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Claude E. Ake and the Praxis of Knowledge Production in Africa

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Abstract

South-driven initiatives on endogenous knowledge production owe a great debt to Claude Ake. This article discusses the strengths and weaknesses of Ake's account of the social sciences and knowledge production on Africa. It evaluates his legacies and presents him as one of the most fertile and influential voices within the social sciences community in Africa. Claude Ake, being a political scientist with an unusually broad intellectual formation and horizon, the article examines his production – over the last four decades – of a wide ranging body of works, which have been instructive, not only for their analytical acuity, methodological rigour and theoretical sophistication, but also for being remarkable products of a magisterial erudition, the creations of an exceptionally great mind, written with a deft and profound authority. The works also constitute 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 *leitmotif* in doing so is 'to establish a specific relevance of studying Ake's works'. Through an examination of the epistemological bases of policy, practice and theory in his corpus, this article establishes an important area within the social sciences in Africa positively affected by Ake's intellectual involvement.

Résumé

Les initiatives enclenchées dans les pays du Sud sur la production du savoir endogène ont une dette importante envers Claude Ake. Dans un tel contexte, cette étude évalue les points forts et les points faibles de l'exposé que fait Ake des sciences sociales et de la question de la production du savoir en Afrique. L'article examine son héritage et le présente comme l'une des voix les plus fertiles et influentes au sein de la communauté des chercheurs en sciences sociales du continent. Il fait un bilan de la production, couvrant les quatre dernières décennies, d'un corpus étendu de travaux de ce spécialiste des sciences politiques doté

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d'une formation intellectuelle singulièrement vaste, et dont la valeur ne tient pas seulement à la sophistication théorique de l'œuvre, à sa rigueur méthodologique et à son acuité analytique ; il s'agit de travaux remarquables de par leur érudition magistrale, car ils sont dûs à un esprit exceptionnel maîtrisant à un degré élevé les théories de la langue et de la critique ; ils sont ciselés avec une autorité profonde, et constituent aussi des aspects significatifs des tentatives d'adapter l'héritage intellectuel des études marxistes en vue de comprendre l'économie politique et l'histoire sociale de l'Afrique contemporaine dans une perspective largement critique. L'idée générale ici est d'établir la pertinence spécifique de l'étude de l'œuvre d'Ake. Grâce à l'examen des bases épistémologiques de la théorie, de la pratique et de la politique dans ses travaux, le présent article trace les contours d'un champ important dans le domaine des sciences sociales africaines et du monde, champ qui a été affecté de manière positive par l'implication intellectuelle d'Ake.

Introduction

This article discusses Ake's contribution to the enterprise of knowledge production. It addresses the question of Africa's epistemological and philosophical lag in the area of knowledge production. To clarify, while the academies in Asia and Latin America shifted to postcolonial studies in the 1980s, Africa remained – trapped – within the dependency, political economy and underdevelopment paradigm as the dominant mode of analysis. Consequently, history writing and more broadly, knowledge production on the continent has neither benefited much from, nor engaged substantially with the expansive debate and rich literature on postcolonial studies, especially as we see in the subaltern studies intellectual project in India, South Asia and Latin America. It bears repeating that Ake was never directly identified with the debate on postcoloniality, which only became common currency and took the centre stage in major intellectual circles and political debates across the world about a decade before his sudden and tragic death in a plane crash in November 1996. While his publications are marked by an original brand of Marxism, some of his contributions and insights can, nevertheless, be linked to the discussions on postcoloniality. This article attempts to make such a linkage explicit.

Data were obtained for this study from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data took the form of extensive, unstructured in-depth interviews conducted with a selected group of twenty strategic informants purposively sampled, five each from the colleagues, contemporaries, old friends and past students of the late Claude Ake. Secondary data were drawn from Ake's original texts; the published commentaries, critiques and tributes written in his honour before and after his death by colleagues, friends and various institutional bodies; the information available in his curriculum vitae

as well as the texts which focus not only on the debates and issues on which Ake worked and wrote, but also on the general context of scholarship in Africa during his lifetime and beyond.

