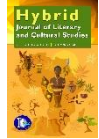




The crisis of post-colonial intellectual thought and knowledge production: Examining Jared Angira's African revolutionary egalitarianism



Review article



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Abstract

This paper critiques Jared Angira's poetry, and the ideology it manifests with a view to interrogating the "Marxist" label scholars attach to him. Although justifications abound for the prevailing perspectives on Angira's ideology as "Marxist", they are limited in their subconscious reinforcement of the traditional white-supremacist image-branding of Africa in terms of deficiency and inferiority. In further contributing to the decolonisation of knowledge generation and consumption in the Global South, the paper interprets these views as theoretically misleading and ideologically incorrect. It adopts the contrary position that Angira is an African Revolutionary Egalitarian, thus paving way for the appreciation of his uniquely African contribution to endogenous knowledge production and the intellectual armoury of African political ideas. Though African Revolutionary Egalitarianism, a term we coin to try and apprehend the ideology we read in Angira's poetry, has Marxist inclinations, in contexture, it is not Marxism. Angira's poems are the primary data. Besides critical evaluations on the primary texts, knowledge situated around the general context of contemporary African ideological paradigms and knowledge systems constitutes secondary data. Knowledge on the broad range of historical factors, experiences and contours which shape Angira's worldview, personality and writing also constitute an essential category of secondary data.

Keywords: African revolutionary egalitarianism, global south, marxism, endogenous knowledge, authorial ideology

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Public Interest Statement

African post-colonial studies dedicate research into redressing Western fallacies and stereotypes on the continent and the African person. Though major achievements have been made in encentering the African identity and African cultures, there remains a gap where interrogating the constrictions of received Western supremacist knowledge paradigms are concerned. Thus, there is a need for the enterprise of African intellectual discourse production and ideological thought to be systematically scrutinised and grounded as historically situated. This addresses the challenge of recognising and upholding African thought and knowledge production, which continues to suffer from the West's hegemonic hierarchy.

Introduction

As the African peoples' efforts to vindicate their Africinity and their human dignity and rights continue into the twenty-first century, one major area in which Africa, and other regions of the Global South remain dependent is the intellectual and ideological. As Arowosegbe has noted, "contemporary intellectual reflections on Africa unwittingly maintain the same essentialist distinctions, profiling and objectifying formula between the Global North and the Global South" (2008:348). Holsinger (2002) criticises this formula, and the continued inadvertent abetting of the same even by contemporary African scholars as having led to longstanding neglect of the otherwise vibrant intellectual traditions of Africa and other quarters of the South. This paper concurs with Chakrabarty & Ghosh that it is untenable that intellectual thought and knowledge production in Africa continue to exist within a borrowed and dominated framework, and that Others, precisely postcolonial subjects can no longer uncritically accept or cling to Western gifts more so in the form of intellectual ideas (2002: 1195). The paper's position is that Africinity must therefore be embraced as the vehicle for realising ways of framing models of African thought and discourses, deciphering and delineating their particular constitution within their particular African context, independent of the halo of the hegemonic knowledge hierarchy instituted by the West.

This hegemony originated in and is propped on the West's prejudiced attitudes and convictions about the African continent and the African person, persisting from the days of early exploration, missionary and colonial activities. These activities have been negatively associated with Africa's forceful occupation as the lesser Other and the subsequent "imposition of foreign administrative governance, economic exploration and exploitation, political dominance, cultural and linguistic domination and social oppression and suppression of Africans" (Ifejirika, 2017: 4). The West has asserted that prior to the moment of encounter with Africa, the latter had no serious cultural, religious, economic or political life of its own, or even an intellectual tradition. Consequently, the West is alleged to be the teacher who provides the model while Africa is the pupil whose only business is to copy (Roscoe, 1971). Beginning with the accounts of White 'explorers' such as Henry Morton Stanley, Frederick John Lugard among others who 'discovered' Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this imperialist ideology continues to be reflected in general Western thought. At the core of this body of

thought is the denigration of the peoples of Africa on account of their being non-white. It has functioned as a platform upon which early African coverage created a racist image of Africa that persists even in the twenty first century (Allimadi, 2003).

With former African colonies having assumed sovereignty in the second half of the twentieth century, this essay finds justification in the contention that it is imperative for Africa's struggle in the twenty first century to evolve to an assertion of Africa's contribution to world history and culture and to promote a postcolonial intellectual independence (Hendrickson & Zaki, 2013). Having a cultural-politi-intellectual leaning, the essay also rises to the challenge to serve as a forum for challenging and rewriting colonialist discourses, explicating and defining African culture, intellectual history and being (Muchiri, 2019). In so far as strangleholds of Euro-American ideologies and theories on African identities and bodies of knowledge remain evident, there is merit in the scholarly pursuit of decolonising knowledge produced in the Global South. This paper traces the historical factors, experiences and contours which have distinctively shaped Angira the intellectual, his personality, worldview and writing. By anchoring his ideological orientation, as manifest in his poetry, within his specific African and Post-independence milieu, the paper recognises that the ideologies of individuals do not originate, and therefore cannot be satisfactorily named or delineated, autonomous of the intricate interaction of dialectical materialities and forces that inform their thoughts. Such an approach enables the contextual grounding of Angira's accomplishment as an African knowledge producer and therefore checks the inclination to force labels such as 'Marxist' on him. Sticking the 'Marxist' label on him is tantamount to denying him recognition for his contribution in the field of African political thought as well as compromising a proper comprehension of the distinctive social, intellectual, econo-political history and context of such contribution.

