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Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe

## The Social Sciences and Knowledge Production in Africa: The Contribution of Claude Ake

### *Abstract*

This article examines the strengths and weaknesses of Ake's contribution to the social sciences and knowledge production in Africa. It discusses the relevance of Ake's works for adapting the intellectual legacies of Marxist scholarship to understanding the political economy and social history of contemporary Africa. It also highlights the shortcomings noted in his orientation, and dispositions to expatriate knowledge generally, and the Western social science in particular. Given his advocacy of the need to reconstruct existing disciplinary fields following uniquely African critiques and interpretations, the study presents Ake's works as a corrective intervention to Euro-centrism and advocates the practice of 'non-hierarchical' 'cross-regional' 'dialogue', in which neither the North nor the South is taken as the paradigm against which 'the other' is measured and pronounced inadequate.

### *Keywords*

*Knowledge production, endogeneity, social sciences in Africa, post-Marxism, post-colonialism*

Claude Ake (1939-1996) is one of Africa's foremost political philosophers who worked extensively in the area of political theory and made original and uniquely perceptible contributions to the political economy of democracy and development in Africa. In addition, he is a major praxiological figure from whose works the real world in the continent can best be understood. His writings therefore constitute a significant entry point not just for understanding contemporary Africa, but also for rethinking globalization, modernity and other larger theoretical concerns that are shared by post-colonial theorists throughout the world. The recurring topicality and significance of his contribution to African political thought assuredly place him in the pantheon of great African political thinkers alongside such luminaries as Cheikh Anta Diop and Samir Amin (Martin 1996). Ake's works are particularly

instructive given his successful application of the radical theory in illuminating 'the African condition' and as a guide to political action (Harris 2005: 86). He has no doubt made penetrating contributions, which, although unpopular in the past, are instructive points of departure today. As such, the foci of his works are bound to provoke widespread intellectual interest and attention.

This article discusses Ake's contribution to knowledge production in Africa<sup>1</sup>. It examines his critique of Western social science in its application to Africa. One of his major works 'Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development' is discussed in the light of his critique of expatriate social science and his conception of the conditions for re-creating and re-inventing 'the social sciences in Africa' as a unified body of knowledge relevant for speaking about social realities in the continent. The making of Ake's life, his career and scholarship as well as other developments and issues which influenced different aspects and periods of his thought are matters that will not be treated here.<sup>2</sup> Rather, his contribution to the social sciences and knowledge production in Africa through his critique of Western social science and the limitations of his efforts in this regard are at the focus of analysis in this article. The aim is to establish some of Ake's contribution and insights that are linked to the debate on 'post-coloniality'.

Data were obtained for this study from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data took the form of extensive unstructured in-depth interviews conducted with a selected group of twenty strategic informants purposively sampled, five each from Claude Ake's contemporaries, old friends, colleagues and past students. Secondary data were drawn from Ake's original texts; published commentaries, critiques and tributes written in his honour before and after his death by his colleagues, friends and other institutional bodies; the information available in his curriculum vitae; and the texts which focus not only on the debates and issues on which he wrote, but also on the general context of scholarship in Africa during his life-time and beyond. Following the introduction, this article is divided into four sections. The first section conceptualizes 'post-coloniality' and describes the making of 'post-colonial studies'. The second discusses Ake's critique of Western social science and his contribution to knowledge production in Africa. The third provides his advocacy on the need for 'endogeneity' in knowledge production in Africa, while the fourth offers a conclusion.

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1 The author would like to thank the African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands, for organizing a seminar at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands, in March 2008, at which an earlier version of this article received helpful discussion. He is also grateful to Adigun A. B. Agbaje, Dirk Kohnert, Jon G. Abbink, Ulrich Lölke and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions on earlier versions of this article.

2 For a detailed treatment of Ake's biography and theoretical orientations, see Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe (2008).

