

Past, present, and future of ecological democracy in Africa: imperialism and ecological sustainability.

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Abstract

This study aims to envision ecological sustainability in Africa based on the current knowledge extracted from lessons learned from the different phases of implications of democratic institutions on ecological governance in Africa. This qualitative case study addresses three questions: a) How has democracy evolved in Africa? b) how does democracy with African characteristics deal with ecological security compared to the imposed models of democracy? c) What are the impacts of ecological politics in the different phases of democracy on ecological security in Africa? d) How may the lessons learned from ecological governance and natural resource management (NRM) phases help construct feasible ecological policy recommendations? The assumption was that the socio-economic and political system (independent variable) affects ecological governance and NRM (dependent variable). The theoretical framework is built around the implications of the African democratic system on ecological issues in the pre-colonial period (before Muslim conquest and slavery) (category 1), during colonization and neocolonialism (category 2), and in the future post-colonial period (category 3). This inquiry is a comparative case study to provide insights on how and why the current ecological governance programs for peace and security if the legality of NRM works and then provide future recommendations. This study compares ecological governances across space and time to expose underlying issues of the current ecological policy. Many drivers- political, financial, and economic motivations and incentives for policymakers, accountability of stakeholders, a participatory and deliberative mode in decision making, questions of ecological justice, inclusion of scientific community and civil society, inclusion of other non-state actors (interest groups, such as minorities, lobby groups, and corporation), impacts of ecological exploitation and conservation on individuals and communities- help conduct this cross-sectional study. This study uses non-probability purposeful sampling because selecting the institutional and legal frameworks targets solely ecological policies. The population of the study is the African continent, in which the states are the unit levels. This assessment includes a review of the relevant literature on democracy and ecological security. The empirical review involves consultation of official reports and strategy documents to help analyze and assess ecological security policies and actions of key stakeholders in the different states - including scholars and think tanks- at the national levels. This study proposes that public disinterest, ecological literacy, and the challenges of state and non-state actors in constructing and implementing ecological policies constrain the models of democracy introduced in Africa from anticipating ecological disruptions. The solution resides in cooperation and dialogue between the stakeholders to consider the environment and natural resources to make and support multidimensional policies regarding ecological security in correlation with human security and national security in Africa.

1. Introduction, scope and main objectives

The theories of ecological democracy conceptualize and operationalize the causal relation between the two variables: ecological sustainability and safeguarding democracy. Empirical evidence shows inconsistencies in how democracies address ecological issues. Nevertheless, many researchers posit that democratic regimes accept citizens' participation and innovations in ecological decision-making. However, some research findings concur that autocratic regimes have the comparative advantage of centralized government control over ecological policy decisions, which is strong enough to implement ecological policy decisions. However, African democracies often face immediate human and traditional insecurity to the detriment of long-term ecological insecurity.

Liberal democracy is a working democracy, for the African democracy was disrupted by slavery, which took the form of colonialism, then neocolonialism. The question of democracy is distinct from the question of democratization (Burnell 2012) in Africa. Democratization is a sequence to achieve the value of democracy, which lands in the norm to be achieved as a process, a set of institutions, and check-and-balance, as an arrangement. This type of political system was imported in the nascent African system. As democratization is a recent phenomenon (declaration de la Baulle in the 1990s), operationalizing the concept of "democracy in Africa" to understand it as working progress would bring different types of notions: pre-colonial phase, colonial phase, and post-colonial phase. That would help understand the issues of the experiences from colonization and colonialism and the subsequent recent issues of ecological democracy in Africa. If democracy can be conceptualized as political behavior, there is evidence of the presence of democracy in the form of systems of cooperation and mutual understanding within the societal body. This research conceptualizes the "societal body" as a community (tribal) system, a traditional setting of the elders' system that checks and balances the authorities. That system earlier in the epoch of kingdoms and empires, such as Congo, Benin, Mali kingdom, Songhai Empire, and Ethiopian Empire, all of these socio-economic and ecological political systems included not only the elders but also women in the decision-making process (Kalilou 2023 forthcoming).

