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‘Eekamba adishe nadi ufanwe, eendingosho adishe na di ongelwe u pule kwali Nashima’¹: Nanghili Nashima, the performer and feminist intellectual

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Abstract

This article studies Nanghili Nashima's Oudano practices and public life. We discuss how her autobiographical public performance practices during apartheid and independent Namibia constitute feminism. The study mainly focused on the sound and video recordings currently archived at the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation's Music Library and on YouTube. This work offers critical engagement on themes of migration, sexuality and labour, challenging colonial, Christian, patriarchal and heteronormative norms, and systems in Ovawambo and African societies at large. We unpack her mobile work and public life as defiant and subversive, therefore, speaking truth to multiple forms of power. By listening collectively and closely to her performance work, the study argues that Nanghili Nashima emerged as a trans-local figure who relied on transgression through her Oudano praxis to embody agency and radical imagination as practices of freedom. It is on this basis that her intellectual tradition is situated in what Pumla Gqola has theorised as African feminist imagination.

Introduction

This paper studies the cultural, gender and political identities, and work of Nanghili Nashima (hereafter Nanghili) as performed in her chronicled orature in public spheres. Nanghili's was one of the few black women to be documented during colonial and post-colonial times in Namibia, especially as a musician and gender non-conformist.

Orford (2018) argues that literature has paid little attention to Namibian women in the 19th century, during colonialism and after independence, therefore suggested 'gathering scattered archives' as one approach of attending to this gap. We study the iconic and complex public life Nanghili, who was viewed as proscribed, insubordinate, obstinate or

¹ Direct Translation: 'May all cuca shops be called and all shebeens be assembled so that you ask about Nashima'. Cuca shops are Southern Africa's shebeens (liquor and essentials stores). This phrase is part of Nanghili Nashima's praise recital that she performed during her interview with Botelle and Kowalski (1999).

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irreligious in a dominantly Christianized and patriarchal communities of Ovawambo. The archival material of Nanghili at our disposal were all recorded in her old age, giving us glimpses and glances into her lived experience. It is for this reason that we see this collection as a scattered archive, which we unpack below in the methodology. The paper focuses on her musical and autobiographical material which we see as sites of her intellectual labour that she was deeply committed to until she passed away.

Nanghili was born in 1926² as Monika Haimene and grew up in times of Christian missionaries and colonial administration that played a major role in altering the politics of gender and sexuality of women. In an interview with Andrew Botelle and Kelly Kowalski that was to form part of the film *"The Power Stone"/ "Emanya L'Omundilo woShilongo"* (1999), Nanghili described herself to be of Ongandjela (in Omusati Region) descent but born in Omukwiyu Gwemanya in Ondonga (in Oshikoto Region). She further narrated that she spent her early years at Ongali, Ombadja (in Omusati Region) before she moved to villages of Ekaka laNamudenga and Oshimbyu shaHishosholwa, Okwalondo, Onandova, Eenghango and Enghandja in Oukwanyama (in Ohangwena Region). In Angola, she lived in Ondjiva, and its neighbouring villages Oukwangali waHanyangha, Embulunganga and Omusheshe. She described having lived with her various intimate partners in these parts of Namibia and Angola. She was at some point also married.

The influence of Christianity and colonisation with the support of patriarchal African traditions, at most succeeded in moulding and policing women to be submissive and obedient to men, therefore controlled the sexuality and assertiveness of women while stigmatizing them both in public and private spheres (Segueda, 2015). Buys & Nambala (2003: 34) discuss how the influence of missionaries was equated with good moral and social life; the adoption of the European lifestyle supposedly elevated the living standards of locals. Nanghili was explicitly critical of this "good influence" often pointing towards the erasure and cultural genocide of this colonial modernity.

Meanwhile, colonial policies, especially the migrant labour system, contributed to the de/construction of gender identities and gender relations. The colonial administration, together with the willing local patriarchal men, in relation to other identities that were deemed "traditional", remodelled and reproduced new meanings of gender and culture, and by implication, this bred new gendered identities (Becker, 2005). The colonial administration, for instance, restricted women's mobility as this was seen as a threat to both tradition and the colonial project. Women were increasingly restricted to domestic spheres and were not able to earn an income compared to men, which silenced and made women invisible. The trend was that of the husband as breadwinner and the wife and children as homemakers, which licensed men with power and authority (Becker, 2005). However, Nanghili's creative work evidently testifies to the refusal and defiance of this heteropatriarchal erasure, who, among some other women, created or reclaimed spaces to defy the fast-changing social and cultural landscape which was favouring and benefiting men. It is against all odds that women like Nanghili engaged in deconstructing the local

² Although no details of her birth date were found in existing writings, Shivute (2003) reports that Nanghili Nashima was 77 years old when she died in 2003, which makes her born in 1926.

notions of gender and sexuality by deliberately generating pleasure, agency, mobility, and liberation as key aspects of her feminist politics.

Nanghili's *oyimbo*³ of *Oudano* were her vehicle of plotting and mobilising her freedom of movement, labour, sexual and gender expression. *Oudano* is the Oshiwambo conceptual term that implies play, performance and performativity in everyday life practices of arts and culture, leisure, heritage, labour, religion, politics, sports, etc. It refers to multiple forms of play and playfulness; therefore, serves as a container of historical and cultural work. In Oshiwambo, it is embodied in traditional practices such as *oudano weengobe* (oxen show), *oudano wokoluvanda* (moonlight dances), *eenghama* (dances by a group of men) and *efundula* (initiation/rite of passage ritual). *Oudano* can also be traced in other ethnic groups as it is often translated in Setswana as Motshameko and in Shona as Mutambo, meaning that it is inherently an African concept of performance that is citational, orientational and colloquial. *Oudano* is a praxis, meaning that it is useful for doing intellectual and epistemic work and Nanghili's practice is a good example of this.

Nanghili's brand of *Oudano* includes praise poetry such as Okulitanga⁴ which is self-citational in nature, which is generally an act of paying homage, celebrating and showing pride in their totemic, familial, geopolitical and social ties. This form of orature is a practice of self-writing and an expression of belongingness that is often performed at social events (Mans and Mushaandja, 2017). *Omaliitango* are similar in form and structure to *Omitandu*, which are specific forms of praise poetry performed by Ovaherero. Kavari (2000) discusses various forms of Otjiherero praise songs and poetry as they relate to several other African praise forms and meanings, which he describes as "concise encyclopaedic sources of knowledge presented in a stylistic or poetic fashion" (Kavari, 2000: 18). Such praise performances have overlapping forms that historicise places, lineages and personalities, "widely intertwined with all sorts of social performances and discourses" (Kavari, 2000: 18). Nanghili's repertoire is not only made up of praise songs, but it also includes dance songs that are allusive texts. They hold substantive knowledge about her life, communities and southern Africa at large. Her practices in *Oudano* are important remnants of Nanghili's history of migration, labour and sexuality.