### Conceptualizing 'Post-Coloniality'

What is 'post-coloniality'? How relevant is it for understanding Ake's works? And what relationship exists between this concept and Ake's characterization of the African condition? This section answers these questions and draws attention to some of Ake's contribution and insights which speak to the debate on 'post-coloniality'.<sup>3</sup> Post-colonial studies is the intellectual engagement developed over the past three decades on a set of issues, debates and articulations of points of intervention, performed as a tri-continental project within the institutional sites of universities and research centres across the world, particularly outside the metropolitan intellectual centres (Young 1990), and across a range of disciplinary fields.<sup>4</sup> Characterized by its geographical capaciousness and multiple sites of production, its lineage embraces Frantz Fanon's 'theorization of anti-colonialism and the complex psychology of racism' articulated in the 1950s; Albert Memmi's analysis in the 1950s of 'the drama of North African decolonization'; Edward Said's elaboration of Fanon's (1968: 102) thesis that 'Europe is literally the creation of the Third World' in his (1978) *Orientalism*, which sparked decades of scholarship on occidental representations of the East; the wide-ranging scholarship of Caribbeanists like C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney and Wilson Harris, whose early lives in Trinidad and Guyana respectively, shaped their very different approaches to the history of colonialism after their migration to England; the works of theorists of the Hispanophone Americas, from Gloria Anzaldúa to José David Saldivar; and the contribution of the Subaltern Studies Group in India initiated by Ranajit Guha, with Partha Chatterjee, Sumit Sarkar, Gayatri C. Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty as its founding members. Its emergence was inspired by the realization by these scholars that post-Enlightenment traditions of European historiography had led to a long-standing neglect of 'history from the South' and that disciplinary practices had failed to address the full complexity of historical change in the era that they studied. Hence the determination to make the perspectives of other disciplines integral to the historical enterprise (Holsinger 2002: 1195). It is also an intellectual-political discourse inspired inter alia by Marxist, structuralist, post-modernist and post-structuralist writings and deals with the legacies of the Enlightenment for post-colonial societies generally and Africa, Asia and Latin Amer-

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3 The section is organized in this order mainly because unless we first establish from the beginning what 'post-coloniality' is, it may not be convincing to see how Ake's works are linked to the debate on it.

4 For further discussions on 'post-coloniality' and the intellectual genealogy of 'post-colonial studies', see Michael M. J. Fischer (1988), Florencia E. Mallon (1994), Lloyd Kramer (1997), K. S. Brown (1999), Bruce W. Holsinger (2002) and Joseph Massad (2004).

ica in particular.<sup>5</sup> 'Post-coloniality' is therefore an intellectual field in which no single historical perspective can have a monopoly over the elaboration of 'the post-colony' or 'the post-colonial condition'.<sup>6</sup>

While some post-colonial theorists have been influenced by the cultural and political critiques developed over time by structuralist and post-structuralist theorists like Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, Ake was influenced mainly by the intellectual legacies of Marxist scholarship, particularly the writings of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Rudolf Hilferding and Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, especially as articulated in the Latin American contributions to the theories of underdevelopment and dependency (Arowosegbe 2008). As Ake's works reveal, barring the historicist reading noted in his epistemological and methodological formulations, Marx remains relevant not just as a critic of capitalism and liberalism but also to any 'post-colonial' and 'post-modernist' project of history writing. And as Kelly Harris explains: 'Underdevelopment theorists clearly embrace much of the philosophy of Marx and Engels and Ake was no different.' 'The Marxist vision of development seems closer to Ake's notion of development' (2005: 78).

While 'post-coloniality' makes clear the legacies of inherited power relations and their continuing effects on modern global culture and politics (Ashcroft *et al.* 1998), its exponents<sup>7</sup> seek to replace the hermeneutic approach to the construction of history by competing constructions of the past.<sup>8</sup> Its spirit is found in the writings of Hichem Djait, the Tunisian historian who accused imperial Europe of denying Africa its own vision of humanity. It is also found in Fanon's (1968) articulation of 'the African liberation struggle', which held on to the Enlightenment idea of the equality of the human person. The engagement with European thought is thus marked by the fact that the European intellectual tradition is the most dominant in the social sciences departments of most, if not all modern universities today. And as Samir Amin (1989) observes, although the idea of the European intellectual tradition stretching back to ancient Greece is merely a fabrication of relatively recent European history, it is the genealogy of the thought in which social scientists across the world find themselves inserted. Given the opposing claims to history around which the

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5 Bill Ashcroft *et al.* (1995).

6 For probing analyses of 'post-coloniality', especially in the context of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, see Aijaz Ahmed (1992) and R. Radhakrishnan (1993).

7 I refer here to the growing body of works by such post-colonial theorists as Achille Mbembe, Homi K. Bhabha, Kwame A. Appiah and Partha Chatterjee, each of which problematizes received historiographies.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche's (1957) text is a seminal treatment of the selective privileging of issues and people in world history by the West. For an in-depth critique of historicism and the idea of 'the political' or 'political modernity', see Ashis Nandy (1995) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000).

genealogy of the social sciences is constructed, the critique of historicism is therefore an integral part of the unended story of 'post-colonial studies'.

