow in African society. She confronts her mother who blames her for her infertility and inability to bear children, comparing her situation to other women who married after her. Kauna displays a stoic demeanour upon discovering her husband's lifeless body, refusing to shed tears and challenging the patriarchal traditions that have confined her to a vulnerable existence in Oshaantu.

The novel, furthermore, subverts patriarchal norms as Kauna exhibits unusual behaviour during the funeral preparations for her husband, Shange. She displays no signs of grief or sadness, and a significant gap appears in the programme of the burial, symbolising a cultural and patriarchal divergence, as Kauna refuses to designate her friend Ali to deliver a speech on her behalf as a widow.

It is evident that Andreas not only delves into the intricacies of cultural practices but also recognises the agency of women, exemplified through the character of Kauna. Kauna's defiance of the patriarchal system and her proactive stance against accusations of witchcraft symbolise a broader challenge to male dominance. By resisting the expectation for widows to display excessive grief, Kauna challenges traditional norms that seek to silence women's voices and emotions. The choice of the title, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, reflects this theme of breaking free from societal constraints, drawing from the natural beauty of the Oshaantu village as a backdrop. As Cudjoe (1990) suggests, fiction provides a platform for women to assert their presence and challenge their invisibility.

Through Kauna's journey, Andreas illustrates the potential for individual transformation to spark broader societal change within the Aawambo community.

Finally, Kauna returns to her parents' house, feeling abused by Shange's relatives. Despite seeking assistance from other women like Mee Maita, a member of the church council, Kauna finds minimal support in the village. However, Andreas leaves the reader with an open-ended conclusion, as Shange's family asserts their cultural authority, ultimately forcing Kauna out of the home she shared with her husband. In this instance, Kauna succumbs to the patriarchal system, yet she maintains her cultural identity by seeking refuge with her maternal family. She states (Andreas, 2001):

They had won in that they had the homestead, it was not a moral victory, and they seemed to be aware of this, which made them more bitter and angry. (p. 173)

Kauna is anointed by Mukwankala, "she put oil on her head and wished her good luck" (2001:173). Kauna receives the anointment from her friend Mee Ali, a ritual commonly practised by Aawambo women on various occasions such as welcoming a new baby into the family, wishing luck to their husbands or children on long journeys, and more recently, blessing a new car to prevent accidents and other misfortunes.

Both novels explore how widowhood reshapes a woman's connection to her cultural surroundings. The experiences of the widows illustrate the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as between individual autonomy and societal expectations. Ngongkum (2016) compares the situations of the two characters, noting that Diana is spared from traditional widowhood rites while Akwenoh undergoes them, albeit initially resisting. This juxtaposition allows Kauna and Mukwahepo to join Diana in challenging society's perceptions and affirming the importance of upholding tradition, particularly in mourning their husbands. Set against a backdrop of post-independence, where women's rights are increasingly emphasised, both works depict women grappling with the unwelcome status of widowhood and navigating ways to cope with it. They highlight how changes in the socio-cultural landscape shape the actions and perspectives of widows.

The focus in the next chapter will move to an androcentric representation in *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila.

CHAPTER 4 AN ANDROCENTRIC REPRESENTATION IN “MUKWAHEPO: WOMAN SOLDIER MOTHER” BY ELLEN NDESHI NAMHILA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the book of *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* (2013), an oral narrative written by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, which observes the life of Mukwahepo, the first Namibian woman to receive military training during the early years of the Namibian liberation struggle in Tanzania. Namhila comes in physical contact with Mukwahepo after independence when she conducts face-to-face interviews with her at her house. This book is part of a collection of stories written by Namhila after returning from exile, which includes *The Price of Freedom*, her autobiography (1997); *Kaxumba kaNdola – Man and Myth: The Biography of a Barefoot Soldier* (2005); *Tears of Courage: Five Mothers Five Stories One Victory* (2009).

Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother is widely regarded as one of the most influential nonfiction books of the 20th century due to its portrayal of Mukwahepo's decision to follow her fiancé across the Namibian border into Angola. Namhila interjects Mukwahepo's biography with incidents from her childhood to highlight the injustices of cultural norms in an Oshiwambo setting. This narrative traces Mukwahepo's life as a woman, mother, and soldier, illustrating how she was denied formal basic education both in Namibia and abroad due to patriarchal dominance. Even after Namibia gained independence in 1990, Mukwahepo faced limited job opportunities due to the prevailing patriarchal system.

Namhila invites Mukwahepo to her house in Windhoek, Namibia's capital city, to delve deeper into her personal life and share experiences of the liberation struggle through flashback sequences.

Namhila writes in a prologue to the book (2013):

I interviewed Mukwahepo five times over a period of fifteen years. Having carried her story for sixteen years, I now feel it is time to let it out. This book narrates the story of Mukwahepo as a young woman journeying into exile, joining the armed liberation struggle there, the different roles she played in

exile during the struggle, and what became of her after she returned to Namibia for the coming of independence. (p. xii)

The quotation suggests that Namhila employs a stream of consciousness technique in narrating Mukwahepo's story, aiming for a realistic portrayal. Throughout the book, Mukwahepo serves as the narrator, directly addressing the audience without any dialogue between the author and the narrator. Namhila maintains an omniscient narrative style, giving her control over the story while also delving into Mukwahepo's inner thoughts and feelings.

She asserts (Namhila, 2013):

When I had sat down with Mukwahepo in the formal setting of my home, she had spoken openly. There was a flow of events in her story and I felt that she had enjoyed telling me about her life. Yet when I went to interview her formally in 2003, with a tape recorder in my hands, the passion of story-telling was lost. She was very tense and I had to constantly probe – something I did not do when she had narrated her story to me at my home. (pp. xi-xii)

Already, we can observe that Namibian society is deeply entrenched in oral history, with much of its past undocumented, including the history of the liberation struggle, particularly the significant contributions made by women in that struggle (Namhila, 2013: xi).

For the purpose of this study, this chapter addresses the second research question: "To what extent does Ellen Ndeshi Namhila use the story of Mukwahepo to reflect on the Namibian liberation struggle and challenge the cultural belief of patriarchy in *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*?" In line with this research question, the chapter delves into the research objective of examining how Namhila employs African womanist perspectives to challenge the inherent androcentric view of Namibia's liberation struggle portrayed in *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother* (2013). It is important to note that this chapter is based on the concept of inherent androcentrism, which dictates the perceived gender roles that Mukwahepo fulfils since her childhood. Androcentrism, defined as "the privileging of male experience and the 'otherising' of female experience", emphasises masculine interests (Bem, 1993:41), which have been institutionalised throughout history through scientific, political and religious ideologies.

In this research, the concept of androcentrism will be incorporated to justify the application of the Africana womanism theoretical framework, which focuses on analysing women in the African context. Africana womanism is described as “a theory that focuses on women in the family and society, especially highlighting their experiences in settings defined by patriarchy” (Ngongkum, 2016:139), and it will be used to analyse the text in this specific research work.

Additionally, the term ‘androcentric’ was coined by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her investigative work, *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture* in 1911. Androcentrism is a practice predominantly used by male individuals to emphasise male views, culture, and perspectives. It prioritises masculine patterns of life and mindsets, portraying men as the centre of the world and giving them power over women. This perspective is evident in various literary works, such as Shakespeare’s tragedies, where female roles are often secondary, reinforcing the notion of women’s lesser importance (Viswanathan, 2021).

Therefore, this chapter discusses the androcentric perspectives evident in Namhila’s portrayal of Mukwahepo, the female character in the book, highlighting strong patriarchal inclinations. The aim is to illuminate the challenges faced by women in African maledominated communities and how patriarchal power structures reinforce their subjugation. The chapter aims to examine the influence of culture and tradition on a woman’s social status, which is often uncertain in patriarchal setups. The story is narrated from a firstperson perspective, providing insight into Mukwahepo’s experiences and struggles within this framework.

4.2 Cultural dispensation in “Mukwahepo: Woman Solder Mother”

In Oshiwambo culture, premarital sexual interaction between boys and girls is considered taboo, as highlighted by Okafor (2018). There were customary laws in place to regulate sexual conduct, and failure to adhere to these rules was considered an offence against the entire society. Namhila portrays the consequences of intimacy between unmarried couples, emphasising that if such intimacy led to pregnancy, the woman bore a heavy burden.

Traditionally, cultural norms prohibited a man from visiting and staying overnight at his fiancée's house before marriage. Even engaged couples were not allowed to sleep together or engage in intimacy before marriage, as reiterated by Namhila (2013). Sex before marriage was considered disgraceful, and girls faced heavy punishment, along with their mothers, if they engaged in premarital intercourse.

The conditions attached to overnight visits between engaged couples were biased and placed a heavy burden on women. The girl was subjected to strict observation by prospective in-laws and often had to wake up very early in the morning to perform tasks, such as pounding millet in a strange house before sunrise. In contrast, the boy typically waited until later in the morning to milk the cows, as traditional practices dictated that cows should not be milked in the early morning.

Mukwahepo's narration leaves the reader questioning whether she feels excitement about these cultural practices, or if she harbours doubts or reservations about them. In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), the character of Efuru highlights similar themes, as noted by Mohite and Vijay Ghorpade (2023):

Marriages are generally arranged after young woman's consent after which she is introduced to grooms' family and also the man is introduced to girl's family. Before the marriage is fixed certain things are tested as character of a girl, her family background. In few cases marriages are fixed even in childhood through family negotiation. (p. 148)

Mohite and Vijay Ghorpade (2023) discuss the concept of cultural reinforcement as a way of instilling discipline regarding intimacy among the youth. They describe how this lack of privacy and respect for the couple can restrict their rights. If a boy and girl are engaged, and their parents recognise the engagement, they may be allowed to show affection to each other. However, there are conditions attached, such as refraining from holding hands and kissing each other in public (Namhila, 2013).

In the context described by Namhila, it was customary for a man to obtain permission from his future in-laws in order to spend the night at his fiancée's house. This arrangement required advance planning, and the girl's mother would prepare her daughter for the visit, instructing her on how to behave with her partner that night (and also covering her body

with red ochre dye). This practice challenges the notion of discrimination against women, as discussed by Cash *et al.* (1997), who found minimal relationships between body-image attitudes and feminist identity or adherence to traditional gender beliefs at individual or societal levels.

Similarly, Mukwahepo's story illustrates a similar situation, where a man had to undergo a ritual to prove that he had spent the night in his girlfriend's hut. The presence of red ochre dye on his body the next morning served as evidence to his in-laws and the community that he had indeed stayed overnight. It also symbolised manhood. This practice was not only a personal affirmation but also a public declaration of his relationship and the qualities of his fiancée as a traditional woman.

Mukwahepo interprets it thus (Namhila, 2013):

The boy would feel great pride to show that his fiancée was a girl of culture and tradition. If the girl's parents failed to cover their daughter well with dye, and the following day the boy had no dye on him, it was considered a big social shame to the girl's family, and a public humiliation for the boy. (p. 2)

The practice described served multiple purposes beyond just preventing premarital sex. It was intended to educate young girls and boys about the importance of respecting cultural values, avoiding transgressions, and understanding the consequences of unprepared pregnancies, which could result in severe punishment for the girl and her mother. This underscores the notion that the value placed on sex in African societies is not indicative of primitiveness but rather reflects the development of human social groups and their harmonious coexistence, as noted by Okafor (2018).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that this cultural practice also perpetuated gender inequality, as it placed the burden of proof and responsibility primarily on the woman. The requirement for the man to demonstrate his presence and engagement with his fiancée was not solely a matter of meeting the expectations of the in-laws but also served as a symbol of his manhood and integrity within the community. This practice, outlined by Namhila (2013), was a customary norm that guided the conduct of unmarried couples spending the night together.

The cultural practice of Olufuko, observed in the Oshiwambo culture, marks the transition of a girl from childhood to womanhood. This ritual, akin to other rites of passage in African societies, is performed to prepare young girls for the roles of womanhood and motherhood. It is believed to imbue them with social status and identity as women within their communities (Kasomo, 2009). Mukwahepo undergoes this ritual as part of her cultural upbringing, symbolising her transition into womanhood and her integration into societal norms and expectations. She states (Namhila, 2013):

According to our culture, I was no longer a considered a girl because, from the day my family had put me through the traditional wedding transitional rites, I was considered a woman. (p. 4)

Namhila delves into the complexities of social status and identity, particularly through the lens of marriage, in Mukwahepo's narrative. She challenges cultural norms and traditions by depicting Mukwahepo's journey from childhood to adulthood, which leads her into an unhappy polygamous marriage among her husband's elderly wives. Mukwahepo's experience reflects a sense of cultural orphanage, exacerbated by her separation from her biological family due to her father's death. She finds herself under the care of her uncle from her paternal family, whose identity and relationship with her father remain unspecified in the story.

Hailing from the Ovatjimba maternal family in Kaoko, Mukwahepo grapples with the struggle to reclaim her identity upon returning from exile. She feels a profound sense of emptiness, haunted by the loss of her true self as she navigates the confines of her personal identity. Her attempts to reconnect with her paternal family roots are met with resistance from her uncle, Haimini yaHalweendo, who refuses to provide clarity on her origins. This leaves Mukwahepo in a state of uncertainty, as she endeavours to reconstruct her identity within the broader context of her Oshiwambo heritage.

Additionally, Mukwahepo's narration hints at ambiguity regarding the specific tribe of her ancestors, further complicating her quest for self-discovery and cultural belonging.

Namhila employs the flashback technique to facilitate Mukwahepo's journey of rediscovery and recollection of events from her past, particularly before her exile, as she seeks to unearth her origins. Through this narrative device, Mukwahepo retraces her

childhood experiences, piecing together fragments of her background and ancestral history that serve as a tether to her identity. However, she grapples with the absence of family members who could validate her recollections, adding a poignant layer to her quest for belonging.

In recounting her family's history, Mukwahepo reveals a legacy marked by migration and adaptation across different ethnic groups. She reflects on her grandmother's resilience, who, after losing her first husband, sought refuge in the Oukwanyama district and remarried for security, a pattern repeated by Mukwahepo's mother following the death of her father when Mukwahepo was still an infant. This cyclical narrative underscores the enduring impact of cultural traditions and the challenges faced by women navigating widowhood within a patriarchal society.

She states (Namhila, 2013):

I therefore kept my family in their homestead for nearly two years after my father's death. The land-use right to my father's homestead was sold to another community member and my mother had to find another place to live and raise her children. (p. 6)

Namhila emphasises the harshness of cultural norms surrounding the practice of widowhood, as noted by Familusi (2012):

A widow surrounded by hostile in-laws is vulnerable to inhuman treatments that are not necessarily cultural, she could be accused of having killed her husband and she may have been sent out of her matrimonial home while those inherited could be exposed to unhealthy rivalry with the wife or wives of the new husband. (p. 307)

Furthermore, the safety and protection of widows and their children are considered the responsibility of the woman's maternal family. If a widow happens to migrate to a place where she has no relatives, she is likely to become a victim of polygamy, resulting in her losing control of her children from the previous marriage.

Additionally, according to tradition, a widow should vacate her deceased husband's house immediately after the burial. Mukwahepo's mother, however, was allowed to stay in their

house for eight months only because she was breastfeeding. Nevertheless, as a widow, she does not own anything that they shared with her husband when he was alive, a situation that subjected her mother to the cultural belief of losing social status (Dube & Phethlo-Thekisho, 2019).

Namhila exemplifies a similar situation where the headman of Onengali yaKaluvi, the village where Mukwahepo's father's house is located, ordered Mukwahepo's mother to vacate her husband's homestead when he realised that she stopped breastfeeding her. He instructed her and her children to vacate the house of her husband to make space for another new occupant of the house. Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) stresses a similar situation among the Igbo society of the southeast of Nigeria, stating that the moment a woman loses her husband, she automatically loses her prized dignity.

Moreover, it is firmly believed in African culture that a woman becomes her husband's property the moment she gets married. According to Nahole (2020), women are viewed as inheritable property in various African civilisations. Chukwu-Okoronkwo reaffirms the statement that "the god that owns a woman is the husband that married her" (ChukwuOkoronkwo, 2015:74). In fact, "bringing up a child is challenging responsibility, thus it becomes overwhelming when it's not shared" (Nahole, 2020:32). Mukwahepo's mother loses her husband to death, and the situation compels her to give away her last-born girl child for adoption. Consequently, this situation ruins Mukwahepo's childhood as a young girl. She is being deceived by the culture of widow inheritance when her mother gives her away to a new family for adoption. She is also inherited by her uncle Haimini from her paternal family, who behaves like a Christian but contradicts the doctrine of Christianity when he takes Mukwahepo to be initiated through a cultural practice, Olufuko. This practice is labelled as a pagan ritual in Christian churches in Owamboland (MuAshekele *et al.*, 2016). Ironically, Mukwahepo refers to her upbringing as influenced by Christianity, initially enabling her to escape the tradition of oiling practice to which young girls are subjected, but later she conforms to tradition when her uncle puts her through a traditional marriage transitional rite, '*meengoma*'⁸ (Namhila, 2013).

⁸ 'Eengoma' is a traditional rite of passage, a practice employed to transition young girls from childhood into womanhood. It is an Oshiwambo word in the Oshikwanyama dialect, having the same meaning and

I was brought up under the care of my uncle, Haimini, who raised me as a Christian. Then, in 1954, the very same elders who had brought me up as a Christian decided to put me through a traditional marriage transitional rite (*meengoma*). (p. 7)

Namhila echoes Dangarembga's exploration of women's resistance to patriarchal norms, similar to Tambu's experience in *Nervous Conditions* (1997). Tambu finds empowerment through formal education, which opens her eyes to cultural injustices and the hypocrisy within Christianity. She challenges the patriarchal and colonial influences, notably by rejecting her uncle's attempt to make her conform to Western-style weddings to appease colonial authorities. In contrast, Mukwahepo lacks access to formal education, limiting her ability to challenge such norms.

In this context, Namhila illustrates how African cultural norms influence individuals like Haimini to uphold traditional practices such as bride wealth and bride service, as described by Akurugu *et al.*, (2021) as a form of marriage transaction where the groom provides labour in exchange for a bride. Haimini, acting in a paternalistic manner, arranges a forced marriage for Mukwahepo, marrying her off to an elderly man from a prominent royal family. This polygamous marriage exposes Mukwahepo to senior wives much older than her, highlighting the prevalence of polygyny in traditional Namibian communities throughout history. Mukwahepo's experience reflects the enduring practice of early and forced marriages, perpetuated to satisfy cultural expectations and familial obligations.

