CHAPTER 8

Claiming Sovereignty Through Equestrian Spectacle in Northern Cameroon

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This chapter argues that sovereignty is not the inalienable preserve of the state, but rather that it may be contested internally. This is particularly true in postcolonial states such as Cameroon where externally imposed conceptions of legitimacy and authority may prove disconnected from those recognized at a local level. Through artistic media, understood broadly here to include architecture, dress, and performance, alternate realities may be evoked and potentially even invoked. In the case of Ngaoundéré, northern Cameroon, celebrations focused around the Islamic holiday of *Juulde Layhaaji* provide one such potential opportunity for a traditional ruler to contest the state's sovereignty.

On March 18, 2000, I witnessed the public celebrations of the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré, a powerful ruler in precolonial Cameroon who now acts as a local representative of the independent state, attendant to the Islamic religious holiday of *Juulde Layhaaji*. Ngaoundéré is the capital city of Adamaoua Region in northern Cameroon, as well as the historic capital of a sub-emirate of the Islamic Caliphate of Sokoto, founded by Shehu Usman dan Fodio in the early-nineteenth century.[1] Muslim Fulbe herdsmen conquered Ngaoundéré and the indigenous non-Muslim Mboum

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population in approximately 1835. The city and surrounding domain were thereafter incorporated into the Sokoto Caliphate, owing tribute to an emir at Yola in northeastern Nigeria, and ultimately to the caliph who resided at Sokoto in northwestern Nigeria. The *laamiido* as local ruler was the Commander of the Faithful, at once political and Islamic religious leader for his subunit of the caliphate.

When Ngaoundéré, and indeed all of northern Cameroon, was conquered by the Germans in 1901, the position of *laamiido* was allowed to persist as a link between the colonial regime and the local population. After 1916, this arrangement was maintained under the succeeding French colonial occupation until independence in 1960. Unlike southern Cameroon, the French experimented with a variation of indirect rule in northern Cameroon through the *laamiibe*, plural of *laamiido*. In the postindependence era, the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré remains an intermediary figure, considered a local representative of the state, from which he receives compensation, as well as a representative of the local population to the state (Fig. 8.1).[2]

The holiday of *Juulde Layhaaji* recalls Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as proof of his faith, and the miracle of God's replacement of the young boy with a sheep. Known in Arabic as *Id al-Adha*, *Id al-Kabir*, or more generally in western Africa by its Wolof name as *tabaski*, it is also a culminating act of the Hajj, or annual pilgrimage to Mecca. On the actual day of the holiday, the *laamiido*, along with the rest of the population of Ngaoundéré, remove themselves to the communal prayer grounds just outside of the city to pray in unison. On the following day, the ruler leads a parade around the city, starting and ending at his palace, after which a spectacular display of equestrian skills is exhibited by the ruler as well as the various noblemen. This display is commonly referred to by the French term *fantasia*. The ruler's tour of the city is repeated on successive days by the representative of the indigenous Mboum population and by the crown prince. The *laamiido*'s equestrian tour of the city and the practice of *fantasia*—typically perceived as archaic expressions of a world and time long past, that is, of the precolonial period—continues to hold political significance in contemporary society. The continued performance of these celebrations is a means by which a traditional ruler, deprived of real power since the inception of the colonial era, may challenge the sovereignty of the postcolonial government.

Sovereignty has frequently been portrayed as the exclusive preserve of the state; recent scholarship, however, points to the fragmentation, disper-