Ake did not use the very notion of 'post-coloniality', which is central in this article.<sup>9</sup> Rather, his publications are marked by 'an original brand of Marxism' and not so much by the debate on 'post-coloniality', which only took the centre stage a few years before his death. Nevertheless, some of his contribution and insights can be linked to the debate on 'post-coloniality'. This section attempts to make such linkage 'explicit'. Importantly, by questioning the use of the prefix 'post' in 'post-colonial' as an appropriate discursive referent for referring to the state in Africa, Ake contributes to, and engages with characteristic ingenuity, a contentious debate of continuing concern for post-colonial theorists on Africa: this bears on the extent to which Africa's 'colonial past' still influences its 'post-colonial present'. Notwithstanding the passage of time after formal independence and the many experiences which now re-shape social memory through the introduction of new agendas, defining events and political practices in the continent, Ake (1985a, 1985b and 1996) argues that far from being obscure or overwritten, significant legacies of Africa's 'colonial past' still influence its 'post-colonial moment' in remarkable ways. In proving this assertion, Ake (1985a: 108) observes that although the state's form of domination under capitalism is the one under which autonomization and other essential features of the state are actually developed,<sup>10</sup> the specific form of capitalist development which occurred in Africa is both 'enclave and peripheral'. He traces the history of the state in Africa to (i) colonialism and the capitalist penetration of the regions and (ii) the eventual political legacy of colonialism for the continent.<sup>11</sup> Being a colonial creation, he questions the appropriateness of referring to the social formations in Africa as 'independent states'. As he puts it, this is mainly because "the process of state formation in the continent is bogged down by knotty contradictions, which stubbornly resist transcendence" (Ake 1985a: 108). Speaking to these contradictions, Ake (1985a and 1996) refers to the wholesale importation of the mentalities, practices and routines of the colonial state into its post-colonial successor and the limited nature of the state's independence, which resulted from this process. He identifies 'limited auto-

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9 This is an important caution for our purpose in this work.

10 In emphasizing the salience of the state's form of domination under 'capitalism', Ake (1985a: 105-108) concedes that socialist, pre-capitalist and other 'non-capitalist' forms of the state's domination also exist.

11 A major aspect of his works is the contention that an understanding of the nature and character of the state in Africa is important for capturing the dynamics of political and socio-economic processes within it. This, according to him is because the state is the central locus of politics and therefore the major determinant of the direction of most societal processes. For an elaboration on this contention, see Ake (1985a and 1985b).

nomy' as 'the unique feature of the state in Africa'<sup>12</sup> and points out that being a 'post-colonial state', the lack of autonomy of the state in Africa furthers its dependent and peripheralized status within the polarized system of global capitalism. In doing this, he draws attention to the role of the state, which he describes as central to the worldwide polarization of the capitalist system through the intensification of its dependent and appendage status to the metropolitan economies. Politically, Ake (1996: 2-3) observes that in spite of independence, 'the statism', 'arbitrariness' and 'absoluteness' of the colonial state crept intact into its 'post-colonial heir' and still define its character as an autocratic and exclusive state which alienates people in economic and political decision-making processes.<sup>13</sup> Economically, Ake (1981: 44-65) states that the 'dependence', 'disarticulation' and 'contradictions' which characterized the colonial economy still loom large.<sup>14</sup> As Ake (1981: 88) qualifies:

The expression 'postcolonial' could be misleading so it is as well to begin by clarifying it. The expression does not mean that an economy has been decolonised, i.e. that it no longer possesses the features of a colonial economy, which we have already described. The expression which follows conventional usage here is merely a convenient way of talking about the economy at a particular historical period - namely, the period following the winning of formal political independence.

Using the term 'postcolonial', Ake argues that the independence of the state in Africa is both 'marginal and limited'; and that the influences of 'the colonial past' on 'the post-colonial present' are far from being over. These aspects of his works link up brilliantly with the debate on 'post-coloniality' in more than a neutral sense. His insights in this direction remind us that beyond their expansion, no fundamental transformation has taken place in the basic institutional arrangements of the state - of law and administration, of the courts, the bureaucracy, the police, the army and the various technical services of government in Africa. They also highlight the ambivalent role of the colonial state not just as the agency, which brought the modular forms of the modern state to the colonies but also as the agency, which crippled its normalizing mission through the inhibitions it created in its post-colonial successor. Crawford Young (2004: 23-24) connects these experiences with the emergence of 'post-colonial studies':

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12 On the implications of 'the limited autonomy' of the state in Africa, see Ake (1985a: 108-115).

13 Ake (1981: 88 ff.) argues that colonialism's will to power not only creates binaries in which a unified field of healthy singularity of purpose once existed, but also leaves behind certain instruments of power relations for asserting itself in spite of independence. According to him, this is what underlines the limited nature of African independence and the very essence of neo-colonialism.

14 This is a significant sense in which Ake uses the term 'postcolonial', which as we argue, links up albeit indirectly with the debate on 'post-coloniality'.

By subtle metamorphosis, over time the routine descriptor for African states became 'post-colonial'. This semantic shift was not innocent of meaning. Formal sovereignty and anti-colonial struggle gradually became less salient as defining attributes than the colonial origins of the African state; more crucially the wholesale importation of the routines, practices, and mentalities of the African colonial state into its post-colonial successor became evident.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, post-colonial studies became an influential current in the larger tides of 'post-modern' academic discourse by the 1980s.

