

Challenges Faced by Indigenous People of Calabar Province in Firearm Imports and Licensing, 1917-1960.

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges encountered by indigenous people of Calabar Province in firearm imports and licensing between 1917 and 1960. During this period, significant quantity of firearms was imported into the province, which necessitated the colonial authorities to impose a wide range of firearm regulatory laws through colonial legislation to regulate all aspects of firearms, including ownership, usage and imports. The attempt by some indigenous people of the province to comply with a regulated firearm regime appeared to have been challenging. This study deployed the historical research design of the qualitative approach to analyse available historical evidence used in the study, while relying on primary sources of evidence complemented by secondary sources of evidence. The primary sources of evidence include Archival materials, such as intelligence reports on districts in Calabar Province, memoranda and circulars on firearm imports and licensing, as well as official permits to bear firearms. The secondary sources of evidence are drawn from the analysis and interpretation of primary evidence, which include book chapters, journals, articles, research papers, newspapers and magazines relating to Calabar Province on firearm imports and licensing obtained from the University of Calabar library. The Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria Journal of African History, among others, served as vital sources of evidence. The findings of the study show that an assortment of factors, regarding the procedure for obtaining valid firearm licenses, posed significant challenges to some indigenous people of the province during the colonial era. Therefore, the imposition of a series of firearm regulatory laws by the colonial authorities in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, appeared to have resulted in assortment of challenges that militated against the attempt by indigenous people of the province to comply with extant firearm regulations, especially in firearm imports and licensing.

Keywords: Firearms, Licensing, Firearm Imports, Proliferation and Firearms Regulatory Laws.

Introduction

Drawing inspiration from the Brussels Convention of 1890 which prohibited the importation of certain classes of firearms into Africa, including Calabar Province as well as making some distinction between flintlock firearms (Dane guns) and the arms of precision, like the magazine guns, pistols, revolvers, shot guns, cap guns and the rifles, the British colonial authorities in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province imposed a series of firearm regulations to curb unrestricted access to firearms which was expected to result in a surge in firearm-related violence in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province.

The imposition of a series of firearm regulatory laws on all aspects of firearms, including possession, usage, imports and licensing in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, appeared to have led to some challenges which limited some indigenous people's attempt towards legitimate access to firearm licenses, including firearm ownership, despite being a 'gun society',¹ where firearms had evolved to be an "object of material culture";² implying that firearm served the varied political, economic and socio-cultural needs of the people of the province, during the colonial period.

Causal Explanation for the Challenges Faced by Indigenous People of Calabar Province on Firearm Imports and Licensing

The assumptions by the colonial authorities that unrestricted access to possession and use of firearms in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, would result in a surge in firearm-related violence appeared to have led to the imposition of a wide range of firearm regulatory laws through the introduction of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917. Though curbing unfettered access to possession and use of firearm as well as addressing issues of public safety and security were given as the principal reason for imposing a series of firearms regulatory laws as encapsulated in the Arms Ordinance Acts of 1917, its enforcement led to some challenges that confronted indigenous people of the province as they struggled to satisfy the various requirements of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917, regarding their attempt in obtaining firearm licenses to ensure legitimate ownership and use of firearms, including firearm imports.

Overtime, it did appear that the colonial authorities had ulterior motives of ensuring that, indigenous people of the province were restricted from having access to some classes of firearms, including the 'arms of precision', implying that through a firearm regulatory regime, it was quite cumbersome for some indigenous people of the province to possess and use sophisticated firearms so they would not utilize those classes of firearms to subvert the authority of the colonial government. David Northrup's³ stressed that, the importation of firearms 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, implying that, the colonial authorities in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province appeared to have been deliberate in their attempt at restricting indigenous people of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including those of Calabar Province from accessing superior firearms because they feared that, allowing indigenous people of the province unrestricted access to assortment of firearms could endanger the legitimacy of the colonial authority.

Similarly, Inikori⁴ and Richards⁵ argued that it was through the massive quantity of firearms imported into West Africa that slave trade flourished during the transatlantic slave trade era. The assortment of arguments on massive firearm imports, proliferation of firearms, as well as unrestricted access to firearms, including the proclivity of inciting firearm-related violence, was the principal reason the British colonial authorities imposed a wide range of firearm regulations. Saheed Aderinto's,⁶ "Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria" posits that between the 1890s and 1910s, the colonial government in Nigeria imposed a new regime of firearm ownership

¹Saheed Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria: Firearms, Culture and Public Order*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 4.

