

In Memoriam - Claude Ake (1939-1996)

by

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I learned to know Ake in 1994 at the 2nd Finnish Africa Days Meeting, May 23-25, in Hyttiälä. Before then, I had read some of his books and articles, and come also across others in the reference lists of various African writers in social sciences. In fact, until we met I did not know that he was a Nigerian or African social scientist. The echo of his first name "Claude" was the reason. The second name "Ake" also did not make it easier. It is a common Yoruba name. In my days at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, my Yoruba college mates carried the name Ake. But of course, the Claude Ake we are remembering attended the "Kings College" in Lagos - a secondary school for the children of "the-well-to-dos" then in a Nigeria that was gradually shaking off the yokes of colonialism.

Claude Ake and I met in Hyttiälä - the conference venue in the middle-south of Finland during a break from one of the sessions. We exchanged a few words and I invited him, professor Hurskainen from Helsinki University, professor Koffi Tetteh - then a WIDER scholar from the University of San Francisco, Liisa Laakso of the Helsinki University, Tony Okugueme and some other participants for a post-conference reception home with my family. This occasion afforded me a closer opportunity to know that he, Claude Ake, was a "black man"; and more so, from the Rivers State - Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, where Port Harcourt is the capital.

We pay a tribute to the man, an internationally recognized social scientist, a compatriot and a friend, whose loss reverberated the world over including our far-away country Finland. Ake was one of the casualties on board a Nigerian Boeing 747 plane from Port Harcourt, which crashed into a lagoon in a mangrove jungle, 25 miles north-east of Lagos and was not found until the following day.

This social scientist compatriot and friend will be remembered by many members of the social sciences epistemic communities and beyond for some time to come. His academic contributions to the social sciences as a scientific discipline are many and varied. In political economy, he left behind such publications as: *Social Science as Imperialism*; *The Theory of Political Development*; *Revolutionary Pressure on Africa*; *New World Order: A View from the South*. Among the titles of his other writings are to be named: *The Unique Case of African Democracy*; *The Political Economy of Development: Does it have a Future?*; *The Political Economy of Development*; *Reflection on UNESCO's Role*; *The African Context of Human Rights*; *Rethinking African Democracy*; *Building on the Indigenous*.

The latter two titles tend to sensitise readers to Hyden (1995) in *Rethinking the Theories of the State in Africa*, and Rustow, A. Dankwart (1970) arguments

drawing on "genetic rationality" in the book *Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model*, respectively. That these and other academic productions made him known internationally by universities and publishing houses is evident in the reactions to the news of his death. In the African Studies Association (ASA) circles, the reactions are seen in the "remembrance service" plans for him during the Association's Annual Meeting in San Francisco, due to take place November 23-26, 1996, according to the network calls for colleagues and friends to forward their message.

But, who really was Claude Ake and in what type of epistemic community was he a member? Claude was always concerned about how to explain, understand and interpret Africa's socio-cultural-economic and political development problems. He was a member of a number of international and local social science communities.

Colleagues liked him, his writings and works because he was empathic and deferent. At the same time, in attempt to unravel development "impasses" in Africa rationally, examining cautiously the "interactive" effects on Africa's development problems at the international, national, and local levels, as Bradshaw, Kaiser and Ndegwa (1995) did in *ASA Review*, Claude Ake always came out clear and distinct with his meanings to us either in conferences or through his books. I heard him in Hyytiälä - one of the many times the academician was at the best of his moments of eloquence, addressing the topic "Development Discontents in Africa". In the spirit of the profession, his rich expositions attracted Marja-Liisa Swantz's comment about the "fallacy of dichotomy" in reaction to his discourse about the scope of discontents, in which case she added that peripheralisation respects no national borders, hence it could even induce a situation making globalisation create a possibility for the world to be mobilised against the regimes described as oppressive and hegemonic. The latter aside, I personally can recall his meanings in many African-related senses as fine, in the context of the international system we live in - except that I choose to do that with William Shakespear's Henry V (III.6):

"I tell you what, Captaine Gower: I doe perceiue hee is not the man that hee would gladly make shew to the World he is: if I finde a hole in his Coat, I will tell him my minde." (This was Claude Ake in a literal text)

Social scientists are many and varied in values and meanings. That is why their epistemic community is atomistic. Claude Ake lived through it. He succeeded to invoke academic freedom for himself. That is why we can say he left behind what will live on to stimulate us develop new forms of behaviours, patterns and models in our discipline and beyond. As a brilliant scholar, he was also well committed very sensibly with "pragmatic politics", because he was aware that where there is no enduring culture of political democracy and human rights, to become too committed to pragmatic politics would fold and make him a character in the satire by Price in sociology of science from the story of the "Young Lady from Kent":

"Who said that she knew what it meant when men asked her to dine,

gave her cocktails and wine; she knew what it meant - but she went."

Together with other Nigerian intellectuals, he joined to offer insights into the interpretations into the political confusions there and articulated bold remedial initiatives. He was active against human rights problems in Nigeria; criticised the military government and was bold to resign from the Advisory Committee (NDES) to Shell in 1995, following the judicial execution of the minority leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists.

This man, Claude Ake, was a "widow's might which Africa could hardly dispense with. But he is no longer with us. Our posthumous reconstruction of who he was and what he left behind beckons us restate that he was an international academic personality for many reasons, known in several circles - including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund circles. In Finland, he addressed the Westermarck Society in Helsinki in 1994. In Nigeria, he was a Merit Award Winner, and Director of the Centre for Advanced Social Science, Port Harcourt, and more than a known "professor" personality at the university of Port Harcourt. Now that Claude Ake has gone into eternal rest, the question before us from the knowledge of the challenges he faced is: Are Nigerians home and abroad to say like in William Shakespear's Hamlet (I.5):

"The time is out of ioynt: Oh cursed spight;
That euer I was borneto set right.
Nay, come let's goe together".

No!

Farewell Claude Ake, but Long Live your memory and spirit our compatriot and friend.