In the next section we discuss Ake's contribution to knowledge production and the social sciences in Africa, his critique of Western social science and his limitations in this regard.

### The contribution of Claude Ake

The major issue which he engages is the question of how knowledge developed and appropriated by Africans on the basis of their historical experiences can be valorized for empowering the state in the pursuit of democracy and development (Ake n. d.). The pertinence of his intervention in this regard is very much timely, especially now when the continent's political leadership has declared itself in search of a suitable framework for achieving an all-embracing continental renaissance. His (1979) *Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development* radically questions from the perspective of the colonial and post-colonial world, the profound epistemological transformation which 'the advent of theory' supposedly brought about. Dealing with Western political science scholarship on the developing countries and the literature on political development in particular, Ake (1979: i-iv) engages with "one of the most subtle and most pernicious forms of imperialism - imperialism in the guise of scientific knowledge" and establishes its practical significance for development. In an extended passage Ake (1979: i) mentions:

My thesis is that with the exception of the Marxist tradition, Western social science scholarship on developing countries amounts to imperialism. Western social science scholarship on developing countries is imperialism in the sense that (a) it foists, or at any rate attempts to foist on the developing countries, capitalist values, capitalist institutions, and capitalist development; (b) it focuses social science analysis on the question of how to make the developing countries more like the West; and (c) it propagates mystifications, and modes of thought and action which serve the interests of capitalism and imperialism. Needless to say that this thesis is not breaking new ground but merely supplementing the effort which others have made. The capitalist and imperialist character of the Western scholarship on economic development in the Third World has been indicated by several progressive economists, particularly Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, and Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*. Unfortunately, the treatment of the imperialism of social science in these writings is



merely incidental. Paul Baran is merely interested in how the economic surplus is produced and used and how developed and underdeveloped societies undergo economic transformation. The major task which Samir Amin sets for himself in *Accumulation on a World Scale* is primarily to clarify the phenomenon of underdevelopment. The idea that the bulk of Western social science scholarship on developing countries amounts to imperialism does not come out clearly and forcefully, and the significance of this imperialism does not stand out in clear relief.

He takes a critical stance toward Continental theoretical discourses from Africa's point of view and exposes the Euro-centric assumptions undergirding the most avant-garde writings to emerge on the continent from the developed world.<sup>15</sup> He advances a critical re-thinking and re-constitution of our fields' intellectual genealogies in ways that depart from the constricting narratives of disciplinary origins and originality received from the West. Focusing on the theory of political development, he opposes those Western versions of history which claim for themselves totality of knowledge on Africa. Yet, in keeping with social scientific ideals, he also reveals his own commitment to uncovering an apparently deeper level of truth. He demonstrates with copious evidence how the models earlier imported from Europe - Marxisms, a belief in progress and modernity, a commitment to revolution as forward-looking, linear developmentalist transformation - are now in doubt.

His aim was not to re-shape 'the modern African left'. Rather, his task was to contribute towards re-creating 'the social sciences in Africa' as a unified body of knowledge relevant for speaking to social realities in the continent. On the ideological character of the theory of political development, Ake (1979: 60-98) says its central position within Western social science scholarship is not fortuitous. He traces its emergence to the winning of formal independence by the colonies in the atmosphere of the Cold War, a development, which some felt would jeopardize the vital interests of the colonizing powers. In these circumstances, Ake argues, the interests of the Western powers required the preservation of the fledgling-peripheral capitalist states which they had nurtured from the penetrating influence of the Soviet Union. Corresponding to the need to preserve the West's hegemony across the world, the theory of political development thus emerged as the ideological tool for maintaining the existing world order under changing conditions that preserve liberal democratic values as the political correlate of capitalism. Ake (1979: i-iv) says given its historical context and partisan character, the theory of political development and more broadly, Western social science scholarship 'in its application to the post-colonial world' is 'bourgeois ideology'; 'it

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15 From the quotation above, although Ake makes an exception of the Marxist intellectual tradition, he does not explain his basis for such an exception. This limitation has been treated by Kelly Harris (2005: 73-88).

has no scientific status'; 'it is neither applicable to the South'<sup>16</sup> 'nor useful for understanding it'. At best, he says it merely fosters capitalist values and institutions and legitimizes the consolidation of the dictatorship of the Third World bourgeoisie, who are the allies of international capitalism (Ake 1979: 60-61). Given its orientations and value-assumptions, he says, it studies Africa after the images of the North; it shows the persistent gaps and lacuna that the continent must overcome to finally reach 'the promised land' of democracy and development, of social progress and economic prosperity. This way, Ake contends, it constructs the continent's history in terms of 'a lack' by underlining what more is needed to make democracy work: modernization, institutionalization, industrialization or the development of civil society, civic community, social capital and other recipes, which seek to replicate in the political sphere Walt W. Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Ake deals with these issues with instructive and telling effects. For Ake (1979: ii):

Every prognostication indicates that Western social science continues to play a major role in keeping us subordinate and underdeveloped; it continues to inhibit our understanding of the problems of our world, to feed us noxious values and false hopes, to make us pursue policies which undermine our competitive strength and guarantee our permanent underdevelopment and dependence. It is becoming increasingly clear that we cannot overcome our underdevelopment and dependence unless we try to understand the imperialist character of Western social science and to exorcise the attitudes of mind which it inculcates.

