

WARFARE IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF AFRICAN BLACKSMITHS

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Abstract. The rise, fall and expansion of most kingdoms in pre-colonial Africa were credited to the activities of warfare. To sustain war efforts, various societies and warlords in pre-colonial Africa evolved unique military complexes, strategies and tactics, which they deployed during war times. The blacksmith was the fulcrum of pre-colonial war armory and strategy. The knowledge of iron metallurgy was the exclusive domain of the blacksmith. The knowledge of metallurgy made the blacksmith indispensable in actual execution of wars, hence he fashioned the weapon, went with the army to the battlefield to ensure adequate supply of weapons and repair of worn-out weapons for the reinforcement of the armies in the battleground. All these functions combined, made the blacksmiths an invaluable party in the preparation and actual execution of wars in pre-colonial Africa.

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1. Introduction

In pre-colonial Africa, war was fought for a range of reasons, including territorial expansion, self-preservation, defense, protection against external aggressors, etc. War has been profoundly important in shaping Africa's past; it has been both the outcome and driver of broader political, social, and economic change. The struggle, moreover, to domesticate hostile physical and climatic environments has been a

crucial driver of warfare, leading to the violent quest to control resources (water, arable land, healthy pasture) (Reid 2011). Many kingdoms in pre-colonial Africa reached its apogee in terms of power and wealth relations as a result of conquest and acquisition of new territories.

The inevitability of war in pre-colonial Africa demanded a level of sophisticated weapons in the arsenal of an army. This is because the success of a military operation during war times depended on the level of the sophistication of the armory, tactics and strategy employed by the army. Against this background, therefore, there was a continuous evolution in the technology of development of war armory in pre-colonial Africa. It is true that the emergence of Africanist historians has provided a watershed on African military past; the works of scholars like John K. Thornton, John Keagan, Bala Achi, G. N. Uzoigwe, Kenneth O. Dike, Toyin Falola, among others are replete with potpourri of African military experiences. John K. Thornton in his book *Warfare in Africa* went a step further to identify the numerous environmental and climatic conditions that shaped the nature of African warfare and how these conditions influenced the nature of arms deployment and strategy. Bala Achi's work, on the other hand, provided an explicatory synopsis on the nature of arms and armor in pre-colonial Africa. Even though his work was on the Hausa States, his discussion on *Arms and Armour in the Warfare of Pre-Colonial Hausaland* was congenial with the accounts of other scholars and his classifications corroborated what was obtainable in other Africa States.

However, useful though these studies are, they were designed to provide an overview of a wide range of issues and topics in African history of warfare. In this regard, the current work gives credit to the African indigenous technology – blacksmith for the manufacturing of weapons in pre-colonial Africa; for the overwhelming exploits and contributions of the blacksmith in the actual execution of warfare in Africa. It is historically accurate that prior to the advent of colonial rule and Western military technology, Africans evolved a functional military complex based on indigenous knowledge of iron technology for the execution of wars. The transition from stone tools to iron metallurgy in Africa introduced the use of metallic objects such as spear, bows, arrows, breastplates, helmets, etc. in pre-colonial wars. Technologies of iron smelting and forging, which likely began in the African continent around 2,500 years ago, were ardently sought and jealously guarded. Their control could promote a king's ambition, enhance a soldier's fortune, and secure a community's well-being. Iron tools and weapons enabled Africans to forage, hunt, and till the soil, assuring prosperity and protection (Fowler Museum 2018a). The technology of iron metallurgy appeared to be ubiquitous and was domiciled with the blacksmith who was acclaimed to wield divine knowledge on the extraction and fabrication of iron into domestic, spiritual and war implements. Beyond the fabrication of metallic tools, the blacksmith was also revered and consulted before the deployment of metallic tools during the war. The blacksmith also accompanied the warriors to the battlefield to ensure adequate supply of weaponry and repair of worn-out ones. He was proclaimed the custodian of the god of iron who must be consulted to fortify the army and make some predictions in times of war.