African Revolutionary Egalitarianism vis-à-vis Marxism

It is not in contention that the ideologies of Post-independence African intellectuals, such as Angira, committed to socioeconomic analysis, dissection of class relations and social conflict through historical materialism, as well as the dialectical perspective of social transformation would display kinship with the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Jared Angira (Kenyan, b. 1947) is a major poet emerging in the Post-independence African period, which is also the context of reference in his poems. He is a politically conscious poet whose protest-oriented poetry is exemplary of functional art rich in form and ideological content. Hailed as "Kenya's first truly significant poet... inspired by the urge to remedy the injustices and glaring inequalities that characterised independent Kenya as they did a majority of the new African states" (Knight, 1986: 913) this paper acknowledges Angira as representing the critical spirit of Post-independence African committed writing at its best. Brought up and educated in Kenya in the 50s and 60s, Angira's intellectual development took place at a time when, and would have been influenced by the currents of change and expectations blowing across Africa on the verge of independence. It would also be valid to argue that growing up in what was until 1963 (Angira was aged sixteen then) known as Kenya Colony, Angira could not have avoided noting or

experiencing the condition of existence, the strife and tribulations of the native Kenyan populations under the aberrant British colonial regime. Kenya, Angira's home country, was a vibrant British settler colony between 1895 and 1963, years in which in increasing degrees, colonial imperatives subjected the native population to sustained forms of economic exploitation and political repression and disrupted the cultural dynamics that in the pre-colonial past had been an integral part of African society (Lonsdale & Berman, 1979). Angira came of age in this socio-economic environment whereby Kenyan people who initially sustained their pre-capitalist forms of production and a rich cultural life but were now enlisted as a proletariat force, mostly rural but also urban, were struggling to cope within the colonial fabric that had been constituted and was being upheld in the interests of settler capitalism (Gatheru, 2005). With blatant disregard for the subjugated colonised who, on their part, maintained a precarious existence of poverty, economic hardship and political repression, the socio-econo-politics of colonialism were inhumanely inequitable and iniquitous. The paper argues that such a state of affairs may likely have made a mark on Angira's moral and political consciousness to influence his ideological development in later years as an author. Thus, long before his arrival at the University College, Nairobi, and his formal encounter with Marxism and the debate on the social function of literature which preoccupied intellectuals especially at African university spaces in the immediate Post-independence years (Nazareth, 1978), some level of political consciousness, anti-injustice clarity and pro-egalitarian inclination would have already constituted a crucial dimension of Angira's ideological orientation.

In theory and practice, Marxism as espoused by the two stands out in its criticism of capitalism. As a philosophical system, it has inspired many political and socio-economic revolutions and initiated fundamental changes in production and capital relations in many parts of the world (Roemer, 2008). It is not surprising then that arguments categorically designating Angira as Marxist abound in scholarship on Angira's poetry. For instance, Othman (1980) argues that Angira is Marxist in ideological orientation basing on his (Angira's) open declaration of Karl Marx as his teacher quite early in his career, and the perceived consistency of his poetry as a vocal expression of Marxian ideas. In a study that examines the entrenchment of social concerns in Angira's poetry collections such as *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972), *Soft Corals* (1973), *Cascades* (1979) and *The Years Go By* (1980), Akingbe (2012) argues that as the very basis of his works, Angira brings in a Marxist-oriented class analysis of modern Kenya to bear upon his writing. In his own preface to *Juices* (1970), Angira writes:

The shadow of Karl Marx seems to give my trembling self some consolation; for how can I talk of the tower of Babel without recording the presence of the ground on which the tower stands? It is this much trampled on ground that decides the course, for if the ground is sandy and porous how long can the tower stand? (1970, p. 12).

