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# International NGO Journal

July-December 2022  
ISSN: 1993-8225  
DOI: 10.5897/INGOJ  
[www.academicjournals.org](http://www.academicjournals.org)



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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **British colonial rule: Its impact on police corruption in Ghana**

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Received 7 October, 2022; Accepted 21 October, 2022

**Knowledge and perception of policing and police corruption in most developing societies, including Ghana, seem to reflect through the media. Yet, of course, police corruption is an old and multifaceted issue. In Ghana, it can be argued that it has historical roots extending to the period when professional policing was first introduced during the colonial era -1831. Police forces established during British colonial rule in most countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, and India, are perceived to be incredibly corrupt, violent, and exploitative. Contemporary policing in sub-Saharan Africa is a colonial legacy and in that capacity imperialism and its legacies have foreordained the nature and styles of policing, functions, structures, and accountability in the post-colonial period. As such, chronic corruption within the Ghanaian police service can be linked to the legacy of the British colonial authorities. The aim is to present the social and cultural context for understanding police corruption in Ghana. This paper examines a body of literature and explores various forms of social control, particularly, policing and argues that the existence and the practices of police corruption in contemporary Ghanaian society have a significant element of colonialism as the primary influential factor.**

**Key words:** Policing, colonial police, police corruption, and colonial rule.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article examines the extent to which contemporary corrupt practices within the Ghanaian police is a product of the country's colonial past. Knowledge and perception of the police and police corruption in most developing societies, including Ghana, seem to reflect through the media (Stapenhurst, 2000; Nogara, 2009; Chêne, 2010; Olken and Pande, 2012; Foltz and Opoku-Agyemang, 2015). Yet, of course, police corruption is an old and multifaceted issue. In Ghana, it has historical roots extending to the period when professional policing was first introduced during British colonialism; this led to the

institutionalisation of the concepts of corruption within the colonial police to aid in legitimising the authority of the colonial rule over the natives. It is noteworthy that the British Colonial era in Ghana (formerly known as the Gold Coast) was formalised in 1874 (Addo-Fening, 2013), until 1957 after Ghana gained independence. The interest of the British colonial authority and, indeed, other past colonial rules, for example, the Portuguese (in the 15th Century) were primarily raw materials, mainly Gold, which was a readily available product, hence the name Gold Coast until independence in March 1957 (Howard, 1999).

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To promote and preserve the interest of British colonial rule, the British colonial authority instituted units such as the colonial police (Gocking, 1997; Tankebe, 2008), developed and implemented regulations that replaced the traditional decentralised structure of policing and justice system before the colonial period. As noted by Killingray (1986) law and order were a significant aspect of British colonial governance in Africa, colonialism was, primarily exploitative, law and order exploited in the interest of the colonial authority over the prevailing traditional structures of policing that were practised before colonialism. According to Lange et al. (2006) the raw materials associated with pre-colonial societies (wealth) mostly influenced colonists to introduce extractive institutions, in this context, the colonial police. However, these extractive institutions produced an unequal class structure that has impacted negatively on post-colonial trajectories. Hence, this article argues that structural policing approaches introduced by the British colonial rule in Ghana, in turn, left a legacy of corrupt practices and institutionalised repressive policing style within the contemporary Ghanaian policing styles.

Discussing corrupt practices in developing societies such as Ghana, most views, perhaps unintentionally, see the police as the most corrupt institution, with limited consideration for the primary cause of police corruption. Police corruption in Pakistan, according to Malik and Qureshi (2020), is influenced by the concepts of kinship and the monopoly that political authority has over police conduct. Hills (2002) also argues that it would not be in the interest of the political elite in most post-colonial states to have an uncorrupted and transparent police institution, which suggests that police corruption is entrenched within the political culture of most developing sub-Saharan societies. Hence, this article aims to classify corrupt police practices, with an emphasis on the conduct of the colonial police and its impact on contemporary policing within the criminal justice system in Ghana. The discussions are presented in five sections; the first section considers the theoretical frameworks that ground the arguments presented in this article. This is followed by a discussion on pre-colonial policing and indigenous strategies of control and justice. This lends itself well to the subsequent second section which explores how security and order were maintained to enforce societal norms and implement judicial decisions under the concept of punishment and collective discipline during the pre-colonial period.

The article further focuses on colonial policing and corruption. The underlying cultural and primary factors necessitating the establishment of the colonial police are discussed. This section examines the corrupt intent of the colonial police, as it is argued to be the cause of contemporary police corrupt practices within the Ghanaian criminal justice system. Having discussed the development of police corruption, the final section looks at post-colonial police corruption and how the Ghana

Police is yet to shed its colonial legacy characteristics.

### Theoretical developments

The colonial police were the eyes and ears of the colonial authority and were dependent upon by the colonies as an instrument of direct dominion over the natives (Lange et al., 2006). The primary significant features of the colonial police were coercing labour, dealing with potential threats or risks to the colonial authority, providing safety and security on routes patronised by white merchants and protecting whites owned properties or goods (Killingray, 1986). Against this background, it can be argued that this selective form of colonial policing had a negative effect on the natives. The style of policing was predatory; colonial police officers could utilise their position and authority to exploit the natives as a means of patronage to the British colonial authority. Police forces established during British colonial rule in a range of countries, including Ghana, Nigeria and India, have been considered to be incredibly corrupt, violent and exploitative (Tankebe, 2008; Agozino and Head, 2007; Verma, 1999; Alemika, 1993). The use of violence and repression by the police during the colonial era denoted a separation in the relationship between the police and the communities (Maldar, 2005) which profoundly affected the subsequent development of policing in Ghana. As such, this article argues that corrupt practices within the contemporary Ghanaian police service can be linked to the legacy of the British colonial authorities.

