

The Spread of the *Sooro*

Symbols of Power in the Sokoto Caliphate

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The *sooro* (pl. *sooroji*), a pillared hall constructed of earth, serves as the entrance to nearly every palace now existing in northern Cameroon (Figure 1). Usually twice the height and broader than the standard building types of the region, the deep shadows cast by its windowless walls and broad eaves engender a sense of mystery. The grandeur of the *sooro* is associated with the pre-colonial power of the Fulbe rulers of northern Cameroon.¹

The *sooro* is understood, both popularly in Cameroon as well as in scholarly literature, as an architectural type introduced by the Fulbe when they conquered northern Cameroon in the early nineteenth century and incorporated it within the Sokoto caliphate (Figure 2). The first *sooro* was built at Rey at the turn of the nineteenth century, when it was an independent state. It was only in the decade just preceding colonization, however, that Ngaoundéré followed Rey's example. It was not for lack of ability that so few *sooroji* were built in the pre-colonial era; it was because the rulers of northern Cameroon did not have the right to do so within the caliphate.

It was only after German colonization when the rest of the Sokoto caliphate was severed from northern Cameroon, providing its rulers with a degree of autonomy, that the *sooro*

became widely used in northern Cameroon. In the late colonial period and during the post-1960 era of independence, the *sooro* became so popular that even non-Fulbe rulers began to make use of it in a symbolic battle for authority and resources.

This article traces the proliferation of *sooroji* in northern Cameroon since the early nineteenth century to suggest that the transformation of the architectural symbolism of the *sooro* presents a complicated story of power under colonialism. A regional analysis of the *sooro* helps explain both the extent of dissemination of this architectural type and its formal transformation and shifting political valence, particularly in the context of ethnic group dynamics during colonial rule.

Political Authority in Cameroon

The Sokoto caliphate originated in 1804, when the Fulbe Islamic scholar Shehu Usumanu dan Fodio declared an Islamic reformist movement, or jihad, in northern Nigeria. The state that he founded eventually spread to encompass all of northern Nigeria, the northern Republic of Benin, and southern Niger, with the Shehu as caliph, or spiritual and political leader. In 1806 the various groups of seminomadic pastoral Fulbe residing in northern Cameroon joined the jihad under the leadership of the respected Islamic scholar Modibo Adama. The region was incorporated into the larger caliphate as the emirate of Adamawa, named after its

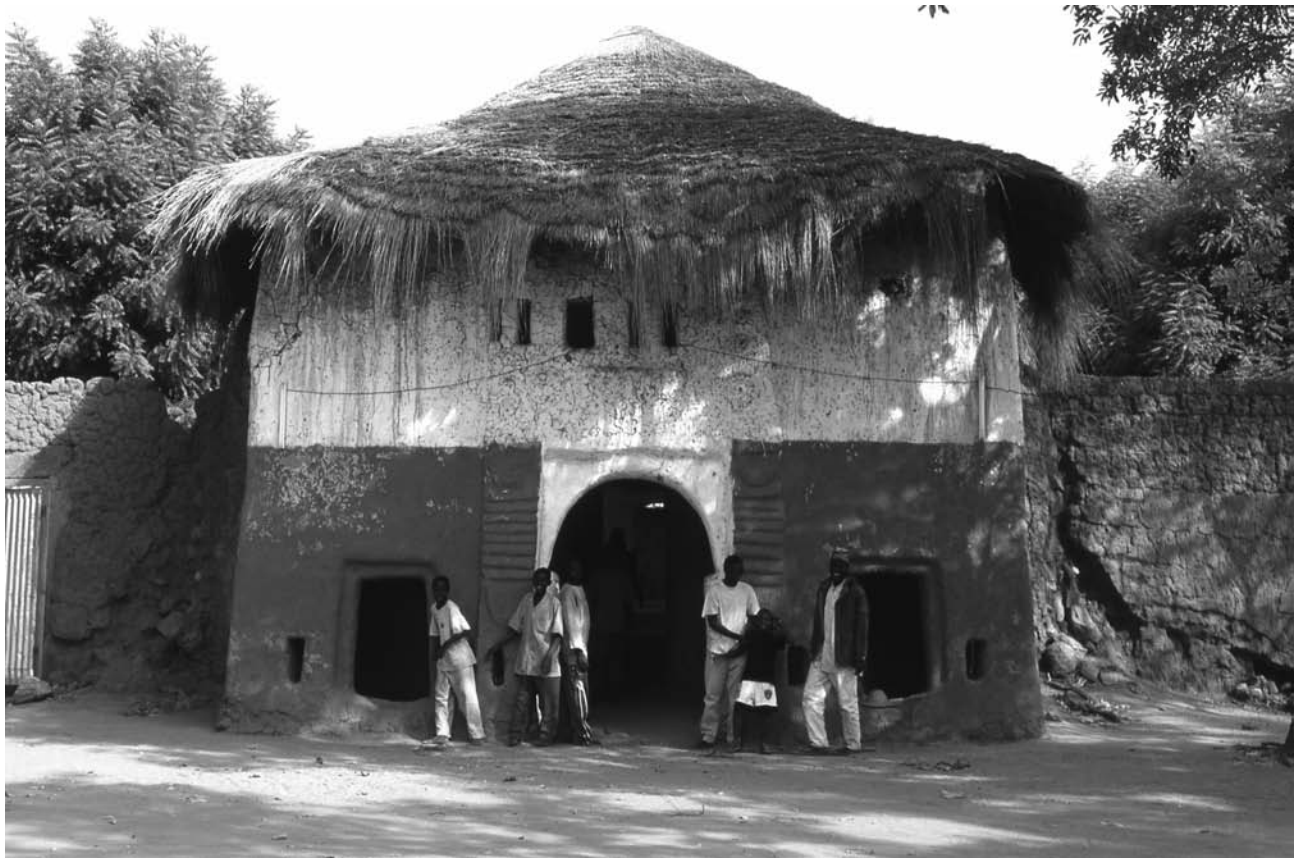


Figure 1 Palace Entrance, Boundang-Touroua, Cameroon, ca. 1914 (photo: author, 2000)

founder.² The various Fulbe leaders of the region founded subemirates, owing allegiance to the emir, or governor, Modibo Adama and ultimately to the caliph. Throughout the history of the caliphate, however, there was tension between the centralized rule of the caliph and the autonomy of the local rulers.

Construction of a *sooro* as the entrance to one's palace was the prerogative of only the caliph and the emirs.³ This elite use of the *sooro* can be dated back to the inception of the Sokoto caliphate and drew upon sumptuary laws of preceding regional powers, most particularly the previously independent Hausa states of northern Nigeria, which formed the core of the caliphate. In nineteenth-century northern Cameroon, only the rulers of Ngaoundéré and Rey bucked this sumptuary law, constructing *sooroji* to indicate their autonomy from the centralized power of the caliph.

With colonization, first by Germany in 1901 and later by the French from 1916 to 1960, the subemirs, or *ardo'en*, of northern Cameroon were cut off from the main body of the Sokoto caliphate in British-colonized northern Nigeria.⁴



Figure 2 Map of North and Adamawa Provinces of Cameroon (author)

The tangible powers of the *ardo'en* to adjudicate, tax, and command military forces, were replaced by a more symbolic articulation of power based on religious leadership and cultural tradition. This shift in power relations may be understood in terms of the distinction between authority and power. Yoshihito Shimada, drawing upon M. G. Smith and ultimately Max Weber, distinguishes between power as the ability to decide the political policies of the state, while authority is merely the ability to carry out administrative orders of a political superior. In the colonial period, rulers of pre-colonial states became more autocratic due to their empowerment as a part of the British colonial administrative system but they lacked the power to effect policies on their own as political heads of state.⁵ The authority of the *ardo'en* was strictly curtailed and limited to the boundaries of their respective regions by the colonial rulers. The *ardo'en* had little control over how their domains were defined and they had no authority to enforce sumptuary laws.

It is in this period immediately following colonization that the Fulbe rulers of northern Cameroon constructed *sooroji* in a symbolic battle for colonial resources and political representation. Early-twentieth-century examples may be seen at Banyo, Kontcha, Boundang-Touroua, and Tignère. By the late colonial and early post-independence periods, non-Fulbe rulers at Galim, Ngadjiwan, and Ngangha also adopted this architectural type to symbolically mitigate the power of the Fulbe. The efflorescence of the *sooro* is one element of a symbolic warfare carried on during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, when rulers lost much of their power. As a symbol it crossed ethnic boundaries, losing much of its historical specificity in a struggle for relevance across a shifting political environment.

