

*Sociological
Theory and
Practice*

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Exploring Akiwowo's Asuwada Principle of 'Sociation'

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Introduction

The global South is faced with many academic challenges including but not limited to funding, missing link between research and policy, as well as 'academic colonization'. Many academics within the global South while being aware of so many of these challenges have not known of, or have failed to acknowledge the 'academic colonization' debate. Only a few had diagnosed, and sought to rectify this problem which revolves around social scientific discourse as well as the import of social science theories from the global North to address phenomena in an entirely different part of the world with its unique histories and challenges (see for example Onwuzuruigbo 2019; Omobowale and Akanle 2017). Bhabra and de Sousa Santos (2017) have highlighted that identifying theories from the global North as western-centric as well as problematic due to the differences between the western cultural premises, and the developing world's cultural premises and histories, is only just becoming clear in recent years to numerous social science scholars from the global South. This has of course evoked the questioning of the monopoly of knowledge about human society, and supposed universality of cultural premises thought to be held by European and American social scientists and shown by the adoption of the theories arising from those parts. This is why major African thinkers in recent decades, the likes of Mahmood Mamdani (1996, 1998, 2007, 2019), and 'Le' Grange (2019), have written about the need to 'decolonize', especially African universities, scholarship, and the educational curriculum. Olutayo (2012) highlighting the importance of indigenous knowledge and theories to deconstructing social phenomena in Africa had also observed the application of

mainstream theories and methodologies to Africa without taking into cognizance indigenous knowledge and practices relevant to African societies.

It is crucial to note that while the developing nations are largely together in the throes of this 'academic colonization', Latin American theorists have increasingly been making their mark on the global academia and garnering immense recognition for their theoretical contributions such as the Post-colonial theories, Dependency theory among other notable theoretical outputs. Africa on the other hand had been over time lesser heralded for the theoretical outputs of her academics. This is however not an indictment of the continent as being unable to evolve sophisticated indigenous philosophy capable of guiding societal relations, as it certainly is capable of as evidenced by the theoretical positions and expositions among many such, of the likes of Peter Ekeh (1975 – Theory of Two Publics), Akinsola Akiwowo (1980 – Asuwada Principle), and Claude Ake (1967 – Political Integration) who then argued in 1979 about the production of scientific knowledge and the social sciences in its entirety being a form of imperialism.

Akiwowo particularly borrows heavily from the immense repertoire of knowledge and wisdom available within the culture of the Yoruba peoples, mainly of the south-western region of Nigeria. Omobowale (2008) notes that the Yoruba ethnic nation comprising many cultural groups said to have a common heritage traceable to Oduduwa, an ancient Monarch of Ile-Ife who ruled around 1100 A.D., are known to have evolved 'sophisticated forms of indigenous philosophy', many of which are encoded in diverse oral sources of knowledge not limited to folklores, songs, and proverbs which have survived over time (Akiwowo 1983). Akiwowo's Asuwada which Adesina (2002), and Omobowale and Akanle (2017) note as localizing the discourse of sociological thought, focuses on purpose-driven individual social actions which may be described as inherently good or bad within a given social context. Earlier and more popular sociological theories are noted as arising from, and providing explanations for the societal occurrences in Europe, whilst neglecting not only the events but also the theoretical propositions from other continents. A vivid illustration of this argument is the relegation to the sidelines of the ideas of

early societal thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Rushd (Weiss 1995; Omobowale 2017). The Asuwada principle however rises out of the Orunmilaist inquiry of the nature of personhood which highlights the metaphysical and physical natures of humans while emphasizing the connection between humans and the metaphysical world.

Payne (1992) observed that the interconnectivity between man's physical and the metaphysical worlds mean that the social action of persons is as a result of their perceptions of their physical, spiritual, and social environments as well as their interactions with, and within these spaces. Smith also highlights that the Orunmilaist perspective sees human persons as metaphysical beings who have a corporeal manifestation. Akiwowo (1983) had earlier termed this way of seeing the world and the relationships within and across the spaces as the 'unwelt'(world view) which he deems as not entirely dissimilar across both cultures and epochs. However, the 'unwelt' of persons of Yoruba ethnic extraction found in Southwestern Nigeria, as noted by Idowu (1962) and Akiwowo (1980), is based on the primordial religious forms which serves as the foundations and sources of all principles of life for these persons. It is this 'unwelt' as deducible from the Ifa divination system that Akiwowo harnesses to explore human relationships and their purposes.

