

This Discussion Paper is based on a theoretical exploration of state reconstruction and the prospects for peacebuilding in post-conflict West African countries based on critical reflections on the political thought of Claude Ake, one of Nigeria's foremost political thinkers. Its point of departure is the refutation of the view that the state project in Africa is 'hopeless' or at a dead-end. It therefore revisits the debate on the viability of the state project in the continent, particularly as it relates to those West African states emerging from or affected by violent conflict.

While acknowledging the shortcomings of the state-formation project in some post-conflict West African countries, the author argues that the state remains a key institutional and social actor that needs to be understood more in terms of its historical moorings, political economy and marginal position in the international order. Drawing on Ake's postulations about the limited autonomy of the state in Africa and its links to political violence and conflict, the author critiques both the hegemonic discourses on the nature of the state in Africa and those relating to post-conflict peacebuilding in the continent.

The analysis of the latter focuses on the epistemological groundings of mainstream peacebuilding discourses, and posits that there is no guarantee that such imported models ensure sustainable peace in West Africa. Thus, the paper makes a compelling case for reinventing the state in West Africa based on autochthonous democratic transformation in favour of ordinary people. In this regard, it argues for an endogenous transformation of the state in Africa in ways that can strongly root it in the people as a fundamental step towards sustainable and locally owned participatory peacebuilding. It thereby opens up a new perspective on state reconstruction as a step towards ending violent conflict in the sub-region.

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## Reflections on the Challenge of Reconstructing Post-Conflict States in West Africa

INSIGHTS FROM CLAUDE AKE'S POLITICAL WRITINGS

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