

Book Review: Beek, Jan, Mirco Göpfert, Olly Owen, and Johnny Steinberg, *Police in Africa: The Street Level View*. Oxford University Press. 2017. ISBN: 9780190676636 (Paperback). 392 Pages. \$39.95.

Reviewed by Kevin Angelo Brown¹

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Police in Africa: The Street Level View is a comprehensive synopsis of how the police operate throughout various parts of the African continent. The book is split into three distinct parts: “What Is the Police in Contemporary Africa?”, “Who Are the Police in Africa?”, and “How Are the Police Doing Their Work?” The book begins with how Twentieth-Century cities in Africa are commonly missing properly functioning institutions. Modern law enforcement agencies in Africa have been, for the most part, imported from the European models during colonization. An example of colonial influence in policing in Sierra Leone comes from a statement from the former Assistant to the Inspector General, who states, “We always look up to Britain, you know, we were British colonized” (54). The authors make the distinct point that police forces in Africa are all unique, in that no African police force is like the other due to complex political issues, historical occurrences, and the influence of social constellations.

The foundations for many of the African police forces studied in this book were established by coercive colonial regimes. These authors bring attention to the gaps in the literature of African police studies and add ample knowledge to this field of study. The authors articulate for the reader the history of colonization that has shaped the police in Africa still to this day: “The origin of most African police forces is to be found, of course, in measures to secure the colonial regime by coercive means” (21).

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The authors explain how the police vary in the strategies they use to enforce the law. The tactics of the police in Africa are often limited because of the inadequate training officers receive, as well as the deficiency of funding to purchase the technology and resources that the police in the West commonly use. As Baker (2002) explains, there are several factors, including the lack of resources and the limited number of officers, which has led many communities in Africa to rely on non-state actors to provide policing services and security.

The authors provide great detail about the means that the police use to acquire money to operate, such as using roadblocks that force drivers to pay tolls to pass; this is a distinct factor of African policing that is uncommon in the West (Marenin, 2013). Makeshift roadblocks are just a small part of the exploitation that has been a part of African police tactics (Marenin, 2014). Most owners of cars in many of the African villages can be fined for one infraction or another at the officer's discretion, due to the maintenance of the cars in Africa not following the vehicle code. This is a problem because it gives the police the ability to pull over, search, and question the drivers of these vehicles whenever they decide to. Many people are frightened to cross these police roadblocks, especially those who cannot afford the toll. The police at the roadblocks usually allow for certain individuals such as non-governmental organization workers (NGOs) and government employees to go through without paying a fee. Civilians' attempts to protect themselves against police exploitation include the use of the media, witchcraft, politics, violence, connections, and other unconventional means.

The authors also describe the reforms that were attempted to professionalize the police in various African police agencies. For the Togo police, reform was established due to the need for professionalism. This professionalism meant that officers must follow bureaucratic rules, be transparent with enforcing the law, write reports, have clean standardized uniforms and use formal techniques in policing. However, professionalism in this instance did not result in less police violence or more effective policing in Togo.

Throughout the book, the authors explain the influence of Western nations in Africa. Stanley (2008) notes that the influence that western nations had over the African police included establishing security sector reforms to help stabilize these nations. On the other hand, numerous African nations have experienced problems with high levels of organized crime and transnational terrorism, which impede their economies' growth and ability to receive foreign investments. Due to nations throughout the world exporting resources from Africa, having successful

security sector reforms on the continent is crucial for the global community to obtain essential resources and labor (Wood & Mayer, 2001).

Security sector reform in Sierra Leone was outlined in an important segment of the book. The reform was led by the British government, which was Sierra Leone's former colonizer. Sierra Leone has been an independent nation for over 50 years but has experienced various forms of foreign intervention due to instability and civil unrest. Many police stations were burnt down, and hundreds of officers were killed during the civil war in the 1990s, which led the British military to intervene. A 1998 survey of people in Sierra Leone found that one hundred percent of respondents proclaimed that the police were corrupt (Albrecht & Jackson, 2009). The recent security sector reform included promoting the use of community policing to increase the trust and support of the citizens. The United Kingdom spent over twenty-seven million Euros on the Sierra Leone Police between 2002 and 2005 to help with the reform (Baker, 2006). The United Kingdom established local needs policing, which helped increase the effectiveness of the police, but by 2006 the police still did not have effective control over many areas. Corruption within the police force has remained a significant problem in Sierra Leone (Abess, 2015) even though the reform was publicized as a success.

