# The Democracy Deficit, Global Capitalist System and Ubuntu

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**Abstract**
Many African countries are plagued by a democracy deficit associated with authoritarianism, neo-patrimonial systems, a lack of democratic accountability to the poor majority, and illegitimate accountability to corporations. There is a school of thought associated with the view of Patrick Chabal that maintains that the democracy deficit in Africa emanates from authoritarian rulers who adopt a neo-patrimonial system. I will show that such a view is too narrow, as it fails to consider how the world capitalist economic system undermines democracy. I will use the views of Issa Shivji, Michelle Williams, Nancy Fraser, and Samir Amin to show that the democracy deficit in Africa emanates from the world capitalist economic system. If the democracy deficit, among other factors, is an effect of the incompatibility of democracy and the capitalist economic system, then there is a need to construe a non-capitalist economic system that is compatible with democracy. In this work, I seek to contribute to the literature by showing that the Ubuntu-related feta kgomo o tshware motho maxim, which prioritises the promotion of welfare over the accumulation of wealth, is important for constituting an economic system that is compatible with democracy.
**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, the Neo-patrimonial system, the Democracy Deficit in Africa, Capitalism, The feta kgomo o thsware motho ethical maxim

## Introduction

There is a crisis in Africa that is associated with the democracy deficit. Cheeseman, Fisher, and Mwambari maintain that a staggering 79% of citizens in African countries in 2022 experienced autocracies of various forms, ranging from electoral ones to closed ones (CHEESEMAN, FISHER, and MWAMBARI 2025). The crisis of democracy deficit in Africa is associated with, among other factors, the absence of democratic accountability of government to the majority of poor people associated with poverty reduction. Most African countries are integrated into the world capitalist system and are configured by capitalist logic in such a way that leads to the formation of government and the state's power to promote the interests of corporations while undermining the interests of the poor associated with poverty reduction (WILLIAMS 2021). Most African governments lack political legitimacy, as they have illegitimate accountability to corporations. They face public discontent, anger, and agitation, which threaten their control of state power. They become increasingly authoritarian and form neo-patrimonial systems to sustain their rule.

Many scholars have tried to explain the cause of the abovementioned democracy deficit in Africa. Such attempts have yielded, among others, three schools of thought. One school of thought is associated with the work of Mogobe Ramose, which maintains that the democracy deficit emanates from the demise of "democracy and its surreptitious substitution by timocracy (rule by money)" (2010, 292). Such a view maintains that both political and economic elites are to blame for the democracy deficit, as they value the accumulation of wealth above the human dignity of all human beings (RAMOSE 2010). If the accumulation of money is more important than people, then democracy is undermined, as human rights can be violated to accumulate wealth. The rule by money replaces democracy, which is associated with popular sovereignty (RAMOSE 2010). This school of thought does not distinguish between authoritarianism and neopatrimonialism on the one hand and capitalism on the other hand as factors that undermine democracy. Both authoritarian rulers who practice neo-patrimonial politics and capitalism are influenced by rule by money, and it is such rule by money that undermines democracy. For Ramose, the remedy for restoring democracy is ethical relations among human beings based on the feta kgomo tshware motho maxim that prioritizes the promotion of the welfare of all human beings above the accumulation of wealth (2010).

Ramose holds that the democracy deficit emanates from the substitution of democracy by timocracy (2010). The democracy deficit does not emanate from the incompatibility of democracy and the global capitalist economic system. Capitalism is just an economic system that operates according to the dominant logic of timocracy that configures the social order. The absorption of capitalism in timocracy can obscure how the global capitalist economic system undermines democracy and how authoritarianism and a neo-patrimonial system of rulers that undermine democracy can be caused by the global capitalist economic system. [1] It is possible to have rule by money without capitalism, as happened in ancient Greece. However, it is not plausible to hold that the rule by money associated with timocracy has taken ascendancy in contemporary times and replaced capitalism. Capitalism is the dominant world economic system that influences and shapes social, political, and cultural facets of society to a great extent after the demise of communism in the Soviet bloc. There has not been any major historical break with capitalism. It is tenable to focus on the democracy deficit caused by capitalism rather than by timocracy. It is perplexing why Ramose chooses to regard timocracy as the cause of the democracy crisis when both his concept of timocracy and capitalism share a feature associated with the use of economic power to influence government to promote accumulative practices while undermining democratic accountability to the poor. Ramose alludes to the problem of the elevation of the "profit motive" in society without mentioning capitalism (2010, 296). It seems that Ramose is imposing a different term on the established and enduring historical practices of the global capitalist system that undermines democracy.

[1] The school of thought associated with Ramose's claim that the democracy deficit emanates from the replacement of democracy by timocracy is beyond the scope of this paper. In this work, I seek to show and emphasize how capitalism, as a global economic system, causes authoritarianism and neo-patrimonial systems, which undermine democracy

Another school of thought associated with the work of Patrick Chabal blames African political elites. According to Chabal, the African rulers are culpable for the democracy deficit as they form neo-patrimonial systems and practice authoritarian rule (2002). Such culpability of African rulers is echoed by Moeletsi Mbeki (2009), who regards African rulers as merchants of poverty who seek to use state resources for self-enrichment while undermining the welfare of many Africans, and by van Wyk (2007), who exposes African rulers' patrimonial politics and authoritarianism (2007). I will show the limitations of such a school of thought associated with a failure to consider how the world capitalist system causes a democracy deficit. I will draw on the school of thought associated with Michelle Williams, Nancy Fraser, Issa Shivji, and Samir Amin to show that the democracy deficit in Africa stems primarily from the incompatibility between democracy and the capitalist system.

