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global South:  
Claude Ake and the praxis of  
knowledge production in Africa**

Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe

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PhD candidate in Political Science  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

African Studies Centre  
P.O. Box 9555  
2300 RB Leiden  
The Netherlands

Telephone +31-71-5273372  
Fax +31-71-5273344  
E-mail [asc@ascleiden.nl](mailto:asc@ascleiden.nl)  
Website <http://www.ascleiden.nl>

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# Decolonising the Social Sciences in the Global South: Claude Ake and the Praxis of Knowledge Production in Africa

Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe\*

## Abstract

South-driven initiatives on endogenous knowledge production owe a great debt to Claude Ake. Against this backdrop, this paper reviews the strengths and weaknesses of Ake's account of the social sciences and knowledge production in Africa. It discusses his legacy and presents him as one of the most fertile and influential voices within the social science community in the continent. Being a political scientist with an unusually broad intellectual horizon and formation, the paper discusses Ake's production, over the last four decades, of a wide-ranging body of works, which have been quite instructive not only for their theoretical sophistication, methodological rigour and analytical acuity, but also for being remarkable works of magisterial erudition, the products of an exceptionally great mind, written with a deftly profound authority, and also constituting a significant attempt to adapt the intellectual legacies of Marxist scholarship towards understanding the political economy and social history of contemporary Africa, from a broadly critical perspective. The *leit motif* in this paper is *to establish the specific relevance of studying Ake's works*. Through examining the epistemological bases of theory, practice and policy in his works, this paper establishes *an important area within the African social science*, which has been positively affected by Ake's intellectual involvement.

**Key words:** Claude Ake, African social science, endogeneity, epistemology, knowledge production and post-Marxist scholarship.

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\* The author is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. In January – March 2008 he was a Visiting Fellow at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented at the 2006 Social Science Conference entitled *The Social Sciences in an African Context*, organised by the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA), in collaboration with the Social Sciences Network of South Africa (SSNSA) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), at the Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre, Boksburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, from 27 to 30 September 2006; the 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA), on the theme, *21st Century Africa: Evolving Conceptions of Human Rights*, at the Sheraton Hotels and Suites, New York, from 18 to 21 October 2007; the African Studies Centre, the University of Leiden, The Netherlands, on 4 March 2008; and the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands, on 6 March 2008. The paper has also benefited from my discussion with researchers at the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, The Netherlands, on 11 March 2008 as well as with members of the research programme on *Social Movements and Political Culture* at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, The Netherlands. My benefactors are therefore too numerous to be mentioned individually, but the following have been particularly helpful. First is my supervisor at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, Professor Adigun Ajao B. Agbaje, under whose guidance this study was undertaken. I would also like to thank Professors Jon Abbink, Partha Chatterjee and Dr. Stephen Ellis for their critical comments and suggestions on the work. Needless to say, all views here are my own and the usual caveat about responsibility for errors holds. My special thanks also go to Ann Reeves and Marieke van Winden for their research and secretarial assistance in the production of this paper.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Capitalism, Marx said, was the first universal social form, at least the first form capable of a possible universality. It imposed, on most people with whom it came in touch, certain peculiar forms of suffering. These several sufferings at the various frontiers of capitalism gave rise to critiques in which those who suffered at its hands tried to make sense of their history. In a sense, each critique analysed and held up for criticism aspects of suffering related to capitalism which were opaque, unperceived and unreported to the others. But as critiques they are potentially connectable; they, as it were, waited to meet each other. It is only now, in the writing of history, that such a meeting is possible. In this, the critique of an aggressive, uncritical, all-conquering rationalist colonialism by the early nationalists is a necessary part. And it is only when these critiques are stitched together that a true map of the unhappy consciousness of humanity, when capitalism reigned, can be put together (Kaviraj, 1992: 34).

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 the continent. In addition, he is a major praxiological figure from whose works the real world in the continent can best be understood. His writings thus constitute a significant entry point not just for understanding contemporary Africa, but also for rethinking globalisation, modernity and other larger theoretical concerns, which are shared by post-colonial theorists throughout the world. The recurring topicality and significance of his contributions to African political thought assuredly place him in the pantheon of great African political thinkers, alongside such luminaries as Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwasi Wiredu and Samir Amin, among others (Martin 1996 and Osha 2005)<sup>2</sup>. Ake's works are particularly instructive given his successful

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an excerpt from my PhD thesis. I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, Senegal, which funded the writing of the thesis through its Small Grants Programme for Thesis Writing in October 2007. My appreciation also goes to the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS), at the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, The Netherlands, for funding my one-year research training programme as a SEPHIS Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC), India, from July 2006 to July 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ake is to be functionally differentiated from another category of African thinkers, namely, those who were neither scholars *nor* theorists. In this sense, we must note that Ake was *both a writer and a theorist*, who being a *scholar and an activist* cannot be classified in the same mode of thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Julius M. K. Nyerere, Amilcar L. Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba and Ruth First, among others. Unlike Ake, these African nationalists and pan-African heroes were *intellectual activists* who emerged originally as *unlikely candidates* but later became leaders and spokespersons of their people. Their assignment as vanguards of the nationalist cause was historically imposed on them by the prevailing colonial realities of their time. In most cases, they emerged as *revolutionary leaders* in their time, mainly because they rejected the option of escaping from the realities and sufferings of their people, but elected instead, to *return to the source* of their being

application of the radical theory in illuminating *the African condition*, and as a guide to political action (Harris, 2005: 86 and Oculli, 1997: 29).<sup>3</sup> He has made penetrating contributions, which although unpopular in the past are instructive points of departure today. As such, whatever was the focus of his writings, they are bound to provoke widespread intellectual interest and attention.

This paper discusses the contribution of the late Professor Claude Ake to the enterprise of *knowledge production* in Africa. In doing this, it provides an insight into the making of his life, career and scholarship. It traces the historical factors, experiences and contours which shaped his personality, worldview and writings. It captures the gamut of issues, processes and developments, which influenced different periods and aspects of his thoughts, his contributions to African political thought and African social science in particular. The aim is to explain the details, contexts and implications of his theoretical paradigm shifts and other contentious, if controversial issues and aspects of his works. The paper also provides an account of Ake's contributions to the study of political behaviour, the political economy

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through leading the various nationalist struggles and by reaffirming the rights of their people to take their own place in history. Through their written, often polemical works, and other practical contributions to Africa's political transformation, they are appreciated as having contributed to the subject matter of African political thought. More than these heroes, however, Ake, being a *scholar-activist* was able to capture and speak more pungently to the realities of the African condition. And, given his training as a *scholar* and *revolutionary writer*, he was much more theoretically rigorous, methodologically nuanced and therefore successfully systematic in his analysis of the continent. In Ake's group are Cheikh Anta Diop, Chinua Achebe, Kwasi Wiredu and Oluwole Soyinka, some of who have been studied extensively in History, Philosophy and the Liberal Arts. Accordingly, while *intellectual activists* are here understood as engaged in instrumentalising knowledge, *scholars* take on knowledge production as a vocation or profession. Scholars are therefore vocationally confined to an area and are professionally dedicated to knowledge production, almost on a life-time basis. The engagement of *intellectual activists* with knowledge production is however, *not* usually on a full-time career basis, but principally as an instrument, or as a means, with which struggle is prosecuted towards a desired form of change. For *scholars* however, knowledge production is sacredly accepted as an unconditional assignment to which they are committed and dedicated. These illustrations should help us appreciate more clearly, the differences between Ake as a *scholar, theorist* and *activist* and other modes of African thinkers who were neither scholars nor theorists, but nevertheless, worked as activists and wrote some polemical-political texts during the anti-colonial, nationalist and pan-African eras in African history. See Africa Information Service (1973).