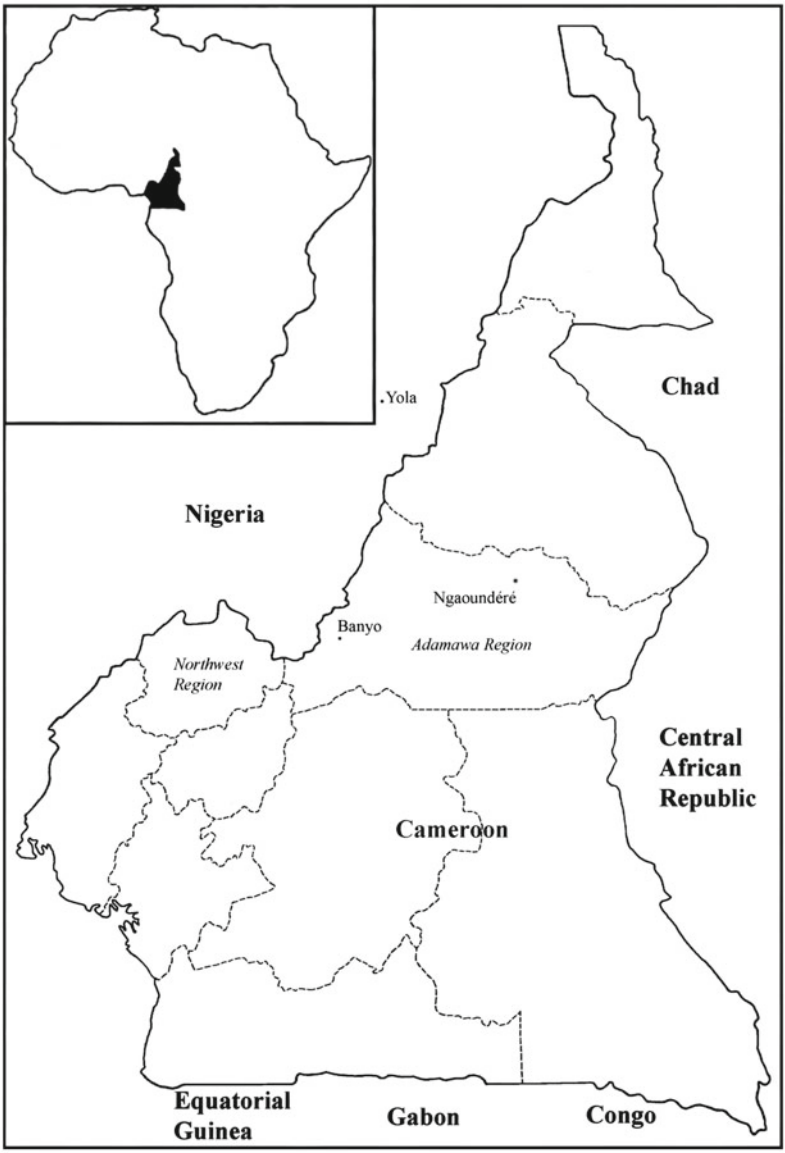

Fig. 8.1 Map of Cameroon

sal, or plurality of sovereignty.[3] Sovereignty may be thought of in terms of external and internal sovereignty. It may, on the one hand, be considered as the international recognition of a state's absolute authority over its territory and population. It may, on the other hand, be considered from the internal perspective as a question of the legitimacy of a state's authority in the eyes of its population.[4] It is in this latter sense, in essence the notion of a social contract, that sovereignty is of import here; that is, the legitimation, or lack thereof, of the authority of the state by the citizenry, and the population's willingness to identify with the state instead of the local identities surviving from precolonial polities.

The persistence of subnational identities derived from precolonial polities is a challenge not only in Cameroon, but across Africa and one might also claim across the postcolonial world.[5] The practice of *fantasia*, as with various other forms of political theater across the continent, is more than simply a passive reflection or representation of an idea; it is an active engagement by which sovereignty is both appropriated and demonstrated. I begin by describing the events of the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré's celebration of *Juulde Layhaaji* on March 18, 2000. I then suggest those elements that are indeed more historically significant, followed by an interpretation of the contemporary political relevance of these celebrations.

Juulde Layhaaji, March 18, 2000

The ruler's intention to emerge from the palace was signaled aurally by the oboe-playing of a young man who began to spit out strings of high-pitched notes at 8:00 am before the palace. As 9:00 am approached, horsemen wearing leather riding boots and tunics festooned with protective charms and carrying long iron spears slowly began to congregate before the palace. Soon after, trumpets began to blare, drums began to beat, and the gates of the palace opened wide emitting a long procession of men on foot, dressed all in red and carrying various weapons and important items.

Laamiido Mohammadou Hayatou Issa himself then appeared on horseback. The *laamiido* wore a blue gown beneath a white robe, his head and part of his face in turn covered by a white turban. A wide leather belt that held a series of large protective charms was cinched around his waist. A man following him to his right twirled a blue and white parasol over the *laamiido*'s head to simultaneously protect him from the sun and mark his high rank. To the left walked the Sarkin Ara, a tall robust man who fanned the *laamiido* from time to time. Following the ruler were footmen

in red in an entourage even larger than that which preceded him. One member of the entourage was an older man who carried a large leather bag perched upon his head. When I asked, everybody agreed that he carried *siirku*—"superstition," "heresy."[6]

As the *laamiido* emerged, the horsemen fell in before and behind him. The trumpeters suddenly multiplied, running ahead and stopping to trumpet at the ruler as he approached. The procession marched down the main street of the old city to enter the colonial-built Commercial Center to the West. The streets were lined with the cheering citizenry. As the ruler passed, they shook their fists in the air over their heads and shouted praises. At the end of the paved road, before the restaurant Marhaba, the procession turned left toward the municipal parade grounds. At the next intersection, they turned left again, and from there began to return toward the palace.

As we neared the Texaco gas station, located just in front of the Central Market where the palace stood in the nineteenth century, the horsemen trotted ahead, circled back, and then galloped up to the *laamiido*. Pulling to a halt just before him, horses reared as their riders yelled praises to their ruler, proclaiming him to be like a lion. The crowd of servants surrounding the ruler joined the mounted notables. The *laamiido* graciously acknowledged their praises with small waves of his hand, and they all proceeded to a location just beside the Central Market.

