Chapter 7

Slavery and Plantation Society at Dorayi in Kano Emirate

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This study addresses the issue of the relative importance of slave-based agriculture in Kano Emirate in the nineteenth century by examining one, small agricultural district near Kano City. The area in question is known as Dorayi, although there was no village or hamlet of that name. It was simply an area that had numerous agricultural estates and large households, and virtually no vacant land. As Polly Hill has described Dorayi, it is a “featureless, drab, farming area” that begins less than three miles south of Kofar Gadon Kaya, one of the gates into Kano.1 Its name, however, reveals another feature, since *dorayi* are locust-bean trees, which are economically useful. The area came to be known because of prevalence of these trees, which provide a canopy that suggests parkland more than farms. The area apparently has been known for these trees since at least the fifteenth century. The proximity to Kano city and the location to the immediate east of the main caravan road south from Kano to Madobi, Bebeji and Zaria made this prime land, and hence in the nineteenth century, its land was almost entirely cultivated, and by 1900, at least, agricultural labor was done primarily by slaves, who formed a majority of the population. Moreover, there were a number of absentee landowners who lived in Kano and who managed their slaves and land through agents, some of whom were in fact slaves themselves. Dorayi therefore provides an interesting window into the rural economy of Kano Emirate.

In many ways Dorayi was representative of the region surrounding Kano, which has been referred to as a “close-settled zone” because of the high population density and the intensive cultivation of the land in this region. In 1900, there were over 40 walled towns within thirty miles of Kano, and while many of these had populations of only a few thousand people, they were the focal points of agricultural settlement.2 They served as defensive positions in case of slave raiding where people could retreat in the event of danger. The people in Dorayi were actually close enough to Kano that they would have gone there. Dorayi lay within the inner
parameter of this defensive system of fortified towns. According to Hill, who surveyed Dorayi in 1971-72, before Kano City overflowed its walls and incorporated large parts of the rural into the modern city, Dorayi had a population of 3,500, located on 1,660 acres; the population density was 1,400 per sq. mile (540 per km²). As Hill notes, it is highly unlikely that the population was ever any denser; at the end of the nineteenth century, the population may have been somewhat less than 3,000 and most of the people would have been servile. Hence her census is an upward limit on the number of people in the area. Dorayi’s importance as an agricultural district where there was large-scale use of slaves allows an examination of the nature of social relationships in the countryside, and how the countryside related to the city of Kano.

By placing Dorayi in historical perspective, the present study calls into question the conclusions of Polly Hill, who used the case to demonstrate the relative importance of small scale agriculture in Hausaland and the resilience of peasant farmers during the colonial and post-colonial periods. It is argued that Hill misinterprets the historical situation at Dorayi, which severely limits her analysis. In fact the historical record demonstrates the predominance of large-scale agriculture at Dorayi and therefore the study of Dorayi reinforces the interpretations of numerous scholars who have highlighted the role of slavery in the rural economy of the Sokoto Caliphate. Dorayi was a “microeconomic” unit within what might be called the “rinji or plantation complex” in which slavery shaped the relations between city and the surrounding areas of the kasar Kano. Moreover, Dorayi was in the area which was subjected to state control over land, and as Abdullahi Mahadi has demonstrated, large scale confiscation of land occurred under Emir Muhammad Bello (1882-93) to reward his own followers and to increase his own revenue, and then again after 1894, when the victory of the Yusufawa and the installation of Aliyu as emir led to the reapportionment of land yet again. Hence it is difficult to document the extent of plantation development before the rule of Muhammad Bello, but it is clear that whatever tendencies to divide land through inheritance, as Polly Hill has argued, were counterbalanced by the confiscation and redistribution of land by the state which was apparently considerable at the time of the jihad and in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, as least.

**Dorayi in the Nineteenth Century**
The name, Dorayi, betrays a sylvan background with a canopy of locust bean trees. Its location near several gates of Kano city, and
adjacent to the main highway southward from the city to prosperous southern Kano, Dorayi has long been in a strategic location for agricultural production. As noted above, *dorai* (*s. dorawa*) is the Hausa botanical name for locust beans trees (*Parkia Clappertonia*), and the area still has some large *dorai* trees. Moreover, one of the principal cattle trails near Kano passed through Dorayi south of the city walls. The history of the area is closely tied to that of Kano, therefore. The first reference to Dorayi, in the *Kano Chronicle*, dates settlement to the reign of Sarkin Kano Dauda Bakin Damisa (1421-1438); it is claimed that an exiled Borno official, Mai Uthman Kalinwama, was based at Dorayi. According to the *Kano Chronicle*, the area that came to be known as *sashen* Dorayi stretched from Salanta in the present day Sharada quarters to Kofar Gadon Kaya. Mai Uthman was said to be in control of a large area of land south of the Kano wall that included Dorayi and Gadon Kaya as far as Salanta, and was responsible for collecting revenue and overseeing a market at Karabka, and until today the area from Dorayi to Salanta is known as “*sashen* Dorayi,” the Dorayi “section.”

After the jihad, the land was administered as state land, under the direct control of the emir and whomever he entrusted with its supervision and administration. Technically, the land was held in trust for the Muslim community, but in fact it was parcelled out to aristocrats, royal slaves, and wealthy commoners, often merchants or craftsmen. The administration of the land at Dorayi, as elsewhere, was through the institutions of *hurmi* and *chaaffa* which was awarded to those who were considered to benefit the economy and society of Kano. Hence immigrant merchants, local craftsmen, and cattle herders were awarded land on payment of certain fees and regular homage. Once granted, the land could be inherited, and bought and sold. In addition to the influence of the state in Dorayi and in the *kasar* Kano more generally, land “whether utilized or not was vested in the heads of various communities for the common benefit of their communities.”

