



Involvement of Indians in state policing in Kenya, up to 1895

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Abstract: *In historical and contemporary geo-political establishments, the enforcement of the law, the execution of state intent, and the definition and preservation of social order have relied on the structure, motive and interests of policing therein. Policing has always existed in societies, and in the absence of policing, the state would be confined to immeasurable social instability and disorder. In pre-colonial Kenya, the establishment of a police force was amongst the most integral strategic moves made by the British and, perhaps, the basis behind the quick annexation of the colony and subduction of its people. In establishing the police force in Kenya before 1895, the British prioritized Indians, who were considered more effective, cooperative, and, therefore, suitable. This paper traces the involvement of Indians in state policing in Kenya up to 1895. It describes the historical foundations of state policing in the Kenyan colony and the place of Indians in the force in the period thereof, grounded on a combination of desk reviews and oral interviews. The paper documents that Indians and the Indian policing system were the foundation of policing in Kenya before 1895 and that the Indians in the force primarily advanced the interests of the British, namely; the establishment of colonial control in Kenya; protecting the economic interests of the colonizers; ending slavery and slave trade, and providing security services to missionary activities.*

Key Words: *Policing, colony, Kenyan, Indian,*

1. INTRODUCTION :

The history of policing in Africa is rooted in the foundations of European policing, where policing skills and practices were developed over several decades of state-building (Baker, 2008). In Kenya, the Indian minorities were an integral part of the initial police force (Chebai, 2001). The first police officers were Indians, and even the initial police-related statutes: the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Act, and the Police Act, were borrowed intact from British India (Wolf, 1973;401). The Indian involvement in the Kenyan police force began in 1887 with the beginning of trade and the arrival of the British East African Company at Mombasa (Foran, 1962). The force was necessary to prevent constant attacks from savage tribes along the trade route, protect the interests of the British government, and ensure smooth commerce (Gimode, 2007;227). Indians played a significant role in the debut of the Kenyan force, contributing not only to its growth, stability, effectiveness and usefulness in establishing the Kenyan colony. This paper documents the involvement of Indians in state policing in Kenya up to 1895, tracing the development of the force and the roles played by Indians in its establishment.

2. METHODOLOGY :

The study employed a descriptive research design, Triangulating primary and secondary historical sources for an objective investigation of the involvement of Indians in state policing in Kenya up to 1895. Historical information analysis leveraged a desk review of books, journal articles, reports, and newspapers relevant to the area of focus, supplemented by oral interviews with key informants with rich information on Kenya's pre-colonial and colonial history.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS :

Historical foundations of state policing before 1884

Although the boundary between police and policing is ambivalent, the institution of "the police" is a global phenomenon with a clear distinction between "policing" as a method and "the police" as an institution (Lundman, 1980; 67). Although private policing has not received much attention in history, private policing has grown alongside state policing. In commercial police work, private policing has supplemented state policing in business-related activities, including thief-catching (Bittner, 1974:17; Shearing & Stenning, 1987). According to Rawlings (2012), the industrial revolution prompted the creation of the police in Europe to protect the interests of the capitalists.

The goal of colonial policing was suppressing disorder in the subject people within and outside Africa (Clayton, A., & Killingray, D.1989). The British used preventive police in Colombo, Bombay, Jamaica and British Guiana. It has



been argued that colonial policing was majorly linked with achieving the commercial interests of expanding capitalism by protecting sources of raw materials, minerals and markets for manufactured goods (Senior, 1997; 129) Colonial policing varied significantly within colonies in structure, law and policing cultures. Nonetheless, common characteristics of colonial policing cultures prevailed, although they were not necessarily unique to the colonies (Bell, 2013; 3).

British colonial policing in Africa modelled itself after the Indian and Irish paramilitary policing model because of its effectiveness. Tobias (1977) says that India was "crucial in the spread of the Irish model throughout the British empire" He says;

"The Indian police were the first overseas to be formed on Irish lines and were the largest of those that followed the path. The Indian police service was to be a major formative influence (cited in Verma 1988; 355)."

In all colonial areas, the upkeep of law and order was a fundamental factor in the political economy (Baker, 2008). The British introduced police in West Africa to end the slave trade, encourage legitimate commerce and protect missionary activity (Beek Et al., 2017).