²Aderinto *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 71.

³David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92.

⁴Joseph Inikori, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa 1950-1807: A Quantitative Analysis", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 18, No.3 (1977), 339-386.

⁵William A. Richards, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1980), 43-59.

⁶Saheed Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria: Firearms, Culture and Public Order*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 10.

that gave way to a gun society by first disarming “Nigerian” and destroying the arms and ammunition they used in resisting colonial conquest.

These arguments serve as causal explanations for the challenges some indigenous people of Calabar Province face while trying to comply with a new firearm-regulated regime. However, through some rigorous scrutiny and placement of loyalty to the colonial authorities, some indigenous elites who appeared harmless to the existence of the colonial authorities had seamless access to firearm licenses, especially when they had recommendations from their respective heads of departments.

Obstacles Faced by Indigenous People of Calabar Province in Firearm Imports 1917-1960

Bureaucratic Hurdles

One of the difficulties encountered by indigenous people of Calabar Province regarding firearm imports was the issue of bureaucratic hurdles that appeared to have frustrated their attempt at obtaining firearm import licenses. The importation of firearms into the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, was one of the aspects of firearms regulated by the firearm regulatory laws as encapsulated in the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917. The provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917 required that one must obtain valid import license from the prescribed authority of the colonial authorities before engaging in firearm imports during this era.

In a Public Notice, regarding firearm imports in Calabar Province, the Divisional Officer of Calabar in 1929 stressed the provision of the Arms Ordinance Acts of 1917, which stipulated that one must apply and obtain valid firearm import license before engaging in the importation of firearms into the province.⁷ Relying on some bureaucratic frailties, some colonial administrators appeared to have made the process of obtaining firearm import licenses very cumbersome. Issues of paucity of colonial staff whose duties involved handling of the processes of obtaining firearms import licenses as well as perceived negative attitude of some British colonial staff who were often condescending to indigenous people of the province appeared to have acted some hidden imperial government’s script that tended to restrict some indigenous people from obtaining import licenses to import some classes of firearm, posing obvious economic obstacles to indigenous firearm importers.

Perceived Ambiguity in Firearm Regulatory Laws

Indigenous people of Calabar Province also faced some obstacles regarding issues of clarity on some provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917. The Arms Ordinance Act of 1917 provided a template through which all aspects of firearms in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Provinces, were regulated in accordance with the firearm regulatory laws.

The proclivity of misunderstanding some of the provisions of the Arms Ordinance often led to some infractions of the firearm regulatory laws. In a memorandum from the Resident, Calabar Province, to the District Officer, Calabar, in 1925, clarity on some provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917, regarding firearm imports, was addressed by the Resident of Calabar Province.⁸

The Resident, Calabar Province, made it clear that the responsibility of handling all issues of firearm import licenses was under the Customs Department, through the Collector of Customs in the province.⁹ The memorandum also offered clarity on issues of having the permission to import firearms, stressing that once the Lieutenant Governor had given assent to granting of licenses to bear firearms, it implied that those category of firearm could be imported, while the prescribed authority (Custom House) was under obligation to grant licenses to importers whose customers had obtained licenses to bear same firearms they intended to import. Despite the process appearing to be seamless, the procedure of obtaining import licenses was seemingly complicated because of the broader issues of bureaucratic hurdles, racial issues, as well as some financial expectations, including the payments of customs duties and license fees levied on firearm importers.

Indigenous firearm importers faced some humongous difficulties while attempting to obtain firearm licenses to import the arms of precision. Arms of precision refer to some sophisticated firearms, like the shotgun, pistols, revolvers and rifles, including machine guns. These classes of firearms were highly regulated because of

⁷Public Notice. “Importation of Firearms” from the Divisional Officer, Calabar, Calabar Province. 25th March, 1924, (NAC).

⁸Memorandum from the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar to the District Officer, Calabar. “Importation of Arms”. Procedure, “No. 1658/1922, 10th August, 1925, (NAC).

⁹Memorandum, “Importation of Arms”. Procedure, “No. 1658/1922 (NAC).

their technical potency, which led some colonial officers to assume it could be exploited by some disgruntled elements in the province to subvert the authority of the colonial government.