Activity 1

...we can ask what is a person or what is the nature of a person within the Yoruba philosophical context...when an attempt to provide an answer is a departure from the metaphysical or empirical realms to the sociological normative realm which engages an inquiry into the peoples' perception of their cultural and personal identities.

Source: Fayemi (2009)

Question:

- (a) *How do the Traditional Western and Orunmilaist traditions of Sociology differ in their views of humans?*

(b) Explain how the Orunmilaist sociological perspective and its metaphysical inquiry into humans fulfill the drive towards 'academic decolonization'?

Key terms

Global North

Global South

Academic

decolonization

Orunmilaist Perspective

Unwelt

Indigenous

Meta-physical

nature

The Development of the Principle of 'Sociation'

Omobowale and Akanle (2017) noted the pioneering efforts of Akiwowo with regards to the development of a Nigerian school of Sociology in the early 1970 and 1980s and bringing it into the frame of international sociological discourse (see Akiwowo 1983a, 1983b, 1986, 1988a, 1991). His argument for the place of his theoretical proposition in the world at the time was that the Orunmilaist perspective of doing Sociology was the view of society that Abraham Maslow had erstwhile described as the humanist view. To this end, his work dealt largely on establishing a principle about patterns of human societies from the Orunmilaist 'unwelt'. This 'unwelt' posits that 'sociation' which is the form in which human beings align as a unit and ensure the realization of the individual as well as group interests comprises association, dissociation and a mixture of both, and describes the co-existence but not noncooperation of evil with goodness in a fractional situation in which none has full control. Akiwowo's position on 'sociation' describes the sociological nature of any relationship between two interacting individuals or groups over time, or at any given moment with the situation being one with consensus as to the numerator, and disharmony as the denominator. He further notes that some "reciprocity" of "driving impulses and purpose" exists between both individuals or groups.

His presentation of the 'Asuwada' principle of 'sociation' thus focused particularly on the notions of relations such as consanguinity and co-residentship which he tagged 'Ajobi' and 'Ajogbe' respectively, both of which he argued to be the primordial forms of human 'sociation'. He described the former as based on

blood ties; and 'Ajogbe' as dependent on the sharing of shelter or residence in which case those sharing may not necessarily have blood ties (Akiwowo 1980: 18). Both primordial forms however as he highlighted, are particularly crucial as he notes that they are guided by the need to achieve the purpose for which the group or 'Asuwada' (*the coming together of humans in a bid to facilitate the attainment of a goal or goals*) is in existence. The 'Ajobi' 'sociational' life characterized by cooperation quickly degenerates with increasing modernity, the complexity of social life, and economic challenges, into the 'Ajogbe' 'sociational' life characterized often by unhealthy competition and rivalry and nearly bordering on strife in such a way that is quite similar to the move from Durkheim's organic to mechanical solidarity, and Tonnies' Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft transitions.

Core Ideas of Asuwada

According to Akiwowo's proposition (1983), humans are both metaphysical and physical beings and possess intangible (spiritual), and tangible (physical) traits. The intangible aspects of the human nature are said to constitute brainpower and include Thought, Knowledge, Useful insights gained from experience, Wishes and 'Spoken word' while on the other hand, the tangible aspects reflected by the behavioral expression include are: Hunch, Doings, efforts or activities, Pattern of doing and Behavioral patterns. These traits make it possible to bond, live together, and act consciously and purposefully (Amherd 2001). The purposeful knitting referred to as the 'asuwada' 'eniyan' (human society) is deemed as having meaning for the members of such a social group if certain values are for the group internalized and consciously sought by all members as common goals. An individual's actions within this social group are directed toward other members of society who act under a given rule or set of rules.

The 'Asuwada' thus arises as a bond out of the multiple patterns of doings or actions of individuals as a complex network ensuring unison among individual members of society to one another. The purpose of the bonding within this network is social, while the purpose of the 'Asuwada' 'eniyan' (human society) is to ensure the provision of five inalienable social values considered as important for each member of society, and which constitute the

purpose and goal of the coming together within any 'Asuwada'. These five collectively termed '*Ire Gbogbo*' (Akiwowo 1983), mostly achieved within the '*Ajobi*' 'sociational' life as persons look out for each other, are a set of values considered most essential within the Yoruba ethnic nation (may differ from values in other social groups) and include: (i) '*Ire Aiku*' (Good health even in old age); (ii) '*Ire Owo*' (Being financially comfortable); (iii) '*Ire Oko-aya*' (Love and intimacy); (iv) '*Ire omo*' (Parenthood); (v) '*Ire Aboriota*' (Self-actualization).

