



chapter 3

THE ANATOMY OF GHANA'S SECRET ARMS INDUSTRY

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Introduction

Although craft small arms production is present throughout West Africa,² Ghana's long-standing and socially embedded gun-making tradition make it a country of particular concern. Guns 'made in Ghana' are now known regionally for their competitive prices, their effectiveness, and their accessibility—thus raising concerns that they might one day represent a significant source of weaponry for armed groups. Indeed, some local blacksmiths now possess the requisite know-how to copy imported AK-47 assault rifles.

This chapter documents the extent, nature, and effects of Ghanaian craft small arms production and discusses existing and potential responses. It is divided into three main sections. The first section seeks to measure the scope of the activity at the national level, and identifies trends in the production process and the various actors involved. It also highlights the national and regional implications of gunsmithing, paying particular attention to smuggling across borders and criminal use. The second section maps small arms production in selected towns in the country's ten regions, and seeks to identify critical areas for intervention. The last section provides an assessment of existing responses to the problem. It reviews the relevant legislation and government policies, and concludes by discussing alternative civil society-led approaches.

Unless stated otherwise, the information and analysis contained in this chapter are based upon extensive field research carried out in Ghana from June to November 2004. During this period, the author coordinated a team of 12 interviewers who visited 25 towns in Ghana's Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo,

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Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Volta, and Western regions. Approximately 40 gunsmiths, middlemen, and customers were interviewed. Contacts established by Africa Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR)³ greatly facilitated the confidence-building exercise required to interview blacksmiths on what remains a prohibited activity. Although the research team had initially developed a semi-structured questionnaire to guide the interview process, it became clear as the research evolved that the artisans were more comfortable with free-flowing discussions. Notes were therefore taken only after the interview was completed.

This study should not be considered the authoritative survey of Ghanaian craft production. Rather, the following findings should serve as an informed call for further research on the issue.

- All ten regions in Ghana are home to workshops with gun-manufacturing capability.
- On average, each of these has the capacity to produce approximately 80 guns annually—although production varies greatly depending on demand.
- Guns are manufactured in conformity with imported ammunition available on the open market.
- Gunsmiths are also engaged in the production of a variety of other, mainly agricultural products, which provides opportunities for technological reconversion. Gun production, however, clearly constitutes their most profitable activity.
- A thriving group of middlemen export craft guns to other countries in the region. These include Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Togo. This trade appears to be limited to individuals, however, and there is no evidence that armed groups elsewhere in the region actively seek to obtain Ghanaian craft weapons.
- Craft guns are used by some of Ghana’s vigilante groups, landguards, and criminals.
- In Ghana, the prohibition of craft gun production has not prevented the industry from growing. Rather, it has forced gunsmiths to organize into sophisticated and secretive networks.

The nature of the problem

Worrying trends

Gun manufacture in Ghana dates back several hundred years, when iron working was first introduced. In pre-colonial and colonial Ghanaian society, guns were used in a variety of different contexts—but were most often deployed in the slave trade. Guns were used to terrorize and enslave thousands of people, to force them to dig for gold in order to buy and/or manufacture more guns, and to capture even more slaves. Among the several Ghanaian ethnic groups involved in slave-raiding expeditions, guns are a symbol of a 'glorious' past now colourfully recreated during festivals.⁴

Gun production was first criminalized in the mid-nineteenth century, after colonial powers (Denmark and then Great Britain) began to perceive the proliferation of small arms as a serious threat to their hegemony.⁵ Legislation, however, succeeded only in driving the industry further underground. Under the guise of producing trinkets, gold ornaments, and basic farm implements, blacksmiths secretly continued to manufacture the more profitable small arms which then slipped outside the purview of the law and the state. Not only did clandestine manufacture continue to grow, but it also engendered networks and mechanisms designed to elude law-enforcement agencies.

Guns 'made in Ghana' are now known for their competitive prices, reliability, and accessibility. Indeed, guns produced elsewhere rarely challenge Ghanaian gunsmiths when it comes to their own market. In addition to pistols, single-barrel guns, double-barrel shotguns, pump-action shotguns, and traditional dane guns, reports suggest that some gunsmiths now possess the capability of copying imported AK-47 assault rifles.⁶ Craft guns use ammunition available locally—most of which, however, is still imported from abroad. Indeed, it is common for customers to bring ammunition in order that gunsmiths may create the appropriate firearm. The most popular and easily available types of ammunition include 12-bore shotgun shells and .410 calibre cartridges.⁷

Although self-defence, collection, and sport shooting (primarily hunting) clearly drive the demand for craft guns, significant numbers of locally made weapons have also made their way into criminal hands. Low price, efficacy,

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and easy accessibility has resulted in Ghanaian craft guns being the weapon of choice used in as many as 30 per cent of gun-related crimes (Ghanaian Chronicle, 2002). According to law-enforcement officials, these have risen sharply since 1998.⁸ Out of the 60 reported armed robberies in the Greater Accra region and its vicinities during June 2001, as many as 15 involved locally manufactured small arms (Accra Mail, 2003b). Apart from armed robbers and bandits (Accra Mail, 2003a), vigilante groups, landguards, and 'political macho-men'—e.g. the armed gangs hired by politicians—are the main organized users of craft weapons in Ghana.⁹ Recurring chieftaincy disputes in the Northern region—including the 1994 conflict involving the Nanumbas and Konkombas, and the more recent Dagbon crisis—also fuel small arms demand.

