



EUROPEAN INVASION AND AFRICAN RESISTANCE

Saheed Aderinto

Introduction

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth century ushered in a new epoch in Afro-European relations. That period was characterized by a series of wars and diplomacy between the peoples of Africa and some European powers—notably, France, Britain, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, and Italy. The failure of resistance eventually led to the establishment of colonial rule, which lasted until the third quarter of the twentieth century in most parts of the continent.

A short review of Afro-European relations before the period of “scramble for Africa” is provided in order to enhance a critical understanding of the subject. This part, which serves as the prelude to the events of the 1880s and beyond, is needed to place the theme of the chapter within a broader historical context. The second part of the work looks at three different, but closely connected, issues about European expansion and African resistance. These themes include, first, the numerous factors which changed the pattern of Afro-European relations and facilitated expansion; second, the ways the peoples of Africa responded to European invasion of their territories; and, lastly, the reasons resistance failed.

Afro-European Relations to 1880

The first half of the fifteenth century is a significant period in Afro-European relations in many ways. Developments in Europe galvanized new patterns of thinking about Africa—its resources, peoples, and geography. These developments can be conveniently discussed as the religious, economic, and political motives for European expansion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The economic motive is explicable in terms of the intensification of the old age between Christian Europe and the Islamic world. The overwhelming influence of the Arabs in the Mediterranean Sea trade inhibited European economic success with the outside world. Europe therefore decided to explore alternative routes to the sources of gold and other African commodities by bypassing their Arab middlemen. The new routes were also needed to connect Europe to the Far East, where spices, a highly priced commodity, originated. The economic motives cannot be divulged from the

religious one. The religio-centered motive posits that Christian Europe craved for the discovery of a fabulously rich Christian King called Prester John, who ruled over a large African Empire around modern day Ethiopia. The King was needed to establish an alliance against the Islamic world. The discovery of this King was also seen as a step needed to carry out the European evangelical mission of converting Africans to the Christian faith. Bartholomew Diaz, a Spanish explorer's observation that European explorers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries went to Africa to serve the Lord and the Majesty, to throw light to those who are in darkness, and to grow rich, sums up and provides precise insight into the link between the religious and economic motives of expansion.

Evidently, European sailors before the fifteenth century never ventured beyond the coast of southern Morocco. This development was not a product of their lack of interest in exploring Africa beyond this part of the continent. Instead, the unscientific notion, which found solace in the superstition that a ship that ventured beyond the Cape of Bojador would not return, placed the African coast beyond the reach of the Europeans. This pattern of belief was orchestrated by the unavailability of vessels that could withstand winds that blew from the north to the south. Portuguese ships during that period could sail southwards with the winds blowing their vessels, but could not sail northwards because their vessels were not strong enough to withstand southbound winds.

The situation of things seemed to have remained unchanged until the second decade of the fifteenth century when Prince Henry (1394–1460), popularly known as Henry the Navigator, appeared in world history. The son of King John I (João I) of Portugal, the Prince had the military and economic resources to pioneer the exploration of Africa. He was able to gather facts about the availability of large deposits of gold and ivory in West Africa, two major European desired commodities, when he followed his father on the conquest of Cueta, a northern Moroccan city in 1415. In order to achieve his dream of exploring the coast of Africa, he established a school of navigation in 1418, which brought sailors, ship builders, soldiers, and cartographers together. A sort of multidisciplinary navigation enterprise under his command soon developed. A major success was recorded when Prince Henry's sailors reached Cape Bojador, on the West African coast below 27° north, in 1434. Other monumental voyages led to the exploration of Cape Blanco, mouth of Senegal River and Cape Verde Islands in 1434, 1442, and 1444 respectively. The Portuguese had pioneered the exploration of West African coastal waters by proving to their European counterparts that the territories beyond Cape Bojador were not a "region of darkness and no of return." The British, Dutch, Spaniards, and French immediately followed suit. By 1488, the southern tip of Africa had been rounded, the circumnavigation of the continent achieved, and a new route to the Far East discovered.

Europe was able to achieve its economic goal of expansion with the opening up of African coastal waters and the establishment of direct trading relations with Africans. Fortresses were built to serve as temporary trading and military posts. The Elmina Castle, located in present-day Ghana, was the first permanent European

trading post in Africa. This trading post, which was initially built by the Portuguese in 1481, frequently changed hands from one European nation to another.