It is essential to highlight that Africa cannot be analyzed as one block but should be separated into regions, such as southern, Northern, Eastern, Western, and Central Africa, within which there are sub-regions, such as Sahara, Sahel, Soudanese zone, and Kalahari. This study retraces patterns of political behaviors in those regions and sub-regions as to how far one can go in the past in pre-colonial settings compared to modern times. That historical pre-colonial phase is suspended or put in desuetude by three key phenomena: Slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Africa endured slavery for five centuries (the 1400s to 1900s) when 18 million people were exported, and 12 million were estimated dead in transit (Illife 2008). The slavery trade hijacked the antique and authentic pattern of socio-ecological and political behavior. That 500 years of slavery helped suspend the practice of African democracy or democracy with African characteristics.

Over the hill comes the other form of slavery, colonialism, which was a more modern, more sophisticated system of domination involving seven European countries, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium, to the benefit of the European economies via a system of disposition (arrangement between themselves initiate during the Berlin Conference in 1885) (Illife 2008). The impacts of colonialism on African democracy are twofold: a) physical impact: the atomization of the land, the disintegration of the ecosystem, and the remaking of the African identity; b) socio-economic impacts, for the colonizer exploited the working class.

All the above characteristics illustrate the impacts of colonization on the African socio-economics and ecological politics by dismantling the three aspects of the democratic system, which are the norms, practices, and institutions. That transformational adaptation was a very violent experience. Over 20 million were killed during a century and a half of colonization. That experience also came at a time when the question of democracy was interpreted as a nationalist movement and emancipation to push back against the colonial power, the occupier.

From independence, leaders like Patrice Lumumba, who were inspired by nationalism to found a post-colonial democracy, were assassinated. Hence the post-colonial emerged, but it was characterized by violence, authoritarianism, and nepotism from the 1960s to the 1990s. Africa's post-colonial socio-ecological, political- economic and monetary systems played the neo-colonialism game. The government was modeled to guarantee the socio-political, economic, and monetary dependence in favor of the colonial power and to the detriment of the environment of the ex-colony. The system was established so that the elites were given the ruling power but controlled by the colonial powers. The Habib Bourguiba, Mobutu Sese Seko, Felix Houphouet Boigny, and Leopold Sedar Senghor were put in power to represent a system- such

as *françafrique*¹ - different from what democracy could have been. The bourgeoisie, the democracy compactor in Africa, became the one that led the country in the context of one party-state, and the role of the military became essential in maintaining power. Nevertheless, the elite, the military, and the rich cultivated the predatory logic and corruption.

At the beginning of the 1990s, democratization replaced the old democracy to introduce new dynamics: multipartyism. From the 1990s to 1999, 43 multipartite elections were organized in Africa (Osaghae. 1999). New voices had been able to express themselves, and civil societies had emerged, making room for participatory democracy and freedom of expression. However, in reality, that has been a democracy of pretense. The resistance was visible, but it ended up producing clientelism and tribalism. As the liberal democracy imposed on Africa is inadequate to the African ideology and philosophy, this paper tries to answer whether imperialism and its product, liberal democracy have impacted ecological sustainability in Africa. This inquiry relied on the literature review as a methodology (part two) to narrate the result of the investigation on the correlation between ecological democracy and imperialism (part three) to discuss the significance of the results of this work (part four).

2. Methodology/approach: Literature review

This inquiry is a qualitative illustrative case study based on the literature review consisting of conducting a systemic review of the published studies on democracy, ecological democracy, imperialism, and ecological sustainability in Africa. As part of this review, keywords such as "democracy," "African history," "African traditions," "African cultures," "African ideologies," "African philosophies," "African politics," "African economics," "environmental democracy," "ecological democracy," were used to search for relevant data. It is essential to highlight that this research approaches African knowledge as socio-ecological and economic thinking and practices rooted in the pre-slavery era. The scrutiny of the relevant data traced thoughts and patterns of practices of African ancestors, which may have emerged in the epoch of the great African civilizations (Iliffe 2008), such as ancient Egypt, Nubia, Sahel, and Maghreb.

3. Results: Democracy and sustainability

Before exploring the implications of the liberal democracy and its imperialist agenda in Africa, this paper outlines democracy, environment, and ecology nexus.