Nanghili was aware of the colonial society's discriminative expectations of her as a woman, in terms of her interactions with men and particular spaces she could occupy. However, she held autonomous spaces through her contentious personality and collective performances and orature; advocating for equal sexual, political, economic and social freedom. This historical study of Nanghili's intellectual labour is, therefore, a contribution to Namibian/African feminist discourses which have not received enough scholarly attention in Namibia. Given the hostility of Namibian patriarchal nationalism (Mans, 2003)

³ Generic songs that are typically sang at Owawambo's traditional events.

⁴ An Oshiwambo verb (pl. *omalitango*) that describes a traditional way of rhyming and expressively making oneself known; for example, describing your place of origin, life and love experiences among other personal narratives. Okulitanga was commonly conducted by men but we assume Nanghili became a role model to the following and younger generations of Owawambo women, who today practice okulitanga even on social media platforms.

and its inherited structural violence (Edwards-Jauch, 2016), Nanghili's work is a useful reference for contemporary feminists and gender non-conforming people's genealogies of activism and imaginaries. While Nanghili might not have identified as a feminist, her autobiography and work are evidence of what Gqola (2017) theorises as the African feminist imagination. "African feminist imagination demands the refashioning of new languages again and again, in conversation, taking risks, unlearning, unburdening and reloading" (Gqola, 2017: 165). Akawa (2014) and Becker (2000) wrote that the term feminism has been historically contested, rejected, and considered 'western' by some women in Namibia's liberation movement. However, this has changed in post-apartheid Namibia. We position Nanghili's life and work as feminist thoughts because the contemporary Namibian feminist movement has done the work of debunking myths that feminism is not African (Gawanas, Edwards-Jauch & Mwiya, 2020).

We are interested in reading Nanghili's work in relation to the feminist scholarship on Southern African women artists under colonialism and apartheid for us to point to the long-existing tradition of African feminist imaginations. We refer to Gqola's (2021) theorisation of liberation and imagination in the literary work of Miriam Tlali (1933-2017), the South African playwright, novelist and anti-apartheid activist. Pointing us to how Tlali's writing imagined freedom from the racial, gendered and class confinements of apartheid, Gqola argues that "...she wrote because she understood the ways in which writing and erasure were always linked to history and memory. The violence of erasure "led to myths about women's essence and invisibility" (Gqola, 2021: 20). To highlight this long-standing erasure of black women in history, we reference Yvette Abrahams' (2003) work on the life and resistance of Sarah Baartman (1789-1815), a Khoi woman who was exhibited in freak shows in 19th-century Europe. Abrahams' work points us to dysfunction and disjuncture as results of slavery and colonial history and therefore argues that for us to do justice to the historiography of Sarah Baartman, we must look at her art and resistance (Abrahams, 2003). Such anti-colonial resistance is reflected in the orature performed by Adelheid Mbuandjou (1918– 2020), recorded in 1954 in Omaruru, central Namibia by Ernst and Ruth Dammann. Mbuandjou is one of the Ovaherero women recorded performing Omitandu and Omitango that Kavari (2000) discusses. Rutihauser (2021) discusses Mbuandjou's praise song as one of self, place, and memory. Mbuandjou recites her maternal lineage and history of the colonial occupation of Omaruru during German colonialism in Namibia. Rutihauser reminds us that Mbuandjou's recital is an act of reclaiming the land that Ovaherero have lost during the genocide of 1904-1908. Tlali and Mbuandjou are both Nanghili's contemporaries while Baartman is their predecessor. Their contexts may differ, but their artistic works can be read as acts of resistance, inherently African feminist imagination.

Today, Nanghili's music is part of Namibia's rich musical heritage and has influenced many contemporary Namibian musical practises, such as Shambo⁵. Musicians such as Jackson Wahengo, Susana Haimbala and the late Tunakie followed in her musical footsteps and performed her music various times. Her work has also influenced veteran radio journalists

⁵ A traditional dance music genre of the Ovawambo people.

such as Lapaka Weyulu, who has largely identified with her work and often recited her praise poetry.

Methodology and key questions

This study employed both primary and secondary data sources such as audio or video recordings of her orature performances as well as newspaper articles about Nanghili. Our methods included close listening to lyrics, to audio recordings archived in the Music Library of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and to brief interview segments on social media sites such as YouTube. Hoffman (2021: 535) defines close listening as “...the attempt to grasp as much as possible of the audible features of a recording, which includes recorded features which do not appear on the label”, which indicates listening as a means of working through sound archives recorded during colonial periods. Nanghili’s work is deeply philosophical; her songs and rhymes are multi-layered and do not always mark singular meanings. This implies that meanings change depending on who is listening. However, in the events that Nanghili uses *okulitanga*, we analysed such data as part of her biography.

It is challenging to translate all her work verbatim as the meanings will either get diluted and/or become meaningless, especially to non-native speakers of Oshiwambo dialects who might not be familiar with the settings and the ‘spaces’ she comes from. We have rather opted to offer thematic and aesthetic translations that offer some context. In addition, the sound and visual material are remnants of Nanghili’s live performances, which also mark her lived experiences and imaginaries. These performances were recorded by the white broadcasters and filmmakers during and after apartheid, but are more than just content; they are traces and narrations of her lived experience and her imagination. To supplement these sources, we conducted interviews with informants such as journalists, co-performers, and contemporary musicians inspired by her.

We read Nanghili Nashima’s *oudano* as a method of theorising in practice. It is a praxis that informs our study’s conceptual framework. We pose the following questions as an attempt to understand Nanghili’s intellectual tradition.

- a) What do her movement and mobility tell us about her life?
- b) What were her artistic and ideological influences, and how did they influence her political thinking and cultural work?
- c) What does her feminist practice reveal about labour and sexual relations in her era?
- d) How does Nanghili Nashima’s work contribute to African feminist theory and method?