In British East Africa, a small group of armed soldiers known as *askaris*, which means "soldiers" in Kiswahili, was engaged by the Imperial British East Africa Company to carry out police responsibilities in Mombasa starting in 1887 (Foran 1962;6). The company had a royal license for the administration of some of East Africa. The first "true" police force in Kenya was created in 1896 at Mombasa, with Assistant Superintendent Ewart serving as its commander. This was after the British Foreign Office took over management of British East Africa from the company. Police forces in British protectorates in East Africa were established and deployed as military outfits characterized by unique names. These forces took up military and police duties, with brutal and uncivil traits that have dominated police practice in Africa to date. Furthermore, members of the police forces were recruited into armies of occupation, with Colonial authorities deliberately fuelling ethnic prejudice between the strangers recruited into the forces and their host communities (Alemika, 2009;495).

Emergence and roles of Indians in state policing in Kenya, up to 1895

Before colonialism, every community in Africa had a police force and intelligence agencies that allowed residents to assess the advantages and disadvantages of their neighbours (Ndeda, 2006). The majority of the localities required the age groups to conduct information gathering (Gold, 1978:86; Ndeda, 2006; 27). Intelligence agencies were tasked with finding out about the weaponry, the guards, and the warriors of the adversary. In 1895, for example, the Nandi, through their intelligence, became aware of British presence, and when traders Dick and West trespassed their area, they were immediately attacked (Ndeda 2006; 54).

Similarly, the Akamba people, regarded as a martial race, were adept fighters and hunters with a reputation for mastering bows and poisoned arrows (Osborne, 2014). The Akamba raised their children in a culture that prepared them for battle, pushing their commerce to the coast (Parsons, 1999; 671). Likewise, the Babukusu, a sub-tribe of the Luyia, had a traditional intelligence agency that was a part of the military system (MacArthur, 2013:355). In offensive combat, the Bukusu intelligence agents were frequently dispatched to sketch out the enemy's bases to determine their dispositions. On the eve of establishing colonial power, there was a wealth of knowledge among the Africans about the dangerous and armed Europeans (Africa, & Kwadjo, 2009; 17).

The British used chartered companies to establish colonial rule because they did not want to commit huge financial resources to run the colonies (Brogden, 1987). This mandate was left to the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) in British East Africa. The company administered British spheres through complete political and economic control (Maxon, 2002; 94). To effectively administer the region, IBEAC started to build a network of stations or forts from the coast to the interior. The company employed a private army of Sudanese, Indian, and Arab soldiers under the command of British officers (Stichter, 1982).

At its establishment at Mombasa, Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) imported guards, police, clerks and accountants from India to help run its affairs (Gregory, 1971, Omenya, 2011, Kiruthu, 2022; 44, Dietz, 2017). The 32,000 labourers were mostly Sikhs, Goans, Hindus and Punjabi Muslims who worked as railway builders, soldiers, artisans, bricklayers, clerks, craftsmen, merchants, traders, carpenters, plumbers, construction workers, tailors, motor mechanics and electrical fitters.

The historical association between the Indians and the British was due to colonial rule and trade associations; they tolerated and had closer ties with the British (Hobson, 1995; 23). Indian traders operated in many areas of the empire and had become accustomed to a certain level of security as a result of their status as Crown subjects. The British viewed Indians very differently from how they treated persons of African descent, and that is why they gave the Indians



priority in police recruitment (Hill, 1950; 147). In 1895, the company put up an administration with an armed security force to protect its trading routes, trading centres, stocks and staff (Trivedi, 1971:618). The security personnel were recruited from the Indian police and watchmen governed by Indian police statutes (Macdonald, 1897). According to oral testimony at Old town, the majority of the military members in this unit at the time were Indians who were subject to Indian police statutes (Abdulla, O.I 14.5.22). The elderly man said that the British idea of depending on the Indians as the primary security in the force was founded on the notion of racial supremacy, where the Indians were regarded second after the Europeans and then the Africans, who were viewed as less human and uncivilized. In contrast to the latter, the IBEAC officials preferred to employ and trust the former (Abdalla, O.I 14.5.22). Wolf (1973) and Sommer (2007) noted that in Mombasa, police were hired from within the Asian population.

Determinants for Recruitment into Colonial State Policing in Kenya

Imperial powers used foreign subjects and local resources to maintain order in the newly conquered territory (Bayley, 1969). The British established a policy known as "let aliens rule," whereby they recruited colonial subjects from one colony and sent them to other colonies to enforce local laws on natives of those areas (Ludden, 1988:669). This strategy of using aliens to police colonies was applied to Britain's Asian and African colonies (Yin, 2015:47). These ideologies formed the primary criteria for identifying and recruiting native populations for military and police duty (Westwood, 2016; 1). Physical fitness was a critical factor in weapon handling, law enforcement, and physical aptitude for handling situations that required physical force (Lagestad and Tillaar, 2014:76; Kumar, 2019; 6).

