



WEST AFRICAN
STRATEGIES USED TO
FIGHT AGAINST SLAVERY

African Resistance To Kidnapping in West Africa 1440's

Raborn Muntu

So the Moors had the same thought that our men had had and, being more carefully on the watch, had arranged three ambushes as well as they could behind some dunes located there. There they waited until they saw that our men were near. Then the Moors, seeing they were much more numerous than our men, sprung their trap and advanced strongly against them....

However, at last our men saw the great danger they were in and the need to retire, and began to retreat....

The others who were still on the shore wanted to get into the boat belonging to Gonçalo Pacheco's ship, but found themselves in extreme danger because, although it had the lightest load, it was large and could not be launched, remaining stuck on dry land because the tide was in the last quarter of its ebb. So some of the men who knew how to swim, seeing danger so near at hand, threw themselves into the water and saved their lives by swimming. Others, who did not know that art, were forced to prepare themselves to meet their fate, and they met a sad death 7 perished!

The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, 2 vols., (Hakluyt Society, London, 1896-9), pp. 143-6,

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“As the Portuguese encountered more inhabitants, the terms “Black Moors” “blac  *“Guineas,” and “Negros,” or the descriptive terms to which a religious signifier was appended, such as “Moors . . . [who] were Gentiles” and “pagans” gradually constituted the rootless and sovereignless—and in many cases, simply “slaves.”*

“By linking Portugal’s activities in Guinea with the conquest of Ceuta, the Infante stressed how spiritual imperatives motivated exploration along the Atlantic littoral. In his diplomatic entreaty, Infante Henrique minimized the commercial incentive and fashioned the “toils of that conquest” into a “just war” under the banner of a Christian Crusade.³

African Kings and Black Slaves

Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic

Herman L. Bennett

ZOOM



Fighting the Slave Trade

West African Slave Trade



Raborn Muntu



- There are numerous historical developments that shaped the political and social context of enslavement and resistance to enslavement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- Here I will focus on one the internal slave trade.
- The rise of relatively powerful polities like Futa Jallon and Moriah.
- Fula elite decided to launch a jihad in the 17 20s after the lead of Futa Toro and Futa Bundu in Senegal. Even though it was successful in converting many people to Islam, the jihad also became a justification for the enslavement of the non-Islamic peoples in the area.



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- ❖ As the Imam of Futa Jallon put it in a letter to the governor of Sierra Leone in 1810:
 - ❖ They are the Kafirs, and they are like ass [sic] or like cattle; they know not the rights of God, and still less the rights of men. And in our parts you are not sold any man who knows the God of truth.... The people whom men used to sell into your hands do not acknowledge the religion of Moses (peace be upon him) nor the religion

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- ⊕ *Internal slave trading African Societies*
- ⊕ *Fula, Mandingo, and Soso societies were heavily dependent on the slave trade and enslaved labor for local food production*
- ⊕ *The slaveholding elite separated their bonded population into recently enslaved and house enslaved.*
- ⊕ *By the late eighteenth century, as the Atlantic slave trade declined, the slaveholders in the Upper Guinea Coast created a spatial separation between the free population and ordinary slaves.*
- ⊕ *They placed the latter in separate villages called runde in Fula, dakha in Soso, and jong kunda in Mandingo.*



African Resistance Against the Fula

- ⊕ *In 1756 the enslaved population in Futa Jallon rose against the slave-owning class, declared themselves free, and migrated northwest toward Futa Bundu. They built a well-fortified settlement called Kondeah, which was repeatedly attacked by the Fula and their allies*
- ⊕ *James Watt, a British emissary to the almamy, cites two other rebellions against the Futa Jallon elite during his visit to Timbo in 1794. He noted the extensive destruction caused by the revolt, its brutal repression, and the execution of thirty men among the leaders.⁷*



Illustration: Alamy

THE MANDINGO REBELLION, 1785-96

Edited by Sylviane A. Diouf

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- It was one of the largest and most protracted antislavery rebellions and it affected the entire Upper Guinea Coast. It involved a group of Temne, Baga, and Bullom people and was directed against the Mandingo ruling and slave-owning elite in Moriah.
- The enslaved represented 70 to 80 percent of Moriah's population by the 1770s, and produced most of the rice, the state's major commodity.
- The Moriah elite held their plantation slaves in villages that rapidly multiplied. The Moriah elite held their plantation slaves in villages that rapidly multiplied plied within fifty years.
- One ruler, Fenda Modu Dumbuya, owned up to nine villages reportedly producing about a hundred tons of rice and a hundred tons of salt annually. The slaveholders usually worked new captives on their rice plantation before selling off some of them to the Europeans on the coast.