In the nineteenth century, Dorayi was part of the heavily settled zone between the city walls and the Challawa River. In an early assessment of the area including Dorayi, a region that was reapportioned as the Dan Iya Sub-District within the District administered by the Ciroma, a senior official in Kano Emirate. This area formed a belt 19 miles from east to west and 13 miles from the city walls of Kano in the north to the Challawa River to the south, encompassing 155 sq miles.
The soil is light and sandy, typical jigawa, with a few patches of kekua which are useless for cultivation, but which serve as pasture lands. The whole sub-district is thickly studded with Dorowa trees…. The village boundaries are well known but very confused, a village often consisting of two or more tracts of land separated from each other by several other Villages…. There are 64 principal and 159 subordinate villages. There are 5 walled towns Dawaki, Yargaia, Gogel, Ganu and Tamburawa. The other villages are rather tracts of country dotted with hamlets, though some of them such as Damfari, Giware, Busai, Yan Iris, etc, of considerable size.  

The canopy of dorowa trees and the rural landscape should be noted. Dorayi was bordered by several large slave settlements, those at Gaida, Gwazaye, Ja’en, Rijiyar Zaki, and Rimin Gata, and also by the main road from Kano to Zaria across the Challawa River that encircles Kano to the south. The river served as a natural boundary for the area. Dorayi itself was divided into separate hamlets or sections; Dorayi Babba (Big Dorayi), situated close to one gate, Kofar Kabuga, Rijiyar Zaki, to the immediate south, Dorayi Karama (Little Dorayi), closer to the gates at Kofar Dukawuya and Kofar Gadon Kaya. Dorayi Karama had perhaps one of the densest populations of slaves anywhere near the city. This belt of plantations near the city was owned or controlled by the Kano aristocracy and its merchant class.

As noted by Lovejoy and Hogendorn, there were two types of estates, those controlled by officials whose land and servile population were attached to an office, and those owned or occupied under various relationships of dependency known as hurmi and chaffa. Officials, including the emir, gave land with tax concessions to attract followers and to encourage the immigration of merchants. In the course of the redistribution of land under Emir Muhammad Bello, for example, a number of Agalawa merchants obtained land in this way, and they subsequently lost it under the reign of Emir Aliyu. Although land was acquired through acts of favoritism, the land could be sold and bequeathed, although there were restrictions on the inheritance of land by women, restricted to a one-third portion, and sometimes excluded all together. The state had great influence on the distribution of land in Dorayi regardless of the status of individual holdings.

Given the organic relationship between slave labor and agricultural economy in the nineteenth century Hausaland, Dorayi was one of the areas where owning land was a source of prestige. Individual’s access to land resources was based on gandu as “a
method of production that ensured member of a household or family had access to land. This indeed ensured collective ownership and inheritance in right in land. For centuries land around Dorayi was utilized in various forms either as individual free holding or state land given to officials responsible for taxing and supervising various occupations, such as blacksmiths, who were essential for both agriculture and the military. The official in charge of the blacksmiths was the sarkin makera and the office had a rinji in Dorayi.

The emir’s lands seem to have been divided among various officials, including the Dan Rimi, one of the most important royal slaves in the Kano government. Some accounts credit this official with sole responsibility for the administration of Dorayi. According to one tradition, Dorayi was one of several estates under the Dan Rimi, the others being Nassarawa and Darmanawa. According to Sean Stilwell, “under [Ibrahim] Dabo, slaves held and administered state lands attached to their office and from which they derived personal rewards. According to one informant, in the mid to late nineteenth century the estates were identified by the title of the slave who managed them. Thus, there were five estates located near Gandun Dorayi named: Sallama, Dan Rimi, Kasheka, Turakin Soro and Sarkin Hatsi.” Other accounts say that the Shamaki was the official responsible for Gandun Sarki, and that official may have an estate there, as well.

There were several estates at Dorayi that belonged to the state or to the offices of officials of the state. The most important of these was the complex known as Gandun Sarki, which was one of the emir’s many estates around Kano. At the turn of the twentieth century, Gandun Sarki included Runjin Shamaki (the runji of the Shamaki, an official) and Gandun Sarkin Makera (the gandu of the Sarkin Makera, the head of the blacksmiths), and it may be that other estates were also enclosed therein. One tradition claims that Dorayi was a ribat, that is a fortified settlement, but this seems unlikely. Gandun Sarki probably had a wall around it that was large, but there were no ribat between Kano and the Challawa River, which itself served as a line of defense in the south. However, Emir Alu built a fence to separate Gandun Sarki from the other estates in the area. The Dorayi gandu was one of many estates of the emir, where there were quarters that could accommodate the emir on the rare occasions he was in the area. The emir had particularly large estates at Gandun Nassarawa, Fanisau, Gandun Albasa, Wudil, and elsewhere in the vicinity. It was a short ride to the palace from Dorayi. Hence the need for a major establishment at Dorayi was minimal. Dorayi was not the most important estate belonging to the emir; nearby
Nassarawa and Fanisau were visited more frequently by the emir, for example.22

There is no consensus about the origin of Gandun Sarki in Dorayi. One tradition claims that Dorayi was established during the reign of Sarkin Kano Aliyu (1894-1903) in response to the threat of raids from Damagaram and Ningi – two of the staunchest foes of Kano emirate.23 Despite being an “official” Dorayi source, this information does not provide much needed data about the first settlers in the area and the reasons behind Sarki Aliyu’s actions for establishing, or more likely, enhancing the settlement. Despite attempts to establish the exact time of the foundation of the gandu, it appears that even the overseers of the gandu do not know or do not want to say.24 One informant claimed that during the first Fulani emir of Kano, Suleiman (1806-1819), a Fulani man called Jibrin, who was said to have been a descendent of the ruling clan, arrived Dorayi with his cattle and established a base.25 However, it is not clear if Jibrin was the founder of Gandun Sarki. The Fulani clan leader, Jibrin, settled at Dorayi during the reign of Emir Suleiman (1806-1819). He appears to have been related to the ruling clan, but it is not clear if he founded Gandun Sarki26.