As a political and social construct, the "martial race" doctrine was used by the imperial powers to recruit police officers, on the notion that certain individuals are naturally or culturally inclined to the art of war (Lacey, 2021:4). The martial races notions and practice emerged in British India after the Indian Mutiny of 1857 (Barua, 1995:107). As a result, some ethnic and religious groups were considered more masculine, loyal and desirable for military service (Hingkanonta, 2013; 12). "Martial race" ideology was rooted in handbooks, memoirs and diaries on tales of adventure among war-like people in wild parts of the British empire (Streets, 2017; 28).

The Indian races possessed different fighting abilities and loyalty to the British Empire (Kaye, 1898; 24, Singh, 1969; Surrige, 2007; 147). During the Indian Mutiny, the Sikhs demonstrated their loyalty to the Raj by actively enlisting in the government army and engaging in remarkable combat achievements (Fox, & Fox, 1985; David, 2002; 22; Kaur, 2011:205; Streets, 2017). Having been viewed as a martial race alongside the Punjabi Muslims, they became the majority of the colony's police force until the middle of the 20th century (Metcalf, 2007:146; Surrige, 2007; 147; Gurung, 2014, Rand & Wagner, 2012:232). The Sikhs were quite skilful at controlling riots, discouraging secret societies and defusing local conflicts (Yin, 2015; 63). Ethnic military representation as martial races was common in Asia and Africa (Stapleton, 2019; 2).

In British East Africa, martial-race doctrine was applied in recruitment to the Kings African Rifles (KAR) (Moyses-Bartlett, 2012). According to Timothy Parsons (1999:54), persons from isolated and underdeveloped areas that were perceived as martial races were favoured for recruitment into the KAR (Parsons, 1999; 54). The British did not recruit high-caste Indian soldiers and police constables in Kenya, as they had done through the East India Company (Metcalf, 2007; 148). Most recruits for the Kenya police were middle-caste or lower agriculturalists (Parsons, 1999; 88). For the British, Indian recruits presented a cheaper, healthier, and more reliable option (Rand & Wagner, 2012:237). The majority of the early Kenyan police officers had prior Indian service.

The Roles of the Indians in State Policing in Kenya up to 1895

In Kenya, the Indian minorities were an integral part of the Kenyan police force (Chebai, 2001). The Indian involvement in the Kenyan police force began in 1887 with the beginning of trade and the arrival of the British East African Company at Mombasa (Foran, 1962). The British considered Indians superior to Africans and prioritized them in the initial police force. Notably, the roles Indians played in the force were synonymous with British interests. This section highlights the agency of Indian servicemen as agents of the crown in the early stages of colonial occupation up to 1985.

One of the major engagements of the Indians in state policing in Kenya was to aid in the establishing of colonial rule and control. Colonial success was premised on maintaining law and order (Chanock, 1982:4). Imperial powers used foreign subjects and local resources to maintain order in newly conquered territories (Bayley, 1969). The British established a policy known as "let aliens rule" in its colonies (Ludden, 1988:669; Yin, 2015; 47). The Imperial British East Africa Company was tasked with the expansion and establishment of control in the territory when the British policy of informal control had become obsolete (Merry, 1991; 890). In establishing control, the IBEAC founded command stations in Vanga, Rabai, Malindi, Lamu, and Kismayu, as well as a police headquarters in Mombasa (Oliver, 1951; 49). The police played a significant role towards achieving this objective by use of Indian *sepoys* that had been taught by



British military concepts (Mattausch, 1998:124). The IBEAC also had its own policing units that comprised 150 agents of Indian origin, Somali, Swahili and a few Europeans that could be called upon to protect the company's trade and commercial enterprises. The forces were also tasked with the economic and territorial construction of colonial rule (Deflem, 1994; 53, Wolf 1973; 402). In reference to Indians, Winston Churchill later said the following:

"It was the Sikh (and Punjabi Muslim) soldier who bore an honourable part in the conquest and pacification of these East African countries. It was by Indian labour that the one vital railway on which everything else depends was constructed (Cited in Odhiambo, 1974; 137)."

Sommer (2007) supports Churchill's idea and points out that Indian Askaris were used by the British colonial powers in East Africa during the time of European rule. He states:

"Indians helped in the conquest of the various colonial possessions and subsequently served as garrison and internal security forces. The IBEAC employed the first Indian policemen to protect shops, storehouses and banks. The expanding economy, however, necessitated the construction of a police headquarters (Sommer, 2007)."