3.1 Ecological democracy: theory and practice of the linkages between democracy, environment, and ecology

Gary et al. (2020, p.168) explore the normative and empirical operationalization of the political "representation of nonhuman interests within decision-making processes, in terms of eco-democracy." Gary et al. (2020, p.176) conclude that "giving a human voice to nonhumans, eco-democratic procedures will help in widening the political community and have the broader potential to increase awareness of the interests, needs, and lives of nonhumans within a world... dominated by human societies." However, Pickering and Åsa Persson (2020) find the "prospects and pitfalls for democratizing sustainability transformations" (p.1). Nonetheless, these two scholars posit those fostering synergies between democratic processes and environmental protection while taking into consideration five key dimensions of sustainability transformations: institutional, social, economic, technological, and epistemic, would lead to adequate sustainability. Furthermore, Pickering and Åsa Persson (2020) believe that the theories of ecological democracy advance the exercise of democratic decisions about plausible conflicting views of ecological limits. In the same vein, Dryzek (2010) argues that deliberative democracy is, specifically, an adequate approach to ecological democracy, for it gives legitimacy to those

¹ *Françafrique* is a political and monetary mechanism consisting of controlling the French-speaking African elites through bamboozled and informal ties between the French elites and those African elites (see: Verschave, François-Xavier. 1998).

affected by the ecological decision to participate or to be represented. In this logic, Rockström et al. (2009) pose the problem of how experts and societies, in general, could set the planet's boundaries in ways their authorities would not affect societies' freedom to choose their pathways to sustainable development. Holz et al. (2018) and Rockström et al. (2009) both concur that the setting of the "safe operating space" may imply a burden sharing of the countries in their collective efforts to attain an ecological limit or target at the global environmental governance level. Thus, Pickering et al. (2019, para 2) conclude that Environmental democracy can be achieved "through reforming existing institutions of liberal democracy and capitalism to incorporate environmental values and expanding participatory governance. Ecological democracy sets out a more fundamental critique of neoliberal environmentalism and an agenda that is more transformative, participatory, cosmopolitan, and ecocentric.² Meaning that, ecological democracy is a more radical approach to climate security, for it reclaims a transformation of the existing institutions of liberal democracy to include the nonhumans and the future generations in the democratic decision making (Eckersley 2004). Comparatively, environmental democracy merely pushes for a reformation of the liberal institutions centered on the idea of anthropocentrism (Arias-Maldonado 2012; Mason 1999; Smith 2003) contriving green liberalism (Wissenburg 1998) or liberal environmentalism (Bernstein 2001). As both environmental democracy and ecological democracy share common traits, such as interest in ideal environment outcomes, inclusive participation, representation, and deliberation in the democratic decision process, they can be complementary. In that vein, Eckersley 2019, p. 17) View "environmental democracy as a stepping stone towards ecological democracy."

In line with a good number of scholars, such as Dryzek & Pickering (2019), Mert (2019), Niemeyer (2014), Schlosberg (2016), Tremmel (2019), Fiorino (2018), Fischer (2017), and Hanusch (2018), democratic theories of the Anthropocene admit that the democratic institutions need to adapt to the current dangerous tipping stage of the ecological degradation in order to be more effective to face the global planetary crisis. According to Heilbroner (1974), liberal democracy, by fostering individualism, greed, profit-seeking, and overconsumption, is incompatible with the core values of sustainability. It may be interesting to add to this skepticism the slow, compromising, cumbersome, interest-centered, and veto mechanisms of the democracy itself (Pickering & Persson 2020). Therefore, the ideal alternative is, as Hardin (1968) and Ophuls (1977) mentioned, the "eco-authoritarian" (Humphrey 2007; Shearman & Smith 2007) or "survivalist," through a necessary strong state (green leviathan), adopting a hierarchical, technocratic and centralized response to avert environmental catastrophe. Nonetheless, later on, scholars such as Shahar (2015) advise on the limits of eco-authoritarian.

Owing to the split of view on the best approach to ecological democracy and the polarization of the public opinions and the technocrats, Asafu-Adjaye et al. (2015) and Giddens (2009) propose a "Promethean eco-modernism" approach to climate security to the detriment of ecological democracy. Fisher (2017), one of the most recent critics of ecological democracy, states that ecological democracy would succeed better locally, where democratic transformation is easily attained. Fisher's (2017) ideas resonate with Blühdorn (2013, p. 29), stating that "the greater emphasis that late modern societies place on individual freedom, 'more democracy' – understood in terms of greater responsiveness to citizens' demands – 'may well imply even less sustainability.'" Despite all, many scholars believe that democracies, in their varying models, perform better than non-democracies or autocracies regarding environmental issues (Fiorino 2018; Li & Reuveny 2006) because of pluralism, civil society activism, more vital institutions, and electoral accountability in democratic societies (Winslow 2005; Duit, Feindt, & Meadowcroft 2016). This performance in confronting environmental problems depends on the democratic

² Ecologists denote ecocentrism as a nature-centered, as opposed to human-centered ([anthropocentrism](#)) and living beings' (biocentrism) system of values. Hence, humans and nonhumans have intrinsic values.

quality level (Hanusch 2018), lower corruption (Povitkina 2018), and longevity of the history of democratic institutions (Fredriksson & Neumayer 2013).