It is imperative to note that Europeans during that period did not attempt to venture into the hinterlands of Africa, but instead confined their activities to the coast. Up until the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Africa's tropical environment was a major threat to the survival of Europeans. Sailors recorded high mortality and the rates increased as their activities intensified. Surviving along the coast was a major challenge and trying to venture into the hinterland would have created a more precarious medical condition. Moreover, the newness of the Europeans on the African coastal waters and their unpopular arrival were factors which might have allowed them to respect African chiefs and shun the idea of attempting to bypass them by venturing into the hinterland. The payment of tributes that took the forms of taxes and levies to local chiefs was an aspect of trade relations, which suggest that African rulers, traders and merchants were in complete control of their trade with their European guests.

The discovery of the New World in the late fifteenth century, the extermination of the indigenous Amerindian population, and the beginning of plantation agriculture and mining activities were developments that radically changed the pattern of Afro-European relations for the next 400 years. The transatlantic slave trade emerged because of the need to use black labor to augment the dwindling Amerindian population. Slaves for the transatlantic voyages were derived from a variety of sources, which included but were not limited to raids and wars. Debtors, convicts, or people accused of crime such as robbery and witchcraft formed part of the human cargo sold to the Americas. A very good percentage of African slaves sold to the Americas came from the hinterland of the Slave Coast (the heavily populated area which stretched from modern Togo to Cameroon and included the Bights of Biafra), and the Gold Coast (parts of modern Ghana and Liberia).

The transatlantic slave trade is also called the "triangular" trade. It is so called because the movement of manpower, resources, and capital is likened to the shape of a triangle. First, slave vessels embarked on their Atlantic journey from Europe to Africa with goods such as firearms, gin, and textiles. Then upon arrival in Africa, ships waited for several weeks or months along the coast for the slave ship to be loaded with slaves that must have been bought with cowries or by barter. The loaded ship then embarked on the Atlantic journey to the New World where the slaves were needed for plantation agriculture and mining. Merchants completed the triangle by taking the products of the plantation, which included sugar and cotton, to Europe.

How many Africans were taken to the Americas as slaves between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries? This question has generated contentious debate among scholars of slavery and Diaspora studies. J. D. Fage's fifteen million estimate has been challenged by Philip Curtin's nine million. The actual number of people of African descent taken to the New World remains a puzzle. Another contentious debate is the effect of the trade on Africa's development process. While Fage is less convinced that the trade negatively affected the development of Africa, Walter

Rodney, leaning heavily towards the Marxist school, illustrates how the slave trade laid the foundation for Africa's economic and technological "backwardness."

The foundation of another phase of Afro-European relations was laid in the late eighteenth century. Empirically, the abolition of slavery in England in 1772 provided a serious impetus for Puritan groups who mounted pressure on the British Parliament to outlaw the transatlantic slave trade. After extensive debates, Britain outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1807 and began to globalize this humanitarian gesture by persuading, bribing, and forcing former African, its American, and European accomplices to follow suit. Post 1807, which is known as the "Abolitionist era," is also identified as the period of "gun boat politics." One salient characteristic of that period was the stationing of the British Anti-Slave Trade Naval Squadron along the West African coastal waters; this force monitored, captured, and freed slaves en route to the Americas. The bombardment of African states, accused of refusing to stop the trade in human beings also took place. The British humanitarian gesture has been subjected to criticism. There is an intellectual tradition that posits that Britain gave up the transatlantic slave trade at a time the trade meant little to her economic and technological development. As the first European nation to industrialize, and having lost its American colonies after the American War of Independence, the need to replace slaves with other commodities became popularized. Eric Williams, the most important protagonist of this argument, had his submission challenged by Seymour Drescher. To Drescher, the Parliament's decision constituted an "economic suicide" because the trade in human beings was still providing profit and the decision to put a halt to it was a wrong economic policy. In recent times, new patterns of arguments have been structured towards exploring the role that slave resistance played in the abolitionist movement. Although slaves were like pawns in the chessboard of humanitarians and government officers, the numerous slave rebellions of the eighteenth and the opening years of the nineteenth centuries helped undermine the continuation of the trade in human beings.

The British abolitionist campaign did not take place in isolation. The exploration of different parts of Africa by European explorers and the second wave of missionary enterprise had religious and economic undertones. Moreover, one could talk of the mutually exclusive nature of the motives of European officers, missionaries, and explorers. In the words of Basil Davidson, it was the "the Bible and the gun" that soon brought Africans into the realm of European control despite resistance. To the London Christian Missionaries such as the CMS and Wesleyan society, the mission was to "civilize" the "savage" Africans. The explorers were concerned about opening up the African interior and naval officers were concerned with trade treaties needed to legalize the so-called "Legitimate Commerce" in a post-abolition era.

