

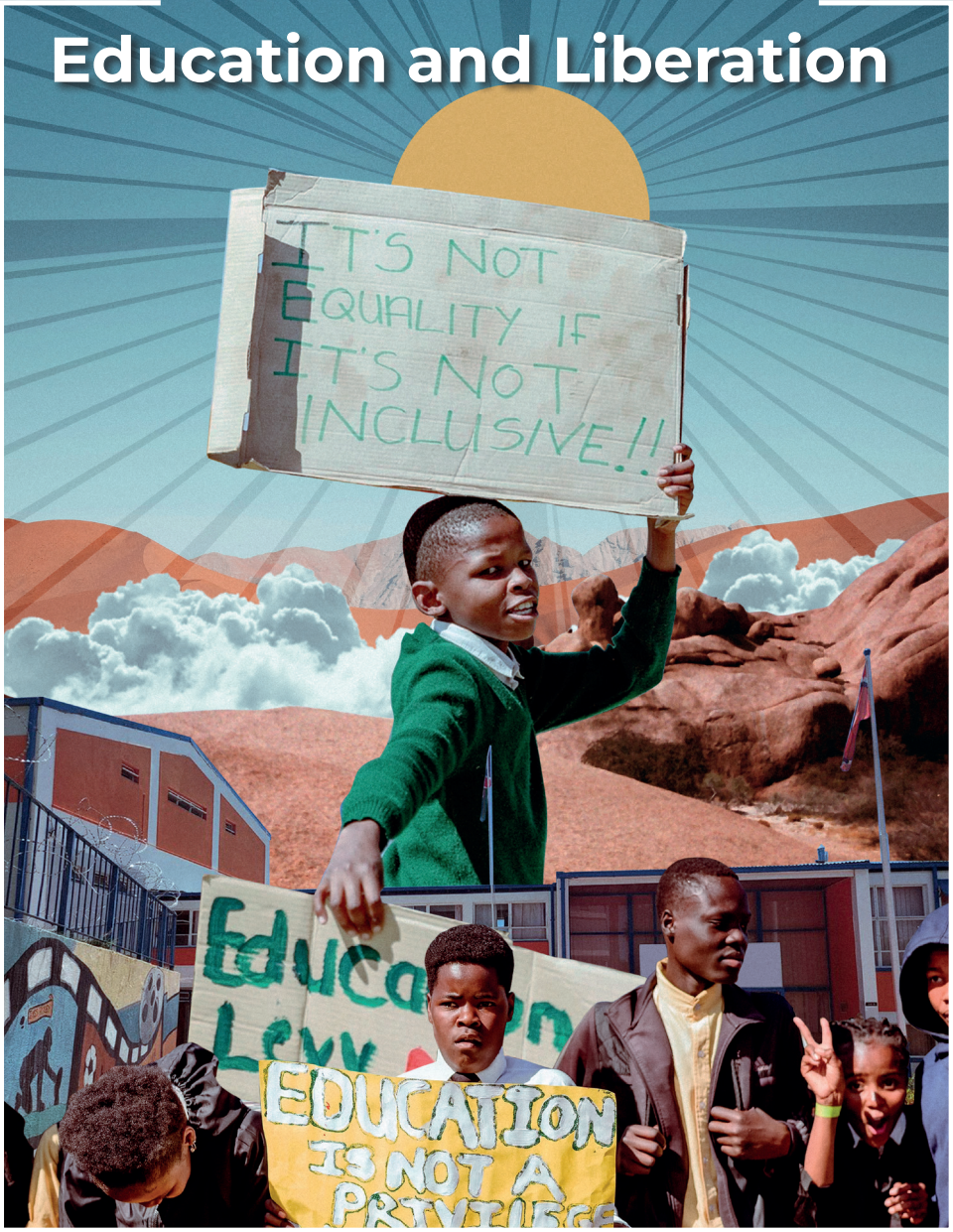
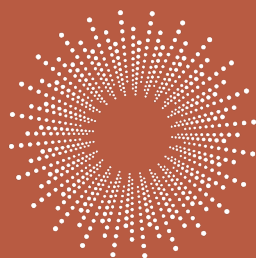


Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Acronyms and Initialisms	5
Editorial: Education and Liberation	7
The Quest for Education for Liberation: The Case of the Namibia National Students Organisation	20
<i>Ndumba J. Kamwanyah</i>	
A Case Study of Radical Pedagogy in Practice: The South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) and Regional Liberation Networks (1959–1994)	26
<i>Tammy-Lee Lakay</i>	
Challenges that Outsmart the Transformation Agenda: An Analysis of Why Certain Challenges Persist in the Namibian Education System Despite Several Reforms.....	43
<i>John Nyambe, Marius Kudumo, & Ellison Tjirera</i>	
Social Justice and Education in Namibia: From Theory to Practice	69
<i>Lucy Edwards-Jauch</i>	
Education for All? Unpacking Social Justice and Grassroots Policy Implementation: A Case Study of the Otjituu Settlement	97
<i>Tjipura Tjipura</i>	
Beyond Colonialities: Leveraging Ubuntu for Transformative Higher Education in Namibia.....	105
<i>Bruno Venditto & Adalbertus Kamanzi</i>	
Epistemic Destruction and Indigenous Knowledge Loss During the OvaHerero/Nama Genocide (1904–1908): A Case study of OvaHerero Epistemicide	137
<i>Kahuhu Alphons Koruhama & Joyce Muzengua</i>	

