

‘Guns Don’t Colonise People ...’: The Role and Use of Firearms in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Africa

RORY PILOSSOF

Department of History, University of Pretoria

African Military History. Edited by John Lamphear. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xli + 505 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-2521-6.

Guns, Race, and Power in Colonial South Africa. By William K. Storey. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xvi + 378 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-88509-6.

The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion. By Jeff Guy. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005. xii + 276 pp. ISBN 1-86914-048-6.

Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives. By Joseph P. Smaldone. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xii + 228 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-10142-2.

This review essay examines a number of recent works that contribute to the history of firearms in colonial and pre-colonial Africa; two based upon new and original research (Storey and Guy) and the others on reproductions of earlier seminal contributions to the historiography of firearms in Africa (Lamphear and Smaldone). Given the nature of firearms it is not surprising that the vast majority of literature on this technology focuses on their role in warfare and conflict. This is the primary concern of Smaldone’s work and the Lamphear collection. However, the scholarship on the role and use of firearms in Africa has undergone considerable changes over the last half-century and, given the dramatic transformations in political context within Africa over the same period, this is hardly surprising. Storey’s contribution adds important depth to the study of firearms by examining a vast range of uses to which firearms were put in South Africa, as well as the numerous ways the colonial state sought to control the trade and possession of firearms. By discussing these works together, this essay explores what, if any, new developments have taken place in the historiography of firearms in colonial and pre-colonial Africa. While there are still some massive gaps in the literature, as this essay review exposes, the history of firearms in Africa should still be seen as an exciting field of study that has a great deal to offer potential researchers.

Introduction

Firearms have a long and significant history in Africa. From their early introduction into the continent, largely as items of trade, firearms have been intricately bound in the various forms of European intrusion into Africa, from the slave trade to pacification and colonisation. Predictably, the history of firearms in Africa has attracted substantial scholarly attention over the past half a century. The result has been the development of a large body of literature on the topic and a proliferation of conflicting viewpoints and beliefs. The literature on the role and use of firearms in Africa has undergone significant changes over the last half-century and, given the dramatic transformations in political context within Africa over the same period, this is hardly surprising. This essay review looks at some of the most recent contributions to scholarship on firearms in Africa to explore what, if any, new developments have taken place in the historiography of firearms in colonial and pre-colonial Africa.

Several works are examined in detail. The first is John Lamphear's *African Military History*, an edited collection of 22 seminal contributions to the military history of pre-colonial Africa published between 1968 and 1999. Given the nature of firearms, it is not surprising that the vast majority of literature on this technology focuses on their role in warfare and conflict. Lamphear's selection not only gives insight into the major debates on the uses to which firearms have been put in various African contexts, but includes an extended and eloquent introduction by Lamphear, which in and of itself is a valuable contribution to the historiography of firearms in Africa. Alongside this collection Jeff Guy's *The Maphumulo Uprising* (2005) and the recent digital reproduction of Joseph P. Smaldone's *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate* (2008, originally published in 1977) will be analysed for their treatment of firearms. The last book looked at is William K. Storey's *Guns, Race and Power in Colonial South Africa* (2008). While supplying a detailed treatment of the role that firearms played in conflicts in South Africa, Storey's contribution expands the discussion of guns beyond their military uses. One of his central aims was to explore 'the ways in which people involved guns in the changes in society, politics, and ecology'.¹ Storey develops a number of alternative avenues of investigation that offer the foundations for a richer and more nuanced assessment of firearms in Africa.

A New Historiography of Firearms?

