

COLONIAL CONTINUITIES OF RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES IN AFRICA: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This paper explores the contemporary patterns of resource extraction and environmental injustice in Africa as direct continuations of colonial frameworks. The problem persists as multinational corporations and state elites perpetuate colonial logics of dispossession, resulting in impoverished communities and ecological degradation. From a philosophical standpoint, this study interrogates the ethical, ontological, and epistemological dimensions of this crisis. Methodologically, it employs critical hermeneutics, drawing on decolonial thought, African philosophy, and environmental ethics to analyze how inherited colonial structures continue to dictate extractive practices. The core contention is that Africa's ecological challenges are not merely economic or political but are fundamentally philosophical, rooted in distorted human-nature relationships and colonial knowledge systems. Consequently, the paper advocates for dismantling these continuities by centering indigenous African ecological ethos. It proposes a reimagined development paradigm grounded in African metaphysics of land, community, and a theory of ecological justice to forge a philosophically sound foundation for sustainable and just resource governance.

Key words: Colonialism; Resource extraction; Environmental injustice; African philosophy

Introduction

The ecological devastation of Africa is inseparable from the colonial history of extraction, which transformed both people and land into instruments of accumulation. (Mbembe, 2021;47)

The current environmental crises unfolding across Africa, from deforestation and pollution to land dispossession and resource conflicts are not isolated events. They continue a historical logic that extracts value from African people and land. This is evident in the extraction of oil in Nigeria's Niger Delta, cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and gold in Ghana, mirroring the colonial era. While formal colonialism has ended, the logic of extraction and dispossession remains deeply embedded in African economies (Murombedzi, 2019; Lowes & Montero, 2020). Resource extraction now operates through new actors, including multinational corporations, global financial institutions, and domestic elites; however, the implicit structures of control, dependency, and environmental degradation still persist (Chiwanza, 2022). This ongoing exploitation, as Obi (2020) notes, allows Africa's natural wealth to sustain global industries while local communities remain impoverished and harmed. Resource extraction now includes not only physical removal of minerals or oil but also the political and economic systems that prioritize profit over communal life. As Boelens, Hoogesteger, and Swyngedouw (2023) argue, extractivism in the Global South remains "entangled with the colonality of power, knowledge, and nature" (p. 112), meaning that the principles governing how resources are valued and who controls them are still shaped by colonial hierarchies. The ongoing external capture of value happens when profits from resource use leave a country and benefit foreign companies and elites, leaving local communities with degraded environments, conflict, and reduced livelihoods.

These dynamic produces what Schlosberg (2007) refers to as environmental injustice: the unequal distribution of environmental harms and benefits. Across Africa, the poorest communities bear the costs of pollution, toxic waste, oil spills, and un-rehabilitated mines while receiving few of the benefits derived from these resources. In the Niger Delta, for example, entire fishing communities have lost their livelihoods due to oil contamination, yet they remain excluded from environmental governance. Environmental injustice thus reflects structural inequalities, where those least responsible for ecological degradation suffer its most severe consequences. The persistence of these patterns can be understood through the concept of coloniality, developed by Walter Mignolo (2011) and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018).

Coloniality describes the enduring systems of power and knowledge that maintain Western dominance in economics, epistemology, and models of development. Within this framework, Africa's ecological crises are not merely environmental problems but manifestations of a deeper colonial matrix of power that determines who controls land, its use, and whose knowledge counts as legitimate. Independence did not dismantle these hierarchies; it only changed their appearances. The ecological question is therefore also a philosophical one, with ethical, ontological, and epistemological dimensions. Ethically, it concerns how humans ought to relate to land, non-human nature, and one another. Ontologically, it raises questions about what the natural world is: a living community or a collection of inert resources. Epistemologically, it interrogates the knowledge systems that shape how societies understand and govern the environment. Colonialism redefined all three dimensions: it transformed African landscapes into “empty” lands available for exploitation, replaced relational cosmologies with utilitarian models, and silenced indigenous ecological wisdom. Western modernity's mechanistic worldview, inherited from thinkers like Descartes (1641) and later critiqued by Plumwood (1993), conceives nature as a storehouse of resources for human domination. By contrast, African philosophy emphasizes relationality, community, and interdependence. The Ubuntu ethic, articulated by Ramose (1999) and Metz (2011), recognizes that human identity and well-being are inextricably linked to the broader ecological community. Likewise, Wiredu (2004) and Gyekye (1997) argue that in African metaphysics, land is not a commodity but a moral trust shared across generations.