Following the introduction, this article is divided into three sections. The first locates Ake within the academic formation of postcolonial studies. The second discusses his contribution to endogenous knowledge production on Africa and presents his corpus as a corrective intervention for challenging historically entrenched and institutionalized paradigmatic domination of the continent by European and other supremacist scholarships, and advocates the decolonization of knowledge production on Africa – *inter alia* through articulating the epistemological and referential bases of Afrocentrism; asserting the African identity and the possibility of an African renaissance; invoking the exclusivist and ontological connotations of Africanity as well as reclaiming the humanity of Africans. The third section is the conclusion.

The Subject Matter of Postcolonial Studies

This section does not tackle the somewhat quixotic task of writing the history of postcolonial studies, several eloquent examples of which are already in print. Rather, it seeks briefly to describe its central tenets and locates Ake's works within them. Broadly, postcolonial studies represents an intellectual engagement developed over the past three decades on a set of issues, debates and articulations of points of intervention, performed as a tricontinental project within the institutional sites of research centres and universities across the world, particularly outside the metropolitan intellectual centres (Young 1990) on a range of disciplinary fields.

Characterized by its geographical capaciousness and multiple sites of production, its lineage embraces Albert Memmi's analysis in the 1950s of the drama of North African decolonization; Frantz Fanon's theorizations of anti-colonialism and the complex psychology of racism articulated in the 1950s; Edward Said's elaboration of Fanon's (1968:102) thesis that Europe is literally the creation of the Third World in his (1978) *Orientalism*, which sparked decades of scholarship on occidental representations of the East; the wide-ranging Caribbean scholarship of writers such as C. L. R. James and Wilson Harris, whose early lives in Trinidad and Guyana, respectively, shaped their very different approaches to the history of colonialism after their migrations to England; the works of theorists of the Hispanophone Americas, from Gloria Anzaldúa to José David Saldivar; and the contribution of the subaltern studies group in South Asia initiated by Ranajit Guha, with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri C. Spivak, Partha Chatterjee and Sumit Sarkar as founding members. As an academic formation, its emergence was inspired

by the realization by these scholars that post-Enlightenment traditions of European historiography had led to a longstanding neglect of 'history from the South' and that disciplinary practices had failed to address the full complexity of historical change in the era that they studied. Hence the determination to make the perspectives of other disciplines integral to the historical enterprise (Holsinger 2002:1195).

Postcolonial studies is an intellectual-political discourse inspired mainly by Marxist, structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodernist writings. It critically engages the legacies of the European Enlightenment for postcolonial societies generally and Africa, Asia and Latin America in particular. As an anti-colonial project, it draws from many hybrid and indigenous sources of representation, self-determination and self-writing with the aim of supplanting the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge (Ashcroft 1995). Understood in this vital sense, postcoloniality – notice the ontological-nominalist form of the category – is thus a shorthand expression for an intense, travelling human condition, a circumstantial experience taking place within specific geopolitical boundaries, particularly the South (Ahmed 1992 and Radhakrishnan 1993). From yet another perspective, it is also best understood as a problematic field where contentious and heated debates are bound to take place for quite a while to come – a field where no single historical perspective can have a monopoly over the elaboration of the postcolonial condition – especially at such times like ours when grand discourses and master narratives in general, like Marxism and nationalism, are deservedly in disarray. Hence, the need for rigorous and situated unpacking before they become canonized as universal constants by the imperatives of metropolitan theory (Radhakrishnan 1993:750–62).

While some postcolonial theorists have been influenced by the cultural and political critiques developed over time by structuralist and poststructuralist theorists like Louis Althusser (1918–1990), Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), 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 dependency and underdevelopment. As Ake's writings 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 postcolonial and postmodernist project of history writing. And as Kelly 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.

Postcolonial scholars challenge the hermeneutic approach to the construction of history and seek to replace it with competing constructions of the past. Seen from this perspective, postcolonial studies is thus markedly distinguished from orthodox Marxism by combining its critique of objective material conditions with the analysis of their subjective effects. It popularizes a self-reflective critique of the excesses of a history modelled on the Baconian concept of science, which incorporates into historical consciousness crucial components of the moral universe of the ahistorical. Its narrative does not aspire to be a universal form, but rather draws lines, distributes peoples and insists on a position of difference, 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 clear. As permanent features, colonialism and other legacies of the Enlightenment left behind two contradictory heritages within the character of postcolonial modernities. On the one hand, they established and defined 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.