<sup>3</sup> The notion of *the radical theory* here represents the reaction away from the conventional wisdom enshrined in the bulk of the writings and teachings on African History, Sociology, Economics and Politics both *in the West* and *from the West* on Africa. It began mainly in the 1950s and 1960s with its generic name known as *radical African scholarship*. With this, Africans expressed intellectual reservations and ideological opposition to imperialism. They expressed a concern for the continent's masses and a preference for socialist economic policies and political strategies. For a detailed treatment of this discursive practice, see Waterman (1977) and Onoge (1977).

approach and his involvement in national and international institution-building.<sup>4</sup> These are done *inter alia*, by highlighting his efforts and role in the professional associations as well as research institutions with which he was engaged.<sup>5</sup>

My study relies on data generated from the following sources. One, extensive-unstructured oral interviews conducted to a selected group of *strategic informants* who are not only leading scholars in Nigeria and Africa, but also contemporaries, old friends, colleagues and in some cases, past students of Claude Ake.<sup>6</sup> Two, on the published commentaries, critiques and tributes written in honour of Ake after his death by his friends, colleagues and institutional bodies. Three, I also used the information provided in Ake's detailed curriculum vitae and other relevant sources accessed, especially those texts which explain the context of scholarship among *progressive opinion* at the University of Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania, in the 1970s. These are situated around the general context of scholarship in Africa during these periods, with particular attention paid to the Cold War era, during which radical scholarship and critical Marxist perspectives were quite popular and indeed influenced many scholars.

Other developments also accounted for, are the impact of the collegiate spirit and peer

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<sup>4</sup> By *Ake's theoretical orientations*, this study refers to his specific intellectual and theoretical positions, with a particular focus on those developments and experiences, which informed his adoption of such positions and their implications on his person, scholarship and writings.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of such professional associations are the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), the African Association of Political Science (AAPS), the International Political Science Association (IPSA), and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). Some of the research institutions with which he was involved include the Centre for Advanced Social Science (CASS), the National Universities Commission (NUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the Sage Series on Modernisation and Development in Africa, the Brookings Institution, and the United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER). Other areas of his life examined include his involvement in public service and politics at the national level in Nigeria; his role in the Niger Delta struggle against marginalisation and underdevelopment; and his resignation from the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES).

<sup>6</sup> Some of them are Professors Adebayo O. Olukoshi, Archibald B. M. Mafeje, Bernard Magubane, L. Adele Jinadu, Okwudiba Nnoli, Mark Anikpo, Michael Neocosmos, Katabaro Miti, Thandika Mkandawire, Jimi Adesina and Drs. Abdul Karim Bangura, Yakubu Ben-Charles Omelle, Said Adejumbi, Abubakar Momoh, Adefemi V. Isumunoah, Abejide P. Odojin, Kayode A. Omojuwa and Joab S. Peterside. At different periods, these interviews were conducted (i) in August 2002 at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, where the idea of this study was first conceived, and also in January 2003 during the 22nd Annual National Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association held at the Kongo Conference Hotel, at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria; (ii) between August and September 2004, during which this researcher was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Social Science, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria; (iii) in September 2005 during the 15th Biennial Congress of the African Association of Political Science, in Cairo, Egypt; and (iv) in September 2006, during the 2006 Social Science Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, among others.

influences, especially Ake's interactions with scholars like Walter Rodney, Abdulrahman M. Babu, Dani W. Nabudere, his access to the writings of Frantz Fanon and the great debate at the University of Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania. These are followed by an insight into the social history of Africa. This is done through shedding some light on the historical sociology, not historicism of the continent. In historicising Africa, the study avoids particularistic approaches which limit analyses to one moment or trajectory, but focuses on the entire historical span of the continent and the periods both pre-dating and ante-dating the emergence and development of nation-states in the continent. It theorises the whole of Ake's life and scholarship as a lived essentialism. As Abubakar Momoh (2002: 25) observes, this is necessary because moments and aspects of Ake's life may throw up features and developments that could make primary determinants of his consciousness assume the forms of secondary determinants of his scholarship and vice versa. It is therefore, theoretically mistaken and methodologically incorrect to use specific aspects and manifestations of his life to generalise about the character of his scholarship. Rather, the forms and contexts of those manifestations should be critically interrogated, analysed and explained by focusing on the details of his entire trajectory and lifetime sojourn. And, as will be shown shortly, it is important to examine Ake's biographical and intellectual accounts, and historicise him in relation to the complex social history of Africa for a number of reasons. One, Ake's intellectual shifts are not properly accounted for, unless we critically interrogate, narrativise and analyse his life, scholarship and career in relation to the material conditions and the complex social history, which facilitated such a transformation. Two, establishing such vital connections helps one to show that, far from being abstract, Ake's scholarship, experiences and theoretical positions are products of the material world in which he lived and concerning which he wrote. In other words, just like those of other scholars, Ake's theoretical positions were socially developed and historically constituted. This suggests that the consciousness of

men can neither be independently understood nor entirely abstracted from the specific social contexts and experiences within which they were developed. Consciousness therefore includes fundamental elements of criticality, which are indomitable and are also not mechanically determinable. Hence, the concepts of relevance and engagement, which help us in appreciating the concept of socialisation in relation to Ake, and by which reference is made to the material conditions within which his thoughts were conceived and given expression.

The paper therefore situates Ake's works within his specific milieu. Doing this reveals that his writings obviously did not develop in a vacuum. Neither did they arise independent of the complex dialectical realities, which informed his thoughts and concerning which he wrote. In fact, those ideas make sense only when juxtaposed with, rather than separated or isolated from the complex interactions of social forces and the mode of production of his time. Through such an approach, one is able to appreciate Ake's praxis of knowledge production in Africa and therefore avoid the temptation of vainly glorifying, vilifying or condemning either his paradigm shifts or his contributions to different areas and aspects of the African social science, without properly understanding the context of such contributions, and the specific social history that gives rise and meaning to them. These considerations thus make the examination of Ake's life and works in the context of the African condition and experience *sui generis*. In other words, Ake's ideas on African politics and the summation of his scholarship and experiences are expressions of the struggles of the African people as a collectivised social force. And, to deny the significance of such struggles is to abstract Ake, not only from his historical context, but also to undermine the struggles themselves, which informed his development and career. The paper, therefore approaches the explanation of Ake's intellectual contribution not as an independent episteme, but locates it through examining the complex interplay of different social classes, productive forces and the entire



social structures in Africa as an organic whole. Two positions emerge from this exercise, which underscore the central argument of this paper. One, theories as a peculiar genre of writings in the social sciences are special forms of discourses based largely on imagined categories, objectified realities and established relations, which are grounded in the mindsets and experiences of the theorists themselves and the societies or environments on which they are based. They are also products of the literary imaginations of men and therefore must be critically engaged and scrutinised in terms of their boundaries, which are constrained by the institutional parameters that inform and limit such thinking. Two, the successful revision of theories is contingent upon a sufficient understanding of the thinkers' mindsets and experiences, which are not only historically constituted in specific contexts, but also shape and condition the subjectivity of the theorists as agents (see Booth, et al., 2003, Burke 2005, Moore and Parker 2006, and Swingewood 2000).

Following the introduction, this paper is divided into four sections. The first provides an insight into the development of Ake's theoretical orientations. It discusses the various biographical factors, intellectual influences and inspirations, which shaped his life, career and scholarship. The second section locates his writings within the tricontinental project of post-colonial studies. Section three discusses his contribution to endogenous knowledge production in Africa. This is done by locating his works within the enterprise of history writing in the continent - an intellectual effort, which challenges the institutionalised paradigmatic domination of the continent by European and other, often supremacist, scholarship and advocates the decolonisation of knowledge in Africa through (i) invoking the ontological and exclusivist connotations of Africanity;<sup>7</sup> (ii) carefully articulating the epistemological, methodological and referential bases of Afro-centrism;<sup>8</sup> (iii) rewriting and

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed treatment of the provocative debate on *Africanity* and *Afro-centrism*, see Mafeje (2000).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

reclaiming the humanity of Africans; and (iv) by asserting the African identity and the possibility of an African renaissance. The last section offers the conclusion.