There they waited as crowds gathered, lining the long route to the palace entrance. Soon thereafter drums and horns were heard, and were accompanied by the crowd's applause. The group of horsemen who had been waiting before the Central Market now paraded slowly down the road past the Central Mosque and around the flag pole in the midst of the square before the palace entrance, after which the entire group returned to its starting point.

Then the cavaliers as a whole slowly trotted forward. As they approached the central mosque, the *laamiido* suddenly broke ranks, galloping straight toward the palace, a long, black, iron spear in hand. Rearing before the palace, he saluted this edifice and those gathered on its steps with his spear as a servant discharged an old rifle. A roar from the crowd resounded in response. The whole procedure was repeated again (Fig. 8.2).

After the *laamiido*'s second charge, sirens began wailing from the end of the road. Space was made for several police trucks followed by a black Mercedes. The rear door of the Mercedes opened, and the provincial governor stepped out. He mounted the steps of the Islamic Health Center,

Fig. 8.2 The *laamiido* performing *fantasia*, Ngaoundéré, Cameroon (Photograph Mark Dike DeLancey, 2000)

next to the palace entrance, and took a seat with the other government officials who were waiting there. The *laamiido* then charged again, pulling up before the governor to salute him. A wave of dust floated from the hooves of his horse to coat the dignitaries. The *laamiido* remained on horseback before the palace, his servants covering him with the parasol and fanning him. Horsemen charged repeatedly in groups of four, rearing their horses before the palace and shouting praises as they raised their spears in aggressive postures.

After repeated charges, the *jawro*, or village chief, of Béka Hooseere, a town situated about ten minutes by motorcycle outside of Ngaoundéré, paraded slowly toward the palace entrance on horseback. The group of palace musicians moved to the flagpole in the center of the square. The *jawro*'s servants and citizens of Béka Hosseere danced forward alongside him, striking aggressive poses and feigning combat with phantom enemies. They advanced almost to the palace where the entourage of the *jawro* danced around the musicians whose backs were against the flagpole. The *jawro* and his servants then returned to the head of the road.

The *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré likewise returned to the head of the road and charged one last time, after which he remained on horseback before the palace. The *jawro* of Béka Hosseere paraded slowly forward once again, surrounded by his servants. The *laamiido*'s entourage moved ahead to meet them. The two groups merged and gathered around the ruler. As the dancing ceased and the dust began to settle, the governor arose from his seat on the porch of the Islamic Health Center, descended its steps and greeted Laamiido Mohammadou Hayatou Issa. They exchanged a few words as the crowd kept respectfully quiet. The governor then entered his black Mercedes and was driven away, after which the *laamiido* and his entourage disappeared through the palace gate. The procession was over by 11:15 am. The crowd began to mill about, the assembled populace slowly dispersing.

The following day, the *kaygama maccube*, or representative of the conquered peoples, performed a similar, albeit much less extravagant, version of the procession and *fantasia*, as did the crown prince, or *yeriima*, the day after that. These last two processions rounded out the four days of celebrations for the *Juulde Layhaaji*.

Touring the City

On the one hand, this ceremony does indeed seem anachronistic. After leaving the palace on horseback, the ruler makes a round of the city. The city serves as a microcosm of his domain as a whole; the ruler surveys his realm. Clifford Geertz relates the surveying of the realm to an act of possession, which creates an omniscient and omnipresent *persona* of the ruler—a divine being:

> royal progresses (of which, where it exists, coronation is but the first) locate the society's center and affirm its connection with transcendent things by stamping a territory with ritual signs of dominance. When kings journey around the countryside, making appearances, attending fêtes, conferring honors, exchanging gifts, or defying rivals, they mark it, like some wolf or tiger spreading his scent through his territory, as almost physically part of them. This can be done, as we shall see, within the frameworks of expression and belief as various as sixteenth-century English Protestantism, fourteenth-century Javanese Hinduism, and nineteenth-century Moroccan Islam; but however it is done, it is done, and the royal occupation gets portrayed as being a good deal more than merely hedged with divinity.[7]

When the *laamiido*'s procession passes, everything else stops. He crowds the streets with his followers; the air is filled with the sound of his orchestra. Movement and speech are pointless, and the world comes to a standstill. Existence is dominated by the presence of the ruler who invades space physically, visually, aurally, and spiritually. He owns the space of the city and all within its confines just as he owns the palace and all within its walls. This relationship would have been even more poignant in the precolonial era when the entirety of the city was in fact surrounded by heavy earthen defensive walls, later destroyed and replaced with a ring road by the French colonial regime.

The removal of the *laamiido* from the confines of the palace would have been a rare occurrence in the immediate precolonial period. When Ngaoundéré was founded in 1835, the Fulbe population was composed primarily of pastoralists who had previously lived semi-nomadic lives.[8] The leader of this pastoralist population would have been fairly accessible to his followers. As Ngaoundéré became wealthier and more powerful toward the close of the nineteenth century, however, the ruler became increasingly more reserved from the public eye. Various responsibilities of the ruler were delegated to officials, religious leadership to the Imam, for example, or judicial functions to an Islamic judge. The absence of the ruler, except on particular festival occasions, engendered a sense of mystery and ultimately the impression of an individual with superhuman qualities. This late precolonial conception of the ruler and his powers is still to some extent in operation today.

