

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PORTRAYAL OF THE GIRL- CHILD IN  
ERNA MULLER'S *IT ALL GOES WRONG* AND *WHEN YOU DANCE WITH*  
*THE CROCODILE*

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH STUDIES

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

TIMOTHY MWILIMA CHUNGA

9405569

JANUARY 2015

SUPERVISOR: PROF. JAIROS KANGIRA

## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a critical analysis of the portrayal of the girl-child by Erna Muller in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*. The two novels were selected using purposive sampling as they primarily characterise girl-children as protagonists. The researcher employed the African feminist literary theory in this study. The African feminist literary theory was used to study how the girl-child is portrayed in the patriarchal world. The study used a qualitative research design to interpret the depiction of the girl-child in the two novels. Content analysis was used to analyse the two novels for depictions of the girl-child. The study revealed that in both novels the girl-characters make independent decisions and act on them, while other characters such as adults and boys play secondary roles. The study revealed that as portrayed by Muller, the girl-child is innocent, open minded, caring, adventurous, assertive, compassionate and brave. Among the themes that came up in the study are innocence versus naivety, child trafficking, slavery and sexual abuse. In the two novels the girl-child is portrayed as a heroine as the actions that are carried out by the protagonists are life-saving. All in all, it can be concluded that Muller used the two novels to empower the girl-child.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Glory be to the Lord the Almighty for the health, strength and peace of mind during the writing of this thesis. I would like to thank Professor J. Kangira for the support, guidance, encouragement and for showing faith in my abilities. Your wisdom is much appreciated Professor. I would like to thank my colleagues at the Polytechnic of Namibia for the constant words of encouragement. I would like to thank especially Ms Juliet Pasi for the fruitful discussions we had that in part gave rise to this study. I would also like to thank Dr Nelson Mlambo for always being of assistance whenever I needed his help. My understanding wife, Numbe for the moral support, peace and understanding that she maintained throughout the course of this study. My parents, for the solid foundation they laid during my childhood and my daughter, Lunza, for giving me reason to work hard.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Numbe, my mother, Bana Kennedy and my daughter, Lunza.

## DECLARATION

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

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Timothy Mwilima Chunga

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Date

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction and orientation

#### 1.1. Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. The chapter discusses the orientation of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, limitations of the study and the organisation of the study.

#### 1. 2. Orientation of the proposed study

Various studies have been carried out in the field of literature where different sectors of society have been analysed. These studies include the portrayal of children in literature. Some of the studies have sought to understand the notion of childhood in literature. According to Georgieva (2009, p. 2), “one of the most important conclusions these studies have drawn is that our notions of childhood have changed.” These changes can be reflected in literature through characterisation and other aspects of the text. The characterisation of the girl-child in literature can either reflect the stereotypical views of girls as a weaker sex held by some sectors of society or can help empower them by portraying them as independent beings, free from prejudices. To illustrate this point, this study explored how Erna Muller, a Namibian writer of children’s books, portrays girls in the following novels: *It all goes wrong* (2014) and *When you dance with the crocodile* (2012). According to Pasi (2012, p. 182), “children’s literature represents an important resource of understanding the needs, wishes and aspirations of young people.” This means that studying how

children are depicted provides a gateway to this understanding. In this case, the study seeks to understand how the awareness of the needs, wishes and aspirations of the girl-child can inform the portrayal of the girl-child in Muller's novels. Since literature can be regarded as a mirror in which human existence can be viewed, children's literature in Namibia can be seen as a record of changes in children's social and cultural lives as well as how these changes over the years have impacted the children in general and the girl-child in particular. The study has examined Muller's representation of the two girl-characters as protagonists, as well as the other girls depicted in the novels.

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

In many discourses about the portrayal of children worldwide, there are tensions between the exercise of educational, religious, and political power on one hand and various concepts associated with 'freedom' (notably fantasy and the imagination) on the other. The question arises, therefore, as to how literature should portray children. Should children be portrayed as voiceless and submissive characters, or should they be subjects that dictate their being and take active roles in shaping their social world? The answer to this question can be best found in the judgement of children's books as being good for advocating a certain aspect of life as opposed to being just inherently good. This means that characterisation in books that are geared towards the promotion of free will and the power of imagination and fantasy tend to reward such elements in their characters than those whose intention is to promote submission to authority and obedience. This study focussed on how the girl-children characters are depicted in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*.

The study also evaluated the extent to which the dominant cultural values in modern day Namibia are either challenged or echoed in Muller's novels through her portrayal of girl-characters.

#### **1.4. Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were to:

- Evaluate the challenges faced and overcome by the two protagonists and other girls in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*.
- Analyse how girl-characters are portrayed in the novels in relation to male children characters and adult characters
- Discuss emerging themes.
- Examine how the author uses the novel, to promote the plight of the girl-child.

#### **1.5. Significance of the study**

In an attempt to define literature, Ngugi (2012, p. 60) views literature as a kind of enjoyment that shapes the "raw material" of life, stretches one's mind, deepens one's experiences and heightens one's awareness. The novels under discussion in this research provide that awakening call through art, for one to think deeply about how girls define themselves and how they respond to various circumstances they find themselves in. Through literature, society can also revisit its own views and practices as far as gender issues and the place of the girl-child in society are concerned. Children and young adult's literature can therefore be used to fight against

stereotypes associated with girls and help combat gender based violence in Namibia. Pasi (2012, p. 182) argues that “starting from birth, through childhood to adulthood, social expectations for the male and the female child differ from society to society.” Most often girls are socialised to be submissive, caring and soft, whereas boys are socialised to be adventurous and tough. This socialisation gives rise to discrimination on the basis of gender.

### **1.6. Limitation of the study**

This study explored how girls are depicted in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile* by Erna Muller, a Namibian writer. Since the study only covered two novels by Erna Muller, its scope may not be enough to be generalised to Namibian children’s literature. However, studying the two novels only allowed for an in-depth study of the novels. As the study used feminist literary theory to analyse how Muller portrays the girl-child in her two novels, the study may seem to be biased on its analysis of the depiction of the girl-child over other social groups such as boys. However, the study only analysed such depictions as portrayed by the author. Also, by employing African feminist theories such as Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (STIWANISM), the study viewed male and female characters as partners in social development and not as enemies.

### **1.7. Outline of the chapters**

This study is composed of five chapters which are subdivided into titles and subtitles. Chapter One contains the introduction, orientation, statement of the problem, significance and limitation of the study. Chapter Two reviews literature on

Children's literature, Children's literature and the girl-child and African feminist literary theory. Chapter Three provides the research methodology used in the study. Chapter Four discusses the portrayal of the girl-child in Erna Muller's *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile* and discusses the character relationships as well as emerging themes and evaluates the strength of the novel as used by Muller to advance the plight of the girl-child. The final chapter concludes the study and offers recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature review

#### 2.1. Introduction

In order to find gaps in literature, a survey of various literatures written on the subject of children's literature, feminism and the girl-child has been conducted. Children and young adults' literature is an important genre of literature for both political and commercial reasons. According to Mwanzi (1982, as cited in Ngugi, 2012, p. 61), "literature is crucial to the mental, psychological and social development of a child. Literature stimulates children's imagination and sharpens their awareness of the world around them." It is important because it contributes to literacy, cultural, literary aspects of society (Hunt, 1991, p. 17). According to Hunt (1991, p. 61), "children's literature, disturbingly enough, can quite reasonably be defined as books read by, especially satisfying for, members of the group currently defined as children." It is important to examine the definition of literature according to different perspectives. Literature may be defined in terms of its features, cultural view or in terms of what the text is used for. A literary text may be defined as a literary text because of its special use of language. Moreover, a literary text may have a didactical aspect to it and this may determine its use. A literary text can, for example, be used to address social inequalities against a particular sector of society. In order for a story to be enjoyed by children, it should use a register and describe situations that are appealing to children. Definitions of what a child is vary from culture to culture and from one generation to another. However, the novels of this

study have protagonists aged between 10 and 12, and are a recommended reading for children between the ages of 10 and 14.

Nodelman and Reimer (2003, p. 14) observe that “whether baby books or young adult novels, what all the different kinds of texts described as children’s literature have in common is the gulf between their writers and the intended readers.” The difference between adult authors and implied children readers seems to be one challenge that the discipline called children’s literature seems to be facing. Chitando (2008, p. 12) contends that since in most cases children do not write for themselves, but instead adults write for them, there is a great risk that adult writers simply dictate to children what they should read. However, there are various strategies that writers of children’s books can employ to make the books more meaningful for young readers. Adult authors can assess what is of interest to the implied reader and make that the subject of their work. What is of interest to children may include themes that deal with children as well as a special register that can express children’s world better. Furthermore, the knowledge of the world that the implied reader brings into the world of the text is something that the author can predict. Norton (2011, p. 40) observes that “when children’s books were eventually written, they usually mirrored the dominant cultural values of their place and time.” However, deciding whether a book is good enough depends on what Hunt (1991) terms as ‘dominant literary/academic establishments.’

## **2.2. Children’s literature**

According to Ruud (2005, p. 22), the study of children’s literature involves three elements: the texts, the children and the adult critics. However, there are debates on

where the child, whether conceptual or actual fits in both the text in particular and children's literature criticism in general. Ruud (2005) brings to the fore two views of children in the text and children's literature. The first view of children is that of a child as just a mere construction of the writer. The child is constructed and is either silenced or created by adults and other outside forces without a voice of his or her own. Another view is that of a child as being constructive. This means that children have the ability to construct their own identities within the culturally available precepts. Here they are able to judgementally engage ideas and practices before adopting them.

For one to understand the characterisation of children in children's literature, it is important to understand the notion of childhood. In her article Mangena (2011, p. 206), argues that "almost all human cultures recognise the phase of childhood and consequently the difference between children and adults." Mangena (2011) continues to posit that for there to be this phase called childhood, there ought to be defining characteristics associated with this phase. Freeman (as cited in Mangena, 2011, p. 206) gives us "irrationality, weakness, imbecility", as some of the social constructs of childhood. These are however constructed by the adults and are not necessarily objective truths about the state of being a child. Chitando (2008, p.12) identifies "innocence and lack of responsibility" as some of the socially constructed attributes that society associates with childhood. Another view raised by Mangena (2011) to underscore the perceived weakness of children is the dependency on adults and the weakness in physique and size. Frosh (1983, as cited in Mangena, 2011, p. 207) argues that "dependence is a defining, necessary element of childhood, and children have a right to enter into it with trust." Dependency is not only limited to emotional

support but financial and social support too, (Mangena, 2011). However a question remains as to whether this dependency and small physique constitutes weakness. Muponde (2004) maintains that childhood is a subject that receives overprotection most of the time. This notion emphasises the idea of the vulnerability of the child and to a large extent the girl-child. It goes without saying that these vulnerabilities are often socially constructed and often limiting on the part of the girl-child.

Apart from dependency and physical being as defining characteristics of childhood, Mangena (2011, p. 206) borrows the definition of the United Nations in the Rights of children, which defines a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years.” This definition, however, takes cognisance of the provisions of the law into account, where the law is applicable. On the same question of the definition of a child and childhood, Chitando (2008, p. 11) observes that generally children are regarded as those that are 12 years and below. Chitando (2008) cites writers who include young adults in their definition of childhood and others like Wilson Tagoe who classify childhood to be between the ages of 4 and 12.

Chitando, however, is quick to point out that childhood is not only limited to numbers. Different societies define a child or childhood differently, depending on different social attributes such as the rites of passage such as circumcision. As cited in Chitando (2008, p. 11), Mbure (1997) takes a pan-African stance in defining children’s literature and maintains that “African children’s literature addresses the existential situation of African children.” It is clear here that the definition of children based on age is not the mainstay of children’s literature but the themes discussed in this type of literature. Chitando (2008, p. 11) concedes that “due to

cultural differences, it is difficult to clearly state the focus group in children's literature."

"Society needs to understand that children are not "an artefact or mere potentiality, but an actuality" (Muponde, 2004, p. 2). Children are actual beings. They are not just a creation of the author. Therefore, their conditions of being should be reflected through their portrayal in literature. According to Rudd (2005, p. 22), although children can be seen as powerless objects in adult discourse, they have subject positions that can resist this objectivity. Furthermore, according to Nodelman and Reimer (2003, p. 59), "characterisation is what readers discover in literature when they look for information about the "personalities" of the "people" the text describes."

Achufusi (2015, p. 2) argues that "[a]s part of African literary canon, much of children's literature is created not just for entertainment, but to address one social problem or the other or generally to educate." Education here means in the words of Huxley (as cited in Achufusi (2015, p. 2) "the instruction of the intellect in the laws of nature, under which I include not merely things and their forces but men and their ways." Ugochi (2010) argues that children's literature can be used to sustain and teach about cultures. This can be interpreted to mean the representation of common cultural practices that should be maintained in the face of globalisation. If a society preserves its culture through children's literature the risk of such a culture to be lost is reduced. According to Ugochi (2010, p. 51):

Children's literature thus becomes an ideological tool which while entertaining the people is also used by adult members of society to initiate their young ones

into their socialisation process used in personality enhancement and moral development, and cultural transmission.

One cannot deny the ideological nature of literature; hence the call is for writers to evaluate their representation of sectors of society that have not been correctly represented in the past.

Children's literature as a vehicle of ideology is the subject of a study by Tagwirei (2012). Tagwirei argues that the novel *Tunzi the Faithful* (1988) was used by the government as a prescribed children's literature book to socialise children into patriotism and watchfulness against "dissidents", "poachers" and "bandits" which are characteristic of post-independence conflict in Zimbabwe. These needed to be uprooted in order to usher in the spirit of nationalism and nation-building. Children's literature is used as a vehicle to instil these ideals.

McCallum and Stephens (2011, p. 361) identify two functions of ideology in children's literature or any other literature, namely: the social function of sustaining and defining group values as well as the meaning and organisation of attitudes and relationships between characters. This can be generally seen in narratives where cultural values are passed from generation to generation. McCallum and Stephens (2011, p. 360) observe that "... all aspects of textual discourse, from story outcomes to the expressive forms of language are informed and shaped by ideology." However, belief systems are subject to change and this study shows how children can be an active part of a changing belief system.

### **2.3. Children's literature and the girl-child**

The girl-child has been a subject of literary works in Africa and elsewhere. Many writers have concerned themselves with the plight of the girl-child and critics have devoted their time to the analysis of how the girl-child is portrayed in literature. However, in many writers' works, there are overlaps between the characterisation of the girl-child and women. The section below reviews the relevant literature with regards to the portrayal of the girl-child and gender issues in children's literature.

Since the study deals with the portrayal of the girl-child, it is of significant value to examine what scholars have written on gender representation in children's literature. According to Crisp and Hiller (2011), western notions of gender have undergone transformation over the past century. There has been a shift from the understanding of gender and sex as natural to the notion of sex and gender as ideological and socially constructed concepts. Crisp and Hiller (2011, p. 197) argue that inspired by radical feminism and gender studies "contemporary scholars and critics work to make explicit the nature of phallogocentric systems that undergird, among other things, Western cultural constructions of what it looks like to be "male" or "female." These cultural constructions are not only existent in the west, but in Africa too. Therefore, the cultural constructions of gender that have been fossilised in many cultures need to be evaluated. Butler (1990, as cited in Crisp and Hiller, 2011, p. 197) theorises that "gender is not a thing (noun), but a series of repeated actions (verbs) that through their repetition appear "natural"." Crisp and Hiller (2011, p. 197) condense the societal view of "male" and "female" as "contradictory and complementary", where the "male" is viewed, in part, as active, aggressive, directive, and persistent;

while the “female” is constructed as passive, creative, emotional, and imitative. In a nutshell, this is to say that people are never born gendered, but they are rather socialised into gender. The study’s focus therefore, stemming from this argument is to examine gender roles in Erna Muller’s novels.

It is argued that stereotypes about gender are socialised into children quite early in life by their caregivers and that upon beginning kindergarten such social constructions of gender are further cemented (Crisp & Hiller, 2011). Crisp and Hiller (2011, p. 197) posit that “children are instructed (explicitly, through caregivers and teachers, as well as implicitly through media like literature, television, and film) on how to “act as a lady” or “be a man”. The study’s chief concern is the extent to which Muller’s portrayal is influenced by societal views of being female and being male. However, what sets this study apart from the one conducted by Crisp and Hiller is that they focused on gender representation in picture books by Caldecott. In picture books, whether one is male or female can be determined by physical appearance and clothing. This study relied mostly on the descriptive characterisation and character depiction by the author.

According to Muriungu and Muraya (2014, p. 169), “many traditional African cultures tended to relegate the woman to lower or subordinate levels because of patriarchal ideologies that often view women as supporting characters in life.” Muriungu and Muraya (2014) further argue that even when traditional oral stories were told to children in Africa, heroism in females was often presented in less interesting ways and that more often females assumed a lower status in such stories. “More restrictive rules of morality are also often imposed on women compared to

men even in contemporary situations”, (Muriungi and Muraya, 2014, p. 169). This means that moral standards on the basis on which women are judged are stricter than those used to judge men. For example it is permissible for a man to have multiple partners, while it is a punishable offence for a woman. While surveying the representation of females in children’s books in Kenya, Muriungu and Muraya (2014) identified different eras of the portrayal of females in Kenyan fiction and these will be discussed below

In the early sixties there was an increase in books written for children in Kenya. Many of these were borrowed from the African traditional tales. One such collection of tales is *The Orange Thieves* which was published in 1969. In *The Orange Thieves*, five girls are portrayed as thieves of oranges who steal oranges from a giant’s farm. They agree to pick the oranges with their eyes closed. Meanwhile, four of the girls conspire to open their eyes with the exception of Muthoni who picks raw oranges as she has had her eyes closed. Later, it is found out that Muthoni’s oranges were raw and she has to go back and pick ripe oranges. On her way back she encounters a giant, which takes her in for a wife as she is too small to be eaten. When the giant brings home two baby boys for food she hides them to save them from death. These boys grow up to kill the giant. While picking oranges for the family may seem empowering for the girls as they are providers, their powerlessness lies in the fact that Muthoni is not in a position to defend herself from the giant. To make matters worse it is the boys that she serves who are dubbed the heroes after killing the giant to rescue her.