The literature considered below provides key frameworks that ground the arguments presented. It is worth noting that most literature presents studies on police corruption in a variety of contexts within post-colonial societies but with limited consideration of the direct influence of colonial police corruption. However, regarding imperialistic heritage with inferences to policing advanced in this article as a determinant of police corruption, the related link to this is Mulinge and Lesetedi's (1998) study, which focussed on the legacy of the colonial authority and its influence in institutionalisation and tolerance of corruption both in the private as well as the public sector in sub-Saharan Africa. The study indicates that corrupt practices have attained a normative cultural and social status. Furthermore, Angeles and Neanidis (2015) write on 'the persistent effect of colonialism on corruption' and identify ethnic fractionalization under colonial rule as one of the determinants of corruption. Boateng and Darko's (2016) study examines the impact of colonialism on the legitimacy of the Ghanaian police and identifies that police behaviour, policies and practices are some of the areas that mirror the imperialistic approach to policing during British colonial rule. Likewise, the dilemma of the successive governments post-colonial era in Ghana was to distance itself from the colonial legacy of policing,

forging a new identity for the police from its colonial past, however, this realisation seems to have failed in the decolonisation of the paramilitary style of colonial policing. These key frameworks are discussed in depth throughout the article and developed in a way that captures the social foundations and conditions underpinning contemporary police corruption in Ghana.

Against this background, what remains to research is the direct influence and experience of British colonial police on contemporary police corruption in Ghana. It is acknowledged that the causality of police corruption in Ghana could have multiple factors, such as low remuneration, lack of transparency and abuse of legitimate authority (Newburn and Webb, 1999; Punch, 2000; Bayley and Perito, 2011; Hope, 2015; Newburn, 2015; Malik and Qureshi, 2020). This makes it challenging to establish a plausible cause. Considering colonialism as the genesis of institutionalising corrupt practices in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa (Mulinge and Lesetedi, 1998) cast shadows over the direct impact of colonial police corruption upon contemporary police corruption. Against this background, to give a foundational framework for police corrupt practices in Ghana, and to contribute to the literature on police corruption in developing societies, this article argues that contemporary police corruption in Ghana can be attributed to the style of policing inherited from the British colonial authority.

It is worth noting that the overarching objective of colonial rule (British colonial rule) was economic exploitation (Rimmer, 1978; Settles, 1996), and the colonial police were instrumental in this objective for the colonial state.

Colonialism, according to Johnson (1995) and Mulinge and Lesetedi (1998), was an international system of economic exploitation where powerful nations dominated weaker societies. The conquerors exercise their direct authority and dominion over the natives via colonial structures such as the police or exercise para-military authority or coercion to exploit the vulnerabilities of the natives. By its features, corruption is a complex social phenomenon. Nonetheless, in the context of police corruption in Ghana, the comprehensive functional definition of police corruption considered is taken from Hope (2015: 5), whereby:

*Police corruption is any action or omission, a promise of any action or omission, or any attempt of action or omission committed by a police officer or a group of police officers, characterised by police misuse of official position and motivated in significant part with the achievement of personal gain, or organizational gain or advantage.*

Corruption as presented above falls under a broader sense of police occupational deviance. It serves the purpose of the few, thus the elite in society, in this context

the colonial authority, does also involve the illegal use of professional power for personal gain and it may involve an officer or officers working in a coordinated effort to act violently towards the marginalised population (Sherman, 1978). It also encompasses dishonest facilitation of authority or payments extorted by the police from the natives; improper or unethical behaviour, such as violence; excessive authoritarian policing; and nepotism (Douvli and South, 2003; Gerber and Mandelson, 2008). Hence, as presented in this article, analysing police corruption in the post-colonial era is worth considering these broader perspectives. This is against the background that, policing in most developing societies is typified by both high and low-profile instances of corruption, illegitimate arrest and detention, excessive use of force and police authority, usage of abusive language, and the inability of the police to effectively serve the public, such as by following up on complaints (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative – hereafter, CHRI – 2007; Jauregui, 2016). Much could be discussed about police use of excessive force and authority with inferences to policing under colonial rule. In analysing the impact of the concept of colonial violence, it can be argued that within contemporary post-colonial societies, state institutions, such as the police, who may share a similar outlook with colonial police, ‘are likely to develop similar pre-dispositions, practices and norms’ (Thomas, 2012:7) in the treatment of the natives. This is because the defence of the colonial interest took precedence over service to the natives.

Policing in sub-Saharan Africa often takes the form of paramilitary operations, rather than the provision of services to the public (Laguna et al., 2010; Obaro, 2014). In Nigeria, for example, the Police Force is known to operate under an arrangement called ‘fire for fire’, suggesting that suspects apprehended or under police, guardianship risk losing their lives, high possibility of being shot if they attempt to escape. Years of police corruption coupled with limited effective control and prevention of crimes seem to have prompted a situation where extra-judicial killing appears to be the acknowledged modus operandi in managing individuals the police considers criminals (Obaro, 2014). This seems very similar to the mandate of the police during the colonial era where colonial police forces were mostly characterised by a para-military structure, an authoritarian imposition, explicitly established to conquer, control and exploit the indigenous people (Ahire, 1990).

Similarly, according to Bell (2013), the culture of colonial policing during the colonial era was characterised by paramilitarism, it was distinct from the civilised policing style considered common to Britain. An example of this is the Scramble for Africa (the period between 1884 and 1914) denoting an era when colonial police forces and armies were officially merged from different geographical locations to form the West African Frontier Force (aimed at controlling Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana and the

Gambia) (Papaioannou and Michalopoulos, 2016). The adoption of such policing style was integral to the political objective of the police in the colonies which entailed exploitative and protecting the elite (colonial authority) from the natives (Killingray, 1986, Tankebe, 2008). The function of the police was to legitimise British colonial authority, as identified by Thomas (2012); one of the characteristics of the imperial rule is the reliance on the colonial police authority for economic gains, for countering dissidents and for the general suppression of the natives.

One of the arguments considered through which colonial rule could be linked to contemporary police corrupt practices is corruption requires a well-developed centralised power characterised by differentiation of interest as a motivational factor to thrive. For the police to act in the best interest of the colonial authority, control was imposed from a central authority (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2013; Cheeseman and Fisher, 2019), such conditions needed to be nurtured to capitalised on structures conducive to police corrupt practices.