On the rare occasions when the *laamiido* emerges from the confines of the walled palace into the entirety of the once-walled city, he is presented to the public and all the attendant dangers of such exposure. His wide belt with large leather-bound Islamic amulets creates a protective envelope for his body. Inside each packet are folded pages of paper with select passages from the Qur'an, employing the literal word of God as spiritual defense. These phrases may be combined with letters, numbers, geometric symbols, and framing devices to augment their power. The spiritual protection derived from an Islamic heritage is balanced by the sack of *siirku* carried upon the head of a nearby retainer. The unknown materials within, collectively labeled as "heresy" by the onlookers, are most probably derived from the heritage of the conquered non-Islamic Mboum population. The *laamiido*, himself the offspring ideally of a Fulbe father and Mboum mother, is able to employ the heritage of both populations, the collectivity of whom he represents.[9] The aesthetic of concealed power evident in

both of these devices, the word of God secreted in leather amulets and a bag of unknown materials, can be extended to the body of the *laamiido* himself.[10] Swathed in multiple layers of robes, high leather riding boots, and a white turban, nothing but his hands and eyes remain exposed to the hot sun, or to the eyes of the loyal populace. Thus, the presence of the *laamiido* is projected beyond the façade of the palace, which normally would present his presence to the public eye, yet remaining almost as anonymous as if he had never left its confines at all.

While the procession itself enforces the cessation of daily activity, the population responds by devoting their undivided attention to the ruler. The people line the streets to watch, raising their arms as he passes and shouting praises. In this action, they display their loyalty to the ruler and simultaneously come together as a community in unified action. The ruler is therefore both the instigator of the tour, through his emergence from the palace and circumscription of the city, and the focus of all related action. This is reminiscent of Ralph Giesey's description of the entry into Paris of the Kings of France during the Renaissance: "The *entrée*, like all other royal ceremonials, existed to honor the king, and he was the principal actor; but each performance of the event called for original theatrical creations that could be used to edify the king; he was therefore also the principal spectator."[11] The ruler may choose any processional route, and each procession is different. Wherever he decides to go, the city comes to a standstill. Thus, the population becomes as much a part of the ceremony as the ruler himself, participating in response, but also at the whim of the ruler. It is this reply by the population that serves historically to legitimate the *laamiido*, shifting a unidirectional expression of power, which could be perceived as tyranny, into a reciprocal expression and legitimation of sovereignty. This is, in effect, a social contract reified.

The degree to which such legitimation was historically essential is enshrined in the precolonial political order, derived from the semi-nomadic pastoral culture of the Fulbe. This political system was defined by the *tokkal*, a series of allegiances, population to notable and notable to ruler.[12] The population that follows a notable is his *tokkal*, resembling the manner in which cattle follow their herder. A *tokkal* is not defined in terms of particular neighborhoods or territories, but in terms of people who choose to follow and be represented at court by an individual as a result of his personal qualities, such as piety, wealth, access to the ruler, and potentially other characteristics. An individual who is dissatisfied with the representation provided by a notable may simply switch his allegiance. A notable's

tokkal may reside in every neighborhood of the capital city and scattered settlements throughout the larger domain. The result is an emphasis on the allegiance of populations, rather than on control of particular areas.

While derived in this instance perhaps from the Fulbe's semi-nomadic pastoral heritage, it has been suggested that the emphasis on human labor instead of territory is in fact a much broader one on this historically underpopulated continent.[13] In other words, land was historically abundant and thus held relatively little value compared with the scarcity of people to work and produce wealth from that abundant land. Irrespective of land controlled, the loyalty of populations was the true testament of sovereignty. Therefore, it is probably more accurate to state that the ruler circulated among the city's population, rather than that he traced out the physical imprint of the city, for his route followed the main thoroughfare connecting the old precolonial and later-established neighborhoods of the city, not following its outer boundaries.

Fantasia as an Anachronism

After returning to the palace, the population responded to the movement of the ruler from the palace to the community by an opposite reaction. The town's population gathered about the palace as its representatives, the nobles, perform *fantasia*. This latter segment of the ceremony saw the nobles galloping toward the ruler, or by extension his palace entrance if he has entered it, stopping just before him with their horses rearing, shaking spears in the air and shouting praises, oaths of loyalty, and good wishes for the health and future of the *laamiido*.