The contrast between these worldviews reveals that Africa's ecological predicament is, at its core, a philosophical crisis; a clash between extractive logics rooted in colonial modernity and indigenous philosophies that affirm the sacredness and interdependence of life. The colonial encounter not only dispossessed Africans of their territories; it also delegitimized their ecological epistemologies, replacing them with Western notions of progress and development. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) observes, colonialism “did not end with the lowering of flags; it mutated into global coloniality” (p. 23), shaping both Africa's political economy and its systems of thought. The ongoing exploitation of African environments by multinational corporations and state elites exemplifies what scholars term ecological colonialism; the continuation of imperial domination through ecological means (Boelens et al., 2023).

Recognizing this continuity demands philosophical reflection. The issue is not only that resource exploitation persists but that it is legitimized by inherited worldviews that define nature as property and progress as accumulation. Addressing environmental injustice in Africa, therefore, requires questioning the epistemic foundations of the modern extractive paradigm and recovering alternative visions rooted in African ecological thought. This paper argues that modern resource extraction in Africa reproduces colonial paradigms of dispossession and exploitation, perpetuated by multinational corporations and postcolonial elites. Philosophical reflection is essential to expose the moral and epistemic roots of this injustice and to chart a decolonial ecological alternative. True

sustainability in Africa requires more than policy reform — it requires a transformation in how humans understand their relationship with the earth.

Historical Foundations of Colonial Resource Extraction in Africa

European colonization of Africa was not merely a project of territorial domination but, an economic reorganization of entire societies to serve the interests of colonial masters. Colonial powers restructured economies, labor systems, and international relations to facilitate the continuous flow of raw materials to European industries. As Walter Rodney (1972) argued in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the colonial economy was designed not for African development but for European enrichment. The so-called “civilizing mission” was a disguise for economic conquest — what Rodney called “the transfer of value” from the colonies to the metropole. The Scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century institutionalized this exploitative order. Under the banner of civilization, European powers divided the continent into administrative units whose borders corresponded not to cultural realities but to resource potentials. Mudimbe (1988) explains in *The Invention of Africa* that this process was not only political but epistemological. It imposed a Western way of seeing, classifying, and extracting value from both land and people. The extraction of minerals, rubber, and agricultural products was accompanied by the imposition of monetary taxes, the creation of wage labor, and the destruction of subsistence economies that had sustained African communities for centuries.

Colonial regimes relied heavily on forced labor to sustain extractive production. In the Congo Free State, King Leopold II's administration turned entire populations into rubber harvesters under horrific conditions. Millions of Congolese died due to violence, starvation, or disease (Hochschild, 1998). In Southern Africa, British and Dutch colonists introduced hut taxes and pass laws to compel Africans into working in mines. Land expropriation was central to this system. Fertile areas were seized for settler plantations, while African populations were confined to “reserves.” These transformations produced both environmental degradation and social disintegration. Forests were cleared for export crops; rivers were polluted by mining; and indigenous ecological knowledge was suppressed as “primitive” (Beinart, 2000). By the early twentieth century, Africa had become a global resource frontier, a periphery that fed Europe's Industrial Age. Colonial infrastructures such as railways and ports were not built for African mobility or trade integration but to transport resources from the interior to coastal export points. This extractive geography, the mine, the plantation, the port, still structures Africa's economies today.

The violent transformation of Africa's environment and economy rested upon deeper philosophical assumptions that shaped Europe's relationship with nature and non-European peoples. Central among these was Cartesian dualism, introduced by René Descartes in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), which separated mind from matter, human from nature, and reason from emotion. Nature, in this worldview, was conceived as inert, mechanistic, and available for manipulation. This philosophical orientation underpinned not only scientific progress but also imperial expansion. By viewing land and nature as resources of no intrinsic value, colonial powers justified the conversion of ecosystems into commodities. As Mignolo (2011) later argued, this worldview constitutes a form of coloniality of power, an ongoing matrix of domination that links epistemology, economics, and environment. In contrast, African philosophies articulated a relational and holistic understanding of existence. Concepts such as ubuntu (Ramose, 1999) and personhood as community (Menkiti, 1984) express the view that human identity and flourishing are inseparable from relationships with other humans, with ancestors, and with the natural world. Kwame Gyekye (1997) similarly emphasizes that African thought does not isolate the individual self but situates it within a web of moral and ecological obligations. In such worldviews, land is not

property but heritage.