Some researchers highlight the evolution of environmental and ecological democracy in practice through innovative bottom-up or participatory approaches since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Pickering et al. 2020). The subsequent environmental politics delivers climate diplomacy (Fischer 2017, p. 93; UN 1992, chapter 23, p. 2), NGO diplomacy (Betsill and Corell 2008), and sustainable development diplomacy (Hale 2016; Sénit, Biermann, & Kalfagianni 2017). Hence, civil society participation, multi-stakeholder dialogues (e.g., indigenous, youth, and gender groups), and institutionalized representation of non-state actors (Non-Governmental Organizations-NGO and scientific community) (Sommerer & Tallberg 2017) are increasing at the national, regional, and international levels (Stevenson & Dryzek 2014).

Other researchers zero in on the evolution of the environmental and ecological democracy, based on principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development through the increasing consideration of environmental rights in domestic law (Gellers 2017; Hayward 2005) and in international environmental law (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe-UNECE 1998). By way of illustration of the evidence of the evolution of global environmental governance, the 1998 Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, commonly known as the Aarhus Convention, sets out three core procedural rights concerning government decisions on environmental matters: access to information, participation and access to justice (Baber and Bartlett 2020). Additional illustrative examples are the Bali Guidelines- after the Aarhus convention- helping institutionalize procedural environmental rights (Etemire 2016) and the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement) in 2018 (ECLAC 2018). Nevertheless, Despite the importance of environmental rights in environmental and ecological democracy, the empirical evidence of a correlation between substantive environmental rights (e.g., the right to a safe or healthy environment) and environmental outcomes is fraught (Gellers & Jeffords 2018; World Resource Institute-WRI 2015).

Then comes research on prefigurative environmental politics of practice research (Yates 2015) and on sustainable materialism (Schlosberg & Coles 2016) to investigate the radical democratic implications of the relationship between everyday life and environmental values (Eckersley 2019; Schlosberg & Craven 2019). This radical shift of the status quo from environmental politics to ecological politics engages new environmental movements "around the sustainable flow of materials of everyday life – such as local food systems, community energy, and sustainable fashion" (Pickering et al. 2020, pp. 6-7). These grassroots movements on comprehensive lifestyle politics advocating material participation as part of the new democratic politics are leading to ecological security "practices that are simultaneously democratic, sustainable, and attentive to material flows (Pickering et al. 2020, p.7).

A growing number of research on ecological and environmental democracy's challenges of citizen participation and populism (Pickering et al. 2020) highlight the difficulties of citizens' meaningful engagement in the deliberation process due to the existing participatory power inequalities (Bäckstrand et al. 2010; Delina 2020). This challenge of citizen democratic participation is increasingly true in industrialized countries where the apparent environmental protection decisions do not faithfully align with citizens' underlying interests in environmental democracy (Newig & Fritsch 2009). In addition to the previous challenges of environmental democracy enumerated, ecological democracy aims at the participation of environmental organizations, Indigenous peoples, or conservation scientists. By way of explanation, environmental democracy falls short of the nonhuman interest inclusion (Pickering et al. 2020)- if those nonhuman interests are somehow considered-, assessment (Winter 2019), or best representation (Eckersley 2011).

Consequently, the public distrust in democratic institutions' capacity to protect environmental values rises, as does populist anti-environmentalism (McCarthy 2019).

Along the same lines, Pickering et al. (2020) call attention to technocracy and politics of expertise as sources of challenges for environmental and ecological democracy. In the face of the need for informed judgments on environmental matters, which is gathered through scientific knowledge, Fischer (2017) points out issues of democratic legitimacy regarding, on the one hand, the experts abating the citizens' experience and knowledge; on the other hand, the citizens' scrutiny and contestation of the experts claims. Democratic efforts are gathering experts and citizens to concert on climate change and biodiversity urgency to remediate this disjunction in environmental science-policy-community interactions (Rask, Worthington, & Lammi 2012), organizing community knowledge and scientific expertise around environmental justice movements (Ottinger 2013), and bridging indigenous ecological knowledge with modern scientific knowledge (Kalilou 2023; Esguerra, Beck, & Lidskog 2016).