According to him, it is incorrect and supercilious to claim that some ideas need to be treated as universally worthy and that their spread across the world is purely positive. In validating this position, he illustrates several strategic moments when particular interests of popular politics mobilized as community interests expose the limits of political universals that liberalism poses as sacred. In doing this, he offers an exposition of his trans-continental epistemological engagement with the questions of democracy and development in Africa. In his critique of 'members of the Princeton Series on Political Development', Ake (1979: 12-59) tackles the liberal claim that the nation-state as the most legitimate form of the political community has been instrumental in creating some positive values - such as citizenship and the equality of rights - and making them acceptable and applicable across cultural and historical boundaries. According to him, while the modern nation-state recognizes the nation as the only legitimate and homogeneous form of community, actual politics across the world gives rise to various heterogeneous collectivities that do not necessarily conform to the sovereign demands of the

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<sup>16</sup> For operational and politically suggestive discussions of 'the North-South dichotomy' in the context of 'post-coloniality', see Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992: 1-2) and Dwaipayana Bhat-tacharyya (2004: 58-60).

nation-state. This way, he questions the West's universalizing assumptions about culture, identity, language and power and the institutional privileging of theoretical knowledge together with the very ontology of 'theory' as a discrete and knowable category of critical engagement. According to Ake (1979: iv):

... this critique is crucial for my argument about the imperialist character of Western social science. It exposes the fraudulence of the theory of political development and reveals the sharp contradiction between the *raison d'être* of the theory and what it pretends to be. If indeed the theory of political development had been sound scientifically, it would have been more difficult to see it as imperialism. For instance, it would be quite problematic to show that a work which merely explains the principles of hydraulics or of heat is imperialism. In this case, the argument could be made that the work only demonstrates the objective character of an aspect of phenomenal experience, that the only questions one can properly ask of such a work are, Is it valid? Is it useful for my particular purposes? Well, I have asked these questions of the theory of political development, and I have found that it fails on both counts. It is by seeing how it fails in these respects that we are able to fully appreciate its ideological character.

It bears repeating that Ake (1981: 68-87) presents the impact of the colonial presence as central in understanding the continent's history. Following Walter Rodney (1972), he defines colonialism as an effective instance of intervention and take-over in which local conceptions of time, space and modes of self-governance were dismantled; in which a new tradition was invented and presented to the colonized as sacrosanct, so that in their very act of self-understanding they could acquiesce in the moral and epistemic legitimacy of European sovereignty and superiority. This way he rehearses the familiar thesis of the post-colonial predicament by arguing: (i) that heterogeneity and even hybridity are written into the fabric of the post-colonial experience; and (ii) that there is a relationship of historical continuity, however oblique and problematic between colonialism and nationalism. He says in spite of formal independence, the domineering impulses of the West on Africa are still apparent through Western social science, the ideological apparatus, which ensures the underdevelopment and dependence of the continent under changing historical conditions. These aspects of Ake's argument also re-inforce the debate on 'post-coloniality'. Hence his advocacy for decolonizing the social sciences in the South through endogenizing the very strategies of knowledge production. Describing Western social science scholarship on Africa as 'irrelevant and passé', Ake (1979: iv-v) says:

It seems to me that the alternative to Western development studies is not a social science with no ideological bias. That type of social science is neither possible nor desirable. The alternative has to be a social science whose thrust and values are more conducive to the eradication of underdevelopment, exploitation and dependence. A social science which meets that requirement will necessarily have socialist values.

In another statement, Ake (1986: i) remarks that:

For the most part, the social science we learned and practise today appears to have rather limited relevance for the progress of Africa. Nevertheless we have continued to peddle it for a variety of reasons which include laziness, self-interest or fascination with esoteric irrelevancies.

### Claude Ake on 'endogeneity' in knowledge production in Africa

Another significant contribution of Ake is his advocacy of the need for 'endogeneity' in knowledge production in Africa. He presents this as the alternative to the continent's dependence on the West in the sphere of knowledge. He observes that Africa is not winning the battle to control its development agenda. To him, this is because the struggle has been misconstrued as a battle over economic and political power. While not underestimating its economic and political dimensions, he argues that the struggle is 'mainly' paradigmatic and that social scientists have a central role to play in this regard. Ake (1986: iii) states that:

... unless we strive for endogenous development of science and knowledge we cannot fully emancipate ourselves. Why this development must be endogenous should be clear for it is not a question of parochialism or nationalism. The point is that even though the principles of science are universal, its growth points, applications and the particular problems which it solves are contingent on the historical circumstances of the society in which the science is produced.