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THE MANDINGO REBELLION, 1785-96

- The rebels had a number of leaders but only two, Mambee and Dansage, are identified in the available sources. The rebellion, which affected the entire northern rivers region, involved from six to eight hundred people residing in the slave villages
- They torched the rice fields, the state's economic mainstay. Many rebels took refuge at Yangiakuri, Kani, and Funkoo, in Soso country. Located on the foothills of the mountain ranges from where the Kolenten (Great Scarcies) River rises, Yangiakuri was easily defensible.
- The insurgents further fortified the town with twelve-foot-high mud walls and three large security towers. They increased their numbers by recruiting and providing refuge for other enslaved men and women and also attracted Soso freemen.

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THE MANDINGO REBELLION, 1785-96

- When the conflict between the Moriah rulers and the Soso abated, the slave-holding holding classes resumed their offensive against Yangiakuri and the other maroon communities.
- They waylaid, raided, captured, and sold into slavery all the fugitives they could. In response, the rebels organized themselves and attacked Moriah, Melakori, Berriera, Kissy, and other Mandingo polities. They also captured and sold several members of the ruling elite of these territories.

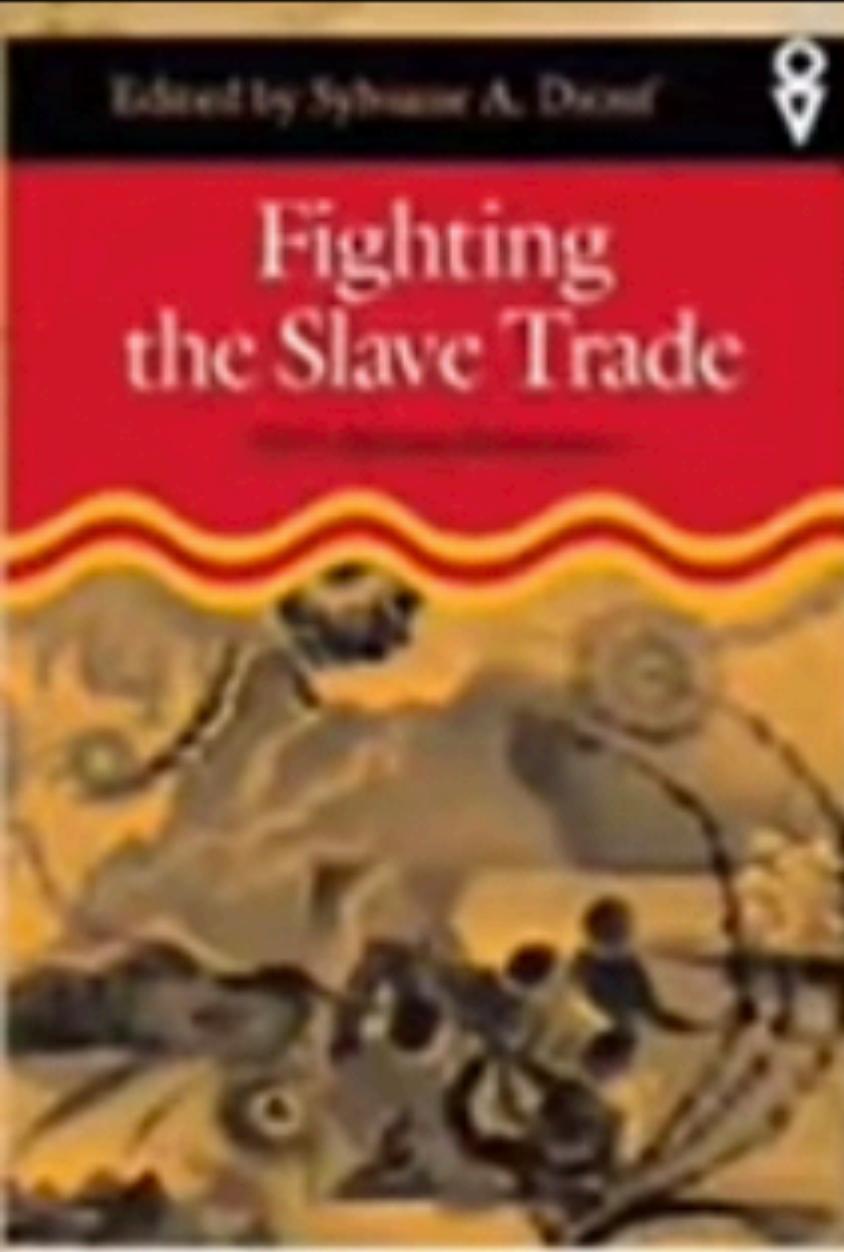
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THE BILALI REBELLION, CA. 1838-72