That firearms have had important influences on the course of Africa's history is beyond doubt, yet there has been very little consensus on the issue beyond this basic acknowledgment. As Gavin White stated in 1971, 'that firearms have had an impact on African history cannot be denied, but the nature of that impact is more questionable'.² In 2002, David Northrup reiterated this sentiment, acknowledging that 'firearms were arguably the most significant technical innovation to arrive

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

2 G. White, 'Firearms in Africa: An Introduction', *Journal of African History*, 12(2), 1971, 173.

from the Atlantic, and their impact on the continent has been hotly disputed'.³ J.F. Ajayi agreed that the most important of commodities traded into Africa were firearms, mainly due to the lack of local production, but stressed that the difficulty in assessing the effects of this imported technology has led to a multitude of interpretations.⁴ Indeed the role and history of firearms in Africa have produced such a range of differing opinions as to make any discussion of the topic a treacherous affair.

The paucity of sources for the pre-colonial period, and the multitude of complications in studying such a dynamic topic as warfare, have exacerbated many of these fissures in the academic literature and have had numerous negative impacts upon the development of African military history. Mazrui's lament that African military history is 'still an underdeveloped field of study', expressed over 30 years ago, remains true to this day.⁵ To this end, Lamphear hoped that his collection of essays would assist the process of reinvigorating African military history as a 'respected subdiscipline' and that 'we may be entering a new historiographical era in which essays with ... [an excellent] degree of sophisticated military analysis will become more common'.⁶ This assertion is tempered somewhat by the noticeable lack of any articles published after 1999 included in the collection. Nevertheless, the articles that constitute the collection cover some of the key debates concerning military history and the evolution and introduction of related technologies up to and including the nineteenth century. Many of the included essays speak directly to the role and use of firearms in pre-colonial Africa.

The collection, which in effect is only concerned with sub-Saharan Africa, is notionally divided into three sections. The first contains essays by Robert Harms, Humphrey Fisher and Roy Larick and is predominantly concerned with the historiography, nature and material culture of pre-colonial warfare.⁷ The second, and by far the largest section (it contains eight articles), focuses on war in Africa before 1800. It is in this section that many of the major debates about the effect that the introduction of imported technologies (mainly firearms and horses) have had on African military function and strategies are discussed. With regards to firearms, the articles by Lansiné Kaba, Richard Grey and John K. Thornton provide valuable insights into the early impact of firearms in West and East Africa and how they influenced the processes of warfare, regional conflict and state formation.⁸ Thornton's piece provides the most thoughtful appraisal of the interactions between early European traders and African populations (in this case between Portuguese and

3 D. Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90.

4 J.F. Ajayi, 'Africa at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Issues and Prospects', in J.F. Ajayi, ed., *UNESCO General History of Africa VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s* (California: University of California Press, 1989), 9.

5 A. Mazrui, 'The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 12(1-4), 1977, 1.

6 J. Lamphear, 'Introduction' in J. Lamphear, ed., *African Military History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), xiii and xxx.

7 R.W. Harms, 'The Wars of August: Diagonal Narrative in African History', *American Historical Review*, 88(4), 1983, 809-34; H.J. Fisher, "'He Swalloweth the Ground with Fierceness and Rage": The Horse in Central Sudan', *Journal of African History*, 14(3), 1973, 355-79; R. Larick, 'Spears, Style and Time among Maa-Speaking Pastoralists', *Journal of Anthropological Anthropology*, 4(3), 1985, 206-220.

8 L. Kaba, 'Archers, Musketeers and Mosquitoes: The Moroccan Invasion of the Sudan and the Songhay Resistance (1591-1612)', *Journal of African History*, 20(4), 1981, 457-75; R. Grey, 'Portuguese Musketeers on the Zambezi', *Journal of African History*, 12(4), 1971, 531-3; J.K. Thornton, 'The Art of War in Angola, 1575-1680', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30(2), 1998, 360-78.

Africans in the region now known as Angola) as well as placing events and developments in Africa within a global military context.