Morphology of the *Sooro*

Galina Zoubko provides three meanings of the term *sooro*: first, as a story or level; second as a multistoried house, including “a house of earth with a flat roof;” and third, as “a tower in a fortified enclosure.”⁶ Zoubko identifies its etymological origins in Arabic, most likely from the Arabic verb سَوَّرَ [*sawwara*], “to enclose, fence in, wall in, surround with a railing or wall.” Furthermore, سَوْر [*sūr*] is a noun derived from the previously mentioned verb meaning “wall; enclosure, fence, railing.”⁷ The Arabic origin of this term may be the ultimate reason for its widespread use, as variations of it occur in many west and central African languages across the Sahel. In the immediate area of Cameroon, both the Hausa and Kanuri languages have their own cognates with similar meanings. It is commonly accepted by scholars that

the word *sooro*, and the architectural type it designates, was adopted by the Fulbe from either Hausa or Kanuri, as a result of long-term cohabitation.⁸

While authors have often pointed to the structure of the *sooro* as its defining feature, the Arabic etymology of the term suggests that historically, its function may have been its primary quality. Zoubko's third definition may have been the meaning originally adopted from Arabic, with solidity of construction and an imposing countenance becoming the eventual defining formal characteristics of the type. The imposing scale of the form in contemporary palaces, flanked by high walls that reach up to 30 feet, certainly resemble a fortified enclosure and connote the ruler's historic control of the military.

In contemporary usage, *sooro* in northern Cameroon refers to an earthen structure with an earthen ceiling. In contradiction to Zoubko's second definition, the *sooro* in this region is normally only a single story, usually of monumental proportions. While a rectangular plan is the norm, *sooro* is applied to both circular and rectangular structures as long as they have ceilings, which are usually supported by one or more earthen pillars. The structural support for this ceiling may be either of two varieties. Infrequently, one finds a series of arches spanning the pillars and walls that supports either a coffered ceiling or a shallow dome (Figure 3). More common is a system of wooden beams set between the pillars and the walls as the framework for a coffered ceiling, which is created by filling the spaces between the beams with slightly smaller secondary beams (Figure 4). The spaces in between these smaller beams are filled in with slender sticks laid in intricate herringbone patterns. This wood, drying to a silvery hue, often becomes blackened over time by the smoke from fires lit for warmth during the rainy season. Woven grass mats are laid over the coffered wood structures. Finally, earth is laid on top to create the primary roof.

A conical, pitched, or hipped thatched secondary roof is usually placed on top of the flat earthen roof of a *sooro*, although this may be omitted in the drier climate of the Far North Province and parts of the North Province. The beams to which the thatching is attached, depending upon the height of the structure, may need the additional support of an internal framework. The thatched roof protects the interior from the heavy rainfall on the Adamawa plateau of northern Cameroon. The specific form of the roof, however, can be a prominent marker of identity, whether regional, ethnic, or otherwise.

The ceiling reduces the interior's height, making it more easily heated. This is particularly important on the Adamawa plateau, with its cool rainy season. The space between the ceiling and thatched roof can also be used for storage, particularly of grain.⁹ This is also a function of ceilings in the



Figure 3 Interior arches of Jawleeru Faada (council chamber), palace of Tignère, 1920s (photo: author, 2000)



Figure 4 Coffered ceiling of Jawleeru Njakmukon (Room of three exits), palace of Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, ca. 1887–1901 (photo: author, 2000)

Cameroon Grassfields, to the southwest, as evoked in a 1980 novel by Kenjo Jumbam:

Our compound consisted of two houses facing each other with a small courtyard in between them. The walls were of bamboo and mud, and roofed with grass. Each house had a wide veranda all round it and the roof was tall, forming almost a second floor. But this was never lived in. It was used as a store for maize and groundnuts and millet. The door into the second floor was on the veranda and you climbed up to it using a portable bamboo ladder.¹⁰

Fire prevention is another frequently cited explanation for earthen ceilings.¹¹ Even if the thatched roof burns, as frequently happens when a spark from a cooking fire lands in the grass material, the fire can be halted by the earthen exterior of the ceiling.

Introduction of the *Sooro* as a Royal Type in Cameroon

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, small groups of nomadic pastoralist Fulbe entered northern Cameroon from northern Nigeria, leading their herds of cattle to new pastures. Through military conquest and alliance building, the first Fulbe state in Cameroon was established at Rey, in what is now North Province. According to the account of the emir of Rey's secretary and advisor, Alhajji Hamadjoda Abdoulaye, the ruler Bouba Ndjidda (r. 1798–1866) built the first *sooro* in Cameroon as the entrance to his palace when he established the city of Rey in 1799 (Figure 5).¹² The original building is no longer extant, although it is said that the entrance to the palace is a faithful reproduction of the original.

Photographs in the collections of the Musée de l'Homme and La Documentation Française in Paris show the entrance has indeed been rebuilt multiple times even during the past century.¹³ They also show that the form has been generally maintained. Minor changes were made in details of the thatched roofing, including, most noticeably, the development of the netting and acroteria, which are absent in the earliest photos. These elements were apparent on structures inside the palace, in photographs taken in 1932 by Marcel Griaule, but did not appear at that time on the entrance *sooro*. They had been incorporated, however, at least by the time of independence in 1961.¹⁴ Entrances identical to that at the palace at Rey were built at the ruler's alternate palaces at Tcholliré and at Nassarawo, originally called Rey Manga.

From the exterior, at least half of the structure's height appears composed of the thatched roof, which is covered with a net woven of the same grasses. The net serves an



Figure 5 Palace entrance, Rey, Cameroon, originally ca. 1799 (photo: author, 2000)

aesthetic purpose and maintains the integrity of the thatching in the fierce winds that sometimes whip across the savannah. The roof, as a whole, casts dark and ominous shadows over the doorway of the palace. This peculiar style of the *sooro*, with a thatched roof featuring three basketry acroteria, has become synonymous with the palace architecture of Rey.

The construction of a large and majestic *sooro* at the entrance to the palace at Rey preceded the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate by five years and declared Bouba Ndjidda's independent status in that land on the eastern periphery of the Fulbe world. Geographer Christian Seignobos notes that in Rey it was illegal for any commoner to construct a *sooro* as part of his residence; the form was strictly reserved for the ruler.¹⁵

Rey's later relationship with the caliphate, and particularly with Modibo Adama, was tumultuous and resulted in wars in 1836 and 1837. As Martin Z. Njeuma put it, "[t]he crux of the matter lay equally in Rai's [*sic*] love for untrammelled independence to manage its own affairs, and in its remote geographical position."¹⁶ Rey's independence was maintained well into the colonial era by the ruler Bouba Djama'a (r. 1901–45), who struck a bargain with the French, in large measure in return for support in World War I, whereby he would submit to their authority in exchange for an extraordinary degree of autonomy. Even today, the emir of Rey enjoys greater autonomy than any other traditional ruler in Cameroon.

Royal Symbolism of the *Sooro*

Architectural form and materials served as important signifiers of social distinction in the Sokoto caliphate, although

these signifiers could vary by region and as a reflection of differing constituent cultures. In particular, an emphasis on the permanency of earthen construction in the historically sedentary Hausa culture that had previously ruled the heartland of the caliphate in northern Nigeria was confronted with the cultural preference for impermanent vegetal architecture in the historically seminomadic Fulbe culture of the new rulers of the Sokoto caliphate. In a fascinating reversal of Western valuation of materials, the Fulbe in early-nineteenth-century northern Cameroon used relatively impermanent thatched construction as a sign of wealth and identity. Islamic scholar Modibbo Bassoro, first appointed a judge of the subemirate of Garoua in 1941, reported:

It was only in the era of Malloum Issa [r. 1866–94] that they began to construct houses and the walls of the saré [residential compound] in earth in the city of Garoua. It was not that they were ignorant of how to construct them, because Ardo Tayrou [r. 1810–35] had already used them when they first settled at Garoua-Yayréwa, and the Kanuri and Hausa constructed their houses in earth. But because the Fulbe preferred their houses in straw and the enclosures of the saré [homestead] in secco [woven grass mats]. For some that even constituted a sign of social importance, because the act of reconstructing the houses every year proved that they possessed a great number of servants to do it.¹⁷

Bassoro is recounting events that occurred at least 150 years ago, but his narrative makes certain important points. First, it was largely the Kanuri and Hausa populations who historically built earthen structures. Both were sedentary populations with extensive architectural traditions. Second,

long after they had permanently settled, the Fulbe population preferred to build in less durable materials. The palace of the ruler was the main exception to this rule. Palaces were usually built in earth, emulating the palaces of the Hausa rulers of northern Nigeria that the Fulbe had conquered to establish the caliphate.

Bassoro's account is corroborated by the German traveler Heinrich Barth's observations on his visit to Yola, the overwhelmingly Fulbe capital of the entire emirate of Adamawa, in 1854. Barth noted that the city was "a large open place, consisting, with a few exceptions, of conical huts surrounded by spacious courtyards, and even by corn-fields, the houses of the governor and those of his brothers alone being built of clay."¹⁸ Thus, even in the capital of the emirate, the majority of the residences, at least in 1854, were built largely of vegetal materials rather than earth. The sole exceptions, in this Fulbe city, were the palaces of the ruler and his potential successors.