She reflects (Namhila, 2013):

I was afraid, and too young to understand what marriage was all about. If there had been somewhere to go, I would have run away from the marriage. If I had a protector, I would have called on him or her. But there was no such

being exactly the same as 'Olufuko'. The Aakwanyama and Aambandja use the word 'eengoma', while Oshindonga and all other dialects aligned with the Oshindonga language call it 'Olufuko'.

place or person, and so I obeyed my elders and suffocated in the marriage.

(p. 8)

Namhila vividly depicts Olufuko as a cultural tradition that significantly impacts a woman's life, often leading to societal degradation. Mukwahepo's early marriage during her teenage years brings forth expectations from her husband and the community, particularly the pressure to conceive and bear a child for her elderly husband. Despite the significant age gap between Mukwahepo and her husband, societal norms prioritise the fulfilment of marital duties over her well-being. Mukwahepo's inability to conceive not only threatens her marriage but also undermines her social standing, contributing to her mistreatment and abuse, especially by her husband and uncle. Her marriage only lasts for a very short period, and she returns to her family when she divorces her husband, Nakale kaHangula yaKangundo, after two years of misery. Mukwahepo acquires the status of a divorcee at the age of twenty: "I was considered a divorced woman." (Namhila, 2013:8)

Mukwahepo finds herself compelled to accept the decisions of her extended family, thereby forfeiting her rights and agency as a young girl. Without the guidance and protection of her biological parents, Mukwahepo becomes vulnerable to the dictates of her extended family, particularly her uncle Haimini.

Although Mukwahepo goes through the initiation process successfully, being transformed from childhood into adulthood, she finds herself conforming to social norms of women discrimination, not by choice, but because nature denies her the status of motherhood.

She loses the title of motherhood as it is defined in the African context that "there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless" (Akujobi, 2011:2). Despite her successful transition into adulthood, Mukwahepo grapples with societal norms that define a woman's worth based on her ability to procreate.

Her unhappy and abusive marriage to an elderly and affluent husband ends in divorce due to her infertility, further reinforcing the societal stigma surrounding childlessness. Mukwahepo's subsequent relationship with a partner of her choice fails to bring about the desired change in her life, as she continues to remain childless. Through Mukwahepo's narrative, Namhila sheds light on the harsh reality faced by women who are unable to

fulfil traditional expectations of motherhood, highlighting the emotional and societal challenges they endure in such circumstances.

Despite her past experiences, Mukwahepo finds solace and hope in a new relationship after escaping the confines of forced marriage. While visiting her sister in Ohakweenyanga, near Ongwediva, she encounters a man named Shikongo shaHangala and falls deeply in love. Mukwahepo is captivated by the idea of starting a family with him, dreaming of the joys of womanhood that come with procreation and nurturing new life. She eagerly anticipates the special treatment and recognition she will receive from her husband-to-be and society at large, as she envisions herself glowing with the prospect of motherhood.

She states (Namhila, 2013):

Although women are not supposed to show affection, I was deeply in love with Shikongo. I expected to marry him, have children and be surrounded by my family. (p. 8)

The quoted passage highlights a cultural norm and taboo within Oshiwambo culture, wherein it is frowned upon for a woman to openly display affection towards a man in public. However, Mukwahepo defies this cultural expectation by openly declaring her deep love for Shikongo and accepting his proposal without seeking approval from her parents. Later on, she introduces Shikongo to her family, signalling her commitment to their relationship. This newly found freedom allows Shikongo to feel comfortable coming to pick her up at night for their journey into exile.

4.3 The journey into exile – androcentric politics during the liberation struggle

Mukwahepo journeys into exile not by choice but following her fiancée Shikongo shaHangala who shows up unexpectedly one night. Traditionally, a man does not visit the house of the woman he intends to marry after the sun has set. Shikongo shaHangala, Mukwahepo's fiancée, turns up one night without any appointment – an action that surprises Mukwahepo and her family members.

She says (Namhila, 2013):

I expected Shikongo to arrive in a respectable manner that was acceptable to my parents and I. When he eventually did arrive, however, he came embarrassingly late. He offered his apology, and my parents accepted his explanation because he had walked a very long distance from Ongandjera to Onengali yaKaluvi in Oukwanyama. (p. 2)

The passage underscores Mukwahepo's departure from her family home in Namibia to Angola in 1963, aligning with the sentiments expressed by Goel (2010) regarding the International Women's Liberation Movement. Despite being kept uninformed about the true purpose of their journey by her fiancé, Shikongo, who claims they will be seeking support from the United Nations to liberate their country, Mukwahepo silently complies. However, amidst her silence, she observes the vibrant social life in Luanda and is captivated by the appearance of other black women, a moment of self-realisation and discovery for her.

This self-realisation challenges traditional notions of a woman's role confined to the household, as Mukwahepo reflects on her own beauty and complexion compared to those around her. Namhila portrays Mukwahepo's realisation of her own beauty as a catalyst for her self-confidence and resistance against patriarchal oppression. Through her journey, Mukwahepo embodies the ideals of womanism, asserting her independence and challenging gender discrimination.

Moreover, Mukwahepo's eventual role as a pioneering woman among men, traditionally absent due to the division of labour between men and women, further emphasises her bravery and heroism, redefining the concept of heroism in terms of heroines.

She states (Namhila, 2013):

I had proven the point that, like our male comrades, women could face both military training and combat. I never fought a single battle, but I was well trained and combat-ready. (p. 38)

The notion presented aligns with Wolf's argument (1991) concerning the historical advantage bestowed upon women considered beautiful, particularly in terms of social mobility. In Mukwahepo's case, her beauty at home is overshadowed by the patriarchal

norms dictating arranged marriages, depriving her of the opportunity to enjoy her teenage years as she is thrust into wifehood prematurely.

Namhila's portrayal of Mukwahepo as a powerful female character serves to challenge oppressive cultural norms, positioning her within the context of gender equality amidst the liberation war. This pivotal moment marks the beginning of Mukwahepo's cultural transformation, catalysed by her journey into the unknown world, which she acknowledges as a life-changing experience (Namhila, 2013).

However, this transformative journey also brings with it challenges and revelations.

Mukwahepo's realisation that, as a woman, she is prohibited from cooking in the forest due to its designation as a male space underscores the entrenched gender norms and restrictions faced by women even in revolutionary contexts (Namhila, 2013).

I was surprised that during our journey I was not allowed to cook. It was the men who prepared the food. I just sat and watched, waiting to be served. This was indeed a privilege. (p. 10)

In the cited passage, Namhila illustrates the dietary taboos enforced by the patriarchal system within war zones. Mapara (2010) explains taboos as practices designed to prevent harm or friction within communities. Within Oshiwambo culture, it is considered taboo for a woman to cook alone in the jungle among men. However, an exception is made in this scenario, allowing the woman to eat all the food she prepares, regardless of how full her stomach may be.

Mukwahepo redefines her role as a traditional woman, in contrast to the typical male viewpoint that "a mother's place is in and about the house" (Begum, 2006:106). During her travels, Mukwahepo observes the varying treatment of women by men, a phenomenon deeply intertwined with colonial efforts, as noted by Begum (2006). As she joins her male counterparts in the fight against political colonialism and gender oppression, Mukwahepo becomes a trailblazer for African womanhood. Enduring hunger and war alongside her male companions during their journey to Tanzania, Mukwahepo's perseverance symbolises a personal victory over adversity.

Upon settling in Kongwa, Tanzania, Mukwahepo makes history as the first woman to undergo military training with SWAPO, further solidifying her role in shaping the lives of African women during the early stages of Namibia's liberation struggle. This pivotal moment in Mukwahepo's journey signifies a profound shift in cultural identity towards gender equality within the context of the Namibian liberation struggle. By actively participating in traditionally male-dominated tasks such as receiving military training to become a soldier, Mukwahepo challenges the status quo and seeks to dismantle the entrenched system of male dominance in political conflicts. Her involvement reflects both her determination to liberate her country and her commitment to empowering her fellow women.

However, despite her significant contributions and efforts, Mukwahepo continues to face the persistent and often dismissive behaviour of her male comrades. They treat her experiences and needs with a lack of consideration, often resorting to joking or trivialising her concerns without fully recognising the unique challenges she faces as a woman in their midst. This ongoing dynamic underscores the enduring nature of male dominance within the liberation movement, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address gender disparities and promote genuine equality within all spheres of society.

As a woman, Mukwahepo is prohibited from entering war zones and instead assigned less productive tasks in the camp, such as cooking for her comrades during their departures and returns from war zones.

Despite facing mistreatment, Mukwahepo maintains her composure, silently enduring the challenges she faces. She refrains from disclosing her difficulties, such as painful menstrual periods, and tolerates the annoying jokes of her male comrades. This resilience echoes the sentiments of African feminists like Hudson-Weems, who argue that both men and women suffer under the same oppressive systems that marginalise them, (1993:23).

The military leadership in Kongwa deprives Mukwahepo of her rights as a trained soldier, providing her with military skills but denying her the opportunity to utilise them in combat.

Namhila (2013) reflects:

I had arrived at Kongwa in 1965 with the first intake of trainees and I remained there for nine years, until 1974, when our leadership told me that I was overqualified as a military combatant and that it was time for me to move on to Zambia, where the party would give me new assignments. So I left Kongwa for Lusaka. (p. 57)

Disheartened by life in exile, Mukwahepo expresses her disappointment as she observes the injustices unfolding in Kongwa. While her comrades are assigned various tasks outside the camp, including opportunities for education and further military training, Mukwahepo feels isolated and overlooked, left alone to manage the camp. “Men deny women education as a liberating tool” (Shabalala, 2019:13). Mukwahepo begins to question her assigned role as a cook including other traditional female tasks, recognising how it perpetuates cultural norms of male dominance. Despite her reservations, she remains silent during discussions, hesitant to challenge the status quo.

As she reflects on her situation, Mukwahepo realises that her lack of formal education limits her opportunities within the liberation struggle. She begins to blame herself for not being able to contribute more meaningfully. However, she finds solace in her ability to assist her male comrades, particularly those returning from the battlefield, despite her perceived educational shortcomings.

Struggling to reconcile her feelings of inadequacy with her valuable contributions, Mukwahepo grapples with the limitations imposed by her illiteracy, which she perceives as hindering her from fully realising her potential and making a significant impact.

Namhila (2013) complains: People who came to- Kongwa for military training were sent to the war zone and found me still in Kongwa on their return. I do not know why I was left off the list. Perhaps there were no military training facilities for women in the countries to which my male comrades were sent. It could not have been because I was illiterate as I did know the alphabet and had basic literacy and numeracy, albeit in my mother tongue. (p. 56)

Dangarembga’s portrayal of Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* echoes similar themes of gender discrimination in education. Tambu is denied further education due to financial constraints in her family, with priority given to her brother Nhamo’s schooling. Similarly,

Andreas (2001) depicts a comparable scenario involving Kauna, whose father chooses to allocate church funds to sponsor her brother Blacky's education instead of hers.

Kauna (Andreas, 2001) states:

There was an opportunity for him to go overseas with a church scholarship. Father was working very hard on that. Blacky was very intelligent but chose the mine above his education. (p. 69)

In all these instances, Andreas, Dangarembga, and Namhila shed light on the issue of gender discrimination, wherein many women are deprived of education due to economic and gender-based oppression stemming from colonialism, further exacerbating their marginalised status in society. Like Tambu, Mukwahepo's aspirations, needs, and emotions regarding education were disregarded, underscoring the pervasive denigration of women in society. In this vein, Andreas, Dangarembga, and Namhila, through their main characters, endeavour to pursue a womanism that "allows women to weave together their maternal identities and histories in order to revise their oppressive circumstances and to rewrite more acceptable scripts for themselves" (Montelaro, cited by Izgarjan and Markov, 2012:313).

Furthermore, Namhila exposes the traditional androcentric hierarchy of male dominance during the liberation struggle of Namibia, wherein Mukwahepo and other women were relegated to passive roles and assigned primary responsibilities for nurturing children, effectively quashing their aspirations for direct physical involvement in the liberation struggle, comparable to their male counterparts.

Despite the discrimination Mukwahepo faces in Kongwa, she remains determined to contribute to the independence of her country in her own way. Seeking solace and happiness, she joins the Tanzanian Mama-Rosa social gatherings organised by women. Additionally, she attends Sunday services outside the camp for socialisation. Finding comfort among other women, she is invited to their homes as a guest of honour, where she is treated with great respect and kindness, feeling as though she were "treated like a queen" (Namhila, 2013:57). Namhila reaffirms the statement of Hudson-Weems (1993) that African womanism is capable of establishing genuine sisterhood. Like Amaka in *Efuru* (1966), Mukwahepo embarks on a journey to challenge the traditional role of women

confined to the household. She resists the notion of being a victim of colonialism and takes proactive steps to empower herself. During her time in Tanzania, she seizes the opportunity to interact with local communities, allowing her to learn Swahili, another African language. Remarkably, she quickly masters Swahili and becomes fluent in it within a short period, demonstrating her determination to adapt and thrive in new environments.

In this context, Mukwahepo aligns herself with other women globally in embodying authentic Africana womanism, choosing to live their lives in alignment with the principles of their cultural heritage. As a result, their behaviour reflects their deeply held beliefs and values. Together, they engage in activities that affirm their worth and garner respect and recognition. These women, whose names and identities are rooted in their experiences as Africana women, cultivate strong relationships based on genuine sisterhood. They come together to discuss and address issues that are important to them, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity.

She is given a voice as a woman to encourage other women to join the liberation struggle. She integrates into the male-dominated environment by undergoing the same training as her male comrades, without any special treatment or accommodation. In this way, Namhila utilises Mukwahepo's story as a means to depict her character as a woman and soldier, highlighting several positive roles that position her as an agent challenging androcentric representations of women in society.

Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother (2013) is the remarkable life story of the first woman to be trained by SWAPO, as recorded and translated by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, a librarian at the University of Namibia. Mukwahepo left her home in Namibia in 1963, followed her fiancée across the border into Angola without knowing exactly where she was going or what she was getting herself into. For nine years she was the only woman in SWAPO's Kongwa Camp, but then she was entrusted with a more traditional woman's role of taking care of the children in the SWAPO Camps in Zambia and Angola. This text preserves the oral⁹ history of not only the 'dominant male voice' among the colonised people of

⁹ In this context, oral refers to shared verbal stories about culture and tradition, but eventually written down to preserve the history of Aawambo people.

Namibia, “but brings to light the hidden voice, the untold and forgotten story of an ordinary woman and the outstanding role she played during the struggle” (Akawa, 2013:184).

Mukwahepo brought his five children back to Namibia after independence. She was left alone when their parents arrived one by one to take them back. Mukwahepo was already in her forties and was unable to find work due to her lack of education. She was dependent on handouts until the government started providing veterans with a pension and other benefits. Through a series of interviews, Namhila translated and documented the incredible narrative of Mukwahepo.

This section examined Mukwahepo’s narrative, presented as a means of challenging the status quo and preserving the oral history not only of patriarchal male dominance among the colonised people of Namibia, particularly in the Oshiwambo setting, but also shedding light on the hidden, untold, and forgotten stories of ordinary women and the remarkable roles they played during the struggle.

In Africa, women were essential to the preservation of customs and traditions. They were regarded as the foundation of African oral literature and, as such, as the culture’s emissaries. It used to be the duty of women to educate their children and maintain the bonds within the family. Throughout the pre-colonial era, women were involved in

agriculture, found in almost every field of human endeavour, and were in charge of upholding family unity. African women engaged in the conservation of literary seeds. Women were prominent in African oral traditions, both as performers and as knowledge creators, especially when it came to the moral duties and educational value of oral literature. African oral traditions, as mentioned in the research’s first chapter.

African writers view the folktale actors who are primarily women—as active participants in the patriarchal society, fighting for a place. They base their argument on the idea of “Othering,” which holds that the African woman’s status of otherness gives her the ability to observe and critique the standards, beliefs, and customs that the patriarchal culture imposes on all people, even those who are marginalised. In *Some Aspects of Women’s Voices from Northern Nigeria*, Kassam (1996) affirms that African women resist

oppression and space confinement by producing and remaking popular culture and songs appropriate for both public and private consumption.

With the advent of feminist criticism, the interrogation of male writers' treatment of women in literature has become a major field of study for purposes of challenging androcentric representations of women. In Africa, the same trend has marked the female-centred critical discourse on literature, whether from a feminist or womanist perspective (Sougou, 2010).

In addition, Namhila's writing aims to highlight the historical and oral evidence, which often goes unacknowledged, of successful women during times of conflict. Like other African women, Mukwahepo provides a testimony of her significant contributions during the war struggle. It underscores the importance of acknowledging the narratives of all women who contributed to liberation struggles, not only in Namibia but also across the globe.

At first glance, this setup appears highly patriarchal due to the exclusively male nature of the upper echelons of military organisations. However, it is important to note that military rule is not always exclusively male. In the context of liberation movements, military rule has frequently facilitated the advancement of women's interests, encouraging their participation as freedom fighters and supporters. This was evident in movements such as Zimbabwe's ZANU, Mozambique's Frelimo, the Angolan MPLA, and the Eritrean EPLF (Mama, 1995:42).

As mentioned earlier, according to Sougou (2010), the portrayal of women in fictional discourse remains a topic of considerable interest in African literary criticism. Sougou highlights the ongoing focus on the flawed depiction of women in male-authored literature, while noting that more male writers are increasingly striving to represent women from a gender-sensitive perspective. The story of Mukwahepo provides an illustration of this changing strategy, since Namhila offers a narrative that examines the various ways in which women were subjected to colonialism and compares it to that of males. Namhila seeks to portray, via Mukwahepo's journey, the resilience of the African culture and the identity of African women, both in exile; and in Namibia when they returned after independence.

Namhila, as a narrator, endeavours to expose the pervasive gender gap that is often overlooked in various spheres of life, including the workforce and social engagements. Furthermore, Namhila's analysis delves deeper into personal experiences recounted in *The Price of Freedom* (1998), illustrating her journey as a writer of her own story and how she navigates challenges in countries like Gambia, Sweden, and even in her birth country, Namibia.

In *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*, Namhila critiques gender discrimination in both cultures while directly confronting colonial oppression. She does not endorse the uncritical acceptance of Western colonial institutions such as school education and church practices, but instead advocates for women's representation. Through characters like Mukwahepo in SWAPO's Kongwa camp, Namhila highlights the importance of women having a voice in the struggle for freedom. Mukwahepo's role as a functional mother and nurturer to the children of the liberation movement and the wider community in Angola underscores the significance of women's contributions beyond traditional roles.