### **Claude Ake: A Biography and Theoretical Orientations**

Claude Ake's lifetime, from birth in his native home, Omoku, on 18 February 1939 until his death in an air crash on 7 November 1996, spanned the periods of European colonial domination and political independence in most African states. His native home, Omoku, is located in the present day Ogba-Egbema Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. He attended the Kings College in Lagos, where he passed the Cambridge School Certificate Examination with distinction and earned a scholarship to study Economics at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, which was then known as the University College at Ibadan, an affiliate institution of the University of London (CASS, 1997: 3). He graduated in 1962 with a First Class Honours Degree in Economics and then proceeded to Columbia University in New York, which awarded him a PhD Degree in Political Science in 1966, with specialisation in Political Economy, Political Theory and Development Studies (see Ake's Curriculum Vitae, 1996). It should be noted, however, that an array of contrasting claims exists on the various accounts of Ake's educational background, especially at his First Degree level. This has been treated extensively elsewhere in a larger study.<sup>9</sup>

Ake's teaching career began at Columbia University in New York as an Assistant Professor, a position, which he held from 1966 to 1968, after which he relocated to Carleton University in Canada, in 1969. For a long time, and up until the 1970s, two major features characterised his scholarship and career. One, he came under the strong influences and works of liberal Euro-American authorities under whose tutelage his doctoral research was undertaken. Two, most of his writings during this period were also of very liberal ideological leaning.

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<sup>9</sup> See Arowosegbe (forthcoming).

Examples of such works are many.<sup>10</sup> During this period, his research and scholarship took the form of theoretically exploring epistemes and issues like *Africa and the politics of unity, pan-Africanism and African Governments, charismatic legitimation and political integration, foreign relations and the politics of nation-building, rights and utilitarian discourses of politics, political integration and political instability, political obligation and political dissent, the scientific status of political science, the social contract and the problem of politicisation in Hobbes*, among other issues (see Ake's Curriculum Vitae, 1996). In other words, even though he researched Africa and related these subjects matter to the continent, he did that mainly from a liberal perspective, and was not involved in deploying the critical approaches of the neo-Marxist scholarship to the debates on the continent. Later, however, especially by the 1970s, Ake's posture and standing as a liberal scholar were challenged by a number of developments, which suggested an alternative paradigm to him. Adele Jinadu (2004: 1) captures these developments within the context of an Afro-centric intellectual movement, which emerged within the international social science community in the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Jinadu (2004), it was an intellectual movement, which was defined by, and which *raison d'être* was derived from its engagement with Africa's marginalisation in the world economy. It was also a form of intellectual-political struggle, which interrogated the cumulative consequences of the historical developments within the world economy for African and world politics. This period was marked by the world economic crisis, which was due largely to the economic recession in the major capitalist countries, and for which an end was hardly in sight. In Europe and North America, the spectacle of the monetarist new right regimes of Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl and others were already growing. In Africa and other parts of the Third World, the rightward drifts of the imperialist countries had been accompanied by more pressures on conservative, neo-colonial

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of one of his most prominent works in this regard, see Ake (1967).

regimes and progressive states to adopt and favour more pro-capitalist strategies in combating underdevelopment. Thus, by the 1970s, about a decade after the attainment of formal independence by most African states, the strangleholds of the international capitalist system on African initiatives had become more blatant, while political influences and enforcements had also become more overt. As Thomas Hodgkins (1972) observes, the intellectual roots of this movement lie in the radical tradition and reactions of the black African critique of colonialism and the international system, which date back to the 18th century, and which received powerful revolutionary inspirations, reformulations and re-statement in the writings of Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney among others, in the penultimate decade of the decolonisation process. During this period, efforts were made to re-think the continued relevance of the neo-classical development approach, particularly the new role of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which by virtue of being the collective voice of Western capital were able to dictate their terms to Third World governments. Also questioned was the debate on neo-colonialism, with the emphasis placed on the need to transcend its limitations, especially the dominant role, which it assigned to external factors, almost exclusively. New approaches were introduced, which focused on the nature of African regimes, the crisis of neo-patrimonialism, the character of the state in Africa and the ideologies that have informed their disastrous performances. African revolutionaries were therefore encouraged to address their attention to the nature of state power and the critical role of vanguardist forces in facilitating popular democracy (see *the Editorial, Journal of African Marxists*, 1984: 3). Efforts were also made to provide platforms for critical debates, discussions and information with the aim of generating sound theoretical bases for political action by African revolutionaries, scholars and intellectuals.

The most important factor or influence, which radically changed Ake's worldview during this period, was the great debate at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, in the 1970s,

followed later, by his association with Walter Rodney and the writings of Frantz Fanon. According to Yashpal Tandon (1982), in 1976, there opened a great debate at the University of Dar es Salaam, which focused on class, state and the role of imperialism in Africa. It took off on the heels of Issa Shivji's (1973) book, *Class Struggles in Tanzania* and Dani W. Nabudere's critique of the book in his (1982) article, *Imperialism, State, Class and Race*. Other publications, which also provoked the debate, were Mahmood Mamdani's (1976) book, entitled, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, and the book, *The Political Economy of Imperialism*, authored by Dani W. Nabudere. The debate raised a number of important issues. It also suggested the need for absolute clarity, which was proposed by both the supporters and opponents of Shivji's book. It later extended into other areas, and brought forth contributions from scholars and comrades who were not initially involved. As Tandon (1982, cover page) observes:

In the Marxist-Leninist tradition the exchanges were sharp and uninhibited by bourgeois politeness or hypocritical applause.... that debate, was not only important to Marxists in Tanzania but also to Marxists elsewhere in Africa and outside in their study of imperialism and the struggle against it.

According to Adebayo Olukoshi (2006), Archibald Mafeje (2006), Bernard Magubane (2006), Katabaro Miti (2006) and Thandika Mkandawire (2006), the intellectual situations and experience at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania contributed immensely to Ake's paradigm shift, especially between 1972 and 1976.<sup>11</sup> As Miti (2006) recalls, during this period, Tanzania attracted several socialist scholars from different parts of the world, and the University system had commendable academic freedom.<sup>12</sup> The debates and seminars

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<sup>11</sup> This position is based on the oral interviews conducted by this researcher in September 2006, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>12</sup> Katabaro Miti (2006) defines *academic freedom* as the unrestrained freedom of the intelligentsia to raise issues and provoke debates not only on matters of academic interests, but also on other issues, which bear on state policy. According to him, during this period, scholars fearlessly engaged the ideologues and representatives of various interests; challenged the policies of the state and all manifestations of foreign capital, without necessarily fearing for their lives. He describes it as an indication of the democratic culture obtainable in a university system, which also derives from the culture that obtains within the larger political system. According to him, *the dynamism that prevailed at the University of Dar es Salaam stimulated the democratic*

suggested to most people the need to re-think socialism in East Africa and to re-read the entire literature on Marxism. In deed, Claude Ake was not the only African scholar whose liberal ideological leaning and theoretical orientations were changed by this radical intellectual rendition.<sup>13</sup> Abdulrahman Babu (1982: 1) describes the debate as a vigorous discussion of the most burning issues of the day, namely, imperialism, finance capital, monopoly capitalism, neo-colonialism and classes in the ex-colonies, issues which, according to Babu (1982) had either been entirely ignored in Africa or had deliberately been subjected to a rather simplistic and therefore misleading investigation by opinion leaders, persons who themselves had developed vested interests in both neo-colonialism and the pro-imperialist status quo. According to Babu (1982: 10):

Finally, what is the purpose of these essays? They originate in response to the publication of three most important books to come out of East Africa. One of these is Issa Shivji's *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, one is Dan Nabudere's *The Political Economy of Imperialism*, and third is *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* by Mahmood Mamdani. These books have inspired a lot of thinking among East African intellectuals [unfortunately they could not reach the masses because they are written in English] and especially among those with Marxist inclinations.

The purpose of these essays is obvious; Marxists do not engage in debates just for the fun of it as in school debates. Their principal task is to change the world. Their debates are about the correct understanding of the world around us. Once this world is understood then the task is to outline policies, which will guide their struggle - to draw up the general line. This is arrived at by concrete analysis of the concrete situation in any given area. To do this they use the dialectical methodology, which is universally applicable, and they relate it to their concrete situation.