Similarly, in the 1960s Z. R. Dmochowski recorded the congregational mosque of Gurin, Nigeria, as a structure built of wood posts and joists covered with corn stalks, the whole surrounded by a wall of lashed cornstalks.¹⁹ The particular significance of this mosque lies in the fact that Gurin, Modibo Adama's natal home, became the de facto first capital of the emirate in 1809 after he was appointed by the caliph to lead the jihad in Adamawa. Adama left Gurin to establish a new capital in 1831 at Ribadu, before finally settling permanently at Yola in 1839.²⁰ Echoing Bassoro's description of the high-status associations of impermanent building materials amongst the Fulbe of northern Cameroon, Dmochowski explains the unique character of the Gurin mosque:

The remarkable feature concerning the mosque, apart from its architectural value, was the method and organization of its maintenance. Obviously this was determined by the fragility of materials used, but also by punctilious Muslim custom. The whole cornstalk construction was entirely rebuilt every year.²¹

Thus at Gurin, as in northern Cameroon, honor attached to faithful maintenance, which was seen as evidence of the size and capability of the Muslim community. Permanent earthen construction had no such value.

Building in earth was considered a distinctly political act in the nineteenth century. This was evident to Barth at Yola, and it was also evidenced in a complaint lodged by the founder of Adamawa Emirate, Modibbo Adama, against his subordinate, the ruler of Garoua, Ardo Tayrou. One of the accusations against Ardo Tayrou was that "he had surrounded his homestead with a wall of earth, when even Modibbo Adama had not done so."²² Ardo Tayrou recognized that he

had insulted the honor of his superior, and the act of building with earthen walls was one of the reasons for which he was removed from office by Modibbo Adama. While impermanent construction connoted prestige within Adamawa, and in particular as understood by the formerly seminomadic political elite, the more permanent earthen architecture of the palace of Yola bespoke the emir's position vis-à-vis the caliphate as a whole. Emirs throughout northern Nigeria took up residence in the earthen palaces of the defeated Hausa, inheriting their language of architectural symbolism.

The New Palace of Ngaoundéré

At Ngaoundéré, founded in approximately 1835, increasing wealth and the relative autonomy of this geographically remote subemirate led, in a manner similar to Rey, to the construction of a new palace with *sooraji* in the late nineteenth century. The palace was built in its current location during the reign of Mohammadou Abbo (r. 1887–1901). The previous palace had been located a mere 300 meters to the west of the contemporary one, and continued to stand until replaced by the French with a central market in 1938 (Figure 6).²³ Mohammadou Abbo built his new palace on a much grander scale, with higher walls and multiple *sooraji* (Figure 7). The entrance to his palace was the largest traditional structure in the area, both in the extent of area covered and in the height of its peaked roof. It was a large *sooro* with nine pillars arranged in three rows of three. Each of the pillars was decorated with molded and painted designs in low-relief.²⁴ A porch was created in front of the entrance by extending the eaves almost to the ground, supported on a half-circle of double rows of wooden columns. A similar porch existed on the opposite side, leading into the palace proper.

The reason for constructing a new palace so near to the old one is unclear. One may speculate that this new site, being on the eastern edge of the city, was still virgin land available for development. Its repositioning may also be interpreted in terms of the shifting relations between ruler and general population, as well as allegiance to an Islamic or a Fulbe identity.²⁵ A third interpretation might be that comparison of the new larger-scale structure with its smaller predecessor illustrated the increasing power of the ruler and his place within the caliphate hierarchy. One could decipher the rise of Ngaoundéré power as one passed the old palace on the way to the new one.

This last interpretation is supported by the ruler's political maneuvers. Muhammadou Abbo was the first of Ngaoundéré's rulers to refuse to make the customary trip to Yola to receive the official confirmation of his appointment



Figure 6 Palace entrance, original palace of Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, ca. 1835–87 (from Eugène Brussaax and Etienne Muston, “La place à Ngaoundéré,” 1905–7, Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Séries Géo 8Fi347/127)



Figure 7 Entrance to the new palace of Mohammadou Abbo, Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, ca. 1887–1901 (Eugène Brussaax and Etienne Muston, “Entrée du tata du lamido,” 1905–7, Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Séries Géo 8Fi347/115)

from the emir; he merely sent tribute. In doing so, he declared that although he was still nominally under the rule of Yola, he was no mere servant of the emir.²⁶ The construction of his new palace, complete with a grand entry *sooro* and high earthen walls, reinforces this interpretation.

There may be a further element of local political maneuvering to consider. Mohammadou Abbo’s succession to the throne was heavily contested by his nephew Yérîma Bello, the son of the previous ruler Haman Gabdo (r. 1877–87), who spent most of his time as a young man leading

Ngaoundéré’s military forces on expeditions in the western Central African Republic. He clearly expected to inherit the throne upon his father’s death in 1887, but his cousin, Abbo, was chosen instead. Distressed, Yérîma Bello departed for the earlier capital of the subemirate at Boundang-Touroua, approximately 95 miles northwest of Ngaoundéré, where he declared the independence of Boundang-Touroua and set up his own court.²⁷ Mohammadou Abbo’s construction efforts in Ngaoundéré may have been a response to this internal division of the subemirate and the contestation of legitimacy and royal symbolism by Yérîma Bello.²⁸

It is significant that the first *sooroji* in northern Cameroon appear at palaces of rulers who were asserting their autonomy. As noted, the *sooro* at Rey can be interpreted as a declaration of

autonomy, particularly as it was constructed in the pre-caliphate period. Rey’s location at the absolute easternmost limits of the Fulbe diaspora contributed to its ruler’s defiance of the authority of the emir of Yola and his superior, the caliph of Sokoto. Similarly, Ngaoundéré lay at the edge of the Fulbe expansion, to the southeast. Thanks to its distance from the center of power and to its extraordinary wealth, derived primarily from raiding slaves from southern Cameroon and from the Central African Republic in the east, Ngaoundéré was similarly able to flex its independence and adopt the symbols of royalty with relative impunity. Unlike the *sooroji* at all other palaces in northern Cameroon, these two were introduced prior to colonial conquest. They reflect the patterns of power and privilege within a Sokoto caliphate that was still vibrant, albeit plagued by internal conflict.

The *Sooro* as a Twentieth-century Architectural Type

Other subemirates followed suit in building palace *sooroji* after the German conquest in 1901 severed northern Cameroon from the rest of the Sokoto caliphate. In this new political environment, the *ardo’en* ironically acquired a de facto independence from the Sokoto caliphate, despite having lost much of their real political and military power to the Germans. While the *sooro* had been restricted in use largely to the most important rulers within the nineteenth-century caliphate, the subemirs of northern Cameroon found

that they could employ this symbol of power with impunity in the colonial period. It is unlikely that the colonizers fully understood the shifts in political symbolism represented by these architectural changes, and the former overlords in Nigeria were no longer able to extend their authority across the colonial borders. During the colonial period the *sooro* emerged as a widespread architectural type in Cameroon, representing the autonomy of these former substates. Likewise, the subemirs of northern Cameroon, who in the pre-colonial era were designated by the more generic term *ardo* or “leader,” began in the colonial period to adopt the title of *laamiido*, or emir, indicating their newfound status in the colonial era vis-à-vis their former overlords in Nigeria.

Similar processes of pre-colonial hierarchies being overturned on a symbolic level occurred in many parts of Africa during the colonial period. One of the best-known examples is the pair of beaded boots acquired by the British Museum in 1904. These were created for the Yoruba ruler, the elepe of Epe, who was deemed not of proper status to wear beaded regalia by his Yoruba peers. The British, in an attempt to maintain status quo, seized the footwear. Henry Drewel pointed out, “[i]n nineteenth-century southern Yorubaland, rulers instituted laws prohibiting commoners from using certain items of dress associated with royalty and chiefs.”²⁹ One assumes that such laws were established in the face of challenges to royal prerogative on symbolic grounds. Indeed, Drewel also observed that there was an “explosion in Yorùbá beadwork” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁰

A closer similarity to the situation in northern Cameroon at the turn of the twentieth century, however, is seen in royal imagery of the Dahomey kingdom. After the French abolished the kingdom in 1900, artists who owed allegiance to the royal house necessarily looked elsewhere for patrons. As a result, royal art forms, materials, and imagery became available to nonroyal families. As Suzanne Preston Blier explained for asen: “Initially a mainly royal tradition, figural brass *asen* began to be commissioned by non-royal families in the twentieth century when the power of Dahomey kings had been largely dissipated.”³¹ Likewise, the Yemadje family of royal tailors began creating appliqué for the general public after the French conquest.³² As in northern Cameroon, those who had not previously been accorded the right to possess and display royal regalia suddenly gained access to these forms and materials, as a result of colonial intervention in the political system.

One of the earliest examples of this colonial-era expansion of royal prerogative in northern Cameroon can be seen at Banyo, some 125 miles southwest of Ngaoundéré, near the border with Nigeria. The palace of Banyo was rebuilt in

the twentieth century, probably in the early 1920s, during the second reign of Modibbo Yahya (r. 1904–11 and 1917–34).³³ The architect was Mohamadou Maiguini, who learned his trade in Kano. Maiguini was particularly known for his mastery of the construction of the *sooro*, and he quickly became renowned throughout the region, later being hired to construct the palaces of Dodéo and Kontcha.³⁴

At Banyo, Maiguini constructed the palace entrance as a *sooro* (Figure 8). The massiveness of the four central pillars and the emphasis on the earthen arches crossing the central axis create the sense of an extended hallway. To further this experience, walls have been erected more recently between the pillars and outer walls to create four small guard chambers at the corners of the *sooro*. The central space on each side between the two corner rooms has been left open as a storage area.

Maiguini also constructed the audience hall and throne room as *sooroji*, although again with a character that differed from most other examples in the region. He connected the



Figure 8 Palace entrance, Banyo, Cameroon, early 1920s (photo: author, 2000)



Figure 9 Jawleeru Faada (council chamber) of the palace of Banyo, Cameroon, early 1920s (photo: Virginia H. DeLancey, 2000)

pillars and walls with arches rather than the more common method employing wood beams. The central bay of the audience hall is covered by a dome, and the plastered ribs have porcelain plates embedded in them in the style of northern Nigeria (Figure 9). This appears to be the unique instance of this technique in northern Cameroon. A similar effect, however, was achieved at Tibati and Tchéboa, where the summits of ceilings and crossings of arches have been emphasized with the placement of the disc-shaped basketry cover that Fulbe women use on calabashes of milk (Figure 10). The dome at Banyo has recently been embellished by the introduction of a chandelier.

The throne room is a single open space, without the pillars typically required to support the ceiling of a *sooro*, displaying a sophisticated comprehension of vaulting (Figure 11). Indeed, this room corresponds to what Allan Leary has described in the context of the palace in Kano as, “an elaborate form of *daurin guga* construction, of a type referred to as *kafar ashirin* (twenty half-arches) or *rijiyar (goma) sha shida*

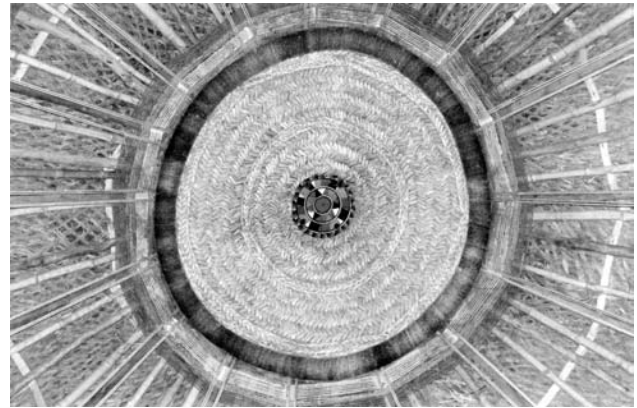


Figure 10 Jawleeru Faada (council chamber), palace of Tchéboa, ceiling featuring a lid used to cover calabashes of food, Tchéboa, Cameroon, late 1990s addition to mid-twentieth-century structure (photo: author, 2000)



Figure 11 Throne room of the palace of Banyo, Cameroon, early 1920s (photo: Virginia H. DeLancey, 2000)

(sixteen ‘wells’ or coffers, between arch crossings).³⁵ The ability to create such masterful compositions, in a Hausa context, is evidence of architectural genius, or *gwaninta*, and may be recognized by appending the honorific title *gwani* to the name of the master mason.³⁶ The experience at Banyo has been modified recently, however, by placing white-washed plywood elements, covering the original and more elaborate ceiling, in the interstices of the arches.

The expansion of the palace at Banyo occurred at almost exactly the same time as the radical reconstruction of the palace of Foumban, some 95 miles southwest of Banyo in the Grassfields, under the renowned ruler Sultan Njoya (r. 1888–1933) (Figure 12). This was rebuilt after the old palace of Foumban was destroyed by fire in 1914; however new architectural idioms were joined with those of the Grassfields by the architect Ibrahim Njoya to address an expanded audience. In particular, the exterior speaks the language of German colonial architecture, drawn from the model of the governor’s residence in Buea, combined with a reference to the semicircular pavilion in the audience courtyard of the previous palace of Foumban. The interior uses a structural system of pillars and arches that looks more to the north, albeit on a monumental scale (Figure 13). Ibrahim Njoya appears to have used the idiom of the *sooro* for the central throne room of the new palace.

This connection with the north is made poignant by the fact that in the early years of his reign, Sultan Njoya received military support from Banyo in fending off a challenge to his throne. He continued to employ northern cavalry throughout his reign and converted to Islam, as did much of his court. Sultan Njoya even requested that the caliph of Sokoto send him an emir’s flag and Islamic scholars in an attempt to ally

himself visually and politically with northern emirates. That alliance might have been based on the support he received from Banyo and motivated by his search for an advantage over other Grassfields kings in the competition for colonial resources. Ibrahim Njoya’s building of a *sooro* is an instance of the expanded use of this symbolic form in the competition for colonial resources. Ironically, Sultan Njoya evidently used this form to indicate his participation in the caliphate at the same time that the Fulbe of northern Cameroon were employing the *sooro* as a declaration of autonomy.³⁷

The current entrance of the palace of Kontcha was also constructed during the reign of Emir Souidi (r. 1920–49). Kontcha had only become an emirate after its separation from Banyo by the Germans during the reign of Emir Ahmadou (r. ca. 1905–8). Its new status was indicated architecturally by moving the entrance of the former governor’s palace so that it faced the mosque to create an appropriate orientation for the procession of the emir to the congregational prayers each Friday. The new entrance was built in the form of a *sooro*, with pairs of arched openings flanking the rectangular portal of the porch (Figure 14). Three other *sooroji* were also built within the palace; these served as a meeting chamber for the weekly council or *faada*, a room for the emir to receive important visitors and to relax, and a transitional space connecting the public and private areas of the palace. The construction boom at the palace of Kontcha reflected its new status as an emirate, and the palace of Banyo served as the model of Kontcha’s new royal architecture. Indeed, these new *sooroji* were constructed by Maiguini, or Baba Hausa as he was called locally, the architect of the new palace of Banyo.

Since Maiguini is said to have trained as an architect in Kano, it is interesting to note that certain peculiarities of



Figure 12 Façade of the palace of King Njoya, Foumban, Cameroon, 1917–21 (photo: author, 1996)

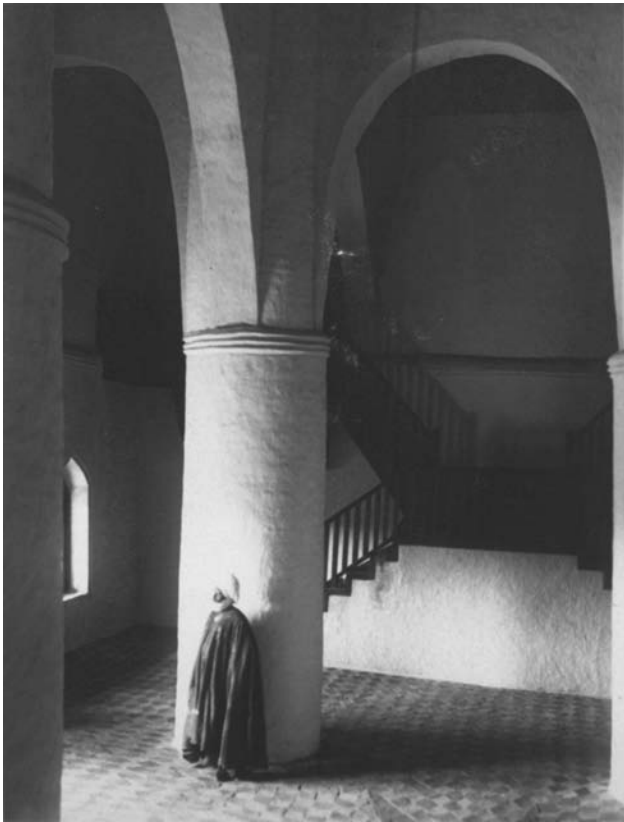


Figure 13 King Njoya standing in the throne hall of the new palace, Fomban, Cameroon, 1917–21 (Anna Rein-Wuhrmann, “Im neuen Palast, nach 1917,” ca. 1920–21, Basel Mission Archives, QE–30.006.0033)



Figure 14 Palace entrance, Kontcha, Cameroon, ca. 1920–49 (photo: author, 2000)

his style bear resemblance to Hausa architecture, rather than to most Fulbe palaces in northern Cameroon. His use of a dome with inlaid ceramic dishes for the audience hall of Banyo, and the *kafar ishirin* ceiling for that palace’s throne room, are characteristics of this style. Certain decorative elements at Kontcha, such as large flat disc reliefs, are unusual

in the northern Cameroon repertoire; they are typical of northern Nigerian architecture and perhaps are a reference in less-expensive earthen relief to the common practice of plastering ceramic plates into the wall surface, similar to Maiguini’s treatment of the audience hall of Banyo palace.

As at Kontcha, the entrance to the palace of Boundang-Touroua was built not long after 1914, when that emirate was separated from Ngaoundéré by the German colonial administration (see Figure 1).³⁸ The Germans installed Mohammadou as the first emir, and he reigned for the next sixty-eight years. During his reign the current entrance to the palace was constructed. As in Ngaoundéré, the ceiling is supported by thick timber beams. In 2000, the roof, however, appeared fairly low, reducing the overall height of the exterior: the internal supports of the thatched roof had splayed, causing it to sink down on top of the earthen ceiling of the building. With its original higher pitched roof, this *sooro* would have rivaled the exterior height of the one at Ngaoundéré, proclaiming its equivalent status after the German-enforced separation of the two emirates.

While perhaps rivaling Ngaoundéré’s palace in height, the entrance to Boundang-Touroua is nevertheless formally distinct, most notably in the shorter grass employed for thatching and in the absence of Ngaoundéré’s extended eaves and cap. The shape of the roof is a primary indicator of ethnicity and regional identity in northern Cameroon. The roofs of buildings built by the Bata, the largest non-Fulbe population of Boundang-Touroua, differ significantly from those of the Mboum in Ngaoundéré. These indigenous traditions have shaped the rooflines of what are otherwise essentially Hausa buildings built by Fulbe patrons. A clear example of the use of roofs to visually signify ethnicity may be seen at nearby Tchéboa, located about 15 miles east of Boundang-Touroua. A 1980s project to transplant populations from the desiccated Far North Province to the more fertile North Province has resulted in a large immigrant population in Tchéboa. This influx is readily apparent from the distinct style of the house roofs in their neighborhood, located to the west and to the south of the main town (Figure 15). The distinctive form of Ngaoundéré roofs may be seen in the rooms of the Hôtel le Relais St. Hubert in Garoua, where the individual rooms have long, smooth, sloping roofs topped by small caps. These roofs, and the long, thin grass used for thatching, are specific to Ngaoundéré and look glaringly out of place in Garoua.

The *sooro* at Boundang-Touroua is said to have served as the model for the *sooro* at the entrance to the palace of Tignère (Figure 16). Formally, however, the model may have been the *sooro* of Kontcha, the porch and heavy pillars of which the *sooro* of Tignère resembles more closely. An early



Figure 15 Recent construction by immigrants from the Far North Province, Tchéboa, Cameroon (photo: author, 2000)



Figure 16 Palace Entrance, Tignère, Cameroon, ca. 1920–54 (photo: author, 2000)

photograph hanging on the walls of the current palace of Tignère depicts the ruler Mohamman Djalo (r. 1920–54) in front of the palace before its enlargement. The entrance directly behind him was clearly circular in plan. Soon after

the construction of a *sooro* at Boundang-Touroua, Mohamman Djalo expanded and enlarged the walls of his own palace and constructed the *sooro* for its entrance. Drawing upon the martial aspects of older palaces, and perhaps acknowledging Tignère's tumultuous history, security, and hence wall thickness, was emphasized. One source stated that the foundations of the palace's outer walls were so large that the emir once emerged from the palace on his horse and galloped atop the foundations.³⁹ The thatched roof was replaced with corrugated zinc by Emir Mohaman Yero, after a fire on 15 November 1963 burned 90 percent of the city.⁴⁰ More recently, walls have been constructed between the pillars to create four corner rooms for the guards, as at Banyo.

In sum, the construction of *sooroji* in Fulbe palaces of northern Cameroon is largely characteristic of the colonial period after 1901. The rulers found that, in their administrative separation from the Sokoto caliphate, they were able to claim the grander title of emir and construct *sooroji* as visual symbols of their newfound status. Secondarily, new emirates were created by the colonial powers, leading to the construction of *sooroji* at these palaces to symbolically proclaim parity with their parent emirates. Thus, by the close of the colonial period in 1960, all of the Fulbe palaces of northern Cameroon were marked with *sooroji*.

Non-Fulbe Examples of the Sooro

The proliferation of the *sooro* as a royal symbol in the twentieth century was not restricted to the Fulbe, as the example of the palace of King Njoya in Fommban has already highlighted. The practice became extensive during the French colonial period when a number of independent emirates were created for non-Fulbe groups. Under the pretense of protecting non-Fulbe populations from Fulbe oppression, entirely new administrative units were created from the domains of Fulbe rulers. Prominent examples of this practice are the emirates of Ngadjiwan, Mayo Baléo, and Almé that were created from the territories of Kontcha. These new emirates were created specifically for the Péré ethnic group, ostensibly to liberate them from oppression under Fulbe rule. Shimada pointed out that these colonial reorganizations usually responded to conditions on the ground, in particular the inability or unwillingness of Fulbe emirs to force these populations to pay taxes.⁴¹ In these cases direct colonial administration was frequently prescribed. Each new polity constructed a new palace for its ruler, employing the *sooro* as an entrance. Alternatively, non-Fulbe groups could be maintained under their Fulbe overlords if the arrangement seemed for the most part to work. Thus, the French largely

maintained the status quo of Mbang-Mboum and Ngangha, two capitals of the Mboum ethnicity lying within the domains of Ngaoundéré.

The adoption of Fulbe architectural symbolism by newly independent non-Fulbe emirates may be understood under the terms established by anthropologist Kees Schilder for the Mundang context of the Far North Province. He described the negotiation of identity by the Mundang as “a blend of confrontation and accommodation,” although the balance between the two varied.⁴² For instance, in the examples to follow, the Nyem-Nyem were more confrontational than the Péré, while the Mboum vacillated. Despite these differences in politics, the architecture was the same: from the 1950s *sooroji* were built at the Nyem-Nyem palace at Galim, the Péré palaces of Ngadjiwan and Almé, and the Mboum palace at Ngangha.⁴³ Each drew upon the nearest pre-existing model.

The Nyem-Nyem palace at Galim, some 80 miles west of Ngaoundéré and 22 miles southwest of Tignère, was constructed in 1915 following the descent of the population from their mountain stronghold atop Mt. Djim in response to French colonial persuasion. The Nyem-Nyem had never been subdued, whether by Fulbe, Germans, or French. They had managed to resist all attackers in their mountainous refuge. There is little record of how the buildings of the palace might have appeared, and all but a few bare ruins have now disappeared.⁴⁴

The French colonial regime that persuaded the Nyem-Nyem to come down from Mt. Djim, seemed much more tolerant than the former German colonizers, whose military forces had attacked the Nyem-Nyem in 1902 and 1906–7 in conjunction with Fulbe forces from Tignère. Upon relocating under the leadership of the ruler Njomna to the current site of Galim, the people quickly set about constructing a new palace.

Philip E. Leis has described how the Nyem-Nyem adopted many elements of Fulbe culture, at least outwardly, in order to claim status in the colonial era. These borrowings included clothing, language, Islam, and a political structure headed by an emir.⁴⁵ As the German imposition of colonial boundaries provided the Fulbe of Cameroon the opportunity for symbolic appropriation, so too did the later French colonial segregation of non-Fulbe ethnic enclaves provide similar opportunities to the Nyem-Nyem, Péré, and others.

Court ritual likewise reflected the new status of the emir of Galim. Leis furthermore states that the palace and the events that transpired there did more than anything else to give the overall impression that the emir was supremely important—comparable to a Fulbe emir.⁴⁶ The original entrance to the new palace was circular, most likely

replicating the architectural style employed by the Nyem-Nyem on Mt. Djim. After the original entrance burned in 1978, a new rectangular *sooro* was constructed to replace it. In plan and in the articulation of the pillars, this entrance clearly draws upon the model of the Fulbe palace of Tignère, the capital of the subprefecture into which Galim was incorporated (Figure 17). However, the *sooro*'s walls are thicker than necessary and become radically thinner as they extend into the front and rear porches, suggesting unfamiliarity with the type. Likewise, the perimeter walls of the palace are approximately the same thickness as those of the *sooro*, but lack both the thickness and height of Tignère's. In 2000 the entrance was in the process of being refitted with walls between the pillars to create guard chambers in the style of Tignère.

