



**African Studies: One-Year Master Degree Thesis**  
**15 Credits. Second Cycle Level 1**

**Transcultural memories of German-Namibian history (1978-1990):**

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**Micro-perspectives from the global autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo**

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## **Abstract**

The present thesis deals with the Namibian liberation struggle against the South African regime, by focusing on the relationship of solidarity between SWAPO and East Germany. It provides an original perspective of the German-Namibian history between 1978-1990, by using the life stories of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo. They are Namibian women who, according to the pact of solidarity, lived on the brink between Namibia and East Germany, becoming in this way witnesses of the historical upheavals that have changed the global order. Then, this thesis makes use of *Child No. 95. My German-African Odyssey* – the autobiography of Lucia Engombe – and *Kalungas Kind: meine unglaubliche Reise uns Leben* – the autobiography of Stefanie Layha Aukongo – as sources to investigate the complexities of that period. The global lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo allow the combination of macro and micro history and bring out new facets, which otherwise would remain in the shadow. Through the deconstruction of their life narratives, in fact, the big narrative of the global history become fraught with new meanings, bringing out the power of microhistories. This thesis shows how individual autobiographies can be meaningful to history, and how global history can be reconciled with micro-history through the story of global lives, which provide new and unprecedented points of view.

**Key words:** Namibia, East Germany, autobiography, global history, microhistory.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

DDR: Deutsche Demokratische Republik

DTA: Democratic Turnhalle Alliance

FRG: Federal Republic of Germany

GDR: German Democratic Republic

ICJ: International Court of Justice

MPLA: People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola

OPO: Ovamboland People's Organisation

PLAN: People Liberation Army of Namibia

SADF: South African Defence Force

SED: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

SWAPO: South West African People's Organization

UN: United Nations

UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution

UNTAG: United Nations Transition Assistance Group

USA: United States of America

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WCG: Western Contact Group

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Preface

The current thesis wants to shed light on an uncharted chapter of the German-Namibian history, by using the life stories of two women who have lived through it. During the years of the Namibian struggle against the South African system of apartheid, in fact, the relationship between the two countries was reinforced by the pact of solidarity stricken by South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) with German Democratic Republic (GDR). On one side, in fact, SWAPO – declared by United Nations as *the sole and authentic representative of Namibian people*– was engaged in a deadly struggle against the racist South African regime and, therefore, it was seeking support from other countries. On the other side, East Germany, following the socialist principle of the anti-imperialist solidarity, was engaged in helping people struggling for national and social freedom and thus gave support to the Namibian cause.

This work concerns the historical period of Namibia's liberation war, a war shaped by internal forces as well as by global changes. External factors contribute in fact to determine the development of the struggle and the patterns of the transition to independence in Namibia. In particular, the tensions caused by the Cold War, perceived all over the world, affect the Namibian destiny.

It is within this time frame that Namibia achieved independence in 1990, proclaiming the end of colonialism in Africa. But it is also in this period that the Berlin Wall collapsed, proclaiming symbolically the end of the bipolar system and the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic. Two events – the Namibian independence and the end of the Cold War – which established a new global order.

It is within this context that the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo have taken place. They, “ordinary” women involved in the most eventful global changes, are two Namibians who, in different ways, were subjected to the pact of solidarity struck between East Germany and SWAPO. Historical circumstances led them to live transnationally between these two worlds, as small pawns in the global history. Lucia Engombe was one of the so-called GDR children from Namibia, who, according to the pact of solidarity, lived in East Germany between 1979 and 1990. Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, born in East Germany with several physical problems, was adopted and raised by a German family in Berlin, where she lives today.

The present thesis focuses on the individual perspectives of these two women and provides an unedited view of the personal side of events that have had global impact. By doing so, it adds another dimension to the historical complexities described above.

## 1.2 Objectives and research questions

This thesis will make use of *Child No. 95. My German-African Odyssey* – the autobiography of Lucia Engombe – and *Kalungas Kind: meine unglaubliche Reise uns Leben*<sup>1</sup> – the autobiography of Stefanie Layha Aukongo – as sources to investigate the complexities of the period between 1978 and 1990 in Namibia and the relationship with East Germany. Both women were young witnesses of the global changes and both live through a set of historical conditions that contributed to create their identity. The memory that appears from their autobiographies is in some way a diasporic memory, colonial and post-colonial memory, and also memory of the *Wende*<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, their autobiographies provide a meaningful tool to investigate that period from the perspective of women who have been protagonists and involuntary objects of the history.

The objective of this thesis is re-examining the last decade of the Namibian liberation struggle – and the involvement of East Germany in the process of transition to independence – in the light of the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo.

More specifically, I focus on the re-analysis of the historical processes between 1978 and 1989-1990 and of the main actors involved, by using the two autobiographies as tools for the analysis. I add the years 1989-1990 together because they are strongly interlinked both in Germany and in Namibia. In Germany, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, on 9 November 1989, led to the reunification of the two Germanies and to the end of the GDR, on 3 October 1990. In Namibia, the first free elections on November 1989 – during the same week of the collapse of the Berlin Wall – laid the basis for the Namibian independence, proclaimed on 21 March 1990.

In line with this objective, my work is driven by the following research question:

- What is the contribution of the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo to the understanding of the history of Namibia – and its relationship with East Germany – during the period between 1978-1990?

In order to answer, also these two sub-questions have oriented my work:

- How can the concept "global life" be applied to the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo?

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<sup>1</sup> “Kalunga’s Child, My incredible journey into life”.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Wende* (“The turning point”) is the German term that indicates the process of dissolution of German Democratic Republic, culminating in the reunification of the two Germanies.

- In which ways are the perspectives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo relevant for global history?

### 1.3 Delimitations

I concentrate my analyses on the last period of the Namibian struggle against the South African regime, starting from 1978, the date of the Cassinga massacre, until 1990, the date of the achievement of independence. At the same time, seeing the position of the Namibian cause within an international context, the same period deals with the last years of the Cold War in general, and of the GDR's life in particular.

I have decided to focus on that period because it is in these years that the GDR reinforced its pact of solidarity with SWAPO and welcomed Namibian children to East Germany. Therefore, it is during these years that the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo became transnational.

### 1.4 Source materials

The following editions of the two autobiographies constitute the primary sources of my thesis:

- Lucia Engombe, Peter Hilliges (2014), *Child No. 95, My German-African Odyssey*;
- Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo, Peter Hilliges (2013), *Kalungas Kind: meine unglaubliche Reise uns Leben*.

In both autobiographies the name of the journalist Peter Hilliges appears as editor and transcriber. The autobiography of Lucia Engombe was originally published in the German language with the title *Kind Nr. 95: Meine deutsch-afrikanische Odyssee* in 2004 and the autobiography of Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo was published for the first time in 2009 with the title *Kalungas Kind: Wie die DDR mein Leben rettete*<sup>3</sup>. Whereas *Kind Nr. 95* has an English version, there is no English translation of *Kalungas Kind*.

I have selected these two autobiographies because they deal with the period in question and with the relationship between East Germany and Namibia. A third autobiography by one of the GDR-children is under publishing in English and is therefore not used in this thesis.

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<sup>3</sup> "Kalunga's Child, How DDR saved my life".

## 1.5 Other materials

In addition to the two autobiographies other sources have been used to describe the historical background from a global perspective. Among all, the work of Lionel Cliffe, *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*<sup>4</sup>, proved relevant for my thesis. It is focused especially on the last years of the struggle, describing with high precision the international dynamics that contribute to the process of transition. The value of this book, in fact, lays in its global perspective, that provides a clear image of the whole process, by considering all the external influences that have characterised the Namibian war of liberation. Next to books on the period of Namibian struggle, I have used contributions that portray the international climate of the Cold War, its patterns, its sides and, relevant for my thesis, its consequences into African continent. *Global Cold War*, written by Westad Odd Arned<sup>5</sup>, provides a useful tool to understand the implications of the Cold War on the Third World. By assuming a truly global perspective of the Cold War, Westad focuses on the policies adopted by superpowers in relation with the Third World and on its most recent consequences. Then, to narrow the search and approach the topic of my thesis, I have found useful also the book *Hot Cold War*, written by Vladimir Shubin<sup>6</sup>, who clarifies the Soviet involvement in Southern Africa during the Cold War, arguing that often it is subjected to distortions<sup>7</sup>. Even if the collecting of sources is made up with academic cure, he himself admits that his work could be viewed as personal<sup>8</sup>, since he was involved in the liberation movements in Southern Africa, as a member of Soviet Armed Forces and then of Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity committee. However, not aiming to write a comprehensive history of the events, he provides an useful account of Soviet involvement in the liberation movements in Southern Africa during the period between 1960-1990, by deserving a chapter to Namibia. In order to understand Soviet involvement in Africa, and in particular in Namibia, I have used it together with other works, among which, *The Soviet Union in the Third World*, edited by Donaldson<sup>9</sup>, which clarifies in uncritical and clear form, the ways in which USSR intervened in the Third World. Despite I concentrate my thesis on the relationship between East Germany and SWAPO, I have used also these books concerning Soviet Union, since its policy dictated in some way that of GDR. Then, rising to

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<sup>4</sup> Cliffe L. et al. (1994), *The transition to independence in Namibia*, Boulder; London: L. Rienner.

<sup>5</sup> Westad O. A., (2005), *The Global Cold War, Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Shubin V. (2008), *The Hot Cold War: the USSR in Southern Africa*, London: Pluto Press.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. xv.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Donaldson R.H. (Ed.) (1981), *The Soviet Union in the Third World: Successes and Failures*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press; London: Croom Helm.

the top of my thesis, the book written by Winrow, *The foreign policy of GDR in Africa*<sup>10</sup>, has demonstrate its usefulness, by providing the first full account in English language of East German involvement in Africa. The clear and detailed account of Winrow examines GDR involvement in Africa, highlighting especially some points of its policy, such as its relationship of interdependence with Soviet Union and its continuous discredit upon West German policy in Africa. In doing that, he analyses East German actions throughout Africa, by referring often to the Namibian case.

Then, other sources helped me to become familiar with the autobiographical genre, such as *L'autobiografia moderna*, by Franco D'Intino<sup>11</sup>, *Reading Autobiography* by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson<sup>12</sup>, and *Il Patto Autobiografico* by Philippe Lejenne<sup>13</sup>.

Furthermore, other sources helped me to elaborate and implement the research method. They are, among all, *Storia Globale*, written by Sebastian Conrad, the writings of Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi about microhistory and the writings of Francesca Trivellato and Tonio Andrade about global microhistory<sup>14</sup>.

## 1.6 State of research

Historians have deeply analysed the incidence of the Cold War in Africa, but little is known about the case of the GDR children of Namibia, and in general about the individual experiences of who was subjected to the pact of solidarity. The main contribution is edited by Costance Kenna, the first scholar to conduct research on the topic, collected in the book *Homecoming: The GDR kids of Namibia*<sup>15</sup>. Constance Kenna is an American scholar who spent many years in Germany and in Namibia, interested in the connection between these two countries. During a stay in Namibia, she noticed a substantial presence of German speakers and she began to investigate the past of the GDR children of Namibia. Her book provides a complete description of the life of these Namibian children who grew up in East Germany between 1979 and 1990. The book lets people speak, by collecting pieces

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<sup>10</sup> Winrow G. M. (1990), *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> D' Intino F. (1998), *L'autobiografia moderna. Storia forme problemi*, Roma: Bulzoni.

<sup>12</sup> Smith S. and Watson J., (2010), *Reading Autobiography. A guide for interpreting life narratives*, second ed., Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>13</sup> Lejeune P. (1986), *Il patto autobiografico*, Bologna: Il Mulino.

<sup>14</sup> See section 1.9.

<sup>15</sup> Kenna C. (Ed.) (1999), *Homecoming. The GDR Kids of Namibia*, Windhoek: New Namibia Books.

contributed by the GDR children and pieces written by other people involved in their experience. Collecting oral and written sources, the value of this book lays in the direct testimonial of the events. However, as Constance Kenna wrote in the preface, *Homecoming* claims to be “only” a document of the life of Namibian children, not their final story<sup>16</sup>. Constance Kenna, who published her book in 1999, hoped that one day the GDR children will tell their own stories, in order to give new light on the topic.

Another relevant scholar that have contributed to the topic is Jason Owen, interested in Afro-German culture and history and in the case of the GDR children. In his doctoral thesis in 2001, titled *Changing Constructions of Germanness in Namibia: The “GDR-Kids”*<sup>17</sup>, he examines the existence and the formation of a German-speaking community in Namibia and how it was shaped by the arrival of the GDR children in 1990. Therefore, the contribution of Jason Owen consists especially of an analysis of the consequences of the return of the GDR children in Namibia. Moreover, he also dealt with the autobiography of Misheke Matongo – one of GDR children – which he has translated but not yet published.

With regards to scholarly work on the two autobiographies that I will address there are several articles on the question of identity. *Child No. 95*, probably because it is translated into English and because it was published before, is more known and more analysed than *Kalungas Kind*. Contributions written by Katrin Berndt<sup>18</sup>, by Elisa Leonzio<sup>19</sup> and Nora Moll<sup>20</sup> point out many issues emerging from the reading of *Child No. 95*, such as questions regarding identity and displacement in a diasporic process. Contributions written by Matthias D. Witte, Kathrin Klein-Zimmer and Caroline Schmitt<sup>21</sup> propose research on the transnational lives of the GDR children by highlighting especially the strategies that they elaborated to find a new sense of belonging.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Owen J. (2001), *Changing Constructions of Germanness in Namibia: The “GDR-Kids”*, Georgetown University.

<sup>18</sup> Berndt K. (2009), Shared paradoxes in Namibian and German History, Lucia Engombe’s *Kind*. Nr. 95, In: Bekers E., Helff S., Merolla D. (Eds.), *Transcultural Modernities, Narrating Africa in Europe*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, pp. 347-361.

<sup>19</sup> Leonzio E. (2011), Emigrata due volte, L’odissea tedesco-africana di Lucia Engombe, *Dep. n. 15*, pp. 28-51; Leonzio E. (2011), Anche il tedesco ha il suo postcoloniale, URL: [rivistatradurre.it/2011/11/anche-il-tedesco-ha-il-suo-postcoloniale](http://rivistatradurre.it/2011/11/anche-il-tedesco-ha-il-suo-postcoloniale).

<sup>20</sup> Moll N. (2009), La diaspora verso la Germania dell’Est e il ritorno in Africa narrati da Lucia Engombe in *Kind Nr. 95*, In: Sinopoli F. (Ed.), *La Storia nella Scrittura Diasporica*, Roma: Bulzoni, pp.109 -133.

<sup>21</sup> Witte M., Klein-Zimmer K., Schmitt C. (2013), Growing Up Transnational between SWAPO and GDR—A Biographical Ethnographic Study on Namibian Refugee Children, *Transnational Social Review A Social Work Journal*,

With regards to *Kalungas Kind*, there are not many studies and, in general, no deep study that provides a combined analysis of these autobiographies have been conducted. Some works mention the two autobiographies but without proposing a deep combined analysis. Dirk Göttsche<sup>22</sup>, who deals with colonialism, postcolonialism and cross-cultural experience in German literature, puts the two women on the list of those authors who provided testimonies of Africans in Germany, without deepening what emerges from their autobiographies.

### 1.7 Innovativeness and weakness of my study

The state of research demonstrates that, even if the topic of the GDR children is not well known, many studies have contributed to enrich that background in the last years. Most of them are focused on the analysis of the lives of these children in order to pinpoint the consequences of the experience on their identity. Some like Kenna, have been able to portray historical events by inserting the testimonials of the children. The present thesis differs from the previous research by the use of two autobiographies. Furthermore, my thesis does not focus only on the experience of the GDR-children, as *Homecoming* does. It focuses on two individual lives involved in some way in the pact of solidarity.

The innovativeness of my study lays in the comparative analysis of these two autobiographies and in the re-analysis of the historical background on the light of their individual lives. While Costance Kenna has portrayed the historical background by letting them speak, I use their voices as a tool to investigate the past. I “eviscerate” the autobiographies in order to bring out new nuances of the history.