Importation of these classes of firearms involved obtaining valid firearm import licenses, though there were requirements, especially the one that customers who sought to purchase those imported 'arms of precision' had to obtain valid firearm licenses for them to possess and use those classes of firearms. This implied that one had to obtain firearm licenses to possess and use arms of precision before they were allowed to purchase those categories of firearms. Interestingly, the provision of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917, which stipulated that firearm importers should be granted import licenses at the point of entry of their goods after due diligence by the Customs department to ensure compliance with extant firearm import regulations, was also challenging to some indigenous firearm importers.¹⁰ because a rejection of their imports at the point of entry by the prescribed authority was devastating to their economic aspirations.

Misinterpretation of the Arms Ordinance Act

Issues of misinterpretation of the Arms Ordinance Act also offered some significant challenges to some indigenous importers of firearms in the province because more often than not, firearm importers tended to misinterpret the provisions of the Arms Ordinance to suit their desires, leading to a series of infractions of the provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917. By November 1958, some importers of Cap guns erroneously believed that importing cap guns, while storing them in warehouses, would not require their customers to present valid firearm licenses before those cap guns could be sold to them, whereas existing regulations. In contrast, extant firearm regulations required those buyers to present valid firearm licenses before they could purchase cap guns from the importers of Cap guns. This situation led some firearm importers to argue that the bulk of their customers were farmers and hunters, they needed no firearm licenses to purchase cap guns,¹¹ suggesting the misinterpretation of the provisions of the Arms Ordinance by some indigenous firearm importers was quite challenging to some of them, while it was clear infraction of the firearm regulatory laws. A case of Messrs T. J. & S. M. Solomon of Mount Lebannon Merchants who went ahead to import cap guns, without ensuring their customers had valid firearm licenses to possess and use cap guns, corroborate the argument that, the misinterpretation of the Arms Ordinance posed some difficulties to some indigenous firearm importers as some of them went ahead to import firearms without confirming whether or not their customers had valid firearm licenses to purchase same firearm they imported into the province. However, the misinterpretation of the Arms Ordinance Act was often referred to the Lieutenant Governor's office for clarity.¹²

In a correspondence from T.J. & S. M. Solomon of Mount Lebannon Merchants to the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar,¹³ they accepted their error, regarding the misinterpretation of the provision of the Arms Ordinance Act, regarding Gun Caps and Cap guns importation. They stated how confused they were regarding the issues of interpretation of the Arms Ordinance Act which involved the sales of imported cap guns to their customers in the province, until they were properly addressed by the Collector of Customs, Calabar that, the general rule concerning firearm imports was also applicable to the importation of Gun caps and cap guns. Whereas Messrs Mount Lebannon Merchants, an indigenous firearm importer, had assumed that the requirements for the importation of flint lock firearms (an inferior firearm) would also apply to cap gun imports,¹⁴ while they assumed that cap guns were not lethal enough. The explanations of the Acting Secretary, Southern Provinces of Nigeria, also offered clarity on issues concerning cap gun imports, suggesting that the general rule governing firearm imports also regulated importation of Cap guns into the province.

Regulations on Warehouses

Warehousing of imported firearms also posed some difficulties to indigenous firearm importers. Sales of imported firearms stored at the warehouses by firearm importers posed huge challenges because the Arms Ordinance Act

¹⁰Memorandum from the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar, to the District Officer, Calabar. "Importation of Arms: Procedure" No. 1658/1922, 10th August, 1925, (NAC).

¹¹Memorandum. "Importation of Arms: Procedure" No. 1658/1922, (NAC).

¹²Memorandum from the Senior Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar, to the Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, Gun Caps and Cap guns, M. P. No. C. 40/1930, 30th December, 1930, (NAC).

¹³Correspondence from T. J. & S. M. Solomon, N. Mount Lebannon Merchants to the Resident, "Calabar Province, Calabar, "Request to Withdraw Imported Cap Guns" from Public Warehouse in Calabar, 28th November, 1958, (NAC).

¹⁴ Correspondence, "Request to Withdraw Imported Cap Guns" from Public Warehouse in Calabar", (NAC).

required that buyers of such firearms needed to possess valid firearm licenses, as a prerequisite for them to buy same firearms their licenses authorised them. This development posed massive challenges to some indigenous firearm importers because the importers of firearms had to wait longer for their customers to process firearm licenses before they could buy firearms from the importers, regardless of the tedious nature of obtaining firearm licenses by some indigenous people of the province, including the tendency of rejecting some of the applications for firearm licenses.