In their analysis of *Cutting the giant king's tooth* (1969), Muriungu and Muraya (2014) posit that girls are less empowered to the extent that they are either married off or eaten by giants and it is only men or boys who can rescue them from these giants. In the story giants disguise as handsome men in order to entice young girls into marrying them. According to Muriungu and Muraya (2014, p. 172), “when narrated to children, such narratives served to entrench African patriarchal norms, which often disadvantaged women.” These stories helped in keeping girls subservient and submissive to male authority.

In another story called *Captured by Raiders* (1969), an eight year old girl named Nanjala is captured by Tondo raiders from Bukusu community (Muriungu & Muraya, 2014, p. 173). As a captive Nanjala observes how women in the two societies are oppressed by men. She is encouraged by her grandmother to one day liberate women from the bondage of patriarchy. In protest she escapes upon finding out that the men in the village of Tondo are planning to marry her off to the king who already has twenty-five wives.

From the mid-1980s to the 1990s, Kenyan Children's literature has seen very little of female representation in literature as this literary era concentrated on narratives of the war of liberation where only men and boys took centre stage. Leading writers such as Ngugi wa Thiongo celebrated male heroism only in their children's books. This situation prompted reactions from Ali Mazrui (as cited by Muriungu and Muraya, 2014, p. 173) who observes the “absence of African heroines in the African literary and political scene and argues that during the struggle against White minority rule [in Africa] most ‘unsung’ super-heroes were often women who took great risks

although their efforts were mostly unrecognised.” Despite immeasurable sacrifices made by women during the struggle for independence in Kenya, very little about them is told in literature.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century with urbanisation in Kenya, the focus of writers was mainly on the issues brought about by urbanisation such as homelessness, prostitution and others. Despite planned efforts to bring out the female empowerment agenda, people wrote about issues on the ground. A notable novel from this era in Kenya is *Shida the Street Boy* by Makotsi, which was published in 2003. This novel tells a story of a girl who gets raped and impregnated by her head teacher. Due to the rape and the resultant pregnancy her father sends her away from home, leaving her homeless. She goes to the city to escape from the shame that the village places on her and to make a living. In the city she gives birth and since she does not have anyone to help her bring up the baby, the only way open to her is prostitution. It is evident here that the male dominated society blamed the girl for her misfortune to the extent that even her own father turned her away.

According to Muriungu and Muraya (2014), another notable text from this era is *My Mother's Voice*, written in 2008 by Kamundi. Kamundi explores the dangerous situation the girl-child is exposed to during the post-election violence in Kenya. Here the narrator tells about her ordeal during a raid on her village in the aftermath of the 2007 elections. Through the chaos and displacement brought about by lawlessness the girls are raped, thereby getting infected with the HI virus. It goes without saying that the characterisation discussed above expresses the negative experiences of the girl-child only.

A scholar who has written on the portrayal of the girl-child in literature, Kangira (2009, p. 187), posits that “the girl-child has been the object of scorn in Zimbabwean literature since time immemorial.” Kangira (2009) further argues that the treatment of the girl-child as being inferior to the boy-child can be seen through the imbalances in today’s society, where access to basic rights such as education seems to be favouring the male gender. Such imbalances are a result of the patriarchal society, which is also reflected in literature. Kangira (2009, p. 187) also argues that “Children’s literature is one of the most effective and effortless ways of inculcating in child readers’ minds that both boys and girls are equal and have the same aspirations and can achieve the same things in their lives.” To illustrate this point, Kangira (2009) uses Stephen Alumenda’ characters such as Marita, Tambudzai and Thandiwe.

In “*Marita goes to school*” (1997), Alumenda tells about a girl called Marita who was eager to go school. Both her brother and her mother wanted her to go to school, but her father thought it was impossible as she was a girl and a girl did not need an education. However, through the help of a teacher named Miss Hombo, Marita secretly learns to read. This was kept a secret until Marita’s parents were in need of somebody to read them a letter in the absence of Marita’s brother. It was this time that Marita stepped up to read them the letter. After reading the letter which contained sad news from her father’s brother, Marita was allowed to go to school by her father. While at school Marita organises a fundraising fete that raises so much money. Because of her innovation, she earns a scholarship to continue with her education.

According to Kangira (2009, p. 189), “*Tambudzai hnoona hyoka huru*” (1996) (Tambudzai sees a big snake) tells about a girl named Tambudzai who uncovers a secret way about how an old woman calls a snake out of a hole in her house. She learns about the old woman’s secret while she was innocently playing. However, the knowledge that she gained while playing proved immensely valuable as her testimony helped the elders to uncover the old woman’s witchcraft activities. In *Thandiwe’s spirit and the river* (1994) a boy called Akedu loses his friend Thandiwe through drowning. When he dreams about her, the teacher makes him believe that his friend’s spirit needed protection from him. Akedu believes that the spirit of Thandiwe lived in beautiful creatures. Later Akedu is involved in a crime busting event. According to Kangira (2009), when this happens Alumenda convinces his readers to believe that it was Thandiwe’s spirit that led Akedu to the thieves and murderers at the local shop in order for him to get them arrested.

In this short survey on the portrayal of the girl-child in Alumenda’s work, Kangira (2009, p. 188) concludes that “Alumenda satirises the patriarchal society that treats the girl-child and women as inferior to boys and men.” In the stories surveyed above there is a portrayal of a brave girl who gets empowered against the wishes of the patriarchal system, a girl who holds the key to the village riddle and the spirit of a girl which is believed to give inspiration to a boy.

Furthermore, a study on gender roles was carried out by Ruterana (2012) to test the gender roles perception of children aged between 10 and 12 in Rwanda. The study was inspired by the need to address gender inequality in the Rwandan society. According Ruterana (2012, p. 85), “the patriarchal structure in Rwanda, as reflected

in its oral literature, has influenced the life of women and men in traditional society by assigning them different roles and identities.” Ruterana (2012, p. 85) further argues that “most narratives have revealed that there has been gender inequality since time immemorial, whereby female characters have played important roles but not prominent roles in society.” This is said to be a result of socialisation that binds girls to the walls of the home and has propelled boys to the public sphere of life. However, Ruterana (2012) is quick to admit that considerable efforts are being made in the post genocide Rwanda to alleviate the conditions of the girl-child through initiatives in education access for the girl-child.

In the case study, Ruterana (2012) uses a fairy tale about Ndabaga to test his hypothesis. From the onset, Ruterana (2012) maintains that fairy tales are clouded with menial representations of females. In fairy tales male and female characters are not equals. To illustrate this point Ruterana (2012, p. 89) posits that:

[I]n fairy tales male characters have been portrayed as being strong, potent, and powerful, with mastery themes such as cleverness and adventure, whereas female characters were portrayed as impotent, weak, passive, naïve, even sweet, with second sex themes such as beauty, gentility, domesticity, marriage, emotions, motherhood, and so on.

The tale of Ndabaga revolves around a girl who takes it upon herself to rescue her father from captivity at the king’s palace. Her father has been kept there because he has only one child who happens to be a girl. The tradition of the land compels men to camp at the palace until they are replaced by their sons. When Ndabaga learns (on her own) that her father has been kept at the palace for a lack of a son, she acquires

all the skills that boys in the land have and squeezes her breasts to physically look like a boy. When she is satisfied, she goes to the palace and tells her father that she has come to replace him. Other men know that her father does not have a son and they contest against his release until Ndabaga intervenes. Her father is released and Ndabaga excels at every task “he” is given, but still the rumour of her being a girl spreads throughout the entire palace. The king takes it upon himself to test if Ndabaga is indeed male by wrestling with her, but he fails to defeat her. At last he asks her to tell the truth and she does and tells him why she has done what she did. The king marries her and releases all the men who do not have sons to replace them.

In the study children were asked to reflect on the fairy tale and in most cases they admired Ndabaga and they felt that girls could excel more than boys. Also, they felt that parents should not discriminate between their children on the basis of gender. The girls criticised Ndabaga’s mother for not confiding in her about her father’s whereabouts. The responses also touched on changing roles of males and females in terms of professional vocations and the fact that what boys can do girls can also do. The study by Ruterana (2012), tests the attitudes of children towards a girl-character who takes on the roles done by boys. It concludes that all the participants sympathise with the protagonist. While Ruterana tested the children’s attitudes towards swapped roles, this study is concerned with how the author characterises the girl-child in the two novels.

In her study on girlhood, Ngoshi (2010) investigates how the absence of girlhood in selected narratives in Zimbabwe implies the perception of girls as women even when they are still girls. She introduces the concept of ‘erasure’ to mean the absence of

girlhood in discourse, which means that there is the merging of girlhood with womanhood. This happens when girls forcefully assume responsibilities of women. Womanhood is traditionally characterised by marriage and childbirth. These are two stages of life in which girls are often hastened into by patriarchy. Ngoshi mourns the lack of girlhood narrations in Zimbabwean feminist literature. Ngoshi (2010) examines the character of Tambu in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Miriro and Tariro in Hove's *Ancestors* (1988), Janifa in Hove's *Bones* (1997) and Vaida in Mahachi Harper's *Echoes in the shadows* (2004).

*Nervous conditions* in part tells a story of Tambu, a girl whose father denies her access to education on the premise that she does not need education to become a house wife. This view takes away the liberty and freedom of choice associated with childhood from Tambu as she is expected to only learn skills that are necessary to take up a domestic role in marriage. According to Ngoshi (2010, p. 244), "Tambu is signified in domestic terms, precluding her from acting and living her girlhood or aspiring for any other identity outside the domestic sphere." Conversely, while Tambu's girlhood is interrupted, her brother Nhamo is afforded freedom to pursue his passion and enjoy the pleasures associated with boyhood.

According to Ngoshi (2010), Hove's narration of the forced marriages of Tariro and Miriro at tender ages represents another erasure of girlhood. The girls are married off too early in their lives such that they are robbed of the pleasures of youthful femininity. Although the mother of the two girls does not partake in the act of marrying them off other elderly female members of society take part in the act. Ngoshi (2010, p. 245) observes that "both girls cease to be girls the moment they are

betrotted to adult males and have to make adult choices as modes of rebellion.” While Tariro escapes, Miriro commits suicide and comes back to haunt her family not as a girl but as a woman, even though she died as a girl. In *Bones* by Hove, we witness the erasure of girlhood through the supposed passage rite symbolised by the handing over of kitchen utensils. This is a lame excuse given by Chisaga for raping Janifa. He justifies his action by saying that because she was given utensils she had become a woman.

Erasure in the face of HIV and AIDS can be epitomised by Shimmer Chinodya’s *Tale of Tamari* (2004). Chinodya tells a story of a girl called Tamari who inherits a responsibility over her siblings after the loss of her parents to HIV and AIDS. She abandons her dreams for the future to fend for herself and her brother at a tender age of fourteen. Her situation is exacerbated by her lazy and irresponsible uncle who preys on the household supplies. The erasure here is also intensified by irresponsible grown men who sexually take advantage of her. In *Secrets of a woman’s soul* (2006), Lutanga uses Lingarileni to depict erasure in the form of a girl who suffers in a violent home, where violence is perpetrated by her own father and then at the hands of her stepmother and later aggravating circumstances when her father dies and her mother returns. Life becomes difficult for them to an extent where they trade with their bodies in order to make ends meet. They both get infected with HIV by the same man. Lingarileni is ushered into womanhood prematurely when she is forced by circumstances to fend for herself and her mother.

In *Echoes in the shadow* (2004) Mahachi-Harper tells a story of a girl, Vaida who is sexually abused by her wealthy brother in law. She comes to live with her sister and

her husband because of the economic benefits that are attached to such an arrangement. When she is raped, she is offered a marriage proposal as a consolation to which her parents agree to. The erasure of girlhood is manifested in the rape and the resultant marriage, which instantly metamorphoses Vaida into a woman. The rape represents an interruption of her future plans such as the completion of her schooling.

The cases presented above represent depictions of erasure of girlhood in girl-children as a result of patriarchy. The girlhood of all the characters in the study is interrupted by the harsh realities they find themselves in. According to Ngoshi (2010, p. 248), “Tambu, Janifa, Lingarileni, Tamari and Vaida all become mini-matriarchs and have to relinquish all concerns with youthful pleasures and play that presumably are markers of girl-childhood.” While Ngoshi’s study zoomed in on the erasure of girlhood in selected Zimbabwean fiction, this study looks at the overall portrayal of the girl-child in Erna Muller’s two novels.

Mohammed (2010) puts forward a very important observation as far as the oppression of the girl-child is concerned. According to the study, the oppression of the girl-child starts in the home and the mother is seen as a tool of patriarchy against her daughter. According to Mohammed (2010, p. 466), “one of the recurrent themes that expose mothers as oppressors of their own sex is that of male preference.” Mohammed (2010) uses Buchi Emecheta’s novels to explain how the preference of boys over girls by their mothers further oppresses them.

The maternal oppression of the girl-child through male preference is evident in Emecheta’s *Second class citizen* (1974). *Second class citizen* is a novel about a girl named Ada. Ada suffers oppression at the hands of her own mother, who makes her

son a priority over her. Her mother's preference of the boy-child comes to the fore when Ada's mother denies Ada access to education before her younger brother. Even when she goes to school without her parents' permission, she fears her mother's punishment than her father's. Furthermore, Ada's problems are compounded when her father passes on as she is taken out of school by her mother. Surprisingly, her mother finds her a husband in return for a high bride price. It is disheartening to note that the high bride price could only be afforded by older men and the money generated from marrying her off is envisaged for her younger brother's schooling. The scourge of mothers preferring their sons over their daughters spills over into Ada's life too as she is too concerned with her son's sickness as the other child is "just a girl".

In another of her novels, *Joys of motherhood* (1979), Emecheta depicts another scenario of a mother's preference of male children over female children. This theme is advanced through Nnu Ego and her twin daughters, Taiwo and Kehinde. Nnu Ego reduces her own daughters to inferior beings compared to her sons. She thinks that they should not go to school so that they can help her with household chores. She teaches them that because they are girls they are less important by telling them that boys cannot help with household chores as they have to do more important things like learning. This type of treatment often made the girls to resent the fact that they were born as girls. Nnu Ego responds to views that the Igbo would sell their own children for money by expressing her willingness to send her daughters to work in return for money. This analysis expresses the worth of girls in the eyes of their mothers.

Mohammed (2010) also analyses how Emecheta brings out the theme of maternal oppression of girls through the lack of a bond between Ma Blackie and her daughter Aku-na. Aku-na feels closer to her father than she is to her mother. The rift is worsened when Ma Blackie is inherited by her late father's brother, (a union that produced another son) and Aku-na's love for an outcast that saw her mother cursing her. Aku-na views this as betrayal coming from someone who is supposed to be the closest person to her, and she finds hard to deal with.

Mohammed's analysis focusses on Emecheta's novels and highlights that the oppression of girls at times is spearheaded by their mothers. The mothers oppress their own daughters by preferring their male children over them. Mothers can be instrumental in removing their children from school so that they can help with household chores. They also inculcate in them the view that boys are superior to them and better things should be reserved for the boys. This study therefore, building upon that background sought to analyse the portrayal of the girl-child in the two novels by Erna Muller.

Another scholar of Children's literature who has dwelt on discrepancies in the treatment of the girl-child and the boy-child by the patriarchal society is Anna Chitando. Chitando (2008, p. 17) argues that "Zimbabwean children's literature pays attention to the theme of the marginalisation of the girl-child. It calls upon society to reflect critically on the silent and undeclared war between men and women." Chitando, like Kangira illustrates her point by examining Alumenda's portrayal of the girl-child in his work *Marita goes to school*. Chitando (2008, p. 17) maintains that "patriarchal oppression results in the suffering of the girl-child. Social

development is retarded when women are prevented from engaging in meaningful pursuits.” Chitando (2009, p. 17) points out that “Alumenda shows the positive value of sending a girl-child to school when Marita salvages the situation by reading a letter for her father, who had previously dismissed her.”

Muriungu and Muriiki (2013) conducted a survey of gender based violence in Henry Ole Kuret’s *Blossoms of the savannah* (2008). This analysis does not solely focus on gender based violence against the girl-child in particular even though the girl is also a part of its subject of concern. Muriungu and Muriiki are rather concerned with the portrayal of abuse against the women folk in general. The main form of violence identified in this analysis is female circumcision, which is both “a painful form of violence” and a form of subjection of women to men by rendering them “less powerful in sexual matters”, (Muriungu & Muriiki, 2013, p. 118). Female circumcision is aimed at taking away sexual pleasure from girls, thus making them available to satisfy men’s sexual pleasure whenever it is so needed. According to Muriungu and Muriiki (2013), Kuret narrates about a family that had to relocate after the retrenchment of Ole Kaleo, who is the breadwinner and the head of the household, to a village where circumcision is practiced. Due to this fact, suffering befalls upon his wife, Mama Milanoi and their two daughters, Taiyo and Resian. While Ole Kaleo is a traditional man who subjects his wife and children to harsh treatment, his wife too submits to patriarchal demands and allows the two girls to suffer. Firstly, they are mocked for non-conformity as they are not circumcised. Secondly, even the girls’ mother only considers them important only for the bride price she would get when she marries them off to elderly wealthy men. Thirdly, upon

the insistence of Lokinyaa, Ole Kaleo agrees to his demand to marry Resian as she did not matter much to him as she was just a girl. The two girls are at the mercy of a stranger who rescues them when they are dragged into the forest to be raped. On the surface level the rescuer, a man named Olarinkoi seems to be a good man. However, his ill intentions come to the fore when he wants Resian to get circumcised and marry him after she escapes into his custody. To exacerbate the situation, Ole Kaleo gives Taiyo to Lokinyaa to replace Resian. While women are portrayed as partakers in their own suffering, Muriungu and Muriiki (2013) observe that Kuret seems to be suggesting that only women can free themselves by using other women as catalysts in the escape of the two girls. Kuret also affords the two girls an opportunity to enter university, perhaps as a tool for women's emancipation.