Epistemological Access at the Institutions of Teacher Education.....	148
<i>Fares Amweenye, Sakaria M. Iipinga & Elizabeth Ngololo</i>	
The Relevance of Theological Education in Contemporary Namibia: A Contextual Analysis of the United Lutheran Theological Seminary–Paulinum..	173
<i>Emma N. Nangolo</i>	
Critical Pedagogies in Anti-Colonial Cultural Work: Oudano as Praxis.....	198
<i>Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja</i>	
Decolonising Early Childhood Development in Informal Settlements: A Case Study of New Elementary Namibia and the Implementation of the Sixth National Development Plan	218
<i>Kevin Wessels</i>	
A Case Study of Parenting a Neurodivergent Child Juxtaposed against the Provisions of the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education in Namibia.....	229
<i>Immaculate Mogotsi & Christel Menette</i>	
Case Study: Bridging the Gender Gap in Education in Zambezi Region, Namibia.....	256
<i>Phiona Nandu</i>	
Political Worker Education in Namibia: The Case of the Labour Diploma Course.....	262
<i>Herbert Jauch</i>	
Dissecting the Subsidised Funding Model in Namibia 2026: Free Registration and the Question of Sustainable Access to Higher Education	269
<i>Benhard Kavau</i>	
Contributing towards Social Justice in Namibia? The Activist School of the Economic and Social Justice Trust.....	274
<i>Herbert Jauch & Nafimane Hamukoshi</i>	
Review of the Namibia State of Skills Demand and Supply Report.....	281
<i>Christophina Ndahambelela Ainima</i>	

Critical Pedagogies in Anti-Colonial Cultural Work: Oudano as Praxis

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

Abstract:

The nexus of pedagogy and culture was central to the work of intellectuals, artists and educators in the Namibian struggle against apartheid. The archives of their popular culture show the pedagogical practices that emerged from cultural processes which have had the potential for transformative education. However, these archives of popular education are largely forgotten in post-apartheid Namibian educational discourse. This article is informed by a close listening to archival musical material and reading of visuals by cultural workers during the struggle against apartheid. Using archival research, the study provides a sketch of creative pedagogical practices that emerged from this cultural work, situating them in the indigenous concept of performance known as “oudano”. The article discusses oudano as a praxis which mobilises critical pedagogy. The paper argues that the culture of song and printmaking in an anti-colonial context is not exclusive to this period, and that it remains critically useful in post-apartheid Namibian discourse on decolonised education.

Keywords: *oudano*, critical pedagogy, cultural work, praxis, living heritage

Introduction

This article engages with archives of cultural works, some produced in Namibia and some in exile, emphasising the ways in which they mobilise the ideals of critical pedagogy. This includes Enoch Sontonga’s hymn *Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika*, which was continually deployed by African liberation movements as a source of liberation praxis. Most of the archives discussed in this article are the prints of Namibia’s most celebrated artist, John Ndevasia Muafangejo. The analysis focuses on Muafangejo’s three linocut prints produced in the early 1970s, illustrating his imagining of “education for liberation” and access to education, as well as reflecting on the role of living heritage in education. The study listens to the rhythm of Sontonga’s hymn and reads Muafangejo’s prints as art historical interventions that hold decolonial potential in post-apartheid Namibia, where transformative educa-

tional discourse has underestimated and undermined the role of arts and culture.

The decolonising potential of the cultural works in this article is discussed from the point of view of critical pedagogy rooted in critical theory. Critical pedagogy is understood as a transformative educational philosophy which encourages and enables students and teachers to critically examine and question power structures, as well as inequality and oppression (Freire, 2007; Giroux, 2005). It is fundamentally concerned with making education a process of critical consciousness, and it is achieved through dialogic action and agency (Freire, 1972). Critical pedagogy relies on popular culture primarily for its ability to forge embodied learning, and this is why this paper's objects of analysis are forms of popular culture. Both Freire (2005) and Giroux (2005) saw educators as cultural workers who must make use of 'alternative cultures' to achieve the goals of transformative education.

In this article, the theory of critical pedagogy is put in conversation with an African concept of performance, known as *oudano*. This paper situates *oudano* within an expansive framework for creating and archiving performance as a human practice. *Oudano*—an Oshiwambo and Rukwangali word—implies play, performance, and performativity as processes of

enculturation. Culturally, *oudano* is a term that is used to refer to a range of social activities for the purposes of rituals, learning, leisure, labour, sports, politics, religion, festivities, and commemorations. *Oudano* comes from the word *dana* (play), the verb being *okudana* (to play). *Oudano* thus refers to play-driven secular and sacred rituals that combine dance, music, drama, visual arts, and literature to facilitate everyday social functions (Mans, 1997, 2017). This article unpacks different forms of *oudano* practice (a song and linocut prints) to argue for an understanding of *oudano* as a fluid praxis of indigenous cultural production that is mobilised through play, publicness, protest, place, archive, sound, and ritual, and therefore constitutes a critical pedagogy.