Positions such as these, by critics of Angira's poetry and himself, seem to lend credence to the

conferment of the 'Marxist' title on him. The subsequent thematic and aesthetic analysis of his poetry also demonstrates shared concerns with Marx and Engels in so far as Angira boldly engages with the themes of cutthroat capitalism, mass penury and the poor's struggle for survival typical of Post-independence African economies (Paciaroni, 2014). In Angira's poem titled "Manna", "wilderness", "barrenness", "manna" and the "screening chamber" are central symbols. "Manna" is a poem in which Angira stylistically draws upon the Biblical account of the Israelites' sojourn from slavery and bondage in Egypt, through the wilderness, to Canaan, a land of plenty and liberty. The poem stylistically facsimilates the African continent's struggle with, and freedom from, colonialism and the unrewarded optimism on the advent of independence. Ideologically anchored on Angira's contestation of political and economic betrayal of the masses and class differentiation in Post-independence Africa, the poem censures the minority class in Post-independence Africa as engaging in acts that, in motive and procedure, reek of capitalism. The capitalistic system is underpinned by "individual pursuit of self-interest, exploitative relationships between the wealthy and the poor, as well as the unequal distribution and concentration of wealth and income (Holton, 1986, p. 179).

As a symbol, "Manna" connotes abundance of sustenance. Biblically, it is an ancient Hebrew word for "what is it? and a symbol of the promise of abundance to the Israelites upon their arrival in Canaan (Gardener & Osborn, 2005). Yet in the context of the poem, only a few have access to the 'manna' while the majority, "wide throated", eagerly anticipating and in dire need of the manna's sustenance, after having suffered and sacrificed for it, "never chanced to see it". For the alienated and deprived majority, courtesy of the selfishness and betrayal of the elite minority, the only sure prospect is socio-political and economic "death". Indeed, the poem ends on a note of certainty of "death" as the very last line, "death in seven ways", suggests. This death of the majority in the "wilderness" and "barrenness" of Post-independence Africa symbolically represents the experience of those who have come to be described as the underprivileged. It is characterised by political and economic alienation from national life, disempowerment, oppression, betrayal, exploitation and the resultant decline of human development standards and various other types of social indignity and abuses. In the poem "Manna", though all hopefully waited for "manna", when the moment came for them to have their patience and sacrifice rewarded and their hunger pangs quelled, only a few, the privileged Post-independence minority elite, who are strategically positioned to grab the "manna", get it. It is in the "screening chamber" that these few lock themselves, effectively shutting out not only the cries of those "wailing in hunger" but also the competition they would otherwise face from those whom they deprive of sustenance by avariciously taking more than they need or ought to.

In acoustic studies, a screening chamber is a "room capable of sound-proofing by being insulated from exterior sources of noise and completely absorbing all reflections of either sound or electromagnetic waves" (Eknott & Tulley, 2004). Assertively labelling the screening chamber "the quietest place on earth", Eknott & Tulley (2004, p. 531) further advance that the interior of a screening chamber simulates an open space of infinite dimensions very quiet, with

typical noise levels in the extremely low ranges. “A human being in a screening chamber would perceive the surroundings as devoid of sound” because a screening chamber is free of outside vibrations and noise and is also secure from unwanted echoes (Eknott & Tulley, 2004: 530). Therefore, the screening chamber is a multiple-embracing symbol of moral depletion, betrayal, marginalisation, indifference, alienation, and the capitalistic self-interest and cruelty of the ruling Post-independence African elite. Through this symbol, Angira in “Manna” expresses ideological anxiety at the deracination and human suffering bred from the enclosing and privatising of what are, ideally, common resources by the dominant class in Post-independence Africa. The “screening chamber” in the poem, and the poem as a whole is symbolic of the disturbing pursuit of obscene comfort and satiety ironically in a vast “barrenness” populated by “wide throated” “hungry natives”, “Children wail[ing] in hunger” and eyes hopelessly “soar[ing] the sky”. Thus, the avarice of the political elite class for who the “wilderness” of newly independent Africa proves lucrative, prompting vested interests and slackness in developing and implementing sound ideological systems to advance genuine socio-economic reconstruction is symbolically realised through “manna” and the “screening chamber”.

That Angira as well provides critical insights into, and invites readers to reflect on social conflicts, socioeconomic and political aspects, institutions and situations in Post-independence African society through consistent and sustained satirical censure may contribute to his being labelled Marxist. In poems such as “The Model” and “Mistaken Identity” Angira employs satirical nuances, aesthetically dependent for their function as a tool of constructive social criticism on literary devices such as irony, sarcasm and ridicule, with the revolutionary purpose of advocating for socio-political reform towards egalitarian schemes. Angira’s “talent for apt and felicitous phrasing combined with a sense of humour targeted at the selfish hedonistic tendencies of the Post-independence ruling class” has been observed as finding “complement in his scathing sarcasm in his collections” *Juices*, *Soft Corals* and *The Years Go By*” (Senanu & Theo, 2003). These critics see Angira’s “No Coffin, No Grave” as exemplifying the poet’s aptitude for satire. The poem combines dramatic and satirical properties to show the folly of the esurient flair of the ruling class for material acquisition. In the same vein, in “The Model” and “Mistaken Identity”, poems contained in *Juices* and *The Years Go By* respectively; the poet respectively satirises prevailing betrayal of the masses and the unbridled avarice of the elite class that thwart equitability in Post-independence Africa. On this point too, there is kinship between African Revolutionary Egalitarianism and Marxism. Angira’s “The Model”, for instance, is aesthetically, a satire of ironic contrasts. Post-independence political institutions and practices inherited from the colonial regime's substantial essence are satirised in the poem. The satire, in this case, exploits the setup of a modelling event in which the model of the title, addressed directly as “you” is nudged to “stride slowly with pride” to showcase “the beauty that blind men have missed”, “a soft mellow voice that the deaf ones have missed”, and the “stride with gentle pride that cripples have missed”. It is ironic that all the above aspects of “beauty” on display are strangely hollow and discordant with what the respective target audiences supposedly have not previously seen, heard or had other sensorial experience of. For