In the context of this article, the Ghanaian police are viewed in a particularly critical manner as, because of their legitimate state authority, they constitute a vital aspect of an empowering environment for promoting and maintaining public safety. However, this seems to fall short of expectations, as the investment in a centralised police power remained after the colonial authority departed (Eck 2018), a feature that is present within the contemporary structure of policing in Ghana. As Mulinge and Lesetedi (1998) suggest police corruption appears to be traits of fraudulent behaviour rooted in the historical context of British colonisation, behaviour instilled in the colonial police, the people (natives) and carried forward into the post-colonial societies. Change in political regimes did not seem to distance itself from the hegemonic colonial policing styles and practices. On the basis that most of the police in post-colonial societies, such as Ghana seem to function in a similar ideological and political context of colonial domination of power and control (Onyeozili, 2005). A system of policing that overlooks traditional concepts such as services to the natives coupled with the reluctant attitudes of the police to form a partnership with the community but rather serve the interest of the few, are some of the features of post-colonial policing inherited from the colonial culture of para-military styles of policing. As Cole (1999) posits, the experiences of colonial policing seem to have had a negative impact on contemporary knowledge and practices or the functions of post-colonial police in most developing nations. Likewise, according to Maldar (2005) the use of violence and repression during the colonial period suggest a shift in the communalism which seem to have characterised contemporary law enforcement in Ghana, an image that was uncharacteristic of law enforcement practices during the pre-colonial era (period before the 19th Century).

## Pre-colonial policing

Literature suggests that pre-colonial policing in Ghana was created to serve a heterogeneous and multi-tribal society, with different clans forming independent communities and following different traditional beliefs (Murdock, 1967; Dalglish, 2005; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2015). Boundaries were kept and managed by ethnicity and varied cultural practices. These different groups were small political entities, with limited bureaucratic organisational systems but where social order was formed along the lines of kinship, and political domination was limited (Kisangani, 2010; Osafo-Kwaako and Robinson, 2013). Traditional societies were organised under small chiefdoms, and implementation of regulations and conflict resolution practices were dealt with through a decision-making process within each tribe (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2013). One could argue that pre-colonial social orders were profoundly varied. These tribes were established on the standards of communalism as they were self-governing and autonomous.

An example of self-governing and autonomous pre-colonial non-western kingdom was the *Asanteman* (Ashanti State) (Austin, 2004), which did and still occupies the middle spectrum of Ghana. The Ashanti was well organised in chiefdoms with good loyal alliances in which various traditional units operated through a traditional linkage within the Ashanti kingdom. An organised form of policing was executed by traditional rulers with a mandate to organise field marshals to enforce the norms of the society (Boateng and Darko, 2016; Stapleton, 2016). Safety, security and law enforcement were achieved through indigenous techniques. For instance, law enforcement, traditional customs and social order were carried out via indigenous structures, such as dedicated chiefs or elders believed to have a direct link to the gods or ancestral spirits (Ajour, 2008). Crimes committed were considered offences against the deities, hence, a departure from traditional norms or customs, such as a corrupt act, or any crime committed, incurred the wrath of the ancestors, the individual, or inclusive of the extended family or the whole society was at risk of the spirits' anger (Ajour, 2008).

Additionally, pre-colonial societies also believed in the existence of a devil spirit, considered the purveyor of misfortunes, members of the traditional societies were made aware of when either of these spirits was at work. According to Ajour, these "*forces served as the police force whose vigilance was not only believed in but also relied on*" (2008:197). As Okafo (2007:7) states, "*the indigenous strategies of control, justice, and law in each pre-colonial African society had grown out of the society's traditions, customs, and native laws*". It is worth noting that traditional societies during the Gold Coast era (1874 – 1957) generally did not have professional full-time law enforcers. Instead, security and order were maintained

with dedicated armed men (Okafu, 2007; Kisangani, 2010). Maintenance of security and the wellbeing of society were carried out via the legitimate customary powers elders or chiefs. The chiefs exercised their judicial powers and relied on committed individuals such as the '*ahenfie polisi*' (palace police officer) to complete legal official obligations and security duties from their respective traditional states (Killingray, 1986; Tankebe, 2008).

If an individual breached traditional regulation, this was normally settled via an oath before a shrine in the name of an ancestral spirit, under the guidance of a designated chief priest. No fees were demanded other than, for example, palm wine as a significant aspect of the traditional 'judicial process' (Okeke, 2013). One of the primary functions of chief priests was to summon suspects and offenders for court hearings at the traditional council (Opolot, 2008; Igbo and Ugwuoke, 2013). The Ashanti Empire was exceptional in setting up units to conduct policing duties (Charney, 2016).

These units ('Akwansrafo', 'Twafo', 'Adonten' 'Akwanmofo' and 'Kyidom') were run by dedicated individuals, and policing services were mostly voluntary. Each of these units had a specific task, for example, the Akwansrafo were superintendents who patrolled commercial routes, maintained security and control of the movements of merchants, as well as collected tax for the Ashanti state (Badong, 2008; Tankebe, 2008; Boateng and Darko, 2016).

The maintenance of social order during the pre-colonial era was the obligation of indigenous institutions in charge of crime control and social conformity (Inyang and Abraham, 2013). There were few systematic laws and the social structure served to regulate conduct, which was largely under the authority of the different traditional figures responsible for dealing with all forms of criminality within distinctive parts of the traditional society (Inyang and Abraham, 2013). It is worth noting that the Ashanti state had individuals who were specifically authorised to maintain law and order; there was no professional police force in the form that is seen today (Tankebe, 2008). However, Francis (2012a) suggests that during the pre-colonial era the Akan society had a system of policing to react and deal with law violations and lawlessness. Studies have also identified that, within these traditional states, law enforcement was accomplished mostly through an informal social control system, such as the family group and larger community (CHRI, 2007; Tankebe, 2008).