Insecurity in Ghana and instability in Togo, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire have resulted in higher prices—which holds trans-national implications for Ghanaian production. In these countries customers not only import Ghanaian craft guns, but also invite gunsmiths to teach their craft to others. Under the rubric of skills transfer, manufacturers are thus able to evade the scrutiny of Ghanaian security forces. Gunsmiths credit this tactic with raising their income, while simultaneously reducing the need for bribery and the likelihood of arrest.

Despite worrying trends, there is a general lack of reliable information on the extent of Ghanaian craft gun production. Analysts not only run into a wall when it comes to confronting high levels of secrecy, but must also deal with the politicized nature of the debate, which tends to result in official underestimation of the true extent and breadth of small arms production and trade. The unreliability of data proffered by Ghanaian officials is perhaps best illustrated by the following, which appeared in the November 1999 interim report of the Arms and Ammunition Inventory Committee:

The Police and Customs, Excise & Preventive Service (CEPS) provided the committee with a list each of active and dormant arms dealers. It was observed in the course of the Committee's work that the lists were not up to date. Several of the

dealers who were classified as 'Active' were in fact dormant operators who renewed their licenses yearly hoping to re-commence business sometime in the future. On the other hand some dealers whose names appeared on the dormant list turned out to be active operators.¹⁰

It remains virtually impossible to quantify the actual extent of craft gun production in Ghana, primarily owing to the fact that it is an illegal activity and gunsmiths have no incentive to keep records. Researchers have, therefore, sought to estimate production capacity based on the number of identified gunsmiths and information regarding the average time required to produce individual guns. From the end of 2000 until the middle of 2001, early estimates pin the production capacity at between 35,000 and 40,000. This is based on information available from only five of the ten regions and was calculated using the estimated production capacity of the 500 gunsmiths operating in the 70 towns known to be involved in gun manufacture (Aning et al., 2001).

New information gathered during the course of this study suggests production capacity is also likely to be on a much greater scale. More than 2,500 blacksmiths are now known to possess the capacity to produce guns in the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions alone.¹¹ This figure does not include their apprentices, who also possess the skills to manufacture guns with supervision. Field interviews suggest that each gunsmith has the capability to manufacture approximately 80 weapons per year. Based on this information, Ghana may have the potential to produce an estimated 200,000 illicit weapons annually. Because of disparities in production and demand, the actual output nevertheless remains an unknown.

During the last 10–15 years, profit has become a driving force, although few gunsmiths are willing to admit it.¹² Interviews suggest that criminal activity, export, and personal protection spur increased profitability. According to a gunsmith in the eastern region's Akyem Manso, a single-barrel gun can be sold for USD 100. Because the weapon costs only USD 25 to produce, this means a profit margin of 75 dollars.¹³ Previously, the pride engendered from the father to son transfer of traditional artisan skills drove much of the craft

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gun industry. Indeed, many manufacturers maintain their families have been producing guns for more than 100 years.

Production process and actors

In Ghana, the manufacture of guns involves a hierarchy of diverse actors and is not confined only to individual artisans. The production process is usually headed by a guild,¹⁴ a family elder, or a loose association of leaders, who coordinate a complex network of 10–50 individuals possessing the specific skills necessary to design, supply, market, and further develop small arms (see Table 3.1). In addition to offering practical skills, members also provide the following types of support:

- market analysis and information regarding the reliability of trading partners; contract-enforcement mechanisms to resolve disputes over agreed upon products and prices;
- financial support and informal credit in times of crisis through kinship and urban-rural networks; and
- intelligence on forthcoming raids by the police and other security agencies. Needless to say, this suggests that some members enjoy access to these sectors.

Table 3.1 Critical actors involved in the gun-making process

Actor	Role
Guild	Coordinate whole process Set rules and sanctions
Lock- and blacksmith	Gun manufacture and assembly Repair and servicing Accessories
Carpenter	Shaping of stock
Machinist	Engravings on stock and barrel Trigger
Mechanic	Springs
Middleman	Identifying potential buyers Sale of product Introducing actors

Of particular note is that the skills of some manufacturers are not limited to gunsmithing and can be used to produce non-lethal items. For example, black- or locksmiths involved in gunsmithing usually also produce a number of tools¹⁵ such as metal chairs, hangers, tile cutters, irons, bellows (for making gold and silver ornaments), iron beds, cutters, tongs, corn mills, ploughs, harrows (for ploughing fields prior to sowing seeds), and handcuffs. Some also manufacture motorcycle, car, and bicycle parts on a very small scale. Parts include discs, bells, and horns. Among smaller blacksmiths, repair and assembly are more common activities than the full-scale gun production.

Although networks can be large, individual actors are usually aware of only part of the manufacturing process and are usually unfamiliar with other players—the rationale being that this limits the risk that the entire operation will be dismantled following the arrest of a single member. While the secrecy shrouding Ghanaian artisan capacity is in no way limited to gun manufacture and has existed for centuries, criminalization has rendered it even more secretive. As a result, gun-making techniques and expertise are now tightly controlled and limited to few individuals.

Clear restrictions apply when it comes to joining gunsmithing networks. These further guarantee confidentiality. Traditionally, membership was transmitted from father to son and from uncle to nephew. However, industry profitability has led to a greater demand for labour. As a result, some guilds have established strict apprentice training procedures to allow the recruitment of non-family members. It must be noted, however, that the rules and conditions for group membership are not homogeneous across regions.