instance, “blind men” lack the ability to see “the beauty of their dreams”, supposedly showcased by the model on the rostrum, by virtue of not having the sense of sight. “Deaf ones” lack the ability to hear the model’s “soft mellow voice” by virtue of not having the sense of hearing. It is apparent that in the goings on in the poem, there is a disconnect between the model and the audience, between what seems to be the case and indeed what is really the case, between appearance and reality. These are the paradoxes and contrasts by virtue of which “The Model” resonates with deep meaning and significance to the contradictions typical of the Post-independence African period. Throughout the poem, humour is an integral component to the plot in which the “model” of the poem, is cryptically held up to derision and ridicule.

In the context of Post-independence Africa, the antics of the “model” represent “the essential superficiality of post-colonial development undertaken without radical socio-political changes to the colonial structure” (Fanon, 1971, p. 118). Through the technique of satire in this poem therefore, Angira creates awareness of the need for fundamental structural changes to crucial political and socio-economic practices and patterns typical of the African Post-independence era, essentially residues of the colonial heritage, so that the marginalised majority can reclaim their dignity as well as their rightful place in national life. In “The Model”, satire relies on understanding these Post-independence developments as the target of Angira’s humour. In literal conformity to the theatrics of the model in the poem, the widely heralded process of African independence has at some point shed off its ideals and core principles and is devoid of commitment to achieving significant aims. The poet therefore employs satire, realised through irony, in a manner that audiences familiar with Post-independence African developments would easily relate to. The model’s “cheer” is satirised as false in the line “posture and smile are all you bring” for instance. This effectively represents the discrepancies between the claims made for independence in Africa and how independence has actually been experienced by the deracinated subaltern majority as:

all just pomp and ceremony, nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of the trumpets, nothing save a minimum of re-adaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving: and down there, at the bottom, an undivided mass, still living in the middle ages, endlessly marking time (Fanon, 1971, p. 118).

Angira’s “Mistaken Identity”, is a satirical social commentary through whose characters and plot development the aggressive capitalist pursuit of profiteering and individual self-interest nourished on “theft and robbery and corruption” (Ngugi, 1981, xiv) in Post-independence Africa is held up to ridicule. In light of this, “Mistaken Identity” just as the poems “Manna” and “The Model” conveniently lends itself to a Marxist interpretation. The satire in “Mistaken Identity” stylistically operates to highlight the two scandalously polarised dimensions of human existence in Post-independence Africa. While the condition of the exploited is implied through ironic negation of the reader’s expectations embodied in the title of the poem, the self-inflicted condition of the elite class is openly ridiculed. Furthermore, through situational irony, the

contrast between what the reader would expect – what would be morally appropriate – and what actually happens emerges from the events of the poem very subtly. It is heavily ironic that the privileged elite class do not “labour” in any way perceptible in the poem yet they have counted “countless/ New currency notes/ To pile up millions”, to the extent that “When you feel their palms/ They sand paper your skin”. Angira’s target of satire in “Mistaken Identity” is the privileged elite class in Post-independence Africa. To this extent, “Mistaken Identity” comes across as a satirical poem which makes fun of the privileged elite class, exposing and criticising their greed and viewpoints as counter-productive. For example, for getting so caught up in the trappings of privileges associated with wealth in which process they push the subaltern into increasing pauperisation within their own nationspaces, this class ends up “thin”, “haggard and bowed” with “hunger”. More so, they not only suffer calloused hands but also “ulcers” out of their exaggerated anxiety “over the security/ Of millions piled up the bank/ Of property borrowed in line” and “what more mortgage” they can give! In a way that stresses the absurdity of their obsession with acquisition of material wealth, this class rolls in the night with sleeplessness occasioned not by “the creative urge” or “coiled intestines due to hunger” but by concern with “the safety of the luminaires/stocked one on top/oh whither the end!” Angira employs satire as a technique to expose and criticise the folly and capitalistic self-seeking nature of the privileged elite class in Post-independence African society by using ridicule, exaggeration, irony and humour basing on the circumstances and fictive actors dubbed “they” in the poem. Their greed and insensitivity to the plight of the defenseless majority whom they ruthlessly prey on as portrayed in the poem emerges not just as a political issue but more so as a moral and ethical one, a matter of individual and collective conscience in so far as excessive materialism and vanity breed morally decadent and spiritually vacuous societies.