Similarly, the Péré palace of Ngadjiwan, separated from Kontcha in 1950, draws upon the architectural example of its former overlord.⁴⁷ Richard Fardon notes that the Péré had little centralized authority prior to the Fulbe conquest in the early nineteenth century. Such authority was no more evident after the separation of these entities in 1950. In fact, he points out that Ngadjiwan was the only one of the three Péré emirates created in 1950 that seems to have developed any authority, and as a result, reintegration of all three with Kontcha was proposed by the French in 1958, even though the proposal remained unexecuted.⁴⁸ It is important to note that not only was the introduction of centralized authority and corresponding palace architecture novel, but the French also enforced permanent residence in a single location, since historically, the Péré had moved the location of villages periodically. Charles-Henry Pradelles de Latour stated, “the great majority [of Péré] still live in scattered hamlets, the sites of which are changed approximately once a decade.”⁴⁹ Fardon believes a Ngadjiwan permanent settlement has existed since the turn of the twentieth century at least, which may be part of the reason for its greater authority.⁵⁰

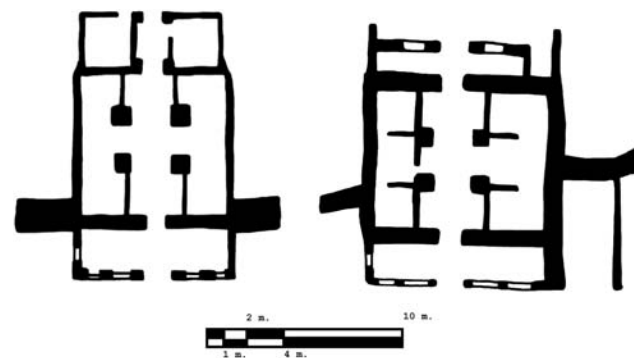


Figure 17 Plans of the entrance *sooros*, Tignère (left) and Galim (right), Cameroon



Figure 18 Palace entrance, Ngadjiwan, Cameroon, ca. 1950 (photo: author, 2000)

The façade of the entrance *sooro* of Ngadjiwan is designed with a series of arched openings that mimic the entrance to the palace of Kontcha, albeit on a smaller scale (Figure 18). The four interior pillars are unadorned with relief sculpture, unlike those of Kontcha that bear elaborate abstract designs, and the building lacks a sense of monumentality. That the palace of Kontcha should provide a model for the palace of Ngadjiwan is not surprising, since the Péré maintained the Kontcha palace until 1951. According to the current ruler of Ngadjiwan, Djibrilla Djibi Danki, the palace was originally constructed in *secco* (woven grass mats), and individual structures were only gradually replaced with earthen construction. Indeed, he stated that the first ruler of Ngadjiwan and his brothers themselves built the residence of the emir within the palace.⁵¹ At Almé another Péré entity separated from Kontcha at the same time as Ngadjiwan, a *sooro* entrance was only recently added to the palace in 2000 under the direction of a local French Catholic missionary, Père Cosmas.⁵²

The *sooro* entrance of the Mboum palace at Ngangha drew its inspiration from that at the palace of Ngaoundéré (Figure 19).⁵³ The current Mboum ruler has confirmed that this palace, constructed at the commencement of his father's reign in 1931, was the first Mboum palace to use the *sooro* form. This was also a more permanent palace than previous incarnations. Upon coming to the throne, Mboum rulers, like those in many cultures of Central Africa such as the Kuba or Buganda, established new capital cities to which they moved the court and the entire population of the previous capital. Commencing with the reign of Bellaka Saomboum (r. 1931–76), the father of the current ruler, the French abolished the practice of moving capitals and forced permanent settlement on this people in order to facilitate taxation and administration.⁵⁴

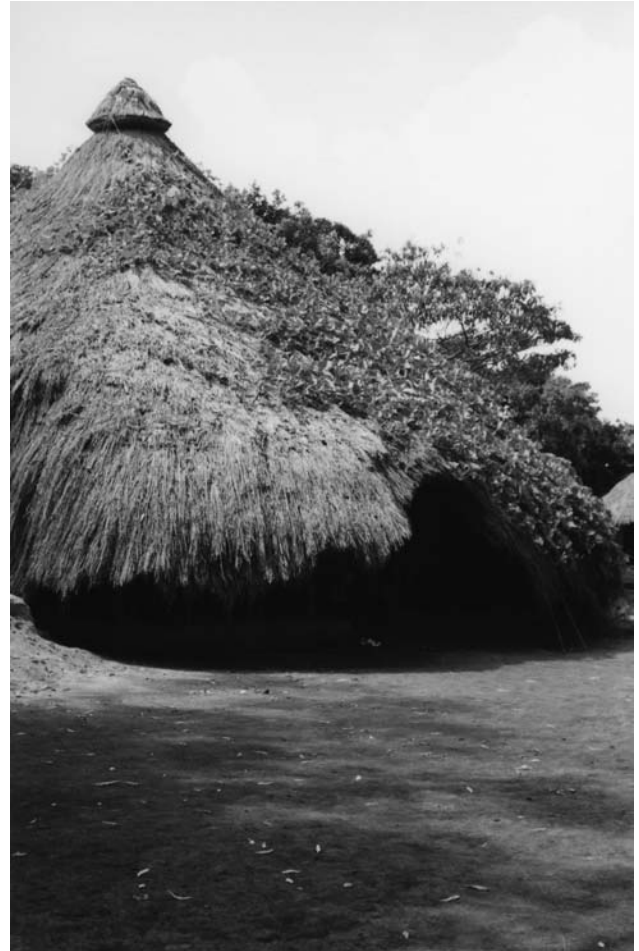


Figure 19 Palace entrance, Ngangha, Cameroon, 1931 (photo: author, 2000)

The entrance to the palace of Ngangha has a coffered wood ceiling supported on beams placed across four pillars. While the original entrance of the palace of Ngaoundéré no longer exists, it is possible to look to the audience hall for a good sense of Ngangha's model. The arrangement of coffers at Ngangha is not nearly as orderly as at Ngaoundéré, nor are the lengths of wood used as uniform (see Figure 4). Nevertheless, there is a close similarity in architectural form and style of bas-relief decorations on the pillars, not to mention the unusually smooth thatched roof with low-hanging eaves and iconic roof cap. That the two should be clearly related is not surprising, considering that those who constructed the palace of Ngaoundéré were Mboum, just as those who maintained Kontcha palace were of the local Péré population. The Kaygama Mboum, or representative of the Mboum at the court of Ngaoundéré, is charged with all construction and maintenance of the Ngaoundéré palace. Indeed, it may be speculated that the entrances at both Ngangha and Ngaoundéré are amalgams of the architectural

type of the *sooro* imported from northern Nigeria by the Fulbe and the thatched roof and molded bas-reliefs inspired by the local Mboum heritage. While it may be fairly simple to identify the borrowing of architectural technology from northern Nigeria and style from the local Mboum population, the political strategies that underlie these architectural adoptions is more interesting.

Ethnoarchaeologist Diane Lyons has provided a model and explanation for this behavior in a post-colonial context, based on work in the Far North Province town of Déla. She explains that the government of Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960–82), began a modernization campaign in the 1960s that favored many aspects of the Muslim culture of the northern provinces over non-Muslim cultures. Architecture of Muslim elites is generally rectangular, while non-Muslims prefer circular plans. In the struggle for political, economic, and social legitimacy, historically non-Muslim groups have adopted rectangular housing as an outward sign of modernity, echoing the rectangular government structures of both colonial and post-colonial eras built in the community, as well as seeking to blur the ethnic boundaries with their Muslim neighbors.⁵⁵ The Mboum imitation of Ngaoundéré and the decisions of other “liberated” groups to follow the Fulbe model are similar moves of recasting identity for political and economic gain.

Although Lyons's model is applicable to the post-colonial era, President Ahidjo's modernization program was built upon the favoritism shown toward Muslims in the northern provinces during the preceding French and German colonial periods. As Shimada explained, the French and Germans favored the Muslim Fulbe because their states could easily be co-opted into the colonial administration under indirect rule. The literacy of the Muslim scholarly class was an additional boon to colonial administration. Moreover, Shimada noted, “the Germans admired Islam and were fascinated by the Fulbe cavalry; this was also true for the French.”⁵⁶

Similarly, Schilder traces how the historic division between Fulbe conquerors and non-Fulbe subjects in the Far North Province was accepted first by the Germans and later by the French. The colonizers considered the Fulbe to be more civilized and sophisticated than their non-Fulbe subjects.⁵⁷ As such, the Fulbe became the model into which the colonizer molded the non-Fulbe. Even when ethnic groups were separated and administered by direct French rule, the administrators imposed the model of the Fulbe emirate, incorporating its structure and terminology, to improve administrative efficiency.⁵⁸

This emphasis on the Fulbe model, and along with it Islam and its accoutrements of power, continued into the post-colonial era under the regime of Ahmadou Ahidjo. A northern

Muslim Fulbe, Ahidjo shared the fruits of government patronage primarily with his Fulbe compatriots in the north, and to a lesser extent with non-Fulbe who converted to Islam and adopted Fulbe manners.⁵⁹ Schilder points out that Mundang rulers in the Far North Province emulated Islamic culture to gain favor with Ahidjo.⁶⁰ He concludes that the malleability of public image “is an indication that the contemporary power position of the Mundang chiefs depends much more on their legitimation with regard to the regional state elites than on their popularity among the common Mundang people.”⁶¹ This malleability is not a feature exclusive to the Mundang, or even of non-Fulbe more generally, but has become widely characteristic of rulers in northern Cameroon, regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. They all seek to emphasize relations with the national government, modernizing in ways that are often perceived to ignore the cultural specificities implied historically by the *sooro*. Thus for much of the last century, in both the colonial and post-colonial eras, emulating the Fulbe model has been the only viable option in northern Cameroon in the struggle for political, economic, and social parity.

Conclusion

The dispersal of the *sooro* as an architectural type and the attendant transformation of meaning were caused by a multitude of factors related to colonialism and intergroup dynamics among Fulbe and non-Fulbe populations. Rulers in northern Cameroon, Fulbe and non-Fulbe alike, had to take into account their relations with the Sokoto caliphate, other local rulers, the colonial and later independent national regimes, in addition to their own populations. The decision by each ruler in northern Cameroon to adopt the *sooro*, and the shifting nuances of its meaning over time, is largely a result of the complex balancing act performed between all of these forces in the continuous competition for authority and resources.

