

Review of: "Okolo on the Question of African Philosophy and its Periodization"

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I am in many ways sympathetic to the spirit of this article but have reservations about its form and content. And I guess my job as a reviewer ought to focus on the latter, the integrity of the scholarly work, so I will do just that.

The body of the essay seems to focus in the main on the polemical and important debate on the question of the existence of African philosophy that raged between the early 1970s and the late 1990s. I see a sense in which this debate might be considered dated or simply irrelevant to many contemporary African philosophers, and this should concern the authors. The more difficult problem for the authors, however, is the accusation that this debate is diversionary and subversive to the task of actually doing African philosophy. This latter concern has been expressed to my hearing in many seminars, conferences, and lectures that I have been a part of in many African countries' academies (in the philosophy departments or in African Studies). Nonetheless, I wouldn't suppose that these objections constitute sufficient grounds to nullify any attempt to revisit that debate and or any of the teething issues addressed within the corpus of that lively moment in the evolution of 'modern' African philosophy. But the question is why? Why exactly do we need to revisit the great debate at this time, either as contained in one philosopher's work or as a collective endeavour? The authors of this piece need to answer this question at the outset. And I think this cannot be avoided.

That said, let me return to a few of the many difficulties I encountered going through the content of the article.

1. There are far too many infelicities, typographic, grammatical and syntactic errors for this to pass as a finished work ready for publication, though I have to say upfront that the authors can deal with this challenge by themselves or employ the services of a proofreader. Let me point out a few of these infelicities.
 - a. When the authors mention 'Okolo', which Okolo do they mean? This should be clear at the outset, we have quite a few notable Okolos or Okoros in African philosophy including Okonda Okolo, Chukwudum Okolo and so on. They should endeavour to use the full names of interlocutors when they mention them for the first time, this problems runs throughout the essay.
 - b. In the Abstract, the comma should be removed after 'to' here: 'For Okolo, there was what could be referred to, as expressions of...'
 - c. In many cases where the authors should only write 'African philosophy' they included the definite article 'the', so you have 'the African philosophy'. And more worryingly, they use capital letters for some words for no reason, including the word 'African'. They should rather use italics or scare quotes to put an emphasis on certain word/s.

- d. The very first sentence in the Introduction has an error: 'It baffles coming across argumentative positions on the reality of...' This should read 'It is baffling to come...' On the same page (2) Levy-Bruhl is wrongly spelt (not that the name is that important!), and they end with 'just to mention a few', that phrase should be deleted, list only what you want and end with a full stop. On page 3, it should be 'anchored in', not 'anchored on'.
1. There is also a tendency to use multiple words when one would suffice throughout the piece. An example on page 3: 'The term 'philosophy', as history holds is first scholarly used/said/applied by the Samosian...' This is unnecessary and a little jejune.
2. The entire piece is gender insensitive. Consider substituting human, humanity or human beings for 'man', except in direct quotations.
3. On page 4, we have this: 'To be wise necessarily needs not to be educated and crack brain in search of logicity and criticality...' What do the authors mean? There are other problems here, but 'crack brain'? A little hilarious! I'm forced to have to ask them to consult a dictionary a bit. And then I read 'Okolo and co' throughout the piece. This is at best informal language, please revise. For citational purposes, 'Ngugi' is used as the surname, not 'Thiong'O'.
4. Lengthy, incoherent sentences abound throughout the piece, with many of those 'bearing' typos and grammar problems. For example, on page 11: "He believed that criticality and engaging the mind squarely rational can never be possible without a western form of education..." Several problems here. Take another surprising example on page 12: 'Was the European who taught the African the invention of fire with stones, the digging of hole along the foot path to subdue the enemy, make home pots both for cookeries and storage which science has proven to be the best healthy and safest and less toxic to life, to fashion knife from palm-frond extract which served him adequately them and later with bronze iron, construct his bed some of which are in storey forms, making of his cultural music drum which is highly technical, engage religiously and in communion with both visible and the invisible beings and certainly got results inventions like isimbidi, signs, and those of the ancient origins, how to genuinely moral conscious, apply herbs, roots, flowers and other natural items to fly (witch-craft), give to mammals so as to push down quickly and painlessly the after when it becomes difficult to follow the child/ren, invention of agricultural tools and management of farm inputs, eating good food which kept them longer than what the Europeans have provided us with, today that damage systems and send us to earlier grave than what was obtainable in this so tagged 'irrational, uncoordinated and uncritical African existential era', just to mention but a few?' Far too many problems here. The sentence immediately after this seems even longer and more issues. I advise the authors to write shorter, clearer and more active sentences.

Recommendations

As I suggested, not everything is wrong with this piece. I believe the issues the authors pursue are very important, but the essay should be reformulated to serve the authors' purpose better. One way of doing this is to read the debate on the existence of African philosophy more closely and be more cautious about how they connect key figures like Wiredu, Bodunrin, Houtondji and Okolo with specific ideas. Whatever the authors do, they should refrain from suggesting that these African philosophers were decidedly Eurocentric or racist against themselves or other Africans! This is simply false at best. Okolo and others clearly made some mistakes, even serious ones, I'm convinced of that, but they were actually

fighting for their very lives, they were pushing back against a highly obnoxious conception of human ideas, philosophy and Africa/ns as peddled by Eurocentric scholars.

My more helpful suggestion is to invite the authors to change the focus of the article and do something on the controversial issue of periodisation in African philosophy while delimiting the scope and limits of the discipline in Africa (I would love to read that). Much of the materials they need for that are already in the present article. In this way, they can do a far more original piece by not focusing on only Okolo or any other philosopher. They can then bring in the interesting insights from the great debate and challenge them as they admirably did in the present piece. They need not dwell too much on that debate, and by all means, show that they are aware of the current state of the field, which is very important. I'm happy to continue this discussion with the authors in whatever way beyond this space.