This suggests that specialist crime control units were largely unnecessary as the vast majority of the traditional states relied upon the inescapability and omnipresence of ancestral spirits (Vold et al., 2002, Tankebe, 2008).

Pre-colonial crime prevention mechanisms were organised around the concepts of traditional religious practices, spiritual beliefs and ensuing moral rules. Law-abiding members of the community had the opportunity to

participate in community policing. Traditional rulers coupled with spiritual beliefs played a significant role in maintaining social and moral values (Igboin, 2016) based on the belief that ancestors were exceptionally dynamic in the culture and organization of pre-colonial life. Hence the fear of repercussions from engaging in any form of a criminal act or deviant behaviour was significant and prevented most forms of crime and corruption. Spiritual retribution, intervention and the concept of ancestral spirits compensating those who conformed to social standards and values were perceived as ever-present (Tankebe, 2008).

### **Punishment and collective discipline in pre-colonial period**

One of the defining features of the culture and organization of pre-colonial life was the notion of a collective discipline, the whole family, lineage and, perhaps, the clan being involved in enduring the punishments. As such, policing was a collective obligation of all adults. Many contemporary crimes such as corruption could not, therefore, have existed (Tankebe, 2008; Igboin, 2016). Many criminal acts or corruption were believed to have a detrimental impact not only on the perpetrator or the immediate family but on all extended family members. This was generated through the collective belief in ancestral practices, based on the idea that spirits and supernatural entities played a part in pre-colonial life (Anderson, 1991; Gumo et al. 2012). Such spirits could also heal, punish offenders and ensure protection for those who revered them (Gyimah-Boadi, 2002). These spirits were accepted as omnipresent, embodied in stones, streams, wind, seas, trees, mountains and rivers (Opokuwaa, 2005). These communities thus had some type of customary police service, but it was very different from what was to be set up during the era of colonialism. As Tankebe (2008) states, before the 'professionalisation' of the Ghanaian police, the contemporary style of policing did not exist in most African societies.

Belief in ancestral spirits was and is widely practised if not all, most tribes in Ghana; ancestral spirits are believed to exist at a higher level than human beings, capable of bestowing blessings or curses (punishments in a form of illnesses) upon the living descendants (Chiorazzi, 2015). African ancestral spirituality acknowledges that practices inform and reflects every aspect of human life, ancestral belief is considered holistic, for instance, sickness within the indigenous family could be considered as an imbalance of the body or an individual's social life which could lead to a breakdown in one's family relationship with the ancestral spirits (Chiorazzi, 2015). The ancestral spirits were considered a source of prosperity, protection from dangers and guidance for all aspects of pre-colonial life

(Opokuwaa 2005; Gumo et al., 2012; Awoyemi, 2013). These spirits of pre-colonial religion played a significant role in some traditional parts of Ghana, and perhaps still do in some instances. There were different ancestral spirits and gods (Opokuwaa, 2005; Bellucci, 2010). One such god, Obosom Nana Abana Akonedian and her shrine (Bosomfie), located at Larteh Kubease in the Eastern region of Ghana, is believed to deal out justice as well adjudicate disputes concerning chieftaincy, all forms of criminal or non-conforming behaviours, and other issues related to land and family. Obosom Tano refers to ancestral spirits which had their spiritual divinity sourced from River Tano. They aimed to maintain family well-being and social order.

Pre-colonial society beliefs and practices were densely populated by spiritual beings that were considered as dispensers of favours and misfortunes (Ezenweke, 2008). The distinction between good and evil or a corrupt character was paramount. As Tankebe (2008) argues, one of the most recognisable aspects of the pre-colonial belief in retribution was the thought that the punishments of ancestral spirits and other gods had at their heart the triple components of 'promptness', 'escapelessness' and 'seriousness' (Tankebe, 2008; see also Abotchie, 1997). The idea of promptness relates to the conviction that the ancestral disciplines were not subject to the delays that one may experience within contemporary justice systems (Tankebe, 2008), and there was no potential for appeal. 'Escapelessness' implies that the ancestral spirits were thought to be all-knowing; no violation of the standards of society got away from their observation. This conforms comparatively with procedural fairness and justice.

Ancestral spirits were or perhaps still are considered as disembodied spirits who are upright in their dealings with the living, which suggests they were beyond any form of criticism (Kiernan, 1982; Tempels, 1969; Ezenweke, 2008).

Ancestral spirits and their impact on pre-colonial culture were not burdened on by contemporary attributes of corruption. Their actions were inscrutable and just on the basis that their authority over the living surpassed the human role in the moral and judicial system. By their standards justice was dispensed without any form of external influence, such as corruption. Suggesting that the concepts of corrupt conduct was not a feature of the culture and organization of pre-colonial life, but was institutionally introduced in the police, and perhaps the society as a whole via the instrumentalities of the colonial authority and colonial police. Nonetheless, punishments dispensed by ancestral spirits were always considered just retribution for breaking societal values and norms (Kiernan, 1982). Due to this, people consciously or subconsciously allowed themselves to be held accountable and engaged in fair dealings. Additionally, those in authority were perceived to be in moral alliance with powerful members of the traditional society and the gods.

This suggests that any form of social deviance or corruption would not have been associated with the 'police' during the pre-colonial era. However, this system was replaced by the British colonist's professional police who usurped the traditional system of law enforcement (Brogden, 1987; Tankebe, 2008). The exploration of the colonial police in Ghana that follows illustrates this point.

### **Colonial policing and corruption**

Before the era of colonial rule, (including British colonial rule between 1821 and 1957), there were a series of tribal conflicts. The Ashantis, as discussed previously, had well-structured traditions and regional autonomy through which they endeavoured to expand their territorial control from the interior part of Ghana to other parts, such as the coastal areas which were occupied by other ethnic groups such as the Fanti and Ga. However, this was met with resistance, after a series of confrontations between the Ashanti Empire and other tribes, such as the Fanti state, the traditional leadership of the Fanti became concerned about their safety. Such instability arguably created an opportunity for the British colonial authority to cajole the Fanti state into becoming a comprador group (Fanon, 1963) and worked cooperatively against the Ashanti. This approach led the Fanti to sign an agreement in 1844 giving British colonial rule a centralised judicial role as well as enabling occupation of Ghana (Allott, 1960; Dennis, 2000; Belmessous, 2014). The bond of 1844 provided protection and security to the signatory states and provided the political momentum for the British colonists to legitimise their authority over the Gold Coast (Howard, 1999).