Data collection and analysis challenges

As authors, we acknowledge various challenges that we experienced during the conduct of data collection and analysis for this paper. While we managed to conduct some interviews and secondary data analyses, we faced challenges in gathering the data we initially envisaged to collect. These challenges are:

Interviews: some of the participants identified/targeted for interviews who knew Nanghili well and/or worked with her were unwilling⁶ or elderly and unable to recall prior events.

Secondary data: most of the acquired secondary data was incomplete. For example, we were unable to locate the missing pieces of the interviews on YouTube, the newspaper articles about her death, and the eulogy.

It is against these challenges that we primarily relied on archival material and recordings of her music that include the 1998 interview. While we acknowledge this methodological limitation, we maintain that the data collected is comprehensive enough to allow a conclusive position and make a significant contribution to African cultural studies. The established evidence will enable us or other researchers to build on the foundation to enrich and shape future research endeavours on Nanghili.

Accounts of Nanghili Nashima's public life

In the Botelle and Kowalski (1999) interview, Nanghili narrates that she started singing around 1941/1942. She emotionally recalls her youthful performance times while reflecting on the moment of the interview, which she describes as *olukateko otali u ongod*⁷. In that reflective expression of old age, experience and struggle, she also speaks about how her singing brings her to tears. Nanghili points to a young lady and wonders if she was as youthful as she is (Nanghili Nashima, 16 February 1999). Nanghili is famously known for her traditional poetry, which the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) Television and Oshiwambo Radio continue to air today (Shivute, 2003). According to Wahengo⁸, Nanghili's talent and performances were so unmatched and sought-after so much that her performance group was regularly invited to the gatherings of traditional chiefs at the Oukwanyama Kingdom at Oihole in Angola.

In mapping her life, Nanghili is also indicated to have been married various times, including at Onghala. According to Nangolo (2020), "her last matrimonial home was in Okahenge village, in the Ohangwena Region, where she was married to Hamunyela"⁹. We assume her motives for getting married several times had to do with not bearing children, therefore, possibly held responsible for childlessness by her spouses, which could have led to various marriages and divorces. Also, her outspoken and expressive character may

⁶ One of her relatives who is the heir to Nanghili Nashima's copyright refused to be interviewed. During the phone call we had with her, she raised a lot of issues relating to the exploitation of Nanghili Nashima's intellectual property by local artists and broadcasters and how she hardly receives royalties from the relevant authorities. Another potential informant became a devoted Christian and viewed it as sinful to narrate or cite Nanghili Nashima's explicit life and work.

⁷ Directly translated as "a (traditional) grass broom is losing the string that holds it together, A proverb to mean someone is gradually coming to the end of life.

⁸ Jackson Wahengo, one of our informants who is a Shambo and Afro-jazz musician, interviewed in Windhoek on 25 August 2020.

⁹ Lucia Kambode Nangolo, a 99-year-old who was one Nanghili's backing vocalists and fellow villagers in Okahenge, interviewed on 2 August 2020.

have ultimately intimidated the spouses she married at different times. Becker (2007) highlights how in the colonial and Christianised Owambo (among other parts of Namibia), women's place was made to be domestic and private; women were silenced and kept out of the public sphere. Through her songs and public performances that dissect issues of her sexual and gender identity, Nanghili clearly renounced gender roles that women were expected to uphold in society. This, therefore, may have been considered insubordinate and inappropriate.

In her song entitled "*Omutumwa ikukutu ndaVeliho*", Nanghili sings melancholically of how her back never carried a child and how she would have preferred to give birth even to an albino or a blind child to name the child after her father. It is one of the beliefs among Ovawambo that it is better to have a child with a disability than no child at all; and that a child with a disability is equally a gift from God. This is understood as God not giving parents a child with a disability if He did not trust or want them and their community to learn something through this experience (Haihambo & Lightfoot, 2010). Nanghili never had a child, and seemingly, being childless brought some grief that she openly expresses and acknowledges in her songs. Shigwedha (2004) explains how Ovawambo women are traditionally expected to produce children as a guarantee for their marriage and social/community recognition; consequently, marriages for childless women are sometimes ended, leading to new relationships with whom they might bear children. Therefore, the question of whether Nanghili also embarked on various marriages and relationships with the wish to conceive and become a mother is inevitable.

Although Nanghili was christened in 1944 (as she sings about it in "*Shalongo pa ile eloli*"), she maintained her indigenous lifestyle through her traditional songs. In this song, she detests and questions the intelligence and civility of the Christians, referring to a particular Christian who passed by them (Nanghili and others) without greeting them. She sings, "*Osho nda tya, lombwel' omukelefiti, eendunge openi hamu xungile? Eendunge mwali ku tala momambo...*". She asks the Christian to reflect on where they (Christians) were cultured in terms of *Oxungi*¹⁰ while posing the question of whether this is the kind of intelligence they get from books. This was despite the fact that orature was considered pagan and thus prohibited by missionaries throughout Owambo (Becker, 2005: 243). This was supported by Wahengo, our informant, who indicated that Nanghili and her contemporaries were referred to as "*Ovashunimonima*"¹¹ to derogate or ridicule those who had not (completely) converted their lifestyle to Christianity or those that has regressed to the heathen ways. She was a nonconformist who refused to comply with Christianity's gender values and expectations or be confined to one sexual identity. In the Botelle and Kowalski (1999) interview, the interviewer asked Nanghili what she meant by saying she is "*hainangala yopokat*"¹², to which she responded as translated below:

¹⁰ Oxungi is a traditional assembly done in Ovawambo homes, usually in the evenings on a daily basis, where all members of the family gather around the fire at *olupale*/central meeting place, to generally socialize, hold common discussions and learn proverbs and riddles, and tell stories.

¹¹ Those who regress or return to old habit.

¹² To literally mean having multiple sexual relationships at a time.

When I left my partner in Eengwena, I slept in Omakango; I spent the night in the granary baskets with the son of Nahole, but do not ask me about it, because you would never understand. Because I did not like the room I was given, I went to sleep in the granary baskets. Nanghili is a man that resembles a station, I am *hainangala yopokati*¹³.