In her review of Yvonne Vera's selected short stories in *Why don't you carve other animals* (1992), *Without a name* (1994) and *Under the tongue* (1996) and Chenjerai Hove's *Ancestors* (1996), *Bones* (1996) and *Shadows* (1991), Mangena (2013), argues that the stories of the liberation war in Zimbabwe are often told from a patriarchal viewpoint, which omits the contribution made by women. The focus of the review is on women, but it uses feminist lenses to argue the plight of female representations in literature. It also underscores the importance of women telling their own story.

Mangena (2013) opines that while the nationalist struggle does not embrace women emancipation, the latter is a requirement of the former. In one selected story from Yvonne Vera, women are subjected to a prescribed form of behaviour as far as their interaction with their male counterparts is concerned. "Men in this short story order

women around and uphold the age-old tyrannical values associated with the subordination and humiliation of women” (Mangena, 2013, p. 142). Tyrannical values thus reduce women to the inferior version of men.

In *Ancestors*, Hove (2013, p. 142) dramatizes “the difficulties that arise when the identities of the African girl are determined by biological conditions.” Tariro is the name of the girl who is dumb and deaf. Instead of getting support and protection from her female relatives, she is instead bundled off by her aunties without her knowledge, to marry her off to a useless old drunk. Mangena (2013) brings out societal cruelty, which is rooted in patriarchy at its best. The irony is that even women are involved in this sinful act against other females. Mangena (2013, p. 142) posits that “the idea of a forced arranged marriage translates a girl-child into a commodity that can be passed from one hand to the other, especially in cases where the husband is old and is approaching his death.” This is true because in most African traditional societies a wife just like other possessions of the deceased is often inherited. Mangena (2013) also observes how the paying of bride price by men reduces the girl-child to a commodity in Hove’s *Bones*. Here again a girl is married off just for the benefit of receiving bride price. This is illustrated when “Janifa’s mother encourages her to get married so that the family can enjoy the pride price” (Mangena, 2013, p. 142). The practice takes away the girl’s right to choose her life partner.

Mangena (2013, p. 142) argues that “patriarchal ideologies are also questioned in relation to the concept of Western formal education that the girl-child is usually denied of.” According to Mangena (2013, p. 143), “in Vera’s ‘*Crossing boundaries*’

(1992), Masibanda reflects on how her father did not allow girls to attend school.” According to her father, sending girls to school was a waste of money (Mangena, 2013). According to Mangena (2013), Masibanda mourns about the disadvantages of not having an education. However, as a woman she had no choice in the matter as her father’s decision was final.

In *Shadows* by Hove, Mangena (2013, p. 143) observes that “children who do not go to school end up like Johana, who milks the cows, dehorn the small bulls and smells cow dung.” Mangena (2013, p. 143) is quick to alert us that “Yet according to Johana’s father, ‘girls do not have to go to school for more than was enough to open their eyes to the letters of their young lovers who courted them in the forests’.” However in Hove’s *Bones*, the issue of access to Western education by the girl-child is not a problem as adult characters attach value to the education of the girl-child. The remainder of the review focusses more on the ‘double colonization’ that the women endure. According to Rutherford (1985, as cited in Mangena 2013, p. 143), double colonization refers to the “observation that women are subjected to both colonial domination of the empire and the male domination of patriarchy”.

In yet another article titled “Theorising women existence: Reflections on the relevance of the Africana womanist theory in the writing and analysis of literature by and about Zimbabwean women”, Mangena (2013) theorises about how literature in Zimbabwe has been influenced by feminism. The article examines how Zimbabwean women narratives depict the plight of the African woman. The survey includes early writers such as Chifamba and Makhalisa, who drew attention to the plight of the widows as well as marriage and fertility. Mangena (2013) also looks at strides made

by writers such as Dangarembga in advancing the plight of girls and women in her novels *Nervous conditions* (1988), *She no longer weeps* (1987) and *The book of note* (2006). In *Nervous conditions* the issue of the education of the girl-child takes centre stage. In other words the author uses literature to expose patriarchal practices of preferring to educate the boy-child over the girl-child. According to Mangena (2013), woman identity in post-colonial Zimbabwe is tackled with issues such as inheritance.

Muhwati, Gwekwerere and Gambahaya (2010) draw from *The Offshoot* (1997) by Mazhindu and Magosvongwe and *Marita goes to School* (2008) by Alumenda to discuss child engineering and agency. In their analysis of child engineering in Alumenda's *Marita goes to school* Muhwati et al. argue that "...the school symbolises the 'new' by extension, 'enlightenment' and 'development' without which the girl-child would forever remain entrapped in a distorted tradition" (p. 207). Muhwati et al. observe the bravery of Marita when she opts to attend secret lessons with Miss Hombo regardless of the consequences should she be found out by her father. According to Muhwati et al., (2010), *The offshoot* tells a story of Masiwa, a girl who loses her father to an HIV and AIDS related illness. "Masiwa is the prism through which the authors advance the awareness of the debilitating conditions experienced by orphaned children", (Muhwati et al., 2010, p. 204). When her father dies, her relatives force her mother out of the house. Masiwa and her sister remain with the father's family, but cannot cope as they do not have enough to survive on. They are practically forced by the situation onto the street where she is raped twice. As a child, Masiwa is subjected to a shameful upbringing, which is characterised by poverty. This is compounded by the drunkenness habits of her grandmother who falls

short in her parenting role and it has a negative bearing on Masiiwa's performance at school. Masiiwa and her sister are moved to Harare where they are ill-treated by their cruel aunt, Clara. As a new comer on the streets of Harare, Masiiwa is brutalised by other street children and at once isolated and raped twice by an older man. Through the narration of her story, Masiiwa manages to turn her life around to become a medical doctor.

Muponde (2007) theorises on the plight of the girl-child through his article, "Reading girlhood from *Under the Tongue*" a book by Yvonne Vera. In the story Vera lets us into a painful world of a girl called Zhizha. Zhizha's father Muroyiwa dies a mysterious death. Her mother is accused of his death as he died just after he had raped Zhizha's sister. Because of this alleged crime, Zhizha's mother is imprisoned. During her mother's period of incarceration, Zhizha has to live with her grandmother. With her grandmother as the breadwinner together they go through immense suffering. The rape incident, especially in the hand of a father signifies a traumatising experience for a girl.

Pasi (2012) uses Kangira's *The bundle of firewood* (2002) to assess environmental concerns in the novel. The story is about a girl who lives in poverty with her grandmother. She stumbles on a pangolin while collecting firewood and is amazed by this wonderful creature. When her grandmother sees it, she knows the creature is in danger and she takes it upon herself to save it against her grandmother. While trying to save the animal, she is assisted by officials from the nature conservation office. They are impressed with her interest in conserving animals and her unconditional love for them. The officers sponsor her education and she becomes a

veterinarian. Pasi's focus is on issues of the eco-critical elements of the book as a way of girl-child empowerment.

The section above provided a review of literary criticisms on the portrayal of the girl-child in literature. Most of the texts reviewed expose the ills of patriarchy against the girl-child. Some of the critics analysed texts written in the time of war and others have analysed the African tale. In some cases there are representations of books analysed from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Throughout all these critical opinions, a trend of the suffering of the girl-child is common. The girl-children always lack a support base from people as close as their family members. Therefore, there seems to be a general notion that girls can only be portrayed under conditions where unpleasant things are done to them. They are always portrayed as passive members of society who do not take a lead in anything. When they do so they are just catalysts and not agents.

#### **2.4. African feminism**

According to Sheila (as cited in Egunoluwa, 2009, p. 228), "what feminism means to various people depends on one's political or sociological observations and goals, one's understanding or interpretation of the word 'woman' and several other factors." What seems to be the focal point here is that women are a social group whose oppression is tied to their sexuality and that as a united force they must stand up together to fight against the disabling conditions that the male dominated system puts them through. Another African feminist critic, Chukwuma, (2006, p. 2) observes that "the term "feminism" is English, as the language itself but its realisation is inextricably bound to the culture and peculiar backgrounds and experiences of the women." From this observation one can argue that whichever way a female asserts

her autonomy under a given set of circumstances may be viewed as an act of feminism. Thus literature can be used as a weapon to advance women empowerment in general and the empowerment of the girl-child in particular.

Feminism has seen many developments since its inception, with African theorists at times rejecting the more radical notions from their western and American counterparts. Therefore, African feminist theorists find it necessary to distance themselves from other forms of feminism. Steady (as cited in Mekgwe, 2008, p. 16) defines African feminism as “emphasising female autonomy and co-operation; nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship.” Mekgwe (2008, p. 16) continues to point out that “although African feminists question some practises which denigrate women, it does not vilify such practices and it also advocates the inclusion of men in the fight for gender equality as partners.” Mekgwe (2008, p. 16) also theorises on Leslie’s STIWANISM which stands for: Social Transformation Including Women in Africa as a concept that carries an economic agenda for both men and women in Africa. In Muller (2012) and (2014), the social setting reflects the African circumstances and the girl-characters are situated in these African circumstances. These may be engraved in the way they are brought up through socialisation into a community. It is also important to appreciate that these communities in which they live in want them to conform to certain norms. They either operate in a system of conventions where they have to conform or be rebellious. The following analysis involves the application of different versions of African feminism to analyse literary texts by feminist writers:

Chukwuma (2006) uses the writings of Flora Nwapa to show that women should have a voice in the marriage institution. She illustrates this by drawing from Nwapa’s

novel *Efuru* (1966), where the protagonist was successful in life, even though she was not fertile. Efuru entered her first marriage without bride price, which is a sign of self-determination. After two failed marriages, she still reserves the right of choice to remain married or leave the marriage. In her analysis of *Idu* (1970), Chukwuma (2006) employs feminism to analyse the fate of a woman, Idu as she is put to shame in her marriage. Because of the massive amount of shame and rejection, she succumbs by committing suicide. According to Chukwuma (2006), Nwapa follows up on her theme of women in marriages with another novel called *One is enough* (1981). In this novel the protagonist, who is childless, leaves an abusive and adulterous marriage to find freedom in the city. In the city she is able to give birth to twins. Because of her self-determination, she chooses the new found freedom over marriage to the father of her twins.

Chukwuma (2006) contrasts the success of Nwapa's characters with Buchi Emecheta's character in her novel *Joys of motherhood* (1979). According to Chukwuma (2006), the main character, Adaku, begets two daughters from a marriage with two brothers. She gets out of the last marriage, but resorts to prostitution to bring up her daughters. Chukwuma (2006, p. 5) concludes that "what Nwapa and Emecheta are advocating is personhood. By urging women to break out of subsuming norms and situations as the marriage institution, they stand the enormous risk of being dubbed cultural deviationists."

Chukwuma (2006) also explores African feminism in the writing of Nawal el Sadawi, an Egyptian writer. Her novel, *God dies by the Nile* (1985), tells a story of a cruel mayor who caused suffering to the ordinary people. When his wrath befalls Zakaya's family, she loses all her family members due to the mayor's evil deeds. As

a way to free herself from the pain caused by the mayor, she seeks revenge by striking him to death with a hoe. In *Woman at point zero* (1997) Saadawi tells about Firdaus, who upon reaching her limits kills her oppressor in self-defence. Another element of feminism which Chukwuma brings to the fore is the portrayal of Mrs. Beatrice, a submissive wife by Chimamanda Adichie in *Purple hibiscus* (2003). Here we encounter a fanatic in every sense of the word, in the name of Eugene Achike, a wealthy man, who subjects his wife and children to unbearable suffering. He is too strict and harsh on his wife and children. According to Chukwuma (2006), “the author quietly ushered in a domestic revolution through the wife who slowly and methodically poisoned her husband.” In another extreme act of feminism, Emecheta in her novel *The rape of Shavi* (1983) tells about how women stood together to kill a Dane, Ronje, to avenge his raping of Ayoko, a fellow woman. In her analysis of breakaway ways for women in troubled relationships as portrayed in African literature, Chukwuma (2006, p. 7) argues that instead of killing and prostituting themselves, there should be other ways for women to free themselves from bondage without acquiring negative identities.

Sylvester-Molemodile and Mba conducted a survey of women empowerment in Nigeria from pre-colonial Nigerian literature to present day Nigerian literature. Their research looked at how gender equality was advanced by Nigerian writers over time. Below is a summary of the eras and writers covered in the research:

In pre-colonial Nigerian literature up until the 1970s, little coverage of gender advancement took place. This era saw the introduction of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi and many more into the

literary world. This era mainly focussed on writing the African story to dispute the notion by some western writers that Africa did not have a literature. Novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958) were ushered onto the literary scene to correct the distorted representations of Africa by European writers. Women in this era were presented as stereotypes that were there to complete men.

From the 1980s, feminist writings began to gradually emerge in Nigeria. The advocacy of feminist issues was led by writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Zulu Sofola. Sylvester (as cited in Sylvester-Molemodile and Mba, 2010, p. 109) observe that "...a primary goal of women's literature has been to correct and redirect attention to their own ideals, worldview and to the significance of the feminine element." In this era, themes such as access to education and the inability to have male children are often tackled. According to Sylvester-Molemodile and Mba (2010, p. 109), "the female writers of this period write on unique themes, such as the themes of self-actualisation, political leadership, early marriage and its aftermath, theme of death, press freedom, political oppression and love, etc." This stage propelled Nigerian women writers into the promotion of the women agenda through literature. Later both male and female writers began to represent women in a fair manner in their writing. New male writers countered the misrepresentation by early male writers by affording their female characters a voice and freedom. Also, early writers began to portray female characters in a positive manner.

The study also touched on issues of women and productivity. According to Sylvester-Molemodile and Mba (2010), in the pre-colonial era women productivity is signified by child bearing in marriage. However, this notion has been challenged by

Ezeigbo in *The last of the strong ones* (1996). In the novel, Ezeigbo tells the story of women who transform the land by taking leadership positions when the land needed leadership. The women characters are: Ejimnaka who is admired as a great decision maker and Chieme the barren woman who found fulfilment as a performer. These women are productive members of their society and occupy roles that benefited everyone. While the study by Sylvester-Molemedile and Mba surveys Nigerian literature for the advancement of gender balance, the present study looks at how girls are portrayed in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*.

Another study that employed African feminism on African women's writing is the one by Simon and Obeten (2013), who analysed the impact of pan-Africanism on African feminism using Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982). This study focusses on the role played by women in the time of war. The story tells about the life of Debbie who joins the army to fight to liberate her territory. This is a bold move as the army was mainly seen as a man's world and also it is in itself a symbol of self-sacrifice.

In her study of Mariama Ba's *So long a letter* (1980) and Flora Nwapa's *One is enough* (1981), Ifejirika discusses elements of feminism by exploring themes pertaining to the plight of women. However, Ifejirika (n.d) is of the opinion that the idea of feminism in these stories is far-fetched as she opines "It is however, ironical that the African concept and brand of feminism as showcased by Mariama Ba and Flora Nwapa advocated rugged spinsterhood and single parenthood as opposed to the original philosophies of early proponents of feminism." Ifejirika continues to term characterisation in Mariama Ba and Flora Nwapa as a 'myth of feminine superiority'

or anti-chauvinistic chauvinism. Ifejirika is of the opinion that Mariama Ba's characterisation of men in *So long a letter* is unrealistic and unfair. According to Ifejirika (n.d, p. 4), male characters in *So long a letter*, are characterised as “unfaithful husbands, irresponsible fathers, shameless womanisers, or studs/ he goats that go after any woman in skirt.”

Nwapa's *One is enough*, tells a story of Amaka who divorces her husband to find happiness in the city. However, Ifejirika (n.d) is of the opinion that the fulfilment of a woman cannot be complete without a man and vice versa. She emphasises that Nwapa encourages women to have children outside the marriage. However Ifejirika (n.d) argues that Nwapa contradicts herself by the introduction of Rev. Father Izu Maclaid, who fathers Amaka's twins and who opens Amaka's door to fortunes. According to Ifejirika (n.d), “this accentuates the fact that a woman becoming fulfilled, happy and accomplished without a man, either as husband or lover is a mere myth.” This means that there should be some form of partnership between men and women through some kind of relationship for there to be success.

A feminist analysis of the anthology of short stories *Breaking the silence* (1996) by Basse and Eton (2012) begins with “*No sweetness here*” a story about barrenness in women. The story is about Onome, a barren woman who kills her wheelchair bound husband upon learning that she fathered a child by another woman. Again, in the story the birth of a boy-child is celebrated as being more important than the birth of a girl-child. Although Onome is jailed for murder, the story brings to the fore problems faced by women in Africa.

*Queen honey bee and drone designs* by King-Aribisala is another story in the anthology. Bassey and Eton (2012) admire the use of bee symbolism in the story as the story tells about a bee community headed by a queen bee. The drones conspire to overthrow her, but she convinces them to drink honey before they can decide on her fate. She plans to give them poisoned honey instead. However, they change their mind before drinking it. Bassey and Eton (2012, p. 52) conclude that “The matriarchal bee society, like the ant society is attractive to feminist writers because it provides an example of effective female control of large and productive communities.” It also demonstrates how patriarchy is dependent on female labour.