A number of articles in this second section focus on the interaction between the slave trade and the importation and trade of firearms in Africa. At the turn of the nineteenth century Africa's interaction with Europe was dominated by the slave trade. This was the principal means of exchange whereby European imports and technologies entered Africa and firearms constituted a large proportion of these imports. The older historiography has been dominated by a guns-for-slaves stereotype of Euro-African trade, whereby African demand for firearms increased their capacity to produce the slaves required to supply the Atlantic demand, leading in turn to the general destabilisation of the continent.⁹ Such assessments claimed that firearms were a menace to African societies and caused mayhem and anarchy among pre-colonial states. The argument followed that 'the importation of guns was the principal reason for warfare within Africa and that it was by means of such wars that gun-toting Africans supplied the Atlantic economy with slaves'.¹⁰ For J.E. Inikori and W.A. Richards, the massive quantity of firearms imported into West Africa was central to the flourishing of the slave trade.¹¹ Indeed the 'slave-gun cycle' thesis that posits the arming of Africans as the principal reason for war in Africa and the supply of slaves to the Atlantic world has long been popular. However, Northrup has gone to great lengths to show that

while imports of firearms closely tracked imports of slaves, a guns-for-slaves equation is too simple to describe the complexities of political transformations. Not only did guns play an ancillary rather than primary role in most African armies of this era, but for the most important states, guns [were merely an element in] a process of military transformation that was already underway.¹²

In addition, Richards notes that the firearm trade peaked in the 1830s (although he gives no figures for this peak), which again weakens the 'slave-gun cycle' theory.¹³ Firearms were being imported well before the heyday of the slave trade and their importation continued to rise in many key slaving areas after its abolition.

Other works that have undertaken some form of quantification of the firearms trade into West Africa have shown that the majority of firearms imported were of a kind unsuited for military use. White insists that the African trade musket, which constituted the bulk of firearms imported into Africa, was 'not intended for rapid reloading, cheap to buy, simple to repair, light in weight, and with no delicate parts, would be more popular than either a military musket or later military weapon

9 For a brief summary of this theory see Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, 91.

10 Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, 90-2.

11 J.E. Inikori, 'The Import of Firearms into West Africa 1750-1807: A Quantitative Analysis', *Journal of African History*, 18(3), 1977, 339-86; W.A. Richards, 'The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 21(1), 1980, 43-59.

12 Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, 97.

13 Richards, 'The Import of Firearms into West Africa', 49.

dependent on imported parts and cartridges'.¹⁴ The trade musket was more suited to hunting or crop protection, rather than military uses such as slave raiding and capture. Richards and Northrup also show that large quantities of cheap industrial firearms were produced and traded into Africa; the Bonny gun and the Angola gun being two prime examples. This not only demonstrates the demand for cheap firearms, but also the 'subtleties and interregional differences of African demand'.¹⁵ As Northrup stated:

most of the weapons imported by this region [West Africa] must have gone into the hands of the common people, who used them for hunting, for self-defence, and for firing at funerals and on other ceremonial occasions, rather than for war ... although the abolitionist literature saw the proliferation of low-quality weapons as an example of Europeans exercising their trading advantage, the facts now seem otherwise.¹⁶

As White shows, and Northrup corroborates, the profit margin on such weapons sales was very narrow and European suppliers would have preferred to sell better-quality firearms.¹⁷ All in all, goods traded into Africa were determined by 'African preferences and the competitive position of goods on the world market'.¹⁸ Northrup shows that Africans getting two guns for every slave in 1682 were getting between 24 and 32 for every slave in 1718, and this process continued into the 1800s. What this suggests is that the overwhelming demand for firearms in Africa came from Africans of limited means, for personal rather than military use.¹⁹ Another reason why the cheaper arms would have been more sought after by African populations is that many of them could be repaired *in situ* by their owners. Many of the more expensive and modern weapons were machine-made and so difficult for owners to mend or maintain. The cheap muskets made for Africans could be repaired by the owner or local African gunsmith. In many of the regions where firearms became an important feature of local life, blacksmiths and gunsmiths proved vital service industries.²⁰ Africa may not have had an armaments industry of its own, but there was definitely a lively small-scale firearm repair and service industry, the history of which has yet to be written.