Angira’s engagement with the dialectical perspective of social transformation in poems such as “Factors” and “At This Time” would apparently display kinship with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ ideas. In indirectly referencing historical incidents, persons, places and ideas of significance to his concerns while leaving it to the reader to discern these allusions and comprehend their significance, the poet employs allusive references in his poems. The allusive reference to the Cuban Revolution in “Factors” and Mbella Sonne Dipoko in “At This Time” is not as obscure as to be only understood by the poet himself. In “descamisados”, “Sierra Maestra”, “Eutimios”, “Camillo Cienfuegos”, “Venceremos” and “Patria O Muerte” lies the aesthetic potency of the poem “Factors”. We read in these expressions Angira’s conscious allusion to the Cuban Revolution. The revolutionary zeal and radicalism of the leaders of the Cuban Revolution was ignited and fuelled by the poverty, hunger and disease they witnessed among the masses, a wide class gap and deplorable capitalist exploitation of the working class in the Cuban society of the day (Eric, 2001). Among these leaders and specifically alluded to in the poem is Camillo Cienfuegos. These aspects of Cuban society working class condition bring to mind the deracinated majority’s living conditions in Post-independence Africa. The allusion to the Cuban Revolution in “Factors” cogently calls up parallels in the two historic situations without overburdening the poem with details. “Sierra Maestro” is a quintessential geographical

allusion to Cuba and the Cuban Revolution itself. The Sierra Maestro is a rugged mountain range in South-East Cuba. As Chomsky (2015) has noted, the Sierra Maestro as a point of reference for the Cuban nation has become a component of Cuban lore. This is because it has multiply served as the grounds for intense liberation battles involving Cuban rebels dating back to Hatuy (killed in 1511). It has also been the grounds for three wars of independence against Spain in the 1800s and a revolutionary war against the dictator Fulgencio Batista led by Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara and Camillo Cienfuegos among many others. In interpreting Angira's allusion to Sierra Maestro in "Factors", this paper broadens Chomsky's assertion to argue that in so far as the pursuit of liberation, fairness, equality and justice are desirable not just in Cuban society but as well in every human society, Sierra Maestro would be as well a point of reference for Post-independence Africa and the whole world too. By alluding to Sierra Maestro therefore, Angira celebrates political martyrdom and the spirit of true revolutionism but above all demonstrates how the small handful of "Camillo Cienfuegos" (here representing truly committed intellectuals) who do not only shout "Venceremos" but indeed act "Patria o muerte" can successfully steer the cause of class struggle and rebirth of society.

In "At This Time" Angira also makes allusive reference to a personage of political significance. In the poem, the poet allusively elevates Mbella Sonne Dipoko (1936-2009) as an iconoclastic prototype for the militantly revolutionary spirit and strong political conscience requisite for social transformation and also as a beacon of the common people's yearning for a new egalitarian and humane social order. Mbella is a Cameroonian Anglophone engaged writer whose political commitment as a watchdog and voice of the minority marginalised Anglophone Cameroonians tangled in the lopsided relationship between the two Cameroons, Anglophone and Francophone, has inspired generations of Cameroonians and Africans with his militant poems. Nemkul (2017) describes Mbella as a radical obsessed with the "Anglophone problem", an expression Nemkul uses to refer to "the anxieties of a marginalised group of people that is required to assimilate and yet often deprived of the rights of full citizenship" (p. 48).

"At This Time", describes the Machiavellian tactics by the state directed against pro-democracy intellectuals such as Mbella who "tell this world little 'insane' things". "Insane" is in quotes to emphasise irony and to point to the fact that the committed intellectual has to run great risks and attract heavy criticism from right-wing sections for remaining true to the revolutionary agenda and questioning of the structures that deracinate the subaltern majority. For "asking for a classless family", Mbella in "At This Time" is "declared a dangerous element / the publicity officer of the socialist party/ subversive/ an imperialist agent /a paid agent of Communism" by "the guardians of the people". That the "the guardians of the people" will subsequently "hurry up/ a motion in the house/ To censure/ Mbella's nonsense/ Of confusion/ And insanity" reflects the state hostility that those like Mbella who represent progressive forces in their societies come up against. The challenges of pro-democracy agents as allusively referred to in Mbella are intensified in that "the guardians of the people" as well "preach" to the masses "not to hear" and "goggle their eyes dark" so that they become impervious to the need for change as proclaimed by agents such as Mbella. The "guardians of the people" also subject