His advocacy of endogeneity is hinged on the need to transcend the erasures and extroversions that constitute the hallmark of imperial pedagogy. He cautions that failing to achieve this we risk re-importing the very hegemonies we are working to overthrow, a failure, which he says must be resisted as a matter of nationalism and professional commitment. On the implication of the role orientations of social scientists in Africa, Ake (1986: i) maintains that:

As social scientists, we study the human being and society, trying to ascertain what they are, how they have come to be what they are and what they can be. So it comes about that the social science knowledge of society is the summation of the existential realities of social life and its developmental possibilities. One implication of this is that the social scientist has an enormous responsibility, for his or her work defines in an important way, the possibilities of progress.

The way out of this epistemic failure he says is to develop a form of scholarship which takes its local intellectual, political and existential contexts seriously while also seeking to be globally reputable. He advances this position through his pragmatic belief that all theories, paradigms, modes of thought and models of social action should be contextualized in a manner that en-

ables us to transcend the temptation to wrongly generalize from one context to the other without critically considering the specificities of individual case histories and cultures. He argues that far from being universal, the European invention of historical consciousness is only the result of its own perspectival imaginings, just as 'other' perspectives are also implicated in the polemics of their own positionalities. His aim is to assert the 'autonomy' of 'South-driven intellectual thought', generally through opposing perennially dominant historiographies which resist change and ethico-political persuasion.

He advocates the building of an alternative system of knowledge production based on an appreciation of the different histories which produce the diverse knowledge bases across the world. To him, this is a criterion for transcending the restrictive contexts of knowledge production in the modern world. It was precisely in the struggle to achieve this objective that Ake became a central figure in the movement that gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s among the progressive forces within the African social science community, a movement, which exposed the epistemic shortfalls of Western liberal and Marxist social sciences in their application to Africa. For Ake therefore, the universality of empirical and theoretical knowledge is only a ruse, which should be carefully broken down into distinctive cultural and historical components to be explored and pursued within the frameworks defined by one's cultural milieu and social experience. In other words, searching for the universals vaguely defined as 'the truth' or 'knowledge' must proceed from an appreciation of one's context, experience and history. An understanding of Ake's aversion to dogma and orthodoxy thus helps us to appreciate his principled rejection of the pluralist, national integration and his modification of the neo-Marxist theories of underdevelopment and dependency in their application to Africa.

His emphasis is hinged on the development of a social science scholarship, which in epistemic terms is rooted in its culture and locale to create canons in its own right, especially ones that take the African policy-making nexus seriously. From this he criticizes a major paradox and practice in the continent's universities namely, the idea of teaching and deploying, especially in African policy-making contexts, as 'nomothetic' what is rather 'idiographic' in other contexts. He argues that engaging a social science that derives the source-codes for its epistemologies from the life forms and practices of its context and people is a requirement for taking the practice of scholarship in Africa beyond its conception as translation or data-gathering for 'others' in the global division of intellectual labour. Ake (1979) exposes the inclination of Western social science towards teleological analysis. He demonstrates and encourages further acknowledgement of the idiographic nature and particularities of Western social science and thought rather than blindly treating them as either 'nomothetic' or 'universal'. He recommends an in-

formed recourse to 'endogeneity' articulated inter alia through critical distancing and a selective borrowing from other epistemic contexts.

To illustrate the issues which Ake painstakingly engages two examples are in order. These concern the presentation of what Hountondji (1997) calls 'extroversion' as 'the nomothetic' and the unkind erasure of what is uniquely African from the collective global memory. One, as Adesina (2006) observes, Anthony Giddens (1996) defines sociology as 'a generalizing discipline that concerns itself above all with modernity'; 'with the character and dynamics of modern industrialized societies'. This is added to the attempt by most texts in the field to trace the emergence of the discipline to Auguste Comte, the nineteenth century French philosopher and identify Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim as its founding fathers. Such approaches deny uniquely African contributions, a position not only in sociology but also in other social science disciplines. For example, Ibn Khaldun had written his three volume *Magnus opus*, *Kitab Al 'Ibar* in 1378AD. In the first volume *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun sets out the conceptual framework and methodological bases for adjudicating between competing data sources, all of which are self-consciously sociological. As Sayed Farid Alatas (2006) and Mahmoud Dhaouadi (1990) have shown, Ibn Khaldun outlines his 'new sciences' of human organization and society *ilm al-umran al-bashari* and *ilm al-ijtima al-insani*, which were rejected by the extroversions of Westernization. In Adesina's (2006) estimation, this had occurred for about 452 years before the first volume of Auguste Comte's six volume of *Cours De Philosophie Positive* was published. In the same work, Ibn Khaldun articulates the concept of *asabiyyah* in explaining the normative basis of group cohesion, its decomposition and re-constitution; the different ways in which it manifests at different levels of social organization among different groups (Adesina 2006: 6). Again following Adesina's (2006) estimations, this had occurred about 515 years before Emile Durkheim's (1893) *De la Division du Travail Social* and its idea of social norms was published. However, in spite of these instructive and pioneering efforts by Africans, one hardly encounters any 'modern sociology' textbook available to African students and universities mentioning Ibn Khaldun or even discussing his works. Carefully, but of course deliberately, the value of Ibn Khaldun's works has been repudiated on the grounds that (i) they are ridden with excessively religious thinking, which supposedly avers from the modern context of secularism; and (ii) that they do not focus on 'modern societies'.