Captain George Maclean introduced a professional police force in the Gold Coast in 1831 (Gocking, 1997; Tankebe, 2008), for the defence of settlement of the colonial authority. Initially employing just 129 officers known as the Gold Coast Corps, and later as the Royal Corps, their sole duty was to patrol trade routes to protect colonial interests, colonial merchants, and exercise power over the conquered populace in the interests of the British (Mawby, 2008). The established colonial police were disbanded in the early 1860s and replaced by what was considered a more productive police force recruited from a West Indian Regiment. Perhaps disbanding the Royal African Corps was considered a necessity, firstly, to neutralise any form of corrupt behaviour from the natives that may have been informally introduced in the society by the colonist. Secondly, prevent or neutralise police deviant behaviour against the colony and lastly, promote the colony's zero tolerance of services offered to the natives via tribal loyalty or kinship. As Ukpabi (1974) suggest, the colonial authority could not rely on the services provided by the Royal African Corps, particularly, when they had to be instructed to act against their kith and kind in the same community. Arguably, an approach

to promote and serve in the interest of the elite (few in society); which seems to be one of the similar features of contemporary policing in Ghana.

When the British colonists gained total control over the Gold Coast in 1871, it became necessary to create a police force to manage rebellious ethnic tribes (Mensah, 2018). For this purpose, the British brought an army of 700 Hausa men from Northern Nigeria and the West Indies to the Gold Coast. Out of that number, 400 served under the Gold Coast Constabulary in 1871, as part of the Police Force Ordinance, which was established around the time. As the years passed, more Ghanaians were included in the force, and this later became the Gold Coast Police Force (Mensah, 2018). All the commissioned officers at that time were British. In 1876, the name of the force changed to the Gold Coast Constabulary (Anane-Appiah, 2011; Police.gov.gh, 2018), and an Ordinance passed in 1894 provided lawful support to the development of non-military police in the colony. By 1902, the police had been segregated into sections, including General, Escort, Mines and Railway Police units, which were legislated by the Police [Amendment] Ordinance of 1904 (Ghana police service, online, 2018; Mensah, 2018). The composition and objectives of the colonial police were varied and influenced by its colonial mandate (Maldar, 2005). The Gold Coast Constabulary was established with a militaristic role to control the natives (in the interest of the colonial rule), for example in 1896, the then Governor of the Gold Coast ordered that “*no police should be stationed where there were no Europeans*” (Gillespie, 1955 cited in Tankebe, 2008: 190), suggesting that the colonial police became subservient to the colonist and provision of security and safety was for the powerful elite. However, it can be argued that should the natives (traders) attempt to access the security provided by the Gold Coast Constabulary, perhaps would have to willingly pay the police or the police would capitalise on the opportunity to extort payments from the natives in return for security and safety. Allegiance to the colonist suggested inequality in police service delivery across the socio-economic cultures.

The colonial police service was primarily established to maintain the law and order of the colony, and to promote, defend and deliver imperialistic interests, such as protecting the properties and personal safety of the colonists (Killingray, 1986). This suggests that the policing style was more likely underpinned by a corrupt intent rather than a desire to provide services equally across cultures. Partisanship and colonial structures of repression seem to have corrupted the role of the colonial police, since the obligation of the Gold Coast Constabulary was duty or allegiance limited to the colonial authority (Killingray, 1986; Addo-Fening, 2013). Angeles and Neanidis (2015) argue that the British settlement in Ghana may have contributed to the worse socioeconomic outcome, in this context corruption. On the basis that the

British colonial authority placed itself at the top of the social structure, heavy reliance on structures such as the paramilitary style of colonial policing provided the capacity to control the natives and exploit the resources (Mawby, 2008; Gariba, 2014). Likewise, British colonial rule in Ghana suggests a higher degree of corruption among the chiefs (Ali et al., 2020), as previously mentioned, ‘compradors’ to the colonial state. Pre-colonial Ghana was characterised by self-governing and autonomous tribes, hence in the absence of a central authority, in addition to the colonial police, colonial control over the natives had to be carried out through chiefs. British colonial authority provided greater autonomy to the chiefs, duty and allegiance was to the colonial rule, which subsequently reinforced their traditional authority, and undermined their accountability to the natives, as a result became autocratic, repressive, corrupt and insensitive to the natives (Alemika, 2009; Ali et al., 2020).

It is worth acknowledging on one hand that although the British colonial settlers were small in population as compared with the natives, however, the economic interest, control over the natives and resources denotes settlement of a more powerful British colonial authority (the powerful elite) (Lange et al., 2006). On the other hand, the capacity of the natives to counter or provide a similar opposition structure diminished (Wolfe, 2006). According to Bell (2013), colonial policing was typified by para-militarism, which can be contrasted with the civilised type of policing established in London in 1829, especially as professional policing was first introduced in Ghana in 1831. The arguments provided is that the principles which underpinned the introduction of the police in Ghana should have replicated the principles that governed the establishment of the police in England in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel. According to Peel’s principles of law enforcement, the police should treat all citizens with respect, use only minimum force, and prevent crime and disorder, rather than repressing the citizens via military force.

The Peelian focus was on crime prevention by securing the willing cooperation of members of the community in voluntary observance of the law to secure public trust and respect (Reiner, 2000; Lentz and Chaires, 2007; Mawby, 2013). However, in Ghana, it was mostly the case that police exercise of authority disregarded normative requirements of services when dealing with indigenous members of the colony (Tankebe, 2008). This was largely influenced by the corrupt intent of colonial authority, the structure of subjugation, cultural differences and class positions. Andvig (2008), states that one of the principles adopted by the colonists was to centralise any form of colonial administration. In this case, heads of administration (in this context, the police) were accountable to the colonists and not the colonised public.