On the converse side, the failure of the '*Asuwada*' to ensure the afore-mentioned assumed desirables of '*Ire gbogbo*' for its members fosters upon the '*Asuwada*' and its members what Akiwowo describes as the '*Ibi marun*' (five ills or non-desirables). Akiwowo (1983) represented the '*Ibi marun*' often seen as common within the '*Ajogbe*' form of 'sociation' as, (i) '*Ibi Were*' (The rise in the number of mentally ill persons); (ii) '*Ibi Ole*' (The rise in the incidence of armed robbery and other violent crimes); (iii) '*Iku*' '*odo*' (Increasing mortality rate among youths); (iv) '*Aidurot'omo*' (Abandonment of children by parents for any number of reasons); (v) '*Olori ibi*' (A self-evident social problem for which the societies may hold her leaders, and which may lead to the formation of new 'sociations'). The five non-desirables as afore-highlighted can be said to be especially synonymous with problems arising in situations of rapid and unplanned urbanizations as can be noted in many parts of contemporary Africa (Agbola 1987; Omoakin 2012; Owojuyigbe and Busari 2019).

The five social desirables of the '*Ire Gbogbo*' are values indigenous and crucial for the social survival of the Yoruba people and are known to lay emphasize on kinship and communal support systems and unison, to ensure that all members are catered for adequately, and survive within both the physical and social environment (Omobowale and Akanle, 2017). The five societal ills on the other hand highlighted by Akiwowo ('*Ibi*' '*marun*') are those challenges evident in contemporary urban societies which have failed to pursue the values of '*ire*' '*gbogbo*' (Owojuyigbe and Busari, 2019), and bear a striking similarity to those described by Bascom (1969) who represented them as (1) death; (2) ailment; (3) fight; (4) poverty; and (5) loss (1969:54-55).

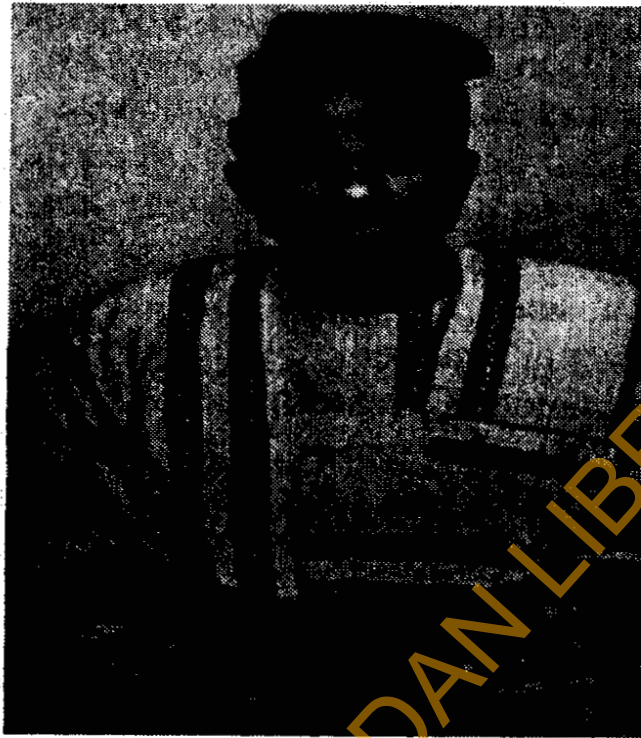


Fig. 9.1:Akiwowo when he was the Head of Department of Sociology, University of Ife, Nigeria.