Vera Osuokwu’s *Our best years* is another story that formed part of Bassey and Eton’s study. The story narrates the ordeal of a woman whose husband has lost interest in her. Like many women, she thinks that something is wrong with her after failed attempts to reignite her husband’s interest in her. The story deals mainly with women abandonment by husbands, but it also touches on the exploitation of women.

A study of Oyedepo’s play titled *The rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested and Brain has no Brain* (2002) by Yeseibo (2012) is another important contribution to literary feminism in Africa. Oyeidepo’s play centres on the demand by women for equal rights with men. Here women organise themselves to rebel against the oppressive patriarchal system. According to Yeseibo (2012, p. 142), “In their rebellion, they embark on kitchen and bed strike against their husbands who are custodians of ‘patriarchalism’”. Furthermore, Yeseibo (2012, p. 142) sums up the gender issues addressed in the play as “the basis of bride wealth or bride price; the respect accorded a woman whether married or unmarried and the domestic roles of a woman defined by men.”

Alkali, Talif, Yahya, and Jan, (2013) examine the use of feminism in an African context by African writers. They analyse the relevance of African versions of feminism such as Womanism, Stiwanism, Motherism and Nego-feminism in the African novel. Although Alkali et al., (2013) do not illustrate by way of a novel by an African writer, they trace Womanism's roots in the work of Alice Walker. The theory is rooted in the peculiarity of the experiences of black women in Africa or in the diaspora.

According to Alkali et al., (2013), STIWANISM has its roots in the work of Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. The acronym stands for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. This version of African feminism concerns itself with the social development of women in partnership with men in Africa. Alkali et al., (2013) identify the work of Ama Ata Aidoo, particularly the novel called *Our sister Killjoy* (1977) as an expression of STIWANISM. In the novel, the narrator from Ghana is on an exchange programme at a university in German. As a young female student, she observes how women are left out in social development. When she returns home to Ghana she encounters the same issues.

According to Alkali et al., (2013, p. 244), "Catherine Acholonu discusses women's freedom through Motherism, emphasising the impossibility of the severance of issues of motherhood from the African woman." Here the emphasis is on the need of an African woman to have space to build a relationship with her child, unlike her white European counterpart. This is very applicable to professional women who have to find space in their busy schedules to develop a bond with their children. Alkali et al., (2013, p. 244) maintain that "this African feminism considers nature, nurture, and

respect in the mother-child space as the centre of any motherist concern.” This point is illustrated by the use of Abubakar Gimba’s *Sacred apples* (1994) which tells a story of Zahra an African woman employed as an industrial officer, who refuses to sever her ties with her child to keep her job, which a Western feminist would not do. She was only six months in her job when she had to decide whether to keep her job or to be with her baby.

Another African feminist theory is called Nego-feminism. Nego-feminism was born out of the need for a ‘more rewarding partnership’ between men and women. It is a brainchild of Obioma Nnaemeka. This version of feminism entails negotiation between men and women in order to forge a stronger alliance. Nego-feminism is best summarised in the following quote by Alkali et al., (2013, p. 247):

The highly significant attraction of its name, Negotiation-feminism, not only suggests the broad range of its tolerance: in one bold sweep it has eliminated so much of the unfruitful discussions of offensive literatures or the embattled conflicts in novels that give the impression that all men are (potential) rapists and wife-beaters, or at most, sisterhood or solidarity among women is shown as a possible doubtful source of solace or a vague anchor.

“The thinking behind Nego-feminism goes beyond the notion of winners and losers and wars which do not end” (Alkali et al., 2013, p. 248). Nego-feminism is visible in Osammor’s novel called *The Triumph of the Water Lily* (1996). In *The triumph of the water lily* Osammor showcases a couple’s suffering at the hands of in-laws who victimise a childless wife. She compromises and moves out of her home to give a lifeline to their marriage. When the couple reunites on a trip to America they get

back together again and this time their reunion brings forth an offspring. Here we can see a resurgence of life and love born out of patience and humility - a peaceful resolution to a crisis.

As part of the womanist agenda, Mba (2015) carried out a study to investigate the career development of women in selected works by Adimora-Ezeigbo. She grouped careers under academia, administrative, job rehabilitation and creation, women and press, politics, business and creativity. The selected works are: *Children of the eagle* (2002), *Trafficked* (2008), *House of symbols* (2001), *The last of the strong ones* (1996), *Roses and bullets* (2011), *Fractured and fragments* (2006), *Rhythms of life: Stories of modern Nigeria* ((1992), *Rituals and departures* (1996), and *Echoes in the mind* (1994).

Representations of women in academic advancement is epitomised in the works discussed below:

*Hallucinations* tells a story of Leechi, a university lecturer who is awarded a scholarship to study in Britain, but is rather hesitant because of her domestic roles. However, her husband encourages her to take the opportunity and she successfully completes her studies and returns to a well-managed home. In the story *Reflections, rituals and departures*, Muta is a university lecturer and a married woman with children. She finds it challenging to balance her teaching load with her household responsibilities, that at times she neglects her career responsibilities. She is not so lucky to have a supporting husband either. However, even in cases where men are supportive of their spouses, woman nature still poses a challenge for career women as they are tied to their gender roles. *A Matter of negotiations* presents us with

Madam Uchendu, the sole breadwinner of her family who negotiates that Mr Edet marries her daughter after impregnating her even when she was just a junior staff member. Overall, Mba (2015) is advocating the point that Adimora-Ezeigbo highlights issues of domestic roles and professional roles as issues that women have to contend with in a world of inequality.

Under the administrative career, Mba picks on the suffering of career women at the hands of men who are their husbands, workmates and neighbours. The stories studied show the perseverance of women in order for them to achieve their goals. Such suffering and perseverance is told through Chito in *The Unexpected*, an accountant who was abandoned by her driver; Uggomma in *A Time to get away* who suffers from lack of accommodation and negative attitudes towards unmarried women; and Edoro who works for a family that helps her get admission to study nursing; and in *Agaracha must come home* because her family does not want to support her.

Under rehabilitation and job creation, Adimora-Ezeigbo addresses the plight of girls who fall prey to trafficking by telling the story of Nneoma who recovers from the deceit of child traffickers to achieve her goals. The trafficking of girls for sexual trade has become very common and it is a challenge that women and girls are faced with today.

The press is seen as having an agenda to expose women. It is therefore the successful women who get attention from the press for the wrong reasons. However, female writers in fiction such as Nnenna in *Children of the eagle* write positively about other women. She captures the important work carried out by women characters and sings praises to them through the media.

In politics, Mba (2015) analyses Adimora-Ezeigbo's portrayal of Fola's ambition to become a senator with the support of her friends. Even in the face of an accusation that nearly ruined her political career, she stands firm to realise her dream. Through the portrayal of women as business people, Mba examines various stories by Adimora-Ezeigbo. The depictions vary from small businesses that make a difference in the lives of the women and their immediate neighbourhoods and the ones that yield power to the women.

Mba (2015) also underscores the importance of creativity on the part of women. She draws from the stories to espouse how women are involved in various creative activities. These activities include creative writing, singing and chanting.

The time when some areas of life were viewed as no go for women is long gone. Nowadays women are making inroads in areas that they never dared to go into before. While women trend into new grounds, new dimensions of feminism are also opening up. Mba (2015) also admits that at times the patriarchal value system makes it difficult for women to achieve their goals. Although some of these categories are incorporated in this study, the perspective is on the girl-child in Erna Muller's two novels.

The works reviewed in this section are sourced from different sources. The sources give us an insight into the work that has been done in children's literature in general and the portrayal of the girl-child in particular. While many works draw from radical feminist stances, some take a negotiated type of feminism. Mostly sins against females by patriarchy are exposed and various portrayals of responses towards the

harsh realities of patriarchy are explored. Access to education and denial thereof is also explored by various writers reviewed above. However, there are rare instances where there is a peaceful coexistence between males and females. There are rare instances where both females and males emerge as winners. This in itself is the opening that this study exploits. The study explores the portrayal of the girl-children characters under normal circumstances, where they are supported by men and women as well as boys. It is imperative to mention that while efforts were made to find publications on children's literature in Namibia, there seems to be very little done in terms of the critical analysis of children's books in Namibia. Therefore, work in children's literature in Namibia remains new ground, despite many authors having written children's stories.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### 3.1. Research design

The study has employed a qualitative design. It is difficult to give a simple definition of qualitative design; however, many authors have attempted to define qualitative research design by looking at its features. Masson (2002) identifies the following as features of qualitative research design:

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

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

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

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

portrayed in Erna Muller's two novels. The understanding was achieved by analysing the complex relationships between the girl-characters with other characters in different contexts of the stories. These were delineated and then interpreted. Qualitative research design is also suitable in the sense that it has flexible methods such as content analysis which can be used to analyse texts and draw interpretations and rich descriptions of people to draw an informed conclusion with regards to the portrayal of the girl-child in Muller's two novels. Also, the study has its own context in which the conclusions drawn are confined to. It is not so much about whether the findings can be generalised to the other works but the ability to use the appropriate methods to achieve the end. Although there may be figures about how many girls are portrayed, the focus is on how they are portrayed.

In order to understand the importance of qualitative research, it is of significant value to examine Masson's (2002, p. 1) synthesis of qualitative research below:

Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understanding, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of meanings that they generate. We can do all this qualitatively by using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multidimensionality and complexity rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them.

The quotation above underscores the importance and relevance of qualitative research in studies that involve the complexities of social life. In literary studies,

representations of real life situations where interactions between characters come to life are studied. This means that the study is interpretive and relies on the richness of descriptive language used in the text. It is the understanding of such language that enriches the study. The design also places the subject of the study within a context. In this case, the study isolates the writer, Erna Muller, identifies her portrayal of the girl-child as the focus of the study and it limits the study to her two novels which are: *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*. The portrayal of the girl-child in the two novels by Erna Muller may or may not be generalizable to other portrayals of girl-children by either the same writer or other writers. However, the study gives an in-depth analysis of Erna Muller's portrayal of the girl-child in the two novels.

According to Flick (2011, p. 13), qualitative research has limitations and these will be highlighted below:

Guiding principles of research and of planning have been used for the following purposes: to clearly isolate causes and effects, to properly operationalise theoretical relations, to measure and quantify phenomena, to create research designs allowing for the generalisation of findings, and effects to create the generalization of findings and to formulate general laws.

The issue of generalizability, quantification of phenomena and formulation of general laws are more applicable to natural sciences than they are to social sciences. Social sciences are more concerned with the explanation of phenomenon in a given context. Because qualitative research is more interested in explanations and analysis, it has an advantage of depth over quantitative methods.

Therefore, a qualitative approach was used as the study sought to analyse the depiction of girls in the selected texts. The study sought to interpret the two novels using the African feminist literary theory. The feminist literary theory was well suited for the study as the study limited itself to the analysis of the portrayal of the girl-child. Also, the girl-child is usually discriminated against on the basis of gender. The study analysed how the girl-child is depicted in Erna Muller's two novels - *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*. This study was a desk study of the two novels. Literature on depictions of children and feminist literary theory was used in the study. The study used content analysis to arrive at possible interpretations of the texts.

### **3.2. Population**

According to Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 65), "a population can be defined as all people or items (unit of analysis) with the characteristics that one wishes to study." The population of this study consists of stories of children that depict children by Erna Muller. All stories that depict children written in English by the author were considered. The population selection was based on the espousal of issues affecting children especially girls.

### **3.3. Sample**

It is not practical to include the whole population in a study due to financial and time constraints. Therefore, a researcher has to find a fair amount of sample that should be representative of the entire population of the study. This situation then requires the researcher to come up with a sample of the population. Masson (2002, p. 121)

defines sampling and selection as “principles and procedures used to identify, choose, and gain access to relevant data sources from which you will generate data using your chosen methods.” Sampling is necessary because a researcher may not have access to the entire population as it may not be possible as the population may be too wide or there may not be time and financial resources to do so. It is also necessary to sample the population in order to give the study a focus. There are many sampling methods that a researcher can employ depending on the nature of the study. Ritchie and Lewis (2009) identify two types of sampling, which are: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, population elements are randomly chosen and each has a probable chance of being selected, whereas in non-probability sampling there is a deliberate selection of elements within the population which match the characteristics of groups in a given population.

This study has used purposive sampling to select two novels from Erna Muller. Cohen, Marion and Morrison (2005, p. 114) maintain that “in purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality.” Ritchie and Lewis (2009, p. 78), argue that (in purposive sampling) “the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles the researcher wishes to study.” Here the researcher chooses the sample on the basis of the purpose of the research such as the depiction of a particular sector of society to be studied. The two novels were selected due to their portrayal of the girl-child. The writer (author) was chosen on the basis of

her portrayal of both urban and rural challenges faced by the girl-child as well as the infusion of technology in her novels.

Due to the prominence of the advocacy of the empowerment of the girl-child, two novels depicting girl-children were selected. Therefore, the two novels were chosen based on their portrayal of the girl-characters as protagonists. This is in line with the principles and aims of purposive sampling as stated by Ritchie and Lewis (2009). Ritchie and Lewis (2009, p. 79) sum up the two principles as firstly, “to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered” and secondly, “to ensure that, within each of the key criteria diversity is included so that the impact of the characteristic concerned can be explored.”

Furthermore, since the two novels are written by one author and both portray girls as protagonists; the approach to purposive sampling used is homogeneous sampling. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2009, p. 79) homogeneous samples “are chosen to give a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon - for example, individuals who belong to the same subculture or have the same characteristics.” When homogeneous samples are studied, a greater degree of a detailed investigation can be achieved. This justifies why the researcher has chosen two novels, both written by Erna Muller and both with characterisation of the girls as protagonists.

### **3.4. Procedure**

This study has carried out an in depth analysis of the selected texts where emerging themes were analysed. The roles played by the girl-children in the novels were evaluated including roles of power. The portrayal of relationships between girl-

characters and other characters in the novels were analysed. The study is systematically structured around the following research objectives:

- To evaluate the challenges faced and overcome by the two protagonists and other girls in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*.
- To analyse how girl-characters are portrayed in the novels in relation to male children characters and adult characters.
- Discuss emerging themes.
- To examine how the author uses the novel, to promote the plight of the girl-child.

Finally, informed judgements and conclusions on the roles of girls and how they are depicted in the novels by Muller will be made as well as how these reflect societal views of girls in Namibia.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

The main data analysis method used in the study is content analysis. Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 116) defines content analysis as a “systematic analysis of the content of a text (e.g., who says what, to whom, why and to what extent and with what effect) in a quantitative or qualitative manner.” Kothari (2004, p. 116) states that “content analysis consists of analysing the contents of documentary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, and the contents of all other verbal materials which can be

either spoken or printed.” This study has used content analysis because it analyses the portrayal of the girl-child in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*, two novels by Erna Muller. According to Bhattercherjee (2012), content analysis involves sampling of the population, breaking down the data into smaller units, naming the units according to themes and finally the actual data analysis according to the themes is done. Even though content analysis has limitations as the available data are the in-text form only, it is relevant for this study as the study analyses written novels.

In order to apply content analysis to this study, the two novels by Erna Muller were sampled using purposive sampling. Then, the content was broken down using the research objectives of the study and themes derived from the research topic. Appropriate topics, which encompass the themes covered in each unit, were assigned to the different segments. Each novel was studied to identify girl-characters. Finally, using feminist literary theory, the data were analysed for the manner in which the girl-child is portrayed by Erna Muller in the two novels. The roles the girls play in the novels were evaluated. These include gender roles which the girl-characters play in the two novels. Furthermore, relationships between girl-children characters, other children characters and adult characters in the novels were analysed. Finally, a critical examination of how the author uses the novel genre to inform the public about how the girl-child should be viewed was done.

### **3.6. Research ethics**

According to Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 137), “ethics is defined as conformance to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group.” Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 137)

maintains that “such standards are often defined at a disciplinary level through a professional code of conduct, and sometimes enforced by university committees called even Institutional Review Board.” This researcher has strived for objectivity and the integrity of this study by reporting the findings in full. The researcher has avoided the misrepresentation or partial interpretation of the findings of this study. As the study has employed feminist literary theory in its analysis of the portrayal of the girl-child, it may be seen as biased as it is leaning on the defence of the plight of girls. However, this should not be interpreted as a kind of victimisation of other sectors of society as the study is interpretive in nature. The researcher provided citations and referenced all sources used, to uphold his academic integrity, honesty and respect for copyright laws. Since the research is based on fictional work, reference to names of real places and people in the study are fictional. While employing feminist literary theory to analyse the text, the study only brought to the fore depictions of girls as portrayed in the novels without bringing in any personal biases.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses how Erna Muller portrays the girl-child in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*. The chapter examines how the girl-child is portrayed by integrating the objectives of the study in the analysis. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To evaluate the challenges faced and overcome by the two protagonists and other girls in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*.
- To analyse how girl-characters are portrayed in the novels in relation to boy characters and adult characters.
- Discuss emerging themes.
- Examine how the author uses the novel to promote the plight of the girl-child.

Firstly, the summaries of the two novels are given and then the analysis of the two novels in an alternating format is done.

#### 4.2. Summary of *It all goes wrong*

*It all goes wrong* chronicles the individual development of an eleven year old girl called Amy. When the novel opens, Amy is aboard a plane destined for Windhoek. She is leaving behind her friend, Lea, her school and dog, Coco. She is unhappy about the relocation from Cape Town to Windhoek.