If capitalism is incompatible with democracy, then I will show that the prospects for democracy in Africa depend on construing an economic system that is compatible with democracy. My main contribution is to show that the Ubuntu-related feta kgomo o tshware motho aphorism, which prioritises the promotion of welfare over the accumulation of wealth, is important for thinking about an economic system that is compatible with democracy. Mogobe Ramose used the feta kgomo o tshaware motho ethical maxim as the remedy to the crisis of the replacement of democracy by timocracy (2010). Ramose holds that democracy can be restored when human relations are governed by the feta kgomo o tshware motho maxim that prioritizes the promotion of welfare over the accumulation of wealth (2010). In this work, I contribute to this discourse by showing the importance of the feta kgomo o tshware motho aphorism in assisting with constituting an economic system that is compatible with democracy and the promotion of democratic accountability of the government to the poor people.

In the first section, I will start by showing the school of thought associated with Chabal, which maintains that the democracy deficit in Africa emanates from the authoritarianism and neo-patrimonial systems of African rulers. I will show the limitations of such a school of thought, associated with the failure to consider how the capitalist world economic system undermines democracy in Africa. In the second section, I will use the views of Fraser, Shivji, Amin, and Williams to show that the democracy deficit in Africa emanates from the world capitalist system. I will show that democracy is incompatible with the capitalist economic system. Next, I will use the views of Ubuntu associated with the feta kgomo o tshware motho maxim to spell out an economic system that is compatible with democracy. Lastly, I will dismiss the claim that democratic accountability to the poor associated with poverty reduction by the government is not possible, and that most Africans can be content with democratic satisfaction that pertains to the protection of abstract rights and free and fair elections.

in Africa and how the feta kgomo o tshware motho maxim can be used to configure an alternative economic system that is compatible with democracy.

## Authoritarianism, the Neo-patrimonial system, and the Democracy Deficit in Africa

Now, I will focus on showing the school of thought that holds that the democracy deficit is a result of African authoritarian rulers who practice neo-patrimonial politics and disdain democracy. There is a lack of shared consensus in African countries on the acceptability of a democratic political system (CHABAL 2002). The people who suffered repression and poverty during the one-party political system yearned for democracy. However, there was no shared consensus on the desirability of democracy between the political class that presided over the one-party system on the one hand and the ordinary people (CHABAL 2002). The wave of democratization in the late 1980s and 1990s was forced on the political elites (CHABAL 2002). According to Patrick Chabal, though there was discontent in Africa against the one-party political system, the drive for the adoption of a democratic political system was instigated by the donor community (CHABAL 2002). The donor community insisted that it would provide aid on the condition that African governments facilitated a transition to multi-party competitive elections (CHABAL 2002). Chabal states that “Thus, multi-party elections were generally seen by African rulers as the price to pay for continued financial assistance rather than as a modality that would make development more likely” (CHABAL 2002, 449).

The ruling political elites in Africa did not wholeheartedly accept democracy. The democracy deficit emanated from the ruling class, who reluctantly implemented a democratic political system (CHABAL 2002). The lack of interest in a democratic political system by the African ruling elites led to an approach of reducing democracy to a ritual of competitive elections that do not address the concerns and aspirations of the majority of the population (CHABAL 2002). Moreover, such a lack of interest in democracy by the political class reduces democratic competition to a contest of elites to control the state, which was regarded as a source of resources for bureaucratic accumulation of wealth (CHABAL 2002). Such rivalry frequently causes conflict (CHABAL 2002).

Moreover, for Chabal, African political rulers undermine democracy by forming a neo-patrimonial order. The neo-patrimonial order involves a government that consists of patrons who favour clients who are critical for sustaining the rule of the ruling elites (CHABAL 2002). The function of the political institutions is constituted by personalized power (CHABAL 2002). Bureaucrats cease to function as impartial agents who render public service. Rather, they are links that connect patrons with their clients (CHABAL 2002). Such neo-patrimonial systems are associated with political accountability that hinges on narrow obligations to promote the interests of clients according to established practices of reciprocity (CHABAL 2002). Political representation is limited to the patron meeting the needs of the client. This undermined investment in economically productive activities that promote national economic growth. Such African political rulers who practiced a neo-patrimonial political system could not promote sustained economic growth (CHABAL 2002).[2] For Chabal, the lack of development in Africa cannot be blamed only on a drop-in world prices, debt, and structural adjustment programs (2002). Chabal holds that the neo-patrimonial political system is to blame for the lack of development (2002).

A neo-patrimonial political system is associated with a lack of democratic accountability of rulers to the poor majority. Rather, there is accountability of patrons to clients. The resources of the state are not used to promote development and poverty reduction. The state, resources and revenues from the economy are distributed in a way that benefits the clients of rulers.