Further Contributions by Scholars to the Asuwada Principle of 'Sociation'

Akiwowo's contributions to Sociological theorizing continues to attract the attention of scholars globally as a unique indigenous theoretical postulation from the global south (Martin et al. 2006; Quah 2011; Sitas 2011). Sanda (1988) argued in favor of Akiwowo's proposition noting that it was indeed a giant step in the endeavor to indigenizing sociology in a situation where western-originating universalist theories had most horribly failed to explain social phenomena in indigenous cultures. Makinde (1988), another Obafemi Awolowo University scholar sought to further clarify and extended the 'Ayajo' 'Asuwada' (the myth of creation) to delineate between 'ori' as 'asuwa' or 'aisuwa', and trying to discuss around 'asuwada' (association) and 'aisuwada' (dissociation), the notions of 'alajogbe' or 'ajogbe' comprising of people from several 'alajobi' or 'ajobi' living together for a purpose; and the importance of 'Ifogbontaayese'. Akiwowo had earlier posited about the role of the Sociologist which was to serve as the society's "Atokun" (the light-provider and mediator) in guiding society aright by engaging in "ifogbontaayese" (using wisdom to restore the world).

Amherd (2001) explored the inquiry of personhood adopting Akiwowo's proposition and adopting Akiwowo's "purpose" as an ontological imperative, and concepts such as 'Asuwada' (social group), 'Eniyan' (human being), 'Ori' (head/creator), and 'Iwa' (behaviour), concludes that human beings are first and foremost metaphysical beings, whose merely express themselves in physical terms. Omobowale and Akanle (2017) sought to understand the place of the 'Asuwada' epistemology in a globalized world. They observed the dominance of western sociological theories, and how unpopular Akiwowo's theory is amongst Nigerian academics. This despite the potential of the theoretical proposition to explain indigenous practices in much better ways compared to the universal theories, while largely against the multiple challenges facing the theory's adoption. Owojuyigbe and Busari (2019) also applied Akiwowo's 'Ibi Marun' to an understanding of rapid and unplanned urbanization in African societies, highlighting the negative implications including unemployment, suicide rates, crimes, homelessness among others, and observed the increasing rates and normalization of social ills in African urbanizations due to a lack of concern for others welfare much synonymous with 'Ajogbe' social life. Governments in such cases are charged with welfare concerns, security and job provision but in themselves are unable to make necessary provisions for these.

Application to Contemporary Society

Bhambra (2014) noted that the 1980s witnessed extensive debates revolving around Akiwowo's arguments regarding the possibility of 'indigenizing' the social sciences, and the importance of the indigenization of sociological theories to the internationalization of the sociological discourse. Akiwowo thought that while theories of society emanating from the west were indeed important as they were enlightened views, there was the limitation of the different socio-cultural milieu and their applicability within a different society several miles across the world. However, these arguments could not be discarded as not applicable simply because they originated from a different clime or within different social situations. As such, Akiwowo discussed the concept of the 'Igbinkugbin' and the role of the indigenous sociologist to

distinguish between what might be useful, and what might indeed not be to the society, after the sociologist had objectively studied and analyzed the society in which he resides. Payne (1992: 178) works out that this would entail a systematic analytical frame for the subject from within the host society, and drawing often on experiential knowledge within the society. 'Igbinkugbin' which may be used to refer to ideological weeds, or theoretical elements of cultural externalities which upon being instilled into the minds of a people, condition the people in such a way that they cannot explain perceived realities in any way other than by alluding to the explanations provided by those instilled through the igbinkugbin (Akiwowo 1988). Payne (1992) further highlighted what he perceived as the understanding of Akiwowo on the subject of 'igbinkugbin' and the need to do away with such by stating that validity problems were bound to emanate from defining and characterizing the development of one society on the structure and values of another society especially one with significant differences.

Whilst the diverse arguments on indigenization have been noted by Bhambra (2014), Bhambra and de Sousa Santos (2017) among others as being crucial steps towards the revolutionary call for 'decolonization of the academics', Akiwowo's work, however, has its importance also in its applicability outside the academics and within the events taking place in contemporary society. Indeed, this as the scholar sought was to be the major reason for the Orunmilaist theoretical perspective in Sociology wherein the sociologist would act as the 'Atokun' to the society, leading and directing the way, interpreting the events in society and mediating between the structure and the people among other roles.