- Bilali's escape from slavery and his establishment of a safe haven for fugitives incensed not only his former master, Almamy Mumini, but also other major slaveholders in the region.
- They regarded them derisively as murtah (runaways, in Soso).¹⁵ His actions, especially the provision of refuge for escapees, potentially threatened the entire slaveholding complex in the region. His free community and its rigidly antislavery posture truly represented a break from the vicious, predatory culture of slavery.
- For more than three decades this New Spartacus, as the British described him, resisted different Soso, Mandingo, and Temne kings who tried to curtail his growing power and support. Repeated attempts to destroy Laminyah failed.

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The Revolutionary Balanta People

- ❖ "The origin of the Balanta was in Mali.
- ❖ Balanta occupy the shores of the Rios Geba and Mansoa, Fo Kidum. They were pushed to these costal regions from Muslim state invaders.
- ❖ Balanta resistance to Mandinka raids and attempts at establishing suzerainty can be found in the Mandinka word *balanto*. In the language of the Mandinka, this word means "those who resist," indicating that Balanta were not easy to seize or to incorporate into an expanding state



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Balanta war tactics

- the Balanta and other coastal groups resisted enslavement by exploiting the advantages offered by the region in which they lived. Put simply, the coast offered more defenses and opportunities for counterattack against slave-raiding armies and other enemies than did the savanna-woodland interior.

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Balanta War Tactics

- Portuguese administrator Alberto Gomes Pimentel explained how the Balanta utilized the natural protection of mangrove-covered areas in when they were confronted with an attack from a well-organized and well-armed enemy seeking captives or booty:
- Armed with guns and large swords, the Balanta, who did not generally employ any resistance on these occasions pretended to flee (it was and is their tactic), suffering a withdrawal and going to hide in the 'mangrove areas ' on the margins on the rivers and lagoons, spreading out in the flats some distance so as not to be shot by their enemies.
- The attackers ... then began to return for their lands with all of the spoils of war" (1927, 4). Organizing rapidly and allying themselves with others in the area, the Balanta typically followed their enemies through the densely forested coastal region. At times, the Balanta waited until their attackers had almost reached their homelands before giving "a few shots and making considerable noise so as to cause a panic." The Balanta engaged their enemies in combat,



Balanta War Tactics

- In 1777, Portuguese commander Ignacio Bayao reported from Bissau that he was furious that Balanta had been adversely affecting the regional flow of slaves and other goods carried by boats along Guinea-Bissau's rivers.
- It was "not possible," he wrote, "to navigate boats for those [Balanta] parts without some fear of the continuous robbing that they have done, making captive those who navigate in the aforementioned boats.
- In response, Bayao sent infantrymen in two vessels "armed for war" into Balanta territories. After these men had anchored, disembarked, and ventured some distance inland, they "destroyed some men, burning nine villages" and then made a hasty retreat back to the river. Finding their vessels rendered "disorderly," the infantrymen were quickly surrounded by well-armed Balanta. Bayao lamented that "twenty men from two infantry companies" were taken captive or killed.¹⁴ Having sent out more patrols to subdue the "savage Balanta" and having attempted a "war" against this decentralized people, the Portuguese found that conditions on Guinea-Bissau's rivers did not improve.¹⁵