Moreover, African political elites use disorder, violence, and even conflict as tools for gaining and retaining control of the state to promote the neo-patrimonial order (CHABAL 2002). The ruler who uses violence and conflict to gain political power openly undermines electoral democracy and eschews democratic accountability to the poor people (CHABAL 2002). Most African rulers are accountable to their clients, who help them to retain control of state power by violence (CHABAL 2002).[3]

The neo-patrimonial system is associated with the promotion of the interests of clients of the patron while undermining the common good. Also, the informal logic of the neo-patrimonial system undermines the representation of the large section of the population by rulers, the formal political system that should link rulers to democratic accountability to all the people in the country (CHABAL 2002). This leads to disorder as state institutions and bureaucracies are mobilized to serve the clients of rulers and not all the citizens. In Uganda, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government diverted state resources from the SAGE project of cash transfers that served poor families to promote a neo-patrimonial system that sustains its rule (CARLSON and MCKIE 2024). A neo-patrimonial system brutally excludes those who are not clients of rulers. The poor people were deemed not essential for sustaining the rule of the NRM. The SAGE project benefited poor families and elderly people aged 65 years (CARLSON and MCKIE 2024). The poor families were denied such benefits, and only elderly people who were above 80years old received the SAGE benefits (CARLSON and MCKIE 2024). Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda, said that those communities that elected opposition parliamentary representatives will not get any services

[2] Neo-patrimonial political order involves using revenues from the export of primary products to promote the interests of clients. Dependence on such revenues is a risk when there is a drop in the prices of primary products (CHABAL 2002). The African rulers who practice a neo-patrimonial political order do not seek to increase revenues by developing other economic assets and activities (CHABAL 2002). They lack coherent policies to promote economic growth from other economic activities and assets. They borrow heavily when there is a fall in the prices of primary products (CHABAL 2002). They cripple the economy with a huge debt burden. Also, the loans are used to promote the interests of clients (CHABAL 2002).

[3] The patrimonial system was affected by the SAPS that were associated with the financial procedures, and monetary control that restricted looting of state revenues, and retrenchment of state employees (CHABAL2002). However, privatization and new aid money were used to continue the neo-patrimonial system (CHABAL2002).

from his NRM government (CARLSON and MCKIE 2024). The neo-patrimonial system in Uganda excludes the poor and communities with opposition legislators, as such people and communities are not clients.

I have shown that, according to Chabal, the democracy deficit in Africa emanates from African authoritarian rulers who disdain and eschew democracy and prefer to practice a neo-patrimonial politics. Such an agential approach illuminates how democracy suffers due to authoritarian rule and a neo-patrimonial political system. However, such an entirely agent-based approach to understanding the democracy deficit is problematic, as it has led to an obsession with removing authoritarian rulers and replacing them with democratic rulers. This has led to a narrow politics of obsession with merely removing authoritarian rulers. There is no understanding of the broad social, economic, and political context associated with the neoliberal world capitalist system that produces authoritarian rulers and a neo-patrimonial system.

Chabal blames the neo-patrimonial system on African culture, which constitutes and produces communal beings who are embedded in community networks that undermine the formation of transethnic and national identities (CHABAL 2002). Such narrow community networks that are mobilized to sustain the rule and control of state power can become the foundation of a neo-patrimonial system (CHABAL 2002). However, such an understanding of democracy deficit as an effect of a neo-patrimonial system and authoritarian rule of African political elites is problematic, as it does not consider how the world capitalist system undermines the democratic accountability and political legitimacy of African rulers, thereby erecting a foundation for the emergence of authoritarian rule. African rulers do not control the economies of their countries. They are controlled by foreign multinational companies (AMIN 1990). African governments have limited revenues that are inadequate to promote development and significantly reduce poverty for the majority of poor people. The failure to spur sustained development due to a lack of control of the national accumulation process generates a political legitimacy deficit. Also, the ruling political elite cannot have democratic accountability to the poor masses, as they cannot control the national accumulation process in a way that addresses mass impoverishment. They lack political legitimacy and democratic accountability to the poor. Political legitimacy and democratic accountability are essential for retaining control of state power. They form patronage networks that create alternative accountability to clients who sustain their rule and control of state power.

The National Resistance Movement regime of Yoweri Museveni, which cannot have democratic accountability to the poor masses, political legitimacy cuts cash transfers to the poor, diverts such resources from the poor and uses them to promote the patronage networks that sustain the regime’s control of state power (CARLSON and MCKIE 2024). The inability to promote development is a common feature of many African countries that are integrated into the world capitalist system, which reduces many African countries to peripheries that transfer value to Western countries and other emerging economies (AMIN 1990).

Authoritarianism and neo-patrimonial political systems in Africa are effects of the disorderly world capitalist system. The World capitalist system does not function in an orderly, democratic manner. There is the use of corruption and illegitimate power by capitalist Western countries and Western corporations to force and induce African countries to adopt economic policies favourable to Western capitalists' accumulative interests. African rulers are paid money to facilitate Western capitalist accumulative practices. This undermines the democratic function of African rulers. There was the use of power and threats of withdrawal of aid to compel African rulers to adopt Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Mueni wa Mui and Guy Martin maintain that "a fundamental principle of adjustment is the role of conditionality" (2009, 90). The West, through its proxies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, used aid and loans to induce African rulers to adopt "neoclassical free-market ideology" (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009, 89). The ideology allocated an important role in the economy to the private sector while reducing the role of the state (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009). This promotes the interests of foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) while undermining the democratic accountability of the government to the poor majority associated with poverty reduction. African governments agree to economic liberalization and privatization, which promote the interests of corporations while undermining the interests of the poor majority in exchange for financial support.[4] This undermined the capacity of the state to control the economy and promote democratic accountability to the poor.

The adoption of SAPs undermined the welfare of many Africans in many African countries, as there were cuts in government expenditure on social services such as education and health care. Such fiscal austerity measures were implemented in an undemocratic and authoritarian manner. African governments became clients that received aid on the condition that they promoted the accumulative interests of Western patrons.