While the majority of *sooroji* at Fulbe palaces were built during the colonial period, these ubiquitous palace entrances are not recollections of the pre-colonial past, rather they are symbolic reformulations of the authority of Fulbe rulers in the colonial period. Such a revised understanding of the proliferation of this architectural type and its meanings reinforces the importance of considering historical context in the study of African architecture. Palace architecture must be understood within a changing matrix of power relations, boundaries, and spheres of influence.

The proliferation of the *sooro* among non-Fulbe groups likewise points to the necessity of understanding the context-bound role of ethnicity in understanding architectural meaning. Even in the palaces of Fulbe rulers, we must understand

the introduction of the *sooro* in light of its much longer use in the Hausa and Kanuri architectural traditions. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, this architectural type became associated more generally with ideas of authority in northern Cameroon and was therefore borrowed across the ethnic spectrum. By adopting the *sooro*, other ethnicities diluted some of the historical specificities of the type, i.e. its associations with the Sokoto caliphate and Fulbe ethnicity, thereby combating the hegemony of the Fulbe on a symbolic level.

Finally, a study such as this pushes one to recognize the importance of considering architecture within varying domains of circumstances, from the local to the regional. On the local level, one must consider the specific circumstances of each palace. At Rey, the *sooro* was adopted when the palace was at the center of an independent state. At Ngaoundéré, *sooroji* were built as autonomy was sought from the Sokoto caliphate, and potentially also in response to attempts to split the emirate. At Banyo, *sooroji* were built after colonial boundaries separated the state from the rest of the Sokoto caliphate. Kontcha and Boundang-Touroua used the form only after being administratively separated from Banyo and Ngaoundéré. These local *sooroji* specificities were played out within broader historical contexts common to all. These include the nineteenth-century sovereignty of the Sokoto caliphate, then German and French colonial rule, followed by national independence. Understanding the fuller context of the popularity of the *sooro* also requires consideration of relationships among ethnic groups in northern Cameroon. The example of the palace of King Njoya is a particularly complex example of balancing local and regional interests, while the later examples of Galim, Ngadjiwan, and Ngangha suggest assimilation of Fulbe cultural traits to appeal to a national government. Thus the local and ethnic circumstances of architectural construction only make sense when considered historically within the context of the broader region.

Notes

1. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the support received in producing this work: a Frederick Sheldon Traveling Fellowship supported the original field research and a DePaul University Research Council Paid Leave supported the writing. Most of the final revisions were completed while I was a visiting scholar at the Northwestern University Program of African Studies. Thanks is due also to those who have read versions of this work along the way, most notably my dissertation advisors Suzanne Blier, David Roxburgh, and Gülru Necipoğlu. The final version of this work owes much to the editing of David B. Brownlee, Swati Chattopadhyay, Mary Christian, and the anonymous reviewers. All translations in the text are the author's unless otherwise noted.

The term Fulbe is a plural term. The term for a single individual of this ethnicity is Pullo. Thus it technically makes little sense to refer to a Fulbe

individual, which I nevertheless do for the sake of simplicity. A wide variety of names are used to refer to the Fulbe; these are usually versions of the Fulbe autonym, in either its singular or plural form, as interpreted through the languages of surrounding populations. Therefore, the terms used to refer popularly to the Fulbe depend on where and with whom they live. These terms include Fulani, Fula, Fellata, Peul, Haal-Pulaaren, and others. Fulbe is the autonym widely used by Eastern Fulbe groups, which would include the entire area being considered in this essay, and is therefore most appropriate from the standpoint of this author.

2. This emirate was also commonly referred to as Fombina, a Fulbe term meaning "the South."

3. For the sake of simplicity and familiarity, the term *emir* is used throughout rather than the Fulbe term *laamiido* (pl. *laamiibe*). *Laamiido* is derived from the verb *laamugo* meaning "to rule" in Fulfulde, the Fulbe language. Likewise, I use the term emirate rather than the Fulbe *lesdi laamiido*, literally "land of the ruler," or the frequently employed French pastiche of *lamidat*. The ruler of the Sokoto caliphate will be referred to as caliph for the sake of logic and to stress the religious basis of the polity, rather than "sultan," as is currently more common. In fact, in the nineteenth century *caliph* and *sultan* appear to have both been used.

4. The term *ardo* (pl. *ardo'en*) simply means leader. It is derived from the semi-nomadic Fulbe culture in which the leader of a transhumant group would be referred to by this title.

5. Yoshihito Shimada, "Dynamique politique des Etats traditionnels sous l'Indirect Rule: Du pouvoir à l'autorité—étude de cas du Lamidat de Rey-Bouba," in *Africa* 3, ed. Shohei Wada and Paul K. Eguchi, *Senri Ethnological Studies* 15 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1984), 292–93.

6. Galina Zoubko, *Dictionnaire peul-français*, Senri Ethnological Reports 4 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1996), 442.

7. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Arabic-English*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), 441. Allan Leary, on the other hand, traces the etymological origins to "the Arabic *sarḥ* [صرح] (pl. *surub* [اصروح])—palace, castle, lofty structure, and it is likely that the *sooro* concept was an Arab importation into Hausaland through Songhai. That Hausa words to do with arch and vault construction have no apparent links with Songhai or Arabic suggests that the structural system, if not the form, may have an independent origin." Allan Leary, "A Decorated Palace in Kano," *AARP: Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 12 (Dec. 1977), 11. This is an appealing etymology as well, and many of the same arguments I have made would also apply were this the case.

8. See Eldridge Mohammadou, "Kanuri Imprint on Adamawa Fulbe and Fulfulde," in *Advances in Kanuri Scholarship*, ed. Norber Cyffer and Thomas Geider, *Westafrikanische Studien* 17 (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 1997), 280; F. W. Taylor, *Fulani-English*, Hippocrene Practical Dictionary (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1995), 180.

9. The combination of dwelling unit and granary is common in Africa and may also be seen in Joola architecture of Senegal, for example. See Jean-Paul Bourdier and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Drawn from African Dwellings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 232–89. For ceiling spaces as produce storage, see G. J. Afolabi Ojo, "Traditional Yoruba Architecture," *African Arts* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1968), 17, where he contradicts the statement by Bourdier and Minh-ha that "Impluvia in Ivory Coast and in Nigeria did not, for example, make use of combined granary-bedroom structures, and hence were built only with an overall unifying thatched roof." Bourdier and Minh-ha, *Drawn from African Dwellings*, 255.

10. Kenjo Jumbam, *The White Man of God*, African Writers Series 231 (London: Heinemann, 1980), 1. Wolfgang Lauber likewise pointed to the use of the ceiling space for storage in residences of the Cameroon

Grassfields. Wolfgang Lauber, *Palaces and Compounds in the Grasslands of Cameroon* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer, 1990), 16. There is a strong resemblance between the roof construction and the profile of houses in the northwest of Cameroon and the Adamawa highlands, despite differences in materials. Many of the various populations now inhabiting the Grassfields ultimately trace their origins to the Mboum of the Adamawa highlands. Thus, it is possible that Grassfields architecture is an interpretation of Mboum architecture. The degree to which these populations are actually connected historically, however, is a debated topic in scholarly circles. For more on this subject, please see: Eldridge Mohammadou, *Les royaumes foulbe du plateau de l'Adamawa au XIX siècle: Tibati, Tignère, Banyo, Ngaoundéré*, African Languages and Ethnography 8, ed. Morimichi Tomikawa (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1978) and *Traditions historiques des peuples du Cameroun central*, vol. 1, Mbéré, Mboum, Tikar, African Languages and Ethnography 23 (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1990). David Zeitlyn's summary of Mohammadou's work also suggests other sources on this complex debate: David Zeitlyn, "Eldridge Mohammadou on Tikar Origins," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 26 (1995), 99–104.

11. See Christian Seignobos, *Nord Cameroun: Montagnes et Hautes Terres*, Collection Architecture Traditionnelles (Roquevaire: Editions Parenthèses, 1982), 171.

12. Eldridge Mohammadou, ed., *Ray ou Rey-Bouba: Tradition transmise par Alhadjji Hamadjoda Abdoulaye*, Traditions Historiques des Foulbé de l'Adamawa, Les Yillaga de la Bénoué (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1979), 158, 278 note 63.

13. In the photograph from La Documentation Française in Paris ("Rei Bouba: Palais du Sultan," ca. 1912–32, A129, Archives de la Documentation française, Ministère de la F.O.M.), the roof displays three vertical lines of ridges. This detail may be the mark of Di'i architects, as this motif appears frequently on Di'i structures. The Di'i population was much more significant in Rey, before their early-twentieth century flight to the less tyrannical domains of Ngaoundéré, and would have been responsible for much of the work of constructing and maintaining the palace.

14. For examples of the woven netting and acroteria on buildings inside the palace, see two 1932 photographs by Marcel Griaule, "Rey Bouba: Palais du Sultan de Rey Bouba—case-vestibule et porteuses d'eau," C33.2524.41 and "Rey Bouba: Le Sultan de Rey Bouba chez lui. A sa droite, un captive eunuque," C36.1716.41, both Musée de l'Homme. For a later view of the palace featuring netting and accroteria, see the photograph "Rey Bouba, Département du Logone et Chari: Entrée du Palais du Sultan," n.d., C47.507.153, Agence Économique des Colonies Autonomes et des Territoires Africains Sous Mandate, also in the collections of the Musée de l'Homme.

15. Seignobos, *Nord Cameroun*, 173.

16. Martin Z. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa): 1809–1902* (Yaoundé: the author, 1978), 80.

17. Modibbo Ahmadou Bassoro and Eldridge Mohammadou, *Garoua: Tradition historique d'une cité Peule du Nord-Cameroun*, Mémoires et travaux de la R.C.P. 395 (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980), 105.

18. A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Barth's Travels in Nigeria: Extracts from the Journal of Heinrich Barth's Travels in Nigeria, 1850–1855*, West African History Series (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 191–92.

19. Z. R. Dmochowski, *An Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture*, vol. 1, *Northern Nigeria* (London: Ethnographica, 1990), 2.40–2.45.

20. Adama also spent a year at Joboliwo in 1838, but this can be considered simply a transitional capital. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony*, 84.

21. Dmochowski, *An Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture*, 2.43.

22. Bassoro and Mohammadou, *Garoua*, 40.

23. J.-C. Froelich, "Ngaoundéré: La vie économique d'une cite peul," *Etudes Camerounaises* 43–44 (March–June 1954), 29.

24. Finding images of the molded designs on these interior pillars is exceedingly difficult, particularly as this *sooro* burned to the ground in 1993. Glimpses of the pillar reliefs can be seen in the film *The Sultan's Burden*, dir. Jon Jerstad with Lisbet Holtedahl, 50 min., Filmmakers Library, New York, 1994, videocassette. A photograph by Eugène Brusseau, "Péristyle du tata," ca. 1900–1905, 1999–040337, "Congo (Brazzaville) photographs, [between 1900–1905]," Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, shows bare pillars without molded decoration. The painted bas-reliefs may, therefore, be mid-twentieth-century augmentations of the original architectural surfaces.

25. Mark D. DeLancey, "Moving East, Facing West: Islam as an Intercultural Mediator in Urban Planning in the Sokoto Empire," in *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*, ed. Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola, *Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora* 21 (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 3–21.

26. L. Mizon, "Explorations en Afrique Centrale: 1890–1893" (special issue), *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 3 (1895), 69. Of course, as soon as Emir Zubayr of Adamawa threatened to use his authority to replace Mohammadou Abbo with his brother, according to Mizon, Abbo found the means to make the journey to Yola to pay allegiance in person. Mizon may have confused Mohammadou Abbo's nephew Yerima Bello as a brother.

27. Mohammadou, *Royaumes Foulbe*, 301–2.

28. After Yerima Bello's death, Boundang-Touroua returned to the fold and was placed under charge of a nonroyal governor. Boundang-Touroua remained an integral part of Ngaoundéré's domains until forcibly separated by the Germans in 1912. *Ibid.*, 316.

29. Henry John Drewel and John Mason, *Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Life in the Yorùbá Universe* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998), 218.

30. *Ibid.*, 62. Also see Suzanne Blier, *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 38–39.

31. *Ibid.*, 101.

32. *Ibid.*, 119–20.

33. Although the Germans never destroyed the palace, they apparently did not allow any new construction within its confines. It was only with the return to power under the French colonial regime of Emir Yahya, who had been deposed by the Germans in 1911, that any construction occurred. Emir Mohamman Gabdo Yaya, interview with the author, Banyo, 9 Oct. 2000.

34. Kaouzad, "Itinéraire peu commun d'un vieillard extraordinaire," *GICPAC Magazine: Organe d'expression du groupe d'initiative commune pour la promotion de l'art et de la culture du Mayo-Banyo* 3 (July–Sept. 1997), 17.

35. Leary, "A Decorated Palace," 14.

36. Haman Tukur Sa'ad, "Between Myth and Reality: The Aesthetics of Traditional Architecture in Hausaland" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1981), 254; Haman Tukur Sa'ad, "Role of Individual Creativity in Traditional African Art: The Gwani (Genius) Amongst Master Builders of Hausaland," *Nigeria Magazine* 53, no. 4 (1985), 3–16.

37. This material forms the basis of an article in preparation, based on a paper presented at the 2008 African Studies Association meeting, "King Njoya's Palace as Political Negotiator: A Fulbe Sooro behind a German Façade."

38. Boundang-Touroua is actually a hybrid name that is frequently used in that area. The original name of the town and of the emirate was Boundang. The term is said to mean, "look over there" in Bata, the language of its founders, because the village is situated at the bottom of a hill from which one can see in all directions over the flat plain. Mohammadou, *Royaumes foulbe*, 227. The Fulbe village of Touroua directly adjacent to Boundang, was established as the new capital ca. 1848 by Ardo Lawan Hamman following

a succession struggle with his appointed regent, Modibo Gana. After the defeat of Modibo Gana, Touroua was made a regional governorate of the domain, while the capital was moved permanently to Ngaoundéré. Ibid., 284–286. The hybrid name is used here in recognition of the history of the emirate.

39. Alhadji Nana Hamadjoda and Bobo Hassana, interview with the author, Tignère, 13 July 2000. The emirate of Tignère had only been reinstated in 1895, after its destruction by Tibati in 1856.

40. Mamoudou, *Le Lamido Mohaman Yéro de Tignère: 1954–1982* (master's thesis, Université de Ngaoundéré, 1998), 104–5.

41. Shimada, "Dynamique politique," 314.

42. Kees Schilder, *Quest for Self-Esteem: State, Islam, and Mundang Ethnicity in Northern Cameroon*, Research Series 3 (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1994), 236.

43. The term *Nyem-Nyem* is used here to refer specifically to those people who occupied the area of Tignère before the arrival of the Fulbe, but is commonly applied to a variety of peoples in North Province. It is a derogatory term meaning "eat-eat" in Fulfulde, ostensibly referencing the anthropophagy supposedly practiced by these non-Fulbe peoples. In the case of the environs of Tignère in Adamawa Province, the people have adopted the term as an endonym. Eldridge Mohammadou explains that there was apparently no prior term to label the entire group, its members referencing solely their lineage names. Mohammadou suggests that a more ancient endonym may have been "Souga," which is the exonym currently used by the local Mboum population. He proposes that these peoples were in fact refugees from the Tchamba incursions into North Province that eventually were to establish several kingdoms, in particular Bali-Nyonga, in Northwest Province. Mohammadou, *Royaumes foulbe*, 395–96, n. 33. Philip E. Leis likewise observes that the seeming absence of an autonym reflects Nyem-Nyem origins as a group of various independent peoples who aggregated in the area prior to the early-nineteenth century arrival of the Fulbe. Philip E. Leis, "Accommodation in a Plural Chiefdom (Cameroon)," *Man* n.s. 5, no. 4 (Dec. 1970), 675–76.

44. My own observations could only determine that circular foundations seemed to be the norm.

45. Leis, "Accommodation," 676–77, 679.

46. Ibid., 680.

47. The Péré are frequently also called "Koutine," though this is in fact a pejorative Fulbe appellation derived from *Kutiiru*, meaning "dog." Zoubko, *Dictionnaire peul-français*, 277.

48. Richard Fardon, "Pere and Chamba: A Report on Comparative Researches in Adamawa, North Cameroon," *Ngaoundéré-Anthropos* 4 (1999), 19, note 5.

49. Charles-Henry Pradelles de Latour, "The Initiation of the *Dugi* Among the Péré," *JASO: Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 26, no. 1 (1995), 81.

50. Fardon, "Pere and Chamba," 19.

51. Emir Djibrilla Djibi Danki, interview with the author, Ngadjiwan, 20 July 2000.

52. Père Cosmas, personal communication, Kontcha, 21 July 2000.

53. Ngangha is more properly called Ngaouha, or the Mountain of the Ha. The *ba* is a ceremonial multibladed throwing knife that serves as a royal emblem. For an example of a *ba*, incorrectly identified as currency, see Frank Herreman, *Material Differences: Art and Identity in Africa* (New York: Museum of African Art, 2003), 71, cat. 58. The mountain, near the settlement of the same name, is both the historic burial site for the rulers of Ngangha and a repository for royal and sacred objects, such as *ba*. The name "Ngaouha" was recorded as "Ngangha," or various permutations of that name, during the colonial period.

54. This recalls Charles-Henry Pradelles de Latour's description of the periodic movement of Péré settlements. See note 49.

55. Diane Lyons, "The Politics of House Shape: Round *vs* Rectilinear Domestic Structures in Déla Compounds, Northern Cameroon," *Antiquity* 70, no. 268 (June 1996), 351–67.

56. Shimada, "Dynamique politique," 304.

57. Schilder, *Quest for Self-Esteem*, 126–54.

58. Ibid., 146–47.

59. Ibid., 158–71.

60. Ibid., 216–28.

61. Ibid., 175.