Of the impact of Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney and the *Dar es Salaam School of Marxist History* on Ake's scholarship, Okello Oculi (1997) recounts that Rodney had earlier written with commendable oral narration to what he calls the tumultuous intellectually battered, psychologically and emotionally hungry crowds in the street corners of Jamaica about the

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*aspirations of the people*, especially given *the very enlightened leadership of Julius M. K. Nyerere*, despite the imperialist domination of the country, which tried to negate democracy in general.

<sup>13</sup> From Miti's account, others include Anthony Ryeweyemamu, Dani Wadada Nabudere, Emmanuel Hansen, Ibbo Mandaza and Mahmood Mamdani. And, as Martin R. Doornbos recalls, examples of leading Africanist scholars who also witnessed *the Dar es Salaam Marxist Debate* are Harry Bernstein, John Saul, Lionel Cliffe, Suresh Chandra Saxena and Thomas Hodgkins. Doornbos volunteered this information during the discussion that followed the presentation of this paper at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands, on 6 March 2008.

glorious histories of the Benin, Mali, Oyo and Songhai empires. According to Oculli (1997: 29):

Ake met his age mate, Walter Rodney, at a time when both brilliant men were groping for ways of seizing African post-colonial realities with their rare intellects. Rodney whose book would suggest his early contact with George Padmore's radical Work: **How Britain Rules Africa** (published in 1955), had made earlier contacts with revolutionary Marxist analysis of world history combining that with his research on the history of the slave trade on the West African coast, it was easy for Rodney to force Ake out of the liberal American social science rails, Ake's wrath after his moment of seeing the light is the burden of his work **Social Science As Imperialism**. The traditional scholar that he was, he felt the responsibility to expose, from within, the entrails of Western scholarship, its structures and imperialist political strategies (sic).

Thus, after having such an inconspicuous beginning, and given the impact of the *neo-Marxist Debate* at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Ake later distanced himself from his earlier positions.<sup>14</sup> Fanon's call to *set afoot a new man* is thus much apropos for describing the nature of his radical departure, especially as seen in his later writings in contrast to the earlier ones (see Harris, 2005: 76). In what follows, the paper locates Ake within the subject matter of post-colonial scholarship. It also discusses how this feeds into the enterprise of endogenous knowledge production and history writing for Africa and other countries of the global South.

## **The Subject Matter of Post-Colonial Studies**

Broadly, post-colonial studies represents an intellectual engagement developed over the past thirty years on a set of issues, debates and articulations of points of interventions, performed as a tricontinental project within the institutional sites of the universities and research centres across the world, particularly outside the metropolitan intellectual centres (Young 1990, 1995 and 1996) on a range of disciplinary fields, especially Anthropology, History, Political

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<sup>14</sup> As Mkandawire puts it, it was mainly Ake and other African scholars who participated in this Debate that later formed the African Association of Political Science (AAPS), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1973, and the various professional associations in the respective African countries. According to him, the Dar es Salaam school actually interrogated the question of *how* power is historically organised, articulated and exercised in Africa, and its implications for the constitution of society.

Science, Sociology, Cultural, Gender and Literary Studies. In addition to colonialism, its discussions examine the continuing impact of displacement and forced migration; slavery and suppression; gender, racial and cultural discriminations; and other responses to the dominant narratives and discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being (Said 1978 and Ashcroft *et al.*, 1995).<sup>15</sup> On its own, none of these categories is essentially post-colonial, but taken together they form the complex fabric of the field. It is an intellectual-political discourse inspired mainly by Marxist, structuralist and post-structuralist writings, and critically engages the legacies of the European Enlightenment for post-colonial societies generally and Africa, Asia and Latin America in particular. According to Bill Ashcroft, *et al.*, (1995), it is a counter-colonial resistance project, which draws upon many indigenous and hybrid processes of representation, self-determination and self-writing with the aim of supplanting the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge. In this sense, while post-colonial literatures are generally a result of the interactions between the imperial cultures and the complex of indigenous cultural practices, post-colonial scholarship represents the intellectual resistance articulated against the export to the ex-colonies of European languages, literature and learning as parts of a civilising mission, which involve not only the suppression of the vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control, but also their dismantling and an unprecedented assertion of the cultural superiority of imperial Europe in post-colonial societies. Understood in this vital sense, post-colonial scholarship is therefore based on the historical fact of European colonialism and the

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<sup>15</sup> As a South-driven intellectual thought, post-colonial studies engages issues of language; location or place; history, ethnicity and hybridity; conceptions of the body and the articulations of its performance; education; production and consumption; the politics and philosophy of modernity, democracy and development; modern forms of power and techniques of governmentality; citizenship, state society relationships; as well as issues of nationalism and orientalism. I owe this insight to Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya and Rosinka Chaudhuri both at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC), India.



diverse material effects to which this phenomenon has given rise. In tracing the history of this crucial thought, Bill Ashcroft, *et al.* (eds.), (1995: 1) state that:

Once colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial 'theory' came into being.

In addition to Claude Ake, examples of leading post-colonial theorists across the world include Archibald Mafeje (2000), Kwame A. Appiah (1992), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) and Achille Mbembe (2000 and 2002). Others include Edward Said (1978), Ranajit Guha (1983), Ashis Nandy (1983), Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1994 and 1999), Homi K. Bhabha (1990 and 1994), Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992 and 2000) and Gayatri C. Spivak (1999).<sup>16</sup> Importantly, while some have been influenced by the cultural and political critiques developed over time by structuralist and post-structuralist theorists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Louis Althusser, Ake was influenced mainly by the intellectual legacies of Marxist scholarship, particularly the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Frederick Engels (1820-1895), Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870-1924), Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), Rudolf Hilferding (1877-1941), Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin (1888-1938) and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), especially as articulated in the Latin American contributions to the theories of underdevelopment and the developments described in the preceding sections of this paper. As Ake's writings clearly 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 theorist and post-modernist project of history writing. And, as Harris (2005: 78) 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.*

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<sup>16</sup> The list is far from being exhaustive. We have rather been limited to those theorists whose works are directly relevant to this study. Others, no doubt abound. The listing is also in the order of the relevance of the works of these theorists for this study.

Put together, these scholars challenge the hermeneutic approach to the construction of history and seek to replace it with competing constructions of the past, within various levels and kinds of empirical support, advanced *inter alia*, through the growing self-confidence of scholars fighting objectivism and scientism in history. Seen from this perspective, post-colonial scholarship is thus markedly distinguished from orthodox Marxism by combining its critique of objective material conditions with the analysis of their subjective effects (see Young, 1990, 1995 and 1996). According to Ashis Nandy (1995), it popularises other modes of time perception based on the rediscovery of other modes of knowledge acquisition such as *Zen* and *Yoga*; and theories of transcendence celebrated in ecology and ecofeminism. It is also a self-reflective critique and an attempt to correct what Nandy (1995: 50) calls *the excesses of a history modeled on the Baconian concept of science*, which incorporates into historical consciousness crucial components of the moral universe of the ahistorical. In this sense, the historical conception of time inherited from the European Enlightenment is rightly demystified as being only one mode of time construction with which contemporary knowledge operates. In the present juncture, most sciences and even a few of the social sciences *now* work with more pluralised conceptions and constructions of time.<sup>17</sup> As Nandy (1995: 44) argues:

The historical mode may be the dominant mode of constructing the past in most parts of the globe but it is certainly not the most popular mode of doing so. The dominance is derived from the links the idea of history has established with the modern nation-state, the secular worldview, the Baconian concept of scientific rationality, nineteenth-century theories of progress, and, in recent decades, development. This dominance has also been strengthened by the absence of any radical critique of the idea of history within the modern world and for that matter, within the discipline of history itself. As a result, once exported to the nonmodern world, historical consciousness has not only tended to absolutize the past in cultures that have lived with open-ended concepts of the past or depended on myths, legends, and epics to define their cultural selves, it has also made the historical worldview complicit with many new forms of violence, exploitation, and satanism in our times and helped rigidify civilizational, cultural, and national boundaries.