Amy's family then visits Long Beach for Christmas. It is here that Amy is loneliest until she meets another girl of about her age called Tanja. Tanja helps the ice cream man to taste his flavours and she works in the ice cream van. Through Tanja, the reader is made aware of Amy's caring nature as when Tanja's cell phone goes unanswered after she had gone to taste the ice cream flavours Amy is worried. This can be seen in the number of calls that Amy makes and the constant worry of what might have happened to Tanja.

One day Amy notices her father working late on his laptop. She comes up to him and apologises for the message that she had deleted on New Year's Eve. It was a New Year's message by somebody called Morgan. Her father tells her not to worry as Morgan is just an obsessed old client.

Amy's father goes back to Cape Town. His return is delayed much to the dissatisfaction of her mother. When he returns, there is a fall out between him and Amy's mother. He has to return to Cape Town for good. This is devastating for both Amy and her mother.

The ice cream van arrives at Amy's school in Windhoek. In order to draw Amy closer, the ice cream couple make Amy the supposed winner of the ice cream slogan competition. She is invited to taste the ice cream flavours at a secret place. However, Amy cannot make it and they arrange that Samantha does the tasting on her behalf.

Amy returns to Cape Town to visit her father. The visit does not meet her expectations as her father does not live alone. Amy learns that her father has another family and another life in Cape Town. She finds out about the real Morgan, her

father's lover and her daughter Marlee-Chante. Amy's visit to Cape Town is short lived as she is summoned back to Windhoek to help find the missing Samantha. Amy is taken to the border to help identify the suspects. She helps the police in arresting the ice cream couple and in rescuing Samantha, Tanja and three other girls.

### **4.3. Summary of *When you dance with the crocodile***

*When you dance with the crocodile* tells a story of Helena, a girl who lived with her father, Dr Amadhila and her brother, Sam. Dr Amadhila is a computer specialist who brings in and tests the viability of computer games for children. He experiments some of the games on his daughter. Helena has lost her mother in a car accident and she yearns to spend time with her father discussing computer games. Dr Amadhila thinks some games are too dangerous for children but Helena feels that her father is just overprotective.

When Dr Amadhila is summoned to a neighbourhood meeting, he calls Sam to come home in order to attend to Helena. Unfortunately, Sam is too late. When he arrives home Helena is nowhere to be found. She has played a dangerous game that takes her back in time to a place between Angola and Zambia. She is sucked in by a worm hole and transported to this place.

She finds herself in this remote place and she has to rescue a girl almost her age from a trap. When her first attempt fails, she asks the men she finds around the corner to help. Instead, the men capture her together with Ruth (the girl she wanted to rescue). They are made to join a group of other children in chains. The men are slave traders and they are on their way to Angola, where the children will be sold off as slaves.

Helena lures the youngest of the men with a wrist watch and convinces him to release her and Ruth. The young man agrees and lets them go in the night. The two girls have to brave the night and the jungle. Ruth leads the way and Helena uses her 7h to illuminate their way. They are followed by a hyena and they have to survive snakes, hunger and thirst.

At the banks of the Zambezi, the two girls come across Maddy. Maddy looks abused and she offers them food. She insists that they should leave immediately after eating so as to protect them from Zakes. Before they can leave Zakes arrives and takes them captive. They are being watched by Zakes's two Masubia guards who do not leave them unattended. After learning that the guards fear magic Helena uses sound combinations on her 7h to subdue them. They give in and she instructs them to lead the way to Sesheke, where Ruth's mother lives. This escape is not successful as Zakes catches up with them and makes Maddy and Helena to pay for it.

Helena gets in touch with her father through the internet using the 7h. She pleads with him to change the rules of the game so that she can return home. Her father and Mark assure her that she just has to finish the obstacles. Helena devices another plan by planting her 7h in the bush and making it crow. On hearing this, Zakes sends his guards after the rooster. The 7h produces a lion roar, which sends Zakes into panic. Instantly, Helena reaches for his gun and she has him tied before they escape.

After the escape from Zakes, Helena is set to return home, but she has to find Sam. In an attempt to follow Helena, Sam landed in another area. They meet up and take Ruth to her mother in order to break the news of her father's passing.

#### **4.4. The portrayal of the girl-child by Erna Muller**

##### **4.4. 1. Innocence naivety and the girl-child**

In the struggle to overcome various obstacles, Amy is portrayed by Muller initially as an innocent girl in *It all goes wrong*. Amy does not inhibit any thoughts of evil. Her reasons for resisting the relocation to Windhoek are merely based on her unwillingness to leave behind her school, her friend, Lea and her dog, Coco. Muller depicts Amy as innocent by showing the trusting and unsuspecting part of her character. This portrayal can be linked to how Chitando (2008) considers innocence as part of the notion of childhood in her definition of childhood.

The espousal of innocence in Amy's character can also be seen in her unsuspecting attitude towards the newspaper reports her father reads about the disappearance of girls in Namibia. She does not pay attention because her world at this moment is only made up of friendship and loyalty. She refuses to be drawn into the drill on how to respond to strangers. Muller shows us that in the world of Amy, evil acts such as the kidnapping of children do not feature and that girl-children are seemingly virtuous as they value positive attributes such as friendship only. They do not harbour negative motives.

Like Amy, Helena does not see danger in the adventure she is about to embark on. All she cares about is the girl in the trap. The game is labelled as dangerous, and she somehow understands that the game will transport her through time and space to a different world. However, Helena refuses to see the danger part of it. All she can feel is the urge to help. It also turns out that she does not have a clear plan on how to

execute this plan. She deals with the situation as it comes. Muller brings out this lack of planning and unpreparedness to underscore the element of innocence and naivety on the character of the girl-child, Helena.

Furthermore, Muller portrays Amy as having a close relationship with her father in *It all goes wrong*. In a similar manner, Muller creates this close bond between Helena and her father, Dr Amadhila in *When you dance with the crocodile*. Helena repels her father's protective stance by dispelling the notion that computer games could be dangerous. Here Helena seems to be putting forward the argument that computer games are just games without considering the nature of the game and the implications involved in playing it. She is preoccupied by the need for adventure and compassion.

Mangena (2011) brings to the fore another element which can be associated with childhood innocence. Children tend to be irrational. This can be seen in how Muller portrays Amy's insistence to remain in Cape Town without the supervision of her parents. For instance Amy argues that she wants to remain in the hostel so that she can only visit her family during the holidays. It is clear that in the eyes of a parent this line of argument would be considered irrational. Likewise, Helena chooses to be transported back into time and space where she would be alone without the supervision and protection of her father and her brother. She decides to do that the moment she is left alone. We can learn from this incident that Muller is telling the reader that it is in the nature of girl-children to act with naivety in order to achieve what they want without considering the implications of their actions. However, this irrational behaviour may be motivated by good intentions and not mischief. Helena is

presented as someone who sees the rescue of the trapped girl as primary to any other consideration. She seems to take the time of her father and brother's absence as an opportune time to carry out this mission

Mangena (2011) emphasises dependency as one of the pillars of the relationship between adults and children. Dependency can be seen as emotional, financial and social, for children need guidance in their life journey. In *It all goes wrong*, despite her preference to remain in Cape Town, Amy has no choice but to move to Windhoek as she is dependent on her parents. Equally, Muller portrays Helena's dependency, when she draws support from her father. This comes at a time when she wants to give up on her mission as the hardship is too much for her to endure. Helena is seen pleading with her father to change the rules of the game in order to enable her to return home. However, the situation is out of her father's control and she is urged to complete what she has started. Muller may be implying that although the girl-child may seek assistance from others, she is able to achieve success on her own. On another level, the encouragement that Helena sources from her father can be seen as emotional support that fuels her desire to be victorious.

In *It all goes wrong*, Muller shows us Amy's innocence by portraying her as a trusting and unsuspecting girl. Since Amy is depicted as very close to her father, she trusts him and is dutiful towards him. For instance she keeps secrets for him as we can see with the message from Morgan. We can see that Amy is amused by her father's description of Morgan and believes whatever he tells her about the identity of Morgan. Such a trusting relationship is deemed necessary by Mangena (2011), who maintains that children have a right to enter relationships with adults with trust.

Compared to relationships where girls are denied access to education as in the case of Marita in Alumenda's *Marita goes to school* (Chitando, 2008) and the forced circumcision and forced marriage of Taiyo and Resian in Kuret's *Blossoms of the savannahs* (Muriungu and Muriiki, 2013), Amy has the privilege of not being hurt by her father, although he takes advantage of her innocence. Helena on the other hand enjoys a very healthy relationship with her father, who supports her even when she has gone against his warning against playing dangerous computer games.

Moreover, we can see through Muller's portrayal many cases where children's innocence is betrayed by those they trust. Muller's portrayal of Amy's obliviousness towards her father demonstrates the abuse of children's innocence by adults. Although the betrayal of innocence and trust is not physical, it may be likened to what Muponde (2007) refers to when he analyses the suffering that befalls Zhizha and her mother when her father dies mysteriously after raping her sister in *Under the Tongue* by Yvonne Vera. Muller shows us how adults, especially men take advantage of the innocence and trust of girls. Muller seems to be cautioning society against the tendencies of men to deceive the girl-child. Although these tendencies do not constitute physical harm, they are psychologically detrimental to the well-being of the girl-child.

Although somewhat suspicious, Amy is led on by the ice cream couple due to her innocence. This depiction by Muller underscores Amy's innocence as her concept of strangers is somehow crowded by the ice cream man's instant closeness to her father and Tanja's role at the van. Amy enjoys the complements that the ice cream man showers her with. She admits that she enjoys being complemented by somebody

other than her parents. It is on this innocence that the ice cream man preys on in order to get Amy closer.

Despite the fact that Amy is concerned about the secrecy surrounding the ice cream tasting exercise, Muller shows us through Amy that children, especially girls can be easily deceived due to their naivety. Muller portrays a doubtful Amy getting convinced that ice cream tasting is supposed to be done in secrecy, lest the adults will know about it and steal the recipe. The predatory nature of the ice cream man can be compared to Olarinkoi in Kuret's *Blossoms of the savannah* who rescues Resian from getting raped, but still wants to subject her to the same patriarchal injustices he claims to have saved her from (Muriungu and Muriiku, 2013).

Even when Tanja is unreachable on her phone Muller still portrays Amy as innocent enough not to question the intentions of the ice cream couple. The element where girls are deceived by other characters can also be seen in *Orange thieves* where Muthoni is deceived by her four friends to pick oranges with her eyes closed while they have theirs open (Muriungu and Muraya, 2014). Upon realising that she has picked raw oranges Muthoni returns to pick ripe ones and she is captured by the giant which is also the owner of the farm. Unlike in the *Thieves of oranges*, Muller uses adults such as the ice cream couple to depict how innocent girls can be taken advantage of by evil minded adults without them suspecting it.

Muller brings out the issue of innocence and trust in *When you dance with the crocodile* by portraying the trust that Helena has in the slave traders when she asks them to help Ruth out of the trap. She comes from a loving and caring family that has made her the centre of attention since the passing of her mother. In her world it is

beyond imagination that people could be trapped in snares like animals. She leads slave traders to where Ruth was trapped hoping that they will help her in her quest to rescue her. Ironically, the slave traders add her to the number of slaves they have captured so far. Muller portrays Helena in a manner that she does not have any suspicions about the strange men and she trustingly asks for their help without observing their nature first. She remains oblivious to the men's true nature until Ruth tells her.

#### **4.4.2. Caregiving as an attribute of the girl-child**

It is characteristic of girls' depiction in literature to be portrayed as care givers. In the *Orange thieves* (Muraya & Muriungu, 2014) Muthoni hides and cares for the little boys that were brought home by the giant. Equally, in *The bundle of firewood* by Kangira (Pasi, 2012) it is evident that Tariro's caring nature compels her to protect the pangolin by all means. She braves the night just to keep the pangolin from her grandmother who wants to kill it. Muller does not fall short in bringing out this characteristic of the girl-child in *It all goes wrong* either.

Muller depicts Amy throughout the novel as caring and concerned about the wellbeing of others. From the onset Amy is presented as a person who cares about others, including her pet, Coco. She insists that they should take Coco on the plane, when her family leaves Cape Town. We see Amy warning Coco to behave or he may be taken to the SPCA by Lea's father. This is a sign of how caring Amy is. Muller shows us that if she can care that much for an animal, then she can be more caring as far as human beings are concerned.

Moreover, Muller portrays Amy as caring as it can be seen in Amy's concern over her parents' divorce. Muller presents a worried Amy, who is afraid of the storm. The storm is the motif that Muller uses to refer to the inevitable divorce of Amy's parents. She wishes that it does not happen because she cares about both her parents. By contrasting Amy's preoccupation with Jacob's indifference, Muller wants to convince the reader that the girl-child is more caring than the boy-child. This is climaxed by the incident in which Muller describes the quarrel between Amy's parents from Amy's point of view. She describes how Amy hears the voices but cannot make out the words. She tiptoes to their door, but all she hears is the end of the quarrel where her mother asks her father to leave. Muller portrays Amy as being greatly affected by that resolution to an extent that she fell on her bed due to shock. We also see Amy, despite promising herself to be strong, breaking down at school. These instances are used by Muller to show the reader how Amy cares about her parents' union. Muller reveals to the reader the innermost soft part of Amy by showing how much she cares about her family.

Moreover, Muller uses the relationship between Amy and her father to demonstrate Amy's caring nature. Amy is always concerned whether her father is happy about the relocation to Windhoek. For instance, she is concerned about her father's blank stares into the wall. Muller makes this a subject of Amy's thoughts to show how caring she is about the plight of others. She wants to see her father happy and when he is not, she is worried. When she notices her father awake alone late at night she goes to him and initiates a conversation just to assure herself that he is fine.

Muller uses the description of the emptiness in Amy when her father returns to Cape Town for good to show her caring nature. Interestingly, Muller does not let us into her father's mind so that we can see if he too feels that emptiness. With the absence of this insight, we are led by the author to believe that the girl-child cares more about her parents than the way the parents care about her. Moreover, Muller uses Marlee-Chante's confrontation of Amy's father to confirm his lack of care as Marlee-Chante concludes that he does not go out of his way for Amy. Amy is more affected by the return of her father to Cape Town to an extent that all his traces in the house arouse the feeling of emptiness in her.

To amplify Amy's caring nature towards her father, Muller uses Amy's undying desire to visit him in Cape Town. Where Amy's father does not care about visiting her, she has this burning urge to visit him. We can see Amy exploring all the possibilities of being reunited with her father when she corners her mother into letting her visit him as a birth day wish. Muller uses the anticipation and the preparation of this trip to express the care that Amy has for her father. For example, she talks about the visit every time at school and she prepares the musk of Morgan, which she thinks will amuse her father. She also works hard at school in order to impress her father with her improved marks. It is important to note that Amy puts extra effort in her school work just for her father. In other words, she goes out of her way for him.

Muller also uses self-blame to illustrate that Amy cared about her parents' marriage. Because Amy wants to see her parents together, she looks at herself as the cause of their separation. Self-blame can be seen as an attempt to correct the situation by

attributing the cause to oneself and then try to work on changing those aspects of oneself one considers as the cause of the problem. By portraying Amy in this way Muller is showing us Amy's resolve to solve her parents' problems just because she cares. For instance, we see Amy working hard to improve her history marks at school as she thinks that her father left because he could not stand being embarrassed by a dull child.

The other depiction of self-blame can also be seen in Amy's feelings of imperfection, such as her mousy hair. Amy searches her physical appearance for imperfections that could have caused her parents' divorce. This constant concern shows how Muller presents the love and care that Amy has for her family.

Muller goes on to show the reader through her portrayal of Amy's mother's devastation after the separation that Amy is caring. She portrays Amy as the caregiver in the house. She portrays her concern over her mother's condition and her having to literally take care of her younger brother, Jacob in the place of her mother. For example, Amy has to wait for Jacob to fall asleep in order to move him from her mother's bed as he wets the bed. We can see here that Amy's mother is not only unable to dictate things around the house, but in her bedroom too. The situation that girls find themselves after divorce constitutes what Ngoshi (2010) refers to as the erasure of girlhood in her analysis of the absence of girlhood in selected novels by Zimbabwean writers. Instead of enjoying her girlhood innocence and the playful nature associated with girlhood, Amy is 'graduated' into a semi adult who has to take care of the whole household.

Through Amy's perpetual worry over Tanja, Muller demonstrates that Amy is a caring girl. She constantly tries to call her initially to hear about the ice cream tasting exercise, but later she inhibits worry over her safety as her cell phone is off. This caring nature is carried on to the end of the novel where Amy has to cut short her visit to Cape Town to return to Windhoek and help identify the ice cream couple in order to save Samantha and the other girls.

At Marlee-Chante's school, Muller portrays Amy as being concerned about the learners who are not caring enough. Amy experiences mean children such as the boy who pulled her hair and the one who put chewing gum on her chair in order for her to sit on it. The teacher does not care at all and does not attend to her during her stay in her classroom. The other girls are busy with their special friends. Muller uses this description to draw some parallels with the school in Windhoek where the teacher cared about Amy and went to an extent of assigning Samantha to help her. Muller uses this as the main reason that Amy uses to reject this school. From this, one can infer that since Amy is a caring girl herself, she loves to be in an environment where there are caring people.

In *When you dance with the crocodile* the plot also revolves around the urge for the girl-child to care for others. Helena cannot stand seeing another girl, hungry, thirsty and trapped for days without any help. She takes it upon herself to provide that help because she cares. There is no relationship of any sort between her and Ruth (the trapped girl). Helena is perfectly comfortable with her life, but she has the burning desire to get out of her comfort zone and face danger just out of care and concern.

Due to her caring nature, Helena cannot help but observe with great concern the treatment that the slave traders give to their captives who are mainly children. She observes an instance where a girl could not walk any further and the punishment in terms of whipping that is meted out to her is unbearable. On another instance she observes how a boy is beaten for spilling a drop of water. Overall Helena is concerned about how the captives are chained together and starved, while their captors feast on roasted meat.