Oudano as Praxis and Critical Pedagogy: A Conceptual Framework

Oudano is embodied. This includes its orality, which is a central feature in indigenous music, dance, and storytelling practices. *Oudano* is ritualised behaviour, often taking various forms in Aawambo social events such as *efundula* (women's initiation rite); *oshipe* (harvest); and *oudano wokoluvanda* (moonlight dances). It is, however, important to note that *oudano* is not a term limited to Oshiwambo, as it also exists as a cultural practice in other languages

and performances. It is through this transcultural view that we can experiment with the critical usefulness of this concept by exploring its capacity to function as a translocal concept of (decolonial) cultural production.

Oudano is also referred to as *mutambo* in Shona, *motshameko* in Setswana, and *dala* in Afrikaans slang. These terms are conceptual drivers of play that refer to a range of cultural performances as practised in everyday activities. Oudano is what contemporary performance and cultural studies scholars such as Agawu (2007), Chinyowa (2005), hooks (1995), and Mans (2017) have read as African and African diasporic performance practices as vehicles of historic, spiritual, political, and educational work. This scholarship on performance is situated in the fields of literature, theatre, musicology, and choreology.

Oudano privileges an ethos of communality and holistic participation

that would generally be reflected in the feeling, structure, and content of its sound and movement. African music scholar Kofi Agawu (2007) refers to techniques such as call-and-response, repetition, and improvisation as expressions of that communal ethos among the Ewe of Ghana. These performance techniques and the ethos of communality traditionally characterise oudano practices such as *oyimbo* (songs) and *oidano* (dances). The Namibian ethnomusicologist Minette Mans (2017) also highlights the notion of playing together in her discussion of oudano wokoluvanda, also known as “women’s moonlight or entertainment play” (Mans, 2017, p. 94). This oudano practice—which involves dancing, drumming, singing, and clapping hands—is often performed in open spaces. This ethos of communality is also marked in the basic structure of several oudano dances amongst the Aawambo. Mans (1997) writes, “In Oudano, for example, the basic structure - rhythmic



Oudano as an indigenous dance. Illustration by Nambowa Malua

singing, foot and drumming patterns - is fixed. But the individual movements, the melodies and texts, the total length, these constantly change.” (Mans, 1997, p. 123).

This structure is common in many African languages of performance, and can be seen in *mutambo*, as theorised by Kennedy Chinyowa (2005) in his PhD study, *Manifestations of Play as Aesthetic in African Theatre for Development*. Chinyowa defined *mutambo* as play that denotes “... a form of human symbolic interaction performed for its own purposes and/or for the understanding of existence” (Chinyowa, 2005, p. 5). Chinyowa uses the term ‘aesthetic’ to read play as a phenomenon of public culture that is dynamic and plural. *Mutambo* is read for its discursive, participatory, and dialogical functions, which manifest as playful aesthetic (Chinyowa, 2005). Chinyowa draws our attention to the artistic features of play, such as freedom, imagination, secrecy/disguise, space, rules, and enjoyment to understand Shona cultural expressions such as *ngano* (folktales), *detembo* (praise poetry), *mahumbwe* (children’s games), and *nyau* (masquerade) as forms of *mutambo*.

The process of ‘playing’, which takes multiple forms of performing, can be understood as a crucial critical pedagogy. This process produced what

critical pedagogues have termed ‘praxis’. The paper is therefore an exploration of how and why we must look at *oudano* as a praxis in its method(s) of theorising in practice, or theorising that which has been practiced. Conquergood’s (2002) theorising of performance studies speaks to the heart of *oudano* praxis, highlighting its practical, theoretical and reflexive implications. He stressed that performance studies hold a unique position because of its threading together different modes of knowing production. This is because performance as a social activity makes space for what Conquergood (2002, p. 152) called the “crisscrossing lines of activity and analysis”. The broad spectrum of performance allows us to think of performance as a work of imagination, an object of analysis, a method of inquiry and intervention in the struggle for social justice. Conquergood suggests “... the three a’s of performance studies: artistry, analysis, activism. Or to change the alliteration, a commitment to the three c’s of performance studies: creativity, critique, citizenship (civic struggles for social justice)” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 152).

By approaching performance this way, we also reconcile multiple modes of cultural and historical processes that are embedded in the principles of border crossing, ownership, agency, self-determination, and critical consciousness, as put forward by critical pedagogues

such as Paulo Freire (1972) and Henry Giroux (1992). Border pedagogy as a conceptual framework connects to how *oudano* works as a pedagogical framework. Border pedagogy, which is part and parcel of critical pedagogy as theorised by Giroux (1992), points us to the politics of dis/location and dis/placement which have been useful in framing cultural production. This theorisation is useful for this study as dis/location and dis/placement potentially speak to the pedagogical nature of popular culture, as highlighted by Giroux (1992). In Giroux's discussion on decolonising the body, co-authored with Roger I. Simon (1992), they ask the questions below to help us think of varying and shifting forms of popular culture as ways of border crossings.

Critical pedagogy frames praxis as a meeting point of theory, practice and critical reflection.

Giroux's (2005) writing on border pedagogy, particularly on decolonising the body, encourages educators to consider both meaning and pleasure as useful sources of a transformative education. He not only suggests that we read a range of popular cultures as pedagogical vehicles, but also notes that border crossing as an act of a larger intellectual project is a necessary political project based on postmodern, feminist and Marxist principles. Giroux advocates for critical consciousness,

culturally and pedagogically, as also suggested by Freire (1972).

