

# GOLD, GOVERNANCE, AND ILLEGALITY: RETHINKING THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME IN GHANA

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## Abstract

Between 1870 and 1900, British colonial authorities expanded mining in Ghana to meet rising global demand for minerals. This expansion introduced mechanised technologies that displaced indigenous mining systems and reorganised local economies around extractive production. While economically driven, these policies produced severe environmental consequences, including the release of toxic effluents into rivers and farmlands. Mining communities bore these costs, as colonial responses remained limited and prioritised short-term economic gains over long-term environmental sustainability. This paper situates contemporary environmental crime and mineral exploitation in Ghana within this historical trajectory. Drawing on a colonial political economy framework, it examines how early mining policies institutionalised patterns of environmental degradation, weak regulation, and uneven power relations. Focusing on a critical juncture in colonial mining governance, the study analyses how policy choices reshaped interactions among the state, local communities, and external economic actors, laying the foundations for enduring governance challenges. By tracing these evolving dynamics, the paper offers a historically grounded explanation for persistent environmental and resource management problems in Ghana. It argues that present-day environmental crimes are not merely regulatory failures but are embedded in inherited extractive structures with both local and global implications. This perspective contributes to broader debates on resource governance, sustainability, and the political economy of extraction in Africa.

**Keywords:** Environmental crime, mining, mineral waste.

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