


# Decolonisation of African philosophy: Regular – abstraction or scientific thinking?

**Author:**Johan A. van Rooyen<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Johan van Rooyen, roojresearch@gmail.com

**Dates:**

Received: 09 Jan. 2024

Accepted: 24 Apr. 2024

Published: 25 July 2024

**How to cite this article:**

Van Rooyen, J.A., 2024, 'Decolonisation of African philosophy: Regular – abstraction or scientific thinking?', *Inkanyiso* 16(1), a112. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ink.v16i1.112>

**Copyright:**

© 2024. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

It is this article's projection to think decolonised as an African (as my own *Gestimmtheit* is from Africa), with Okolo's proposition that African philosophy appeared only from the African-European connection. Okolo, was what can be point to, as utterances of philosophical proclivities that are not philosophically inherent, viewed as a (the) philosophy in Africa that originated and persisted in Africa. This can be explicated as an elementary cultural utterance of sapiens in Africa. Yet, original philosophy is defined by captious cogitation or thinking that originated post-World War II whereupon Africans should have seized some degree of precise scholarly and spontaneity, thus African philosophy. Still, it raises the inquiry: Why primarily inquire African philosophy? What is the motive behind African philosophy formulation of African sagaciousness, be a by-product of an African-European connection? A transparent enigma in Okolo's stance is the assertion that the aggregated African, specifically the substance of being-African that he labelled with the phrase being-with is a non-African-radiation, and therefore not a realistic sapiens philosophy for European radiation on African philosophy.

**Contribution:** This article investigates the theory or proposal that being or existential designate the evidence of existence that is at the heart or core of philosophy, an African-philosophy in its affirmative stance, without the European connection. This investigation then derives from: one, to evaluate the critique from sceptic authors against Okolo's deficiency, two, to investigate the dating of the African philosophy thus the locality that philosophy has consistently abided and could be acquired in the dating's spheres, and three, presupposes that what Africa is can then, with credibility, carry Africa.

**Keywords:** Okolo; Africa; philosophy; dating/periodisation; thinking; cultural; educatedness; inter-subjectivity; Veldsman.

## Introduction

This article is in a short conversation with Ugwu, Ozoemena and Ukwuoma regarding a sublime article they authored titled *Okolo on the Question of African Philosophy and its Periodization* (2023). When scholars entertain transversality to the contentious localities on the existence of African philosophy, they, most astonishingly, get inattentively captivated with an impulsiveness in such a discourse. Even worse is the tendency that even Africans regard African philosophy as prerequisite from the customs of Western philosophy that requires: (1) a subsidiary of African philosophy to Western rational and philosophical values; (2) depositions that are more important from a Western philosophy context that is supplemental to the African philosophy; and (3) that Africans had never been rational and captious enough, and therefore, impotent of philosophising continuously drawing from the European connection. Absurdly, this locale is significantly impotent from degrading appreciation of Africa and Africans by a few tendentious thinkers like Hegel, Ley-Bruhl, Westermann, Diedrich, Hume, Kant, and Carothers – and amusingly a few African thinkers like Wiredu, Hountondji, Momoh, Okolo, and Okere, to name only a few. Yet and notwithstanding this, it is this article's foundational objective to be part of a bickering-discourse as well as counteracting-bickering-discourse as to the existential and historicisation of African philosophy. It should be earmarked as a rejoining discourse in principle with Okolo and other scholars of minds alike who suggest that African philosophy just emerged at the African-European connection (Ugwu et al. 2023:1).

From this standpoint, this article then presupposes a contention that the authenticity of existence or *being*,<sup>1</sup> the stage of actuality (*being*) is the primary discourse of philosophy. Thus, the shielded

1. Please note that in the context of this article, the terms existentialism and *being* are used interchangeably. The reason for this is that it is better for me to use these terms in different, albeit same, meaningful contexts; however, for me, it resonates better from time to time as interchangeable in this article.