Post-coloniality therefore engages the constitutive illustrations and legacies of slavery, colonisation and apartheid (Mbembe 2002). This way, it constitutes the unifying discursive

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed treatment of the critique of historicism and the idea of the political or political modernity, see Chakrabarty (2000); Nandy (1995) and Spivak (1999).

intellectual practice embodying the self-reflexive desire of the denied and objectified African to know itself and its community, re-write its own history, re-capture its destiny and sovereignty, and belong to itself in the modern world - in the context of independence and actual autonomy (Oladipo 1995). Being based on the retrieval, reconstruction and reconstitution of *the self* in relation to *the other*, the narrativisation of post-coloniality is articulated through invoking both endogenous and indigenous conceptions of *the re-discovered self*. Such a narrative does not aspire to be a universal form of discourse, but rather draws lines. It insists on a position of difference and distributes people, unlike European rationalist discourses, which attempt to unite all peoples and positions in an illusive universe of ideal consensus. Its insistence on a position of difference, especially in relation to *its other* should be cleared. As permanent features, colonialism and other legacies of the European Enlightenment left behind two contradictory heritages within the character of post-colonial modernities. On the one hand, they established and define not just the character and context of the intellectual engagements and theoretical thinking in the countries of the South (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001: 3), but also shaped and now dictate the very contents of the pedagogical engagements in the disciplinary fields and institutional sites in these societies (Said 1978).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Although the idea of *the South* signals a geographical division of the world between the countries of *the North* and their counterparts in *the South*, its meaning is not entirely coeval with its conventional textbook understanding. As a discursive referent, the idea of *the North* overlaps with the self-designation of *Europe* and more broadly, *the West* in modern history. Its usage speaks to the division of the world into *the North* and *the South* within three broad contexts, namely: (i) the division of the richer and economically prosperous countries of Europe, North America and Australia from the backward, or developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbean; (ii) the division of the former imperial powers from countries which have experienced formal or indirect colonial domination; and (iii) the division of those countries, which control the production of knowledge from those which remain at its liminality and margins. Far from being innocent, this division is integral to a world order in which the globalisation of commodities, services and ideas takes place under the mediation and control of a new empire. And, although as figures of the imaginary, *Europe* and *Africa* refer to certain figurative constructions whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate, they are nevertheless understandable as given, reified categories, especially as opposites paired in a global structure of domination and subalternity. In this regard, liberal scholars are *wont* to protest that any conception of a homogenous, uncontested *Europe* dissolves under analysis. This is true to some extent, but just as the phenomenon of *orientalism* does not disappear simply because some of us have now attained a more critical understanding of it, in the same way, a certain conception of *Europe*, reified and celebrated in the phenomenal world of our everyday relationships of power as the birthplace of *the modern*, continues to dominate the

On the other hand, they are implicated in the underdevelopment and dependence of Third World societies, especially through creating the conditions sustaining their backwardness, marginalisation and stagnation under the present situations. These two realities define the mode of engagement with the European world and thought generally in the post-Enlightenment period, with the result that while seeking to emphasise the applicability of universal notions of rights and the equality of the human person to all societies regardless of age, race and sex, post-coloniality also seeks to establish alternative conceptions of time and history, through the presentation of underdevelopment and dependency *not* as original states of being in these societies, but as products of the unequal relations between the core countries and the peripheries. Poised by the realisation of the need to recover and develop a local identity and a sense of distinction damaged by the domineering imperial discourses, post-coloniality advocates the writing of a new history, which rather than returning to atavistic, nativist histories, or outrightly rejecting modernity in its entirety, invents a narrative that adequately makes visible within the very structure of its various narrative forms its own repressive strategies and practices (Chakrabarty 1992 and 2002).

Post-colonial scholarship is therefore committed, almost by definition to engaging the universals, which include abstract conceptions and figures of the human and, of reason, forged in eighteenth-century Enlightenment Europe, which inform most of the human sciences (Chakrabarty 2000). And, given the domination and control of about nine-tenth of the world by the imperial powers in the post-World War I period (Young, 1990) and the confirmation of Lenin's (1968) theoretical positions on the complete division and future redivision of the world, post-coloniality makes clear the nature and legacies of inherited power relations and their continuing effects on modern global culture and politics (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998). For countries of the South, political questions, which interface nation-state

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discourse of history. Analysis does not do away with it. I owe this construction to Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

relations as well as considerations of development and underdevelopment, are therefore best considered in clear reference to their colonial past, while their analyses draw on a wide variety of theoretical positions and their associated strategies and techniques of analysis.

The spirit of this engagement is found *inter alia*, 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 (1963) 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) has observed, although the idea of the European intellectual tradition stretching back to ancient Greece is merely a fabrication of relatively recent European history, nevertheless, that is the genealogy of the thought in which social scientists across the world find themselves inserted. The point at issue here is that, given the contentious nature of the opposing claims to history around which the genealogy of the social sciences is constructed, the critique of historicism is therefore an integral part of the unended story of post-colonial scholarship. For, as Chakrabarty (2000: 6) brilliantly surmises:

... the very history of politicization of the population, or the coming of political modernity, in countries outside of the Western capitalist democracies of the world produces a deep irony in the history of the political. This history challenges us to rethink two conceptual gifts of nineteenth-century Europe, concepts integral to the idea of modernity. One is historicism - the idea that to understand anything it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development - the other is the very idea of the political. What historically enables a project such as that is the experience of political modernity.... European thought has a contradictory relationship to such an instance of political modernity. It is both indispensable and inadequate in helping us think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical. Exploring - on both theoretical and factual registers - this simultaneous indispensability and inadequacy is the task of postcolonial scholarship.

From the standpoint of this study, it is mainly within this mode of thought that Ake makes his contributions. As Sudipta Kaviraj (1992) observes, many issues characterise the experiences of post-colonial societies generally. But, given their connectible nature, post-colonial scholarship takes the form of an intellectual discursive practice, which critiques all aspects of

imperial representations, language and control. And, as the epigraph at the beginning of this paper illustrates, Africa and other regions of the South are deeply contested intellectual and ideological terrains by the various shades of imperial thought, which seek to *dismember* the making of their nationalist imaginations, their strategies for history writing and self-preservation. The epigraph also underscores the fact that, although the histories and legacies of the capitalist penetration of Third World societies are not entirely a homogenous narration, their central thesis has a potentially connectible character. Given this connectible nature, the task of the post-colonial scholar is therefore to engage what Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001) call the constraining contexts of borrowed knowledge, paradigms and language within which the histories of these societies are being written. For, as Kaviraj (1992: 34) maintains, unless an intellectual history of anti-colonialism is compiled, the history of colonialism will remain permanently unfinished. This, Kaviraj (1992: 35) says is because:

Unless the people who are subjected to colonialism ... engage in such an enterprise which - despite evident internal differences between periods, between high and folk culture, between the great tradition and the small, between the anti-colonialists and the nationalists, between the radicals and the conservatives - is seen as one - as a single, whole, historical enterprise - its history cannot be written.

The first general point that emerges is to recognize the seriousness of this enterprise, and to respect its authenticity. Serious historical reflection can exist in non-theoretical and non-historical works. What I wish to emphasize is the originality and distinctiveness of this intellectual enterprise; what was going on inside these intellectual performances was not just an attempt to counter or criticize western theories of social organization by the use of concepts and argumentative structures taken from the western theoretical discourse. Its originality lay in the fact that this critique was attempted from outside this orbit or circle of discourse; this originality is essentially an acknowledgement of the distinctiveness of ... discourse, the assertion of the abstract possibility of other universes of theoretical reflection.

As will be shown shortly, Ake's scholarship and career represent an engagement in this significant area. Having located him within the tricontinental project of post-colonial scholarship, the next section discusses his contribution to the African social science community and the global system of knowledge production at large.

## **The Contribution of Claude Ake<sup>19</sup>**

Earlier attempts which have noted aspects of Ake's contributions in other studies include the acknowledgement of his role in the Africanisation of the political economy approach (Abiodun 1998); his contributions to international institution-building, research networking and activism (Sawyer 1997); his advocacy of the need for us to put our understanding of the social sciences in the services of peace and human development, based on the pursuit of a systematic study of the conditions for peace, development and the elimination of all physical constraints and manifestations of violence (see Jinadu 1996 and Jinadu 2004).