To engage with this debate, Lamphear included two articles from Robin Law and one from Martin A. Klein.²¹ Both of these authors question the simple 'slave-gun cycle' and offer more nuanced assessments of the slave trade and its impacts on the states involved, their military structures and the role that imported firearms played in the trades development. Law challenged many of the pessimistic views

14 White, 'Firearms in Africa', 179.

15 *Ibid.*, 182.

16 Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, 97.

17 White, 'Firearms in Africa', 182; Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, 97.

18 D. Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 211.

19 Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*, 97.

20 White, 'Firearms in Africa', 181.

21 R. Law, 'Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography', *Journal of African History*, 27(2), 1986, 237-67; R. Law, 'Horses, Firearms, and Political Power in Pre-Colonial West Africa', *Past and Present*, 72(1), 1976, 112-32; M.A. Klein, 'The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the Societies of the Western Sudan', *Social Science History*, 14(2), 1990, 231-53.

propagated about the destructive and negative effects of firearms in pre-colonial West Africa. He also argued that the process of state formation and the means of engagement with internal and external markets were not determined by the adoption of technologies such as firearms and horses. Law expanded many of his central findings in his book, *The Slave Coast of West Africa*, and remains one of the most prominent authors on the topic and region.²²

The third section of the Lamphear collection focuses on war in Africa in the nineteenth century. This section is divided into three parts, each focusing on a different geographical region of Africa, these being South (by which Lamphear means southern and which contains four articles), West (two articles) and East Africa (five articles). Again, the choice of topics covered (the debates about the *mfecane* in southern Africa;²³ the weakness of technological determinist arguments about firearms;²⁴ the rituals and symbolism surrounding firearms in East Africa, particularly Ethiopia;²⁵ and the establishment of warrior states in West Africa²⁶) is commendable and they provide excellent starting points for those with more interest in the topics or areas discussed to develop reading lists from. Furthermore, all of the articles included are augmented by Lamphear's introduction, which provides not only guidance to key further readings, but also an overview of the historiography of each outlined section.

There are two major failings of this third section of Lamphear's collection. The first is that very little treatment is given to the changing nature of the global firearms/armaments industry during the nineteenth century and the impact this had on the imports of firearms into Africa. Over the course of the nineteenth century the trans-Atlantic slave trade was increasingly suppressed and replaced by an era of so-called 'legitimate commerce'.²⁷ The industrialisation of Europe created an escalating demand for raw materials from Africa (beeswax, rubber, ivory and vegetable oils), for which European traders offered increasing quantities of manufactured goods, of which firearms constituted a large proportion. The conviction was that trade and legitimate commerce would 'oust the horrors of the slave trade to the benefit of all parties, an ideology which dominated the intensifying European penetration of nineteenth-century Africa'.²⁸ The period of legitimate commerce saw a massive increase in the quantities of African imports and exports. Firearms were an integral part of this trade. According to Freund:

-
- 22 R. Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- 23 E.A. Eldredge, 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, c. 1800-30: The "Mfecane" Reconsidered', *Journal of African History*, 33(1), 1992, 1-35; C.A. Hamilton, "'The Character and Objects of Chaka": A Reconsideration of the Making of Shaka as "Mfecane" Motor', *Journal of African History*, 33(1), 1992, 37-63.
- 24 A. Atmore, J.M. Chirenje and S.I. Mudenge, 'Firearms in South Central Africa', *Journal of African History*, 12(4), 1971, 545-56; A.L. Epstein, 'Military Organisation and the Pre-Colonial Polity of the Bemba in Zambia', *Man*, 10, 1975, 199-217.
- 25 R.A. Caulk, 'Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 13(4), 1972, 609-30; J. Dunn, "'For God, Emperor, and Country!": The Evolution of Ethiopia's Nineteenth-Century Army', *War in History*, 1(3), 1994, 278-99.
- 26 J.F. Ajayi, 'Professional Warriors in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Politics', *Tarikh*, 1, 1968, 72-81; R.L. Roberts, 'Production and Reproduction of Warrior States: Segu Bambara and Segu Tokolor, c. 1712-1890', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13(3), 1980, 389-419.
- 27 A., Boahen, 'New Trends and Processes in Africa in the Nineteenth Century', in J.F. Ajayi, ed., *UNESCO General History of Africa VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s* (California: University of California Press, 1989), 40.
- 28 B. Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of an African Society since 1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 53.