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

locality reassortment that there is (in Africa) a philosophy in all its manifestations as in so much as this philosophy is an interpretation of intellect. In other words:

... that dating of the African Philosophy implicates the idea of dating being in Africa, hence being in Africa predates the World War II as Okolo and likes, postulated. (Ugwu et al. 2023:1)

Hence, the implication of periodisation of philosophy, particularly with the recognition that it has been ventured with a multitude of coercion and contempt of the African, suggesting that the African has no philosophy, therefore, ridiculous and *being* mediocre till such a time they ascertain the European connection, and consequently intelligent engagement, does not emerge anyhow. It is at this juncture that convinced queries beseeched justification: what Africa is has always existed, in a state of *being* in Africa, ergo distinguished as *One* with the authenticity of *being*, ergo has also appreciated that Africa's philosophy emerged post World War II; why is there a substantial disparity betwixt them (African & Western philosophy)? Is the African socio-ontological *being-with* that is the African sapiens philosophy as named by Okolo, a by-product of pre or post World War II Africa?

This been contemplated, and to enhance what was said above, this article will further endorse philosophical, theoretical, as well as circumstantial inquiries (investigations) as well as elucidation meaning, that is docked on captious assessment. Thus, the forecast (in this article) is that the periodisation, as well as the analytics of the African philosophy as sapiens *beings*, as it is before named by Okolo and other scholars alike, are error-ridden and groundless (Ugwu et al. 2023:1). The article shall also propose for enhanced discourses on African philosophy and thus postulates a grandeur of what African *Oneness* is and that Africa with its Africa sapiens can acclaim and carry Africa's *being* (existentially).

The article is configured in segments with an abstract where an abridged *précis* of the article is composed, in which *the* abstraction of Philosophy with the abstract's embodiment is offered as an extensive investigation. After this, a segment of what is to be understood by an appreciation of philosophy that entails an investigation of the appreciation and awe of philosophy is given, which is followed by a segment discussing Okolo's investigation of philosophy as a philosophical theory, as well as the action it instils and lastly, a postulation. In doing this, the author will make use of the following headings, namely: (1) *Abstraction of philosophy*, (2) *Okolo's interpretation of philosophy*, (3) *Regular thinking*, (4) *Experimental/scientific thinking*, (5) *Philosophical thinking*, and (6) *African philosophical thinking*, and lastly an abridged summary with a postulation as a deduction.

## Abstraction of philosophy

The appellation of philosophy, as the record specifies, primarily uttered by the Samosian, mathematician and algorithmic philosopher Pythagoras, suggested an appreciation for

sapiens sense and understanding as it is extrapolated with the intelligence knowhow in investigating some sapiens-*being*, as it is composed for an appellation. Therefore, as an appellation, philosophy is an aftermath of sapiens conjecture and affection of intelligence declared like sapiens intelligence in collaboration with existential eventualities. Destiny or providence in discoursing the African philosophy in specific, as per one example Chimakonam (2015:4–9), would bicker that diverse philosophies from sapiens intelligence can be appreciated as sapiens sense and understanding, unless you are an African as there are always meanderings, a sense of annoyance and dissatisfaction regarding the dilemmas, for example thralldom (slavery), colonialism, neo-colonialism, bigotry, and apartheid, among others, that ensued African sapiens. Yet and notwithstanding this, as an appellation, when it comes to the etymological-philosophy in Greek, that means – *philein* (or *philo* in Latin), which means 'to love' or *oneness*, or better yet, *being* in oneness with intelligence. Therefore, a philosopher that is emerging as a *lover* or *oneness* of intelligence. The indication here is that the approach of philosophy abides specifically, *WHAT IT IS*, that suggests that it must be accommodated and practised, to the actuality of *being* and in the existential locale to vindicate and endorse its intelligence, and therefore thus, does it not seize in theory as something *out* there, rather *in* here. Notwithstanding this or still in today's contemporary broader perspective in our world of intelligence (specifically here in Africa) there are more, from an African point of view, compatible with the terms knowledge, understanding or even better discernibleness. It is discardable as it does not only boil down to precisely the same requirements or demands of what intelligence is.