Colonialism therefore represented not just economic exploitation but epistemic violence. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) explains in *Decolonising the Mind*, the imposition of European languages and education systems erased indigenous ecological wisdom and replaced it with alien epistemologies that privileged extraction over balance. The destruction of local environmental knowledge systems in agriculture, medicine, and resource management was as damaging as the physical extraction of minerals or crops. Colonization did not only take Africa's resources, it also took away the conceptual tools for sustainable living. The Congo Free State offers one of the most brutal examples of extractive colonialism. Leopold II of Belgium claimed the territory under the guise of humanitarianism and free trade, yet his regime turned the Congo Basin into a vast rubber plantation. Indigenous communities were forced to meet impossible quotas under the threat of mutilation or death. The rubber economy devastated forests, destroyed local subsistence systems, and caused population collapse. It was a system of ecological and human plunder justified through European notions of progress and civilization (Hochschild, 1998).

In South Africa, British mining operations in the late 19th century, mainly in gold and diamonds, transformed the region into the industrial heart of the colonial economy. The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley (1867) and gold in Witwatersrand (1886) entrenched a racialized labor hierarchy. Africans were forced into the mines through taxation and pass laws, while profits were centralized in British hands (Fine & Rustonjee, 1996). The environmental cost was immense: land degradation, toxic waste from extraction, and the alteration of landscapes for mining infrastructure. The Niger Delta, under early oil exploration by the British in the 1930s, represents the continuity of this colonial logic into the petroleum age. Multinational companies such as Shell operated within a framework that prioritized export and profit over local welfare. Early environmental impacts such as oil spills, gas flaring, and mangrove destruction were ignored. The colonial administration's economic interests aligned with corporate goals, laying the foundation for the ecological crises that continue in modern-day Delta (Watts, 2008).

These historical patterns established both the infrastructural and epistemological foundations of Africa's present ecological crisis. Railways, mines, plantations, and ports created an economy oriented towards export rather than domestic growth. Equally, colonial education, science, and religion ingrained a way of thinking that sees land as a commodity and development as extraction. Thus, the contemporary extractive economies of Africa are not accidental but inherited and built upon centuries of organized dispossession. The philosophical devaluation of nature and the human hierarchies established under colonialism continue to structure global capitalism today. Any attempt to address Africa's ecological crises must therefore begin by confronting this history.

The Continuity of Extractivism in Postcolonial Africa

The end of colonial rule in Africa was widely celebrated as the dawn of freedom, self-determination, and development. Yet, decades later, the continent continues to bear structural scars of extraction and dispossession. Independence did not dismantle the extractive logic of colonialism; rather, it reconfigured it into a subtler form known as neocolonialism. The same infrastructures (railways, mines, and ports) that once enabled colonial exploitation were repurposed for global capitalist interests, while the same logics of resource appropriation and racialized hierarchy persisted under new political arrangements. Political independence across Africa did not translate into economic autonomy. Kwame Nkrumah (1965) famously warned that neocolonialism represented "the last stage of imperialism," a system in which foreign powers controlled African economies through debt, aid, and trade dependency. The colonial pattern of exporting raw materials and importing finished goods persists, ensuring that value addition and economic power remains in the Global

North (Rodney, 1972). The rise of global financial institutions after World War II reinforced this dependency.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank introduced Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) during the 1980s and 1990s, ostensibly to promote growth, but in reality, they reshaped African economies in favor of foreign investors (Ferguson, 2006). These programs required privatization, deregulation, and the removal of state subsidies, which stripped governments of control over natural resources. Zambia's copper industry, for instance, was privatized under SAPs, allowing multinational firms to dominate the mining sector while national revenues declined (Lungu, 2008). Infrastructure projects funded by foreign loans were presented as modernizing initiatives, yet they deepened debt. Thus, what colonialism achieved through direct rule, the postcolonial order replicated through economic governance, a phenomenon that Achille Mbembe (2020) calls “the privatization of sovereignty.”