Therefore, by analyzing the contributions of the blacksmith in the execution of warfare in pre-colonial Africa, this work makes a major contribution to the existing literature and knowledge on the modus of pre-colonial warfare. It differs remarkably from the work of other scholars from the in-depth analysis it offers in the understanding of the production and deployment of colonial weapons of warfare. However, in examining the place of the blacksmith in the development of wars in pre-colonial Africa, it is also necessary to glance at the nature of warfare and weaponry in pre-colonial African wars, because it is particularly necessary in establishing the relationship between the blacksmith and his involvement in war.

2. Theoretical framework

Several theories abound in the realm of social sciences aimed at explaining issues and realities in the state setting. Wars and warfare have characterized the human society since the beginning of human civilization. The explanatory tool for this study is the Developmental State Theory. The crux of this theory is that society is at liberty to look inwards in the management of its local and critical production, technology, economy and other facets of development. Key proponents include (Leftwich 1995: 418) and (Chalmers 1982: 110). The production of the local blacksmiths was essential in the local warfare because they produced local weapons of warfare. These local productions ought to have been sustained in spite of the upsurge of foreign technology displacing the indigenous materials. We note without equivocation that colonialism and imperialism distorted the local production (Ake 1981: 97). Conventional warfare was initially executed by the productions of the local blacksmith in pre-colonial Africa. This theory is obviously antithetical to dependency theory.

3. The nature of warfare in pre-colonial Africa

Warfare in pre-colonial African societies was ubiquitous, most societies saw war as a means of territorial expansion and a source of power, while some saw it as a means of territorial defense from hostile neighbors. Warfare in pre-colonial Africa was of both external and internal dimension, i.e. it could be between two kingdoms or within a kingdom as a result of internal uprisings or disagreement between the ruling elite or dynasties. Achi writing on arms and armor in pre-colonial Hausaland, distinguished between great wars planned and organized by the central government which consisted of hierarchical ordering of military commanders and the general army under the control of the Sarki (king) and the smaller raids and military operations carried out by individuals or bands of free looters who, although they had to obtain permission from the king, retained most of the booty (Achi 1988: 45). Against this background, the socio-political organization of traditional societies featured the organization of an army; and earliest rulers in Africa made rapid efforts in building functional military complexes for the execution of wars.

Eurocentric scholars often undermine the significant developments in African military history prior to colonialism; their narratives, frequently shaped by normative assumptions about the nature of warfare and its proper conduct and by condescending attitudes towards uncivilized people, tend to dismiss African wars as tribal or ‘bush’ wars that needed no special explanation, or whose explanation defied the logic of those civilized wars that were the proper subject of military history (Thornton 1999: 4). Africa is often left out or dealt with in a rather unsophisticated manner in the literature of comparative history of war (Thornton 1999: 2). Although studies in African military history are relatively novel, the war experiences of Africans in different societies have been captured in the seminal works of Africanist scholars and historians including; J. F. Ade Ajayi and R. Smith *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*; Toyin Falola and R. Law (eds) *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial Nigeria*; R. J. Reid *Warfare in African History*; R. S. Smith *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*; J. Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800*; among others. These literatures reecho the significant contributions and exploits of warlords like Hannibal of Carthage (247 BC-183/182 BC), Yakub al-Mansur of Morocco (c1149–1199), Sonni Ali of the Songhai Empire, Shaka kaSenzangakhona also known as Shaka de Zulu (1787–1828), etc. in the development of war strategies, tactics and general military organization.

Moreover, the desire for territorial expansion and state preservation which made war inevitable in Africa provided African rulers an avenue to consolidate their reign over large territories, assert their power and influence, as well as dominate their economic relations with their neighbors. Wars were fought to ensure survival or to expand and consolidate at the expense of others. This entailed mobilization of men and materials, continuous modification of weapons and the adoption of tactics and strategy through which decisions were reached on the basis of situations which could not be predicted by the enemy and, therefore limited the enemy’s will (Achi 1988: 12). John Thornton’s work on *Warfare in Atlantic Africa* captured the situation when he wrote that:

The consolidation of the kingdom of Wolof in the late fifteenth century, followed by the establishment of Songhay’s control over the Niger bend after 1464 and then the implantation of a powerful Fulbe State on the upper Senegal, ended the period of nomad domination. But the nomads returned to power in the eighteenth century when civil war weakened the powers who dominated the Sahel (Thornton 1999: 20).