Two nights later, during the procession of the crown prince, the *laamiido* appeared at a window of the entrance to acknowledge the prince and the nobility. He then disappeared within the palace, after which the assembled horsemen repeatedly charged the entrance, yelling praises at the structure as if the ruler himself were present. Art historian Dominique Malaquais, drawing upon the work of Suzanne Blier, Margaret Drewal, and Jean Borgatti, discusses palace architecture in the Cameroon Grassfields, to the southwest of Ngaoundéré, as a portrait of the ruler.[14] Likewise, in charging the palace entrance as willingly as they would the *laamiido* himself, the common identity of the two is made particularly explicit in Ngaoundéré. This would have been even more pronounced in the precolonial era when the *laamiido* rarely exited the palace to be seen in public.

The practice of *fantasia* seems as anachronistic as the tour of the city. It can be interpreted in militaristic terms as a recollection of the foundation of the city by wresting control from the previous non-Islamic inhabitants, the Mboum. There are conflicting stories of how this was accomplished. The majority of Mboum claim that their ancestors welcomed and befriended the Fulbe, and that the ascendancy of the latter to a dominant position occurred surreptitiously over an extended period of time. The Fulbe, on the other hand, tend to espouse a more decisive and glorious military conquest over the Mboum forces as the origin of the city and its domain. One of the principal military advantages wielded by the Fulbe over their enemies was the horse, and its use in *fantasia* highlights the means by which they conquered the region. In actual practice, however, the bulk of those performing are of Mboum heritage, thereby contesting ethnic distinctions and arguing against the Fulbe version of events for a more inclusive conception of history.

Beyond a mere recollection of the city's conquest, the practice of *fantasia* suggests a military readiness to defend the city against uprisings and invaders. *Fantasia* also refers to the *laamiido* as the commander-in-chief of the city's military and of the allegiance of the military to their commander. The military historically would have included troops from both communities, as much for defense as for raiding slaves from populations to the south and east, one of the mainstays of the city's nineteenth-century economy. This military display also must be read as an anachronism, for under the current independent government of Cameroon, as under first the German and then French colonial regimes, the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré controls no military, nor does he have the right to defend his territory. The roles of the *laamiido* both as commander of the armed forces of Ngaoundéré and political leader have been usurped by these successive governing bodies.

The anachronism of these interpretations is blatantly obvious from the interruption of the ceremony at the height of its excitement by the provincial governor. The ceremony stopped temporarily as the governor's big Mercedes performed its own version of *fantasia* before the assembled population of the city, pulling up just in front of the palace so that the governor could take a seat on the porch of the Islamic Health Center. The *laamiido* only continued his charges once the governor in his suit was seated comfortably. Thus, for a short but impressive moment, the governor usurped the ceremony using a similar ritual vocabulary, although his regalia were of a different nature. That the governor felt the necessity to upstage the *laamiido* in this manner begins to signal the underlying

insecurities of the state and its tenuous claim to sovereignty. Of course, nobody was there to see the governor perform *fantasia* in his Mercedes; nobody cheered his arrival, though they respectfully maintained their distance and remained quiet.

Fantasia, furthermore, is a sign of a bygone era when the horse represented an elite form of transport, as opposed to the more contemporary black Mercedes of the governor. As was stated by Jack Goody, the horse does not serve an agricultural role in Africa. Instead it served historically as a mount for military conquest, occasionally for transport of individuals involved in long-distance trade, but most significantly for the transport of high-status individuals.[15] This status is derived largely from the value of the creature itself, as well as from a culture of the knight and his noble steed, that is, from its military function. *Fantasia* recalls the nineteenth century when the ruler of Ngaoundere derived political power primarily from his control of military force, in addition to his religious role.

Finally, this practice in social terms is an anachronistic display of the proper hierarchy of the world. Its occurrence on the Muslim holy day of *Juulde Layhaaji* makes explicit the primary force of this celebration. God and his representative are the focus. The central and flamboyant role of the nobility allows these elites to stand out from the masses while declaring their subservience to the *laamiido*. The involvement of the crowd evinces their place at the base of society, willingly supporting all that is built upon its back. The importance of hierarchy is further exemplified by the performance of the crown prince two days later, as the head of those contending for the throne in the future and of the free Fulbe. The performance of the *kaygama maccube* on the intervening day points out the other major source of social identity and political power, the Mboum.

All this continues despite the fact that in contemporary Ngaoundéré the hierarchy on display is in many ways a thing of the past. Wealth has catapulted merchants into positions of extraordinary power, as demonstrated by the entrance to the *laamiido*'s palace and the opposing Friday Mosque, both of which were constructed for the *laamiido* with funding from Alhajji Abbo, a prominent local merchant. Likewise, young men often refuse to inherit their father's noble title in favor of more remunerative pursuits.

Victor Turner states that with performance:

> One can work in the subjunctive mood as seriously as in the indicative—making worlds that never were on land or sea but that might be, could be, may be, and bringing in all the tropes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, etc., to endow these alternative worlds with magical, festive, or sacred power, suspending disbelief and remodeling the terms of belief.[16]

One sees this "subjunctive" mood in operation during the *Juulde Layhaaji* celebrations in Ngaoundéré. *Fantasia* represents a world which once was, but is no more—a historical reality in which the Fulbe rested control of a *lamidat*, and indeed an empire, by the might of the sword and with the swiftness of the horse. At Ngaoundéré, the Mboum joined forces, raiding slaves in the Central African Republic and southern Cameroon from horseback with the Fulbe. The hierarchy created between God, *laamiido*, nobility, and population is one that once was rigorously enforced. The militaristic dance of the *jawro* of Béka Hosseere and his citizens represents the type of allegiance they gave the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré in times past.