Environmental rights and ecological limits are crucial for ecological democracy (Pickering et al., 2020). As previously discussed, from an environmental democracy standpoint, environmental rights are inherently anthropocentric, but the democratization of ecological politics extends those rights to nonhumans. Recent moves to concretize that elongation of rights echoed in New Zealand and India, granting personhood rights to rivers and ecosystems (Safi 2017; Winter 2019) and the Equator giving constitutional rights to Mother Earth (Espinosa 2019). The issue remains, though, on the fitting implementation of those stretched rights in the domestic and international legal contexts (Pickering et al. 2020). Moreover, the aforesaid ecological limits distort ecological democracy by fostering undemocratic procedures aiming at reaching green and other sustainable agendas (e.g., inclusive economic growth versus capitalist individualist economic growth) in marge of the citizens' freedom of choice (Dobson 2016). Moreover, considering the ecocentric approach to ecological democracy, the anthropocentric approach of the planetary boundaries' "safe operating space for humanity" reveal itself partially, for it omits the nonhumans and their relations with a human in the ecological system (Pickering and Persson 2020)—these setbacks in the global north spill over into the global south, especially in Africa.

1.2. Imperialism, liberal democracy, ecological sustainability in Africa

The humanist ideology is inherent to the African civilization (Omowale 2017). With African humanism, human transcends money and material. Putting people in their rights, African humanism would rethink the capitalist ideology, which puts profit as the highest priority and accept the exploitation of people and the environment in the continent (Cabral 1973; Omowale 2017).

The African science and metaphysics on the nation's composition and society are typically different from Western colonial teachings. Authentic African knowledge ought to be promoted, not as liberality viewed as mysticism, but as a science, which once helped create mathematical theorems, calendars, and pyramids in the millennia (Omowale 2017). African knowledge views society and nation as abstracts or mental construct (Omowale 2017). Society and nation are the ideals and immaterial which lay on the material, nature. Society and nation exist in nature—nowhere else. In turn, nature comprises four elements: a) the fire materializes in the sun; b) the water materializes in the oceans, rivers, lakes, streams, and the like; c) the land, which materialized the earth, the base for the human and the nonhuman species (the environment); and d) the air surrounding all the precedent physical ingredients, which are critical to society and nation (Omowale 2017).

The ecological politics rooted in the African ideology would make the world a better place for human and nonhuman species. However, the present geographical configuration inherited from colonization impedes ecological sustainability. The juxtaposition of 55 states is a factor in the geopolitical decision, which would be easier to make and implement in a unified continental state. The current African Union, overseeing the compartmentalized African States, would only reach the goal if the continent evolves into the aspired United States of Africa. A super-state politically governed by one united entity, economically promoting a mass production mechanism opened to

industrialization and advanced technology in respect of the humanist ideology (Nkrumah 1970; Seku Ture 1978).

As discussed above, the physical component of society and nation is nature (Omowale 2017). Humanism, as the core ideology around ecological economics and ecological politics (Nkrumah 1970) in pre-slavery Africa, views human and nonhuman species as the end goal (Omowale 2017). In contrast, the mercantilist ideology of capitalism views human and nonhuman species as resources susceptible to exploitation for profit. The pre-slavery Africa's humanism relies on collectivism and egalitarianism as socio-ecological and ecological political modes of societal organization to attain the commons (or its contemporary form as socialism) (Omowale 2017). At the same time, the capitalist philosophy of slavery relies on exploitation, individualism, and elitism, which characterize the capitalist philosophy of slavery and its gradual forms of colonialism and neocolonialism. While the ecological economics principles in pre-slavery Africa accept the means of production owned by all, capitalism- in all its forms mentioned above- accepts the means of production owned by a few. Thus, pre-slavery Africa implements nature's rights, one of the pillars of ecological democracy, which subordinates people to nature as the source of spirit. The ancestors' teachings help us understand and approach nature (material) and the spirit (immaterial). In contrast, capitalism treats nature as a means to the end, profit. This mercantilist ideology of capitalism explains the destruction of the African socio-ecological settings by the colonialists and the neo-colonialists through the exploitation of the minerals and the transformational agenda of the African societies, nations, cultures, land, economics (Nkrumah 1970), politics, identities (Cabral 1973), ideologies (Cabral 173; Seku Ture 1978), philosophies (Cabral 173; Omowale 2017), and histories in favor of the economies in the Global North.