Therefore, the degree of power a king exercised within and without his territory was directly proportional to the strength, tactics and strategy of his army.

Another significant feature of pre-colonial warfare in Africa was the interlocking of state power with military leadership. Uzoigwe noted that “in no State, traditional or modern is the military totally divorced from the political structure. The degree of integration, however, between the military and politics varies from State to State” (Uzoigwe 1987: 23). He further maintained that the ideal king was a great

warrior; larger than life (Uzoigwe 1987: 24). Most rulers in pre-colonial Africa also distinguished themselves as great warlords and strategists. Kings did not just sit in administration but also led and commanded the army in battles. The case of the three interlacustrine states of Bunyoro, Kitara and Buganda, Zulu kingdom, etc. stand out as instances. In pre-colonial Africa, Thornton observed that control of the ‘means of destruction’ was more important than control over ‘means of production’ and thus placed armies firmly in the panoply of state and political development (Thornton 1999: 6). It is within this context that some kingdoms in pre-colonial Africa reached their zenith in terms of political and economic power under influential rulers and military strategists. Examples of such kingdoms in pre-colonial Africa include the Kanem Bornu Empire under Mai Idris Aloma, Songhai Empire under Sunni Ali, the Sokoto caliphate under Uthman Dan Fodio, Ehugbo under Igboukwu, Ghana Empire under Mansa Musa, Zulu kingdom under Shaka de Zulu, etc., these rulers introduced significant military strategy, strategic thinking and tactics which transformed the nature of warfare in Africa in pre-colonial times.

In pre-colonial Africa, wars had fronts and geography was a major determinant of the nature of warfare and arms organization. They tended to fight in open order, sometimes to enhance the individual skill of fighters, in other cases simply to make missile weapon strikes slower or less effective by requiring their users to aim at their targets (Thornton 1999: 12). Geography determined the type of army deployed to fight in certain fronts. The military factor cannot, indeed, even be considered an independent variable since the availability and utility of different systems of military technology evidently depend upon economic and environmental conditions (Law 1976: 84). In corroborating the geo-military distribution of warfare in pre-colonial Africa, Achi wrote that “the geographical location of Hausaland in the savannah belt of the Nigeria area influenced the type of weapons and tactics of warfare. Here, unlike the forest belt, long range missiles like the sling, catapult, javelin and the bow and arrow could be used” (Achi 1988: 53). In pre-colonial Africa, Thornton identifies four geo-military environment and military organization:

First, there was the broad savannah of the western Sudan, ideal for the use of cavalry and ruled by horse soldiers and their infantry accompaniment. Second are the extensive savannahs of central Africa, where because of disease cavalry could not survive; these were the land where infantry reigned supreme and even reconnaissance had to be done on foot. Thirdly, there is the great tropical rainforest of West Africa, impossible for horses and thus infantry country, but also so tangled by trees and undergrowth (for most of it was secondary forest even in the sixteenth century) that warfare was channeled into fairly fixed locations and a war of ambush and position was often important. Finally, the savannah and sahel environments, with denser populations of peasants living along rivers or in villages favoured with sufficient water, leaders raised infantry as well as cavalry, there were the river valleys and coastal regions where boats and marines played an important role in moving troops and maneuver (Thornton 1999: 12).