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3:2, pp. 28-33; Schmitt C. and Witte M. (2017), “You are special”, othering in biographies of “GDR children of Namibia”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>22</sup> Göttsche D. (2014), Cross-cultural Memoryscapes: Memory of Colonialism and its Shifting Contexts in Contemporary German Literature, In: Bond L., Rapson J. (Eds.), *Transcultural Turn, Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 225-242; Göttsche D., Dunker A., Dürbeck G. (Eds.) (2017), *Handbuch Postkolonialismus und Literatur*, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag; Göttsche D. (2014), Recollection and Intervention, Memory of German Colonialism in Contemporary African Migrant’s Writing, in Berman N., In: Mühlhahn K., Nganang P. (Eds.), *German Colonialism Revisited, African, Asian, and Oceanic experiences*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 245-258; Göttsche D. (2016), Self-Assertion, Intervention, and Achievement; Development in Contemporary Black German Writing, In: Lennox S. (Ed.), *Remapping Black Germany, New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics and Culture*, Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, pp.67-90.

Given my major familiarity with Italian and English languages, for this study I have chosen to look mainly at works in these languages. If this could be considered a weakness of my study, I think however that the selected sources could be adequate to achieve the objective, since this thesis works on two autobiographies, for which an accurate translation will be used.

## 1.8 Theoretical framework

This thesis works on the assumption that the study of individual lives contributes to enrich the understanding of the historical framework. Single case studies introduce plural voices into the more general process and animate the historical account with real people. The larger environment gains new meaning when it is examined from the perspective of the human actors who populate it. In the writing process of this thesis, I rely on this fundamental assumption, by following the teachings given by the global microhistory, which I will explain deeper in the next section. In general, global microhistory is able to connect the macro and the micro perspectives through the study of individuals whose lives cross boundaries from many points of view. Then, a phenomenon is viewed from a decentering transcultural perspective, which focuses on the study of global lives of individuals who are often placed on the margins of the history<sup>23</sup>.

By following these assumptions – which find expression in the methodology employed – this thesis is drawn up within a theoretical framework which makes use of fundamental concepts such as “global lives” and “transcultural identities”.

In this thesis, the expression “global lives” is used in the meaning that emerges from the article written by Brice Cossart, “*Global lives*”, *Writing Global History with a Biographical Approach*<sup>24</sup>. In turn, Cossart borrows that expression from the work of Miles Ogborn, titled *Global lives, Britain and the World 1550-1800*<sup>25</sup>, which is a history of the British expansion told through the short biographies of forty-two individuals, both well-known figures and subaltern figures. Cossart uses this term to refer to individuals who are involved in the globalization process, in long-distance connections between various part of the world and, therefore, whose existences are shaped by political events on a global scale. Cossart addresses the issue of the usefulness of the biographical approach for the

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<sup>23</sup> Davis N. (2011), Decentering history: local stories and cultural crossings in a global world, *History and Theory*, 50 (2), pp. 188-202.

<sup>24</sup> Cossart B. (2013), “Global lives”, *Writing Global History with a Biographical Approach*, *Entremons. UPF Journal of World History*, 5, pp. 1-13.

<sup>25</sup> Ogborn M. (2008), *Global lives: Britain and the world, 1550-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

historical writing, by pursuing a conciliation between the individual and the global. He analyses three biographies that are relevant for the field of global history (*The career and legend of Vasco da Gama* by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Trickster travels* by Natalie Zemon Davis and *The ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* by Linda Colley) and then he opens the debate on the relevance of the micro-analysis in the global studies.

Thus, I look at Cossart's comprehension of the expression "global lives" and I will adapt it to the cases of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, by highlighting to what extent their perspectives can be relevant to global history.

Another relevant concept within this thesis is that of "transculturality". As Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson point out in the introduction of the book *Transcultural Turn, Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*<sup>26</sup>, the transcultural turn started to dominate the cultural, philosophical, historical and literary discourse from the late twentieth-century, emerging as «a rejection of the formerly pervasive model of container culture in favour of a more fluid and transient paradigm of relations between societies»<sup>27</sup>. The German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch, who rejected the Johann Gottfried Herder's formulation of cultures as closed spheres and autonomous islands, used the term "transculturality" as the most suitable concept to describe cultures<sup>28</sup>. In fact, as Welsch argues, because of migratory processes, worldwide communications system and economic interdependencies and dependencies, cultures today resulted interwoven with each other, characterized by hybridization and syncretism<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, on individual's micro-level, multiple connections can shape the individual identity and can create cultural hybrids<sup>30</sup>. The consequences on the identity formation in individuals who are subjected to global processes will emerge vividly in the analysis of the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo. Then, the term "transcultural" that emerges from Welsch's definition will constitute an important theoretical concept of this thesis, since it highlights the importance of considering global connections in formulating a definition of cultures, and it pinpoints the consequences of those connections both at macro and micro levels, both on cultures as well as on individuals. Then, in this thesis, I will use the adjective "transcultural" in the meaning launched by Welsch and, therefore, I will use the definition "transcultural identities" to

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<sup>26</sup> Bond L., Rapson J. (Eds.) (2014), *Transcultural Turn, Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, Berlin: De Gruyter.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Welsch W. (1999), *Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today*. In: Featherstone M., Lash S. (Eds.), *Spaces of Cultures: City, Nation, World*, London: Sage, pp. 194-213: pp. 194-195.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 197-198.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 198-199.

referring to the interplay between different cultures in the process of identity formation which affects ordinary individuals who have experienced “global lives”.

## 1.9 Research Method

Autobiography is the literary genre that acts as the greatest owner of the past. It is able to inscribe the subjective experience of the author within the broader historical framework, by giving new nuances to the past. It has an historical-memorial and literary dimension and, through the act of remembering, it brings out the memory of the past. The author of an autobiography «raises his/her voice at the intersection of existential events and historical events, between his own destiny and collective drag, between memory and oblivion»<sup>31</sup>, representing, at the same time, the character, the narrator and the witness to a particular story. In fact, as Lejeune points out, unlike the autobiographical novel, the autobiography is characterized by an undeniable identity of the name between author, narrator and character<sup>32</sup>.

Biographies and autobiographies embody historiographical documents that are useful to reconstruct an age. The lives, in fact, «can be used as a “window” or a “lens” for studying an age and an environment»<sup>33</sup>. In this way, biography appears as a common approach in history. Autobiography could be an even more precious source, as it represents – in the words of Popkin – «the only genre with a convincing claim to credibility»<sup>34</sup>. Autobiography is at the intersection between literature and history. It provides at the same time a model to comprehend the history and a mean of expression of individual consciousness<sup>35</sup>. By proposing itself as a variation of the biographical genre, the autobiography has one more source: the memory. It organizes in a linear order «the confuse bunch of emotions, sensations and memories»<sup>36</sup>, by proposing its own expression of reality. Autobiography acts retrospectively, by knowing «what the actors in the past thought they were doing and what actually happened as a result of their actions»<sup>37</sup>. It is a retrospective reconsideration of one’s own life. The risk of autobiography lies obviously in its subjectivity that it is expressed through memory and could create indetermination. Personal emotions at the same time could enrich history but also

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<sup>31</sup> De Federicis L. (1998), *Letteratura e storia*, Roma: Laterza, p. 17 [my translation].

<sup>32</sup> Lejeune P., *Il patto autobiografico*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>33</sup> Gamsa M. (2017), Biography and (Global) Microhistory, *New Global Stud*, 11(3), pp. 231-241: p. 232.

<sup>34</sup> Popkin J. (1999), Historians on the Autobiographical Frontiers, *The American Historical Review*, 104 (3), pp. 725-748: p. 729.

<sup>35</sup> D’Intino F., *L’autobiografia moderna*, p. 242.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159 [my translation].

<sup>37</sup> Popkin J., *Historians on the Autobiographical Frontiers*, p. 726.

distort it. Historians use autobiographies of other people as historical sources with the awareness of that risk. I think that the beliefs and the emotions of an individual, viewed by an “outsider” who have the awareness of the subjectivity, could provide additional elements to analyse history. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest by echoing Couser, «autobiography might be read [...] for what it does, not what it is»<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, they highlight the usefulness to consider autobiography as a social action rather than a fixed form: «Rather than being simply the story of an individual life, self-life writing “encode(s) or reinforce(s) particular values in ways that may shape culture and history”»<sup>39</sup>.

In order to achieve my objective, I will carry out a comparative analysis of the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo. The comparative analysis will be done by using the insights given by the paradigm of the global microhistory, which embodies a point of contact between two historical approaches that are apparently irreconcilable: global history and microhistory. Global microhistory takes elements from both methodologies, by using biographical elements in order to enrich global history. This section will outline the paradigms that fuel the debate on the historical writing, in order to explain the context in which global microhistory is born and to introduce the reflections that drive my thesis.

### ***1.9.1 Global history***

In recent years, global history<sup>40</sup> established itself as one of the most important field in historical sciences. Firstly, global history is a perspective, an historical approach that puts at the core transnational processes and the exchange of relationships. It is a form of analyses in which phenomena are viewed in a global context. The connectivity of the world is the starting point of global history. In fact, against the tendency to conceive a national history as a compartmentalized history, global history is interested in universal processes, in the relatedness of historical developments. Global history proposes a relational, positional and multi-centric lecture. It has a polemic dimension, by posing itself against perspectives that privilege Eurocentric, national and internal lectures. On the contrary, global history prefers interpretations that give an important role to interactions and external influences. The researcher that adopts a global perspective is able to disregard borders and to consider transnational networks. However, global-historical perspectives are not necessarily oriented toward a macro-historical direction. The most interesting questions arise in the intersection between global processes and their local manifestations.

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<sup>38</sup> Smith S. and Watson J., *Reading Autobiography*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> For the clarification of this approach, I rely on: Conrad S. (2015), *Storia Globale. Un'introduzione*, Roma: Carrocci.

### 1.9.2 Microhistory

Microhistory is an historiographical trend born in Italy at the end of 1970s with Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg as initiators. For the variety of the internal approaches within microhistory, it is difficult to give a unique definition. I propose a definition by using the paradigm launched by Levi and Ginzburg, even though there are internal divisions also within Italian microhistory. Microhistory is an historiographical practice that drives the work of the historian. It should not be considered local history. It, in Levi's words, has to be intended as the investigation of reality with a microscopic view, in order to bring out the complexity<sup>41</sup>. As Lanaro points out, the purpose of microhistory is:

not to sacrifice the individual element to generalization, while at the same time trying not to renounce any kind of abstraction, since minimal clues or individual cases can be revelatory of more general phenomena. In a certain sense, the micro-history began – and remains – as a critique of macro-history. The privileged procedure is that of starting from the particular, often characterized by its individualized appearance, to interpret it in the light of its specific context<sup>42</sup>.

Levi and Ginzburg suggest this new methodology, which starts the investigation from something that apparently does not fit in order to discover factors previously unobserved. In this way, altering the scale of observation and assuming a microscopic perspective, phenomena assume new meanings. Their starting point consists of the assumption that «any social structure is the result of interaction and of numerous individual strategies, a fabric that can only be reconstituted from close observation»<sup>43</sup>. Then, in the words of Ginzburg, reducing the scale of observation means to transform a footnote into a book<sup>44</sup>. And «it is on this reduced scale, *and probably only in this scale*, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationship between system of beliefs, of values and representations on one side, and social affiliations on another»<sup>45</sup>. The Italian microhistory assumes that the more improbable documentation could be the richer, by using the anomalous, not the analogous, by using what Edoardo Grendi calls the “exceptional normal”<sup>46</sup>. The idea of the normal exception defines the special characteristics of a phenomenon.

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<sup>41</sup> Lanaro P. (2011), Interview with Giovanni Levi, In: Lanaro P. (Ed.), *Microstoria. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, e-book (not numbered pages).

<sup>42</sup> Lanaro P., *Microstorie. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*, In: Lanaro P. (Ed.), *Microstoria*, [my translation].

<sup>43</sup> Ginzburg C. (2006), *Il filo e le tracce. Vero falso finto*, Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 267 [my translation].

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* [my translation]. In this passage Ginzburg quotes Chartier.

<sup>46</sup> Grendi E. (1977), *Micro-analisi e storia sociale*, *Quaderni storici*, 35, pp. 506-520: p. 512.

### 1.9.3 Global Microhistory

A controversy within the historiographical trend of global history lies in the relationship between its perspective and that of histories from below, such as microhistory and gender studies. The macro-perspective, according to these lines of research, tends to neglect differences and alterities. Therefore, microhistory and global history seem irreconcilable paradigms. As Francesca Trivellato points out, in fact, microhistory eviscerates the complexity of a place, a person or a moment, while global history is a history in broad terms of the century-old change<sup>47</sup>. And while the macro-scale focuses on the secondary sources, the micro-scale proposes a close-up lecture of the original documentation. As Luciano Allegra says, the macro-micro link is the Achilles' heel of microhistory<sup>48</sup>, and also Carlo Ginzburg had noticed that it is necessary to pursue the conciliation between macro and micro<sup>49</sup>. The development of the trend of global history has raised new challenges to microhistory. The global turn in the historical writing has questioned the validity of the micro-perspective and has called for a different use of microhistory. It is no longer possible to study within a village, because the village has become global. However, the value and the effectiveness of microhistory do not change. What need to be changed are the borders of the investigation and the conviction according to which microhistory is the study of the small things, whereas, instead it is the observation of the reality from a small scale<sup>50</sup>. By making a further step, «microhistory advocated combining micro and macro scales, rather than favouring micro as an article of faith»<sup>51</sup>. The multiplication of the scales of analyses could become «microhistory's most valuable heuristic device»<sup>52</sup>. From these considerations, the new paradigm of *global microhistory* arises, a microhistory with a global inflection. As Tonio Andrade points out:

World history has tended toward the social science side of history. We've made great strides building powerful models of global historical structures and processes: global silver flows, strange parallels, divergences great and small. But we've tended to neglect the human dramas that make history come alive. I believe we should adopt microhistorical and biographical approaches to help populate our models and theories with real people, to write what one might call global microhistory<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Trivellato F. (2011), *Microstoria, storia del mondo e storia globale*, In: Lanaro P. (Ed.). *Microstoria*.

<sup>48</sup> Allegra L. (2011), *Ancora a proposito di micro-macra*, In: Lanaro P. (Ed.), *Microstoria*.

<sup>49</sup> Ginzburg C., *Il filo e le tracce*, p. 260.

<sup>50</sup> Allegra L., *Ancora a proposito di micro-macra*.

<sup>51</sup> Trivellato F. (2015), *Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory*, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 33 (1), pp. 122-146: p. 130.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Andrade T. (2010), *A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord*, *Journal of World History*, 21 (4), pp. 573-591: p. 574.

In this context, microhistory reveals its usefulness to global history, by providing a new methodology and by focusing on stories of individuals lives in a global context. The task of a global microhistorian becomes not to «focus in a centrist manner on “global social sites” but [...] on the “space(s) in between” [...] on margins and “interstitial spaces”»<sup>54</sup>, by adopting a decentering perspective, whereby “decentering” is understood as a practice of the historian who – in the words of Natalie Davis – «does not tell the story of the past from the vantage point of a single part of the world or of powerful elites, but rather widens his or her scope and introduce plural voice into the account»<sup>55</sup>.

Microhistory and global history encounter themselves in the biographical field, by dealing with biographies with global setting, which talk about connection and encounter between worlds that are not easily reconcilable.

Then, the comparative analysis of the autobiographies will be carried out by taking in consideration the paradigm of the global microhistory, which combines different scales of analyses in search of new answers, in search of new complexities, by preferring the analyses over the synthesis, by linking the particular with the general. If they are analysed with the micro-analysis method, in fact, «global biographies [...] can address some wider issues in global history»<sup>56</sup>.

The autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo could be defined global autobiographies since they bring out the transcultural memories of two women that have witnessed the connection between two worlds. Since they narrate the individual experience of global lives, they are able to combine micro and macro levels. Macro and micro can be viewed as two perspectives. The macro level is the perspective of the global history in broad terms, that brings out the global interconnections. The micro level is given by the observation of the reality from a small perspective. Macro encounters with micro within the study of biographical experiences with a global setting. Therefore, the analysis of the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo allow for a combination of the two levels. Here, the micro level is given by the subjectivity of their experiences, and the macro level is given by the transnationality of their lives. Their autobiographies provide two micro-perspectives, and their global lives allow me to portray a renewed historical framework, enriched by undiscovered facets.

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<sup>54</sup> Medick H., *Turning global? Microhistory in Extension*, pp. 241- 252: p. 251. (Presented at the conference “The Space Between: Connecting Microhistory and Global History”, organised by Maxine Berg and John-Paul Ghobrial at Venice, 26–29 February 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Davis N., *Decentering history*, p. 190.