Therefore, it could be inquired: what is intelligence, and how could we as African sapiens, be a friend of intelligence? Alternatively, does philosophy aggregate theoretically fiendlike intelligence? I mean to say that here, (in Africa) to become a friend to intelligence, we as sapiens Africans must take ownership of the sentiment of *being* captious yet, cogent, coherent, compelling, consistent, convincing and then it will bear us to be intelligent. Then, we can safely agree that intelligence here will and can be regarded as veracious and factual, putting forward an aggregated as well as an elevated and soaring discernment of intelligence. In an ambiguous context, no philosophical common sense can be fortified, yet, in an unambiguous context. A philosophical prudence is to be experienced as a oneness, a friend. Makumba (2005) notes that intelligence could be regarded as:

[C]ertain knowledge of the deepest causes of everything' demanding that a wiseman is the one who has certain knowledge about the most general causes of everything, and not just in some particular speciality as is commonly understood. (p. 32)

Hence, can this intelligence be justified as the recondite effects of the aggregated? Meaning alternatively, convinced intelligence regarding the almost prevailing effects of the aggregated. Yet Plato, as like many other scholars, also

Okolo, would entertain intelligence as a prominence, a proviso that alternatively has a standing that provides an attainment of intelligence after years of academic calisthenics, gathering the byproduct of intelligence or even better articulated *transcendence*.

To me, intelligence is an honest endowment of or from sapiens, specifically prevailing in creatures that are related to the kingdom Animalia,<sup>2</sup> against Nature as an Environ in an ontological subjectivities. A myriad of intelligent and schooled sapiens are not sagacious (wise);<sup>3</sup> yet, they could be extremely intelligent as well those who are academically savant with ingenious bright cognitive as well as affective inter-subjectivity. And vice versa, are there a myriad of non-academic sapiens that are blessed with these inter-subjectivities.

Notwithstanding this, sagacious sapiens need a scholarly intelligence for the sake of complementarity, as he or she can surely be misled by an intelligent sapiens, specifically when it boils down to perusing, handwriting, verballity and other intelligent formalities. Still on the other side of the coin, a sagacious sapiens can surely enact on the intelligence of a scholarly sapiens and make he or she appear to be unintelligent, specifically when it boils down to formalities beyond academics, say for arguments sake, regarding a culturist that is glanced to have well-to-do social formalities, where norms in the contexts of sapiens traditional decree, perceptions piloted by a sense of attitudes or the so called acumen of intelligence, regarding existential probabilities of the sapiens, among others. Therefore, it is forlorn that some intelligence, some scholarly sapiens in the present-day are debilitated sapiens who do not know where they come from, and even worse, who they are, both in an anthropological sense, and not just in a cultural sense. In other words, some intelligent sapiens do not know how to delineate their existential probabilities that sagacious sapiens ought to be aware of – to be more substantial and cogent than scholarly academic provisioners. It is this essence, specifically here at this point of juncture in this article, from where intelligence is proposed.

Being sagacious is one thing; yet, what does it bring to the table (discourse)? To be sagacious establish sapiens on the one side of the table, with a sense of certainty, but not to my mind automatically as, usually there is the other side of the table to be taken up, and herein *lies the rub* (conundrum). Let me explain this by investigate Okolo's interpretation of (African) Philosophy, next.

2.As a scientific definition for 'animal', in this context when we speak of creatures (beings), it is any of the multicellular organisms belonging to the kingdom 'Animalia'. All animals are eukaryotes, with each of their cells having a nucleus containing DNA. Most animals develop from a blastula and have a digestive tract, nervous system, the ability to move voluntarily, and specialised sensory organs for recognising and responding to stimuli in the environment. Animals are heterotrophs, feeding on plants, other animals, or organic matter. The first animals probably evolved from protists and appeared during the Precambrian Era, therefore, also *Homo sapiens*

3.Please take cognisance that the author uses the terms 'wise' and 'sagacious' interchangeably as the continuation with the one or the other sometimes leads to misinterpretation. However, for the purpose of this article, both mean the same and must be ontologically as well as epistemologically understood as the same.