According to sources in the emir’s palace, Gandun Dorayi was established during the reign of Sarki Abdullahi Maje-Karofi (1855-1882).27 The reason for its establishment related to the annual ceremony of Hawan Dorayi, which occurred at the end of the month of Ramadan, after the Id el Fitr. Dorayi served as a retreat for the emir and his district heads. The hawan Dorayi is said to have started during the reign of Sarkin Kano Ibrahim Dabo 1819-1846, but whether or not there was an estate there at the time is not known.28 Gandun Dorayi, according to other palace sources, was founded during the reign of Sarkin Kano Alu at the end of the century.29 He is said to have brought the estates at Nassarawa, Gandun Albasa, Fanisau and Jigirya under his direct control or that of his supporters. It was at this time that a fence was apparently built to separate Gandun Sarki from the other estates in the area.30

In 1908 when Dorayi was included in Dan Isa District, the Ma‘ajin Watari, who was in charge of the prison in Kano, was responsible for Dorayi, and at least from this time, prison labor was also used there. Whether these officials had previously been jakadu (slave officials who collected tax) is not known. In the twentieth century, at least, the Ma‘ajin Watari designated the Sarkin Kofar Dukawuya to supervise the collection of taxes, who in turn actually appointed slave officials to collect the tax. Those who remembered in these capacities include Malanta and Malam Haruna, while
Ahmadu Bando was the Mai Unguwa who administered Dorayi and the only official who resided there at the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the owners of estates at the time were absentees, living in Kano City.

Other Estates
Traditionally, land tenure in Dorayi was based on the status of the individual, whether he was slave or free, part of the aristocracy and royal slavocracy, or a merchant. Conceptually, the free community considered that there was a mai gida, that is the head of the house, who supervised work and was responsible for the distribution of land within the family. In his capacity as slave owner, he was recognized as the ubangiji, and the responsibility of distributing land to family members was transformed into the allowance of usufruct over small plots of land that were known as gayauna. Slave owners were considered heads of households, in which members worked communally on family land. The contrast between the “rights” of sons in gandu to the responsibilities of slaves on a plantation should be noted. The land would be inherited by sons, along with the slaves and their gayauna farms. This is not to say that there were no small producers who were not slaves. There was a resident free population, some of whom were immigrants who obtained land, as “strangers” or b’ako, on the basis of aro lease agreements.

The list of the other major landowners included merchants, Fulani livestock herders, and craftsmen. These estates were also referred to as gandu, which indicates that the term was used to designate other large agricultural holdings that were prominent at Dorayi. The great majority of the residents of Dorayi whose livelihood depended upon the gandu system of production were said to have migrated from the city, and settled in Dorayi as independent or affiliated household producers. Some of the earliest people in Dorayi, according to local traditions, were merchants from Borno, as well as Fulani herdsmen.

According to Hill, there appear to have been thirteen slave owners with holdings large enough to be identified as plantations. Since the total slave population of Dorayi probably approached 1,000, and only a very few of these were owned by small holders, the other ten slave owners must have had quite substantial plantations. Most of these owners lived in Kano city, where they were part of a large absentee class of merchant planters. Many of these businessmen were kola importers, salt dealers, slave traders, and textile brokers. The large estate of the Sarkin Makera was populated by slaves who had been in the area since the early
nineteenth century. According to local sources in Dorayi the earliest blacksmiths in the area were of Borno origins.

There were also a number of what Hill refers to as “big houses” that were in fact large slave estates. Gidan Barau, was founded by an immigrant from Nupe, but it is not known when. Gidan Sambo was founded by the father of Sambo, Adamu, who moved from Minjibir during the reign of Emir Ibrahim Dabo, the second emir of Kano, and at one point belonged to titled land-owner, Yahaya, from Kano city. Mahamman Lawal, hamlet head of Cikin Gari (Ciranci), said his paternal grandfather came from Jahun in eastern Kano. Various Fulani cattle herders were resident, who had moved in from Jahun, also from Shanono in Gwarzo District, and from elsewhere. Hill assumes that settlement near the city wall was restricted for defensive reasons but that in the course of the nineteenth century, “rich city farmers desirous of establishing slave-estates were naturally attracted to this zone.” The remains of these estates were still visible in the early 1930s, although large tracts of land, some of it lying in Dorayi, was vacant, “having formally been cultivated by slave labour.” The owners of the land were having difficulty paying the land tax as a result. According to the report, the main road south of Kano through Dorayi had previously been a center of large plantations.

The abolition of slavery threw these estates...out of cultivation. The original owners are dead.... Yet the estates still remain, owned by aged widows and small traders who exist in the ruined mansions of their husbands and fathers which line the road to Goron Dutse.

This area between the Challawa River and the western hill within the city walls passed by Dorayi. Given the extent of these large holdings at Dorayi, there was probably not much land left for small farmers.