Policing in and after apartheid in South Africa was an important aspect of the book. Policing in apartheid was politically driven to protect the White citizens. When apartheid fell, so did the structure in place to protect the White minority. A sense of order for the White citizens was reestablished during the post-apartheid era when the police became remilitarized. The South African Police became a mix of paramilitary policing (high-policing) and public safety policing for citizens, including protections for the first time for Black citizens (low-policing). According to the authors, being a police officer in South Africa is not the most respected occupation, but they do earn much more than the average Black South African. In South Africa, police officers will support other police officers even during accusations of misconduct such as torture and massacres of civilians (Steinberg, 2008). Many acts of police misconduct have been captured on cell phones and shared on the internet, which has hurt the legitimacy of the South African Police. Extralegal violence has been commonly used by the South African Police. The police use fear tactics so people will follow their commands. South African police officers also commonly use the code of silence, especially when policing in the village areas. In the village areas, the police do less actual policing

and more disciplining of the youth for engaging in inappropriate activities, such as having sexual relations at a young age.

Another issue among police in Africa is *moonlighting*. The authors detail how moonlighting is very common, especially in South Africa. *Moonlighting* consists of police officers working as private police or security on their days off. A similar problem to *moonlighting* is *twilight policing*, which is a mix of both private and public policing. These issues occurred more often as apartheid increased the need for private policing (Diphorn, 2015). The private police worked directly with the governmental police force to protect the White population and politicians. A law was instituted in South Africa that prohibited the police from being involved in *moonlighting*. An example of the corrupting influence of *moonlighting* occurs when a police officer who also works at a nightclub might be reluctant to investigate the club for underage drinking or other law violations. Often when police officers are caught *moonlighting*, they are just given a warning.

Another problem the authors outline with regard to *moonlighting* in South Africa concerns the abundance of racial issues surrounding the Black and White officers. Current state affirmative action plans may hinder White police officers' promotions which can create hostility between the Black and White officers. As a means of supplementing their income, White officers have at times turned to external activities to make more money outside of police work, as "white policemen have fewer promotion prospects and are more dependent on extra income generated from moonlighting" (144-145).

Vigilante policing, according to the book, is a version of "community policing" (81). In Nigeria, vigilante groups can be a big part of policing. Vigilante groups often attempt to be an extension of the state by mimicking their powers. Non-state actors like the VGN (Vigilante Group of Nigeria) attempt to fill gaps in security that the state cannot. Groups like VGN use different types of tactics and strategies than the formal police because they do not have to be as accountable and transparent as the state. These vigilante groups sometimes collect taxes from citizens, and at times these vigilante groups are even paid by the government. The authors explain the complex need for the vigilante groups: "Police numbers were insufficient at this time due to the lack of resources from the government to employ new police officers but also for the training and retraining of those already in service. The allowances paid were monthly stipends paid to the vigilante groups. This was a case of vigilante policing established by the state to respond to a shortfall in policing numbers" (94). Some of the vigilante groups were mixed

ethnically and religiously, which allowed for Muslim and Christian men to work together, even when there was a high level of tension between the Muslim and Christian communities.

The authors illustrate how African police agencies are multidimensional. In general, the African countries that were colonized by the French had police forces that resembled the French more than those who were colonized by the British. The former colonies that ruled left a legacy that the African people continued to follow in many ways. Reasons for much of the corruption and poor policing are due to the poor infrastructure, limited money to pay and recruit good officers, limited funds for training, lack of modern technology, lack of legal counsel for most citizens, and the fact that many of these nations are very large and spread-out, making it difficult for the police to provide adequate supervision and oversight. The book claims that there can be one police car per 100,000 citizens in some African jurisdictions. The technology is very limited for many of these police forces, as for example, DNA testing does not exist in many areas, resulting in most evidence being gathered from witness testimonies.