African rulers received money from Western MNCs to facilitate Western accumulative practices. According to wa Mui and Martin, the formation of the system called LaFrancafrique, which brings together French and African leaders, firms, and public and private agencies, operates especially in oil-rich countries of Angola, Cameroon, Congo Republic (Congo-Brazzaville), and Equatorial Guinea (2009). LaFrancafrique, the former state oil corporation, which is now a private entity and changed its name to Total-Fina-Elf; it operated for many years as a huge money "laundering" system "designed to recycle the enormous oil revenues from its Central African operations" (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009, 94). It uses an elaborate system that encompasses "offshore bank accounts and advisers or

[4] There is privatization of even essential welfare functions such as health and education, which opens opportunities for the accumulative practices of corporations. Privatization in Côte d'Ivoire benefited a Belgian bank, Banque Belgolaise, which at the time controlled "80 percent of the capital of the Ivoirian branch of the International Bank of West Africa (BIAO-CI), for which Côte d'Ivoire received 5.6 billion CFA francs" (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009, 91). Also, economic liberalization in Côte d'Ivoire was accompanied by the French multinational Bouygues having "a monopoly of the utilities (water and electricity) and of the telecommunications sectors" (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009, 91).

intermediaries, creative accounting", to transfer billions into major French political parties, into foreign bank accounts of presidents Jose Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola (former late president), Paul Biya of Cameroon, Dennis Sassou Nguesso of Congo, Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, and Omar Bingo of Gabon (former late president), and their connections (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009, 94). Andre Tarallo, Elf Africa representative, who managed the Illicit transfer of financial resources to African leaders, estimates that in the 1990s, around $60 million was allocated each year to the four leaders of the central African countries (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009). During three years between 1989 and 1992, $280 million was transferred into the bank accounts of leaders in Gabon (WA MUIU and MARTIN 2009).[5] Elf, the French oil multinational corporation, used bribes to influence African leaders and governments to promote corporate interests while undermining the democratic accountability of African governments to the poor majority associated with poverty reduction and promotion of welfare.

The African rulers are clients of Western MNCs. The Western MNCs are the patrons. The democratic accountability of rulers to the impoverished majority and democratic legitimacy are undermined as the African rulers are connected to the Western patronage network, and they derive legitimacy from and have accountability to Western MNCs, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and Western governments. They cover the lack of democratic accountability and political legitimacy to the impoverished masses by creating neo-patrimonial systems that sustain their rule. They become repressive and authoritarian to crack down on public agitation that arises due to their lack of democratic accountability to the impoverished masses and consequent deficit of political legitimacy.

**Uneven Development, the State as a Site of Accumulation, and a Democracy Deficit**

Another factor that dismisses the view associated with Chabal that maintains that the democracy deficit in Africa is primarily a result of authoritarianism and neo-patrimonialism in Africa pertains to how authoritarian bureaucratic accumulation of wealth associated with repressive African rulers who loot state fiscal resources is produced by the world capitalist system, among other factors. I will show that such bureaucratic accumulation is, among other factors, an effect of the world capitalist system.[6] The accumulation strategy of the global capitalist system is based on the domination and expropriation of Africans (FRASER 2018). Such an accumulation strategy undermines sovereign national accumulation that favours the emergence of a local bourgeoisie that productively acquires wealth from economic activity (AMIN 1990). The Western control and domination of the African economy blocked local/national capital formation, which is critical for technological innovation and development. The lack of domestic capital formation excludes many Africans from participating in the economic sector as capitalists.

[5] According wa Muiu and Martin "after 1997, Elf continued to pay a commission of between 40 and 60 cents per barrel to the leaders of Angola, Cameroon, Congo, and Gabon" (2009, 94).
[6] See Shivji (2025) on the notion of bureaucratic accumulation.

Hence, the route to emerging as the local bourgeoisie involves stealing state resources. The control of the accumulation process by foreign capital restricts economic outlets for the formation of the local bourgeoisie. Only a few Africans have been incorporated into capitalist accumulation practices. There is an aberration associated with the formation of the extreme immoral comprador authoritarian bureaucratic bourgeoisie that cannibalizes the state's fiscal resources and transforms the state into a site of accumulation.

This blocks the formation of a democratic state that can promote the interests of marginalized classes.[7] The comprador authoritarian bureaucratic bourgeoisie class seeks to control the state to acquire wealth while at the same time facilitating capitalist domination and expropriation. Such a class acquires wealth through unproductive rent-seeking and the theft of state fiscal resources. The African authoritarian, bureaucratic, bourgeois who turn the state into a site of selfish accumulation of wealth lack democratic accountability to the poor associated with poverty reduction, and they lack political legitimacy. They adopt repressive practices and a neo-patrimonial system to sustain their rule. However, the actions of the African extreme immoral comprador authoritarian bureaucratic bourgeoisie that undermine democracy are structural effects of the global capitalist system associated with foreign domination of the African economies, and which leave the state as the only viable site of accumulation.[8]

The democracy deficit in Africa cannot be conceptualized merely in terms of the patrimonial political system of authoritarian rulers. Such a narrow view fails to consider how the world capitalist system contributes to the democracy deficit. Authoritarian rulers' neo-patrimonial system undermines democracy. However, authoritarian systems and patrimonial systems are complex outcomes of both African rulers and the world capitalist system. In the following, I will show in detail how the world capitalist system undermines democracy and contributes to a democracy deficit.