This section discusses Ake's contribution to the African context of knowledge production. Importantly, one major area of Africa's dependence has been in knowledge production, appropriation and dissemination, a situation, which undermines the continent's ability to maximise its democratic potentials and development agenda (Africa Institute of South Africa 2006). This is reflected mainly in the notion that Europe and North America largely define and must continue to determine the orientations and research directions governing the social science vocation together with the modes of engagement within its respective disciplinary fields. Instances of this dependence are found not only in the theories, paradigms and methods of seeking knowledge that dominate the fields of enquiry and practice but also in the kind of literature and scholarship that define the various disciplinary vocations. Consequently, in Anthropology, History, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, it is assumed that the entire vocation exists as an appendage and extension of European and North American scholarship. Also, these disciplines suffer intellectual dislocation; they lack context-sensitivity, as well as the needed endogeneity and originality with which they are to be pursued. As argued by the Africa Institute of South Africa (2006: 1):

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<sup>19</sup> In writing this section, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor O. O. Adesina at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. In addition to the oral interview I conducted with him and our discussion in September 2006, he also made some of his published papers available to me.

This failure of context-sensitive scholarship is epistemic and analytic. Debates regarding ...African issues are often filtered through epistemic approaches that are products of other (largely Western) contexts. From Economics to Sociology, from Philosophy to History, it was the depth of endogeneity that gave the canonical western works their vibrancy. As much as many may think of Economics as a science, for instance, we cannot understand the distinction between David Ricardo and Friedrich List, outside of the specificity of their locales; neither can we understand the profundity of the scholarship of Max Weber or Emile Durkheim, in Sociology, outside of the depth of their endogeneity.

Regretfully, even in the rare situations where there are engagements with uniquely African issues by African scholars, such efforts often portray findings from such studies as products emanating from *an alien other*, based on an *area study approach* even in the post-colonial period. This is added to the relative neglect and lack of awareness of the debates, scholarships and scholars from the rest of the continent - both past and present, with the result that while scholarly engagement with the continent remains largely perfunctory, in the areas where it exists, it is rather in the negative form, a sense of what Africa must never become. These situations are compounded by the dearth of sustained engagements with the wider African scholarship, manifested in the entrenched lack of awareness, appreciations for, and acknowledgement of celebrated works by African authorities, who for centuries and decades have engaged issues on the continent (Africa Institute of South Africa 2006). Of the degree of this ignorance, however, we are only hazily aware (Hountondji, 1997: 1).

According to Ake (1986: iii):

...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 and the particular problems, which it solves, are contingent on the historical circumstances of the society in which the science is produced.

The major issue, which Ake engages is the question of how knowledge, as developed and appropriated by Africans on the basis of their historical experiences can be valorised 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. In one of its recent publications, CODESRIA (2004: 2) qualifies this search and the significance of Ake's intervention:

After nearly three decades of unsuccessful orthodox economic reforms imposed by the international financial institutions under the guise of the so-called Washington Consensus, development thinking for the purpose of re-building the foundations of African economies appears to be at a dead-end and begs the question of alternatives that could enable the continent to turn the table of underdevelopment. Furthermore, a massive process of social re-ordering appears to be under way across Africa as various social players seek parts of the continent, including the collapse of state legitimacy and central governmental authority. These developments call for a re-thinking of state, economy, culture and society in ways that depart radically from conventional wisdom. In addition, a fresh commitment to extend the boundaries of pan-Africanism appears to be in evidence with the launching of the new, bolder African Union in replacement of the Organisation of African Unity, a development that has been accompanied by pleas for a harnessing of African knowledge for the advancement of peace, stability and unity. And yet, in the face of the different changes occurring across the continent and the intellectual challenges which they pose, the inherited analytic tools derived from the European scholarly heritage by which African scholars have sought to grasp the transitions and shifts taking place in their societies, appear increasingly ill-adapted to the phenomena they are meant to capture and the environment to which they are applied. Also, the institutional context of knowledge production and dissemination, epitomised by the university, is undergoing a severe crisis of identity, mission and relevance.

With respect to endogeny, epistemic and the institutional challenges of the social sciences in Africa, Ake provides us with useful intellectual tool kits for thinking through the transformatory developments taking place in the continent, especially the domineering impulses of the imperial and androcentric scholarship. In this sense, his legacy lies in his contribution to the development of a uniquely African social science, a contribution, which today, simultaneously enables and challenges us to transcend the extroversions and erasures that constitute the hallmark of imperial pedagogy and scholarship. He does this by exposing the history and legacies of the foreign presence on the character of African scholarship through the articulation of protest scholarship, critical reflections and an affirmation of the need for epistemic rupture and curricula transformation. He was principally concerned with developing a form of scholarship, which takes its local intellectual, political and existential contexts seriously while also seeking to be globally reputable. In doing this, Ake builds on the works of older scholars, especially Fanon, Fanonist scholars, Walter Rodney and others, whose influences have been noted in the earlier sections of this paper, in our illustrations on

the making of his scholarship and paradigm shift. He was also inspired by the works of his contemporaries and other succeeding scholars.

Ake advances this position through his pragmatic belief that all theories, paradigms, modes of thought and models of social action should be contextualised in a manner that they enable us transcend the temptations of wrongly generalising from one context to the others without critically considering the specificities of individual case histories and cultures. According to Ake (1982) being part of the global system of knowledge production, social science scholarship in its application to Africa is a central cultural apparatus of expatriate intellectual domination of the continent, which agenda has been to ensure the realisation of capitalist and imperialist interests across the world (see also Jinadu 2004). Having exposed this aspect of the global system of knowledge production, Ake advocates the building of an alternative global system of knowledge production based on the appreciation of the different histories, which produce the diverse knowledge bases across the world. To him, this is a crucial condition for transcending the limitations of the restrictive contexts of knowledge production in the modern world. It was in the struggle to achieve this objective that Ake became a central figure in the movements that gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s among the progressive forces within the African social science community, a movement, which challenged and exposed the epistemic shortfalls of Western liberal and Marxist social sciences in their application to Africa (see also Barongo 1980). For Ake, therefore, the universality of theoretical and empirical knowledge is only a ruse, which should be carefully broken down into distinctive historical and cultural components, to be explored and pursued within the frameworks defined by one's social experiences and cultural milieu. In other words, searching for the universals, vaguely defined as *the truth* or *knowledge* must proceed from the point of view of an appreciation of one's history, context and experience. By extension, an understanding of Ake's aversion from orthodoxy and dogma thus helps one in

appreciating 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.

Put differently, his emphasis is hinged on the question of endogeneity and 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 one that takes the African policy-making nexus seriously. From this, he critiques 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, which 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. As we see in his (1982) *Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development*, Ake exposes the inclinations of Western social science for 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 universal or nomothetic. He therefore, recommends a recourse and resort to endogeneity, articulated inter alia, through critical distancing and a selective borrowing from other epistemic contexts, settings and locales.<sup>20</sup> An illustration of Ake's (1982) position on endogeneity is expressed in Jimi Adesina's (2005: 4) presidential address to the South African Sociological Association:

Contrary to the false claims of universalism and unicity of Sociology, endogeneity is fundamental to the canonical works of what we call sociology. "Universal knowledge", as Archie Mafeje notes, "can only exist in contradiction."<sup>10</sup> More importantly, "to evolve lasting meanings, we must be 'rooted' in something."<sup>11</sup> It is precisely because Marx, Weber, and Durkheim were firmly rooted in their specific contexts that they produced the canonical works that we today consider

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<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, following Ake (1982), Adesina (2006) draws attention to the global impact of African historiography, starting with Onwuka Dike's insistence at the Ibadan School of History on the validity of *oral sources* for writing history. See Adesina (2006) and Marks (2000).