Muller shows Helena's caring nature when Helena rejects Luis' offer of letting her alone escape without Ruth. She rejects this offer on the grounds that Ruth has become her friend, therefore she could not leave her anymore. Due to her caring nature she has time even when she too is a captive to negotiate on Ruth's behalf when Ruth is unaware of it. At the same time she motivates Ruth who is about to give up on her dream to be able to break the news of her father's passing to her mother. Helena works hard to give meaning to Ruth's life by reminding her of her duty towards her departed father. Helena sacrifices the wrist watch her late mother gave her for the sake of Ruth. By portraying Helena's willingness to part with an object of sentimental value, Muller wants to convince the reader that the care demonstrated by Helena is unmatched.

When Helena and Ruth encounter Maddy the reader is quickly made aware of the unfavourable conditions she is exposed to. Muller immediately propels Helena into action for Maddy's sake. Like Nanjala in the tale *Captured by riders*, who observes how women in Bukusu community are oppressed by men (Muriungu and Muraya, 2014) Helena notices how Zakes oppressed Maddy. The parallel here lies in the fact

that both girls commit themselves to the liberation of women from the concerned men. Muller makes it Helena's purpose to rescue Maddy from Zakes. This undertaking becomes part of Helena's mission out of her love and care for Maddy. Muller presents Helena's hard work to find a strategy to escape. However, it takes some convincing to get Maddy into the escape mode. The first attempt is foiled by Zakes, but the last one works and Helena manages to execute acts of love and care.

#### **4.4.3. Open mindedness and independence of thought in the girl-child**

Throughout the novel Amy is presented to the reader as a person who does not jump to conclusions. Muller deliberately withholds all the information that Amy needs to make her judgements until the very end. She is made not to rush into conclusions about people before she has her facts right. In other words all those that are involved with her are given a fair chance to prove themselves worthy of her trust.

Muller makes Amy disregard all she was taught about strangers to show the reader how open minded Amy is. She portrays Amy without any prejudices about strangers. Although suspicious, Amy still gives the ice cream couple the benefit of the doubt. Like Tariro in Kangira's *The bundle of firewood* (Pasi, 2012) who chooses to save the pangolin despite her grandmother's superstitious beliefs, Amy disregards the advice of adults with regards to her dealings with strangers. Equally, she refuses to be swayed into postponing her trip to visit her father by the ice cream couple. Her mother also fails to wield her influence on her with regard to her much anticipated visit to Cape Town. Muller also portrays Amy as a person who is able to withhold or release information depending on the need. For example she keeps the ice cream flavour tasting a secret from adults both at Long Beach and in Windhoek until the

time when such information becomes the missing puzzle in the disappearance of Samantha.

As for the problems in her parents' marriage, Amy is portrayed as determined to get all the facts about the problems on her own. She disregards her mother's opinions about her going to Cape Town. Muller uses the journey to Cape Town as an introspective journey. Muller uses this journey to open up a new world for Amy. It is in this journey that Amy finds evidence to piece up a puzzle in her parents' marriage.

Muller presents Amy as critical of the information that she gets. For instance, Amy hangs on to the information that her father gave her about Morgan until she verifies it. Her father's description of Morgan as a witch sticks with Amy to an extent where it disturbs her father. However, Amy still gives her father the benefit of doubt and does not lose any respect for him even when it is revealed that he lied. Equally, when Amy finds out about Morgan, she remains calm. Rather she probes more about Morgan and her father's relationship. Although, Morgan and her father are to blame for her parents' breakup, Amy still finds some positive elements in Morgan. As a girl she is made to be continuously inquisitive by the author in the novel.

To show her inquisitive nature, Muller depicts Amy asking her mother questions in the immigration office. This is a conversation that the two characters have not had before. Muller deliberately makes the conversation to begin with Amy's enquiries in order to show that Amy has gathered the information she has on her own. However, she still wants to get the information from her mother too. It is evident here that Muller is demonstrating a point that Amy is checking the information that she got from Marlee-Chante against that given by her mother. Only after confirming from

her mother does Amy make her conclusion about her father's lying ways. This portrayal of openness between a female parent and her daughter is a rare portrayal as many works reviewed portray women as supportive of patriarchy against their daughters as it is the case in Buchi Emecheta's novels where mothers prefer to have sons instead of daughters and this creates a rift between them (Mohammed, 2010).

In Amy and Marlee-Chante's discussion about Morgan's affair with Amy's father, Muller exposes the reader to how Marlee-Chante was assisted by a psychologist in dealing with her parents' divorce. Muller uses this conversation to show that Amy does not get any professional help but still manages to put her problems into perspective before she can move on. This is done to show the independence of thought in Amy's character as she works out strategies to cope on her own. In other words Muller is telling us that girls have the ability to analyse issues and come to terms with life problems without assistance from males, adults and professionals.

Muller's portrayal of Amy as open minded and as an independent thinker can be traced in her narration of the new found reality in Cape Town. Muller creates a situation where Amy has to revisit her desire to relocate back to Cape Town with her father. She is made to evaluate her friendship with Lea and Coco. Muller presents the reader with a scenario where Amy's expectations are not met by her father, Lea and Coco. According to Amy, she wants to live with her father only, which has become impossible as her father lives with Morgan and Marlee-Chante in Morgan's house. Similarly Amy observes that Lea has other friends she is now closer to and Coco is more loyal to Lea than he is to Amy. Based on this observation, Amy decides to move on with her life with her mother and Jacob who have only her.

Muller shows how open minded and independent Amy is when she is expected by her father to assess the situation before she decides on whether to live with him or not. He exposes her to the house in which he lived with Morgan and her daughter, Marlee- Chante and the school she is supposed to attend should she decide to relocate to Cape Town. Although Amy is only expected to choose from the options that her father gives to her, she goes further by bringing in other options such as her previous school. Muller depicts Amy standing her ground on the choice of school in Cape Town. Muller still shows the reader that even though Amy prefers her old school in Cape Town over the new one, there are still other factors she has to consider. Eventually, it turns out that her decision does not only depend on the choice of schools or the hospitality at Morgan's house.

The supportive nature of Marlee-Chante towards Amy and the welcoming nature of Morgan help in portraying Amy's open mindedness in terms of deciding where to live. For instance, Marlee-Chante supports Amy's cause in terms of her choice of her old school over the new school which Marlee-Chante attends. She fights for her plight and teaches her to be a lady. Morgan welcomes her should she decide to live with them. Muller uses this to widen Amy's options and make her consider all the available means before she eventually decides to move on. Moreover, by implication this makes her decision even tougher.

To underscore Amy's independence of thought, Muller initiates a conversation between Samantha and Amy at the end of the novel. Samantha enquires if Amy has finally decided as she has put her participation in school activities on hold in anticipation of a possible return to Cape Town. Muller here presents us with a

decided Amy, who has let go of Cape Town and the past. Amy has finally decided to move on and live with her mother and Jacob in Windhoek. Muller thus portrays Amy as a girl who applies critical thinking skills to a situation before she can make up a mind.

Muller's portrayal of Helen in *When you dance with the crocodile* shows independence of thought and open mindedness in terms of her views and the decisions she makes. These can be summed up as follows.

Muller lets the reader into Helena's mind in terms of her views on the danger of computer games. Helena is presented to the reader as holding a divergent view from that of her father with regards to this subject. She maintains that games do not pose danger to children and argues that the notion that computer games posed a danger to children is just a creation of the adult mind. She does not see any justification why her father is worried about the dangers of computer games. In a similar way Helena is portrayed as someone who has a mind of her own on family issues. For instance she values spending time with her father; therefore she tells Meme Olivia that her father is very tired and already sleeping when she only wanted to spend time with him. The independent nature of her thoughts has parallels with the portrayal of Marita by Alumenda when she secretly decides to get some education despite her father's refusal (Chitando, 2008). In Alumenda's story Marita's independence become handy when she reads a letter containing sad news to her father, much to the surprise of her father who has denied her education, preferring to send his son to school.

Helena makes a decision to carry out a dangerous mission when she thinks that it was a simple task of getting to the scene, rescue the girl and return to modernity and civilisation. To the contrary, this decision leads her into deeper trouble. When Helena fails to rescue Ruth from her first position she tries to look for other alternatives. One alternative that presents itself is asking for help from the men she meets around the corner. When the men turn out to be slave traders, Helena does not give up. Although she seems to co-operate with them, she continues to seek other ways to rescue Ruth and herself. She evaluates different possibilities of escaping until she finds one. She is not totally consumed by the unbearable suffering she finds herself in, but she is steadfast and on alert for a possible escape route. Because of Helena's open mindedness, her wrist watch, which is a gift from her late mother, does not remain a possession of sentimental value only. She sees it as a bargaining power tool when she observes how much the youngest of the slave traders needs it. She uses it as a bait to entice him to release her and Ruth during the night while the older men sleep. She shows her independence in the process where the young man counter offer by excluding Ruth in the deal and threatens her with a knife. Muller emphasises Helena's composure in her dealings with the young slave trader until she attained her goal.

A similar resolve is shown by the author when Helena encounters Zakes. Despite Zakes' attempts to break Helena's spirit, she is determined to find a way to escape. The author depicts Helena as determined to be in opposition with Zakes' motives even after punishing her and revealing that he is aware of the fact that she devised the escape plan that failed. Helena did not condone violence; therefore she could not

sit and watch Maddy being violated by Zakes. She also analyses Zakes' sudden fondness in Ruth and interprets it as having a potential to lead to the sexual violation of Ruth by Zakes and she acts promptly to escape in order to avoid this eventuality.

Muller also shows how Helena takes advantage of her technological knowledge to achieve her mission. She analyses the relationship between black magic and technology and concludes that there is a very thin line between them, especially for people who are not exposed to modern technology. After understanding that the Masubia men, who helped guard Maddy, Ruth and herself are afraid of black magic, she concludes that they may as well be afraid of the loud music played from her 7h since they are not familiar with the technology. Through the use of loud music Helena manages to subdue the Masubia men and orders them to escape with her, Maddy and Ruth. Helena finally manages to send Zakes into panic by using the 7h to produce a cock crow and a lion roar. These plans are well thought out, making Helena capable of seeking solutions to her problem successfully by planning carefully.

#### **4.4.4. Dependability and reliability in the girl-child**

Muller portrays Amy as reliable and dependable. To illustrate this point Muller entrusts Amy with secrets and a sense of duty towards other characters. She keeps secrets for her father and the ice cream couple. Moreover, she is there when her mother, Jacob and Samantha and her mother need her.

To show how dependable Amy is, Muller portrays her as her father's confidante. Her father knows that his secrets are safe with her if they agree that they are to be kept

secret from her mother. For instance, when Amy finds Morgan's message, her father asks her to keep it a secret lest her mother will be worried. He also requests her not to tell her mother that he said that moving to Windhoek was her idea. It is ironic that Amy keeps these "believable lies" as a secret for her father, but this can be interpreted from another angle to imply that the author wants to demonstrate to the reader how trustworthy the girl-child can be.

On the part of the ice cream couple, it is quite clear that Amy keeps her dealings with them strictly confidential. From the time she accepts the rationale of using children to taste ice cream flavours secretly as a way of preventing theft of their recipes, Amy has always respected that. Although she is curious, she does not share this information with any adult until the time it was needed to save her friend, Samantha.

When Amy's parents break up she sees her mother through a difficult time. Although affected by the divorce too, she picks herself up to support her mother. She helps with the cleaning up in the house when her mother cannot do it. For instance she fetches Jacob from his friend, gives him food and puts him to sleep. Muller depicts Amy literally taking care of her mother and Jacob as she gives her mother food immediately after putting Jacob to sleep. Amy is not only physically dependable, but emotionally dependable too. Muller demonstrates this by portraying Amy kissing her mother through the car window to make her feel loved when she drops them at school. This happens during the time she was feeling down. She also engages her in conversations in order to make her feel better and complements her on her new hairstyle. Muller uses Amy's mother to show the reader that girl-children can provide the necessary support when the need arises.

Amy is portrayed as dependable as she abandons her visit to Cape Town to come and help find Samantha. Samantha's mother and Amy's mother depend on the information that Amy has to find Samantha. The detective cannot arrest the ice cream couple unless Amy identifies them. Like Tambudzai in *Tambudzai anoona nyoka huru* by Alumenda, who had valuable information to convict the old witch (Kangira, 2008), Amy has valuable information to convict the ice cream couple. There are parallels between the importance of these girls to their immediate community as they hold a solution to a social puzzle involving life and death. Her prompt return to Windhoek demonstrates that Amy is dependable and reliable as she does not forsake her friend Samantha when she needs her most.

In *When you dance with the crocodile* Muller demonstrates how dependable and reliable the girl-child is by entrusting Helena with a responsibility towards others. While using the modalities of a computer game, Muller closes all possible doors for outside help and makes everything to depend on Helena. Throughout the trying times, Helena does not abandon her responsibilities. She refuses to leave without Ruth when she is offered to escape alone in exchange of the wrist watch. Muller also presents a helpless Maddy benefiting from the dependable nature of Helena when she saves her from the suffering that Zakes subjects her to.

It also turns out that Sam's (Helena's brother who tries to follow her and ends up in a different place) depends on her. According to the modalities of the computer game, Helena must complete her huddles and then find Sam so that they can wait for the worm hole to transport them back to Windhoek. Only Helena can salvage hers and her brother's return otherwise her father will lose both his children. By placing so

much importance and responsibility on Helena, Muller wants to prove to the reader that no responsibility is too big for the girl-child. Subsequently, by making her successful in carrying out the tasks she gives assurance that the girl-child can indeed be dependable and reliable.

#### **4.4.5. Assertiveness and the girl-child**

Muller portrays Amy as being assertive in many ways. To illustrate the point that Amy is assertive, Muller uses situations to explore ways in which the girl-child can assert herself. Like Ndabaga who stands up to the king in *The tale of Ndabaga* to liberate her father from the palace on a charge of a lack of a son (Ruterana, 2012), Amy stands up against views by adults. Amy is portrayed as being assertive on her opposition to relocate to Windhoek, her insistence to visit her father in Cape Town and her preference of her previous school over Marlee-Chante's school.

Muller portrays Amy's expression of her unwillingness to relocate to Cape Town as a sign of her assertiveness. She is depicted fearlessly trying to convince her mother to allow her to remain in Cape Town and visit them during the holiday. Muller portrays Amy as a person who fights for what she believes in. She manages to assert herself on this issue through her proposal of returning when she is twelve as her mother thinks she is too young to remain alone now. She is portrayed confronting her father about the same issue when her father shifts the blame to her mother.

When Amy's mother still thinks of protecting her from finding out about her father's life in Cape Town, Amy asserts herself by insisting on visiting him. The notion of childhood and protection is put forward by Muponde (2004) as one of the adult

views of childhood. Muponde (2004) argues that this view stems out of the belief that children are vulnerable. By assessing the outcome of this visit, it is clear that it is sometimes not necessary to protect children. Muller portrays Amy as someone who feels that it is her right to visit her father even when her mother is opposed to it. Muller portrays her taking advantage of her mother's offer of a birthday wish to ask to be granted permission to visit her father. The author brings Amy's assertiveness to the fore through the way she argues her case against her mother who tries to find excuses for her not to go.

In Cape Town Muller portrays Amy as being assertive when she rejects her father's proposal to attend Marlee-Chante's school. Amy comes out of her shell to stand up to her father, who is used to having her do things for him. Amy has her reasons for not wanting to attend the new school and proposes that she goes to her old school. Muller shows the reader how upset she is about the fact that her father never considers her opinion. Muller also depicts Amy expressing the conditions for her return to Cape Town. For instance she makes it very clear in the presence of Morgan that she wishes to live with her father only. She also chooses to discuss her issues with her father only when she confronts him about the necessity of her going to school with Marlee-Chante when she is on holiday and how she can take care of herself if she remains at home.

In *When you dance with the crocodile* assertiveness is depicted through Helena's stance that computer games are not dangerous as opposed to her father's view to the contrary. During their discussion, Helena takes a view that there is no danger in

playing computer games and then goes ahead to play a game labelled as dangerous. She later opines that adults see danger lurking everywhere when it is not the case.

Muller presents the reader with an assertive Helena when she bargains for her and Ruth's release with Luis. Helena is made by the author to stand up to Luis. First of all she refuses to be released alone leaving Ruth behind. Later she repels Luis' attempt to threaten her with a knife. Helena warns Luis against threatening her with the knife since he too will also lose the wrist watch to the adults if she screams. Helena could have easily accepted Luis' conditions if she was not assertive enough and her goal would not have been achieved.

When Helena and Ruth meet Maddy she is sore yet submissive to Zakes. Her spirit has been broken and she has no desire to escape anymore. Helena assertively makes her see the suffering she was going through and the need to get out of it. She convinces Maddy who was initially adamant about trying to escape to consider escaping with her and Ruth.

When Helena is on the verge of giving up, she communicates with her father. During this communication Muller shows how Helena tries to push through her agenda by insisting that her father should change the rules of the game and let her return home. When she is put through to the computer technician she refuses to talk to him stating that she only wishes to talk to her father.

#### **4.4.6. Compassion, love and friendship in Muller's girl-child**

Pervading the two novels are acts of compassion and love by the two main characters, namely, Amy and Ruth. Both characters show extraordinary compassion

and love for other characters. The novels are characterised by deep friendships that compel characters to perform great acts of love. Where Chinodya tells about compulsory compassion in the *Tale of Tamari*, when Tamari is forced by the loss of her parents to fend for her siblings (Ngoshi, 2010), Muller portrays situations in which the girls elect to perform compassionate acts.