Two, in addition to the erasure of uniquely African contributions from the global system of knowledge production, there is also the denial of systematic knowledge to the continent, following the Hegelian logic and tradition (Adesina 2006). While not substituting erasure for uncritical adulation, the point at issue here is to highlight the immanently ethno-centric and racist inclination to create binary opposites between knowledge and ignorance on

the one hand; as well as science and magic on the other. In this structure, while the West is privileged as 'the source' of all scientific knowledge, ignorance and dubious magic are presented as the signifiers of 'the Eastern other'. These issues are taken on in Ake's (1979) engagement with the extroversions of Western social science. He says, just as Africa has been reduced to raw material production and Europe specializes in the production of capital goods and finished products, there is also the ideological reduction of the continent to a source from which data are generated and exported to Europe for advancing the frontiers of knowledge, so that theories are perpetually imported into Africa from the West in a global system dominated by the West. He traces the origin of this practice to the developments and period following the European conquest of the continent and says in spite of independence, extroversion is still immanent in Africa's relations with the West, especially given its complicated positioning in the global system of knowledge production. He draws a parallel between the extroversion of African economies manifested in the export of cocoa or gold and the import of chocolate and jewellery and the extroversion in the global system of knowledge production manifested in the reduction of African scholarship to the vain proselytization and regurgitation of received paradigms including those which do not speak to the continent's situations.

Pitching 'endogeneity' and 'ontology' against the contradictions of Eurocentric 'extroversion' and 'idiography', Ake challenges us to replace the practice of scholarship in Africa as 'extroversion' and 'translation' with its engagement as an objective reflection of 'Africanity' through a careful re-formulation of 'the African condition' and 'self'. While the practice of scholarship as 'translation' involves the articulation of knowledge according to Western academic standards, its 're-articulation', 're-definition' and 're-formulation', which Ake advocates, are based on the 're-construction' and 're-constitution' of existing disciplinary fields and vocations following uniquely African critiques and interpretations; through an appreciation of 'endogeneity' and 'ontology' as the objective bases of 'epistemology' and 'philosophy' rooted in an understanding of the disciplinary and institutional histories of existing knowledge-producing frontiers; inspired by a corrective commitment to 're-claim history and re-write the careless deployment of the ideas of neo-colonialism' in constructing African history (Ake 1979 and Adesina 2006). Ake is not alone in this advocacy. Rather, being an influential voice, he is complemented on the continent by others whose works have been noted in this study. Taken together, these efforts challenge methodological and theoretical universalisms in expatriate social science scholarship on the continent.<sup>17</sup>

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17 Other areas exist within the African context of knowledge production, which have been positively affected by Ake's intellectual involvement. We have referred to them in a larger study on which this paper is based. See Arowosegbe (forthcoming).

## Conclusion: A recapitulation

As we have tried to show, Ake's aim was not to re-shape 'the modern African left' through transcending the classical university-based African Marxism of the 1960s and 1970s, although this was achieved to some extent. Rather, his task was to contribute towards re-creating 'the social sciences in Africa' as a unified body of knowledge relevant for speaking to social realities in the continent. This was his conception of 'the role of the social scientists in advancing social progress' through decolonizing knowledge production on the continent. It should also be cleared that Ake does not criticize all branches and methods of Western social science. Nor does he fault all shades of European thought. What he questions are the imperialist character; ideological orientations and value-assumptions underlining them in their application to Africa, especially given their role in the continent's dependence and subordination in the sphere of knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Although European thought has a contradictory relationship to Africa, it is nevertheless indispensable for developing the social sciences in the continent.<sup>19</sup> This is the relationship existing between Eastern and Western social sciences. Notwithstanding the inadequacy of Western social science in accounting for the transformations taking place in Africa, scholars in the continent cannot develop their vocations without borrowing from the paradigms emanating from the West. This dependence is a major legacy of post-Enlightenment thought for post-colonial societies generally.<sup>20</sup>