essential to Sociology. [As] Kwesi Prah reminded us ...: "If what we say and do has relevance for our humanity, its international relevance is guaranteed."<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, Ake addresses the question of agency in the struggle towards bringing about the desired forms of change in the continent's economic and political transformation. He does this by identifying the intelligentsia as the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle (see Ake, 1978; 1982 and n. d.) and also by locating the people, especially the toiling masses as the means and end of development (Ake 1996). And, through his praxis, Ake presents his life and works as examples of the kind of change, which he passionately advocates. In illustrating aspects of the issues, which Ake painstakingly engages, two examples are in order. These concern the presentation of what Hountonji (1977) 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 generalising discipline that concerns itself above all with modernity; with the character and dynamics of modern industrialised societies*. This is added to the attempt by most texts in the field to trace the emergence of the discipline to Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the nineteenth century French philosopher, and identify Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) as its founding fathers. Such approaches deny uniquely African contributions and other non-Western cultures a position not only in Sociology, but also in other social science disciplines. They also deny the contributions made into these disciplines by Africans and other non-European authorities and societies. For example, Ibn Khaldun had written his three volumes Magnus opus, *Kitab Al 'Ibar* in 1378AD. Among others, 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 organisation and society *ilm al-umran al-bashari* and *ilm al-ijtima al-insani*, which were denied and rejected by the

extroversions of Westernisation. In Adesina's (2006) estimation, this had occurred for about 452 years before the first volume of Auguste Comte's six volume of the course of *Positive Philosophy* was published. In the same work, Ibn Khaldun rigorously articulates the concept of *asabiyyah* in explaining the normative basis of group cohesion, its decomposition and reconstitution; the different ways in which it manifests at different levels of social organisation and among different groups (see Adesina, 2006: 6). Again, following Adesina's (2006) estimations, this had occurred for about 515 years before Emile Durkheim's (1893) *Division of Labour* and its idea of social norms were 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 conform with, or focus on the real modern societies. Elsewhere, Momoh (2003: 41) observes that:

In all books on post-Newtonian science that exist, virtually all those mentioned as scientists that made discoveries are Europeans. Nowhere is Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) or Jan Ernest Matzeliger (1852-1889) mentioned. German philosophy is widely acknowledged to be a major influence on modern western philosophy. Yet when works are written on German philosophy nothing is said about the Ghanaian philosopher, William Amo, who was a Professor in a German University and whose views were well respected by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant.

Other examples certainly exist on African philosophers whose works have been erased on similar grounds by the power-driven impulses of modernity and the West, so that Ibn Khaldun is just one of the numerous examples and illustrations of such instructive and pioneering efforts from the continent which have been dispossessed of the value of their intellectual labour and contributions to the global context of knowledge production.

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,

especially following the Hegelian logic and traditions (see Adesina 2006). While not substituting erasure for uncritical adulation, the point at issue here is to highlight the immanently ethnocentric and racist inclinations to create binary opposites between knowledge and ignorance on the one hand; as well as science and magic on the other. In this sense, while the West is privileged as *the source* of scientific knowledge, ignorance and dubious magic are presented as the signifiers of the non-Western *other*. These issues are taken on in Ake's (1982) engagement with the extroversions of Western social science. He says, just as Africa has been reduced to raw material production and Europe specialises 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 Europe and the West. He traces the origin of this practice to the period and developments following the European conquest of the continent, and says in spite of independence, extroversion is still immanent in Africa's experiences and relations with the West, especially given its complicated and contradictory positioning in the global system of knowledge production. He draws a parallel between the extroversion of African economies manifested, inter alia in the export of cocoa or gold and the import of chocolate and jewellery on the one hand, and the extroversion in the global system of knowledge production manifested in the reduction of African scholarship to the vain proselytisation and regurgitation of received paradigms and borrowed discourses, including those which do not speak to the continent's situations, but are nevertheless deployed by the West in explaining social reality in the continent, on the other hand.

Thus, pitching endogeneity and ontology against the contradictions of Eurocentric extroversion and idiography, Ake challenges us to replace the practice of scholarship in Africa as translation and extroversion with its engagement as an objective reflection of

*Africanity* through a careful reformulation of *the African condition* and *self*. In this way, while the practice of scholarship as *translation* involves the articulation of African social science, cultures and ideas according to Western academic terms, *its re-articulation, re-definition and reformulation*, which Ake advocates are based on *the reconstruction, reframing and reconstitution* of the various disciplinary fields and vocations following uniquely African interpretations and critiques; through an appreciation of endogeny and ontology as the objective bases of epistemology and philosophy, rooted in a proper understanding of the institutional and disciplinary histories of existing knowledge-producing frontiers; and also inspired by a corrective commitment to *reclaim history and rewrite the careless deployment of the ideas of neo-colonialism by the alien other*, in narrativising the African past and future (see Ake n. d., 1978 and 1982; Adesina 2006; and Zeleza 1997 and 2006). It should be stated, however, that Ake is not alone in this advocacy. Rather, being a strong voice, he is complemented within the continent by others whose works have been noted in this study. Put together, these efforts challenge the dominant Western narratives on the subject matter of *Africanity* and the practice of social science scholarship in the continent. As Harris (2005: 77) puts it, Ake's legacy challenges us to (i) be clear why Western social science is inadequate, how to change it and why; (ii) clarify the idea of development; and (iii) invent an appropriate model of development which is based on mass-interest.

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.<sup>21</sup> More will be noted and discussed by future scholars focusing on other aspects of his works. According to Mafeje (2006),<sup>22</sup> Ake possessed two major qualities, which not only endeared him to international funding institutions across the world, but also made him outstanding among the scholars in his generation. These were (i)

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<sup>21</sup> See Arowosegbe (forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> Our oral interview with him in September 2006.

his sensitivity to the research needs and foci of major funding agencies; and (ii) his integrity, accountability, prudence and financial discipline. These, according to Mafeje (2006) were evident in his principled utilisation of research funds for their intended purposes; his maintenance of unfaulted record of research performance, and also in his research engagements with the funding bodies from which he obtained financial support for his research. Mafeje (2006) explains that very few African scholars in Ake's generation have been excellent and privileged enough to have received approval and funding to conduct research at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. He says, fewer still will ever qualify for a second successful appointment as a senior research fellow by the same institution like Ake, who was appointed by the institution between 1990-1991 and also in 1996,<sup>23</sup> where he wrote and published his (1996) *Democracy and Development in Africa* before his death (see also Ake's Curriculum Vitae, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed Ake's contribution to the social science community in Africa and the global industry of knowledge production at large. In doing this, we located him within the tricontinental intellectual project of post-colonial scholarship, which we defined as a South-driven critique of historicism. In the process, historicism was defined as a revisionist Western conception of history, which obfuscates, rather than further the understanding of Africa. We also defined post-colonial studies as a South-driven critique of political modernity and the very idea of the political, a practice, which involves by implication, an engagement with the practice of history writing from the South. Lastly, we argued that the impact of the imperial presence and other legacies of the European Enlightenment are central to an understanding of the continent's present and future histories. The aim is to further research on aspects of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



issues raised in Ake's works. This was done by suggesting vital reasons why Ake's works are considered worth reading, at least in the limited understanding of this researcher.

As we have tried to show, Ake's engagement with the extroversions of the Western social science in its application to Africa is only a case in point on the ambiguity of the Enlightenment, and more broadly European thought in its reference to non-metropolitan histories at large. Similar efforts are found in the works of other scholars within this mode across Africa, and in far away Asia and Latin America. Put together, they represent bold initiatives in asserting the identities of African and other non-Western cultures, *inter alia*, through carefully rewriting the intellectual and nationalist histories of these societies on their own terms.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, through (i) re-appropriating their vantage location in the home ground - the African soil - as the ultimate *firma terra* (Mafeje 2000); (ii) by establishing the centrality of *race* in the making of the Enlightenment and all shades of imperial thought (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 2002);<sup>25</sup> and (iii) by exposing the ambiguity and dualism that lie at the heart of liberalism and other European philosophical traditions (Chatterjee 1994),<sup>26</sup> post-

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<sup>24</sup> Some Western theorists on Africa have arrogantly claimed that there is nothing like African philosophy. Not only is the right to knowledge production *in* and *on* Africa arrogated by *Europe* and *the West*, but also the very idea of discourse production through the monopoly of *discourse formation* as a historically performed practice. Hence the questions: *Who is actually qualified to speak on Africa? Who is also elected to speak for the continent, and by who is this election? In other words, who has the most authentic voice on the continent? And, how is the continent to be best constituted, constructed and represented?* The answers provided to these questions, together with the ideological battles around which research is conducted on the continent - explain the rupture between African scholars and their foreign counterparts - especially given the arrogant deployment of the discursive power in recent years by Africanist scholars. For a detailed treatment of these issues, see Momoh (2003).