By November, 1930, the Acting Secretary of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria gave clarity on issues concerning importation of Gun Caps, which required all firearm importers to have ownership of private warehouses. The Acting Secretary of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria also stressed the provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act, which stipulated that all importers of firearms were expected to own private warehouses to store their firearm imports. This was to ensure a seamless withdrawal of those imported firearms for sales to their respective customers because before the new rules, importers of firearm patronized public warehouses.

Ownership of private warehouses was also a critical requirement for one to be granted firearm import license, especially to indigenous firearm importers, though there was a provision for those who could not privately own warehouses. Firearm importers who were not able to privately own warehouses were expected to rent available private warehouses, though inadequate number of private storage was a major challenge to those firearm importers.¹⁵ The difficulty faced by some indigenous importers of Cap guns in the province caused the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar, to suggest modalities for releasing imported cap guns for sales, while addressing the Collector of Customs. He suggested that one-sixth of each consignment of cap guns should be released monthly,¹⁶ as part of a concession to the importers of cap guns in the province.

Cap guns were merely toy firearms, replicated after the real firearms and were mostly used by some hunters and farmers because they produced loud sound when triggered by holders of those firearms. However the delisting of cap guns from the prohibited list of firearms, confused some firearm importers and users of cap gun to the extent that, some indigenous importers of cap guns believed they could easily import cap guns for sales to their customers without taking cognizance of the provisions of the Arms Ordinance Acts of 1917 which stipulated that, buyers of all imported firearms had to obtain valid firearm licenses before they could purchase the type of firearms their licenses authorized.

Despite Nigeria, including Calabar Province, being a gun society, where firearms evolved to be “an object of material culture,”¹⁷ the restrictions imposed on all issues of firearms ownership and usage, including firearms imports by the colonial authorities, made it very complicated for some indigenous firearms importers whose sources of livelihood depended largely on importation of firearms. The issues relating to firearm importers having to wait on buyers to obtain valid licenses that authorised them to possess and use same firearm quality they imported into the province before they could make sales were indeed challenging.

Difficulties Encountered by Indigenous People of Calabar Province in Licensing of Firearms 1917-1960

Despite the classification of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, as a “gun society” where firearms had evolved as an “object of material culture,”¹⁸ implying that firearms shaped the various means of livelihood of indigenous people of the province, the attempt by some indigenous people of the province to obtain licenses that would enable them to possess and use firearms became very challenging, ranging from administrative issues to attitudinal dispositions of the prescribed officers.

During this era, it was expected that some indigenous people of the province who were desirous of possessing and using firearms had to satisfy the requirements of the provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917 which included obtaining valid firearm licenses before one could lawfully possess and use firearms, implying it was an infraction of the firearm regulatory laws to possess and use firearms without obtaining licenses to do so.

¹⁵Memorandum from the Senior Resident, Calabar Province.

¹⁶Memorandum from the Senior Resident, Calabar Province.

¹⁷Saheed Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria: Firearms, Culture and Public Order*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 71.

¹⁸ Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 71.

Attitude of some Prescribed Officers

The attitude of some colonial officers, especially British colonial officers, towards indigenous firearm applicants was one of the challenges that confronted some indigenous people of the province, who sought to obtain firearm licenses. The condescending attitude and a seeming lack of administrative capacity by some colonial officers, especially in coping with increased number of applications, appeared to have led to indiscriminate disqualification of some applications for firearm licenses that were sent in by some indigenous people of the province without giving cogent reasons.

Dane Gun Regulations

In the 1920s, the colonial authorities' attempt to impose firearm regulations on Dane guns, which appeared to be a popular type of firearm among rural dwellers, posed significant challenges to some indigenous people of the province, especially in rural areas. The colonial authorities' fear that enforcing compliance with the Dane guns regulations would lead to defiance of government policies prompted some colonial administrators to reconsider and later adopt a diplomatic approach to persuade the indigenous people of the province regarding the regulation of Dane guns. Dane guns served as a means for rural dwellers to satisfy their various economic and socio-cultural needs. Therefore, the attempt to regulate the use of Dane guns in the province seemed to threaten the well-being of its people. Although the enforcement of Dane gun regulations was weak, registration was made mandatory, as it provided a way for the colonial authorities to identify users and keep records of the number of Dane guns in circulation within the province.