<sup>56</sup> Cossart B., “Global lives”, p. 13.

## **1.10 Structure of the Thesis**

The present first chapter has provided a brief introduction to the topic, by presenting objective, research questions, sources materials and the methodology employed. The second chapter portray the historical background in which the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo have taken place. It provides firstly a general historical background of the Namibian history, and then it focuses especially on the Namibian liberation war, by examining the relationship between SWAPO and East Germany. The third chapter gives a background to the two autobiographies, by pointing out their structures and their narratives and portraying the global setting of the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo. Then, in the final chapter, I carry out the comparative analysis of the two autobiographies and I bring out the facets that emerge from that analysis. With the deconstruction of their life-narratives, in fact, new nuances of history will come to light.

## **Chapter 2. On the macro level: global history of the Namibian liberation struggle**

Namibian history is a unique case due to its long past of subjugation. Namibia, in fact, has suffered both European colonization and the illegal occupation perpetrated by another African state, the Republic of South Africa. It has suffered exploitation of its lands and racial segregation of its people. But Namibian history is not a history of passive domination. It is, as Peter Katjavivi pointed out, a history of resistance, a history of rebellions and of a long liberation struggle<sup>57</sup>.

When the time came for the European imperialism, with its project of “civilising” African people, Namibia was faced with the period of short but cruel German colonialism, responsible for the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which exterminated most of Herero and Nama populations<sup>58</sup>. Namibia was the colony of German South West Africa from 1884 until 1915, when South African troops under British orders occupied the territory. The year 1915 marked the end of German colonial rule and the beginning of a unique form of domination, the occupation by South Africa. The war of liberation from the racist regime of South Africa, which extended apartheid to Namibian territory, was long and exhausting. Various international dynamics contributed to affect the development of the struggle and many actors were involved in the process of transition to independence.

Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss the historical background of the Namibian liberation war, adopting a global perspective, in order to bring out the less visible forces that led to historical changes. I do not focus only on what happened within Namibian borders, but I portray the international climate that had been the setting for the transition to independence. Then, I provide a picture of the relationship between East Germany and Namibia, which is also the framework in which the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo are inserted.

### **2.1 South African occupation of Namibia**

With the treaty of Versailles, in 1919, which marked the end of the First World War, Germany lost its colonial territories and Namibia changed its status. In 1920, South Africa was charged in administering Namibia under the terms of a League of Nations Mandate, which specified the duties

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<sup>57</sup> Katjavivi P. H. (1988), *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, London: J. Currey; Addis Ababa: OAU, Inter-African cultural fund; Paris: Unesco press.

<sup>58</sup> See Gewald Jan-Bart (2003), *Herero Genocide in the twentieth century: Politics and Memory*, In: Bruijn M. De, Abbink J., Walveren K. V. (Eds.). *Rethinking resistance: Revolt and violence in African history*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 279-365; Wallace M. with Kinahan J. (2011), *A History of Namibia, from the beginning to 1990*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 155-182.

that South Africa was supposed to fulfil: «to prepare the territory for eventual self-determination and “to promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being, and the social progress of the inhabitants”»<sup>59</sup>. Instead of fulfilling their duties, South Africa violated the terms of the Mandate and proceeded to incorporate Namibia into its territory and promoted policies that continued the process of expropriation and repression carried out by Germans during their colonial reign. Moreover, South Africa encouraged white settlement in Namibia and implemented racist policies among Africans, by extending progressively the apartheid policy. In the early 1950s, the Nationalist government had deepened its segregationist policies also within South Africa, by building a rigid apartheid system «under which racial discrimination, spatial separation and the control of black labour in white interests were all secured by heavy repression»<sup>60</sup>.

The separation between ethnic groups became concrete with the Bantustan policy<sup>61</sup>, which was introduced also in Namibia in 1964 with the Odendaal Plan<sup>62</sup> and was implemented in 1968-69 with the *Development of Self-Government for Native Nations in South West Africa Act* and the *South West Africa Affairs Act*. The Bantustan policy divided Namibians into twelve “ethnic groups” – including whites – and provided for the creation of tribal homelands. In practice, eleven ethnic groups were separated along ethnic lines from each other and from the white. The black groups, with the exception of Coloureds, were forced to abandon their existing homes and to stay in these homelands. While black communities occupied barren reserves or overpopulated areas, the white area comprised the best farming land, diamond areas and towns and covered two thirds of the total land area of Namibia. The philosophical explanation of the Bantustan programme was that «separate developments ensures the harmonious progress of these groups towards “self-determination”»<sup>63</sup>. With this justification, South Africa managed to gain international acceptance and to jeopardise the consciousness of national unity for a certain period.

However, South African policies soon caught the international attention. In 1945, the League of Nations was replaced by the United Nations (UN), which established a trusteeship system with independence for the former mandated territories as its primary goal<sup>64</sup>. In 1946 UN General Assembly refused South Africa’s request for incorporation of Namibia and, in 1949, South Africa ceased

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<sup>59</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF) (1980), *Namibia: the facts*, London: International Defence and Aid Fund, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, p. 251.

<sup>61</sup> See Katjavivi P.H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 72; IDAF, *Namibia: the facts*, pp. 14-18.

<sup>62</sup> See Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, pp. 261-267.

<sup>63</sup> IDAF, *Namibia: the facts*, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Katjavivi P. H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 34.

submitting its reports. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, various actors demanded for major attention to the Namibian case, but the United Nation seemed initially unable to deal with the matter and did not take any concrete measure. In 1960, Ethiopia and Liberia brought the case against South Africa in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but the court refused to judge the case. A general frustration by those who carried on the cause of Namibian independence created a climate of mistrust in the United Nations' potential and led to the creation of SWAPO in 1960. Given the pressures from the international world, on 27 October 1966, the UN General Assembly finally terminated the mandate and placed South West Africa under the direct responsibility of UN. The South African occupation was declared illegal by the UN Security Council in 1969 and by the ICJ in 1971 and the immediate withdrawal of its administration from Namibia was ordered.

## **2.2 SWAPO, the *sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people***

In the 1940s and 1950s, movements of opposition to South African rule began to spread across the country. The injustices perpetrated by the South African regime and the immobilism played by the UN, in fact, led some actors to promote movements of protest and political resistance. Opposition came from different environments with various manifestations: it came for example from the church, from the students and especially from workers. In particular, the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO), born in 1958-1959, proposed the intention to form a national organization that protested against the awful conditions of workers and that opposed the South African regime. In 1960, OPO transformed itself into a broader movement and, in June, it was formally reconstituted as South West African People's Organization, with Sam Nujoma as the president. The central objective of SWAPO was the «liberation of Namibian people from colonial oppression and exploitation in all its forms»<sup>65</sup>, in the short term. In spite of its regional origins, SWAPO was formed by a wider composition and was marked by international recognition, even if Owambos remained its most numerous supporters. SWAPO was able to expand its initial membership, made up mostly of contract workers, and to gain popular and cross-ethnic support, presenting itself as the main symbol of protest against the South African rule<sup>66</sup>. In 1976, SWAPO was recognised by UN General Assembly as the *sole and authentic*

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<sup>65</sup> IDAF, *Namibia: the facts*, 44.

<sup>66</sup> See Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, p. 260.

*representative of the Namibian people* and, therefore, it «was accepted as the principal actor in the effort to bring about national independence for Namibia»<sup>67</sup>.

In the face of South African brutality and of the deadlock in which diplomatic efforts were embedded, political and military struggle was declared necessary and complementary to the aim of national liberation. Therefore, in 1966, the armed struggle became part of SWAPO's strategy. Even if SWAPO was never banned, it suffered many episodes of repression, justified by the legislation introduced by the South African regime. The *Suppression of Communism Act* and the *Terrorism Act*, for example, acted retrospectively punishing with harassments, arrests and detentions any political activities that supported the liberation movement<sup>68</sup>.

Controversies around SWAPO's policies are still subject of discussion in Namibia. Since the seventies, in fact, allegations of corruption and abuse of power and criticism about the disorganization began to flourish within the movement. The internal dissidents were treated with authoritarianism and were detained in harsh conditions. It seemed like, as Wallace points out, the SWAPO leadership viewed the internal dissension «as military mutiny rather than a legitimate demand for democratic accountability»<sup>69</sup>. The abuse of power by the SWAPO leadership resulted in a violation of human rights, which escalated especially during the last years of the war, when SWAPO detained and tortured hundreds of its members, accusing them of espionage.

### **2.3 The liberation war**

The liberation war in Namibia was long and drawn-out. Independence, achieved in 1990, was the result of several factors: hard campaigning, active resistance, but also continuous negotiations and change of international dynamics. In this international stage, SWAPO was one of the main actors that led the war against the South African regime. The strict marriage between political and military matters materialised in the close link between SWAPO and the People Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), its military wing<sup>70</sup>.

Angolan independence from Portugal in 1975 marked a new phase of the war and gave SWAPO bases in Angola. A new climate of nationalist ambitions and hopes spread thanks to the victories of

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<sup>67</sup> Katjavivi P. H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 100.

<sup>68</sup> See IDAF, *Namibia: the facts*, pp. 32-35; Katjavivi P. H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 77-83; See Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, pp. 269-271.

<sup>69</sup> Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, p. 281.

<sup>70</sup> See Katjavivi P.H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 90-91.

national liberation movements all over the world<sup>71</sup>. On the other side, the struggle became increasingly intense. The opening of the Angolan border, in fact, meant the possibility to flee from the repression in Namibia but also the intensification of the war on the Namibian/Angolan border. Therefore, during the years after 1975 there were an increase in guerrilla activities by SWAPO but also an intensification of militarisation of Namibia by South African forces, which increased the size of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and created a military build-up. If on one hand the political and military skills of SWAPO became more and more honed, on the other hand South Africa adopted the strategy of total war<sup>72</sup>, fought at military, diplomatic and psychological level. In the general increasing of hostilities, South African forces used Namibia as bases for attacking neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Angola, by representing in this way «a threat to peace not only in the region, but at an international level»<sup>73</sup>.

The most brutal attack was on 4 May 1978, when South African forces launched *Operation Reindeer*, which consisted on an air and ground attack on SWAPO bases in Angola. The main target was Cassinga, an Angolan camp near the Namibian border. There has been controversy over whether Cassinga was a military base or a refugee camp, and some evidences demonstrate that it was both a military and a civilian base<sup>74</sup>. South African forces bombed Cassinga for an entire day destroying the camp and caused the death of six hundred people. Other camps near Cassinga were also attacked, and the survivors from the Chetequera and Vietnam camps were imprisoned and released only many years later<sup>75</sup>. The Cassinga massacre showed the «evidence of a lack of a commitment to withdrawal from this territory or an acceptance of Namibia's independence»<sup>76</sup> and, in a time of negotiations for independence elections, represented «an attempt by South Africa to get SWAPO to reject the proposals or delay in responding to them»<sup>77</sup>.

The years between 1976-1987 were also years of continuous negotiations. South Africa carried out a new strategy, which included social and economic reforms – that actually perpetrated the same policies behind new names – and a plan for a form of independence for Namibia. These kind of concessions were part of a strategy for containing the struggle and finding alternatives to

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<sup>71</sup> For example, the defeat of the American forces at the hands of FLS Vietnam.

<sup>72</sup> See IDAF, *Namibia: the facts*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>74</sup> Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, p. 290.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 45.

<sup>77</sup> Katjavivi P. H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, p. 119.

nationalism<sup>78</sup>. The South African regime set up the Turnhalle Constitution Conference<sup>79</sup>, which took place in Windhoek between 1975 and 1977. The conference was rejected by the United Nation and did not see the participation of SWAPO and other political groups because it was ethnically oriented and it perpetuated the white minority rule. The South Africa regime implemented new alternative strategies, by laying the basis for a Namibian government that would be only formally independent but actually controlled by South Africa. However, the Turnhalle proposals were rejected by SWAPO and the international community. A result of the conference was the creation of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), a party formed in 1977. During this period, UN Security Council adopted Resolutions 385/76 and 435/78 in order to put pressure on the South African regime, to condemn its illegal occupation of Namibia and to demand free elections under the supervision of the UN. However, the South African regime did not accept international provisions and continued to pursue the internal option represented by the Turnhalle conference, with the holding of internal elections without UN supervision. Elections took place on 4-5 December 1978 in a climate of widespread intimidation perpetrated by SADF and sought the victory of DTA.

UNSCR 385/76 and 435/78 remained unimplemented for more than ten years, during which South Africa continued its dual track policy in order to buy time to allow the creation of precondition for Namibian independence<sup>80</sup>.

The year 1988 marked a turning point: several factors led South Africa to finally end its politics of delay and to accept the implementation of Resolution 435/78. Firstly, the struggle had achieved a military stalemate, by causing too many losses, both at human and economic level. In 1987-1988, conflicts between South African troops and Cuban/Soviet/Angolan troops<sup>81</sup>, although quite inconclusive, led to a profound change of the character of fighting and to few concessions from each side. Secondly, also South African policies began to soften, in step with the increasing movements of protest in the second half of the 1980s in Namibia but also in South Africa itself. Lastly, the international context was going to turn completely, with the approach of the Cold War's end. The change of international context was a key element in determining the change of policies that led Namibia to independence. Therefore, the UN plan for Namibian transition, between 1989 and 1990, provided for a cessation of fighting, free elections and the achievement of independence<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 34.

<sup>79</sup> See IDAF, *Namibia: the facts*, pp. 59-60; Katjavivi P.H., *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 94-99.

<sup>80</sup> See Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, pp. 45-51.

<sup>81</sup> For example the Battle of Cuito Carnevale (See Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, pp. 57-60).

<sup>82</sup> See Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 65.

## 2.4 Southwest Africa as a battleground of the Cold War

As it has been emphasised, the transition in Namibia was driven by international forces and, as Wallace points out, «the contest between SWAPO and South Africa thus remained embroiled in the power politics of the Cold War»<sup>83</sup>. These were also the years of the Cold War, which sought the presence of a bipolar system born as the only viable solution to the antagonism between USA and USSR - an antagonism ingrained in different beliefs, which never materialised in effective struggle. However, this silent battle has had effects at a global level and especially on the Third World, which became «the widest field in which the bipolar antagonism tried to mortgage, or even to resolve, its strategic game»<sup>84</sup>. As Westad<sup>85</sup> points out, the interventionism of Soviet Union and United States in the Third World was driven by their ideologies and by the willingness to prove their universal applicability. In turn, the Third World leaders chose whether to take part in this ideological struggle or not, and eventually which side to stand on.

Therefore, Namibia became the theatre for the East-West conflict and the question of independence qualified only as a little piece in the wider political scene. In this context, South Africa was an international actor able to present itself «as the upholder of the free world faced with communist expansion in the region»<sup>86</sup>. The anti-communist ideology of South Africa, together with economic interests, made Western powers more open to dialogue and more reluctant to take action against it. Therefore, the South African politics of delay was favoured by continuous vetoes imposed by Western countries<sup>87</sup>, which, in this way, did not make the UN sanctions against South Africa effective but, on the contrary, contributed to perpetrate its illegal occupation. In particular, United States, France, Great Britain, Canada and West Germany formed the Western Contact Group (WCG) in 1977, with the purpose to liaise with South Africa, in order to prevent a Namibian independence under a socialist SWAPO government.

On the other side, from the 1960s, the presence of the Soviet Union was consistent in supporting the liberation movements in southwest Africa<sup>88</sup>. In particular, the Soviet bloc decided to intervene in Angola by supporting the Marxist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the fighting against the rival movements during the Angolan civil war (1975-1976). Here, on behalf of a “socialist internationalism”, also Cuban troops intervened to reinforce Soviet forces, and then they

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<sup>83</sup> Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, p. 297.

<sup>84</sup> Romero F. (2009), *Storia della guerra fredda, L'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa*, Torino: Einaudi, p. 8 [my translation].

<sup>85</sup> Westad O. A., *The Global Cold War*.

<sup>86</sup> Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 44.

<sup>87</sup> Britain, United Nations and France.

<sup>88</sup> See Westad O. A., *The Global Cold War*, pp. 207-249; Shubin V., *The Hot Cold War*.

stayed in the Angolan territory even in the following years, in helping to resist South African invasions. In an official statement, the Soviet government declared its objectives in Southern Africa:

to strengthen and expand its “peaceful relations” with all legitimately-ruling African governments; to aid national liberation movements throughout Africa in their struggle against outside domination; to oppose colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racism; and to support progressive programs adopted by African governments which had embarked on the noncapitalist path of development<sup>89</sup>.