The method by which land was acquired at Dorayi was similar to other parts of Kano Emirate. There were seven systems of land tenure. First, there was saran daji (bush clearance), which was the oldest method of acquiring and controlling land. There was no limit to the period an individual could hold the land, once cleared and farmed continuously. The cleared land could be used for residential or agricultural purposes. Slaves who were given gayauna plots were said to possess enough farmland that in turn enabled them to earn considerable income. Land could also be acquired as a kyauta (gift), in which case the land so acquired was considered the permanent property of the person to whom it was given. Several
factors were associated with the condition of acquiring land through gift. For example, the gift of land could be based on the individual qualities of a person, such as when the emir on behalf of the state allocated land as hurumi to the chief of the blacksmiths in Dorayi, which established the rights to the office holder and his descendants. Both sons and slaves in the family were usually given gayauna land to cultivate. Witnesses were required to make gifts legally binding among the concerned parties. Land could also be acquired through gado (inheritance). Children and other free members in the family were accorded land on the basis of Islamic norms. However the actual practice of inheritance of land was somewhat problematic because of disagreements over the procedures associated with the disbursement of the deceased estate. The larger the inheritance and the greater the number of individuals involved in the inheritance the more difficult it was to settle the estate. Women generally did not inherit land or the houses of their deceased parents, sons or close relations.

Land could also be leased (aro), which usually involved a stranger in Dorayi who had no family support or was too weak or poor to clear land for cultivation or settlement elsewhere. Due to legal complications associated with this system the consent of Dagachi (village head) was always sought for proper certification. Polly Hill describes the aro system of farm tenure as “an important safety valve, which operated much commonly than in former times.”\textsuperscript{44} Jingina was the practice of pledging land for a specified period in exchange for a certain amount which had to be paid back before the right of ownership was restored. The commercial value of the land determined the amount to be paid for the land. This system of land tenure is also prone to complications. Hill describes the problem of jingina when “creditors to whom farms have been pledged sometimes refuse to return the farm unless the loan is quickly repaid”.\textsuperscript{45} Land could also be held for a person under a system known as riko, which involved the transfer of land for keeping without a specified fee. This situation usually arose as a result of the departure of the owner of the farm to engage in caravan trading or as the result of death when the children or inheritors were unable to cultivate the farm. Finally, land could be sold outright, and such purchase (saye) entailed the permanent alienation of the land. It was usually an easy transaction between parties with the full consent of the Dagachi and with the knowledge of the general public.
The Rural Economy of Dorayi

The major crops grown on the estates in Dorayi were cereals – millets and sorghums of different types, some of it raised to feed horses rather than people. According to Webster’s report in 1911, the principal crops were dawa, both farfara and kaura, the former being most common in 1911 because the soil had become exhausted and farfara required extensive manuring. Gero was grown principally around the villages, while wheat was an irrigated crop near the Challawa and also in several swampy areas. Finally, maiwa was grown on outlying farms as it did not require manure. In addition, rogo, gyada and dankali were grown: the cultivation of rogo increased dramatically in the first decade of colonial rule, as it was a valuable food and commanded a high price. Even the stems were saleable as cuttings so there was no waste, according to Webster. Most of the plots were protected by a ditch and a low wall surmounted by thorns but in spite of the extra labour the profit was large. Groundnuts were only planted at this time as a preventive against the encroachment of tofa grass on a farm lying fallow. Groundnuts were not much planted in 1911, as it is found that in order to obtain a fair yield it was necessary to deep hoe and ridge, which the crop was not valuable enough to stand. This situation would change rapidly within a year or two, and groundnuts became staple export of the colonial economy, and areas like Dorayi became major sources of supply. Dankali was more important in the early years of colonial rule, even though this crop also required deep hoeing and ridging but it commanded such a good price that it repaid the farmer.

Cassava appears to have been a relatively new crop and replaced onions as a crop to some extent, and also probably wheat. It seems that the massive desertion of slaves that was reported for this area had a major impact on agriculture, including the adoption of practices that led to the deterioration of land. This deterioration was the result of two factors – cattle were not grazed there as long as previously; hence there was less manure, and most important there were far fewer slaves to carry manure and household waste from Kano City to the farms.

The location of Dorayi close to Kano meant that is was possible to specialize in particular crops, depending upon demand in the city. While the principal growing season coincided with the annual rainy season, there was also considerable dry-season farming. In 1900, according to Hill, there was little uncultivated land in Dorayi. Moreover, production was enhanced because of the number of livestock that passed along the main cattle trail south of
the Kano wall, and in addition to this manure, farms were fertilized by compound sweepings and manure brought from Kano City. Although the relative proportions of crops would have been different, the types of crops that could be grown at Dorayi are revealed in the 1932 re-assessment report by S.A.S. Leslie. According to Leslie’s calculations, the area of Kumbotso District, in which Dorayi was in many a typical area, the main crops included guinea corn (*dawa*) (46 per cent of crops); peanuts (20 per cent), millet (*gero*) (13 per cent), cassava (*rogo*) (5 per cent), *maiwa*, a type of millet (5 per cent), and sweet potatoes (*dankali*) (3 per cent). The area was also the center of dry-season farming, both on non-irrigated *rafi* land, producing wheat and sweet potatoes, and on *fadama*, or irrigated land. In 1911 cotton was grown as well. Previously, there would have been less land under peanut cultivation, which had expanded rapidly after the opening of the railroad to Kano in 1911.