Mbella's nonsense/ Of confusion/ And insanity" to a referendum. A referendum should function as an opportunity for the citizens to participate in the exercise of power and to freely determine urgent and complex national issues and the course of democracy (Patrick, 2006). In the poem, however, the agency of the people is marred by the manipulation of the voters. Consequently, the referendum results in victory for "modern democracy". "Modern democracy" is in quotes to underscore the irony of the referendum process in that it is in itself a travesty of democracy and a purposeful thwarting of the reform process sought by visionary agents such as Mbella who challenge established dogma for which they are branded public enemies. On the strength of Angira's thematic preoccupation expressed through standard components such as symbolic signification, satirical nuances and allusive references in the poems explicated in the foregoing, we argue that Angira ideologically reflects a realistic dissection of Post-independence African class relations and social conflict through historical materialism. He broaches prospects for social transformation prescribing revolutionary action towards the dissolution of socio-economic classes and the management of collective resources for common good in Post-independence African society. In such aspects, Angira's African Revolutionary Egalitarian ideological orientation resonates with Marxism.

Nevertheless, it is our position that the kind of specifically African ideological and moral component underlying the revolutionary and egalitarian sentiments manifest in Angira's poetry cannot sufficiently be accounted for as Marxism. While acknowledging that as a body of thought Marxism would, to a certain extent be relevant and instructive in apprehending the ideological content of Angira's poetry, it has limitations that render it insufficient. It is, for example, limited owing to its bias for economics and economic systems. This resonates with already existing criticism of Marxism as narrow in its preoccupation with the divide between workers and owners of productive property and the ultimate abolition of classes.

For instance, arguing that Marx in essence disregards the sense of greater equality among human beings, Freedman dismisses as only notional the postulation that Marx is truly egalitarian (1996: 117). In the same vein, Nielsen argues that in reality Marx eschews the entire concept of equality as abstract and bourgeois in nature, preferring to focus on more concrete principles such as opposition to exploitation on materialist grounds and economic logic (1987: 413). Moreover, it is our view in this paper that Marx's vision of the socialist state which he equates to a dictatorship or tyranny of the proletariat is inconsistent with Angira's egalitarian vision which envisages the annihilation of all forms of oppression and the integral rebirth for all humanity. Indeed, the pervasive desire for equality among people discernible in Angira's poetry is more aligned with egalitarianism as a doctrine of "distributive principles, which claims that all individuals should have equal quantities of well-being in the relevant factors that affect their lives" (Hirose, 2014: 1). In this respect, Angira fits the criteria of an egalitarian as one who maintains that "justice requires that we attempt to bring it about that everyone has an equal (or more nearly equal) and positive (non-zero amount of some good [- welfare, income, opportunity, wealth, resources-]..." Narveson, 2002, p. 49). It is also worth noting that though their intellectual and ideological positions may display kinship, Karl Marx and Engels on one

hand and Angira on the other are unique products of distinctly socially developed and historically constituted material worlds. Hence, designating Angira as Marxist without a critical interrogation and analysis of the complex social history, biographical and intellectual details of his life and writing which directly facilitate his ideological orientation is erroneous.

Jared Angira's Revolutionary Egalitarian Ideological Identity: The Elliptical of Post-independence Africa

We cannot begin to understand Angira's revolutionary egalitarian ideological identity without a preview of Post-independence Africa. This is because Angira's ideology is steeped in the conflict between the interests of capitalistic exploitation on the one hand and the struggle for survival and emancipation by the oppressed on the other. The context of Angira's engagement in poetic composition is the Post-independence African period which can proximately be said to commence from shortly before the 1960s to the present day. The 1960s, by the end of which more than two thirds of the African states formerly under colonial occupancy had declared their independence, have been widely acclaimed as the momentous decade of African independence. The immediate Post-independence period in African history was one of high anticipation as encapsulated in such nationalist sentiments such as "Our march to freedom has been long and difficult, today, the tragedies and misunderstandings of the past are behind us. Today, we start on the great adventure of building the Kenyan nation" Kenyatta (1968, p. 212). This period was therefore not only positively dynamic but as well transitional in that most African nations had just emerged from the anti-colonial struggle laden with revolutionary zeal, ambition and impetus for the eradication of exploitation and oppression so that human dignity and equality of all become the basis of development in Post-independence Africa (Nyerere, 1968).

However, this celebration and anticipation has turned out to be ephemeral and many decades since the attainment of independence, "the Post-independence African society sadly still reflects social and economic structures characteristic of the colonial regime, serving the interests and objectives of a dominant minority group" (Kubayanda, 1990, p. 9). Post-independence African masses have been alienated in two ways; firstly, they are not given space to participate in the development and political processes of their country and secondly, the post-independence African leaders disregard the aspect of their accountability to the people (Ngurumo, 2010). Thus dispossessed, "the people" in Post-independence Africa have a marginalised and bitter experience of the process of independence. As a result, they endure a scarcity of true political, social and economic prosperity and there is a palpable class-consciousness, with the majority assuming subaltern status. Though it has been many years since all African countries formerly under colonial control attained their independence, apparently, the struggle for social justice rages on in Post-independence Africa. Conscious sections of society have responded to the cardinal question of alienation of the masses and neglect of social justice in Post-independence Africa. Angira counts among motley committed intellectuals who constitute a formidable alliance of dissenting and progressive energies with a

socio-political disposition that is of necessity subversive of the status quo. As a socially and politically committed writer employing his poetry as a veritable weapon for imaginatively depicting the pains and disillusionment in Post-independence African nations, as well as for prescribing the way forward, this preoccupation forms the visceral background and corner brick for his African Revolutionary Egalitarian ideological identity. His ideological identity is otherwise not mechanically determinable away from this context.