The above distinction reveals two military organizations that were prevalent in warfare in pre-colonial Africa – the cavalry and infantry army. As long as large numbers of cavalry were on the field, infantry could not afford to straggle or leave gaps (Thornton 1999: 11). Cavalry forces in the savannah regions of West Africa tended towards a sort of decentralized military oligarchy (though not feudalism), because mounts were expensive and only a limited number of people could afford them. Armies in forested regions, on the other hand, used bows as their principal weapon, which necessarily created much more democratic organizations, since bows were owned by everyone and used in hunting (Thornton 1999: 20). Moving southward from the desert, where there were no waterways and all fighters rode on horseback, one met a land of cavalry mixed with infantry and notable rivers like the Niger and Senegal. Going still further south into the savannah, the infantry component gradually became larger, and as one approached the coast, watercraft counted for a larger part of military thinking until one reached the coast at the Gambia and further south (Thornton 1999: 24).

Consequently, prior to the introduction of Western and modern military technology and armory, Africans maximized indigenous technology in the production of arms and ammunition used in wars. In the earliest period of recorded history, West African warfare was dominated by the bow and arrow. By international standards, the West African bow – a simple bow firing normally fletcherless arrows, with an effective range of about sixty yards’ was perhaps not a weapon of great efficacy, but at least in open country archers were superior to any other type of warriors (Law 1976: 113). Achi classified weapons of pre-colonial warfare as those that could be hurled at a distance, missiles which include slings, bows, stones, javelin, catapult, and the throwing spear. Those that are used in close combat shock weapons which included clubs, spear, lances, pikes, swords and war bracelets (Achi 1988: 148). Horses, although not indigenous to Africa were later introduced and used especially in the savannah and forest areas.

Horses seem to have been introduced into the Nile valley during the first half of the second millennium B.C. and from there to have spread into North Africa. The principal use of the horse in early times was military: at first, horses were used to pull chariots, but later horse-riding also developed, the shift from chariotry to cavalry taking place in the Maghrib (North-West Africa) around 300 B.C. (Law 1976: 115). The tactics with which these weapons were deployed varied according to the balance between infantry and cavalry. Cavalry tactics were uniform throughout the whole region. Perhaps because they could not breed or buy large horses in sufficient numbers, cavalry focused their attention more on delivering missile weapons than on home charges. On the other hand, infantry did play an active role in the battles of areas with strong cavalry traditions as a steadying force (Thornton 1999: 27). It is instructive to mention that instruments of warfare in pre-colonial Africa continued to evolve, especially following the transition from stone to iron tools. The involvement of the blacksmith in the process of colonial warfare was significant for the numerous transformations it caused in this process. The contact with the West and the use of Western military equipment introduced new changes and altered the dimensions of warfare in pre-colonial Africa.

4. Blacksmithing technology in the context of African indigenous industry and industrialization

Blacksmithing technology refers to the knowledge of iron working evinced in the transformation of iron ore to finished products such as farm implements, hunting and fishing materials, palm wine tapping tools, weaving implements, household utensils, wood carving tools, ceremonial staff, military weapons, political royal swords, seats and scepter among others. In a more precise perspective, one can also construe the blacksmith technology as the process through which iron ore is converted into metallic objects fashioned for the purpose of domestic, agricultural, military or ceremonial uses by the blacksmith. A blacksmith is best defined basically in operational terms as a man who manufactures certain products in iron, e.g. farm implements, domestic utensils, and weapons, and who uses in the productive process the following basic raw materials and tools: fire, charcoal, a rooted iron anvil, tongs, skin bellows, and a variety of hammers (Ikenegbu 1990).

The origin of blacksmithing in Africa dates back to the transition from Stone Age to the Iron Age. The exact date of origin and development of ironworking in Africa at large has remained a controversial issue and hence cannot be concluded either from written literature or from oral information (Onuoha 2017: 2). Some scholars argue that the earliest reported evidence of metal smelting in sub-Saharan Africa is Nubia where small numbers of copper artifacts have been recovered from sites dating after 4000BC (Okafor 1993: 432). Some are of the view that blacksmithing probably originated from Egypt where the technology for smelting copper was introduced from Upper Egypt between 2686 and 2182 BC (Child and Killick 1993: 319).