The applications of the theoretical framework put forward by Akiwowo include but are not limited to governance, conflict resolution, social control as shown in not only the scholar's works but also the research efforts of scholars belonging to his tradition. Busari, Owojuyigbe, Okunola and Mekoa (2017) in a study of traditional social control mechanisms did highlight the need to borrow heavily from indigenous culture among developing nations in a bid to raise better members of the society. This draws heavily on the 'ajobi' 'sociational' theme and implies the likelihood of reducing the rates and patterns of criminal activities in society if

the indigenous practices are relied upon rather than being allowed to fade into the background of the more formal criminal justice system. Aboluwodi (2015) had also suggested likewise arguing that the cultural elements in indigenous groups may be used to ensure children grow to become well-disciplined members of the societies in which they find themselves.

Furthermore, Olupayimo (2015) in a study of conflict resolution in modern societies, with a specific focus on land boundary disputes in the Yoruba society highlighted the argument that the Yoruba social structure is built on the twin pillars of 'Ajobi' and 'Ajogbe'. His suggestion for the avoidance of continued conflict on land boundary disputes included the maintenance of 'ajobi' ties and the avoidance of formal courts due to the retributive nature of judgments in courts. This has the advantage of reducing time and monies spent in the pursuit of litigation in formal court settings, whilst allowing for continued collaboration and cordiality between formerly disputing persons. Dealing with inter-ethnic nationalities and the conflicts arising amongst societies, Akiwowo (1983) recommended a 'live and let live' attitude, noting that peace and concord, victories and defeats are transient, and each successive generation relives a constant struggle for unity, one which can only be consistently conquered by putting aside the ethnic, class and religious differences, and embracing the five social values of 'ire' whilst seeing our nations as one big 'ajobi'. Failing to do this, would lead to many more problems.

Additionally, Busari, Owojuyigbe and Mekoa (2017) did take note of how 'igbinkugbin' had crept into the political rhetoric of Nigeria and had made politics much characterized by elements such as character assassination, insult-hurling while under-developing the nation by not focusing on core social values with regards to governance, thus bringing upon it diverse forms of social ills. For Akiwowo, the core social values with regards to governance he believes define what governments and their citizens must aspire to. These five values, which Akiwowo (1983) has outlined, define for him the values that a government must continuously seek for its citizens if the society which that government represents is to be considered a good society. Governmental programmes, if they are to achieve any good and become real to the Nigerian, must thus incorporate all five social

values, otherwise, they would result in colossal wastes of resources, and an increase in the 'Ibi marun'. Thus, Akiwowo contends that sociologists should study social values which indeed serve as the 'basis for choices' in the decision-making process. This he believed would help highlight indigenous social values that would be crucial to constructing policies among policymakers for social structures. His position served to highlight the possibility of stemming social ills or vices before decisions about engaging in certain acts. Indeed, he believes it is possible to extend the application of cost-benefit analysis which may arise from a consideration of the social values (ire) achievable from any certain decision to every form of human and social endeavor including, as he mentions, economic and business management.

Activity 2

Source A

...the once rich and powerful villages are today pathetic figures scraping out their existence. Poverty walks on human legs, sees with human eyes, and grips with human hands. Some of the reasons cited as the cause of this dire poverty in West Africa's rural areas are Politics and its easy money; Ajaokuta Steel Company that sapped many farms of their strong hands; Lack of agriculture incentives for rural farmers; Increasing pauperization of the tiller of the land in the early 1980s; and Lack of proper education and training. The reality of the countryside in Nigeria is one of negligence. Edinoyi-Ojo insists that the tragic story is true for not only his small village in Kwara state but that it is the story of most rural areas in Nigeria. He laments that the state and federal governments vote millions on paper to transform the rural areas! Life deteriorates; this annual hope fizzles into nothingness.

(Adopted from Smith's 2001 published response to Akiwowo's 'Ajobi' and 'Ajogbe')

Source B

If a thief knows no shame, the members of his household should be ashamed to be associated with the thief

(Adapted from Coker's gasping for breath article published in 2012)

Source C

Modern technology and the differentiation of labor tend to decrease the need for cooperation between neighbors, while increasing the cooperation (or dependency) required at more inclusive levels, especially at those of the firm and the state. The social system in traditional African societies involved high levels of intrafamilial and interfamilial and lineage cooperation and co-dependence with personal tragedies such as orphanhood and widowhood not faced alone. A major downside of the change from such social systems is the rise in individualism, and the consequent increase in the number of distressed persons in societies where indices of morality, welfare, and household economies are not dependent on communal co-dependence..., and no growth or economic indices can compensate for such an outcome as this.