On the other hand, they are implicated in the dependence and underdevelopment of Third World societies, especially through creating the conditions sustaining their backwardness, marginalization 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. Consequently, while emphasizing the applicability of universal notions of rights and the equality of humanity to all societies regardless of age, race and sex, postcoloniality also seeks to establish alternative conceptions of history and time by presenting dependency and underdevelopment not as original states of being in these societies, but as products of the unequal relations between the core capitalist countries and the peripheries. Struck by the realization of the need to recover and develop an identity damaged by the domineering imperial discourses, postcoloniality advocates the writing of a new history, which rather than returning to atavistic, nativist histories, or rejecting modernity outrightly 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 2000). Put differently, postcoloniality sees nothing atavistic or regressive about a people revisiting

the past with the intention of reclaiming it. The problem, however, comes up when revisionist identities are upheld as primordial and transcendently sanctioned rather than as historically produced.

Postcolonial studies is therefore committed almost by definition to engaging the universals, which include abstract conceptions of the human and of reason, forged in eighteenth century Enlightenment Europe, which inform most of the human sciences (Chakrabarty 2000). And given the control and domination of about nine-tenths of the world by the imperial powers since the post-First World War period and the confirmation of Lenin's (1968) positions on the complete division and future re-division of the world, postcoloniality makes clear the legacies and nature of inherited power relations and their continuing effects on modern global culture and politics (Ashcroft 1998). 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 (1968) articulation of the African liberation struggle, which held on to the Enlightenment idea of the equality of the human person. The engagement with European thought is thus marked by the fact that the European intellectual tradition is the most dominant in the social sciences departments of most, if not all modern universities today. And as Samir Amin (1989) has observed, although the idea of the European intellectual tradition stretching back to ancient Greece is merely a fabrication of a 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 postcolonial studies. As Chakrabarty (2000:6) submits:

... 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 our standpoint, it is mainly within this mode of thought that Ake makes his contribution. As Sudipta Kaviraj (1992) observes, many issues characterize the experiences of postcolonial societies generally. But, given their connectible nature, postcolonial studies takes the form of an intellectual discursive practice, which critiques all manifestations of imperial control, language and representations. And, 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 postcolonial theorists is therefore to engage what Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001) call the constraining contexts of borrowed knowledge, language and paradigms 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. As will be shown shortly, Ake's career and scholarship represent an engagement in this direction. Having located him within the tricontinental project of postcolonial studies, the next section discusses his contribution to the social sciences, and Africa's context of knowledge production in particular.

Claude Ake's Contribution

This section discusses Ake's contribution to the African context of knowledge production. I argue that although obliquely so, Ake's works speak eminently in the multidisciplinary direction of postcolonial studies. In proving this assertion, attention is drawn to those aspects of his works which further postcolonial thought, particularly with respect to Africa.

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

My thesis is that with the exception of Marxist tradition, Western social science scholarship on developing countries amounts to imperialism. Western social science scholarship on developing countries is imperialism in the sense that (a) it foists, or at any rate attempts to foist on the developing countries, capitalist values, capitalist institutions, and capitalist development; (b) it focuses social science analysis on the question of how to make the developing countries more like the West; and (c) it propagates mystifications, and modes of thought and action which serve the interests of capitalism and imperialism.

Needless to say that this thesis is not breaking new ground but merely supplementing the effort which others have made. The capitalist and imperialist character of the Western scholarship on economic development in the Third World has been indicated by several progressive economists, particularly Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, and Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*. Unfortunately, the treatment of the imperialism of social science in these writings is merely incidental. Paul Baran is mostly interested in how the economic surplus is produced and used and how developed and underdeveloped societies undergo economic transformation. The major task which Samir Amin sets for himself in *Accumulation on a World Scale* is primarily to clarify the phenomenon of underdevelopment. The idea that the bulk of Western social science scholarship on developing countries amounts to imperialism does not come out clearly and forcefully, and the significance of this imperialism does not stand out in clear relief.

Ake takes a critical stance toward continental theoretical discourses from Africa's point of view and exposes the Eurocentric and European assumptions undergirding the most *avant-garde* writings to emerge on the continent from the developed world. He does this by advancing a critical rethinking of our fields' intellectual genealogies in ways that depart from the constricting narratives of disciplinary origin and originality received from the West. Focusing on the theory of political development, he opposes those Western versions of history which claim for themselves a totality of knowledge on Africa. Yet, in keeping with social scientific ideals, he also reveals his own commitment to uncovering an apparently deeper level of truth. He demonstrates with copious evidence, how the models earlier imported from Europe – Marxism, a belief in modernity and progress, a commitment to revolution as forward-looking, linear, developmentalist transformation – are now in doubt. Ake engages these issues with instructive and telling effect.

