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978-0-521-10708-2 - Population, Prosperity and Poverty: Rural Kano, 1900 and 1970

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Population, prosperity and poverty

RURAL KANO, 1900 AND 1970

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*Population,
prosperity and poverty*

RURAL KANO

1900 and 1970

POLLY HILL

Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge

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TO
MY FATHER
A. V. HILL
act. 90

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Preface

In my book *Rural Hausa: A Village and a Setting* (1972) I examined the socio-economic affairs of Batagarawa, a small village near Katsina city in the extreme north of Nigeria, and I also provided a long alphabetical Commentary (and glossary), of some 130 pages, which set that village within the general framework of present-day rural Hausaland and was partly intended as a separate browsing ground. In writing this companion volume I have again adopted a dual approach. On the one hand I have sought to compare and contrast 'Dorayi' (an extremely densely populated farming area of dispersed settlement near Kano city) with Batagarawa, with special reference to the consequences of high population density; on the other hand I have endeavoured to place Dorayi in historical perspective by examining socio-economic conditions in rural Kano generally in immediately pre-colonial and early colonial times. Although the latter task has led me into far deeper waters than I had originally intended, it proved inescapable mainly because I was unable to comprehend the present-day stability of stagnating, impoverished, overcrowded Dorayi without grasping the basis of the earlier prosperity of the densely populated farming zone in which it is situated; also, the golden opportunity of consulting the memories of elderly informants who were born before the brief colonial interlude of less than sixty years was irresistible, for it will soon be too late.

Two main difficulties have dogged me in writing this book. First, I have found it most painful and depressing to examine, albeit 'clinically', the miserable circumstances in which so many Dorayi people find themselves: to my mind, it is no wonder that the study of individual poverty has been so greatly neglected in rural Africa. Second, has been the problem of avoiding repetitiveness while producing a volume which may be conveniently read without necessary reference to *Rural Hausa* (though many page-references to that book are given for the sake of those who are interested): fortunately the time has long since passed when it is necessary to preface every book on Hausaland with a potted history going back to the *jihad* of 1804.

Within the vast expanse of rural Hausaland, which may have a population of the order of twenty million, farmland is not generally scarce and there are many sparsely populated regions and districts. When writing about Batagarawa, where farmers are free to clear and cultivate as much bush land as they require, I came to the conclusion that it was a not unrepresentative kind of place – which is not to say that I hold with any concept of a ‘typical village’. Dorayi, on the other hand, is most atypical: with its (increasing) population density of some 1500 per square mile, and its low rate of outward migration, it is an extreme, even a bizarre, case, which shows what *can* happen but not what *will* happen generally elsewhere in rural Hausaland – for it is safe to assume that in most localities high rates of outward migration, particularly for farming, would start to relieve population pressure when (as in Batagarawa) densities were but a small fraction of that in Dorayi. But since the condition I denote as *individual impasse* may occur at population densities far lower than 1500 per square mile, Dorayi is nevertheless a very interesting case.

With the exception of Chapter XIII (which is concerned with the conversion of a slave-owning economy into one based on free labour), the historical chapters do not represent an attempt to follow through the processes of socio-economic change between ‘1900’ (a shorthand expression for ‘immediately pre-colonial’) and today. As during the early colonial period large and small Emirates had equal numbers of British political officers, the archival material relating to large Emirates, such as Kano, is exceptionally deficient and their recent socio-economic history cannot be written until far more fieldwork has been undertaken. Consequently, my historical chapters are separate essays on certain selected themes relevant to an understanding of present-day rural stagnation or impasse – ‘under-development’ is far too weak a word. The crude notion that rural communities are merely exploited by city dwellers needs to be reinforced, in the case of Kano, by an insistence that they stand deprived of their old-established functions as long-distance traders and manufacturers: that they have become economically disenfranchised, as a simple comparison of 1900 with 1970 immediately reveals. In 1900 when rural Kano was the matrix within which most economic activity was set and when farmers with their donkeys carried nearly all the heavy loads, it was positively advantageous for agricultural communities to live dispersedly on their farmland; nowadays all is reversed, and the perversities of dispersed settlement are to be equated with isolation and backwardness.