According to Paulo Freire the teacher is "... an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 181). This teacher-artist analogy is useful for thinking about the role of culture and creativity in teaching, as well as the inherent pedagogical potential of art practice. As one of the pioneer critical pedagogues of the late 20th century, Freire has stressed the critical role that culture plays in shaping a society's educational system.

Freire (1972) considers the work of dialogic action to be a everyone's right. This is particularly true in the world of cultural work which tends to be on the forefront of social justice. It is for this reason that he strongly argues for the oppressed to be on the forefront of reclaiming their right to speak. Here, dialogue is an existential necessity which implies that it cannot take place if spaces of learning and culture are not aimed at forging people's agency and ownership. In the ideological formation of Namibian and African liberation, learning and culture were to be practices of freedom. In Freirean terms, learning and culture become practices of freedom when there is

love, for people and social justice. Love is discussed as a commitment to the other and a courage to change the world, the opposite of fear (Freire, 1972). Placing emphasis on love in defining dialogue as a transformative force is highly relevant for cultural work given its affective and embodied dimensions. For example, the artistic works discussed in this article are examples of dialogic action that result from a deep love for creativity and freedom.

Critical pedagogy is concerned with developing critical consciousness in spaces of learning and culture, which means encouraging analysis and questioning of societal norms and power structures. It involves enabling critical engagement with content. In the context of this paper, critical consciousness is evoked during the making and consumption processes of the artwork. Freire named it *conscientização* and discussed it as an awareness that is developed through a process of critiquing social reality, which includes making connections between lived experiences and the broader contexts (Freire, 1972). The opposite of this problem-posing education is what Freire termed the ‘banking’ approach to education, which re-enforces domination and structural oppression. Freire critiques the banking system because it is anti-dialogic and it treats subjects of learning and

culture as empty and knowledge-less. The artistic archives in this paper are examples of situated knowledge that is dialogic, emerging from contexts of banking education, specifically apartheid’s Bantu education system and its coloniality of knowledge.

Methodology

Using archival research, this paper gathers and reads historical cases of anti-colonial cultural work which served as pedagogical processes in their contexts of the struggle for liberation. It includes looking at an archive of musical productions of the South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) recorded in exile during the 1980s, paying particular attention to the popular hymn *Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika*, which was adopted and re-written to become SWAPO’s national anthem. Additionally, it also looks at three of John Muafangejo’s linocut prints from the 1970s. This includes one about his experience of being excluded from the University of Cape Town’s art school, and another about Oshikwanyama-speaking women’s initiation ceremonies, reading them as representations of modern and indigenous systems of education. The third print shows his advocacy for access to education during his time as a teacher at St. Mary’s Mission High School. The paper shows how we can read the critical pedagogical efforts in the making of these cultural works, and

their circulations across various publics and periods. Here critical pedagogy as anticolonial work is shaped by praxis, which, as the paper argues, is embodied in the acts of drumming, dancing, praying and printmaking. The paper goes beyond the colonial period by briefly demonstrating how these archives, concepts and practices have been translated into Namibia's post-independence period to make claims and interventions for decolonising education in post-apartheid Namibia. It does so by referencing practical examples of hands-on studies that suggest the critical usefulness of the concepts *oudano* and *ngoma* in education curricula. These concepts are contextualised as indigenous, and forms of living heritage.

Oudano, Prayer and Liberation Pedagogy

Namibian archives of cultural work that was produced as part of the struggle against apartheid both at home and in exile are largely inaccessible and under-researched. Whether embodied or institutional, these archives remain scattered and under-explored, particularly in spaces of teaching and learning. One such archive is the audio collection of the late Sabine Zinke (1941–1994), a music teacher from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) who worked in SWAPO's cultural and educational programmes in Angola and Germany. Between 1981 and 1989,

Zinke made audio recordings of songs performed by various musical groups in the SWAPO exile camps in Lubango and Kwanza Sul, as well as children's homes in Berlin and Strassfurt. This archive is currently based at the Berlin State Archive, as well as the National Archives of Namibia. It consists of about 100 audio recordings of songs performed by bands, choirs and traditional dance groups, and at mass rallies. This musical material includes original compositions and as well material that has been adapted from existing traditional and religious songs from home.

German scholar Ulrike Kiessling, who exposed and provided me with access to this archive, referred to its musical material as an example of liberation pedagogy that was made possible through socialist solidarity. It is through the international solidarity with African liberation movements that Zinke was able to do these recordings. For Kiessling to read them as liberation pedagogy is to read them as a critical pedagogy, because the music was aimed at building the anti-apartheid movement and mobilising the masses in the fight against apartheid. These SWAPO songs are typical examples of *oudano* in their form and structure. Take one unusual example of *oudano* which has been adopted from Christianity, which is the hymn *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika*. In SWAPO's public

culture, as is audible in the Zinke collection, this hymn was adopted with rewritten lyrics to become SWAPO's anthem. My discussion of the hymn will not focus on its lyrical content as such, but rather on the original prayer and its circulation, as well as its pedagogical potential. This is because the prayer and its melody have been used widely in African liberation movements to do the work of liberation pedagogy.