Furthermore, this study suggests that the awareness of womanism should not be limited to Africana women alone. Hudson-Weems (2019) similarly emphasises the importance of recognising African women's roles as nurturers and caretakers, not only in biological motherhood but also in their broader contributions to their communities and society as a whole.

In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the cultural, patriarchal, and colonial subjugation of women and girls aligns with Africana womanism, which acknowledges the importance of African culture while highlighting the oppression faced by women under patriarchal authority (Aegerter, 1996). Unlike Mukwahepo, Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* attends school to receive formal education, which becomes her tool to combat gender inequality. Through education, Tambu becomes aware of gender oppression imposed on women in her society, both by patriarchal norms and the colonial context in which she lives. Colonialism exacerbates the oppression experienced by Tambu and other women in the text, adding another layer to their struggle for liberation.

In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's works, such as *A Grain of Wheat*, the role of women is significant as they are portrayed as active participants in the life and struggle of their community. For

instance, Wambui in *A Grain of Wheat* is depicted as a highly regarded figure who participated in the Mau Mau movement. However, Africana womanism emphasises that Africana women are often marginalised due to their race, socio-economic condition, and gender. Despite their importance in their communities, they may still face discrimination and lack of recognition. Wambui's character serves as a medium through which the postMau Mau era is evaluated in the novel, highlighting the challenges and disillusionment faced by women who were once actively involved in the fight for freedom (Sougou, 2010:97).

4.4 The reception of an androcentric in “Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother”

Mukwahepo travels to Kongwa, Tanzania, with her fiancé, Shikongo shaHangula, and there she becomes the first female member of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) to get military training. Surprisingly, she has been the only female in SWAPO's Kongwa camp for nine years.

In Kongwa, the comrades adopted a culture of using combat names for various purposes, including security and anonymity, as well as to commend bravery during wartime. However, Mukwahepo experiences disappointment when her male comrades deny her the right to choose her own name. Instead, they assign her several names to conform to the male-dominated society in the camp. Initially, she is given the traditional name Namupaafita, which connects her to the cultural life of Owamboland. This name traditionally signifies the only girl born among boys, indicating her role within the family. Despite her disappointment, Mukwahepo embraces the name Namupaafita, using it as motivation to continue performing the daily tasks typically associated with girls, such as cooking for the community in the camp. She asserts: “I also became a cook, which I was happy to do because in my culture I had been raised to fulfill this role. I was a great cook, too” (Namhila, 2013:33).

Mukwahepo finds herself trapped in a recurring tragedy reminiscent of her experiences back home. She continues to prioritise the needs of others, such as cooking for her male comrades, while neglecting her own. Despite experiencing the normal monthly menstrual cycles, she suffers in silence, seeking ways to manage without drawing attention to her

feminine needs. This silence stems from the ingrained belief instilled in her upbringing, emphasising the importance of behaving politely and respectfully, particularly towards men. Mukwahepo's demeanour resembles that of a mule, as described by Wu (2014). Furthermore, in the novel in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Wu submits that the mule serves as a haunting image for Janie, symbolising the roles she rejects in her pursuit of self-fulfilment. Similarly, Mukwahepo struggles to reconcile societal expectations with her own needs and desires, silently enduring her circumstances.

Mukwahepo becomes increasingly frustrated when her male comrades express dissatisfaction with the name Namupaafita¹⁰. Moreover, she finds herself growing impatient with their discussions on politics, topics that test her patience to the limit. She feels discriminated against, as she asserts (Namhila, 2013):

During my first weeks at Kongwa, I found the company of men very intimidating. They always spoke about politics – every day, every hour – unless we were in the training sessions. The moment the training session ended, their political discussions began... During leisure time we received news, which was followed by heated political debates. I did not know anything about politics, so I had nothing to say. I became angry with these men. They would talk about their politics around me whether I wanted to listen or not. (p. 35)

In order to transform her cultural identity, Mukwahepo decides to reject the cultural norm of negative connotative Oshiwambo names that girl-children receive from their parents. She announces that her combat name would be Namumbaduka/Mawila¹¹ – the morning

¹⁰ *Namupaafita* is a female name traditionally given to the only baby girl born among boy siblings. It is a compound name in the Oshiwambo language, where *Na* is a prefix for female names, *mufita* is the stem meaning 'cattle herder' in the singular form, and *aafita* is the plural form of the stem, meaning 'cattle herders'. Therefore, *Namupaafita* signifies a situation where a girl child is born into a family in need of someone to feed the cattle herders.

¹¹ *Namumbaduka* or *Mawila* refers to the morning star that rises in the east of Namibia. In Oshiwambo culture, this star is seen as an alarm clock for women, providing them with

star serves as an important landmark and an icon for many young people and a guide for many traditional tasks they are expected to perform. She identifies herself as a morning star, symbolising her significant contribution as the only woman among men during the early years of the liberation struggle in Kongwa. In the absence of watches, people in the camp relied on natural cues like the rising of the morning star. Despite enduring hardship while performing traditional female activities in the camp, her male counterparts chose to give her the name Mukwahepo¹², which was a strategy to tease her due to her unique position as the sole woman in a military setting. Her male comrades view Mukwahepo's life through the lens of patriarchy, believing that decisions should be made solely by men, even on behalf of women. This mindset leads them to victimise her further by assigning

her another derogatory name, adding to the stigma she already faces in her life. This name was given to her despite her original name being Auguste Mukwanangombe¹³ yaImmanuel, where *Mukwanangombe* denotes her paternal kinship, specifically her totem.

The name Mukwahepo itself carries significant weight, representing not only her unique circumstance, but also the broader challenges faced by women in male-dominated environments. As she endures her assigned roles among her male comrades, Mukwahepo encounters pervasive gender biases that undermine her capabilities and relegate her to domestic duties instead of allowing her to participate fully in the struggle

light for early morning activities. It serves as a guide for tasks such as pounding millet, which is traditionally performed by girls before the sun rises.

¹² In traditional Oshiwambo culture, the name Mukwahepo is typically given to a girl whose father passed away while she was being born. In the context of the story, Mukwahepo is given this name by her male comrades to symbolise her situation as the lone woman among men, highlighting the challenges and difficulties she faces in that environment.

¹³ Mukwanangombe, being a paternal name, is given to women whose fathers are affiliated with a clan symbolised by cattle as their totem. *Mukwa* signifies kinship, while *ngombe* denotes cattle. Thus, Mukwanangombe is linked to a prosperous clan, as cattle symbolise wealth among the Aawambo people.

as a soldier. This pattern of discrimination reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that prioritise male dominance and undervalue women's contributions. Despite her skills and dedication, Mukwahepo faces persistent feelings of inferiority and marginalisation, compounded by the attitudes and actions of her male counterparts. The presence of her former partner, Shikongo shaHangala, serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggles and obstacles she faces, highlighting the pervasive nature of gender inequality within the context of the liberation movement.

Mukwahepo's resilience in enduring the harsh conditions of being the sole woman among men for nine years is emblematic of the silent suffering experienced by many women who endure abuse and oppression. She is burdened by the patriotic spirit of comradeship when she assumes the role of caretaker for all children whose parents are unable to provide for them. While some individuals bravely share their circumstances, the majority suffer in silence due to cultural norms. This silence stems from the belief that women's societal roles are fixed, hindering their ability to challenge or change their circumstances – "The conviction that women's socially constructed position situates us on shared ground enables the consciousness and the community of action among women to impel change"

(Eboh, 2000:110). Mukwahepo's struggle highlights the entrenched cultural traditions that confine women to predefined roles, such as motherhood and marriage, leading to their isolation on multiple levels.

4.5 Repatriation, homecoming and cultural resilience

Mukwahepo spends 26 years of her youth in exile, enduring the long and bitter struggle for liberation. However, upon her return to Namibia, she faces another struggle: reuniting with her original family. Namhila delves into the theme of motherhood, highlighting the profound sense of loss and incompleteness Mukwahepo experiences when the biological parents come to reclaim their children from her care, registering them as their own family members. This abandonment leaves her submerged in loneliness, grappling with the emotional impact of relinquishing the children she cared for during the liberation struggle. Despite this heartache, Mukwahepo finds solace and affection from six children whose parents fail to collect them. As the remaining children she kept in Kwanza-Sul are

reclaimed by their biological parents, Mukwahepo is left questioning her sense of family and belonging. Returning home, she embraces her role as a mother figure once more, entrusted by some comrades to bring their children to Namibia while they continue their studies abroad.

The analysis of Mukwahepo draws upon events depicted in Namhila's memoir *The Price of Freedom* (1997), reflecting Namhila's own experiences in traversing the complexities of freedom. Through this lens, Namhila explores the multifaceted costs associated with achieving and maintaining freedom, which have, in various ways, diluted the promised fruits of independence for many Namibians. Employing rhetorical strategies, Namhila utilises the concept of the 'price of freedom' to illustrate the inherent contradictions within political liberation. Mukwahepo's perspective underscores the paradoxical nature of political freedom, revealing the ongoing burdens borne disproportionately by Namibian women even within their ostensibly liberated homeland.

Numerous African female writers grappled with these conflicting contexts amid the struggle for independence over decades (Dube, 2020). The protracted war for liberation in Namibia provided ample opportunity for exploring women's involvement in political warfare and the gender conflicts inherent in the liberation struggle. This exploration sheds light on the insights offered by Namibian female writers as they address and articulate colonial and patriarchal oppression within their unique contexts.

It is noteworthy that Namhila intertwines her personal experiences to provide a platform for Mukwahepo to recount her self-memories, serving as a self-witness to the traumatic political accounts both inside and outside Namibia, before and after independence. This is exemplified in the book *The Price of Freedom*, where Namhila contrasts the hope of political independence as a female freedom fighter with the eventual disillusionment she experiences, questioning the freedom she had long awaited in light of the harsh circumstances she describes as various forms of paying the price for freedom. Namhila (1997) recaps:

When we were in exile, in the struggle, in the refugee camps and in foreign countries, I did not question my identity. I felt strongly Namibian. I wanted to return home to Namibia, so that I could reclaim my identity, and my rightful

place in society, having lost all my childhood during the long, long years of the apartheid war. (p. 198)

The weaving of personal experiences becomes a vivid expression in Mukwahepo's life upon her return home from exile. She integrates all aspects of her life that could contribute to her own freedom after many years of the liberation struggle. Similar to Namhila, she questions her identity and what independence truly means to her as a freedom fighter. The physical training, spiritual growth, and moral education she received in exile were meant to prepare her for the role she played as a mother and grandmother to the children in the camps. Mukwahepo states (Namhila, 2013):

Then, one day, I realised that what I was experiencing was a direct result of what had happened while I was in exile. SWAPO had generously given its members the opportunity to study. Anyone who was willing and able to study was sent to school in various parts of the world. But I never been offered this opportunity, especially in the 1960s when I was in Tanzania, probably because I had no basic educational foundation. So, the opportunities were gone... I was never sent for further training abroad, maybe because the countries that trained SWAPO cadres had no facilities to train women. Also, unlike today, there were very few women in the military in those days. (p. 132)

In a similar vein, Mlambo and Tobias (2020) adopt an Afro-triumphalist perspective through which Namhila emerges victorious despite the historical challenges she faces. This research aligns with this perspective and integrates the concept of transforming cultural identity, as discussed by Clarke (2008), which highlights the differences in individuals' identities and the establishment of deviance from societal norms leading to stigmatised identities. The story of Mukwahepo should be understood within the framework of womanism as a continuing paradigm in which Namhila, along with other female writers, reinvents and operationalises the concept to monitor the creation and definition of women's roles in their communities, aiming to avoid past mistakes and establish essential gender balance. Reading this book evokes a sense of empowerment, akin to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's portrayal in *Detained* (1981), where women are depicted as

the most oppressed and exploited section of the working class. Furthermore, Namhila's depiction aligns with Ngugi's intention to create strong, determined female characters who resist and struggle against their present conditions. "In his commitment to changing women's image by creating a sturdy female character, Ngugi makes Wariinga execute her wrong-doers" (Sougou, 2010:92).

Namhila actively engages in the liberation struggle to combat discrimination of women and advocate for the recognition of women's rights, thus enabling them to attain and enjoy complete freedom. Akawa (2013) further elucidates that women understand that their liberation from dual oppression – patriarchal male dominance and colonialism – will not be bestowed as an act of charity or through the benevolence of men, but rather through their own efforts and struggle. Hence, one can infer that the underlying motive of Namhila's narrative is to unveil the pervasive influence of patriarchal forces across all facets of human existence and to bridge the gender gap, exemplified in Mukwahepo's heroism as the first and only woman among men at the onset of the liberation struggle. Mangena (2009) observes a similar dynamic during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, where women, like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, assumed the role of custodians and preservers of cultural values due to their pivotal position within the household. Within the framework of 'hunhu' or the ubuntu philosophy, reclaiming motherhood strategically involves accepting the responsibility of caring for children, including extended family members, as a means of combating patriarchy from within. Despite the burdensome nature of these responsibilities, the African woman remains the cornerstone of the family, a fact that should imbue her with a sense of pride and initiative (Mangena, 2009).

In Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), the fear of infertility and the disappointment of bearing female children confront the African woman with the harsh reality of a life dedicated solely to raising her offspring. Through trials and tribulations, she invests herself completely in nurturing her children, only to find herself abandoned by those very children as they pursue their own paths to happiness and fulfilment. Similarly, Mukwahepo assumes the role of a mother to all the children in exile, tasked with caring for the offspring of comrades deployed around the world to further the country's independence academically, socially, politically, and economically. Despite her dedication to this maternal role, Mukwahepo receives no tangible benefits upon her return

home. Remaining illiterate and devoid of formal education, she is denied the opportunity for a better future.

Nigerian author, academic, and literary critic Chikwenye Okongo Ogunyemi (1996:114) argues that while feminism and African American womanism address important issues, they may overlook the unique circumstances of African women. Ogunyemi suggests the necessity of defining African womanism to encompass the specific experiences and challenges faced by women on the African continent. In certain respects, Ogunyemi (1996) explicitly dissociates herself from Walker's ideas:

It is necessary to reiterate that womanist praxis in Africa has never totally identified with all the original Walkerian precepts. An important point of departure is the African obsession to have children. (p. 133)

Ogunyemi's argument centres on the concept of unjustified childbearing, which represents a gender issue that oppresses African women who are unable to conceive. In many African societies, the ability to bear children is often considered essential for maintaining marriages and upholding the status of their natal families.

Despite her efforts to become a biological mother, she ultimately finds herself caring for not only her comrades' children, but also her sister's children as if they were her own. This situation reflects the societal expectation, as Akujobi (2011:2) suggests, that "every woman is encouraged to marry and have children in order to fully express her womanhood".

Similar to Nnu Ego in the Ibuza tradition, Mukwahepo appears to have relinquished her dream of becoming a biological mother, a dream she might have envisioned in all her relationships. As a result, she misses out on the comfort of an African old age, which is typically associated with having your own children to care for you. It is only in the twilight of her life that she begins to taste the fruits of independence, receiving the honour and recognition that she rightfully deserves for being among the first women to join the liberation struggle of Namibia and undergoing training as a female soldier.

4.6 Conclusion

Mukwahepo serves as a reconstruction of Oshiwambo culture and tradition, prompting a re-evaluation of past cultural practices that favoured patriarchal systems. In the book *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*, Namhila meticulously documents the life and heroism of a young Namibian woman who navigated a traditional Oshiwambo culture rife with discriminatory practices, amidst the competing influences of tradition, Christianity, and politics. As an African woman, Mukwahepo shares her narrative as a means to challenge cultural norms that confine women to traditional roles, focusing solely on domestic concerns such as procreation, infertility, marriage, and separation.

Mukwahepo's resilience shines through as she confronts and survives the oppressive elements of her culture, including arranged marriages and gender discrimination. Despite being denied opportunities afforded to her male counterparts during the liberation struggle, particularly among the first group of Namibian refugees in Kongwa, Mukwahepo emerges as a powerful figure, defying societal expectations and paving the way for the recognition of women's contributions in political wars and liberation struggles.

This study relies primarily on the oral accounts of Mukwahepo, woven together with secondary sources and historical narratives, to underscore the significance of women's participation in Namibia's liberation struggle. The way that historical records and personal biographies interact to emphasize the critical role that women like Mukwahepo have played in upending established patriarchal systems and transforming society norms.

Mukwahepo's experience of accepting the forced name *Mukwahepo* in exile reflects the erasure of her true identity, which should have been defined by her paternal family's kinship. This loss of identity underscores the profound impact of cultural displacement and the stripping away of one's heritage. In contrast, forced to grow, she delves into the implications of her newly found freedom following her husband's departure. In traditional, male-dominated societies, marriage can be a repressive institution for women, particularly in the realm of motherhood. Mukwahepo's liberation from her marital constraints, albeit through abandonment, offers her a chance to pursue her own desires and aspirations, unencumbered by the cultural expectations tied to arranged marriages. Crossing the

border of Namibia symbolises not only geographic freedom, but also liberation from the confines of cultural stereotypes and traditional gender roles imposed by marriage.

Mukwahepo's narrative parallels that of Amulungu in its unexpected trajectory, revealing a forced exile that she did not anticipate. Initially unaware of her destination or the reasons behind her journey, Mukwahepo's exile becomes a pivotal moment of self-discovery. Through her experiences in exile, she gains a deeper understanding of her cultural identity, reflecting on aspects such as her level of education and the unique form of motherhood she embodies despite not being a biological mother to any child. This journey of self-discovery amid the challenges of exile underscores the complexity of Mukwahepo's character and her resilience in navigating unfamiliar terrain.

In a tragic turn of events, Shikongo's decision to end their relationship and marry another woman propels Mukwahepo into a journey of self-discovery and transformation of cultural identity. Despite the pain of witnessing her former fiancé's marriage, Mukwahepo chooses to demonstrate dignity and resilience by wishing him well and accepting her role in caring for the children of their comrades. This experience, though emotionally overwhelming, ultimately strengthens her resolve and deepens her commitment to SWAPO ideologies. As she mourns the loss of five children and fulfils her cultural obligations as a bereaved mother, Mukwahepo reconstructs traditional patriarchal notions by proving her independence and resilience in the face of adversity. Her journey reflects the complexities of African womanhood and motherhood, as depicted in modern African fiction, which seeks to challenge and reshape societal norms influenced by colonialism and Western ideals. Through Mukwahepo's experiences, the novel underscores the importance of honouring African culture and celebrating the strength and resilience of African women in the face of oppression and adversity.