However, Soviet involvement in Southern Africa was driven also by geopolitical strategies as well as ideological commitment. Along with these declared objectives, the Soviet policy was obviously driven also by the willingness to reduce American - but also Chinese - influences in the area<sup>90</sup>. Between the different instruments used by the Soviet Union to support front-line states and national liberation movements, the most visible aid consisted on military support. Furthermore, Namibian cadres were sent to the Soviet Union and to Eastern European countries – especially East Germany – for training both academic and military<sup>91</sup>.

Given this, it is clearly visible as the transition in Namibia «was taking place within the context of a complex and much broader interplay of regional and interregional forces involving Angola, its own internal conflicts, the Cuban and the Soviet presence there and Western responses to that presence»<sup>92</sup>. The United States under the Reagan administration, afraid of the Soviet Union’s expansion in the Third World, elaborated an even more constructive policy towards South Africa, and imposed a «linkage between regional conflicts and global issues»<sup>93</sup>, by making the South African withdrawal from Namibia and the Cuban withdrawal from Angola dependent on each other. On the other side, Cuba, Angola and the Soviet Union refused the linkage and remained uninvolved in direct negotiations with regard to Namibia until 1988, when Cuban and South African withdrawals were both negotiated, together with Namibian independence. As previously mentioned, the turning point of 1988 was caused also by the change of the international political climate<sup>94</sup>. The heralding of the end of the Cold War created a general change of strategies. When Gorbachev<sup>95</sup> became the new general

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<sup>89</sup> Donaldson R.H., *The Soviet Union in the Third World*, p. 70.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-74.

<sup>91</sup> See Shubin V., *The Hot Cold War*, p. 197; Donaldson R. H., *The Soviet Union in the Third World*, p. 79.

<sup>92</sup> Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 40.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-65.

<sup>95</sup> See Romero F., *Storia della Guerra Fredda*, pp. 306-318; Westad O. A., *The Global Cold War*, pp. 364-395.

secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, with his pillars of *perestrojka* and *glasnost*, USSR launched a reform policy, opened for dialogue with Reagan and began to look for a solution to their conflicts. The desire to disengage from Africa led the Soviet Union to increase military pressure in order to accelerate the negotiations. This, together with other elements analysed in the previous section, led to the implementation of the UN resolutions and, therefore, to Namibian independence.

## 2.5 East Germany and Namibia solidarity

One of the main actors in the Cold War was the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) or GDR. Born on 7 October 1949, one month later than the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), GDR was one of the pillars of Eastern Europe. It was the ground on which the experiment of the creation and development of real socialism was performed. Then, the construction of the Berlin Wall<sup>96</sup>, erected on 13 August 1961 under Walter Ulbricht, represented the «non-metaphorical translation of the situation of irreconcilability between the two Germanies»<sup>97</sup>. With the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain materialized giving rise to two conflicting worlds and impeding the free movement. GDR made up an authoritarian system, controlled in a maniacal way by Stasi, the most powerful secret police of the history<sup>98</sup> and the shield and sword of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany or Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED).

East Germany played a key role in the cooperation with African movements during the Cold War. The involvement of GDR in Africa was driven by both ideological motives and personal interests. On one hand, GDR was a state in seeking international recognition, especially during Erich Honecker's era. With its intervention in the Third World, East Germany discredited West German presence in Africa – by attacking its policy of militarism and economic monopoly and by denouncing its political support for South African regime – and supported Soviet interests there, presenting itself as its affiliate rather than as its mere appendage. On the other hand, GDR developed an ideological

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<sup>96</sup> See Taylor F. (2009), *Il Muro di Berlino. 13 agosto 1961 – 9 novembre 1989*, Milano: Mondadori.

<sup>97</sup> Collotti E. (1992), *Dalle due Germanie alla Germania unita*, Torino: Einaudi, p.129 [my translation].

<sup>98</sup> «After the fall of the wall, the German media called East Germany "the most perfected state of surveillance of all time". [...] It is estimated that in the Third Hitler Reich there was an agent of the Gestapo every two thousand citizens, and in the USSR of Stalin an agent of the Kgb every six thousand people around. In the Ddr there was an agent or informant of the Stasi every sixty-three people. If you add part-time informers, some estimates bring the percentage to an informant every 6.5 citizens» [my translation]. Funder A. (2010), *C'era una volta la Ddr*, Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 55.

justification consisting on the anti-imperialist solidarity with people struggling for national and social freedom<sup>99</sup> and, therefore, it encouraged the development of revolutionary forces and national liberation movements. Concretely, as Winrow writes:

in the late 1960s the GDR stepped up its support for liberation movements by offering assistance (including military support) and solidarity aid. Wounded guerrillas were treated in East German hospitals; teachers despatched to educate the next generation of 'freedom fighters'; African apprentices trained in East German factories; propaganda publications printed in the GDR and school books distributed in Africa<sup>100</sup>.

Therefore, according to the principle of anti-imperialist solidarity, SWAPO had found support in the socialist countries, in the form of training and material. In particular, during the 1970s, contacts between Sam Nujoma and the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany increased. Many solidarity shipments arrived from GDR to refugee camps in Angola and elsewhere during the most intense years of the warfare. After the Cassinga massacre, East Germany provided medical care to survivors and combatants and welcomed eighty children coming from refugee camps. They were called the “79ers”, the first group of Namibian children that arrived in East Germany. As Kenna points out,

the eighty Namibian young people [...] – almost all of whom are Owambo ethnic origin and many of whom are survivors of Kassinga – were caught up in the crosscurrents of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century African, German, and world history. What happened to them must surely be seen in the context of the Cold War and its aftermath, but also in the context of the African movements of self-determination which had begun in earnest after World War II<sup>101</sup>.

Then, between 1979 and 1989, the number of GDR-children from Namibia increased. Totally, around four hundred Namibian children spent a significant part of their lives in East Germany – in Bellin/Zehna and then in Stasfurt/Loderbug – where they were trained with a socialist education, in order to become the future Namibian elite. Then, in 1990, the political transition both in Germany and in Namibia forced them to repatriate.

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<sup>99</sup> See Winrow G. M., *The foreign policy of the GDR in Africa*, p. 87.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>101</sup> Kenna C., *Homecoming*, pp. 12-13.

## 2.6 1989-1990

In view of the transition to independence, in Namibia, the UN were engaged in stipulating preconditions to guarantee free and fair elections and in establishing provisions for the running of the elections and the role of the Constituent Assembly. What was to be elected, in fact, was the membership of an assembly that would write the country's constitution and, in practice, the new government. The process of demilitarization was very long and difficult<sup>102</sup> and the social and political atmosphere was tense until the independence. The transition provided that the elections should be overseen by the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)<sup>103</sup> and held by the South African Administrator-General under UN supervision. The United Nations' role in Namibia was considered unique since it assumed direct responsibility for the colony and it continued to supervise the transition through election monitoring and peacekeeping<sup>104</sup>. Despite its role, a climate of violence and intimidation haunted the election process but it seemed that this did not affect the general results<sup>105</sup>. Furthermore, during the election campaign the issue of SWAPO's detention and torture of its members became widely known and a Parents' Committee was constituted by those who demanded justice for the detainees<sup>106</sup>.

The elections, which took place between 7 and 9 November 1989, saw the two main political parties, SWAPO and DTA, opposing each other. On one side, SWAPO sought to assert its position presenting itself as a truly national movement representative of the Namibian people and carrying on the principle of undogmatic and reasonable reconciliation. On the other side, DTA presented itself as a party used to power and carried out its principles of democracy and not socialism. DTA sought to undermine SWAPO, not thinking about improving its own image<sup>107</sup>, already damaged by its connection with South Africa. At the end, SWAPO was the winner party, obtaining the majority that would entitle it forty-one seats in the Constituent Assembly. However, it did not obtain the two-third majority that would give the control of the Constituent Assembly. The elaboration of the constitution

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<sup>102</sup> On the 1st April 1989, date of the supposed cease-fire, a bloody conflict between PLAN fighters and SADF broke out.

<sup>103</sup> For the role of the UNTAG see Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, pp. 134-144.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>105</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 94-110.

<sup>106</sup> See Wallace M. with Kinahan J., *A History of Namibia*, pp. 298-299; Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 167.

<sup>107</sup> Cliffe L., *The transition to independence in Namibia*, p. 178.

was a pacific process and Namibia was declared officially independent on 21 March 1990, with Sam Nujoma as the president<sup>108</sup>.

During the same week of November 1989, also East Germany was subjected to a radical change. After forty years of existence, in fact, the internal problems of GDR began to be felt. The lack of popular consensus and the general social discomfort, combined with the blurring of the Soviet support – given by the new reform attitude of Gorbaciov – led inevitably to the crisis. Mass demonstrations developed rapidly all over Eastern Europe. Moreover, the runaways from GDR had assumed unstoppable proportions and, when the Hungarian government opened the border to Austria in 1989, it became an exodus. In face of the impossibility to arrest the popular drive, the East German regime was forced to assume a more tolerant tone and to open the borders, never guessing that this decision would mean the end of the GDR. On the contrary, in fact, this was «a decision which becomes fateful because it leads to a climate of confusion, to the popular and not deliberate opening of the Berlin Wall»<sup>109</sup>. This was a miscalculation, defined as «the most colossal error in the bureaucracy's history»<sup>110</sup>. On 9 November, the GDR announced officially, quite by accident, that the borders were opened *ab sofort*, with immediate effect<sup>111</sup>. From that moment, Germans was climbing on the wall, celebrating the liberation. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, as well as its construction, was held in one night, on 9 November 1989. Therefore, in the face of an ungovernable situation, GDR was forced to abandon any attempt to preserve its own identity. On 3 October 1990, the treaty *Einigungsvertrag* came into force, extending the western legislation to the future reunified Germany and expelling the Eastern legislation, incompatible with the new order. After forty years, GDR ceased to exist and Germany went back to being a big reunified power.

The 1989 was a year of big changes, at international level. That week of November signed the most eventful changes in the global history, with the end of the Cold War – symbolised metaphorically by the collapse of the Berlin wall – and the end of colonialism in Africa – symbolised by the first free elections in Namibia.

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<sup>108</sup> For the development of SWAPO after independence see Melber H. (Ed.) (2003), *Re-examining liberation in Namibia: political culture since independence*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; Melber H. (2014), *Understanding Namibia, The Trials of Independence*, London: Hurst & Company.

<sup>109</sup> Sogliani F. (1999), *La riunificazione della Germania 1989-1990*, Roma: Carrocci, p. 36 [my translation].

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> See Meyer M. (2009), *L'anno che cambiò il mondo. La storia non detta del Muro di Berlino*, Milano: il Saggiatore; Taylor F., *Il Muro di Berlino*, pp. 322-340.

## Chapter 3. Micro perspectives from global biographies: life narratives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo

### 3.1 Lucia Engombe: an introduction to *Child No. 95*

In *Child No. 95*, Lucia Engombe tells her own story, a story in between two worlds. She, in fact, lived in East Germany for almost eleven years, from 18 December 1979 until 26 August 1990. Together with other children, she arrived in GDR when she was seven, and she was forced to return to Namibia after 1990. Her autobiography touches on themes at the intersection between German and Namibian history and inserts an individual life within a complex historical landscape. As Nora Moll points out, *Child No. 95* «is part of a broad genre of autobiographies written by ordinary people, by *everymen* who are eager to self-analysis and who want to communicate this self-observation and self-narration to a wider audience»<sup>112</sup>.

The autobiographical subject is at the same time the narrator, the author and the protagonist of the narration<sup>113</sup>. In *Child No. 95*, this materializes in an interweaving of different perspectives that intermix in an effective way. The innocent point of view of the protagonist-child Lucia is intertwined with the rational voice of the author-adult Lucia who remembers her life, by giving the reader all the information about the history that a child cannot fully comprehend. The density of historical references in *Child No. 95*, contextualizes the experience and elevates Lucia Engombe to become a guardian of historical memory.

The narration is constructed following a chronologic order and it is divided in sections that embody the main phases of Lucia's story. Each section, in fact, coincides with a different place that has had a value for her childhood and adolescence. Furthermore, the accurate division in sections is marked by titles that make the chronologic order of the narration clear: "Nyango, July 1976", "Bellin, December 1979", "Staßfurt, Summer 1985", "Windhoeck, August 1989". Therefore, Lucia starts her narration from 1976, with the tale of her childish years in Nyango (Zambia), where she was forced to stay in order to escape the dangerous conditions of Namibia. And then she concludes the narration not just focusing on the tale of her return in Namibia, in 1990, but also on the consequences of that return<sup>114</sup>. Therefore, *Child No. 95* finishes when Lucia-girl discovers all the issue which she was looking for, as if it was a tale of self-discovery, a tale of a journey through two worlds, but also of a journey within her own consciousness.

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<sup>112</sup> Moll N., La diaspora verso la Germania dell'Est e il ritorno in Africa narrati da Lucia Engombe in *Kind Nr. 95*, p. 114 [my translation].

<sup>113</sup> Lejeune P., *Il patto autobiografico*.

<sup>114</sup> It is not specified the exact year of the end of the narration, but it is around 1997.

### 3.2 Lucia Engombe and her German-African Odyssey

During her first years in the refugee camp in Nyango, Lucia Engombe lived with the sporadic presence of her mother, who is often obliged to leave her children and without a father, who is considered a traitor for reasons that she will discover only after her return in Namibia. This period of her life is remembered especially for the terrible hunger that affected her. As she remembers: «I had grown up with hunger. It was there when I woke up, it stayed with me during the day, and it was the last thing I felt when I cried myself to sleep»<sup>115</sup>. Therefore, in the refugee camp, Lucia has suffered a childhood of deprivation together with her siblings and her friends. She experienced a childhood in which alarms constantly warned for danger, in which she heard political slogans that she could not understand, in which the only real friend who would not abandon her was Kalunga, God.

Not long after the tragic day of the Cassinga massacre, the proposal to fly to Germany came and Lucia remembers the excitement that followed such an opportunity, even though she «didn't have the slightest clue what *Germany* was»<sup>116</sup>. She remembers the day of the departure as the day in which she undertook a journey to life, to survival, but also as the day in which she lost her family and her roots. She left Nyango, which in her memory represents the place where she was «always hungry and often scared»<sup>117</sup>, and she arrived in East Germany on 18 December 1979. Then, she took part in the first group of eighty children who flew to Germany. As a child, Lucia was unaware to be part of a project of solidarity between SWAPO and GDR, unaware that the political developments of these two countries would reverse her fate. Now, Lucia-author explores her past with a new awareness and provides the historical record of her life.

They arrived in Bellin, where they lived with German and Namibian governesses in a manor almost completely isolated from the rest of the world, hidden from the inhabitants and everyone else. The children, in fact, had to remain a secret, in order to prevent acts of revenge by SWAPO's enemies.

During the first period in Bellin, Lucia alternated moments of homesickness with moments of immense joy and gratefulness. From the beginning, Lucia and other children had to face up to all the discoveries of a world to which they were unfamiliar: little things that they never experienced in the refugee camp, such as pyjamas, shoes, watches and brushing teeth, became part of their everyday lives.

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<sup>115</sup> Engombe L. with Hilliges P. (2014), *Child No. 95, My German-African Odyssey*, brainstorm-berlin.de (e-book edition), part I, ch.1 (“When my mother cut down trees”). Since I use e-book edition, where the pages are not numbered, I will write the title of the chapter.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, part I, ch.3 (“An adventure, a journey!”).

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*.

As Jason Owen points out, in East Germany, Namibian children were subjected to a process of deracination, assimilation and socialisation. With the latter term he intends that they «were assimilating to a socialist socialization»<sup>118</sup>. The process of assimilation took place in the context of an indoctrination and education based on the dogma of SWAPO. Lucia and the other children, in fact, started their training to become soldiers ready to lead the independent Namibia but also to fight if necessary. Then, as Constance Kenna writes, «the liberated Namibia was conceived of as a socialist society not unlike that of GDR»<sup>119</sup> and «the Namibian children were to be made familiar with the “accomplishment of a socialist state even at this early ages of their development”»<sup>120</sup>. Even the scholarship program was planned in accordance with these objectives and was deserved only to Namibian children. They were educated to march properly, to repeat political slogans, to follow discipline, to behave like soldiers, always reminded with seriousness that they were the elite, and they had to be able to fight for peace and socialism.