The IBEA utilized the laws and personnel of the Government of India as well as Indian indentured labour (Heyer, 1961:77). A wide range of subjects were addressed by the Indian codes, including criminal law, criminal and civil process, evidence, contract, and succession (Swanepoel, 2019; 98). Even the Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, which were passed in 1860–1861, the year before the police were reorganized, made it clear that the police's top aim was to subjugate the populace (Bushe, 1935). Under these legal instruments, plots to start wars received significant attention. Similarly, under the Criminal Procedure Code, the protection of public order took precedence over those that dealt with the investigation and prosecution of criminal acts (Morris, 1974:10; Gupta, 1974; 7).

Internally, the military force had to be employed against portions of almost every group in the colony in the early days due to some African resistance to colonial rule (Hills, 2007; 292). In October 1890, for instance, as part of an ongoing dispute with the Sultan of Witu, three Royal Navy ships were dispatched to Lamu to establish British authority on behalf of the Sultan of Zanzibar (Ylvisaker, 1978:670). The Witu expedition included roughly 800 sailors and Marines, as well as 150 Indian police officers. From the 1890s, Indians were recruited into the protectorate (Tyagi, 2009). In 1896, a real police force was constituted at Mombasa and stations were established along the caravan route between Mombasa and Uganda (Foran, 1962; 4; Trivedi, 1971; 621).

Indian administrators were also hired to administer the company's bureaucracy, many as administrators, police officers, clerks and customs officials. Indian police served both in the interior and along the shore to protect and secure construction materials and other property (Odhiambo, 1974; 136). Fortified posts sprung in trading stations along with the Mombasa-Uganda caravan route-Mazeras, Machakos, Ngong, Fort Smith Eldama Ravine and Mumias (Wolff, 1970; 276). Each had a small body of *askaris* under the official in charge of the post. These were more armed guards, although they were often summoned for construction and maintenance work (Mutungi et al., 2019). Each station commander recruited his own men, and no overriding form of administration existed of these men as a composite body (Foran 1962; 4).

The Indians police were used to safeguard the economic interests of the colonizers and then the Indian traders. Many scholars have argued that the colonial authorities in Africa established modern police forces to protect their economy from the dangers of the colonized (Ahire, 1991; Anderson & Killingray, 1991, Clayton & Killingray, 1989; Deflem, 1994; Tamuno, 1970). The police was one of the main tools the colonial state used to guarantee an authoritarian containment of social disturbance and safeguard the property rights and individual liberties of white settlers (Mbaku & Kimenyi, 1995; 277).

Fundamentally, professional policing was directly linked to the commercial interests of the British Empire and capitalism in search of new markets and resources (Emsley, 2012:112). Colonial police were most frequently associated with the business objectives of growing capitalism that were looking for new markets and resources (Chimera O.I 20-6-22. The new police were primarily justified by the demands of business and corporate profit (Jeffries, 1952; Foran, 1962). British colonies commenced their imperial connection as the private domains of limited companies based in London (Brogden, 1983). Committed to the cheap reproduction of labour and to outwit their competitors, the colonial governments saw the economic imperative as foremost in establishing professional police (Clayton & Savage 2012)

The Indians had already settled and were by far the most dominant economic community along the East African Coast of Zanzibar, Kilwa, Pate, Bagamoyo, Pemba, Pangani, Tanga, Dar-es-Salaam, Malindi and Mombasa (Mangat, 1969; Gilbert, 2002). The Indian Rupee coinage was introduced in May 1893 and replaced the German, English and Indo-Portuguese currency. During this time, the Indians became an important link between Eastern Africa and Europe,



as well as America and Asia (Aiyar, 2015, Maganda, 2012; 51). Occasionally, bouts of violence against south Asians erupted, which posed risks to their wealth and property. This prompted Indians to respond by arming themselves and forming vigilantes to safeguard themselves from attack (Oonk, 2013;50).

Indian dominance in the Indian Ocean trade on the East coast of Africa desired considerable policing for their businesses (Zaidi 1967; 21). The Asians were able to protect their property through organized efforts. Although Asians had ties to the East African coast far before the 19th century, the Imperial British East Africa Company's opening up of the East African Protectorate's interior allowed Indian labour, capital, and business to enter the hinterland (Ochieng & Maxon, 1992;131). Asian businesses largely followed the trails that the company had previously established. By 1890, A.M. Jeevanjee, a renowned businessman at the time, had contracts to hire Indian labourers and police officers to serve in the Protectorate (Patel, 2002).

The IBEAC's armed troops, which were distributed among Mombasa, Machakos, and Kismayu at the time of the interior invasion, consisted of 1120 of these servicemen. In order to supply food and offer military security, the company also established a few outposts along the caravan route to Uganda (Beachey, 1962). It should be remembered that human portage was required for all overland transportation for business and the early administration (Maxon, 2002; 95). The majority of porters were employed in Mombasa, which had approximately 1000 porters available by 1895. Military expeditions offering protection for the porters were composed of Arabs and Indians (Kiruthu 2006; 45). These troops guarded scattered trading stations and supported company servants on lawful excursions in the interior (Foran, 1962; Percox, 2001).