Because gun manufacture is often illegal, gunsmiths rely on rules and punitive measures to resolve internal conflicts and punish offenders. Sanctions include being banned from the village or town and being refused access to information and credit. Disputes are usually related to market access, the recruitment of effective middlemen to locate potential purchasers, and the establishment of pricing mechanisms. During the course of this research, however, it became clear that as financial returns have increased and even smaller gunsmiths have become financially independent, many are increasingly unwilling to conform to guild rules. In one case in Ashanti, a

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dispute between two blacksmiths prompted one to report the other to the police for allegedly manufacturing weapons to supply armed robbers.¹⁶

Part of the difficulty in combating gunsmithing is that much of it takes place under the cover of legitimate production activities. Most Ghanaian gunsmiths originally started as legal black-, gold-, and silversmiths, and only turned to gunsmithing gradually and for profit. For the most part, they continue their legal activities. The production of ornaments and paraphernalia for traditional chiefly rites remains a powerful motivation to continue in the legitimate economy. Market forces and the drive to make a higher income have, however, encouraged some gunsmiths to manufacture weapons to meet criminal demand, a move that is against the rules and regulations of most legitimate guilds.

Although gunsmiths have far-stretching networks, they do not appear to be interested in extending their influence to the political or judiciary sphere. This group has no direct representation in the parliament, the executive, or the diplomatic service of Ghana. The very secretive nature of these networks is such that influencing them is virtually impossible. The closest that Ghana comes to politically driven armed groups is the 'macho-men' hired by politicians or chiefs to intimidate their opponents (Hope, 2002; Vinokor, 2002).

Gunsmiths are nevertheless well connected with local law-enforcement authorities, particularly the police, who at the village level are often reluctant to arrest manufacturers owing to their socially integrated nature and the lack of immediate threat. Apparent contradictions in existing legislation that on the one hand criminalizes the local manufacture of arms but permits blacksmiths to repair imported arms on the other, further complicate law enforcement.



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Chief Mahamadu, 20, speaks to journalists on 14 December 2004. Mahamadu is the potential successor to Ghanaian Dagbon king Ya-Na Yakubu, who was killed during the latest salvo in a 30-year power struggle between the Abudu and Andani clans.

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Mapping Ghanaian craft small arms production

Volta region: Kpando, Tafi Atome, and Ho

Kpando, Tafi Atome, and Ho are towns that support appreciable levels of gun manufacture. While Ho is the regional capital of Volta, Kpando is a fairly large district town and Tafi Atome a smaller rural setting.

The Volta region, located in the eastern part of the country on the Togolese border, possesses some of Ghana's best gunsmiths. Gun manufacture is deeply embedded in the region's colonial history and host communities accept and protect their gunsmiths. Oral tradition suggests that the Volta's first gun manufacturer, a man called Asamoah, learned his trade from working with Europeans and studying in India. Some even claim that Asamoah knew how to make guns before the arrival of Europeans.

In the past 50 years, conflicts between the citizens of Alavanyo and those of Nkonya have contributed to the dispersion of gun-making skills across the region's towns and beyond, with recent disputes occurring in 1996–97, May 2001, and 2004.¹⁷ Among the two groups, gunsmiths originating from Alavanyo are usually recognized as the more capable craft gun manufacturers and handlers. However, others have extensively copied their techniques, and security forces now threaten to expose and damage their operations. Artisans from Nkonya are believed to have migrated to Nkawkaw and Hordzor, near Ho and Tafi Atome, in Hohoe District. The migration of these itinerant gun manufacturers is significant because it reveals how expertise is dispersed and suggests wider implications for the spread of gun-making technology.¹⁸

Today the region's gunsmiths produce pistols (locally known by their nicknames 'Klosasa' or 'Tukpui') that are sold for approximately USD 25; single-barrel guns ('Aprim') for USD 115,¹⁹ double-barrel shotguns ('Nueze') for USD 20–35; pump-action shotguns ('Gadoe') for USD 15; and traditional dane guns ('Nueze') for USD 6. While useful to researchers, it is important to note that these prices tend to fluctuate during periods of local insecurity and tension.

Today it is almost impossible to distinguish guns manufactured in Volta from imports. By purchasing, dismantling and examining imported weapons, blacksmiths have managed to create near-perfect replicas of the

originals—the only difference being the degree of smoothness inside the barrel. Most craft guns are of good quality and have a lifespan of approximately 20–30 years. Moreover, blacksmiths are now designing their own models, whose quality and durability are comparable to those of industrial weapons. Customers from other regions have expressed a willingness to travel long distances in order to purchase Volta-made guns owing simply to the mastery and artisanship of the local gunsmiths.²⁰

Volta region gunsmiths have established particularly strict rules and codes of conduct, all informed by the need for secrecy and discretion. Both marketing and manufacturing are confined to networks of trusted individuals. It is impossible for an outsider to purchase a gun in the Volta region. To avoid suspicion, the region's gunsmiths rely on secure networks for the acquisition of raw material. They purchase metal only in small quantities in Accra, while trusted local carpenters provide wooden parts. Most manufacturers do not mark their products with their personal signatures, as these would indicate the town and workshop of origin. Rather, they copy industrial marks to make them look like genuine imported weapons.

Gun-producing workshops in the Volta region are usually headed by a guild that employs between 10 and 20 workers. Apprentices must be natives of the town in which they wish to learn gun-making and are obligated to obey the guild's rules. In order to acquire knowledge of the entire manufacturing process, apprentices learn to produce different gun parts in addition to undertaking a wide variety of tasks: the guild ultimately decides whether the apprentice meets the requirements necessary to establish his own workshop. As part of the graduation ceremony, all trainees collectively purchase a white sheep. The sheep is slaughtered and fragments of gun parts are symbolically placed on the corpse. The apprentices then swear to protect the secrets of the trade. This oath reinforces social cohesion between blacksmiths and formally requires members to share intelligence regarding potential threats and to cooperate when it comes to establishing common pricing mechanisms.

Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions: Kumasi and Techiman

Suame-Magazine in Kumasi, Ashanti region, and Techiman in the Brong Ahafo region, are host to a large group of manufacturers organized under the

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rubric of the Ashanti Region Association of Blacksmiths (ARAB). While Suame is known as the technological hub of Ghana, Techiman is better known as a regional trading centre, which attracts customers from the entire West African sub-region.

Because raw materials are cheap and the retail price high, gun manufacture is profitable. Depending on demand, each manufacturer may produce more than a hundred weapons a year—mainly rifles and single-barrel guns. In Techiman, customers include both international traders and local users, while in Suame they are mainly local (including members of the local Lebanese diaspora). Trusted friends and middlemen facilitate sales. Little is known, however, about where guns actually wind up. Interviews reveal that some manufacturers and apprentices admit to producing weapons commissioned by armed robbers, macho-men,²¹ landguards, and gun traffickers intent on smuggling them out of the country.

The Suame-Magazine area of Kumasi is probably one of the most established gun-manufacturing centres in Ghana. This is largely owing to the presence of numerous mechanical workshops specializing in different products. This large manufacturing capacity has resulted in larger numbers of highly skilled craftsmen, which has in turn facilitated the proliferation of manufacturers producing high-quality weapons. In fact, although the Suame-Magazine area is relatively open to public trade, it is also one of the few regions that apply a professional code of conduct designed specifically to restrict gun manufacture information to insiders only.²²

Associations influence the entire production process. The manufacture of a pistol or a pump-action gun does not take place at a single workshop. Rather, different artisans produce and deliver parts to a central assembling point. Several reasons are behind this. First, subcontracting the manufacture of different parts to specialized artisans enhances the quality and increases the calibre of products. Second, because post-independence governments perceive local gun manufacture as a potential threat to stability, subcontracting individual parts ensures the financial survival of manufacturers because some gun parts are not identifiable as such and can be passed off as something else.²³

Central region: Agona Asafo

Agona Asafo is a medium-sized town with a population of approximately 30,000 and is considered one of the oldest towns in the Central region. Agona Asafo boasts two workshops of between two or three gunsmiths and apprentices each. A number have been in business for more than a century, and their primary clients are *Asafo* (warrior) companies who deploy weapons for musketry displays during the annual *akwanbo* (literally, 'clearing the path') festival.

Despite 'risks', gunsmiths interviewed maintain small arm manufacture is considerably more lucrative than either farming (the dominant local economic activity) or trading. Manufacturers here retain no organizational structure owing to the belief that it could spell disaster if one of its members were to be arrested. Because small arms manufacture is more or less a family undertaking, expertise is usually passed on from father to son. Owing to increasing police pressure, artisans will purchase weapon parts from out of town in order to avoid detection. Customers pay in two instalments—at the time of order and upon delivery. Following assembly, gunsmiths hide guns for safe keeping in outlying villages and will deliver their product only when customers make their final payment.

Guns manufactured in Agona Asafo differ from imports only in the appearance of the trigger and the lack of distinctive marks. Both stocks and barrels are highly polished and smooth. Over the five days of field research, more than 70 guns had been ordered, finished, and stocked ready for delivery. The town is involved in the manufacture of four different types of guns.

Table 3.2 Craft gun prices and length of manufacture in Agona Asafo

Type of Gun	Price (USD)	Time required for manufacture
Pistols	35–45	3 days
Single barrel	95	2 weeks
Short action pump gun	65	1 week
Traditional dane gun	20	2 days

Customers appear to be individuals rather than groups. They include both foreigners and nationals coming from all major towns in southern Ghana (especially Accra, Takoradi, and Cape Coast).²⁴ While most Ghanaians request unmarked guns, foreigners routinely ask for specific identification, including false country of origin.

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Buyers usually claim guns will be used for hunting, as decorative pieces, or during annual local festivals. Queried about registration and permits, one customer claimed that police contacts could enable him to quickly register a craft gun for a fee of 120,000 Cedis (approximately USD 13). This price corresponds to the bribe paid to register craft guns. In Ghana the official registration fee is 250,000 Cedis (USD 27).

Northern region: Tamale and Kumbungu

The inhabitants of Tamale, the Northern region's capital, are known and recognized for their blacksmithing skills, including the manufacture of tin drums and agricultural implements. Local artisans can also produce pistols and convert discarded steel pipes into lethal weapons. The name of one of Tamale's suburbs, Sabunjida-Machelene, literally means 'a colony of blacksmiths in Sabunjida'.²⁵ A craft gun costs between USD 100 and 200 and can be produced within three days. Tamale gunsmiths have found ready markets for craft weapons following civil disturbance in several districts in the North, especially in and around Yendi.²⁶ In the Kumbungu area, in the central part of the Northern region, demand for guns is driven by Dagomba warriors whose profession, identity, and manhood rest upon gun ownership. Warriors and blacksmiths have thus developed a symbiotic relationship and recognize the importance of each other's skills to ensure the collective survival of the clan.

Greater Accra region: Kasoa

Although there is not much evidence of gun manufacture in the capital itself, which is under relatively tight police control, Kasoa, one of Accra's adjoining market towns, is a well-known and technologically advanced gun manufacturing and trading centre. According to officials, a workshop raided by the police had developed the capability to produce an imitation AK-47 as well as revolvers that could hold up to eight bullets each.²⁷ Proximity to the capital has facilitated technological developments in two ways: first, Accra's strong industrial base makes possible the transfer of widely available technological skills. Second, in the capital there is a strong demand from landguards, macho-men, vigilante groups, and customers from Nigeria, Togo, and Benin.