In this journey, Namhila demonstrates various ways in which she employs a predominantly womanist consciousness while reflecting on women's roles within their families and societies at large. She aims to exemplify the proximity of ideologies that overshadow women's experiences as wives and mothers, as well as the hierarchical divisions that lead to conflict and struggle within families (Koyana, 2001:64). Additionally, she illustrates the interrelationship between personal space (home and family) and the

larger political context. Finally, Namhila encourages other women to write and to engage in challenging, resisting, and participating at a political level.

Chapter 5 will focus on self-narrative and empowerment as depicted in Amulungu's *Taming my Elephant*.

CHAPTER 5 SELF-NARRATIVE AND EMPOWERMENT FUNCTION IN “TAMING MY ELEPHANT” BY TSHIWA TRUDIE AMULUNGU

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to delve deeper into the concept of self-narrative beyond its conventional interpretation and literary significance. It endeavours to uncover nuances that may aid readers in comprehending the intricate dynamics of radical political and cultural transformation as portrayed in the book *Taming my Elephant* (2016) by Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu. The chapter specifically addresses the third sub-question of the research inquiry: How does Tshiwa Trudie Amulungu tackle the issue of self-narrative and its empowering function concerning tradition and cultural practices in *Taming my Elephant* (2016)?

The force and power wielded by Amulungu in her interrogation of cultural practices are inspected, tracing her observations and experiences from childhood to adulthood, where she could make her own decisions. The chapter delves into perspectives on how cultural and traditional influences impact an African woman in modern society. It is essential to note that *Taming my Elephant* is crafted as both a memoir and autobiography, with Trudie Tshiwa Amulungu narrating her personal story from a first-person perspective.

According to Angus and Greenberg, as cited by Cunha *et al.* (2016:4), the process of selfnarrative serves as a reconstruction of self, occurring in the final phase of emotionfocused therapy, and is deemed crucial for transforming emotions and reconstructing identity. *Taming my Elephant* emerges as a compelling narrative of survival, homesickness, fear of returning, and triumphing over adversity in unfamiliar environments as Amulungu courageously reflects on various events spanning her life

since childhood. As self-narrator, Amulungu echoes the sentiments of Eakin and Howes (2020), underscoring her commitment to autobiographical truth and prioritising the recollection of her past thoughts and feelings; it is this past she seeks to reconstruct, thus becoming the arbiter of its truth. Through her writing, she endeavours to account for her personal, political, and cultural identity, asserting her role as a woman, a freedom fighter, and an author with a remarkable life story.

The researcher's intention is to explore the techniques Amulungu employs in navigating her cultural background, achieved through recollections of her childhood experiences and tracing her family history, which later extends to her involvement in the Namibian liberation struggle in 1977 and her return home upon Namibia's independence in 1990. Amulungu addresses specific aspects of Oshiwambo culture and African tradition at large, highlighting them as crucial issues worthy of reconsideration through the transformation of cultural practices to uphold and value women's dignity.

5.2 The title “Taming my Elephant”

Amulungu aptly titles her narrative *Taming my Elephant*, drawing upon a metaphor common in the Oshiwambo language. This phrase, as noted by Simataa (2019), is a symbolic expression used by the Aawambo people to wish for a peaceful night that will lead to a productive morning for carrying out daily activities. Essentially, *Taming my Elephant* serves as an idiomatic representation acknowledging the inevitability of encountering unexpected hardships and challenges in life, particularly during the night.

In Amulungu's context, the phrase encapsulates the adversities and disappointments she faces throughout her life, symbolised by the metaphorical elephant. However, it also signifies her resilience and determination to confront and overcome these challenges. This chapter delves into Amulungu's portrayal of self-narrative, exploring how she uses the metaphor of taming an elephant to convey the myriad disappointments and struggles she encounters, particularly during her involvement in the liberation struggle. Through her autobiographical memoir, *Taming my Elephant* (2016), Amulungu shares her journey as a woman travelling through adversity, highlighting her triumphs and perseverance in the face of adversity.

In her memoir, *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu focuses on both Namibia's historical backdrop and her own significant role within it (Rensing, 2017:111). Amulungu's narrative delves into her experiences during exile, particularly in Angola and France, following a substantial exploration of her family's traditional roots within the Oshiwambo context. This includes a detailed depiction of her paternal and maternal family lineage through a visualised family tree.

Employing an autobiographical approach, this study aims to dissect how Amulungu navigates societal issues and conflicts throughout her narrative, drawing inspiration from personal memories. By utilising her own cultural experiences as a lens, Amulungu aims to offer insights into past events and their implications, echoing the sentiments expressed by Nawale *et al.* (2019). Essentially, Amulungu assumes the role of both author and witness, utilising her first-hand experiences as evidence within her narrative.

Furthermore, a key motivation behind the creation of the book was to educate not only her own children but also the youth of post-independent Namibia about her personal background and the broader historical context, as highlighted by Amulungu (2016) herself:

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 into the posh Windhoek suburb of Ludwigsdorf. Before putting anything on paper, I reflected a bit on what to include in my story. This obviously made me think deep into my past in order to sort out the relevant information. I went as far as some forty years, to the earliest days of my life. I was amazed about the whole lot I had gone through. I clearly recall my natural upbringing, my native village and school life at the Catholic mission stations in Okatana and Anamulenge and my very first step into the unknown, a liberation movement that would become my guardian for twelve years. (p. 5)

In this context, *Taming my Elephant* assumes a subjective stance, as the author's thoughts and feelings reflect her own experiences as a self-narrator. Amulungu shares personal opinions and emotions based on her individual perspectives and preferences

throughout the narrative. While she is referred to as a character in the story, she does not take on the role of the protagonist, as her influence on the plot is clearly secondary. Essentially, readers are immersed in the first-hand account of *Taming my Elephant*, where Amulungu, the narrator, observes and recounts events without being the primary driver of the story's unfolding.

Furthermore, she delves into her cultural background, recounting significant discoveries made along her journey with honesty, emotion, and humour, acknowledging the reality of events as they unfolded. Amulungu's memoir serves an empowering function, offering a woman writer's perspective on her personal, political, and intellectual growth, asserting her identity as a woman, a freedom-fighter, and an author with a remarkable life story. Through the metaphor 'taming my elephant', Amulungu illustrates perseverance in her pursuit of personal freedom, reflecting on the supportive individuals she encountered and how they aided her in overcoming life's challenges as a woman.

Moreover, *Taming my Elephant* offers a gripping narrative of survival, homesickness, apprehension about returning home, and triumph over challenges encountered in unfamiliar surroundings, as Amulungu bravely reflects on numerous events spanning her life since childhood. As noted by Simataa (2019:219), Amulungu's involvement in the struggle for independence brought about a transformative shift in her life, transitioning her from an ordinary Oshiwambo girl to a transnational individual who settled in various countries.

Amulungu (2016) asserts:

One however, is not shielded from challenges in precarious situations such as the ones we found ourselves in. It was during these 12 years away from home that I was to receive the sad news of the sudden death of my mother, leaving behind eight younger siblings. I was further to get myself into a very short marriage which left me shattered for a number of years. But as the saying goes: challenges can be turned into opportunities... Soon afterwards I met a remarkable young man whom I was to marry some two years later. His skin colour became a challenge for me for some time, but it gradually became a non-issue. We both, however, had to find a creative but convincing

way of introducing each other to our respective families. And this had to happen upon our return to Namibia, in the wake of the excitement and anxiety of our national independence. (pp. 6-7)

The quotation highlights Amulungu's purpose in writing, which is to convey her personal, political, and cultural identity, asserting herself as a woman, a freedom-fighter, and an author with a remarkable life story. Furthermore, as a self-narrator, she emphasises the importance of autobiographical truth, echoing Eakin and Howes' (2020) assertion that her commitment lies in accurately depicting her past thoughts and emotions. Her writing serves as a means to reconstruct her experiences and assert her own truth, reflecting her multifaceted identity and the complexity of her journey.

Amulungu chooses the title *Taming my Elephant* to encapsulate the myriad cultural encounters she negotiates, from her formative years as a village girl witnessing the clash of modernity at Roman Catholic missions like Okatana in Oshana region and Anamulenge in Omusati region. Her narrative expands beyond Namibia's borders when she becomes involved in the liberation struggle, residing in Angola and other global locations during her exile. Drawing from Adhikari (2013), the book portrays the personal and political maturation of a curious young Namibian who, through educational experiences abroad, gains insights into the rich but often unrecorded culture of the Aawambo people, framing her journey within a deeply personal narrative. Amulungu (2016) reflects on what she knows about her ancestors:

As there is no way I could have complete information on my ancestors beyond my grandparents, a general picture can be painted from stories told by various relatives and family friends... What really matters in this case is the general idea of the situation. (p. 13)

In essence, *Taming my Elephant* serves as a reflection of cultural events, history, and politics, as Amulungu engages in personal reflection and narrates cultural aspects of kinship, including intermarriage, among other themes. Rensing (2017) suggests that the book embodies the concept of collective memory, wherein the author or narrator utilises their memory to provide essential social context across various forms of recollection.

It is noteworthy that the title of the book, *Taming my Elephant*, originates from an African text, specifically an Oshiwambo proverb, connoting a common concluding remark when the elders depart to their houses, typically at sunset: “*Uusiku nge inau vala ondjamba*”, meaning they would meet again if nothing huge happened during the night to interrupt the completion of the activity or to start a new assignment the following morning. As Rensing (2018) states: “In Ovambo culture the elephant stands for a major issue that comes up and requires those who encounter it to devote all their attention to its resolution” (p. 42). Ironically, Amulungu picks the same phrase to reflect on the challenging circumstances she experienced when she was in exile. She states (Amulungu, 2016):

And every time my elephant started charging, there were so many helping hands stretched out to me. With every charge, these readily available helping hands reassured me and every single time I was able to calm and pacify my poor ever charging elephant. And finally it was tamed! (p. 293)

The book exemplifies a significant development in contemporary culture, particularly within modern African literature, which emerged within an educational system shaped by colonialism. This system often adopted models from Europe rather than drawing from existing oral African traditions. Amulungu’s educational journey, starting at the Roman Catholic missionary at Okatana and continuing with further studies in Europe while in exile, serves as a reflection of this shift. Through her experiences, she is able to infuse her writing with influences from the rich African oral tradition, transforming it into a modern written culture that documents events of the past.

The hopes symbolised by the notion of the following morning in various scenes of the book reflect upon the circumstances Amulungu encounters. She uses her self-memories to convey the traumatic accounts of culture and tradition that she observes and inherits through oral history. Additionally, as an African writer, she seeks to utilise her platform to educate people and convey messages to institutions such as the church. She advocates against compromising cultural practices like Olufuko and emphasises the importance of rituals such as welcoming or anointing a newborn baby, asserting that these are integral African practices that warrant restoration and preservation.

Furthermore, *Taming my Elephant* is a narrative that delves into real events, allowing the author to reflect on cultural issues that shape the life of an Owambo woman. Through the sequences of events, the narrative explores how past events led to self-realisation within the diverse culture of independent Namibia. Additionally, Amulungu presents the reader with the illusion of glimpsing the past in an experimental, mythical, or antagonistic way, as Erll and Nünning (2008) suggest. As the narrator, she rearranges events according to her writing decisions, offering a personalised account of her experiences.

In connection with transforming cultural identity, the text contains many incidents symbolic of cultural identity and the convergence of different cultures in a changing world. For instance, marrying outside one's cultural background, as Amulungu does when she marries a white husband, challenges traditional norms and is perceived as a sense of betrayal by some (Amulungu, 2016). Another example is the maintenance of cultural identity in exile, where Amulungu's friend, Nangula, disapproves of her borrowing her wedding dress, asserting that the wedding dress should be provided by the groom.

The narrative also encompasses events where the term 'transformation' applies in context. For example, Amulungu's decision to participate in the war and liberation struggle in Angola as a young girl challenges the perception that such tasks are reserved for men: "Women were considered too weak to fight in the bush in a guerrilla war." (Thompson, 1982:247) This mirrors observations by Ezenwanebe (2015) regarding Zulu Sofola (Nigeria) and Ama Ata Aidoo and Efua Sutherland (Ghana), who pioneered womancentred writing in African drama by creating strong, central female characters who defy male domination in patriarchal African culture.

Amulungu's story is emblematic of many Namibian women who participated in the liberation struggle, filling gaps not only in the history of Namibian exile but also in the largely neglected history of liberation movements transitioning to the post-liberation period. Thus, the arguments presented in this thesis regarding *Taming my Elephant* (2016) underscore the representation of self-narrative within an autobiographical approach to transform cultural identity, as narrated by Amulungu in the context of Namibian women during the liberation struggle. As Simataa (2019) argues, when

discussing the liberation struggle, it is essential to recognise the diverse perspectives and roles, including those of women like Amulungu, who participated from a different angle.

Rather than engaging in armed conflict, some women, including Amulungu, were tasked by SWAPO to acquire skills essential for the development of an independent Namibia. They were sent to pursue education, thereby bolstering the country's image and progress. Through her diplomatic representation of the country in various nations, Amulungu has made significant contributions to amplifying the voices of women in national discourse (Simataa, 2019:245).

In their analysis, Emvula and Woldemariam (2023:65) highlight the multifaceted impact of exile on individuals: "Returning to Namibia was a joyous occasion for Amulungu and Shinana-Kambombo, the first generation of exiles, because they were finally returning to their home country, for which they had made several sacrifices." Thus, the researcher's aim is to elucidate the methods Amulungu employs to traverse her narrative, intertwining her childhood experiences and family history with her involvement in the political sphere, from joining the Namibian liberation struggle in 1977 to her eventual return home following Namibia's independence in 1990.

5.3 The concept of self-narrative and empowering function

Taming my Elephant encompasses a recounting of various situations and events from the perspective of Amulungu, who serves as both the author and protagonist. The narrative aligns with the concept of self-narrative, which, according to McAdams (2008), entails a prose narrative recounting personal experiences typically told in the first person, with non-traditional content. Amulungu employs personal narrative as a tool to navigate and transform her cultural identity, maintaining her self-image as an African woman amidst encounters with Western culture. Even upon returning to Namibia and interacting with her in-laws from a different racial background, she steadfastly preserves her cultural identity. Through her experiences, Amulungu reveals truths about herself, showcasing a contemporary self that evolves alongside the narrated self during the process of scripting (Jayaannapurna, 2017). Through this technique, Amulungu effectively draws readers into her experiences, providing vivid portrayals of her personal life, friendships, and societal

interactions across the various locations she inhabited during exile and after independence. Her concluding remark further underscores the collaborative nature of her narrative journey: “I owe many thanks to so many institutions and individuals.” (Amulungu, 2016:297)

In this research, two underlying concepts – self-narrative and empowering power – frame the discussion of the transformation of cultural identity within the exploration of cultural practices. These concepts serve as key elements to interrogate and determine the method of self-expression and the courage demonstrated by Amulungu as a writer in advocating for issues affecting African women, given her own identity as a black woman.

Goredema (2010) reaffirms the concept of self-narrative within the framework of African feminism. This perspective views African feminism as a justice framework aimed at delineating a clear distinction between women who were colonised and those who were perceived as colonisers. It also represents a social movement aimed at fostering a global consciousness that empathises with the histories, realities, and aspirations of African women.

Grounded in the theory of African feminism, self-narrative, as defined by McAdams (2008), refers to an individual’s internalised, evolving, and integrative story of self. In the context of *Taming my Elephant* as a cultural text, Amulungu utilises her personal story as a platform to empower herself through the formulation of a convincing narrative. As the narrator, she depicts the norms and beliefs of Oshiwambo culture, with which she is intimately familiar.

According to Shands *et al.* (2015), the fictional autobiographical novel serves to establish the existence of the protagonist, such as Godfrey, in their analysis. Shands *et al.* assert that the autobiographical genre was an avenue for African American women to reconnect with their roots, providing them with a platform to document their own stories amidst the ongoing struggle for racial and gender equality in the United States.

In this chapter, within the context of transforming cultural identity, I address the research question of how Amulungu’s self-narrative, as an autobiographical genre, contributes to the identity reconstruction process as portrayed in *Taming my Elephant*, and how it navigates the realm of African cultural practices. Building on this perspective, Shands *et*

al. (2015) argue that black women writers often utilise the self-narrative form, particularly when their protagonists are female, to challenge and subvert the prevailing notions of voicelessness and invisibility within black society and literature.

Shands *et al.* (2015) assert that their approach allows readers to track the development of female characters as they confront numerous obstacles and eventually triumph over them. In contrast, grounded in the concept of womanism, as defined by Ogunyemi in Phillips (2006), the ideology celebrates black roots and the ideals of black life, while also presenting a balanced view of black womanhood that addresses both the struggle for sexual power within the black community and the broader power structures that oppress black people.

Amulungu (2016:44) exemplifies this concept through her exploration of issues such as male superiority and the practice of polygamy, which is more prevalent among wealthy individuals in the Aawambo community: “My grandfather’s house was a hub of activities. Being the headman of the village, it was automatic that he had many wives.”

Amulungu engages in self-exploration, portraying her character to empower herself and navigate the complexities of cultural identity transformation as both a woman and a writer. The introduction of a white comrade into her life during her exile symbolises a significant change for her. Initially curious about this visitor, Amulungu is struck by the unusual sight of a white Namibian being addressed as ‘comrade’ by the Institute Director, Comrade Hage Geingob. This contrasted with her understanding that the term ‘comrade’ was traditionally reserved for black Namibians, because being white in Namibia during those years was associated with whites inevitably acting as if they were superior to blacks.