Thus, as the traditional African culture embraces humanism and rejects exploitation, respect for human and nonhuman species becomes the core of the African philosophy of socialism. Hence, socialism with African characteristics before slavery promotes generosity and hospitality as principles of the mechanism of the commons. The traditional African way of life manifests through communication, redistribution, and sharing, all of which depict the humanism of the ideology of socialism contrary to the exploitation for profit of imperialist capitalism.

4. Discussion

Five military coups- Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger- were in France's old sphere of influence while the French troops were in the subregion. Moreover, the population supported the putschists and took to the street to denounce the undemocratic decisions of the leaders suspected to be backed by the colonial powers present through military and other mechanisms of political influence. Public opinion condemns the interference of regional and subregional organizations allegedly guided by colonial power and imperialism. For instance, the Economic Community of West Africa States- ECOWAS' sanctions on Mali, Burkina Faso, and very recently Niger have been perceived as driven by France ignoring the underlying causes of the military coups. The military coups aim to overthrow elected regimes, sources of population resentment.

In the past, France instigated the putsches, or organized mercenaries led by agents like Bob Dennard, to overthrow African regimes attempting to liberate the country from the France domination. In Mali, French troops did not expect a military coup against the Malian president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. In Burkina Faso, while everyone saw the putsch coming- A first attempt failed on January 23rd- without a fight, officers overthrew President Jean Roch Marc Christian Kabore without the habitual approval of France. However, Paul Henry was in turn, overthrown by the captain Ibrahim Traore, who accused his predecessor of complicity with the colonizer. Those officers reject the counterterrorism strategy imposed on them by the colonial power and the imperialist collaborators, such as the imposed civilian leaders and the instrumentalized organizations, such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU), European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Moreover, the African youth and the population, civil societies, the intelligentsia have questioned the importance of foreign troops when the jihadists continuously multiply atrocities in the regions and threaten the integrity of the states' territories. The civil societies and a growing number of intellectuals are decrying France's interference in interior affairs and advocating for the military in power to reclaim the lost territory to the jihadists and reach out to new partners with a clear roadmap, and dismantle old conventions and geopolitical mechanisms that characterize the great power conflict in favor of the Global North, to the detriment of the national interests. But NATO has a different perspective of the issues of the current climate insecurity in the Sahel. For instance, NATO proposes a federation of Mali, so that the black population of the South, which is 90 percent majority imposes its will on the Malian population and the ten percent that holds 50 percent of the territorial land in the North. That undemocratic approach of the Europeans echoes the Berlin Conference in 1885 when the great powers split the continent between themselves without a single African participation. The Berlin conference creates artificial borders without taking into consideration the ethnic, cultural, and political diversity of the continent, throwing the premises of the current heterogeneity and instability of Africa. This paternalism also resonates during COVID-19, when the specialists from the North pretended to know and project the effects of the virus on Africa (Kalilou, Hsiao & Fakunle 2021). The same strategy to divide the Africans echoed in the speech of the French president, Emanuel Macron, in Equatorial Guinea when he mentioned President Mbalo (from Fulani ethnic) that the alleged discrimination of the Fulani ethnic groups as a cause of terrorism in the Sahel. It is important to note that, in reality, a good number of promises of aid have been made, but only some have been fulfilled. For instance, the EU has not fulfilled its promise to send 12 billion US dollars to invest in development and in areas where the terrorists have struck and 400 million to equip our armies to face Boko Haram (Foka 2021).

Three decades ago, the democratization, or the introduction of liberal democracy into Africa, was initiated at De Labaule. (George Washington University 1990). It was an opportunity for many Africans to take black Africa out of obscurantism and misery. The old influential founding fathers inherited from the independence, and whom the African regular citizens were asked to celebrate, those who have been their tacit collaborators, the models to follow became the sources of all the misfortunes and the causes of the unsustainability. The "much wanted" single-party system was to be banished. The colonial powers piloted this multipartyism to ensure the bridge to the new form of domination, and the Western ideology insidiously dictated the African elites. Many young African (students and the union) fought for and lost their lives for what the ex-colonies decided was suitable for the ex-colonies, and the population naively adhered to the new ideology. Leaders who tried to modify the new multipartyism system were systematically swept away. It was the case of the General Moussa Traore of Mali and General Mathieu Kerekou of Benin.