[7] See Shivji (2025) on the class he calls bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

[8] The formation of the extreme, immoral, comprador, authoritarian-bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the transformation of the state into a site of wealth accumulation are structural effects of global capitalist uneven development that undermine national control over the accumulation process. The uneven development associated with global capitalism involves development in the West and underdevelopment in Africa and the other peripheral countries of the world capitalist system (BOND 2006). Such underdevelopment results from the domination and control of African economies by foreign multinational corporations. Only a few Africans have been incorporated into capitalist accumulation practices. The African economies are largely controlled by foreign capital (WENGRAF 2018). In many African countries, global capitalism, associated with Western control of African economies, persisted, as many liberation movements gained political independence by replacing Western administrators while leaving Western capital in control of the economy (NDLOVU-GATSHENI, 2013).

**Neoliberal Capitalist World System and the Democracy Deficit**

The democracy deficit emanates from the negative impact of capitalism in Africa.[9] For Amin, the absence of democracy in Africa is an "inevitable consequence" of the expansion of existing capitalism (1996, 67). Amin states that "Democracy is here incompatible with capitalist expansion" (1996, 62). Shivji holds that capitalism privileges the accumulation of wealth over democracy (2021). Shivji states that "in the drive for accumulation, capital respects nothing, least of all freedom and democracy" (2021, 2).[10] For Fraser, dictatorships that undermine democracy in Africa are essential for facilitating capitalist domination and expropriation (2018). The democracy deficit emanates from the negative impact of capitalism in Africa.[11] I will elaborate on the views of Fraser and Williams to show how capitalism produces authoritarianism and a democracy deficit in Africa.

The democracy deficit emanates from the accumulation practices of imperial global capitalism centered on constituting subjects of domination and expropriation in Africa and other parts of the Global South to facilitate the exploitation of rights-bearing workers in the West (FRASER 2018). Such a democratic crisis is associated with the construction of an authoritarian African neo-colonial comprador state to facilitate domination and expropriation. Expropriation after political independence is intensified by "global financial institutions that promote dispossession by debt" (FRASER 2018, 24). Fraser states that global financial institutions use debt to "pressure states to collude with investors in extracting value from defenceless populations" (FRASER 2018, 29). For Fraser, "it is largely by means of debt that peasants are dispossessed and

corporate land grabs are intensified in the capitalist periphery" (2018, 29). Moreover, debt is used to force postcolonial states to abandon developmentalism and to adopt liberalising policies "which transfer wealth to corporate capital and global finance" (FRASER 2018, 29-30). Fraser maintains that debt restructuring increases "the ratio of debt service to GNP," condemning "countless generations to expropriation, some long before they are born, and regardless of whether or not they are also subject to exploitation" (2018, 30). The African rulers function in a capitalist world order in which they are assigned functions of domination and

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[9] For Shivji, capitalism undermines freedom as it is associated with relations of domination that oppress and exploit many members of the working class and middle class (2021). For Amin, capitalism causes a democracy deficit as non-democratic principles of private ownership and competition coordinate economic management (1996). Private ownership leads to inequality and differentiation between the dominant class, which owns the means of production, and the dominated class, which owns little wealth.

[10] Shivji holds that capitalism generates a democracy deficit as it is responsible for causing fascism and neo-fascism (2021). Shivji holds that "fascism, in the last century, was an outgrowth of monopoly capital, so is neofascism of the neo-liberal era" (2021, 2).

[11] For Shivji, capitalism undermines freedom as it is associated with relations of domination that oppress and exploit many members of the working class and middle class (2021). For Amin, capitalism causes a democracy deficit as non-democratic principles of private ownership and competition coordinate economic management (1996). Private ownership leads to inequality and differentiation between the dominant class, which owns the means of production, and the dominated class, which owns little wealth.

expropriation of Africans. They lack democratic accountability to the poor majority associated with promoting poverty reduction. They can increasingly become authoritarian and repressive rulers as they seek to deal with public discontent, agitation, and anger that threaten their control of state power. The African rulers have illegitimate accountability to corporations associated with promoting capitalist accumulative practices while undermining the welfare of the poor people.

For Williams, the democracy deficit cannot be understood merely as a political problem that requires a political solution (2021). In other words, the democracy deficit is not merely a result of authoritarianism and a neo-patrimonial political system. Williams states that “Democracy’s destruction is one manifestation of the broader crisis created by neoliberal capitalism” (2021, 2). For Williams, neoliberal capitalism, among other issues, refers to neoliberal rationality that assigns “economic metrics” to all aspects of life and non-human nature (2021, 2). The state and government, society, social reproduction, and politics are valued in terms of their contribution to the promotion of the economic interests of corporations (WILLIAMS 2021). This undermines democratic accountability as the ruling political class is required to be accountable to corporate organizations and to neglect the workers, peasants, and the unemployed urban poor.

The crisis of democracy is generated by neoliberal capitalism, which seeks to turn everything in society into a commodity (WILLIAMS 2021). Important components of society, such as political power, government, and social reproduction, among others, are constituted to promote corporate interests while undermining the interests of other marginalized social groups. The government lacks democratic legitimacy as it fails to have political accountability to marginalized social groups. Public and common interests are undermined by the private interests of corporate organizations (WILLIAMS 2021). The state is turned into an instrument for the promotion of corporate interests. There is a severe restriction on the capacity of the state to interfere with the markets to promote common and public interests (WILLIAMS 2021). The primary role of the state is reduced to the creation of conditions for economic growth and passing laws that favour corporations (WILLIAMS 2021). The economic growth benefits corporations while many citizens are impoverished, marginalized, and unemployed. For Michelle Williams, neoliberalism constitutes a “market democracy” in which “the interests of corporations are elevated to national interests” (2021, 10). Such “market democracy” is associated with “undemocratic states in which states are not accountable to their populations” (WILLIAMS 2021, 10). States follow and respond to the dictates of corporate power.