Decolonial scholar Maldonado-Torres (2017) writes about prayer in oration as a form of agency for decolonial thinking. He specifically refers to Frantz Fanon's "O my body, always make of me a man who questions!" (Fanon, 2008, p. 205) as a state of embodying vulnerability in the process of self-critique—the critique of coloniality and the pursuit of decolonial love (Maldonado-Torres, 2017). "The prayer is for the body to serve as a site of questions, for which it has to shed the 'masks' that colonial subjects wear in order to attempt to appear as human in a context defined by coloniality" (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 125). This unmasking is how the body becomes vulnerable, opening to its dialogic potential. The body as a subject emerges as a site of inquiry through which it is able to "... touch the other, feel the other, discover each other" (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 125). This decolonial love is the same kind of love ethic that Freire (1972)

refers to in his discussion of dialogic action. Maldonado-Torres reminds us that these conditions of unmasking the body make it possible for the oppressed to join the revolutionary struggle.

Prayer is a revolutionary tool in any social movement, and at the same time, we must also be aware of how it can be practised in oblivion and naivety. In fact, it is opposed to this background of prayer and vulnerability and works towards radical consciousness, as discussed above by Maldonado-Torres. The genealogy of the popular Xhosa classic *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1897, is one great example of a Christian hymn that was eventually adapted by early African anticolonial movements as a lament, and to mobilise political action (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019). This song was translated into various African languages and used as the national anthem of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa. The melody of this hymn has also been used as the anthem of SWAPO. This hymn also emerged in Fallist¹ protests through student activists such as Koketso "KK" Poho (Wits University) who reimagined and rearranged parts of the anthem, adapting and adding to its melodic and

1 Fallism refers to the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student movements (2015–2016) for free and decolonised education in South Africa. This Fallist moment of public pedagogy forged the decolonial turn in global academic spheres.

lyrical content (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019). This shows how spirituality is significant in the context of the work of any social movement. The performance and performativity of prayer transcend material circumstance by tapping into emotive aspects of the human body. These dimensions are sites of survival, resistance, resilience, and freedom. Gillespie and Naidoo (2019) capture this when they write, “The students used the song to redefine the nation as still in struggle, still seeking to end apartheid and its long colonial inheritance” (Gillespie & Naidoo, 2019, p. 228).

Spiritual work in African movements goes beyond Christian hymns. In fact, African spirituality has been a source of knowledge for many popular struggles against colonialism. For example, in the First Chimurenga² of 1896 – 1897, Mbuya Nehanda was one of the Zimbabwean spiritual leaders who fought against British colonialism (Gonye, 2013). After the colonial forces captured her, she refused to convert to Christianity and was therefore hanged. Mbuya Nehanda “... defiantly performed a traditional dance and prophesied that ‘my bones will rise,’ meaning another Chimurenga ‘uprising’ would follow” (Gonye, 2013, p. 65). The Second

Chimurenga and Third Chimurenga both turned to Nehanda’s prophecy as a way of continuing the unfinished work of the liberation struggle. This was done through Pungwe meetings (all-night gatherings of the community) which hosted dance practices such as Kongonya that facilitate spiritual possession and have therapeutic significance in the context of chimurenga (Gonye, 2013; Chinyowa, 2001).

John Muafangejo as Teacher-Student in Pursuit of Study

The name and work of the prolific Namibian artist John Ndevasia Muafangejo have been at the centre of Namibian art histories and discourses both during and after apartheid. Muafangejo was born on 5 October 1943 in Etunda lo Nghadi, southern Angola—part of the Owambo territory that was divided by the colonial carving



Oudano as an indigenous game. Illustration by Nambowa Malua

2 *Chimurenga* is a Shona word for the liberation struggle and war against British colonialism in Zimbabwe.

up of Africa. Muafangejo received his art education in South Africa, at the Evangelical Lutheran Art and Craft Centre in Rorke's Drift, KwaZulu Natal, from 1967 to 1969 (Mtota, 2015; Palumbo, 2005). Muafangejo's work became widely known in the world of contemporary art after he had won several international prizes and held exhibitions since the 1970s (Mtota, 2015; Palumbo, 2005). Muafangejo went on to become an educator at St. Mary's Odibo High School during the 1970s, a role which can be read in his practice of making art.

Muafangejo (1971) illustrates institutional borders in his 1974 linocut print, *An Interview of Cape Town University in 1971*. This print is an autobiographical image by Muafangejo reflecting on his unsuccessful interview to study at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1971. He is reflecting on the structural exclusion, historically executed by white and predominantly male gatekeepers in the South African academy. He reflects on the white head-centred form of pedagogy, as can be seen in Figure 1 below.

The table in official or formal arts education establishes a divide and hierarchy between those who sit around it, and the interviewee. In this print, the table is a head-centred device used by the professors (interviewers)

to disembody Muafangejo by reducing him to the spoken word and his portfolio to justify why he should get access to the UCT. The intimidating interviewers are holding pens, paint brushes and a book that could be Muafangejo's portfolio. Their eyes stand out, in a way symbolising the white colonial gaze on the black artist's body. Muafangejo is positioned lower at the one end of the table, under observation and being cross-examined under the gaze of the write "phalanx of interviewers" which "suggests a single authoritative narrative wielded by the pale faced custodians of the institution" (Mistry & Mabaso, 2021, p. 2).