Continued Significance of *Fantasia*

The continued practice of touring the city and of *fantasia* also points to its persistent significance and that of its principal actor, the *laamiido*. The contemporary significance of the *laamiido* derives primarily from his role as leader of the Muslim community and from his moral leadership of the broader community. This is by far his most important contemporary role in society, from which all other functions, judicial and political, derive. But we may also understand these practices as an element of a continuous contestation of the sovereignty of the state.

The interpretation of the *laamiido* as a primarily religious and moral figure is reinforced by the timing of this particular display, on the day following the Islamic holy day of *Juulde Layhaaji*. Just as the celebration of the holiday itself clogged the streets with worshipers on their way to the prayer grounds and shut down all business in the city as merchants closed their shops in order to observe the holiday, so too does the *laamiido* cause all activity to cease as he clogged the streets with his followers, blasted out all sound with his trumpets, and drew to the spectacle of horsemanship all those who might otherwise be flocking to the markets. As all attention had been focused on God the day before, all attention was focused on his primary representative on the following day.

The practice of *fantasia* itself is a concrete expression of Islam, both for the local population and for westerners, through its association with North Africa. For westerners, the term *fantasia* resounds with North African displays of horsemanship. The subject was introduced to Europe and the West most forcefully by the French painter Eugène Delacroix in a pair of paintings entitled *Fantasia Arabe*, also known as *Arab Cavalry Practicing a Charge*, painted in 1832 and 1833 soon after Delacroix

returned from a trip to Morocco. These works are but two of a number of paintings by Delacroix depicting mounted Arab cavalry in a variety of wild, energetic scenes. The imagery of *fantasia* quickly became a central theme in Orientalist painting.

For the Fulbe of Ngaoundéré, *fantasia* is but one of a host of cultural elements which bear a similarity with, largely through wholesale adoption from, North Africa. These include the robes, turban, and Islamic amulets worn by the *laamiido*. The conceptual importance of North Africa derives largely from the fact that the Islamic faith was introduced to Cameroon from there. The ancient Islamic sites, educational system, and numbers of traveling missionaries from North Africa reinforce the association of Islam with North Africa. The association is even more powerful for the Fulbe, who trace their own ethnic origins to Sidi Uqba bin Nafi, the seventh-century Arab conqueror of North Africa and founder in 663 or 664 of the historic capital city of Qairouan in Tunisia.[17]

The primary role of the ruler as leader of the Muslim community is dramatized by an event that occurred during the reign of the previous ruler of Ngaoundéré, Laamiido Issa Maigari Yaya. Laamiido Issa Maigari Yaya generally played his role as government functionary faithfully, with one major exception. The beginning and ending of the holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from sunup to sundown, are correctly determined by the sighting of the new moon. In an effort to exert control over the Muslim community and to plan ahead for the religious celebrations, the national government reserves for itself the right to determine in advance the beginning and ending of Ramadan. In 1997, this posed a dilemma for the faithful because the new moon had not yet been sighted on the evening designated for the end of the month of fasting by the government. As faithful servant of the state, the *laamiido* was expected to begin the celebration of Ramadan's end on the date predetermined by the government. As leader of the Muslim community, however, the *laamiido* postponed the culmination of the month of Ramadan until the new moon had been sighted on the following evening. The *laamiido*'s disobedience and independence led to murmurings that the government could remove him from office, but his popularity with the local Muslim community was greatly enhanced. Laamiido Issa Maigari Yaya died only a month later, and so the ripple effects of this action were left undetermined. What is clear, however, is that the ruler's continued leadership is dependent upon his position as head of the Islamic community.

This role also provides opportunities for disputing the authority of the national government, as suggested above. The celebration of *Juulde Layhaaji* is one of the primary expressions of this role. It does so first by bringing him into the public eye, a practice which is expected in the modern era of "multiparty" politics. One must woo the electorate. In the past, the *laamiido* was only rarely seen in public, gaining greater power through sequestration within the palace walls and the mystery which was thereby engendered. In the modern era, he must leave the palace and solicit the support of the people, although when he does so he is completely swathed in clothing, hemmed in by servants, and protected by amulets making it difficult to say that he is truly in the public eye. The palace itself since 1993 has undergone a transformation from a historical form that cast deep shadows to a modernist form that reveals and frames the ruler.[18]

Similarly, the city tour and *fantasia* are opportunities for the expression of support, which the people return to the *laamiido* as a measure of their respect for him. The importance of this display as a "vote of confidence" in the rule of a contemporary *laamiido* is exemplified by the *fantasia* held by the *laamiido* of Banyo, a city situated southwest of Ngaoundéré, in early December 2000. This particular display occurred during the simultaneous visit to the city of a number of rulers, including the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré. Although I was not able to make the trip, and therefore was not able to observe this event myself, the *laamiido* of Ngaoundéré's noblemen and servants enthusiastically described it upon their return. With notes of amazement in their voices, the various noblemen and servants informed me that several hundred horsemen had performed *fantasia* for the assembled rulers. The general consensus was that the ruler of Banyo must truly be a man of great power and importance.