Angira made his creative writing debut in the 1968 issue of *Busara*, a University of Nairobi (then known as the University College, Nairobi) English Department based journal which, in spite of being a Commerce student, he was appointed to serve as Editor in 1969 and Editor-in-Chief between 1970 and 1971. His full collections of poetry would follow soon after, i.e., *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972) and *Soft Corals*, (1973) and others much later. Angira is among a crop of the African intelligentsia who undertook his undergraduate studies at the University of Nairobi between 1968 and 1971, then known as the University College, Nairobi. In these years immediately after Kenya attained independence in 1963, the intellectual environment at the institution and other universities too in Africa was not only one of lively artistic creativity but also one in which progressive sentiments were in the air arising from the apparent dashing of the expectations and hopes of the people as initially articulated by the political figures of Uhuru (Mwangi, 2015). Indeed, a key aim of the journal *Busara* was the publication of “critical factual articles” regarding the “cultural or social scene” (Gacheche, 1969, p. 2) and representative of the political climate in the nation at large. In these early years, the position of the intellectual in Post-independence African society, “his/her training and educational background were such as to enable him/her to master philosophical and social truths about the world and to use that knowledge to guide and influence the masses” (Adoko, 1968, p. 21). In light of the social and economic contradictions unexpectedly emerging after independence in Africa, as discussed in an earlier section, there was a general consensus that there was no place for the artist or the intellectual who was not concerned with and entirely at one with the people (Amateshe, 1979). Angira, just as other intellectuals and creative artists of Post-independence Africa would, as such, have been intellectually obligated to respond to the socio-economic happenings around them or else risk being branded irrelevant. Firstly, to the revolutionary exposition of the social deprivations of the majority and their poor living conditions and on the other hand, the rapid degeneration of the emergent elite class due to excess privileges and rapaciously amassed personal wealth. Secondly, the intellectuals of the day would have been also obligated to the categorical pointing forward to equitable resolutions to these contradictions in the interest of the common people.

Angira became part of the tradition of African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o among legion others. The tradition is glued by the keen intellectual interest in momentous events on the continent such as the atrocities of colonialism, the kindling and development of African nationalism, its eventual coming into fruition in the form of the gradual attainment of political independence for former colonies in Africa, the ironic shattering of the independence dream by the new African ruling elite and the resultant conflicts

and tensions. In the light of these events and especially the Post-independence epoch of aborted aspirations and dashed hopes where the optimism of the masses shrivels before it is fulfilled and their development is nipped in the bud, the conviction of the founding intellectuals of this tradition is that any worthwhile African writer should not self-servingly “retreat into individualism, mysticism and formalism” (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p. 74) in their writings. “There is a clear duty to make a statement” and therefore “a serious writer” cannot “stand aside” or be “indifferent” (Achebe, 1964: 158). As “the sensitive point in his[/her] community” and as “his/her society’s gadfly” (Achebe, 1975, p. 44), “a kind of conscience of the nation” (Ngugi, 1969, pp. 15-16), “it is the duty of the writer to lead his people” (Achebe, 1975, p. 44).

These sentiments distil the conventions of this tradition regarding the exactions on the artist in Post-independence Africa. In their light, the paper argues of Angira’s Revolutionary Egalitarian authorial ideology to be a product of this particular African literary and intellectual tradition and environment as founded by intellectuals such as Achebe Soyinka and Ngũgĩ. This is because as a writer in immediate Post-independence Africa, Angira’s authorial ideology is pressured to be of purpose. In its context of operation, African Revolutionary Egalitarianism validates its claims to relevance by a recognisable dynamic visionary quality as emerges in the analysis of Angira’s poems earlier on. Indeed, commenting on the state of literature in Africa, and the affairs of the continent in the present times, Angira decries:

The corruption is big-time, quite copious, complete with corporate protection through institutionalised mechanisms. Tribalism being practised with religious commitment, based on a creed of promises made at the campaign euphoria. It is a matter of life and death for ‘our people’. How can one talk of equality? With what audacity can one talk of unity? The high and mighty have internalised evil through hard psychological wiring, consumed themselves in the power of deceit and self-induced obsession with wealth stolen from the wretched of the earth. Can anyone talk of societal core values? (Angira, 2016, p. 25).