I left Dorayi in July 1972 since when its people have endured the effects of the great droughts of 1972 and 1973 and the near-failure of the 1975 groundnut crop. But even more serious than this succession of calamities are the dire and lasting consequences of the continuing Great

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Inflation which (unknown to most 'Westerners') claims its chief victims in rural communities of the Third World where earnings lag further and further behind the advancing price indices for essential manufactures and services such as lorry transport.

In the first of my thirteen chapters, which is on the economic relationship between Kano city and the countryside in 1900, I justify my provocative thesis that most trade and industry in Kano Emirate was rurally based; in a general attempt to 'reinstiate the countryside', I criticise the common practice of employing terms derived from European feudalism, since the use of such jargon obscures the inherent vitality and autonomy of pre-colonial rural economic enterprise. In Chapter II, which demonstrates with the aid of archival material that the colonial policy of indirect rule amounted (except for the slavery proclamations) to 'rural non-rule', I attempt to examine the politico-economic roots of present-day rural neglect; Part 1 of that chapter deals with colonial policy in 1903-12 in rural Northern Nigeria generally and Part 2 with the remarkably unsuccessful endeavour to reform indigenous rural administration in Kano Emirate. For all that the very densely populated farming area around Kano city (the Kano Close Settled Zone) is very much larger and more populous than any comparable region in savannah West Africa, its existence has somehow been taken for granted: Chapter III is an attempt to pose certain questions about the recent history of the Zone which cannot yet be answered.

In the next nine chapters I examine socio-economic conditions in present-day Dorayi with special reference to demographic factors. Those readers who are interested in the general implications of my findings on the consequences of persistent and severe pressure of population on the land, rather than in the details of the Dorayi case, may find that the summary of those findings in Chapter V together with the brief introduction to Dorayi in Chapter IV provide adequately for their needs. For Dorayi, as for Batagarawa, the implications of pronounced economic inequality are a dominant theme: the subject is introduced in Chapter VI and further pursued in Chapters X and XI relating, respectively, to 'rich' and 'poor' men. In Dorayi the fortunes of married sons are closely linked to those of their fathers, as Chapter VIII relates. Inheritance, land-selling and other aspects of 'the attitude to farmland' are dealt with in Chapter VII; Chapter IX is concerned with the very low rate of outward migration from overcrowded Dorayi; and Chapter XII with the very big houses, inhabited by up to 106 people, which (it is argued) have come into existence owing to the high population density.

Finally, the manner in which the details relating to particular cases, such as Dorayi, may provide the raw material illustrating broad basic

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themes is illustrated by Chapter XIII on the transition from farm-slavery to freedom in rural Kano. In Muslim communities where land-holding lineages and tenancy systems were lacking, ex-slaves and their descendants neither suffered assimilation as pseudo-kin nor rejection as tenants but rather asserted their absolute freedom as farmers. The study of an earlier, inegalitarian, agrarian system based on the ownership of farm-slaves by ordinary, richer, farmers, who were not members of a ruling class, gives perspective to contemporary studies and helps one to avoid the most dangerous of all misbeliefs, that present trends, such as developing economic inequality, are necessarily something new in kind.

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Acknowledgements

Full financial support for my work in rural Hausaland, which lasted for fourteen months between April 1971 and June 1972, was provided by the Social Science Research Council. Owing to the extreme scarcity of skilled manpower in Northern Nigeria, I was unable to recruit a Hausa assistant with higher educational qualifications or more than two other suitable men, so that it was shortage of labour rather than finance which limited my activities.

However, after much delay, I was so fortunate as to obtain the services of M. Husaini Yahaya, who had had much previous experience as a field assistant; as my constant companion during the ten months when I mainly worked in Dorayi, I greatly appreciated his work as a skilled interpreter, who had a kindly, humorous and genuine interest in rural life. I am also most grateful to M. Musa Ibrahim Bagudu who despite his total lack of the appropriate training (and my own inexperience) successfully mapped all the farms in about three square miles of farmland in, and around, Dorayi, with the aid of an aerial photograph. Despite the great heat at certain seasons, Malam Musa undertook this arduous work uncomplainingly and was very reliable and painstaking; he was also responsible for our house-to-house enumeration of the population which, through no fault of his own, had to be repeated several times.