The first soldier spoke again: “If we want to free Namibia, we will need everyone, also you children.” Teacher Jonas indicated his wish to speak: “You do all want a free Namibia, don’t you?” “Yes, Teacher Jonas, we do! We will give the enemy a hiding,” we answered enthusiastically. But I wasn’t really speaking from the heart. Although I wanted a free Namibia, I had some reservations as to whether I, as a girl, would even be able to fight<sup>121</sup>.

Namibian children played their parts, alternating the discipline of soldiers with the naivety of children. Lucia Engombe expresses efficiently this image, by saying that, after a training lesson, «we soldiers turned into children again that went to play»<sup>122</sup>. Obviously, as children, they did not understand the gravity of their duties and they were constantly warned: «when you are fighting the enemy you can’t make jokes, because then your enemy will find you and you will die»<sup>123</sup>.

In the meantime, since the liberation war in Namibia continued to rage, the number of Namibian children sent to East Germany increased. And some children, including Lucia Engombe, were transferred from Bellin to Staßfurt in the summer of 1985. They had to leave the manor, which had now become their real home, and they had to bid another farewell to their fellows, their governesses

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<sup>118</sup> Owen J. (1999), Namibia's "GDR kids": Multiple displacement, identity, and assimilation in a post-apartheid state, *Bookbird*; 37, (2); pp. 24-29: p. 26.

<sup>119</sup> Kenna C., *Homecoming*, p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part II, ch.3 (“Indians don’t like traitors”).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, part II, ch.6 (“Soldier don’t cry”).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

and their teachers. As Lucia tells, her heart ached when she had to leave Bellin, but «I held back the tears, like a good soldier»<sup>124</sup>.

In Staßfurt, many hostels were reserved to accommodate not only Namibians, but also Mozambicans, Cubans and Vietnamese. The Namibian children were housed in a facility named *School of Friendship*, together with 900 Mozambicans. «Judging by the size of this, the GDR has many friends»<sup>125</sup>, one of the children commented. The name of the school, as Leonzio points out, «indicates the purposes that DDR has set itself with its instruction: to demonstrate friendship and solidarity to African States (Mozambique and Namibia), but also to those of Asia (Vietnam) and Central and South America (Cuba)»<sup>126</sup>.

After the first difficulties of this new overwhelming situation, their daily lives went on with all the typical issues of adolescence. Yet always monitored, warned and trained to not fail, Namibian children felt like being behind fences. And within this world, their adolescence cannot take place in a normal way. The young love was in some way hindered. The girls were warned to behave correctly, to fulfil their duties, and they were threatened to be sent back to Namibia if they wasted the opportunity of their education. A pregnant girl was forced to have an abortion. Such episode shocked Lucia, who felt increasingly trapped within a political system: «you don't know where your parents are or where your house stands. There's only a party – which threatens to send you where you don't want to go»<sup>127</sup>. A stop sign in her head – the warning to be sent back to Africa – prevented her from approaching boys. Only few little concessions, such as being able to go to the GDR-disco, made them feel what they never were, normal young people<sup>128</sup>.

The historical upheavals of 1989-1990 would soon change their destiny: «Gradually the world around us changed. In the summer of 1989, in Germany one state slowly dissolved, and in Africa another emerged. We were directly affected by both»<sup>129</sup>. As a young girl, Lucia did not perceive immediately the gravity of the situation until she heard that they had to return to Namibia. GDR was falling apart and Namibia was finally a free country. Their presence in Germany was no longer justified in this new political landscape.

The feelings that followed such news were conflicting. The longing to re-join her family was in fact mixed with the fear of the unknown: «I absolutely wanted to go to Namibia, to my estranged

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.1 (“Another farewell”).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Leonzio E., *Emigrata due volte*, p. 43 [my translation].

<sup>127</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part III, ch.4 (“Date in the dark”).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.8 (“Locked up”).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

motherland. But what awaited me there? There was much talk of politics and victory and the end of racism. But what did that have to do with me? With my own fate?»<sup>130</sup>. Added to this, the perspective to put an end to their experience in Germany is accompanied by feelings of disillusion: as Jason Owen points out, «the dissolution of the GDR led to the children’s disillusion, or disenchantment with all they have been taught»<sup>131</sup>. Immersed in these mixed feelings, Lucia perceived that a new fight will lay ahead, «one that would be fought without guns. One for which we hadn’t been trained»<sup>132</sup>.

At the end of August 1990, Lucia had to leave the dying GDR and to come back to an independent Namibia. With the return to Namibia, Lucia Engombe and the other children became now *the forgotten elite*, which does not find a place in the free Namibia. Lucia had to start a new process of adaptation within a Namibia that differs from the one depicted in her German world. In her homeland, Lucia struggles to understand and speak Oshiwambo, her mother tongue, she is unable to cook *pap*, the Namibian national dish, and she is defined by her relatives as “our German girl”. She meets her father, from whom she was pulled away because he was considered a traitor of the nation. She discovers, in fact, that her father was an ex SWAPO militant who was expelled as dissident. He had accused SWAPO for corruption, treason and embezzlement and he had taken part in SWAPO-Democrats party, which was the opposition. Once again, Lucia is disappointed by the fact that her whole life was dictated by politics: «What did politics have to do with me now? I hated politics! I didn’t want a politician. I wanted a father»<sup>133</sup>. Her father reveals her all the injustices of the system in which she grew up. And,

the idea of having sustained an alienating treatment during her education in GDR could have been one of the main motives at the base of the scripture of her book: the affirmation of her personal identity within a complex interviewing of belongings, homelands, habits and dreams, must not fail to take in account that such interviewing is intersected by political-ideological forces, of which she realizes she has been a puppet, or even a victim<sup>134</sup>.

Lucia hardly adapts to this new world, in which she does not understand neither her mother, who has an intimate relationship with Sam Nujoma, neither her father, who has a relationship with a young girl.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.10 (“Germany above everything”).

<sup>131</sup> Owen J., Namibia's "GDR kids", p. 27.

<sup>132</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, Part III, ch.10 (“Germany above everything”).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., part IV, ch.4 (“Kiss Uncle Sam on the lips!”).

<sup>134</sup> Moll N., La diaspora verso la Germania dell’Est e il ritorno in Africa narrati da Lucia Engombe in *Kind Nr. 95*, p. 130 [my translation].

The history of Lucia Engombe is a story of a double diaspora and, therefore, of a double displacement. The double diaspora, in fact, made even more difficult a reconstruction of identity, split in two sides: on one hand a Namibia that they have not experienced, on the other hand a Germany that, after reunification, did not exist anymore. The return to Namibia puts Lucia in a situation of confusion and disorientation, in which she struggles to find herself: «Who was I anyway? [...] A chameleon? Sometimes white, sometimes black? What colour was I supposed to be? Why had they turned me into a white person if they now wanted a black person? Why did they want me to belong to the ‘elite of tomorrow’ if they now forgot about me on this farm?»<sup>135</sup>. As Schmitt and Witte point out, now GDR children from Namibia found themselves deprived of a sense of belonging:

The belonging to Namibia which has always been communicated to them in GDR as “their country” is permanently denied. This shows a threefold deprivation of belonging – in GDR, the children have always been the “other”; also in Namibia, they are not seen as being equals; and lastly they are not perceived as the elite as was promised to them<sup>136</sup>.

Jason Owen argues that the GDR-children from Namibia constitute a new ethnic subgroup, pulled apart both in East Germany and in Namibia<sup>137</sup>. Therefore, their identity can find its home only in their micro-community, that they try to reconstruct also in Namibia. Lucia recreates her new microcosm by searching comfort in her fellows, in the German school in Windhoek and in a couple of Germans who take care of her. GDR children from Namibia created spaces of agency both in East Germany and in Namibia<sup>138</sup>. Already in East Germany, for example, they had created their own secret language, a mix of Oshiwambo and German: the Oshigerman. This linguistic creolization is part of a broader process of cultural creolization that, in this case, could represent a strategy for finding a new sense of belonging.

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<sup>135</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part IV, ch.2 (“This is our German girl”).

<sup>136</sup> Schmitt C. and Witte M., “You are special”, pp. 12-13.

<sup>137</sup> Owen J., Namibia’s “GDR’s Kids”, p. 29.

<sup>138</sup> Schmitt C. and Witte M., “You are special”.

### **3.3 Stefanie Layha Aukongo: an introduction to *Kalungas Kind***

The life of Stefanie Layha Aukongo was in some way intertwined with that of Lucia Engombe. Both women were objects of the pact of solidarity between East Germany and Namibia. But the difficult conditions of Stefanie did not allow her to become part of the group of children that should have been the future Namibian elite.

In her autobiography, *Kalunga's Child, My Incredible Journey into Life*, Stefanie tells of her struggle for life and her victory on a destiny that put so much strain on her. The life of Stefanie was in fact in danger since her birth. Her mother, Clementine Aukongo, was badly wounded during the Cassinga massacre, when she was pregnant with her. The GDR, which provided medical treatment for survivors of the massacre, took care of Clementine and then of Stefanie, who was born with several problems, with which she has had to fight for her entire life.

The narration of her autobiography does not follow a precise chronologic order, but it is rather dictated by her spontaneous thoughts. The narration mixes episodes of her life with memories taken by people important for her, seeking in this way to reconstruct also the years of her life that she could not remember. In *Kalunga's Child*, Stefanie gives much space to her emotions and to considerations about her life, her family and her identity, resulting in a text describing a journey of self-discovery, in a similar way as *Child No. 95*.

The narration begins with the dramatic Cassinga massacre and continues with the tale of the main episodes of her life, always bounced between Germany and Namibia. Therefore, *Kalunga's Child* tells the story of Stefanie since 1978 until almost 2009, including in this way also the tale of her adult life. If the first part of the book is a reconstruction of her past, completed with the help of external memories, the second part of the book is the tale of a woman constantly researching her past and her roots. Doubts about her birth and about the Cassinga massacre permeates the whole narration, which ends with their resolution, as if the author wants to come full circle to find the truth. The end catches up with the beginning. Her present catches up with her past, and it prepares the ground for a future that will be lived with a new awareness.

### **3.4 Stefanie Layha Aukongo and her journey into life**

Stefanie Aukongo begins to tell her story starting from when she was in her mother's womb. The first pages deal with the dramatic tale of a sixteen-year-old girl, Clementine Aukongo, who tries to escape from the gunfire and from the explosions which raged everywhere around her, in the Cassinga

refugee camp. Gravely injured to her hip, Clementine was treated in East Germany, where, three months later, she gave birth to her baby, who was called with the name of a German nurse, Stefanie. After this preamble, Stefanie introduces herself and portrays her life by using the metaphor of a flower born in the sandy African soil:

And this is my story: I grew up in a German garden. Tulips, roses and dahlias bloomed around me. One day, I looked around and I realized that I wasn't one of these flowers. Because numerous twists of fate have left scars on my body. I can cover them with clothes, but my shorter leg forces me to limp. Furthermore, I have other handicaps with which I have learned to deal. However, the scars of my soul don't want to heal. They torture me during the night, with nightmares that seem like the memory of something terrible that I have lived. But I know that I can't have such a memory. It was my mother who went through the hell of Cassinga, four months before my birth. In spite of all the limitations with which I have to fight, I think that my life is a fortune<sup>139</sup>.

Then, Stefanie tells how her life met with that of her German family, the Schmieders. Petra Schmieder was a young girl who worked as a nursing assistant at the *Solidarity Station*, founded to accommodate patients coming from Namibia. Since Clementine was still hospitalized awaiting further operations, Petra convinced her family to take care of Stefanie until she was allowed to return to Africa with her mother. In fact, as Stefanie explains, «the patients of the *Solidarity Station* were allowed to stay in the DDR until they recovered. After that, they had to go home»<sup>140</sup>.

Soon, doctors discovered that Stefanie had developed disabilities as a result of her mother's injuries. She was born with a spastic cerebral hemiparesis, a partial paralysis that involved one side of her body. Nevertheless, the Schmieders accepted to welcome Stefanie as long as necessary, embodying in this way a great example of solidarity.

Stefanie spent the first years of her life surrounded by the love of her German foster family. Born in critical circumstances, Stefanie now finds herself with four mothers: Clementine Aukongo, the birth mother, Waltraud Schmieder, called "Omi" or grandmother, and her two daughters, Petra and Ines. Rudy Schmieder, called by Stefanie "Opi" or grandfather, was Waltraud's husband and, as coach of the national ice-skating team, held a respected position in DDR. Stefanie tells how the Schmieders did everything for her, favouring her physical development with physiotherapy exercises and encouraging her to never give up. On the other side, she also tells about her difficult relationship with her biological mother, characterized by a strange estrangement keeping them away from each other.

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<sup>139</sup> Aukongo S. L. (2014), *Kalungas Kind, Meine unglaubliche Reise ins Leben*, brainstorming-berlin.de, (e-book edition), ch.1 ("The day that changed everything") [my translation]. From here on out, the translated title *Kalunga's Child, My Incredible Journey into life* will be used and "my translation" will no longer specified.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., ch.2 ("My four mothers").

After one year, the *Solidarity Committee* ordered the homecoming of Clementine, together with her daughter Stefanie. Since Namibia was still at war, they had to return to Angola. The Schmieders opposed this decision, guessing that Stefanie's conditions were not yet well enough to be able to survive in Angola. Despite all the efforts, at the beginning of 1980 Stefanie had to leave DDR:

The sad situation was seen from its unbiased side: the state had saved my life, but, since the beginning, it had been said that the help for me would be temporary. But my foster family did more than accomplish the mission – they had loved me. Their humanity seemed to have failed because of the DDR's rules<sup>141</sup>.

After Stefanie's departure, the Schmieders discovered that, according to an agreement between Erich Honecker and Sam Nujoma, a solidarity campaign was launched and a group of Namibian children were welcomed in Bellin. As Stefanie tells, «unfortunately, with their agreement, the two gentlemen did not give me any gift»<sup>142</sup>. At this point, and especially when they discovered that Stefanie's health was deteriorating in the Angolan refugee camp, the Schmieders started a fight to bring her back. Finally, almost one year later, Stefanie was allowed to return to East Germany. She returned as a dramatic care case. Suffering from malnutrition, Stefanie also had scars on her arms, a ruptured eardrum, an ocular muscle slipping outwards and a very weak leg muscle. «I was really like a construction site», Stefanie comments, and then she says: «if solidarity had been used not only as a means of politics, but as a human gesture, all the loved ones, who in the following years sacrificed themselves for me, would have been spared a great deal of work»<sup>143</sup>.

Slowly, Stefanie gained her strength, and she was allowed to continue her life in Berlin with her German family, with the constant fear of being sent back to Africa. In order to keep the connection with her roots alive, at some point Stefanie would have to grow up with the Namibian children in the Bellin's manor. But there, she was considered inadequate because of her conditions and she was allowed to stay with them only for short periods of vacation.

Of the 430 children of Namibia who lived in Bellin and Staßfurt between 1979 and 1989, none of them was disabled. Which is surprising when you realize that the war, especially the Cassinga massacre, has mutilated many children. The SWAPO sent exclusively boys and girls to the GDR, who later, as they said, should form the elite of a Namibia freed by the South Africans. A frightened and handicapped girl with a slightly paralyzed hand and with all other possible problems did not seem to fit to the Liberation Movement. My inadequacies deceived the official integration plan with SWAPO children. I was sent home<sup>144</sup>.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., ch.4 (“The finger in the flames”).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., ch.5 (“Easter eggs for the Minister”).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., ch.7 (“Who bites such a small child?”).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., ch.9 (“Nothing for the elite”).

Stefanie spent her childhood in the love of her foster family, struggling against the everyday difficulties of school. When the year 1989 came, the ten-year-old Stefanie learned from television what was happening around her. Stefanie tells the ironical episode during which she and her “sister” Jenny mourned the Honecker’s resignation, which anticipated the end of the GDR: «that was "our Erich!", which belonged to the DDR as the wardrobe belonged to our living room. Very few people probably wept a tear for Erich Honecker, but two of us shed more than one! Jenny immediately drew an image, on which the eight-year-old girl wrote: "Erich, we love you, you cannot leave"». <sup>145</sup>

Soon, the Schmieders realized that the political changes could be dangerous for Stefanie, who now wonders: «what would happen to a child like me, if there was no longer the system that tacitly tolerated me?» <sup>146</sup>. At the same time, Namibia was becoming independent and the perspective to have to return to her homeland became more and more real. This possibility concerned Stefanie, a problematic child used to live in Germany and not too happy about returning to a mother whom she did not really know.