This picture dominates Amulungu’s mind as she is trying to find out what this white comrade did to deserve his comradeship. She states (Amulungu, 2016:200): “Comrade was a sacred word for us.” Through her assertion that ‘comrade’ held a sacred meaning for ‘us’, she underscores the collective identity shared by black Namibians who left their homeland to participate in the liberation movement. She further reaffirms to herself (Amulungu, 2016):

This time I definitely knew and perfectly understood our fate as Namibians. Although this was not an official position, we at the back of our minds knew that whites in Namibia were the reason for our struggle. (p. 200)

Amulungu's narrative delves into the complexities of reconciling political engagement with cultural identity as a black Namibian. Her encounter with Wilfried prompts her to confront preconceived notions about white individuals, challenging her perceptions and prompting a reassessment of her cultural identity. Through her evolving perspective on Wilfried's character, Amulungu acknowledges the diversity within Namibian society, recognising that not all white Namibians conform to negative stereotypes. "And after having chatted to Wilfried a few times, we came to the realization that not all Namibian whites were bad people." (Amulungu, 2016:205)

Amulungu finds herself caught in a dilemma as she encounters the complexities of cultural expectations and personal desires. Despite her growing affection for Wilfried, she grapples with the cultural norms and societal judgements that threaten to undermine her autonomy and happiness. As an African woman, she feels the weight of tradition bearing down on her, knowing that her relationship with Wilfried challenges established norms and may invite criticism from her community. Several cultural issues weigh on her mind. Firstly, the type of relationship she was about to enter was deemed unacceptable in Namibia, let alone within her Oshiwambo culture. Secondly, she was still married to Aaron and had a daughter with him. Thirdly, she was three years older than Wilfried, and in Oshiwambo culture, all these factors counted against her decision to accept Wilfried's love proposal. These concerns were evident to her even though she was away from home. Thus, these considerations encapsulated the challenge of being a black woman within her cultural environment, as she sought to avoid feelings of guilt and regret upon her return home. She states (Amulungu, 2016):

Why should we ignore this reality of our society back home simply because we were temporarily outside the country? ... Under normal circumstances, I would have been shielded by sufficient solid defences. Any sensible person would have understood my position. Agreeing with it was seemingly another matter. (p. 213)

Her conversation with her friend Maria leads to disturbing thoughts, through which she reflects on her cultural identity. In other words, the elephant slowly but vividly appears in her mind as she becomes entangled in a number of cultural issues that define her as an African and cause her confusion. Although she was married and did not transgress the cultural law of Olufuko by having a child before the rite of passage, she is still disturbed by the fact that she is married and has a child with another man.

She asserts (Amulungu, 2016):

Of course, my chat with Maria began to work a bit on my nerves. What if there was the slightest truth in Maria's observation? No, it could not be. Even if there were a remote possibility, I had so many layers of protection around me. I was married, I was a mother of a three-year-old daughter, I was slightly older than Wilfried and most importantly, our different colours were an overriding factor. (p. 210)

Amulungu reiterates what Kolawole (2020) elucidated: there are strands in the thoughts of black male scholars, who perceive women's experiences as grounded in the structures and norms of African cultures that disadvantage women yet express a desire to empower them. In this context, Amulungu vividly contemplates the feelings and imaginations associated with being an African woman. She finds herself caught in a maelstrom of doubts and mixed feelings regarding whether she can fall in love with Wilfried due to his skin colour. However, she later undergoes a change of heart and accepts him as a comrade: "Yes, I had a shift in mind regarding that in the meantime." (Amulungu, 2016:210). It's interesting to note that Amulungu leaves the reader with a vague impression when she generalises her conclusion to Wilfried's specific inquiries, suggesting that they are all allies bound by a common leadership.

In addition, it is important for women to realise that they possess the power to use their own voices and speak for themselves and others in order to change the status quo of patriarchal society. It should also be kept in mind that *Taming my Elephant* is crafted as a memoir and autobiography, wherein the author unravels her personal story from a firstperson point of view. Amulungu adopts the authorial narrator position as she

addresses her audience directly (Hokenson, 2014). Allison (2005) points out the discerning characteristics of autobiography:

...[R]eal autobiography is a weave in which self-consciousness is delicately threaded throughout interrelated experiences. It may have such varied functions as self-explication, self-discovery, self-clarification, self-formation, self-presentation, self-justification... Autobiography, with its emphasis on understanding the individual through a focus on the lived life, is often considered to be typically “an invention that has its roots in Western culture but has characteristics that have been articulated and theorized within, say the last hundred years”. (pp. 99-100, citing Kedourie)

Lloyd (1986) asserts that autobiography seeks to present the self as it understands itself. By merging the narrator and protagonist, it shows the self as an object depicted from its perspective, establishing a relationship between the subjective and objective dimensions. For example, the use of the pronoun ‘I’ denotes the narrator who is also the protagonist in the story; Amulungu refers to herself as a narrator who at the same time appears to be the main character. She states (Amulungu, 2013):

Well, I started feeling awkward being with people who did not know much about me. I know that this sentiment may be hard to believe, but, for me, the awkwardness only intensified when it came to those I lived with. I first thought of sharing my story with my family. (p. 3)

Similarly, Olney (1980) defines the term autobiography by focusing on the link between self and form. He deconstructs the term autobiography into three parts (Olney, 1980:6): “What do we mean by the self, or himself (*autos*)? What do we mean by life (*bios*)? What significance do we impute to the act of writing (*graphe*)? – what is the significance and the effect of transforming life, or a life, into a text?”

Lloyd (1986) explains that autobiography aims to provide the truth of a self as grasped by itself. It presents the self as an object described from its perspective. Moreover, the description above is congruent with Fivush (2011) who says that autobiographical memory goes beyond guiding current and future behaviour to serve social and emotional functions such as self-definition and self-regulation.

In this regard, the intersection of autobiography and postcolonial theory will be employed to determine the personal legitimacy of cultural practices that Amulungu exemplifies in the text. She speculates on the events along the narrative as she reports, tells, and provides information that falls within her own first-hand knowledge of the world or what she learns second-hand from other people in the story. This is exemplified in the third chapter of her book – My world opens up (Amulungu, 2016):

Coming from a place where we ate once a day, this was a welcome gesture. I literally ate everything and drank everything that was edible and drinkable. Only one little black thing did not taste nice, but I managed to swallow it. Ten years later I learned that it was an olive... And the meal was over. These girls came back again and they were taking cups to pour coffee in. I tried to swallow my coffee, but there was no sugar in it. How can one prepare coffee without sugar? (p. 111)

In this context, reference is given to the depiction of an elephant that remarks the heroism of Amulungu, a strong African woman who faces the unknown world when she takes a flight for the first time in her life and is introduced to the colourful cuisine that marks the metropolitan life ahead of her destination. In other words, *Taming my Elephant* does not only concern itself with the complex challenging situations perceived in Oshiwambo culture, but it also empowers Amulungu to gain confidence to interrogate the culture outside her homeland as she battles to understand the type of food she is eating for the first time on the plane.

Rak (2004) reminds us that autobiography is more than simply relating the past or factual details. Like fiction, it constructs an individual through writing, with its aesthetic aspects pointing towards deeper truths. In this context, *Taming my Elephant* takes on subjectivity as the author's thoughts and emotions are channelled through a self-narrator experience, crafting a protagonist who serves as a conduit for personal introspection (Shands *et al.*, 2015).

It can be observed that Amulungu chooses the title *Taming my Elephant* to symbolise the diverse cultural encounters she undergoes from her childhood days as a village girl, witnessing the shifts towards modernity at Roman Catholic missions such as Okatana in

Oshana region and Anamulenge in Omusati region. Her narrative transcends the borders of Namibia as she becomes involved in the liberation struggle, spending time in exile in Angola and other global locations.

Moreover, *Taming my Elephant* serves as a reflection of cultural events, history, and politics, as Amulungu delves into personal reflections and narrates cultural aspects related to kinship and intermarriage, which are themes identified for this textual analysis.

Rensing (2017) suggests that this narrative embodies the notion of collective memory, wherein the author or narrator draws upon their own memories to provide essential social context for various forms of remembrance.

As indicated before, the title of the book, *Taming my Elephant*, is based on a typical Oshiwambo proverb used by elders when departing to their houses, especially during sunset: “*Ongula osho tatu ningi ngele uusiku inau vala¹⁴ ondjamba¹⁵*”. Amulungu (2016) relates her narrative to the same proverb when she refers to unexpected events in her life:

Metaphorically, in Oshiwambo, my mother tongue, the elephant is likened to the most challenging situation that can face humanity. The Aawambo believe that if an elephant shows up, everything else, irrespective of its nature and urgency, is put aside. Dealing with and getting rid of the elephant becomes priority number one. (p. 2)

“In Ovambo culture the elephant stands for a major issue that comes up and requires those who encounter it to devote all their attention to its resolution.” (Rensing, 2018:42) Ironically, Amulungu (2016) picks the same phrase to reflect on the hard circumstances she experienced when she was in exile:

¹⁴ This is a metaphor used in the Oshiwambo language to describe a challenging situation that may arise and disrupt the proceedings of the next task. In Oshiwambo culture, there is a belief that anything can happen during the night while people are sleeping, potentially affecting the plans for the following day, regardless of their urgency. This metaphor compares the unexpected challenges and difficulties to the immense presence of an elephant.

¹⁵ *Ondjamba* is an elephant.

And every time my elephant started charging, there were so many helping hands stretched out to me. With every charge, these readily available helping hands assured me and every single time I was able to calm and pacify my poor ever charging elephant. And finally it was tamed! (p. 293)

Amulungu (2016) recounts the cultural shocks and huge discoveries she made, both in exile and after independence, with honesty, emotion and humour:

Looking back today, I realise that under the circumstances, my parents-inlaw had a number of understandable concerns. Until my appearance in their lives, they had no black person within their yard except for the gardener and the cleaning lady. They never had a black person taking part in their life and sharing the same facilities. (p. 289)

She immerses the reader in her experiences, delving into the socio-historical-cultural context and depicting life, friendships, and community across the various places she resided in. It is a gripping narrative of survival, yearning for home, apprehension about returning, and triumphing over challenges in unfamiliar settings. She chooses to name her daughter Palenyondjila, which translates to 'pave the way back home', a name laden with longing and homesickness, symbolising her dual role as both parents.

She recalls her dreams about a future Namibia and the sacrifices she made by going into exile (Amulungu, 2016):

We had spent days and nights, doing nothing else but thinking and dreaming about this Namibia! And as time went on, we had imagined what our families were possibly doing. What pain we went through, as we gradually glided into the determination to sacrifice for our motherland, even though unreachable for the longest time. (p. 229)

She relates the challenges of meeting her in-laws for the first time (Amulungu, 2016):

My parents- in-law and in particular my mother-in-law and I made an amazing effort. But clearly, tact was part of it. When it came to any discussion, it was initially safer for me to stay out of it. (p. 289)

Amulungu finds herself grappling with the weight of Namibia's colonial and apartheid history. She envisions the potential turmoil of such a relationship during an era when skin colour was a significant issue, and mixed marriages were virtually unheard of. Yet, amidst these challenges, her narrative also unveils a poignant love story that transcends boundaries, uniting two families and cultures despite the societal barriers of the time (Amulungu, 2016).

Yet, they managed to turn around and to gradually embrace me. As soon as I had rid myself of mistrust, I too started my move towards them. Somewhere along the long road, the genuineness just emerged. (p. 292)

As an author, Amulungu reflects on the profound disparities in life experiences spanning three generations within her family. The contrast between her own childhood and that of her children is stark, not to mention the disparity between their youthful experiences and those of her parents. Her memoir stands as a remarkable and significant contribution, offering invaluable insights that should be widely embraced by readers in Namibia and beyond, both within academic circles and among the general public with an interest in Namibian history and culture.

Therefore, the book exemplifies a significant evolution within contemporary culture, representing a strand of modern African literature that emerged within the framework of colonial education. This literature drew its models and influences primarily from Europe, rather than from the existing oral traditions of Africa. She states (Amulungu, 2016):

My recollection brought back fond memories of this typical village girl who, like any village girl, had to learn every household activity, ranging from all that it takes to produce meals for an entire family without measurement, to looking after siblings in the absence of both parents. (p. 5)

The author's journey, beginning with education at the Roman Catholic missionary at Okatana and continuing with further studies in Europe while in exile, serves as a prime example of this dynamic. This trajectory empowered her to wield influence in her writing, allowing her to blend the richness of African oral tradition with the modernity of written documentation. Through her narrative, she reflects on a multitude of experiences, expressing personal memories and traumatic accounts of culture and tradition passed

down through oral history. Additionally, as an African woman, she endeavours to utilise her platform to educate and advocate for the restoration of African cultural practices often overlooked or misrepresented, such as the rituals associated with Olufuko and the welcoming/anointing of newborn babies.

Moreover, *Taming my Elephant*, as a narrative, is embedded within authentic events, offering reflections on cultural issues that profoundly influence the life of an Owambo woman. The sequence of events prompts contemplation on how past occurrences have contributed to self-realisation within the diverse cultural landscape of an independent Namibia. Simultaneously, Amulungu provides readers with a nuanced portrayal of the past, often adopting an experimental, mythical, or antagonistic approach, as noted by Erll and Nünning (2008). Within the narrative, personal experiences are recounted, with the narrator rearranging events according to her chosen narrative structure. Through this exploration of transforming cultural identity, numerous incidents within the text symbolise cultural heritage and facilitate the convergence of diverse cultures amidst a changing world.

Indeed, the arrival of Wilfried as a white comrade serves as another symbol of the transformation of cultural identity within *Taming my Elephant*. Amulungu confronts the entrenched societal norms dictating that in African culture, women are expected to relinquish their autonomy and defer to the decisions made by their parents, particularly their fathers. This portrayal challenges the status quo, echoing the sentiments expressed by Archana (2022), who characterises such actions as betrayals against paternal authority.

Additionally, Amulungu (2016) illustrates the influence of Christianity on culture, recalling her experiences at the girls' hostel in Okatana Catholic Mission Station. She highlights the stringent requirement that all girls must adhere to in the Catholic faith.

Needless to say, the learners had to be Catholic without any exception. Initially, however, hostels were built to keep children away from their cultural environment, which missionaries considered to be heathen and would therefore interfere with their efforts to convert young people to Christianity.
(p. 65)

Therefore, the narrative encapsulates various transformative events, such as her involvement in the liberation struggle in Angola despite societal expectations that such tasks were reserved for men. In this context, Chung (2006) states:

One such woman was Sheiba Tavarwisa, a primary school teacher who joined the liberation struggle and became one of the first women commanders in ZANLA. Her responsibility in the beginning was to carry arms from Zambia and Mozambique to the frontline in Rhodesia. She was also responsible for working with the peasantry in order to persuade them to support the freedom fighters. When the peasants saw that the fight was being led by women like Sheiba, a highly respected person within her own community, it became much easier to gain moral and logistical support for the war effort. (p. 81)

In essence, the arguments presented in this thesis regarding *Taming my Elephant* (2016) support the idea that the representation of self-narrative is intricately linked to the complex interplay of historical and cultural backgrounds, as well as an engagement with the politics of writing from a first-person perspective, (Gilmore, 1994) – involving a reconceptualisation of both self and cultural identity:

Traditional criticism of autobiography has constructed a genre that authorizes some 'identities', and not others and links 'autobiography' to the postEnlightenment politics of individualism or the post-Romantic aesthetics of expression or both. In contrast, much feminist criticism of autobiography has sought thematic, formal and even broadly epistemological coherence among all women's autobiography, claiming that women represent the self by representing others because that is how women know and experience identity. (p.xiii).

The quote above extends the arguments made by Amulungu in her book, which are grounded in Africana womanist principles, expressing her identity and cultural reality, (AlHarbi, 2017). Al-Harbi draws a similar parallel in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (2004), where the character Tambu undergoes a journey of self-definition, seeking to

align herself with her native culture while receiving formal education at a missionary school.

5.4 Forces of culture in kinship and clanship lineages

According to Kuoppala (2018), Ovambo societies operated under a matrilineal system in pre-colonial times, similar to many other Bantu-based communities. This system meant that property inheritance followed the maternal line. Kuoppala (2018:17) also cites Märta Salokoski, who suggests that the economic foundation, political organisation, and religious practices were all structured around matrilineal principles. Within this system, according to McKittrick, cited by Kuoppala (2018:17), families and the community held significant interest in controlling their women, particularly young girls.

In this context, in Oshiwambo culture, clans were and remain solid bases of kinship and social relationships, especially when it comes to women and girls. Amulungu (2016) reaffirms the statement:

During that time, children would normally move with their mothers, and not so much with their fathers. Similarly, sisters or nieces would move with or to their brothers or uncles, brothers of their mothers, or to their maternal grandmothers. This is due to a strong inclination of the matrilineal kinship among the Aawambo. (p. 13)

This quotation should be considered alongside Holy's (1996) assertion that a clan constitutes a type of kin group wherein members assert a shared identity and certain privileges based on their lineage from a common progenitor. Clans typically emerge in societies with descent systems that emphasise either paternal or maternal lineage exclusively, resulting in either patrilineal or matrilineal descent patterns. They are often linked to totemic clans, which Tuupainen (1970) defines as organised social entities comprising living and deceased individuals who trace their ancestry unilaterally from a single progenitor and maintain a ritualistic, mystical relationship with their totemic symbol to ensure the preservation of specific natural species.

Furthermore, clans have been documented in societies with cognatic descent systems, where lineage tracing may alternate between male and female connections across

generations. Within clans, various lineages exist, representing groups whose members can trace their lineage back to a common ancestor through documented genealogical ties. These lineages are typically ranked internally based on seniority, with those closest in direct descent from the clan's founding ancestor holding higher status. However, such rankings are frequently determined by consensus, as members generally lack precise knowledge of the genealogical connections between their earliest remembered ancestors and the original founder of the clan. Essentially, the clan functions as an extension of the lineage, serving as a corporate kin group whose members identify themselves based on their presumed, though not proven, shared descent from a distant ancestral progenitor (Holy, 1996).

A study conducted by Malan (1995) suggests that the Aawambo tribes, part of the southwestern Bantu group, share cultural affinities with the matrilineal agriculturalists of Central Africa. However, Malan fails to provide a definitive explanation for the persistence of matrilineal customs, a question that remains unanswered by anthropologists. Shigwedha (2004) corroborates this assertion, stating that the Aawambo people adhere to matrilineal traditions. Amulungu also echoes this sentiment, emphasising the significance of clanship among the Aawambo, where every Oshiwambo-speaking individual from the same clan is considered a relative (Amulungu, 2016:12).

Despite the efforts of other researchers, it is essential to underscore that the aspects of clanship and rituals discussed in this research within the Aawambo ethnic groups are not fundamentally distinct from those explored by other scholars. Various studies, such as those by Shigwedha (2004), Nampala *et al.* (2006), & Sheetheni (2016), delve into precolonial customs among the Aawambo and the impact of colonialism on cultural identity. However, the diversity in research focus reflects the varied interests and objectives of individual researchers.