Amy in *It all goes wrong* is portrayed as compassionate as she feels that her life has been disrupted by her family's relocation to Windhoek. She feels for Lucia, who because of her relocation is left without a friend. She even goes to an extent of feeling for Coco her dog. Amy tries to negotiate that Coco be carried on the plane to Windhoek. She tries to figure out how this relocation will affect him. Muller shows her concern for Coco by stating the possibility of being taken to the SPCA if he does not behave well.

We see an act of compassion from Amy when she is worried about Tanja. After Tanja has gone to taste the ice cream flavours her cell phone is switched off. Amy cannot stop thinking about what could have happened to her. She decides to call out of curiosity and perhaps to keep the friendship going, but she ends up being gravely concerned about Tanja's well-being.

When she is summoned back from Cape Town to help detectives identify the ice cream couple, Amy does it for her friend Samantha. Samantha agrees to go and taste the ice cream instead of her and it was her turn to show compassion. Amy is thus fearless even in the face of the threatening ice cream man.

Amy's concept of friendship is deeply rooted. It has its foundation in fidelity, trust, love, duty and compassion. Muller shows the reader how essential friendship is to the girl-child and how much effort a girl-child will spend on building and nurturing friendships. This is done through the portrayal of the friendships that Amy has and how she judges their meaningfulness in her life.

In *When you dance with the crocodile*, Helena is pushed by compassion and love to play the dangerous game. Helena has great love for humanity; therefore she cannot stand seeing someone suffering. She takes a bold decision to get involved and save Ruth from danger. Out of this, an unbreakable bond is born.

The acts of compassion are depicted through Helena's sense of duty to Ruth and in some cases this is reciprocal, for Ruth also acted compassionately towards Helena. Initially Helena plays the game to rescue Ruth, but this turns out not to be a once off mission. During this mission, compassion comes into play as Ruth realises what Helena has come to do for her and Helena realises the contribution that Ruth can make to this mission. While Helena vows not to leave without Ruth and comforts her not to give up hope, Ruth saves Helena from death when she can no longer cope with the demands of the mission by bringing her some tubers and water.

Out of compassion and love, Helena realises the need for Maddy to be saved from the predicament that Zakes imposes on her. She and Ruth cannot escape alone leaving her behind. Helena endures punishment and unfavourable conditions for Maddy and Ruth. It is Zakes' sudden interest in Ruth that prompts Helena to act swiftly for she cannot allow Zakes to violate Ruth. Through this portrayal Muller shows the reader how the girl-child can do selfless sacrifices out of compassion.

#### **4.4.7. The girl-child as fun-seeking and adventurous**

Children love to have fun and at times get carried away. Because of this fact adults understand childhood as a stage that warrants protection (Muponde, 2004). However, sometimes children refuse to be protected by adults because of their adventurous nature. In Muller' portrayal of the two protagonists in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile* it is clear that girls are also fun loving and adventurous.

In *It all goes wrong*, Amy is portrayed as playful and fun loving. She prefers to spend time playing and when she does not have a playmate she is frustrated. The reader is ushered into her fun world when she meets Tanja at Long beach. She and Tanja spend the whole day playing on the rock. She wants some more of this and invites Tanja the following day again. Her fun seeking traits draw her closer to the ice cream couple as she is intrigued to find out more about their mysterious part.

Because Amy likes adventure, she insists on visiting her father in Cape Town, despite her mother's doubts. The reader is shown through her father's reception that Amy is known to be a fun loving and adventurous person by her father. Her father already has two bathing towels and is ready for the beach. At the beach Muller introduces the reader to Amy's swimming abilities. However, this part is interrupted by her father's insecurities.

In *When you dance with the crocodile*, Helena expresses her fun and adventurous self through computer games. The reader is made aware of the fact that Helena has been used by her father to determine the suitability of computer games for children. Due to this she is exposed to many dangerous games and she seems to have developed the love for dangerous games. During her conversation with her father, Muller makes the

fact that Helena enjoys dangerous computer games clear. She sees no danger in them but fun. However, her choice of the most dangerous game is more of risk taking than adventure, which is a trait that many authors do not bring out in girl-characters. However, in *The bundle of firewood*, Kangira narrates how Tariro braves the night just to save the pangolin (Pasi, 2011). Parallels can be drawn between Kangira and Muller's portrayal of the girl-child as both provide the girl-child with the motive to undertake such dangerous missions. While Tariro's mission is to save the pangolin, Helena's mission is to save Ruth. Moreover, the fact that the girls are made victorious in these undertakings speaks volumes about the ability of the girl-child to overcome adversities.

#### **4.4.8. Education and technology as enablers in Muller' portrayal of the girl-child**

While writers such as Alumenda have made the refusal of education for the girl-child the centre of their novels (Chitando, 2008), Muller uses education and technology as enablers in her portrayal of the girl-child. Both her protagonists have access to education. For Amy, the issue is about the choice of school and not access to education, while Helena boasts vast knowledge of computer skills as her father has a doctorate in computer science.

In *It all goes wrong* Muller uses education to give Amy a voice. She is made vocal on her choice of school. Amy is made to question the motives to relocate to Windhoek from Cape Town in part due to her school. When she returns to Cape Town, she clashes with her father over which school she is comfortable going to. It is clear that Muller uses education as an empowering tool in the life of the girl-child.

Prior to her visit to Cape Town, we see Amy working hard in history in order to convince her father to return to her mother. She earlier on blames herself for her parents' breakup and she tries to use education to mend her parents' marriage. When she performs well in history she attaches value to her marks in terms of their potential to help in her father's return to her mother. We also see how Morgan's portrait, which is inspired by a school project, opens up a whole new world for Amy. Although the musk was done for a school project, it was mainly aimed at impressing Amy's father who Amy believes is bothered by Morgan. The musk helps Amy in ascertaining the true identity of Morgan in relation to her father.

In *When you dance with the crocodile*, technology and innovation is made to be the main enabler. Muller fuses in her narration many aspects of computer mediated games. The author even goes as far as inserting a 'beep' where vulgar language and insults are used. Noteworthy is that the story takes place within a computer game. Helena learns about the girl who needs help in the computer game. She has options to choose the level of difficulty and the place she wants to carry out her mission. Since Helena chooses to play her game in the past, she finds modern technology in the form of a device called the 7h very useful in the accomplishment of her mission. The 7h saved the following purposes:

When Helena and Ruth are set free to escape by Luis in the night they needed light to find their way. So Helena has to use the 7h to illuminate their way. It is also an empowering tool as without it they would not find the way through the bush in the night.

When they are stalked by the hyena, Helena uses the 7h to play music on it. Ruth explains to Helena that the hyena will not attack somebody who is awake. She teaches her how to scare it off. With the use of the 7h, Helena saw that they do not need to do anything, but play loud music and the noise from it will scare off the hyena.

The 7h is also used to produce loud music which drives the two Masubia guards into submission to Helena's authority. The Masubia men are known to fear black magic; therefore Helena uses the 7h to scare them. Since they are not familiar with the technology behind the device they take it for black magic.

As an internet enabled device, Muller portrays Helena as conversant using the internet to connect with her father using the 7h. When she gets in touch with her father, she is assured that nobody can do anything to save her but herself. It is because of this knowledge that Helena finds new vigour in her quest to devise new ways to escape from Zakes.

Muller uses the ability of the 7h to produce various sounds to enable Helena to send Zakes into panic. Helena plants the 7h in a bush and sets it to play a sound like that of a roaster and later a sound like that of a lion. Zakes sends his guard after the roaster at the first sound and then panics at the roar of a lion. In the moment of panic Helena reaches for Zakes' gun. With the help of Ruth they assume power through the gun and escape from Zakes. This shows why technology is such an important tool for a girl-child. It separates those who have the privilege to be able to use it from those who are unable to use it. The benefits that the 7h affords Helena are immense.

#### 4.4.9. Heroism and the girl-child in Muller's novels

Muller portrays the girl-child as a heroine in her two novels. While Muriungu and Muraya (2014) mourn about the limited and uninteresting presentation of the females in traditional African tales, Muller uses her two novels to celebrate the bravery and heroism of the girl-child. The ways in which Muller portray girls as heroines in the two books will be discussed below.

In *It all goes wrong*, Muller portrays Amy as she faces life changing obstacles and overcomes them. The enormous nature of these challenges for an 11 year old are used to elevate her as a heroine. The problems that Amy faces are rather mainly emotional and psychological. Below are ways in which Muller builds the heroic nature of Amy.

The novel opens whilst at the airport in Cape Town, when Amy and her family are leaving for Windhoek. We learn that Amy does not wish to go on this trip. She thinks to herself: "Let there be a problem before we take off. Let there be clanging and smoke. Let the pilot announce, "Ladies and gentlemen, no more flying. Please return to the lives you have lived before" (Muller, 2014, p. 1). Muller uses this part to establish in the mind of the reader how displacing for Amy the relocation is. She is not mentally prepared and she is not given reasonable ground to warrant this relocation. Relocation has been portrayed as devastating for the girl-child by Kuret in *Blossoms of the savannah*, where a family has to move after their father's retrenchment. In the village the two girls were subjected to ill treatment for non-conformity (as they were not circumcised) and forced marriage (Muriungu and Muriiki, 2013). Although not seemingly as harsh as the conditions alluded to by

Muriungu and Muriiki, relocation from Cape Town to Windhoek affected Amy in many ways. Among her losses are Lea, her best friend and Coco, her dog. The relocation threatens Amy's well-being due to loss of friendship. Muller introduces the issue of child trafficking to foreshadow the possible danger that awaits Amy in Windhoek through the newspaper reports her father is reading on the plane. Later on she writes to Lea:

There are no kids in Windhoek. Genuine. It's scary. Very scary, because kids disappear here. It's written in the newspaper. But the paper only tells about three girls so far, and I think they should update their facts. I can't remember having seen one kid my age, or any school-going age, since I put my feet on the ground at the airport. (Muller, 2014, p. 5)

At Long Beach Amy is alone and lonely. She complains about not having friends again. This loneliness threatens her sanity and Muller underscores it by making it something that gnaws at Amy's very existence. There is no one to talk to or play with like she used to with Lea. "I sit on my towel on the beach and watch the children play around me. Some brave the ice-cold water; some splash at the edge of the breakers; some play ball games on the sand" (Muller, 2014, p. 10). Later she also remarks in reference to her loneliness. "And everybody, just everybody, has a friend. At least one, but most of them have a whole bunch. Everybody except me" (Muller, 2014, p. 11). These utterances indicate that Amy feels displaced by her parents' decision to move to Windhoek. This decision has deprived her of friendship and made her a lonely and hopeless figure. It has robbed her of her playful self and to some extent her childhood. Her mother once again tries to comfort her by telling her

that she could play with Jacob, but Lea thinks Jacob is too young to understand her world. She makes a mockery of the situation by hinting at writing up a 'friends wanted poster'. By using an image of Amy with a 'friends wanted' poster Muller is trying to convince the reader about the gravity of life without friends. The situation is portrayed as very close to madness, something which has the potential to render someone insane.

At the extreme end Muller contrasts Amy's loneliness with the heightened newly found friendship with Tanja. Again Muller still makes the issue of lack of friendship and loneliness a challenge for Amy by quickly inducing Tanja's disappearance when Amy cannot reach her through her cell phone. By doing this Muller wants the reader to believe that the ability to remain sane and composed in the face of displacement constitutes heroism for a girl of Amy's age.

Amy can be seen as a heroine because her dealings with the ice cream couple bring about their eventual apprehension. She serves as the catalyst in the mysterious disappearance of girls in Namibia. Muller deliberately develops a relationship between Amy and the ice cream couple in order to empower her with information that could incriminate them. She makes her curious about their real intentions through the suspicious language that they use at some points. Muller brings a twist into the plot to make the ice cream couple follow Amy to Windhoek and she brings in the mixture of the trip to Cape Town and the ice cream slogan competition to render Amy an impossible target.

Since Samantha is used as the second choice, the ice cream couple has to contend with another child who knows the ice cream tasting secret out there. This makes it

easy for Amy to use the information that she has against the ice cream couple. In other instances such as Tanja's disappearance, the ice cream couple has an advantage of secrecy as the girl who knew about the information about the ice cream tasting was often the victim.

Muller celebrates Amy's heroism by making her the sole informant in the case the same way that Kangira accords Tariro heroic status when she braves the night in order to take the pangolin to the game reserve (Pasi, 2008). Although she is in Cape Town, she has to return to Windhoek immediately. Amy is afforded VIP status as a helicopter is waiting for her at the airport in order to airlift her to the border. At the border, amid threats from the ice cream couple, Amy stands her ground and identifies the couple. When they are arrested their van is searched and five girls are found. The number of girls that Amy helps to save gives a sense of heroism to her role in finding them. She saves the Namibian nation and the world from the wickedness of the ice cream couple and helps five families find their loved ones. Above all, she helps the police force with cases they have dubbed mysterious.

On another level of analysis, Amy can be seen as a heroine through her ability to uncover deception from her father. During the course of her family's stay in Windhoek, Amy's father is responsible for telling her a lot of misleading information. This misinformation could easily form attitudes against her mother or could simply affect her world view. Through deception, Muller demonises her father and makes Amy the truth seeker. Hence the argument is that if Amy could find the truth behind the relocation to Windhoek and her parents' divorce, she can be admired by other children and therefore be regarded as a heroine.

The main lie told by Amy's father revolve around her relationship with Morgan. Amy is under the impression that Morgan is an obsessed old woman whom her father had helped win a case. She is also made to believe that her father is irritated by Morgan's behaviour. The wrong reasons are also given as to why Amy should not share such information with her mother. On her visit to Cape Town Amy discovers that Morgan is in fact her father's lover whom she left her mother for. During her conversation with Marlee-Chante, she learns that this relationship has been going on for a long time and that it caused the divorce between her parents too.

This revelation helps Amy put a number of things into perspective. First of all she realises that it was not her mother's fault all along. She begins to doubt the truth behind everything her father has told her. Later in a conversation with her mother she refers to them as "believable lies". She checks all the information that her father has told her including the version that her mother is the one who insisted on moving to Windhoek against her father's wish. It is important to note that all this evidence and information is gathered by an 11 year old. Her immense intellect in piecing up related information in search of the truth stands out and calls for admiration. Above all, the fact that Muller depicts an 11 year old who embarks on a mission to search for truth is an epitome of a celebration of heroism in the girl-child.

Furthermore, in *When you dance with the crocodile*, Muller takes a more feminist stance by making Helena stand up against the evil perpetrated by patriarchy. These evils include slave trade and physical and sexual violence against women and children. Although this is just a computer game, Muller skilfully turns it into a real life matter. The game leads us into issues that our society is faced with. These are

then told using the perspective of the girl-child. Muller's portrayal of Helena's journey as full of obstacles makes the reader believe that she is indeed a heroine.

The heroic deeds in *When you dance with the crocodile* include Helena's escape from the slave traders and from Zakes. All these escapes involve other people in the form of Ruth and Maddy. When Helena falls victim to slave traders, she does not give up on her mission to save Ruth. She continues to find a way for her and Ruth to escape. When she finds it, the two of them are able to navigate through a jungle where only very few people have managed without succumbing to hunger and thirst or animals of prey.

When she thinks that it is all over, Muller sets in another adversary in the form of Zakes. Zakes is a cruel man who holds Maddy against her will. Helena is not content with this situation and wishes to save Maddy from Zakes. Through her description of Maddy as an abused woman, Muller wins the reader's sympathy of Maddy and makes them applaud Helena's efforts to save her. After a failed escape attempt, Helena manages to escape from Zakes with both Maddy and Ruth.

On a literal level, Helena is able to pass the obstacles presented to her by the computer game. She plays the game in a very difficult mode. She is not entitled to any outside help and she has to finish the obstacles before winning the game. Her father registers his pride for her achievement. In other words she is literary and literally a heroine. In a literary sense she is able to save a girl and a woman from the forces of patriarchy and literally she manages to complete the obstacles which are a requirement for completing a game and return home.

#### **4.5. Emerging themes**

*It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile* bring to the fore some fundamental themes related to childhood. Through these themes Muller creates an inventory of issues that concern the girl-child in today's world. These themes include friendship, infidelity and the divorce of parents, childhood innocence versus naivety and girl-child vulnerability versus girl-child heroism.

##### **4.5.1. Friendship and compassion**

In *It all goes wrong*, the theme of friendship runs through the whole novel. In the beginning of the novel we witness Amy's reluctance to leave Cape Town. Her unwillingness to relocate is mainly due to the potential loss of familiar ground. The familiar ground centres on her friendship with Lea and Coco her dog. Amy is preoccupied with the loss of friendship to an extent that she fails to find meaning in life without her friend. For example, when her father buys her a cell phone as a Christmas gift, she cannot see its use as Lea is not there to communicate with her.

There is a void in her life due to Lea's absence in her life. This void is temporarily filled by Tanja at Long beach. Here again another form of friendship is brought to the fore through the level of engagement that is formed in a very short time. It is characterised by the long hours of play and subsequent yearning for play time. The friendship is so deep that Amy feels desperate when she cannot reach Tanja through her cell phone. Amy still feels that her friendship with Tanja is not as adequate as the one she shares with Lea since Tanja will go back to her real friends after the holiday and she will remain without a friend.