the main change between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not the difference between slave labour and free, but simply the quantitative intensification of commerce. Increasingly improved weaponry arrived in Africa and assisted the expansion of hunting of both animals and men and made warfare more murderous. Firearms made access to European traders of vital importance to African rulers if they hoped to keep up with their neighbours and rivals.²⁹

Crucial to this development, as Freund illustrates, was the development of more sophisticated weaponry. Industrialisation in Europe not only created an increased demand for raw materials in Africa, but also led to advances in technology which had a direct impact on the performance and efficiency of firearms.

In the eighteenth century, flintlock rifles were the main trade weapon to Africa, along with older matchlock versions. For the first half of the century, many improvements and alterations were made in the design and function of flintlocks but the real breakthrough came in the 1860s with the breech-loading revolution. This revolution brought about significant changes in the functioning of arms that made them more suited to warfare and hunting. They were easier to load and fired faster and this, together with precision production techniques, meant that firearms were more reliable, handled better and were more durable. Equally as important, the first metal cartridge bullets were developed at the same time which provided the gunpowder with greater protection from rain and humidity, and made the process of firing much quicker.³⁰ The breech-loader revolution of the 1860s created millions of obsolete military weapons available for dumping. Roberts, for example, mentions African markets absorbing 'huge quantities of obsolete weaponry' after the breech-loader revolution.³¹ No attempts at quantification of the firearms trade into Africa are included in the Lamphear collection. Lamphear noted that scholars such as Inikori and Richards have attempted quantification of the trade in West Africa, but chose not follow this debate and the issues it raises. (This is discussed in more detail below.) Nor does Lamphear ask any questions about the obvious impacts the scale of the trade may or may not have had on African deployment of firearms.

The second shortcoming is that there is very little overview given to the increasing levels of European intrusion into the continent and the changing nature of interactions between Europeans and Africans, be it military, economic or political.³² In his introduction, Lamphear expressly stated that he wished to limit the collection to pre-colonial military history.³³ However, the reasons given for doing so are weak and take very little cognisance of the ambiguities between colonial and pre-colonial during such a contested and turbulent period in African history.

29 *Ibid.*, 55.

30 There is a large quantity of literature on firearms and their development in the nineteenth century. For summaries of this process see W.K. Storey, 'Guns, Race, and Skill in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa', *Technology and Culture*, 45(4), 2004, 691-692; White, 'Firearms in Africa', 176-178.

31 R. Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley 1700-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 92; White, 'Firearms in Africa', 178-179. Despite this claim, neither Roberts nor White supplies any figures to show this rise.

32 There are other issues with the Lamphear collection. Not only do some of the authors included in the collection have their names spelt incorrectly (Klien, rather than Klein among many others), but there are also an enormous number of inconsistencies in the referencing of various authors and academics (for one example of many, is J.J. Guy the same as Jeff Guy).

33 Lamphear, 'Introduction', xi.

Neither did the arrival of Europeans and colonialism necessarily result in the abolition or corruption of many African modes of military organisation and practice. The works of Smaldone and Guy illustrate the ambiguities of European intrusion remarkably well.