The fact that an estimated five hundred thousand Dane guns were in circulation in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria¹⁹ propelled vibrant debates on the status of Dane guns, an inferior type of firearm, in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province. Despite the assumption by some colonial officers that unrestricted access to Dane guns could jeopardise colonial security and public order, some colonial officers like Governor Hugh Clifford believed that, possession and use of Dane guns was a necessity for the rural dwellers,²⁰ corroborating a widespread believe that, Dane guns was a means through which the daily livelihood of indigenous people of Calabar Province was sustained. Whereas some colonial officers advanced reasons like colonial security and public order as central to their belief that Dane guns should be regulated, indigenous people of the province, on the other hand, believed they were about being robbed of their firearms,²¹ which served their economic and socio-cultural needs, though the deployment of Dane guns during the escalation of inter-ethnic conflicts proved otherwise.

Central to the arguments on imposing firearm regulations on Dane guns was the issue of the registration and licensing of Dane guns as requirements for possession and use of Dane guns. Whereas the registration of Dane guns yielded enormous financial revenue to the colonial authorities, while helping the government to determine the number of Dane guns that were in circulation in the province, licensing also yielded significant financial revenue to the colonial authorities because import duties and levies imposed on firearm ownership augmented the government's financial revenue.

The argument by the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar, that Dane guns posed no significant danger to the province and that it was through the use of Dane guns that some farmers protected themselves against wild animals, especially bush cows and leopards, prompted the desire of some indigenous people of the province to possess and use Dane guns without necessarily obtaining valid licenses. However, the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar argued that, the only danger he noticed, regarding possession and use of Dane guns was the issues relating to accidental shootings by some indigenous hunters who were more often than not careless with handling of Dane guns, implying that some hunters fired before sighting animals, while others often overloaded their Dane guns to ensure maximum impact on their targets. The Resident's argument implied that Dane guns were dangerous when fired at close range; therefore, should not be listed as one of the prohibited firearms.²²

The central argument here is that some indigenous members of the province were frustrated by the attempt at regulating Dane guns because the use of Dane guns was central to their daily livelihood, therefore regulating the use of Dane guns by the colonial authorities was viewed by some indigenous people of the province

¹⁹Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 228.

²⁰“Memorandum on “Arms Control” by Donald Cameron. (NAI).

²¹“Memorandum on “Arms Control”, (NAI).

²²The Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar to the Secretary, Southern Provinces, CSO 26/03620, 6th May, 1920, (NAI).

as a disservice to the attainment of their various economic and social needs, little wonder some indigenous users of Dane guns patronized indigenous blacksmiths who fabricated Dane guns for them to ensure their firearm needs, though it ran riot with the expectations of the firearm regulatory laws, during the colonial era.

It is instructive to note that Frederick Lugard encouraged the use of Dane guns for hunting because he argued that Dane guns were less dangerous, implying that offering tacit support for indigenous people of the province to utilise them for hunting was better and safer than deploying poisonous weapons like the bow and arrows for hunting. Going by the above arguments, it is imperative to note that regulating the use of Dane guns had psychological effects on some indigenous members of the province, especially the hunters and the farmers whose demand for firearms (Dane guns) was seen as a critical need for their daily livelihood. Interestingly, the liberalisation of the use of Dane guns in 1948 by the colonial authorities, through the amendment of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917, which removed “Dane gun” from the category of prohibited firearms, one must use under license or permit,²³ evoked wild jubilation among the rural dwellers in the province, especially the hunters and the farmers.

Involvement of the Colonial Police in Licensing

The involvement of the colonial police force in licensing issues also led to some difficulties the people of the province faced in their effort to obtain firearm licenses during this era. The provision of the Arms Ordinance Act that required endorsement of ‘police comments’ on each firearm application submitted by indigenous applicants not only frustrated those applicants, it significantly delayed the process of granting them firearm licenses, while disrupting their respective economic endeavours. A case of Mr B. D. Afebege, then employee of U. A. C. Calabar and Mr Hogan Bassey, then resident of No. 90, Goldie Street, Calabar,²⁴ highlight the intricacies of processing firearm licenses in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, because in most cases, after much delay, regarding the profiling of applicants by the prescribed officers of the colonial authorities, some applicants were considered successful and were granted licenses to bear firearms, while other applicants had their applications rejected without giving them cogent reasons for doing so.