If the colonial state once embodied imperial power, today that role has been assumed by multinational corporations (MNCs). These corporate entities hold enormous influence over African governments, often surpassing them in economic might. Companies such as Shell, Chevron, TotalEnergies, Glencore, and Anglo American have come to dominate the oil, gas, and mining sectors across the continent. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, for instance, Shell Petroleum Development Company continues to operate with near-sovereign authority. Despite decades of environmental degradation, oil spills, and gas flaring, the company remains protected by political alliances and weak regulation (Watts, 2004). The profits flow abroad while local communities endure poverty, unemployment, and ecological ruin. Similarly, Glencore's cobalt and copper mining operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) embody the ongoing exploitation of African labor and land under neocolonial conditions. Miners work in hazardous environments for minimal pay, extracting minerals essential to global industries such as electric vehicles and smartphones (Amnesty International, 2021).

MNCs maintain their dominance through tax avoidance, transfer pricing, and lobbying, practices that drain billions from African economies annually (Christian Aid, 2014). Under the guise of “foreign direct investment,” they negotiate contracts that secure long-term control over strategic resources, often with little transparency or accountability. As Zalik (2015) notes, such arrangements perpetuate a “petro-development complex” in which states are structurally dependent on oil and mining rents, undermining democracy and environmental stewardship. While external actors play a major role, the persistence of extractivism in Africa also depends on the complicity of domestic elites. Postcolonial leaders often inherited the centralized, authoritarian structures of colonial governance and repurposed them for personal or class enrichment. Jean-François Bayart (2000) calls this dynamic “the politics of the belly”, a system in which power and wealth circulate through patronage, corruption, and rent-seeking. The “resource curse” provides a useful lens for this phenomenon. Countries rich in natural resources, such as Nigeria, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea, have higher levels of corruption and inequality than resource-poor nations (Auty, 1993; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

Rather than fostering development, resource wealth breeds dependency and authoritarianism. Nigerian elites, for instance, have long profited from oil revenues while neglecting infrastructural and human development. In Angola, the state-owned oil company Sonangol became a vehicle for elite accumulation under José Eduardo dos Santos, even as most citizens lived in poverty. Philosophically, this complicity reveals a deeper problem: the internalization of colonial hierarchies. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues, decolonization in many African states was

incomplete. Political sovereignty may have been achieved, but epistemic and economic liberation was not. Elites, educated in Western institutions, often embraced the same developmentalist and extractive paradigms as their former colonizers, perpetuating the alienation of the people from their land and resources. The neocolonial logic of extraction has yielded devastating ecological and social outcomes. Environmental destruction is perhaps the most visible legacy. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2011) documented that the Niger Delta is among the most polluted regions on Earth, with oil contamination of soil and water threatening human health and biodiversity. In the DRC, unregulated mining has led to deforestation, soil erosion, and toxic waste disposal in rivers (Global Witness, 2018).

These ecological crises have profound social implications. Rural communities displaced by mining and oil projects face loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and forced migration to urban slums. Women, in particular, bear disproportionate burdens as they lose access to farmland and water sources, taking on increased unpaid care work (Shiva, 1988). Extractive projects also generate violent conflict: from the Niger Delta militancy to the resource wars in Sierra Leone and Congo, environmental injustice and armed resistance have become intertwined. Despite these costs, African states and corporations continue to frame extraction as the path to modernization and poverty alleviation. Yet, as Boelens et al. (2023) argue, this narrative masks an “ecological colonialism” that sacrifices ecosystems and communities for global profit. The paradox is stark: extraction, justified as development, reproduces the very underdevelopment it claims to solve. In essence, the logic of extraction has endured through the transfiguration of colonial structures into global capitalism. Postcolonial Africa remains situated at the periphery of a world system designed to convert land, minerals, and labor into wealth for the center. This persistence is not accidental; it reflects what Walter Mignolo (2011) terms the “colonial matrix of power”: an enduring configuration of economic, epistemic, and ecological domination.