Some 30 years later, after dozens of democratic elections and a few dozens of new leaders, it is vital to gauge the outcomes. Many political parties, often based on ethnicity and led by corrupted elites, emerged. The buying of the votes and clientelism have replaced the pressure that used to be exercised during the system of the party unique. Some of these leaders have even labeled as the best students in Paris. Nevertheless, in reality, when looking at the human development Index, the population has become poorer, and the youth is disenchanting. The socio-economic and political-ecological situation has deteriorated. Some countries have fallen into civil wars as leaders appeared to erect the constitution and the law in the favor of the elites without any vision and a clear strategy for developing the country.

African countries and the international community have spent a colossal amount of money to hold elections every five years. For instance, in 2010, in Cote d'Ivoire, international partners paid 252 million Euros for the elections, which was a record of money spent in Africa for elections. In 2018, the presidential and legislative elections cost Mali over 76 million Euros to renew the mandate of a president who was in power for five years. Three years later, he was overthrown; that was a waste of money. In Cameroon, more than 82 million euros were spent in the elections to renew the mandate of a president who has been in power since November 1982 and the same

representatives in the national assembly. In 2015, in Burkina Faso, 47 million Euros were spent on the reelection of Jean Mac Kabore in a country where the priority should be national security against insurgencies threatening the existence of the state and having killed or displaced the villagers. Two years later, president Roc Marc Christian Kabore was overthrown. In 2018, in the Republic Democratic of Congo-RDC, legislative, provincial, and presidential elections cost 60 million US dollars. With the same amount of money, the five hydroelectric dams could have been built to provide energy in that vast territory lacking electricity. The 2023 elections in RDC are projected to cost more than 500 million dollars when the results are already known in advance, which will divide the population and lead to eventual violence (Foka 2021). In this logic, there should be a balance between wasting money with bogus alternation in power and investing that money in the country's development. Although democracy is essential in advancing ecological sustainability, liberal democracy seems unsuitable. The model of democracy with African characteristics, based on the cultures and traditions that worked millennia before the invasion of the continent, is necessary. That would avoid the waste of money, civil wars, and deviations from the crucial issues of the continent. That would also prevent bad governance, which pushes the youth to flee from the continent to Europe, Asia, and America. The colossal amount of money in those elections could have helped finance important projects of ecological sustainability, which are desperately needed in the region. Worse, the same people win back the elections.

In comparison, it may be interesting to look at other models of regions and countries that were at the continent's level 50 years ago when they obtained their independence. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is an excellent example to illustrate. At its independence in 1971 (eleven years after most African countries took their independence), the UAE was very deserts and impoverished. However, today, the country is one of the most envied places in the world. They have controlled the water supply by purifying the seawater for the population's consumption. They have transferred the dunes of sand into gardens, for instance. Emirates attracts investors from all around the world, and the world takes them as an example. The vision of the country's leadership helps provide its people with the most modern health system in the world, one of the best educational systems in the world, and one of the most sophisticated and ecologically friendly infrastructures in the world. The problem that emerges here is: What would be the preference between the sentiment having the citizens' rights, liberty, and happiness in the liberal democratic (Laboite 1945) countries from the North, and the access to the right and liberty of the citizens in the autocratic system, as it is the case of the Emirates? Nevertheless, it is not exaggerated to say that the Emiratis seem happier and better treated than citizens of the nations in sub-Saharan Africa and even some Western countries despite the like of democracy as defined by the West.

Conclusions/ wider implications of findings

This paper hypothesized and found that the socio-economic and political system (independent variable) affects ecological governance and NRM (dependent variable). The literature review helped conceptualize and operationalize environmental and ecological democracy. This study finds that: a) the essence of neo-colonialism is the capitalist's industrial capacity to subordinate and exploit the under-industrialized African economies; b) African nations and societies are different from Western nations and societies and engage with nature differently; c) Africans have different identities, cultures and traditions, histories, ideologies, and physical environments, pasting the liberal ideology and norms leads to different results; d) liberal democracy is incompatible with the African continent despite the transformational agenda of mercantilist imperialism. Hence, this paper recommends a political and economic system specific to the African socio-ecological characteristics retraceable in the ancestral teachings. African leaders should demarcate these characteristics from the Western ideology of imperialist capitalism. With the setbacks of liberal democracy in Africa, research would be more exhaustive in exploring how much an African country could save for climate investment and acquire ideal ecological outcome if it decided to drop the liberal democracy.

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