One final example serves to reinforce our understanding of the contemporary relevance of the ceremonies attendant to *Juulde Layhaaji*, extending beyond the purely religious into the realm of the political. On the fourth day of the celebrations, I once again followed along with an equestrian tour of the city, this time led by the crown prince. The procession veered off to the north of the main thoroughfare, entering a neighborhood outside the historic city referred to commonly as "Le Petit Marché." This neighborhood was created in the French colonial period to house southern Cameroonians working for the administration. With massive relocation from the south commencing after the completion of the northern terminus of the Trans-Cameroon Railway in Ngaoundéré in 1973, the Petit Marché district has since become the most densely populated and

commercially vibrant area of the city. As the crown prince rode through this crowded part of town, drunks and prostitutes fell out of the bars to voice their support, as did the numerous merchants and neighborhood children. A decidedly un-Islamic scene, the procession nevertheless continued through the area claiming it as part of the royal domain, and in the boisterous response seeming to receive the support of these more recent transplants. Such a performance cannot be relegated to the realm of the religious, nor can it be comprehended through the lens of history. One could interpret the scene as simply the raucous enjoyment of a cultural performance. One could also see it, however, as a contemporary statement of sovereignty, extending the domain to include not only peoples and places ruled in times past, but also over more recent immigrants, regardless of origin or religion. In this manner, the significance of the ruler is extended beyond a purely historical figure, as this area of the city has no relationship to such history, into a figure capable of garnering support in the present and therefore of holding contemporary political significance.

Conclusion

These celebrations seem in many ways archaic, and perhaps for this very reason they persist as purely cultural events, representing the heritage of a people. To oppose them would be to oppress local identity and to offend religious sensibilities. Such opposition would furthermore seem hypervigilant to the point of paranoia, signaling the weakness and vulnerability of the state. The celebrations ostensibly bear no political content, for they mark a religious event and the moral leadership of a government representative. But this representative's unique intermediary status between the government and the population, as he himself is descended from the precolonial rulers of the area, creates a more problematic scenario than either the *laamiido* or the state pretends.

Even that which seems most anachronistic serves the contemporary purpose of emphasizing the current ruler's position as the most recent member of a lineage that gained its right to rule from the Islamic theocracy of the Sokoto Caliphate. Historical continuity conveys legitimacy and a deep connection to the local population. In fact, as has been suggested likewise for rulers in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, government recognition "gives an imprint of legality and not necessarily legitimacy to the office of the traditional ruler."[19] The *laamiido*, through his roles as spiritual and moral leader, represents the public with a legitimacy that the

externally imposed provincial governor cannot hope to match. The tour of the city and *fantasia* serve as primary means to publicly proclaim that role and receive public approval. That is, these acts are aesthetic manifestations of sovereignty.

Acting against this measure of legitimacy, however, is the lack of coincidence in political support between the *laamiido* and the population that he represents. The *laamiido*, perhaps understanding the source of his paycheck, is a supporter of the ruling CPDM/RDPC party. The population of Ngaoundéré, on the other hand, are primarily supporters of the northern Cameroon-based NUDP/UPDM opposition party. The ability of the ruling party to acquire the official support of traditional rulers has been an important means by which it maintains power, but one that has also served to create serious rifts between many populations in Cameroon and the rulers who represent them. As with the Northwest Region, however, such disagreement focuses on the individual ruler's decision-making, and not on the legitimacy of the institution itself.[20] Were the *laamiido*'s political affinities to reflect those of the population, the situation might become increasingly a concern for the government.

From the perspective of the state, such expressions of sovereignty are to some extent always worrisome. At what point do they transition from primarily cultural displays based in the past to political displays that call for action in the present? Or in Victor Turner's terms, at what point does the subjunctive cross over into the indicative? Lying just under the surface is the state's fear of self-determination. That the state, in fact, recognizes the latent potential for challenging its sovereignty in this moment is signaled by the disruptive, even appropriative, actions of the governor.