Transnational corporations exercise power through labour, transnational agencies, and by directly influencing governments to pass laws that favour their interests in accumulating wealth while undermining the public good (WILLIAMS 2021). The actions of transnational corporations undermine the legitimate authority of elected governments.[12] Neoliberal rationality configures a state that

[12] States are shifting from legitimate power associated with accountability to the electorate to illegitimate power associated with accountability to corporations (WILLIAMS 2021). Such illegitimate power is concentrated in the hands of the political and economic elite (WILLIAMS 2021).

promotes capitalist accumulative practices while undermining democratic demands for justice and inclusion. Furthermore, neoliberal capitalism seeks to make corporations more powerful than states and citizens and seeks to constitute whole populations into economic entities that promote the markets (WILLIAMS 2021). The growth of corporate power and weakening of state capacity to limit corporate domination are accompanied by an incremental loss of state capacity to promote the interests of the electorate (WILLIAMS 2021).[13]

**The Imperial Global Capitalist System, the Immoral Functions of African Political State Managers, and the Democracy Deficiency**

I have shown that, according to Williams, the neoliberal capitalist world system contributes to a democracy deficit by constituting a society in which the government and political power promote the economic interests of corporations while lacking democratic accountability to the poor. Now, I will defend Williams's view by showing that the imperial global capitalist system contributes to a democracy deficit associated with producing immoral authoritarian comprador rulers who lack democratic accountability to the poor majority as they perform authoritarian functions of facilitating capitalist domination and expropriation.

The comprador and authoritarian African rulers are required by the global capitalist system to ensure the defenselessness and vulnerability of many Africans (FRASER 2018). They do not seek to defend Africans by averting and thwarting capitalist domination and expropriation (FRASER 2018).[14] The comprador and authoritarian African rulers lack democratic accountability associated with promoting the welfare of the poor Africans, as they are required to lack care and sympathy for the majority of poor African people and to withdraw from providing help associated with defense against imperial global capitalist domination and expropriation. If they seek an autocentric development that benefits the poor, they are threatened with the withdrawal of aid. They were forced by threats of withdrawal of aid to adopt SAPS-related austerity measures that slashed spending on social services that promote the welfare of many poor Africans.

Furthermore, the imperial global capitalist system constitutes an African political system that requires and recruits political managers of the state who regard Africans as disposable beings who exist for the benefit of others. Such disposable beings are deprived of wealth and resources to benefit others. Their wealth and resources are expropriated to remedy declining profits for capitalists (FRASER 2018; BOND 2019). They are deprived of their wealth to promote welfare and a high quality of life for Western exploited workers (FRASER 2018).

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[13] The ANC rule shows how market democracy (corporatocracy)undermines the capacity of the state to promote the interests of the electorate (WILLIAMS 2021). The ANC rule has been marked by an obsession with markets, economic growth, and maintaining credit ratings while failing to promote "politically and constitutionally mandated goals of redistribution, justice, and radical democratic forms of rule" (WILLIAMS 2021, 16). It allows capitalistic accumulative practices of corporations associated with exploitation and pollution, and the state manages the population through disciplinary techniques and intensifying surveillance (WILLIAMS 2021).

[14] They function in a political system constituted by a view that regards Africans as disposable beings who should be deprived of security and welfare.

Moreover, they are victims of expropriation to diffuse a political crisis in the West, which is caused by the exploitation of Western workers (FRASER 2018). Such views of Africans as disposable beings who are fit for unjust treatment, domination, and expropriation, and who exist for the benefit of others, lead to undemocratic rule in Africa, as African rulers fail to have democratic accountability to the poor majority.

In addition, the imperial global capitalist system constitutes a political system that requires the African comprador rulers to carry out immoral acts of facilitating the production of many Africans as waste. Such African rulers facilitate imperial global capitalist domination and expropriation of Africans by implementing liberal economic policies that permit the transfer and repatriation of profits from the extraction of African natural resources (FRASER 2018; BOND 2019). Such liberal economic policies that undermine reinvestment and employment creation contribute to the constitution of many Africans as waste. These are Africans who cannot be exploited by capital and are excluded from wage employment (YATES 2011. The imperial global capitalist system contributes to a democracy deficit as it assigns roles of facilitating capitalist accumulative practices to African rulers, which undermines their capacity to have democratic accountability to the poor associated with poverty reduction.

Additionally, the imperial global capitalist system configures neocolonial comprador African post-colonial states, which require the recruitment of African comprador and authoritarian political state managers who use force to facilitate global capitalist accumulative practices associated with the domination and expropriation of African people. Such authoritarian rulers jettison fairness, justice, care, and concern for the Africans. The constitution of post-colonial states that use force to facilitate capitalist accumulative practices contributes to the democracy deficit associated with the production of authoritarian political systems and the government's lack of democratic accountability to the poor majority. Such use of force came to light as the post-apartheid South African government was implicated in defending the interests of foreign and local mining capital when the police shot and killed 34 striking Marikana platinum mining workers in 2012 (BOND 2019). Abahlali base Mjondolo complained that they faced arrests and killings by government agents for protesting against exclusion from economic wealth by government policies that promote mainly white bourgeois capital.[15] In some cases, the Nigerian government uses military force to quell protests of local communities that are against the looting of wealth by foreign oil companies (WENGRAF 2018).