(Adapted from Goody's Futures of the family in rural Africa published in 1989)

Questions:

- (a) Using Akiwowo's 'Asuwada' principle, analyze the sources A and C.
- (b) Discuss how true Source B is using Akiwowo's ideas of 'Ajobi' and 'Ajobe'.

Key terms

'Ajobi' 'Ajobe' 'Ire' 'Gbogbo' 'sociation'
'Ibi' 'Marun' 'Asuwada' 'Eniyan' 'Ifogbontaayese' 'Atokun'
'Asuwa' 'Aisuwa'

Challenges and Criticisms of Akiwowo's Asuwada Principle of 'Sociation'

Intellectual responses were most immediately engendered from Nigerian scholars upon the reception of his work by the academic world, some positive and others especially less than complimentary. While the likes of Makinde, Payne and Sanda were particularly effusive in their praises, others such as Lawuyi and Taiwo were less than impressed. Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990: 61) in one of such arguments against Akiwowo's 'Asuwada' dismissed

it as 'unhelpful to sociological analysis'. Although this view may be seen as being biased towards western philosophical thoughts, as it summarily dismissed the 'Asuwada' principle as not 'sociological' enough, it may be explainable that the definition of 'what is sociological' according to most scholars both of African and non-African origins is hinged upon a Eurocentric conceptualization of what the subject is, and what its subject-matter entails, and they argue that the bit about meta-physical and spiritual nature of man is much outside the frame of sociological inquiry. Furthermore, questions remain regarding Akiwowo's emphasis on the nature and purpose of Spiritism within his work. Omobowale (2008), for instance, highlights that a major area in which he is at odds with Akiwowo's proposition is in his overemphasis on 'spiritist' ideas. For Akiwowo whose ideas on the Asuwada are rooted in and extracted from the wisdom of the deity of Orunmila, this is especially a point which he continues to hammer on, a notion that the human cannot be separated from his spiritual roots (Akiwowo 1991).



Fig. 9.2: Akiwowo on the occasion of his 90th birthday (*Source:* Internet)

Also doing sociology in vernacular is another major criticism levelled against Akiwowo's contribution to understanding society (Archer 1991). Claims made by critics of this work highlight the similarities to Tonnie's ideas of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as well as Durkheim's concepts of mechanical and organic solidarities. Adesina (2002) argues that by 1999, Akiwowo was largely pre-occupied with 'indigenous sociology', and sees this as reinforcing Archer's criticism that he was more concerned about 'teaching/doing sociology in the vernacular'. Adesina also criticizes the failure of Akiwowo and Makinde to note that 'ajobi' and 'ajogbe' are ideal states, and shifts may indeed not be prompted by European invasion, economic issues among others as described by Akiwowo and the former. While Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990) also argued that the possible coexistence of both 'ajobi' and 'ajogbe' was not sufficiently reflected upon in either Akiwowo's or Makinde's works. Also, problems arise with scholars deciphering whether it is an action theory or a structural theory. This is occasioned by his reference to more action-theory related concepts such as 'iwa' (behaviour), 'ihuwa' (behavioural pattern), 'isesi' (pattern of doing), and at other times more structural-related concepts such as 'asuwada', 'ajumose' (unison) among others. Lawuyi and Taiwo (1990) and Adesina (2002) note that the 'asuwada' as described has a purpose hence the principle's functionalist nature, even when alluding to individual and social actions. Furthermore, based on Akiwowo's assertion that 'ajobi' had been expelled by 'ajogbe', and Makinde's (1988) expansion of the principle implying that 'ajogbe' due to linear succession had come to be in its place as the mainstay of modern society, critics have questioned the future fate of the replacement of 'ajogbe' as society further evolves (Adesina 2002; Omobowale 2008).

Activity 3

- (1) Explain and assess the criticisms leveled against Akiwowo's Asuwada principle.
- (2) Highlight the similarities and differences between Tonnie's and Akiwowo's works.
- (3) Akiwowo was right to have continued his sociological inquiry along the lines of spiritist ideas. Explain and Assess this statement.

Key Terms

<i>Spiritism</i>	<i>iwa ihuwa</i>	<i>isesi</i>	<i>Organic solidarity</i>
<i>Gemeinschaft solidarity</i>	<i>Gesellschaft</i>	<i>ajumose</i>	<i>Mechanical</i>

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