Reasons for the European Scramble for Africa

The causes of the scramble for Africa are one of the most hotly debated themes in African history, the history of European imperialism and culture contact. Apparently, scholars and commentators from diverse cultural roots are divided on

this issue partly because they address the issue from the standpoint of their intellectual conviction or school of thought. For our purpose, we are going to enumerate all the arguments, which have been put forward, bearing in mind that all the causes are significant because they help to corroborate the profundity of one another. The point being made here is that instead of choosing one factor, we will consider all the causes of the scramble in a way that will allow us to appreciate the diversity of thought and ideas about the manifold nature of the causes of the scramble for Africa.

The Economic Factor

John Atkinson Hobson provides the earliest and most detailed academic analysis of the economic factors responsible for European imperialism in the nineteenth century. In his seminal work, *Imperialism: A Study*, published in 1902, he argues that the industrial revolution led to the over-production of goods, which had to be sold and were indeed sold elsewhere. Having invested so much outside Europe, the extension of political hegemony, Hobson argues, was the best means of protecting the economic investment of Europe. Vladimir Lenin, the great Russian leader, apparently influenced by the Marxist intellectual heritage and tradition argues that the search for new markets, investment, and banking made Europe look for colonies which afforded the opportunity to invest, exploit, and eliminate all competitors. The resources invested in colonies were derived from the ruthless process of capitalist exploitation, which involves strict competition. It is in light of this that he argues that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism.

Political Theories

The political theory can be conveniently grouped into three categories—namely, “national prestige,” “balance of power,” and “global strategy.” The categorization of the political theories into the following groups is not a neat exercise. This is partly because the arguments in the three categories crisscross one another. The “national prestige” argument posits that European nations came to Africa for the purpose of demonstrating to their continental counterparts their power. Overseas possession of territories was seen as a very important factor, which determined the military and economic strength of a European power. Carlton Hayes, who authored this argument, propounds that the German and Italian interest in overseas territories were precipitated by the need to show the world that their new political unification was formidable and could stand the test of time. For the Russians, the death of future expansion in the Balkans placed the need to acquire territories outside Eastern Europe, a major item on the agenda of their foreign policy. In sum, the more territories European countries had outside the European littoral, the higher the prestige accorded them.

In terms of balance of power, the unification of Germany under Otto Von Bismarck and the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussia War of 1870–71 altered the balance of power, which Europe had precariously maintained since the second decade of the nineteenth century. France lost Alsace and Lorraine, two regions, rich

in iron to Germany. It therefore sought new territories outside the continent in order to make up for the lost territories. The thrust of this argument is that the French imperial activities in Africa after the Franco-Prussia war became a threat to Germany's ascendancy in Europe. Germany readily discovered that France and Great Britain's activities in Africa might allow them to be closer and develop a diplomatic relationship that might lead to the formation of an Anglo-French alliance. An anticipated alliance might encourage France to fight back for the repossession of the lost European territories. To avoid being taken unaware, Germany quickly rushed to Africa and acquired territories.

Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher are the major exponents of another type of the political theory known as "global strategy." These two scholars developed their thesis in their widely read tome, *Africans and the Victorians*. They argue that Europe decided to conquer and impose colonialism on Africa because the location and conditions in some parts of Africa threatened its interest elsewhere. Some of these regions included the Suez Canal in Egypt, the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, the strait of Gibraltar in North Africa, and Saint Louis at the mouth of Senegal. Contrary to the economic theory that tends to make Africa a place where investment could be carried out, these scholars believe that Africa had nothing to offer because it was economically worthless. However, the threat it posed to the economic interest of Europe in other parts of the world, notably, the Far East, made its conquest a matter of necessity. British occupation of South Africa and Egypt are considered as the need to exercise control on trade and commerce of the Far East.

Racially Inclined Theories

Some racially informed arguments explain why Europe felt that Africa had to be partitioned. One of the most popular of these theories is "Social Darwinism."

Charles Darwin, the exponent of this theory, argues in his landmark study, *The Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, published in 1859, that the European race is superior to other races. He continued by providing the scientific justification which contends that the superior race had the right to govern and impose their authority on the less superior ones. The unavoidable natural process of selection, according to him, is the conquest or domination of the "subject race" by the "master race."

The crux of the Evangelical Christian theory, another type of the racially motivated theory, is that Africa was colonized in order to "civilize" the benighted Africans who lived on the "Dark Continent." Having been involved in the sale of human beings for several centuries, Christian missionary sects, whose role in the abolition of the slave trade cannot be denied, believed that the sins of the African soul should be cleansed through conversion to Christianity. Christianity and the civilizing mission went hand in hand. Africans as a result of their adherence to traditional faith were seen as "uncultured," "uncivilized," "primitive," "savages," and so on. Their religion was described as "fetish" and observances as "barbaric." If Africa and its people were to be civilized and removed from darkness, they had to embrace Christianity. The Evangelical Christian theory was adequately promoted by

Kipling and Herbert Spencer in their books entitled, *White Man's Burden* and *Theory of Social Evolution*, respectively. Christian missionaries were not the only category of people who saw Africans and the people as "uncivilized" race.

An interesting aspect of the "Evangelical Christianity" thesis is the transformation that it continued to take up to the third quarter of the twentieth century. Like an old wine in a new bottle, different categories of people from the tail end of the eighteenth century up to third quarter of the twentieth century, continue to make remarks about Africa as the continent of the "savages." The most disappointing is "Colonial historiography" developed by some pseudo intellectuals who include British officers and university professors. A good number of these "scholars" were arm-chair commentators who never saw Africa and were largely influenced by the stories read in the traveling journals of early explorers. To these pseudo-intellectuals, Africa had no history until the contact with Europe. The absence of written documents on Africa's pre-colonial past formed the basis of the argument. Nineteenth century historiographical tradition that owed its origin to German scholars such as Hegel rested on the use of written sources for the reconstruction of the past of the people. History, that is the events of the past, was equated with written sources, and societies in Africa, where records of the past were not kept in written form were seen as societies without history. These commentators believed that Africa required foreign domination to evolve a modernized political organization. The list of "scholars" in this category is vast. They include A. P. Newton, Margery Perham, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and D.G.O. Yarest. The need to counter this colonial hegemonic presupposition paved the way for the development of African-centered scholarship around the late 1950s. The new African history provided the necessary intellectual and ideological weapon needed to counter the colonial hegemony that Africans do not have history.

The Nature of African Resistance to the European Scramble

African states were not passive in the wake of the invaders encroachment of their domains. The ideology of resistance, which can be described as the traditional Africans' ideas or understanding of politics, resources, and foreign domination requires analysis. In the first place, land and its resources meant more than economic assets to Africans. The earth/land is the abode of the gods and goddesses, ancestors and ancestress. It provides the legitimacy for historical and cultural formation, which governs the pattern of thought and consciousness of the people. The loss of control over a territory spells doom because of the importance the living generation places on land as their physical place of abode and the relevance of the sacred entities such as gods, goddess, and ancestors, in the day-to-day affairs of the community. Traditional authorities and other custodians of cultural heritage owe their relevance and civic allegiance to the control of territory and the conduction of affairs in accordance with traditionally accepted values and customs.

African states and empires had a very long history of inter-state wars and rivalry. Some of them came into existence through empire building. Wars needed to break away from a large empire were waged with some degree of success. To a very

reasonable degree, the subjugation of one African state by another did not necessarily lead to the destruction of the traditional pattern of lives of the subjugated ones, since in most notable cases the conqueror shared similar cultural and historical backgrounds with the conquered. The need to acquire slaves for the transatlantic slave trade, manpower for military expedition and annual tributes, partly motivated inter-state African rivalries. In most instances vassal states, which held allegiance to a bigger political entity had power over their local subjects, maintained law and order within its jurisdiction and upheld all cultural values, as long as it continued to pay its annual tributes and demonstrate allegiance to the conqueror.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that African leaders knew the implications of foreign control on their domain. The need to preserve independence largely explains the mode and pattern of response. As we have seen earlier, coastal communities had a longer history of dealing with Europeans by collecting taxes and levies from them and by laying down the principles and procedures under which commercial relations should take place. When the encroachment began, traditional authorities understood that the advancement of Europe was aimed at terminating their political and economic status and the independence of the territory they governed, in accordance with traditionally sanctioned laws and customs. This short Afro-centric interpretation of the nature of war and conquest in pre-colonial Africa negates the Euro-centric proposition that African states wanted colonialism and welcomed Europeans with open hands. Implicitly, some Euro-centric and pseudo intellectual arguments that African states deliberately embraced the scramble is not only fallacious but also tantamount to the misrepresentation of history. Premph I of Asanti (present day Ghana), response to the British when offered protection under its Britannic Majesty's umbrella, in 1891, was categorical and frank:

The suggestion that Asante in its present state should come and enjoy the protection of Her Majesty the Queen and Empress of India I may say is a matter of very serious consideration, and which I am happy to say we have arrived at this conclusion, that my kingdom of Asante will never commit itself to any such policy. Asante must remain as of old at the same time to remain friendly with all white men.¹

Reading through the lines of his response, one discovers that the King understood the politics of the period and the doom that subjugation could spell to his kingdom and the long preserved tradition. He was very diplomatic and firm. Conversely, his Mossi counterparts tended to be very confrontational. Below is an excerpt from the statement he made when the French approached him for a request similar to the one offered Premph I:

I know the whites wish to kill me in order to take my country, and yet you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country

¹ Cited in Adu Boahen "Africa and the Colonial Challenge" in *General History of Africa Vol. II: Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, Adu Boahen ed. (Paris and Berkeley: UNESCO and James Currey, 1985) 1.

good just as it is. I have no need of them. I know what is necessary for me and what I want: I have my own merchants: also, consider yourself fortunate that I do not order your head to be cut off. Go away now and above all, never come back.²

Violent Military Resistance

A prominent scientific law: "For every action, there must be an equal and opposite reaction" cynically explains African military reaction to the scramble. The story of resistance in Africa is replete with numerous battles, some of which had of course been named in accordance with the places they were fought, the belligerents³, and the leading military commanders, and sometimes the military apparatus used.⁴ The size and the level of political organization of African states determined the nature and dynamics of military resistance. African states with centralized or larger political structures such as the Zulu, Ndebele, Sokoto caliphate, Asante, and Tukolor Empires adopted a more sporadic and direct military confrontation, while some ethnicities without centralized states, such as the Igbo and the Tiv, largely adopted the guerilla hit-and-run approach. None of the two approaches outweigh the other in terms of efficiency since they both had their merits and limitations. The pacification of noncentralized communities posed greater challenges to the invaders because it took time to design approaches needed to subdue an entire region on one after another basis. This partly explains the long military resistance of these communities. The centralized states tended to have in their possession ammunition and manpower that the noncentralized could not afford.

It took the invaders over thirty years, from the 1880s to the early 1900s, to establish military control over the entire continent of Africa, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia. After the imposition of colonial rule, European powers all over the continent did not sleep without an eye opened. The time it took Europe's armies to impose colonialism, coupled with the pockets of resistance which continued throughout the colonial period, demonstrate the profundity of African military response to European invasion. Contrary to the preconceived notion of African military impotence, Europe was shocked to discover that the resistance took a long time and consumed many resources. The earlier misguided representation of African armies as "the irregular marching and skirmishing of the barbarous horde" and little better than "slave-hungry rabbles, easy prey for the disciplined, well-equipped European armies"⁵ gave way for their identification as a formidable, hard to crack knot. During the numerous military engagements, European military commanders discovered that they were fighting people who also had long history of warfare, with generals who had spent their entire lives

² Ibid, 1.

³ For instance, the Anglo-Ijebu war of 1892.

⁴ The *Maji Maji* in Tangayinka is a classic example. *Maji* is the name of the water prepared to prevent European bullets from arming and killing the resisters.

⁵ Michael Crowder "Introduction" in *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*. Michael Crowder ed. (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 1.

mastering the art of warfare, fighting, and winning battles. Wars were not new to Africans—virtually all African states had fought a war needed to ward off enemies or impose authority. During the scramble for Africa, what was new was the composition of the belligerent.

All over the continent, African states and empires fought ferociously to keep their sovereignty. While some of these wars lasted a few days or months others, as in the case of the Tukolor Empire versus the French, lasted over sixteen years. Samouri Toure of Guinea's resistance is celebrated as one of the most formidable in modern French West Africa. He had well trained armies made up of foot soldiers and cavalry. His resistance psychologically relied on the Madinke nationalist ideology of old Malian empire of medieval western Sudan. European and locally made weaponry such as bows, arrows, and shields were put into use. Generally, the resisting armies tended to out-number the invaders. Thus, Colonel Kimball's force of 1,200 engaged Sokoto of 30,000. General Dodd invaded Dahomey with a force of 2,000, while the resisting army numbered about 12,000. As we shall see shortly, the decisive factor in military engagement rested largely on the superiority of weaponry and not the size of the armies.

The racial composition of the invading army is also important. European armies were not an entirely white contingent, although in all instances, the commanders were mostly whites. African "collaborators" joined the European armies during the numerous military expeditions. Expectantly, many people, both the invaders and the resisters, lost their lives, with the latter recording heavier casualties. African leaders, if not killed in the battles, were deposed and exiled. The exiled tended to live the rest of their lives outside their homeland.

Diplomacy

The nature of diplomatic machinery varied from one part of the continent to another. It sometimes took the dimension of African states playing one European state against another. It is important to note that military confrontation was sometimes a product of the breakdown of peaceful diplomatic arrangements. The military confrontation between the Bemba and the British began after over fifteen years of diplomacy. Samouri Toure of the Guinea had long years of diplomatic relations with the French before the final military crackdown. The British military invasion of Zululand in 1879 was a fall-out of years of diplomatic arrangements, with Cetshwayo their prominent leader. Lobengula of Ndebele, Cetshwayo's southern African neighbor, adopted a diplomatic approach in dealing with the British between 1870 and 1890. In another vein, the so-called African "collaborators" worked with the Europeans to terminate the autonomous existence of their own community or of unfriendly neighbors. A classic example can be drawn from East Africa. Among the Abaluyia of western Kenya, King Mumia of the Wanga, sought the support of the British in gaining control over his Iteso and Luo rival neighbors. The other side of the story emerged when the British extended their control over the whole of western Kenya, including, Mumia's sphere of influence.

Diplomatic responses took the dimension of signing of treaties and agreement. In this instance, some African states readily signed treaties by preventing the "guns

from talking." Treaties of this nature guaranteed European trade, political and economic interventions in local politics. One apparent fact about the signing of treaties is that African states tended to learn from the "mistakes" of their neighbors who lost in their bid to ward off European encroachment. The defeat, which the Ijebu, a prominent Yoruba ethno-cultural cleavage of modern southwestern Nigeria, suffered in the Anglo-Ijebu war of 1892, served as a lesson for their neighbors. In 1893, Yoruba kings and chiefs signed a peace and trade treaty, which opened up the intervention of the British in local politics and the establishment of colonial rule in that part of modern Nigeria. The people of the Uzuakoli village approached the British with open hands and allowed state reception during the 1902 expedition into the heartland of Igboland (southeastern Nigeria). The elders of the village had met shortly before the expedition and decided that if the British could succeed in sounding a knell to their powerful Aro, Abam, and Ohaffia neighbors, military resistance would be a waste of lives. Other Igbo communities that diplomatically surrendered to British invasion included the Orlu, Onitsha, and Awka.

Magico-Religious Response

The history of resistance is replete with illuminating insight into how Africans called upon their gods and ancestors for assistance against external incursion. Human sacrifices and numerous forms of religious observances were made to ward off colonial invasion. African communities had strong beliefs in the power of supernatural or unseen forces which were seen to be capable of disbanding the troops with bees or other dangerous insects, make the invaders blind, or enable the body of their warriors to be bullet proof.⁶ The *Maji Maji* uprising in Tanganyika (southern Tanzania) is a classic example of the use of magic as a military tactic. This war, which broke out after the Germans tried to impose taxes and other forms of economic exploitation, started in 1905 and lasted until 1907. A spirit medium, Kinjikitile Ngwale (Bokero), prepared magic water which he believed could turn the German bullets into water if rubbed on bodies. During the numerous military confrontations, thousands of people who believed in the *Maji Maji* (water) died as the German bullets pierced through their skin and into their bodies. Survivors left battle-fields in dismay, chanting: "The *Maji* is a lie."⁷ An earlier southern African episode is worth mentioning. In 1819, Nxele, a Xhosa priest, prepared a concoction which he believed was capable of turning the white man's bullets into water. In 1850, another priest, Mlanjeni, sent warriors to the battlefield with a twig from a plumbag. On both occasions and as seen in the *Maji Maji* case, the magic did not work and the African armies were heavily routed.

Analysis based on African use of magic and sorcery to stall or resist European incursion, presents serious historiographical, epistemological and metaphysical problems. This aspect of resistance is very slippery. Two positions have emerged on

⁶ A. E. Afigbo, "Patterns of Igbo Resistance to British Rule" in *European Conquest and African Resistance Part I*, Obaro Ikime and S. O. Osoba, eds. (London: Longman, 1972), 20.

⁷ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent From 1876 to 1912* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), 621.

this issue. Some Africanists argue in favor of the significance of the sorcery by positing that it was a significant factor in the resistance.⁸ Other commentators believe that it was nothing but a sterile method of resistance.⁹ Without going too deep into the controversy, a point which remains abundantly clear is that there seems to be no evidence of a place on the continent, where *juju* was successfully used in warding off colonial encroachment. If the gods and goddesses actually existed in precolonial Africa and functioned as the protectors of their adherents, they should be able to assist their people in their war of continuous autonomous existence. External invasion, epitomized in colonial rule, contributed imponderably in eroding the power and greatness of African traditional religions. Why were African temporal bodies hapless in the wake of the destruction of their powers, which came through colonial military invasion? One plausible defense is that African war magic did not work during the colonial invasion partly because those charms were traditionally designed to protect people against local/ African enemies and not the foreign/European ones. There is adequate evidence which suggests that African magic did work in inter and intra-state wars.