Smaldone's work, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate*, remains one of very few books dedicated to the study of firearms and the evolution of their use in an African polity. Smaldone offers detailed insights into how the adoption of new military technology, cavalry in the early nineteenth century and imported firearms later, impacted upon the processes of state formation in the Sokoto Caliphate (located in present-day Nigeria). His central thesis was that the Caliphate was a predatory state organised by war and that these technological developments (or revolutions) resulted in the transformation of the organisational structure of the peoples and groups in the Sokoto Caliphate. Smaldone identified three stages of state evolution. Stage one (1790–1817) was dictated by egalitarian combative communities, largely standing armies armed with bows. Stage two (1817–1860) saw the development of a royal army that employed a cavalry and functioned like a feudal state. The third stage (1860–1903) saw the emergence of a nascent standing army armed with firearms as part of a centralised bureaucratic state.

Unfortunately the 2008 release is only a reproduction of the 1977 edition and offers no engagement with the many debates that the original book inspired. Many questions were asked about the book's organisation and layout, which contemporary reviewers found made large sections of the book redundant and repetitive.³⁴ Another criticism of the book was that no fieldwork was undertaken in Nigeria itself to augment his research and findings.³⁵ Smaldone commented he had tried to go to Nigeria three times between 1969 and 1973, but 'unforeseen problems precluded its fruition'.³⁶ One might have thought that there would have been an occasion to redress this imbalance in the intervening 30 years. This would not only have offered new material to consult, but also a chance to examine the fortifications, terrain and battlefields he made frequent reference to.

The most severe criticisms however, centred on the technological determinism of Smaldone's assessment and model. As Murray Last commented, 'Whilst other historians have mentioned these military and political transformations, they have never been spelt out at such length or with such technological determinism.'³⁷ The republication of the book may have been better served by an attempt to re-engage with this aspect of the work, especially considering advances that have been made over the last three decades in thinking about the interaction between technology and change in Africa. That being said, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate* does still offer a range of valuable insights into how the Caliphate engaged with the changing contexts of the nineteenth-century arms trade as well as increasing levels of European intrusion. Smaldone's work is an important contribution to the study

34 D. Robinson, 'Review: [untitled]', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 11(2), 1978, 319-321; M. Last, 'Review: [untitled]', *Journal of the International African Institute*, 49(2), 1979, 192; T.R. de Gregori, 'Review: [untitled]', *Technology and Culture*, 18(4), 1977, 730-1.

35 P. Irwin, 'Review: [untitled]', *ASA Review of Books*, 5, 1979, 224-225; Robinson, 'Review: [untitled]'.

36 Smaldone, *Warfare*, ix.

37 Last, 'Review: [untitled]', 192.

of firearms in an African polity, which, despite its flaws, remains one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind to date.

Smaldone's focus on firearms and their use in the military structure of the Sokoto Caliphate contrasts sharply with Jeff Guy's latest offering on the history of KwaZulu-Natal, *The Maphumulo Uprising*.³⁸ This very specialised study focuses on the Maphumulo Uprising in 1906, its suppression by the colonial state and its repercussions. For Guy, the rebellion and its repression by the colonial authority were 'the act of conquest that the colonialists had been unable to carry out when Natal was established sixty years before'.³⁹ As such, Guy gives a valuable insight into the ambiguities of the colonial project and its processes of control. One of the most interesting aspects of Guy's work is his use of court records in the second half of the book, through which he identifies the colonial court as one of the most successful weapons for destroying African resistance after the battlefield confrontations had ceased. In many ways the use of the courts by the colonial authorities was 'the final offensive in the attempt to create a subservient African population', a process that Guy details remarkably well.⁴⁰

While Guy reveals the continuity of military tactics and practices of the Zulu, there are missing aspects to his overview. One of these is the role and use of firearms by the Zulu. From his account it is clear that firearms were not employed as military technology by the Zulu at this time. The obvious question is why? Did Zulu warriors deliberately avoid using firearms? If so, what reasons were behind the Zulu not adopting guns or firearms? Or was it more a question of control? Did the colonial authorities seek to ensure that the African populations were deprived of access and ownership of firearms? If so, what were the processes of control, deprivation and confiscation, and how effective were they? Surely, throughout their contact and conflict with colonial forces throughout the nineteenth century, the Zulu would have learnt from their experiences of engaging with an enemy armed with firearms. Guy makes no mention if this was indeed the case, or how such experiences might have informed tactics and manoeuvres.