Perhaps my inability to recruit any other full-time assistants for my work in Dorayi was ultimately a blessing, as it forced me to lean very heavily on the part-time services of five Dorayi men who proved far more helpful, frank, reflective and at times inspired than I had any reason to expect. Had it not been for the initial welcome and later assistance I received from Mahamman Lawal, the Mai Unguwa (Hamlet Head) of Cikin Gari, Ciranci, who unfortunately died at the age of about eighty in 1974, I doubt whether I would have had the strength to have worked in a place where most people were (understandably) entirely baffled by my continued presence. (Never before have I felt the anthropologist's central conflict so keenly: that the ordinary victims of one's intrusive inquisitiveness

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are right to complain that they have nothing to gain from it.) Such respectability as I had in Dorayi derived directly from Mahamman Lawal; and it was his wonderful memory and accuracy which formed the essential basis of my work on farm-slavery. The excellent help I received from my other four Dorayi assistants, who treated me with great kindness and patience, is gratefully acknowledged on p. 109 below. I also owe particular thanks to the Village Head of Kirimbo whom I visited on many occasions.

During my stay in Nigeria I received much general help and encouragement from my friends Professor Lalage Bown, Professor Michael Crowder, Dr Adamu Fika (whose unpublished thesis I have cited), Mrs Lindsay Friedman, Mr John Grey-Theriot, Mr John Lavers and Alhaji Sabi'u Nuhu; and I am especially grateful to Miss Renée Pittin for the numerous occasions on which we discussed her research work on secluded women in Katsina city – and much else besides.

The last stages of writing this book were immensely assisted by a visit I made to Kano in January 1976 to attend an international seminar organised by Ahmadu Bello University on the economic history of the central savannah of West Africa. Many people were there and I must content myself by thanking Dr Mahdi Adamu, chairman of the seminar organisers, for arranging the most enjoyable and stimulating conference I have ever attended in my life. Following this event I was able to consult Dr Yusufu Bala Usman's valuable thesis on the history of Katsina Emirate at Ahmadu Bello University, and I am most grateful to him for his permission to cite his unpublished work. My re-meeting with Dr P. J. Shea at the seminar was really opportune, for I know very well that the opportunity of citing his unpublished thesis on the development of the cloth industry in Kano Emirate in the nineteenth century has enormously increased my credibility in the first chapter. I also benefited from renewed discussions with Mr M. J. Mortimore, the pioneer worker on the Kano Close Settled Zone.

Here in England I wish to thank Professor Sir Edmund Leach for encouraging me in a practical way to return to Hausaland, Professor M. I. Finley for advice on the history of farm-slavery, Dr Barbara Ward and Mr A. H. M. Kirk-Greene for reading parts of the typescript, Dr Basil Davidson for finding the time to engage in a long correspondence about Hausaland from which I, alone, derived benefit and, in particular, Dr Murray Last who has wasted much time reading earlier drafts and who has been a constant support in this enterprise, though far better qualified to undertake something similar himself. None of these people should be held responsible for any of the views I express. I would not have sustained the ordeal of writing this book without the intellectual and moral support I have received from Dr Susan Drucker-Brown, Mr John Dunn, Professor

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Finally I have to thank the managers of the Smuts Memorial Fund for general support given during my tenure of the Smuts Readership in Commonwealth Studies at Cambridge.

Clare Hall
August 1976

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Abbreviations and conventions

- KCSZ The acronym of the Kano Close Settled Zone, the densely populated farming area around Kano city in which Dorayi is situated.
- NAK (Nigerian) National Archives, Kaduna.
- PRO Public Record Office, London.
- R.H. These initials refer to my book *Rural Hausa: A Village and a Setting* (1972).
- Currency Although the old Nigerian currency of £s, shillings and pence was replaced by the Naira and Kobo immediately after I left Dorayi, I have found it necessary to follow my notes by retaining the old currency: this is partly for the sake of historical continuity, partly because a change of currency itself tends to affect rates of payment (such as wages), partly because of fluctuating rates of exchange and partly for the benefit of British readers.
- Decimilisation Comparisons with Batagarawa would have been intolerably confused had I here employed hectares rather than acres.
- Parenthetical references References such as (Last, 1967, p. 135) relate to entries in the list of references on pp. 223 *et seq.* – in this case M. Last's book of 1967.
- Rounding As the use of decimal points in my statistical tables would have given a spurious sense of accuracy, I have rounded all percentages to the nearest integer with the result that they do not always total 100.