The characteristics of agricultural production in Dorayi centered on the utilization of familial and slave labor, but in large holdings that were organized into *gandu* as an arrangement of production. The *gandu* was a family unit centered on the head of the household and his immediate male kin, especially his sons. The *gandu* allowed for the allocation of land within the family and enabled the mobilization of labor on common fields whose output benefited the whole families. Slave labor supplemented family labor, and in large holdings replaced family labor entirely, except to the extent that the slave owners supervised production. As Wallace has noted, *gandu* “embraced not simply the nuclear family but extended kin as well,” which was interpreted as the unit of production and consumption. Within the individual houses, there was supposed to be a sense of common allegiance between slaves and their masters; as one informant remarked “we were all one family before the arrival of the Europeans, with a single kitchen, hence we ate from the same pot.” Since the basic unit of production was tied to land, both residents and non-resident owners of *gandu* in Dorayi used similar means of organizing labor. At Dorayi as elsewhere, the head of house or *gandu* was responsible for the provision of farm implements as well as seed. It was compulsory for every male member of the *gandu* to undertake the tasks assigned by the head of the *gandu*. A small piece of land (*gayauna*) was allocated to male members and hard working slaves. Women were not allowed their own *gayauna* because it was believed that they should not control land. Female slaves, however, were engaged in field labor, but never free women at Dorayi.
Gandun Dorayi, as other rinji in kasar Kano, had a primary economic function, chiefly in supplying the Emir’s palace. All slaves in the gandu participated in agricultural production. It has been claimed that Gandun Dorayi supplied grain to feed the residents of the palace, as well as fodder for the horses in the palace. In terms of production and organization of labour within Gandun Sarki, there was an assigned duty for each slave family. Every male slave in the Gandu was expected to actively participate in the clearance of farmland during the dry season and in cultivation during the rainy season. All grain produced in the Gandu was transported to the emir’s palace in the city and entrusted to Sarkin Hatsi (chief grain officer). The principal occupations of the inhabitants of Dorayi in the long dry season, besides dry-season farming, related to opportunities that arose because of the proximity of Dorayi to Kano City. There were opportunities in grain speculation, which required adequate storage, and the transport of manure and household sweepings (daukar taki) from the city was nearly continuous.

Despite the presence of the estate of Sarkin Makera at Dorayi, the occupations of the Dorayi people centered on readily available resources. Firewood collection, construction of cornstalk beds, rope making, and mat weaving were most common. During the dry season, a large portion of the male population of Gandun Dorayi was engaged in repairing roofs and building and repairing rooms at the emir’s extensive palace in the city.

The primary dry-season occupation of women was making daddawa (locust bean cakes), one of the principal seasoning agents in Hausa cuisine. This occupation is perhaps not surprising given the name of the area. As Webster noted in 1911, “There is…good local demand for the flour (budi), the dried seeds (kalua), and dadawas, the seeds boiled and fermented with the custard apply leaf and then kneaded into the little malodorous cakes that are such a pungent feature of every Hausa market.” The production of daddawa in Dorayi was made easier as the result of the availability of kalwa (locust bean seeds). In recent times, firewood sellers have cut many of the dorayi trees so that Dorayi women have to procure a substantial quantity of kalwa from elsewhere, but this was not the case in the nineteenth century. Women were also engaged in spinning thread (kadi), although most weaving in the area was carried out by Barebari women, who were not numerous.

Slavery and Society at Dorayi
Following the incorporation of Kano into the Sokoto Caliphate in 1806, economic relations in the caliphate were based on slave
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labor, and as a consequence there was a clear division between slave and free, as well as between aristocrat and commoner. Indeed it was estimated in the middle of the nineteenth century that nearly half of the population of Kano was slave. This pattern seems to apply to Dorayi, where there were a large number of slaves who worked the land. It is likely that slaves constituted at least half the population and probably considerably more. In the nineteenth century, therefore, Dorayi was representative of the wider society, being a center of slave settlement. This reliance on slave labor determined the nature of social relations.

The ethnic origin of the population of Dorayi was decidedly mixed, despite the fact that is in the most central part of Hausaland. Most importantly, there was the division between slave and free. The masters included people of various backgrounds, including Fulani, Barebari, Agalawa, Nupe, aristocrats who were also Fulani, and royal slaves of diverse “non-Hausa” backgrounds. These people, whose ethnicity was essential to their identities as free people, dominated this “Hausa” district. Most of the resident Fulani are to be identified with livestock herders who settled in Dorayi, and are not to be confused with the aristocracy, which was also Fulani and through the emir controlled the land. As Webster noted in 1912,

By far the larger number of the [free] people are Fulani of various tribes. In Dawaki Jahunawa are the dominant sept. As elsewhere that I have met them they appear to keep purer than most settled Fulah, rarely if ever intermarrying with the Habe. In the rest of the subdistrict Malawa and Bornawa prevail. In Tamburawa alone the Habe predominate. Of nonfulani races the principal are, Kanawa, Beriberi and Agalawa.

The Barebari were immigrants from Borno, for which as indicated above there was a long connection. The few Nupe are associated with the several emirates, most notably Bida, to the south of Hausaland. Agalawa were wealthy kola traders who traced their origins to the desert-side economy dominated by the Tuareg. All of these identifications indicated free Muslims, who in fact were the slave owners in Dorayi.

The slaves were often referred to as Gwarawa (s. Bagwari), who were defined as anyone who could not speak Hausa correctly and who was ignorant of various Hausa customs, and hence someone who was an alien and whose status was that of slave or the descendant of slaves. The term did not refer only to the ethnic group known in Hausa as “Gwari” (Gbari), who lived south of Zaria,
but the term included people from Adamawa, Ningi and Damagaram, and probably elsewhere. Most were considered to be non-Muslim in origin, although it is unlikely that all were. Indeed those from Damagaram were not only Muslim but also often Hausa. The father of Malam Isyaku, interviewed in 1975 at Dorayi, came from Maradi “as a result of war between Kano and Maradi.” More numerous were slaves from Adamawa, and also Ningi, particularly Warjawa and Umbutawa. The nature of social interaction among these distinct groups of various origins shaped Hausa society at the local level and appears to mirror the type of interaction that was more general in Hausaland in the nineteenth century.