Notwithstanding the arguments surrounding the origin of the blacksmith industry, it is important to note that the art of blacksmithing was ubiquitous in pre-colonial Africa and was a quantum leap in the early industrialization and technological breakthrough of pre-colonial Africa. This assertion was corroborated by the German scholar, Ludwig Beck, in 1884 and 1903 who wrote that “Everywhere, an original art of producing iron among numerous native tribes of Africa were not imported but original (Alpern 2005: 42). The Iron Age revolutionized Africa and forever altered human civilization practically and symbolically. Nowhere else in the world are there more diverse and accomplished forged iron forms than in Africa (Roberts & Berns 2018), the objects made of iron were generally of domestic utilitarian purpose; knives, arrow and spearheads and the like (Phillipson 1981: 686). It is in the milieu of the early Iron Age industrial complex that a number of cultural traits of paramount importance make their first appearance in southern Africa. These traits are, primarily, food production, metallurgy, the making of pottery and settlement in semi-permanent villages with houses made of mud applied to a wattle or lathe framework (*po\|e-ind-daga*) (Phillipson 1981: 195).

The emergence of the blacksmithing industry in Africa gave a quantum leap to the industrialization of traditional Africa. In his work *Striking Iron*, Marla observed how the smith’s craft extended from the production of the most basic of domestic tools to the creation of a corpus of inventive, diverse, and technically sophisticated

vehicles of social and spiritual power (Roberts & Berns 2018). There was hardly any society that survived without the services or products of the blacksmith. In some societies as would be expatiated later in this paper, they were revered for wielding metaphysical powers which made them the most sort after institution in traditional African societies. In Nigeria, archaeological explorations and ethnographic studies revealed some of the earliest iron working sites such as Taruga in the north, located about 25 kilometers west of Abuja in the federal capital territory and dated to around 500BC, the Nok culture around Plateau dated to 5th century BC, Isundunrin in Ejigbo LGA of Oyo State in the west, Lejja in the east at Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Igbo Ukwu in Anambra State dated to the 9th AD (Aremu 2008: 173). Other centers of blacksmithing in Africa included Afikpo, Nkwere, Abiriba, Ogun, Kano, Mandé peoples of Mali and the Bamana, etc. from these earliest centers the technology diffused to other parts as a result of trade contacts, war, migration and settlements.

The use of the tools helped to increase food production such as yam, vegetable, maize and cocoyam. Ultimately, the great need to barter the smiths' products with the agricultural foodstuff encouraged progress and productivity in blacksmithing (Osuala 2012: 12). The blacksmithing industry became indispensable as other indigenous industries became dependent on the work of the blacksmith. From the fifteenth century onwards Kano City developed into one of the major commercial and manufacturing centers in Western Sudan (Jagger 1978: 43). Among the Bamana people of West Africa, training of young blacksmiths lasts about eight years. After completion of the apprenticeship the young blacksmith is ready to begin forging tools, weapons, and ritual masks and staffs, used for ceremonial purposes. "When used actively and sacrificed to, iron staffs continue to gain and radiate power, the power to protect, cure, fight, honor, lead, and repel spirits (Perani and Smith 1998: 71).

Similarly, the sophistication of the products of the African blacksmith appealed to the European invaders at the nascent stages of colonialism. The European invaders catered away most African metal works which now adorns several museums in Europe. In fact, early European explorers attempted to recreate African-made objects. In many instances, tools forged by African smiths from locally smelted iron were absorbed into these early European enterprises. In the 16th century, for example, the Portuguese thought so highly of the quality of the iron produced by the Shona (today, in Zimbabwe and Mozambique) that they took it to India for use in the manufacture of guns (Roberts & Berns 2018). Consequently, the advent of colonialism had a pernicious effect on the advancement of blacksmithing technology in Africa. Colonialism did not only stagnate the industry but also pushed it to a precipice. Jagger noted that the blacksmiths themselves refer to these adverse consequences as *cuta*, literally 'harm, injury'. In the first place, the new British administration, naturally cautious in what were then untried surroundings, immediately outlawed the production and carrying of weapons in the area and, as a show of strength, publicly burned as many weapons as it could lay its hands on (Jagger 1978: 48). The Europeans undermined the products of the blacksmith in order to assert

superiority of European- made metal works. They introduced metallic objects which replaced those hitherto manufactured by the blacksmith. The aesthetic appeal of these European made objects and the discrimination and ban on the activities of the blacksmith undoubtedly eroded the industry. Moreover, as European metallic products dominated African markets, in order to sustain the industry the blacksmith engaged in a vicious scouting for raw materials taking advantage of the railway system. Shehu insists that the Blacksmiths stole from the railways to compensate for the shortage in locally mined iron, which was the industry's original raw material (Yusuf 2012: 276).