<sup>25</sup> In its application to the post-colonial world, *race* is both an intellectual and an ideological tool for driving and legitimising the coercive apparatus and character of Empire - as a belligerent civilisation. Ghosh (2002) describes it as the foundational social fact of Empire and an idea whose articulation is embedded more in practices than in discourse. See Ghosh and Chakrabarty (2002). See also Chakrabarty (2004).

<sup>26</sup> This is clear enough in the ambiguity caused by the tension between the universal applicability that liberalism claims for itself and the unacknowledged racism that runs through its practices - particularly in non-Western societies. Chatterjee (1994) captures this in his reference to the changes introduced by British colonialism into the operations of the bureaucracy, the police, the army, the schools and other institutions of the state in India and Africa. He observes that (i) the inherited institutions of political modernity in these societies *are* not modern enough; (ii) that freedom, liberty and other aspirations, which characterise the post-Enlightenment period in the West were only selectively introduced and applied to the non-metropolitan cultures through the controlled form of modernity, which characterised the colonial project; and (iii) that societies in the East still look up to the West for inspiration on the practices of freedom, justice, liberty and other admirable ideals, which have proved difficult to be entrenched within their social systems. Hence Chakrabarty's (2000) assertion that the European colonisers of the nineteenth century both preached the Enlightenment humanism and at the same time crippled

coloniality *decentres* Europe and more broadly the West from being the source of all legitimate signification and makes room for other ways of being (Argyrou 2001) through carefully asserting the abstract possibility of other universes of theoretical reflections (Kaviraj 1992). In other words, it challenges Europe's tendency to absolutisation of theoretical insights and fights to redress the entrenched inequality of ignorance which still characterises the global system of knowledge production.<sup>27</sup> Through its legitimate intellectual project of *narrative history writing*, post-coloniality counters the misrepresentation of the continent in terms of a lack, an absence and an incompleteness, which translates into perpetual inadequacy and inferiority - through the imperial project of *transition narrative*.<sup>28</sup> In doing this, it simultaneously advocates and asserts the originality of the African voice as the most authentic expression of the African condition, and, an end to *African Studies*, not just in Europe and North America, but also in South Africa.<sup>29</sup>

Two positions are clear from our examination of Ake's writings on knowledge production in Africa. One, far from being subservient, the intellectual tradition of African scholarship has been largely progressive, especially in terms of its orientation. It has not been defined entirely by conventional and obedient discipline-based academic study. Rather, being shaped by, and having responded to significant challenges and inspirations in the eras of anti-

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and denied it in practice to the colonised. In post-colonial Africa, these contradictions stem from two premises: (i) the inadequacies in the continent's social system, which is largely governed by irrational and prescriptive customs rather than a well-regulated rational system of law and a common code of morality; and (ii) the British imperial interest, which bred discrimination in the services on ethnic and racial grounds as well as differentiations in respect of social status and the conditions of service. See Chatterjee (1994) and Chakrabarty (2000).

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed treatment of *Europe's absolutisation of theoretical insights* and *inequality of ignorance*, see Chakrabarty (1992 and 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> It is conceded that *African Studies* exists as a legitimate field of global academic pursuit, just like *Asian*, *Chinese*, *Ethiopian*, *European* and *Japanese Studies*, among others. It is also appreciated that the contributions directed towards understanding the continent transcend continental, disciplinary and nationality lines. Nevertheless, in addition to its lack of commitment, and, barring a few exceptions, the pursuance of African Studies by non-Africans distorts and misrepresents, rather than further the understanding of social reality in the continent. I am not generalising this assertion, but the dominant Africanist approach *on* Africa is guilty of the distortion, misrepresentation and negative image-making of the continent. And, while a few exceptions exist to my position in this regard, it is to the dominant Africanist approach on the continent that I refer. For illustrations and detailed critiques on *African Studies*, see Mafeje (2000) and Momoh (2003).

colonial, nationalist and pan-African struggles for freedom and self-determination, it has been a critical tradition premised on an ethic of freedom and a search for the ideational basis of that freedom (Momoh 2003). It holds itself accountable, not to any particular institution, regime, class or gender, but to the collective imagination, aspirations and interests of the ordinary people. And, by challenging and subverting the constraints of dominant and received disciplinary approaches and paradigms, it seeks to be socially relevant and politically responsible in more than a neutral or liberal sense. It is therefore, guided by an ethic that simultaneously challenges and requires scholars in the continent to be identified with, and grounded in the broader landscape of Africa's liberation and democracy movements. Two, while the ethical foundations of this scholarship have been conceptualised, framed and understood by the considerations of endogeneity, epistemology, identity, methodology and ontology, and also, while Africa's radical intellectuals have truly engaged and pursued anti-imperialist ethics and self-reconstitution for the people, the liberatory dividends and promises of the anti-colonial and nationalist eras are far from being delivered (see Mama 2007).

What options, then, abound in the legitimate struggle of transforming the state in Africa, especially from the perspective of knowledge production? As we have tried to argue elsewhere,<sup>30</sup> given the endemic nature of the African crises, it will not do, to end matters by merely advocating a more proactive engagement by African scholars with the methodological implications of their liberatory intellectual ethics. Rather, in addition to such efforts, there is the need for more focused and incisive analyses of the origins, dimensions and impacts of the continent's crises - as a condition for proffering lasting solutions to them. This is, therefore, a call on African scholars to rededicate themselves towards improving the material conditions of their people, inter alia, through a fearless articulation of the ideational

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<sup>30</sup> See Arowosegbe (forthcoming).

and ontological connotations of Africanity and Afro-centrism. And, as Momoh (2003: 53) rightly suggests:

... Afrocentric intellectuals are expected to combine scholarship with activism, this is a challenge for both diasporic and African-based Afrocentrists (sic). They must struggle with the working people. This was the original position of the doyens of pan-Africanism; it is a position whose truism is *transhistorical*.

In doing this, efforts must be made not only to revive Africa's rich heritages and traditions in the bid to make sense of modernity, but also to invoke and retrieve aspects of its imaginary golden past, which are useful for thinking through the continent's present and future histories. For, as Amitav Ghosh (2002: 147) puts it, *history is never more compelling than when it gives us insights into oneself and the ways in which one's own experience is constituted*. History writing in Africa *must* therefore create those conditions that would enable *us* redeem ourselves by ourselves. In other words, while good history writing on the continent may well involve acknowledging the efforts of non-African contributors, it also centrally involves making choices and judgements of our own - as Africans.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, Africans and other non-Western cultures cannot afford to renounce their traditions in their quest for modernity, for it is these traditions, which enable them not only in accounting for their pasts, but also in imagining a liberated future. The rise of *Africanity* must therefore put an end to the negative image-making of the continent by the *alien other*. For, as Vassos Argyrou (2001: 221) argues:

Postcolonial subjects, natives, primitives, non-Europeans, non-westerners, in short, Others cannot afford to become 'nativists',. ... But neither can they afford to *uncritically* accept western gifts, whether these go by the name of social justice and equality, humanism, reason, or whatever. They cannot afford to be traditional or modern but neither can they afford to be 'hybrids' of any sort. In this struggle, at this particular historical juncture, they cannot afford to dwell on any sort of fixed identity or achieve any sort of permanent synthesis because under conditions of symbolic domination it is not they who decide the meaning and value of identities and of the world. Others should strive to keep the liminal space between tradition and modernity open for as long as possible and to the extent that it is possible operate on the basis of what one might call 'ontological epoche'. The fundamental question is not what Others are, might be or become because that is always already decided by the powers that be. It is, rather, what those who decide are or to be more precise what they think they are. [My emphasis in italics].

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<sup>31</sup> My appreciation goes to Stephen Ellis for suggesting this idea to me.

It is hoped that beyond sentiments and hagiography, this paper 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.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I owe these constructions to Archie Mafeje. See Mafeje (1997 and 2000).

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