Even though there was no defined limit of social interaction between the various groups in Dorayi, it is noted that since 1806 when the “first” Fulani immigrant, Jibrin, settled in Dorayi, most of the Barebari people resident in the area did not receive him well. This tradition seems to reflect animosity between Muslims from Borno and the upstart jihad aristocracy, which was almost entirely Fulani. Jibrin was reputedly a member of the ruling clan of Fulani, suggesting that he was a relative of Emir Sulaiman. As a result of tensions arising from questions of Muslim legitimacy, the Barebari would not marry Fulani. Rather, they retained a corporate identity through marriage within their ethnic group. Jibrin was perhaps not unusual. Other Fulani also settled in Dorayi, and because of their relative lack of Islamic education are said to have sometimes married Gwarawa, who were presumed to have an acceptable social status.

The most important factor responsible for the tension was the presumed religious differences between the groups. First, the Barebari considered themselves the forerunners of Islamization in the central Sudan, with a higher standard of education than most Fulani. The failure of the jihad in Borno had resulted in considerable displacement of population, and while many Barebari moved to Kano and other parts of the Caliphate, it did not mean that they liked Fulani. In Dorayi, the Barebari were said to have considered both the Fulani and the Gwarawa as “people of no religion;” consequently, “they were not allowed to marry outside their (Barebari) society.” Over time, Barebari clerics in Dorayi and Kano bridged the gap by teaching the basic ethics and creed of Islam and thereby educating the Fulani settlers as good Muslims by Barebari standards.

However, because of the people of Gwarawa descent were considered slaves or persons of servile status, they did not enjoy favorable relations with the Barebari, because they were not considered “good” Muslims but were even worse than the “non-religious” Fulani. The status of slaves in Dorayi depended on who
their masters were. Slaves who worked for aristocrats were also in many instances better off than most commoners (talakawa), regardless of the fact that they were not free men, and their recognition as Muslims was more likely. A slave in Dorayi could secure his freedom, acquire wealth and own property, and thereby become a “complete person” and mingle among persons of free descent, but only if he were recognized to be a Muslim. However, this avenue to emancipation was not always available, and was certainly only possible for Muslims. In general, according to Alhaji Zubairu Geza,

The religious status of a slave is not the concern of the master. Here...all that is expected of a slave is to serve the master in whatever capacity demanded, for instance on the farm, if the slave is male, or in concubinage, if the slave is female.

Very likely bori was practiced in Dorayi, and in the twentieth century there is a gidan bori there, but this may be of recent origin. According to George Webster, who assessed the area in 1912, “There are a few Maguzawa left who retain the religion of their ancestors, but the greater number have embraced Islam and lost all racial characteristics.” The reference to Maguzawa and ancestral religious practices suggests bori, which may have been widespread. Webster’s observations were made after many of the slaves on these plantations had run away, and they were the ones who were least likely to be devout Muslims.

Those slaves who remained were most likely to be Muslims. Their future was more closely tied to the dominant society because of incentives that were sometimes proffered to slaves. If a slave acquired enough resources either as a result of personal effort on his gayauna or as a result of his position as a bawan yarda (trusted slave), he could secure his freedom following his master’s approval and on payment of a stipulated amount (fansa) either in installments or at once. The slave could then say “na fita daga gandu,” that is, “I have walked out of the gandu; I have regained my freedom.” It was also possible to work independently of the master through the payment of set amounts of money, a practice which was known as murgu. However, there were risks in working on one’s own because, as Lovejoy has noted, “anything slaves might gain belonged to their owners, but in fact there were layers of property rights.”

However, if a slave felt cheated or maltreated by his master he could protest in two ways, either through instituting a legal case before the emir or by going to the main city market, Kasuwar Kurmi,
where he would “stretch” his legs, an act called “mike kafa.” This act signified a slave’s protest, and that he was offering himself to any other prospective master who would treat him better. Reputedly, his master faced public ridicule and hence this was considered an act of intimidation, in which the usual power relationship was reversed. The practice was known as mike kafa. If the master wanted to win back the confidence of the slave, he could go to the yan bayi section of the market and enter into negotiations with him. The case would be declared settled if they reconciled, but the slave could still insist on changing masters. There are no acknowledged cases of mike kafa among royal slaves, whether as a result of maltreatment or other complaint against overseers or others in authority. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that royal slaves were not normally bought or sold.

Because of the large number of slaves in the population of Kano in the nineteenth century, it is important to note that the extent to which Kano society, but in particular Dorayi incorporated slaves into its social structure. The society in Dorayi did not consider slaves as jari (a capital commodity), but on the contrary they were considered as dukiya (assets), which signifies a desire at the maximization of both labor power of the slaves but also other slave related services. Therefore, the majority of the slaves in Dorayi and the environs were not acquired to be sold but to be put into productive activities in the economy and society. Through this incorporation, “the gandu system enabled the slave population to become almost entirely absorbed.”

One feature of incorporation depended upon marital status. If a slave proved trustworthy, the master could procure a wife for him, either through purchase or through negotiations with another master who owned a female slave. The children born by the slave “wife” belonged to her master not to her “husband” or his master. Moreover, she could not be regarded as the property of her “husband’s” master nor could she be required to work for him because of her responsibilities to her actual master. Such marriages and the families that they produced were essential in redefining and extending Hausa society in the nineteenth and continuing into the twentieth century.