5. The role of the blacksmith in the development of warfare in pre-colonial Africa

Blacksmithing in Africa is of remote origin, dating back to the transition from Stone Age to the Iron Age. The exact date of origin and development of ironworking in Africa at large has remained a controversial issue and hence cannot be concluded either from written literature or from oral information (Onuoha 2017: 2). Some scholars argue that the earliest reported evidence of metal smelting in sub-Saharan Africa is Nubia where small numbers of copper artifacts have been recovered from sites dating after 4000 BC (Okafor 1993: 432). Some are of the view that blacksmithing probably originated from Egypt where the technology for smelting copper was introduced from Upper Egypt between 2686 and 2182BC (Child and Killick 1993: 319).

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The transition to iron tools was a significant improvement in the development of weapons of warfare in pre-colonial Africa. The exercise introduced a new dimension to Africa's evolving technology – the blacksmith whose responsibility it was to smelt iron into different sizes and shapes, became an indispensable party in the forging of weapons of warfare. Through his involvement in weapon production, the blacksmith ensured availability and supply of weaponry during war times. He also accompanied troops to war fronts to ensure a rapid supply of and or repair of worn-out weapons to aid the fighting army. From forge to field, from hearth to shrine to battleground the work of the West African blacksmith became ubiquitous (The Blacksmith Artistry,

Culture 2019). The smith occupies quite an indispensable position in the community, providing vital tools for the farmers and weapons for the warriors and hunters, a position which is summed up in the Hausa saying – Kowane abu sai an gama da maSeri ‘a blacksmith has his hand in everything (Jagger 1978: 43). In practice, the blacksmith was the fulcrum of weaponry in pre-colonial Africa.

Writing on the activities of the Abiriba blacksmiths, Onuoha recalled that the blacksmith trained some youths in his profession who continued making hoes, machetes, spears and other implements which were purchased mainly by the people of Ohafia (Onuoha 2017: 13). The Ohafia people in pre-colonial times were remarkable warriors who were often hired as mercenaries by other Igbo communities. According to oral history, the ancestors of Ohafia were renowned to be mighty men of war who were always on the lookout for wars to partake in (History of Ohafia People and Culture 2011). It is no doubt that the use of improved metallic tools was a major distinguishing factor of the Ohafia warriors from the warriors of other communities during pre-colonial times. Among the Nkwere people of eastern Nigeria, Osuala noted that the Nkwere smiths manufactured hunting and war implements. Thus, they made *mma opia* (long knife used for war), *mma-apata-ukwu* (knife with double blade), *mma nweti* (dagger), *mma ugada* (long knife also used for war) and *otutu* (hammer) (Osuala 2012: 23). During the earliest contact of Africans with the Europeans and the introduction of firearms (guns) into African warfare, the African blacksmith quickly adopted the technology of gun-making using indigenous technology. This further advanced developments and sophistication in the weapons of pre-colonial warfare.

Gun-making in pre-colonial Africa was popular among the Awka of the present-day Anambra and Nkwere of the present-day Imo States of Nigeria. In earlier times, the smiths were of vital importance to the community as makers of weapons. Guns and cannons were used for firing salutes at funerals and other ceremonies (Ikenegbu 1990). The smith who had always produced *ola* (finger rings), *mkputu* (nails), hoes etc. began to redirect his efforts towards repairing and manufacturing of guns. Among such guns was *egbe cham* or flint gun. It had an ignition barrel into which the gunpowder was applied. Closely associated with the repair and manufacture of gun was the ability to make *mkponala* (small indigenous cannons). They could also repair *kurutu* or *egbe-ndu* (cannon of more complex composition) (Onyejiaka 1977). This *egbe-ndu* was the latest of all the firearms and they appeared perhaps in the late 19th century. It would appear that by achieving this skill, Nkwere reached the height of craftsmanship and from this excellence the town derived its sobriquet – Nkwere *Opia Egbe* (Nkwere, the gun makers) (Osuala 2012: 25).