Exposing the ideological character of the theory of political development, Ake (1979:60–98) claims that its central position within the Western social science scholarship is not fortuitous. He traces its emergence to the winning

of formal political independence by the colonies in the atmosphere of the Cold War, a development which, it was felt, would jeopardize vital interests of the colonizing powers. In these circumstances, Ake argues, the interests of the Western powers demanded the consolidation and preservation of the fledgling-peripheral capitalist states which they had nurtured from the penetrating influence of the now defunct Soviet Union. Corresponding to the need to preserve the West's hegemony across the world, the theory of political development emerged as the ideological tool for maintaining the existing world order under conditions that preserve liberal democratic values as the political correlate of capitalism. Ake writes, given its historical context and its class partisan character, the theory of political development and more broadly, Western social science scholarship in its application to the postcolonial world, is bourgeois ideology. It has no scientific status. It is neither applicable to the world nor useful for understanding it. At best, he says, it merely fosters capitalist institutions and values, and legitimizes the consolidation of the dictatorship of the Third World bourgeoisie who are the allies of international capitalism (Ake 1979: 60–1). And given its orientations and value-assumptions, he states, it studies Africa after the images of the North. It shows the persistent gaps and lacuna that the continent must overcome finally to reach the promised land of democracy and development, of economic prosperity and social peace. This way, Ake contends, it constructs the continent's history in terms of a lack through underlining what more is needed to make democracy work – industrialization, institutionalization, modernization and the development of civic community, civil society, social capital and other recipes – which seek to replicate in the political sphere Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. According to Ake (1979:II):

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

According to him, it is not only incorrect but also supercilious to claim that some ideas need to be accepted and treated as universally worthy and that their spread across the world is purely positive. In validating this position, he illustrates several strategic moments where particular interests of popular

politics, mobilized as community interests, expose the limits of political universals that liberal theorists had posed as sacred. In doing this, he offers an elaborate exposition on his transcontinental epistemological engagement with the questions of democracy and development in Africa. For example, in his critique of the Princeton series on political development, Ake (1979:12–59) tackles the liberal claim that the nation-state as the most legitimate form of political community has been instrumental in creating some positive values – such as citizenship and the equality of rights – and making them acceptable and applicable across cultural and historical boundaries. According to him, while the modern nation-state recognizes the nation as the only homogeneous and legitimate form of community, actual politics across the world gives rise to various heterogeneous collectivities that do not necessarily conform to the sovereign demands of the nation-state.

Ake not only questions the theory's universalizing assumptions about culture, identity, language and power, but also the institutional privileging of theoretical knowledges as well as the very ontology of theory as a discrete and knowable category of critical engagement. According to Ake (1979:IV):

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

Ake (1981:68–87) presents the impact of the colonial presence as central for understanding the continent's history. Following Walter Rodney (1972), he defines colonialism as an effective instance of intervention and takeover in which local conceptions of time, spaces and modes of self-governance were dismantled; in which a tradition was invented and presented to the colonized as sacrosanct, so that, in their very act of self-understanding, they could acquiesce in the epistemic and moral legitimacy of European sovereignty and superiority. This way, he rehearses the familiar thesis of the postcolonial predicament by arguing (i) that heterogeneity and hybridity are written into

the fabric of the postcolonial experience, and (ii) that there is a relationship of historical continuity, however oblique and problematic, between colonialism and nationalism. He says, in spite of formal independence, the domineering impulses of the West on Africa are still strong – through Western social science – the ideological apparatus, which mediates the dependence and underdevelopment of the Third World. Hence his advocacy for decolonizing the social sciences in the global South through endogenizing the very strategies of knowledge production. Describing Western social science scholarship on Africa as ‘irrelevant’ and ‘passé’, Ake (1979:IV–V) writes:

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

Advancing the case for endogeneity in knowledge production in Africa, Ake (1986:III) argues that:

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

Ake’s (1979) advocacy of endogeneity suggests transcending the erasures and extroversions that constitute the hallmark of imperial pedagogy and scholarship. He cautions that, failing to achieve this, we risk reimporting the very hegemonies we are working hard to overthrow – a failure which he says must be resisted as a matter of nationalism and professional commitment. The way out of this epistemic failure, he says, is to develop a form of scholarship which takes its local existential, intellectual and political contexts seriously while also seeking to be globally reputable. He advances this position through his pragmatic belief that all theories, paradigms, modes of thought and models of social action should be contextualized in a manner that they enable us transcend the temptations of wrongly generalizing from one context to the others without critically considering the specificities of individual case histories and cultures. He argues that, far from being universal, the European invention of historical consciousness is only the result of its own perspectival imaginings, just as other perspectives are also implicated in the polemics of their own positionalities. His aim in this regard

is to establish the hegemony of 'South-driven intellectual thought' generally through opposing perennially dominant historiographies which resist change and ethico-political persuasion.

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 precisely 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 social science community in Africa, movements which challenged and exposed the epistemic shortfalls of Western liberal and Marxist social sciences in their application to Africa. For Ake, therefore, the universality of empirical and theoretical knowledge is only a ruse which should be carefully broken down into distinctive cultural and historical components, to be explored and pursued within the frameworks defined by one's cultural milieu and social experiences. In other words, searching for the universals, vaguely defined as 'knowledge' or the 'truth', must proceed from the point of view of an appreciation of one's context, experience and history. By extension, an understanding of Ake's aversion from dogma and orthodoxy helps one in appreciating his principled rejection of the pluralist, national integration and his modification of the neo-Marxist theories of dependency and underdevelopment in their application to Africa.

His emphasis is hinged on the development of a social science scholarship, which, in epistemic terms is rooted in its culture and locale to create canons in its own right, especially 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 deploying and teaching, especially in African policymaking 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. Ake (1979) 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 nomothetic or universal. He therefore recommends recourse to endogeneity, articulated *inter alia* through critical distancing and a selective borrowing from other epistemic contexts, locales and settings.

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 and n. d.) and also by locating the people, especially the toiling masses, as the means and end of development (Ake 1996). Through this praxis, Ake presents his life and works as examples of the kind of change which he 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. As Adesina (2006) observes, Anthony Giddens (1996) defines sociology 'as a generalizing discipline that concerns itself above all with modernity, with the character and dynamics of modern industrialized societies'. This is added to the attempt by most texts in the field to trace the emergence of the discipline to Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the nineteenth century French philosopher, and to 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 to these disciplines by Africans and other non-European authorities and societies. For example, Ibn Khaldun had written his three-volume magnum opus, *Kitab Al 'Ibar*, in 1378 AD. 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 organization and society *ilm al-umran al-bashari* and *ilm al-ijtima al-insani*, which were ignored by the extroversions of Westernization. In Adesina's (2006) estimation, this had occurred for about 452 years before the first volume of Auguste Comte's six volumes on 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 organization and among different groups (Adesina 2006:6). Again, following Adesina's (2006) estimations, this had occurred for about 515 years before Emile Durkheim's (1893) *The Division of Labour* and its idea of social norms was published. However, in spite of these instructive and pioneering efforts by Africans, one hardly encounters any modern sociology book 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 ground that they are ridden with excessively religious thinking, which supposedly is contradictory to the modern context of secularism; and that they do not conform with or focus on real modern societies. Other examples certainly exist of 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 contribution and labour to the global context of knowledge production.