There is an image of slavery in Hausaland in the nineteenth century that suggests a relatively benign condition, “with slight features that may offend the observer.” This observation indicates a general state of fair treatment, although this is difficult to verify, but may reflect an important difference between slavery in Hausaland and the Americas. As already indicated slaves in Dorayi were not considered jari which could be disposed by way of re-sale or as
something that could be re-invested in other sectors of the economy.
Unlike the social relations of slaves and their master in the new
world, slaves in the gandu economy of Hausaland could own not
only property but were generally accorded better treatment. They
could regain their freedom, and if they were royal slaves, they could
also own slaves. 85

In slave social formations such as that at Dorayi in rural
Kano, the basis of societal interaction was on group’s individual
participation in production and in the distribution of resources. Thus,
it was part of Dorayi’s social regulation that no matter how a slave
may become influential, materially or otherwise, he could not be
regarded as free if his master did not release him. Hill has argued
that the slave had the “right to ransom himself or to demand
manumission if ill-treated...corresponded to a son’s freedom to leave
gandu at any time and a slave-owner’s right to sell a slave... [and
that this] essentially corresponded to a father’s right to dismiss his
son from gandu.” 86 However, Hill appears to be assuming that
conditions in the colonial period were similar to those of the
nineteenth century. Because slaves could be resold if they became
“too strong” or if they posed a “threat” to their masters, their ability
to press their “right” to freedom was severely limited indeed. 87 They
were not allowed to leave, and while it probably happened, there are
not even memories of slaves running away in the nineteenth century,
although there was considerable desertion at the time of the colonial
occupation in 1903. 88

Conclusion
As the case of Dorayi demonstrates, the rural economy of Kano was
heavily based on slavery. Although Hill concluded otherwise, Dorayi
was comprised almost entirely of large estates, held under a variety
of tenures, and that were principally involved in the production of
grain and other crops for Kano, and specifically for the large
households of merchants, aristocrats, and even the emir who had
land there. Dorayi was in the heavily populated areas close to Kano
City, and as its history demonstrates, one of the main features of
Kano economy and society in the nineteenth century was the
incorporation of slaves from outside Kano into the social and
economic fabric of the emirate. Paul Lovejoy has identified the
historical conditions for the establishment of large slave plantations
in the Sokoto Caliphate that establish that a plantation economy
similar to those in the Americas had developed in the Muslim areas
of the Central Sudan, despite the different ideological foundations of
slavery in Muslim societies and the European colonies in the
Americas. According to Lovejoy, “this tradition of identifying large-scale agriculture with plantations… [suggests] a comparison with the Americas is warranted…; the Islamic tradition included plantations [but] has not always been recognized.” The situation in Dorayi amplifies Lovejoy’s analysis, establishing that the dominant pattern of land holding in this agricultural district was based on the *gandu* in its plantation form.

Notes

4. According to Hill, 79: “Perhaps the population density in 1900 was lower than today, but this is uncertain for a considerable proportion of the population then consisted of farm-slaves (and their descendants), many of whose descendants subsequently migrated,” i.e. ran away; see Hill, *Population*, 79.
7. The study draws on a variety of sources, including the published details provided by Hill, but also oral data collected in the course of undertaking research for my M.A. degree; see “Dorayi: A History of Economic and Social Transformations in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Kano Emirate” (M.A. dissertation, Usmanu Danfodio University, 1994). For the concept of a plantation complex, see Lovejoy, “Characteristics of Plantations.”
8. Mahadi, Sarauta System in Kano, 459-60. The Agalawa kola merchants who supported Emir Bello benefited from this confiscation of land; see Stilwell, Kano Mamluk, 280-81, citing A.U. Dan Asabe, “Comparative Biographies of
Slavery and Plantation Society at Dorayi in Kano Emirate


10 Salanta is situated between Ja’en and Sharada, the largest industrial area in the present Kano metropolis. Dorayi is also situated between Gandun Albasa, Sheka, and the Kano Zoological Garden. It borders Ja’en and Kofar Gadon Kaya near Bayero University.


13 Mahadi, Sarauta System, 448.

14 George Webster, Assessment Report, Dan Iya’s Sub-District of the Chiroma’s District, July 11, 1912, SNP 7/13 4055/1912.


16 Haruna Kundilla, the wealthiest merchant in Kano in the late nineteenth century, came from neighboring Gozaye, while Sharabutu was also said to have had land in the area. See Abdulkarim Umar Dan Asabe, Comparative Biographies of Selected Leaders of the Kano Commercial Establishment (M.A. thesis, Bayero University, 1987), 24, 84.

17 Mahadi, Sarauta System in Kano, 453.


20 Interview with Malam Isyaku of Dorayi.

21 There were other large estates, some associated with ribat fortifications, at Sawaina, Gasgainu, Yokanna, Giwaran, Shanono, Wasai, and Yukuna; see Stilwell, Kano Mamluks, 175, based on an interview with Dan Rimi Muhammad, December 30, 1975 (Yusufu Yunusa Collection). For the estate
at Takai, see the chapter by Philips in this volume. For Nassarawa, see Sa’idu Abdulrazak Giginyu, “History of a Slave Village in Kano: Gandun Nassarawa” (B.A. dissertation, Bayero University, 1981).

22 Giginyu, “Nassarawa.”

23 Alhaji Shehu Sani, Dagachin Dorai, interviewed August 10, 1993, who was about 60 in 1992. He was appointed dagaci in 1954.

24 Efforts to determine when Gandun Sarki was established were futile. Alhaji Balarabe Yakasai, the current Wakilin Dorai and representative of the Emir of Kano, claimed that he did not know anything more about the estate than that his parents lived there. He was about 60 when he was interviewed in 1992. His father, Muhammadu, held the title of sarkin shanu.