Even as political maps changed, the world's division into zones of extraction and consumption persisted. Achille Mbembe (2020) extends this insight through his concept of “necropolitics,” showing how entire populations are rendered disposable in the pursuit of profit. Philosophically, the continuation of extractivism reveals an unresolved moral crisis: the denial of Africa's full humanity and of nature's intrinsic value. As long as land and people are seen merely as instruments of capital, true liberation both political and ecological remains unattainable. Hence, dismantling extractivism requires not only policy reform but a transformation of consciousness: a return to relational ontologies found in African philosophy, where community, land, and life are interdependent. This vision points toward what Ramose (1999) describes as ubuntu ethics, an ecological worldview that recognizes the dignity of all beings and the sacredness of the Earth. Africa must not only reclaim control over its resources but reimagine the very meaning of development, grounded in justice, community, and respect for the natural world.

Philosophical Dimensions: Ethics, Ontology, and Epistemology of Environmental Injustice

Africa's ongoing ecological and extractive crises cannot be fully understood through economics or politics alone. They are rooted in a deeper philosophical disorder a disconnection in how human beings perceive, value, and relate to the natural world. The colonial encounter did not only exploit Africa's material wealth; it transformed its moral, ontological, and epistemological landscapes. At the ethical level, colonialism institutionalized a worldview that reduced both land and people to instruments of accumulation. The commodification of nature and the exploitation of human labor were justified through a moral logic that prioritized profit over life. Environmental degradation, displacement, and inequality are therefore not accidental but moral consequences of a system founded on domination and greed. From the perspective of Western modernity, nature was seen as

inert matter to be controlled and utilized. René Descartes (1641) famously declared that humans could become “masters and possessors of nature,” framing the non-human world as something external to human subjectivity. This moral stance legitimized exploitation: if nature is a lifeless object, its destruction carries no ethical weight. Val Plumwood (1993) critiques this “hyperseparation,” showing how it enabled the colonial subjugation of both women and colonized people.

In contrast, African ethical thought emphasizes mutual dependence between humans and the natural world. The Ubuntu ethic, expressed in the phrase “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (“a person is a person through other persons”), extends beyond human relationships to include nature as part of the moral community (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2011). In this worldview, to harm the environment is to harm oneself. This communitarian moral philosophy challenges the extractive ethics of colonial modernity. It reframes environmental injustice as a violation not only of rights but of moral order an assault on the shared life-force (vital force) that binds humans, animals, and the land. Gyekye (1997) explains that, in African metaphysics, the land is not owned but held in trust for past, present, and future generations. Ethical responsibility, therefore, entails stewardship, reciprocity, and respect for the sacredness of the Earth.

The ontological crisis at the heart of Africa's environmental degradation stems from two conflicting worldviews: the Western dualistic ontology that separates humans from nature and the African relational ontology that sees all life as interconnected. Western metaphysics, deeply influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, draws a strict boundary between the subject (human) and object (nature). This dichotomy produced an extractive worldview: if humans are subjects and nature is an object, then domination becomes naturalized. As Descartes (1641) and Bacon (1620) suggested, knowledge itself becomes a tool for mastering the natural world. The ontology articulated by African thinkers such as Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) and Kwame Gyekye (1997) conceptualizes existence as communal and not individual. A person's being is deep-rooted in relationships with others, ancestors, and the natural world. Land, trees, rivers, and animals are not “things” but living entities. Colonialism was not only an economic or political project, it was an epistemological project. It established hierarchies of knowledge that privileged European science and dismissed indigenous ways of knowing as superstition or myth. This epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986) legitimized the exploitation of both people and the environment.

African environmental knowledge including ecological taboos, sacred groves, rotational farming, and water management systems became systematically devalued. The colonial state imposed Western categories such as “wilderness,” “resource,” and “development,” thereby reshaping both thought and practice. In the postcolonial era, this epistemic hierarchy continues through institutions such as the World Bank and global environmental NGOs, which impose technocratic solutions without regard for local realities. Decolonizing environmental knowledge requires what Walter Mignolo (2011) calls “epistemic disobedience” — a refusal to accept Western epistemology as universal. It necessitates re-centering African ecological wisdom, oral traditions, and indigenous sciences as legitimate sources of environmental understanding. Vandana Shiva (1988) similarly advocates for “earth democracy,” where diverse knowledge coexist and guide sustainable coexistence. African philosophy offers resources to support this. The Akan and Yoruba traditions, for example, hold that knowledge is not merely rational but experiential and relational. As Wiredu (2004) notes, African epistemology prioritizes communal verification and practical wisdom (sankofa) over abstract rationalism. This pluralistic approach contrasts sharply with the extractive epistemology of modernity, which isolates knowledge from ethics and being. Reclaiming these epistemologies means more than cultural revival; it is a step toward epistemic justice which is the

right of African communities to determine their own ecological realities and futures. In this sense, decolonizing knowledge is both an intellectual and environmental necessity.