Eastern region: Nsawam

Gun production in the Eastern region is limited, and tends to occur in small villages and towns. Manufacturers primarily specialize in the repair and servicing of guns but also produce a wide variety of 'non-lethal' domestic implements such as hoes, cutlasses, and farm implements.

Most gunsmiths appear to produce the bulk of their weapons for farmers and hunters in the forest regions, or for purchasers who want their guns specially engraved. This uniformity of demand encourages better collaboration and support among manufacturers. Middlemen smuggle craft guns to sell in larger towns such as Nsawam, population 300,000. In addition to local clientele, long-distance drivers heading to Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger also stop over in Nsawam to purchase guns. Impossible to determine, however, is for whom, or for what use, such guns are ultimately destined. Anecdotal information suggests that international demand has contributed to price increases.

Western region: Takoradi

Takoradi, home to some 400,000 people, is the capital of the Western region and hosts Ghana's second largest port after Tema. Although a minor manufacturing town, Takoradi is nevertheless geographically critical to the exportation of weapons to other West African states. Furthermore, demand for guns is high in Côte d'Ivoire, which borders the region to the west. As a result, craft guns are being smuggled in, while some Western region gunsmiths claim they have been invited to demonstrate skills and train Ivoirians to make their own weapons. Middlemen from Takoradi also facilitate the purchase of guns by foreigners residing in Ghana.

Unlike those in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo, Western region gunsmiths are poorly organized and rarely collaborate, even when producing similar products. Although gun manufacture remains profitable, serious seasonal price fluctuations occur depending on demand and insecurity in the Western region and in the wider West African sub-region. As of September 2004, prices fluctuated around USD 10 for a pistol, USD 135 for a double-barrel gun, and USD 100 for a rifle. Western region gunsmiths also produce agricultural implements and basic household equipment such as irons, drying lines, tongs, and buckets.

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Upper East and Upper West regions: Bolgatanga and Bawku

In the Upper East and Upper West regions, which border Burkina Faso to the north, locally manufactured shotguns, while also available, are less of a problem than imported industrial weapons. Gun violence appears to be relatively under control even though armed robberies and cattle rustlers armed with AK-47s have forced herders and communities to arm themselves.²⁸ Fulani herdsmen, who criss-cross the West African sub-region searching for cattle pasture, are also well armed owing to struggles with locals over access to grazing lands and watering holes. Furthermore, two professional outlaw gangs based in the town of Bawku (Upper East) roam most of northern Ghana and are known to engage in smuggling and motorcycle jacking.²⁹ Weapons of choice include assault rifles (AK-47s, G3s), pistols, shotguns, self-loading rifles, medium machine guns, hand-held grenades, and rocket-propelled grenades.³⁰ Bolgatanga (Upper East) and Bawku are among the principal gun-trading centres in the North of the country.

Responses***Legislation and government initiatives***

Ghana first criminalized gun manufacture in the mid-nineteenth century, when colonial powers (Britain and Denmark) began to see it as a threat. Since Ghana gained independence in 1957, the government has enacted new legislation. Section 16 of the Arms and Ammunition Act of 1962 (Act 118) proscribes arms and ammunition possession and use, and bans local manufacture of small arms. Section 17 allows blacksmiths to repair imported guns damaged in Ghana. Section 6 of the 1972 Arms and Ammunitions Decree (NRCD 9) improved the registration process and also reinforced sections of the 1962 law that criminalized the local manufacture of arms. Subsequent tinkering has led to the Locksmiths Act of 1994 (Act 488) and the Arms and Ammunition (Amendment) Act of 1996 (Act 519).³¹ The 2003 Draft Arms and Ammunitions Bill, which as of December 2004 remained in draft form, states that 'A person shall not without the written consent of the Minister manufacture arms or ammunition.'³² While the law clearly bans gun manufacture, in practice the Minister of Interior can at his or her discretion,

grant exemptions—although conditions are not spelt out. As of December 2004, however, no known exemptions were granted.³³

While the law prohibits craft manufacture, state security forces and civilians continue to purchase weapons abroad. The legislative regime allows two categories of arms importers in Ghana: those described as individual first-class arms and ammunition dealers who import between 1,000 and 2,000 shotguns a year, and second-class importers who bring in fewer than 1,000 units a year. Annual shotgun imports in Ghana average 20,000 units and are dominated by five major arms importers: Game Marketing Limited; Yadco Enterprise; Globart Teslria Enterprise; Bradco Trading & Associates,³⁴ and Ampoma Ahwene Enterprise (GoG, 1999, p. 3). In 2003, new gun registrations fetched the Ghana Police Service 1.4 billion Cedis (USD 155,000).³⁵ At 250,000 Cedis per gun registration, this implies that only about 5,600 guns are registered annually, which raises questions about the final destination of other imported guns. According to the Arms and Ammunitions report of 1999 (GoG, 1999), a disturbing number of guns imported into Ghana are then smuggled into other West African states.