An Interview of Cape Town University in 1971 (Muafangejo, 1971) speaks well to the 2015/2016 student movements in South Africa calling for decolonisation and accessible education, such as *Fees Must Fall* and *Rhodes Must Fall*. The print is relevant in both post-apartheid Namibia and South Africa today because it points us to the burden of coloniality and the necessary project of decolonising the neo-liberal university. One might wonder where border crossing is depicted in this print. The print is a response to his experience of being othered and excluded. Mistry and Mabaso (2021) contend that this kind of othering and exclusion is prevalent in post-apartheid South African academies such as UCT. These art historians ask what this 1974 print

reveals about seeing and being seen, as well as hearing and being heard. They hint towards epistemologies that require deep listening and recognising different experiences and knowledge. Reading Muafangejo's subjectivity in this image, Mistry and Mabaso (2021, p. 8) note: "The artist sits at the head of the table. He is bearer of a system of knowledge unknown to his audience." They question the audience and their complicity in white privilege, and whether they take on the responsibility for recognising subjugated knowledges.

Mistry and Mabaso (2021) write about historic strategies and initiatives by southern African artists whose

works call in decolonisation of artistic practices and pedagogies. They draw us to the questions about contested ontologies and epistemologies in South African art schools. A copy of the *An Interview of Cape Town University in 1971* (Muafangejo, 1971) was acquired by UCT's Works of Art Collection in 1989. Considering how this image has re-emerged in decolonial discourses at the turn of Fallism, the UCT Works of Art Committee has yet to properly contextualise this artwork as part of the university's long history of segregation. Part of the text that accompanies an image of the artwork in the university's online catalogue reads as follows.

This image is ambiguous; the group's raised pens (or might they be paintbrushes?) have nothing to write on; the two women look decidedly out of place (looking quite playful compared to the solemn gentlemen). (Interview at UCT, 2022, August 06)



*Illustration of John Muafangejo by
Hage Mukwendje.*

It goes without saying that this is one of many artworks in the university's collection that have yet to be properly contextualised. However, this raises the question of what it means for the university to be in possession of artworks like *An Interview of Cape Town University in 1971* (Muafangejo, 1971) while still perpetuating the same systemic inequalities. Muafangejo received an art education at Rorke's

Drift in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Azaria Mbatha, one of his teachers, had a distinct influence on his visual vocabulary.

Muafangejo's (1973) print *St. Mary's Mission High School students are Very Thirsty and Hungry for Education* is another notable artwork which depicts the struggle for democratic participation in education at the height of apartheid in Namibia, then still South West Africa. In this print, Muafangejo plays with words such as "thirsty" and "hungry" to symbolise the inequalities that many black pupils were facing at the time. The hunger and thirst which Muafangejo describes as a lack of teachers also implies a coloniality of knowledge. We can make sense of this by referring to how the feminist author bell hooks writes about her thirst when she encountered Paulo Freire's work. She writes, "I came to Freire thirsty, dying of thirst (in that way that the colonised, marginalised subject who is still unsure of how to break the hold of the status quo, who longs for change, is needy, is thirsty)..." (hooks, 1994, p. 50). In appreciation of Paulo Freire's work, hooks expressed that she found his work on critical pedagogy to be a means of quenching her thirst, and that drinking from Freire's well afforded her an intimacy and familiarity (hooks, 1994). Muafangejo's imagination of the thirsty and hungry students at St. Mary's Mission High School depicts the

intimacy and familiarity that bell hooks reflects on. He does not only portray the students as deprived because of their circumstances, but he also shows hope and love for education. For Freire, hope and love are precursors to education for liberation. Muafangejo visualises love and hope in the faces of the students who are gathered in waiting lines, facing different directions. The gathered bodies are bodies in dialogue.

As a teacher at St. Mary's Mission High School at the time, Muafangejo sees himself through his students' lived experiences. He identifies with their struggles. He identifies as the Anglican artist who is appealing to higher institutions of learning, and as the student teachers who come to their rescue. Muafangejo ends his storytelling by highlighting that the inequality he represents in this 1973 print is a question of study. Here, study and studying are pursuits of inquiry. The print itself is also a form of study, given its artistic and analytical potential as a historical source that tells us about the struggle for education for all in a highly unequal context. From today's perspective, we are able to read the print and be reminded that post-independence issues such as the scarcity of educational resources are not new, but ones that are rooted in a longer history of unequal access and apartheid of knowledges. The print itself is testament to how educators

and students have continued resisting apartheid, as well as imagining and practising freedom. St. Mary's Mission High School holds a significant position in Namibia's educational history and the struggle for independence. It was where liberation struggle figures such as Andimba Toivo ya Toivo and Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah were educated and conscientised—in fact, Nandi-Ndaitwah was a student of Muafangejo. Due to increased mobilisation against apartheid by workers and students, the school became a fertile ground for revolutionary organising, which subsequently led to many students and teachers going into exile.