Elsewhere, Guy has discussed the role of firearms in the Zulu kingdom and commented that while there may have been large numbers of firearms in Zulu possession (official estimates put the number at 8,000 in 1879), they were subordinated to traditional tactics. Guy stated:

it is impossible for the people of a society with a simple technology to make full use of the end-product of relatively advanced technology. But it is also due to the conservatism of the Zulu army which, in spite of what African societies in southern Africa had experienced in the nineteenth century, and what the Zulu themselves had experienced at Blood River, continued to attempt to counter fire-power with numerical strength and traditional practices.⁴¹

38 J. Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005).

39 *Ibid.*, 106.

40 *Ibid.*, 124.

41 J. Guy, 'A Note on Firearms in the Zulu Kingdom with Special Reference to the Anglo-Zulu War, 1879', *Journal of African History*, 12(4), 1971, 569.

Importantly, Guy's analysis, while imbued with its own negative technological determinism, illustrates that firearms were not completely pervasive in military units across Africa. However, the obvious question arises, that if the Zulu had large numbers of firearms in their possession, but did not use them for military purposes, what were they then used for? It is this question that Storey has sought to explore in his recent book dedicated to firearms in South Africa.

Despite the expansive title, Storey's *Guns, Race, and Power in Colonial South Africa* is predominantly concerned with the role and use of firearms in the Cape Colony and its border regions. Keen to avoid the pitfalls of technological determinism, Storey argues that the interdisciplinary approaches of the developing field of science and technology studies allow explorations of the ways in which 'technology, politics and society are mutually constituted or "coproduced"'.⁴² Accordingly, Storey examines the evolution of firearm use in southern Africa and discusses the range of uses to which firearms would have been put by African populations that were not merely for military purposes. Hunting, crop protection and the destruction of vermin were all key activities that firearms were put to by Africans. Large portions of the book are set aside to discuss the development of skill in handling firearms that developed in southern Africa and how these had to adapt to the technological advancements made in the production of firearms over the same period. Firearms as a technology, and as a tool, were adaptable. They were manipulated for a range of activities and purposes (hunting, crop protection, eradication of vermin). As a result Storey complicates the technological determinism so often present in discussions about firearms (positive or negative) and how Africans employ them.

As importantly, Storey tracks the growing political concerns of the entrenching colonial population about black firearm ownership. His investigations into the language and processes put into place to limit black access to firearms in the Cape Colony touch on interesting discussions about the issue of gun ownership and debates about citizenship, exclusion and racism. The extensive debates about the limitations, control and confiscation of black-owned firearms that took place in the Cape Colony during the final decades of the nineteenth century were indicative not only of the white colonial fear of black uprising, but also of extending and entrenching a colonial project that was exclusionary and inflexible. While Storey's basic outline of this process is fairly detailed, what he fails to explore in any detail is whether or not these fears were imaginary or real, and whether this would have made any difference to the processes of disenfranchisement under way. Pushing the point even further, one reviewer has commented that Storey's analysis 'begs the question of whether the imperial strategists wanted Africans to have at least some guns, so as to appear sufficiently menacing and violent to justify full "pacification"'.⁴³

Guns, Race and Power is an important contribution, but by no means an exhaustive one. It fails to give any detailed insight into the employment and significance of firearms in African societies and how this technology may have changed

⁴² Storey, *Guns, Race, and Power*, 12.