Embodying Agency

It is important to understand Nanghili's agency as a symbol of resistance, resilience and self-determination. Her artistic work and personal life contain several sites that reveal the significance of her role in local contexts. We acknowledge her agency that leans heavily towards the feminist principle, 'the personal is political' while mapping what it mobilised at different points of her life. In performative terms, we can refer to her ensemble of women, co-performers, and enthusiasts as an obvious example of what her performances mobilised. Her songs and poems were a medium through which she could facilitate critical engagement on subjects such as migration, labour, sexuality, womanism, love, religion, and slavery. Nanghili is the lead singer in her songs which are traditionally known as *Oyiimbo yOvawambo*. Both her solo as well as call and response vocabulary in her song-making practices are largely conceptual, relational and functional to her immediate context. This suggests that her work was not just limited to the aesthetic value but rather, that it was also engaged in a trans-historic, and radical activism, hence an intellectual praxis. These utterances are evident in her song *Mwene woKino*,

Naa dje po ohatu kande
Nava ye ohatu waneke
Taa ti hatu va tuku
Na'adjepo vaNangobe
Aame mwene woKino
Mwene woshiwana eshi'ya
Aame mwene wongudu
Nda pewa ndi na omutumbo
Weexwingi waNangobe
Ndi popile mowayela
Membako lokoushimba
Ndi ka lombwele oilumbu
I li kouniona
Taku ti kwa li Nashima
Taku ya mwene wokino

Mwene woshiwana shila
Nda pewa kuShingunguma

¹³ A phrase that literally translates the one that "sleeps" with many, in the context that Nanghili said, we deduce that Nanghili was implying that she is polysexual.

*A ila nge kokaumbo
Ke li kepya levaya
Ke li kepya Nekwaya
Ke li komisha natango
Nda fa ndi li komumbada*

[Let them leave..., they say we are insulting them. I am the owner of the cinema, the bearer of this nation; the leader of the gathered. Let me speak in the broadcast, the mic of Oushimba¹⁴, to tell the whites at the union of Nashima.. I was given a small house by Shingunguma, in the farming land of a coward man, Nekwaya, as if I was the wife of a king]

(Nanghili Nashima, n.d)¹⁵

Mwene woKino is a song about clearing and occupying a space as well as claiming ownership of artistic, domestic, and political spaces. The lyrical content expresses and performs a feminist agency. *Mwene woKino* is translated as 'owner of the cinema'. Kino is a German word for cinema. This ownership is overtly expressed in her claim of being the organiser and leader of her group. The group that references is either her ensemble of co-singers, women or her larger community. She positions this ownership and agency in the context of her role, which she understands to be of great importance. When she sings "...*Nda pewa ndi na omutumbo*", she is alluding to her role as one of great importance. This suggests that she is aware of her voice as one that mobilises critical consciousness, locally and nationally. Her demands to 'speak through the radio, via a speaker of urbanity', demonstrates the intentionality of her claim to political space. *Mwene woKino* shows that Nanghili wishes to address and engage with 'white people at the union'¹⁶. She takes on the mantle of the activist and speaker, on behalf of her people. This speaks to the notion of shared and communal agency. African musicologist, Agawu (2007) writes about communality as an ethos in African life and music, with specific reference to the northern Ewe of Ghana. The communal ethos is significant in African processes of performance and orature for the survival and cohesion of the group. Agawu (2007: 8) discusses the call-response structure which speaks well to Nanghili's performance of communality as a 'soloist', he writes:

¹⁴ Oushimba usually refers to central and southern Namibia which was also known as the Police Zone as determined by the Red Line.

¹⁵ The digitized audio recordings of Nanghili Nashima's live performances at the NBC Music Library that were recorded by the Suidwes-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie (SWAUK), the South-West Africa broadcaster are undated. They are recorded as 'Ukwanyama Vroue' (Ukwanyama women) and catalogued together with other women performance groups. These are part of the rich yet scattered collection of field and studio recordings conducted by the broadcaster during the 70s, 80s and after apartheid.

¹⁶ Referring to the Union of four South African provinces of which Namibia was de facto regarded as a fifth province.

The material foundation for song performance is the call-response principle. Although typically figured as a solo followed by a chorus, the call-response principle is a complex structure whose basis is the chorus, not the solo. The solo departs from the chorus; it is not pitted against it. The solo takes its bearings from the chorus; the chorus “sends” the solo.

Hence, we must read the repetition (call and response) between Nanghili and her ensemble as vertical or circular modes of cultural performance. This approach highlights the functionality of echoing, mirroring, reflecting, and resonating the artistic content, which is to embody communality and a shared performance experience. This is inherently an embodiment of *Ounhu* as an African philosophy that highly values the interconnectedness of life and humanity. Nanghili’s role of great importance is a gift that she inherited from her people, as she sings in *Mwene woKino*. However, this role is not neutral and tension-free, the embodiment of communality also has its contradictions. These contradictions are embodied by Nanghili when she sings about ‘hosting a small house, located at a coward’s field, located at the margins as if she is exiled.’ This is Nanghili performing her subjectivity and vulnerability, showing us her awareness about herself as a colonised subject. There is a productive tension in this embodiment of her role as artist-activist-intellectual and her marginalisation as a black radical and deviant woman in both apartheid and democratic Namibia. She is aware of her deviant self which she highlights when she sings about her hair, ‘*weexwiki waNangobe*’. This highlights the political nature of hair in a conservative and colonised country like Namibia. Black hair can be a mobiliser of radical expression and disruption of religious and white expectations of hairstyling and fashion.

This kind of feminist agency is also discussed by anthropologist Becker (2005) in her reading of Nekwaya Loide Shikongo’s 1953 poetic recital to overthrow King lipumbu yaShilongo. Becker’s theorising motivates the need to explore relations between gendered subjectivities and public discourse in Namibian historiography. She argues, “that thinking about agency and desire is also crucial to the new theorising of gender identities and gendered subjectivities” (Becker, 2005: 239). This is a necessary exercise for Namibian gender discourse which is dominated by hegemonic and conventional performances of gender. Nanghili and Nekwaya are some of the feminist icons who relied on the literary power of *oudano* to mobilise transgression in their societies. One significant distinction that can be made between Nekwaya and Nanghili’s feminist activism is that Nekwaya adopted and appropriated Christian leadership roles including being a lead singer within her Christian community, performing within Christian spheres; she kept her performances of the prohibited orature by missionaries a secret (Becker, 2005). Conversely, Nanghili’s defying orature performances overtly and deliberately disrupted the Christian, heteropatriarchal and racist constructs of black womanhood which form the basis of Namibia’s public discourse. For example, her demand in *Mwene woKino* to address the Union (of South Africa) is her crossing the boundaries into a terrain of activism that is male-dominated. *Mwene woKino* is a performance of fluid and contested identity politics that reshaped and challenged the compulsory construction of women as submissive, obedient, and meek. Nanghili as a feminist iconography, is one of many under-

valued Namibian women who found spaces to manoeuvre outside the set and restrictive societal structures.