Hence, it is noteworthy, even within the current research, to acknowledge that similar to other African cultures, Amulungu underscores the importance of clanship among the Aawambo people, who belong to clans with specific names, each individual having both a paternal and maternal clan. This clanship, known as Aakwetu (my relatives), emphasises the close familial ties within the community. Additionally, historical accounts

indicate that not all clans were equally revered, with some associated with poverty while others were esteemed for upholding the dignity of their members. Amulungu mentions another clan, Aakwanekamba (a clan associated with hyenas), suggesting that traditionally, this clan was perceived as powerful commanders capable of leading tribes to victory in wars. Consequently, strangers often sought alliances with affluent clans for survival.

In *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu further emphasises the strong maternal kinship prevalent among the Aawambo people, highlighting that women typically relocate with their children wherever they settle. This assertion reflects the cultural expectation that mothers bear multiple responsibilities, with nurturing their children being among their primary duties.

Interestingly, Amulungu (2016) begins the first chapter of her book with the heading 'My Ancestors', where she describes the chain of her clanship from both maternal and paternal side to indicate her cultural identity and her origin.

My maternal great-great grandmother arrived and settled in Uukwaandudhi with her only daughter following some social disturbances in the district of her birth. (p. 13)

Amulungu intricately weaves together her family's genealogical narrative, tracing her ancestry back through four generations, as highlighted by Mauta (2023). This journey reveals her connection to her great-great-grandparents, the furthest link she could discern, as genetic genealogy studies indicate a span of 16 ancestors across 200 years (Greytak *et al.*, 2019). Shigwedha (2004) underscores the role of clans not only in preserving Aawambo material culture and socio-cultural unity, but also in conserving their shared historical background rooted in common ancestry.

Reflecting on her own lineage, Amulungu recounts her relationship with her greatgrandparents, albeit through the identification of places rather than personal names, locating their origins in the Uukwambi and Ongandjera districts of northern Namibia. Despite the cultural challenges she observes, such as the harsh punishment for girls who conceive before completing the initiation rite into womanhood known as Olufuko,

Amulungu navigates these complexities with a sense of reconciliation and acceptance upon her return from exile.

While Olufuko remains a contentious cultural practice within the Uukwambi community, Amulungu embraces her heritage and endeavours to reconnect with her roots. She underscores the significance of personal clanship across regions, illustrating familial bonds, when she introduces her white husband to her grandmother and presents her twin daughters for blessings. In this act, the grandmother symbolically anoints and welcomes them into the clan, affirming the enduring ties that transcend cultural boundaries (Amulungu, 2016).

... we went to see her for *akwate aanona*, a cultural gesture to apply traditional ointment to newborns to welcome them into the clan. She performed her cultural ritual and we enjoyed the little moment we had with her. (p. 281)

Amulungu shows the value of culture, customs, beliefs and way of life that are shared and accepted by people in a particular society. Culture has the potential to transmit from one generation to another (Khatar & Zarrinjooee, 2016). Although Nyasha in Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions*, does not approve of the patriarchal dynamics and practices of her native Shona culture she yearns to embrace her African heritage once again (Rodgers, 2013).

Although Amulungu does not explicitly mention her paternal and maternal clans, she sheds light on her affiliation with the Aakwambashu and Aakwahepo clans in the Oshikwambi and Oshikwanyama dialects, respectively, with the former associated with locusts and the latter with hyenas. This reveals a transformation of cultural identity as Amulungu imparts the significance of her clan names to her children, reflected in their Oshiwambo names. She prioritises imparting her cultural background to her children, emphasising her desire for them to understand the society from which she originated before settling in Windhoek (Amulungu, 2016).

Despite embracing aspects of modern culture, such as transitioning from an oral to a written culture (King, 1996) and engaging in an interracial relationship, Amulungu endeavours to preserve her cultural heritage by retaining her father's name, 'Amulungu',

which serves as her paternal identifier throughout the analysis sourced from the authorship on the cover page of her book. This action, as argued by Eagleton (1996), is not without its challenges, given the complexities and interpretations inherent in diverse cultural landscapes. However, Amulungu's commitment to authenticity aligns with the core principle of Africana womanism theory, as articulated by Hudson-Weems, encouraging Africana women to embrace their genuine selves and reject societal stereotypes and expectations. For instance, Amulungu underscores her cultural identity by highlighting her affiliation with the Aakwambashu clan, known as Ekwambashu in the Oshikwambi subtribe, and by a different name, Aakwahepo, in the Oukwanyama districts. This naming of both her maternal and paternal families serves to strengthen her connection to her cultural heritage.

Although the maternal clan holds significance in a child's upbringing, cultural norms dictate that every child should bear their father's name. Children with absent fathers often feel discriminated against and may be excluded from participating in family cultural events on the paternal side. Additionally, culturally, a child carries their father's family name from both sides of the paternal lineage, which is expected to be passed down through generations. Despite the maternal side's prominence in clanship, traditional beliefs restrict women from owning land or villages. Mafabi (2018) asserts that in African culture, families prioritise maternal kinship due to the belief that every clan originates from a woman, leading women to relocate with their children wherever they settle.

Amulungu challenges this notion by emphasising her paternal clan's significance, listing names associated with her paternal clan Ekwabahu/Ekwambashu, which translates to 'related to locusts'. She expresses a preference for kinship from her father's side over her mother's side. Amulungu exposes the patriarchal forces inherent in polygamy, a cultural practice that often subjects women to multiple marriages. She illustrates her mother's kinship to her father, noting that her mother, as one of the daughters from his first wife, held a different status compared to children from subsequent wives (Amulungu, 2016).

My mother was one of the daughters from his [the grandfather's] first wife.
So, she somehow had a different status than the other children from the
second, third, fourth and fifth wives. (p. 44)

This underscores the solid foundation of clans in Aawambo society, serving as bases for kinship and social relationships (Amulungu, 2016).

Clans were and remain solid bases of kinship and social relationships among the Aawambo. (p. 15)

In Amulungu's narrative, the importance of clan affiliation is evident, as strangers entering a territory must ascertain the headman's clan affiliation, a tradition that persists to this day. While it remains unclear whether Tshikongo truly belonged to the Ekwambashu clan, the headman's enthusiasm for extended family highlights the cultural significance placed on clan ties. Traditionally, only individuals from the clan are appointed as headmen of villages in the district, showcasing the influence of clanship in leadership roles.

Furthermore, Amulungu reveals that in Oshiwambo culture, maternal kinship also factors into royal succession, with only those related to the king through his mother's clan eligible for kingship. While this tradition has been adopted, it can marginalise individuals ineligible for kingship. Tshikongo's appointment of his cousin as village headman perpetuates the status quo of clanship leadership, highlighting the complexities and power dynamics inherent in cultural practices and traditions.

In Oshiwambo culture, it was customary for a woman not to entertain love proposals from men directly. Instead, the responsibility of arranging marriages rested with the parents, particularly the father, who would select a suitable husband for their daughter. If parents disapproved of a particular suitor, they could veto the marriage, ensuring that it never materialised. Ultimately, the choice of spouse was often influenced by parental preferences and considerations, especially those of the father. In this conjunction, Archana (2022) states:

The dominant cases are because of the cultural belief that wives are husbands'; that women should end up and surrender in an arranged marriage they do not even know who will become their future husband. Their father will arrange a marriage for his daughter when they have already grown up. This internal conflict is saturated within the women's psyche. The internal conflict of the main character facing above clearly represents how women in their culture are supposed to give up their destiny into her father and family

decision, it is not acceptable to deliver a protest or even betrayal against their father's choices. (p. 22)

Therefore, with the advent of Christianity in Owamboland, Christian weddings necessitated a church service officiated by a priest for blessings. Traditionally, at the bride's home, both the bride and groom would stand at the gate, awaiting the welcome from the paternal family, particularly if the father had passed away.

Contrary to traditional ceremonies, weddings in Maseru, as noted by Opong (1997), often involved church services attended in car convoys amidst celebratory singing and horn honking. However, during the liberation struggle, young Namibians found themselves dispersed across the globe, far from their biological parents' guidance. Amulungu's marriage in Yugoslavia, a different continent from Africa, under the unverified marriage "laws of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO)" (Amulungu, 2016:169), reflects this global diaspora.

Despite marrying Aaron, a fellow Namibian from a different ethnic group, Amulungu faces disapproval from her friend Nangula, who questions her choice and even criticises her wedding dress borrowed from her. Nevertheless, Amulungu's excitement about marriage overrides Nangula's concerns, as she rationalises her decision based on cultural norms where girls regularly marry before turning 25. She is getting married without really considering the situation she puts herself in, as she states (Amulungu, 2016):

I didn't give much thought to my getting married. At that time and at that age, and in my little way of thinking and perceiving things, that was the right thing to do. (p. 167)

Amulungu's decision to proceed with her marriage despite her friend's concerns illustrates how she may have been influenced by her circumstances, potentially overlooking important cultural and traditional considerations. Nangula's comments serve as a subtle warning about the significance of cultural rituals and blessings that should accompany a marriage, typically facilitated by elder relatives or close family members.

Tsoubaloko (2013:13) provides a detailed description of the traditional Aawambo marriage practice (Efundula/Ehango). In the Oshiwambo culture, the decision regarding

a marriage typically rests with the parents of the girls. Before the wedding ceremony, the parents of the groom-to-be meet with the parents of the bride-to-be, a few days beforehand. Following this meeting, a messenger is dispatched to inform Omuputuli, who is responsible for organising the gathering of girls eligible for marriage, to include the particular girl in the list. This occasion also serves as an opportunity for unmarried girls to be considered for future marriages. Both families of the couple then prepare for the marriage ceremony, ensuring an ample supply of food. In the months leading up to the wedding, the bride-to-be undergoes certain preparations to signify her impending marriage. This includes adorning her hair with Eembaba (pearls) and Oshikwanga, in addition to the traditional hairstyle known as Elende. Throughout this period, the parents of the bride-to-be are referred to as Ovafukiki.

Nangula expresses concern about the feasibility of traditional marriage rituals taking place in Ljubljana, where Amulungu's wedding ceremony is scheduled to occur. This aligns with the belief, as noted by Opong (1997), that Westernised weddings should be conducted separately from traditional marriage rituals in African culture. Despite Nangula's concerns, Amulungu (2016) chooses to proceed with her wedding ceremony without the presence or blessings of family members or close friends.

I went to borrow Nangula's wedding dress. I am sure today people find this unthinkable, but that was exactly why I went to Paris on that particular occasion. After trying on the dress and after Nangula's many hilarious comments about the fashion and the bad luck this might bring, I neatly packed everything I needed for my wedding. These were hard times. And I was a student, so was Aaron. Fashion was not an issue, and those days, the meaning of bad luck did not mean much. (p. 168)

This act soothes Amulungu's worries about the absence of any close relatives to witness her wedding ceremony. However, it becomes evident to Amulungu that her marriage lacks blessings in all forms. The briefness of the ceremony, Tate Mwaningange's swift departure without offering advice or accompanying the couple in their celebration, and Amulungu's own lack of feeling any difference between singlehood and marriage are some of the issues that haunt her, leading her to regret her decision to enter into such a

covenant without approval from the elders. Therefore, while Amulungu is in the process of taming her elephant, she considers Tate Mwaningange's handshake as both a cultural practice and a ritual that brings blessings to her marriage. She expresses gratitude, stating, "I thanked him for having performed the rituals and we parted" (Amulungu, 2016:169).

To expand on the previous point, Amulungu's marriage to Aaron Uazeua, a comrade from the same country, takes place despite disapproval from her friend Nangula, highlighting the significance of cultural norms dictating that starting a family should be accompanied by blessings from the elders. The absence of traditional rituals in their wedding ceremony may contribute to the eventual dissolution of their marriage, as Amulungu (2016:168) reflects, "... those days, the meaning of bad luck did not mean much". Opong (1997) suggests that in Sotho culture, as in many other African cultures, communal well-being is prioritised, and individuals seek purification and harmony through ritual practices and sacrifices to appease the gods and ancestors. Similarly, adherence to cultural traditions and rituals may have provided a foundation for Amulungu's marital stability and harmony.

Amidst the physical and emotional distance between them, Aaron's indifference towards their marriage becomes increasingly evident to Amulungu. Despite her efforts to maintain communication and visit him in Ljubljana, Aaron shows little interest or willingness to engage in their relationship. His lack of response to her letters and absence at the airport upon her arrival symbolise a deeper disconnection within their marriage. When they finally reunite, Aaron's cold demeanour and immediate demand for divorce shock Amulungu to her core. She grapples with feelings of confusion and self-blame, struggling to comprehend the sudden collapse of their relationship. Aaron's abrupt declaration and subsequent departure leave Amulungu (2016:173) reeling, prompting her to search for the strength to confront the harsh reality of their situation: "After I had overcome my shock, I pulled myself together, literally, picking up pieces of myself, one by one, to become a whole self again."

Amulungu faces yet another stroke of misfortune when she is unexpectedly injured by an unknown object while on her way to purchase a ticket to return to France. The incident leaves her shaken and in need of medical attention, prompting her to seek treatment at a

nearby hospital. However, the details of the event remain hazy in her memory, with each visit to the hospital clouded by uncertainty; however, she recalls the last time she went to the hospital for the doctor to remove her stitches. She regains her well-being when she arrives in Paris.

5.5 Cultural change and identity: A biologism concept

In Oshiwambo culture, the inheritance of the father's family name holds significant importance, symbolising continuity and lineage across generations. Amulungu's narrative delves into her own familial history, tracing her roots back to her great-great-grandmother, highlighting the interconnectedness and longevity of her family line. The traditional leadership structure within Aawambo villages, overseen by village headmen, reinforces the societal framework and respect for authority, as noted by Bartholomew (2015).

Traditional beliefs and customs often instil a sense of caution and reverence for the unknown among the Aawambo people. For instance, customs such as refraining from purchasing a baby carrier (*Ovikwa*) before the child's birth stem from a fear of potential misfortune or curses. However, Amulungu's actions challenge these cultural norms, influenced by her exposure to multicultural environments. Her preparation of clothing and a bag for her unborn child before birth signifies a departure from traditional taboos.

Another aspect of cultural evolution is reflected in the practice of girls' initiation rites, such as the *Olufuko* ceremony marking the transition to womanhood. While traditionally strict in some Aawambo ethnic groups, Amulungu observes variations in attitudes towards pregnancy before such ceremonies. The migration of people between districts, as seen in the movement from Oukwambi to Uukwanyama villages, highlights the diversity in cultural practices among Aawambo communities. Notably, the differing approaches to handling pregnancies before traditional ceremonies, with the Aakwanyama demonstrating leniency, illustrate the nuanced nature of social structures and daily customs, as discussed by Miyamoto and Wilken (2013).

The belief in Oshiwambo culture that a woman who loses her husband to death carries a stigma known as *Omupya* reflects deeply entrenched societal attitudes towards widows. This derogatory label not only ostracises widows but also perpetuates harmful

stereotypes, making it challenging for them to find suitable partners and reintegrate into society. Amulungu's narrative vividly illustrates the impact of such cultural practices through the experiences of her own family members.

The plight of widows, as depicted by Amulungu, underscores the societal pressures and expectations placed upon them. Widows like Naambo, Amulungu's aunt, face considerable challenges in remarrying after the loss of their husbands. The portrayal of Naambo's remarriage to both an elderly man from the village and later to a stranger highlights the limited options available to widows and the complexities surrounding their marital decisions.

Another harmful cultural practice exposed in this narrative is the birth of the first-born twins, which is regarded as an exorcism curse. In the past, if a woman gave birth to twins, she was isolated from the rest of the family. She did not eat together with other family members, and she was believed to be associated with misfortunes. For example, when it was raining with lightning, people were alert to distance themselves from her because she attracted lightning to strike people. However, Amulungu escapes this curse. She gives birth to twins outside of her culture when she divorces Aaron, a black man, and marries Wilfried, a white man from Western culture. She re-emphasises the misery of culture and tradition, especially concerning the birth of firstborn twins.

The chapter narrating the final year of Amulungu's school life, is aptly titled: "My world Opens Up" (Amulungu, 2016:71). From the beginning of the book, we witness the winds of change sweeping across the northern region. Amulungu's family homestead is relocated from Omayanga to Ongwediva, a village near the main road in Owamboland, where she witnesses new developments in material culture every day. She sees cars for the first time and is amused by these new modes of transport that she cannot yet fully identify with. She reflects, "Since we stayed very close to the road between Ondangwa and Oshakati, the two first established towns in northern Namibia, my sister and I spent endless hours outside the homestead marvelling at cars without really understanding what they were" (Amulungu, 2016:48). Here, we witness the cultural shift as the world begins to open up. For example, the cars that initially entertain her also play a role in

taming her elephant, as she learns when living in exile that they eventually cause an accident that results in her mother's death.

Amulungu employs the flashback technique in her writing as she observes rapid changes unfolding. She illustrates the introduction of new transportation when she hitchhikes with a missionary Father and witnesses the upgrading of the gravel road into a tarred road in her village. The moment, where her brother experiences being in a car for the first time, marks the onset of a new cultural transformation into the modern world.

Furthermore, the introduction of the black tarmac road not only dampens the noise of cars on the gravel road but also symbolises numerous instances of modernity's transformation throughout the book. At the age of 14, the threshold for participation in *Olufuko*, Amulungu departs from her cultural milieu and joins other village girls at the Okatana Catholic mission station hostel, immersing herself in the new culture of Christianity. The missionaries viewed traditional cultural events like *Olufuko* as pagan practices, leading them to discourage conversion to Christianity. Hence, Christian involvement in *Olufuko* was strictly prohibited, and considered a serious transgression (Miettinen, 2005). Similarly, MuAshekele *et al.* (2017) highlight the impact of colonialism and Christianity, noting how these forces led to *Olufuko* (known as *Efundula* in the *Oshikwanyama* dialect) being practised in secrecy or abandoned altogether by those embracing Christianity.

Therefore, Amulungu illustrates colonialism as a systematic effort to eradicate African culture by introducing Christianity. She highlights the role of nuns at the Okatana missionary station, who gathered girls in the hostel to dissuade them and their communities from participating in *Olufuko*, aiming to impose the new culture through daily attendance of Holy Mass. Despite being a German priest and missionary, Father Kaishara's involvement in the Namibian liberation struggle within the country drew the attention of the apartheid regime, forcing him into exile in Angola. This underscores the influence of colonialism and Christianity in breaking traditional customs, such as the practice of marrying relatives to maintain close clan relationships. Father Kaishara's interrogation of marriages between cousins reflects the view that forced marriages, as argued by Gullestad in Liversage and Rytter (2015), are considered deviations from cultural norms, arranged against the wishes and consent of the individuals involved.