Ongoma and Learning through Living Heritage

The term '*ongoma*' in Namibia's northern languages and cultures refers to a range of drums that are manufactured and played in rituals of teaching and learning. These percussive drums and associated instruments that are used in festivals, ceremonies and rites of passage had to go underground following the arrival of missionaries and colonialists in the 1800s (Mans, 2002). Drumming cultures were labelled as uncivilised because they were central to indigenous schooling and healing systems across the African continent. In Namibia's northern regions bordering Angola, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, there is a concentration of drum making and playing practices,

many of which have survived cultural invasion for centuries of the European civilising mission (Mans & Olivier, 2005). We can refer to *okangoma* (small drum) and associated percussive instruments such as *erose* (kudu horn) that are used for healing ceremonies amongst Ovahimba and Ovazemba of Kunene region. In Ohangwena Region, the large *eengoma* (plural of *ongoma*) are carved and used in *efundula* and ordainship ceremonies. In the Kavango regions, the phrase '*daya ngoma*' expresses an invitation for drumbeats which activate the traditional dances, such as *epera*.

All of these drumming cultures form part of *ngoma*, the epistemology of holistic learning and an ecosystem of music, dance, medicine, and the universe. In African Performance Studies, *ngoma* praxis includes *IsiNgqi neSandi* (energy, rhythm, vibration and sound) as tools for healing and therapy in South Africa, as well as traditional dance, poetry and jazz for national cultural memory in Tanzania (Koela, 2025; Askew, 2002). Koela suggests that *ngoma* as a praxis of consciousness is forged through embodied and experiential forms of learning. *Ngoma* as a praxis of thinking, doing and reflecting has not received extensive academic attention. Minette Mans' (1997) doctoral dissertation on the application of *Ngoma* as an epistemology of reforming Namibia's

arts education stands as a notable academic source. Another recent interesting doctoral study is by Liveve (2022), which considers integrating Kavango drum making and playing practices into the teaching of Science in Namibian schools. These two dissertations offer useful roadmaps which we can use as indigenous frameworks for decolonising school curricula in Namibia.

What is the critical and anticolonial work of ongoma? This question can be addressed by considering how eengoma (plural of ongoma) survived missionary and colonial suppression. Amukugo (1993) reminds us that the African traditional education system in precolonial Namibia was made up of initiation processes which were spaces of intergenerational dialogue. It is within these initiations in which ongoma would be played. We could speculate that one reason why ongoma avoided colonial erasure is because it holds the potential to cross borders both materially and sonically. This potential includes both the shared cultural practices across ethnic and national borders, and the sound of a beating drum's ability to travel across geographies and temporalities. The custodianship of ongoma was not contained to these northern regions of Namibia. Exiled Namibians encountered other eengoma in Angolan, Zambian and Congolese

cultures which they adopted and adapted to their repertoires of the liberation struggle. This okangoma is audible in some of the liberation songs in the Sabine Zinke collection, used by SWAPO women's and children's performance groups. These groups performed *oidano* (Oshiwambo song-dances) that became known as *ondilimani*, specifically teaching SWAPO's ideology of liberation and Pan-Africanism. Another historical trace of ongoma's spillage into Christian evangelism can be found in 1980s recordings archived in the International Library of African Music, of Catholic nuns performing biblical songs with okangoma in Oshikuku, in Omusati Region. It is not surprising that ongoma is being used within a Christian context because liberation theology played a significant role during Namibia's anticolonial periods.

Muafangejo depicted ongoma in two of his prints, *Kuanyama Wedding* (Muafangejo, 1970) and *A Kuanjama Wedding* (Muafangejo, 1973) which both depict efundula in motion. Both prints show performances of men beating drums and women dancing in a ritual of efundula. Most of Muafangejo's work, including the ones discussed above include writings that usually describe the action that is visualised. Muafangejo describes the bodies and cultural objects in this embodied act of dancing. He notes

how well trained the drummers are, and their role in activating the dance. Even though he refers to the brides and bridegrooms that he depicts, efundula is not a wedding in the sense of two people getting married. Rather, it places more emphasis on the girl initiates' process of gaining new status. In other words, they can gain the social status of women without necessarily being married to a man.

Efundula as an initiation school teaches women skills related to spiritual, social and economic life. There are several studies in southern Africa that place initiation rites and modern education in conversation with each other. These studies highlight both positive and negative contributions of young people's initiation rites to modern education systems in South Africa, Mozambique and Angola (Domingos, 2025; Manlia, 2025; Kaseke & Luvala, 2025). This scholarship points to the disjuncture between the modern and indigenous systems of education, emphasising that the systems can complement one another. Initiation rites have been subject of intense public debate in contemporary societies in Africa. In Namibia, there has been a critique of *olufuko* (efundula in Omusati Region), which has become a state-sponsored cultural festival. Kuoppala (2021) reminds us that human rights, child protection and fundamental religious

groups have been arguing that the rite promotes child marriage and therefore violates the dignity of the girl child. This tension reveals that oudano, as a method in olufuko is implicated in patriarchal values. However, the proponents of olufuko have pushed back against the criticism, highlighting that the critics are ignorant to the transformative potential of the rite (Kuoppala, 2021). It is also worth noting that the critics of olufuko have criticised the rite from a distance, a problematic point of view of modernity, which underestimates African cultural consciousness. This is not to say that olufuko or oudano are exceptional and therefore cannot be influenced by patriarchal control. It is rather to point us to the misconceptions of the rite which are rooted in colonial modernity and Christian evangelism.