The book details the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its specialized police force to fight organized crime. The issue with certain specialized units of police in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is that they are too similar to the military. These police officers have armored vehicles, military-grade weapons, and are often former military soldiers. This country has had ample violence and war throughout its existence and has been unstable politically and economically. According to the authors, the police cannot efficiently do the same policing as they do in the West due to issues with well-armed rebel groups and lack of infrastructure. The police reform attempted to try and separate the role of the police from the military, but with the climate of the country, it has been very difficult. Issues of post-conflict countries like this are that the people are in fear of the military and the police. When people are in fear and do not trust the police, it makes it difficult for the police to properly fulfill their duties, such as investigating criminal activity.

Risk and motivation are important and related factors for the police in Nigeria. In Nigeria, crime is investigated in many cases due to non-legal factors and in order to evaluate the officer's use of their discretion. Cases are often only filed based on the personal gains to be received by police officers. While a problematic way to gain legitimacy, such practice is common within Nigeria. The Nigerian police often lack essential resources that the police have in the West, so they rely on existing craft skills to solve cases and survive. These officers face various risks due to

their occupation, such as being targeted and killed. The Boko Haram insurgency has been a growing concern to the Nigerian police and civilians in the country due to various terrorist attacks against the people, the police, and the United Nations (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Many officers hide the fact they are police officers when they are off duty to remain safe from violence from criminals and groups like Boko Haram. Due to poor pay and the danger of the occupation of policing, there is a strong lack of motivation for police officers to do effective, ethical police work.

The authors provide knowledge and examples of the wide range of discretion the police have in Africa. The discretion generates a low standard for authority and allows abusive police actions to occur. Police officers in countries like Ghana often use their discretion to lecture the people on morality and safety issues in attempts to support the social order, as well as to legitimize their actions. The officers often give much more leeway in rural areas than in urban areas, especially regarding vehicle laws. The wealthy citizens also are expected to pay higher bribes than the poorer citizens. In Ghana, for example, demanding a bribe is technically extortion and a felony, but accepting a bribe is just a misdemeanor. Because both parties are guilty if caught engaging in bribery, citizens are unlikely to report it. Police officers learned how to correctly ask for money in indirect ways to avoid being involved in a felony, and bribes are oftentimes defined as gifts, wherein “Civilians often describe the handover of money as a ‘dash’ or ‘gift,’ rather than a bribe or corruption” (236). Civilians often use threats of power and violence and even flee from stations in which the police are trying to use their power. Drivers at checkpoints often try various attempts to not have to pay the fee, such as waiting for hours until the police give up.

The authors describe in detail how the police extort the people, take bribes, conduct extrajudicial killings, become inebriated on duty, and commit other abuses of power in Ghana. The abuse of power can create a loss of legitimacy for the police and a loss of trust in the eyes of the community. Lack of legitimacy and procedural justice can have an impact on people following the law and trusting the police (Tyler, 2006). The police often use informal measures to help with conflicts between citizens, which can be quicker and more effective than formal strategies. The authors use the Maputo police of Mozambique as an example of the discretionary powers allowing the police to decide to handle a case informally or use formal sanctions such as arrest and fines. The people often look to the unofficial police in the community to hand out punishment and justice due to police ineffectiveness and corruption.

Police in Africa: The Street Level View is an excellent source of information on the police in various African settings and the tactics that these officers employ fulfill the duties and expectations of their position in law enforcement. I found that *Police in Africa* covered all concepts that a street-level policing book should have. The big takeaways from this book includes the importance of colonization, the lack of resources for police forces, the corruption of the police, and the cultural importance that influence strategies of the police. Due to the interdisciplinary approach needed for studying police in Africa, the authors used a wide range of references and credible research to produce a reliable overview of African police. The authors of this book showcase specific nations such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, and South Africa and by doing so highlight the uniqueness of the different nations and their police forces. This is an informative book that provides a critical and vast view of the complexities of policing in Africa.

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