Another friendship that is presented in the novel is the friendship between Amy and Samantha. The friendship grows out of the classroom situation as Samantha is the learner that is assigned to look after Amy. The two of them start bonding inside and outside the classroom. They visit the ice cream van together and they work out a diet plan in line with Samantha's mother's guidelines for her intake of junk food. Muller brings out the depth of friendship where the girls look out for their health and are able to follow a healthy diet together. The friendship is further cemented by their mothers' friendship when Samantha's mother begins to support Amy's mother during her separation. It is due to this friendship that Samantha agrees to ice cream tasting, thus making her a victim of child trafficking. In turn Amy also acts on the strong bond that existed between them to provide the necessary information on Samantha's possible whereabouts and promptly returns from Cape Town to help find her. At first Amy feels that her friendship with Samantha does not match the one she shares with Lea, but she later chooses to move on with Samantha when she realises that Lea has moved on too. This demonstrates the ability in the girl-child to accept what they do not have control over. Instead of being suicidal, Amy accepts her situation and approaches life with a new perspective. This aspect also underscores the adaptability of the girl-child.

In the same vein, when Helena in *When you dance with the crocodile* embarks on playing this dangerous game she does it out of compassion. She cannot do otherwise but help the girl in trouble. This desire to help gives her a sense of duty towards Ruth. This can be seen in the fact that even when Helena could escape alone she could not because of her compassion for Helena. The theme of compassion can also

be seen in the bond that develops between the two girls. They look out for each other in many instances. When Ruth is about to give up in her desire to be the one who breaks the news of her father's passing to her mother, it is Helena who consoles her. When Helena has given up on life and is about to succumb to death, it is Ruth who comes to her rescue with food and water. This shows a deep connection between the girls and how they look out for each other even in the most difficult of times.

#### **4.5.2 Infidelity and divorce**

The novel *It all goes wrong* deals in part with a marriage on the verge of falling apart. The reason why Amy's family relocates to Windhoek is to attempt to save her parents' marriage from falling apart. When it fails to work in Windhoek, Amy's father returns to Cape Town; on one occasion on a business trip and on another occasion for good as the marriage does not work out. On her trip to Cape Town, Amy learns about how Morgan and her father were cheating on both their partners for years. She learns how this has led to the divorce between Morgan and her husband. In addition, Amy has witnessed the strain in her parents' marriage and their separation. It comes to light that underlying all the problems that her parents are going through is her father and Morgan's relationship. This has culminated in divorce for Morgan and a separation for Amy's father's marriage, which is well on its way to divorce. Of utmost importance here is that neither Marlee-Chante nor Amy condones Amy's father nor Morgan's behaviour as it has brought them suffering and displeasure.

#### **4.5.3. Childhood innocence versus naivety**

At the beginning of the novel, *It all goes wrong*, we come across Amy, an innocent girl who only cares about friends and family. She is introduced to reports about missing children in Namibia. She is carefree as she is only preoccupied by her loss of a friend due to the relocation that is forced on her by her parents. She refuses to be drawn into the talk about fending off strangers and the disappearances of the children she does not even know. It is this innocence that Amy's father preys on when she tells her about Morgan the witch. It is evident that Amy is interested in whatever makes her father happy and jumps at every opportunity to share laughter with him. She agrees without questioning when her father asks her to keep Morgan a secret from her mother. Amy does not see the real man behind her father's mask until in the very end. This demonstrates how the adult world preys on the child and unashamedly exploits their innocence.

The ice cream couple also prey on childhood innocence as they prey on the unsuspecting innocence of children. They get them very close by showering them with complements on everything about them. They make children feel special in order to draw them closer. For instance, Tanja was enticed with money for tasting their ice cream flavours and Amy was drawn closer by making her the fake winner of the competition. After winning the children's trust they then ask them to keep their meeting a secret from adults.

#### **4.5.4. Girl-child vulnerability versus girl-child heroism**

The child trafficking part in *It all goes wrong* brings to the fore two different perspectives of the girl-child. One can argue that the girl-child is perceived as an

easy target by the ice cream couple or one can argue that they are simply the ones on demand for their market, perhaps for the sexual gratification of their clients. Therefore, one can conclude that the fact that there are many ways in which the girl-child can be exploited makes her more vulnerable than the boy-child. However, instead of drawing from the popular story telling culture of celebrating male heroism, the writer uses a female character in the form of Amy in the rescue of the kidnapped girls and the arrest of the culprits.

Similarly, *When you dance with the crocodile* celebrates female heroism in several ways by pitting girls as protagonists against male antagonists. The evils of slave trade, drunkenness, thuggery, abuse and blind loyalty are represented by men. We learn about the Portuguese men who capture children to sell them off as slaves. On the way they starve and ill-treat their captives. There are signs of alcohol abuse among them. Zakes is a runaway criminal who hijacks the dreams and aspirations of Maddy and keeps her with him against her will. He too is a drunkard and an abusive man. All this evil is conquered by a girl who earns self-pride and heroism from overcoming all this evil presented through adults.

#### **4.5.5. Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse is epitomised by Maddy's relationship with Zakes. Maddy is held by Zakes against her will. She tries to escape, but he still finds her. He physically assaults her and treats her like his own property. Their relationship is devoid of love and it is tantamount to sexual abuse. It also comes out clearly that Zakes is developing an interest in Ruth. "There had been a shift in his attitude. He had grown fond of her, fonder of her than of Maddy" (Muller, 2012, p. 88). This translates to

sexual fondness and the potential of sexual abuse if Ruth remains in the company of Zakes. To thwart this, Helena has to act promptly in thinking up another escape plan.

#### **4.5.6. Child-trafficking and slave trade**

*It all goes wrong* warns against the threats posed by child trafficking against the girl-child. She portrays this ugly practice through the ice cream couple which is set to smuggle children across the Namibian border in order to ship them to markets overseas. Muller uses the girl-child as a catalyst in arresting the culprits, thus making the girl-child an agent of change in finding solutions to her problems.

From the onset of the story, Ruth's entrapment becomes Helena's mission. Although it is not clear to the reader how she got into this trap, it becomes clear when the men who speak Portuguese come into the picture. They have with them children in chains and they also celebrate the addition of Helena to their stock of captives. The vulnerable targets of slave trade are children who do not have the physical power to resist their captors. However, through Helena, Muller wants the reader to see the fact that although they may not be physically stronger, girls can outwit adults. This is proven by Helena's ability to escape when the adult slave traders least expect it. Slave practices reduce human beings to animals as snares are set for them and they are trapped for days like animals. The captives are regarded by their captors as commodities that will fetch prices on the market for them. Before their first escape, Helena, Ruth and several other children are being led to Angola to be sold off as slaves. It is worth noting to see how the author uses Angola as the destination for child and slave trade. This might in part be caused by the political instability that has rocked that country for so long, which may have led to illicit traders to use it as a

transit port. Such practices represent some of the harsh realities of life that the girl-child in particular and children in general are faced with.

#### **4.5.7. Modern world versus ancient world**

The story uses a computer game to empower a girl from the modern world to conquer the adversities in the ancient world. She travels back in time through a computer game to execute her good intentions, namely to rescue another girl from eminent danger. While on the rescue mission, Helena uses the modern wrist watch to entice the youngest of the captors to release her and Ruth. When tracking back away from their captors they use the 7h to illuminate their way and to scare away predators by playing loud music on it. The same 7h is used in the first escape attempt from Zakes. It is used to produce loud noise, which the Masubia guards take for black magic and give in to Helena's authority. Helena uses the 7h to communicate with her father, Dr Amadhila and the computer technician Mark about the possibility of returning to the modern world through the internet. When she is advised through email that she needs to complete the obstacles, she uses the 7h to produce sounds which confuse Zakes. In a moment of confusion, Helena takes control of Zakes' rifle and takes charge of the camp with the help of Ruth's shooting skills. The use of this device here brings out the girl-child's creativity, sense of heroically conquering mountains and utilising the modern inventions to surmount the given parameters of evil and patriarchal dominance - she is a soldier of some sorts in her own right. So the child cannot be defined in single terms or a straight-jacket, the girl-child is a complex, thinking and crafty individual who can read the world around her and

devise mechanisms which can secure freedom not just for the self but for the wider world.

#### **4.6. The use of the novel to advance the empowerment of the girl-child**

The author uses the novel genre to portray the girl-children in positions of power. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, a novel is a fictitious prose narrative of book length. Given this definition, it is also important to appreciate the fact that a novel is one of the genres that can be classified as fiction. In order to understand how a novel works one needs to examine the concept of fiction and how it works in societies.

We can start with a number of seeming paradoxes: fictions are not true, but they are not lies; they typically describe that which is not real but which is nonetheless not totally unreal; they can include references to real people and events without jeopardising their fictional status; they are designed to get readers or listeners to respond ‘as if’, but not (normally) to deceive them; even though readers are aware that fictions describe people who do not exist or events which have not happened, they nonetheless produce emotions, important reflections, and even altered behaviour in the real world (Hawthorn, 2005, p. 2).

The explanation above alludes to various aspects of fiction, of which the novel is one. While it is true that the incidences narrated in the two novels (*It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*) are not real, the experiences described may be similar to those experienced by girls. It is important to note that what people read in fiction is related to everyday experiences in one way or another. While readers

appreciate that names of places and people are fictitious in fiction, these names still give the reader a sense of the physical setting of the novel. For example places like Cape Town, Windhoek and Long Beach in *When it all goes wrong* give the reader a sense of orientation to well-known places as places where the story took place. Equally, the area around the borders of Angola, Zambia and Namibia give a physical orientation to the story in *When you dance with the crocodile*. This setting enriches our imagination of the events that unfold in the story. Since the events narrated in novels are believable, they can be used to make society aware of the plight of the girl-child by portraying both realistic and idealistic views of the girl-child. In the novels under discussion Muller uses the novel to empower the girl-child by portraying girls as heroines yet caring.

In conclusion therefore, the foregoing analysis has demonstrated that the girl-child has abilities to interpret her world and take meaningful decisions where necessary. The girl-child as portrayed by Muller in the two novels is innocent, caring, and independent and open minded, dependable and reliable, assertive, compassionate and loving, adventurous, conversant with technology and heroic in nature. It therefore goes without saying that Muller uses her novels to create a positive image of the girl-child.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions and recommendations

#### 5.1. Introduction

The aim of this research was to analyse the depiction of the girl-child in Erna Muller's novels, namely *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*. The study was conducted in line with the growing concern over the plight of the girl-child in Namibia. The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To evaluate the challenges faced and overcome by the two protagonists and other girls in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile*.
2. To analyse how girl-characters are portrayed in the novels in relation to boy characters and adult characters.
3. Discuss emerging themes.
4. To examine how the author uses the novel, to promote the plight of the girl-child.

The study used the African feminist theory to analyse the two novels as both novels advocate the empowerment of the girl-child. The main findings are summarised below.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Muller portrays the two protagonists in *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile* as girls. The protagonists are presented as purely innocent and at times naïve. Amy in *It all goes wrong* is portrayed as simplistic in her reasoning, unsuspecting and oblivious to the truth about her parents' divorce at the beginning of the novel. Helena on the other hand is depicted as experimental and carefree and unsuspecting in her approach to life in the beginning. Both girls are dependent on their parents since they are still young. With this portrayal, Muller wants to convince her readers to provide the necessary guidance that should be rendered to children as they are still young to make all decisions on their own. Proper guidance will just unleash their potential.

Girls are always portrayed as care givers. Muller's portrayal of the girl-child in her two novels is not an exception. Amy and Helena are portrayed as care givers to their family members as well as to those they extend a helping hand to. Amy is mostly bothered by her parents' divorce and their individual well-being. She worries about her father's happiness in Windhoek and cares for her mother when she is affected by the divorce. She takes over as Jacob's keeper during this hard time and comforts her mother when she is down. Amy is concerned about Tanja's well-being when she cannot reach her through her cell phone. All these concerns and caregiving tendencies towards others are used by Muller to bring out the caring nature of the girl-child.

Helena, in *When you dance with crocodile* gets out of her comfort zone out of care. She is motivated by the need to take care of others to play a dangerous game in order

to help a trapped girl. When the mission is not complete at once, other instances that bring out her caring nature present themselves. These can be seen in the way the author makes her worry over the manner the slave traders treat the children under their captive by beating them and letting them walk for miles without rest as well as starving them. Muller shows how caring Helena is by making her refuse to escape alone without Ruth. Helena's caring nature can also be seen through her concern over the situation of Maddy. Her act of freeing her from Zakes speaks volumes about her caring nature.

In *It all goes wrong* Muller does not rush Amy into making up her mind about people without obtaining facts first. She deliberately delays her major decisions and conclusions about people until the very end. Amy is made to give the strangers a chance until she is aware of their real motives. She waits until the end to form an opinion about her father and based on all these factors she decides to move on with her life in Windhoek.

In *When you dance with the crocodile* Muller allows Helena to form her own opinion about computer games and the choice of people she would love to help. When Ruth cannot be rescued instantly, Helena remains calm and devises other plans to continue with her mission. She works out plans using her technology to find a way out for Helena and Maddy.

In order to show how dependable Amy is, in *It all goes wrong* Muller portrays her as a person who is there when others need her. Firstly, Amy's father depends on her to keep his secrets about Morgan and other lies. Secondly, she keeps the ice cream couple's secret regarding their secret recipe and flavour tasting. Thirdly, Amy is

there for her mother and Jacob when times are tough. Finally, Amy cuts her holiday short to return to Windhoek in order to help find Samantha.

Helena, on the other hand, is dependable and reliable as demonstrated by her portrayal in the following instances:

Helena sacrifices her comfort to go down the lanes of history to help someone in need. While on her mission she also extends her mission to rescue Maddy from bondage. The two characters find Helena dependable and reliable as she does not abandon them. Also Helena's brother's return depends on the successful completion of the mission by Helena. When she is successful her father is happy because both his children will return home. Muller makes Helena's role in this novel so big that others are saved due to her actions. This is the view of the girl-child that Muller wants her readers to adopt.

Amy is portrayed as assertive in many ways throughout the novel. It is always clear in the novel as to what Amy wants. Whenever Amy needs something she would always state it. Instances of assertiveness include:

Amy's position on the family's relocation to Windhoek, her preference of her previous school in Cape Town over Marlee-Chante's school, her insistence to visit her father despite her mother's insistence to the contrary and her decision to elect to involve only her father in her issues in the presence of Morgan.

For Helena, Muller makes her assertive in her views over the computer games where she maintains that she does not see any danger in computer games, contrary to her father's views. We also see her later standing up to Luis over the inclusion of Ruth in

the bargain for escape. Through the portrayal of her determination to free Maddy from Zakes, Muller shows how assertive Helena is. When she persuades her father to change the rules of the game to allow her to return home, Helena is being assertive and autonomous. This shows that childhood is thus not a form of handicap or disease but a state of being imbued with an uncanny sense of agency, self-determination and a resoluteness which defies the simple and limiting notions of naivety, innocence and 'childishness'.

Muller portrays Amy as someone who values friendship. She portrays her expressing herself on the need for friends. When she finds friends she shows great love, trust, loyalty and compassion for her friends. This can be seen in her attachment to Coco, Lea, Tanja and Samantha. Compassion can be seen in her commitment to help find Samantha when she is missing.

In *When you dance with the crocodile*, we can see a sense of duty and commitment between Helena and Ruth. Muller wants to convince the reader that the girl-child is driven to act out of love, compassion and friendship

In the two novels, girls are portrayed as adventurous. We can see the playful nature of Amy as depicted in the playing hours spent when she meets Tanja. She is seen to be adventurous as she insists on travelling to Cape Town. Because of her nature, her father seems to have taken time off to take her to fun places such as the beach. Helena on the other hand is into dangerous computer games. She is portrayed as a risk taker. Thus Muller's presentation is empowering and it redefines the position of the girl-child as a maker of history, involved in the sense of map making and redefining the self and not just as a senseless and fickle being. The boundaries of

gender stereotypification are thus challenged and enlarged; the de-oracised girl regains not only her voice but her objectivity and place in the world; not as a second citizen but as an individual like any other.

Muller uses education and technology to empower the girl-child. Amy uses her education to assert herself in terms of the choice of school. She also sees her improvement in her school work as a way to keep her parents together. Helena is able to achieve a lot through the knowledge of computers that her father imparted to her.

Heroism in *It all goes wrong* is climaxed by the identification of the ice cream couple by Amy. There are other acts by Amy that are heroic. These include the composure she maintains in clearing misconceptions created by her own father in her own life as well as her ability to cope with her parents' divorce and adapt to her new environment.

Helena in *When you dance with the crocodile* is dubbed a heroine by the author through her acts of rescuing Ruth and Maddy from exploitative male forces. Her achievements are also echoed by her father's pride in her just after she finishes the final obstacle. It can thus be concluded that the girl-child has the audacity to challenge normal visions of heroism as parameters expressed along gender lines. The two protagonists are heroines and this form of presentation demonstrates that girls can occupy celebrated positions in society.

In *It all goes wrong* and *When you dance with the crocodile* there are fundamental themes that are concerned with children in general and the girl-child in particular.

These themes are weaved into the plots of the two stories. The themes observed include; friendship and compassion, infidelity and divorce, childhood innocence versus naivety, girl-child vulnerability versus girl-child heroism, sexual abuse, slave trade and child trafficking as well as modern world versus ancient world.

### 5.3. Recommendations

The study revealed that Erna Muller uses the novel genre to expose the girl-child's plight by highlighting challenges faced and overcome by the girl-child and making the girl-child characters prevail in her two novels. Thus, the researcher makes recommendations for further investigations in the following areas:

- Research should be conducted to analyse how other Namibian writers portray the girl-child.
- Comparative research on the portrayal of the girl-child and the boy-child.
- Studies tracing the changes in the portrayal of the girl-child over time in Namibian literature.
- Apart from the themes explored in the two novels as obstacles faced by the girl-child, what themes do other Namibian writers use to advance the plight of the girl-child?
- Further research on Namibian children's literature to evaluate the extent to which it is reflective of society's beliefs and practices.

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