## The New Economic System and the Reversal of the Democracy Deficit

Williams holds that the crisis of democracy emanates from its entanglement with capitalism (2021). Democracy is incompatible with capitalism. The prospects for democracy hinge on disentangling it from capitalism. We should discard the configuration of the political realm and social reproduction to promote the capitalist accumulation practice. We should constitute the economy to serve society as a whole, not only corporate interests. Such a remedy to the democracy crisis seeks an alternative economic system that is compatible with democracy.

[15] See S. Zikode, Land and Housing.

The economic system that is compatible with democracy does not elevate the corporate interests of capitalist accumulation above the interests of workers, unemployed urban poor, and peasants. If the interests of corporations are not above those of other social groups and there is equality, then the government does not seek accountability to corporations but to the electorate. Such an economic system restores democratic accountability of governments to all people and promotes democratic political legitimacy. Williams suggests that an economy based on anti-capitalist social relations is important for the reclaiming, restoration, and rehabilitation of democracy (WILLIAMS 2021). Democracy is damaged and limited by capitalism. A non-capitalist economic system is the panacea for reversing democracy deficits.

Next, I will show how Ubuntu is important for constituting a non-capitalist economic system that restores and rehabilitates democracy. The work of Carlson and McKie indicates that democracy can be recovered when there is democratic accountability of the government to the poor majority (2024). Such democratic accountability involves the government having control over the economy and configuring it to reduce poverty (CARLSON and MCKIE 2024). I will utilize the ideas of Williams, Carlson, and McKie to show how Ubuntu provides essential ideas on configuring the economy that restores and rehabilitates democracy.[16]

An economic system that is compatible with democracy can be configured by the Ubuntu ethical principle associated with the feta kgomo o tshaware motho maxim. The feta kgomo o tshware motho maxim maintains that if one has a choice between the promotion of the welfare of the other on the one hand, and the accumulation of wealth on the other hand, then one should choose the option associated with the promotion of welfare (RAMOSE 2010). The saying has two beings: the cow (kgomo), which was a symbol of wealth in the past, and the human being (motho) (RAMOSE 2010). One should prioritise the welfare of the human being over the cow, which represents the accumulation of wealth (RAMOSE 2010). The human being is more important than the cow, which represents wealth (RAMOSE 2010). The Sotho saying indicates that we can have the interest of accumulating wealth conflicting with the interest of promoting welfare for everyone. However, according to the Sotho saying, one should act ethically by choosing the option associated with the promotion of the welfare of every human being.

The ethical principle embedded in the feta kgomo o tshaware motho aphorism indicates that an economic system should prioritize the promotion of welfare over the accumulation of wealth. Such an economic system that prioritizes

[16] A solution to the democracy crisis involves an idea of democracy that involves the government having control of the economy to benefit everyone. This discards the capitalist configuration of the economy to promote the interests of business while undermining the interests of the poor majority. This promotes the government’s democratic accountability to the poor associated with poverty reduction. Such democratic accountability to the poor is possible when the government addresses the concerns and interests of the poor electorate. The essential key for the recovery of democracy involves the configuration of an economy that is compatible with democracy.

better prospects of democratic accountability to the often-neglected marginalized poor majority. If the economic system is configured by an ethical principle that prioritizes the promotion of the welfare of all human beings over the accumulation of wealth by a few individuals, then the government regulates the economy and governs in a way that promotes the welfare of all human beings. The government has democratic accountability to all human beings. Such democratic accountability to all human beings is associated with the promotion of the welfare of all human beings. Moreover, such a government adopts economic policies and passes laws that benefit all human beings. The promotion of welfare is elevated above corporate interests.

The democracy deficit is a systemic crisis that emanates from the world capitalist economic system that requires governments to promote the interests of corporations while undermining the welfare of the poor majority in Africa and other parts of the Global South. The government has democratic accountability to corporations and lacks democratic accountability to the poor majority. The feta kgomo o tshware motho principle configures an economic system that requires the government to adopt economic policies and laws that promote the welfare of all human beings. This promotes democratic accountability to the poor. If the government seeks to have democratic accountability to the poor, then it should control the economy. A government that does not control the economy cannot have democratic accountability to the poor majority, which is associated with reducing poverty. Democratic accountability to the poor requires an economic system that is constituted by the feta kgomo o tshware motho ethical principle in such a way that it prioritizes the promotion of the welfare of all human beings above the accumulation of wealth. A governing political party that seeks to retain control of state power can use its policies and programs of elimination of poverty and promotion of the welfare of all human beings as a re-election strategy.