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Balanta Victorious

- ❖ Viewing the regional slave trade as a threat to their communities, the Balanta continued their raids on merchant vessels transporting captives and other goods.
- ❖ 16 Such raids would tax Portuguese patience throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, when resentment about Portuguese colonization of the coast brought renewed attacks (Correia e Lanca 1890, 50-51). Thus, by garnering weapons and iron in regional markets and from Luso-African can merchants, many Balanta communities, like those of other decentralized coastal societies, were not only able to stand up to threats posed by the slaving armies of Kaabu and Casamance, they were also able to withstand assaults by Portuguese who were attempting to profit by insuring the smooth running of the coastal trade routes that moved captives to area ports.

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Slave ship Revolts

There were five hundred rebellions identified in the Atlantic trade which came from the last half of the eighteenth century, especially during the years of peak traffic between 1751 and 1775.

Data on shipboard revolts suggest that rebellion occurred more frequently on ships with a larger than normal percentage of female slaves aboard. While the vast majority of slaves taken across the Atlantic were men, and men led the revolts and suffered higher casualties, women seem to have played an essential supporting role.



Fighting the Slave Trade



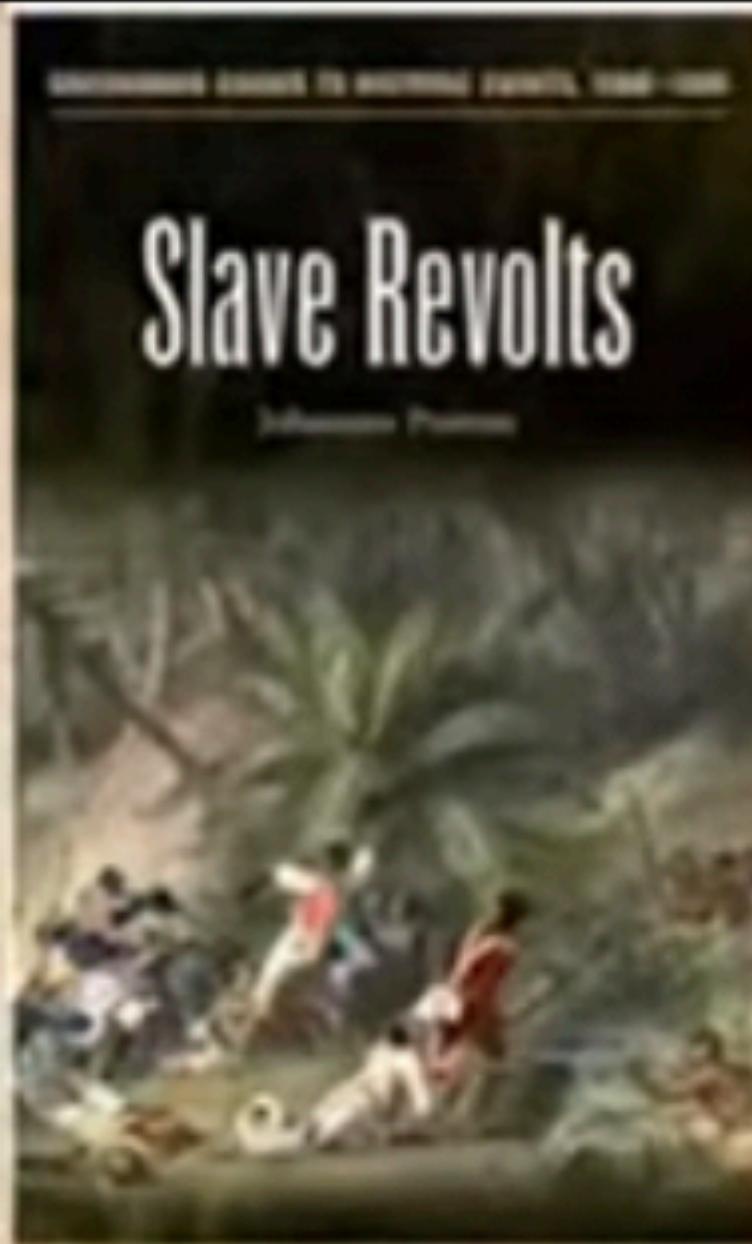
Slave Ship Revolts