Transgression, trans-locality and migration

Nanghili cannot only be understood as an Oshiwambo traditional music icon but also as a transgressive figure. Her 'transgression of tradition' can be mapped in both the form and content of her artistic work as well as her in biography. Her subversive life and performances are also strongly signified and linked to her narrations and experiences of migration. Nanghili was a nomadic artist who engaged in the practice of map-making through the body. She expresses her nomadic experiences in *Eendima nda ka lima koimhote*. She sings:

*Eendima nda ka lima kOimhote
KoNambabi yaShime shaMukonda
Onda lima wondjabi kOshilao
Ondali kUukwamundja nEkuma
OkOixwa yaShango waNamundali
oNanghili nda i le kOshiyelova*

*Enyakwa laNangobe nda ile kEmbulunganga
Mbulunganga nEhenge laShilungamwa
MOshiyale onda fika Ndaafita
Onda li mOkapale ndi li oupepi nOndjiva
Fye moNdjiva atushe ovayeledila
Ongula kOmusheshe hatu lindile okandongo
Nda kongele oshinena no shimwali waNangobe
Okandongo nolufi waHailonga
Ame edila nghilimwene waNanghombo
Ndakongele okandongo nghikamwene wa Nangobe.....*

[I ploughed at Oimhote, Onambabi and ondjabi¹⁷ at Oshilao, I was at Uukwamundja, Ekuma and Oixwa of Shango; I am Nanghili that went to Oshivela; I am the talented one of Nangobe that went to Embulunganga and Ehenge; I have been at Oshiyale; I was at Okapale close to Ondjiva, and in Ondjiva we were all landing birds; in the morning we

¹⁷ A communal way of cultivation or doing other work by neighbours and supporters. See Mbenzi & Ashikuti (2018).

would be at Omusheshe, catching syphilis; I searched for gonorrhea and Oshimwali¹⁸, syphilis and Olufi¹⁹; I never caught edila²⁰ of Onghombo. I sought to get Gonorrhea, but I never got it.]

(Nanghili Nashima, n.d).

This song is another map in which Nanghili maps different places in both northern Namibia and southern Angola, establishing her as a border crosser, signifying her transgression as a black woman in both colonial and independent Namibia. She makes it very clear that she travelled for work and labour purposes, when she states *Eendima nda ka lima koimhote*, implying and referring to agrarian work which is essential in Oshiwambo lifestyle and culture. What is also interesting in this excerpt is that it sounds like she is using metaphors of walls, palm bushes, 'under the mud', and open fields to describe the places that she has visited and transited through but also that these are names of actual places. It is obvious when one listens to her that her trans-locality influenced her outlook on life, particularly her transgressive character. In *Eendima nda ka lima koimhote*, she also reveals that it was not only agrarian work that motivated her migration from place to place. She also makes it clear that her sexuality was also a contributing factor to her nomadic life. This is expressed when she sings "*Ndakongele oshinena noshimwali waNangobe*", citing her intention to encounter sexuality and motherhood. Here, transgression can be read through her expression of sexual liberation which is unpacked in the next section of this paper.

Nanghili's commitment to *Oyiimbo yOvawambo* in public life was her mode of resistance to assimilating to the colonial and missionary influences on music production that were dominant during her time. Her musical sound is therefore subversive to the mainstream sound of both colonial and independent Namibia. This does not mean that she was resistant to change, but rather to highlight her trust in *oudano* forms that were deemed pagan and 'uncivilised' in a colonised and Christianised society. A lot of music-making and education in contemporary Namibia, particularly in urban areas, continues to be influenced by sonic systems brought by "19th and early 20th century colonial adventurers, traders, settlers, and missionaries" (Mans, 2002: 262). Further, missionary and colonial influences on tonal structures and musical production in Namibian music history are extensively written about, as follows:

Many dances and the use of drums were discouraged or even abolished. Because cultural practices involve the totality of a person's existence, the effects were multitudinous. Some music went "underground", others were forgotten, and others were unaffected. Even today, for example, people in some areas practice the Damara healing ceremony arub surreptitiously due to church censure (Mans, 2002: 262).

¹⁸ A mortuary taboo that the one suffers (to death) if they have sex with a widower/widow before their purification ritual/ceremony (see Davies, 1994).

¹⁹ Another mortuary taboo-related suffering similar to Oshimwali.

²⁰ An illness that affects babies and assumed to be caused by ground hornbills (See Davies, 1994)

We understand Nanghili's practice as a form of radical imagination because it preserves indigenous forms of performance while generating an African feminist narrative during both apartheid and post-colonial Namibia. A good example here is the fluid tonal texture of her voice as a singer and poet. Her vocal vocabulary is not governed by the Christian missionary and apartheid tonal regimes of her time. In fact, her language of song making defies and breaks the conventions that govern classical musical production, such as 'Christian hymns, choral anthems and light orchestral music' (Agawu, 2014). Agawu's argument is in line with that of Mans (2002) as he states that these dominant forms of musical production accompanied 'Europe's ostensibly civilising mission to Africa' and hence, have caused a lot of musical violence in Africa.

Labour, music and sexual liberation

In several of her songs, Nanghili expressively combines her experiences of labour and sexuality. She performs her poetic work as a spatial practice in relation to labour, feminism and bodily autonomy. This is because she wanted to challenge patriarchal injustices and stereotypes, gendered labour relations and society's disapproval of the sexual assertiveness of women altogether.

*Oo koNdjiva nghali ndi li kOshaandjala
Eee kEtunhu nghali ndi li kOmusheshe
kOmusheshe onda ama kOshimbala
kOshimbala shOmauni shaShikonda*

*Oipala ye munyona waHamunyela
Ouxwanga we munyona waHamukwaya
Oipala ngeno oya li olukula
Ouxwanga waNashima ngeno owa li oshide
Wa li oshikwangha ngeno ondi na omakonda
Omavala nda fa ndi na oimomolo
Omakonda nda fa ndina oitakaya
Oipala munye oukadona vange*

[At Ondjiva I was not at Oshaandjala; at Etunhu I was not at Omusheshe; at Omusheshe I was around Oshimbala and Omauni of Shikonda. I, of Hamukwaya, lust ruined me;

promiscuity ruined me. If lust was Olukula²¹, promiscuity would be Oshide²²; if it was ochre, I would have stripes, colours as if I had spots, stripes as if I had Oitakaya²³; lust in you my girls]

The excerpt above is a continuation of *Eendima nda ka lima kOimhote* in which Nanghili places emphasis on her sex life by expressing her sexual attraction to her lovers in different places and how promiscuity damaged her. Nanghili openly talks about how she went as far as Oukwangali²⁴, to be with a certain Haingura. She uses obscene words such as *ouxwanga*, which can be loosely translated as promiscuity. It is one that simultaneously represents feelings of pleasure, pain, and deep experience.