The work of Carlson and McKie supports the notion that democratic accountability of government to the poor requires an economic system that reduces poverty (2024). For Carlson and McKie, if the government does not control the economy in a way that reduces poverty, then the government cannot have democratic accountability to the poor (2024). Carlson and McKie show that the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) governments in Ghana sought democratic accountability to the poor associated with reducing poverty (2024).[17] These governments mobilized economic resources for the LEAP social welfare programme that seeks to reduce poverty. Such democratic accountability indicates that the government does not only seek to promote the interests of corporations. The government also seeks to promote the interests of the poor majority. However, such an attempt at democratic accountability to the poor in Ghana is problematic as it does not involve a fundamental reconfiguration of the economy to promote the welfare of all human beings. It does not involve fundamental changes that discard the capitalist economic system, which is incompatible with democracy. There are just minor poverty alleviation interventions based on mobilizing inadequate donor funds and

[17] . The NPP in 2008 and the NDC government from 2012 to 2016 sought democratic accountability to the poor majority by reducing poverty.

fiscal revenues. There is tokenistic democratic accountability of government to the poor, as the government does not control the economy and does not constitute itself to promote the welfare of all citizens. The government in Ghana maintains a capitalist economic system that promotes corporate interests while undermining the interests of the poor majority. Desirable democratic accountability of the government to the poor requires the government to constitute the economy in such a way that prioritises the promotion of the welfare of all human beings above the accumulation of wealth by a few corporations. Carlson and McKie indicate that democratic accountability of the government to the poor, which is associated with reducing poverty, requires the government to control the economy (2021). Such government control of the economy can be guided by the feta kgomo o tshaware motho principle that seeks the constitution of the economy to promote the welfare of all human beings.

The economic system that prioritizes the promotion of welfare over accumulation practices inevitably leads to disengagement from the world capitalist economic system. The world capitalist economic system is based on the logic that prioritizes the accumulation of wealth by a few when there is impoverishment of many. It produces a few billionaires when there are many billions of poor people. An economic system based on Ubuntu that is compatible with democracy cannot be integrated into the world capitalist economic system that is incompatible with democracy. The economic systems in African countries, based on Ubuntu, which is compatible with democracy, can integrate and constitute a rival emerging sub-world economic system. African countries can merge into an economic union that generates bargaining power and utilize it in their strategic engagement with the capitalist economic system.

In this work, I have shown that the recovery of democracy is contingent on configuring an economic system that is compatible with democracy. The remedy to the democracy deficit associated with the government's lack of democratic accountability to the poor majority requires the constitution of an economic system that enables the government to promote poverty reduction. However, Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes argue that such a democracy deficit is not important, as Africans can have democratic satisfaction when there is protection of their abstract rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, speech, association, assembly, and the right to vote (2002). For Bratton and Mattes, the approval of democracy hinges less on government capacity in delivering economic goods but more on its ability to guarantee basic political rights (2002). Democracy is valued “intrinsically (as an end in itself)” and not “instrumentally as a means to improve material living standards” (BRATTON and MATTES 2002, 447). Bratton and Mattes challenge the notion that new democracies derive legitimacy from “economic performance” (2002, 447). The work of Bratton and Mattes shows that respondents to a survey in Ghana and Zambia indicated that they have democratic satisfaction associated with the protection of abstract rights and free and fair multi-party elections (2002). This argument renders superfluous concern about the democracy deficit associated with the government's lack of democratic accountability to the poor majority. Such a view of democratic satisfaction can narrow the democracy deficit, as it indicates that a democracy crisis occurs mainly when there is a violation of abstract rights.

For Bratton and Mattes, African economies are largely agrarian, and there is a small middle class (2002). There are no prospects for the government to improve the material conditions of life. There is a high level of economic underdevelopment that undermines government capacity for democratic accountability, associated with poverty reduction. Africans should be content with democratic satisfaction when there is political democracy, associated with the protection of basic human rights, and when there is an end to authoritarian rule. However, such a view is problematic as the government's lack of accountability to the poor majority is entangled with illegitimate accountability to corporations. The lack of government accountability to the poor majority produces a society in which government and political power are constituted to promote the economic interests of corporations. This creates a market democracy that elevates the interests of business above those of the poor people (WILLIAMS 2021). A society that has political democracy associated with merely guaranteeing basic political rights, while democratic accountability to the poor associated with poverty reduction is absent, has a democracy deficit. Such a political democracy is vulnerable to destruction, as poor people can be influenced by small food parcels to vote for corrupt and authoritarian rulers (CHIMAKONAM 2023).

There is no conclusive evidence that people can have democratic satisfaction when there are free and fair elections and a guarantee of basic political rights. Sewordor Toklor, Precious Wedagi Aller, and Ruby Amand Oboro-Ofeerie establish that democratic satisfaction involves, among other factors, government democratic accountability to the poor, associated with promoting poverty reduction (2025). If there is a lack of democratic accountability to the poor, then the government lacks political legitimacy and may practice neo-patrimonial politics to generate defective legitimacy to clients and may become repressive and authoritarian to sustain its rule.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown the limitations of the school of thought that maintains that the democracy deficit in Africa emanates mainly from the authoritarianism and neo-patrimonial system of African rulers. I have shown that such a school of thought fails to consider how the world capitalist system causes a democracy deficit in Africa. I have used the views of Williams, Fraser, Amin, and Shivji to show that the democracy deficit in Africa emanates mainly from the incompatibility of the global capitalist system with democracy. I have shown that the feta kgomo tshware motho aphorism is important for thinking about an economic system that is compatible with democracy. Additionally, I showed the limitations of the view that maintains that Africans can be content with democratic satisfaction associated with the protection of abstract rights and free and fair elections. One can contend that the Ubuntu-based economy that is compatible with democracy can be undermined by the authoritarian rule of political elites who seek to control the state for self-enrichment. Future research work should focus on how to protect an Ubuntu-based economy that is compatible with democracy from authoritarian rule.

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