As mentioned previously, colonial policing by the British was essentially to control, repress, manage, exploit and repress the natives (Mawby, 2008; Gariba, 2014), with

little concern for fairness and accountability because these were not considered part of police duties during colonial rule. Some studies also consider the colonial period as an era that impeded the internal process of developing and nationalising traditional states and practices by the introduction of alien and authoritarian leadership styles on native societies (Fanon, 1967; Washbrook, 1992; Wa Mui, 2010).

Studies have identified that policing practices associated with the colonial past persist in most contemporary African societies, including Ghana (Brogden, 1987; Tankebe, 2008; Bell, 2013; Marenin, 2014). Political elite use of the police to suppress opposition in human rights violation, and over reliance on police authority to control the populace, police brutality, as well as inequity in police service delivery across different socio-economic classes (Alemika, 1988, 2009; CHR, 2007; Tankebe, 2008). Thus, latter-day corruption is likely to be an outcome of the colonial system of rule and its pursuit of resources (Bell, 2013; Emsley, 2014; Igboin, 2016; Boateng and Darko, 2016). According to Onyeozili (2005), the development of the European police powers in Africa is reflective of European interests in the continent, where the primary objective of the police was to advance the interests of the colonial authority. The police engaged in oppressive governance by suppressing dissidents fighting against colonial authority.

Policing in Africa is a colonial legacy and because of this imperialism and its legacies have foreordained the nature and styles of policing and accountability of the police in the post-colonial period (Francis, 2012b). Thus, on the one hand, colonial policing became a salient institution across most sub-Saharan African countries. On the other hand, decentralised policing practices that existed in the traditional states became obsolete. The structure and mode of operation of the colonial police became centralised and unaccountable to the colonised people. During colonial rule, chiefs or local government officials were allocated to prominent 'comprador' individuals (such as local chiefs) who oversaw the administration of the judiciary, police, tax collection and so forth. Although they were designated chiefs, as stated previously, they were not accountable to the natives of the land but to the colonial administrators (Fanon, 1963; Acemoglu et al., 2014; Williams and Le Billion, 2017). These basic foundations have characterised law enforcement within Ghana ever since. As Onyeozili (2005) contends, this model of policing subjected customary informal law to an authorization system with forceful concepts based in Western ideologies of policing.

It is worth noting that colonial policing had two main characteristics: firstly, in relation to the structure of the police force. It was to be centralised and militaristic in the interest of the colonist (Anderson and Killingray, 1991; CHRI, 2007; Gariba, 2014). Secondly, the colonial police force was not characterised by legitimacy. The police maintained and promoted – often through severe

violence, the interest of colonial rule. The colonial police were loyal to the colonial government rather than being, for instance, community-based service and the police sanctioned a repressive system of law enforcement during the colonial era (Kratcoski and Celubak, 2000). The system of colonial policing in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa thus provided a limited opportunity for transparency and accountability (Walsh et al., 1994; Mawby, 2003; Reiner, 2000). The colonists established new laws that supplanted effective and traditional regulations and practices, as well as indigenous tribunals and justice. Additionally, with the advent of colonialism came the distortions of the customary foundations and qualities which had from time immemorial supported and sustained relationships, maintained accountability and promoted the security of lives and property in pre-colonial African traditional societies (Onyeozili, 2005). As a result, the colonial police in sub-Saharan Africa held very little legitimacy this has continued to a great extent in policing in most post-colonial societies, including Ghana (Francis, 2012b; Tankebe, 2008). It is a system of colonial policing with limited opportunity for police transparency and accountability (Walsh et al., 1994; Mawby, 2003; Reiner, 2000), which deserves further elaboration.

### **Post-colonial police corruption: A product of British colonial history**

Independence for Ghana began in 1951. One of the key policies set out for independence by the first post-colonial Prime Minister, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, was the Africanisation of the police force (Deflem, 1994). This meant that changes were needed for the public to be able to relate to the Ghanaian police, specifically professional changes and change of authority, which meant that positions within the police force occupied by the British would have to be occupied by Ghanaians. When Ghana eventually attained independence in 1957, Mr E.T. Madjitey was the first Ghanaian appointed as the commissioner of the Ghanaian police (Aning, 2006; Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2009). This appointment was a significant step in symbolising that the Ghanaian police was to focus on the expectations and the needs of the people of Ghana.

The name Ghana Police Force was changed to Ghana Police Service to give the institution a human face and, importantly, to help the police to be regarded as serving the interests of the public. This approach was intended as a way of distancing itself from the past colonial policing styles. Notably, when Dr Nkrumah was addressing the first graduation of police recruits in 1959 at the Police College, he stated that:

*There are colonial police forces, which exist to enforce the authority of a foreign power on a colonial people. In such forces, this will be demonstrated by the fact that the*



*police will be peremptory and even brutal in their dealings with the inhabitants of the colony while they will be ingratiating and subservient to those in authorities. In a free and independent country, the conduct of the police must be the exact reverse of this. They must demonstrate to the people at large that the country is free and independent by behaving towards the ordinary man in the street with exactly the same politeness as they would behave towards those in superior positions* (CHRI, 2007:12).

It can be argued that the statement was meant to convey to Ghanaians that the new political leadership of the nation was keen on setting up a police service that would serve, maintain and ensure the rights of the Ghanaian public. This reflected the desire for Ghana to be regulated by acceptable values and norms of police conduct. Arguably, this was the era that marked the beginning of a form of post-colonial police professionalism which had as its aim to avoid exploitation of the vulnerable and uphold the interests of the Ghanaian public (Gariba, 2014). However, this realisation was short-lived; the paramilitary style of colonial policing crept into the fold of the police. On the 2nd of January 1964, a police officer attempted to assassinate President Kwame Nkrumah, but the attempt was unsuccessful (Adekson, 1976).

Nonetheless, in the wake of this attempted assassination, the Police Commissioner and other senior police officers and prominent members of society, such as politicians, were detained. In doing this, the President made it known that he did not trust the Ghanaian police. This led to the belief that the Ghanaian police were hugely susceptible to political influence and corruption. Although precautionary measures were taken to curb political influence and corruption of the police, this did not materialise as President Nkrumah had hoped and, on the 24th of February 1966, both the police and the military joined forces to overthrow Nkrumah's government (Annan, 2016).

The police were heavily involved in the coup. Its actions in this regard could arguably be considered another form of political corruption and authority exercised over police officers. In other words, a subjugated political class influenced the police as part of a strategy to overthrow an elected government. Hence, to avoid the police being corrupt and so as not to experience a similar fate, the succeeding government (the National Liberation Council) included four police officers and four military officers in its governance structure (Harvey, 1966; Annan, 2016). The National Liberation Council enacted the Police Service Act 1965, which made some provisions for "*the organisation of the police service, the appointment, promotion and retirement of police officers and the conditions of service, disciplinary proceedings and other matters relating to the police service*" (CHRI, 2007:13).

It is noteworthy that measures have been introduced to curb political influence, police corruption and to scrutinise

police conduct. The Police Service Act 1965 is one of these. The 1969 Constitution established the Ghana Police Council. Police legislation, which is still valid today, was then passed based on the 1969 Constitution (Aning, 2006). The Police Service Act covered the functions of the Ghanaian police, structures and conditions for the administration of the police, police misconduct, and unacceptable police services and complaints procedures (Quantson, 2006; CHRI, 2007).

These measures were perhaps taken so that the Ghanaian police could leave behind its oppressive past and attempt to counter police corruption. This would increase police legitimacy through being more accountable to the public instead of serving the interests of the elite in contemporary society in Ghana. However, corrupt practices in the Ghanaian police and the centralised state-controlled system introduced under the British colonial rule cannot yet be considered a thing of the past. As an example, structurally, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) who is appointed by the President heads and supervises operational procedures of the Ghanaian police. The IGP has the power to delegate functions to individuals within the police according to what he or she deems fit (CHR 2007). Against this background, it can be argued that the extent to which the Ghana Police Service (GPS) could be independent from the state may be problematic, as the command structures within the Ghanaian police is politically influenced. Likewise, traditionally, the Ghanaian public often associates the Ghana police service with the government, and this has led to the popular nickname for the police- "Aban", which in the Akan Ghanaian language means 'government'. As Gariba (2014) suggests:

*The GPS is perceived as a branch of government that has become subservient to political authority instead of focusing on the provision of service to humanity. The GPS has therefore been tagged as insensitive to the people, politically biased, brutal in character, and not amenable to change even within the framework of contemporary democratic policing practice (2014: 157).*

This implies that the application of the concept of police professionalism as it was projected by Dr Kwame Nkrumah in his address during the graduation ceremony of the first police recruits at the Police College in 1959 has somehow not occurred or it has been wiped out by Ghana's turbulent political history (CHRI, 2007, see also Gariba, 2014). It is as if the colonial history of the Ghanaian police, despite more than half a century of reform; continues to influence its style of policing. Indeed Atuguba (2003) states that, the contemporary Ghana Police Service is still principally controlled by a political class and is used to ensure the security and safety of that class. It also continues to be rooted in colonial styles that are often violent, repressive and militaristic. The examples considered in this article set out some of the different

types of corrupt practices experienced within contemporary Ghanaian police service. In a media report from the Citi Newsroom, Adogla-Bessa (2019a) accounts of police use of force (brutality) against law students who were on a protest march to demand for a reform within the Ghana legal education system. At least 500 students partook in the peaceful protest heading towards the Presidency in the Greater Accra region, however, the protest was met with police brutality from the Accra Regional police using water cannons and rubber bullets, at least 13 protesters were arrested and several other injured. Although there was condemnation from the government regarding the conduct of the police, nonetheless, the police justified their use of force by stating that the protesters were impeding traffic. In the same year, according to Adogla-Bessa (2019b), relatives of a 35-year-old besieged the Tafo Pankrono Divisional Police Command, in the Ashanti region on the bases that officers who were on patrol from the Division had beaten a man to death. The deceased, Kofi Poku was chased by officers upon his refusal to stop. The relatives stated that the officers subjected Kofi Poku to extreme violence and he became unconscious, Kofi Poku was subsequently taken to the hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative - CHRI (2007) conducted a study into police accountability in Ghana and identified instances of police corrupt practices, in particular, police brutality, repression, and negligence. In 2006, according to the CHRI (2007) based on a report from Ghana Web news article, a police officer knocked a trader off a bicycle at Madina market, a suburb of Accra. The trader subsequently got injured but was not given medical attention – the officer rather took him to the police station. However, the trader was unable to respond to any questions from the police officer as a result of the injuries sustained. The police, nonetheless, measured the trader's unresponsiveness and disorientation on an account of drunkenness, and was locked up. After being locked up for eight hours without medical care, his condition deteriorated, it took a different police officer who identified the risk of death in police custody, and the injured trader was then taken to hospital for urgent medical attention.