25 Malam Bashir Musa of Dorai conducted various interviews with elders on the history of Dorai in 1991; for a discussion see Hamza, “Dorai,” 12n.

26 Hamza, “Dorai,” 26, citing information from Malam Bashir Dorai.

27 Sallama Nuhu, aged 68 years, when he was interviewed at his residence, Kofar Kwara, in the emir’s palace in Kano, June 15, 1993. Nuhu was in charge of the emir’s ‘yan bindiga (gunmen) and the emir’s estates at Diwaram and Gogel.

28 Hawan Dorai can be traced to the reign of Emir Abdullahi (1855-1882), according to Sallama Nuhu, June 15, 1993, while other sources trace the tradition to Emir Ibrahim Dabo (1819-1846); see Hamza, “Dorai,” 26-27.

29 Alhaji Balarabe Yakasai, the Wakilin Dorai, was of the opinion that Emir Alu played a prominent role at the Hawan Dorai but did not know when the Hawan Dorai started. The Dan Rimi, Alhaji Shehu Kwara, who was about 60 at the time of interview in 1992, also was unable to establish the origin of the practice. Also see Hamza, “Dorai,” 27n.

30 Hamza, “Dorai,” 27

31 Information from Malam Bashir Dorai, based on interviews in 1991.

32 Hamza, “Dorai,” 12, based on information from Malam Bashir Musa.


34 For a discussion of slave ownership at Dorai, see Hill, Population, 213-15.


36 Information from Malam Bashir Dorai.

37 Hill, Population, 190. According to information I collected in Dorai, the following “big houses” have been identified: Gidan Malam Haladu, Gidan Liman Isa, Gidan Sadai, Gidan Zubairu Dan Kasim, Gandun Sarkin Dawaki Mat Tuta, Gidan Barai, Gidan Salihun Tudu, and Gandun Sarki, which included Gandun Sarkin Makera and Runjin Shamaki.

38 Hamza, “Dorai,” 12, based on information from Tankon Ladi Dorai, interviewed August 9, 1993. Also see Hill, Population, 163.
41 Ibid., 193.
43 Alhaji Zubairu Geza, interviewed at Gwazaye, December 29, 1993, when he was about 70.
45 Ibid.
46 Webster, Assessment Report, Dan Iya.
47 According to Webster (Assessment Report, Dan Iya), “The deterioration in yield per acre is apparently, allowing for all possible exaggeration, at least 50% in the last 20 years. It is due in part of closer cultivation, and at the same time deprivation of the manure formerly supplied, but which cannot now be obtained as practically all cattle have to be sent south before the crops are cut, instead of being as formerly kraaled on the farms partly also to the excess of dorowa, which, though a most valuable asset in times of shortage is apt to produce the ill for which it is the cure, it is a notorious exhauster of land.”
51 Malam Hashimu Dorayi, aged 63 years when interviewed at his residence in Dorayi, August 2, 1993. Hashimu was the eldest male of Gidan Limani Sarki Lawan.
52 Malam Yahaya Sani Dorayi aged 64 years when interviewed at his residence in Dorayi, August 2, 1993. He is the brother of the dagaci, Alhaji Shehu Sani, and was one of Polly Hill’s informants.
54 Ibid.
55 This observation by Sallama Nuhu, interviewed June 15, 1993, accords with the account of Imam Imoru that the agricultural workers in the countryside received in return for their produce and other goods and services the protection of the aristocracy from raiding and brigandage. See the account of Imam Imoru in D.E. Ferguson, Nineteenth Century Hausaland being a description by Imam Imoru of the land, economy, and society of his people (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1973), 126.
58 Malam Hashimu, interviewed August 2, 1993.
59 Webster, Assessment Report, Dan Iya.
60 According to Leslie, there were 1,400 dorawa trees in the area of Dorayi, which supplied a substantial quantity of kalwa seeds used to make daddawa, a
condiment used in cooking; see Reassessment Report for Kumbotso District, 1932.

61 Information from Malam Bashir Dorayi.


63 Heinrich Barth’s observation was based on the considerable number of slaves he reported in Hausaland in general: “I think it hardly equal [said Barth] certainly ...the wealthy have many slaves, the poorer class, which far more numerous have few or none;” see Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (London, 1965 reprint), vol. I, 510.

64 See Hill, "Slavery to Freedom."

65 Webster, Assessment Report, Dan Iya’s Sub-District.


67 Interviewed September 17, 1975 (Yusufu Yunusa Collection).

68 Ibid.

69 Information provided by Malam Bashari Musa Dorayi.

70 Ibid.

71 There is a popular Hausa saying, “Bawan Sarki maganin bawan Allah,” that is, “A royal slave is more important than a slave of Allah.” This saying is attributed to the alleged brutality perpetrated by royal slaves in carrying out assignments either sanctioned by the state or otherwise.

72 Baba of Karo narrates how she adopted a son who was a slave but freed on commemoration of her marriage. The former slave in turn married a free woman who lived with Baba and her husband; see Smith, *Baba of Karo*, 122-27.


74 Webster, Assessment Report, Dan Iya’s Sub-District.

75 Malam Hashimu, August 2, 1993


78 Ibid.


80 Alhaji Adamu Gwazaye, aged c. 110 years when interviewed at his residence in Gwazaye, December 30, 1993.

According to Alhaji Zubairu Geza, when a slave began to display disobedient attitudes against his master, he could be sold even if he had a family.

There are no reports of fugitive slaves before the twentieth century at Dorayi, but cases of fitar kafa (absconding) occurred at the time of British occupation. Local traditions remember cases of runaway slaves, both males and females, who were said to have been lazy or tired of farm work.