The Indian police provided security services to missionary activities in the colony. The missionaries' reports sparked a public uproar in Europe about the displacement and suffering of natives brought on by the slave trade (Oliver, 1969). The evangelical revival and the growth of anti-slavery ideas among European Christians in the nineteenth century increased European interest in Africa (Strayer, 1978). Thus the need for colonial administrators provide missionaries with security (Okon, 2014; 192). Missionaries and traders entered Africa together with colonial authorities with the goal of bringing Christianity, trade, and civilization to the continent. However, Brantley & Johnson (1981; 2) point out that some African communities resisted Christianity. He gives an example of the Giriama people of Kenya's coastal hinterland consistently fought colonization and were hostile to both Islam and Christianity.

The spread of Protestant missionary activity was directly influenced by the Royal Charter granted to the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) in 1888 (Trivedi, 197:617). Nthamburi (2002; 57) observes that the business's director, Sir William Mackinnon, urged the missionaries to continue working in the interior, especially in areas where the corporation could guarantee their safety. According to one respondent, missionaries entirely relied on administrators for physical security and protection during times of need, and they also relied on traders for financial support (Gathogo O.I 24-6-22). Missionaries essentially collaborated with colonial rulers in the exploitation and cultural subjugation of Africa (Mokebo, 2023). In his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney argued that missionaries were imperialists. He argues that "Missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light. The Christian missionaries were as much a part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders, and soldiers (Rodney, 1972: 277; Mokebo, 2023).

The role of the Indian in state policing in Kenya was also aimed at ending slavery. One of the main grounds for European colonial control of eastern Africa was the repression of the slave trade, which peaked in the nineteenth century in eastern Africa and the western Indian Ocean (Heartfield, 2017). Slave labour was significantly more widely used in eastern Africa during the nineteenth century as a result of the region's increasing incorporation into the rapidly growing global capitalist market (Alpers, & Hopper, 2017; 67). In 1888, Her Majesty's Agent and Consul-General issued a proclamation making it illegal for British Indian subjects to hire slaves through agreements with their proprietors (Cave, 1909;23). Two other proclamations in the same year declared it illegal to transport slaves from the interior to the coast for sale, and therefore all slave caravans were stopped. England and Germany were given a perpetual right of search over all local dhows in the territorial waters of Zanzibar by Seyyid Khalifa bin Said in 1889 (Church Missionary Society, 1868:6). Additionally, it was decreed that everyone entering the Sultan's domains after November 1, 1889, and everyone having a child there after January 1, 1890, should be free (Nwulia, 1975). The General Act of the Brussels Conference, to which the Sultan of Zanzibar was a party, had entered into force in the interim in July 1890 (Unangst, 2020; 806). This Act established overall oversight of the routes used for the slave trade in the interior of East Africa, with a focus on the search of indigenous ships at sea and the release of any slaves held against their will. Following the issuance of this Decree, there was a significant rush for emancipation, which peaked in 1899 when 3,657 slaves received their freedom documents from the Courts (Cave, 1909; 24).

The most heavily used slave routes were patrolled by police or military personnel (Hopper, 2011; 50). However, on occasion, the traders simply changed their routes and markets (Ubah, 1991; 447). The presence of patrol teams and policed locations served to frighten off slave traders who would ordinarily abandon their captives and flee when they



saw them (Miers & Roberts 1988). When their captors abandoned some of the freed slaves, patrol squads picked them up. The British were solely responsible for monitoring key areas and patrolling trade routes during the initial phase of the slave trade's abolition (Hopper, 2011;55).

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION :

It was the objective of this paper to trace the emergence and early involvement of Indians in state policing in Kenya up to 1895. The paper, therefore, presents the historical foundations of policing up to 1895. It examines the histories of policing and models of policing, tracing the historical background of African Police in the pre-colonial period and during the colonization era. It has been demonstrated that the Imperial British East African Company played a big role in the establishment of state policing in Kenya. In 1896, the company established an administration with an armed security force to protect its trading routes, trading centres, stocks and staff. The security personnel were recruited from the Indian police and watchmen. This marked the beginning of Indian policing in Kenya. The paper describes the various roles of colonial police up to 1895 that include: the establishment of colonial control in Kenya; protecting the economic interests of the colonizers; ending slavery and slave trade; and providing security services to missionary activities.

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