- In 1720, Tamba, a chief on the Rio Nunez, organized his people against the African and European slave traders. He obstructed their trade and executed the middlemen he captured. He was caught, sold, and enslaved but organized a revolt among the captives on the ship. It was brutally put down; Tamba was killed and his liver fed to his supporters, porters, who were subsequently executed (Barry 1998, 121).
- A Fula named Old Mano rebelled on board a Danish slave ship, the Claire B. Williams. Aided by a local headman, they fled and established a free settlement in the mountains off the Sierra Leone coast. The community became a target for slave raiders, and the residents and the escapees
- In 1730, captives on the American slave ship Little George escaped, reached shore at Sierra Leone, received support from the local population, and apparently regained their freedom



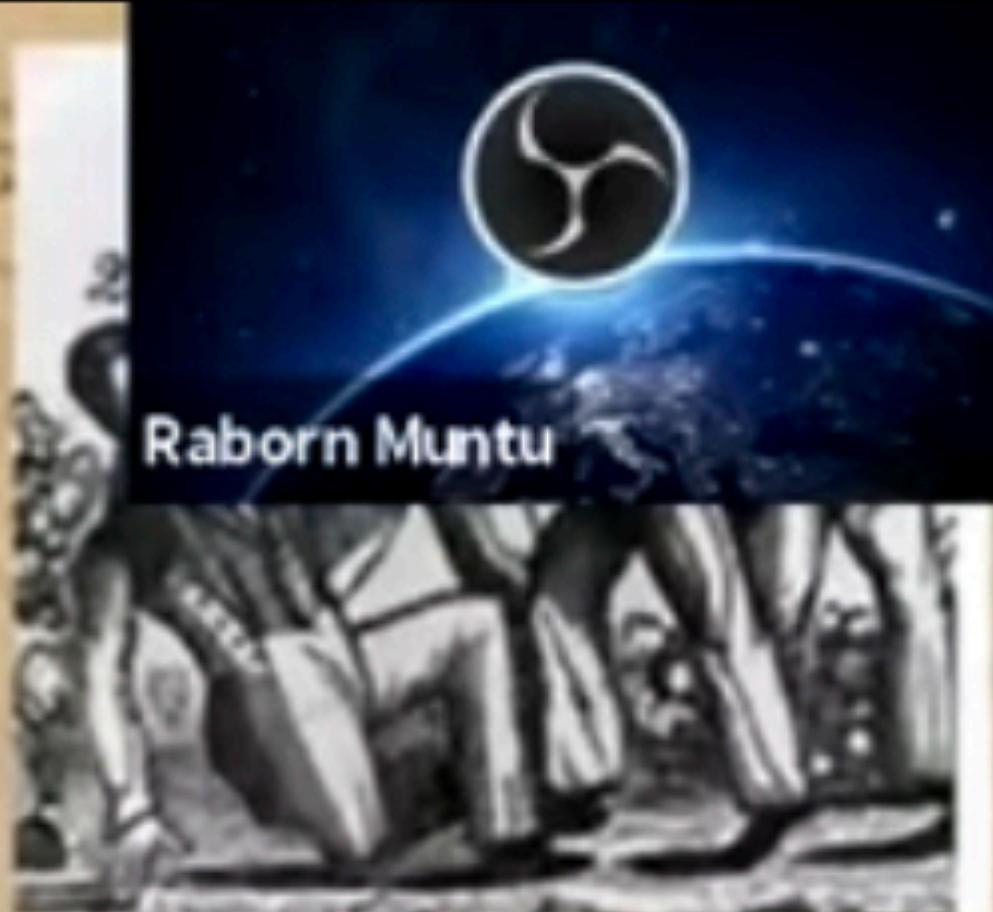
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Slave Ship Revolts

In 1769 a revolt resulted in records that identify the African name of its leader—Essjerrie Ettin (see Biographies). The Dutch ship *Guineese Vriendschap* had completed loading 358 slaves and was ready to begin its voyage across the Atlantic when some of the slaves overpowered the crew, cut the anchor, and set the ship adrift. But a Dutch warship in the vicinity sent two boat-loads of soldiers to recapture the ship. Ten suspected leaders were taken to the Dutch West India Company's headquarters at Elmina, the largest trading post on the West African coast. After authorities questioned three of the slaves individually, Ettin was determined to have been the leader and appears to have been the only rebel set to die.