## Okolo's interpretation of philosophy

Ugwu et al. (2023:5) suggests that Chukwudum Barnabas Okolo, a professor in African philosophy, was consistently indecisive to render an explanation of what African philosophy is regarding that it consists of por exist of or *being* in no association with, say for instance, Africans, Chinese or even Western philosophers among others. Still, Okolo, in some instances, demonstrates an ultimate call for philosophy as an avocation and in a prevailing sense. Philosophy, for Okolo (1993), is:

[A] form of critical inquiry into things and their causes, human experience, and man's role and prospects in it. It is in short, the highest form of inquiry because it alone involves no presuppositions, no taking anything for granted A Philosophy thus questions everything including itself ... Philosophy tries to give a coherent, systematic account of the multi-faceted reality, of all nature and how man knows and interprets it. Philosophy indeed addresses itself to all sorts of problems which burden the human mind, and which are important to or confront man in their kinds and intensity. (pp. 3–4)

For Ugwu et al. (2023:6), it infers that philosophy is the utilisation of captious investigation onto what is *being*, and which, therefore, influence sapiens in diverse space(s). Therefore, it boils down to that IT<sup>4</sup> acts with *being* sapiens as well as other phenomena, that hinder sapiens in their environ, with ontological behaviour that is effectively the heart or substance of being as it is the rationale of philosophy. To me, this implicates then that philosophy is an enterprise to rationalise IT; thus, it is given a systematic, neat, and precise outlook, of that what is *being* in the appearance and prospect of sapiens involvement in their world, as it contracts with the most ordinary hypothetical constructs that affect sapiens cogitation and therefore its duplication and/or depictions as sapiens *being* in a profound existential phenomenon (Ugwu et al. 2023:2). This entails that Okolo (1993) the following phenomenological constructs that sapiens must endure namely:

That at times, the particular problem is about the ideal government and social organization for man; at other times, it is the ideal human life, laws, the nature of the universe, human history, world history, thinking itself, material objects, human consciousness, and intentionality, etc. these are typical philosophical subject-matters dealt with by different branches and systems of philosophy. (p. 4)

Therefore, revisiting that does not irritate sapiens' constructs and behaviour with other phenomena is not philosophy in essence. It is a peculiarity that is ordained to contemplate the construction of *being* sagacious to discourse the existential phenomena as IT entrepreneur sapiens in his or her environ and thus, sapiens experience, through their foundational rationale of philosophy. No wonder then that Heidegger, in his ontological deconstruction grandeur, had not-so-wonderful things to say regarding the pre-Socratic philosophers who

4.In this article, this hyphenated IT takes cogitation to the author himself as an African and the term is loosely based interchangeably as the continuation with the one or the other. As there is in this instance many IT'S in the sapiens sphere of existence and this leads to misinterpretation, for the purpose of this article, this IT (S) has an ontological as well as epistemological reality to 'IT'.

tried to negate the inquiry of *being* in holistic stages and grandeur as it resonates with a negative meme or grouping that resulted in a renowned dual essence (ideal) with the empirically existent or matter. Thus, Heidegger is frowning upon Socrates and post-Socratic philosophers who veered away from the dominant inquiry of *being* emanating a wrong foundational trauma on Western philosophers as it constitutes in the philosophies of Medieval thinkers, for example Descartes, Kant, and perhaps Locke (Korab-Karpowicz 2019:64–67, 109–178; Okolo 1993:6). Eventually, after this criticising process, Heidegger put forward a summary of his philosophy regarding Dasein and his approach of *being* in the world. With this he, therefore, is philosophising principality from the world of *being* sapiens, and their endurance in their world also and yet, IT can be vindicated with Okolo's point of view that philosophy is indeed conformist, as well as an aftermath of articulated knowledge together with captious cogitation. Still, to the novice sapiens' interpretation, elegantly pointing to his philosophy in Africa, the timeslot of evidently (a deceived sense that there were never a philosophy here in Africa), Okolo adhered to a diverse interpretation and/or appreciation of philosophy:

To some people, philosophy connotes something mystical, mysterious, difficult, esoteric, reserved for massive intellects only; Others think of philosophy as a subject which deals with matters out of this world, in a spiritual realm. Others still call philosophy people's worldview or one's moral guide. (1989:19, 1993:3)

I think it is content to add that philosophy accepted by Africans, as well as articulated above, is in an unbound, natural or a non-scholarly apprehension that determines a non-philosophy, as some of these implications of philosophy, for Okolo, do not absorb captious cogitation, as well as the reliance exclusively on philosophising to be rationalistic in this discourse. Meaning that, if one contemplates how philosophy is narrated in Africa, Okolo starts separating philosophical stages in essence and/or inherently significantly at a level of philosophising pointing right down his unconventional philosophy-in-Africa as a Canon-philosophical plan, where he begins recounting the importance of philosophy as it involves sapiens in a profound and captivating grandeur. That is why this article will shortly identify these substage-stages. The first of that will be regular thinking.

## Regular thinking

This stage of thinking is motivated by sapiens dexterity with that of what sapiens is enriched with - to be distinguished from the kingdom of Animalia (see footnote 2). It is the spontaneous sapiens, and this spontaneity or impulsiveness of sapiens is used on a day-to-day basis to dispose and grasp what he or she is *being*-endure. It is the logic basis for post-sapiens being that are recounted as a thinking-*being* whose phenomenon of their cognisance drive them into benefiting with it as sapiens. Okolo (1993:1) asserts this when he points out:

In this sense, all men in all cultures are rational, following this, it could be said that there is no pre-thinking, pre-logical stage of human development, no pre-logical human beings. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that people in all cultures, and races differ in

degree not kind in the use they make of this faculty unique to man. (Okolo 1993:1)

A captious connotation of this is Okolo's effort to resolve the racial conundrum to the one and initiate more such conundrums, to the other. Thinkers have set up thinking as the foundational prerequisite for sapiens. Thus, if a (the) stage(s) of philosophising are contradicting Africans, say for instance from the Americans or Europeans, et cetera (as per only two examples), are because of a false perception that Africans have slower thought processes compared to other sapiens, are defiantly not vindicated. And to illustrate this kind of Western effects on Okolo's work Ugwu et al. (2023:7) stipulates:

All men, literate, and illiterate civilized or backward, unless impaired by some accident, carry out ordinary reflection or thinking in their everyday world, in living out their daily experiences. (p. 1)

Therefore, to me, regular thinking sapiens is indicative of the Greek verb *philosophhein*. That *gist fully* infers that the *being* of sapiens is to grasp, investigate, expand, and then what is being acquired is sagaciousness and facts and/or veracity regarding the cosmos, the cosmological answer of being sapiens. This brings me to the second stage of thinking, namely, the experimental or rather the scientific thinking. My reason for this is that it will render ourselves a diploid of recognitions regarding Philosophy in and on Africa.

## Experimental and/or scientific thinking

Equivalent to Okolo (1993:1–2), this stage of thinking has a dual rationale namely, a regular and a contemporary rationale. It is the regular thinking *being* appropriately correlated with thinking as an embodiment of being sagacious, and experimental thinking the disposing thereof refers to *being* sagacious is a stage of questioning with an eschatological or view-to-the-end reasoning that are pointed to the constitution of thought. Therefore, is it justified to render that every scholar who are following, this castigation can be referred to be an experiment in its stage of questioning. Still and to the point that in its regular and contemporary stages, experimental rationale that resonates with disciplines that gains their impetus through hypotheses, experiments, and its byproducts, of empirical validation, (that usually take place) in empirical based laboratories. Now, I am asking: Does this not need some kind of conformed pedagogy as well as guidance and instructions, through connoisseurs in their disciplines? This question leads us then to the second stage of philosophical thinking and the reason for this is that philosophical rationale has always been affiliated with happenings or to also be empirical orientated, validations.