Small arms have become an important political issue in Ghana since the New Patriotic Party (NPP) took power in January 2001. While in opposition, the NPP repeatedly highlighted the dangers associated with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (NPP, 2000, p. 40). Subsequently, when it launched its campaign manifesto, *An Agenda for Positive Change—Manifesto 2000 of the New Patriotic Party*, the NPP for the first time highlighted the potential threat that the ready availability of small arms and increasing levels of small arms-related violence posed to private investment in Ghana. The NPP promised that, if voted into power, it would grant 'a two-month amnesty for all assault weapons and ammunition currently held by unauthorised persons in private homes to be handed over to the regular army, and thereby outlaw private possession of AK-47s and allied weapons which should only be in Police and Military custody' (NPP, 2000, p. 40).

One month after taking over the reins of government in January 2001, the NPP administration gave an operational directive to the security services to initiate a joint police and military small-arms collection scheme titled '*etuo mu ye sum*,' literally meaning 'the barrel of a gun is dark'. This joint operation was

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Ghanaian blacksmiths display agricultural implements. In addition to firearms, most Ghanaian gunsmiths also produce a variety of other products.

conducted under the Command of Yaw Adu Gyimah and Lt. Col. Issa Awuni of the 5th Battalion (*Daily Graphic*, 2001). During the first phase, owners of unregistered guns were granted a two-week amnesty to hand in their guns without punishment. A cash-for-guns reward scheme sought to encourage the retrieval of excess and unlicensed weapons.³⁶ The amnesty ultimately lasted six months and resulted in the collection of 2,000 weapons, primarily from former government civil servants who had acquired weapons during the 1979–1992 military regime (Bah, 2004, p. 41).

After the amnesty period, targeted searches based on local intelligence provided by private citizens were the principal means by which police flushed out illicit weapons. Weapons confiscated included AK-47 assault rifles, pistols, shotguns (both locally manufactured and imported), and pump-action guns. Because there is little information regarding numbers of guns in private hands it is impossible to gauge whether the operation has been successful or not. However, during the country's July 2004, International Weapons Destruction Day, Vice-President Aliu Mahama stated that 'in a massive cordon and search operation conducted in Accra in February 2001, 715 small arms of various types were seized. These were part of the 8,000 weapons destroyed on 9 July 2001.'³⁷

In spite of these limited successes, in Ghana the potential clash between 'modernity' and 'tradition' in the interpretation of the law has resulted in a pronounced legal dualism when it comes to gun control. First, a parliamentary and judicial-legal system inherited from the colonial period forms the 'official' system. A second, unofficial system is based on more traditional norms, often in the form of taboos, which, like the official system, are associated with various sanctions and systems of institutional support. As a result, people 'jump' from one system to the other whenever it is felt appropriate (see Aning and Addo, 2005).

Legally, only the first system exists—and the second is barely acknowledged. But in reality the first is embedded in the second. The way the official system is interpreted in any given situation depends on its relationship with the traditional system. The power of the traditional system, of course, arises from the fact that it is rooted in the traditional values and ethical concerns of the people, and its ultimate sanction lies in its unseen and spiritual dimensions,

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especially with ancestors. One may be legally required to observe the first system but morally obliged to observe the second. Because of this dualism and dichotomy, the police and law enforcement agencies, in rural areas especially, often side with gunsmiths or are sympathetic towards them. They may be breaking the law but it is a Western law (*aborofɔ amamre*) and therefore not really regarded as something that works for the common good. From this perspective, they are bearers of an important tradition and perform a valuable service to the community, of which they are upstanding members.³⁸

Law enforcement

The family (for example, the guilds in Volta), ritual (for example, the Aboakyir and Akwanbo festivals in Central region), warrior (for example, the Ashanti and Dagomba in the Northern region) and historical (for example, in the Ashanti, Central, and Volta regions) ramifications of craft gun production described earlier show how this banned activity has played a significant role in Ghanaian culture since pre-colonial times. Thus gunsmithing is bound by a cultural ethos that requires further exploration because it has a direct impact as to why such activities continue—in some cases even with the knowledge and tacit support of the local community and minus local police intervention. Despite official political rhetoric that criminalizes gun manufacture, its social embeddedness means that local police officers are often sympathetic towards gunsmiths, given that craft guns have many traditional—and therefore morally acceptable—uses. Allegations that the local police occasionally register craft guns as foreign-made for about half the official registration fee³⁹ illustrate this dichotomy between official and actual attitudes. While the political rhetoric is one of criminalization, in practice it is widely felt that this particular type of crime should be re-evaluated.

The dubious quality of official intelligence further hinders ban enforcement by the police and Ghana Armed Forces (GAF). According to a newspaper report, a highly publicized ‘joint police-military team in an exercise seized nine locally made cap guns and ammunition . . . The exercise was aimed at seizing illegal arms and locally manufactured weapons in the two traditional areas’ (*Daily Graphic*, 2003, pp. 1, 4). Two hundred police and military officers were involved in what can only be described as a failed mission.

Such fiascos highlight the necessity of better intelligence and information involving illicit manufacture. As discussed earlier, craft guns are not numbered, nor are registers of purchasers kept. This makes it impossible for the police to know who is involved in manufacture, where the gun was produced, and who the final users are. This will not change unless information flows are improved.