The postcolonial state is largely based upon boundaries drawn in the colonial period, and as with most other African states these boundaries in Cameroon enclose numerous precolonial polities and identities. But the postcolonial state's claim to territory, and the people and resources within that territory, are at odds with indigenous conceptions of power that privilege populations first and foremost. Thus, at present, the *laamiido* may make claims upon the people, while the state maintains its claim upon the territory. What is suggested here is that there are dual sovereignties in existence, which come into focus depending upon particular circumstances. This implies that the *laamiido* is more than simply a local representative of the state as intended, but also that the state cannot claim the absolute authority to which it pretends. Ostensibly, the role of the *laamiido* is to garner the support of the population for himself as local representative of

the state, and thence to convey such support to the state. This in itself is a fragmentation of sovereignty, devolving its exercise of authority to the local level. The crucial link, therefore, is the point at which the *laamiido* chooses to debase himself before the governor, accepting that his authority is not absolute and extending the support shown him ultimately to the state. Art then becomes the arena of contestation in which at some point local sovereignty not only could be claimed, but also that the state's sovereignty might be rejected.

Notes

1. I have chosen to employ the Hausa form of this individual's name, rather than the form employed in his native language of Fulfulde, as it is the one most commonly used in the scholarly literature.
2. Nantung Jua, "The State, Traditional Rulers and 'Another Democracy' in Post-Colonial Cameroon," *Africa Insight* 32.4 (2002): 4.
3. Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15.
4. See, for example, David L. Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, "The Third World and a Problem with Borders," in ed. Mark E. Denham and Mark Owen Lombardi, *Perspectives on Third-World Sovereignty: The Postmodern Paradox* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 87–91.
5. Mark E. Denham and Mark Owen Lombardi, "Perspectives on Third-World Sovereignty: Problems with(out) Borders," in *Perspectives on Third-World Sovereignty: The Postmodern Paradox*, 3.
6. The term *siirku* is most likely derived from the Arabic *shirk* meaning "polytheism, idolatry." Closely related is the term *siiri*, meaning "magic, evil intent." F. W. Taylor, *Fulani-English Dictionary* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1995), 175; Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Arabic English* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), 468.
7. Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in *Rites of Power* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 13–38, 16.
8. The best known study of the founding and precolonial history of Ngaoundéré is in Eldridge Mohammadou, *Fulbe hoseere: Les royaumes fulbe du plateau de l'Adamaoua au XIX siècle: Tibati, Tignère, Banyo, Ngaoundéré* (African Languages and Ethnography 8. Tokyo: ILCAA, 1978). Mohammadou's work can be criticized, however, for relying too uncritically on oral tradition.

9. This dynamic is explored further in Mark Dike DeLancey, "Between Mosque and Palace: Defining Identity Through Ritual Movement in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 208.4 (Dec. 2012): 987; Ketil Fred Hansen, *The Historical Construction of a Political Culture in Ngaoundéré, Northern Cameroon*, Ph.D. diss. (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2000), 96.
10. One might also consider this aspect of concealment as a key aesthetic of power across numerous cultures of sub-Saharan Africa, an issue pursued by Mary Nooter Roberts in her publication *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993).
11. Ralph E. Giesey, "Models of Rulership in French Royal Ceremonial," in ed. Sean Wilentz, *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 53.
12. Jean-Claude Froelich, "Le commandement et l'organisation sociale chez les Foulkbé de l'Adamaoua (Cameroun)," *Etudes Camerounaises* 45–46 (Sept.-Dec. 1954): 26–33.
13. Donald R. Wright, "'What Do You Mean There Were No Tribes in Africa?': Thoughts on Boundaries: And Related Matters: In Precolonial Africa," *History in Africa* 26 (1999): 415–16.
14. Dominique Malaquais, *Architecture, pouvoir et dissidence au Cameroun* (Paris: Karthala, 2002), 40–42.
15. Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition, and the State in Africa* (London: Published for the International African Institute by Oxford University Press, 1971), 66.
16. Victor Turner, "Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film, and Spectacle in Cultural Performance," in *The Anthropology of Performance* (Performance Studies Series 4. New York: PAJ Publications, 1988), 26–27.
17. Thierno Diallo, "Origine et migration des peuls avant le XIXe siècle," *Annales de la faculté des lettres et sciences humaines* (Dakar) 2 (1972): 131–33. With respect more specifically to Cameroon, see Eldridge Mohammadou, *Ray ou Rey-Bouba: Les Yillaga de la Bénoué* (Traditions historiques des Foulbé de l'Adamâwa. Garoua: Musée dynamique du Nord-Cameroun, ONAREST, 1979), 137; *L'Histoire des Peuls Feroobe du Diamaré: Maroua et Pette* (Les Traditions Historiques des Peuls dans l'Adamaoua 1. Niamey: Centre regional de documentation pour la tradition orale, 1970), 146–47.
18. For a broader exploration of the act of arson that destroyed the old entrance and precipitated the construction of the new one, see Hansen, *Historical Construction*, 156–67.
19. Nicodemus Fru Awasom, "Traditional Rulers, Legitimacy and Shifting Loyalties: The Case of Northwest Chiefs in Cameroon," in ed. Olufemi Vaughan, *Indigenous Political Structures and Governance in Africa* (Ibadan: Sefer, 203), 348.
20. Ibid., 347; Jua, "The State," 7–8, 10.