Reasons for the Failure of African Resistance

By the second decade of the twentieth century, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia, all hitherto independent African states had been placed under colonial rule. The establishment of colonialism on its own constituted the failure of African resistance and the military and diplomatic success of the invaders. Military, political and diplomatic factors explain the failure of African resistance.

Militarily, with the exception of Samouri Toure of the Guinea, the Dahomeans, and Ashanti, most African states did not have standing armies on the eve of the invasion. Men and women used for the military confrontation during the wars of resistance were poorly prepared and trained in the use of some exotic ammunition. The reverse was the case with the Europeans who had a long history of maintaining a large standing army. Even when they made use of African soldiers, which they indeed did, European military officers made sure they were adequately trained in the use of sophisticated weaponry. Although some African states made use of European made ammunition, such as the breech-loaded rifles, there is evidence which suggests that they had limited mastery of their handling. Robert Smith, an unrivalled authority on nineteenth century Yoruba military history describes the loophole in Ijebu's handling of ammunition during the Anglo- Ijebu war of 1892:

Despite their long acquaintance with firearms, the Ijebu (like other Yoruba) never evolved any drill for their efficient handling, and after the introduction of rifles, they continued to load and fire these weapons from a standing rather than a prone position, sacrificing a major advantage of the breech-loader over

⁸ See among others, A. E. Afigbo, Patterns of Igbo Resistance, 20–21, Richard Petaitis, *Bullets into Water: The Sorcerers of Africa*. www.reall.org/newsletter/v06/n06/bullets-into-water.html.

⁹ T. O. Ranger, "African Initiatives and Resistance in the face of Partition and Conquest" in Adu Boahen (ed.), *General History*, 28–29.

the muzzles-loader. Moreover, it is unlikely that they were using the recently introduced smokeless cartridges in their rifles.¹⁰

The discovery of the Gatling and Maxim guns in the 1870s and 1890s respectively, constituted, on its own, the most decisive factor in the military success of the European adversaries and the failure of African resistance. From all indications, it appears that no African state was able to acquire or use these machine guns in the defense of their territories. Europeans were sufficiently convinced of the role of the Maxim gun in placing them on higher military footing. British poet Hillarie Belloc's frequently quoted observation best exemplifies the role of superior military equipment in the conquest of Africa: *Whatever happens we have got the Maxim-gun and they have not.*¹¹

In the Islamic and Zulu states of west and southern Africa, respectively, resistors made use of fighting equipment such as bows and arrows. The warlike Ezza group of eastern Igbo confronted the British with machetes, their traditional fighting weapon when an expedition was sent against them in 1902. One wonders what fighting equipment such as machetes, bows, arrows, shields, and outmoded firearms could have done in resisting attack that employed sophisticated ammunition. While bows and arrows could kill one person at a time and within a close range, European ammunition was capable of destroying an entire community and killing large numbers of people at close and long ranges. African fighting equipments were effective in indigenous inter-state wars and rivalries, but they were grossly inadequate in wars with Europeans who used in state of the art fighting ammunition and motivated by greed needed to establish colonial structure of capitalism and barbarism.

European military superiority was given a boost with their clear knowledge of Africa's geographical terrain. Earlier European explorers who visited numerous parts of Africa starting from the late eighteenth century kept records of the continent's geography, topography, and other physical and human character. The invaders knew the continent fairly well and were able to make use of their longer history of fighting with advanced maps. Moreso, the state of military warfare on the continent was not out of their reach, since Europe was the largest source of African firearms—at least the very sophisticated ones. In places where limited knowledge of geography and terrain was recorded, local "collaborators" and the missionaries served as guides, providing the much-needed information. Medically, the discovery of quinine, a malaria prophylactic meant that Africa was no longer the "white man's grave" as hitherto conceived. As previously mentioned, Europeans partly confined their activities to the coast because of the fear of malaria, a tropical African disease.

"A house divided against can never stand" is an old adage, which itself summarily explains how internal division allowed African states to be invaded and conquered in a gradual piece-meal fashion. Nineteenth century Africa was characterized by inter-state friction and rivalry that produced an atmosphere of fear,

¹⁰ Robert Smith, "Nigeria-Ijebu" in Michael Crowder (ed.), *West African Resistance*, 181.