⁴³ A. MacKinnon, 'Review: [untitled]', *African Studies Quarterly*, 11(2&3), 2010, 148.

their world. Nor are their reactions to the purchase and ownership restrictions explored or detailed. Undoubtedly the availability of sources makes this problematic, but this could have been explained and acknowledged by Storey. In other areas where interpretation was not limited by lack of sources, Storey has made a number of oversights. Firstly, for a study so concerned with the imperial reaction to firearms and their spread, Storey fails to supply an exhaustive insight into the official processes of regulating the trade and movement of arms. Throughout the nineteenth century numerous Acts and Ordinances were passed to restrict, monitor and control the sale and movement of firearms, gunpowder and ammunition a firm grasp of which would have served to reinforce and strengthen Storey's assessments of the colonial state.

However, due to the expansive nature of the book, by far its biggest weakness is the failure to offer any detailed and comprehensive attempt at a quantification of the firearms trade in the Cape Colony (let alone South Africa). The basic information for the Cape Colony and the Colony of Natal is contained in their Blue Books. Claiming that there is no way to arrive at 'precise figures' of gun ownership, Storey uses this to excuse himself from undertaking any detailed statistical analysis. He states that he will use the general information from the colonial Blue Books only for an overall picture and admits that more information is available in the Cape Archives, but 'I expect that this information will not change the substance of the story that I present here'.⁴⁴ While I do not want to accuse Storey of being derelict in his duties, such loose statements certainly provide easy ammunition for those who most certainly will question the conclusions and assertions Storey puts forward.

The brief attempt at quantification Storey does provide ends in 1881 and claims that between 1857 and 1881 over 300,000 firearms entered the Cape and Natal for local consumption.⁴⁵ However, there is very little discussion of the implications of this number of arms, the turnover of cheap firearms, or how this compared to other parts of Africa. For a work that is so concerned with the reception of firearms, the development of skills in using them and their control by the colonial authorities, surely a vital element to discuss is the extent of the proliferation of firearms, and not merely to sidestep the issue with excuses about the inability to extract exact figures. If such an approach had been undertaken it would have offered the chance for Storey to provide a comparative assessment of the effect of colonial settler populations on the scale of the arms trade in certain parts of Africa and compare this to areas that experienced different forms of colonialism and trade.

Conclusion

Despite the criticisms levelled at Storey's book here and elsewhere, it is a highly valuable contribution to a topic of study that has been surprisingly neglected. Hopefully, more detailed and comprehensive accounts about the role and use of firearms, as well as the scale of the trade into Africa and its variations across the vast continent, will begin to emerge off the back of studies such as those of

⁴⁴ Storey, *Guns, Race, and Power*, 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

Storey's. As this review has consistently made apparent, current work on the quantification of the arms trade across Africa in the nineteenth century is remarkably weak. The most banal and obvious benefit of quantifying the nineteenth century firearms trade is that ascertaining the numbers limits discussion to the actual as opposed to the hypothetical and thus avoids partisan over- or under-inflations of scale in a historiography notorious for its bitter and acrimonious sectarian enmities. Furthermore quantification, particularly for areas such as South Africa, integrates places like the Cape into African history by enabling comparisons of the Cape's firearms trade and that in other parts of Africa. It also allows the firearms trade to be correlated with other plottable variables, such as hunting exports (ivory, feathers, skins), to reveal otherwise invisible inter-relationships for further inquiry. In all these ways, quantification would enable fundamental reinterpretations of Africa's firearms trade and its role in larger economies and networks. Of course other qualitative research needs to be undertaken to augment the quantitative, such as types of firearms imported, what they could be used for, and the variations in demand and trade. Furthermore, there are a number of other aspects of the firearm trade that remain largely untold. The processes and economies of arms smuggling, European and settler control of the trade in other parts of the continent, the emergence of African blacksmiths and gunpowder producers, and the numerous ways African populations reacted to this imported technology are but a few avenues of research that still require more detailed exploration. All things considered, the history of firearms in Africa should still be seen as an exciting field of study that has a great deal to offer potential researchers, and perhaps Lamphear's optimism that a new era of study of such topics will blossom may not be entirely unfounded.