Intellectual thought in Africa therefore betrays a characteristic element of self-contradiction: an urge to emphasize the differences of 'indigenous knowledge', 'local' and 'national culture' from that of 'the West' conflicts with a simultaneous aspiration towards 'modernity' definable only in terms

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18 It is conceded that 'African Studies' exists as a legitimate field of global academic pursuit just like 'Asian' and 'European Studies' among others. It is also conceded that the contributions directed towards understanding the continent transcend 'disciplinary' and 'nationality' lines. Nevertheless, it is Ake's position that the pursuance of 'African Studies' by non-Africans often misrepresents rather than further the understanding of social reality in the continent. To be sure, it is the bias of Euro-centric historical theories in their application to non-metropolitan cultures that has led to the search for alternative intellectual perspectives everywhere in the world through the development of counter-hegemonic knowledge from the South, a practice, which counters the portrayal of post-colonial histories as a history of 'lack' or as a history that always falls short of 'true history' (Chatterjee 1994: 30). For detailed critiques on 'African Studies', see Archie Mafeje (2000) and Abubakar Momoh (2003).

19 On the 'indispensability' and 'inadequacy' of European thought for understanding post-colonial societies, see Chakrabarty (2000: 6).

20 On the ambivalent role of colonialism and its limitations as a modernizing project, see Partha Chatterjee (1994).



of the post-Enlightenment rationalism of European culture. Nationalism thus sings the glory of the national culture as it is simultaneously anguished by a perceived 'backwardness' of the 'nation'. The axioms and frameworks of knowledge that nationalist thought employs are no different from those employed by colonial rulers (Chakrabarty 1987: 1137). Intellectual thought in the continent thus unwittingly accepts and adopts the same essentialist conception based on the distinctions between 'the East' and 'the West', the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject and hence the same 'objectifying' procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science (Chatterjee 1986: 38). Far from being independent, intellectual thought and knowledge production in Africa therefore exist within a borrowed, constrained and dominated framework. This dilemma is a product of the history of 'the East' and its destiny.

It is hoped that beyond sentiments and hagiography, this article has proved that Ake was a truly committed African scholar with strong and insightful perspectives and an uncompromising position on major issues. For his courage, commitment and integrity, Ake deserves our profound recognition.

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### **Zusammenfassung**

Die Sozialwissenschaften und die Wissensproduktion in Afrika: Der Beitrag von Claude Ake

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die Stärken und Schwächen der Beiträge Akes zu den Sozialwissenschaften und der Wissensproduktion in Afrika. In diesem Artikel wird die Relevanz der Arbeiten Akes für die Anpassung des intellektuellen Erbes marxistischer Analyse an die Politische Ökonomie und die Sozialgeschichte des gegenwärtigen Afrika thematisiert. Dabei werden gleichermaßen die Unzulänglichkeiten in Akes Haltung gegenüber externer Wissensproduktion im allgemeinen und gegenüber der Westlichen im Besonderen diskutiert. Angesichts seines Eintretens für eine Umstrukturierung der wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen unter Berücksichtigung afrikanischer Kritiken und Interpretationen stellt die Studie ein Korrektiv zum Eurozentrismus dar. Ake befürwortet einen „nicht-hierarchischen“, interregionalen Dialog, in dem weder der Norden noch der Süden als Paradigma gelten sollte, an dessen Vorbild die „andere Seite“ gemessen und als unzulänglich beurteilt wird.

### **Schlüsselwörter**

*Wissensproduktion, endogenes Wissen, Sozialwissenschaft in Afrika, Post-Marxismus, Post-Kolonialismus*

### **Résumé**

Les sciences sociales et la production du savoir en Afrique: la contribution de Claude Ake

Cet article examine les forces et les faiblesses de la contribution de Claude Ake aux sciences sociales et à la production du savoir en Afrique. L'étude présente dans quelle mesure les travaux d'Ake permettent de revisiter les héritages intellectuels marxistes, afin de mieux comprendre l'économie politique et l'histoire sociale de l'Afrique contemporaine. Elle souligne également les défauts des positions d'Ake par rapport aux savoirs expatriés en général et aux sciences sociales occidentales en particulier. Etant donné que pour Claude Ake, il est nécessaire de reconstruire les champs disciplinaires existants, en prenant uniquement en compte les critiques et les interprétations africaines, l'auteur de cet article considère le corpus d'Ake comme un apport correctif à l'eurocentrisme, et préconise d'établir un dialogue interrégional et non hiérarchique, dans lequel ni le Nord ni le Sud n'est pris comme paradigme par rapport auquel l'autre est mesuré et décrété inférieur.

### **Mots clés**

*Production du Savoir, endogénéité, science sociale en Afrique, post-Marxisme, post-colonialisme*

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