The 1999 Interim Report of Arms and Ammunition Inventory Committee offered the following conclusions:

During the Committee's visit to the Volta region some information on locally manufactured arms was obtained. It came out that although these manufacturers were still operating; most of them had gone 'underground' for fear of apprehension. The committee intends to collect further information on the subject for inclusion in the final report. (GoG, 1999, p. 4)

More recent data provided by the Ghana Police Service (GPS), former members of the Arms and Ammunition Inventory Committee and of the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms (GNCSA) are certainly out of date.⁴⁰ A typical example is the assertion by the Ghana Police Service that 'the following areas are known for their locally manufactured firearms [*sic*]; Alavanyo and Nkonya/Volta region; Techiman/Brong Ahafo region; Suame/Ashanti region' (GoG, 1999, p. 5). Despite the fact that these towns produce relatively high numbers of craft weapons, they form only a minute percentage of the production base in Ghana as a whole. As this study has shown, this extends to the country's ten regions. Popular discourse has characterized craft gun-making in Ghana as almost extinct, at best, obsolete with weapons produced still dependent on gunpowder (GoG, 1999, p. 9). This chapter reveals the exact opposite: Ghanaian gunsmithing has become ever more sophisticated and the weapons manufactured of a quality comparable with industrially produced guns.

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Civil society initiatives

The quality of the blacksmith products and their traditional integration into communities highlight the limitations of coercive approaches to outlawing gun production, which rely mainly on official bans. Clearly, any effective and sustainable solution will involve persuading local communities to include in their traditional codes of conduct the condemnation of gun sales for the purpose of anti-social activities—including armed conflict and criminal use.

In a pioneering attempt to undertake social change, civil society organizations such as the Africa Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR) have sought to initiate a dialogue between manufacturers, local communities, and government—particularly in the Ashanti region. The first step involved organizing gunsmiths into associations. To date, the Ashanti Region Association of Blacksmiths (ARAB) is the largest, with headquarters in Kumasi. Established in 2002, it was the first organization to formally register the region's gunsmiths and has lobbied for a shift in public perception, which tends to perceive all blacksmiths as supplying weapons to criminal gangs. As a result, and in consultation with the Ashanti region Police command, ARAB has endeavoured to encourage blacksmiths to form a formal association, register its members, and begin the process of reconversion to non-lethal products.

Since 2003, and under the leadership of Inspector Opoku of the Ashanti region Police Service, several informal meetings between the police and blacksmiths have taken place with the express purpose of formally organizing blacksmiths and changing the institutional culture within the GPS. Information campaigns also aim to encourage blacksmiths to abandon gun production—especially those destined for criminal use. The success of these efforts is difficult to gauge as daily newspapers still report incidents of blacksmiths being arrested for illegal manufacture. Presently, and with the support of ASDR, initiatives are under way to form similar associations in Brong Ahafo and the Western and Central regions of Ghana.

Conclusion

Lack of information and research on Ghanaian arms manufacture has inevitably led to bad policy. The current prohibition and overall coercive approach adopted by previous and the current administrations, has, far from stemming gun production and trade, simply driven the manufacture, sale, and transportation of locally manufactured small arms underground. Artisans involved in the manufacture and sale of these weapons are convinced that, owing to the illegality of their activities, the true extent of their small arms production needs to be kept secret. Thus the trade thrives despite prohibition and owing to the establishment of long-standing networks that are honour-bound to protect the identities of members. Because of the high degree of trust, secrecy, and information-sharing between participants, these networks function effectively without any state intervention.

Enlightened legislation should not seek to outlaw the manufacture of small arms and light weapons but needs to establish regulations designed to bring the trade into the open, while, at the same time, bringing it under more effective government control. The criminalization of gunsmithing has driven it underground and subsequently weakened the state's ability to exercise control and to partner with Ghanaian manufacturers in their efforts to regulate and stem the illicit flow of arms. Furthermore, criminalization fails to recognize the family, ritual, warrior, and historical traditions underpinning craft gun production, which represents an important aspect of Ghanaian culture and is therefore much more broadly accepted than the law would suggest.

The social embeddedness of gun manufacture in Ghana should not, however, overshadow the more troubling findings uncovered in this study: craft small arms are becoming increasingly advanced and are attracting a growing number of 'illegitimate' users—including criminals in Ghana and elsewhere in West Africa. Though much more is required to deal with this threat, it is clear that the state, manufacturers, and civil society have recently demonstrated an admirable willingness to begin the difficult and rocky process of communication and confidence-building. An important 'first step' would be the establishment of an amnesty period to allow for a series of discussions, moderated by civil society, to take place between different stakeholders (law enforcement agencies, various ministries, blacksmiths) without fear of arrest.

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The skills developed by Ghana's gunsmiths could be more productively used for agricultural and industrial ends. Technological transformation, however, requires substantial amounts of financial backing. If gun-making is to be replaced with less lethal products, it will be necessary to provide economic incentives to make reconversion worthwhile.

Finally, while public rhetoric continues to dominate the headlines, there is still very little scholarly information on the extent of the small arms problem in Ghana. Complementing this first regional mapping exercise with a more exhaustive review of Ghanaian gunsmithing at the district level is essential to ensure the effective implementation of any reconversion scheme. The examination of the economic significance of gunsmithing within communities is one key area that would help us better assess the challenge inherent in technological transfer.

List of abbreviations

ARAB	Ashanti Region Association of Blacksmiths
ASDR	Africa Security Dialogue and Research
GAF	Ghana Armed Forces
GNCSA	Ghana National Commission on Small Arms
GPS	Ghana Police Service
NPP	New Patriotic Party

Endnotes

- 1 The author is grateful to Kojo Brew, Daniel Numetu, Issa Mohammed, and Emmanuel Addo Sowatey for their help in gathering field information. These were the four main researchers, who subsequently hired additional individuals with specific local knowledge.
- 2 See Part II for a regional overview and Kante (2004) for a detailed analysis of the situation in Mali.
- 3 ASDR is a think-tank based in Accra, Ghana that specializes in issues such as security sector reform, civil-military relations, and the mechanisms and processes of military budgeting in Africa. For further information, see <<http://www.africansecurity.org>>
- 4 The author is most grateful to an anonymous Ghana expert for this point.