Additionally, the assimilation of the Oshimbaanhu dialect represents another aspect of cultural change within the narrative. Amulungu's transition from her home village to formal education at Canisianum, a Roman Catholic Church school in the Ombalantu district, signifies her entry into a broader world of diverse cultures, including her experience as a refugee in Angola. The encounter with a different dialect at Canisianum school prompts her to contemplate her own self-identity within her country. This transition to another missionary school serves to further reinforce the influence of the new culture of Christianity on her life. Titled 'My World Opens Up', this section of the narrative signifies the ongoing process of cultural transformation beyond the borders of Namibia. Interestingly, Amulungu (2016) structures her story as a flashback, delving into the history of her paternal clan and attending school in Ombalantu to reconnect with her ancestors, particularly her grandfather Amulungu, who hailed from that area during tribal conflicts among Aawambo ethnic groups:

Amulungu was brought to Efululula [the name of a village] at a tender age as a captive from Ombalantu, another district in the former Owamboland. The boy could not even pronounce his name, and his capturer, Amunime, named him Amulungu (p. 29).

The Aawambo people adhere to traditional gender roles, which involve distinct responsibilities for girls and boys. It is customary for girls to light the fire in the *Ondjuwo*, the main sleeping hut for women, while boys typically perform the same task at the *Oshoto*, *Oshinyanga*, or *Olupale*, which serve as fireplaces for family gatherings at night or as central meeting places. These locations are considered sources of fortune and blessings within the community (Malan, 1995). Consequently, when Amulungu crosses the borders of Namibia into exile in Angola, she moves to Ombalantu seeking blessings from her forefathers, aligning with the cultural significance attributed to such actions within her community.

In a foreign country, Amulungu maintains the flame of tradition, steadfastly adhering to her cultural heritage as a means of self-identity. Reuniting with three comrades from her village, who had departed Namibia three years prior, she experiences the breadth of cultural beliefs and rituals performed for social conviction. Immersed in the spirit of her

ancestors, she finds solace in their protection, embracing the unknown nature of their whereabouts. Metaphorically, the exiled life overwhelms her with the fervour of her fellow women in the liberation struggle. Freed from fear, she embarks on taming her elephant in a positive light, bolstering herself to confront the challenges of the liberation movement under the guidance and protection of her ancestors. One particularly poignant encounter occurs when she meets her comrades, one of whom, a girl, wields an AK47, symbolising empowerment and transformation within their culture.

Amidst her journey, Amulungu finds strength in the ritual of the traditional fire in the *Ondjuwo*, a practice she deeply misses in her current foreign surroundings. This ritual holds significant cultural beliefs, particularly in times of danger or hardship. The act of kindling or maintaining the fire in the *Ondjuwo* becomes a beacon of survival for her, allowing her to navigate through challenges such as her departure from Cassinga two weeks before the massacre on 4 May 1978. Cassinga stands as a sombre emblem of the liberation struggle, having been the site where approximately 600 Namibian refugees lost their lives in a single day. Through her narrative, Amulungu underscores the importance of upholding the tradition of lighting the fire in the *Ondjuwo*, a nightly ritual in Oshiwambo culture, as a means of preserving luck and blessings for family members, especially those who find themselves far from home for various reasons. Thus, Amulungu (2016) states:

Parents kept the fire lit for the safety of their children in an unknown place and for an unknown period of time, and they would keep the fire going for as long as it took. (p. 103)

5.6 The controversy of interracial marriages and cultural identity

According to Bandyopadhyay and Green (2001), intercultural marriages have a long history in Africa, particularly among the coloured groups in Southern Africa who emerged from centuries of European-African-Asian mixing. They further argue that interethnic marriage was discouraged during colonial times, as colonial officials sought to delineate tribes as distinct units. In apartheid South Africa, white/non-white marriage was actually banned. Ogede (1995) echoes similar sentiments in Bessie Head's work, where the main character Maru represents a significant contribution to literature on racial prejudice. This

was due to the prevailing apartheid system that prohibited sexual intimacy between blacks and whites, as exemplified by Head's own mother being sent to a mental institution when her pregnancy was discovered.

In this section, I aim to explore the expression of self-narrative in *Taming my Elephant* as a direct attempt to “erase the ugly scars of apartheid”, as the unity between Trudie and Wilfried symbolises the beginning of a new era in independent Namibia, showcasing how reconciliation can function in the private sphere (Rensing, 2017:116). Amulungu's intercultural experience confronts the challenge of cultural identity, particularly when she faces the deep division between black and white upon Wilfried's interest in becoming her future husband. This social issue prompts her to delve into intercultural experiences as a writer (Hokenson, 2014).

However, she struggles to delineate between a white man as a missionary, advocating for the abandonment of cultural activities due to their perceived permissiveness and paganism, and a white man who disregards the concerns of a black person. Her narrative voice in her autobiography transitions from straightforward storytelling to internal interrogation when discussing her relationship with Wilfried (Krishnamurthy *et al.*, 2022). Amulungu (2016) states:

I was locked up in a battle with myself. I could change my view or my position from one minute to the next. If need be, I would also lock myself away somewhere and refuse to give any response or explanation... Wilfried was going to prevail against all odds. I was completely beyond myself. My moods were unpredictable, even for myself. It was just hard for me to win the battle within myself. And unfortunately, it was going to be a long one. (p. 221)

Wilfried's declaration of love to Amulungu in a foreign country symbolises a transformative attitude between black and white in Namibia after independence, as historically, it was impossible for black and white people to marry each other. Amulungu (2016:200) acknowledges, “... we at the back of our minds knew that whites in Namibia were the reason for our struggle”. She senses the fear of losing her identity, not only from a political perspective but also due to the difference in skin colour and cultural background with Wilfried.

In a similar vein, Peffley and Hurwitz (2002) argue that while race holds significant social implications, anthropology has determined that it is not a valid biological construct. They further explain that race carries social, rather than biological, significance, and interracial couples and their biracial or multicultural children disrupt expected norms, challenging rigid categorisations. Rensing (2018) notes that Amulungu employs this strategy to perplex the reader, acknowledging her own confusion when encountering Wilfried, a white man.

Amulungu finds herself in a state of fluid identity, described by Hongladarom (2019) as an identity constantly evolving, shaped by cultural experiences and beliefs. Throughout the book, both her cultural identity and experiences influence how she perceives her world and values.

Towards the end of the book, the situation becomes more manageable as Amulungu and Wilfried successfully convince their families and friends to accept their mixed marriage, allowing the status of their relationship to become more manageable for themselves.

5.7 Conclusion

At the conclusion of the book, Amulungu reaches a point where she has largely tamed her elephant, with the independence of Namibia marking a reduction in the challenges she faces. Her marriage to Wilfried is no longer a burden, particularly as her relationship with her mother-in-law improves, and she begins to see Wilfried's children as her own grandchildren.

This research concludes that *Taming my Elephant* (2016) is a transformative story, not only for the author but also for the reader. Amulungu addresses the issue of cultural identity, highlighting its multifaceted nature. Through various incidents, she illustrates how transformation is a crucial tool in navigating cultural change, drawing from perspectives of African womanism and postcolonial feminism. Amulungu's journey reflects selfempowerment as she narrates events with confidence and impacts change in her new lifestyle, despite moments of ambiguity, particularly regarding her decision to accept Wilfried as her white husband.

Amulungu's book, like those of other female writers, contains important thoughts, truths, and ideas. For instance, she highlights her father-in-law's speech on her wedding day in December 1990, which serves as a means of empowering women and supporting their struggle for free expression, equality, and intellectual emancipation. Through the written word, Amulungu gains personal power to transform oral tradition and make her story visual, joining other female authors in showcasing their creative potential to claim freedom and liberation in the realm of unlimited expression.

Her work embodies a truly powerful text, employing various writing styles and techniques, including locating her narrative within the realms of feminist autobiography and Africana womanism. Through *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu asserts her authority in telling her own story as a first-person narrator.

Taming my Elephant serves as a metaphor for Amulungu's challenges throughout her life, representing moments of uncertainty and ambiguity regarding her identity. An example of this is when the car guard questions her about the people she usually accompanies to the gym, highlighting the stereotypes and prejudices she faces in her journey to love and marry Wilfried. This encounter raises concerns about her sense of belonging and identity in her own country.

Indeed, Amulungu grapples with the haunting effects of racism and cultural identity. Clarke (2008) aptly points out that these factors underpin feelings of hatred, racism, and societal and cultural exclusions. When individuals define themselves in opposition to others, it often results in a firm understanding of who they are not, or more significantly, who they strive not to become.

Amulungu, the protagonist of *Taming my Elephant*, emerges as a resilient and independent woman who emboldens other women to challenge the injustices perpetuated by patriarchy while remaining true to themselves. Through a close examination of the text, it becomes evident that Amulungu does not reject her traditions outright; rather, she openly addresses and interrogates various issues stemming from her childhood background and culture, particularly the tradition of polygamy. Furthermore, she defies societal norms by marrying and divorcing at a young age, a practice prohibited in Oshiwambo culture and deemed taboo. Later, she enters into a marriage with a white

person, which subjects her to the burden of racial discrimination and stereotypes upon her return to Namibia after 12 years in exile.

She takes her twin daughters to her grandmother to perform birth rituals, and the grandmother anoints them in the traditional way to bless them. Even after experiencing divorce twice, she finds inner peace through her own decisions. Amulungu is an independent woman who has survived many bad experiences and criticism from her friends during her life in exile and upon returning home with the love of her life from a different racial background. Though she freed her mind about her love for Wilfried, she became more worried about how to introduce him to her friends and family, especially her father. In the end, she confided in one of her brothers to tell her father on her behalf.

It is widely understood that a wedding marks a significant rite of passage in many cultures worldwide. However, in the case of Amulungu, her first wedding unfolds without adequate preparation. She fails to consider the implications of married life, a situation that ultimately leads to a distressing experience when she discovers that Aaron is unwilling to uphold their matrimonial vows. This research concludes that his actions, including infidelity, amount to dishonesty and betrayal, particularly as his wife finds him involved with other women during her initial visit after nine months of marriage.

It was also concluded that Amulungu reached a point where she was no longer sure of her identity, experiencing a sense of ambiguity. When the car guard appeared, asking about the whereabouts of the people she usually accompanied, it raised concerns about her identity in her own country. Furthermore, from this perspective, it is evident that Amulungu is haunted by the differences and negative connotations stemming from racism and cultural identity. Clarke (2008) suggests that these differences serve as the basis for hatred, racism, and social and cultural exclusions. Defining oneself in relation to another often leads to a strong sense of who we are not, or more likely, who we do not want to be.

As the main character in *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu shows that she is an independent, strong woman who empowers other women to fight the injustice of patriarchy without changing who they are. By closely reading the text, one finds that Amulungu does not reject her traditions; she openly discusses her childhood background

in the polygamous tradition. Despite marrying and divorcing at a young age, a practice prohibited in Oshiwambo culture and regarded as taboo, she later remarries, this time to a white person. However, she faces the burden of stereotypes and racial discrimination upon returning to Namibia with her white husband after 12 years in exile.

Throughout her life, Amulungu survives many bad experiences and criticisms from her friends, both during her exile and upon returning home with the love of her life from a different racial background. She takes her twin daughters and her husband from a different culture to her grandmother to perform birth rituals, anoint them, give them blessings, and welcome them into the family.

In conclusion, Amulungu's life underwent a profound transformation through her involvement in the struggle for independence, an experience for which she appears grateful. Transitioning from an ordinary Oshiwambo girl, her life became transnational as she settled and lived in different countries (Simataa, 2019:219).

The next chapter, Chapter 6, will conclude the study by presenting the overall findings and providing recommendations following from the findings.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter of the study, the researcher will look back and reflect on the data that has been gathered and analysed. The first part will review the findings of the study, while the second part will focus on the recommendations from the study. Lastly, the final conclusion of the study will be presented.

A textual analysis was undertaken to investigate the transformation of cultural identity through Aawambo cultural practices as articulated in three books: *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, *Mukwahepo: Woman Mother Soldier* and *Taming my Elephant*. All three books were written by Namibian women after independence.

6.2 Findings of the study

Through the textual analysis of these books, the researcher delved into the exploration of cultural practices as depicted in the narratives, focusing particularly on the Oshiwambo culture, to derive broader conclusions. The researcher's aim was to elucidate how the authors laid the groundwork for Namibian literature, utilising literary works to shed light on African culture, including rituals, taboos, and superstitions surrounding aspects such as widowhood, motherhood, and womanhood.

The researcher's goals extended beyond completing coursework; she sought to critically examine these works of art to discern the authors' underlying purposes in crafting their narratives, understanding that interpretations can vary across different studies. By contextualising her analyses within the framework of this specific research, the researcher aimed to contribute to existing literature and advance knowledge in the realm of cultural practices depicted in these texts. Ultimately, the researcher's goal was to generate fresh insights into African cultural issues that can inform interpretations of the evolving cultural landscape in an independent Namibia. The researcher also wanted to demonstrate how the literary texts contribute to the development of new knowledge in perceiving culture and tradition in line with the transformation of cultural issues. In other words, the researcher feels that the three authors' arguments contribute to the idea of transforming cultural identity, provide insight into African cultural dynamics, and encourage the reform of harmful cultural practices such as the statuses associated with women's biological motherhood, femininity, and widowhood. Accordingly, this thesis argues that in order for Africans to embrace the new culture of multi-living in multiculturalism Africa while upholding the desirable culture and tradition, it is important to recognise cultural differentiation and the wholeness of a human being.

In interpreting the texts, the researcher employed Africana womanism in conjunction with the African postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminism, as the framework for her analysis. The aim was to leverage the insights of womanist and feminist scholars in elucidating their concerns and contributions to the representation of women, particularly from an African perspective, as advocated by early pioneers like Hudson-Weeds. These

theories facilitated the identification of womanist elements, thereby informing various aspects of the conclusions drawn from this research.

Therefore, it is important to note that the selected texts were pertinent to this study as they facilitated the establishment of a connection between the content within the texts and African womanist perspectives on cultural transformation. They allowed the researcher to situate her argument within the African context, wherein the authors, drawing from their own experiences as African women, shared insights into cultural and traditional practices. Furthermore, all originating from an Oshiwambo background, the authors infused the names of the main characters with local meanings, serving as catalysts for cultural change. To a certain extent, they maintained a womanist voice, interrogating the privilege of men within their culture and speaking from within, conveying the experiences of women within a pure Oshiwambo setting. It can be said that they wrote from their lived experiences within the societal structures, particularly the patriarchal system, prevalent in both their rural and urban environments globally.

In summary, all three narratives underscore the societal inclination to privilege men at the expense of women, a burden that women must bear as they endeavour to develop empowerment strategies, as discussed in this thesis. Beyond culture, the authors shed light on the impacts of colonialism, Christianity, and apartheid, which have significantly influenced the evolving landscape of gender discrimination, contributing to the marginalisation of the majority of women and their subaltern conditions in Namibia and Africa as a whole. Through the lens of various theories, the analysis enables a more profound understanding of Namibian post-independence literature, aligning it with the works of other African women writers and theorists. This alignment reveals a collective exploration of personal and collective experiences concerning cultural subjugation, interracial marriages, and other pertinent issues, as exemplified in Amulungu's autobiography alongside figures like Kauna and Mukwahepo.

In essence, it can be concluded that paradigms such as African postcolonial feminism and Africana womanism are not entirely separate from mainstream feminism, as their proponents often assert. Instead, they complement each other, providing a nuanced

framework for understanding and analysing the experiences of African women (Viriri, 2014).

Furthermore, it was revealed that Africana womanism emerges from the intellectual discourse of modern black critics and writers, contributing to a comprehensive representation of women in this research. This theory offers a multidimensional and flexible approach, influenced by African writers in African texts and highlighting the heroism of African women authors eager to transform their cultural identity. In this context, Africana womanism provides a method to achieve the objective of this analysis by offering a framework to examine Namibian writings, particularly those of females, within the context of Oshiwambo culture. It aims to address and transform the cultural environment that impacts African women in modern society, advocating for the development of a new, conducive African cultural environment.

Moreover, narrated stories are the result of reconstructions of the past, drawing from a selection of memorised acts. This reconstruction process involves learning how individuals choose from their various life experiences and why it is important to narrate them to others. Individuals in societies live diverse lives and are influenced by societal expectations and reactions, acting as protagonists in their own narratives. For instance, while an autobiography may reflect history, it also raises questions about what did not happen or occur in society.

The application of postcolonial feminist theories and methodologies, in addition to Africana womanism, facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the issues identified in this thesis. It aimed to uncover an African-based female perspective and demonstrate that Amulungu, Andreas, and Namhila not only align their writings with Africana womanism, as noted by Gilliam (2013), but also transcend one-dimensional representations of womanhood. Their works reflect on multiple experiences and realities of women's emancipation in general.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, the narrative highlights that in Africa, women can endure a series of experiences that profoundly affect their lives, yet they remain resilient in making decisions to break free from abusive situations perpetuated by the patriarchal system. Andreas exposes the injustice of cultural male dominance over women,

particularly as mothers, wives, and caretakers, evident in practices such as kinship, widowhood, and accusations of witchcraft following the death of a husband. For instance, when Shange dies, his wife Kauna is culturally blamed for his death and accused of bewitching him.

In response, Kauna embodies the principles of Africana womanism, asserting her identity and demonstrating her potential to transform and create new realities for African women. Despite enduring public abuse from her husband Shange, Kauna remains faithful and strives to maintain her dignity as an African woman. Her struggle to conceive after marriage in Oshaantu village allows her husband, Shange, to engage in extramarital affairs, perpetuating societal expectations of manhood. Throughout, Kauna faces discrimination and abuse not only from her in-laws but also from her maternal family, including her mother, who subject her to domestic violence.

The narrative also reveals the agony of women trapped in loveless marriages, exacerbated by societal stereotypes. This is exemplified by the contrasting meanings of the characters' names: Kauna, which suggests ownership of nothing, and Shange, meaning 'what belongs to me', symbolising the vast disparity between the oppressor (the man) and the oppressed (the woman). Similarly, the name Mukwahepo, assigned to the female character, connotes poverty and reflects the marginalisation and disadvantage faced by women, even after independence, as evidenced by her male counterparts' refusal to acknowledge her proper name and grant her equal rights and opportunities.