Nanghili was notably known for her explicit lyrical content in which she overtly reflected on her sexual lived experience. This is what partly made her a controversial and loved personality as a cultural worker in her community and nation at large. What is clear when listening to her music and other performances, is that she was intentional about playing in the terrain of sexuality and sexual liberation as a way of taking up space that is deemed publicly deviant and morally unacceptable for women. Further, Nanghili was aware of the kind of social interruption that this does in a hetero-patriarchal, colonial, and Christian society. Given the socio-political context of this conservative society, this kind of sexual expression by a woman in the public domain is policed. However, Nanghili's poetic licence enables this kind of expression in this contested milieu. She shows that she is aware of the kinds of 'damaging' impact that sex has had on her life, while she also communicates fulfilment that shows pride and passion in her sexual experience, which is demonstrated by how proudly and poetically she talks about it in the interview with Botelle and Kowalski (1999). Her voice and intonation change as she effortlessly recites:

*Oipala ya twala nge kOkwalondo kaanave
Ouxwanga wa twala nge kOnandova
Kombinga yEpaya laShikesho
Ndee hai shingi, hai tukifa oudila kEenghango kuMwoonde,
Komuti wovakwanangobe, koluvanda laShikongeni kEnghandja*

²¹ Olukula is a dark red *Pterocarpus angolensis* (African Teak tree) roots' scented powder mixed with *citrullus lanatus* (wild watermelon) seeds' oil extracted that is traditionally applied by Ovawambo to cleanse, moisturise and protect the body from harsh temperatures.

²² A dark-red ochre (or its European powder substitute), used to apply to traditional ostrich egg-shells' necklaces, or the body during special events.

²³ A skin condition that develops due to some sort of infection,

²⁴ Referring to Kwangali Kingdom and people that settled along the Kavango River, where we reckon Haingura comes from.

[Lust drove me to Okwalondo, promiscuity drove me to Onandova, to Shikesho's side at Epaya, to socialise and awaken birds at Eenghango by Mwoonde, by the tree of Ovakwangobe clan and the cattle corridor of Shikongeni at Enghandja]

In the excerpt above, Nanghili rhymes when she recalls her promiscuous lifestyle and sex drive, orating that if *oipala*²⁵ were *olukula*, she would be colourful; and if promiscuity was *oshide*, she would have stripes, to show that sexuality took her to Okwalondo and Onandova. This means that if sexual experience could reflect on one's body, it would be visible for everyone to see and notice her sexual lived experience. The stripes and colours which represent her radical beauty as a result of sexual joy and pleasure are meant to dismiss the shame and fear associated with women's sexual liberation. The excerpt further shows the strong connections that Nanghili made between sexuality, labour, and migration. She orates about the places that she has been to in relation to her sexual lived experience. She presents a playful poetic piece that accounts for her migration to places such as Ekaka laNamudenga, Onandova, Okwalondo and Eenghango which are all in Oukwanyama. She explained how she stayed up all night at drinking places at Eenghango and the house of Shikongeni at Enghandja. She insists that it is *oipala* that drove her to these places, which implies that she encountered these places through relationships that might be romantic or otherwise. Interestingly, in this poetic expression, she uses these places to speak back to her body to describe the intensity, specificity, and radical beauty of her sexual lived experience. When one of the journalists in the same interview asked her if she travelled to these places through marriage, she answered, "Kwa *li ngoo nda ya ko ngahenya*," which translates that she went out of her free will and did not necessarily encounter some of these places through marriage.

Nanghili further unpacks these complexities and metaphors in the feminist sense:

*Hai pula meme yange, hai ti: ou lila, nde ou lila tamu fuda po,
Ou lila to tula omwenyo mohonde. . . .
. . . ndishinepe ndi ha ile ko kOmbishi,
Ame ondi shixwanga ndiha ile koLubango
Eembudi dikwetu do kOmbishi,
Oixwanga i yadi keendingosho
Kaanave eekamba adishe na di ufanwe
Eendingosho adishe na di ongelwe u pule kwa li Nashima
Ame kokamba kwa li nda nyenga kuyaShitanga,
Ame kodingosho nda nyenga kuyaShimwandi,*

²⁵ *Oipala* in this context, refers to lust, while its direct translation would be 'faces'. If a person indicated to likes faces, it means s/he has a high sex drive.

*Naai yaHeindjala hai dipaa ovadike hai tomo ovananguwo
A dipaele Omuherero a dja naye kOushimba
Oko tuu hai pukululwa ngaho.*

[I asked mama to sob but with breathing spaces, to sob but with comfort. I am a slut but I have never been to Ombishi, a promiscuous person who has never left for Lubango. My fellow criminals are in Ombishi and prostitutes at shebeens; call all the cuca shops, assemble all the shebeens for you to ask about Nashima; I have even been to the one of Shitanga and of Shimwand's and Hendjala's, where a Herero prostitute was killed after she was brought from Oushimba]

(Nanghili Nashima, 1999)

This excerpt is a good example of Nanghili playing with the politics of difference. Here she pleads with her mother to attend to her emotions and sorrows, urging her to cry and yet rest from the crying. This act of comforting is expressed after her body mapping of stripes and colours as markers of her sexual lived experience. Therefore, we contextualise her expression that she was aware of how her promiscuity might have disheartened or 'damaged' her mother's reputation in the community. Hence, this was Nanghili's way of advising her mother to destigmatise and change her perception towards her promiscuous lifestyle, which was considered taboo in Oshiwambo tradition. She cautioned her mother to take it easy (*tula omwenyo mohonde*²⁶) as she did not indulge in the extremist forms of promiscuity embodied by other women, who were selling their bodies. She consoles her that even when she is *oshinepe*²⁷, she has never been to Ombishi²⁸ and her promiscuousness never led her to Lubango. In colonial times, both Ombishi and Lubango in Angola equally and dominantly attracted male contract labourers as the south of the Red Line (*Oushimba*) in Namibia; the two settlements were also known for hosting sex workers. She, therefore, claims that other promiscuous women and sex workers went further to Moçâmedes and Lubango. In one of her songs, she sings that she is "*Oshikumbu shi na omapata, oshidika shi na oovene*," to literally mean that although she was promiscuous or a slut, she had kitchens and husbands.²⁹ Nanghili's perceptions of extremist sexual relations pose an interesting contradiction that can be read in her feminist work. Nanghili's contradiction is embodied in how she argued for her promiscuity as not as extreme as that of sex workers, she did not go to the extent of exchanging or

²⁶ An Oshiwambo proverbial phrase loosely translated as 'putting the heart in the blood'

²⁷ Literally, to mean a slut

²⁸ Ombishi was a fishing village, which is today Moçâmedes City. The settlement was named after fish in Umbundu. Ombishi had some of the biggest industries, which also provided employment to some Ovawambo.