Replacement of Lost or Malfunctioning Firearms

Replacement of lost firearms, as well as replacing malfunctioned ones, also posed some difficulties to some indigenous people of the province because it required one to go through a burdensome procedure. The process of replacing lost or malfunctioning firearms required a lengthy period of time as applicants were expected to attach the details of the lost or malfunctioning firearms they intended to replace. The process of replacing malfunctioned or lost firearms involved attaching the model number of the lost or malfunctioned one, previous firearm license number, warehouse receipts, while including the names of the warehouses where those malfunctioned firearms were kept.²⁵ In most cases, having to reapply for new licenses, including giving details of all that was required, did not yield commensurate results as some of the applicants who sought to replace their lost or malfunctioning firearms had their applications rejected by the prescribed officers, causing huge frustration among those applicants.

Racial Attribute and Prejudices

A seeming involvement of some sort of racial barriers, which appeared to have influenced the processing of applications for firearm licenses of some indigenous people of the province, tended to pose some challenges to some indigenous applicants. Whereas some British colonial officers availed themselves to assortment of firearms without encountering issues of bureaucratic hurdles, some indigenous people of the province were made to go through some difficult bureaucratic processes while seeking to obtain valid firearm licenses that enabled them to possess and use firearms in the province.

However, it appeared that some British colonial officers used firearms without necessarily having requisite firearm licenses to do so, especially some British members of the Nigerian Rifle Association (NRA), who dominated the NRA, though pockets of indigenous elites later joined them. Saheed Aderinto²⁶ stressed on what appeared to be an intentional exclusion of some indigenous people of the province from possession and use

²³Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 232.

²⁴Correspondence from the Acting Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar to the District Officer, Calabar, No. 34/6/272, 10th June, 1955, (NAC).

²⁵Correspondence from the Acting District Officer, Calabar Division to the Resident, Calabar Province, Calabar, No. 35/2/86, 25th June, (NAC).

²⁶Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 57.

of firearms by the British, while the colonial authorities intentionally used firearm regulatory regime to prevent them from having access to superior firearms, through a series of firearm regulations. A subtle appearance of some racial prejudices during the processes of obtaining firearm licenses posed some significant challenges to some indigenous applicants who sought to obtain valid licenses to bear firearms. Saheed Aderinto,²⁷ examine issues of politics of firearm ownership in Nigeria, suggesting that firearm ownership was not a privilege but a right for all European that served in Nigeria, especially as firearm was the most 'enduring symbol of imperialism,'²⁸ Discriminatory firearm laws appeared to have allowed some Europeans, especially the British to use superior firearms in imposing imperial dominance, while restricting indigenous people of the province from having access to sophisticated firearms. The discriminatory laws, regarding access to firearms, appeared to have posed psychological challenges to some indigenous people of the province because it was difficult for them to fathom out reasons for the rejection of their applications for firearm licenses, especially as they were not given cogent reasons for such rejections. Central to the argument on racial disparities was the often-condescending attitude of some colonial officers who believed that indigenous people of the province were not responsible enough to be trusted with possession and use of superior firearms, whereas some British colonial officers were often found wanting in mishandling of firearms. The various issues of incidents, resulting from abuse of firearms by some British colonial officers, especially those incidences of firearm accidents which often occurred among the British colonial officers during leisure shooting as well as the activities of some overzealous colonial police officers during riots and protests, negated the claims by some British colonial officers that, indigenous people of the province were irresponsible, therefore not suitable to be granted licenses to bear superior firearms. This suggests that some of the comments made by some British colonial officers, regarding indigenous people of the province not being responsible enough to handle firearms, were borne out of racial biases.

Financial Cost of Licensing

Similarly, issues of the financial involvement in licensing, including payment of application fees and renewal fees to the government, posed a huge financial challenge to some indigenous people of the province. A case of some applicants who applied for explosive/blasting certificates and were expected to pay a mandatory fee of £5, while forwarding their application forms through the Provincial Engineer at the Public Works Department for processing,²⁹ serves as evidence of the numerous financial involvements in the processing of firearms licensing. Under the firearm regulated regime, payment of fees as levies placed on different classes of firearms in the province led to huge financial challenges, which frustrated some indigenous people of the province. It was mandatory for applicants who desired to obtain firearm licenses to pay application fees, and the assortment of these payments augmented the colonial authority's finances, while the people suffered some financial difficulties, especially during the great economic depression of the late 1920s and the early part of the 1930s.