When Stefanie was fourteen, the Schmieders, who considered it necessary for her to reconnect with her homeland, convinced her to spend a period in Namibia. There, Stefanie had to face a completely different world. In Namibia, Stefanie met her father, with whom she felt an affinity from the first moment. As her father will tell her, he and Clementine did not have the opportunity to marry and to have a family because of the war, which kept them away from each other for a long time. In Namibia, Stefanie lived with the constant fear to be held there. She discovered Windhoek, the misery of Katutura and the everyday life in Owamboland, in the village of *meekulu*, her grandmother. The life in huts, the lack of electricity, the dirty water and the eating of worms, make her thoughtful about this life that she did not understand. Then, she was happy to return to Germany.

However, after this experience in her homeland, Stefanie found herself thinking about African life with longing, afflicted by the feeling that may suggest the so-called *Mal d’Afrique*. In Namibia, as Stefanie writes, «people still made sense of the little things that the Germans could not certainly enjoy. [...] In the faces of Namibia, I had seen joy when something was beautiful and the disappointment when things were not going so well. One lived his feelings there» <sup>147</sup>.

With her following travels in Namibia, she slowly learnt to love her homeland. She discovered Namibian culture, to which she becomes increasingly attracted, she found out Kalunga and she gives a new meaning to her whole life:

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., ch.12 (“Erich, you cannot go!”).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., ch.17 (“Elvis lives in Swakopmund”).

In Africa I have discovered Kalunga, but also something else: now I feel like an Owambo woman. I belonged to a tribe. I felt that it was something incredibly exciting. It had taken a long time before grandma convinced my African roots to work. Now nobody could take this discovery away<sup>148</sup>.

In the meantime, Stefanie continued also her life in Germany, with a new awareness, that to be a Black German, a German woman but also an Owambo woman: «Their convictions and their beliefs, as well as mine - both were valid. We did not exist beside to each other, but together. This was the answer to all my questions. I am Meekulu's niece, an Owambo woman, and at the same time a young German woman»<sup>149</sup>.

Stefanie continues her studies in Germany, where however she struggles to find a job. Then, she began a stage in Namibia, where she worked for *Women's Action for Development*, an organization that aimed towards the self-determination of Namibian women and dealt with issues such as AIDS and prostitution. During her long stay in Namibia, Stefanie learned about a mysterious disease afflicting her mother, who however did not want to talk about it. Then, Stefanie embarked on a journey to discover the truth, the truth about her mother's illness, which she suspected was AIDS, and the truth about her own past. Several questions in fact tormented her for a long time: «I wondered what powers actually pulled the strings that control our lives. Why was I born in the DDR? Why did not I work in the fields in Owamboland with a child on my back? The only answer to these questions was the Cassinga massacre, which was always mentioned»<sup>150</sup>. Looking for the truth, she run through the first stages of her life. She discovered the causes of her spastic hemiparesis, to be found in the type of weapon used by South Africans during the Cassinga massacre. She discovered that her mother had rejected the possibility of an abortion, suggested by doctors in DDR because of her precarious conditions. Finally, during a stay in Namibia, Stefanie discovered her roots within her parents' past. She found out how they fell in love with each other and how her mother survived the hell of Cassinga. Her father tells her that, at the time of the massacre, she was in the Vietnam camp, and he was jailed by the South African regime for six years<sup>151</sup>, without knowing anything about Clementine and Stefanie.

Then, *Kalungas Kind* ends with many discoveries and with a new awareness, closing in this way the loop at the same place as she had started.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., ch.19 (“The life I never had”).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., ch.24 (“My grandmother's gifts”).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., ch.18 (“Kalunga's child”).

<sup>151</sup> The survivors of Vietnam camp were detained for many years (See section 2.3).

## Chapter 4. Combining macro and micro history through global lives: transcultural memories of German-Namibian history (1978-1990)

### 4.1 Introductory notes: global autobiographies of transcultural identities

*Child No. 95* and *Kalunga's Child* reveal a need that is often implicit in the autobiographical writing: a need within the author to discover their own identity, to make sense of a biography whose unity has been threatened by historical upheavals. The experiences of migration and exile make this need even stronger. The autobiographical impulse is felt more in the case in which the authorial subject finds himself/herself in situations that question the sense of belonging. Judith Melton points out, by analysing the autobiographies written by individuals who have experienced the exile because of the rise of fascism, that «coping with life in a new country and a strange culture and language simultaneously with the loss of one's homeland brought on shock and sometimes despair»<sup>152</sup>. The experience of exile implies the loss of the homeland and feelings of alienation. In this context, the autobiographical writing gains a healing power, leading the author to an auto-analysis that helps him/her to overcome the sense of disorientation that follows such experience. Therefore, «writing an autobiography becomes a means of healing, of reconnecting, or of regaining identity»<sup>153</sup>.

In the cases of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, the migration takes place within an agreement between two countries. Lucia Engombe had to face the loss of her native land twice: in 1979, when she left her family and landed in East Germany and in 1990, when, after completing a process of assimilation, she was forced to return to Namibia, leaving in this way what had now become her new homeland. In this context, the homecoming is in some way a journey to an unknown country. Stefanie Lahya Aukongo had lived the feeling of disorientation in a different way. Born in DDR surrounded by Germans, her travels in Namibia make her identity on the brink between two cultures that are completely different. Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo appear in this way as transcultural subjects whose identities undergo to a not easy process of integration between different cultures. In fact, as Welsch points out, «wherever an individual is cast by differing cultural interests, the linking of such transcultural components with one another becomes a specific task in identity-forming. Work on one's identity is becoming more and more work on the integration of components of differing cultural origin»<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>152</sup> Melton J. (1998), *The Face of Exile, Autobiographical journeys*, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, p. xiii.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>154</sup> Welsch W., *Transculturality*, p. 199.

In *Child No. 95*, the search for her own identity carried on by Lucia is clearly perceptible in the constant and almost paranoid search for her true birthday date. Furthermore, the issue of the loss of Oshiwambo, which symbolically embodies the loss of a part of herself, is one *leitmotiv* of the narration. In East Germany, in fact, Lucia Engombe soon realized that Oshiwambo does not have some words for describing objects or concepts that do not exist in the African perception. For example, there is no word for “manor” or for “snow”. Therefore, she realized the limitedness of Oshiwambo, no longer adapt in this new world, and, after first difficulties, she began to learn the German language. As Leonzio points out:

Language is therefore the instrument of codification and appropriation of the lived experience. [...] The moment she understands this fact, Lucia begins her journey to discover German, which will lead her to a perfect mastery of the new language; mastery that brings with it, as a price, the removal of the mother tongue and part of one's identity<sup>155</sup>.

On the other side, the birth of Oshigerman embodies the birth of a new transcultural identity. *Child No. 95* ends with the (partial) resolution of the inner conflict of Lucia, who finds her place in new spaces of agency.

In *Kalunga's Child*, similarly, Stefanie Aukongo constantly wonders about who she is. From the first pages, she asks herself: «I know who I am, if I do not even know who is the woman to whom I owe my life?»<sup>156</sup>. She defines herself as a Black German, «black on the outside and white inside»<sup>157</sup>. The transcultural identity of Stefanie finds expression right in her name, that unites one German name (Stefanie) with the Finnish<sup>158</sup> name of her African aunt (Lahya) and with an African surname (Aukongo). When Stefanie was in Bellin for the first time, she herself, who has always been surrounded by whites, found it difficult to distinguish her African fellows: «There, what happened to all those who are not used to black faces happened to me - for me, the girls and boys from Africa looked exactly the same»<sup>159</sup>. And, even though Stefanie feels she does not even belong to the community of GDR children from Namibia, she perceives that they are united by a sense of disorientation: «I had led a completely different life in the GDR. At one point, however, our experiences were similar: wherever we were, we were not really at home anywhere»<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>155</sup> Leonzio L., *Emigrata due volte*, p. 37 [my translation].

<sup>156</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.2 (“My four mothers”).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, ch.18 (“Kalunga's child”).

<sup>158</sup> Due to the establishment of Finnish missionaries in the Owamboland.

<sup>159</sup> Aukongo S.L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.9 (“Nothing for the elite”).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, ch.16 (The beetle in my stomach).

Then, *Child No. 95* and *Kalunga's Child* are the stories of a journey that is both physical and metaphorical. A journey that starts with many questions, but that ends with their resolution, embodied in the elaboration of a new transcultural identity. Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, in this way, give a testimony of their global lives. Since their autobiographies deal with the connection between two countries – and its incidence in individual lives – these autobiographies could provide significant contributions to global history, with the emergence of new perspectives that otherwise would remain in the shadow. *Child No. 95* and *Kalunga's Child* provide at the same time an historical memory and an individual memory, by interweaving an historical-political content with the intimate narration of the autobiographical subject.

Furthermore, since they deal with global connections, they cross the borders both physically and metaphorically, by placing at the intersection between different countries, many histories and various literary genres. They offer «a transcultural delineation of what it means to grow up in the GDR as a Namibian girl»<sup>161</sup>. Then – especially for what concerns *Child No. 95* – they can be considered examples of migration literature in the German language. They can also embody examples of the fourth generation DDR literature, since they are autobiographies of young authors who have spent their childhood and adolescence in East Germany and who have experienced the collapse of the Berlin Wall<sup>162</sup>. Furthermore, since the particularity of Namibian history, they can be viewed as examples of colonial and post-colonial literature. *Child No. 95* and *Kalunga's Child*, in fact, document the history of colonialism perpetrated by the South African regime but, at the same time, they bear witnesses to the solidarity established between Namibia and its former colonial power, Germany. Both autobiographies provide the reader with the historical background of Namibia and of the German colonial involvement in Namibia, by including this information in the text and also in appendixes.

Dirk Göttsche highlights that some German texts written by African authors, such as Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, «recontextualize the transgenerational “post-memory” of (German) colonialism, which is distinct from both personal memory and contested historical memory, in the light of transcultural experience in global migration, traumatizing violence in Africa, and diasporic achievement»<sup>163</sup>. Some of them, in addition, «interlink postcolonial memory with prominent German memory discourses, such as memory of the German Democratic Republic and the Wende»<sup>164</sup>.

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<sup>161</sup> Berndt K., Shared paradoxes in Namibian and German History, p. 350.

<sup>162</sup> Leonzio E., Emigrata due volte, p. 30.

<sup>163</sup> Göttsche D., Recollection and Intervention, pp. 245-246.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

For their power to touch themes that are relevant from an historical, memorial and transcultural points of view, *Child No. 95* and *Kalunga's Child* emerge as precious historical documents that enrich the studies of global history. They, in fact, are stories of individual lives in a global context, which allow for an exploration of intercultural connections and global changes from a different perspective. The micro perspective that emerges from the autobiographies appears as a lens through which history can be viewed. Since they have a global setting, the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo combine the macro and the micro levels, providing in this way a new enriched historical landscape. In this final chapter, I highlight and analyse the new facets that emerge altering the scale of observation and using the microscopic observation provided by their global autobiographies.

## 4.2 Image of Africa

The image of Africa that emerges from the autobiographies is in some way significant of the inner conflict that has afflicted the two women. The feelings of fear pervade the tale of the first years of Lucia Engombe, during which she wondered about the homeland that she was forced to leave: «During the many speeches to which my mother listened attentively with hundreds of others, the one word with which I was strangely familiar was repeatedly mentioned: *Namibia*. “What is Namibia?” I asked my mother. “Your motherland,” she replied»<sup>165</sup>. Therefore, she learnt from her mother that Namibia was her motherland, which will be later called her «estranged motherland»<sup>166</sup>.

The same image emerges also from the first pages of *Kalunga's Child*, in an episode during which Stefanie read the news of her own birth on a German newspaper of 1979: «I read [...] "place of birth: Berlin". And below: "Stefanie in the arms of her mother, expelled from their homeland, Namibia". "Place of birth: Berlin", that was true, but "homeland Namibia" sounded strange to me. How can an unknown country be my home?»<sup>167</sup>.

The myth of the homeland in de-territorialized subjects is often subjected to a process of transfiguration and distortion, since it pursues a need for an identity claim that, in fact, is even stronger in transnational and diasporic communities. The term “deterritorialization” refers to the condition of individuals, communities and groups deriving from their displacement and their rootedness in spaces

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<sup>165</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part I, ch.1 (“When my mother cut down trees”).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.10 (“Germany above everything”).

<sup>167</sup> Aukongo S.L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.2 (“My four mothers”).

that are different from the place of origins<sup>168</sup>. One of the consequences of the deterritorialization is that the de-territorialized subjects elaborate particular conceptions of their existences and develop feelings of belonging and exclusion towards both the new home and the homeland<sup>169</sup>. The result is that, as Appadurai points out, deterritorialization leads the individuals to invent a homeland, that exists only in their imagination<sup>170</sup>. From a certain perspective, Stefanie Aukongo and Lucia Engombe can be considered as de-territorialized subjects who try to give linearity to their lives through the autobiographical writing. The retreat into their identity, the continuous search for something with which to identify themselves, lead them to shape the image of their homeland. The homeland can be invented, imagined, idealized, demonized, it can be distorted by external influences, can assume negative connotations. In both autobiographies, in fact, a negative image of Africa can be glimpsed. In the first pages of *Child No. 95*, that image emerges in the sufferance of a scared and starving child. In *Kalunga's Child*, similarly, a negative image of Africa dominates the first part of the story. The Angolan refugee camp, to which the one-year old Stefanie returned with her mother, emerges as the place that endangered the life of the little Stefanie, as a place of «destruction and human misery on an impressive scale»<sup>171</sup>. And the extreme misery of Katutura, a suburb in Windhoek whose name means “the place where we don't want to live”, appears vividly in both autobiographies<sup>172</sup>.

Furthermore, the perspective of the autobiographical subjects seems influenced by a sort of Eurocentric attitude that has touched the two women during their stay in East Germany. As Leonzio points out, in fact, in *Child No. 95*, «the polarity between a good Germany and a bad Africa is preserved throughout the book»<sup>173</sup>. This is well visible in Lucia's sentence: «Lions in the open African savannahs were a part of me, but I longed for the princesses in the green forests in Germany»<sup>174</sup>. Here, Engombe expresses her inner conflict by proposing the stereotyped dichotomy typical of the European view. That “Eurocentric” attitude, which emerges in a not so latent way in both accounts, is a symptom of a successful assimilation, which has led to the development of a distorted image of their African homeland. The image that Lucia makes of Namibia, for example, is

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<sup>168</sup> Fabietti U., Malighetti R., Matera V. (2012), *Dal tribale al globale, Introduzione all'antropologia*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, p. 175.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>170</sup> Appadurai A. (2001), *Modernità in polvere: dimensioni culturali della globalizzazione*, Roma: Meltemi, p. 72.

<sup>171</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.4 (“The finger in the flames”).

<sup>172</sup> Katutura was the township where most Black Namibians were transferred during apartheid, forced by South Africans to move there. Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part III, ch.11 (“Child Nr. 95”); Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.14 (“My father's dream”).

<sup>173</sup> Leonzio E., *Emigrata due volte*, p. 34 [my translation].

<sup>174</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part III, ch.2 (“A cake divided into 12 pieces equals”).

distorted by European books or reduced to political slogans. And this will be a further cause for disorientation at the time of her homecoming. In the story of Lucia's return to Namibia, in fact, her motherland appears totally different from the image that had been transmitted to her in previous years: «only bush, dry grasslands, a few rocks. None of the blue brooks or green meadows that served as models for SWAPO's colours and that now adorned the national flag»<sup>175</sup>. Furthermore, as Göttsche points out, European lessons on Africa, whose purpose was to keep alive the link with their African roots, ended up transmitting stereotypical colonial images of African life<sup>176</sup>. In fact, Stefanie comments on the pictures of Africa in German books by saying: «this created an image of Africa, which other German children had in mind at the time: people wore raffia skirts, lived in thatched huts, had a lot of fun, and monkeys jumped around everywhere. That's how I imagined my homeland»<sup>177</sup>. Similarly, Lucia Engombe comments on lessons that show them a «colourful Africa made of monkeys and safari entertainment»<sup>178</sup>:

They showed us an Africa that seemed odd to me. For example, one question in the book asked, “Can monkeys read?” It was admittedly funny, but the Finnish textbook showed the monkey on the roof of a pink car driving through a colourful game park. “Does one drive through the zoo in Africa?” I asked the teacher. “Must you always ask so many questions? Can't you for once be quiet for a few minutes?” she barked at me. Because, like me, she had as little chance of knowing that, in Namibia, a game park comprised a huge farming area with wild animals<sup>179</sup>.

Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo seem to present the typical Western vision especially when they talk about *civilization*. The strict organization of the days in East Germany, in fact, astonishes Lucia, who, accustomed to a different sense of time in Africa, says: «that we survived the adjustment to *European civilisation* unscathed was due to the attentiveness of our caregivers, who were in active service around the clock»<sup>180</sup>. And Stefanie's first conscious journey to Namibia presented all the characteristics of a journey to exotic Africa conducted by a European explorer: «somehow it looked fascinating in an exotic way. It was a small world apart, from which I knew nothing»<sup>181</sup>. But Namibia appeared to Stefanie also as a monotonous country, a desolate land full of bushes, weeds and desert expanses. In the judgment that Stefanie expresses after seeing how they

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.11 (“Child nr. 95”).

<sup>176</sup> Göttsche D. (2014), *Cross-cultural Memoryscapes*, p. 241.

<sup>177</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.11 (“If the letters came from Africa”).

<sup>178</sup> Moll N., *La diaspora verso la Germania dell'Est e il ritorno in Africa narrati da Lucia Engombe in Kind Nr. 95*, p. 122 [my translation].

<sup>179</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part III, ch.2 (“A cake divided into 12 pieces equals”).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., part II, ch.1 (“The manor for displaced children”), [my emphasis].

<sup>181</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.15 (“In the bush”).

lived in Owamboland, the ethnocentric mechanism of her mind is clearly perceptible: «I had to think about my history lessons a few years ago: we had studied *primitive* people. And I wondered how people could live like that. *Without civilization*. Now I had the feeling of being suddenly among them!»<sup>182</sup>. Therefore, the image proposed by Stefanie during her first journey in Namibia perpetuates the western narratives on Africa, portrayed as a site of darkness and negativity. That tale could even suggest the Conradian image of Africa, perceived as unknowable, mysterious, as a primitive and irrational continent<sup>183</sup>. However, in the course of the narrative of *Kalunga's Child*, there is a progressive overcoming of this cultural constructs:

I began to wonder if I was really right with my so far rather negative attitude towards the simple life of *meekulus*. How much did I depend on the results of civilization? Was the wristwatch really essential? It is said: Africans have time, Europeans have watch. I think it's true. [...] Finally, I came to the conclusion that I would not be satisfied with either one world or the other, I needed both<sup>184</sup>.

The overcoming of the negative image of Africa goes hand in hand with Stefanie's awareness to be an African in Berlin. Then, the exotic image of a primitive Africa is gradually replaced by a mature re-appropriation of her own roots and a re-negotiation of her culture, that leads her to the affirmation of her transcultural identity. Given the different path taken by Lucia Engombe, it is difficult to say whether this awareness has been reached at the end of her autobiography. The initial negative image of Africa is certainly reshaped and revised in the course of the narrative, but the frustration of being part of the "forgotten elite" and the nostalgia of East Germany obviously do not allow her to see her African homeland with the same spirit as Stefanie. In fact, Stefanie will continue to live on a transnational level, as a Namibian in Berlin. Lucia's transcultural identity, on the other hand, is expressed in the recreation of her German microcosm in Namibia. The different expressions of their transcultural identities represent different ways of reconciliation of their inner conflicts and, at the end, give to the reader two different images of Africa: one dominated by melancholy for the German world, the other by the gratitude of being able to live both the worlds.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid. [my emphasis].

<sup>183</sup> Achebe C. (2016), An Image of Africa – Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 57 (1), pp. 14-27. (Amended version of the second Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, February 1975; later published in the *Massachusetts Review*, vol. 18, no. 4, winter 1977, Amherst).

<sup>184</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.24 ("My grandmother's gifts").

### 4.3 Image of DDR

As anticipated, in both autobiographies, a positive image of Germany emerges in opposition to the ambiguous image of Africa. In *Child No. 95*, for the little girl Lucia, Germany was at the beginning an empty name, a place she knew nothing about. But that was enough for her to crave to go there, just to escape from the hunger of the refugee camp. In her view, as she writes in the first pages, DDR had protected her from that poverty<sup>185</sup>. After Lucia's arrival, East Germany soon became her dream place, where the snow is exchanged for sugar: «this must be sugar, I thought, and I was not the only one. It never crossed my mind that it could be salt. Because in the place I was now, only sweet things could exist»<sup>186</sup>. Engombe highlights especially the positive aspects of East Germany, such as the sense of security and protection that she felt. In a world already divided by a wall, Lucia and the other children lived protected by further fences, which kept them hidden from eventual external aggressions. At first, this way of living behind fences made them feel protected, but then it made them feel trapped in a world that controlled their lives. Since Lucia lived within this system, it cannot be said that she had experienced fully what was the life in the DDR. Rather, she lived under SWAPO's protection, inside the «beautiful GDR»<sup>187</sup>, but at the same time isolated from it.

The positive image of East Germany appears vividly also in *Kalunga's Child*, that in some points seems to be an ode to DDR. The title itself with which an edition has been published is proof of this: "Kalunga's Child: How the GDR Saved My Life". German Democratic Republic, however, is praised not so much for the underlying ideology, but rather for those historical circumstances that have allowed Stefanie to live a life surrounded by that love and those attentions that she needed. Therefore, Aukongo does not propose an examination of what had been GDR's policy, but she express her innate gratitude for a system that had accepted her. Naturally, it seems obvious to her to love the state that saved her life:

I took note of the "Ten Commandments of the Young Pioneers" - the first three said: "We Young Pioneers love our German Democratic Republic, we young pioneers love our parents, we young pioneers love peace." I owed my parents and the DDR a happy life, then it was easy for me to love them<sup>188</sup>.

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<sup>185</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, An old photo.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, part II, ch.1 ("The manor for displaced children"). See also Kenna C., *Homecoming*, p. 74.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, part II, ch.8 ("The kiss").

<sup>188</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.10 ("Lard sandwich").

#### 4.4 Children of *Solidarity*

Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo are both objects of the pact of solidarity struck between East Germany and Namibia. Lucia Engombe was one of the 430 Namibian children who were welcomed in East Germany after the Cassinga massacre. Stefanie Aukongo, instead, was an exceptional case since she was not part of the GDR-children from Namibia, but was adopted by a German family. Aukongo documents such pact of solidarity, providing also an external testimony of that group of children in Bellin and in Staßfurt. Forced to be with them for short periods, in order to strengthen her ties with Namibia, she discovers that not only is this not possible, since they are now becoming assimilated into the German world, but that she does not even feel like she belongs to their community.

Aukongo – as well as Engombe – includes historical explanations about the relationship between Namibia and Germany. They go into detail on the dynamics between the two countries. Stefanie herself was adopted insofar as she embodied the symbol of connection between the two countries. And the Schmieders were considered as one of the best examples of the socialist principle of solidarity. As Stefanie writes, Rudi Schmieder, in an interview of 1999, demonstrates the solidarity of the ex-DDR, by saying: «we belong to a generation for which yes means yes, with all its consequences»<sup>189</sup>. And Stefanie comments:

I think it's a nice description of a solidarity that has nothing to do with politics, but only with humanity. Without politics, however, the effort of relief for me could never have been achieved. Because the official responsibility for me was entrusted to the Solidarity Committee of the DDR and the SWAPO<sup>190</sup>.

Therefore, for Stefanie solidarity is the means that has saved her life. Solidarity must be pursued as a human gesture. But it is only thanks to the politics that a human gesture becomes powerful.

Lucia Engombe also gives a precise account of the solidarity:

East Berlin supported Nujoma and his men by way of millions of Deutsche Mark, uniforms, trucks and weapons for the soldiers until 1989. After the Cassinga massacre, Nujoma successfully appealed to the GDR government to treat the injured in Berlin. But the enterprising Sam had an ever more far-reaching plan, *of which I was to become a minute part*. [...] The negotiations dragged on for months until the SED leadership and SWAPO agreed, in September, on 15 adults who were to be trained as governesses, as well as 80 children between the ages of 4 and 7. *I was one of them*<sup>191</sup>.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., ch.5 (“Easter eggs for the Minister”).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Engombe, *Child No. 95*, part I, ch.3 (“An adventure, a journey!”), [my emphasis].

In *Child No. 95*, other socialist countries, who during the Cold War stood for independence movements, are often mentioned. Once again, it is the mother who gives a simplistic answer to her children's questions, by defining what the Soviet Union was: «Jo wanted to know what Soviet Union was. My mother said, "It's a country that is very far away. People who live there help us [...]"»<sup>192</sup>.

Engombe also explains the situation in Staßfurt, where not only Namibians, but also Mozambicans, Cubans and Vietnamese were welcomed. The street where they were accommodated was called the "International Friendship Street", «"the longest street in the GDR", the Staßfurt inhabitants called it, because it reached "from the Caribbean across Africa to Asia"»<sup>193</sup>.

It can be said that both Engombe and Aukongo do not give a real judgment of this political agreement that has conditioned their lives. But while Aukongo talks about it quite positively, feeling an innate gratitude for this value that allowed her to live a happy life, Engombe's attitude is ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. *Solidarity* emerges in her tale as a background that has pervaded and influenced her whole life. On one hand, Engombe points out that the DDR has protected her for many years, but on the other she seems critical of the agreement that has carried her from one side of the world to another. Often, in the course of the narrative, she seems frustrated by the fact that, for much of her youth, external factors made decisions for her. And, although by stealth, *Child No. 95* can leave a sour taste to the reader, who perceives Lucia's own sense of disorientation.

#### 4.5 In SWAPO's care

The liberation movement SWAPO shaped the lives of the two women. Born during the liberation war, Engombe and Aukongo saw the SWAPO's development from their childish perspectives. Although Stefanie Aukongo provides the reader with all the necessary information to understand the historical background, she did not go too far in giving a judgment of the liberation movement. A hint of criticism toward SWAPO can be glimpsed only when Stefanie is not accepted in the group of children that is supposed to become the future Namibian elite. All the children selected by the SWAPO are perfectly healthy – Stefanie points out – and then she comments with an ironic tone saying that this is very strange, given that the war has mutilated many children<sup>194</sup>.

The criticism toward SWAPO becomes less implicit in Engombe's autobiography. The rigid indoctrination to which Lucia is subjected, pervades the whole narrative. SWAPO's dogma, and the

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., part I, ch.2 ("The hunger years").

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., part III. ch.1 ("Another farewell"); See also Kenna C., *Homecoming*, p. 26.

<sup>194</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.9 ("Nothing for the elite").

importance of liberation struggle, are obviously not always taken seriously by Namibian children. Everything is internalized as imposed from above. They are taught to love their homeland and to fight as soldiers, as if it were a homework.

We learnt how to raise our fist like they did and shout “Viva Nujoma!”, knowing by now what it meant. If we shouted “Down, Botha!”, we also indeed meant the new President of South Africa, hated him from the depths of our children’s hearts, and wanted to give him such a good hiding – like someone from the group next door<sup>195</sup>.

The gratitude of the Namibian children towards SWAPO is practically imposed on them. SWAPO saved their lives and gave them a solid education. Who does not feel grateful, who does not adhere to the SWAPO’s principles, is threatened to be sent back. Then, after her return to Namibia, Lucia discovers all the flaws of the system in which she grew up. Her father’s discourse is a real attack on SWAPO. His judgment on SWAPO «not only reverses negatively the myth of Lucia's political homeland [...] but also question the meaning of her German years»<sup>196</sup>. He, in fact, accuses SWAPO having carried out a brain-washing on Namibian children. Lucia, astonished, wonders: «it was my brain that SWAPO was to have ‘washed’! Had the party actually done that? Had they succeeded?»<sup>197</sup>. She discovers also that her mother cooperated with SWAPO, moving away from her husband, in order to protect her children.

Nora Moll argues that an absolute judgment of positivity or negativity cannot be formulated. Lucia suspends her judgment on all the phases of her life, by preferring to simply bring out the memory of her painful but emotional adventure of double migration<sup>198</sup>. However, her judgment lies inevitably in her frustration to have been a pawn in the hands of a political system. She, in some way, without taking any explicit political positions, condemns SWAPO for having destroyed her family<sup>199</sup>.

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<sup>195</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part II, ch.6 (“Soldiers don’t cry”).

<sup>196</sup> Moll N., La diaspora verso la Germania dell’Est e il ritorno in Africa narrati da Lucia Engombe in *Kind Nr. 95*, pp. 130 [my translation].

<sup>197</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part IV, ch.8 (“A destroyed family”).

<sup>198</sup> Moll N., La diaspora verso la Germania dell’Est e il ritorno in Africa narrati da Lucia Engombe in *Kind Nr. 95*, pp. 130-131 [my translation].

<sup>199</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part. IV, ch.8 (“A destroyed family”).

#### 4.6 Faith: between socialism and Kalunga

In both autobiographies the importance of religion and the contrast between the faith and the socialist doctrine emerges. The faith in Kalunga emerges in all its strength from the first pages of *Child No. 95*. Kalunga is portrayed as a friend for the little Lucia, as a presence that will never abandon her. In an episode during which Lucia and other children were trained to walk in the forest alone during the night, Lucia, scared, prayed to Kalunga to protect her, when the teacher shouted: «“There is no God. Just remember that! I don’t want to hear that rubbish again!” [...] “You are the elite of the new Namibia! You don’t need God. Your leader’s name is Sam Nujoma!”»<sup>200</sup>. Then, presuming that SWAPO and God are mutually exclusive, Lucia hid God somewhere deep inside her heart. The contrast between religion and politics more once again disorients Lucia.

The importance of the fate in Aukongo’s life is visible already from the title. After all the adventures that Stefanie has experienced she finally finds the sense of her life in Kalunga, thanks to her grandmother’s teachings. Even in this case, the conflict between religion and political doctrine emerges, but Stefanie overcomes it and finally resolves her doubts by finding all the answers in the faith:

No, I had no idea that I was Kalunga's daughter. God, faith, religion - what did they have to do with me? My socialization took place in the real socialism. Ironically, should I be a child of God? My skepticism did not last long. After that, my feeling told me: Meekulu is right. Only then everything made sense - when everything became connected. The good and the bad. War and love. This directly affected my life. There had been a civil war, hundreds of people were dead, but many had been saved. My mother and I were part of it<sup>201</sup>.

#### 4.7 The evil enemy: South African regime

The South African regime is a presence that acts as a background to both autobiographies. It is a distant presence, which embodies the enemy of their distant homeland. Engombe and Aukongo, in the guise of narrators, give a retrospective memory of the South African invasion of Namibia and often mention the apartheid regime highlighting its brutality. However, in the guise of the two children living in East Germany, it seems that they portray the war as far away, and what emerges in their stories is rather its consequences on their global lives. The memory of apartheid in a child’s

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., Part II, ch.6 (“Soldiers don’t cry!”).

<sup>201</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga’s Child*, ch.18 (“Kalunga’s Child”).

perception emerges as a puzzle reconstructed through the stories of parents or adults. As soon as they arrive in Bellin – Lucia tells in *Child No. 95* – some children refuse to eat food offered by whites, thinking it was poisoned, «because some of the parents who had been warped by apartheid told their children that white people were not favourably disposed towards us»<sup>202</sup>. Then, the South Africa regime remains an evil presence in both autobiographies, a presence that the two women had experienced in a direct and, at the same time, indirect way. Their distance from the war, in fact, is at the same time a consequence of the war itself and the reason for their non-involvement. South Africa, painted therefore as the enemy, after 1990 will then lose the negative connotation and will be defined, at the end of Stefanie's autobiography, as the homeland of Mandela<sup>203</sup>.