Hence, Kauna firmly refuses to mourn her husband, Shange, when he returns home dead from an unknown disease. She rejects the cultural expectation for widows to mourn their husbands, even those who neglected and publicly abused them during their lifetime. In this interpretation, Kauna demonstrates that women possess a voice that needs to be heard. They require platforms to raise their voices, not only in circumstances like this one, but also to support one another, as evidenced by the initiative of *Okakungungu*¹⁶ when a group of women in Oshaantu village came together to assist Kauna in eradicating unwanted weeds among her crops. According to Africana womanism, the role of women

¹⁶ A group of women who gets together to assist the bereaved widow to manage and eradicate weeds among her crops in the *mahangu* field.

is to show the image of sisterhood as a source to forge identity networks among themselves. Thus, through *Okakungunu* we see how women collectively empower themselves, which later enables Kauna to stand up for herself and face Shange's family when they are scolding her about his sudden death.

Furthermore, Shange's family takes control of the funeral preparations for their brother with a sense of pride rather than sorrow, asserting their superiority over Kauna and her family, whom they perceive as being from a lower social status. Disregarding Kauna's role as the widow, they exclude her from any decision-making regarding the funeral arrangements, including the selection of the coffin, treating her as if she is invisible. In response, Kauna vehemently rejects the oppressive traditions that dictate how widows should behave in African society. Despite her mother's pressure to conform to cultural norms and blaming Kauna for not displaying sufficient grief over her husband's death, Kauna refuses to participate in perpetuating the patriarchal system. Consequently, she maintains her silence during the funeral arrangements, leaving a conspicuous void in the programme where the widow's speech would traditionally be delivered.

It was also concluded that Andreas did not merely address the issue of cultural practices in isolation; she also acknowledged the efforts made by women, exemplified through the

protagonist Kauna, who challenged the patriarchal system and sought to change the status quo of male dominance. This was evident in Kauna's strong determination to liberate herself and other women from the accusation of witchcraft, a cultural practice that unfairly favoured the families of deceased married men in inheriting their wealth, a privilege not extended to women. Additionally, Kauna defied the long-standing cultural expectation that a widow should publicly mourn her husband's death (by declaring loudly how good her husband was), regardless of the hardships endured during their loveless marriage. Andreas aptly chose the title of her novel, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, to deconstruct the traditional beliefs that silenced women, drawing upon the natural beauty of the Oshaantu village as a backdrop. As Cudjoe (1990) suggests, the act of writing fiction provides a platform for women to challenge their invisibility and silence. In other words, Andreas utilised the character of Kauna to illustrate that through the transformation of individuals like her, there exists the potential for broader cultural change regarding

widowhood within the Aawambo community. Simultaneously, this serves as a call to action for women to support one another (unlike Mee Maita who was of no help to other women in the village), emphasising the importance of achieving gender equality for the benefit of both men and women in society.

Lastly, Kauna returns to her parents' house, emotionally battered by Shange's relatives. She rejects the advice from her friend Mee Ali, who informs her about human rights organisations that protect widows and orphans. This notion leaves the reader with a sense of unease, as Shange's family still wields cultural power to evict Kauna from the house she shared with her husband. Kauna's story concludes in a defenceless position within the patriarchal system. Although she transforms her cultural identity by refraining from weeping when her husband dies, the tradition of women being dependent on their maternal families remains toxic. Ultimately, she is forced to leave the house she shared with her husband and return to her parents, symbolising the persistence of the patriarchal system. This underscores the need for further research to explore alternative platforms for addressing these systemic issues.

Defenceless, she states (Andreas, 2001):

They had 'won' in that they had the homestead, but it was not a moral victory, and they seemed to be aware of this, which made them more bitter and angry. (p. 173)

Despite that, Kauna gets anointed by Mukwankala: "She put oil on her head and wished her good luck" (Andreas, 2001:173). This is a ritual practised by Aawambo women on different occasions, such as wishing family members and relatives luck when embarking on a long journey, welcoming a new baby in the family, as well as wishing their husbands or their children luck when they go to seek for jobs. Nowadays, the practice has become a trend as it is used as a blessing when a person buys and brings a new car to the elders to anoint it, as a belief that this will prevent the car from the dangers of accidents and other bad luck as well as making it last longer.

Taming My Elephant unfolds as the captivating narrative of Amulungu, drawn from the real-life experiences of a young Namibian girl whose journey of transformation commenced during her early years at Okatana Catholic mission station. Her narrative

further evolves during her time at Anamulenge Catholic mission station, particularly the pivotal night when she, along with her schoolmates, was compelled to flee across the border into Angola. It was in Angola where they encountered the true identity of fellow Namibians, dispelling the misrepresentations propagated by the apartheid regime in Namibia. While Amulungu did not directly experience the war zones like other freedom fighters, she was sent by SWAPO to study in Europe, and her story (Amulungu, 2016) narrates her significant contribution to the independence struggle of her homeland, Namibia.

In a way, these events reflect a collective achievement. Those of us who went for studies could only do so because others were waging the liberation war and some others went around the world campaigning for solidarity, including scholarships. In the end, each of us had to bring our little pieces to the liberation struggle, although, evidently some brought bigger pieces than others. (p. 7)

With this quotation, Amulungu's narrative points to its culmination, marking the conclusion of her autobiography following a profound journey of taming her elephant, symbolising Namibia's independence and the eradication of challenges she faced both abroad as a woman and upon her return home. As a result of this research, *Taming my Elephant* (2016) emerges as a transformative narrative, impacting readers on various levels. For instance, it sheds light on cultural practices such as the repercussions of female initiation and stereotypes, prevalent issues faced by women across many African communities, as noted by Chikafa-Chipiro (2019) in "The Future of the Past: Imagining Black Womanhood, Africana Womanism, and Afrofuturism".

Amulungu's exploration of cultural identity serves as a pivotal aspect of cultural transformation, viewed through the lenses of Africana womanism and African feminism. These frameworks provide the basis for her self-empowerment and confident narration of life events, as highlighted in this research. Her marriage to Wilfried symbolises interculturalism, signifying an end to racial discrimination in Namibia concerning interracial relationships. Together, she and her husband become agents of change, bridging two distinct cultures.

The acceptance Amulungu receives within the Brock family, particularly from her mother-in-law, reflects a shift in perceptions regarding apartheid's entrenched notions of genetic superiority based on skin colour among Namibians of colour. She no longer struggles with the burden of cultural identity within her old and new families, especially as she succeeds in changing her mother-in-law's mindset, who now embraces her as a daughter-in-law and regards Wilfried's children as her own grandchildren.

Similar to other female writers, Amulungu's book encapsulates significant thoughts, truths, and experiences that resonate with women in real life. It serves as a vehicle for empowering women, providing support in their struggle for free expression, equality, and intellectual emancipation. Through the written word, Amulungu harnesses personal power to transform oral tradition, as evidenced by her detailed narration of her family background and kinship lineage in the opening chapter, "My Ancestors", thereby bringing her story to life visually.

In the aftermath of Namibia's political independence, Amulungu seizes the opportunity to exercise her creative potential, utilising various writing styles and techniques within her memoir, *Taming my Elephant*. Among these approaches is the method of anchoring her narrative within a feminist autobiography and Africana womanism framework. This choice underscores Amulungu's authority in recounting her own story, presenting herself as the primary narrator.

Drawing parallels with Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*, Amulungu embarks on a journey of self-definition rooted in her native culture. Through her narrative, she seeks to carve out her identity and assert her voice, akin to Tambu's quest for personal definition within her cultural context.

In *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu's narrative reflects the challenges she faces, highlighting a sense of ambiguity regarding her identity. This uncertainty is exemplified when a car guard's reaction to her family's skin colour adds to the stereotypes Amulungu encounters in her relationship with Wilfried. The incident raises concern about her identity within her own country, Namibia.

Moreover, it becomes evident that Amulungu grapples with the negative implications of racism and cultural identity, as noted by Clarke (2008), who suggests that these factors

are foundational to issues like hatred, racism, and social exclusion. Defining oneself in relation to others often leads to a heightened awareness of who we are not, or who we do not wish to become.

As the main character and narrator of her own story in *Taming my Elephant*, Amulungu embodies the character of an independent, strong woman who empowers other women to fight against the injustices of the patriarchal system without compromising their identities. Upon close examination of the text, it becomes evident that Amulungu does not reject her traditions outright. Instead, she maintains her paternal surname, highlighting her deep-rooted connection to her cultural heritage, despite openly questioning various aspects of her childhood background and upbringing. Notably, she grapples with the tradition of polygamy, she which traces back to her grandparents.

The narrative also reflects on the significance of weddings as a widely practised rite of passage across the globe (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2002). However, in Amulungu's case, her first wedding unfolds without adequate preparation or consideration for the future. This lack of foresight leads to a distressing realisation when she discovers that Aaron, her husband, is unwilling to honour their matrimonial covenant. This research concludes that Aaron's actions constitute a form of dishonesty and cheating, a behaviour that society often overlooks or excuses when perpetrated by men.

Expanding on this point, similar to Mukwahepo, Amulungu experiences marriage and divorce at a young age, actions considered taboo within Oshiwambo culture and deemed disgraceful to a woman's maternal family. Despite these societal pressures, Amulungu chooses to remarry, this time to a white individual. However, this decision comes with its own set of burdens, as she faces stereotypes and racial discrimination upon her return to Namibia with her white husband after spending 12 years in exile.

She embraces her cultural identity and takes her twin daughters to her grandmother to anoint them with traditional ochre, performing birth rituals to welcome them into the family and bestow blessings upon them. Even after her divorce, which came as a result of her own decision, she finds inner peace. Throughout her life, she survives numerous hardships and criticisms, both during her time in exile and upon returning home with the love of her life, embracing their interracial relationship as a form of self-liberation. Despite

these challenges, Amulungu emerges as a courageous woman, successfully overcoming many obstacles. Her resilience is further highlighted when the Namibian government appoints her as the country's representative in Senegal. Reflecting on her journey, she states, "Life goes on and I do not see any more chance for this daring elephant to show up" (Amulungu, 2016:296).

Last but not least, Goredema (2010) asserts that modern African feminism entails redefining African women's identities as active social, economic, and political participants in the advancement of their nations rather than as passive targets of male dominance and patriarchy or as merely preoccupied with the worries of their "Western" sisters. They are able to freely blend their 'traditional' duties as wives and mothers with their public personas. Amulungu is a perfect example of this.

In *Mukwahepo: Woman Soldier Mother*, Namhila records the oral history of the life and heroism of a young Namibian woman who grew up in a typical Oshiwambo culture characterised by various cultural practices that positioned her as a woman in a discriminatory sphere, subjecting her to an ongoing contest between tradition, Christianity, and politics. Goredema (2010) argues that for women, especially in its traditional and pre-colonial forms, the institution of marriage can be particularly repressive. In other words, in a male-dominated society, married mothers often have to endure various repressive circumstances, especially associated with the condition of motherhood. Mukwahepo, having been divorced and deserted by her husband at a young age, finds herself in a situation that, albeit challenging, turns out to be a blessing in disguise as it frees her to pursue love and personal development. Crossing the Namibian border not only grants her freedom to develop herself as she wishes, but also liberates her from the cultural stereotypes attached to a failed marriage, regardless of its institutionalisation.

The narrative was also found to be a reconstruction of Oshiwambo culture and tradition, rethinking and reviewing the cultural practices that were perceived to determine the position of a woman in society, established in the past by the patriarchal system. Therefore, it was deemed relevant to explore the story of Mukwahepo, an African woman, and embrace the work of Namhila, who observed a lack of literature in Namibian history

not only about the Namibian liberation struggle, which often focused solely on men, but also the significant gap in women's experiences that was hardly covered before independence. Significantly, Mukwahepo emerges as an agent of cultural change, transforming the culture that identified a woman in traditional society primarily as a housewife preoccupied with issues of procreation, infertility, marriage, and separation. She embodies a powerful character that impacts the lives of women, as revealed by her dedication to the well-being of many Namibians in exile. This dedication enabled her to navigate through challenges such as arranged marriage and gender discrimination, and particularly when she was denied opportunities that the liberation struggle offered to other fellow Namibian refugees, especially those in the first group in Kongwa. The study primarily regards the oral story of Mukwahepo as a documented biography, interlaced with secondary materials using a historical narrative style to underscore the relevance of women's participation in the political struggle during Namibia's liberation.

The researcher argues that Mukwahepo endures the pain of agreeing to and accepting a forced combat name instead of her real name, Namumbaduka or Auguste, which later empowers her to participate in political debates. However, she feels the gap of her lost identity due to the lack of companionship of fellow women in Kongwa.

In contrast to Amulungu, Mukwahepo's story presents a situation in which she had no intention of going into exile. Her account indicates a startling realisation of forced exile, since she had no idea where she was heading or why she set out on her trek. However, this revelation makes her journey into exile the beginning of her self-discovery, helping her to understand her cultural life better as she recalls issues such as the level of education she possesses and the type of motherhood she attains without being a biological mother to any of the children she raised.

Shikongo forces her to go into exile, and they stay together for more than a year, but Shikongo decides to end their long relationship without any justification. Ironically, Mukwahepo's transformation of cultural identity bestows honour and praise upon her fiancée's action of getting another woman, a situation that leads to their separation due to her inability to bear children. She witnesses his marriage in Kwanza Sul and decides to show him that she is not relegated to an inferior position, wishing him luck and allowing

him to continue with life while she suffocates in the life of taking care of the children of other comrades. Ironically, she is overwhelmed by the trauma of love, belonging, and relationship implanted by the reappearance of the person she loved very much, but who left her after they suffered together during the long journey into exile.

However, upon close inspection towards the end of the story, it is revealed that Mukwahepo's dedication to SWAPO as an organisation, to which she devoted her youth, was recognised by the new government when they offered her herds of cattle, a wealth traditionally regarded as belonging only to men. She proves to be a true mother when one of the children she brought from exile dies, and she buries him using her own resources. She sustains her cultural identity by hosting and observing the ceremonial processes of mourning as a bereaved mother, and she feels obligated to feed the mourners in the absence of the child's biological parents. In other words, she reconstructs the traditional image of patriarchal society, where women depend on men and only men can own cattle, which are regarded as a source of wealth to solve problems in families. She justifies the spirit of comradeship that was distorted but leaves her strong enough to face the challenges of her life alone. She uses her life experiences to transform the stereotype of the African woman in pre-colonial and traditional society, who was confined to a restricted role and denied her place outside her home, as asserted by Begum (2016).

Modern African fiction, deeply concerned with womanhood and motherhood, has dramatised various facets of women engaged in restructuring their society exposed to the onslaughts of the West. Glorification of Africa and the African woman has been an important mission of the African writer in both colonial and post-colonial eras (Begum, 2006:103).

Thus, in this journey, Namhila, as an author, documents Mukwahepo's life story to demonstrate different ways in which she uses a largely womanist consciousness to reflect on women's roles within their families and societies at large. This serves to exemplify the proximity of the "ideologies that serve to overshadow women's experiences as wives and as mothers, and the hierarchical divisions that generate conflict and struggle within families", (Koyana, 2001:64). Additionally, Namhila demonstrates the interrelationship between the personal space (home and family) and the larger political context. Finally,

she encourages other women to write, challenge, resist, and participate at a political level to gain the same recognition as men do.

In summary, Mukwahepo and Amulungu emerge victorious, embodying the character of Kauna, who ultimately “subverts the dominant ideology by speaking out when expected to remain silent and remaining silent when societal convention demands that she speaks” (Rhode, 2003:52). This statement confirms the idea that the emancipation of women requires meticulous negotiation, joint efforts, and bargaining with existing cultural traditions and practices (Rubaya, 2021).

6.3 Recommendations of the study

Overall, based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends acknowledging the value of African culture and its traditional practices, while also recognising the need for refinement and adaptation to align more effectively with the spirit of modernity. As Gyekye (2002:174) suggests, there may be a requirement for “some refinement and pruning in order to become fully harmonious with the spirit of modern culture and to function most satisfactorily within that culture”.

In essence, the researcher affirms that all three books selected for this study responded to the Namibian postcolonial situation. They embody a liberating voice and transformative intent by adequately representing the various aspects that affect women’s lives in Namibia and Africa at large. Therefore, based on the findings of this research, the texts reveal that even if a man is indispensable, a woman should also be recognised as such, and value must be placed on the human person rather than favouring one gender over another. In this context, the researcher proposes that while culture is a way of life, it is also dynamic, and therefore discrimination and exclusivity should not be tolerated. Hence, the modern world should collaborate with civilised and mature minds to reconsider issues such as widowhood practices and other gender injustices highlighted in the novels, as they are outdated (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2015), deserving increased concerted efforts for their complete eradication. In essence, harmful cultural practices should be discarded, and a new understanding should be embraced to restore and maintain the good ones.

6.4 Final conclusion of the study

In conclusion, it should be noted that while this study focused solely on three books by female writers, there are numerous works by both male and female Namibian and African authors that delve into cultural issues warranting further research.

By centring on women's perspectives on culture, this study delved into the writings of Amulungu, Andreas, and Namhila with the aim of grasping the underlying purpose of their communication. These authors vehemently reject the notion that cultural practices such as polygamy and widowhood are benign, instead highlighting them as significant contributors to the subjugation of women. Through their identified female characters, they portray women as active agents striving to free themselves from male oppression. They amplify the voices and struggles of women in their literary works, underscoring the need to address and dismantle systems of female subordination.

In essence, it is concluded that female subordination not only harms women but also detrimentally impacts society as a whole. Therefore, such cultural practices should be actively discouraged and ultimately eradicated.

Furthermore, on a personal level, this study has profoundly affected me. The women writers whose works I delved into during this research, with their rich cultural experiences and historical backgrounds, have evoked a deep sense of empathy within me as a woman. Their passion and determination to amplify the voices of the marginalised, coupled with their willingness to delve into painful and disheartening subjects, have left a lasting impression. I find myself deeply resonating with their advocacy for women's empowerment and the implementation of gender equality. Their resilience in tackling the complexities of transforming cultural identities within patriarchal African societies serves as a source of inspiration for me.

In line with Chukwu-Okoronkwo's (2015) apt conclusion to his research, this study serves as a foundational platform upon which future research with a broader scope can be constructed. It encourages greater participation of women in the creation of literature, paving the way for further exploration and analysis. As I approach the end of this research, I am reminded of the epigraphs I have incorporated throughout this thesis. Each of these quotations has been carefully selected and woven into the fabric of this study, serving as

beacons advocating for change and illuminating the path towards a more equitable society.

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