

# Capital & Class

## Book Review: *Morality and Economic Growth in Rural West Africa. Indigenous Accumulation in Hausaland* by Paul Clough

Peter Mayo

First Published July 29, 2016 | Book Review

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816816661148h>



### **Morality and Economic Growth in Rural West Africa. Indigenous Accumulation in Hausaland**

Paul Clough *Morality and Economic Growth in Rural West Africa. Indigenous Accumulation in Hausaland*. New York City (NY) and Oxford (UK), Berghahn, 442 pages, 2015, 978-178238-270-6

This book is the product of research which the author, Paul Clough, carried out over more than twenty years, among the Hausa farmer-traders in Nigeria. The Hausa are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa and, through their amalgamation with the Fulani, have dominated Nigerian politics since the country's independence. The study draws on the notion of accumulation with special reference to capital accumulation: the investment of money or a financial asset to generate more money as profit, rent, interest, *capital* gain, royalties and other returns, enabling wealth to appreciate in value. While gleaning important insights from Karl Marx's writings around the concept and processes involved, Clough's study underlines the limits of theories having a Eurocentric bias.

In the words of Canadian sociologist D. W. Livingstone (1995, p. 64): "Marx as well as subsequent orthodox Marxists and most critical Western Marxist intellectuals have operated from a Eurocentric world view which has regarded European civilisation as the dynamic core of global life." The same goes for non-Marxist classical European social theorists such as Max Weber and a host of other western intellectuals. As the book underlines, one must treat their conceptual tools carefully when applying or reinventing them in different non-Western contexts, as is the case with Nigeria.

It is argued, in this book, that accumulation takes on a different form in this African context where it is not based on the appropriation of 'surplus value' – the added value, in Marx's sense of the term, that is created by workers, under capitalism, exceedi

Privacy

their own cost of labour and which is appropriated, following the sale of the product, as profit. The process of accumulation in Hausaland is, as Clough painstakingly shows and argues, not necessarily appropriative when compared to what goes on under capitalism, hence his use of the terms 'non capitalist accumulation' and 'indigenous accumulation'. It is, to the contrary, based on a broad array of social relations which include, following Islam, the notion of extended ties of moral obligation, solidarity and dependency. People *give* and *get* in this process of accumulation which needs to be seen in the context of tribal affiliation and politics, including religious politics.

Accumulation entails, in this part of Nigeria (Northern Nigeria), not simply re-investment in machinery and other forms of capital but also investment in broadening kin ties. Under situations permitting polygamy, as is the case in Hausaland, it entails acquisition of more wives and, as a result, more children, therefore more hands and dependents. With the onset of Islam, this meant the withdrawal of women from farm work which however resulted in more 'hands' which they help reproduce. It also meant the trader being a farmer to increase his earnings. Polygamy is central to the mode of economic activity in this area. Economics and religious mores are inextricably intertwined, a situation which strikes me as calling for some engagement with another Western sociologist's views, those expressed by Emile Durkheim in the *Elementary forms of the religious life*, a work which is surprisingly overlooked.

Economic growth involves a continuous circle of relationships. Accumulation, in this context, is necessary for and entails the development of domestic and extra-domestic circles of dependents. All this occurs within the ethical constraint and governing principle of *hidima* which, the author indicates, is the word used to signify the value of personal responsibility towards others. In short, what the book presents is a value-driven form of accumulation with social communal security lying at its core. This is at odds with the Western Marxist notion of commodification (turning goods and services into commodities) and Rational Choice Theory (seeking to maximise the difference between benefits and costs). I would argue that it somehow connects with notions of pre-colonial Africa provided by statesmen such as Julius K Nyerere with their hearkening to a social system described as an 'extended family', even though there are African scholars who have disputed this, dismissing it as a romanticized view. The drive for accumulation in Nigeria, and probably other parts of Africa, is inflected by specific systems of moral belief.

This book therefore posits an 'elective affinity' between economic activity, and the processes of accumulation this entails, and specific indigenous belief systems. It is a process that consists of not simply relations between capital and labour but, in Clough's own words, relations between humans among themselves and with the Divine.

What emerges from a reading of this well researched book, involving both quantitative and qualitative data and an impressive degree of theoretical sophistication, is further realization of the complexities involved when attempting to analyse economic production in Africa and other non-western contexts from a mainstream, invariably Western, conceptual lens. The situation as described and analysed by Paul Clough might well explain the difficulties of imposing Western political-economic models on African contexts, whether Marxist or otherwise. It might well explain why Marxist models often failed in Africa, a continent which is a far cry from one enjoying the concentration of wealth that characterized 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe when Marx was writing. It lends credence to those who have highlighted the obvious difficulties encountered when seeking to impose western-style democracies in similar contexts.

## Reference

Livingstone, DW (1995) 'Searching for the Missing Links: neo-Marxist Theories of Education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 325–339.

[Google Scholar](#)

## Author biography

**Peter Mayo** is Professor and Head of the Department of Arts, Open Communities & Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta.