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TECHNOLOGICAL RESISTANCE:
WEST AFRICAN MILITARY RESPONSES TO
EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM, 1870-1914

by

BROXTON HARVEY

Under the Direction of Harcourt Fuller, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Authorized by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, the decades-long Scramble for Africa saw Europeans carve out colonial empires across the continent. In recent years, historians have shifted their focus from European conquest to African resistance. However, African military resistance as a dimension of this “primary,” or initial, resistance has received insufficient attention. My thesis explores West Africans’ use of European firearms technology and argues that this capability played a significant role in the conventional, not just unconventional, defense of territorial sovereignty against British and French expeditions and occupations.. For example, Ashanti forces slowed British expansion in what ultimately became the British Gold Coast colony and protectorate. Likewise, Samori Toure’s forces stubbornly battled the French in what became French West Africa. These defensive operations owed a great deal to precolonial West African adaptations of firearms technology acquired from trade with Europeans.

INDEX WORDS: West Africa, Firearms, Technology, Precolonial, Imperialism, Resistance

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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Committee Chair: Harcourt Fuller

Committee: Ian Fletcher

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

July 2020

DEDICATION

To all the people who have supported me throughout this process, above all to my wife Jennifer Harvey, my children Brittany and Lance, and my parents Kato Harvey Jr. and Lula B. Harvey, who are no longer here on earth but with me in spirit.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The theme of African resistance to colonial rule is a sensitive and controversial issue that has been the subject of discussion for decades. On one side of the debate, some historians believe that through superior technology Europe conquered the continent of Africa systematically without any genuine resistance from Africans. On the other hand, other scholars argue that military engagements between African and European forces delayed or slowed the process of military conquest and the establishment of colonial rule. In the face of European military pressure, some West African polities took up arms and were not easily defeated. Their resistance was enabled by firearms. We need, if you will, what is a missing chapter on Africa in a work like the world historian William H. McNeill's *The Pursuit of Power*, which focuses on the art of war through European military and technology history.¹

It is, of course, a mistake to view such resistance as widespread. Ethiopia under the leadership of Menelik II was the only state that completely defeated a European attempt at conquest. In fact, the measure of "success" in almost all African resistances during the Scramble for Africa was delay and disruption, not the defeat and withdrawal of European invaders. The contributing factors that led to African resistance in both the precolonial and colonial periods are complex. In the colonial period resistance tended to emerge from longstanding grievances regarding taxation, exploitation, racism, violence, and paternalistic practices. Resistance in Africa has a long history since the European presence in Africa did not start with colonial imperialism, but with explorers, missionaries, and traders in the precolonial period.

¹ William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

This thesis presents three ways of recognizing and analyzing defiance through acts of resistance. Forms of resistance ranged from non-compliance, to reluctant compliance, to active or armed resistance. My thesis will focus on the armed resistance of West African empires and other polities. First being discussed will be the Ashanti or Asante Kingdom in present day Ghana whom engaged and offered resistance to the British in five wars which consequently caused ripples in Britain's colonial efforts. The second case study will debate the resistance efforts of Samori Toure who led large scale resistance efforts against the French and built factories to repair his arsenal of firearms. The third and final discussion will consider how the distribution, acquisition, and history of firearms technology on the continent of Africa proved complex when mounting resistance against European rule. These case histories and their precolonial background help us understand not only military-technological resistance but also the political restructuring that accompanied this armed resistance.

The years between 1870 and 1914 were the most expansive period for Europeans across the continent of Africa. On the heels of the Industrial Revolution, Europeans pushed deep into the interior of Africa with technological advances in weaponry, transportation, communications, and steam power. It may be easy to discern that these advances propelled Europeans into a position of rule and authority over Africans. However, Daniel Headrick's counterargument is that "if one points to technological progress as the main factor of expansion, thereby defining imperialism as a sort of unavoidable 'natural' consequence of technological innovations, one is led astray too. There is no direct causal relationship between those innovations and imperialism."² Research does show that technological advances facilitated European penetration and conquest of other parts of the globe. However, technology should be analyzed not only as an

² Daniel R. Headrick, "The Tools of Imperialism: Technology and the Expansion of European Colonial Empires in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 2 (1979): 232.

instrument of conquest, but also as a device of resistance. Historians must research African responses to the technology and their adaptations of it for the purpose of resistance.

First it is necessary to identify the ideologies that drew Europeans across unfamiliar lands and oceans. In *Imperialism: A Study*, J. A. Hobson directly quotes the British officer Sir George Baden-Powell on the moral and economic goals of state-organized imperialism and the problem of legitimacy in the eyes of metropolitan citizens when, despite military efforts, it falls short of reaching them in the periphery:

The ultimate unit, the taxpayer - whether home or colonial - looks for two groups of results as his reward. On the one hand, he hopes to see Christianity and civilization *pro tanto* extended; and, on the other, to see some compensating development of industry and trade. Unless he, or 'his servants the Government,' secure either or both these results, the question must be plainly asked, Has he the right, and is he right, to wage such wars?³

Of course, Hobson was the most famous critic of empire in early twentieth-century Britain, therefore not the best exponent of imperialist ideologies. Nevertheless, even Hobson draws invidious distinctions between the civilized and the uncivilized in his critique of what is wrong with imperialism.

The second half of the "long" nineteenth century saw the development of the new imperialism around the world. The Scramble for Africa between 1884 and 1914 brought the new imperialism to Africa. Coastal enclaves and settler colonies expanded dramatically into the interior of the continent. Moreover, imperial rivalries intensified among Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, and Germany. As a result, African polities and peoples were in constant conflict with early European empire-building projects. The full complexity of this transitional period has not yet received adequate treatment. In particular, we do not appreciate the links between the precolonial and early colonial periods in historical contexts that led to the

³ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1902), 212.

resistance of colonial conquest and rule. Historians tend to focus on rebellions against colonial rule rather than resistance to colonial conquest. Thus, Jon Abbink argues that resistance studies focus too narrowly on revolts during the colonial era, overlooking revolts against the rulers of precolonial polities and viewing postcolonial revolts as simply the legacy of the colonial era.⁴ Abbink's argument helps us understand why the scholarship on revolts in Africa has not settled the question of what military-technological capacity could be tapped by precolonial polities in West Africa to oppose European encroachments on territory and sovereignty.

Authors such as Richard Reid have argued that in precolonial Africa “there existed almost limitless local variations on the basic technology available to African societies— spears, swords, bows and arrows— and innovation and refinement were continual, particularly with the spread of ironworking”.⁵ However, the importance of African technology has been overshadowed by European technological advancements that led to their colonial rule. Adding to the complexities of resistance, Europe's expansion of imperialism in Africa did not change the relationship between African tribes or communities. As they resisted European rule, they engaged not only foreigners, but also native African soldiers fighting alongside the British and French as well. Ultimately, they were confronting the European imperial structures and political hierarchies that used other Africans for militaristic purposes.

In this research the core arguments and observations will challenge some ideas and narratives about the role of firearms technology in West African history. While armed resistance was ultimately unsuccessful, some African states, such as the Ashanti and Samori's polity, waged significant defensive wars against European moves against their territories. Importantly

⁴ J. Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn Abbink, and Klaas van Walraven, *Rethinking Resistance : Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 4.

⁵ Richard J Reid, *Warfare in African History: New Approaches to African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8.

for the purposes of this thesis, these African empires deployed military forces equipped with firearms technology that was both indigenous and European in origin or adaptation. The West African resistance experience should be viewed through the lens of technological evolution, not just in terms of political responses to European aggression or occupation. West Africans used European firearms that flooded the continent for hundreds of years prior to the Scramble. Africa might be “approached as a site of representation but the primary concern remains showing that a place called and named Africa has played an important role in world history.”⁶ Africa therefore should be viewed as an active shaper of, not just an unwilling participant in, the world history of the nineteenth century. When limiting the scope of their research into African resistance to the onset of European conquest and rule, historians discount the contributions of Africa to world history.

In addition to a focus on African defenders, such as Samori and the Ashanti uses of firearms technology in clashes with European forces, this thesis will also discuss how technology evolved and was present in precolonial West Africa. The evolution includes the acquisition, adaptation, repair, refinement, deployment and use of firearms technology in the hands of self-determined African rulers, soldiers, and artisans. In order to make an argument for the significance of military-technological resistance, one must show that the Africans had the means and capabilities to resist in the precolonial period. One must show as well that, when conflict broke out, the clashes between African and European forces were serious and sustained. Evidence of both can cast a new light on the claim and institutions of African sovereignty.

While only 10 percent of Africa was under European rule in 1870, Africans already had military structures in place due to state wars and made valorous efforts against foreign conquest,

⁶ Erik Gilbert and Jonathan T. Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present Africa*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), xxiv.

such as the resistance of Algerians to French expansion into North Africa and various peoples to Afrikaner and British expansion into Southern Africa. There were even resistance efforts that took form in year-long engagements and confrontations. For many battles, Africans were able to raise as many as 15,000- 20,000 soldiers and stay in the field for days of fighting without any significant relief or reinforcements.

Although great strides have been made to understand the African contribution and uses of technological advances, the history of technology in Africa still has received little attention compared to the history of technology in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. In 1983, Ralph Austen and Daniel Headrick bemoaned the neglect of African technology by general historians.⁷ The history of technology in Africa was underdeveloped and had large inconsistencies in relation to efficiency and usages by general historical definitions. Although firearms only represent a small part of overall African resistance, guns are usually seen as the general rule, hence why much has been written about guns and their effects on colonialism. However, historians such as David Arnold have recently pointed to our lack of knowledge when it comes to “what indigenes, rather than colonizers, made of new technologies” and how these same technologies “were locally received and adapted.”⁸ This represents a shift in how technologies is now being viewed with respect to the African point of view and their capabilities to adapt to European technology.

Trevor Getz’s *Cosmopolitan Africa* has gone even further in challenging the misconception and false beliefs that Africans were “backwards” and needed Europeans to become civilized. Getz argued that Africa was not backwards or isolated, but instead they were cosmopolitan. The 106-page book also discusses the changing global realities that would

⁷ Gilbert and Reynolds. *Africa in World History*, 8.

⁸ David Arnold, “Europe, Technology, and Colonialism in the 20th Century,” *History and Technology* 21 no. 1 (2005): 97.

eventually drive formal colonialism. European technology and science had reached a point where for the first time they were seriously in advance of Africans' abilities to resist them either militarily or economically. In seeking to redress this imbalance, these Africans were engaged in exploring the advantages of adopting aspects of European culture and technology.⁹ He also discusses hundreds of years of international trade and the creation of cosmopolitan societies in West Africa. By doing this Getz demonstrates that Africa was more complex in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than most historiographies portray. This reveals that African societies and their institutions were equally as complex and cosmopolitan as societies of Europe.

African technological advances before colonial rule were quickly discounted by Europeans. Despite the presence and use of technologies before European conquest and rule, African capacity and knowhow was seen as primitive by a Eurocentric standard of modernity. *Machines as the Measure of Men* by Michael Adas examines the ways in which "Europeans perceptions of the material superiority of their own cultures, particularly as manifested in scientific thought and technological innovation, shaped their attitudes toward and interaction with peoples they encountered overseas."¹⁰ Western attitudes towards the non-European world was based on how developed they were in the field of science and technology. If no production of these fields was present, the next measurement was how well these non-Westerners adapted to science and technology from other places. Europeans saw their technology as superior when implemented which shaped their foreign policies when they first interacted and eventually dominated the non-Western world.

⁹ Trevor Getz. *Cosmopolitan Africa C. 1700-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

¹⁰ Michael Adas. *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 4.

As Europeans positioned themselves as rulers through imperial policies they quickly discounted any native medicine, science, or technology. African medicines were somehow viewed as “native remedies [that] were quickly superseded by Western methods, an early form of development aid which seemed a panacea for all evils.”¹¹ Essentially all things not European were discarded, ignored, and written off as backwards and savage. There were, of course, some instances in which African applications were acknowledged as valuable. In the Maji Maji rebellion in German East Africa, healers and their indigenous medical knowledge and practices were taken seriously. Indeed, colonial interference with African medical authority and practice led to active forms of resistance.

The history of trade is an essential aspect of the history of technology in Africa, given the importance of technology transfer almost everywhere in world history. Historians have learned a great deal about the trade in human beings connecting West Africa to the wider Atlantic world from the fifteenth century to around 1870. The relationship between the slave trade and the gun trade is not well-known. Most of the firearms that infiltrated the western coast of Africa during this trade were purchased with slaves. This initial technology transfer was shaped by the distorting effects of the transatlantic slave trade and the forms of economic dependency and political conflict it created. Even though Europeans were confined to coastal trading enclaves before the Scramble, there was a gradual development of a West African periphery around a European core.

A strong history of trade relations tended to strengthen West African firepower while enabling resistance movements through firearms technology. For example, Africans purchased horses and guns with slaves, which tends to support the notion of the Gun-Slave cycle. This

¹¹ Sjoerd Rijpma. *David Livingstone and the Myth of African Poverty and Disease: A Close Examination of His Writing on the Pre-Colonial Era* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2015), 6.

theory has been written about in great detail by scholars such as Warren C. Whatley, Philip Curtin, and John K. Thornton. The introduction of firearms and gunpowder on the continent manifested itself through West African responses and adaptations to this technology ultimately increasing the slave trade. Whatley argues that the gun-slave cycle initiated a vicious cycle of raid or be raided in the arms race, therefore large numbers of Africans were victimized and sold into the Middle Passage.¹² However, in the mid-eighteenth century this hypothesis gave way to the new idea of Anglo-African Trade which was when European cargo ships provided gunpowder to the continent of Africa. In Daniel R. Headrick's book *Tools of Empire*, he makes the claim that technological changes actually made imperialism possible, both as they enabled motives to create events, and as they enhanced the motives themselves which had an impact on non-Western societies.¹³ In other words, technology built upon Europeans' ability to expand across oceans and continents. Prior to these inventions, Europe would have remained unable to spread their imperialistic policies in this manner.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the initial phase of technology transfer in firearms in West Africa and the subsequent development of firearms technology and uses, especially as the era of the slave trade gave way to the era of legitimate trade. According to the African historian Giacomo Macola:

Decoupling users from inventors and designers, domestication perspectives make it possible to study appropriation as a creative act in itself. This is a powerful tool in exploring the life of any object, but especially so when looking at how ostensibly peripheral societies use externally introduced technologies—such as firearms—for their own purposes, and imbue them with functions and meanings that do not always replicate

¹² Warren Whatley, "The Gun-Slave Cycle in the 18th century British slave trade in Africa," (MPRA Paper 44492, University Library of Munich, 2012), 1.

¹³ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 11.

those for which the objects in question had first been devised in their original, usually Western settings.¹⁴

We are familiar with cases in modern world history such as the Japanese, who made extensive and autonomous use of firearms originally acquired from contact with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and who even disarmed the country in the seventeenth century. It stands to reason that the precolonial evolution of firearms technology in Africa deserves to be studied as something more than a derivative of Europe.

As academic interest in African history began to shift in the 1980s, the study of technology gained attention. At first this research was mostly confined to the fields of anthropology and archaeology, but interest in the intersection of technology and military history is growing. Crucially, what has transformed our historical understanding is a shift in perspective from the European colonial to the African indigenous experience, specifically in this case the way such technologies were locally received and adapted.¹⁵ Technological reception and adaptation are key to researching and writing an African history of the gun in the nineteenth century. Among other things, this perspective reveals many importance uses of this technology in the life of ordinary people as well as powerholders.

There is a lack of research dedicated to firearms and how they contributed to large scale military structures and resistance efforts by Africans. As Macola suggests, the study of firearms by “historians have rarely gone beyond describing the ‘role’ of guns in warfare and seeking to assess the extent to which their introduction ‘impacted’ on African societies, primarily by bringing about changes in military tactics and organization.”¹⁶ This statement encompasses the

¹⁴ Giacomo Macola. *The Gun in Central Africa: A History of Technology and Politics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 7.

¹⁵ Macola. *The Gun in Central Africa*, 9.

¹⁶ Macola. *The Gun in Central Africa*, 11.

literal gap between African History and World History. While there has been a link between technology and colonialism, there is very little about the intersection of technology and resistance. Europeans have enjoyed the narrative that only they possessed ingenuity or genius that resulted in technology, science, and medicine. This is argued by Macola when he suggest that “the African continent, despite vivid displays of grassroots inventiveness and eclecticism in the sphere of everyday technology, technological determinism—the notion, that is, that society is the passive recipient of innovation, by which it is ‘determined’—has enjoyed a much longer lifespan than elsewhere.”¹⁷ The answer to this narrative of Africans lacking capacity, creativity, and initiative is fresh historical research and analysis on the topic. A critical approach to the existing and available primary sources and oral histories can yield insights, even if many documentary records were produced by Europeans.

What can make the difference in this critical approach is contextualizing the topic in terms of African resistance and the longer history of adaptations and collaboration in West Africa. Lucy Mair argues that resistance was a complex process. Some individuals and classes would resist in some instances and collaborate in others.¹⁸ This adaptative strategy was even prevalent during the era of trade between Africans and Europeans in many West African countries. It was a tool of survival. The crisis of adaptation in Africa meaning that while the slave trade was organized by large-scale state monopolies ran by warrior elites, trading in mineral produce and cash crops did not necessarily involve any special advantages for African military.¹⁹ Slaves were the main source of currency used to purchase firearms, which led to stronger military structures for West African states such as the Ashanti and Samorian Army. The

¹⁷ Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa*, 8.

¹⁸ Lucy Mair, “Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960. Volume I: The History and Politics of Colonialism, 1870-1914.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 40, no. 2 (1970): 179.

¹⁹ Reid, *Warfare in African History*, 114.

Europeans demand for slaves and the African demand for guns led to centuries of trade in which millions of Africans were exported from their continent and tons of firearms were imported into it.

My methodology combines archival research with close readings of visual and literary sources. This process brings forth a claim that the deployment and use of firearms technology was crucial to military resistance to European colonialism and that this military-technological capacity was founded on precolonial acquisition, adaptation, repair, and refinement of these weapons. More importantly, West Africans were capable of adapting and incorporating superior European weaponry into their military and political cultures. Firearms were very versatile and had many usages in which the indigenous population could adapt.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the evolution of firearms, gunpowder, and military technology in the precolonial and early colonial history of West Africa. I have organized the story in an unusual, but helpful way. Chapters Two and Three are case histories of military resistance to European conquest and the use of firearms technology in resistance. Having established the importance of this military-technological resistance, Chapter Four takes us back to the precolonial period and the overlooked history of “domesticating” and developing firearms technology.

In the first case study being discussed will be the Ashanti kingdom of Ghana and the wars in which it resisted British colonial authority. It should be known that the scientific definition of war is a state of armed conflict between different nations or states or different groups within a nation or state. War is meant to kill the enemy. Many African leaders that resisted colonial rule either died in battle or were sent to exile. In the case of the Ashanti, they were formidable opponents who put up quite remarkable resistance with the use of European gun technology as

well as native technological and military advancements. The second case study will discuss Samori Toure, a military state leader who waged a protracted war of resistance against the French. Samori not only resisted the French, but his artisans also repaired and manufactured the guns used by his fighters. This is a highly significant claim in West African military history as it relates to resistance and technology studies. Discussions about the precolonial foundations of this resistance will provide ample evidence that West Africans were able to use European-originated but African-developed technology to slow the spread of colonial rule.

2 CASE OF THE ASHANTI VS THE BRITISH

2.1 Military History

African resistance to colonial rule is often presumed to be a black and white power struggle. Relying on this rationale discounts the significance of African strategies deployed when facing colonial order. The case of the Ashanti resistance against the British in West Africa offers a vigorous example of how Africans recognized colonial abuses and acted to challenge political authority. As Europeans encroached more and more into the interior of the continent and colonized territories, they encountered resistance from various African polities and states. These kingdoms had been in power for centuries and offered the most resistance. They included the Dahomey kingdom, which is present day Benin and the Ashanti kingdom which is a part of present-day Ghana. The Ashanti was a much larger state than Dahomey. Their major resources were gold, kola nuts, and slaves. As early as 1823, the Ashanti Kingdom was the first of the West African states to resist and wage war against the Europeans. Over the course of seventy-eight years, there were at least eight military engagements and out of those the Asante held two victories. The Ashanti was a warrior state that was the only West African nation to engage Europeans and have more than one decisive military victory.²⁰ Additionally, during the battles they were able to force the British columns to retreat on several occasions.

Historically, most of the resistance research has focused on Central, South and East Africa. In “Firearms, Horses, and Samorian Army Origins” Martin Legassick discusses a history of Africa and its eventual rise with the introduction of horses which led to cavalries and then firearms. One of the most significant contributors in the resistance field is Michael Crowder. He

²⁰ Robert B Edgerton. *The Fall of the Asante Empire : The Hundred-Year War for Africa's Gold Coast*, (The Free Press, 1995), vi.

published a key study, *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, in 1971.²¹ He subsequently co-authored with J.F. Ajayi an important published survey, *History of West Africa* in 1972.²² In the 1980s, historians expanded their view of African social and political history. By the 2000s they founded their work on an understanding of the sophisticated nature of precolonial African political and military arrangements and institutions and sharpened their focus on resistance. It is my hope that this thesis contributes to this welcome development in African history by highlighting the importance of African adaptations and use of firearms technology in the precolonial period and the military resistance to European conquest in West Africa during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scramble for colonies in this region.

West African kingdoms, such as the Ashanti wanted to maintain control over their vast territories and remain a sovereign state. While the desire to maintain sovereignty was not unusual, only a few African states had the capabilities to resist colonial rule through direct armed resistance. George C. Musgraves stated during his time in Africa that the monarchy of the Dahomey and the kings of Ashanti have enjoyed greater tyrannical power than any other known African state.²³ This shows just how the Ashanti were viewed by Europeans in regards to not only their status in West Africa, but as a military power. In terms of the political geography of West Africa, the Kingdom of the Dahomey was located in the east of the region and to the west was the Gaman tribe and to the North the notorious Ashanti. The Ashanti were able to expand their territory to over 100,000 square miles and incorporate over three million inhabitants.²⁴

²¹ Michael Crowder, *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation* (New York: Africana, 1971).

²² J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, *History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

²³ George C. Musgraves. *To Kumassi with Scott: A Description of a Journey from Liverpool to Kumassi with the Ashanti Expedition, 1895-6* (London: Wightman Press, 1896), 29.

²⁴ Jarvis L. Hargrove. *The Political Economy of the Interior Gold Coast : The Asante and the Era of Legitimate Trading, 1807-1875* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 62.

The trade in firearms and the equipping of military forces with such weapons in this region transformed West Africa into a gun society. The Ashanti were ahead of their time, putting an early emphasis on acquiring European technology and knowledge. Adaptability and the realization of the importance of monopolizing the firearms market is how the Ashanti enjoyed their position of strength. A majority of firearms traded to the Asante and Dahomey were never carried further inland, because both states through restrictions limited the distribution of guns in the lands to their north.²⁵ These strategies that the West African kingdoms used reduced the number of guns that made it to the interior. Also this enabled them to restrict firearms technology from their enemies while maintaining this type of superiority over their neighboring states. Tactics as these eventually led to the build-up of Ashanti firearms strength.

The rivalry between the Ashanti and the British made conflict increasingly likely. As time progressed, conflicts seemed imminent between the Asante and British. The first clash with the British was in 1807 and the last battles were fought in 1900. As the Asante and the British would move closer towards battle, the Asante had a great advantage in numbers. The Ashanti were capable of raising an army of over 200,000 soldiers. Many times outnumbered, the British relied on recruiting African allies from the coast, like the Yoruba and Hausas of Nigeria. Nonetheless, these soldiers were found to be no match for the Asante and their military forces. While taking advantage, the British used existing disputes between the Ashanti and their neighboring communities to create conflicts in which the British would eventually intervene. Rival tribes could use Europeans presence to settle scores with other tribes and get rid of their long-time enemies. Resistance efforts suffered due to there being no widely accepted African

²⁵ R.A. Kea, "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of African History* 12, no. 2 (April 1971): 201.

identity for Africans. The strongest and most common identities tended to be communal and not religious. This can explain African participation when assisting European colonizers with conquering other African states and societies through violence.

While firearms were prevalent in the Ashanti kingdom due to trade, military engagement with the British was not immediate. From the years of 1823 to 1901 the British continuously invaded the Gold Coast and more importantly the Ashanti Empire. During this period there were a series of conflicts. The time line of these wars is as follows. The first Anglo-Ashanti War was between 1823 and 1831, the second in 1863, the third war was from 1873 and 1874, and the fourth between 1873 and 1874 and the fifth and last one was in 1900-1901. The numerous conflicts show just how unwilling the Ashanti were in regards to adopting British imperialistic policies. The Gold Coast, as it was called by the British was officially established in 1867 and expanded in 1872 when the British purchased the Dutch Gold Coast from the Netherlands. A part of this purchase included lands claimed by the Ashanti. This did not sit well with the Ashanti and they ultimately invaded the British.

A history of European contact and relationships was key to acquire guns for any West African resistance. In addition to trade with the British, the Ashanti had received guns previously from the Dutch which had increased their arsenal of weapons. The Ashanti used diplomacy when acquiring their much needed weapons and would sometimes even use devious stratagems to force the hand of the Dutch in order to receive more firearms when needed. Not only did the Dutch provide weapons, they trained the Ashanti in military tactics which gave them distinct advantages when facing British militaries. A.F. Mocker-Ferryman has suggested that whenever they were threatened by the Ashanti Kingdom, the Dutch usually provided them with guns and

trained Ashanti gunners.²⁶ The ability to favorably negotiate in this capacity with a European nation is a demonstration of the status of the Ashanti kingdom in West Africa. The tactical and military training they received additionally prepared them to face any future European threats.

Understanding the dynamics of the Ashanti and British relationship is key to how episodes of resistance started. Although equipped with weapons and military training, when the British encroached upon the Gold Coast, the Ashanti first adhered to the demands of the British as they had made agreements beneficial to both groups. Negotiations left the Ashanti in power throughout their region for the most part. They were sometimes instructed to pay monthly to the British Kingdom, but rarely did. However, the sharing of power and territories in the Gold Coast laid the groundwork for eventual conflict between British and Asante armed forces. As stated by F.K. Buah, “during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries there were many armed clashes between the Asante {or Ashanti} and the states in southern Ghana, with the British on the coast becoming increasingly involved in these conflicts. These armed confrontations were the result of a complex pattern of events and circumstances.”²⁷ As the British became more involved through colonialism, enemies of the Ashanti would retreat to British providences for protection. When the Ashanti requested their return to face penalties, the British would most times deny the Ashanti requests. This increased tensions that over time, transitioned to a resentment of British authority by the Ashanti kings. An example of British disregard for Ashanti rule and dominion can be found in *Fanti and Ashanti: three papers read on board the S. S. Ambriz on the voyage to the Gold coast* in December 1862. This writing shows how the Ashanti demanded a slave and a former chief accused of stealing gold from the King. The British Governor refused to return either to the Ashanti Kingdom. Instead he asked for proof against the accused chief, which was

²⁶ A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, *British West Africa: its rise and progress* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1900), 68.

²⁷ F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana* (London: Macmillan Education, 1980), 83.

now under British protection. The governor did this due to Britain's antislavery policies which he stated that "the British flag can never float o-er a slave, once under that flag, the slave becomes a free man."²⁸ In other words, when a slave or refugee fled to British territories the administration would issue their freedom and protection. Hence why there were so many Africans fleeing to British protection and away from the certain death of the Ashanti. The nature of the Ashanti and British rule tended to contrast. The Ashanti were enslavers and the British were seen as liberators. This type of protection from the British tended to undermine the Ashanti authority and rule. These types of quarrels would eventually turn into armed conflicts.

Still with guns flooding West Africa, the types of guns and how they were used by the Ashanti was important. R.A. Kea offers the argument that technological advances in firearms did not necessarily equal immediate victory for the user. In fact, he proposes that without the proper training firearms are of little value in regards to military engagements. Guns and "certainly, muskets in themselves were of little use, without the discipline and training needed to ensure that the troops could maintain a steady rate of fire; for this purpose, the armies of Dahomey and Asante are recorded to have employed the tactic of firing by ranks, known in Europe as the countermarch."²⁹ This statement supports the idea that the Ashanti had organized militaries and this is in part due to the training they received from the Dutch. Discussions of West African military structure and rankings as it relates to resistance is what has been missing from past African military history when describing Anglo-African warfare. Until recently, African warfare was seen as barbaric and savage. As resistance research develops there are findings that states

²⁸ H. Brackenbury and G. Lightfoot Huyshe. *Fanti and Ashanti: three papers read on board the S. S. Ambriz on the voyage to the Gold coast* (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1873), 26.

²⁹ Kea, "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," 213.

like the Ashanti nation had very structured and organized military structures patterned from European models which improved resistance efforts.

Additionally, historians have noted that some of the longest episodes of military resistance to European conquests were in West Africa. The longest confrontation was the century-long struggle between the Asante and the British from 1807 to 1900, when the Asante armies fought not only small, but also large battles. African soldiers fought against the invasion of Europeans in spite of their superior technological advancements like modern rifles and machine guns that could inflict heavy casualties. Descriptions of the Ashanti portrayed them as fierce and intimidating warriors when first viewed by the British. Mary Gaunt, a British traveler in Africa gives a detailed description of the Ashanti as having “encampments of fierce Ashanti warriors, their clothes wound round their middles, their hair brushed fiercely back from their foreheads, their powder-flask and bullet-bags slung across their shoulders, and their long Danes in their hands, the locks carefully covered with a shield of pigskin.”³⁰ This representation provides Europeans with a strong warrior illustration while also presenting them as savages. The strong military structure of the Ashanti would soon be challenged as British colonial order disrupted Ashanti authority in their lands.

As tensions escalated Garnet Wolseley would challenge the Ashanti and their authority. Wolseley was a British general who had fought in various British colonial efforts throughout Africa. Although experienced in bringing about colonial order in other parts of Africa, he called his struggle with the Asante the “most horrible war” he had ever fought and admitted that he had barely won it.³¹ After numerous engagements with Africans, Wolseley would not underestimate

³⁰ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa* (London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 341, [http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/Alone in West Africa by Mary Gaunt](http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/Alone%20in%20West%20Africa%20by%20Mary%20Gaunt): (Accessed March 30, 2020).

³¹ Edgerton. *The Fall of the Asante Empire*, vi.

the Ashanti. While there were political and social differences, the major cause of such conflicts between the British and Asante were mainly economic. General Wolseley advanced into the Ashanti Kingdom attempting to reach their capital of Kumasi in 1874. This was in response to an Ashanti invasion of the British protectorate.

The British government demanded payment for protecting the Asante, which caused strain on an already delicate situation in the region. In addition to payments, in which the Ashanti agreed to, but paid few times, the British did not place the high level of significance around the Golden Stool. The Golden Stool was a throne that represented the Ashanti king, leader, or *Asantehene*. The demand for it by the British governor bolstered the Ashanti's defiance and resolve to resist. The significance of this Golden Stool forced Britain into a long series of battles and resistance efforts at the beginning of the twentieth century which was known as the War of the Golden Stool. These engagements were not sporadic to say the least, but had been building up over the past twenty-five years as tensions mounted between the British and Ashanti. Some battles were small in size and others were large campaigns that cost thousands of lives. The resilience of the Asante, their bravery and willingness to die for their cause never wavered.

The Asante have a long history of being capable and willing to die for their country, their god, their honor, and their king, or *Asantehene* as he is called. History books have referenced the bravery of the Ashanti soldiers and their positions as fearless warriors. Lord Wolseley experienced their bravery during his campaign in 1874. The Ashanti had a practice of placing their generals behind the soldiers during battles. If a soldier would turn to retreat, they would be killed by the Ashanti generals. Lord Wolseley used these types of actions to reinforce the British notion that the Ashanti were cruel and savage enslavers. As Musgraves suggests "if an Ashanti general was defeated it meant death to him; for he paid the forfeit with his head when he returned

to Kumasi, and they usually committed suicide on the field rather than suffer the disgrace of public execution.”³² This was key to the ferocious demeanor and behavior of the Ashanti warriors which at times seemed fearless. As previously stated, the Ashanti were willing to die for their country and king.

A strong showing in battle was essential for the Ashanti in the art of war. The inability to bring victory was shameful and leaders chose death over facing their king in defeat. Their generals would kill soldiers that attempted to desert and avoid fighting. The Ashanti had a war song when going into battles: “If I go forward I die. If I go backwards I die. Better go forward and die.”³³ This mental strength along with a strict military structure formed a strong military unit. The execution of warriors by Ashanti generals on the battlefield can be compared to the European desertion policies. These policies prohibited British soldiers from abandoning their posts otherwise they could face execution. Both rules of the British and the Ashanti were comparable wartime policies. Yet in their writings and journals, the British tended to represent the Ashanti as uncivilized or savage for killing deserting soldiers.

The slave trade was at the forefront before colonialism. Some regarded the arrival of colonialists as an opportunity to increase trade. Although trade was mutual between the British and Ashanti kingdom, the Ashanti Kingdom was strong-willed when asserting their dominance, rule, and sovereignty. Eventually, the Ashanti kingdom was in a power struggle over the Gold Coast. Not just for territory, but a struggle for stature amongst the indigenous population. There was fear from the subjects of the Ashanti and they saw the British as their rescuers. Due to their powerful politics and military, as well as economic reputation, the Asante Kingdom’s hegemony

³² Musgraves. *To Kumassi with Scott*, 98.

³³ Musgraves. *To Kumassi with Scott*, 98.

to the west was feared nearly as much as British colonialism.³⁴ In many cases, the local tribes feared the rule of the Ashanti for their violence and some may even have preferred the rule of the British. This shows the fear that the local population, communities, and subjects of other rulers/states had for the Asante, but also shows cause for concern on the part of the British as well.

What may help to place such colonial confrontations and resulting conflicts of arms in a better perspective is to grasp the fact that there were multiple pre-existing unities both in patterns of African trade and in migration, as well as broad ethno-linguistic and cultural affinities that bound neighboring states and chiefdoms together and long preceded efforts by the intruding European imperial powers to send in military expeditions, establish their own forms of order and administration and to draw artificial boundary lines that divided them.³⁵

This is how disunity among the indigenous was taken advantage of by not only the British, but other European powers that carved out their own empires throughout the continent of Africa. By sending in expeditions, they were the alternative ruling figures to centuries of local fighting amongst African states. With this came the ability to rally troops from competing tribes to assist with offensives against larger and more powerful African states.

To add to the conflict, Britain and other European colonizers found that leveraging themselves in communal disputes amidst African internal wars was very beneficial. While the trading system of gold on the coast of Ghana was already in place, the emergence of the British tended to heighten already stringent tensions. The Asante were known slave traders during this time as well as great warriors. During the colonization of Ghana, the Asante made great profits

³⁴ Raymond E Dumett, "A West African 'Fashoda': Expanding Trade, Colonial Rivalries and Insurrection in the Côte d'Ivoire/Gold Coast Borderlands: The Assikasso Crisis of 1897-98," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 5 (2013): 724.

³⁵ Dumett, "A West African 'Fashoda': Expanding Trade," 710.

when allying themselves with the British which was also the case with most African rulers and precolonial polities.

2.2 Ashanti Resistance

The 1900 Asante War of Resistance involves large scale conflicts between the British and the Ashanti. During this war Nana Yaa Asantewaa was chosen to lead the resistance against the British. The Asante Empire offered stiff resistance and stood in the way of the British from conquering the entire colony of the Gold Coast. The British called the war The Asante Rebellion or Asante Campaign on of 1900. For the Asante it was seen as more significant and was referred to as the Yaa Asantewaa War or the Asantewaa War of Independence. The war started on April 2, 1900 and did not end until March 1901. This war was the most significant of the conflicts. According to A. Adu Boahen, not many Asante or British remember the preceding wars, yet practically every Asante and many British still remember the Asante Rebellion or Asante Campaign of 1900.³⁶ The Ashanti had harbored resentment over demands for payment, colonial administrative intrusion, and the order to surrender the Golden Stool. These resentments many times found violent means of expression due to colonial abuses of the preceding years. After years of nonviolence there was a call to challenge British rule and regain Asante's sovereignty. At this time, Yaa Asantewaa or the Queen Mother as she was called "gladly accepted the responsibility because, as noted, her grandson, Kwasi Afranie the Edwesohene, had been sent into exile with Nana Prempeh I."³⁷ Prempeh I was the thirteenth ruler of the Kingdom of Ashanti. He began to defend his kingdom after the British offered a Protectorate over his controlled lands. The Ashanti were determined and started a campaign to reassert Asante

³⁶ A Adu Boahen. *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*, (Oxford: Currey, 2003).

³⁷ Arhin Brempong, "The Role of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the 1900 Asante War of Resistance," *Ghana Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019): 101.

sovereignty. Ultimately, the British would annex the territory and declare the lands as the Gold Coast colony. Afterwards Prempeh I was imprisoned and first sent to Elmina Castle. After months of being locked up in the castle, he along with other Ashanti leaders were exiled to Seychelles.

This sets the framework of how The War of the Golden Stool or Yaa Asantewaa War in 1900-1901 came to be such a critical point in British and Ashanti histories, in particular the expansion of the British Gold Coast colony into the interior of what is today Ghana. The war came about from a series of events which facilitated the search for the Golden Stool, the siege of the British fort, and the harassment of the rear-guard of the governor's entourage as it broke through the siege and went through other areas of the Gold Coast.³⁸ A war of acquisition was fought throughout the Ashanti region. For a woman warrior and leader to wage war against the British meant that her people possessed confidence in her militaristic capabilities. Works by Arhin Brempong suggests that Yaa Asantewaa was able to rally warriors to wage resistance against the British and offered traditional Ashanti values. Coming from a military state, Nana Yaa Asantewaa's was able to personify the Ashanti historic military tradition while objecting foreign rule.³⁹ Her ability to return the Ashanti to a traditional warrior mentality gave her influence with her people. This display of strength and unification was needed to move forward with defying and resisting colonial order through armed resistance. The shift is important because during the previous years, the Ashanti leadership had refused to engage in real battle with the British choosing diplomacy over war. It should be known that there were some societies in West Africa that combined both diplomatic resistance as well as violent resistance. According to Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, only societies with a centralized government and coordinated

³⁸ Brempong, "The Role of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the 1900 Asante War of Resistance," 101.

³⁹ Brempong, "The Role of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the 1900 Asante War of Resistance," 110.

militaries would wage conventional warfare, but societies without traditional government organizations tended to resort to guerrilla warfare against their invader.⁴⁰ While viewed as acephalous, or lacking a centralized “head” authority, the Ashanti were not without leadership. In the absence of conventional governments, the Ashanti still relied heavily on the king, which is why the Golden Stool was so highly regarded. The Ashanti kingdom was the exception to most African military structures. They first chose diplomacy and negotiations, but when all efforts failed they chose conventional warfare instead of guerilla tactics.

After Yaa Asantewaa began to lead resistance and war efforts, she reinforced the ideology of independence from any outside sources other than Asante. Her legacy persists in modern Ghanaian nationalism and state policy, which insists on resistance to all forms of aggression whether domestic or foreign.⁴¹ She exemplified what the Ashanti warrior represented for centuries and had the quality of being able to rally 20,000 Ashanti warriors to support resistance efforts. Once the Asante leaders were defeated and sent into exile, resistance efforts continued.

Although the leaders were gone they were not forgotten. In Ghana when the Asante were exiled to the Seychelles Islands, leaders “in deploying their spatially extensive connections and imperial networks to contain and manage anti-colonial resistance through exile, the British inadvertently facilitated new transnational encounters and forms of anti-colonial resistance.”⁴² When sending Ashanti rulers away during the height of their influence created heroes, which were still able to utilize their positions as a platform even while in prison. Even when British authorities were in positions of overwhelming authority, their policy of exiling leaders did not

⁴⁰ Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, *West African Responses to European Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: University Press of America, 2002), 145.

⁴¹ Harcourt Fuller, “Commemorating an African Queen,” *African Arts* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 13.

⁴² Uma Kothari, “Contesting Colonial Rule: Politics of Exile in the Indian Ocean,” *Geoforum* 43, no. 4 (2012): 702.

close off African agency. While voicing national identity from exile was problematic, literary discourse along with other cultural expressions proved beneficial in the articulation, development, and validation of national identity.⁴³ This is crucial because African leaders were able to maintain some form of authority and persist with resistance efforts even while in exile.

As the Ashanti resisted, the British relied heavily on their African alliances with the Yoruba and Hausas. They were used for their native knowledge of not only the African landscapes, but first-hand combat experience with Ashanti. With a history of firearms trade with both the Dutch and the British, the Ashanti were well equipped when waging war against the British. Historically, access to firearms was not an issue with the Ashanti as they had built a large arsenal through the trade of gold, kola nuts and slaves. Adabo, A war chief of the Asante and a relative of Asantehene Prempeh, was reported to have over 3,000 rifles at his disposal and the ability to raise a force of 500 Ashanti warriors.⁴⁴ The ability to obtain firearms through trade and recruit soldiers proved advantageous for the Ashanti during military altercations with the British.

The importance of the Anglo-Asante War is explained by T.C. McCaskie in his book *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1950*:

In 1896 Asante was still recovering from the civil wars when the British arrested and deported the Asantehene Asyeman Prempeh and a number of his close kin and most senior office holders. This political decapitation was the prelude to the formal British annexation of the Asante in 1901. It also occasioned deeply felt sensations of loss and disorientation among many Asante's people. Such feelings crystalized into a politicized resentment and resistance among some- but by no means all- Asante and this exploded in the last Anglo-Asante war (1900-1), the failed military rising against the new colonial order that is known in tradition as the Yaa Asantewaa (in commemoration of the Edwesohemaa Yaa Asantewaa, the symbol of its inspiration and spirit).⁴⁵

⁴³ M'bare N'gom, "Writing from Exile: Memories, Displacement, and the Construction of National Identity in the Poetic Production of Equatorial Guinea." *Afro-Hispanic Review* 28, no. 2 (2009): 109.

⁴⁴ Dumett, "A West African 'Fashoda': Expanding Trade," 730.

⁴⁵ T. C. McCaskie. *Asante Identities : History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1950* (London: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 69.

This has become known as the Siege of Kumasi which was the capital of the Ashanti Region. The British also had built a fort in Kumasi. Based on the actions of Governor Sir Frederick Hodgson whom was over the region at the time, he demanded that the Golden Stool be surrendered to him. During this time, when the Asante became a protectorate of British and paying installments of gold to the Queen, the Governor wanted to ensure absolute loyalty. This was seen by the British military as agitating the situation. The Europeans already had established ground rules, and the demand for the Golden Stool was viewed as an attack on the Ashanti culture and history. The Golden Stool was a symbol in Ashanti culture, a powerful representation of the King of the Ashanti. Whomever ruled, would sit upon the Golden Stool and was given full allegiance and obedience on the Ashanti people. Hodgson felt there was no need to have the Golden Stool and demanded it. Additionally, he felt it was his right to have the Golden Stool as he was now the protectorate. Whether knowingly or unknowingly as to how important this stool was to the Ashanti, Hodgson didn't see why the stool was needed as the Ashanti were now subjects of Britain.

At this point, with their last king, Prempeh I, in exile at Seychelles, the Ashanti had no intention of submitting to the demand of the Golden Stool. Prempeh I was sent away as a strategic approach used by the British and French during these times. By removing persons of authority and imprisoning them, the British were able to maintain order and limit rebellions as their outspoken leaders were no longer available to spearhead any such movements. The British understood that execution of these leaders would indeed lead to revolts, resistance, and possible martyrdom therefore opted to exile instead. In many cases these exiled individuals would be

released years after, when they were either forgotten or were not viewed as a threat. In early newspaper publications, articles were printed that caused concern on behalf of the British and French as well. Stories of this type were used as propaganda to obtain European support of war against the Ashanti. We see in an edition of this paper that Prempeh I was viewed as prepared for war. The article reads:

All the Gold buried by Kofi Kallalli during the last war has been dug up by Prempeh. He is therefore possessed of money to fight and Samory has, it is reported, entered into an alliance for the offensive and defensive purposes with the Ashanti's. They also stated in the same article that Prempeh was prepared to cut all telegraph lines and were armed with ammunition such as sniders, Martini, Henri's, Chassepots, and machine guns.⁴⁶

Kofi Kallalli was the predecessor to Prempeh and tenth King of the Ashanti. The article ended by reemphasizing not to sell powder or ammunition to the colony until permission was given. The original article can from *The Gold Coast Express*, November 5, 1895, but was ran again in *Sierra Leone Times* on November 16th. This shows how the British were able to communicate effectively between colonies to stop the spread of any resistance efforts while also spreading propaganda during this time. Even if the communication was embellished it shows just how much of a threat both the Ashanti and Samorian states were towards the end of nineteenth century West Africa.

The demand to surrender the Golden Stool was the spark which propelled the Ashanti in battle and a rush to armed resistance against the British. Whether it was the hate of the white man or the sheer love of fighting the Ashanti would not submit to British authority, especially under the submission of the Golden Stool. This act by the Governor was an unnecessary demand, especially since he did not have adequate personnel to enforce the ultimatum. "It was chiefly in furtherance of the gold-mining enterprise that the expedition of 1896 to Kumasi was undertaken,

⁴⁶ "Ashantee Preparation for War. The Ashantee Ready," *Sierra Leone Times*. November 16, 1895, 3.

and was followed by the administrative experiments which culminated in Sir Frederick Hodgson's disaster in April, 1900, or in his rescue by Sir James Willcocks."⁴⁷ Therefore the main objective for gold and riches had already been achieved. The demand by Hodgson was deemed unnecessary and was of great cost to the British.

This became a year-long military engagement over the Golden Stool that ultimately showcased the Asante's military strength as a formidable opponent. This was the first battle in West African history in which a seven pounder gun was abandoned then carried off by the enemy, and that enemy was the Ashanti. According to H.R. Fox Bourne, "the Ashanti forming the stronger party, monopolized the more healthy and fertile districts around Kumasi, which a hundred years ago, and later date was the center of a great Ashanti dominion".⁴⁸ The ability to secure areas around their capital gave the Ashanti advantages when cutting off the roads with stockades in and out of Kumasi.

2.3 Weapons

At the beginning of these clashes in the early nineteenth century, access through trade was essential to the Ashanti resistance efforts. Robert Edgerton argued in *The Fall of the Asante Empire* that there was an abundance of muskets on the West African Coast through British sell and trade as early as 1646. In 1829 alone British traders in West Africa sold 52,540 muskets and pistols and almost two million pounds of gunpowder.⁴⁹ Although these numbers represent West African purchases and trading of firearms, we must note that these figures may be higher due to the lack of records keeping for African trade on the part of European traders. Despite the British

⁴⁷ H.R. Fox Bourne (Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society). *Blacks and Whites in West Africa: an Account of the Past Treatment and Present Condition of West African Natives under European Influence or Control* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1901), 62.

⁴⁸ Bourne. *Blacks and Whites in West Africa*, 19.

⁴⁹ Edgerton. *The Fall of the Asante Empire*, 67.

providing a large number of weapons, the Dutch matched or sold even more. It should be known that starting in the 1870's, the Asante ordered tens of thousands of guns and tons of gunpowder in preparation for war against the British. In most cases, the difficulty was not the quantity of the firearms, but the low quality. Typically, these guns sold to the Asante and other West Africans were either outdated or badly manufactured. Guns of this grade would most times explode or stocks would split and would have to be repaired by Ashanti blacksmiths.

However, the issue of low-quality guns was not new to Africa nor the Ashanti. The role of these guns was complex because lethal instruments were not necessary when dealing with slaving as they needed their slave stock in relatively good health. With centuries of iron-working and iron smelting, Ashanti blacksmiths were able to repair many firing and mechanism issues from European firearms. The abilities of the Ashanti blacksmiths to repair low standard weapons was fundamental in maintaining working firearms while engaged in war. R.A. Kea writes that "indeed, various nineteenth-century accounts indicate that firearms were not only repaired by Asante's blacksmiths, but that barrels, locks, and stocks were on occasion remade. Gunpowder is said to have been manufactured in northern Ghana, presumably during the nineteenth century, and may in fact have been prepared in Asante as well".⁵⁰ The history of trade and blacksmiths for West Africans tended to work hand in hand as defective guns made their way into daily activities including hunting, rituals, and eventually warfare. The technological advances the Ashanti had mastered increased their ability to wage war and resist foreign threats.

Blacksmiths not only repaired guns but created numerous objects to be used in warfare. Examples of Asante's blacksmithing ingenuity are the throwing knife and clapper bells. Blacksmiths developed a double clapper bell that when struck during the drumming of

⁵⁰ Kea, "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," 206.

warrior groups could be used to send messages.⁵¹ The ability to effectively communicate between ranks of the Ashanti army should not be underestimated. Just as European telegraph innovations offered them effective means of communication, the clapper bells did the same for the Ashanti. When facing British troops with better weapons and more conventional warfare experience, these bells were able to warn of incoming and advancing troops. Signals could also provide the Ashanti with the approximate number of soldiers approaching as well.

Furthermore, to add to the advanced skills of the Asante military structure, their leaders also appointed scouts and spies to report any activity of the enemy. These people were “posted in the most ingenious fashion, either up in trees, which they ascend and descend by means of a cross pied of wood tied onto the trees, notches being cut in the flanges on which they can rest their guns, and they fire their signal gun which was repeated by another, and so on as far as they enemy’s next war-camp.”⁵² These scouts would then let off a number of rounds as code of how many British soldiers were approaching. This was a communications system that worked throughout this engagement which allowed the Ashanti to be successful in battle.

Although the Ashanti were advanced in ironworking, Europeans still refused to acknowledge their indigenous technology. The Europeans would consider those who resisted as foolish, fanatical or uncivilized regardless of any types of native ingenuity they may have possessed. For example, although Africans may have been able to smelt small amounts of metal, Europeans felt they still lacked in large scale productive measures. “In response to shifts in local economies during the colonial period, African blacksmiths began incorporating increasingly available salvaged materials into their work through creative recycling.”⁵³ The African

⁵¹ A.F. Roberts & M.C.Berns, “Striking Iron: The Art of African Blacksmiths,” *African Arts* 51(1) (2018): 70.

⁵² C. H. Armitage and A.F. Montanaro. *The Ashanti Campaign of 1900* (London: Sands, 1901), 176.

⁵³ Roberts & Berns, “Striking Iron,” 68.

blacksmiths function in society was not to industrialize but repair, mend, and create for their local economies. This is the fundamental difference between European and African means of production, as Africans were not concerned with mass production. Additionally, these low-quality firearms led to the Asante requiring lower quality gunpowder. A high potent gunpowder increased the chances of gun barrels exploding causing injury or even death to the user.

As a solution for the low-quality guns being traded, Europeans were able to reduce the gunpowder potency by decreasing the saltpeter. However, the gunpowder came with its own set of issues as the Asante were required to use higher portions of the low potent gunpowder to increase the range of the guns and bullets. This led to a higher usage, therefore inventory was depleted more rapidly during war. Ammunition was also a factor with many Ashanti soldiers lacking an adequate supply of bullets. Being innovative and adapting to the low-quality guns, the Africans found that they could use a less expensive slug, or pieces of iron, lead, or pewter to fire. However, these types of projectiles were only deadly or lethal at a closer range. This showcases their adaptability when faced with Europeans which possessed higher quality firearms and ammunition.

To add to the complexities of their arsenal of weapons, the Asante had more of a variety of guns than just the Dane which increased their capabilities during resistance efforts. More importantly, in addition to having an arsenal of guns, they were able to procure their gun powder from Cape Coast and manufacture their own bullets from rocks and scrap metals also obtained from the Cape Coast. The Ashanti's self-reliance for gunpowder and ammunition was vital, especially during the Asante-British War. Furthermore, according to Adu Boahen the guns available to the Ashanti were as follows:

1. Oteaborofere- gun with a long barrel, even used to pick-pawpaw from the trees in the bush.

2. Nnarennare- gun shorter than oteaborofere.
3. Akodiawuo-short gun, Asante pistol.
4. Ananta- gun with a big and long barrel; used to kill elephants.⁵⁴

Having these various types of weapons would prove important as the Ashanti built up their firepower in preparation for war with the British.

The sovereigns of Asante also distributed firearms and gun powder as gifts to rulers of neighboring states, but they also permitted guns and gunpowder to be sent to Kong and Timbuktu, where they were publicly sold. A late nineteenth century reference states that old long Dane guns were carried where cavalry were used. These guns were shortened by cutting off a portion of the barrel and stock to adapt them for cavalry use. Firearms, however, remained the exception rather than the rule in the lands north of Asante (Gonja, Dagomba, Mamprussi, etc.), where spears, lances, swords and bows and arrows prevailed as weapons of warfare and hunting.⁵⁵

The Asante undertaking of firearms and not indigenous weapons exhibits their acceptance of modern warfare. The firearms technology in the Ashanti region was more modern than their neighbors. Firearms became the main source of weaponry which was able to be used against the British.

The technological advantages the Europeans had during the pre-colonial and colonial eras played a significant role in the outcomes of the Asante battles. The Europeans were able to load and use ramrods to firmly fit the bullet in the barrel. Before the invention of the rifles, the British would use “Brown Bess”- a .75 caliber musket with range of approximately 150 yards. Even at this distance being struck could be lethal. The Asante had far less technology and even reloading caused issues. While at a distinct disadvantage due to the low quality of the weapons they had acquired, the Ashanti still were able to wage war and resist against insuperable odds. For instance, when firing in battle against the enemy the first round the Asante fired was usually the

⁵⁴ Boahen, *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*, 58.

⁵⁵ Kea, “Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” 202.

most deadly, because their guns had been carefully loaded prior to going into battle.⁵⁶ Any reload afterwards and thereafter, typically when fired would splatter or projectiles would fan out aimlessly. The Asante warriors then rapidly reloaded while using excess gun powder. Usually it would take at least a minute for the Asante to reload their outdated Dane guns. During this time they would usually be defenseless once they fired a round. These types of disadvantages stem from the lower quality firearms that flooded the coast of Africa, not their military capabilities. A summary of quality versus low quality guns is described below:

Gold and Slave Coast traders expected the firearms they bought from the Europeans to have certain definite features (1) Strong barrels. (2) Brass mounting. (3) Locks which gave a loud click when cocked. (4) Large bores. (5) Lightness of weight. Instead, the defective firearms could have one or more of the following faults: (1) Locks with broken cocks. (2) Rusty locks. (3) Holes or cracks in the barrels. (4) Stocks made of pieces of wood glued together. (5) The screws attached to the locks were so small that they fell out of the holes.⁵⁷

To add to the complexities, African expectations were not met regarding firearms quality. Therefore the history of blacksmiths and their abilities to repair these guns is of most importance. Without blacksmiths and a history of iron smelting the Ashanti could have not offered any real resistance. At least would not have been able to resist long term as the guns rarely functioned after their first usages.

Even with knowledge and skills of native blacksmiths, the way in which they repaired guns was slow. Each of the flints was to be put one by one near the click of the gun. Bullets could only be loaded one by one in the barrel. This older technology failed in comparison to more advanced breech loading guns that the Europeans had. In addition to slow loading guns, gunpowder or lack thereof was another concern for the Ashanti. Another obstacle the Ashanti

⁵⁶ Edgerton. *The Fall of the Asante Empire*, 68.

⁵⁷ Kea, "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," 202-204.

had to overcome was that there was little gunpowder available in the region. Therefore the Asante had to make provisions and began making their own gunpowder with brimstone and bullets. The use of less saltpeter was crucial, as any high-powered gun powder could cause explosion in the low powered guns, in which the Ashanti possessed.

The Ashanti guns had shorter range as well, which meant they needed to be closer to their enemies before firing. In addition, tree bark could be used to make bullets as well, as long as mixed with brimstone. After mixing and molded into shape, they were then sundried to harden before being used. Then the bullets were laid to dry in the sun after they had been shaped. Their relative size is that of a small stone that could kill the enemy. The Ashanti were well equipped with these types of ammunition and knew the importance of being able to reload quickly. They would tie the bullets around their waist for easier access and reload after every shot. These were indeed harsh firing conditions in which the Ashanti had to contend with. The structure of the Ashanti army was well organized and capable of inflicting casualties upon their enemies. H.C.J. Bliss described the strategies of the Asante as advanced in the description below.

The organization of the Asante army was quite wonderful, and seemed to one almost incredible for any savage race. It was sub-divided into units of different sizes, the smallest being a company. The various chieftains held command proportionate to their rank. Royalties had large bodyguards of picked men, and the commander-in-chief had a staff and intelligence department of linguists and fetish men. Dispersed forces such as that on the Cape Coast Road, were, nonetheless, under the command of a single individual. Each war camp also had its general. The usual method of fighting was in three lines, each formed of a company under its campaign; these would double up and fire successively, running to the rear when they had done so to get freshly loaded guns; this accounted for the unceasing fire they were enabled to keep up. The hunters, the enemy's crack shots, always had rifles, and were usually placed in trees or in rifle pits, with special orders to pick off the white men. Some of the nearest and most cleverly made things I have seen were the ramrods which the enemy made out of telegraphy wire, miles of which they removed for this purpose. It was closely twisted, and had a handle at one end, with an empty cartridge case fixed on at the other to facilitate the

ramming of the charges. Such were the weapons and methods of the enemy we had to encounter.⁵⁸

The innovative ways in which the Ashanti were able to fight, with lesser weapons was fundamental. The abilities to adapt to different sorts of conditions, proved beneficial in their long engagements with the British.

2.4 Asante Stockades

Just as important as the Ashanti's use of firearms was their knowledge of their lands and territories. This is an advantage that all indigenous people have when faced with invasions from a foreign land. Part of the preparedness of the Asante was their organization. In efforts to neutralize the British firepower and technological advances, their military began to implement the concept of stockades. Stockades are barriers formed from wooden posts or stakes placed in a vertical position. Stockades are used as a defense mechanism or to confine the enemy. Mende travelers first introduced the concept of stockades to Asante as they found that stockades were beneficial in their conflicts against the British in Sierra Leone in 1898. This required a significant communications effort on the part of the Ashanti. Using advanced engineering, in three weeks they were able to block all the roads in and out of Kumasi so that the British could not send reinforcements to their fort. Whenever supplies would get low, because of the strategy of blocking all roads the Ashanti took advantage. They showed no mercy in their blockade of essentials even as British ammunition became low. Anyone captured attempting to come in or leave would be tortured or put to death.

⁵⁸ T.J. Lewin, "The Structure of Political Conflict in Asante, 1895-1900," (Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1974), 57.

The Ashanti construction of the stockades was in depth and complicated. The engineering technology used by slave labor to build these stockades included “two six-foot-high walls of logs, lashed together with telegraph wire torn down from its route from Kumasi to the coast, were filled in with five to six feet of densely packed dirt, stones, and smaller logs where loopholes were cut to allow firing.”⁵⁹ Blocking all roads into Kumasi, this description shows how soundly built these stockades were and the advantages of the native West Africans in regards to the familiarity of their territories. Many times the Asante used zigzag patterns so they could use cross fire should the British penetrate inward. The outskirts or flanks of these stockades were fortified with troops as well to provide fire power. Behind the stockades were war camps with thousands of soldiers. As Edgerton shows these camps had a thousand or more huts equipped with bamboo beds, sitting areas, and other large structures with reinforced log on the roofs that could withstand any firepower other than a direct hit from a 75-mm shell.⁶⁰ The use of stockades along with the large arsenal of weapons is why the Ashanti were able to sustain war for long periods of time. These stockades could be range up to four hundred yards in length, six feet in height, and six feet in thickness. Should these stockades be penetrated the huts, which housed the troops had kegs of gunpowder hidden in the roofs. This was done so that anyone setting fire to them would be killed or injured from explosions.

It was noted that “for a radius of a mile round the fort the Ashanti’s had erected very strong stockades, each communicating with the other by path, so that every point could be quickly reinforced. Each stockade faced the fort, was six feet in height, and a loophole at the top. Behind these obstacles, which were made of great baulks of timber, the Ashanti were

⁵⁹ Edgerton. *The Fall of the Asante Empire*, 196.

⁶⁰ Edgerton. *The Fall of the Asante Empire*, 196.

encompassed.”⁶¹ The loopholes or arrow slits provided clear vision for Ashanti warriors to fire guns at British soldiers. These stockades proved beneficial to the Ashanti as the British were unable to penetrate and the Africans were able to attack, shoot and retreat behind the stockades without any fear of being overtaken.

In the rear was a trench the Ashanti were able to load their guns without risk of being hit from British firepower which proved beneficial and reduced casualties. Additionally, the Ashanti had paths dug out to provide a line of retreat that connected them with their village. At points of vantage neighboring trees were prepared and rifle-pits dug to accommodate riflemen, the grass and bush to their left was untouched, so that as not to raise suspicion by the oncoming enemy. The positioning of the stockades caused issues for the British. This is described by Bliss in his account stating the stockades were built parallel to the road on the right when coming up, a distance varying from twenty to thirty yards from it to camouflage from anybody coming along the path would see nothing, but would find himself in full view of the defenders, who could easily focus their fire on him.⁶² Ashanti soldiers used these kinds of stockades to cut off the supply lines and relief efforts of the British. This type of disruption was employed at sea by the British Navy which utilized blockades to cut off trade and supplies to their enemies. However, the Ashanti deployed this strategy on land.

As an additional defense during the war, the Asante also planted stakes in the ground to protect the middle of the stockade. In some instances the British were lured in by an inviting gap near the center of stockade, however any man who attempted to penetrate it would have fallen into a deep pit and found himself on sharpened stakes at the bottom.⁶³ These strategic openings

⁶¹ Mary Alice Hodgson (Young) lady. *The Siege of Kumasi* (London, C.A. Pearson Ltd., 1901).

⁶² H.C.J. Bliss. *The Relief of Kumasi*, (London, 1901), 82-83.

⁶³ W. M. Hall. *The Great Drama of Kumasi* (London: Putnam, 1939), 297.

invited the British in for a deadly or dismembering fate in most cases. The stockades blocked entrances both to the city and into the jungle. Machine gun and artillery rounds had no significant effects on them. This shows the significance and reliability of the stockades in place. With impenetrable defenses, the Ashanti were able to cause havoc for the governor and the British located at the fort in Kumasi. The British would fire at the stockades and their artillery would eventually overheat, causing times of cease fire.

Furthermore, another advantage of the stockades was the ability to protect their camps. The conditions for the British lacked in comparison to the Ashanti during these campaigns. Regarding the camps behind the stockades for the natives, Europeans viewed the accommodations in these types of camps as far better and superior living conditions than what the British were accustomed to living in during war times. In addition, timing was essential in resistance efforts against the British as well. While seeing the city being surrounded as stockades were going up, Governor Hodgson was requesting reinforcements, but was denied his request. This was due to British involvement in simultaneous military engagements elsewhere in Africa and the world. The British forces were fighting a major war with two Afrikaner republics in South Africa and taking part in the international expedition to suppress the the Boxer Rebellion in China.

The Ashanti took advantage of the lack of British manpower in the Gold Coast region. Most of the British forces assembled to fight against the Ashanti consisted of West African troops and noncommissioned officers to lead them. The troops came from mostly Sierra Leone and Nigeria. The British officers tended to question the enlisted native soldier's ability to stand against the Asante, therefore creating division amongst the British efforts. The British felt these soldiers fired wildly and unnecessarily wasted ammunition so much so that British officers chose

not to provide repeating magazine rifles citing that their officers doubted that they would stand against the Asante.⁶⁴ Additional training could have remedied these concerns of the native African use and knowledge of modern firearms. However, maintaining order within the divisions between British officers and native troops was kept by limiting both the quantity and quality of firearms in which each group possessed.

With a lack of experienced British soldiers in the region, weeks and months passed as the Ashanti continued to block off and subdue the British in Kumasi. British troops attempted to destroy these stockades with repeated attacks. These stockades were so well constructed that they seemed impervious to most of the heaviest British artillery. Although the Asante had managed to build stockades as defense mechanisms, the British possessed forts that could withstand the Asante weapons as well. Yet, despite impregnable forts, the Asante still would attack British barracks while taking on machine guns and artillery from the forts.

The Asante and other Africans were able to maneuver throughout the rough terrain in ways the Europeans could not. This was a tactical advantage for the Asante, especially during the rainy season. Part of the Ashanti strategy was to attack when the annual rains had set in and many of the roads were nearly impossible to travel. The Europeans relied heavily on the Hausas and the Yoruba as allies for their abilities to cope with the natural elements of their lands. It has been seen “that no other soldiers except these Africans could march in such countries under similar circumstances; their endurance is surprising, their cheerfulness beyond praise, and they seem to need neither food nor comforts.”⁶⁵ The British therefore respected the tenacity and toughness of these West Africans to help combat against the Ashanti.

⁶⁴ J. Willcocks. *From Kabul to Kumasi: Twenty-Four Years of Soldiering and Sport* (London: John Murray, 1904), 243.

⁶⁵ Willcocks. *From Kabul to Kumasi*, 194.

They relied so heavily on native troops to join their cause to fight against any and all obstacles that did not conform to British rule and authority. Without these native soldiers, the British manpower would have been dramatically less when engaging the Ashanti throughout West Africa. Moreover, staying healthy for the Europeans proved difficult as well. Europeans in West Africa tended to lose much of their stamina from ills such as fever, while the native soldiers remained very fit.⁶⁶ These were the justifications that Europeans used when not being able to definitively subdue their opponents in a timely manner through battle. Additionally, during conflict towns were protected by ditches, moats, and wooden stockades while armies developed skill in the use of camouflage and seizures accordingly.⁶⁷ This showed how the natives were again knowledgeable of their lands and capable of using the landscape by quickly adapting to British technology, by use of military strategies.

The number of stockades built numbered over twenty one barriers, not just around Kumasi but all over the Ashanti area. Chief Kofi, one of the Asante's leaders and field commanders stated that there were eleven built around Kumasi alone. Chief Kofi, Yaa Asantewaa's deputy commander, gave this account of the Kumasi stockades to Captain Steward on January 8th and 16th of 1901. For a list of the stockades with their names and locations, please view page 74 in *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*.⁶⁸ These structures helped to transform this war that without these stockades could have been over much sooner.

One way in which the British tended to deal with the stockades, was to send in *konsoko* troops from Sierra Leone to rush and jump over the walls while attacking with knives and cutlasses. There was no regard for the lives of the native alliances, as British soldiers would

⁶⁶ Willcocks. *From Kabul to Kumasi*, 207.

⁶⁷ Reid. *Warfare in African History*, 112.

⁶⁸ Boahen. *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*, 74.

never have been commanded to do such a thing, knowing of the deadly outcome. “It was only after some experimentation that the British discovered that by firing a 75-millimeter gun from the right distance-double its real one with very large 18-lb double common shell any stockade could be shattered into pieces. Time had passed and resistance efforts were able to withstand the British technology if even for only a year in this instance. With this discovery the end of the war was only a question of time.”⁶⁹ Until this discovery, the Ashanti held back the British offensives causing great hardships for them in Kumasi.

Although stockades did not lead to the Ashanti winning the war, they were able to slow the pace of British colonialism in their kingdom while not surrendering the Golden Stool. Also, the cost associated with the expedition was a method used by the Ashanti leaders to cause a financial burden on the British. The cost of expeditions did prove quite costly. The Ashanti, tended to put as much strain on them by forcing not only expeditions, but inflicting as many casualties as possible. Below is a statement from the British point of view regarding their conflicts with the Ashanti. In a British newspaper from Accra, the frustration of the costly expeditions resonates through print.

There is no spectacle, hardly, more humiliating than this! Here we are being led about like pigs by Ashanti's! The latter know full well our most vulnerable or weakest parts. When they wish us to pitch away a few thousands, they simply create some little row, and threaten to do this, that, and the other, and forthwith an expedition is sent to the “bush” to await the turn of events. Certainly we are being fought with weapons of a most amusing description by the Ashanti's. The demands on our chest, in consequence of the constantly recurring expeditions, are getting so numerous that before long, at this rate, we shall have very little money left. Possibly the King of Ashanti thinks he can more conveniently injure us by placing us constantly under the necessity of sending expeditions to the interior; and thus contributing towards the ultimate exhaustion of our resources. If every expedition costs, say, L5, 000, 10 must necessarily cost L50, 000, and so on! It is time for us to see that we have not too much money to pitch away. We should like to her of some demonstration of force which will be final. If there are 800 Housas in this Colony, send them all to Ashanti with the Union Jack, and let the whole of that country be declared once and for all a British protectorate in spite of all opposition. Our interior policy has

⁶⁹ Boahen. *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*, 74.

been throughout a failure, and had the 1883 Administration possessed the good sense to avail itself of the offer that was made, the whole of Ashanti might not be under our flag, and during the past 11 years we should not have heard of fruitless missions and unnecessary expeditions to the “bush.”⁷⁰

This shows the unwillingness of the British to continue fighting a costly war and playing into the hands of the Ashanti. The violent resistance was so widespread that it strained European forces. Although equipped with better weapons, essentially European occupation and control of West Africa took over twenty-five years and cost more than European governments had anticipated.⁷¹ Additionally, the idea of sending in 800 native Africans to take the losses, show the little regard they put on the Housa lives, when wanting to end the confrontation with the Ashanti.

2.5 Open Warfare

Throughout conquests during the Scramble for Africa, it is known that the European technological advances gave them a unique advantage when facing indigenous armies. While we may never know just how many firearms or ammunition the Asante may have acquired during the Hundred Years War, it is relevant to discuss how much firepower the British had during these military expeditions, campaigns, and battles. Exploring the arsenals, forts, and technology available to use against the Asante will furthermore support the tenacity and resilience the West Africans showed against insurmountable odds. Even when faced with this type of deadly weaponry and an experienced enemy, the Asante’s determination remained steadfast. They adapted to this technology in efforts to drum up a military response, even if the chances of victory were minimal.

⁷⁰ Musgraves. *To Kumassi with Scott*, 189.

⁷¹ Ohaegbulam. *West African Responses to European Imperialism*, 159.

When the Ashanti were finally defeated, we get a glimpse of the types of technology they had in their possessions through European documentation of the battlefields. As the British surveyed damages after battle, they sacrificed the slaves, snapped spears, cut bow strings carefully, and split arrows.⁷² The British pillaged the battlefields in order to weaken their enemies by taking away crucial components of the economy like slaves, which fueled the Ashanti Kingdom, as well as military weaponry and firearms.

It was the Ashanti's ritual to bury treasure in the bush prior to engagements in war so that it is hidden in case retreat was necessary. What the British found was astounding in terms of the spoils of war. They reported finding items such as:

gorgeous state umbrellas, enormous kinkassies, or war drums, brass studded chairs, beautifully carved stools, European and native swords, native spears, Ashanti dagger and knives, executioners blades and torture instruments, brass studded cases, leather fetish caps, silken and cotton clothes, executioners stools with recent blood stains, valuable old English chinaware, common table knives, large glass vases, carved wooden sandals, silk and gingham pillows of down and soft cotton, a few tusks, ivory pieces for playing "po" and drafts, a few bottles of brandy, common blunderbusses, old flint locks, a few Sniders, and so on *ad infinitum*.⁷³

Most of the time there were few weapons found, as the soldiers had mostly taken the weapons and retreated into the bush while undoubtedly awaiting commands from their leaders. The lack of firearms found shows just how important the Ashanti regarded their firearms. So much so that they retreated with guns in lieu of other valuable items.

However, with superior technology during this time, British forces used the Gatling gun as the primary weapon for institutionalizing colonial provinces throughout Africa and Asia. There were great advantages for this piece of artillery. When considering the conditions of the forces in Africa, the shipping of Gatling guns to the Gold Coast was well planned with good and

⁷² Musgraves. *To Kumassi with Scott*, 184.

⁷³ Musgraves. *To Kumassi with Scott*, 183.

sufficient reasons as a strategy. The use of a Gatling in warfare supersedes the necessity for deploying large forces of infantry. One man whom fired the gun could replace one hundred men with rifles. Only cost associated with the Gatling was the production of it. Once it was created, the Gatlin gun did not get sick nor require wages like soldiers, which made it a formidable asset in the British armed forces.

In most cases, while firing the gun only the lives of three or four men were at risk. However, it would take hundreds of skilled marksmen with rifles to obtain the same firepower as one Gatling gun. Another positive aspect is that the gun had several interchangeable and adjustable parts, such as locks which made for quick repair even amidst battle. It had ten barrels that could fire .45 caliber ammunition and was relatively light weight. So light, that it could be shipped across a shallow river, just as easily as it could be moved across an ocean. The gun could also be drawn by one or two horses, approximately weighing three hundred and thirty-six pounds.

When horses were not available or could not cross certain terrain especially during the rainy season in the Gold Coast, the Gatling could be pulled with ropes by carriers. Carriers were usually slaves that would carry essentials like firearms, supplies, and foodstuff during expeditions or military campaigns. This type of artillery was also very adaptable and could be moved during field fighting as well as stationary defense such as protecting forts. The constant and rapid firepower is the main benefit and was able to inflict thousands of casualties to the Ashanti. This made it the main source of weaponry during these pre-colonial and colonial times. Its sweeping ability which enabled the gun to turn and assault flanks, made the Gatling gun nearly unstoppable once firepower had commenced. At this time given what is known about the African's character and traits, the British felt the Gatling could not be defeated.

Although there were heavy casualties on the part of the West African Hausas, Yoruba, and Ashanti, “in this kind of warfare prisoners inevitably were rare; nevertheless it is a remarkable feature of the campaign that until it was almost over practically no rebel ever fell into the hands of the British alive. It is incredible that the Ashanti should have always contrived to get all their wounded away, so we must suppose that any left behind were quickly disposed of by the victorious soldiery in the excitement of the moment.”⁷⁴ There was very little regard or respect for the killed on the part of the British. Unlike most intra-European warfare, in which prisoners of war were taken and the dead buried, there were no such acts in Africa. For these facts and cultural traditions, the Ashanti made it a habit of gathering the bodies of their fallen soldiers after battle. They did not want to leave them in the hands of the Europeans, and additionally the wounded could provide vital military intelligence which could put the Ashanti military defenses at risk.

Although the casualties were heavy, since the bodies were carried away by the Ashanti or mutilated by the West African Regiment and Sierra Leon Frontier Police that fought alongside the British, the true number of Ashanti killed will never be known. The removal of bodies may have been part of the reason the true number of casualties is not known. More importantly the maintaining of accurate records related to the continent of Africa did not take precedence which has also contributed to this void of accurate casualty figures. This was true in the case of firearms that entered the continent, as well as the number of dead from battles was not deemed significant. During the war of 1900-1901 there were minimal casualties on the side of the British. However, estimates from the numerous battles put the Ashanti casualties in the thousands.

⁷⁴ Frederick Myatt. *The Golden Stool: An Account of the Ashanti War of 1900* (London: Kimber, 1966), 174.

Although the Ashanti resisted the British for nearly 100 years altogether, the British still felt that the Ashanti were inferior competitors and they were an uneven match. Prince Henry of Battenberg that was to join an expedition to the Gold Coast stated that a highly civilized power possessing some of the most deadly weapons of the nineteenth century versus pagans armed with old guns could not handle them effectively enough to threaten the men he would encounter.⁷⁵ Although fueled by notions of racism and superiority, this was the sentiment of most Europeans in regards to African uses of modern technology. Even when Europeans were faced with direct military conflict, they tended to minimize any advancements of non-white races and disregard even the largest of accomplishments. Therefore, as colonialism prospered throughout Africa, confrontations like the Asante-British War of 1900-1 have been largely ignored in the context of world history. Yet, African agency and global history are becoming more popular with today's historian. This has led to the study of history from non-European perspectives. Malawian historian Paul Zeleza has written about globalization, for example, as part of the African experience.⁷⁶ His insights into African self-determination and development in relation to interactions with Europeans serve as a reminder that resistance, such as that by the Ashanti, can shed considerable light on this history.

⁷⁵ *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, December 14, 1895, 5.

⁷⁶ Paul Tiyambe Zeleza. *Rethinking Africa's Globalization* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), v.

3 CASE OF SAMORI TOURE VS THE FRENCH

3.1 Samori's Empire Background

Further to the West similar dynamics were unfolding with resistance against the French. This case history relates to Samori Toure, or Almamy Samore Lafiya Toure, who was a Muslim leader and founder of the Wassoulou Empire that included present day North and Southeastern Guinea, part of north-eastern Sierra Leone, and part of Mali. Born as Almamy Sahnadoo, Samory Toure, as he was called by the French, was the last great Malinke emperor born during a time the Muslim jihad states were expanding into West Africa. At the same time, the French were pushing into the continent of Africa, particularly in the territories claimed by Samori Toure. Samori would eventually engage both French and British militaries while learning from their disciplines and acquiring their firepower through trade.

With goals of expansion, Samori used the religion of Islam to unify and consolidate his army. Historians such as Paul E. Lovejoy have researched and supported the term jihad in relation to African History in his book *West Africa during the Age of Revolution*.⁷⁷ Jihad as it is understood in the contemporary world perceives military movements “rooted in Islam” that are threatening to Western civilization. Yet many Muslims reject the notion of jihad as a globalist radical claim to wage war.⁷⁸ Muslims argue that declaring jihad is the prerogative of the Muslim leader. For full clarity on the subject, the life teachings of the Prophet Muhammed must be examined along with the Islamic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries.

In terms of nineteenth-century West African understandings of jihad, Samori Toure was able to organize large groups in and outside of Mali, while waging successful defenses against

⁷⁷ Paul E. Lovejoy. *Jihād in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 10.

⁷⁸ David Cook. *Understanding Jihad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 4.

European occupation. British vessels arrived weekly on the coast for purposes of trade. The years from 1883 to 1898 were known as the Mandingo Wars, which was the conflict between the French and Samorian army. The Samori Wars were not unusual during this time period and took time to effectively plan. In fact, they were a part of a group of Jihad movements during pre-European colonial interventions in which massive lands merged different societies under one statehood. Kingdoms such as the Samorian states had no interest in conceding their lands and territories to European intervention without a fight.

Samori Toure was the leader of the Mandinka/Wassoulou Empire who put up prolonged resistance efforts against the French. There is an ideology that supports resistance in the Mandinka culture called Kuma. The word Kuma in Malinke means “the first and the last word.” Kuma documents the Malinke political culture and resistance of European invaders in West Africa while marking the beginning of modern warfare against an enemy who came with superior, mass manufactured artillery.⁷⁹ These sources support the native use of modern technology to resist colonial rule. These documents have been used to commemorate the memory of Toure and his resistance efforts. The Samori war machine first engaged with the French using their own technology against them in 1882 and offered resistance until 1898, when its leader was captured and deported to the French colony of Gabon. Although he eventually lost against the French, his battles and strategies demand attention in both African and military history. While outgunned, Samori was able to delay French infiltration of his lands for approximately 17 years.

Samori was born into Dyula, which mainly consisted of Mandinka traders around 1830. At a young age, Samori’s village was attacked and his mother was captured by the Cisse army in 1848. Cisse is a common West African name of Mandinka origin. While attempting to free his

⁷⁹ Nubia Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography: Sundiata Keita to Almamy Samori Toure* (London: Lexington Books, 2014), 286.

mother, Samori offered his services as payment for his mother's freedom and became a warrior in Sere-Burlay's army where he learned the warfare of guns and cavalry.⁸⁰ Sere-Burlay was the king of the Cisse and a fierce military leader. During his time in the army, Samori became a general and learned much from the Cisse fighting style. He eventually deserted and went to fight with the Berete army, which was an enemy of the Cisse.

After two years of service, Samori started his own army based largely on the Cisse army methods, with some modifications to fighting style. Additionally, he built his kingdom off two key and fundamental ideals. First Islam in which he had been converted to through his contacts while living on the west coast of Africa. Secondly, trade which was his native Dyula people's way of life. Trade was instrumental in the acquisition of European goods which included firearms. Mary Henrietta Kingsley suggests that Europeans were proud that they ventured into the interior of Africa through rivers and steam power which increased trade figures through superior English shipping.⁸¹ This maritime and riverine commerce gave Samori ample opportunity as a young leader to master the arts of trading, negotiating and securing firearms.

As a youth, Samori grew up around two different groups that molded his character. Although they had religious differences, they were able to live and function in mutual respect. The first group mainly consisted of freemen, farmers and blacksmiths. This group was focused more on diplomacy and the slave trade. The second group was known as the *kafu*, which was a military and political group. Although a military structure they were not well armed and most of their firearms were suitable for hunting, rather than war. This was the case for most West African states. There was a lack of adequate firearms to challenge European authority. This deficiency in

⁸⁰ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 287.

⁸¹ Mary Henrietta Kingsley. *Travels in West Africa: Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1899), 399.

firepower was compensated by tactical fortification efforts. Although, this army could not function in open battles, sieges were how they succeeded in war. Settlements were surrounded by walls in efforts to keep out the enemy. Dahomey which has been discussed earlier, in modern day Benin, was one of the most successful walled kingdoms during this time period.

The Dyula were traders in primarily gold and slaves. The “general atmosphere of warrior activity provided a means for the Dyula to acquire large numbers of captives for export, the demand for these having increased steadily ever since the route to Cote de Revers had been opened in the early eighteenth century.”⁸² The ability to capture humans in exchange for firearms, assisted them in creating small states in the region. Samori had a history of trade, slaves and military which he would use to solidify his position as leader of the Mandinka Empire and as a military commander. His trade experience afforded him the opportunity to purchase firearms in large quantities. He named himself Faama, which means “king” in Mandinka. Samori started his empire by defending trade from monopolies. He also limited the control of local chiefs and expanded upon global trade routes.

By 1867 trade was a major part of his success along with conquering lands and enlarging his kingdom. Samori used tactics that he learned as a youth when growing his army. In 1887, the Samorian army recruited from four different sources. The recruits included the regular army, a reserve, soldiers sent by chiefs under Samori's protection, and a volunteer group of cavalry force.⁸³ Samori built his army by acquiring soldiers from defeated adversaries and unified it by demanding that they convert to Islam. He first started trading with Sierra Leone for firearms and ammunition. Although he obtained large numbers of firearms, they were mainly bartered with

⁸² Crowder. *West African Resistance; the Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 117.

⁸³ Martin Legassick, “Firearms, Horses and Samorian Army Organization 1870-1898,” 96.

slaves. He was also able to secure the slaves through goldfields from the lands of Boure which he had conquered.

As Samori rose to power and his army grew, he had an adequate supply of firearms and ammunition to expand his kingdom. This is relatively important, as generally there were very few African states that had firearms. These firearms not only were used for tribal wars, but for resistance against European rule as well. With a coastal location, most West African states were able to purchase firearms while keeping them from entering the interior of Africa, which gave them an advantage in neighboring state wars. Samori also possessed horses, but history describes his cavalry as having minimal impact in resistance. However, he successfully divided them into groups of 50 horsemen called a “sere.” Samori would charge on horseback towards the enemy, which gave his army the ability to cover ground much faster than infantrymen. Horses also provided faster retreats when necessary and reduced casualties. This surprised the French as they had never encountered cavalry on the continent of Africa.

Most historians tend to look at Samori Toure negatively because he financed his resistance through the slave trade. Although treated as a villain, he should not be underestimated. He slowed down French empire building in West Africa. In contrast to the view of European historians, he is viewed as a hero in written and oral traditions throughout Mali and Guinea. Oral traditions and epics stand in support of nationalist images of Samori as a resistance hero and martyr. Unlike other forms of oral folklore, epics do not appear in literary forms in every culture but are more widespread than what is generally recognized.⁸⁴ Again, Samori is seen as a hero to most in his own right. However, others tend to focus on his slave trade as well as authoritarian virtues to negate the resistance he put forth against a European army with higher quality

⁸⁴J. W. Johnson, T. A. Hale, and S. Belcher, *Oral Epics from Africa: Vibrant Voices from the Vast Continent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xiii.

techniques, firearms, and conventional warfare experience. As history has shown, guerrilla warfare was not the preference of the Samorian army. In fact, Michael Crowder has suggested that Samori decided to attack in open battle by raiding the enemies' columns.⁸⁵ Strategically he would attack either outside or isolated columns first, since they would be lesser in number and more vulnerable. These raids would be short and precise, inflicting as many casualties as possible. Still, in order to maintain his kingdom, he knew that guerrilla warfare would have to be employed. Samori also would cut off access from the riverbanks and built defense walls in efforts to slow the French advancements. To wage a seventeen year war against such an opponent was a substantial achievement.

His forceful resistance against the French and his tactics for securing and maintaining firearms was fundamental to his success in building an empire. His contributions to West African military history is most important as it relates to resistance. The negative attention he has been given may be a purposeful misrepresentation to fit into a European superiority and imperial historical narrative. This chapter will focus, not on the slave trading, but on the many encounters with the Europeans in efforts to fight and resist colonialism.

3.2 Acts of Resistance

After the Berlin Conference, the French attempted to move into countries and sign treaties. The treaties were meant to stake claims prior to any intervention from missionaries or competing European countries. Usually at the beginning talks were very diplomatic in attempts to bring about peaceful agreements. As the French pushed into the Sudan, they came upon territories that Samori ruled or that he wanted to take. This caused conflicts to say the least. The French in one instance supported and allied with the ruler of Kenedugu, Tieba in 1885. The

⁸⁵ Crowder. *West African Resistance; the Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 134.

French supplied Kenedugu with arms and ammunition to wage war against Samori. Samori did not take kindly to this threat to his sovereignty and independence. He was proactive, using tactics such as damaging and cutting communications lines near Niger in 1885 to impede French penetration of the area.

While his small scale resistance efforts raised tensions between Samori and the French, he knew he could not wage full-scale war against the French and Tieba at the same time. He was very meticulous regarding any engagements he entered. He made sure that he held a distinct advantage before entering any altercations. This is what made him a successful military, not just political leader. One of Samori's greatest talents, developed through personal experience, was avoiding any uncertain military engagements while systematically dividing his enemies and disposing of them one after the other.⁸⁶ An example of this strategy was when Samori reconciled with the Cisse and united to fight the Berete. Only engaging the enemy when he was certain he would be victorious was the secret of his success. This boiled down to strategic discipline, engaging one enemy at a time and avoiding fighting on multiple borders.

Experience is key regarding the resistance efforts of Samori Toure. Contrary to the belief that most Africans deployed guerrilla warfare, Samori vigorously trained his troops in various methods of conventional warfare. His military engagements ranged from Berete in 1865 to the Battle with Sere-Brema and the Wasulu Wars, in all of which he mounted successful campaigns. He fought these types of wars while continuing to build an empire and acquiring an arsenal of weapons. Samori also was able to continue acquiring firearms and ammunition from the French manufacturers as a result of not being too hostile towards their occupation. However, this eventually changed as French demands grew.

⁸⁶ Crowder. *West African Resistance; the Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 120.

Samori had to take into consideration the relationships that he had with Sierra Leone, which he still relied upon for a great number of his firearms and ammunition. He knew of the Anglo-Franco tensions in the region and hoped for some assistance from the British when quarreling with the French. Even though the British assured the French they would not intervene, the French decided not to wage war against Samori. Fortune was with him, as the French were overextended due to operations in Senegambia and against the Tukulor rulers.

As time passed it was evident that war was inevitable for Samori. From 1885 until January 1886, the French had defeated Samori in a battle with his brother, who was a military leader as well. The French did not hesitate to use this victory to start negotiations with Samori to sign a treaty, which would become known as the Treaty of Niagassola. Samori welcomed negotiations, as this was only a diversion tactic. Samori had no intention of honoring the treaty no matter the terms as he still had aspirations of expanding his own empire. Samori took this as an opportunity to reorganize and restructure his troops after suffering defeat. As negotiations continued the treaty was to use the Niger as the border with the Samori State being to the right. The articles in this treaty stated the French would still have protectorate rights over certain lands like Bouré and Kangaba that were part of the Samori State already. Bouré was a gold-mining region with great riches that Samori needed to finance military engagements.

The French knew that Samori used these rich lands for their raw materials for trade for firearms and ammunition. Additionally, another article of the treaty required that neither party could cross the Niger with armed bands. It also required that firearms trade for Samori was restricted to French factories in Senegal. If agreed upon this would provide the French with total control of the firearms that came in and out of the Samorian lands. These articles were inserted to expand upon the French influences within the region and Samorian States, while eliminating

Samori's trade with the British. Furthermore, this would rid them of a potential conflict with British colonies. Although unhappy with the treaty, Samori chose a strategy of drawing out negotiation with the French over territorial issues until he could reorganize his army.

During negotiations, the French had to mobilize forces that threatened their operations in Senegambia by the rise of a proto-nationalist movement led by Muhammad Lamine. This took French troops away, which gave Samori time to reorganize. Samori took full advantage of French distraction. Lt.-Col. Henri Frey, while commanding French forces, had to deal with Lamine and his movement. By the spring Samori's army had grown to almost 10,000 and he was now able to put pressure on the French. Frey's post was surrounded by Samori while French telegraph lines were destroyed to sever communications. Frey was quoted as saying, Du côté de Samory, "la situation avait pris pendant l'hivernage un caractère alarmant."⁸⁷ This statement translated means regarding Samori, the situation has taken on an alarming character.

As negotiations on the treaty continued, the French pursued their fight with Lamine and his uprising. Finally, there was a treaty draft that gave provisions to Samori over Boure and Kangaba. The French were not in a position to wage war since they were preoccupied with Lamine for over the next year and a half. The French knew that the terms were not acceptable by their standards and confrontation with Samori was inevitable. This treaty was only a delay. They did not want to engage in battles fighting on all borders either. "To make matters worse, the French entered into a treaty of alliance in 1885 with the ruler of Kenedugu, Tiéba, who was at war with Samori. Since the conclusion of this treaty, French policy had been to support Tiéba

⁸⁷ Auguste Louis Charles Gatelet. *Histoire de la Conquête du Soudan français 1878-1899* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1901), 106.

against Samori by supplying him with arms and ammunition.”⁸⁸ This was done not only to weaken Samori, but to gain an opportunity to drum up additional firepower against his forces.

Samori was usually well informed on French activities and military capabilities through his own intelligence network, just like the Ashanti. With the Tukolor, he maintained a network of spies around the French posts in the Senegal valley. These spies kept Samori informed of what they had learned of French plans. According to Lt.-Col. H. Frey's evidence, these agents were mostly present at large gatherings on special occasions, for example, like the welcoming of a new French Supreme Commander for the Upper Senegal-Niger area.⁸⁹ This network gave Samori a distinct advantage both offensively and defensively. Frey assumed office in November 1885 and the French later discovered that Samori was well informed of all that happened on the occasion. In one instance, Samori knew what military equipment had been brought by the new Commander of the region. This type of information kept Samori prepared and knowledgeable of the French maneuvers and plans, which was key in resisting colonial order.

Initially, resistance efforts began as the French Army set their eyes upon Southern Sudan. This area was viewed as a Mecca in which they wanted to create their own Utopia. Yves Person compared Southern Sudan with the American Wild West, in which the lands were up for grabs and European rule could be imposed successfully. The French had some concerns as they moved into Southwestern Mali as well. Most of this area was ruled by Samori. Yves Person stated in his research that the Samorian army with their superior tactics would have been successful in battle had they had equal firearms as the French.⁹⁰ Nubia Kai also suggested that Samori “was the last

⁸⁸ Lt.-Col. Louis Archinard. *Rapport sur la Campagne 1890-1891* (St. Louis: Sénégal, Imprimerie du Gouvernement), 118-120.

⁸⁹ Henri Frey. *Campagne dans le Haut Sénégal et dans le Haut Niger 1885- 1886* (Paris, 1888), 73-75.

⁹⁰ Jan Jansen, “A Critical Note on The Epic of Samori Toure,” *History in Africa* 29 (2002): 219-29, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3172161> (Accessed May 27, 2020).

epic hero of Mali before the colonial era whose courage, dignity, willfulness, and military genius inspired the final innovative productions of the *jeliya*.”⁹¹ *Jeliya* specializes in three fields. These fields refer back to *kuma*, which is the art of speech that passes down historical narratives. *Donkili* is the art of song, while *Foli* or *Kosiri* is the art of instruments. These fields are used to tell and remember the history of Samori as seen by West Africans prior to colonization.

The significance of Samori’s engagements with the French is how long he offered meaningful resistance. It was over seventeen years from his first contact with the French in August 1881 until he was finally defeated in September 1898.⁹² This protracted confrontation shows just how much resistance Samori was capable of mounting against the French to maintain sovereignty over his territories. Samori came to power as a result of turmoil in his own country, but with a solid military structure his army had the capabilities to resist the French colonial rule temporarily. While resistance was key, it should be understood that during the time Samori came into power the French did not play a major role in Africa.

The stories or myths, as Europeans call them, of Samori Toure have ignited discussions. He provides a new resistance figure in historical studies of West African responses to the European scramble for colonies in the region. At certain points, European traders provided guns to Samori for ivory and gold that he had purchased with slaves. During this time slaves were traded for numerous commodities, but a trend started in which firearms became the most sought after item by West Africans. Whether direct or indirect, slaves were the fuel that purchased guns for Samori’s army. Oral histories even stated that he would sell his loyal subjects in order to have the purchasing power for guns and horses.

⁹¹ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 286.

⁹² Crowder. *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 112.

The Brussels Conference Act of 1890, which forbid any firearms sales or trade in Africa, weakened Samori's ability to acquire firearms during much of his resistance against the French. Article I, Section 7 provides for restrictions on the import of modern patterned firearms and ammunition throughout the entire territory in which slave-trading is conducted.⁹³ This was not intended to keep firearms in general out of Africa, but to keep modern guns out of the hands of slaveholders, who possessed the wealth to fund military resistance efforts. The last paragraph of Article IX states:

Only flint-lock guns, with unrifled barrels, and common gunpowder known as trade powder, may be withdrawn from the warehouses for sale. At each withdrawal of arms and ammunition of this kind for sale, the local authorities shall determine the regions in which such arms and ammunition may be sold. The regions in which the slave-trade carried on shall always be excluded. Persons authorized to take arms or powder out of the public warehouses, shall present to the State government, every six months, detailed lists indicating the destinations of the arms and powder sold, as well as the quantities still remaining in the warehouses.⁹⁴

Therefore, African resistance efforts were hampered and European conquests were facilitated.

In March 1891 France sent Colonel Louis Archinard to attack Kankan. Samori knew that Achinard, armed with superior weaponry and artillery, could penetrate his fortifications. Although he preferred to fight a conventional war and had successfully battled isolated French columns, Samori had to change his tactics to guerrilla warfare. Kai discusses that during the Franco-Mandinka War, while Samori lacked artillery and evaded pitched battles he deployed modern guerilla tactics along with a scorched earth policy. Scholars have viewed this war as the first total or modern war in Africa that required the mobilization of entire populations to assist in the war effort.⁹⁵ The first total war on the continent of Africa shows how fierce and tenacious

⁹³ Slave Trade and Importation into Africa of Firearms, Ammunition, and Spiritual Liquors, General Act of Brussels (1890), 138.

⁹⁴ General Act of Brussels, 141.

⁹⁵ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 290.

Samori's efforts were against French occupation. Scorched earth was employed to eliminate the French from enjoying any spoils of war, as the British did against the Asante. The French were not able to pillage any lands left by Samori and his regime.

Archinard was eventually replaced by Humbert, who after leading a small band of men was able to secure Ture's capital of Bissandugu in 1892. This was not the end of Samori, however, as he continued fighting through 1898 until captured in the Ivory Coast after eluding the French. A report in a Sierra Leone newspaper gives a sense of how intense Samori's campaign against the French remained a year after the fall of his capital:

to give an idea of the destructive power of the sofas under Chief Samada or Samori as he is called by the French, he or his lieutenants have swept bare in our protectorate alone a broad strip of country, varying from 30 to 50 miles in width and in length over 200 miles from Samanga on the west to Falaba on the east, thence along the watershed which forms our northeastern boundary as far as, and including the Konno district, when at last retribution overtook their band of marauders in that part of the country were exterminated in the expedition led by the late Colonel Ellis against the Sofas in December 1893.⁹⁶

It shows how his resistance efforts against the French were viewed. This type of rearguard action slowed the French pursuit of him and delayed his capture. Meanwhile, he moved his Empire from Bissandugu deeper into the African interior. He left his gold fields behind in Boure which was his main source of income. While defeated and forced to retreat, Samori again used scorched earth policies and left devastation behind. His new capital was then moved to Dakabala which didn't survive long, especially after the French infiltrated.

Samori's army was very advanced and offered great resistance to the French. An important factor was the number of guns in his army's possession. Samori's army included cavalry, but eventually remodeled this army to reach a total of over 30,000 to 35,000 during the Sikasso War (1887-1888). He was considered a military genius with a naval force and cavalry of

⁹⁶ "Destructive Power of the Sofas." *Sierra Leone Weekly News*. August 24, 1895, 3.

around 3,000 men. There is not much research or sources regarding West African or Samorian naval expeditions or engagement, but in African war the canoe provided quick transport of troops. Robert Smith's research on West Africa suggests that "a form of naval warfare in which engagements took place on the water between opposing canoes and blockade and ambush were practiced. From the seventeenth century onwards, firearms were coming into use, and canoes were armed with small cannons, as well as muskets carried by individual warriors."⁹⁷ Although, they may not have possessed large ships, the canoes were able to maneuver faster while still having the ability to fire cannons against opposing naval ships.

3.2.1 Samori's Blacksmiths

When it comes to preferences for types of guns in the Samorian army, there were two rifles that Samori was interested, the Gras and the Lebel. Although the Lebel was the gun of choice he never managed to acquire sufficient numbers of them: "From 1885 he systematically replaced these weapons with Gras rifles which had a light-weight metal cartridge and Kropatscheks which were really Gras repeaters (known as data, ten mouths)."⁹⁸ These guns were easy to mend and lightweight, therefore better for guerrilla warfare maneuvers. Knowledgeable about metalworking, he employed over 400 blacksmiths to repair old guns. This was seen as manufacturing guns, as he would essentially take different parts of a bad gun to make one good gun. The blacksmiths could fabricate the rifles in factories ran by Samori's state. With the Gras rifles, he raised groups of workers who were able to duplicate these rifles so well that it was sensible to continue relying on them.⁹⁹ This capability ensured that he had an adequate supply of good weapons and could resist for a long period.

⁹⁷ Robert Smith, "The Canoe in West African History," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 4 (1970): 533, Accessed January 28, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/180919.

⁹⁸ Crowder. *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 123.

⁹⁹ Crowder. *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 123.

More importantly, Africans were able to adapt to the lack of quality in their firearms. For example, after European governments tried to restrict the arms trade to West Africa, guns could still be obtained from European traders. These traders did not abide by the rules of the firearms act and continued supplying weapons to Africans. With continued access to European-made firearms, “Samori obtained his arms from British traders in Freetown to fight the French, the Ijebu from French traders to fight the British, and Bai Bureh obtained his weapons from merchants of the very country he was fighting.”¹⁰⁰ Access to weapons through trade was the main source of Samori’s military-technological power and success. Historians have been able to show that although the intent was to supply Africans with low quality weaponry as seen in evidence from the Brussels Conference Act documents, sometimes Africans still surprised Europeans with their tenacity. For example, when the British and the French invaded West African countries in the 1880s and 1890s, they found that local rulers and fighters still had rifles from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. When Africans were able to obtain the latest types of guns, maintaining and repairing became problems. To rectify that issue, Samori sent his gunsmiths to study at the French armory in St. Louis. In time, he was able to repair his own weapons and raise his level of efficiency in firepower. This type of forward thinking is why Samori was able to resist for seventeen years. Samori did not fold to European technology, but instead adapted to meet the problems and possibilities it presented for his way of war.

Blacksmithing and ironworking were key to successful encounters against Europeans for Samori, just as it was for the Ashanti. In African traditions, the blacksmiths were the backbone of their cultures. They were able to mend and create objects needed for daily use as well as items crucial to survival. In some communities the blacksmiths were viewed as magical because of

¹⁰⁰ Crowder. *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 11.

their abilities to transform metal and create objects from raw materials. West African blacksmiths worked in their factories, not only repairing but fabricating firearms as well. As documented in her writings, Mary Kingsley observed ironworking during her travels in West Africa:

The iron-work deserves especial excellence. The anvil is a big piece of iron which is embedded firmly in the ground. Its upper surface is flat, and pointed at both ends. The hammers are solid cones of iron, the upper part of the cones prolonged so as to give a good grip, and the blows are given directly downwards, like the blows of a pestle. The bellows are of the usual African type, cut out of one piece of solid but soft wood; at the upper end of these bellows there are two chambers hollowed out in the wood and then covered with the skin of some animal, from which the hair has been removed. This is bound firmly round the rim of each chamber with tie-tie, and the bag of it at the top is gathered up, and bound to a small piece of stick, to give a convenient hand hold. The straight cylinder, terminating in the nozzle, has two channels burnt in it which communicate with each of the chambers respectively, and half-way up the cylinder, there are burnt from the outside into the air passages, three series of holes, one series on the upper surface, and a series at each side. This ingenious arrangement gives a constant current of air up from the nozzle when the bellows are worked by a man sitting behind them, and rapidly and alternately pulling up the skin cover over one chamber, while depressing the other.¹⁰¹

This detailed description gives an account of how the Africans worked and maintained factories for ironworking purposes. Yet she felt, like most Europeans of her time, that Africans, no matter how skilled, had only worked with scraps of iron for some hundreds of years. Regardless of Europeans underestimates of the scale of ironworking, it should be remembered that Africans did not place importance on the mass production of items. Without this type of mass production, however, they found themselves dependent on Europeans.

¹⁰¹ Kingsley. *Travels in West Africa*, 323.

3.2.2 *Alliances*

Samori's army eventually fell when he unsuccessfully attempted to besiege Sikasso in the mid-1880s. Nevertheless, he managed to sign treaties with both France and Britain, which was a strategic measure for Samori. Moreover, this gave Samori a chance to purchase firearms from both European powers. This process of state expansion brought with it widespread enslavement which was also a component of jihad. By the 1880s, the Samorian state depended heavily on the internal slave trade for its procurement of horses. Cavalry forces were a crucial part of the enslavement mechanism. Over time, Samori created an empire with the aim of establishing greater control over trade. He conquered new territories across the savanna and forest fringes of West Africa. According to L.G. Binger,

On all the frontiers of Samori, villages are annexed or treated as enemy territory ... Neutrality does not exist ... If they've been conquered by Samori the inhabitants are sold or pillaged ... This deplorable state of things creates [a situation in which] leaving from one country, one always crosses a zone, varying between forty and fifty kilometers, in which the inhabitants do not know of whom they are the subjects. This zone is always subject to pillage, either by the bandits in the area, or by the inhabitants of neighboring villages. One could compare this frontier zone to the marches of ancient Europe.¹⁰²

This focus on expansion reinforced Samori's determination to remain independent at all costs. Furthermore, beginning with skirmishes against the French army's conquests in 1883, Samori threw himself further into the gun trade, which ultimately strengthened his empire's resistance. With this advantage Samori could systematically wage wars against both local and foreign threats.

It should be remembered that the Samorian wars were not unique in nineteenth-century African history. They occurred within the context of the internal slave trade, which had

¹⁰² L.G. Binger, "Du Niger au Golfe de Guinee par le pays du Kong et de Mossi, 1887-1889," *Nation* 54 (Paris, 1892): 344-345.

disastrous consequences in many rural areas. These wars were also part of a chain of Islamic jihads across the West African that not only opened new slave routes and activities, but formed expansionist ideals. In the case of Samori this showcases the existence of African empires that absorbed people, cultures, religions, and territories prior to European bids to build their own empires in Africa.

The ability of Samori to build an army through the unification of groups of Africans was instrumental in his success. As Kai states, “arising out of a need to form trans-African alliances against the military invasions of the French, the Muslim jihads of Al-Hadj Umar and Almany Samori Toure during the nineteenth century coerced non-Muslims to join the ranks of the Muslim armies with the political objective of building a unified front against the French.”¹⁰³ Against narratives of disunity among Africans, we can argue that West Africans indeed were able to unify to resist colonial order. In addition, Samori was able to build his empire through the acquisition of people from neighboring lands. This was also a time when he tried to form alliances to increase his chances of continued resistance with the French. Due to local divisions, such alliances did not come to fruition and Europeans faced smaller rather than larger states. Rumors still spread across the West Coast of Africa, with hints of concern, that Samori might succeed in making alliances.

Samori was particularly interested in pairing with the Ashanti to resist European colonialism. However, we have no evidence of a lasting alliance between Samori and the Asante. There were several parallels between the Ashanti and the Samorian states regarding the type of warfare utilized against Europeans. Both Samori and the Ashanti started to employ guerrilla warfare towards the end of their wars. However, according to S.C. Ukpabi, the Ashanti never

¹⁰³ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 127.

used guerrilla tactics as extensively or effectively as Samori did, because the Ashanti military was flexible enough in their conventional warfighting that they could counteract most of Britain's tactics.¹⁰⁴ After Samori captured Kong in battle, he shared a border with the Asante. It is intriguing to contemplate what an alliance could have meant in the West African "battlespace."

This would have given both Britain and France a lot more resistance to deal with in just sheer numbers and firepower. Therefore, there was cause for serious concern on the part of Europeans if this unification was ever successful. A newspaper article from Sierra Leone in 1896 stated that, "it is rumored that Samori has joined the Ashanti's; if this should be so the war will probably longer and fiercer than anyone has expected, and may be found necessary to land the naval brigade 600 which is being held in reserve and even to ad home for more troops."¹⁰⁵ This shows just how troubled the French and British were should these two groups join forces making reinforcements necessary. It dispels the notion that Africans were incapable of winning against superior technology. While the Ashanti would have made great allies for Samori, it was not just the Asante that Samori was interested allying with. Yet division among certain groups neighboring Samori stopped alliances before they could be finalized. According to Kai,

The African leaders of Futa Jalon and Sikasso were jealous and suspicious of Samori. J The Tokolor and Mandinka disliked one another. Minority groups such as Kong allied themselves with the French. The French used these divisions to stop an African alliance and then struck down the African states one by one.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ S. C.Ukpabi, "West Africa and Europe in Military Confrontation," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6 no. 1 (December 1971): 105.

¹⁰⁵ From our Own Correspondent, "The Ashanti Campaign, Movements of the West India Regiment An Officer Invalided Already." *Sierra Leone Weekly News*. January 4, 1896, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 290.

This type of division is what gave Europeans advantages over the indigenous peoples of West Africa, along with superior technology which ultimately crushed resistance efforts.

In 1898, Samori was forced to surrender, surrounded by the French on all sides and blocked by the British. He was sent to exile in Missanga, an isolated island off the coast of Gabon. Missanga is similar to Seychelles, where the British exiled their opponents such as Prempeh I and Yaa Asantewaa. Samori later died of complications from pneumonia in captivity at Gabon. Europeans tend to depict Samori as a ruthless enslaver and negate his defensive leadership against the French. Through *kuma* Almamy Samori Toure has an oral history of providing education to the public, removing taxes and tariffs, and being sympathetic to the poor. Traditional versions of the Samori epic point neither to French conquest or the failure of African leaders to unite against them as the cause of Samori's defeat.¹⁰⁷ His legacy is one of a hero and martyr who resisted French rule for over seventeen years with smart military strategies, sufficient resources from trade, and a strong belief in Islam that guided Samori and unified his forces. Samori was able to persuade millions into resistance with his words of "a slave that depends on Allah is never poor."¹⁰⁸ Thanks to new avenues of research that are leading to a fresh appreciation of Africa military history, Samori Toure and his seventeen-year-long resistance should no longer be forgotten in World History.

¹⁰⁷ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 291.

¹⁰⁸ David C. Conrad, "The Epic of Samori Toure Narrated by Sory Fina Kamara," *Oral Epics from Africa*, eds. John William Johnson, Thomas A. Hale, and Stephen Belcher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 73.

4 COMPLEXITIES OF RESISTANCE IN WEST AFRICA

4.1 History

As discussed in the previous chapters, the resistance case studies of the Ashanti and Samorian armies relied upon their arsenal of firearms weaponry. To fully appreciate the magnitude of their resistance efforts an explanation or elucidation of firearms in Africa is essential before an assessment of purposes, strengths, and weaknesses can be elaborated upon. The history of firearms can be used to explore the larger topic of West African resistance through military technology. Since firearms became the main form of weaponry across the globe and principal form of resistance, Africans relied on trade with Europeans to acquire these guns. It is necessary to put into context how many guns were present. According to W.A. Richards “although an estimated 180,000 guns a year were probably being imported into the Gold and Slave Coasts by 1730, the annual average import of guns between 1700 and 1750 was probably well below that figure, because of the reduction in the import of guns into West Africa during the major European wars.”¹⁰⁹ Although European guns were in demand by African customers, the supply was limited by internal demand in war-torn Europe. The majority of guns entering Africa were sold by slave merchants from Portugal and France during the 1750s. Additionally, West Africans also acquired firearms from British manufacturers such as Farmer and Galton who produced Angola muskets in Birmingham. More importantly for African blacksmiths, these guns were equipped with handmade parts so they could be repaired easily in the field. This characteristic was important to Africans, whose military forces did not operate large arsenals. Easily mended guns made for quick repair and kept resistance efforts ongoing for longer periods.

¹⁰⁹ W. A. Richards, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of African History* 21 no. 1 (1980): 51.

During the onslaught of violence that Africans faced between 1870 and 1914, colonialism rather than commerce came to the fore. The acquisition of firearms was the main complexity that African nation states faced while attempting to resist. Almost entirely dependent on Europeans for firearms, African armed resistance was paramount during pre-colonial and colonial times. Over time, firearms entered Africa in large quantities during two time periods and for very specific reasons. The first guns to make landfall on the Gold Coast were introduced by the Danish. The uses of firearms changed over time as well as the West Africans preferences for these guns. The predilection for guns and firearms by African slaveholding states effected the overall quality of European production.

First initial contact with firearm technology for West Africa was during the slave trade. W.A. Richards notes that the firearms trade peaked in the 1830s; although he provides no figures for this peak, his research tends to weaken the ‘slave–gun cycle’ theory.¹¹⁰ This is the time period in which guns were provided as the primary trade item for Europeans to procure slaves from the continent. Yet, specifying a peak timeframe does not necessarily negate the importance guns played in the building of African empires. Also, the 1830s would provide kingdoms such as Samori’s and the Ashanti four decades to secure a stock of weapons that could be used to resist colonial rule.

During this time the trade musket tended to be utilized as a gun that was more proficient for hunting than military use. Overcoming the limitations of this prominent firearm in Africa proved difficult for native armies attempting to withstand European infiltration. This is important due to the fact that most of the weapons imported to West Africa were meant for common people for hunting, self-defense, funerals and other ceremonial occasions rather than for war.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Richards, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century," 49.

¹¹¹ David Northrup. *Africa's Discovery of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 97.

Although these were the typical usages, African utilization began to shift dramatically over the next century as Europeans expanded colonial rule and order.

The second period was during the industrialization of Europe that created an increasing demand for raw materials from Africa such as beeswax, rubber, ivory and vegetable oils for which European traders offered increasing quantities of manufactured goods such as firearms.¹¹² There were significant increases in firearms because they were the most widely traded manufactured good that Africans desired. With trade access to firearms and technology, there has been criticism about Africa as a continent only possessing the simplest technologies. Africa has been discounted as not having the ability to utilize advanced technology in the way in which it was meant.

During colonialism, the British only allowed educated elites to own shotguns believing that they were civilized Africans, therefore would not want to violently bring down a colonial institution that brought about their enhanced privileged status.¹¹³ Basically, Europeans felt these individuals could be trusted not to rebel, even when provided firearms to protect their status in the community. This type of thinking was put to the test and eventually changed as Europeans came into contact with Africans like the Ashanti. Although the Ashanti enjoyed certain privileges under British rule, they still tended to resist.

According to Peter Hammond, when the whites first arrived on the continent, they reported extensively on the technologies of the indigenous groups they encountered. Local order was maintained by technology and warfare precipitated by population growth that was exceeding

¹¹² Rory Pilosof, "Guns Don't Colonise People. The Role and Use of Firearms in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Africa" *Kronos* no. 1 (2010), 266.

¹¹³ Saheed Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria : Firearms, Culture, and Public Order* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 16.

in technological advancements.¹¹⁴ It must be said that Africans were in possession of technologies valuable enough to be hauled off to European museums for documentation and research. Whether indigenous or of European origins, Africans possessed more military weaponry than what was initially anticipated. Although race and notions of superiority played a major factor, Africans served as an exotic prism through which Europeans, refracted images of Africans and of themselves.¹¹⁵ The implementation of colonial order was meant to recreate the African while having them absorb European attributes throughout the continent. Hence any native technology would have been quickly discounted and their impacts nullified in the minds of the whites.

In *David Livingstone and the Myth of African Poverty and Disease: A Close Examination of His Writing on the Pre-Colonial Era*, we learn that African industrialization included manufacturing crafts, carving, iron smelting, medical systems, and carving materials such as stools, chairs, wooden bowls, and masks. According to Sjoerd Rijpma, while these types of technologies existed, Europeans tended to discount them as charlatan and superstition.¹¹⁶ This is a contributing factor to the lack of research dedicated to African technology. This is an example of Eurocentrism in which biased views tend to discourage contributions from non-western civilizations.

However, as African History has become more popular, resistance studies have focused on firearms in Africa, with a shift over the last forty years with close attention being given to African access to guns. We have discovered that blacksmithing and iron smelting were dominant in certain regions of Africa in possession of maintained gun arsenals. The capabilities to

¹¹⁴ Peter B. Hammond. *Yatenga Technology in the culture of a West African Kingdom* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 160-161.

¹¹⁵ John Parker and Richard Rathbone. *African History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2007), 5.

¹¹⁶ Rijpma, *David Livingstone and the Myth of African Poverty and Disease*, 6.

manufacture iron goods, whether for domestic or military purposes was key to daily lives and African rituals. In territories south of the Sahara guns were introduced to Africans by the Portuguese and the Arabs, however in this region Africans rarely manufactured their own guns because of lack of waterwheels to drive bellows and their inability to achieve temperatures high enough to make good barrels.¹¹⁷ In other regions such as in the cases of the Ashanti and Samorian states, they had histories of iron smelting and ingenuity that were more advanced and could obtain the high temperatures. Due to their proximity to the coast and access to trade, they had fewer issues with obtaining guns and ammunition. Because of this, guns became rarer the further one ventured into the interior of Africa. The capability to obtain firearms whether directly or indirectly off the coast is one of the main reasons that West Africans were able to put forth more resistance than other geographic regions. In *Technology, Tradition and the State*, Jack Goody argues that while there were some firearms found in the savannah zone, the African coastal states depended on the gun more heavily and the grass land rulers tended to be horsemen.¹¹⁸ These types of distinctions between various regions, support why some areas were capable of offering higher levels of resistance to European rule than others. In this case, a coastal polity's ability to trade with Europeans for weapons contributed to the necessary military-technological expertise when resistance turned to firearms.

West Africans made adjustments to low quality firearms in efforts to resist colonial rule. The firearms technology acquired by Africans was mainly the "Dane gun." These guns were cheap, low quality, and liable to burst when fired. These weapons were not suitable for military use. Headrick suggests that these guns were most suited to the prevailing technology of

¹¹⁷ Ralph A. Austen and Daniel Headrick, "The Role of Technology in the African past," *African Studies Review* 26, no. 3/4 (December: 1983): 252.

¹¹⁸ Jack Goody. *Technology, Tradition and the State* (London: Oxford, 1971), 55.

agriculture and hunting, since village blacksmiths could easily repair when in need of repair and since un-corned African gunpowder was just weak enough for them.¹¹⁹ Considering that agriculture was the foundation of most African economies, the low quality guns were more than capable of land protection. Also, corned powder used a different process than serpentine powder that tended to burn more uniformly and rapidly. The final product of powder was about the size of grains of wheat or corn, hence the term corned powder. Additionally, with the low-quality guns, there was ample low-quality gun powder to use for these particular firearms. The low-quality gunpowder turned out to be the safest way to fire these low-quality firearms. The lower powered gunpowder proved beneficial in these type guns as the more potent gun powders would cause more damage since the stocks and barrels couldn't hold the amount of power.

West Africans used this powder that was rendered dangerous in older guns like the Dane. This proved significant as if the powder was too powerful for low quality guns, they could burst when fired causing bodily dismemberment or even death. With West African blacksmithing and iron smelting advancements, it put them at the forefront of the gun trade due to their experience and abilities to make crucial repairs to the otherwise outdated firearms. Although not ideal firearms, it should be understood that these bad weapons were better than the guns of the Chinese who fought in the Opium War with matchlocks, spears, bows and arrows, and gingals, which is a type of musket.¹²⁰ This distinction shows the African advantage when offering resistance to Europeans with the Dane. Therefore, the quality of guns played a major part in how Africans resisted and battled with the Europeans. Dane guns served their purposes for daily uses as well, but still failed in comparison to the newer, stronger, and more advanced European guns being manufactured by the British and French.

¹¹⁹ Austen and Headrick, "The Role of Technology in the African past," 252.

¹²⁰ Austen and Headrick, "The Role of Technology in the African past," 252.

In addition, West African kingdoms were up against a European mentality of possessing superior weaponry made them nearly invincible. This way of thinking is evident in the following declaration. “Brethren! Oh! Be not afraid, Heaven your Christian work will aid; Banish all your doubts and tears, Rifles cannot fail 'against spears. Take your banner! Onward go! Christian soldiers, seek your foe, And the devil to refute, Do not hesitate to shoot.”¹²¹ The preceding statement is a parody of a hymn written in 1891 and sung by soldiers when engaging in battle with Africans. Indicative of the British colonial mindset, this profane hymn exemplifies the conquering sentiments of Europeans as they forged forth with Imperialism throughout the continent of Africa in the late nineteenth century.

A large aspect of Imperialism focused on economics and power. The spread of Christianity was vital in this conquest. The ideology of a “world religion” is a construct that implies that Christianity is the only universal religion which set the precedence for imperialism. The spread of Christianity and Imperialism often took form through violent encounters, hence the resistance efforts by some Africans such as the two case studies of Samori and the Ashanti. The implementation of imperial policies was mainly facilitated by the development of technological and tactical advantages over their victims, which proved successful as echoed by the hymn above. The hymn is referencing the technology of firearms. It displays the attitude of European soldiers that their rifles were superior to spears and would lead them to victory.

While European rivalries were rampant, firearms still made their way into the African continent, setting the stage for globalization that would prove crucial in how Africans responded. Initially most usage of firearms by Africans were not military by nature. Africans were restricted

¹²¹ John Galbraith. *Mackinnon and East Africa 1878-1895: A Study in the 'New Imperialism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 1.

to using guns mainly for crop protection and hunting. Although military use was not paramount in the beginning, the African familiarity with firearms and sharpening of gun-handling skills increased. In most instances almost anyone could acquire a Dane gun adding to the availability of guns by most commoners. Guns of precision were reserved for chieftom, popular traders, and traditional leaders.

4.2 Types of Guns Available

Over a four-hundred year period in which guns flooded Africa, the various types of guns that were introduced on the continent of Africa to resist during this period varied. Historian Joseph E. Inikori performed a detailed study of firearms introduced to Africa. Inikori deduced letters from S. Galton the types of guns entering Africa from a letter written in 1789. From this letter, Inikori was able to create a table that provided an in-depth analysis of British firearms on the continent of Africa. Based on his findings the types of guns entering the continent were as follows: “Fuzee guns, soldiers muskets, pistols, caliber guns, birding guns, flat muskets, militia guns, Dutch guns, Fowling pieces, London muskets, blunderbuss, Cornigan guns, Senegals, Carbines, Bundie guns, Gambia guns, Double Barrel guns, Marman guns, Swivel muskets, Cannon, Tower guns, Round muskets, Danish guns, Bonny muskets, Musketoons, French pattern guns, Spanish pattern guns, Trading guns, Angola muskets, ship store pattern guns, Square muskets, Buccaneers, and Riononas.”¹²² This extensive catalogue of guns displays the diversity of the quantity and quality of firearms sold to Africa. The availability of firearms demonstrates the West Africans access and capability to resist when needed.

¹²² J. E. Inikori, “The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807,” *Journal of African History* XVIII 2 (1977), and R. A. Kea, 'Trade, State Formation and Warfare on the Gold Coast, 1600-1826' (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1973), 356-357.

Saheed Adernito's *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria* considers that Dane guns, Bonnies, and flintlocks were the preferred firearms on the Gold Coast. Although indigenous Africans had their own weapons prior to firearms production like spears and knives, it is important to note that "flintlocks – known locally as 'Long Danes', owing to their Danish manufacture – were preponderant in Yoruba warfare until the late 1870s, when some breech-loaders were imported. The main periods of conflict on the continent which ranged from 1779-1880 was known as Africa's Hundred Years War. Firearms largely displaced indigenous weapons, if never completely; soldiers became trained in marksmanship, and fought in relatively open order."¹²³ African use of firearms and military structure followed very distinct and disciplined models. Guns became the cornerstone commodity for British trade with West Africa. This shows the importance of firearms which fueled trade and resistance efforts.

To continue resistance West Africans such as Samori and the Ashanti, relied on a continuous supply of weapons from Europe. Inikori shows that there was a great volume of firearms being imported into West Africa in the eighteenth century with important effects on interstate warfare, economics, Afro-European relations and the politics of states along the Gold and Slave Coasts as they were called. "By examining the preference for guns by West Africans who sold different types of commodities (including slaves) to the Europeans it may be possible to get some insight into the uses to which the firearms were put."¹²⁴ Firearms changed the trajectory of how Africans not only dealt with disputes between local polities, but also affected European contact and conflict. With firearms in hand the Europeans knew that Afro-European interactions and relationships were changed forever. Access to firearms for Africans perpetuated a shift in how Europeans dealt with the stronghold of West African kingdoms. Although the

¹²³ Reid. *Warfare in African History*, 112.

¹²⁴ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1800" 350.

quality of guns that were traded and incorporated into the daily lives of Africa were generally of low quality, the firearms contribution to the slave trade and colonialism are paramount.

Historically guns have been integral to understanding world history, culture, society and technology for centuries. This is no different for the continent of Africa. In *Kuma Malinke Historiography: Sundiata Keita to Almamy Samori Toure*, Nubia Kai discusses a significant claim that Africans were already in possession of firearms prior to Europe's intervention on the continent. Kai shows how written scripts by Muslim clerics in Quran schools of Ghana were discounted as "oral cultures." This is interesting as most European and Asian cultures that use written scripts were viewed as "literary cultures." Therefore, the criteria for what constitutes as literary culture should not be based on the continent from which it came but on the actual content. While using *kuma* as a form of literary culture, *Kuma* claims that the gun was already present on the continent before the arrival of Europeans. African scripts reference a gun that Oulani used to kill Buffalo of Do, which places firearms technology in Africa prior to the European gun on the continent. Kai suggest that "as difficult as it may be for modern scholars to accept the idea that the gun was already invented and used in Africa during the thirteenth century, the griots insist that copper and iron guns were forged by blacksmiths, regarded as sacred and used only on special occasions, at least until European invasions of the nineteenth century forced African leaders like Samori Toure to mass produce guns for military combat."¹²⁵ Griots are a member or class of traveling storytellers and poets that maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa. Likewise, Kai uses these oral traditions along with the natural resources of Africa like copper and iron to support his claim of basic indigenous firearms technology. This shows the technological advances that were already present prior to the arrival

¹²⁵ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 203.

of Europeans, while also displaying the ingenuity of Africans and their production and industrialist capabilities.

The Mandenka blacksmiths that Samori was associated with have been described as creating copper guns and gunpowder using a metallurgical technique that was passed down over several centuries.¹²⁶ This metallurgic technology encompassed a science of heating metals and working it until given a certain shape. These methods along with the capabilities to create gunpowder all add to the discussion. While this technology was available, Kai suggest that these copper guns were still not for military use. Once forged the gun was used during rituals, to initiate the Battle of Krina and was also used by Sundiata's court as his saraka or scepter of power.

Historian Priya Satia has argued that the average lifespan of a gun sent to West Africa was about one year. Less than 1 percent of the adult males on the West Coast of Africa had access to a gun.¹²⁷ The low life cycle of the gun points to continued trade of firearms and current inventory repairs to maintain an adequate firearms stockpile. The slave trade increased the rise of the militarization of powerful slave holding states, while also increasing their need for firearms technology. However, the claim of mass production of guns by Samori Toure has also been supported by scholar Francois Ingold. He stated that Samori was able to increase his firearms arsenal by sourcing through local manufacturing, which was not a violation of the by the Brussels Conference Act of 1890. Samori's firearms industry first started on Sanankoro Mountain located in Mali. Samori then moved his location to Dabakala that employed between 300 to 400 blacksmiths. According to Ingold, Samori was capable of producing 12 rifles in one

¹²⁶ Kai. *Kuma Malinke Historiography*, 204.

¹²⁷ Priya Satia. *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 186.

weekend and over 200 cartridges in one day.¹²⁸ Although this does not constitute mass production numbers, the sheer ability to manufacture and produce added to his firearms arsenal. This proved all-important as Europeans were increasing restrictions on African trade and eliminating African access to guns. Without this type of ingenuity, resisting the French would have proved more difficult for Samori. According to Martin Legassick, Samori was so determined to maintain weaponry and firearms that he even ransomed a British Lieutenant in exchange for guns. There seems to be no definitive information regarding if Samori's firearms manufacturing system was rudimentary or if he created guns from an advanced process. Additionally, the quality and design of these firearms has been questioned as well. However, Legassick researched that Samori's blacksmiths made operating the breech mechanism very easy.¹²⁹ The functionality of the firearms was seen more operational than prior to being repaired by the blacksmiths. Although, the guns may not have been the same quality as European firearms, the blacksmiths usage of this type of technology was pertinent.

African History scholars usually point to the superiority of the European weapons and European military structures as advantageous when engaging Africans. Likewise, military structures and tactics were just as influential for Africans along with the capability to resist. In the thick African bush for example, the British superior weaponry was of no real tactical advantage. This is largely due to the ability of Africans to attack quickly without warning and apply guerrilla tactics. Their knowledge of the landscape gave them the ability to ambush and retreat into the forests. African leaders like Samori were able to take advantages of flaws in European policies and documents. This is evident in the records taken during his arrest when he was finally captured. Samori had a large arsenal of weapons at his disposal. The records display

¹²⁸ François Joseph Jean Ingold. *Samory sanglant et magnifique 1835-1900* (Paris Éditions du Scorpion, 1961), 51.

¹²⁹ Legassick, "Firearms, Horses and Samorian Army Organization 1870-1898," 104.

the importance of his arsenal in quality and quantity, but also proves through his "smuggling" of firearms in West Africa that there were serious failures in the applications of articles in the Brussels Act.¹³⁰ Being able to manipulate European systems and maintaining his arsenal was crucial in Samori's ability to maintain resistance efforts for as long as he did. His cunningness when dealing with British and French governments enabled him to not only continue to acquire firearms, but manufacture them while maintaining resistance efforts to retain his territories in West Africa.

Acquiring firearms through trade was key for West African resistance to colonial rule. In *Before European Hegemony*, Janet Abu-Lughod suggests there were several world trade systems that were already in place prior to Europeans. She refutes Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory in which the Europeans founded the modern world economy.¹³¹ European use of divide, conquer, and rule tactics had been used for over four hundred years with the implementation of imperialism in the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific. These types of imperialistic tactics arrived in Africa much later. This is supported by historian Gregory Maddox as he suggests that "before 1850 European powers lacked the ability to mobilize the force necessary to actually conquer dense or well organized African populations."¹³² While Europeans had effectively enslaved Africans for centuries, it was only through technological advancements that Europe was able to effectively colonize the continent. New advancements such as the use of steamboats allowed Europeans to push deep into the interior of Africa. Steam power could be utilized as a weapon. As trade strengthened and the slave trade continued firearms, like other trade items in colonial

¹³⁰ S. Sané, "Guerres de conquête et contrôle de la circulation des armes à feu et des munitions en Afrique Occidentale sous domination française (1834–1903)," *French Colonial History* 9 (2008): 184.

¹³¹ Janet Abu-Lughod. *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

¹³² Gregory Maddox. *Conquest and Resistance to Colonialism in Africa. Articles on Colonialism and Nationalism in Africa: V. 1*. (New York: Garland, 1993), xi.

Africa, reveal the intersection of both global and local changes in the consumer world.¹³³ This is evident in the way guns and trade supported not only local West African economies, but stimulated global economies as well. Ultimately, this type of trade fueled resistance for Samori and the Ashanti.

As technological advances increased in Europe, the invention of the machine gun provided tactical advantages over the best African armies such as the Ashanti and Samorian armies. Historians such as Michael Crowder suggest that African armies relied upon the innovation of European weapons and could rarely appreciate and use them to their fullest. Criticisms of African use of technology has been ongoing. Africans have been criticized for their proposed inability to use firearms effectively. There have been suggestions that “the fact that with a breech-loading rifle you can fire prostrate, thus presenting a smaller target to the enemy: they continued to fire them standing, as they had to with muzzle-loaded guns.”¹³⁴ This statement insinuates that even when given access to superior technology, Africans lacked the skills and knowledge to adequately leverage them against a European enemy. These types of stereotypes of Africans not being able to effectively combat Europeans are not accurate.

Authors such as Nubia Kai disagree with this argument when discussing West African resistance like Samori Toure and his army. In fact, some African leaders like Samori took initiative by “deliberately sending his soldiers to enlist clandestinely in the French Army to learn how to use the new arms to best effect.”¹³⁵ Samori was determined to provide his soldiers the best training possible, just as the Ashanti were trained by the Dutch. Additionally, Samori would build his army with experienced soldiers who had fought in the British and French armies.

¹³³ Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 12.

¹³⁴ Crowder. *Colonial West Africa*, 52.

¹³⁵ Crowder. *Colonial West Africa*, 52.

African soldiers with combat experience increased the proficiency of his military and enabled him to fight eagerly to maintain independence.

4.3 Access to Firearms

Resistance to European authority and colonial order depended on access to firearms. With a reliance on their firearms supply from Europe, Africans ability to negotiate and acquire large arsenals of weapons was crucial. Although there are not any accurate records of exactly how many guns and ammunition went into West Africa, there is a statement that provides information during a specific period and time in the gun trading industry. An import entry was made in 1765 by Lord Shelburne, “to the effect that for the preceding twenty or twenty-five years Birmingham had practiced 'gun making to a prodigious amount for exportation ... [and] send annually above a hundred and fifty thousand to the coast of Africa, some of which are sold for five and six-pence a-piece.”¹³⁶ This documented estimate gives historians an indication of how many guns possibly flooded the coast of Africa, during the early to mid- eighteenth century. More importantly it shows the access and capability of the Africans to purchase these weapons. At a cost of five to six pence per gun, trade was indispensable. Without the ability to provide commodities that the Europeans wanted the trade would not have been successful.

Having an advantage in war provides a certain momentum. However, the availability of guns did not provide Africans any advantages other than the capability to acquire. The Europeans, although having a tactical and weapons advantage, did suffer from their own disadvantages as well. While in Africa, for instance they were fighting in unfamiliar lands and their artillery was too heavy to be constantly on the move in the dense terrain and extreme African climates. Fighting in unfamiliar terrain was an issue for Europeans across Africa.

¹³⁶ Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice. *Life of William, Earl Shelburne* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 139.

Moreover, African attire was suitable for the heat and proved beneficial to the natives. However, uniforms proved an issue for Whites in Africa. The uniforms and dress of European officers were created more for European conditions and fighting. Combat in the extreme heat of Africa took its toll on Europeans, which had adverse effects on their fighting. There were several instances when soldiers were fatigued or even died from heat exhaustion from the heavy clothing. Whereas the African tended to wear more suitable and lightweight gear. Africans and “their organization, tactics and equipment had evolved to deal with local military situations, which continued to threaten them, at the same time as the presence of European forces demanded that they re-think their strategy to deal with the different tactics and superior weapons of their new opponents.”¹³⁷ These distinct advantages assisted Africans throughout their military engagements with foreign forces. Re-thinking and adapting to strategic warfare was key to the survival of African militaries. The European concept of war tended to be more violent and definitive than the local quarrels and engagements in which Africans had become accustomed.

More violent warfare required more firearms. Because of their access to the coast, firearms took longer to make their way inland, because coastal states such as Ashanti sought to deny enemies in the interior access to new weapons.¹³⁸ This was done by West African trade agreements with the Europeans. With constant contact with European ships, the coastal states were able to control the trade and monopolize the distribution throughout the interior. These West African states provided an ample supply of goods, commodities and slaves in exchange for firearms, even if these goods may have come in part from the interior. The coastal tribes managed to minimize the firearms introduction into non-coastal areas.

¹³⁷ Crowder. *Colonial West Africa*, 53.

¹³⁸ Robin Law, "Horses, Firearms, and Political Power in Pre-Colonial West Africa," *Past & Present* no. 72 (August: 1976): 122.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Samori Toure resisted the French takeover of western Sudan. He had built an empire based on religion and military structures that he learned at an early age. His military background and history of slave trading gave him access and experience in the firearms market across West Africa. His resistance started with “500 soldiers and thirty-six repeating rifles in 1887, his army accumulated 4,000 repeaters by 1898. With the use of guerrilla warfare tactics Samori, halted the French colonialism and progression for a decade, but this direct link to firearms was disrupted by an Anglo-French agreement.”¹³⁹ By working his way up through the military ranks, Samori was able to manipulate both the British and French when acquiring firearms. This was accomplished by pinning them against each other, therefore increasing his ability to continue resistance efforts as they did not want to risk war with another European power on the continent of Africa. Another aspect of Samori’s power was his ability to access firearms from the French even during and after battle, to position himself as a stronger military structure.

4.4 Quality of Firearms Technology

Some West African nations continued to resist in spite of their limitations. The lack of gunpowder, for instance, on the continent played a major role in how much resistance West Africans could muster. These shortages compounded with low quality firearms effected resistance efforts tremendously even after firearms were secured for military campaigns. Joseph E. Inikori provides a revealing chart of the amounts of gunpowder imported into West Africa between 1750 and 1778. On the basis of import figures from England, he gives an accurate account of shipments of gunpowder in particular regions. The records from Birmingham’s largest gun manufacturer and the Dutch West India Company were combined for this firearms

¹³⁹ Austen and Headrick, “The Role of Technology in the African past.” 261.

research and analysis. More importantly during this time period for over fifty-eight years from 1750 to 1807, there was total of 49,130,368 pounds of gunpowder that was imported which were imported totaling an annual averaged supply of 847,075 pounds.¹⁴⁰ Besides a few examples and sources like Inikori's research, the documentation of firearms and ammunition headed to West Africa were not consistently, regularly or properly entered into the British customs ledgers. For the continent of Africa, British customs ledgers only provided iron weight and value being transported to the West Coast of Africa. Iron is the term used for arms. The iron ordinance called for these materials to be entered separately for London every year.

In another instance while low quality guns made their way to the coast of Africa, there initial uses began to change from hunting and crop protection. The slave trading guns were used for purposes other than agricultural. "Because slave-gathering by its very nature provoked inter-territorial wars in different ways, in addition to inter territorial conflicts arising from other causes, firearms acquired for slave gathering or for defense against slave-gatherers may have been employed in a host of operations."¹⁴¹ This shows the slave gatherers preference for guns is what made the demand so high. The demand for guns from empires such as the Ashanti and Samorian army is why enslavers like these groups were able to resist more effectively than others that did not have access to firearms. In other trading, like the ivory sellers and foodstuff sellers, they did not require guns as much as the aforementioned groups because firearms were not as important to them as they were for the slavers.

Samori and the Ashanti adapted to the lack of weapons that were making their way into Africa. With guns in high demand as payment for slaves in West Africa, there was a quality and

¹⁴⁰ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 344.

¹⁴¹ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 351.

production issue. West Africans wanted firearms, but this put a considerable amount of pressure on gun manufacturers from England. This is largely due to the pressures on gun manufacturers to produce a higher volume of firearms whenever trade increased between Britain and West Africa. The trade items that Britain used and shipped on their vessels included textiles, guns, brass kettles, brass pans, and other commodities and goods. Although the prices of these items varied from region to region, the value placed on firearms generally remained consistently higher during this time period. One of Britain's largest firearms producers during the mid-eighteenth century was Farmer and Galton. They kept records and letters that support claims that at the pinnacle of trade in West Africa, Birmingham gun manufacturers were under extreme production pressures. These pressures came from the high demand of merchants trading in West Africa from the Liverpool port in England.

Additionally, the high demand and competition between gun manufacturers caused the workmen to go into a violent demonstration against Farmer and Galton, which limited production even more. There was a legal suit that showed the firm received a large order of Sham Danish guns in 1772. Inikori provides examples of the demand. For example, in the January 1772, based on the firm's books there were 15,900 orders for guns of which one order from Liverpool was for 6,410 guns alone.¹⁴² These large figures fit into the larger scope of just how much of a demand African traders put on gun manufacturers during this period for increased mass production. This may explain the rushed manufacturing which resulted in more defective firearms.

Also, access to these guns based on status has also become a widely debated topic. It has been suggested that firearms were limited for decorating the habitat of some chiefs.¹⁴³ Although

¹⁴² Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 342.

¹⁴³ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 344.

this may have been the case in earlier stages during the introduction of firearms to Africa, accessibility and usage changed as guns established themselves as an ordinary tool for most. Firearms were needed for the protection of crops as most African states were agricultural economies. Historians such as Nubia Kai and Michael Crowder have argued that Samori Toure and the Ashanti relied on the technological advancements in firearms as their main show of force. This was for the purposes of raids and indigenous wars to gather up slaves for trade. Although the quality was low, the poor firearms met the needs of the West Africans whatever the primary use was during the mid- eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries.

Based on Inikori's research British ledgers are limited when trying to research the quantity of guns imported into West Africa during the eighteenth century on a large scale. However, there is one piece of information that surfaced from William Irving, the Inspector General of Imports and Exports of Great Britain in 1806. He prepared an account for ten years, 1796-1805 of small arms exported from Britain for the British House of Commons. Discovered were private records of English merchants that traded to the coast of Africa, showing the prices of 6,530 guns exported to the African coast over the same period.¹⁴⁴ The problem with the research of firearms into Africa is the limitation of documents and records from the Dutch and French. Although they produced firearms and traded with the Ashanti and Samorian army, their ledgers are restricted when accounting for the number of guns that were traded on the West Coast of Africa. Based on data and calculations on Table 3, Inikori shows that during this 10 year period a total of 1,615,309 guns were imported into West Africa from England, which gives an average of 161,531 per year.¹⁴⁵ While limited, England's trading numbers can be used as an estimate for how many firearms other European nations may have traded in West Africa.

¹⁴⁴ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 345.

¹⁴⁵ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 347.

Historians have argued that the poor quality of firearms imported into West Africa from England during the eighteenth century satisfied the Africans need, since warfare was not on the hierarchy of usages. This rationale and narrative figures into Europe's justification of inferior arms manufacturing at the height of their Industrial Revolution. Inikori shows that in 1750 there was a complaint made to the Incorporated Company of Gunmakers in London to the Committee of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa. The complaint states as follows in relations to gun makers and their responsibilities.

obliged to prove all Firearms made and vended by us for Home and Foreign Trade under severe penalties, by which means the Trade and credit of that manufacture have been considerably advanced and confirmed in Foreign Parts and especially on the coast of Africa in favor of London made guns preferable to those of any other nation, principally on account of the Proof, which was the chief reason on which the grant of the charter was founded, the lives of those who use them immediately depending thereon. But of late years persons not members, nor subject to the obligations of the corporation, have made and vended great quantities of unproved guns, to the great discredit of that valuable branch of the British manufacture, which, if continued must end in the total loss thereof to this nation.¹⁴⁶

The quality and safety of firearms was not essential or deemed important due to the fact the firearms were not intended for European use. For firearms bound for the coast of Africa, being proved or safe was not necessary.

The notion of quality firearms not required by Africans was a justification of most European traders and slave merchants, no matter how erroneous the assumption. There were different standards for guns meant for European use versus African usage. Farmer and Galton felt the cheapest guns for the African trade were so cheap and inferior that they would not be considered as arms useful to enemies of England as they were not proved or bored.¹⁴⁷ This type of premise helped to maintain the manufacturing of low quality firearms for the continent of

¹⁴⁶ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 359.

¹⁴⁷ Richards, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century," 53.

Africa. Yet, if Africans were satisfied with low quality weapons there would be no need for complaints from manufacturers. These types of manifestations paint a different picture from the points of view of the British arms provider.

The reliability of firearms was a concern for Africans as well. “It will hardly be believed in the present day, had we not sufficient knowledge that is the fact, that firearms, if we may so call them, were made, the barrels of which neither underwent, nor were intended to undergo, any proof whatever; that immense numbers of guns were made, with the knowledge and certainty, that if they were ever fired out of, they were certain to burst in the discharge. These guns were made for one market- that of the coast of Africa.”¹⁴⁸ Research suggests that more than half of the guns sent to Africa were defective. This was the thought process of British gun manufacturers, who purposely provided the lower qualities guns for trade with Africans. However, if their fail rate was truly 50% the West Africans would have either ceased or reduced trade. In most cases the guns were only used for special occasions or ritual ceremonies. This was not the case for warrior tribes like the Ashanti and Samori which would eventually use these low quality and defective guns to resist imperial rule and policies.

4.5 Purpose of Firearms in West Africa

The introduction and trade of guns had both positives and negatives. The warriors that gathered up slaves needed firearms just for the purpose of waging wars and rounding up slaves, hence their trade and reliance on guns from England. And at the same time, the non-slave holding states needed to acquire guns in order to protect themselves against the slaveholding nations and not become victimized by not being able to protect and defend themselves. These

¹⁴⁸ Jan Hogendorn, “Mechanisms to Assure the Quality of Imported Goods in Precolonial West African Trade,” *African Economic History* no. 27 (January: 1999): 26.

usages resulted in the creation of a dependency on firearms for both offensive and defensive measures. It has been concluded that the majority of firearms went to slave holding states in West Africa. As stated previously, this is mainly due to the preference for guns over other trade commodities like brass and textiles.