²⁹ Epata (singular of Omapata) is a traditional open kitchen with essential rooms such as elimba, oshakalwa and okatala, which are usually established upon matrimony for the (married) woman while oovene (mwene) in this context refers to husbands.

transacting sex, but simply for pleasure. It is in the same clip that Nanghili also invites us to embrace difference and diversity, where she code switches and uses different metaphors and examples to highlight the politics of differences:

..... *Shamha to ti neenghumbinghumbi eedila,*
ShaKalunga naShanghana oshipaxu,
Nongwena ombidangolo,
Oushenge woo ha wina
Ombada oshi'ima shakalunga...

[When you say black storks are birds, I swear to God, a grasshopper is also a locust, and the couch grass is also love grass. Homosexuality is not intentional; queerness is God's will]

(Nanghili Nashima, 1999)

She does this by comparing *eenghumbinghumbi*³⁰ to other birds, a grasshopper (*shanghana*) to a locust (*oshipaxu*); and couch grass (*ongwena*) to lovegrass (*ombidangolo*).³¹ She also highlights that homosexuality and queer people are God's creations. This explains her resistance to compulsory heterosexuality, which is embedded in these social systems. In essence, we interpret Nanghili's expression to mean that although we might be diverse or different, our genesis is one genus/family, despite our rarity in comparison to others.

Meanwhile, part of Nanghili's sexual freedom is expressed in the song *Ndiba waAaron* in which she sings in negotiation with men and women of her community. She initially pleads for a dignified engagement and an exchange of forgiveness, then she expresses how she is being tormented by women and men, asking her to be initiated, despite refusing, they dress her in *Elende*³². She sings:

Oli waVeliho natu likundeni
Ndiba waAaron natu likundeni
Tulimo Shekuna natu lipopife

³⁰ Onghumbinghumbi (singular) is a bird of the black stork family. It seasonally migrates to regions in north-central Namibia during the rainy season and then disappears.

³¹ Both *eenghumbinghumbi* and locust are migratory and seen in north central Namibia seasonally as opposed to their other types of birds and grasshoppers, whereas the tuft couch grass grows in a particular habitat while the tuft lovegrass is native to and common in the region.

³² *Elende* is a headwear/hairstyle, worn just before the onset of the *efundula/olufuko* initiation ceremony (Shiweda, 2011: 48).

Maria waMushashi natu lipe ombili
Natu lipe ombili yetu oukadona
Paife ola toka, hai dulamo ondjeva
Handi shindwa koomeme aveshe nootate
Aveshe nootate taa ti ndi fukale
Onda li ku shaanya va dika nge elende
Ondi na omhatela ndee onda limbililwa
Osho vem'hole shaashi una ondjeva
Wa ninga nge nayi una ondjeva poshi

[Oli Vilho, let's exchange greetings; Ndiba Aaron, let's exchange greetings; Tulimo Shekuna, let's greet each other; Maria of Mushashi, let's pardon each other; let's pardon each other fellow girls; now that it is late, I shall remove my ondjeva³³. I am provoked by women and men; all and men are saying I should go through initiation. I refused, but they dressed me in the Elende. I have Omhatela³⁴, but I am worried. They only love you because you have waist beads; you hurt me because your waist bead is down]

(Nanghili Nashima, n.d)

This excerpt shows us that she was caught up in a situation of being forced to go through the initiation ritual³⁵ and she tried to negotiate her way out of it. This provocative encounter affects her intimate space. She reveals that men and women wanted her to go through the initiation. Once initiated, society would allow a woman to engage in sexual activities. Listening to this song raises questions about her consent and willingness to go through this ritual. Nanghili further discloses her agony at the social pressure and expectations of having gone through *Olufuko* when she sings, "*Ondina omhatela ndee onda limbililwa*". *Omhatela* hairstyle signifies her marital or social status, which does not seem to appeal to her.

In other songs, such as "*Onda li nohonda nofelende yange, ya dile koPutu, koAngola nghelo*," she reveals that her lovers were not only local men, but they came as far as across the border in Angola. She talks of a lover who came from Angola. Her stories are nuanced, and perhaps this is what makes her work appealing to her audiences. As highlighted throughout this article, it is almost impossible to think about Nanghili and sexuality without considering notions of labour and work:

³³ Ondjeva, the waist beads worn by unmarried women.

³⁴ Omhatela is a specialized hairstyle that is worn by women who have successfully initiated for *Olufuko* and married (Shigwedha, 2004).

³⁵ The initiation ritual signifies a transition of a young girl into womanhood.

NdaNangobe shaa nda ning'onghulungu
NdaNangobe shaa nda ninga ndi nyakwa
Ondinghulungu netemo waHamunyela
Ndinyakwa nekukweyo waHamukwaya
Temo lange latema la twa eefola ngondoongi
Ekuku la lima la fa oshipululo
Temo lange ngomwili yaHamulungu
Ndi n'ekuku ngonghambe yaShingunguma

[I, Nangobe's person, when I become an expert and proficient; I, Hamunyela's person, am an expert on a hoe. I, Hamukwaya's person, am proficient on a dull hoe. My hoe cultivates like a donkey-plowed fallow. My dull hoe cultivates like a plough. My hoe is as a mule, I have a dull hoe as a horse of Shingunguma]

(Nanghili Nashima, n.d)

Here, Nanghili turns to the hoe as a symbolic and functional object of labour in her community. She describes her hoe in all its facets and usefulness, one of which being how artistic and creative it is. The use of artistic reference as a way of describing her hoe is interesting because it points to the social-functional nature of *oudano* as an indigenous performance practice. One immediate example of this is that many of Nanghili's songs are about ploughing or performed while hoeing. Performance is deeply embedded in the agrarian culture of Ovawambo and it is through different *oudano* songs and praise songs that facilitate the enjoyment and productivity of cultivating the land. There are songs and dances for different seasonal tasks, from cultivating to harvesting practices such as *Oshipe*³⁶.