When the ethical, ontological, and epistemological dimensions are viewed together, a deeper pattern surfaces; the colonial project disrupted the moral order (ethics), fragmented the web of existence (ontology), and silenced indigenous wisdom (epistemology). Contemporary environmental injustice in Africa thus reflects a triadic crisis of value, being, and knowledge. A philosophy of ecological justice, grounded in African thought, must therefore seek repair on all three fronts. Ethically, it demands recognition of the intrinsic worth of all life forms. Ontologically, it calls for a return to relational existence, where humans are part of nature, not its masters. Epistemologically, it insists on cognitive sovereignty, decolonizing how we know and speak about the environment. Decolonial philosophers like Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Mbembe (2021) argue that the path forward lies in dismantling the colonial matrix of power that governs both thought and matter. An African-centered ecological philosophy does not reject modernity but reinterprets it through indigenous lenses transforming development from domination to coexistence.

Recommendations and Pointers for the future

To end the colonial legacy of extractivism in Africa, which caused the continent's current ecological and economic crises, Africa must decolonize not only its political and economic structures but also its ways of thinking about development, nature, and knowledge.

The first step in decolonizing extractivism is to regain control over the economic structures that determine how value is created and captured. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue, nations fail when extractive institutions designed to benefit a few at the expense of many persist. African governments must renegotiate exploitative mining and oil contracts that disproportionately favor multinational corporations. Ensuring that processes of contract disclosure are transparent and indigenous are well represented can guarantee that revenue from resources benefit citizens rather than foreign shareholders.

African states must also diversify their economies away from raw material dependency to value addition through processing, manufacturing, and regional trade integration. This would allow African countries to retain a greater share of profits. Regional bodies such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can serve as collective bargaining platforms, strengthening Africa's position in global commodity markets; Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) notes that such collective efforts promote the right to define development on African terms. Economic transformation will be incomplete without a corresponding shift in epistemic mindset. The colonial encounter delegitimized indigenous ecological knowledge, replacing it with Western technocratic models that view nature as an object of control rather than a partner in coexistence. Wiredu (2004) and Gyekye (1997) emphasize that African thought systems, rooted in communalism, offer a valuable ethical alternative to the anthropocentric worldview inherited from Europe.

Reclaiming indigenous wisdom requires reform at all levels of education to include local ecological practices, languages, and histories. Universities and research institutions should prioritize African-led studies on sustainable extraction, renewable energy, and environmental restoration. Mignolo (2011) describes this as “epistemic disobedience”, a conscious refusal to remain within Western frameworks of knowledge. By doing this, African nations can create policies that reflect both scientific and cultural relevance. The persistence of extractive inequality in postcolonial Africa is deeply tied to corruption and weak institutional enforcement. To counter this, African governments

must strengthen governance structures that hold both state and corporate actors accountable. Transparency instruments such as open contracting, beneficial ownership registries, and publicly accessible revenue data are important.

UNEP (2011) and Global Witness (2018) highlight the role of environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) as tools for ensuring communities understand and consent to the projects that affect them. These assessments must be independent, gender-inclusive, and legally binding. Moreover, anti-corruption agencies should be granted true autonomy to investigate illicit financial flows and rent-seeking behavior by political elites. Botswana's handling of her diamond resources demonstrate that resource wealth can be managed responsibly through strong institutions and consistent reinvestment in education and infrastructure. The lesson is not that extraction itself must end, but that its governance must serve collective rather than private interests.