Muafangejo's critical pedagogy in his practice of printmaking about the drumming and dancing in efundula initiation is visible in various ways. Firstly, it is critical and anticolonial to imagine and visualise efundula given its pagan and "uncivilised" status in the eyes of colonial and mission education. By making prints about oudano in efundula, Muafangejo is demonstrating his awareness of different schooling systems, showing efundula as one of these systems. In his other print, he visualises the environment of his arts education in *Natal Where the Art School Is* (Muafangejo, 1968). The pedagogical

dimensions of these prints are in their historical materiality, these dimensions circulate and become useful teaching material across different contexts. This is the case with Muafangejo's entire body of work, which became seminal in training artists in post-apartheid Namibia at institutions such as the John Muafangejo Art Centre, the College of the Arts, and the University of Namibia.

In this paper, the praxis of the production of songs, prayers, dance, and prints is read as critical a pedagogical act, because such acts are counter-colonial logics, leaning towards liberation. The paper has thus far paid attention to these acts to signal oudano's conceptual and philosophical potential in different educational spaces. The skills of performing and the craftsmanship of drum making and printmaking are forms of living heritage, which is also known as intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Living heritage also refers to oral traditions and expressions, rituals, and festive events, as well as knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe passed on from one generation to the next. The paper proposes considering oudano and ngoma as concepts of living heritage that can be integrated in Namibian school curricula beyond the arts and culture subjects. Living heritage is a popular concept and term in global

education circles, and it is being championed all over the world. One example of this is UNESCO's *Projects for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which was aimed at capacitating educators on teaching with ICH. Implemented in 2023–24 in Namibian and Zimbabwean schools by the respective education ministries, the project had the goal of supporting transmission of ICH through a whole-school approach that enhances dialogue, innovation and creativity. The whole school approach implies a process of teaching and learning that includes ICH practitioners, communities, events, organisations, school managers, policy makers, teachers, and learners. The UNESCO project capacitated educators and developed a methodology of teaching with living heritage, as well as a formative assessment.

In Namibia, primary schools in the Khomas, Karas, Zambezi and Omaheke regions participated in the whole school pilot implementation by identifying local forms of living heritage and teaching with it across various subjects. Teaching with living heritage is different from teaching about heritage. Liveve's (2022) experiment of using ngoma to indigenise the science curriculum is a good example of teaching with living heritage. Liveve recounts how drum making activities led to Grade 10 Physics

teachers understanding concepts such as amplitude, wavelength, crests and troughs. More Physics concepts were reflected in music and dance related to drumming: “Tension and diameter versus frequency, pitch and tune of the amplitude, and the wavelength of the softness and loudness of a sound wave when drums are played” (Liveve, 2022, p. 165).

The difference between the UNESCO project and Liveve’s PhD experiment is that the UNESCO framing of living heritage does not mention the displacement caused by colonial and missionary projects. Liveve’s project recognises that to redress the injustices of the colonial era, indigenous knowledge systems should be integrated in the education system. In reference to the work of the abovementioned UNESCO project as well as Liveve’s exceptional study, we can see the critical usefulness of indigenous and anticolonial cultural work in educational processes. The examples of cultural work discussed in this section also shows that there is a continuity in the use of oudano and ngoma from the apartheid period to post-independence spaces of anticolonial learning and culture. Although this usage is fragmented and disjointed, it is evident that the role of public culture and heritage remains central to the development of education.

Conclusion

This paper has presented and analysed several cases of critical pedagogical work in cultural action during the struggle against apartheid. As an art historical study, the paper looks at these cases as oudano archival material accessed from digital and institutional platforms. An African liberation hymn and three 1970s linocut prints by John Muafangejo are unpacked as objects of dialogic action and critical consciousness, as theorised by Paulo Freire. The paper argues that this culture of song and printmaking in an anticolonial context is not exclusive to the periods in which they were created. They remain critically useful in post-apartheid Namibian discourse on decolonised education. This argument is based on reading subjects of prayer, as well as concepts such as oudano and ngoma, placing emphasis on their performative and pedagogical potential.

The key cases of oudano discussed in this paper demonstrate the different ways in which artistic and cultural work has been used to resist colonialism. This work therefore constitutes a decolonial praxis that is still very relevant to imagining pedagogies for transformative education in post-apartheid Namibia. The continuity of oudano as a cultural concept that mobilises critical pedagogy in post-apartheid Namibia is evident in key

sources with which this essay engages. On a theoretical level, the practice-oriented theses developed by Namibian scholars referenced in this paper stand out as decolonial scientific praxis. On the level of the whole school, the regional experiments of teaching about and with living heritage, as promoted by the education ministries in Namibia and Zimbabwe, as well as UNESCO, point to the relevance of oudano and associated indigenous concepts. Moreover, the reason why Namibian art schools continue to return to Muafangejo's oudano as a source of revolutionary education is because it conjures up situated knowledges which are usually located outside the hegemonic spaces of teaching and learning. All these fragmented contributions that the essay has explored represent the legitimate and valid practical examples of living heritage, even after centuries of epistemic violence.

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