- 5 For a general discussion of the threats of guns and the responses by colonial powers, see for example de Marees et al. (1988) and Jones (1985).
- 6 Interview with a manufacturer, September 2004. This person claimed that in the Central region blacksmiths hold competitions to best copy a foreign gun. He indicated that he had won one such competition by copying an AK-47. See also *Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Radio 1* (2001).
- 7 This ammunition comes mainly from the UK and the core manufacturer is Gamebore Cartridge Company Ltd.
- 8 Diverse interviews with senior officials of Ghana Police Service at Police Headquarters Accra, September 2004.
- 9 Landguards are individuals or groups of youth hired by landowners to protect their lands from encroachment. See for example Mingle (2003, p. 3). According to the report, '[n]ine people ... took refuge ... following an attack on the residents of the town by suspected *armed landguards and thugs* ... to avoid sustaining severe injuries ... by the *thugs* wielding AK-47s and machetes'. See also Arthur (2001). In this particular case, '*... a group of armed civilians* led by police sergeant Anisah stormed the [building] site and without provocation started firing indiscriminately ostensibly to scare [people] to flee [from] the land' (emphasis added).
- 10 See GoG (1999, p.10). Cross-border crime and smuggling activities involving firearms are very widespread in the West African sub-region. Similarly, '[t]he Western Marine Command of Nigeria's Customs Service intercepted ... in Lagos six Ghanaians in a canoe containing 72,000 rounds of live ammunition and 99 sacks of shotguns from Ghana'. At <<http://www.nisat.org>> accessed on 16 April 2003.
- 11 Interview with the leadership of the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Blacksmiths Association in Kumasi, 6 September 2004.
- 12 In almost all the interviews conducted, gunsmiths were reluctant to indicate the extent to which economically profitable motives underlay their actions. Most spoke about honour, skill development, and family tradition.
- 13 Interview with a blacksmith in Akyem Manso, 27 September 2004
- 14 Guilds are informal groups of gunsmiths that together determine the rules and regulations governing their activities.
- 15 A classic example of this is the Tamale Implements Factory Limited, which has trained ten blacksmiths in technological conversion to produce animal traction implements. The regional office of the Ministry of Agriculture under Sylvester Adongo has been very supportive of this scheme.
- 16 Interview with a blacksmith, Kumasi, 20 October 2004.

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- 17 It is important to recognize the conflicts between these two towns and the relationship to knowledge dispersal of gun manufacturers. The author is grateful to his colleague, Emmanuel Sowatey, for this point.
- 18 Emmanuel Sowatey (2005) argues that knowledge dispersal by itinerant gun-makers from the Volta region is widespread in Ghana.
- 19 The apparent high cost of single barrel guns is related to excessively high demand.
- 20 Interviews at various periods between August and September 2004 at Ho, Tafi Atome, and Kpando.
- 21 These are usually thugs available for hire to intimidate people.
- 22 Interview with the Secretary of the Ashanti region Blacksmiths Association, 15 September 2004.
- 23 Different Interviews with Inspector Opoku, July–September 2004. Since August 2004 Inspector Opoku has been transferred to the Kpeshie Division of the Ghana Police Service in Accra.
- 24 Questioned as to whether customers gave false addresses and identities, manufacturers responded that it was unlikely since purchasing was done through trusted people. In addition, they explained that they did not ask their customers what the guns would be used for.
- 25 Interview in Tamale, 13 August 2004.
- 26 The town of Yendi, home of the Yaa Naa (the second most powerful traditional ruler in Ghana after the Asantehene), gained notoriety in March 2002 when two groups struggling for the control of the Kingdom of Dagbon clashed. In the ensuing battle the Yaa Naa was assassinated and 40 of his elders killed. Until August 2004, the town was under a curfew and a state of emergency declared.
- 27 Interview with police officer in Accra, September 2004.
- 28 The problem posed by cattle rustlers, though not yet perceived as national, is beginning to take on disturbing dimensions. In interviews with Fulani herdsmen in other parts of Ghana, primarily in the Dodowa Plains of Greater Accra, cattle rustling and the use of military-style weapons in such attacks are beginning to be reported.
- 29 Confidential written correspondence with an expert on Ghana, 18 February 2005.
- 30 Interview with official of National Commission for Civic Education official in Tamale, 10 July 2004.
- 31 This particular act modifies the payable amounts and specifies in detail the fees to be paid upon registration.
- 32 Draft Arms and Ammunition Bill 2003, Section 14 i.
- 33 Interview with several senior police officers, Elmina, 15 December 2005.
- 34 According to GoG (1999, p. 5), this particular company was involved in a possible trans-

- shipment of shotguns and cartridges to 2 Nigerians involving 14,672 pieces of shotguns and 1,313,453 cartridges.
- 35 Interview with head of arms registration bureau in Accra, 12 October 2004.
- 36 See *Daily Graphic* (2001, p. 1) and interview with Yaw Adu-Gyimah, 22 March 2001. Yaw Adu-Gyimah was the police officer in charge of this exercise.
- 37 Keynote address by His Excellency Alhaji Aliu Mahama, Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana on the occasion of International Weapons Destruction Day, Friday 9 July 2004, p. 2.
- 38 The author is grateful to an anonymous referee for these points.
- 39 Interview with a manufacturer in the Central region who helps his customers register their guns, September 2004.
- 40 Interviews during July and September 2004 in Accra.

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