Obtaining firearm licenses to operate explosive stores, repair establishment and warehousing also appeared to have been cumbersome for some indigenous people of the province because the requirements were perceived to be stringent. Seeking to operate explosive stores required that applicants who desired to obtain licenses to operate explosive stores incur some financial cost, including payment for the inspection of their proposed stores as well as securing standard shops in isolated areas, while those applicants had to state the type of explosives they intended to keep in the storage facility.³⁰ Similarly, operating a firearm repair shop required that, the prescribed officers of the colonial government who derived authority from section 20 of the Arms Ordinance, that empowered them to grant firearm repair licenses to successful applicants to operate a firearm repair industry,³¹ had to include a twelve months validity period for any firearm licenses granted to successful firearm repairers which was quite challenging because more often than not, the twelve months validity period of those licenses were not sufficient for those firearm repairers, while it required them to seek a renewal of the expired firearm licenses after the twelve month validity period, regardless of a seeming cumbersome procedure of obtaining those licenses.

²⁷ Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 121-122.

²⁸ Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 121.

²⁹ Extract from a letter of the District Officer, Calabar Division to Site Agent Messrs, Costain Limited, Calabar, "Blasting Certificate," 7th August, 1954, (NAC).

³⁰ Memorandum from the Resident, Calabar Province.

³¹ Correspondence from the Office of the Senior Superintendent, the Nigeria Police Force, to the District Officer, Calabar, "Application for Permit to Keep a Repairing Establishment, No. 599/144, 11th October, 1953, (NAC).

The cumbersome procedure of re-applying for new licenses at the expiration of the existing one appeared to have posed some challenges for some indigenous people of the province. In most cases, some indigenous applicants who applied for licenses to operate a repair industry were granted non-renewal licenses, implying that such licenses could be revoked by the prescribed officers of the colonial authorities without giving them options to renew those licenses.

The assortment of what appeared as stringent conditions imposed by the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917, regarding firearm licensing and import licenses posed significant challenges to some indigenous people of Calabar Province, despite being a 'gun society' where firearms served as "objects of material culture," implying that firearms served the varied political, economic and socio-cultural needs of indigenous people of the province. However, it is instructive to note that the imposition of a wide range of firearm regulations in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province, appeared to have been a response by the colonial authorities to curb unrestricted access to firearms, especially superior firearms by some indigenous people of the province, which led to issues of "politics of access to firearms"³²

Effects of the Challenges Encountered by Indigenous People of Calabar Province in Firearm Imports and Licensing 1917-1960

During the colonial era, the people of Calabar Province encountered some obstacles regarding issues of firearm imports and licensing because the imposition of a wide range of firearm regulations, which sought to regulate all aspects of firearms, posed some significant challenges while restricting their hitherto unfettered access to firearm ownership and usage, including firearm imports and licensing. The introduction of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917 in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, including Calabar Province led to some changes in firearm ownership and usage because possession and use of firearms, including firearm imports and licensing were largely regulated by the colonial authorities, while some indigenous people of the province struggled to satisfy the demands of the provisions of the Arms Ordinance Act of 1917.

This situation left an enduring effect on the province, ranging from the political through the economic to the socio-cultural needs of the people of the province, which included both the beneficial and the detrimental effects on the province. The challenges faced by some indigenous people of the province on firearm imports and licensing led to infractions of the Arms Ordinance Act, with regard to the people's engagement in smuggling of firearms. The necessity of firearms increased the demand for possession and use of firearms by some indigenous people of the province. The perceived cumbersome procedure of legally owning and using firearms in the province led some indigenous people of the province to embrace firearms ownership through the black market. Saheed Aderinto,³³ posit that it was cheap and tariff-free for those who acquired smuggled firearms. The argument here is that not having to pay excise duties imposed by the colonial authorities on licensing was an incentive for some indigenous people of the province to patronise smuggled firearms, though it was injurious to the economy of the province.

It should be noted that levies placed on applications for firearm licenses and other financial costs during the process of processing valid firearm licenses posed significant financial challenges to some indigenous people of the province, while they generated financial revenue to the colonial government. Therefore, the tendency for indigenous people of the province to patronise smuggled firearms as well engaging in the smuggling of firearms, led to some major economic effects, especially the loss of revenue by the colonial government.