## Philosophic thinking

Peculiarly (to my mind), philosophical rationale carders rationality and IT review amplitudes validations or happenings and its effects and it points to a factuality that deliberates rationale and cogitation. Therefore, does it

embody that what is *being*-happenings or validations are defiantly not cogitation as the same as religious ways and beliefs, are. I think this is the reason why Okolo urges that - not as experimental thinking that engross it with the query of the howness of a (the) phenomenon – rather with philosophical thought that renders itself to the whyness of the embodied. In this, it deems it to render that the thinker's work is engaged in an enigma resolving around *normal as possible* thinking contemplatively, can be. Thus, the way of philosophy is *a-priori* and not empirical that originates as an *a-priori* conduction (thus self-sufficient in the sapiens world), and not by experience. Ugwu et al (2023:7) declare that:

Okolo does not stop at explaining in generic terms and conceptualization, Philosophic Thinking, but goes on to explain it in relation to the African person. (p. 7)

## African philosophical thinking

To create a lucid foundational as to what Okolo when Ugwu et al. (2023) interjects when stating:

To complete these basic distinctions, we lastly take note of the distinction between philosophical thinking and African philosophical thinking notwithstanding the fact that the latter is what this work is all about. (p. 7)

Through this, Okolo (1993:6) specifies that his objective of restraining restraining the two stages of not-evidentiality-philosophy (natural philosophy in Africa that is named as regular thinking, as well as contemplation of philosophy in a very broad sense), with the stage of evidential philosophy (conforming, as well as African philosophy), that are named African philosophical thought rather to be recommended extensively by the philosophical thought stage. This being what it is, African philosophical thought, and it is a factual philosophical thought and endorsement. Thus, a normal projection in endorsements to the anthropocentric ontology alike Heidegger, Okolo (1993) pointed out that specific endorsements to African philosophical thought:

African philosophical thinking ... restricts its inquiries to the African and his presence-in-the-world. It is certainly philosophizing but in the context of African experience or world-view. In short African philosophical thinking ... is one of the many modes of philosophizing or critically analysing and interpreting reality as different peoples, races, and cultures view it. In African philosophy, therefore, the philosopher reflects and concentrates on African reality, on the African, his role and place in it and not on reality as such nor on man in the abstract. (p. 6)

The main aim here regarding African philosophical thought, is that he (Okolo) finally characterizes the African philosophy as ternary and fretty due to the following: firstly, because all regarding the African-sapiens, what Africans endure, as well as what the African worldview are purporting. Secondly, it is a stage of thought that can be labelled eccentricity, as well as maybe (the) extraordinary still, in a good sense of the word, regarding African sapiens environ. Lastly, it focuses in on everything that is evident to *being* an African, and have nothing to do with complexities as it then extrapolates (validate) itself in an absolute positive and plausible entity.

## Postulation

In conclusion, the African has its own stage of philosophising to view African phenomena. Its main objective is to systematically explicate and interpret the African world and perhaps alter it. Thus, and notwithstanding this, African sapiens bear their own explications with their experiences of African phenomena, the African world of eventualities as is interpreted by the African. This stage endeavour of *being* needs desperate, as well as systematic African interpretation of what *being* African is.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

J.A.v.R. declares that they are the sole author of this article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

## References

- Chimakonam J.O., 2015, 'Transforming the African philosophical place through conversations: An inquiry into the Global Expansion of Thought (GET)', *South African Journal of Philosophy* 34(4), 462–479. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2015.1104795>
- Korab-Karpowicz, J.W., 2017, *The pre-Socratics in the thought of Martin Heidegger*, New edn., Peter Lang GmbH: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften; 2017.
- Makumba, M., 2005, *Introduction to philosophy*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi.
- Okolo, C.B., 1989, *Philosophy of education and education of philosophy*, Snaap Press Ltd, Enugu.
- Okolo, C.B., 1993, *African philosophy: An introduction*, Revised edn., CECTA (NIG.) Limited, Enugu.
- Ugwu, A., Ozoemena, L.C. & Ukwuoma, I.I., 2023, *Okolo on the question of African philosophy and its periodization*, viewed 19 September 2023, from <https://www.queios.com/read/A7DAWK.2>.