Though disturbed by these reports continually cascading out of the African continent in contemporary times, as an African Revolutionary Egalitarian, Angira is optimistic that someday the revolutionary aspiration of liberating the subaltern will be attained. He further reiterates his conviction in the validity of the ideas of the intellectual and literary tradition into which he was initiated as a freshman at the University College, Nairobi as from 1968, on the role of the writer and committed literature in this process of society’s reconstruction. He asserts:

Modern poets must experiment with form, where necessary, and also develop the genre. At the same time, attention must be paid to content, for the poet’s mission is to change society for the better, mirror the soul of society, and identify the diagnostic elements that the surgeon’s knife will be directed to. I see art as a means to an end. I have always believed that my works must have ideological

identity. Without ideological clarity, we can never make this place a better cradle for the future generations. If we will not have succeeded, at least we will have tried. We tried to achieve this in the 70s and 80s (Angira, 2016, p. 25).

Furthermore, the paper argues that Angira's personal moral consciousness is a vital force shaping his Revolutionary Egalitarian ideological orientation and that indeed, it has the greatest influence of all the other factors. Morally repulsed at the enthronement of injustice and the plight of the subaltern majority bred by the blatant egocentricism of the privileged elite few in his contemporary nationspace, Angira is driven by a moral compulsion to boldly contra pose this status quo. In the same moral tenor, he evolves and projects a subversive ideology, which the paper has designated African Revolutionary Egalitarianism. As a question of ethics and virtue, Angira is in ideological disposition opposed to the practical stratification of his society into the elite minority on one hand and the "peasantry, the proletariat, the unemployed, the hungry, the uprooted and dispossessed" (Lazarus, 1995, p. 16) subaltern majority on the other. As a matter of individual and collective conscience, Angira as earlier illustrated in his poetry, interrogates this stratification as an unethical contradiction. This is because ironically, it happens within the nation's conventional concept as a unified entity that shares common identities and goals, cultural, political, economic, social and locational characteristics as defining belonging (Manent, 2007). The exposition of the contradictions in their societies, more so to induce the subaltern to understand these contradictions by designing poetry such as would inspire and politicise them is not merely a politi-literary response to the capitalistic disregard of social or moral considerations in the drive to satisfy material ambitions by the political and economic elite class. Angira's constant probing of these aspects of Post-independence African society is neither in the spirit of calm or trivial reflection too. Rather, it is fundamentally in the spirit of a persistent moral pressure and an inbuilt sense of moral duty to partake in the establishment of a just and equitable human society that he harbours deep within himself and so is the clarity of his Revolutionary ideology and Egalitarian vision for the rehabilitation of the subaltern class in Post-independence Africa. Thus, the paper argues for a deep-seated moral consciousness in Angira's psyche, operating on a very basic humane level that constitutes an indispensable angle of analysis and reference in accounting for his African Revolutionary Egalitarian ideological worldview. This moral sensibility and persuasion comes across clearly in his assertion:

I belong to the larger family of those who yearn to make this earth a better place. A member of that family that longs to be heard, who also have a story to tell, whose dreams have been clouded and suffocated by the myriad contradictions that plague society today. Among those relegated to the peripheral existence and who are barely allowed near the ladder of upward mobility. And here I mean upward mobility into a world of equal opportunities rather than perpetually gingerly clinging to a rainbow of optimism and hope (Angira, 2016, p. 25).

Conclusion

This paper has put forward the argument that multiple factors, locatable starting in his formative years, underlie Angira's authorial ideology not as Marxist but as African Revolutionary Egalitarian. It has also undertaken a particularised delineation of these factors. The factors come across as key in so far as, in line with this paper's position, the adequate understanding of Angira's ideology is not mechanically determinable. Rather, it is of essence dependent upon a detailed apprehension of his mindset and experiences constituted in specific historical contexts and constraining his subjectivity as agent. The paper has presented the ideological labelling of Angira as Marxist as questionable and in its place proposed African Revolutionary Egalitarianism as the product of the intellectual and literary rumination of Angira. It has further critically engaged African Revolutionary Egalitarianism scrutinising it in terms of the boundaries that inform and limit it. Thus, obtaining impetus from the challenge to scholars of African affairs to pay attention to the field of African politico-intellectual ideas which continues to suffer neglect or is at best marginally studied, the paper has doubly attempted to contribute to the recognition and upholding of South-driven initiatives in the resolution of urgent issues militating against Post-independence Africa. This neglect or marginal attention has been criticised to be ironic and untenable since well into the 21st century, scholars still prominently make reference to North-driven exogenous ideas such as those of Plato, Aristotle, John Stuart Mill, John Locke, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, John Dewey, Montesquieu among many others in engaging the Post-independence African situation.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Joyce Wachira conceived the idea and drafted the paper. She analysed the primary data and the secondary data and synchronized the findings. Nicholas Kamau Goro and Stephen Mutie re-examined the content, furnished more insights and reviewed and edited the drafts. Joyce Wachira polished the paper.

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