The excerpt above is Nanghili's ode, to praise her own work ethic. It is also a citational gesture through which she relates and credits her work ethic and passion to familial (*Ondinghulungu netemo waHamunyela, Ndinyakwa nekukweyo waHamukwaya*) and acquaintances. She also relates her hoe to animals such as horses (*Ndi n'ekuku ngonghambe yaShingunguma*) domesticated by people such as Shingunguma in describing the beauty and functionality of her hoe. Nanghili's description of her hoe is also how she comes to collective labour practices, which are common in Ovawambo's agrarian work. These shared labour practices, such as *Okakungungu*³⁷, are studied by Mbenzi and Ashikuti (2018), who theorise them as *Uushiinda* (neighbourliness or *communitas*). These practices are aimed at mobilising social support and alleviating poverty. Nanghili

³⁶ Oshipe translates as new harvest. It is an Oshiwambo thanksgiving ceremony in celebration of a sufficient harvest of produce as a result of good rain.

³⁷ Communal hoeing, in which community members work together on one member's crop field. To show appreciation, the owner of the field offers drinks and food.

embodied this ethos of collective labour practice in her popular line, “*Ovakwati vetemo tu limeni*”, in which she encourages fellow workers to hoe. Most of her songs adopt this *oudano* traditional rhythm, performed in the movement of hoeing (when tilling in the field). Equally, it forms part of the collective encouragement for people to keep tilling. The songs are meant to make work pleasurable and productive. Often, when people sing and hoe, they tend to cover a larger space without thinking about retiring for the day.³⁸

Furthermore, Nanghili resisted the multiple oppression, dominant power of patriarchy and submissiveness enforced by Christianity and the intrusion of the colonial administration. She asserted her autonomy, aspiration, and independence against social injustice. Her desire to break into and enter male-dominated working spaces, for example, becoming a migrant worker in the colonial contract labour system is reflected in her songs. In the song ‘*eeloli odeuya*’, she sings about the arrival of the SWANLA³⁹ trucks, thinking of Nakale, a man who cooked and fed them from the ‘*mesha*’⁴⁰. She sings, “*Onda tile dikeinge ekalanyana, ndi fe omusitotamina*”, which translates, “I said dress me in an overall so that I look like a mine starter [at the entry level]”. During colonial times, only men were allowed to migrate and work in the migrant labour system, yet Nanghili wanted to disrupt that, as she ordered to be allowed to work on the contract labour system like men. While writing this article, we were interested in how Nanghili’s singing of being and becoming a migrant labourer was performed as if she was there. Here, she is using the power of *oudano* to invite this kind of imagination. The colloquial nature of *oudano* makes it possible for her to sing this migrant labour vision into practice. Our interest resonates with Parry’s (2015: 108) questions about the critical usefulness of colloquial performance.

How might a colloquial performance practice create holes in the very fabric of authority and knowledge in order to transform the languages of performance? How might not knowing whether something is real or fictional, formal or informal, serious or unserious, move us to understand things differently?

Nanghili’s work ethic is as well demonstrated in her music as it is expressed in her loathing of laziness. She indicates how she is not impressed by women who do not work hard. She orates, “*Nghina na kalikadi kepya la pwa keemwili* [I am not impressed by a little woman whose field is ploughed by mules]”; *Nghina nakananguwo kepya lwapwa keengombe* (I am not impressed by a woman whose field is ploughed by cattle). The way Nanghili sings about labour is not only limited to domestic and contract forms of labour, but she also extends labour to sexuality. This thematic relationship which is inscribed in her sonic text, points to Nanghili’s use of the erotic as theorised by Audre Lorde (1978), as a source of

³⁸ In the video when she was interviewed, one of her backup singers took a hoe and pretended as if she was tilling the land, following the rhythm of the song Nanghili was singing. The video was filmed in a hut.

³⁹ South West African Native Labour Association (SWANLA) was a colonial labour recruitment agency which recruited primarily men from northern and north central Namibia to work in the south of the country, in the police zones. It was notorious for its use of a contract labour system.

⁴⁰ This refers to a mess hall (canteen) where men in the compound used to eat. Although in the Oshiwambo tradition cooking is a role for women, it was men who cooked meals for other men in the compound dining halls.

power, information, and imagination for women. Lorde discusses the erotic as a feminist life force that generates joy, pleasure, fulfilment, and satisfaction through its creativity, which has been vilified and abused by patriarchy (Lorde, 1978). We hear and see Nanghili's embodiment of this life force in the historic remnants, the recordings of her orature that centre her spirituality and sensuality as part of her political life. For example, we do not only argue that Nanghili is a queer feminist because she makes anti-homophobic utterances in her music. Queerness and queering in Nanghili's feminism can also be read in her singing about nightlife, shebeens, the hoe and overall, as well as her travels, which constantly remind us that she was a gender non-conforming artist.

Conclusion: making a case for a public intellectual and liberation icon

Akawa (2014) argues that Namibian historiography of early resistance and the liberation struggle is male-dominated and has presented women in secondary and domestic positions. Nanghili's biography and repertoire show that there were many women in practices of cultural work who contributed immensely to women's liberation and public intellectual life. Nanghili's intellectual praxis can be theorised and better understood through the concept of *Oudano*, which is also marked by both tradition and transgression in its form, structure, feeling, and content. It is also important to see her work as a way of theorising in practice in its own right. This is because of its obvious borders on the contemporary academic fields of performance studies (dance, music and theatre), historical studies, spatiality and place-making (cartography), philosophy, gender and cultural studies. This kind of interdisciplinary practice is described by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (2007: p 6) as:

The major generic elements of orature: riddle, proverb, story, song, poetry, drama and dance, are an imaginative attempt to explain the universe. The riddle seeks to see resemblances and parallels among the apparently diverse and contradictory in the universe.

This article has established that there is a notable correlation between mobility, labour, and sexuality as performed and historicised in Nanghili's orature. This correlation is marked by liberation, transgression and trans-locality which are reflected in her *oudano* praxis. Contrary to the geo-political and gender restrictions that were imposed by tradition, colonialism and Christianity, Nanghili's artistic work shows that she was defiant, and she relied on her imagination and inherited performance practice to make claims to space, place and her subjectivity as a way of speaking truth to power.

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