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Tofinu origins and Migrations

The Tofinu traditionally trace the origin of their migrations to Tado, cradle and departure center of Aja ethnic groups to various destinations. According to the prevalent tradition, the earliest migration from Tado, led by Agasu, resulted in the establishment of the related kingdoms of Sahe (Savi, Ouidah), Allada, Abomey, and Hogbonou (Ajase, Porto Novo).

The search for security took place within the context of violence and fear associated with the ongoing slave trade in Ouidah, Allada, and Abomey. This violence escalated with the conquest, quest, by Dahomey, of Allada in 1724 and Ouidah in 1727, and forced more groups, including non-Aja, to move to the lacustrine area in order to escape slave raiders and enslavement. The trend was to continue nearly two centuries, since Dahomey remained committed to slave-catching activities.

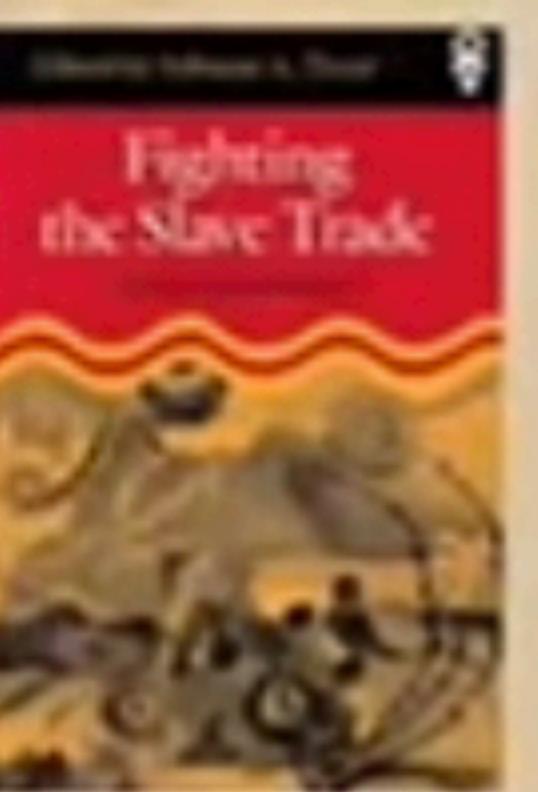
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Tofinu people lake villages

The country of the Tofinu, is part of the lagoon system created along the entire Bight of Benin through the deposit of sand by the eastward-moving moving coastal current. It is located in the lower zone of the So River, a branch of the delta built up by the Weme (Oueme), the most important river of Benin, about forty kilometers from the coast.

- Access to these various localities, whether partially or entirely lacustrine, is difficult. The same goes for conditions of life. Canoe is the only means of transportation from village to village and even from door to door within the same village.



Tofinu Defensive strategy

- The defensive and protective system built up by the lacustrine communities took into account their environment.
- Their skill as canoeists dissuaded Dahomean armies, unfamiliar with the use of canoes, from repeated attacks.¹ They were also renowned for their expertise in naval warfare.
- Their weapons, according to Georges Edouard Bourgoignie, were varied and efficient: "They consisted of javelin launchers, sledgehammers, swords, harpoons, and locally made and imported ported guns. They also had a particularly ingenious kind of Molotov cocktail" (Bourgoignie 1972, 92).
- Gods were also associated with the defensive system of the Tofinu against close or distant enemies. Most, if not all, the deities of the various ethnic groups were integrated into their pantheon. Thus, the cult of the Yoruba deity Shango is one of the most popular traditional religions in Ganvie.

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