The preference of firearms is shown through a high demand for guns in eighteenth century West Africa, while also reflected in the fact that 1£ sterling of guns had more purchasing power in West Africa than £1 sterling of other commodities.¹⁴⁹ In other words, guns were more valuable in trade than even silver. This is apparent during the early days of slave exports and African responses to the demands of technology. The growing international economy for African slaves and the introduction of new gunpowder technology called the flintlock, created a vicious cycle in which Africans sold large numbers of enslaved Africans into the Middle Passage in return for firearms technology.

Before the end of the nineteenth century, when breech-loading rifles with cartridges were introduced to Africa, the following three classes of smooth-bore muzzle loaders found their way to the continent from Europe: the matchlock, the earliest type (probably the ones represented in the Benin bronze statutory); the wheel lock, which was produced in small quantities; and the flintlock, the most popular firearm imported from the 1630's to the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰

These types of guns were proven and meant for European expansion, not African slave traders. Aderinto pays close attention to the technological aspects of guns while still treating them as a commodity and acknowledging their contributions to culture.

Arms trading began to change as laws forbid the sales and trade of firearms on the continent of Africa during the Brussels Conference Act of 1890. Initial use of the firearms that

¹⁴⁹ Inikori, "The Import of firearms into West Africa 1750-1807," 340.

¹⁵⁰ Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 30.

flooded coastal West African countries began to change around 1900. The uses commonly argued for were hierarchy and chiefdom, protection of crops, rituals and celebratory, and protection from slaveholders or slave gathering. Most would argue that around this time the main use of firearms was for hunting. These usages began to shift between the middle and end of the nineteenth century, as the slave trades to the Americas came to an end and resistance to colonialism in West Africa began to mount. This change came about mostly as Europeans began to demand that Africans cede large portions of their kingdoms, just as the British did with the Ashanti. Another example is when Samori's empire was forced to sign unfair treaties by the French.

As in most transactions, the sellers have more knowledge of the item than does the buyer, hence the manipulation by European trade merchants. These are the types of unfair trading processes that resulted in Africans having inferior weaponry. Therefore, military advances or resistance efforts ultimately failed because of the lack adequate technology. A history of technological advances in ironwork and smelting assisted with repairing these damaged and old guns. These firearms could be imported, traded, and then repaired by local African gunsmiths. During trade with Europeans, Africans were constantly in the danger of item surprises and being cheated on trade quality. Europeans used these unfair trade tactics and provided inferior technology while still receiving their quality items of exchange from the Africans. According to Hogendorn, some commodities such as guns embodied technology in which the quality was difficult or sometimes impossible to decipher by sight, smell, taste, feel, or even manipulation.¹⁵¹ This shows how some goods such as firearms, ammunition, and gunpowder although effective was not noticed immediately during initial trade and negotiations, especially with only little or

¹⁵¹ Hogendorn, "Mechanisms to Assure the Quality of Imported Goods in Precolonial West African Trade," 24.

general knowledge of firearms technology by the African recipients. When African knowledge grew, so did their awareness of the caliber of materials they were receiving.

4.6 Ironworking Repairs and Adaptations

In addition to the availability of firearms, the ability of Africans to repair them was fundamental to sustaining resistance efforts. Africa has a rich history of blacksmiths and iron smelters which was instrumental in the repairs of the lower quality guns purchased in West Africa. Although most items that blacksmiths created were domestic, they did possess weaponry. “The spear and the sword formed a transitional stage, because iron was widely found and although access to technology was often restricted, their manufacture could not be controlled completely.”¹⁵² These types of technology and skills put Africans in a particularly good position in regards to adaptability to the low quality firearms. The ability to repair and eventually manufacture ammunition became key in keeping large quantities of firearms readily available.

Since such a large number of defective firearms malfunctioned, blacksmiths on the Gold and Slave Coasts quickly became experts at repairing them. This became a common act since the West Africans were intentionally given guns with defects on a regular basis. Blacksmiths could take bad parts from muskets to make a good musket by adding a new tempering on the lock. There were various methods in which the blacksmiths were able to make repairs as described below as stated by French officials. Kea gives an example that supports the blacksmithing methods of repair.

French merchants found this method of repairing locks incomparably better than any they had ever seen, and these guns, which the merchants had in fact sold because they would not fire, did not misfire after the Assini blacksmiths had mended them. After the guns were repaired and fixed they were many times better than they would have been prior to any defects. The methods in which the blacksmiths repaired these flintlock musket were

¹⁵² John Lamphear, *African Military History* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 352-53.

as follows: the breech pin was out; the lower belt was off; the upper ring was off also; the barrel was out of its place.¹⁵³

These types of adaptations showcase how Africans were determined to have weaponry in their arsenal no matter the costs or time associated with getting the firearms up to military standards of use.

Being able to fix and repair was evident as to why this craft was so highly regarded and respected in most African communities. Traditionally, blacksmiths were believed to have magical powers capable of containing iron, applying fire and air to make tools and weapons, which was passed down from father to son.¹⁵⁴ This concept of having magical skills is why these blacksmiths and iron smelters were entrusted to work on the highly regarded firearm technology of African kingdoms. The blacksmiths even had their own caste systems in which they were both honored and feared.

There were certain guns that were easier to mend and fix; muzzle-loaders, for instance, were easier to repair than breech loaders. Although the breech loader was the latest technology, looking at why such communities prized apparently obsolete muzzle-loaders, Macola explains that these represented an accessible technology made of soft iron that could be mended locally.¹⁵⁵ Accessible technology is technology created with the user in mind. In the case of the African blacksmiths, the muzzle-loaders could be easily customized and individualized to meet their needs. This was pivotal to keeping enough guns in circulation to resist the threat of colonial rule.

¹⁵³ Kea, "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," 205.

¹⁵⁴ Katherine E. Reece. *West African Kingdom : Empires of Gold and Trade* (Vero Beach, Fla: Rourke Educational Media, 2006), 35

¹⁵⁵ Macola. *The Gun in Central Africa*, 59.

In *Africa at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Issues and Prospects*, J.F. Ajayi agrees that firearms were the most important commodities traded in Africa mainly due there being no local production, yet acknowledges the difficulty in assessing the effects of imported technology and how it has led to a multitude of interpretations.¹⁵⁶ With the lack of African written documentation, the importance of firearms in Africa is indeed left up to local oral interpretations and European writings. “The history of technology once consisted of nuts and bolts; stories of great inventors and famous engineers. Today technologies are no longer viewed as ‘externalities’ that arise fortuitously from the minds, geniuses, but as an intrinsic part of the culture and economy of every society ... the work of the social historian of technology is to study the economic and cultural context in which innovations arise and, in turn, their impact upon the societies in which they appear.”¹⁵⁷ This interpretation focuses on economics and trade, both of which support how a European phenomenon like firearms eventually penetrated deep into African culture. As social history has transformed so have non-European perspectives regarding pre-colonial resistance.

4.7 Resistance

African historians are focused on answering a set of particular questions: “Why African military resistance was not more effective, why some states defied the invaders and others did not, why some states were able to adapt their armies to deal with the military strategies of their European opponents, why others fought entirely in traditional terms.”¹⁵⁸ To fully be able to answer these inquiries into resistance is why the understanding of technology and its limitations

¹⁵⁶ F. Ajayi. “Africa at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Issues and Prospects,” in *UNESCO General History of Africa VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*, eds. J.F. Ajayi (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 9.

¹⁵⁷ Walter Gam Nkwi. *African Modernities and Mobilities: An Historical Ethnography of Kom, Cameroon, C. 1800-2008* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG, 2015), 11.

¹⁵⁸ Abbink, Abbink and Walraven, “Rethinking Resistance,” 46.

in Africa must be understood. In order to grasp how Europeans utilized firearms to colonize Africans, the uses by natives and also their failures must be explored to either support or refute the narrative of European superiority. According to Abbink, we should not necessarily substitute it for Marx's old idea of class struggle, but notions of resistance movements are the motive force of African History.¹⁵⁹ Resistance came about through Africans wanting to remain independence even when faced with European technology. We are finding more attention and research in resistance studies as it relates to the continent of Africa that's providing answers to questions that have been ignored or disregarded for over a century.

First, "battles are seen not in terms of the success of the conquerors but of the prowess of the defeated leaders in face of overwhelming odds."¹⁶⁰ With all the overwhelming tactical and technological advantages that Europeans had during the Scramble for Africa, the African resistance efforts can be seen as more powerful and significant in defeat than for Europeans in victory. Many historians have focused on resistance efforts by Africans after colonial occupation. There has been very little attention paid to the technology and the mechanics of resistance. Historians such as Keith Breckenridge have argued that historians find the history of African technology difficult to deal with mainly due to external dependency, exclusion, methodological biases regarding the presence and integration of technology.¹⁶¹ He also has supported and argued that the field of African history has been isolated for decades and the history of technology even more isolated when it comes to Africa. These limitations derive from a methodology focusing on the success of being able to produce viable claims from limited sources, whether colonial documents or traditional oral histories. Yet, in direct contrast, John K.

¹⁵⁹ Abbink, Abbink and Walraven, "Rethinking Resistance," 40.

¹⁶⁰ Crowder. *Colonial West Africa*, 46.

¹⁶¹ David Serlin, "Confronting African Histories of Technology." *Radical History Review* 2017, no. 127 (January 2017): 91.

Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* focuses on politics of technology and the relationship it created between African and European societies after the sixteenth century. In this research he discusses how European navigation opened up connections between not only the Americas, but the Western part of central Africa as well. This book also discusses French historian Pierre Chaunu's argument of "disenclavement" in which navigation ended the isolation of some areas and increased contact with other parts of the world.¹⁶² This notion of disenclavement opened Africa to trade with Europe therefore increasing the capability of acquiring firearms. Nevertheless, while pinned against superior weaponry and discounted as savages, Africans did not succumb easily to defeat. In fact, African armies like the Asante and Samorian army had infantry, cavalry, and were commanded by generals.

This section has focused on the ways in which Africans resisted with the limitations of access to modern military technology, which was mainly firearms. Given the nature of firearms throughout history most literature on this type of technology focuses on their major role in warfare and conflict.¹⁶³ However, when it comes to Africa the overarching theme is that guns were not used in warfare and conflict, but for hunting and agricultural protection. This narrative is the leading one, especially during the 19th century as an estimated 16 million guns flooded the continent of Africa. For Africans where effective training and deployment were available guns gave many African societies new potency throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴ This is shown through the incorporation of military training by the Ashanti and Samorian army that afforded them the abilities to wage active resistance.

¹⁶² John Thornton. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13-14.

¹⁶³ Pilossof, "Guns Don't Colonise People," 267.

¹⁶⁴ Reid, *Warfare in African History*, 108.

Many African states were able to capitalize on their access to firearms and ability to raise large armies in defense of their territories. Armed resistance of Africans against European authorities manifested itself through various means. William K. Storey's *Guns, Race and Power in Colonial South Africa* discusses the role of guns beyond military purposes. Mainly he tends to focus and explore the importance and ways in which people involved guns in the changing of societies and politics.¹⁶⁵ Storey addresses a different time period in which his philosophy and research supports the way in which firearms and their uses did indeed change overtime with the resistance efforts of African resilience and sovereignty in mind.

It has been determined that firearms technology was key when discussing Africa's ability to wage war against Europeans. The use of firearms in Africa was a part of a broader history of technology transfer and innovation, or globalization as one may call it in the Atlantic World.¹⁶⁶ All the connections and trade systems worked together to provide Africa with the necessary tools needed to resist current and future forms of oppression. Not only was European technology adopted by Africans, but they began to incorporate it into their religion, culture, and social experiences.

The importance of military and firearms in Africa has been a principal topic of debate. According to Robin Law the military factor of guns should not be considered independently, since military technology has both economic and environmental impacts.¹⁶⁷ The economies were heavily dependent on the slave trade. Additionally, African political societies transformed and created differences in African militaries during this time period. In the earliest period of recorded history, the primary weapon in West African warfare was the bow and arrow. However, over

¹⁶⁵ William K. Storey. *Guns, Race, and Power in Colonial South Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Law, "Horses, Firearms, and Political Power in Pre-Colonial West Africa," 112.

time the primary weapon changed to firearms technology. This transformation played a major role in the art of modern warfare during these colonial and pre-colonial years.

Historians have rarely gone beyond describing the role of guns in warfare. Firearms and how their introduction impacted African societies while bringing about changes in military tactics and structures must be explored.¹⁶⁸ This is the main issue that warrants being addressed throughout Military History regarding firearms in the hands of West African states that wished to retain their sovereignty. Africa has over four hundred years of history with guns which enriched their military structures on the continent along with iron working skillsets first introduced in 1500 BCE. These aspects created a scenario for some indigenous groups to resist with access to European technology and African ingenuity.

¹⁶⁸ Macola. *The Gun in Central Africa*, 11.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis began with an observation, discussion, and argument. The argument was that not all West Africans were easily defeated, and some polities took up arms, while offering meaningful resistance through firearms against European colonial order, which has resonated with their specific populations, as well as Africans on the continent. For so long African History was seen through the lens of European colonizers that benefited from the ideals of superiority. This thesis has shown that the spreading of European imperial culture and values in the form of colonialism, conquered and created cultural conflicts that resonated through violence on the part of the oppressed people.¹⁶⁹ After conflict and the potential loss of their sovereignty, some African states attempted to resist through violent armed resistance. A thesis of this length can only hope to open the question of access to firearms technology and the imposition of imperialism while giving a few examples to illustrate the argument and the observation.

Through trade agreements, the British and French occupied large portions of Coastal West Africa. With slavery being their main commodity, this type of trade was how firearms were acquired throughout the region before and during colonialism. This thesis was not intended to focus on how firearms came into the west coast of Africa, but instead on how guns were used to prolong the eventual colonization of nearly the entire continent of Africa. For case studies we discussed and elaborated upon two large resistance efforts in West Africa, while also showing the complexities of obtaining these firearms for a continent that lacked a mass production of guns.

¹⁶⁹ Ohaegbulam, *West African Responses to European Imperialism*, 159.

Technological advancements were key instruments in building empires during the Scramble for Africa. These advancements would ultimately jeopardize relationships on the continent of Europe. There was a theoretical challenge of analyzing the system of imperialism that was first addressed by Marxists around the turn of the twentieth century which discussed imperial policies threatening to boomerang back to Europe in the form of war between great powers.¹⁷⁰ This is evident as there was a shift from Imperialism and colonialism to a competition of world powers which was prevalent on the continent of Europe during World War I. In this war, technological advancements “came home” to Europe and caused massive destruction in the European metropole as well as in the European colonies in just four years. Moreover, colonialism from 1884 to 1914 destroyed African landscapes, cultures, and local histories by attempting to impose European values on African cultures.

Moreover, through the ideology of assimilation, French policies provided that when their subjects adopted French culture and language they could eventually become French. This diverged from British imperial policies, which had no such assimilation practices for their colonial subjects. However, while resistance was limited, African states like the Ashanti and Samori States were able to preserve their languages and cultures. This was mainly due to resistance efforts and the acquisition of military firearms by Africans. The aforementioned groups utilized European guns that were acquired through trade to mount military campaigns and battles against imperial Britain and France. While these types of resistance efforts were not common, the Ashanti and Samori defied the odds when fighting Europeans despite tactical disadvantages.

¹⁷⁰ Ian Fletcher and Yael Fletcher, "Imperialism and American Empire in Global Perspective: Part 1," *Empire Online* (2008): <http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/Essays/Fletcher1> (Accessed May 28, 2020).

It should be understood that resistance tended to variegate based on the nature of oppression in which Africans found themselves under. In West Africa, for instance their resistance varied, depending on the nature of existing conditions within the area being dominated.¹⁷¹ This led to different resistance efforts based on the colonizing powers' methods of control over their protectorates, hence direct, indirect, violent, or passive methods. The British method of indirect rule was created by Frederick Lugard, who started the dual legal structure of courts and "native courts."¹⁷² By contrast, direct rule was used by the French as another form of control. Nevertheless, African states resisted both policies, which shows the tenacity and unwillingness to conform even when up against superior weaponry.

First the Ashanti warriors whose determination to keep local and cultural customs intact, while also maintaining their sovereignty, did form long resistance efforts against their British colonizers. Secondly, Samori Toure, the last great Malinke leader that had expansionist aspirations and resisted French infiltration of his West African kingdom. Both these groups had at their disposal not only European technology, but African ingenuity developed by their blacksmiths. Ashanti warriors were able to besiege a British fort in their capital city of Kumasi and keep out British reinforcements by building stockades which blocked all roads in and out of Kumasi. Additionally, Samori was able to build factories to repair and fabricate firearms, which was a main component of how he resisted for so long.

This was essential due to his firearms trade being cut off by the Brussels Conference Act of 1890. The third chapter reinforces the first two chapters, while also discussing the difficulties

¹⁷¹ A.B. Davidson, "Resistance to the Scramble for Africa and the European Colonial Rule," in *The Scramble for Africa: Cause and Dimensions of Empire*, ed. Raymond F. Bates, 2d ed. (Lexington, MA.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1972), 163.

¹⁷² Robert Home, "From Cantonments to Townships: Lugard's Influence upon British Colonial Urban Governance in Africa." *Planning Perspectives* 34, no. 1 (February 2019): 45.

of acquiring firearms on the continent of Africa. This is what resistance looks like when faced with the threat of Imperialism. Although, after years of fighting, both resistance efforts failed, but it was not due to lack of will. Ultimately, the superior technology of the Europeans, led by artillery prevailed along with the laws put in place that kept these modern weapons out of the hands of Africans.

This thesis has argued that technology played an important role in pre-colonial Africa and that military technology made a significant difference in resistance efforts between 1870 and 1914. Adaptations were integral and necessary in day to day dealings with Europeans when acquiring firearms. This research contributes to African History through intellectual research of long-term engagements between Africans and Europeans regarding colonial rule. Seeking to expand upon the limited exploration into successful African defensive programs, which include resistance efforts and wars, no matter how minimal or short lived the success may have been. As Kwame Nkrumah stated “we should write our history as the history of our society in all its fullness. Its history should be a reflection of all of itself and contact with Europeans should only figure in it from the viewpoint of the African experience.”¹⁷³ This statement, intends to give agency to Africans to tell their own history through African experiences. Additionally, we must be careful while not adhering to Eurocentrism, not to create new biases either.

In the Introduction of this thesis, I provided a definition of imperialism. Ideological and material power gave Europeans advantages that led to global dominations and colonial imperialism. Therefore it has been determined that “imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements in a distant

¹⁷³ Jean-Francois Bayart, “The Historicity of African Societies” *Journal of International Affairs* 46 no. 1 (Summer 1992): 61.

territory.”¹⁷⁴ Although this definition discusses the implementation of imperialism and colonialism, Europeans were not prepared to engage in decades of fighting and resistance with the Africans from 1870 to 1914. By viewing the Africans as savages, Europeans underestimated the indigenous advances such as ironworking, military, political structures and possible African responses.

While researching this topic of resistance, it has been determined that fighting for land and sovereignty was already a way of life in West Africa. There were numerous empire wars predating European arrival. In order to understand Africa’s past we must first establish a foundation regarding the truth about resistance. Without making a study of African resistance to the imposition of colonial rule, it will be difficult to understand the past, present, and even future of the continent. By focusing on how Samori and the Ashanti resisted, we have revealed and uncovered a willingness of some Africans to socially exist without the restraints of colonial authority. Some may view their attempts as failed missions by individual groups. However, these cases studies showcase a few moments of protest and resistance that created a kink in the colonial chain of West Africa.

While initial resistance may not have been successful in West Africa, it was only the beginning. Rebellions began to spread across the continent which continued more than fifty years after the last African country was colonized.

Precolonial polities and communities may militarily resist conquest, as the British and French discovered facing the fighters of the Zulus in southern Africa or Samori Touré in West Africa during the “scramble for empire” between the 1870s and the turn of the twentieth century. Military defeat and occupation does not end resistance; new political, social, or cultural forms can develop, ranging from petitioning the colonial state to

¹⁷⁴ Shehla Burney, "Edward Said and Postcolonial Theory: Disjunctured Identities and the Subaltern Voice," *Counterpoints* 417 (2012): 40, www.jstor.org/stable/42981699 (Accessed May 7, 2020).

evading forced labor service or tax collections to embracing the alternative religious worldview of, for example, Islam.¹⁷⁵

The last European ruled country received its independence in 1980, which furthermore shows just how significant the resistance efforts of the Ashanti and Samori states were in the late nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth century. When faced with insurmountable odds, through firearms technology and adaptability, Africans were able to accomplish meaningful resistance on the western coast of the continent of Africa.

¹⁷⁵ Fletcher and Fletcher, "Imperialism and American Empire in Global Perspective".

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