CHRI (2007) also reports that in 2006, a man had complained to his local police station in Kasoa (an urban town in the Awutu Senya District in the Central region of Ghana) that a land he had purchased was being encroached. According to the report, four police officers responded, however, demanded 200,000.00 cedis (now 20.00 Ghana cedis) from the complainant before dealing with the issue. The complainant, perhaps with limited option paid the bribe, the police officers eventually dealt with the encroachment. In another example, in the early part of 2006 (around April) in Dansoman, a suburb of Accra, police officers shot at a taxi killing all the occupants. Those in the taxi had been robbed and were in pursuit of the offenders. The police flagged the taxi to

stop, but it did not, hence, the police subsequently fired at the taxi killing all the occupants. CHRI (2007) also pointed out that illicit police corrupt practices, abuse of police power and their inability to react to most of the public's needs have a devastating impact on the public and criminal justice process:

*When cases are reported at police stations, it often becomes an opportunity to collect bribes. They create the impression that they cannot help much; sometimes advising victims to go home and let sleeping dogs lie. But immediately some few thousand cedis change hands they come alive with enthusiasm to attend to the work for which they are paid with taxpayers' money (CHRI, 2007:28).*

Additionally, literature on corruption in Ghana has portrayed the Ghanaian police as the most corrupt institution in the country (CDD – Ghana, 2000; Atuguba, 2003; Ghana Integrity Initiative 2005, 2011; Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative – CHRI, 2007; Armah-Attoh, 2014). Table 1 indicates a 12-year trend in corruption from 2002 to 2014, indicating that most of the Ghanaian populace (ranging between 69 and 89%) perceives some or all members of the Ghana police to be the most corrupt within the criminal justice system, and Ghana as a whole (Armah-Attoh, 2014).

The extent of corruption in some public institutions in Ghana is disturbing, especially if the focus is placed on various 'hot spot' public organizations, such as the Judiciary and the Police (CDD, 2000: 234). It is noteworthy that in the quest for effective management and implementations of traffic regulations, there is also the high probability of the police engaging in street-level corrupt practices. As previously stated flouting traffic regulations becomes an opportunity for the police to make illegitimate gains; taking bribes mostly from commercial drivers (Jauregui, 2016). One of the most noticeable public-police corruption experiences in Ghana occurs habitually at the street-level, as Norman et al. (2017) identified, street-level policing is often characterised by the police acceptance of tokens (money) from commercial drivers who have flouted traffic regulation to overlook the offence. The police on the other hand, may lack or have limited awareness that the acceptance of gifts fall in the definition and understanding of police corrupt practices (Norman et al., 2017). This is not to suggest that the police are unprofessional in their conduct or ineffective, but in their objective as a law enforcement agency, such as promoting public safety and implementing traffic regulations, there seems to be a high proportion of the Ghanaian police engaging in street-level corrupt practices. This is a view supported by the CHRI:

*It is regrettable and a pity to see our police personnel who patrol our highways extorting money from drivers in*

**Table 1.** Trends in Corruption: CDD and Afro-Barometer (Armah-Attoh, 2014).

	2002	2005	2008	2012	2014	Change 2012-2014	Change since question was first asked
The police	79	81	86	94	89	-5	+10
National governments official	--	66	77	91	86	-5	+20
Members of parliament	--	59	74	90	85	-5	+26
Judges and magistrates	70	72	79	90	85	-5	+15
Tax officials of Ghana revenue authority	--	70	79	90	85	-5	+15
District chief executives	--	--	--	89	84	-5	--
President and officials in his office	47	56	70	87	83	-4	+36
Local governments representatives	--	60	71	86	83	-3	+23
Officials of bectoral commission	--	--	--	--	81	--	--
Business executives	63	--	--	--	82	--	+19
Traditional leaders	--	--	68	--	78	--	+10
Religious leaders	41	--	--	--	69	--	+28

Source: Armah-Attoh (2014).

*the full glare of the public without shame instead of checking that traffic regulations are effectively observed by motorists* (2007: 28).

The case studies considered thus far suggests that the populace's view of the contemporary Ghanaian police seems to be of an organization embedded with corrupt practices. Now, considering the British colonial legacy of paramilitary policing, the colonial police was a strong arm of the colonist, accountable to the colonial rule, the police was regarded and considered as the protector of the colonial regime, as the colonial police enforced laws and policies administered by the colonial rule (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). From the case studies discussed thus far, this appears to be a colonial legacy inherited by the postcolonial police in Ghana. The police use of force to control the public but not protect the community, operating with limited focus on public consent and tend to secure the interest of the few (the dominant elite), suggesting contemporary police cultures influenced by the colonial past (Brogden, 1987; Deflem, 1994; Marenin, 2014). It is worth considering that the standards and the regulatory measures that govern police officers' conduct and the disciplinary measures when these are breached are set out in the Police Service Instructions (PSI); this is a set of conduct guidelines published by the Inspector General of Police (CHRI, 2007; Ghana Police Service, 2010). It is noteworthy that these measures are largely centred around checks on internal police conduct, suggesting that there is not much scope for the public to access these guidelines to hold the police accountable (CHRI, 2007; Ghana Police Service, 2010). It also implies that the guidelines can only be adopted and implemented by more senior officers to mete out discipline for misconduct to relatively junior officers. The Police Service Instructions do not have any significant bearing on officers

who are higher ranking than Chief Inspectors (CHRI, 2007). Arguably, this is yet another vestige of the colonial foundations of the Ghanaian police.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to explore colonial policing and its impact on contemporary police corruption in Ghana. To achieve this aim, it provided a comprehensive social and cultural context of police corruption. It elaborated on indigenous strategies of social control and justice during the pre-colonial era and identified that there was no recognised, specially trained professional unit to oversee the daily maintenance of law and order. Policing was a collective effort of all members of the traditional state, and spiritual gods were considered as maintainers of social and moral order.

However, this traditional system of policing was replaced by the British form of professional police which usurped the traditional structures of maintaining law and order. It also identified that the colonial police service was primarily established to maintain the law and order of the colony, and to promote, defend and deliver the imperialistic interest, such as protecting the properties and personal safety of the colonialists. It examined post-colonial police corruption and argued that the class structures and inequalities developed during the British colonial period have been exacerbated by post-colonial states and styles of policing. Thus, the structure and style of colonial policing had impacted upon police corruption in contemporary police work within the Ghanaian police service which remained wedded to maintaining the security and safety of the propertied and political class. Although the authority of the Ghanaian police did change substantially during the post-colonial period, however, the

police continue to be rooted in colonial styles that are often corrupt, repressive, and violent.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author, Kofi Odei Addo, certifies that, I have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial, or nonfinancial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge, or beliefs) with a third party whose interests could be positively or negatively influenced by the subject matter discussed in this manuscript.

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