The most profound transformation will come from communities directly affected by extractivism. Land and resource rights must be secured through constitutional and legal protections that recognize customary ownership. Without this, dispossession will continue under the guise of “national interest.” The principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) should be made a legal requirement before the commencement of any extractive project. Zalik (2015) argues that meaningful participation must go beyond consultation; it requires redistributing power so that communities can veto harmful projects. Similarly, Shiva (1988) advocates for community-based resource management systems grounded in local ecological knowledge. Such systems not only ensure sustainable use but also rebuild trust between people and their environment. Benefit-sharing mechanisms such as community development funds and equity stakes in extractive ventures can help redirect profits toward local infrastructure, education, and health. Empowering women, who often bear the ecological and social costs of extraction, should be central to these frameworks. True decolonization must also be ecological. Africa's landscapes have been scarred by centuries of extraction that treated nature as infinite and disposable. Restoring ecological balance requires both remediation of past damage and prevention of future harm. Governments should enforce the polluter-pays principle, compelling corporations to fund cleanup and restoration efforts in affected areas like the Niger Delta.

Transitioning toward renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power is a double benefit: reducing dependence on fossil fuels while positioning Africa as a leader in green innovation. These shifts align with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Paris Climate Agreement, both of which call for sustainable growth within planetary boundaries.

Environmental education and community-led conservation programs can foster a culture of stewardship rather than exploitation. In this vision, sustainability is not an imported Western ideal but a return to African philosophies of interdependence; Ubuntu, ujamaa, and other traditions that see humans as part of, not apart from, nature. No African nation can fully decolonize extractivism in isolation. The continent's fragmentation has long been exploited by global powers and multinational corporations. Continental solidarity expressed through South-South alliances and joint policy frameworks is vital to resist neocolonial control. Murombedzi (2019) and Chiwanza (2022) note that global financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank continue to impose conditions that cause dependency. African leaders must advocate for fairer trade rules, equitable debt restructuring, and reforms in global taxation. International legal mechanisms should also be established to hold corporations accountable for environmental and human rights abuses abroad (Obi, 2020; Hoogesteger & Swyngedouw, 2023). Global reform is inseparable from local transformation. Africa's liberation will remain incomplete as long as global economic systems reward extraction

over regeneration. Ultimately, decolonizing extractivism is not about rejecting progress but redefining it. Metz (2011) describes Ubuntu as an ethic of human interdependence and shared flourishing. Applied to resource governance, this principle demands that development enhance collective wellbeing, not private accumulation.

The vision for Africa's future must be moved beyond the colonial logic of resource control toward one of resource care. It is a call to reclaim the right to determine how Africa's wealth is used and who it serves. To achieve this, the continent must combine policy reform, community empowerment, and ecological restoration. Only by integrating these dimensions can Africa transform its extractive legacy into a foundation for sustainable freedom.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the ecological and economic crises facing Africa today are not coincidental but the unavoidable outcomes of deep historical and philosophical continuities. Resource extraction in Africa, whether in the form of colonial mining or modern multinational oil ventures is part of a long-standing pattern of dispossession, domination, and ecological exploitation. The colonial logic that once justified the seizure of land and labor under the banner of “civilization” now persists through neocolonial mechanisms of finance, trade, and governance. These patterns are not simply political or economic; they are moral and epistemological structures that define how value, nature, and human dignity are conceived. Thus, any attempt to address environmental injustice in Africa must begin with a philosophical re-evaluation of the foundations of these relationships. From this perspective, ecological justice in Africa must be reimagined as ontological justice which is the restoration of right relationships between humans, nature, and community. This entails a return to African metaphysical understandings of land as sacred and communal rather than as private property or mere resource. This also demands holding multinational corporations and complicit state actors accountable not only through policy reform but through moral and legal frameworks that recognize the intrinsic rights of nature and local communities. The rise of global movements for environmental justice, climate reparations, and indigenous sovereignty suggests a growing recognition that sustainability cannot exist without justice. Africa's philosophical traditions, if reclaimed, can enrich these global debates with relational and holistic approaches that bridge ethics, ecology, and existence. Lastly, this paper has demonstrated that the persistence of environmental injustices in Africa reflects ongoing colonial logics embedded in political, economic, and epistemological systems. To overcome them, Africa must return to its own philosophical roots seeing humanity as a part of nature and not its master. A decolonial ecological future is possible, but it requires dismantling inherited hierarchies of value and fostering an ethic of care for both people and planet. By grounding its development in African metaphysics of land, community, and justice, the continent can build a sustainable and dignified path forward.

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