The blacksmith was also believed to possess divine powers which were employed during war times. The god of iron was revered as having the power to protect the community during wars and threat of war. The Ife and Oyo people believe that the blacksmith has the power to express the spirit of Ogun, the god of iron. Ogun, the god of iron, is one of the pantheons of ‘Orisa’ traditionally worshipped by the Yoruba of Nigeria (Ross 2000: 198). The power of the blacksmith is thought to be so great that it is also feared. Mande blacksmiths control a force called nyama. This means that

they control all energy and power in the village as well as the makeup and workings of the Mande society (Ross 2000: 218). Among the Bamana people, blacksmiths are also experts in divination, amulet making, as well as the practice of medicines due to their extensive knowledge of the Spirit of Ogun. Bamana blacksmiths are responsible for the well-being of the villagers and the safety of the village.

Armies in pre-colonial Africa often wore a fierce look in form of war regalia, bracelets, masks, distinctive facial marks and decorations intended to scare the enemy. Scarifications were done as a mark of bravery, strength and courage. The procedure which involved incisions on the body with a sharp object was understandably painful and took long to heal, so going through the process without exhibiting any sign of pain was a considered a mark of bravery and coming of age. The more scars one had, the more respected and feared he was in some cultures. War bracelets commonly used among the Kabbawa people were metal rings worn around the wrist, sharpened at the outer edge, which was protected by strings of hide and it was used for close combat in cutting adversary (Achi 1988: 45). It was also the responsibility of the blacksmith to make these distinctive markings on the body of the warriors. Where cavalry forces were engaged in war, the blacksmith made protective metallic shields for the horses and their riders. As the violence of shock combat increased, heavier and metallic armors were built for the horse and his rider. They were both provided with a body shield the *sulke* (chain) armor against deadly pointed missiles of the opponent (Achi 1988: 76). These protective tools enhanced the survival of armies during war and also boosted the moral of the warriors during warfare.

The blacksmith in pre-colonial Africa remained relevant in the development of warfare and featured even prominently during the colonial wars of resistance in various African societies. His ability to replicate European weapons, particularly the guns used by many societies to resist colonialism made him a prime target of conquest and annihilation by the invading colonialist. In the first place, the new British administration, naturally cautious in what were then untried surroundings, immediately outlawed the production and carrying of weapons in the area and, as a show of strength, publicly burned as many weapons as it could lay its hands on (Jagger 1978: 43). Osuala captured the situation, thus “colonialism distorted and disoriented the people’s view about blacksmithing. The European civilization infiltrated into the people’s culture and social milieu. Hence, traditional wares such as the smiths’ products came to be derided and consequently, less patronized. At this point, every indigenous art was considered inferior to European products” (Osuala 2012: 34) The European incursion and the replacement of indigenous weapons of warfare with European-produced arms particularly occasioned the extinction of weapons, hitherto made by the blacksmith.

6. Conclusion

By and large, this paper examined the important role of the blacksmith in the development of warfare in pre-colonial Africa. Worthy of mention is the fact that

the knowledge of iron smelting is indigenous and widespread in Africa and that the geographical distribution in Africa was a determining factor of the nature of warfare in pre-colonial Africa and consequently the type of weapon used. The introduction of metallic weapons in pre-colonial warfare was the function of the blacksmith who became the focus of weapon development and proliferation. The divine knowledge of iron metallurgy which was the domain of the blacksmith made him invaluable in the development of warfare in pre-colonial Africa and for this, he was highly revered in the society.

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