As a second example, in addition to the erasure of uniquely African contributions from the global system of knowledge production, there is also the denial of systematic knowledge from the continent, especially following Hegelian logic and traditions (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 ignorance and knowledge on the one hand as well as magic and science 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 (1979) engagement with the extroversions of Western social sciences. As he argues, just as Africa has been reduced to raw material production and Europe specializes in the production of capital goods and finished products, there is also the ideological reduction of the continent to a source from which data are generated and exported to Europe for advancing the frontiers of knowledge, so that theories are perpetually imported into Africa in a global system dominated by Europe and the West. He traces the origin of this practice to the developments and period following the European conquest of the continent, and says in spite of independence, extroversion is still immanent in Africa's experiences and relations with the West, especially given its complicated positioning in the global system of knowledge production. He draws a parallel between the extroversion of African economies manifested *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 proselytization and regurgitation of received paradigms and borrowed discourses, including those which do not speak to the continent's situation, 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 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 the humanities and social sciences in Africa according to Western academic terms, its rearticulation, redefinition and reformulation, which Ake advocates are based on the reconstruction, reconstitution and reframing of the various disciplinary fields and vocations following uniquely African critiques and interpretations. This can be achieved through an appreciation of endogeneity and ontology as the objective bases of epistemology and philosophy, rooted in a proper understanding of the disciplinary and institutional histories of existing knowledge producing frontiers and inspired by a corrective commitment to reclaim history and rewrite the careless deployment of the ideas of neocolonialism by the alien other in narrating the African past and future (Ake 1979 and Adesina 2006). It should be noted that Ake is not alone in this advocacy. Rather, being an instructive voice, he is complemented on the continent by others whose works have been noted in this study. Put together, these efforts challenge methodological and theoretical universalisms in the social science scholarship on the continent. As Harris (2005:77) puts it, Ake's legacy challenges us to be clear why Western social science is inadequate, how to change it and why; to clarify the idea of development; and to invent an appropriate model of development based on the interests of the masses. 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 article is based (see Arowosegbe 2010).

Conclusion

This article has discussed Ake's contribution to the social sciences and knowledge production on Africa. It locates him within the intellectual project of postcolonial studies, which we define as a South-driven critique of historicism. Historicism was defined as a revisionist Western conception of history, which obfuscates rather than furthering the understanding of Africa. We also defined postcolonial 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 Enlightenment are central to understanding the continent's present and future histories. The aim is to further research on aspects of the

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. Similar efforts abound in the works of other scholars within this mode across Africa, and also elsewhere in Asia and Latin America. Put together, they represent bold initiatives in asserting the identities of non-Western cultures *inter alia* through carefully rewriting the intellectual and nationalist histories of these societies on their own terms. Importantly, by establishing the centrality of race in the making of the Enlightenment and all shades of imperial thought (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 2002) as well as by exposing the ambiguity and dualism lying at the heart of liberalism and other European philosophical traditions (Chatterjee 1994), postcoloniality decentres Europe and more broadly the West from being the only source of all legitimate signification and makes room for other ways of being (Argyrou 2001) through asserting the abstract possibility of other universes of theoretical reflections (Kaviraj 1992). This school challenges Europe's absolutization of theoretical insights and fights hard to redress the entrenched inequality of ignorance which characterizes the global system of knowledge production (Chakrabarty 1992). Through its legitimate project of narrative history writing, postcoloniality counters the misrepresentation of the continent in terms of a lack, an absence and an incompleteness, which translates into perpetual inadequacy and inferiority – by the imperial project of transition narrative (Chakrabarty 1992). It asserts the originality of the African voice as the authentic expression of the African condition and advocates an end to African studies not just in Europe and North America, but also in South Africa, the vortex of white racism (Mafeje 2000).

Viewed from the perspective of Ake's works, postcoloniality thus offers an instance as well as a vantage opportunity in which there is the possibility of a levelling up by indigenous theory with high metropolitan theory. It is therefore an arena wherein historically entrenched asymmetries of power historicize themselves relationally – an arena where dominant historiographies are made accountable to the ethico-political authority of emerging histories. Such asymmetries are not only cultural, gender-based or political, but also economic and sociological, as we see in Ake. His works therefore, feed convincingly into the subject matter of postcolonial studies. Taken together, they are parts of an intellectual repertoire of resistance which creates and preserves spaces of agency and autonomy. They illustrate how hitherto

suppressed humanities, in this case Africans, respond to the forces that challenge and undermine their humanity. They therefore constitute the essence of a cross-regional non-hierarchical dialogue in which neither of the two regions is taken as the paradigm against which the other is measured and pronounced inadequate. It should be underlined, perhaps with emphasis, that cross-regional non-hierarchical dialogue for Ake, and also, in this instance, is not the application of a concept, part and parcel, without contextualization. Nor can it be framed in the assumption that one side of the exchange has nothing to learn from the other (see Mallon 1994). To be sure, Ake's corpus constitutes the kind of non-coercive and justice-based universalism envisioned by Samir Amin (1989:136–52), based on a multivalent and versatile postcoloniality rooted differently in different cultures and histories. This is no doubt a welcome corrective intervention to the many instances in which European theories had been placed next to Third World cases and the latter have been found wanting.

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