#### 4.8 The day everything changed: 4 May 1978

«Of what brutal brutality South Africa was capable, it was demonstrated not last by the Cassinga massacre»<sup>204</sup>, Stefanie explains. Engombe and Aukongo often mention such dramatic historical event in their autobiographies. In particular, the Cassinga massacre is a *leitmotiv* of *Kalunga's Child*, which starts and ends with it. All the physical problems that Stefanie suffers, in fact, are due to the wounds of her mother during the massacre of Cassinga, the refugee camp in which pregnant women were supposed to be safer. The events of 4 May 1978, narrated in the third person because it concerns Clementine, are described in a harsh and agitated tone and depict raw images on what happened in Cassinga. Nightmares that make Stefanie relive the hell her mother went through, torment her since childhood. Only when Stefanie investigates and discovers what her mother had to face in Cassinga, the autobiography can be said to have ended.

Lucia Engombe, who fortunately had not experienced it, portrays 4 May 1978 as «a terrible day»<sup>205</sup>, during which «hundreds of children became orphans»<sup>206</sup>. That day, Lucia explains, «No bombs fell on us in Nyango; we saw the reconnaissance planes in the sky and in this way got to know war's mean little sister – fear. We lived with it»<sup>207</sup>. In East Germany, Lucia spent eleven years with many children who had lost their parents during the massacre. She also met some children who

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<sup>202</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part II, ch..1 (“the manor of displaced children”).

<sup>203</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.22 (“Who thinks must die”).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, ch.5 (“Easter eggs for the Minister”).

<sup>205</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part I, ch.3 (“An adventure, a journey!”).

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

survived the massacre, and she comments on their strange and unfriendly behaviours: «We had to be especially careful of them because they constantly tried to show how superior they were»<sup>208</sup>. As a child, she understands the drama of that terrible day only when she hears the story of Erika, a woman who has survived the massacre: «“It was early in the morning. Suddenly there were many planes in the sky. We didn’t know what was happening when bombs started falling. People with whom one had just been speaking lay there in their own blood”»<sup>209</sup>.

Then, the Cassinga massacre was the beginning of everything. It was the height of the war and the beginning of the transnational lives of Lucia and Stefanie, who, with their story, are able to give the reader an account of that dramatic day.

#### **4.9 The German *Wende* and the Namibian independence**

The turning point of 1989-1990 shocked the global order and affected the destiny of the two women, who, bounced between Germany and Namibia, were witnesses to the global historical upheavals of both countries. The news of the withdrawal of the South African troops and the fall of the Berlin Wall came soon to Lucia and Stefanie. In a world that was heading for global changes, the young Lucia cannot understand all the contradictions that had governed her life. Namibian freedom, for her, meant also that the training to which she had been subjected in the last ten years was now meaningless: «I was unaware that a ceasefire had been in effect in Namibia since November 1988. But what did that mean, after all? Freedom for our country? After it had been drilled into us for so long that we had to be ready to fight? I didn’t really take it seriously»<sup>210</sup>. Lucia's life continued unchanged for some time, unaffected by the changes that were taking place in her homeland. The remoteness of her country did not make clear the importance of Namibian freedom to Lucia, who was a seventeen-year-old at that time worried about her own freedom. The situation began to affect them after they learned they would have to go back to Namibia. Furthermore, the tensions of the election campaign of SWAPO, in view of the first free election in Namibia, was perceived also by Namibian children in Germany. They, for example, had to pay attention to everything they wrote in letters to their parents, because everything will be then controlled by SWAPO, which, during the election campaign, was trying to improve its image, damaged by the establishment of the Parent’s Committee. As Lucia explains, «some worried parents had assumed SWAPO was keeping us in the GDR against

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., part II, ch.2 (“The last louse from Africa”).

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., part II, ch.7 (“The well-behaved Lucia”).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.8 (“Locked up”).

our will. Neither did we know that this had become part of the election campaign in Namibia, and nor did we have any idea what an “election campaign” might be...»<sup>211</sup>. They learned that, at that time, the second largest party in Namibia was the DTA, presented as SWAPO’s enemy. «In our world view to date, South Africa had been the enemy. So the DTA had to be something similar»<sup>212</sup>, Lucia comments, by providing the simplistic prospect of a young girl living far from her home country. In the meantime, East Germany, which had been their home for the last years, was falling apart:

I was just busy doing my homework when Boneti stormed into the apartment I was sharing with Melli: “Just imagine! In Berlin they are dancing on the Wall! It’s a huge festival!” I looked up briefly. “Of course!” I said and repeated the standard quotation attributed to Comrade Erich Honecker: “Neither an ox nor a donkey is able to stop the progress of socialism.” “Then take a look at what ox and donkey are doing now!” Boneti said, and disappeared. “He’s having us on!” Melli said, but we still went to the group room and stared at the black-and-white TV set in disbelief. The inhabitants of Berlin were celebrating with champagne on the streets and were happy to be allowed to cross from one side of the divided city to the other. I couldn’t quite make sense of it<sup>213</sup>.

Lucia did not understand the sense of exodus to West Germany, since her life in the DDR took place in a world of its own, which did not allow her to understand such dynamics from an internal perspective. The consequences of *Wende*, for her, materialized in being able to buy things that were previously not available: «I spent my pocket money on all kinds of delicious sweets like Duplo, kinder chocolate, Nutella as well as romance novelettes. Incredible that the Westerners had had all of this the whole time. I was trying to make up for much of what I’d been missing»<sup>214</sup>.

Differently from Lucia Engombe, the historical upheavals that run over Germany, are lived by the little Stefanie with a childish dismay that is ironically exaggerated. The scene in which she, with her little “sister” Jenny, cries the end of the DDR, could indicate her genuine sorrow for the loss of what was for her a salvation. The fact of being part of a German family that had so well adhered to the socialist principles of solidarity, could then have accentuated that reaction. As Lucia Engombe, also Stefanie highlights the same point: «my childish perception was mainly limited to the fact that classmates suddenly had "Duplo" chocolate bars»<sup>215</sup>. The reunification of Germany, however, did not affect her much. Indeed, its timing proved to be functional for her: «In reality, German unity seemed perfect to me: I still kept a memory of the previous era, and at the same time I was at the age when it

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.8 (“Locked up”)

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., part III, ch.11 (“Child Nr. 95”).

<sup>215</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga’s Child*, ch.12 (“Erich, you cannot go!”).

was beginning to say goodbye to childhood. Basically, a positive development»<sup>216</sup>. The negative consequences of the reunification will be revealed to her soon after<sup>217</sup>.

If the news of the Honecker's resignation firstly upset Stefanie, who entitles that chapter "Erich, you cannot go!", the news of the Namibian liberation had a different effect on her. The concomitance of the two global events made Stefanie fear of having to return to her freed homeland. Thus, the news of the end of the war, joyous in itself, is actually a matter of concern for her own destiny.

Sooner or later everything would fly away. And then what? An answer was not easy to find, because in the meantime something significant had happened in Namibia. I did not know anything about it and I certainly did not want to know it. The impact on my fate would have been completely unknown to me: since the beginning of 1989, the South African troops had withdrawn from the occupied country, tens of thousands of Namibians had returned to their homeland. On 9 November, when the Berlin Wall "fell" at night, the first free elections took place in Namibia. SWAPO won its decade-long struggle for a politically independent Namibia. Sam Nujoma, who once held my small hand in the Berlin clinic, was elected president by a large majority<sup>218</sup>.

Therefore, the changes, both in Namibia and in Germany, posed new challenges for Lucia and Stefanie. The liberation of Namibia allows them, willingly or not, to return to their homeland. The reunification of Germany endangers their permanence there and, as I analyse in the next paragraph, brings out those flaws that were not present– or that were silenced – in DDR.

#### 4.10 Racist legacy of Germany

From the tale of two Black Germans growing up in East Germany, the thematic of the racist legacy of German's history inevitably comes to light. That theme emerges with more strength in the two autobiographies after the German reunification. Stefanie Lahya Aukongo and Lucia Engombe, in fact, has had first-hand experience of racist incidents perpetrated by white Germans. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Lucia and other children are increasingly experiencing hostile attitudes on the part of Germans who, for example, order them to not go to their disco, or curse at them with racial insults: «Suddenly one voice rang out above the rest: "Germany to the Germans!" One by one the others joined in. It did not exactly sound good. But I didn't put much store by it. We didn't want to take Germany away from them anyway: we just wanted to go to school here for one more year»<sup>219</sup>.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., ch.13 ("Into the night").

<sup>217</sup> Stefanie will discover racism in the reunified Germany, as I bring out in the next section.

<sup>218</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga's Child*, ch.12 ("Erich, you cannot go!").

<sup>219</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part III, ch.10 ("Germany above everything").

Also Stefanie, after 1990, was a witness of racist violence perpetrated by German boys to a black friend of her, David. Then, she herself tells of having suffered racist violence in a bus that took her to university. Stefanie wonders: «what went wrong after the “Wende”? The DDR had brought me to Germany before I was born. Solidarity had been such an important concept. Why do not people know it anymore?»<sup>220</sup>. After German reunification, in fact, the violence against Black Germans spread explicitly. This violence was not present in East Germany or, rather, it was silenced. In the DDR, the socialism of difference, as Peggie Piesche calls it<sup>221</sup>, actually hides racist stereotypes. In fact, «in the GDR’s relatively homogeneous and closed society, Blacks were presumed to be exotic, foreign, and different»<sup>222</sup>. This emerges also in *Child No. 95*, where the distinction between white and black classes reveals their racist foundation when the Namibians, given their ability to stand the heat, must attend school even in the hottest months, during which Germans are instead exempted<sup>223</sup>. Then, when Stefanie looks for answers to those racist behaviours that she had never seen before, her friend Synke tells her: «"Maybe there were xenophobic people in the GDR" [...] "But they did not dare show it, we were educated in Solidarity."»<sup>224</sup>

As Göttsche points out,

autobiographies with an East German background and written from a post-unification perspective [...] often combine an examination of Black German history and experience with a critical reassessment of the German Democratic Republic, where an official socialist internationalism masked really-existing racism<sup>225</sup>.

*Child No. 95* and *Kalunga’s Child* also do this. As Black Germans, Engombe and Aukongo bear witness to this aspect of German history, bringing out its colonial and racist heritage.

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<sup>220</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga’s Child*, ch.20 (“Bus line 154”).

<sup>221</sup> Piesche P. (2016), Making African Diasporic Past Possible, A Retrospective View of the GDR and Its Black (Step-) Children, in: Lennox S. (Ed.), *Remapping Black Germany*, pp. 226-242.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>223</sup> Engombe L., *Child No. 95*, part III, ch.2 (“A cake divided into 12 pieces equals”).

<sup>224</sup> Aukongo S. L., *Kalunga’s Child*, ch.13 (“Into the night”).

<sup>225</sup> Göttsche D., Self-Assertion, Intervention, and Achievement, p. 78.

## Conclusion

The present thesis aimed to re-examining the last period of the Namibian liberation war – and the involvement of East Germany in the process of transition to independence – in the light of the autobiographies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo. In order to achieve the objective, I have organized my work by highlighting two levels from which the historical processes can be investigated: the macro level, which must be considered as a broad perspective from which the history can be studied, with the purpose of bringing to light forms of interconnections between different countries, and the micro level, which allow to study a phenomenon from a decentering perspective, by highlighting the experiences of ordinary individuals who are placed on the margins of history.

I started the study with an historical chapter that portrayed the main phases of the Namibian liberation struggle and introduced the historical background in which the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo have taken place. Assuming a global perspective, the global interconnections and the underlying forces that had guided the process of transition to independence emerged. In this chapter, I provided the macro perspective of the Namibian-German history, bringing out the external elements that have contributed to the process of transition, and highlighting the relationship of solidarity struck by SWAPO and East Germany during the years of the struggle.

Then, in the third chapter, I have assumed a narrower perspective, providing a background to the life narratives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, who have experienced the historical processes presented in the second chapter. The introduction of the main elements of their autobiographies has shown how both women are driven by the desire to put in order their global lives and to find meaning of the historical processes that have governed their existences. Their transcultural identities, their way to live thrown between Namibia and Germany, elevate them to be guardians of an historical memory that poses itself at the intersection between different worlds and different histories.

In the last chapter, I highlighted the factors that emerged only thanks to the life narratives of two women who have experienced eventful historical processes. Their views on historical forces that guided their lives are obviously shaped by their personal experiences. The images that emerge from their autobiographies are the result of their special beyond-borders-positions. To cite a few examples, the image they have of their African homeland contains an imagined image that has undergone the influence of the Eurocentric stereotypes to which they have inevitably been subjected. Furthermore, the theme of the racist inheritance of Germany is a facet that emerges thanks to their story, the story of two black women who lived the end of the GDR. In addition, the image of SWAPO proposed by

Lucia Engombe brings out in all its strength the ambiguities of the liberation movement, which are still today subject of discussion in Namibia.

So, to resuming the main research question, what is the contribution of their autobiographies to the understanding of the history of Namibia – and its relationship with East Germany – during the period between 1978-1990? In order to answer, two sub-questions have drive me and have oriented the methodology employed: how can the concept "global life" be applied to the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo? In which ways are their perspectives relevant for global history? The answer to these two sub-questions allow to reflect on the methodological status of global history and to understand to what extent the autobiographies of ordinary individuals can provide relevant perspectives to the understanding of more general processes.

In answering to the first sub-question, it is evident from the analysis of *Child No. 95* and *Kalunga's Child* how the concept of "global lives" can find expression in the case studies of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo. Their lives can be defined global since they are shaped by historical upheavals on global scale. Their birth, their childhood and their adolescence were determined by political events and by political actors who made decision for their own lives. In the case of Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, such a decision saved her life. In the case of Lucia Engombe, the political agreement that has dominated her life gave her feelings of disillusionment and disappointment, which made her doubt the meaning of her entire story. A concrete consequence of their global lives lies in the formulation of their transcultural identities to which both women have come, even if through different paths. The transcultural identity of Stefanie Lahya Aukongo is the result of her voluntary discovery of her past and her roots, while the transcultural identity of Lucia Engombe seems as a (unconscious) strategy to face the new scenario of the homecoming imposed on her. Their global lives provide the perspective of marginal individuals who have undergone the historical processes, portraying the experiences of subjects who have not been able to completely channel the direction of their lives. In answering to the second sub-question, their perspective can be relevant for global history precisely because they portray broader historical processes from the marginal position of individuals who do not determinate the direction of the history, but who allow to «populate our model and theories with real people»<sup>226</sup>. From the analyses of the lives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, the role of autobiography gains the necessary importance. Their autobiographies make the abstract processes more concrete, bringing to light the role played by ordinary individuals.

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<sup>226</sup> Andrade T., *A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord*, p. 574.

Then, in answering to the main research question, the contribution of their autobiographies lies in the new dimension that emerges only thanks to their life narratives. Their global lives allow a combination between macro and micro levels, portraying the global history from a smaller perspective and bringing out some facets, which otherwise would remain in the shadow. With their autobiographies, Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo become witnesses of the global history. They shed light on Namibian history, on the history of the illegal occupation perpetrated by the South African regime, and on the relationship between Namibia and its former colonial power, Germany. They also shed light on the East German history and on the history of the *Wende*, having been witnesses to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of German Democratic Republic. Because of their power to cross boundaries and to stand at the intersection of multiple worlds and multiple literary genres, their autobiographies are able to enrich global history, giving the reader the tale of a transnational story viewed through eyes of little girls who are to become women.

With this thesis, I hope to have shown how individual autobiographies can be meaningful to history, and how global history can be reconciled with micro-history through the story of global lives, which provide new and unprecedented points of view. I do not claim to have applied the paradigms presented in the first chapter<sup>227</sup> with historical care, but they have guided me in the analysis of the two autobiographies. Through the deconstruction of the life narratives of Lucia Engombe and Stefanie Lahya Aukongo, in fact, the big narrative of the global history become fraught with new meanings, bringing out the power of the autobiographies, the power of microhistories. Microhistory is able to capture macrocosm<sup>228</sup>, bringing to light the impact that history has on human lives and therefore giving a human face to history.

The analyses of *Child No. 95* and *Kalungas Kind* have therefore brought to light many aspects and facets that could be further explored. In this thesis, I wanted to provide insights touching on those aspects of the two autobiographies that, in my opinion, are relevant and interesting for their power to enrich history. Each element analysed in the final chapter could be the subject of a separate study, could be the title of a thesis. A footnote, as Carlo Ginzburg taught, could be transformed into a book<sup>229</sup>.

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<sup>227</sup> See section 1.9.

<sup>228</sup> Trivellato F., *Microstoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory*, p. 131.

<sup>229</sup> Ginzburg C., *Il filo e le tracce*, p. 255.

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