¹¹ Cited in Adu Boahen "Africa and the Colonial," 4.

distrust, and anarchy. Starting from about 1817, the numerous Yoruba states were involved in a series of internecine wars and revolution that lasted until 1893. The *Jihad* (holy war) that broke out in present-day northern Nigeria in 1804 spread to other parts of West Africa and lasted until the mid nineteenth century. Like the Yoruba Civil War, the *Jihad* led to the creation of new states, while several others were wiped out of existence. A similar trend was noticed in southern Africa. The wars of supremacy among the Methethwa, Nduwandwe and Ngwane created an atmosphere of political insecurity and disunity in the region.

Internal crises sometimes took the form of royal rivalry. The chieftaincy disputes between two Lagos princes, Kosoko and Akitoye, paved the way for British intervention in local politics of the town therefore making it the first part of modern Nigeria to be placed under her Britannic Majesty's rule in 1861. The Kosoko and Akitoye's case is similar to one between Ahmadu Seku of the Tukulor and his brothers. Seku's brothers were against his enthronement and worked throughout the 1870s, to undermine his authority and rulership. This only undermined Ahmadu Seku's authority over their Bambara neighbors, but opened his empire to French military invasion.

The condition that probably worsened the situation was the "collaboration" between the invaders and their African allies. The fashion in the period was for African states to ally with an invading European power in order to terminate the autonomous existence of their hostile neighbors. Pre-existing inter and intra-state rivalries were easily drafted into the politics of the scramble. A clear example can be drawn from the Ibadan and Ijebu, two states located in Yorubaland (southwestern Nigeria). The age long enmity between these two states dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. Ibadan resented the monopoly of the Ijebu in the coastal trade and did a lot to persuade the British, who had been firmly established in Lagos, to intervene. The British reacted to the allegations of exploitation leveled against the Ijebu by their hinterland neighbor by persuading them to make trade routes accessible. The Ijebu, realizing the implications of this on their economic and sovereign interests, turned down the British request. It therefore became obvious that the only way of forcing the Ijebu to open up trade was through war. By militarily attacking the state, the British sought the support of the Ijebu's traditional enemy, the Ibadan, who had supplied 284 troops stationed for the attack. Similarly, the Ibadan army was bided to attack Ijebu Ode (the capital of the numerous Ijebu states) from the north.¹² The Ibadan-Ijebu example is similar to the situation recorded in other parts of the continent. Other examples include but are not limited to the following: the British with the Dogho and other trade rivals of Nana Olomu during the expedition against Ebrohimi, (located in Niger Delta region of Nigeria) the French and the Tukulor against Mahmadou Lamine and the British and Fante against the Asante (modern Ghana).

The invaders therefore met a continent engulfed in internal political and military convulsion. Had it been that African states were not witnessing a high

¹² Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (London: Routledge/ Kegan Paul, 1966 [first published 1921]), 234.

degree of internal division, showcased by internecine wars and revolution, it would have been difficult for the entire geographical region with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia to be pacified. Cooperation needed to ward off the invaders would have taken place and there is a tendency for sovereignty to have been preserved. Expectantly, an indissoluble Africa was not good for the Europeans, who quickly recognized internal division and devised their strategies accordingly.

Conclusion

The period we have studied in this chapter represents the transition of peoples of Africa from subjects of their various kings and rulers to the colonial one because the failure of African resistance paved the way for the establishment of colonial rule. European interest in Africa cut across political and economic boundaries. By and large, Africans during the period of the conquest resisted imperialism militarily, religiously, and diplomatically. Internal convulsions and European sophisticated weaponry were some of the factors that contributed in the failure of Africa's struggle towards continuous autonomous existence.

Questions

1. Analyze the changing nature of Afro-European relations between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. How did these events prepare Africa for another phase of relations with the outside world during the period of the scramble?
2. What are the factors responsible for the scramble for Africa? To what extent should these factors be seen as a process of consolidation of the already existing pattern of relations between Africa and the wider world?
3. "Africans were not passive in the wake of European invasion of their domains." How did Africans resist European invasion of their territories?
4. What factors account for the failure of African resistance to European invasion?

Further Readings

- Boahen, Adu. ed. *General History of Africa Vol. II: Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*. Paris and Berkeley: UNESCO and James Currey, 1985.
- Crowder, Michael. ed. *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*. New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971.
- Davidson, Basil. *West Africa before the Colonial Era: A History to 1850* London and New York, Longman, 1998.
- Hargreaves, John. *Prelude to the Partition of Africa* London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1963.
- Ikime, Obaro and Osoba, Segun eds. *European Conquest and African Resistance Part I*. London: Longman, 1972.
- Ohaegbulam, F. U. *West African Responses to European Imperialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Lanham: Maryland, University Press of America, 2002.
- Pakenham, Thomas. *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent From 1876 to 1912*. New York: Avon Books, 1991.