A case of Ekpenyong Ita Hogan Bassey, an indigene of Calabar Province, who participated in the First World War, while he previously served as a Customs officer in the province before travelling to the United Kingdom for a law degree programme, highlights the numerous incidences of firearm smuggling that took place in the province during the colonial era. Hogan Bassey and his accomplices, Okon Ene and Edet Mfon, who were then serving as customs officers, facilitated the smuggling of 143,000 rounds of ammunition and percussion caps into the Calabar Province, through one Henry Mitchell, then Chief Officer of Elder Dempster shipping company. Henry Mitchell was offered a £15 bribe to convey those smuggled firearms from the UK to Nigeria,³⁴ which highlights the activities of smugglers in the province that emerged as a result of the challenges indigenous people of the province faced during the colonial period.

³²Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 57.

³³Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 198.

³⁴Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 31.

The growth of indigenous artisanal skills was one of the enduring consequences that resulted from the difficulties some indigenous people of Calabar Province faced in licensing and firearm imports. By imposing a series of firearm regulatory laws that appeared to have been cumbersome for some indigenous people of the province who were desirous of having legitimate ownership and usage of firearms but could not satisfy the requirements of the Arms Ordinance Act, some members of the province resorted to indigenous blacksmiths who through acquired artisanal skills, fabricated inferior firearms as substitute to the imported ones which were under firearm regulations. This led to the growth of indigenous artisanal skills, especially in the fabrication of locally made firearms that satisfied the firearm needs of some indigenous people of the province. G. Basden,³⁵ examines the artisanal growth of some indigenous blacksmiths, stressing how they “produced the bullets or shots from a variety of sources ranging from scrap iron to broken pots.”

The imposition of a wide range of firearm regulations left some communities vulnerable to external attacks, especially during intra and inter-ethnic clashes as some communities could not present ruthless military responses against invading opposition because their access to firearms were greatly restricted by the imposition of a wide range of firearm regulations, which required them to obtain valid firearm licenses, regardless of the difficulties involved in obtaining it. The challenges experienced by some indigenous people of the province in firearm imports and licensing affected the social aspects of firearm usage in the province. During the colonial era, the use of firearms, especially Dane guns, shaped the varied social engagements of the people of the province through ceremonial shooting, which evolved with the use of firearms to incite public spectacles during festivities in the province. By imposing a series of firearm regulations which regulated unfettered access to all classes of firearms usage in the province, it tended to whittle down a cherished social practice of using Dane guns for ceremonial shooting during festivities. Ceremonial shooting represented the social aspect of firearms usage as the booms of firearm shots incited public spectacle during ‘frenzied moments’ of some ceremonies.

Arthur Leonard’s,³⁶ “Lower Niger and its Tribe” examines the social and spiritual importance of ceremonial shooting among Ibibio people, suggesting that, during burial ceremonies of important chiefs, it was traditional to have firearm shots that lasted for eight days and eight nights. He argued that this practice had some deep-rooted spiritual meaning to

Ibibio people of Calabar Province. Saheed Aderinto,³⁷ also noted that ceremonial shooting was also popular among Efik people of Calabar Province, especially after the completion of burial rites of members of Ekpe society, which entailed having a fourteen to sixteen-day ceremony. During the burial ceremonies of Ekpe society members, it was common to have ceremonial shooting, especially during frenzied moments of the event. Therefore, the difficulties in obtaining firearm licenses by some indigenous people of the province appeared to have had some detrimental effects on the social aspect of firearms usage in the province because having to engage in ceremonial shooting entailed obtaining firearm licenses to possess and use firearms, whereas the perceived difficulties surrounding issues of obtaining firearm licenses threatened the flourishing of the growth of ceremonial shooting in the province, during the colonial era.

Conclusion

Despite the imposition of a wide range of firearm regulatory laws by the government of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, to curb unrestricted access to all classes of firearms, the attempt by some indigenous people of the province to comply with the new firearm regulatory regime appeared to have been cumbersome, especially in firearm imports and licensing as assortment of factors tended to miscue the intention of the colonial authorities in regulating all aspects of firearm ownership and use in the province. The expression of fear and anxiety by some colonial administrators that, unrestricted access to firearms by indigenous people of the province would result in a surge in firearm-related violence appeared to have been one of the most visible factors that influenced the attitude of some prescribed officers of the colonial authorities, resulting in assortment of challenges some indigenous people of the province encountered, especially in firearm imports and licensing, during the colonial era.

³⁵George. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, (London: Frank Cass, 1938), 306.

³⁶Arthur Leonard, *Lower Niger and Its Tribe*, (New York: Macmillan, 1906),175-176.

³⁷Aderinto. *Guns and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, 84.

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